

Extreme Vetting: A Thriller

Roxana Arama

Ooligan Press (Feb 7, 2023)

(288pp)

978-1-947845-38-1

A lawyer's resolve and dedication are tested by a case that's dangerous for all involved in the compassionate thriller Extreme Vetting.

In Roxana Arama's thriller *Extreme Vetting*, a hardworking lawyer's family is threatened because of a risky case.

Laura, a Romanian immigrant who works as an immigration lawyer in the US, is no stranger to wrestling with a system that's intent on keeping foreigners out. However, her newest case is different: she is cajoled into representing Emilio, an undocumented immigrant from Guatemala who fled decades ago after the murder of his family. She has to choose between seeing the case through, even if it might cost her life, or cowering beneath the threats of his family's murderer, who found him after decades of lying low.

The book wastes no time in setting its tone: starting with the case of Felix, who fled Honduras to escape local gang violence, it then moves on to Gabriela, who left Mexico to escape sex traffickers. The perspectives of those left behind are included, too: Laura's mother keeps trying to guilt-trip her into moving back to Romania, going so far as to compare her to her ex-husband, who moved back and married a younger woman. Broad and stirring in its concerns, the book suggests early on that everyone is impacted by the choice to emigrate.

The narrative includes balanced, insightful views of the issues posed by undocumented immigration, too. It does so by juxtaposing people's perspectives on the topics: there's Laura's legal perspective; the government's views are voiced by Waltman, the Seattle chief ICE prosecutor; Emilio shares his thoughts; and David, Emilio's son, expresses feelings of being burdened by the immigration status of his parents, even though he and his brother are American citizens. And, as if the case isn't complicated enough, there is a mole in ICE, muddling the situation further.

Laura and Emilio are well fleshed out. They are both haunted by past traumas that influence the decisions they make. The atmosphere is charged as tension over Emilio's fate builds. And faced with the possibility of being blacklisted by judges after pointing out how an earlier ruling influenced the murder of her previous client, Laura teams up with a criminal defense attorney who adds a pleasant but minor touch of romance to the plot.

The absorbing prose animates each character's experience, giving the story a personal, palpable angle. When Emilio is arrested in front of his youngest son, he "jerk[s] his head back and [meets] his son's eyes, wide with fear." Investigations, thorough research, frequent reviews of processes, and the relentless hunting down of officials who make themselves incommunicado to sabotage the case convey the compassion and courage required to be an immigration lawyer when the consensus seems to be that immigrants aren't wanted and when those who help them are treated as enemies—especially when they, too, have an accent.

A lawyer's resolve and dedication are tested by a case that's dangerous for all involved in the realistic thriller *Extreme Vetting*.

GABRIELLA HARRISON (June 6, 2023)

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