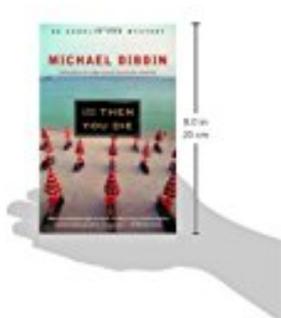


[PDF] And Then You Die

Michael Dibdin - pdf download free book



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Description:

From Publishers Weekly In Dibdin's eighth diverting mystery to feature Aurelio Zen of Rome's elite Criminalpol unit, the hard-to-kill detective is still recuperating from his last adventure, *Blood Rain* (2000), which left him with a collapsed lung, broken ribs and various minor injuries. Zen has been given a new identity and use of a beachfront home in Versilia, a Tuscan coast resort town, while he awaits the beginning of a Mafia trial in America—a trial where he's supposed to be a surprise, and key, witness. Dibdin's wry humor is perfect for Zen's diffident approach as he stirs himself to rejoin the living, even attempting a casual beach flirtation. Zen's enforced idleness chafes, then evaporates as people too near him begin to die and the new strategies developed to conceal

him seem to have (almost) fatal flaws. Dislocations and relocations send Zen to a prison island and then on an abortive journey to America with an unexpected and comical detour. More than one terrible fate may be in store for Zen even if he survives the repeated attempts on his life: being forced to retire or shunted off into some harmless bureaucratic niche to molder away. This is a slight, but enjoyable morsel of a book easily devoured but with subtle flavorings that linger pleasurably. Zen's casual demeanor masks a shrewd mind, one that readers should enjoy seeing return to action.

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From There is an obvious difference between the way we read a mystery series and the way we read a stand-alone novel. The series novel is really a new chapter in an ongoing story, and if we admire a series, we read each installment with the same sort of anticipation that Dickens' original readers brought to each new chapter of one of his serialized novels. It would never have occurred to nineteenth-century Dickens fans to evaluate each chapter on its own rather than as part of the whole, but that's exactly how we usually review mysteries. "It doesn't stand on its own," we say of the latest novel in an ongoing series, but at the same time, we prefer that mystery series evolve over time. And yet, if we insist that each novel in a series tell a completely independent story in which the hero engages us as if it were our first meeting, we inhibit growth by forcing series authors to repeat themselves.

What brought these issues to mind was my recent reading of Michael Dibdin's *And Then You Die*, the latest installment in his Aurelio Zen series. Zen, who takes the world-weary European cop to a new level of no-holds-barred cynicism, is one of my favorite characters in mystery fiction. For anyone who has ever contended with the absurdities of organizational life, or has been trapped in a bureaucratic quagmire from which there is no escape, Zen's daily struggles with Italian officialdom will strike a deep and resonant chord. Unlike most American anti-establishment heroes, who are really just idealists in contrarian drag, Zen is perfectly comfortable with corruption. He believes firmly that a policeman must never "think you have any hope of ever achieving anything," but at the same time, he can't resist the lure of an undiscovered fact. He is the perfect existential hero for a world run by petty bureaucrats on both sides of the law.

Given my attachment to Zen (and, yes, I'll admit it, my identification with him), you can imagine how shattered I was at the end of the previous installment, *Blood Rain*, when it appeared that the much-beleaguered cynic's luck had finally run out. The critic in me, however, recognized that Dibdin had picked the ideal moment to kill off his hero. *Blood Rain* finds Zen in Sicily, caught in a lethal crossfire of power-hungry politicians and crime bosses. As the bodies pile up, Zen is forced to recognize that his obsession with finding the truth is only making matters worse. In a final stroke of bitter irony, he utters the words, "At least we're alive" just before being blown up and, presumably, killed--the perfect exit line for a cynical detective who wasn't quite cynical enough to survive.

But he did survive, we discover in the opening pages of the even more ironically titled *And Then You Die*. Zen is hiding out in Tuscany, waiting to testify against the Mafia chiefs who tried to kill him in Sicily. He meets a woman and is attracted to her just as the bodies start dropping again. Is the Mob on his trail? It takes a while to sort it all out, but remarkably, the story ends on a happy note, with love in the air rather than exploding flesh.

A slight entry in the series, I find myself thinking, a small story with little real punch of its own. And, yet, I loved reading it, first because I was thrilled that Zen survived and then because, damn it, the guy deserves a nice meal and some great sex in the arms of a fascinating woman. Whoa! I'm supposed to be a reviewer here, not a soap-opera addict rooting for my TV friends. But if we read the Zen stories as parts of a serial novel rather than as succeeding stand-alones, my response becomes

more legitimate. Like Dickens, Dibdin is telling a complex, multifaceted story, thematically coherent but full of emotional highs and lows. *And Then You Die* works superbly in the context of what went before; like a perfectly placed small course in an elaborate degustation, it accents the heartier fare that preceded it while preparing us for what is to come.

Authors manage series in different ways. Some, like John D. MacDonald and Robert B. Parker, serve the same entree over and over again. Each book stands alone just fine because each repeats the same formula in the same way. There is nothing wrong with this approach; the pleasures of formula require repetition. But MacDonald and Parker don't write serial novels in the Dickensian sense that Dibdin does. First-time readers of the Zen series shouldn't start with *And Then You Die*, just as first-time Dickens readers shouldn't start with the death of Little Nell. As reviewers, we need to recognize that the way an author manages a series dictates much about the kind of books he or she writes. Don't criticize Parker because Spenser is the same smart-ass he was 30 years ago, and don't criticize Dibdin because it takes more than a single book to hear the sound of one of Zen's hands clapping. *Bill Ott*

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