

# Armand against the world

## *Penny's latest fully up to the mark*

---

### *Suspended Sentences*

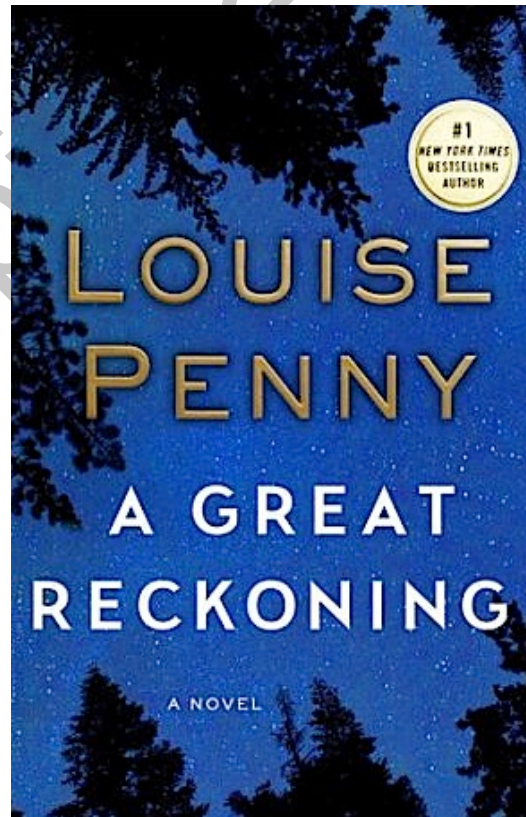
---

by Jim Napier

November is imminent, promising dark and cold times. After decades of work, and not yet sixty, Armand Gamache has taken early retirement as head of homicide for the Sûreté du Québec. After a calamitous shoot-out that left four officers dead and Gamache and his son-in-law, Jean-Guy Beauvoir, severely wounded, he is quite literally still nursing his wounds. But his mission is unfinished: having exposed the rampant corruption at the very core of the Sûreté, most of those involved have either died, been sent to prison, or retired in disgrace. The evil that marked the command structure remains, however, embedded at the force's training academy and threatening to poison the atmosphere of the Sûreté for decades to come. So Gamache accepts yet another assignment, one that will either see his reforms completed, or quite possibly end his life: he undertakes to head the academy, to root out those who have created a culture of fear and dishonesty, so that the force can regain its integrity.

It will not be an easy task. Gamache elects to retain on staff some of the very officers involved in the cor-

ruption. Serge Leduc, a staff member of the Academy conceals dark secrets of his own; and Sylvain Francoeur, an officer who harbours little respect –



and even less love – for Gamache are inexplicably kept on staff. Enigmatically, he also decides to admit as students at the academy several young people whose past, or personalities, seem entirely out of place. Among the incoming students

personally selected by Gamache, is Amelia Choquet, a tattooed-and-pierced young Goth woman with serious attitude and a troubled past. Ominously, we come to learn that Gamache has a very special, and personal, reason for mentoring her.

When others learn of his provocative plans, they think him mad. That feeling is only worsened when someone at the academy is found dead, killed by a single gunshot to the head. Is it murder or suicide? If the former, are any of Gamache's eccentric students involved? And if the latter, what sinister motives could have led the victim to take such a desperate measure? A mysterious map, drawn long ago, figures in the story, adding yet another layer to what is already a mystifying tale.

In this, her 12<sup>th</sup> and latest work, Louise Penny shows once more why she is among the most popular crime writers of our day. All her signature ingredients are present, not least the idyllic village of Three Pines, with its unique, not to say quirky residents and mouth-watering culinary fare. The usual suspects -- Reine-Marie, Olivier and Gabri, Ruth Zardo and her duck, Clara and Myrna, together with engaging newcomers we would like to believe are innocents, and altogether darker figures from Gamache's past, are skillfully woven into a suspenseful and sublime tapestry that never fails to delight, and often manages to amaze the reader. It is a genuine *tour de force*, and a work that Penny cannot fail to be proud of.

---

First published in the *Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph*, August, 2016.

**Jim Napier's** book reviews and author interviews have been featured in several Canadian newspapers as well as on various websites including his own award-winning site, <http://deadlydiversions.com/> He can be reached at [jnapier@deadlydiversions.com](mailto:jnapier@deadlydiversions.com)

