

Justified: A Detective Vic Gonnella Thriller

Louis Romano

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This is an engaging thriller focused on a manhunt, pedophilia, and the state of the modern Catholic Church.

In *Justified*, justice comes from the sharpened end of a crucifix—but could also put the world’s Catholics in danger. Louis Romano’s detective novel is fast and furious, with tight prose and action-oriented chapters that keep a machine-gun pace. Even when providing the exact layout of the Sistine Chapel—including mathematical formulas—or transcribing Swiss German into English, Romano keeps his main story central.

John Deegan is a dangerous man. A former special forces soldier who performed assassinations in Latin America, he is also a proven master of disguise. Both of these skills come in handy when he sets out to rid the world of pedophiles. Inside the Vatican he finds numerous targets, thus revealing the church’s moral “reformation” to have been a big lie.

In response, Rome hires a former NYPD detective, Vic Gonnella. It is Gonnella’s job to stop Deegan and all potential news leaks stemming from his actions, and also to keep the prophecy of Saint Malachy from coming to fruition. If it does, then Pope Francis will be the world’s last pope.

Since the Bronx-born Romano sits on the Trafficking in America Task Force, *Justified* contains an air of legitimacy. Deegan’s tortured past and his hatred of predators is related with honest gusto and earnest conviction. Similarly, the world-weariness expressed by Gonnella echoes the faithful who have grown tired of defending their church. *Justified* is clearly on the side of the victims, even those who take their vendettas too far. As such, the book is not a morbid examination of sin, but a somewhat moralistic detective story told without the straitjacket of didacticism.

Romano’s text pays attention to detail, from explaining how the hierarchy of the Catholic Church works to noting that the Glock pistols used by the Swiss Guard have the words “Equipment of the Guard” embossed on their handles. Romano’s punchy writing style is also a benefit. However, although characters are realistic and the story is pure potboiler, the dialogue, which constitutes a large portion of the novel, is often stilted, and sometimes brims with macho clichés.

Justified is one in a series of novels featuring Detective Gonnella. As a quintessentially hardboiled New Yorker, Gonnella provides the necessary, and necessarily brusque, cynicism that is required in a story about endemic corruption among the leaders of the world’s largest Christian denomination.

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BENJAMIN WELTON (February 1, 2017)

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