

Dark Justice

It is difficult to imagine a more heinous crime than the sexual abuse of children. Yet, terrifyingly, a new case of child sexual abuse is reported every seven minutes. In response to this crisis, self-appointed groups of citizens are fashioning themselves as ‘paedophile hunters’. Operating outside the law, these groups use social media to bait and expose those seeking to engage children sexually, both on- and offline. Their work has been remarkably effective, but at what cost? Following four years of unprecedented access to the UK’s most prolific team of paedophile hunters, Mark de Rond offers balanced and insightful answers to the perplexing question of why these groups persist in using extreme methods to hold predators to account in view of less harmful alternatives. In doing so, he invites us to consider the societal impacts of paedophile hunters on our laws and institutions, as well as societal cohesion and safety.

Mark de Rond is Professor of Organisational Ethnography at Cambridge Judge Business School. He immerses himself in the lives of his subjects, who have included doctors and nurses at war in Afghanistan, a ragtag band rowing the length of the river Amazon, Boat Race crews and paedophile hunters. In his work, he seeks to engage with questions to which the answers can actually make a positive difference to real people in really challenging situations.

‘*Dark Justice* is an ethnographic barnburner, a moral bombshell and a narrative page-turner all rolled into one. It will make you revise all your cherished beliefs about evil, justice and citizenship in the age of out-of-control social media.’

Loïc Wacquant, author of *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* and *Punishing the Poor*

‘Mark de Rond may be the best writer in social science today. His book on paedophile hunters grabs your attention from the first line. He is also one of the most intrepid practitioners of deep ethnography. He describes a world full of dangers – violent, criminal-legal and moral – where the wrongs are emphatic but doing something about them risks even more wrongs. The moral ambiguities of today’s world of interaction by internet are here clearly on display.’

Randall Collins, author of *Explosive Conflict: Time-Dynamics of Violence*

‘This book is incredible! In *Dark Justice* Mark de Rond tells a gripping account of his time with a group of citizens who take it upon themselves to hunt online child predators. Writing like a novelist with his stream-of-consciousness style, he delivers an unflinching examination of what motivates people to personally fight child exploitation. Through a narrative of personal reflections and nail-biting firsthand accounts, *Dark Justice* is a compelling, deeply moving account that lays bare the complexities and ethical quandaries faced by those who pursue predators in their quest for safeguarding innocence.’

Katy DeCelles, Inaugural VMWare Women’s Leadership Innovation Lab Fellow

‘Mark de Rond’s newest book provides important insight into the work of vigilantes who track and entrap paedophiles. Embedded for years on paedophile hunting teams, de Rond’s compelling storytelling explores the many narratives of these hunters including their tenuous relationship with police forces. He forces us to rethink our own relationship with the justice system as we seek to make sense of its grievous failures in protecting children from the most abhorrent crimes. de Rond’s

work pushes us to engage in broader conversations around citizen activism and accountability as we absorb a brilliant and uncomfortable look into the largely invisible work done by paedophile hunters.’

Tina Dacin, Professor and Stephen J. R. Smith
Chair of Strategy and Organizational Behaviour,
Queen’s University

‘*Dark Justice* is a deeply insightful and important exploration of a morally ambiguous world, one wherein the desire of small citizen activated groups to protect innocent children from harm collide with the duplicitous scripts they follow to stamp out predatorial behaviour. A personal and reflexive ethnography that holds little back, recounting the grim and troubling activities of UK and Scotland hunters and decoys as well as their targets. Deftly written around the captivating but nuanced accounts of varied encounters – ‘stings’ – taking place in the enigmatic sphere of identifying and tracking down paedophiles. A treatment of the good, the bad and the ugly as told by a compassionate narrator who draws on four years of participant observation with several groups deemed successful at what they do as well as knowledgeable police officials familiar with the domain and types of encounters inscribed. This vivid narrative is something of a shadow parable for our internet age since so much of the activities of the hunters and their prey relies on social media.’

John Van Maanen, author of *Tales of the Field*

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Inside the World of Paedophile Hunters

Mark de Rond



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-009-45704-0 — Dark Justice
Mark de Rond
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UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009457040

DOI: 10.1017/9781009457026

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When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/
9781009457026

First published 2025

Printed in the United Kingdom by CPI Group Ltd, Croydon CRO 4YY

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

*A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the
Library of Congress.*

ISBN 978-1-009-45704-0 Hardback

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ON THE TITLE OF THIS BOOK

There once was a paedophile hunting team called Dark Justice, but this book isn't about them.

Even so, I did always think Scott and Callum (its co-founders) admirable. Their evidence was repeatedly used in court to convict paedophiles and keep our children much safer than they otherwise would have been. I was as sorry as many others when Scott announced Callum had died in a tragic accident.

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To anyone who's ever stood up for somebody else