

MARACAIBO REVIEW

*Reviewed by Brenda Scott, Manchester Contemporary Literature Examiner
(www.examiner.com/Manchester)*

Maracaibo by James A. Ciullo is a first-rate, action-packed, political thriller that delivers a one, two punch from the first page to the last. Like its predecessor *Orinoco*, *Maracaibo* takes you on an adventure across the globe through the barrios of Venezuela, the deserts of Columbia, and to a lesser extent, Washington, DC, and Manchester, NH. A true master of his craft, Ciullo's writing style is both exciting and thought provoking. An easy read, his insights into the political workings and bi-partisan politics is nothing short of masterful; and he does it all while weaving a well-crafted story of espionage and conspiracy! Ciullo's heroine, the beautiful and intelligent, U.S. CIA Agent Marialena Morales has a huge heart and an amazing sense of purpose.

The action begins almost immediately as two U.S. Senators, Joe LaCarta, an Independent from Vermont, and Jimmy Ray Hobson, a Republican from Texas, are whisked away to Caracas to meet with the Venezuelan President Orlando Vallarta in an effort to try and rebuild relations between the United States and Venezuela. Joe hasn't been back to Venezuela since his Peace Corps days thirty five years earlier and is really looking forward to the long, overdue visit. While in the motorcade on their way to meet Vallarta, they are attacked by a group of men with automatic weapons. The four security guards sent by President Vallarta to protect the two senators are killed instantly along with Senator Hobson. Senator LaCarta is thrown into a waiting vehicle and disappears into the darkness. In the distance Marialena Morales, a former employee of Joe's and whose late father was an old friend from his Peace Corps days, views the aftermath. As gruesome as the scene is, she is more worried about where Joe LaCarta has been taken? Using her intelligence and the skills she acquired from her CIA superior, Geraldo Smith, who trained her well, she risks her life in an attempt to save Joe's. But can Marialena find Joe before it's too late for both of them?

Ciullo's characters are well thought out and unbelievably realistic; so much so that we are swept up by every feeling and emotion felt by Marialena from Joe's kidnapping, to the attempted assassination on her life, to Sergio's demise. We feel Joe's apprehension while he waits and ponders his fate, and we feel Sergio's anger and contempt for the vicious animal who murdered his wife and little girl. Only truly great writing can make us feel such emotion. *Maracaibo* is a winner!

Maracaibo was published by Mainly Murder Press and released in late September 2009. It can be purchased on Mainly Murder Press, Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, and local bookstores everywhere. It is also available in libraries across the country. Orinoco, Ciullo's first political thriller, is still available in audio through Books in Motion, and in print (hardcopy) through Amazon.com.

Jim Ciullo lives in the Berkshires of Western, MA and is a member of Mystery Writers of America, International Thriller Writers, and Sisters in Crime. He has traveled extensively, both internationally and in the US. He spends a great deal of time with family in Vermont, and his Peace Corps experience in Venezuela inspired both Orinoco and its sequel Maracaibo. Jim's tireless work with both the disabled and underprivileged is a true testament to his incredible character and the reason why his next major work has yet to be announced! Visit Jim's website at www.jimciullo.com.

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