



## Deadly Tasting

**Jean-Pierre Alaux**

**Noel Balen**

**Sally Pane, Translator**

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*Difficult to forget and oddly addictive, this tale of derangement deserves a high mark for keeping the answers hidden and the pages turning.*

Ritualized murders laced with symbolism terrorize the vineyards of Pomerol in *Deadly Tasting*, a chilling French mystery set in Bordeaux. Jean-Pierre Alaux and Noel Balen ferment a scenario so shocking and intriguing that even a jaded connoisseur of whodunits will seek an explanation.

*Deadly Tasting* is one of a twenty-two-book series that launched a four-season television run in France, a popular story now propelling a craze that may catch on in the United States. This creepy tale has lost nothing in translation, for its immaculate presentation sets a standard that die-hard writers in the mystery genre—pun intended—would do well to emulate. In carefully arranged precision, elderly bodies and desecrated graves lead to clues that drive a spine-tingling criminal investigation. Benjamin Cooker, a wine critic, works with police on this bizarre case, attempting to decipher the disturbed mind of a serial killer.

Filled with explicit and stomach-turning details, the descriptive passages instill horror and bafflement in a prolonged and complicated buildup:

*Swelling flesh and blood were oozing from the wounds and already congealing on the woolen fibers of the robe. The victim was barefoot, and his toenails were curled upward, like inverted talons of a bird of prey. His sheepskin slippers had ended up near the polished Henry II table, which gleamed under the yellowish light of a hanging porcelain lamp. Twelve wineglasses had been carefully arranged in a semicircle. Two of them, on the right side, were filled with what Benjamin supposed was red wine.*

Propelled by dialogue, action oriented, and focused on plot more than the depths of Cooker's character, the story portrays a down-to-earth man with a sense of humor, which lightens the intensity of the crime scenes. Not for the squeamish, this novel is quite creative in its expression of madness, and it's an excellent appetite suppressant, especially when experienced vicariously with this astute wine detective backed by a law enforcement entourage.

Alaux is a journalist and an award-winning author who enjoys writing in southwestern France. Balen is a fiction and nonfiction writer based in Paris. Sally Pane, a translator for more than twenty years, holds a master's degree in French literature from the University of Colorado.

*Deadly Tasting* lingers in the memory with revolting vividness. Difficult to forget and oddly addictive, this tale of derangement deserves a high mark for keeping the answers hidden and the pages turning. Buried within the annals of history, a dark secret awaits discovery.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (November 3, 2014)

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