



## Vlad Moranski: A Piece of Work

**Ken Samanski**

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*This is an enjoyable comedy with a message: success spoils.*

Samanski's rollicking *Vlad Moranski: A Piece of Work* follows Vlad, a small-time thief, grifter, and fumbling gambler, as he plagiarizes his brother's life experiences into a novel that makes him the toast of Paris. This is a light-hearted takedown of a man who proves to be a bit too full of himself.

Vlad's been trouble most of his life. He's even had a stint or two in jail. It's no surprise that he is forced to hightail it out of Toronto, trailed by death threats. But as he leaves, Vlad doesn't forget to take copies of his self-published book, *French Like Me*.

In Paris, he sneaks copies of the book into a display at the famous BJ Williams bookstore. Prominent French critic Simon de Nadeau stumbles onto the tome, and Vlad is soon semifamous and banking a six-figure advance. That accomplishment quickly turns the small-time scam artist into an "arrogant, self-centred asshole."

The narrative is a rollicking, no-pause one, with a quick lift-off that is followed by a scattering of one-liners across two continents. Dialogue works well, if early on it relies too much on such quick wit, one-liners, and wordplay.

The narrative, fun-laden as it is, makes a midstory shift, beginning to slide back and forth in time. The hectic pace doesn't slacken, though, and the story relaxes into an interesting tale about a man working to outrun his past. The plot itself remains straightforward, thoroughly believable, and easily summed up: success spoils.

In supporting roles, there are oddball characters like the BJ Williams owner, Helen, an uber-control freak set on co-opting Vlad's career, and Pam, an obese clerk who styles herself NiR (Night Reader) and wants sex in return for placing a "pick of the week" sticker on Vlad's book display.

Most realistic is the beautiful bookseller Natasha, a wounded bird of a woman who falls into Vlad's bed and then falls victim to his ego. Vlad is the proverbial unlikable narrator, and empathy for him will be scarce. He is consistent in his betrayals and misdeeds.

The Paris setting is superbly rendered, from wine and cheese to sidewalk cafés and public gardens. The stifling bureaucratic process of renting an apartment and the features of various city districts are included. Of the French people, though, there are only occasional glimpses.

Samanski's *Vlad Moranski: A Piece of Work* is an enjoyable comedy with a message.

GARY PRESLEY (November 3, 2016)

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