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# REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### **ALMOST MORTAL**

Christopher Leibig  
Koehler Books

## BOOK REVIEW

A Virginia public defender aims to protect a priest by stopping a confessed serial killer from committing another murder in this thriller.

Sam Young is a lawyer accustomed to working off the books, especially given the amount of money that people willingly pay him. But helping Father Andrada, who was a friend to his mother, is a little more personal. Church employee Camille Paradisi tells Sam that a confessor has admitted to the priest that he's the Rosslyn Ripper, responsible for three recent, brutal murders. Camille doesn't know the killer's identity but wants to find a way to keep Andrada from landing in legal trouble or breaking his vow. At the same time, someone's sending pages of a journal to the church, possibly the killer, though there are no specifics on the Ripper murders. The journal's author claims to have an ability akin to mind reading, much like seeing a person's inner "framework." Sam, as it happens, can likewise feel or probe other people's minds. He tries to connect the manuscript and a chalice at the church—with a bit of covert DNA testing—to the Ripper case but can't prevent a fourth murder. His apparent psychic abilities, however, may link him to the journal as well as a secret past. Despite the title hinting at something supernatural, the novel becomes more of a legal thriller. There are countless scenes, for example, of Sam with various clients, including physician Fred Torres, who owes money to a loan shark, and Nguyen Jones, who's exonerated of child-porn charges. Jones aids Sam with his computer skills. The perpetually composed Sam carries the story with chic and humbleness. Leibig (*The Black Rabbit*, 2014, etc.) treats Sam's extraordinary talent in the same way, the attorney using it both sparingly and inconspicuously. Sam rightly suspects that Camille's not telling him everything, leading to a final act that's virtually overflowing with revelations and twists. The author keeps all of it from spinning out of control, though a few questions go unanswered, like why Camille felt the need to mislead Sam with at least one significant piece of information. Still, the narrative could be a stand-alone or the start of a series, hopefully fronted by Sam.

A poised protagonist leads this serpentine but engaging legal tale.

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