



## **The Wolf's Sun**

*Karen Charbonneau*

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In this sweeping historical novel of 17th century France, the wrath and power of Louis XIV are felt all the way to Keltic Brittany near the Bay of the Dead.

Born into a peasant culture, a mixture of ancient pagan beliefs mixed with Catholicism. Anna is taught the use of herbs by the women of her family. She also has the gift of healing – a power attributed to French and English kings said to heal scrofula with their touch. A physician will attempt to use her for his own glorification, while a Jesuit witch hunter will seek to send her to a fiery death.

She is caught up in the Breton peasant rebellion of 1675 when, after years of hunger and failed crops, the people rise up against the punishing taxes of the French king and local nobles. The consequence of the violence and retribution by the French sets in motion the wheels of her destiny.

Learning first-hand of her healing touch, a young physician, Luc de St. Connec, purchases Anna's services her from her family and carries her to the chateau of a relative on the French border. To conceal his motive, he creates a new identity for her -- she is his cousin Anne de St. Nolf, stolen away by her peasant nurse as an infant, in need of being taught French and the graces that accompany her birthright. At the chateau she becomes the companion of Marie Angélique de Scoraille, the demoiselle de Fontanges, destined to become Louis XIV's last and tragically short-lived mistress. But Anne has a secret St. Connec has yet to discover, which will change him from her exploiter into her protector.

Paris and the court of Monsieur, brother to the Sun King, beckon. To gain an appointment at court, St. Connec abjures his Huguenot religion and embraces Catholicism, an act of conscience he will later regret as the King, edict by edict, suppresses the freedom to practice Protestantism in France. In Paris, St. Connec renews his friendship with English diplomat and spy, John Keyes, whom he'd met in Brittany and who knows of Anne's origin. Their friendship is challenged by their growing love for Anne, a love they deny to each other and to themselves.

In 1680 the Affair of the Poisons takes Paris by storm. During a three-year period many are tried as blasphemers and poisoners (with the implicit understanding they are also witches). Many are burned at the stake. The poisons investigations implicate the King's longtime mistress, Madame de Montespan, mother of five of his children. Assisted in conspiracy by the lieutenant-general of the Paris police, Louis XIV begins one of the great cover-ups of French history, determined no word of La Montespan's possible involvement will leak out to make him an object of ridicule or to endanger her. Anne is implicated in the Affair of the Poisons, endangering herself and the men who love her.

Researched in depth, the author has revised it for a 2nd edition. "I like to think one can learn history from my novels, and enjoy a good yarn at the same time. Peasants weren't dullards. We're all descended from peasants if we go back far enough. Theirs was an oral culture full of colorful language, practical knowledge, myth and superstition. The aristocracy of France wasn't above superstition itself."

Immerse yourself in a different time and place and, like a ghost at a banquet, observe historical figures in their proper milieu; follow the destinies of charming, ambitious, but flawed characters during a time of French splendor and court intrigue, religious persecution, torture and fiery executions, brandings and life

sentences to the galleys.

## **The Wolf's Sun Details**

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## From Reader Review The Wolf's Sun for online ebook

### Wendy Bertsch says

The Wolf's Sun is an amazing piece of work...a gripping novel that covers a fascinating time in French history. Starting in Brittany at a time of rebellion, it moves to the fabulous court of Louis XIV. It has everything...intrigue, glamour, poison, brutality and witchcraft as well as love, of course... and danger.

The research that has formed the underpinning for this book is flawless, and the talent of the author is formidable. It's a very long book, populated skilfully by an array of well-drawn characters, some fictional, but many who were very real indeed. You can enjoy reading this book, knowing that you're learning something worth knowing about an incredible era.

Be prepared to spend some time with this one. You won't be sorry.

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### Diane says

I almost put this book down because I thought the beginning was too descriptive and just not interesting. I decided to continue to read at least a quarter of the book and I was glad I did because this story ended up being very good and at times, difficult to put down. I liked that most of the characters were like real people. They had some really good qualities and then some not so great attributes. Luc was a character that was pretty likable, but he really used Anna for his own selfish reasons. He did save her from being accused of being a witch in her village, but only because he thought her ability to heal people by laying her hands on them would be advantageous to his career. John Keys was also a character who had faults. When Anna really needed him, he fell short and lived to regret it. I thought some parts of the book were over long. All of the loose ends were tied up in the end, except perhaps it would have been nice to know a bit more about what happened to Luc once he was in the Carolinas. In general, I thought the ending was a bit rushed. But overall, I really enjoyed this book and would recommend it. It also seems as though a good bit of research must have gone into the writing of this book, although I really don't know much about that period of time in France.

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### Doskoi\_panda says

Karen Charbonneau's The Wolf's Sun: Intrigue in 17th Century France follows the story of Anna an Marac, a peasant girl with the unusual ability to heal with not only the knowledge of herbs passed down through generations, but also with the touch her hands. Her childhood begins in the village of Kermerik in Britanny, just before the peasant revolt in 1675, then moves first to a noble's chatteau and on to Paris during the Affair of the Poisons. The novel touches on a number of historical themes: medicine, witch trials, religious persecution (Huguenots), superstition, peasant uprisings due to taxation, the king and his mistresses, and justice.

The Wolf's Sun has a bit of the feel of a romance - not the "bodice ripper" kind, but more of, say, Mary Stewart's Merlin Trilogy or maybe an abridged Victor Hugo, where care has been taken with the details of

everyday life and the surrounds are realistic, down to the smells (or should I say stenches?) The story weaves actual people and events from the time into its fabric, but doesn't build the story on them, except where events they instigate impact on Anna's life, so there is no sense of the author trying to rewrite history.

At times the language and names (particularly the first third) drove me a little nuts. While I realise that the names are probably good reflections on actual names of that place and period, the repetition of them could be dizzying. Also, this is very fleshed out - I wouldn't say padded, exactly, but it is wordy in the way that historical fiction can be. I had expected more to be made of Anna's abilities, but the novel fell on the side of reality rather than fantasy - so much so that it left me wondering about it as a plot device.

I'd recommend this to readers who enjoy historical fiction, particularly those with an interest in French history. The story is excellent, while a little convoluted at times, and engaging. The characters are fully brought to life and their landscape and time period expansively described.

4.5 stars

Review copy supplied by the author as part of Librarything's Member Giveaway program.

\*\*I should note that I read this on my blackberry. That I finished it at all is a testament to the power of the story - I don't recommend reading this on a small screen; a kindle or ipad or other, more sensibly large screen is greatly encouraged. \*\*

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### **Raquel says**

It was a good story and the history was interesting. The book drug for me as there seemed to be a lot of scenes that were superfluous to both the story and history. There were a LOT of characters to keep straight. Overall, I'm glad I read it but wish it'd been more concise.

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### **Jay Fromkin says**

I've always liked historical fiction, particularly when it takes me somewhere new and mysterious. In my teens, it was Dostoevsky's pre-revolutionary Russia; in my 20s Robert Ruark's Kenya; in my 30s Yukio Mishima's post-feudal Japan; in my 40's Patrick O'Brian's British navy; in my 50s Alan Furst's Europe between-the-wars. Now, I've discovered Karen Charbonneau's novel of 17th century France, *The Wolf's Sun*.

The author tells a near-cinematic tale of intrigue that bridges the impoverished agrarian lives of Breton peasants with the shallow and self-absorbed lives of French aristocracy. One can virtually see the tumble-down Breton houses, with their deep hearths and cattle byres; feel the heat of the ritual bonfires; smell the gruel pots and thin baking buckwheat cakes; and smell the sweetness of the honeycombs and the foulness of the dung heaps. Just as vivid, in Paris, are the feel of finely embroidered gowns; the echoes within fabulous cathedrals; the squalor and tumult of the Court of Miracles; the terror of dank prisons and torture chambers; and the grand city with its variety of denizens. I can well imagine a Hollywood producer buying the rights to this story for a mini-series.

At heart, this is the story of Anna, a Breton peasant who, with her family and village endure the hardships of a rural life and its dependence on weather (usually bad), controlled markets, and punishing taxes levied by the rapacious local nobles and by the Sun King, Louis XIV. Desperation leads to rebellion, which amplifies

the already tense relationships among Anna's fellow villagers. Scores are settled, rumors are promulgated, and terror is sown. Anna, is both envied and feared for her knowledge of medicinal herbs and, reputedly, her ability to heal by touch - a skill that draws the attention of both an inquisition-minded Jesuit and a French physician who hopes to use Anna to gain a position at court. Anna is implicated in the Affair of Poisons, which roiled France with charges of witchcraft and murders and with resulting imprisonments, tortures, hangings and burnings. It falls to the physician and his friend, an English diplomat/spy to rescue Anna, at great peril to their own lives when they are caught up in the Catholic persecution of the Protestant faithful. These are all well-drawn characters, with their own distinctive merits and failures. Their interrelationships, motivations, passions, fears, strengths and weaknesses are wholly realistic and appropriate to the storyline. The reader gets to know and develop a fondness for most of the characters, while developing an understandable loathing for others. But even the villains are true to their stations and their times; they are not stock melodramatic characters.

Along the way we also meet a variety of colorful supporting characters, some real, some imagined - the king's many mistresses, including the beautiful Fontanges; an Italian dwarf, a veteran of the theatre; a mysterious assassin; the powerful leader of the Paris criminal class; English ambassador Henry Savile; La Reynie, the chief of the Paris police; and Anna's grandmother, the village elder and midwife who presides at all of the festivals and traditional ceremonies.

The Wolf's Sun is a lengthy book, the kind we lovers of historical fiction treasure, the kind you wish would never end. But, when it does, you know you've been on a wonderful journey that has taken you somewhere new and mysterious.

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### **Chris Galford says**

I have said it before and I'll say it again: there are too few quality historical fiction narratives yet lodged among the hall of trophies on the indie side of literary manor. Charbonneau's marvelous delivery is surely among them.

The Wolf's Sun is a beautifully crafted, richly detailed rendering of 17th century France, peppered with a cast of colorful characters and historical tidbits that leave us with a book I can describe only as "sweeping" in scope. And it is at that. This is a long read, but well worth it. Not only does one become engrossed in the mechanisms and doings of the characters, when you emerge again from the captivating narrative, you find yourself pondering how much you have actually learned, actually pulled still fresh and gleaming from the fertile wealth of that rich French soil.

To say it plainly: this book is well-researched, and planted easily among the boundaries of its period of history. It also helps that it is well edited, and professionally delivered--I doubt you shall ever feel stricken by any sense of "amateur hour" while in the midst of this book.

But I caution thus: it is slow to get going. You will likely ponder, in the first 10% of the book or so, just what the point is, and where it is going. Because this is not just a story, it is the telling of a life, and the lives around it, and for that, that central crux takes some getting to. While in later chapters the multiple viewpoints structure gives us a great deal of insight into the characters, and to the events surrounding, in the beginning it has something of a muddled effect, pulling us this way and that without seeing the why, or even, who shall be our inevitable fixing point. When this shifts, however, you will know it, and Wolf's Sun truly hits smooth sailing from then on.

Through Charbonneau's writing we see a vibrant world, carefully honed and crafted, with figures and scenes that are strikingly realistic...and captivating for it. It puts us, as well, in a unique scandal--the Affair with Poisons--and delivers it to us in a way that, in spite of its breadth, never feels bogged down by its details, but rather, enhances its portrait. This is not a quick read by any means. But for the patient, and the great fan of history, it is well worth the investment of time.

I definitely recommend it.

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### **Hafiza says**

Excellent historical fiction set in 17th C France  
Free on Kindle today

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### **Siobian says**

An epic novel that tells the story of Anna, a peasant girl from Brittany who has inherited the gift of healing and knowledge of herbs from her great-grandmother. When Anna lays her hands on someone, she can take their pain into her own body, leaving the injured with none. Anna is revered and feared for her gift, but is mocked and not trusted because her mother refuses to tell the town gossips who Anna's father is. After getting caught up in the peasant uprising of 1675, when the peasants toiling in the fields became fed up with the king's and noblemen's taxes, Anna's life abruptly changes. Physician Luc de St. Connec discovers Anna's unique talent and decides he must have her for himself. After purchasing her from her family, he takes her to a relative's house and passes her off as a long-lost cousin who needs to be taught the ways of nobility. When Anna and Luc go to the court of King Louis XIV, Anna is implicated in the Affair of the Poisons and Luc and his friend, English spy John Keyes, must rescue her.

Though this is a very long novel, it was definitely worth it. Charbonneau's writing was amazing and made even harvesting and threshing grain interesting. When I first met Anna, I wasn't sure I liked her. She seemed a little irritating, but soon she grew on me and I began to feel sorry for her when it became clear that all of the townspeople mistook her actions and motives for something sinister. All of the characters are very realistic and many times I was so caught up in the novel that my husband would say something to me and it would take a moment for me to remember where I was because I was picturing Anna and Luc talking so vividly. I was unfamiliar with the Affair of the Poisons (I usually focus on the French Revolution when reading about French history) and reading about it made me want to learn more and wonder why I hadn't heard more about this fascinating scandal. This was a very well researched novel, but it didn't feel bogged down in useless historical facts and intricacies, instead the detail helped to bring the scenes to life. There were a few parts that seemed to move slowly, but overall, I was completely immersed in this book and had difficulty putting it down.

\*Please note, I received a copy of this novel from the author in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Mary says**

This is my favourite period for historical novels, Seventeenth Century France, and I was not disappointed. There was a lot of well-researched material and, from the middle bit, approx, when the heroine has to leave home, I could not put it down, which kept me awake for a long time - the book is quite lengthy. The book is well-crafted insofar as language, description and pace are concerned. One of my 'keepers' and I hope the author writes more on this period.

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