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Vendetta



Par Michael Dibdin
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Par Michael Dibdin : Vendetta before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Vendetta:

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThere was something about the Burolo case which was different any other he had ever been involved in. He had known cases which obsessed him professionally, taking over his life until he was unable to sleep properly or to think about anything else, but this was even more disturbing.Inspector Zen has a problem: an impossible murder, recorded on the closed-circuit video of Oscar Burolo's top-security Sardinian fortress. As he gets to work, he is once again plunged into a menacing and violent world where his own life is soon at risk.If you enjoyed the Inspector Zen Mystery series you may also like The Last Sherlock Holmes Story, another crime novel by Michael Dibdin.ExtraitWEDNESDAY: 0150-0245AURELIO ZEN LOUNGED ON THE SOFA like a listless god, bringing the dead back to life. With a flick of his finger he

made them rise again. One by one the shapeless, blood-drenched bundles stirred, shook themselves, crawled about a bit, then floated upward until they were on their feet again. This extremely literal resurrection had taken them by surprise, to judge by their expressions, or perhaps it was the sight of one another's bodies that was so shocking, the hideous injuries and disfigurements, the pools and spatters of blood everywhere. But as Zen continued to apply his miraculous intervention, all this was set to rights, too: the gaping rents in flesh and fabric healed themselves, the blood mopped itself up, and in no time at all the scene looked almost like the ordinary dinner party it had been until the impossible occurred. None of the four seemed to notice the one remarkable feature of this spurious afterlife, namely that everything happened backwards."He did it."Zen's mother was standing in the doorway, her nightdress clutched around her skimpy form."What's wrong, Mamma?"She pointed at the television, which now showed a beach of brilliant white sand framed by smoothly curved rocks. A man was swimming backward through the wavelets. He casually dived up out of water, landed neatly on one of the rocks, and strolled backward to the shaded lounging chairs where the others sat sucking smoke out of the air and blowing it into cigarettes."The one in the swimming costume. He did it. He was in love with his wife so he killed him. He was in another one, too, last week on channel five. They thought he was a spy but it was his twin brother. He was both of them. They do it with mirrors."Mother and son gazed at each other across the room lit by the electronically preserved sunlight of a summer now more than three months in the past. It was almost two o'clock in the morning, and even the streets of Rome were hushed.Zen pressed the pause button of the remote control unit, stilling the video."Why are you up, Mamma?" he asked, trying to keep his irritation out of his voice. This was breaking the rules. Once she had retired to her room, his mother never reappeared. It was respect for these unwritten laws that made their life together just about tolerable from his point of view."I thought I heard something."Their eyes still held. The woman who had given Zen life might have been the child he had never had, awakened by a nightmare and seeking comfort. He got up and walked over to her."I'm sorry, Mamma. I turned the sound right down . . ."I don't mean the TV."He interrogated those bleary, evasive eyes more closely. "What, then?"She shrugged pettishly. "A sort of scraping." "Scraping? What do you mean?" "Like old Umberto's boat."Zen was often brought up short by his mother's ability to knock him off balance by some reference to a past which for her was infinitely more real than the present would ever be. He had quite forgotten Umberto, the portly, dignified proprietor of a general grocery near the San Geremia bridge. He used the boat to transport fruit and vegetables from the Rialto market, as well as boxes, cases, bottles, and jars to and from the cellars of his house, which the ten-year-old Zen had visualised as an Aladdin's cave crammed with exotic delights. When not in use, the boat was moored to a post in the little canal opposite the Zens' house. The post had a tin collar to protect the wood, and a few moments after each vaporetto passed down the Cannaregio, the wash would reach Umberto's boat and set it rubbing its gunwale against the collar, producing a series of metallic rasps."It was probably me moving around in here that you heard," Zen told her. "Now go back to bed before you catch cold." "It didn't come from in here. It came from the other side. Across the canal. Just like that damned boat."Zen took her by the arm, which felt alarmingly fragile. Widowed by the war, his mother had affronted the world alone on his behalf, wresting concessions from tradesmen and bureaucrats, labouring at menial jobs to eke out her pension, cooking, cleaning, sewing, mending, and making do, tirelessly and ingeniously hollowing out and shoring up a space for her son to grow up in. Small wonder, he thought, that the effort had reduced her to this pittance of a person, scared of noises and the dark, with no interest in anything but the television serials she watched, whose plots and characters were gradually becoming confused in her mind. Such motherhood as she had known was like those industrial jobs that leave workers crippled and broken, the only difference being that there was no one mothers could sue for damages.Zen led her back into the musty bedroom she occupied at the back of the apartment, filled with the furniture she had brought with her from their home in Venice. The pieces were all elaborately carved from some wood as hard, dark, and heavy as iron. They covered every inch of wall space, blocking up the fire escape as well as most of the window, which she always kept tightly shuttered anyway."Are you going to stay up and watch the rest of that film?" she asked as he tucked her in."Yes, Mamma, don't worry, I'll be just in there. If you hear anything, it's only me." "It didn't come from in there! Anyway, I told you who did it. The skinny one in the swimming costume." "I know, Mamma," he murmured wearily. "That's what everyone thinks."He wandered back to the living room just as two o'clock began to strike from the churches in the Vatican. Zen stood surveying the familiar faces locked up on the flickering screen. They were familiar not just to him but to everyone who had watched television or looked at the papers that autumn. For months the news had been dominated by the dramatic events and still more sensational implications of the Burolo affair.In a way it was quite

understandable that Zen's mother had confused the characters involved with the cast of a film she had seen. Indeed, it was a film that Zen was watching, but a film of a special kind, not intended for commercial release and only available to him as an officer of the Criminalpol section of the Ministry of the Interior in connection with the report he had been asked to prepare, summarising the case to date. He wasn't really supposed to take it home, but the Ministry didn't run to video machines for its employees, even those of Vice-Questorial rank. So what was he supposed to do, Zen had demanded in his ignorance of the nature of video tape, hold it up to the window, frame by frame? He sat down on the sofa again, groped for the remote control unit, and pressed the play button, releasing the blurred figures to laugh, chat, and generally ham it up for the camera. They knew it was there, of course. Oscar Burolo made no secret of his mania for recording the high points of his life. On the contrary, every visitor to the billionaire's Sardinian hideaway had been impressed by the underground vault containing hundreds of video tapes and computer disks, all carefully shelved and indexed. Like all good libraries, Oscar's collection was constantly expanding. Indeed, shortly before his death a complete new section of shelving had been installed to accommodate the latest additions. "But do you actually ever watch any of them?" the guest might ask. "I don't need to watch them," Oscar would reply, smiling in a peculiar way. "It's enough to know that they're there." If the six people relaxing at the water's edge were in any way uneasy about the prospect of having their antics preserved for posterity, they certainly showed no sign of it. An invitation to the Villa Burolo was so sought after that no one was going to quibble about the conditions. Quite apart from the experience itself, it was something to brag about at dinner parties for months to come. "You mean to say you've actually been there?" people would ask, their envy showing like an ill-adjusted slip. "Tell me, is it true that he has lions and tigers freely roaming the grounds and that the only way in is by helicopter?" Secure in the knowledge that no one was likely to contradict him, Oscar Burolo's exguest could freely choose whether to distort the facts ("I solemnly assure you, I who have been there and seen it with my own eyes, that Burolo has a staff of over thirty servants-or rather slaves!-that he bought, cash down, from the president of a certain African country . . .") or, in more sophisticated company, to suggest that the truth was actually stranger than the various lurid and vulgar fictions which had been circulating. On the face of it, this degree of interest was itself almost the oddest feature of the business. Nothing could be more banal than for a rich Italian to buy himself a villa in Sardinia. Sardinia, of course, meant the Costa Smeralda on the northern coast of the island, which the Aga Khan had bought for a pittance from the local peasant farmers and turned into a holiday paradise for the superwealthy, a ministate which sprang into being every summer for two months. Its citizens hailed from all parts of the world and from all walks of life: film stars, industrialists, sheiks, politicians, criminals, pop singers, bankers. Their cosmopolitan enclave was protected by an extremely efficient private police force, but its internal regime was admirably democratic and egalitarian. Religious, political, and racial discrimination were unknown. The only requirement was money and lots of it. As founder and owner of a construction company whose rapid success was almost uncanny, there was no question that Oscar Burolo satisfied that requirement. But instead of meekly buying his way into the Costa like everyone else, he did something unheard-of, something so bizarre and outlandish that some people claimed afterwards that they had always thought it was ill-omened from the start. For his Sardinian retreat, Oscar chose an abandoned farmhouse halfway down the island's almost uninhabited eastern coast, and not even on the sea, for God's sake, but several kilometres inland! Italians have no exaggerated respect for eccentricity, and this kind of idiosyncrasy might very easily have aroused nothing but ridicule and contempt. It was a measure of the panache with which Oscar carried off his whims that exactly the opposite was the case. The full resources of Burolo Construction were brought to bear on the humble farmhouse, which was swiftly altered out of all recognition. One by one, the arguments against Oscar's choice were made to look small-minded and unconvincing. The security aspect, so important in an area notorious for kidnapping, was taken care of by hiring the top firm in the country to make the villa intruder-proof, no expense spared. Used to having to cut corners to make security cost-effective, the consultant was delighted for once to have an opportunity to design a system without compromises. "If any intruder ever manages to get into this place, I'll believe in ghosts," he assured his client when the work was completed. Having bought peace of mind with hard cash, Oscar then added a characteristic touch by buying a pair of rather moth-eaten lions from a bankrupt safari park outside Cagliari and turning them loose in the grounds, calculating that the resulting publicity would do as much as any amount of high technology to deter intruders. But even Oscar couldn't change the fact that the villa was situated almost two hundred kilometres from the nearest airport and the glamorous nightspots of the Costa Smeralda, two hundred kilometres of tortuous and poorly maintained road where no electronic fences could

protect him from kidnappers. Wasn't that a drawback? Well, it might be, Oscar retorted, for someone who still thought of personal transport in terms of cars. But Olbia and the Costa were only half that distance as the crow flew, and when the crow in question was capable of two hundred and twenty kilometres an hour . . .

To clinch the argument, Oscar would bundle his guests into the crow-an Agusta helicopter-and pilot them personally to Palau or Porto Cervo for aperitifs. As for swimming, since Oscar would not go to the coast like everyone else, the coast was made to come to him. A wide irregular hollow the size of a small lake was scooped out of the parched red soil behind the farm. This was lined with concrete, filled with water, and decorated with a sandy beach and wave-smoothed rocks dynamited and bulldozed out of the foreshore, barnacles and all. And the barnacles thrived, because one of the biggest surprises awaiting Burolo's guests as they padded off for their first dip was that the water was salty. "Fresh from the Mediterranean," Oscar would explain proudly. "Pumped up here through five thousand four hundred and thirty seven metres of sixty centimetre duct, filtered for impurities, agitated by six asynchronous wave simulators and continuously monitored to maintain a constant level of salinity." Oscar liked using words like asynchronous and salinity and quoting squads of figures: it clinched the effect which the villa was already beginning to have on his listener. But he knew when to stop and at this point would usually slap his guest on the back-or, if it was a woman, place his hand familiarly at the base of her spine just above the buttocks-and say, "So what's missing, except for a lot of fish and crabs and lobsters? Mind you, we have those, too, but they know their place here-on a plate!" Zen paused the video again as footsteps sounded in the street outside. A car door slammed shut. But instead of the expected sound of the car starting up and driving away, the footsteps returned the way they had come, ceasing somewhere close by. He walked over to the window and opened the shutters. The wooden jalousies beyond the glass were closed, but segments of the scene outside were visible by looking down through the angled slats. Both sides of the street were packed with cars parked on the road, on either side of the trees lining it, and all over the pavement. Some distance from the house a red sedan was parked beyond all these, all by itself, facing toward the house. It appeared to be empty. The scene was abruptly plunged into darkness as the streetlamp attached to the wall just below turned itself off. Something had gone wrong with its automatic switch, so that the lamp was continually fooled into thinking that its own light was that of the dawn and therefore turned itself off. Then, after some time, it would start to glow faintly again, gradually growing brighter and brighter until the whole cycle repeated itself. Zen closed the shutters and walked back to the sofa. Catching sight of his reflection in the large mirror above the fireplace, he paused, as though the person he saw there might hold the key to what was puzzling him. The prominent bones and tautness of the skin, especially around the eyes, gave his face a slightly exotic air, probably due to Slav or even Semitic blood somewhere in the family's Venetian past. It was a face that gave nothing away, yet seemed always to tremble on the brink of some expression that never quite appeared. His face had made Zen's reputation as an interrogator, for it was a perfect screen onto which others could project their own suspicions, fears, and apprehensions. Where other policemen confronted criminals, using the carrot or the stick according to the situation, Zen's subjects found themselves shut up with a man who barely seemed to exist, yet who mirrored back to them the innermost secrets of their hearts. They read their every fleeting emotion accurately imaged on those scrupulously blank features and knew that they were lost. From Publishers Weekly Corruption in high places, underworld skulduggery and a vendetta among mountainfolk are ingredients for murder in this literate, suspenseful thriller. An intruder guns down an eccentric Sardinian billionaire, his wife and two guests in his seemingly impregnable villa. Enter befuddled Venetian inspector Aurelio Zen, last encountered in Dibdin's *Ratking*. Zen, who has a perfunctory love life, a half-senile, bad-tempered mother and an intuitive faculty sometimes worthy of his name, now works for an Italian government ministry in Rome. He's dispatched to Sardinia to get the chief suspect, a politician's friend, off the hook. Two crazies want Zen rubbed out: a just-released convict whom he'd sent to jail years ago, and the killer, whose lyrical, half-mad ramblings punctuate the narrative--of course, the two could be the same person. Spinning a plot as convoluted as Sardinia's winding streets, Dibdin illuminates a deeply corrupted society and ultimately vindicates his hero, who outmaneuvers the supercops trying to silence him. Copyright