



The Summer Guest

Justin Cronin

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On an evening in late summer, the great financier Harry Wainwright, nearing the end of his life, arrives at a rustic fishing camp in a remote area of Maine. He comes bearing two things: his wish for a day of fishing in a place that has brought him solace for thirty years, and an astonishing bequest that will forever change the lives of those around him.

From the battlefields of Italy to the turbulence of the Vietnam era, to the private battles of love and family, *The Summer Guest* reveals the full history of this final pilgrimage and its meaning for four people: Jordan Patterson, the haunted young man who will guide Harry on his last voyage out; the camp's owner Joe Crosby, a Vietnam draft evader who has spent a lifetime "trying to learn what it means to be brave"; Joe's wife, Lucy, the woman Harry has loved for three decades; and Joe and Lucy's daughter Kate—the spirited young woman who holds the key to the last unopened door to the past.

As their stories unfold, secrets are revealed, courage is tested, and the bonds of love are strengthened. And always center stage is the place itself—a magical, forgotten corner of New England where the longings of the human heart are mirrored in the wild beauty of the landscape.

The Summer Guest Details

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Carol says

I wish that I liked vampire books because I sure love the way this author writes. I recently finished Mary and O'Neil and now The Summer Guest. Both novels were structured in a similar manner. This eloquent, spare and poignant book evokes a strong sense of place as Cronin introduces the reader to an interconnected group of residents and visitors at a summer camp in Maine. All the characters were well developed, likable and their relationships with each other were tender and loving. Even though one theme is the imminent death of one individual, the specter of death doesn't hang heavy. The novel is told from five points of view to gradually reveal past secrets as the story unfolds. Those revelations expose most of the narrators to be complex, flawed but still endearing. It's beautifully told and compelling to the end.

JoAnne Pulcino says

This is a stunning novel written in 2005. I think it is so breathtaking, everyone should be able to share in its beauty. The story takes place at a rustic fishing camp on the northern tip of Maine, and spans the eras just after World War II and continues through three generations of family and friends. The plot revolves around a wealthy entrepreneur who fell in love with the camp as a young man and revisited it for thirty years. The last trip he makes there is different in that he has come for his final visit - he is dying of terminal cancer. The camp itself serves as the physical and emotional center for the extended circle of family and friends. Each character tells their back story in alternating chapters that depict love, war, disease, loss, betrayal and redemption. These stories are told with such deep and touching sincerity of emotions that it's hard to look away. The novel has a lovely timeless quality that remains constant even when dealing with the bedrock realities of family and place. Mr. Cronin has a superb ability to create tremendous beauty out of the everyday business of living, loving and dying. This is an extraordinary book peopled by fantastic characters and heartbreakng warmth. Do yourself a favor and become a summer guest in this beautifully created tale.

Donna says

This is my first Justin Cronin novel, and I loved his writing. I will say, though, I started this a couple of weeks ago and I just couldn't do it. It was too wordy. I tabled it for later. I'm glad I did because once I started this again, I gained an appreciation for his descriptive style. He didn't simply describe something, but he added an extra layer of description and then sometimes another layer. Because the descriptions were so rich, the people and the place were vivid.

The characters had a deep and abiding love for the quiet setting of this novel, which was a rustic fishing camp/lodge where they wished to be there forever. I found that very interesting because we live in such mobile time. Our generation always seems to be moving on to bigger and better. The characters were flawed but they were basically good. There was such a tight focus on them and their relationships.

This was enjoyable. It was slow in a few places, but I hardly noticed because during those times, I was paying attention to the writing.

Marta says

If I ever write a book, I hope I write half as well as Justin Cronin. I love his style, the way he puts words together. That is what struck me first.

Next, I became intrigued by the story, which was revealed bit by bit. It was like looking at a series of pictures and hearing a story about each one.

But last and best, I fell in love with the people. It's hard to even call them characters. I wanted to know them forever. I want to go and stay in one of the cabins and eat breakfast in the lodge and watch a movie by the lake. This doesn't feel like a book I read. It feels like a place I lived and people I loved.

Bagman says

Bang! I want no misunderstandings from the very beginning of this review. I loved the crap out of this novel. It wasn't perfect, hence a 4 1/2 star rating (what the heck is?), but pretty damned close.

A very simple story constructed around six complex and diverse characters, linked with some very human and emotional dialog. Think of reuniting with your closest childhood friend, your first true love, or any very special person you haven't seen in years, but still think of often. Think of the things you could share, ultimately would share, with this person. That's what I felt reading this novel. It's as if I were sharing a close, but distant friend's life experiences.

I am an adult male and freely admit that this novel, on more than one occasion, required me to set down my Kindle and wipe a tear from my eye, stop my lip from quivering, or just think of the people and events that are part of my own past.

To me, Cronin demonstrates an ability to convey strong emotional feelings, using simple, everyday language.

"He had grown into a fine young man, strong and thoughtful, organized in his affairs, perhaps a little melancholy, though that was understandable: his mother was dying, his father seemed only to have just found him, like a book left carelessly on the patio, or a ring of keys he'd mislaid."

"His final pneumonia took him quickly: a fever that rocketed skyward, the tiny, bottlelike lungs filling, coma, death within hours. After all he'd been through, it seemed a mercy, though of course that was an illusion, something to say to fill the silence of his missing life: the bicycle he would not ride, the books he would not read, the friends he would not have and the girl he would not kiss."

If you want a detailed description of the story, read the book jacket, or the publisher's summary. The real question is, will you enjoy this novel? If you're willing to take a break from dystopian worlds, cataclysmic encounters with alien cultures, or the most recent plot to destroy democracy, give it a shot and see how good writing can direct your thoughts, even to places you may not have initially wanted to visit. While I would hesitate to say that this novel had some profound impact upon me, it has caused me to spend time wondering

if some of the things I always thought were important, really are. The highest honor that I can bestow on any novel is to say that I was sad to finish it. I was very sad to finish this one.

Abbie says

John Irving + Kent Haruf = This novel.

A great read.

Families, secrets, danger & death.

Barbara says

I am delighted to read the reviews about this book on Good Reads. I agree with almost everything that's been said: the Maine setting; the deep and abiding affection through the generations---both to a place and to people; the decency of all of the characters. It's pretty close to perfect.

Bam says

A lovely story about three-generations of a family who run a fishing camp in a remote area of Maine. The story unfolds through the points of view of various family members and friends in alternating chapters, utilizing flashbacks to explain what is happening in the present--which is that a sick old man has come back to the camp to die. The main focus of the story is about relationships, especially that between a daughter and her father.

switterbug (Betsey) says

It is so rare to read a book that has not one boring page in it. This is an elegantly written family saga and suspenseful tale which is visually stunning and emotionally riveting. Polished, immersing, unputdownable. I wanted in. I wanted to leap into the novel--literally! and connect with the characters personally. There are times it brought me to my knees.

This is an author who braids craft with art without sacrificing one for the other. Cronin controls his story and characters with a fierce yet velvet subtlety. It shimmers, like a cold, clean, pure Maine river. The North Woods sparkles in all its four glorious seasons and becomes an important part of the story. I was ready to chuck it all and find that spot in Maine and move there.

The prologue begins just after WW II and continues for about 20 pages. We then are carried to the 1990's, where much of the action takes place, all at this Maine fishing camp for tourists run by a family in its second generation of ownership. It is a reflective story that draws heavily on past events. Cronin masters the back and forth sequences of time without distracting or annoying the reader--in fact, the story blooms with time changes rather than halts.

After reading the last page, I closed the book and just sat there, staring at the cover, drifting back into the story, a shudder through my body, a sigh that wouldn't quit. It was such an exalting experience that I have to gush. I want to share this compelling and unforgettable story with everyone. It is practically flawless. Literature, and a page-turner, a passionate drama. Cronin's powerful and well-chosen narrative style and classy use of the English language prevents it from ever being melodrama.

My heart spills over my words.

Debbie says

I knew I liked Cronin because his The Passage series is right up there in my top five favorites. When I absolutely love a book/series, I tend to start reading other books by the same author with a little trepidation, merely because the bar has been set so high & I don't want to be disappointed. There was no need for hesitation here. This book is written so well. It moves quickly but is never shallow. I felt for all the characters and it held my interest throughout. In his acknowledgments, Cronin writes "This is a love story, and it's a story about fathers and daughters." It's done beautifully.

Linda says

2.99

I love a nice cover and was immediately drawn to this one. I had read The Passage which was a 4 star read but haven't completed the trilogy. This book is nothing like The Passage. The setting is a fishing camp in Maine, the writing is so beautifully descriptive I felt I was right there. It left me wishing I lived there. The elegant writing sucked me in. A family saga told in six point of views from Harry, Joe Sr. Lucy, Kate, Joe Jr. and Jordan in alternating chapters. I enjoy this style of writing. Strong character driven, beautiful storyline which all ties together nicely in the end. I did not want this one to end, you read the last few sentences and sigh. I'm going to move The Twelve up on my TBR list. Cronin is a gifted writer, if you've not read any of his books you need to!

Kelly says

A friend of mine gave me this book and said she really liked it. The book was a little wrinkled because she got it wet in the bathtub. I could not put this book down and found myself reading it in the tub also.

This book alternates chapters between characters - which I love. The descriptions of Maine made me want to go there and find a camp just like this one. The story made me laugh and tear up some. I know I have read an excellent book when that happens.

I have not seen this book advertised or recommended anywhere and it was published in 2003. Do not know why because it was wonderful. Great writing and I loved the characters. Bravo!

Alex says

I had Justin Cronin as a professor and he was pretty great. He gave these quizzes to make sure you did the reading, but they would be really really easy. You would know the answers right away if you read, but wouldn't have a clue if you didn't. I got a 100 on all of them. Once, however, I was staring into space waiting for the next question. I honestly wasn't looking at anything. I caught Justin's eye, and realized I had been staring right at someone else's paper. He immediately made an announcement to the class about how we shouldn't cheat on something so dumb.

Justin, if you're reading this, I swear I wasn't cheating.

On to the book - this isn't nearly as wonderful as Mary and O'Neil, but I didn't expect him to top that one. I love the idea of moving somewhere to get away where no one knows anything about you, not even your name. Moving somewhere to work and not necessarily forget, but to just be. Sound familiar?

-Alex/Sasha

Sue says

Another good Justin Cronin book. About relationships - this time, father and daughter. His books are such a pleasure to read because he has this way with words that is mesmerizing. Here's an example worth reading: "I had a dog once - what a dog he was! A retriever with something else mixed in, a breed that liked to work and herd: Australian shepherd, maybe, or collie. I named him Mauritz, though Hal called him Ritzy and it stuck. Ritzy the dog. A steadfast member of the team, as relentless as a metronome: Meredith joked that he would have taken a job bagging groceries at the corner market if only he'd had hands. I loved him, as one can only love such a dog; but I also knew what he was. Behind his eyes, twin chestnuts of the most tender soulfulness, lay encased in its suitcase of bone, a brain that knew nothing at all of time or sorrow or even the true joy that sorrow makes possible - only its own desire to please, an aching, needful love that could achieve its fullest contentment with the most meager offering: a stale biscuit, a walk around the block to do his business, a pat on his golden head. His own existence, its nature and finitude, was a mystery to him; he might have thought he was a person, or else I was a dog. The day I took him to the vet to have him put down - he was thirteen, his hips so bad he could barely walk to his bowl - I could think of only this to say: "You have been a good dog, and a great comfort to me, and I thank you." It was all he wanted to hear. I'd never wished so badly to be the dog he thought I was.

Sarah says

Didn't believe in the characters, which made me really not care about them at all. Which is a shame, because there was a lot of sad stuff going on here and it would have made me feel less like a heartless bitch if I could respond with some kind of emotion. But all the characters told their individual stories (stories that I couldn't force myself to be interested in) in the first person, but all with the same voice (with the same weird and pretentious similes), which was both unrealistic and a little confusing...I kept mixing up the characters in my head. Of course, that was also partially because I didn't care enough about the story to make any real effort to keep them straight. The characters all related their perspectives as memories, in a way which I found to be inauthentic and distant, which in turn made me feel distant and disconnected from the book and ready for it

to END already. It didn't offer any surprises, was slow and boring and just didn't resonate with me.
