

WE ARE THE BEASTS

# READER GUIDE





# DEAR READER,

In 1764, a **mysterious beast** made an appearance in the French countryside and wreaked havoc, killing and injuring between 100 and 200 people—mostly shepherdesses. Despite the fact that this was one of Europe's first cross-border news stories, the identity of the beast remains an **unsolved historical mystery** even today.

Which is why I've wanted to write about it for a long time.

A mystery creature in the woods? Danger at every turn? Historical dudes doing nonsensical things to try and catch the monster? Sign my weird-history-loving heart up.

There was only one problem:

**I am tired of books that sensationalize the killing of girls.** I didn't want our deaths to be an inciting incident.

So, I sat on this story for a long time, unsure how to find my way into it...until my heart asked the right question: *What if monster stories were about saving girls, not killing them?*

Thus came *We Are the Beasts*—a story about two teen shepherdesses who see the arrival of the dangerous beast in their region not only as a reason to be afraid, but also as a *way out* for the girls around them whose homes are the most dangerous place of all.

In these pages, you'll find messy, angry, hurting, wonderful, powerful girls fighting for themselves and each other. There's a beast and a mystery and a town full of other dangers. There is peril at every turn. And **most of all, there is hope**. In our ability to save each other no matter what the world throws at us.

I hope you love where this story landed. I do.

Thank you for reading,

*Gigi*



# THE (REAL) BEAST OF GEVAUDAN

*We Are the Beasts* is fiction, but the beast of Gévaudan was very real. Here's a peek at what really happened.

## 1763

- France is defeated by England in the Seven Years War. This means a dire financial situation across the country, especially already-poor areas like Gévaudan.

## 1764

- **Jeanne Boulet is the first known victim of the beast.** She was fourteen years old.
- The paper *Corrier d'Avignon* starts publishing reports of the beast, which are then **picked up by international papers.** As word of the beast spreads, printers make exaggerated likenesses to sell.
- King Louis XV sends big-deal hunter Duhamel to take on the beast. He leads fifty dragoons (musket-armed soldiers) on horseback and foot.
- After a series of escalating attacks, **a woman is found without a head**—which is recovered about a week later.
- Etienne La Font—our very real government official—expresses frustration with the locals because they simply won't stop going out into the fields and dying! He wants them to stay home, but the government won't pay or feed them and so they are forced to continue their dangerous professions.
- **Firearms are temporarily legalized**, and a two hundred livre reward is offered by the crown (that's a year's salary).

## 1765

- The beast attacks 10-year-old Jacques Portefaix and a group of seven friends ranging in age from eight to twelve. They fight it off with sticks. Portefaix is given 300 livres and the rest of the group gets 300 between them.
- The D'Ennevals—a father-son hunting team—swoop down from Normandy to try and kill the beast. In their luggage, **a royal order demands that the locals provide them support.** They tell Duhamel to leave, allegedly by order of the king. But he refuses.



# THE (REAL) BEAST OF GEVAUDAN

## 1765, continued

- The reward is increased to a whopping four thousand livres, then to six thousand.
- An order from the king arrives, forcing Duhamel to withdraw.
- A highly embarrassed king sends his gun bearer and bodyguard (Francois Antoine) to kill the beast.
- Marie-Jeanne Valet is attacked while crossing a river with her sister. **She impales the beast with her bayonet**, and it flees. She gains the nicknames “Amazon” and “the Maid of Gévaudan.” She’s compensated 300 livres for her bravery.
- Some local boys really do prank the soldiers and send them into a bog to get mired. **The boys are thrown in jail.**
- A large wolf (and its mate and cubs) is killed—allegedly by Francois Antoine, though it’s possible he only took the credit. The wolf is stuffed and sent to court, where the court reacts with a resounding “meh.”

## 1767

- **The attacks continue for 18 months** and claim another 30+ lives, despite the court deciding it’s all over. The last alleged beast victim is Catherine Chautard—a 9-year-old girl—who was killed in June 1767.



# HISTORY IS WEIRD

This book is fiction, but many of the weirdest bits were real. Here are a few:

## LAMBS (AND SOLDIERS) IN DRESSES

They really did dress lambs up in bonnets and dresses to try and trick the beast.

When that didn't work, they put the soldiers in dresses. Perhaps much to Duhamel's dismay, a number of local men decided this was their chance to wear dresses—claiming that they too were hunting the beast.

## POISONED CORPSES

The hunters' strategies included poisoning corpses and laying them out as bait (which did not win them fans among the locals).

## BITING BULLETS

Bullets chomped by virgins, covered in the fat of Christians, and otherwise charmed were real suggestions by our intrepid hunters.

## MENAGERIES

Yes, early modern France was a bit like Tiger King. Fancy nobility imported animals from far-flung locales to show off their wealth. Parrots and monkeys were common pets for the rich.



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In this book (and the real history it's based on), the hunters tried a variety of (often wacky) strategies to trap and kill the beast. If you had to **propose a strategy for tricking or trapping a mysterious beast**, what would you propose?

2. The book has its theory about **what the Beast of Cévaudan was**...but what's yours? Was it a wolf, a pack, a serial killer in disguise? What makes the most sense to you?

3. This is ultimately **a book about power**—who has it, who takes it, who wields it. In what ways do the power structures within the book (class structure, patriarchy, etc.) feel the same as today? In what ways do they feel different?

4. As the story progresses, Jo realizes that she too has been **taking power from the girls around her** by making decisions on her own and throwing herself recklessly into danger. How does this mirror some of the power dynamics of today? In what ways can folks who suffer under uneven power structures also be complicit in harming others with them?

5. When **the identity of the beast is revealed**, we also learn that the situation was created by an abuse of power. In what ways, even unintentionally, do we see echoes of the carelessness of power creating violence on those without it?



# Q & A WITH THE AUTHOR

## WHAT WAS YOUR RESEARCH PROCESS?

In addition to reading whatever I could get my hands on about the beast, I also took a long hike (about nine days) through the former Gévaudan region.

I traced those forest paths, crossed those rivers, left my footprints in black dirt, red dirt, white chalky dirt, pink dirt. I discovered that the locals drink coffee and tea from bowls, not mugs. I ate hearty local meals at pilgrim hostels. And I even had a moment where something large and toothy appeared in the distance before fading back into the trees (yes, my soul left my body for a second)...

## I LOVED THIS BOOK! WHAT SHOULD I READ NEXT?

Set during the Satanic Panic of the 1990s, my YA debut *The Wicked Unseen* is a good choice if you like my style. And if you are reading this in May 2025, my newest book—*And The Trees Stare Back*—has just hit a bookshelf near you.

I'm also an unending fan of all things Sami Ellis, Jessica Lewis, and *The Raven Cycle*.



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gigi Griffis is the author of *The Wicked Unseen*, *We Are the Beasts*, and *And the Trees Stare Back* (2025), and the Netflix tie-in novel *The Empress*, among other things. She's a sucker for little-known histories, "unlikable" female characters, and all things Europe. After almost ten years of semi-nomadic life, she now lives in Portugal with an opinionated Yorkie-mix named Luna and a collection of nerdy history books.

When she was hiking through Gévaudan, she *just might* have seen the beast crossing her path in the distance. Fortunately, it did not eat her.

Gigi's work has been translated into 20+ languages and featured in *Salon*, *Crime Reads*, and more.

## GIGI GRIFFIS



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OUT NOW

# THE WICKED UNSEEN



To say sixteen-year-old Audre doesn't fit in would be the understatement of the century. She's a city kid who's found herself in a rural town. The only girl at school who'd rather kiss a girl than a boy. Not to mention that the whole town believes there's a secret Satanic cult conducting rituals in the nearby woods—and Audre is a born skeptic.

When the preacher's daughter and Audre's secret crush, Elle, goes missing on Halloween weekend, the town is quick to point fingers—in Audre's direction. While they harass Audre's family for being newcomers and nonbelievers, Audre realizes she might be the only person here who can find her friend.

The deeper she goes, though, the weirder it gets. What happened to Elle—and is the evil this town is hiding really what Audre thinks it is?

***“An absorbing mystery with strong characterization.”*** – Kirkus

***“At times discomfoting and chilling, and at others thrilling and empowering, *The Wicked Unseen* will be a popular addition to mystery and horror shelves.”*** – Booklist

***“Griffis captures the reality of this 1980s and '90s cultural moment with eerie resonance, and brisk pacing paired with clever mystery elements deliver.”*** – Publishers Weekly



# COMING SOON

# AND THE TREES STARE BACK

**Many go into the forest. Only one comes back.**

1989, Soviet Estonia. In sixteen-year-old Vik's village—and the cursed forest that looms beyond—danger is everywhere. Soldiers threaten those who so much as dream of dissent. The villagers' words are sharp with accusations of witchcraft. And deep in the heart of the wood, a lantern-eyed spirit lies in wait to disappear those who wander too far past the trees.

Vik knows because five years ago, she led her little sister Anna over that invisible line—and never saw her again.

The only thing Vik has wished for since then is her sister's safe return. So when Anna stumbles back through the tree line on the anniversary of her disappearance, it's a miracle...

Or is it a *lie*?

As unsettling inconsistencies between this girl and the one who vanished reveal themselves, Vik starts to doubt whether this Anna is her Anna—or something else entirely. Whoever she is, one thing is clear: she was never meant to escape the trees.

And unless Vik can uncover the secrets of the forest, it's going to take her back.

COMING 2025 / **ADD IT ON GOODREADS**