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Gene Wolfe

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Castleview, an Illinois town, has a phantom castle that Will Shields sees on his first night there, an experience that involves him in murder and mysterious, life-threatening events, because the castle belongs to Morgan Le Fay.

Castleview Details

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Author : Gene Wolfe

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From Reader Review Castleview for online ebook

Rebekah says

This book is really unusual. the first 2/3 is a page turner, albeit a really weird one; the characters act bizarrely and are unemotional at all times (folks keep dying, and no one--including their close relatives--is a bit bothered!). Anyway, I thought maybe he is following Malory, and it's been a long time since I read The Death of Arthur, so I wondered if maybe the characters were meant to correspond to the characters in the original work, and that's why they're all so odd? At one point, a woman dialing a phone number is given the phone number by another character like 9 or 10 times. Two pages of checking and rechecking the phone number, again and again. "This must be significant!" I thought. Oh, and the recipe details for various desserts scattered throughout, that must mean something too!

But the last 1/3 of the book is a huge letdown, it makes very little sense AND it explains nothing. And I'm not sure any of the weird details meant anything at all.

This review is disjointed and weird. So is this book. I'm not giving up on Gene Wolfe--I've read that this is his worst book--but dang, this was a nonsense roller coaster. Gripping, though.

Oh, and there is some really unsubtle racism towards Asian characters, including a couple of epithets. Why? I thought at first it was a setup for some sort of lesson, but it was just garden variety racism. I see that a lot in mid-century novels, and of course in C19th stuff, but there's really no excuse here-- it's written in the 1990s.

Christopher says

Gene Wolfe's CASTLEVIEW is the second of his turn of the 90's trilogy of fantastical fiction novels. The first, THERE ARE DOORS, was a rather confusing but ultimately comprehensible book, but with CASTLEVIEW the reader has no idea what's going on.

CASTLEVIEW is perhaps the most infamous of Gene Wolfe's novels. Wolfe has always like to present puzzles to the reader, and every book he's written is filled with mysteries, allusions, and inside jokes. The answers to these are usually to be found after some diligent reading and research, and in any event the main plot can always be followed. In CASTLEVIEW, even the plot is totally baffling. Apparently it has something to do with magical creatures and characters from folklore, especially King Arthur and company, plaguing a modern town outside of Chicago. That's really all one can say for certain after reading the book. The entire point of the book is an enigma, and it doesn't appear that Wolfe has included the key anywhere in its 200+ pages. My personal hypothesis right after reading the book was that 50 pages or so fell out of my copy during the printing process, so that I missed the part where everything comes together. However, I read the same copy everyone else did, and no one's ever shown it was incomplete.

Ignoring the fact that the book goes right over the heads of its audience, CASTLEVIEW is not one of Wolfe's stronger works. I was annoyed by the speed in which Wolfe introduced new characters, so that it was difficult to follow who's who. Chapters end abruptly on some mysterious development which may create suspense but which irks the reader. Ironically, the teenagers are the only characters which are portrayed realistically, and the adults are somewhat two-dimensional, which is the opposite of how these sorts of things normally turn out.

Gene Wolfe is truly one of the finest writers in the English language. His four-volume work *The Book of the New Sun* is legendary, and his latest work *The Book of the Short Sun* is filled with moments of sublime beauty and poignant emotion. I would most certainly recommend that one read Wolfe's "solar" works first (starting with the BotNS), his magisterial novel *PEACE*, and just about everything else he's every written before coming to *CASTLEVIEW*. I do recommend *CASTLEVIEW*, and reading the book sure does explain why so many Wolfe scholars are beating their heads against the wall on this one. Save *CASTLEVIEW* for last.

Brian Clegg says

Just re-read this - like many of Wolfe's brilliant fantasies is 90% genius but struggles at the end.

For more than the first half, this book is simply wonderful. It never lets up - the pace is phenomenal. Each chapter piles new strange events, disasters and downright weird happenings on a small town in America that seems to have a boundary with Faerie. It is mesmeric. Although the book does have an ending, though, I feel there are about 50 pages missing - it's as if Wolfe lost interest at the end and quickly cobbled something together.

It isn't the best of his real world fantasies - for that I'd have to recommend *There Are Doors* and *The Sorcerer;s House* - but the sheer narrative drive and cleverness puts most other fantasy in the shade.

Mike says

I've tried really hard to like Gene Wolfe, because people like Neil Gaiman think he's wonderful. But I just can't do it.

Castleview was the book that finally brought me to the point of giving up on him. I could probably have put up with the perpetual ambiguity about which dead characters were actually dead if the live characters had acted and reacted like real people. The closing scene, in particular, is so unrealistic to actual human emotions that I resolved never to attempt another Gene Wolfe book again.

It's just a bizarre, inexplicable sequence of things that happen - or, in some of his books, a bizarre, inexplicable sequence of not much happening - to alienated characters who seem to have learned how to be human from a poorly-written instruction manual. Clearly, his genius is over my head.

Marvin says

Gene Wolfe is one of my favorite writers. His Books of The New Sun series is one of the greatest science fiction fantasy works of all time. He excels in creating strange exotic worlds and has a prose that is hauntingly beautiful. However his stories can also be rather vague and bewildering. Rarely is there a clear ending. He is definitely an acquired taste.

Castleview is not one of my favorite books by Wolfe. This story about two families who are caught in a town that exists between the real and the mythical should work but it just never comes together for me. The

characters seem stilted and forced. I felt sad that I didn't like it because it certainly had the Gene Wolfe magic trying to sneak its way out. Just when I would wonder if I wanted to continue reading I would run into a paragraph like this...

"They kissed, and it was not (as Mercedes has always heard it was supposed to be) before she knew what was happening. She knew perfectly well what was happening--that a whole world, new and strange, terrible yet wonderful, was unfolding for her. She understood, when their lips touched, exactly why Snow White and Sleeping Beauty has been awakened by a kiss, knew what those old grandmothers of eight hundred years ago had been trying to tell her, and knew that they *had* told her, their coded message coming clearly across the years, and that those dear old grandmothers--the bent crones at the firesides--had triumphed, their word not lost with the crackling of the sticks in their fires. That she and Seth or some other like Seth would someday ride on one white horse, laughing in the sunshine."

.. and the magic would shine through.

Yes, it is a good novel by Wolfe but, in my opinion, not consistent enough to be typical of the master. If you really want to see genius at work, read *The Shadow of The Torturer* and the other Books of The New Sun.

brian dean says

This story reminds me of Castle Perilous where so much of the exciting stuff happened off-screen (or off-page). I found the style of switching POV with a cliffhanger every stinking time to get annoying pretty quickly.

The cover tells you it is an Arthurian epic set in Illinois but that is only mostly spelled out in the final chapter.

I think this story is supposed to be experienced as a dream or an LSD trip (as one character remarks), where things happen with no explanation, people change and random people appear and disappear often.

If you choose to read it, do so in as short a time as possible as there are a lot of characters and the POV changes frequently. It actually reminds me of my own Nanowrimo attempts in that there are too many incomplete ideas and what would only appear to the author, who has researched the subject specifically, to be an appropriate amount of mystery.

I am a fan of Gene Wolfe and have enjoyed other books he has written. I am glad I got this one from a swap shelf at work so it was worth what I paid for it. I would not have finished except that my Kindle is now broken and I don't expect to buy a new one until Christmas.

Added minutes later: I published my review, then read the reviews of others. They mostly agree with me, with one pointing out the occasional beautiful paragraph, but one person, <https://www.goodreads.com/user/show/1...>, wrote his review in Greek and rated it five stars. I ran it through Google Translate and here is an excerpt:

And saying to myself that sometime will reread his books.

Like this one. Where in a city of America, the Castleview, -name due to occurrences of a castle in orizonta-, weird things are. Strange strangers mingle with everyday locals, mythical creatures make their appearances, characters with dual personality pull the strings of a mysterious conspiracy. Gradually, playing with the mind of the reader, Wolfe, composes smximo of both worlds - the everyday with the mythical. A folktale creatures, based on the Scandinavian pantheon, the Northern European legends and the legend of Arthur. Phantom, vampires, trolls and knights invade the reality of this small town.

Of course, we are talking about Woolf. An intelligent writer who does nothing easy the reader. Here selects a theatrical approach. The scenes unfold through dialogues, characters come and go several times from the action, without descriptions. thus intensifying the dramatic and bizarre this already strange history where as if these events take place in the minds of the protagonists, like a play that evolves in absentia of the remaining small community.

I loved the book. And once again I enjoyed this regurgitating the end, that regurgitate the scenes, trying to make sense out of the vision of Woolf in each book.

None of that is wrong.

Eric Wisdahl says

Castleview was a pretty quick read, but not an easy one. It seemed to be a little darker than most of Wolfe's work with an almost horror element at times. There were plenty of unexplained occurrences during this strange clash of mythologies in the small town of Castleview Illinois. The action appears to have taken place, for the most part, in a short amount of time when characters from, but not limited to, the Arthurian Legends and Norse Mythology appear to invade the town performing all sorts of strange acts upon an unusual cast of characters.

Overall the pacing on this novel felt a little strange. All in all it was an enjoyable read that will almost certainly warrant another look since, as with many Wolfe books, this one had many subtle events, hints, myths and story lines happening which I am sure that I did not catch the first time through.

Grace says

Ugggghhhhhh.

I wanted to like this book SO BAD. I've been told numerous times by many different people whose opinions I respect and admire that I should read some Gene Wolfe books. Apparently I picked the wrong one to start with?

This book reminded me of when I was little and we would go gem mining in the mountains every summer. They'd give you a gallon size bucket of muck from the bottom of the river and you would run it through your sieve and see what you ended up with. Once you washed away the mud and sand and algae, picked out the twigs and bland river rocks, sometimes you'd get lucky. You'd find garnet and amethyst and topaz. My

brother found a beautiful sapphire once that he had made into a ring for my mom. But for a gallon's worth of material, you came away with just a few shining prizes to take home at the end of the day.

That was this book. A certain description here, a glorious paragraph there, a surprising but kind of perfect turn of events. And then the rest of it was garbage.

Okay, that's harsh.

But seriously? I was so excited about the description, so psyched about the idea behind this book, and so disappointed by the execution.

I've read some reviews where the writer insists if we didn't like the book we just didn't "get" it. That it's a book to be savored on subsequent rereadings, gleaning for symbolism, details, and connections you may have missed the first time around. I've always been annoyed by this way of thinking, like literature is some kind of exclusive "members only" club. Since I didn't get it, and didn't enjoy it, I'll pause here for a moment outside the glittering facade of Castleview and lob some eggs at its windows like the hoodlum these reviewers seem to think I am.

Problems I had with this book, in no particular order:

(1) The timeline. Jumping around in books is nothing new, but the way in which Wolfe chose to leap left it hard to piece together sometimes just exactly what was going on with certain characters, which isn't helpful in a plot like this that's already so chaotic to begin with.

(2) Character motivations and revelations. (Minor spoilers ahead) If you're a teenage boy and you've just discovered your dad is dead, do you leave your mom behind at the house and go seek out a girl you've met just a couple of hours ago to drive her in the rain up to a lookout spot where you might spy a mystical castle? Uh... sure, why not. If you're new to town and your employee decides to show you the town's museum and goes suddenly missing, do you automatically assume supernatural foul play? You do if you're this story's protagonist. And if you're nearly run off the road by a weird giant riding a horse, do you drive through a storm to a nearby girl's camp to confront the owners of the stables and scold them about riding safety? If it serves the plot, you betcha. None of it was believable. And even if the tone of this whole work is meant to be cartoonish and over-the-top, it wasn't CONSISTENTLY done. You can't say it's okay to suspend disbelief over here, then spend whole passages having characters explain in precise detail how and why certain other things happened. This is like the literary equivalent of fingernails on chalkboard!

(3) Racism? There's a Chinese man, a waiter at a restaurant in Castleview, that features prominently in the events of the plot. He is repeatedly referred to as "Oriental," "Chinaman," and "the Chinese." (Not "the Chinese MAN" but "the Chinese," like he's some sort of rare bird or something). It would be one thing if it was characters saying these things. You could just accuse them of being mildly racist. But sometimes the narrator himself uses the terms. I know this was written in 1990, so I shouldn't expect it to be uber politically correct, but I cringed every time this happen, and it pulled me out of the story.

Oh, who am I kidding? I could list a lot more but I don't want to waste my time or yours. Basically, I think I picked the absolute WORST Gene Wolfe book I possibly could have started with, which is a shame as I hear he's actually pretty great at times. I'll just have to wait a year or two to get the memory of this one out of my system before I try again.

Gavin South says

Sometimes a song will move you, but the next time it will leave you cold. Perhaps if I were to read this book again, I wouldn't score it as high. How did it make 5 stars, despite the 3 stars it was heading for halfway through? I don't know. Was it anything to do with the gin-and-tonic I was drinking when I read the last 20%? Perhaps. All I know, is that for me, it made the step up to something special. In the first half, the abrupt changes of POV caused me to re-start reading many paragraphs. It was an annoyance. Yet somehow, as the book progressed, this became a stylistic reflection of the nature of the plot: full of hairpin turns.

Castleview is a strange book. It has a sense of the uncanny. It's as much a horror as a fantasy. It's also enigmatic and impenetrable, at least to my intellect. They say Gene Wolfe's work is best re-read. Perhaps that's true, but I never think I will "understand" it. Literature shouldn't principally be a puzzle to solve, so I hope Mr Wolfe will forgive my lack of appetite for "solving" *Castleview*. I loved it, let's just leave it at that. And I think you will get more enjoyment out of it too, if you just "go with it" and relish the prose, dialogue and characterization. I did, anyway. Oh, and pour yourself a G&T.

Panagiotis says

Η α?σθηση που ?χω ?ταν πι?νω ?να βιβλ?ο του Τζ?ν Γουλφ ε?ναι ?δια με το συναπ?ντημα με ?να παλι? φ?λο. Απ? την πρ?τη στιγμ?, ?που και ξεκ?νησε η γνωριμ?α μου με τα βιβλ?α του, με κ?ρδισε. Δεν ξ?ρω αν ε?ναι αστραποβ?λο χτ?πημα, αλλ? αν θ?λω να προσδ?σω μια ερωτικ? χροι? σε αυτ? το π?ρε-δ?σε, θα πω πως ο Γουλφ κατ?χει τα σκ?πτρα της βιβλιοφιλικ?ς καρδι?ς μου. Με τον ?διο ενθουσιασμ? και λαχτ?ρα τον διαβ?ζω ακ?μα, καθ?ς απ? καιρο? εις καιρ?ν προσφ?ρω στον εαυτ? μου την ευχαρ?στηση να πι?σω ?λλο ?να βιβλ?ο απ? την μεγ?λη βιβλιογραφ?α του.

?τσι την ξεκοκκαλ?ζω την βιβλιογραφ?α του, με ευλ?βεια. Και λ?γοντας στον εαυτ? μου πως κ?ποια στιγμ? θα τα ξαναδιαβ?σω τα βιβλ?α του.

?πως και αυτ? εδ?. ?που σε μια π?λη της Αμερικ?, το *Castleview*, -?νομα που οφε?λεται στις εμφαν?σεις εν?ς κ?στρου στον ορ?ζοντα-, αλλ?κοτα πρ?γματα γ?νονται. Παρ?ξενοι ξ?νοι μπλ?κονται με τους καθημερινο?ς ντ?πιους, μυθικ? πλ?σματα κ?νουν τις εμφαν?σεις τους, χαρακτ?ρες με διτ? προσωπικ?τητα κινο?ν τα ν?ματα μιας μυστηρι?δους συνωμοσ?ας. Σταδιακ?, πα?ζοντας με το μυαλ? του αναγν?στη, ο Γουλφ, συνθ?τει το σμ?ξιμο των δυο κ?σμων - του καθημερινο? με το μυθικο?. Μιας παραμυθιακ?ς πλ?σης, βασισμ?νης στο Σκανδιναβικ? π?νθεον, τους Βορειο-Ευρωπα?κο?ς θρ?λους και τον μ?θο του Αρθο?ρου. Φαντ?σματα, βαμπ?ρ, τρολ και ιππ?τες εισβ?λουν στην πραγματικ?τητα αυτ?ς της μικρ?ς π?λης.

Φυσικ?, μιλ?με για τον Γουλφ. ?ναν συγγραφ?α ευφυ?, που δεν κ?νει τ?ποτα ε?κολο στον αναγν?στη. Εδ? επιλ?γει μια θεατρικ? προσ?γγιση. Οι σκην?ς ξετυλ?γονται μ?σα απ? διαλ?γους, χαρακτ?ρες ?ρχονται και φε?γουν πολλ?ς φορ?ς απ? την δρ?ση, δ?χως περιγραφ?ς. Εντε?νεται ?τσι η δραματικ?τητα και το αλλ?κοτο αυτ?ς της ?δη παρ?ξενη ιστορ?ας, ?που θαρρε?ς αυτ? τα περιστατικ? λαμβ?νουν χ?ρα στο μυαλ? των πρωταγωνιστ?v, σαν ?να θεατρικ? ?ργο που εξελ?σσεται ερ?μην της υπ?λοιπης μικρ?ς κοινων?ας.

Το αγ?πησα το βιβλ?ο. Και για ακ?μα μια φορ? απ?λαυσα αυτ? το μηρυκασμ? στο τ?λος, που αναμασ?ς τις σκην?ς, προσπαθ?ντας να βγ?λεις ?κρη με το ?ραμα του Γουλφ σε κ?θε του βιβλ?ου.

Για μένα ο αγαπημένος μου συγγραφέας και νας από τους πιο αδικημένους και παραγνωρισμένους συγγραφές της Αμερικής.

John Lawson says

An Arthurian fantasy where the whole of Fairyland appears to descend upon a small, midwestern town. To what effect and what purpose, I'm still not clear about. Poor cell phone reception ensues.

The beginning is a mess of interconnecting story lines and characters. People meet, part, meet others, part, bouncing around like pinballs. It's a mess of contrivances, coincidences, and deus machina, and I'm not clear on the point of it all. I'm sure Wolfe had one, because there had to be an easier/clearer way to move the story forward. Technology fails at appropriate times, people make their appearances and then vanish. I get that some of them are ghosts/fairies and magic is involved, but it makes it all darn hard to follow.

Also had difficulty with all the female characters, and there were a lot of them. The real estate agent, the house wife, her mother, her sister, her niece, the car salesman's wife, her daughter, the woman running the camp, and the various girls living there... Didn't help that they all had vanilla names like Sally and Julie. It was difficult keeping them apart, and I had to resort to context of the story, which sometimes was thin.

Lastly, after a majority of the book dealing with people talking and driving around to do more talking, it was finally in the last chapters that the plot moved to Fairyland and things got interesting. Of course, this being Gene Wolfe, answers and explanations were pretty thin.

Stephen Coney says

Like all of Wolfe's books, this is good, but not for everyone. It feels like a casual read for the first half, but then it becomes clear that questions are piling up much faster than answers. Despite what others have written about *Castleview*, it is possible to understand what happened, mostly, though it will take a little work. For non-readers of Wolfe, I recommend that you not begin with this book. *The Sorcerer's House* is a much better first choice. For readers of Wolfe, I was surprised at the speed with which the story moved. The end did feel a little rushed, but for an experienced Wolfeian, it's worth your time.

S. Shepherd says

This book can be described. In one word...FUN!

James Proctor says

Loaded with English mythology, cohabitated somehow with a 20th century Illinois town, this story is a hard sell from the beginning and never quite overcomes the daunting challenge. The arbitrariness of the premise is the thing. Coming from an author who is capable of so much more, I wonder if this isn't an early manuscript

unearthed and published to capitalize on his New Sun fame. Gene Wolfe is certainly capable of better than this screwball story of regular people wrestling with powers and personae of the faerie realm. There are standout moments but overall the story is adrift in conflicting story elements and falls short of what could have been an intriguing tale of urban dislocation.

Mollie says

Reading this book is like having the weird guy from *IT* (the one who's over-enthusiastic about Monty Python, improv, and the Renaissance Fair) corner you at your desk and tell you all about the dream he had last night.
