



An Evil Guest

Gene Wolfe

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Set a hundred years in the future, *An Evil Guest* is a story of an actress who becomes the lover of both a mysterious sorcerer and private detective, and an even more mysterious and powerful rich man, who has been to the human colony on an alien planet and learned strange things there. Her loyalties are divided--perhaps she loves them both. The detective helps her to release her inner beauty and become a star overnight. And the rich man is the benefactor of a play she stars in. But something is very wrong. Money can be an evil guest, but there are other evils. As Lovecraft said, "That is not dead which can eternal lie."

An Evil Guest Details

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Author : Gene Wolfe

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From Reader Review An Evil Guest for online ebook

Amanda says

I read this book earlier this year. A wonderful book from a master of the art. Anyone out there who has never read any of his books- shame, shame on you. However, i would not start with this one, start with The Book of the New Sun instead.

This is noir done right!! Being Noir, I'm sure many hardcore fans hate it, because it is so different from his other works. But i could care less, the man can write whatever he wants, literally. His flow is so effortless. Very intriguing and as is usual with Wolfe, levels upon levels, so i'm sure some people will find it hard to follow, but it is worth it. Plus, look at that cover, always a sucker for a great cover. I will not trade this book as i do with almost all my books after i read them, unless they are something super special, or written by Gene Wolfe.

Eric says

This is a lovecraftian time traveling lycanthropism mystery thriller radioactive love story. It's Wolfe having a great time. He relaxed for a little while, and wrote a novel that is simply fun. Wolfe's deep affection for all of his characters, and for the story he is leading them through, rises from every page. There are a dozen dreams at work here, many of them working at the same time, in the same places, on the same characters. One of joys of reading Wolfe is to parse his clues and understand what's really going on. The story does make sense. It adds up; Wolfe is too good a storyteller to do otherwise. If you have any interest in Lovecraft or lycanthropy or FTL travel or love, then parts of this story will be riveting and quite fun. Imagine the U.S. Navy dropping depth charges on R'lyeh, and how Cthlulu and his minions might react to an incursion from a modern military. Like most Wolfe stories, the story is subtle. I doubt I found all of Wolfe's clues, but I had a great time trying.

Just a fun little book. Very entertaining.

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Panagiotis says

To Evil Guest σηματοδοτε? για μ?να την απομ?κρυνση του Gene Wolfe απ? το αμιγ?ς φανταστικ? στοιχε?α και τις πολ?τομες αφηγ?σεις. Ε?ναι το ξεκ?νημα μιας πορε?ας που ακολουθε? ?ως τ?ρα, ?που αφηγεται ιστορ?ες που ?χουν σαν β?ση το μυστ?ριο. Θεωρ? πως παρ?τι γηραλα?ος, ?χει καταφ?ρει να επαναπροσδιορ?σει την γραφ? του. Ο Γουλφ αυτ? της περι?δου ε?ναι τ?σο χαρακτηριστικ?ς, ?σο ο πιο ν?ος και φιλ?δοξος συγγραφ?ας των Book of the New Sun/Long Sun.

Η ιστορ?α ξεφε?γει σε απρ?βλεπτα μονοπ?τια. Ε?μαι σ?γουρος πως ο αμ?ητος αναγν?στης θα νι?σει με αυτ? το βιβλ?ο, ?πως ?νιωθα κι εγ?, χρ?νια πριν, που δεν γν?ριζα πως γρ?φει ο Γουλφ: πως ανο?γει πολλ? μ?τωπα, τα οπο?α αφ?νει ανοιχτ?. Ωστ?σο η γραφ? αυτο? του ανθρ?που δεν αφ?νει

τ'ποτα στην τ'χη, δ'νει ?λα τα στοιχε?α στον αναγν?στη για να συνθ?σεις τις απαντ?σεις στα ερωτ?ματα που του δημιουργο?νται. Ε?ναι αμετ?κλητος θιασ?της της οξ?νοιας, τ?τοιους χαρακτ?ρες φτι?χνει, και μ?λλον απαιτε? απ? τους αναγν?στες να συμπεριφ?ρονται με μια αν?λογη διανοητικ? ευελιξ?α.

Ακο?γεται β?ναυση η αν?γνωση εν?ς τ?τοιου βιβλ?ου, αλλ? ?ταν κ?ποιος αφαιθε? στις χ?ρες μια ιστορ?ας που ξεκιν?ει ως ?να μυστ?ριο κατασκοπ?ας και καταδ?ωξης και καταλ?γει κ?τι πολ? διαφορετικ?, θα ε?ναι πια αργ?! Ε?ναι ?να κρ?μα αστυνομικ?ς και ε.φ. λογοτεχν?ας, με νε?ματα στην pulp λογοτεχν?α, γραμμ?νο απ? ?ναν πνευματ?δη, ευφυ? ?νθρωπο.

To Evil Guest ε?ναι ακριβ?ς ?,τι ε?ναι τα μετ?πειτα γραπτ? του Γουλφ: λιγ?τερο φιλ?δοξο ?σον αφορ? μια επικ? δι?γηση φαντασ?ας, περισσ?τερο εγκεφαλικ?. Αυτ? τα μυθοπλαστικ? παζλ μ?νο αυτ?ς τα φτι?χνει και ε?ναι ο αγαπημ?νος μου συγγραφ?ας. Νομ?ζω το λ?ω συχν? τελευτ?α, αλλ? ποτ? δεν ε?ναι αρκετ? για αυτ? τον παραγνωρισμ?νο γ?γαντα της Αμερικ?νικης λογοτεχν?ας.

Sean says

First impression: Great writing, terrible characterization, illogical plot, interesting premise, tantalizing mythology/magic/science, anticlimactic ending.

But! He comes so highly recommended!

But-but! That doesn't matter if his writing doesn't work for me.

But-but-BUT! The book is so stylized that the above negatives were probably intentional! After all, it's clearly not only a pastiche of at least three different styles/genres but also an exercise in deconstructing narrative and genre at a very basic level.

But-but-but-but I don't care. It gets three stars, because I didn't like any of the characters, I didn't believe in their relationships, I didn't believe the sexy ones were sexy (especially the men), I was annoyed at the most egregious lacunae in the plot, and what I did like didn't make up for all of that.

But-but-but-but- **BUT** : I will read more Wolfe, to see if I ever "get" him.

Brian Clegg says

Gene Wolfe is one of the world's greatest fantasy writers. He has also written some popular SF, notably the Book of the New Sun series. His SF has never really been my thing, as I prefer his fantasy work, but this is a real oddity that spans the two. Arguably it is science fiction, as the odd happenings all have 'science' explanations. And we've got some science fiction tropes such as warp drive, hyperspace and projected 3D TV. But the whole setting is a dream-like mix of periods.

So, though An Evil Guest is clearly set in a future where we have interstellar travel and have met one other intelligent race, a lot of the everyday technologies, such as the mobile phones, are distinctly early-twenty first century. Meanwhile the characters - both how they speak and act - are straight out of the 1940s. If that

sounds weird, it really is - and yet, being Wolfe, it works wonderfully.

The central character Cassie Casey, a struggling actress, is thrust into a complex situation where nothing is quite what it seems. In classic Wolfe fashion the reader, like the central character, is rarely sure what's going on. This is helped by dialogue that is indirect even by Wolfe's standards - no one seems happy to give a straight answer to a question if they have an opportunity to reply obscurely.

If this sounds frustrating, it really isn't, as long as you are prepared to go with the flow and trust Wolfe. Things do mostly become clear eventually. And the ride is great.

However, don't expect total clarity when you get to the last page. Wolfe's endings are famously open - and this one feels as much a beginning as an end. In fact, the ending didn't quite work for me, which is the reason the book is only getting four stars. Even so, it was an excellent read. In the puff on the back, Neil Gaiman describes *An Evil Guest* as 'a twenty-first century pulp adventure thriller with SF and horror elements that nobody else could possibly have written'. He didn't intend that 'pulp' word as the insult it once was, and his assessment is quite true.

Best of all, this is a book that just won't get out of my brain, and I know I'll read it again. If you do try it, here's one puzzle to consider. Just who is the evil guest of the title?

John says

A delirious swirl of genres - sci-fi, noir thriller, Lovecraftian horror - *An Evil Guest* is the tale of a superstar actress who gets caught up in a number of knotty plots and dark intrigues. It is a fast-paced page turner that reads remarkably quickly for a Gene Wolfe novel, a writer normally fond of baroque language and complex prose. In fact, the bulk of the text is dialog, reading almost like a screenplay at times. But the simplicity is deceptive: like a mixed drink where you can't taste the vodka, the story's various twists and turns often left me flipping back, half-dazed, trying to figure out what just happened and why.

Randy says

I really don't know what to say about this book.

I'm a complete, card carrying Gene Wolfe fan. I buy all of his works as they come out in hardcover. I rave to any and all about the man and am in complete awe of his genius.

But . . .

I just can't get over my first impression of this book. Frankly, it's a stinker.

But, given that it's Gene Wolfe, perhaps, just perhaps, the book will run like a program in my memory and at some point I'll suddenly see it.

Don't think so. This is more likely that this is simply a miss. I shrug, put it on the shelf, and await the next.

Bbrown says

There are good Gene Wolfe books and there are the rest of his works. This book is part of the latter category. It has the ambiguities, mysteries, symbols that you expect out of a Wolfe book, but it doesn't weave those things into a cohesive whole, in fact this is probably the most disjointed book by Wolfe I've read. It also just doesn't have characters and relationships written well enough to carry the book, making the mysteries and symbols ultimately no more than window-dressing.

The first two-thirds of this book is a noir mystery set in the near future. This style and the setting prove a problem right off the bat, as they work at odds with each other: the very old-fashioned tropes of noir, with people saying "golly!" and speaking of relationships in a more demure way, make most of this section of the book seem like it's set in the past. The occasional mention of interstellar travel, cloning, etc. are therefore even more jarring. Also, Wolfe doesn't write the near-future very interestingly, with little in the way of new ideas about what the future might look like (zero points for self-driving cars, for instance). The last third of the book takes an abrupt left-turn into the Lovecraftian, the problem being that there only started to be hints of this aspect of the book after the first third was already complete. Thus, the book feels like two different halves weakly sewn together, with neither half being satisfying.

As I mentioned, there are mysteries here if you want them- is there more than one werewolf in the book? Are some characters time traveling? Is Cassie warping reality around her with her newfound higher-plane powers? Ultimately, I'm left not caring, because these are questions I would only care about if they were built upon a proper storytelling base, and here Wolfe has neglected the fundamentals. As already mentioned, the story is disjointed. Alongside of that, there aren't many characters here. There's Cassie, but her defining traits are her beauty and her concern over her weight, not any aspect of her intellect or personality. There aren't many other characters to speak of besides Gideon. In most Wolfe books, written from the perspective of the main character, it is understandable how the narrative focuses exclusively on a single character and reduces everyone else to secondary roles. Here, there's no such excuse. The lack of well-drawn characters is a serious enough flaw, but it seems minor in comparison to how poor the relationships are depicted in this book. *An Evil Guest* has made me realize that Wolfe really isn't able to write characters falling or being in love. Here, he tries, and the result is a terrible love triangle that failed to evoke anything Wolfe could have possibly intended.

Without a cohesive story, or characters, or interesting interactions between characters, the signature stylistic touches of Wolfe are incapable of redeeming the book. They save it from being downright bad, I guess, but they don't make this book worth reading unless you want to read everything in Wolfe's oeuvre. If you aren't a Gene Wolfe fanatic, skip this one.

Julie Davis says

Gene Wolfe Doesn't Get the Feminine Mind-Set
Warning: spoiler in the last paragraph.

An Evil Guest by Gene Wolfe is a pulp thriller that includes aliens, South Sea gods, and two enigmatic men vying for the hand of a young actress on the rise. Imagine the results if Raymond Chandler, H.P. Lovecraft,

and Walter B. Gibson (creator of The Shadow) all conspired to write a book together, set 100 years in our future. Despite how odd that sounds, the first two-thirds of the book is fairly straight forward. When you get to the last part, it suddenly takes off as if a rocket was lit under you and the reader is left hanging on for all they're worth to keep up.

It is a fun ride and one that I enjoyed. Except for a key part of logic, it all held together. Unfortunately that key logic is integral to the very last line of the book which sums it all up. Essentially describing the reasons for a complete change of heart, actress Cassie delivers a long monologue while walking down the street with a friend. It rang so false that I was convinced she was doing it to poke for reactions of possible betrayal from her friend. Not so. It turns out that the change of heart described, which rang so falsely, was intended to give Cassie the reason for every subsequent action she takes. It took me a long time to realize that but I was able to suspend my disbelief until reading the last line of the book, which depends completely upon our belief in that speech.

No takers here. If that is how Wolfe and his editors think that a woman can change her mind in the way described about a man who she loathes and fears, then they have another think coming. If one is going to hang an entire section of a book, indeed that book's denouement, upon one set of emotions entirely replacing another, then that part at least needs to be real and human and ring true. Perhaps few women read Wolfe's books. I don't know about that. However, as one who does I can testify that such a patently false shift in Cassie's motivation feels like a cheap, easy trick a la "a shot rang out and everyone fell dead." Certainly it makes me lose respect for the author and editors who simply seem lazy in retrospect. It's too bad because I really liked the book and was willing to overlook the false feel until that final line which tied everything to Cassie's faked feelings.

Monty Merrick says

Gene Wolfe has become one of my favorite living American authors. He always places an emphasis on character. As far as his standalone novels go (he has a few books that belong to a series, as you may know, but I'll stay away from those for now), each of them seem almost like they could have been written by a different person.

People either hate or love this book. I loved it. It starts off pretty fast paced with an assassin/wizard? talking to a very hickish president about tracking down an ex-ambassador to Woldercan (the only planet with intelligent life that humans have contact with) and how dangerous he is. They want the assassin/wizard to track him down. But very quickly, both him and his assailant fall in love with the same woman, a stage actress, and she falls in love with both of them.

After the first chapter it's told mostly from this stage actress's perspective as she helps both of her lovers and is torn between which one to be loyal to. I can't state enough how well Gene Wolfe draws his characters and how witty the dialogue is. Wolfe successfully writes a storyline that is highly complex and full of humor, without ruining the integrity of the very ominous mood that starts to set in toward the end.

I hope you don't read the reviews that spoil anything. If you're the kind of person that gets confused easily, I would suggest reading most of this in a short amount of time so the various plot threads make more sense and stay close together inside your head. I read it in two days, which is rare for me, even with a book of this length.

Scott says

Set a hundred years in the future, yet feeling like a pulp mystery from the early twentieth century, *An Evil Guest* concerns a stage actress--somewhat famous but not a superstar--who finds herself caught between two very mysterious and powerful men. A "wizard" named Gideon Chase, at the behest of the president, enlists the assistance of Cassiopeia Casey to entrap William Reis, allegedly the most dangerous man in the world. At least that's how things start out. Along the way, alliances form, dissolve, and reverse... I have to admit it was hard to keep track of, and if the novel hadn't been written to a certain *style* (I felt), I would have found it all rather implausible, and I would have wanted considerably more substance to support it. But I really enjoyed reading, and it reads quickly. (It's almost entirely dialogue-driven, with little narrative exposition.)

Then in the last third of the book there's a jarring shift. This is where the Lovecraftian stuff mentioned on the cover comes in. I had mixed feelings about it. I was enjoying the noir feel and hated to see it go away, but this new direction was intriguing as well. I certainly can't say it was predictable. I enjoyed the book overall, but I think perhaps I need to let the story gel for a while...

Travis Heermann says

Gene Wolfe has clearly earned his Grand Master title, but I'm not sure if this book isn't trying to be too smart for its own good. I spent much of this novel feeling as if everything was slightly askew, as if 95% of the action was happening off-stage, given only brief glances of larger machinations afoot, not all of which are adequately explained.

The heroine, Cassie Casey, aspiring actress, is dragged into strange interplanetary dealings between Earth and the planet Woldercan, by a wizard, Dr. Gideon Chase, whom we find later is a professor at Miskatonic University. A couple of Lovecraftian touches and the presence of Cthulhu and a cult of his worshippers, make an already convoluted story even more so. Cassie is a charming character, with bravery, perception, and moxie, but because the goings on behind the scenes are so high-powered, complete with interplanetary gangsters, nefarious government agencies, Great Old Ones, werewolves, bat-winged humanoid aliens, all of which are so incomprehensible and disjointed that I couldn't quite grasp all the connections, poor Cassie is simply tossed hither and yon by forces beyond her control, along with the reader, with too often no clear cause and effect. She has little agency of her own throughout most of the story, except in instances where she simply grabs it and hopes for the best.

The narrative breaks all the rules I was taught about plot and scene construction, but there's a powerful subtlety lurking behind everything, leaving me a strong sense of more going on than I can grasp, and a pervading oddity about the whole thing. Nearly all of the book is dialogue, often snappy, often difficult to follow, mirroring a dramatic play with the reader expected to fill in a whole lot of blanks. In the hands of anyone other than Gene Wolfe, I probably wouldn't trust that this was purposeful. The fact that the plot of the latter half parallels the plot of an internal play lends a sense of layering and resonance that I can sense is there, but cannot quite grasp the significance of.

Gene Wolfe's writing always provides greater appreciation on subsequent readings as one sees connections and deft touches that were missed on the first go around, but because this was such an odd mix of Lovecraft,

science fiction, 1930s noir, romance, and Spunky Broadway Heroine in the South Pacific, I don't know that I have the kind of time to do it with an entire novel.

I would recommend this book to Gene Wolfe fans, and to people looking for something unlike any other book, someone ready to embrace oddity and just take a surreal ride with a charming red head.

Ivy says

Yikes! This book was awful. I don't normally write reviews unless a book is so amazing that I can't keep it to myself but this one I have to warn others about. This comes from a pretty prolific author from the long list of novels shown on the inside cover so I'm bummed that this was the first book of his I picked up. I'm not sure where the author was trying to go with this one as it was all over the place. It starts off with a government conspiracy feel then flips to science fiction, on to fantasy and alternates between these genres which isn't really fair to the reader. Also futuristic verbiage is used in the novel with no explanation as to what these things mean. Several times I had I guess as to what in the world this guy meant. This was a planet hopping, werewolf wait staff, volcano sea god love triangle for a washed up actress who gets her fame and talent from a presidential informant who uses mountain magic to future her career for his gain. Seriously!?! The storyline was a nightmare and I was honestly hoping she was going to wake up at the end!

The

Yolanda Casica says

At first I couldn't decide what I thought about the story or the characters. This was about a third into the book, I suppose, so not very far in. The majority of the book does stay mysterious and sensual, which was a great tease. I'll admit I didn't believe the characters fell in love exactly when they did but individually they were terrific. The book is dark but not suffocating in the way it presents itself.

It took me a while to get into the story and when I did...man what a story. It constantly strung me along, making me believe a certain thing and then wham! I'm confused again. The ending of course is nothing like I expected or wanted and that is fine with me.

By the end I was very emotional and had to go for a walk to try and clear my head after reading through so much to get that ending. I'm not disappointed by it, far from it.

When I first decided to get this book I had never read Gene Wolfe before and had no idea what to expect. I still don't. Not really. I loved this book is what I'm trying to say...it's just that I feel so...empty. I feel crushed in a way, like I've just tasted an extremely delicious appetizer but I only got a one piece. It was satisfying, but the nagging craving for more is still there.

Benjamin says

Other than being a very good writer, Gene Wolfe is known for two things: he's often a difficult writer and he's a very Catholic writer. (Which is not to say that he's particularly orthodox about Catholicism, only that he often weaves in Catholic themes.) In his most famous works, the *Book of the New Sun* series, Wolfe uses

a very baroque style of language and he plays with genre in a way which could be seen as challenging or treacherous. (It depends on what you think about genre as a contract. Full disclosure: I really dug the *Book of the New Sun* the first time I read it, but I haven't yet been able to force myself to re-read it.) If we were feeling playful, we could call the *Book of the New Sun* **illegible**--it's a book that does not permit itself to be read.

By contrast, Wolfe's *An Evil Guest* is illegible for completely different reasons: while it's an easy read from word to word (nothing here is described as "fuligin"), the deep story here is never really clear to me because the plot is episodic and the telling of it is full of holes. (And, judging from the reviews I've read online, it's not entirely clear to anyone what's going on, though the Gene Wolfe Wiki has some theories.)

Now, on one hand, we could say that Wolfe is playing here with the distinction between surfaces (the word-to-word ease of reading) and depths (the difficulty of finding the true story)--that the structure of the work is directly related to one of its main themes: the surface vs. the depths. (Or as Adam Roberts put it in his review on *Strange Horizons*, the Catholic issue of transubstantiation: how can the wine seem to be wine on the surface but really be blood in its true being, etc.? Well, this being a novel about "an evil guest," we should expect the flip side--the Host--to appear sometime.) Several characters mention this issue and it comes up in several ways. Not least of all the fact that several of the main characters are professional actors, putting on different surfaces but not changing their depths.

But on the other hand, as much as it might be fun to tangle with the strands of Wolfe's story and to fill in the holes, I'm not sure I see the upside to it. While this book gives an interesting alternative view on the Cthulhu mysteries (like what if you don't know what night-gaunts are, how would you describe them?), I miss the cosmic horror that Lovecraft was into. (In that way, this reminds me almost of something by August Derleth, who took care of Lovecraft's estate and was also a Catholic.) And once you take away the main theme of cosmic horror and loneliness, what's left in the Cthulhu stories is just stage settings. Wolfe may be very skillful in moving around sets to make them look real, but I'm not sure there's anything beyond the surface here.
