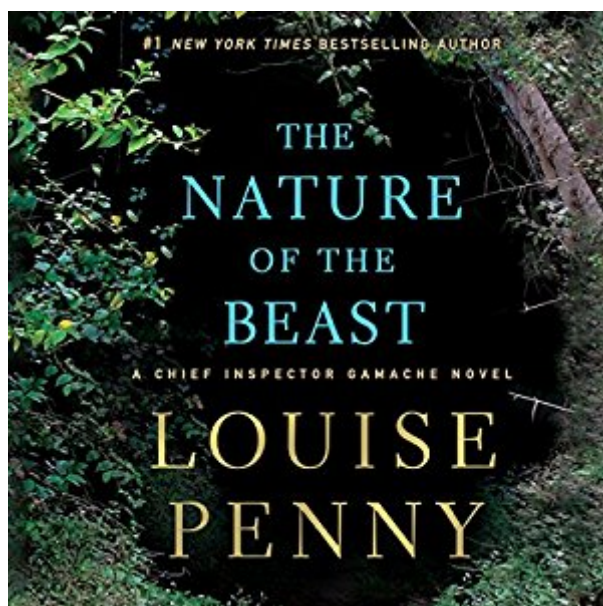


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The Nature Of The Beast: A Chief Inspector Gamache Novel



Synopsis

Hardly a day goes by when nine-year-old Laurent Lepage doesn't cry wolf. From alien invasions to walking trees to winged beasts in the woods to dinosaurs spotted in the village of Three Pines, his tales are so extraordinary no one can possibly believe him. Including Armand and Reine-Marie Gamache, who now live in the little Quebec village. But when the boy disappears, the villagers are faced with the possibility that one of his tall tales might have been true. And so begins a frantic search for the boy and the truth. What they uncover deep in the forest sets off a sequence of events that leads to murder, leads to an old crime, leads to an old betrayal. Leads right to the door of an old poet. And now it is now, writes Ruth Zardo. And the dark thing is here. A monster once visited Three Pines. And put down deep roots. And now, Ruth knows, it is back. Armand Gamache, the former head of homicide for the SÃfÂ»retÃfÂ© du QuÃfÂ©bec, must face the possibility that in not believing the boy, he himself played a terrible part in what happens next.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

One thing that distinguishes Louise Penny's mysteries from most others is that she not only takes murder for the tragedy it is, but she also explores the emotional state of the killer and treats the killer as a damaged human being, not a cold-blooded monster. I don't think it's a spoiler to say that there are several suspects in this case and that more than one is depicted as lacking any humanity. I value characterization above all, so for me, a book is less engaging if characters don't seem human. Days after reading the book, I'm still puzzled by Louise Penny's choice to go in a direction so

different from her trademark style. I was just reading an interview with her in *Book Page*, where she confirms that her books are about the exploration of human nature and says that what she's interested in is "what would make a real-life human being do something like that." I wish she'd stuck with that mindset in this case. She does spend time exploring the very human problems of some of the central cast of regulars, but not a lot and, to be frank, I thought her insights into Ruth Zardo's issues seemed murky and didn't make a lot of sense. This novel is more toward the thriller than mystery, even though it's set in the bucolic village of Three Pines. Penny can do thriller; I'm thinking of the extreme tension in *How the Light Gets In*, for example. But this doesn't measure up to that. The pacing was off and the impending disaster didn't seem very believable. (And yes, I know that the thriller aspect of the plot is based on real events.) Those are the disappointments. But it's not all bad news. All the Three Pines regulars are there, as well as Jean-Guy Beauvoir and Isabelle Lacoste. And, what I've always wished for, we get to see more of Reine-Marie.

In Louise Penny's "Nature of the Beast," Armand Gamache, former Chief Inspector of Homicide for the *Sûreté du Québec*, is enjoying a quiet retirement with his wife, Reine-Marie, in the tiny and rustic Quebec town of Three Pines. They frequently socialize with their warm, caring, and supportive neighbors, and even tolerate Ruth Zardo, an elderly poet and curmudgeon who rarely has a good word to say about anyone. Although he is no longer on the force, Gamache becomes involved when Laurent LePage, a nine-year-old child whom he knew well, is found dead. Armand's son-in-law, Inspector Jean-Guy Beauvoir, informs Gamache that the police have ruled the death accidental. However, when Armand surveys the crime scene, he notices several anomalies that point to foul play. An additional subplot involves a theatrical production that is to be staged by Antoinette Lemaitre. However, when the cast and crew learn that the playwright is a notorious serial killer, most of them hastily back out. The story's centerpiece is a strange discovery made in a wooded area that leaves the citizens in Three Pines in a state of shock. There is little doubt that Laurent stumbled upon this object before he was killed. The police bring in an aging professor who may be able to shed light on the finding, and two members of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service turn up to keep an eye on what promises to be a sensitive investigation. The intriguing opening chapters of "The Nature of the Beast" pique our curiosity. Later, however, the book's momentum is stalled by long-winded and repetitious conversations in which Gamache, Beauvoir, Chief Inspector Isabelle Lacoste, and others discuss the upheaval that has destroyed the serenity of Three Pines.

First Sentence: Running, running, stumbling, running. Armand Gamache, retired from being the former head of homicide for the Sûreté du Québec, and his wife Reine-Marie are now living in Three Pines. Armand befriends a young boy known to have an overwhelming imagination telling stories of beasts and monsters to the residents of the town. When he claims to have found something that others must see, no one takes him seriously. Until he disappears and it's found the story was not fiction, but very real, and very dangerous; changing the lives of the residents and potentially impacting far more than the tiny village of Three Pines. We begin with a situation that is tense and threatening or is it. Such is the uncertainty to which we are introduced. Never was an author more adept at descriptions, painting verbal pictures that take us from the sublime to the comic. Penny conveys emotion so well. You feel the support of Reine-Marie, Armand's wife, for her husband, yet her concern as well, the closeness and teasing of the circle of friends and their concern for one another. Penny has created a cast of characters who become real to us. Even if one has not read previous books in the series, many seem to be as old friends, yet we learn more about some of them, and find some are not as we had previously perceived. Yet, the circle has expanded, as there are new members as well. As with life, all are imperfect people, some with very human phobias; they are, some with character weaknesses; some small, some very large and serious. Some characters accept the responsibilities and results of their weaknesses, while others have buried them away within themselves, and others simply refuse to acknowledge them at all.

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