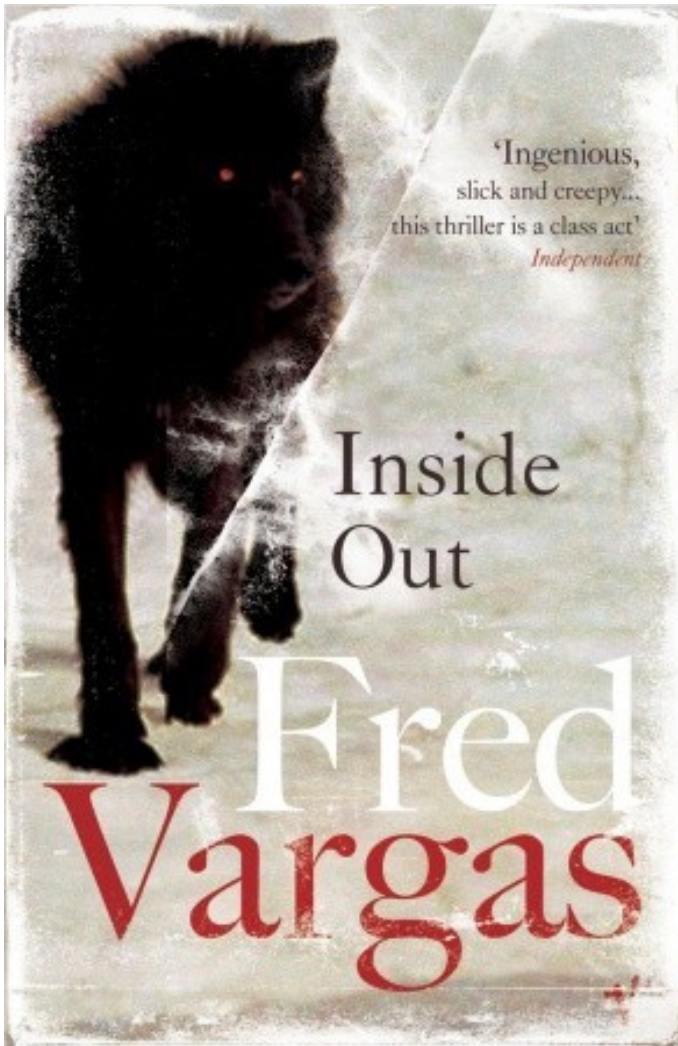

Fred Vargas

Seeking Whom He May Devour (Commissaire Adamsberg #2)



Title: Seeking Whom He May Devour
(Commissaire Adamsberg #2)

Author: Fred Vargas

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Description

In this frightening and surprising novel, the eccentric, wayward genius of Commissaire Adamsberg is pitted against the deep-rooted mysteries of one Alpine village's history and a very present problem: wolves. Disturbing things have been happening up in the French mountains; more and more sheep are being found with their throats torn out. The evidence points to a wolf of unnatural size and strength. However Suzanne Rosselin thinks it is the work of a werewolf. Then Suzanne is found slaughtered in the same manner. Her friend Camille attempts, with Suzanne's son Soliman and her shepherd, Watchee, to find out who, or what, is responsible and they call on Commissaire Adamsberg for help.

Insightful reviews

Nancy Oakes: Seeking Whom He May Devour is book number two in Fred Vargas' series featuring Commissaire Adamsberg of the French police nationale, following *The Chalk-Circle Man*. In 2005, it was nominated for the CWA Gold Dagger Award. This novel is another one which I'd label as "crime light," and actually reminds me a great deal of Andrea Camilleri's Inspector Montalbano series. There are a host of quirky characters, a bit of humor, a chief inspector who isn't anywhere close to what one would consider normal, and a lot of local color. Also like the Montalbano series, my sense is that these books aren't written to focus mainly on the crime elements or the police procedural aspects, but rather on the people who populate these novels.

The small village of Saint-Victor in The French Alps is the setting for this adventure, which begins with the report of the deaths of four sheep. This took place at Ventebrune, on Tuesday; on Thursday, nine more were found savaged at Pierrefort. As the number of dead sheep increases, the villagers begin to suspect that the culprit is a rogue wolf that roams the mountains. But after the savage death of Suzanne Rosselin -- the owner of the breeding station just west of Saint-Victor -- there are those who begin to suspect that perhaps it's something not of this world, and that the real killer is a werewolf. Suspicion falls on one Massart, who works in the municipal slaughterhouse, keeps to himself in his shack, and is rarely seen in the village. But what really makes some believe in Massart as a werewolf is the fact that he has no body hair. "Smooth-skinned as a choirboy," he fits the bill: the mark of the werewolf is that he wears his hair on the inside, and at night he "turns himself around and his hairy coat appears." This, as one person notes, makes him an "inside-out man," which reflects the original French title of this novel. After Suzanne's death Massart vanishes, leaving behind only a map with a specifically-marked route that includes the sites of the previous sheep slaughters. Convinced that it's their duty to go after Massart and rid the French countryside of this werewolf killer, two unlikely companions decide to go after him. First, there's Suzanne's adopted son Soliman, who had been found at the the village church as a baby. Soliman is black, and the villagers were a bit bewildered at seeing a black baby just left there, and it wasn't until Suzanne came along and picked him up that he was comforted. Suzanne had spent a great deal of time teaching Soliman about his African roots, and Soliman is constantly spouting often unfathomable African legends to apply to various situations. Second is old Watchee, Suzanne's shepherd at the breeding station. And to drive the old (and very stinky) cattle truck, Soliman and Watchee recruit Camille,

the elusive, on-again/off-again love of Commissaire Jean-Baptiste Adamsberg's life, who is now living in the village, composing music for a soap opera and working as a plumber. Her current love interest is a Canadian scientist who studies wolves in the wild, currently in the Mercantour National Park in France, near the village. As the strange trio sets out on the road, there are even more deaths, and they begin to realize that this project is beyond them. They need to find some help ...a

"special sort of policeman. A very special flic. A flic who'd pass on all the info about giving us any grief, and who'd let us carry on tracking the vampire down.

And as it just so happens, Camille knows just the guy -- Jean-Baptiste Adamsberg, in Paris, at the police headquarters in the fifth arrondissement."

While the mystery itself is a bit predictable, it's not really the who that counts, but rather the getting there that makes this story. Adamsberg is no ordinary cop -- he deals quite a bit in intuition, has his senses alert to odd situations, and from time to time gets little insights out of the blue as to when things are important. He has a good rapport with his colleagues, although they find him a bit strange, and an even better rapport with the common man. The rest of the characters are quirky, as is the dialogue from time to time. If not laugh-out-loud funny at times, there is a great deal of humor interlaced with the serious business of finding a killer and bringing the culprit to justice. The author is really good at bringing out the sense of place, down to the hairpin curves on a French mountain road or the stink of sheep fat. In short, there are many things to experience within this novel, and it's obvious that Vargas really enjoys writing these books.

As I said earlier, this is a novel on the lighter side of crime, and so should appeal to readers who tend to stay away from more hardcore crime fiction. It's also a book for readers who enjoy quirky crimes, quirky people and a good laugh here and there, much (as also noted above) like the Salvo Montalbano series. Definitely recommended. I'm already on book #4 (Wash This Blood Clean From My Hands) on my way to the latest, An Uncertain Place, which is on this year's CWA International Dagger shortlist. You should probably read the series in order of publication, not English translation, because the whole Adamsberg/Camille relationship starts in book one and may be difficult to follow otherwise.

Trin: Dull dull dull mystery about a female film editor/plumber and two local sheep farmers/eccentrics pursuing a murderous "werewolf" across the French countryside. The werewolf's on foot, and the three of them are in a rickety old truck repurposed from transporting sheep, so the chase is about as high-speed and exciting as being stuck behind a farm vehicle on a narrow road. I just did not get this book at all. The characters had all these weird traits—one of the shepherds is obsessed with definitions and mythology; the other is, um, old; and as for the editor/plumber, Camille, well...her two chosen careers are "editor" and "plumber," an unlikely mix to be sure, but Vargas never connected this to anything interesting or profound about her character. She's an editor and a plumber. Also a part-time amateur werewolf hunter.

Maybe part of the problem I was having was that some of these characters have been featured

in Vargas' earlier books, including Camille and a Commissaire Adamsberg, who's barely in the first two-thirds of this novel but is supposedly the series' main character. (I figured this out based on the fact that the front of my copy had "Commissaire Adamsberg Investigates" solemnly imprinted upon it.) Okay, my bad for not reading the other books first, but a talented author can still make her characters come alive whenever they come on stage. Everyone in this book seemed as flat as the landscape was hilly.

It may have also been a bad translation. A clue: there's an ongoing joke about Camille not being able to remember (or not caring to remember) another character's dog's name. There are a lot of puns—I think they're meant to be puns; jokes, anyway—based on the other, incorrect things she calls this dog. But in English, the dog's given name is Woof, and none of Camille's mistakes (or inability to remember the frickin' name) make any sense based on that moniker. It's entirely possible that this gag was HILARIOUS in the original French, but in English it's just...puzzling.

Equally puzzling: why I persisted in reading this book to the end. Maybe it was so I could discover that the killer was exactly who I expected, based on the character serving no other purpose in the narrative.

Spock: Secondo libro che leggo della Vargas con il commissario Adamsberg come protagonista. La storia anche in questo caso si compone di una trama principale (una serie di uccisioni di lupi e umani) nel Mercantour - regione appena al di là del confine italiano - e una secondaria (a Parigi il commissario perseguitato da una ragazza che vuole vendicarsi a pistolettate). Complice la presenza nella regione alpina di una vecchia fiamma del commissario le due storie si uniranno.

Il responsabile dell'eccidio ovino/umano e' come sostengono molti un lupo mannaro oppure un semplice assassino fuori di zucca oppure ... ?

Non svelo il finale ma chi conosce la Vargas sa che il libro non e' un vero giallo in quanto l'autrice svela solo negli ultimi due capitoli il colpevole e movente (usando sempre sempre il solito pretesto falso soprannaturale). Il lettore non ha indizi per individuare il colpevole e tantomeno il commissario che di solito lo identifica quando se lo trova di fronte.

Sono rimasto un poco perplesso in quanto l'autrice mostra il colpevole in un modo fuorviante e tale che noi non lo si possa identificare. Non mi convince del tutto.

Il personaggio del Guarda e' penso il piu' riuscito.

p.s. l'atteggiamento del commissario con Sabrina e' al limite dell'improbabile

Patrick: i do not understand why the picture is of a unique book. i'm reviewing "Seeking Whom He Mat Devour."Which is terrific. Fred Vargas is a woman, incidentally.In the southeast nook of France sheep have become attacked by way of a few type of mammoth wolf. The villagers get it into their heads that the in charge get together is a) not only any outdated wolf, yet a werewolf and b) the lycanthrope is a neighborhood weirdo who lives on my own means the hell up within the mountains and works within the neighborhood slaughterhouse.So Camille and Sol the foundling and Watchee the shepherd cross on an excursion to trace the fellow down, in a beat-up sheep truck.Meanwhile Commissaire Adamsberg is being pursued through a vengeful female friend of a gangster. He will get stuck up within the wolf factor nearly by means of

accident. If I inform you to any extent further it will smash the story. This is a really funky story, and hugely amusing. Idiosyncratic characters, notable settings, and finally anyone has defined in human phrases the adaptation among the flics and the gendarmes.

Tracey Mathias: I actually loved loads of issues approximately this book. Eccentric and good drawn characters, marvellous experience of place, the traditional risk of wolves / wolf males made modern. Wasn't yes in regards to the translation though. I believe it was once attempting to hold a French idiom however it simply ended up sounding a section clunky and awkward (eg widespread use of previous chap: I suppose as a translation of *mon vieux*, however the overtones in English are only wrong...) there is an impressive description of the policeman's instinctive, free, artistic inspiration processes: 'This is how Adamsberg used his brain, like an ocean that you simply believe totally to feed you well, yet which you've gotten in the past given up attempting to tame.' I enjoyed that.

David Claudon: even though the e-book is the second one in Commissaire Jean-Baptiste Adamsberg series, part the publication concentrates at the adventures of Adamsberg's ex-girlfriend Camille, who in addition to a tender black guy and a previous shepherd, have trigger to capture and forestall the killings they characteristic to a werewolf. because the case turns out to arrive a dead-end, Camille turns to Adamsberg to hitch them. For me, once the 2 subscribe to forces, the booklet alternatives up considerably. The plot takes many twists and turns and takes us from the French Alps to Paris. Camille jokes approximately them happening a street picture, and that's precisely the style Vargus performs with throughout.

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