



READING GUIDE

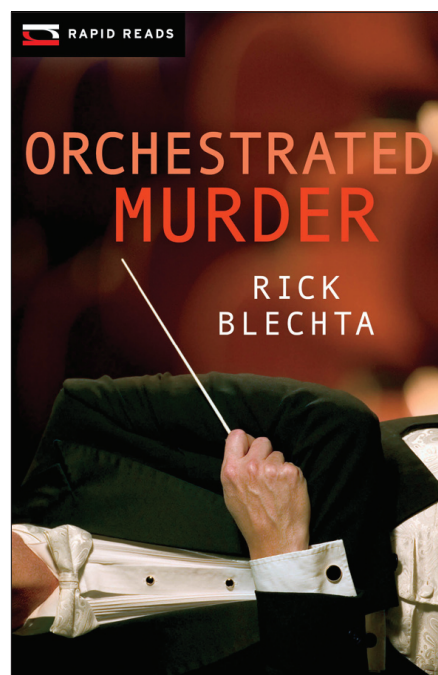
ORCHESTRATED MURDER RICK BLECHTA

Reading level: 5.4

Interest level: Adult

Themes: mystery, murder, mayhem

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Summary

Fifty-four-year-old Detective Lieutenant Pratt is reluctantly dragged into a messy investigation when news arrives that the symphony's star conductor has been murdered. The entire orchestra—a group of seventy-six people—has confessed to the murder. Pratt knows they're covering for someone—but it's up to him to get the facts straight before the media gets hold of the story and blows it out of proportion.

Before he was strangled with a cello string, conductor Luigi Spadafini lived his life purely for himself. The talented conductor was a serial womanizer who used people to get where he wanted to go. He was ruthless with “dead wood” in the orchestra, riding weak members in hopes of making them quit. His career meant more to him than anything else. The entire orchestra disliked their leader for his heartless approach. He had few friends, except, oddly, the symphony manager, Michael Browne.

While at first it seems like somebody in the orchestra might have killed Spadafini—after all, nobody but his girlfriends liked him—Pratt leaves no stone unturned in his investigation. This means talking with Browne. It means speaking with James Norris, the board chair of the symphony, as well as questioning the chairman of the board of a different symphony—one that had offered Spadafini more money to make the jump to *his* orchestra. And there are others: Spadafini's current fling; a disgruntled older member of the orchestra; and the cousin of a girl who committed suicide after being dumped by Spadafini. All possible suspects in a twisted, mixed-up case.

With the mayor and the symphony board urging him to resolve the murder as quickly as possible, Pratt is forced to lean on Ellis, a young detective who he believes is still wet behind the ears. And although Ellis is young, he more than proves his mettle to Pratt, who finds the young man to be trustworthy, observant and fast on his feet—all good things in a detective. The two merge Ellis's technological savvy (checking cellular phone logs and hacking into the symphony manager's computer) with Pratt's powers of observation and deduction to pinpoint the murderer. As it turns out, whereas Spadafini had promised to take Browne along with him when he defected to the higher-paying orchestra, he later went back on his word. Angry at having misplaced his loyalty for so long, Browne sought the ultimate revenge.



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Questions for Discussion

1. *Orchestrated Murder* challenges readers to examine some common stereotypes. For example, in chapter 3, an officer in uniform tells Pratt that the police are finding the orchestra difficult to control. Pratt's response? "Of course! They're musicians." What does this mean? Explain the stereotype that Pratt reflects with this statement.
2. When Pratt has a conversation with Eliza Wanamaker, he gets the feeling she doesn't think cops are capable of understanding classical music. Wanamaker is stereotyping police with her attitude. What are some common police stereotypes? Have you seen any of them play out in the real world?
3. In chapter 5, Pratt instructs several detectives to begin questioning musicians—and to hurry up, as "the press hounds are baying outside." This is an example of a metaphor, where an event or person is described using an image that represents something else. As you read *Orchestrated Murder*, keep an eye out for other metaphors. Why do authors use metaphors?
4. In chapter 6, Pratt reflects on himself when he takes a short break in the men's room. On a blank sheet of paper, create a character map of Pratt. What do you know about his personality? His appearance? His personal history? The way he feels about his job? Add to this character map as you read through the book.
5. When Pratt speaks with Browne about Annabelle Lee's suicide, he says the conductor was a "heartless bastard." Browne responds that that may be the case, but he was a sublime musician. Is this a stereotype? That talented artists are missing some of the essential components that make us human? Think of other artists, writers or musicians you know about who have also struggled with their personal relationships. Write about them.
6. "Sofia Barna put her hand to her mouth and bolted from the stage." This is the last sentence in chapter 7. How does this sentence show the reader Sofia's emotional state? Why is this kind of "showing" more effective than simply telling the reader that she was upset?
7. In chapter 8, Pratt asks one of his investigators for his initial gut reaction to the crime scene. What is meant by the term "gut reaction"? How is this a useful thing for human beings? Explain about a time when you felt a gut reaction about something. Looking back, do you think it helped you make a decision about a particular event or problem?
8. Pratt becomes irritated when others talk down to him, or perceive him as "less" than they are. Find two examples of this in *Orchestrated Murder*. Knowing how this kind of thing rankles Pratt, would you say he's happy with his position as a detective? Why or why not?
9. In chapter 10, Pratt knows the orchestra's board chair, Norris, is lying when he looks away from him during questioning. What other kinds of body language do we know about people who are lying? How does body language help us understand each other when we communicate—for better or for worse?
10. Pratt needs to be an observer of human nature to do his job well. When he speaks with Annabelle Lee's cousin, he notices the young man seems nervous. Besides policing, what kinds of jobs require this kind of ability to study and assess people's expressions and behavior?





11. When Pratt learns Norris hasn't been open with him about the number of times he entered the building that day, he feels like he's being played. Discuss the meaning of this expression. Describe a time when you felt like you were being played.
12. Pratt and Ellis come up with the same solution to the murder, but using different methods: Ellis uses technology whereas Pratt uses observation and deduction. As you see it, is one more valuable than the other? Discuss.
13. At the end of the book, Pratt tells Ellis that if you dig below the surface, a lot of people are pretty ugly. And that the more ability a person has, the greater the ugliness. Do you agree? What would make an extraordinarily talented person become like this? Give several examples of talented people who defy this assessment.
14. How does Pratt's relationship with Ellis change as a result of events in the book? Do you think Ellis changes Pratt in any way?
15. The title of this book, *Orchestrated Murder*, is a play on words. Can you think of another title for this book, with or without a play on words?

