

***The Beast* by František Šmehlík**

summary

The novel is comprised of six lengthy chapters, but the plot takes place over just a few January and February weeks.

The book starts with a prologue set sometime in the 1980s when Czechoslovakia was still ruled by socialism. It depicts an incident during which Private Nowicky has a drunken officer torn apart by dogs.

Twenty-five years later, two corpses are found in a cottage in the Šumperk region: journalist Matěj Jahn has been shot dead and his girlfriend, student Lenka Podlešáková, has been brutally stabbed to death and later found by her mother. The first to arrive at the scene is Josef Změlík, the head of the Šumperk crime unit, whose son went to high school with Lenka.

The leads point in two different directions. The male victim, a journalist who published several articles shortly before his death accusing the Minister of the Interior, Štěpán Maliňák, of being connected to businessman Filip Horký, one of the main figures of the underworld, is suspected to have been murdered by the mafia, perhaps on the instructions of politicians. The fatal injuries sustained by the female victim, however, seem to point to a serial killer referred to in case files as the Obstetrician. Suspicions of the crime being politically motivated grow after Maliňák unexpectedly turns up at the crime scene.

The investigation is led by the Olomouc crime unit in cooperation with organized crime unit investigator Terea Bergerová and two criminal investigators from Ostrava, Václav Pesta and Aleš Černý. The team is headed by the very peculiar major Laura Ara along with the young investigator Adam Prut, and complemented by Dr. Hlaváček, a psychologist who specializes in mass murderer profiling.

Laura Ara is inclined to believe that the murders are the work of the Obstetrician, but the team of investigators cannot seem to figure out why the killer would make a comeback after years of silence. For political reasons, the team decides to go public with this version of events.

The gun found near the scene of the crime is traced back to Attila Krasniq, a Kosovo-born hitman and employee of Horký. The search for him eventually leads the investigators to Zagreb, as they suspect he may have found refuge with Croatian underworld boss Jurij Gjakova. It turns out Gjakova has no idea about Krasniq's whereabouts, but when the team talks to local criminal investigators, they learn that years earlier, Croatia saw the murders of

several young women committed with the same *modus operandi*. However, before the Czech team has a chance to find out any details, they are forced to return to the Czech Republic. Meanwhile, Maliňák resigns as the Minister of the Interior and is replaced by the young politician Patrik Voňavka, who used to date Lenka Podlešáková when they were in high school. The investigators eventually find Attila Krasniq deceased near the cottage where Lenka Podlešáková and Matěj Jahn were murdered. Shortly afterwards, another woman is murdered. All signs point to the version of events in which the Obstetrician is the one committing these murders.

Croatian criminal investigators arrive in the Czech Republic to inform their Czech colleagues about three cases that resemble the Obstetrician murders. One of the suspects in the three murder cases was a friend of Krasniq's, embassy official Artur Nowicky, who disappeared after the third murder before he could be interrogated. When the Croatian team asked Czech Police for help with their investigation, it became clear Nowicky had disappeared without a trace.

It's becoming clear Nowicky is the killer. Eventually, thanks to the president's intervention, the team of investigators learns Nowicky's current identity from former intelligence chief Ladislav Provazník. Nowicky now goes by the name of Lukáš Hájek and teaches at the Šumperk Academy. Lenka Podlešáková was among his former students.

The crime novel, which follows the investigation of a series of murders, dons the garb of a thriller. Dominik Změlík, a former classmate of Lenka's and the son of the head of the Šumperk crime unit, discovers that his younger sister is having an affair with an older man. He secretly follows her and finds out that the older man in question is his former teacher Lukáš Hájek. In the meantime, the police are getting ready to arrest Hájek. The SWAT team is on the way, but when Josef Změlík learns that his daughter is with Hájek, he decides to seek him out himself to rescue his daughter instead of waiting for the SWAT team to arrive. Wanting to avenge Lenka, new Minister of the Interior Patrik Voňavka decides to go out to find Hájek as well. When the SWAT team breaks down the door to Hájek's house, he flees the scene, but Voňavka knows where to find him. He fires a shot at Hájek but misses. Hájek eventually commits suicide, letting himself be torn apart by Doberman Pinschers.

The novel ends with the government resigning under the weight of the recent scandals, the instigator being Ladislav Provazník and his puppet master, businessman Robert Jánošík. Filip Horký is discovered dead in a sandpit lake. Robert Jánošík gets ready to take hold of the reins over the country.