



The Magpie

Oliver Rock

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The methodical search through Amsterdam for a serial killer results in an engrossing thriller filled with memorable characters.

In Oliver Rock's enthralling thriller, *The Magpie*, a serial killer has the citizens of Amsterdam on edge.

One body has appeared every month since January; it's now September. A ninth victim is discovered in a parking garage. Arnaud Van Loo, the middle-aged lead detective on the case, is no closer to finding the perpetrator than when the first body was found. The killer is nicknamed the Magpie for his habit of removing victims' clothing and jewelry. Van Loo is frustrated; he feels the Magpie is personally taunting him.

An eclectic bunch of twentysomethings who live, work, party, and study hard are peripherally touched by the killings. They include Roos, a nurse who is in a tempestuous relationship with a flight attendant, Jade; their roommate, Fleur, a full-time student working part-time at one of the city's brothels; and boyfriend and girlfriend Jan and Mariana, who are from totally opposite backgrounds.

Events unfold over a three-month period. Chapter subheadings list the dates and times of various characters' activities, helpfully maintaining a clear timeline.

Police work, as described, is as rote and mundane as the flawed Van Loo—divorced, a smoker, and a heavy drinker. He and his right-hand man Friso methodically brainstorm, go through videotapes, and interview potential witnesses while the media wait camped out on their doorsteps. This inside look at the information-gathering process gives the story an authentic investigative feel.

Writing is personable and detailed. A wealth of background information is provided for the characters, exploring their personalities, their families, and their past relationships. They represent a range of ages, including an older judge and a barmaid in her mid-thirties. Portions describing Fleur at work seem gratuitous, while the book's focus on characters' physiques becomes awkward.

Relationships between the various characters are realistic and relatable. Roos, who is great at her career, is insecure and jealous where her girlfriend is concerned. Mariana conceals a deep and smoldering anger at her father, while Jan, a struggling art student working at his family's bakery, can't believe he is actually in a relationship with the beautiful Mariana. Friso looks at Van Loo as his mentor, though other colleagues oftentimes dismiss the aging detective.

Though it might be guessed sooner, the identity of the Magpie isn't actually revealed until near the book's end. Plenty of red herrings are tossed out, making it difficult to determine who the real killer is up until then. Those who enjoy playing armchair detective alongside the police will enjoy the ride and the step-by-step process of figuring out who exactly the Magpie is, though the ending is somewhat disappointing.

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characters.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (January 30, 2018)

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