

The SCOTUS Affair: A Dimase Augustin Thriller

Stephen L. Bruneau

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*In the tight, twisting thriller **The SCOTUS Affair**, an affable detective pursues the truth about a far-reaching political conspiracy.*

In Stephen L. Bruneau's thrilling novel *The SCOTUS Affair*, Detective Dimase Augustin returns to confront a brutal mystery centered on the US Supreme Court.

Ben's world was rattled when the love of his life—with whom he has been embroiled in a long affair, and who is from a powerful, wealthy family—was attacked during a botched home invasion and left comatose. Ben draws upon his extensive networking skills as one of the country's premier entrepreneurs to find out why she was targeted. His last resort is his old friend, former detective Dimase Augustin.

The already intriguing case takes an unexpected turn when an elite escort with high connections is brutally murdered. The novel zooms out from this murder with calculated patience to tease out connections between the crimes. Augustin discovers a vast conspiracy—in which Ben is involved—that reaches from Louisiana to the halls of power in Washington, D.C.: corrupt people from one political party are trying to gain control of the Supreme Court by removing judges, hoping to extend and maintain their grip on power.

Augustin is witty and charming. Despite being retired, he maintains personal connections to police officers and other helpful allies, though his warm personality opens more doors than his proven skills. His dogged investigation style leads to the revelation of evidence that local police skipped over, and he woos a witness into giving him access to secret letters. Ben, meanwhile, is flawed but realistic—an adulterer who balances his desires with his drive to adhere to a moral code. The book's secondary characters are developed to the extent that it's never clear who might be pivotal to the story, making the whole cast dynamic.

Characters' conversations are made believable in part because of shifting tones, and in part because of the subtle use of accents: a Louisiana native drawls, and a clever hit man speaks with sharp, precise inflections; and an exchange between Ben and his lover early in the book transforms from distant when they're in the hearing of others to erotic when they're alone. Meanwhile, sensory details—as of the sweat-drenched sheets of a hotel room, crunchy glass strewn across a carpet in an unexamined crime scene, and the vicious snapping of a fingernail during the reenacted assault—result in realism, particularly when regarded from Augustin's critical eye. Because of him, evidence is processed and witnesses are tracked down with care, and the book is steady as it builds toward its dramatic conclusion.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (September 9, 2020)

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