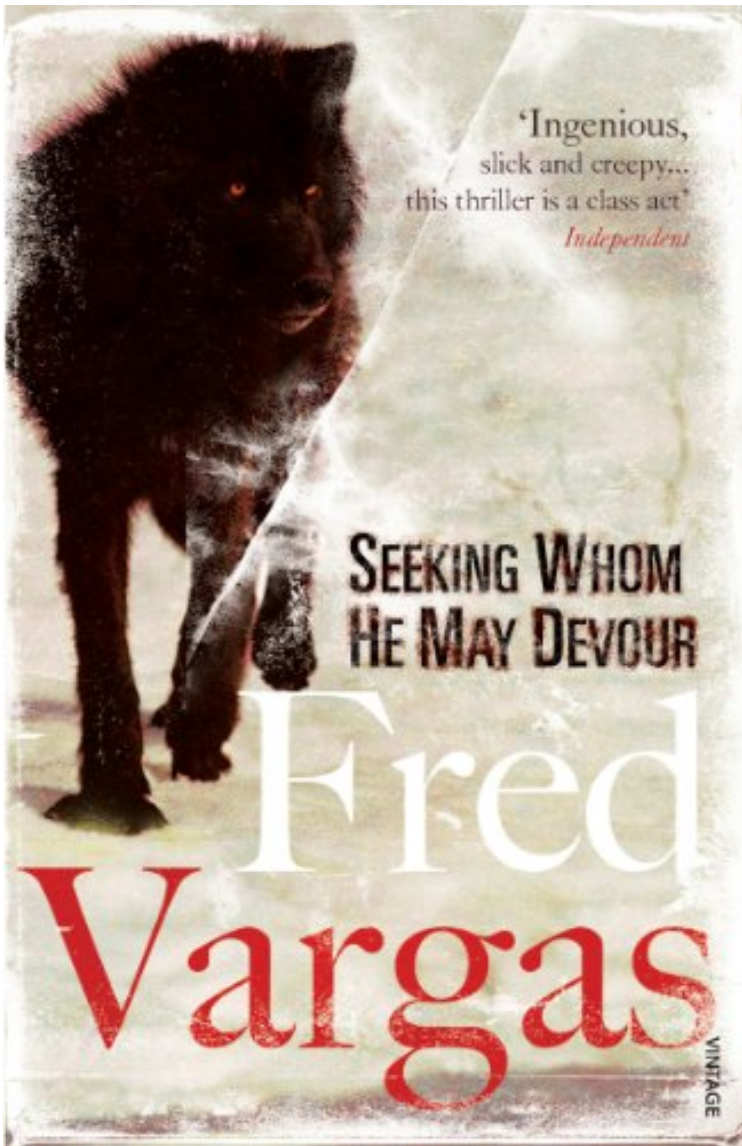


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Seeking Whom He May Devour



Par Fred Vargas
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn 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.Winner of the CWA International Dagger for Wash This Blood Clean From My Hand.ExtraitIOn Tuesday, four sheep were killed

at ventebrune in the French Alps. On Thursday, nine were lost at Pierrefort. Its the wolves, a local said. Theyre coming down to eat us all up. The other man drained his glass, then raised his hand. A wolf, Pierrot my lad. Its a wolf. A beast such as you have never clapped eyes on before. IITwo men were lying prone in the undergrowth. You dont reckon youre gonna teach me how to do my job, do you? said one. Dont reckon anything, said the other. Tall, with long, fair hair. Name of Johnstone. Lawrence Donald Johnstone. They lay quite still, gripping their binoculars, observing a pair of wolves. It was ten in the morning. The sun was scorching their backs. That one is Marcus, Johnstone said. Hes come back. His companion shook his head. A short, swarthy, rather pig-headed local. He had been keeping watch over the wolves in the Mercantour National Park for six years. Name of Jean Mercier. Thats Sibellius, he muttered. Sibellius is much larger. Hasnt got that yellow tuft at the neck. Jean Mercier was needled, so he reset his binoculars, brought the viewfinder once more into focus, and looked closely at the male wolf prowling round his family lair and occasionally sniffing the wind, some three hundred metres to the east of their hide. They were near, much too near, it would be better to pull back, but Johnstone wanted to get one or two good shots at any cost. Thats why he was there to film wolves. Then he had to go back to Canada with his documentary in the can. But he had been putting off going back for six months, for reasons that were not entirely clear. To tell the truth, the Canadian was rooting in. Mercier knew why. Lawrence Donald Johnstone, celebrated connoisseur of Canadian grizzly bears, had fallen in love with a handful of European wolves. And he could not make up his mind to say so. In any case, the Canadian spoke as few words as he could get away with. Came back in the spring, Johnstone muttered. Started a family. But I cant see who the she-wolf is. Thats Proserpine, whispered Mercier. Out of Janus and Juno, third generation. Alongside Marcus. Alongside Marcus, Mercier agreed, after a pause. And whats for sure is that there are brand-new cubs. Good. Excellent. How many? Too soon to say. Mercier jotted some notes on a pad attached to his belt, took a drink from his gourd, and got back into position without snapping a twig. Johnstone put down his binoculars, wiped the sweat off his face. He pulled over his camera, focused on Marcus and smiled as he switched it on. He had spent fifteen years among the grizzlies, the caribou and the wolves of Canada, wandering alone across the vast preserves to watch, record and film, occasionally stretching out a hand to the oldest of his untamed friends. Not creatures to be taken lightly. Thered been Joan, an old female grizzly, whod come at him, her head down, to get a good scratch of her coat. And Johnstone had never imagined that Europe so pinched, so wasted and tamed could have anything of interest to offer him. He had not taken on this documentary job in the Mercantour Range very gladly. But what was he going to do? And when it came to the crunch, hed kept putting off going home, he was dragging out his stay in this neck of the mountain. He was dragging his feet, to be blunt. He was hanging around for the sake of these European wolves with their paltry grey coats, no more than poor panting cousins of those thick-coated, brightly coloured Arctic beasts that deserved all his affection, or so he reckoned. He was hanging around for the sake of the swarming insects, the rivulets of sweat, the charred undergrowth and the crackling heat of the Mediterranean lands. Just you stick around, you havent seen the half of it, Mercier would tell him rather pompously, with the proud manner of a hard-baked habitué and survivor of solar onslaught. This is only June. And he was hanging around, lets face it, for Camille. Round here they called it rooting in. I dont hold it against you, Mercier had said to him, quite seriously, but its better you know: youre rooting in. OK then, now I know, Johnstone had replied. He stopped the camera, put it down gently on his rucksack and shaded it with a white canvas sheet. Young Marcus had gone off out of sight, heading north. Gone to hunt before it gets really hot, Mercier observed. Johnstone sprinkled water on his face, dampened his hat, took a dozen sips. Good Lord, what a sun. Never known anything so hellish. Three cubs at least, Mercier mumbled. Im being fried alive, Johnstone said, grimacing as he passed a hand over his shoulder. Just you wait. You havent seen the half of it. IIICommissaire Jean-Baptiste Adamsberg poured the pasta from the pan into the colander, watched distractedly as the water drained off, then dumped the whole lot on a plate. With grated cheese and tomato sauce, that would do fine for tonight. Hed come home late after interrogating a cretin of a youth for hours on end, until eleven. Adamsberg was slow in any case. He did not like to rush things or people, however cretinous they might be. He especially did not like to rush himself. The television was on with the volume set low, nothing but wars, wars, and more wars. He ferreted about in the cutlery drawer, making all sorts of noise, found a fork, and stood in front of the set. . . wolves in the Mercantour National Park have once again gone on the attack in a locality in the department of the Alpes-Maritimes that had up to now been spared. This time, people are talking of an animal of unusual size. Truth or legend? To find out, our special . . . Adamsberg moved cautiously towards the TV, plate in hand, tiptoeing as if he did not want to frighten the announcer. One false movement from Adamsberg and the guy might fly

from the screen without finishing the terrific wolf story he'd just begun. He turned up the sound and stepped back. Adamsberg was fond of wolves, the way you can be fond of your nightmares. His whole childhood in the Pyrenees had been shrouded in old folks' accounts of the saga of the last wild wolves in France. When he walked the mountain paths in the dark, at the age of nine, when his father sent him out to gather kindling no arguing, now he used to think he could see yellow eyes trained on him all along the way. Those eyes, sonny boy, those wolves' eyes, they burn bright in the night, they do. Bright as a flaming brand. Nowadays when he went back down to those parts, to his mountain home, he retraced the same paths in the pitch dark. That's what makes human beings so hopeless, really. They cling to the worst things they've known. He had heard it said a few years back that some wolves from the Abruzzi had crossed the Alps into France. Just a gang of tearaways, in a manner of speaking. Booze on a night out. A friendly raid, a symbolic return, all hail and welcome to you three moth-eaten beasts from the Abruzzi. Ciao, fellas. Since when, he assumed, some guys had been pampering the predators on the sheltered marl of the Mercantour National Park, and the wolves had lunched on fresh lamb from time to time. But he had not seen such pictures before. So were those good lads from the Abruzzi suddenly getting violent? Adamsberg ate his pasta in silence as he watched sequences of dismembered sheep, bloodied soil, the gnarled face of a shepherd, and the stained carcass of one sheep that had been torn to pieces lying on meadow grass. The camera gave morbidly indulgent close-ups of the carnage, and the reporter plied the locals with leading questions, fanning the flames of anger among the country folk. They had edited into the news report shots of snarling wolves' snouts lifted from old documentaries, more probably about the Balkans than about the Alps. It was enough to make you think that the whole hinterland of Nice was reeling under the onslaught of packs of wild beasts while aged shepherds stood their ground with pride, looking the enemy in the eye. They burn bright in the night, they do, bright as a flaming brand. But the facts were there. About thirty recorded wolves in the Mercantour, plus maybe a dozen lost cubs, along with feral dogs that were scarcely less threatening. Hundreds of sheep killed last season within a radius of ten kilometres around the Mercantour. These facts weren't aired in Paris because no one in Paris gave a damn about stories of wolves and lambs, and Adamsberg was stupefied when he heard the figures. Today's two savagings in the canton of Auniens had reawakened the conflict. A vet appeared on screen, pointing in a measured and professional manner at a gaping wound. No, there was not the slightest doubt about it, this is the bite of the upper jaw, fourth premolar on the right-hand side, see, and here, in front, this is the right-hand incisor, look here, and here, and on the underside, here. And do you see how far apart they are? These are the jaws of a very large canine. Would you say it was a wolf, doctor? Either that or a very large dog. Or a very big wolf? Then another close-up of a defiant shepherd. Since those filthy predators had begun stuffing their bellies four years ago... *Revue de presse* "Commissaire Adamsberg must be the most engaging French detective since Maigret" (Scotland on Sunday) "Poetic, offbeat and gently addictive. Her prose has an unusual deftness, a wry humour. A unique voice" (Guardian) "An intriguing, idiosyncratic voice" (Time Out) "An absolute masterwork. One of the best books of the year" (Toronto Globe Mail) "A work of real class - its characters sharp, multi-faceted and original, and its style crisply intelligent" (Herald)