

## Affiliation

**Andrew Greville Watts**

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*In the corporate thriller Affiliation, two people discover a sinister conspiracy and risk their lives to alert the world.*

In Andrew Greville Watts's thriller *Affiliation*, a document leak leads to a pulse-pounding manhunt.

Matthews Pharmaceuticals—a company more focused on profit than on healing—takes pride in the policies that keep their secrets safe. They require their sales representatives to log in to company servers twice daily; they employ GPS tagging of company property; they track the daily habits of their employees. But despite their secrecy, a mass email is sent out containing chemical formulas that tie into a conspiracy plot.

The information technology department catches most of the emails and deletes them—but not before Steven, a sales representative with a tendency to shirk company security rules, opens the email and transfers its formulas to a USB drive. He does not yet understand its contents; the revelation of their meaning is delayed until the book's climax.

When everyone else who opened the email dies under mysterious circumstances and their deaths are made to look like overdoses or accidents, another employee who's marked for death, Jenna, escapes and joins Steven. They kindle a romance while on the run, even as they work to outsmart the corporation and its goons. Both Jenna and Steven are able heroes; their rich home lives, intelligence, and determination motivate them as they evade company assassins with only a handful of allies to help. Further amplifying their concerns, Jenna's twin sister, with whom she has a strained relationship, is also placed in danger. In the book's rush to flesh its heroes out, though, it leaves other people underdeveloped.

The book maintains a high level of tension throughout. Its action scenes are visceral. In one, a scientist strikes a CEO with his own "CEO of the Year" award before a chase through the building; elsewhere, the assassins grip a woman's skin hard enough to leave bruises and bullets slam into trees, exploding the bark into shards. These action scenes are complemented by scenes focused on the isolation of being on the run.

Concurrent scenes are cut between at a rapid rate to reveal the full picture, as when Jenna flees into the woods and the narrative reveals what the assassins are doing to track her. However, people's exchanges are also weighed down by exposition throughout the book, impeding tension, as when the bumbling assassins talk at length about the murders they've committed in the past and who they're after next at an inopportune time. Still, the book does an able job of solving its mysteries—and of suggesting hope for those who remain among the people whom the company marked for death.

In the corporate thriller *Affiliation*, two people discover a sinister conspiracy and risk their lives to alert the world.

JOHN M. MURRAY (September 12, 2023)

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