

Zen and the Art of Murder

Oliver Bottini

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An exciting new voice in crime fiction emerges with *Zen and the Art of Murder*, the first novel in Oliver Bottini's Black Forest Investigation series.

The book opens with a badly beaten monk wandering the snow-covered German landscape. Soon, a team from the Black Forest police squad, headed by divorced and depressed inspector Louise Boni, gets involved, hoping to discover who the monk is and what has happened to him. It's clear that he is fearful of someone or something, but he won't say anything more.

This kicks off a case that is as bizarre as it is frightening. Louise's team is not only investigating, but becomes implicated in a shocking ring of child traffickers. Louise, already struggling with her personal life and dependency on alcohol, tries to untangle the web while battling ghosts and her fellow police officers.

At atmospheric story that perfectly evokes the stark, forbidding landscape of a German winter, *Zen and the Art of Murder* bends around both real and psychological twists and turns. Exploring both the psyche of a damaged member of law enforcement and the inner workings of an investigation into a disturbing series of crimes, the book unveils its secrets at a perfect pace.

Though Louise is sometimes unlikable and clearly self-sabotages, her redemption is tied into the investigation, making the journey absorbing on both emotional and legal grounds. Supporting characters, including the enigmatic monk, Louise's mother, and her fellow investigators, are complex and add another layer of nuance to an already deep tale.

Zen and the Art of Murder is both baffling and affecting in turn, and always entertaining. It's an excellent beginning to a thrilling new series.

ANGELA MCQUAY (November / December 2019)

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