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An Evil Guest by Gene Wolfe, Tor Books, 2008

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Recommended Readings



An Evil Guest

by Gene Wolfe, Tor Books, 2008

Reviewed by Brian Giesler

An Evil Guest is the latest novel by Gene Wolfe, the critically acclaimed science fiction author whose works usually require careful reading to discern exactly what is happening. That may sound onerous, but Wolfe's prose is deceptively easy to ingest (although digesting can take some time).

An Evil Guest revolves around Cassie Casey, a struggling actress who acts and speaks as if she just stepped out of a '40s pulp thriller. Early on she is elevated through arcane means into something both more and less than human. The novel follows her increasingly baroque encounters with a large cast of characters, who themselves seem to have been plucked from various literary works spanning the past century.

The novel itself, which ends poignantly, does not fall neatly into any one genre - it is science fiction, but also a romance of sorts, a mystery story, a spy thriller, and oddly, a South Pacific adventure tale. Woven throughout are Wolfe's trademark themes, including self transformation, the inevitability of evil and redemption, and the illusionary nature of past, present and future. Wolfe manages to meld together such disparate elements, mostly successfully, by using long stretches of dialogue to advance the plot. The bulk of the action occurs off-page, and the reader must often wait for characters to discuss past events to discover what transpired in earlier chapters.

While *An Evil Guest* is occasionally jarring, if you enjoy literary puzzles, you may find it increasingly difficult to put down this aptly titled novel.

-Brian Giesler is an assistant professor of psychology at Butler University.