

Deadly Distractions: A Stan Turner Mystery

William Manchee

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Attorney Stan Turner's client, Dusty Thomas, is believed to have murdered an IRS agent over back taxes he owed the government. And why not? The agent was shot by a Remington shotgun, and Dusty was found standing over the victim with a Remington shotgun in his hand. Turner takes on the case, turning most of the details over to his new associate, Paula Waters.

Waters agrees to allow the Citizen's Defense Alliance, or CDA, to foot Dusty's bail and pay for his defense. Turner is surprised, because the CDA is practically a terrorist organization, a group of fascists who don't believe in federal taxation and would gladly throw out the government. Now that Turner's agency appears to be in bed with the CDA, the federal government is painting them with a broad and wide brush.

The author, who is a lawyer like his protagonist, has written four previous Stan Turner novels, as well as short stories, several other novels, and a nonfiction work for small business owners.

While Turner is dealing with this case, one of his oldest friends and clients calls him from Ecuador, where he is mixed up in a complicated money-laundering scheme involving Ecuadorian rebels and false identities. With the government tearing apart their lives, this is the last thing he needs; then the client disappears, apparently kidnapped or arrested. Before a reader can say, "This is a pretty dumb move for an attorney to make," Turner and a private investigator fly to Ecuador to look for the client, but are quickly arrested. It is only through a series of very questionable deals, with even more questionable Ecuadorian military officials, that they are released.

Manchee has pretty much thrown everything into this novel—courtroom scenes, Guantanamo Bay, Texas street gangs, insurance scams, money laundering, murder, even a hurricane. This level of plot complexity is both the novel's strength and its weakness. Manchee juggles reasonably well, but each plot point could have been developed by itself into a full novel. The book struggles under its own weight, which isn't helped by Manchee's attention to trivial detail or stilted dialogue. Still, each plot line, in and of itself, can be riveting, and fans of legal thrillers who have already read Grisham, Scottoline, Martini, and Patterson may very well want to check out this novel.

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