

Path to Justice

Jim Dutton

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Path to Justice follows a harrowing case in an absorbing way.

Jim Dutton's *Path to Justice* is a smart and absorbing work of intrigue that goes behind the scenes of efforts to take down an international drug cartel.

Nick Drummond is a droll, middle-aged jazz aficionado who works as prosecutor for the California attorney general. He's head of a money-laundering task force that includes special agents, local detectives, and attractive ICE agent Ana Schwartz.

A wildlife photographer in the backwoods of Montana catches more on his camera than the bears he was expecting, stumbling onto a drug drop-off instead. When information from the sighting falls into Drummond's lap, his task force is challenged to connect the dots, even putting their own lives at risk to stop some very ruthless criminals.

The action occurs over the course of a year and a half. A literally explosive first chapter leads into a lengthy flashback that introduces much information and many characters well.

Characterizations are intricately detailed and realistic, especially for Drummond, who, when the text begins, has already been tossed out of his home for being a workaholic. Somewhat predictably, he falls for his much younger colleague, though this subplot adds to the much bigger story in a sublime way.

Background information on such diverse topics as Glacier National Park, criminal law, authentic Italian cooking, the Holocaust, police procedures, and Father Damien's Hawaiian leper colony is subtly woven into the text, adding an educational aspect.

Brisk, jaunty dialogue adds another dimension to the book's relationships, as when a retired police officer directs his friend to "Document those prints, get the measuring tape and photograph." The friend's response? "I love it when you talk police to me."

Still, some passages of long and involved dialogue detail police strategies too exhaustively; they come to hamper the narrative. The present-tense narration leads to some awkward reading moments, and grammatical errors, particularly around punctuation, are a slight distraction.

In this fast-paced and serious drama, just the right amount of humor is injected in just the right spots. Ongoing jabs between Drummond and Agent Pepe Cantana regarding Drummond's elementary Spanish mask a deep, decades-old friendship. Other relationships also reflect such strong and respectful ties.

Path to Justice follows a harrowing case from its barely discernible beginnings to its conclusion in an absorbing way, providing a behind-the-scenes picture of the personalities who work diligently on the side of justice.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (January 2, 2018)

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