

# Review: New Novel By James Ciullo (Venezuela 1969-71)

Posted by [John Coyne](#) on Friday, October 30th 2009

The reviewer, Don Messerschmidt (Nepal 1963-65) is a writer and magazine editor of ECS Nepal, and has published both in the United States and abroad, including non-fiction several books. Here Don reviews James Ciullo's (Venezuela 1969-71) novel, *Maracaibo*, that mixes Washington D.C. and international politics with Columbian mercenary intrigue and Venezuelan oil.



## [Maracaibo](#)

by James Ciullo (Venezuela 1969–71)

Mainly Murder Press

September 2009

312 pages

\$15.95

*Reviewed by Don Messerschmidt, (Nepal 1963-65)*

If you like fast-paced mystery novels filled with political intrigue in esoteric international settings, with an ex-Peace Corps volunteer character who has gone on (years later) to become a respected US Senator who becomes unwittingly mixed up with assassination and mayhem..., then this is a book for you. At first I thought it was a bit over the top. Could any of this happen? I asked myself. The characters in this novel are too wild (and one is too beautiful), carrying out nefarious acts across volatile international borders. The various abductions and murders by masked gunmen for hire, with a black-hawk helicopter in the sky and other military vehicles moving some of the main characters around on the ground seemed far-fetched. Part of the plot involves the demand for Venezuelan oil that lubricates a potentially dangerous American vs. Chinese global energy confrontation. There's also a Latin American leader who fits the despotic (but with a heart) stereotype. And peppered throughout are several al-Qaida types who show up in cameo shots (both figuratively and literally). I wondered-but only briefly-how convincing it all was, knowing full well that a good mystery novel doesn't have to be entirely realistic.

Then I was reminded of some unseemly recent and current events involving powerful politicians wielding immense power in Washington DC, revved up by media bigots spewing over-the-top opinion to the nation, and scores of private mercenaries for hire egged on by rogue CIA agents and other top security operatives playing deceitful games with one another. As I reflected on all that, considering all the various plot lines of the book, it began to make sense, sounding too imaginable and disturbingly plausible. The author (I told myself) is on to something here. I was hooked.

This is a fast-paced story, the sort of book that publishers' blurbs tell us you can't put down 'til it's done. The dialogue is realistic, and the characters move at lightning speed. It all sounds likely, which is what makes it enticing.

The author and his publisher (Mainly Murder Press of Wethersfield, Connecticut) are on to something here. This is James Ciullo's third novel, with his own past Peace Corps experience informing character development, setting, and plot. And now that I've met him on the pages of this book, I want to read Ciullo's first two books, *A Tango in Tuscany* (2002) and *Orinoco* (2007). The latter is a prequel to *Maracaibo*. I also look forward to the next mysteries he writes.

*Maracaibo* is for fans of puzzling murder mysteries combined with all too realistic political power mongering and deception, informed by the author's own in-depth knowledge of place. What a great combination. Read it, and you'll see what I mean!

Alas, dear reader, my pipe has gone out and my coffee's gone cold writing about it, just as they did yesterday afternoon when I read it through, nonstop, cover to cover. *Maracaibo* is a grand tale.

*Don Messerschmidt, (Nepal 1963-65) biography* Against the Current, The Life of Lain Singh Bangdel, *Nepal's foremost literary scholar and artist, published by Orchid Books, won Nepal's International Golden Civic Award in 2004. More about the magazine ECS Nepal, for which Don is an editor can be found at [ECS.com.np](http://ECS.com.np).*