



Death in Sardinia

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The third in the Inspector Bordelli crime series set in 1960s Florence.

Florence, 1965. A man is found murdered, a pair of scissors stuck through his throat. Only one thing is known about him - he was a loan shark, who ruined and blackmailed the vulnerable men and women who would come to him for help.

Inspector Bordelli prepares to launch a murder investigation. But the case will be a tough one for him, arousing mixed emotions: the desire for justice conflicting with a deep hostility for the victim. And he is missing his young police sidekick, Piras, who is convalescing at his parents' home in Sardinia.

But Piras hasn't been recuperating for long before he too has a mysterious death to deal with . . .

Death in Sardinia Details

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Honor says

Marco Vichi is such a talented writer, but I don't find the actual main plot line mysteries that intriguing. It's the stories of the war, and of his associates' pasts, that are interwoven with scenes of work and family that I find so evocative and haunting. Bordelli is a haunted man, and it's in that blurred border between his everyday reality and his remembered past where the real action is. Certain scenes are so well done and powerful - Botta's dinner at Bordelli's, where each man tells seemingly unrelated stories from their pasts and a Christmas Eve scene in Sardinia with Piras's family are two that come immediately to mind - because the stories these characters are telling draw the reader in like she's sitting at the table with them all, listening and observing and drinking and getting fuzzy headed with the smoke and candlelight. It's magic, this kind of writing. I'm not a huge mystery reader and maybe these are satisfying to me because the mystery is just the bare framework for the rest of it. In a way, the semi clunky plot contrivances are the ideal foil for the ephemeral stories of the past - Vichi's brilliance is highlighted by his weakness. I can't find much about these books in terms of reviews (in the States), so I'm feeling alone in my deep and slightly obsessive appreciation! I've started reading one of his earlier Bordelli books which shows glimpses of his best qualities as a writer but isn't quite up to the standard of Sardinia. But in a way, it just makes me appreciate the good stuff more. It's rare that I experience a writer in this way! Anyways, I loved this book for reasons that seem so specific to me, yet I'm sure that is actually part of its universal charm.

Jan says

I find that many foreign novels fail to translate well. The cultural nuances that make the difference between a fair book & a great one are often lost. And the pace of many European novels can be too slow for my tastes. But this was a very good book--full of complex characters, & a reaves long slice of post war history in Italy.

Chiaralletti says

Facciamo così, diciamo che mi piacciono i comprimari più che i personaggi in generale...il commissario proprio non lo abbozzo! Fastidioso proprio!

Trama facile, prevedibile, che va avanti coi colpi di fortuna...però si legge davvero bene, quando l'alternativa è studiare!

Antonella says

Quando ho tra le mani un libro di Vichi il tempo e le pagine scorrono scorrono scorrono...

Tra indagini e ricordi si arriva alla fine del romanzo e poco importa la storia (buona, tra l'altro); il bello sta nell'aver affiancato, per il tempo di una lettura, personaggi o meglio, persone, come Bordelli e Piras o anche, per assurdo, un delinquente come il Botta.

I ricordi che diventano aneddoti, brevi storie, sono come vicoli di un piccolo paese in cui perdersi, ammirando con calma il tempo impresso su ogni singola pietra.

Bella l'atmosfera che si respira: una Firenze sotto l'acqua (quasi neve), umida, fredda, ma riscaldata dal

Natale, dalle luci, dalla gente e, cosa non da poco, da tanta, tantissima umanità e una sorta di giustizia che dà corpo e peso a giornate e decisioni, perché "un poliziotto prima di tutto deve essere giusto". E la giustizia sta anche nel cuore.

MASH says

Loved this book. It had more meat than most mysteries. I haven't read the first two in the series. Highly recommended.

Helen says

A strangely meandering yet still quite engrossing novel. Set in the 60s in Florence, the author languidly involves us in two murders, one in Florence and one in Sardinia. Ever present are Inspector Bordelli's often overwhelming memories, of lost loves and of the horrific consequences of war.

Dale says

This was a wonderful book, on several levels. It is set in Florence and Sardinia in the weeks before and after Christmas, 1965. Piras, Bordelli's young colleague and the son of inspector Bordelli's war comrade Gavino, is in Sardinia with his parents, recovering from serious injuries. Bordelli is in Florence, investigating the murder of a vicious loan shark that Bordelli had been keeping his eye on for some time.

While Piras is in Sardinia an old friend of the family apparently commits suicide. Piras soon realizes, however, that something is fishy: the gunshell is missing.

So the two stories are told in parallel. Bordelli, for his part, is faced with a moral dilemma. To bring the loan shark's killer to "justice" would be no justice at all. Nonetheless, he follows his instincts and scraps of evidence and finds the killer. Piras has little to go on in his case, but makes the most of what he has, and through good luck and observation also identifies the murderer of his friend.

The story is full of the memories of those who lived and fought in Italy in the closing two years of WWII. Bordelli returns again and again to that awful time; the friends and comrades lost; the terrible suffering; the disgrace of Nazi occupation and fascist collaboration. Vichi does a great job of highlighting the contrast between the memories and experience of those who lived in the fascist period and the young caught up in the new world of the 1960s. Bordelli (and, we suspect, Vichi) feels the full weight of his 55 years, unable to fully understand the changes that are taking place around him. He's by no means a dinosaur, though he is treated as one by the twenty year olds that he meets during his investigation. But neither can he embrace, let alone be part of, the changes that are unfolding.

Vichi does a really smart thing in the middle of the novel. Bordelli gives a Christmas eve dinner party for three of his friends, plus his old friend, the thief Botta. After dinner Bordelli suggests that everyone should tell a story, which they do. They are uniformly sad stories about their experiences in the war and afterward. This sets the stage for a Christmas day story told at the Piras' parents' home, which puts Piras on the trail of the murderer. Besides moving the plot forward, this device of the storytelling adds depth to each of the characters, and gives us a much better sense of the time.

Bordelli is full of regret and longing, mostly for the women who have left him. He daydreams constantly about his lost loves, as well as about his years as a partisan fighter. His main pleasure in life seems to be eating with his friend, Totó, the cook at a local restaurant, and spending time with Rosa, an ex-prostitute. He mostly lives for his work, which he seems to mostly enjoy, despite the terrible things he has seen as a murder investigator. He wonders from time to time what purpose life, or his life, serves, but mostly he just lives his life like the rest of us.

The translation by the ever dependable Stephen Sartarelli is excellent. The story would stand on its own, but the top-notch translation really helped it come alive.

Margaret says

Although rather a lot of emphasis on drinking coffee and trying to give up smoking, I enjoyed reading this book. Some of the dubious references to prostitutes are of their time (the 1960s) and this and other seeming anomalies have to be taken into account. I could certainly identify with the era and the way we younger people had no idea (thankfully) of what our parents had lived through during the Second World War. Even worse in occupied countries, and the descriptions of the outrages committed by the Italian fascists and the Nazis are horrific. I thought the two contemporary investigations were interesting, with one being dealt with in typical Bordelli-type justice fashion.

Tripfiction says

Crime novel set in Florence and Sardinia (an Inspector Bordelli mystery...)

A book that starts on the 12th December 1965, and ends on the 31st December 1965 – so an ideal one for me to have read over the Christmas period. And a book with a slightly misleading / abbreviated title... there are actually two murders, one in Florence and one in Sardinia. The murder in Florence is investigated by Inspector Bordelli, and the one in Sardinia by Sergeant Piras – his assistant who is on the island living with his parents whilst recovering from a leg injury sustained in the course of duty. The Florence murder is of a very unpleasant loan shark, and the Sardinian one of a farmer who lived alone and apparently committed suicide.

The structure of the book is intriguing and, perhaps, a little confusing. The chapter titles are the dates and within each chapter both stories are told – switching quite suddenly from Bordelli / Florence to Piras / Sardinia and back again. You have to be on your toes!

Death in Sardinia is not a page turner. It proceeds at a leisurely pace and we are introduced to the prime suspects quite early, and obviously, in each story. It is, though, a brilliant read for TripFiction – very atmospheric in its description of both Florence and Sardinia (and their respective customs) in the period leading up to Christmas. Food and drink are key, and brilliantly described. And it is also strong on geography with fascinating details of both locations (although a couple of maps would have been a useful addition). The reader feels very much involved in each place.

Bordelli is in the mold of many fictional detectives, a man with lots of weaknesses but with a great crime solving record. He tries to give up smoking (on almost every page), and drinks and eats too much. His best friends are work colleagues and an assembly of ex prostitutes and just-out-of-gaol burglars – but all with

'hearts of gold'. He worries about his age (55) and how out of touch he is becoming with the younger generation. Piras is the son of a man that Bordelli fought with in the anti-fascist brigades in the war – who harbours strong anti-fascist feelings himself. Although he has moved to Florence for work he is, in many ways, a very traditional Sardinian.

Death in Sardinia is a delightful read that offers a great deal of insight into its two locations and its characters. But, as a stand alone mystery, it is probably lacking a little in pace and denouement. It all depends exactly what you are looking for but it is very definitely a book that I enjoyed. It is the first of the Inspector Bordelli mysteries that I have read – and I do not intend for it to be the last.

LauraT says

Ora e sempre Resistenza

Sifra says

The third book of Inspector Bordelli is not to be read for a good whodunnit. The book treats more the question of right and wrong and the moral answer to that question. Nonetheless the picture the writer paints for us of 1965 Italy is perfect! The characters in the book are given depth, and thoughts and doubts that are very recognizable. The book paints a human picture, which you do not see to often anymore.

Nancy Oakes says

3.5 stars

Just when I thought I'd had it with Inspector Bordelli and his long-winded war reveries, as well as his constant flirtations with giving up smoking, along comes Death in Sardinia to change my mind. This book is much more on task than the previous two, enough so that I've already preordered Vichi's Death in Florence, which I should get in November some time.

It's 1965, Christmas is fast approaching, and Bordelli is called out to investigate the death of a notorious loan shark named Badalamenti, who has ended up with a pair of scissors deep in his neck. Bordelli had once tried to investigate Badalamenti, but was denied; now that he's dead, the inspector has full access. The coroner performing the autopsy pulls an engraved ring out of the dead man's stomach, and he lets Bordelli know a bit of information about the killer to help Bordelli narrow down his search. Going through the loan shark's apartment, Bordelli stumbles upon a hidden space filled with promissory notes, compromising photos of a woman, and a collection of wedding rings. He also finds pictures of a young girl, with the name "Marisa" on the back. Going through all of the names on the notes, and looking at the photos, Bordelli decides that Badalamenti's murderer must be among them, and sets about returning the notes to Badalamenti's customers while sizing up each one as to whether or not he is the killer. In the meantime, his trusty sidekick Piras has gone home to Sardinia to recuperate after being shot while in the line of duty; while there, a family friend shoots himself, causing no end of grief for friends and family, but Piras realizes that something's not right --

and after the funeral it dawns on him: where was the shell from the shot? Both men have their hands full trying to sort things out.

Death in Sardinia tackles not only these crimes, but also gets more fully into Bordelli's character. He realizes that he's not getting any younger, and waxes about aging; he also realizes that although the war that is always on his mind has been over now for two decades, it may be time for him to "stop looking at the world through its prism." Besides, in this day and age, the new generation of young people

"could no longer bear hearing the older people's complaints about the war and having to queue up for bread. The tears to be cried had already been shed. Now it was time to start living again, and having fun. Maybe they were right."

More importantly, Bordelli comes to realize that the letter of the law doesn't cover every situation, and that he must apply principles of fairness and understanding while on the track of justice.

This book moved much more quickly than its two predecessors, and there was more of a clear path from crime to investigation to solution than in the earlier novels. Although there was still the war reminiscing and memories to fill the pages, and although there was quite a bit that could have been taken out to move the book along and make it much tighter, it really is the best of the series so far. As in his other two novels, past and present meaningfully intersect in this story, here maybe more so, a quality I actually like in these books. And while there's a good mystery here, it's not so edgy or gritty, so it's perfect for those who enjoy lighter crime fare.

Filippo Bossolino says

Terzo episodio del Commissario Bordelli. Interessante il fatto che ci siano due indagini parallele, quella del Commissario impegnato con l'assassinio di un usuraio e quella del brigadiere Piras, in Sardegna in convalescenza, alle prese con il suicidio di un parente che tanto suicidio non sembra.

Sempre presente l'Italia degli anni sessanta, dei primi programmi in televisione, delle contestazioni politiche e tutti i personaggi già incontrati nei primi due romanzi, Diotivede, Botta, Rosa, Dante ecc...

Non resta altro che proseguire con i successivi

Alana White says

Loved this book, the third in Italian author Marco Vichi's series set in 1960s Florence, Italy. Wry Inspector Bordelli and his cronies are back in a novel that calls on dark memories of the war and Fascism in Italy. All is leavened with great dollops of droll humor and companionable, lengthy dinners wherein much wine is consumed. (Over Christmas dinner, Bordelli and his pals decide that French cooking rules the world. Yes. French.) Very highly recommended. I can't wait for the next title, "Death in Florence," set in 1966 and focusing on the flood that roared through the city, overwhelming its medieval palazzos and churches, damaging so much precious artwork and taking lives. One quibble. The books are translated from the Italian, and while that must be a daunting task, I wish the translator would NOT refer to the men who populate these books as "blokes." These and other decidedly English terms pepper the book throughout and are distracting.

Caroline says

This is the third book in the Inspector Bordelli series. Set in Florence in the 1960s, the book is plump with a rich mood, both of time and place. Many of the characters who peopled the first book are here – Botta, Bordelli's lock-picking thief pal who is also a genius cook, Dr. Diotivede, the punctilious pathologist, Toto, the chef who opens his kitchen to Bordelli every lunchtime, Dante the eccentric inventor, and Rose the prostitute, a great chum of Bordelli's – who in this book shows many facets – including this time introducing him to his first joint.

One person is present but a long way away... Bordelli's sidekick Piras has been sent home to Sardinia after being wounded in a shooting – he has been told to go home and recuperate with his family, and there he must stay until he gets better. This turns out to be no penalty, for instead of one murder to be solved we get two. One with Bordelli in Florence and one with Piras in Sardinia, even on crutches - his investigative instincts are running high.

It all sounds quite promising, but I wasn't grabbed. Instead I was irritated by various nit-picky aspects of Inspector Bordelli that began to drive me a little nuts. Most of all I hated the endless descriptions of his relationship with cigarettes. The ones he lit and inhaled four times, or three times, or five times. The ones he put in his mouth unlit. The ones he deferred having. The ones he tried to defer having but gave into anyway. Grrrrrr! I don't care if this man chain-smoked his way from the first to last page – I just didn't want to know about it. He also fantasised a lot about his war experiences, and I found these fantasies boring.... Obviously they are part of the shaping of his character, and featured a lot in the first book too, but I found them distracting rather than enlightening. For me they didn't bring bounty to the character.

The murders were quite interesting. There was a twist to the one in Florence – I didn't expect the way the ending of it worked out, and the one in Sardinia, although a bit implausible, was rather wonderfully satisfying.

Even so I am only giving this book two stars. There was just way too much smoking. When I was half way through I strongly thought of giving the book up, but having got so far I thought I might as well finish it. And that is no great recommendation :(
