

Evil Guest Reviewed in Washington Post SF Roundup

The Urth list — 7 messages, 6 voices, 13 Oct 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5182>

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Matthew Keeley — 13 Oct 2008, 19:30

Alas, Wolfe didn't get his own review column this time, though of course the Post is generally pretty good to him - our own Nick Gevers had a Wolfe piece there some time ago, and Post critic Michael Dirda is something of a Wolfe fan.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/10/09/AR2008100902537.html>

-Matt

Craig Brewer — 13 Oct 2008, 19:34 · follows Matthew Keeley

Speaking of EG reviews, there's one up on the Strange Horizons website, as well:

http://www.strangehorizons.com/reviews/2008/10/an_evil_guest_b.shtml

----- Original Message -----

From: Matthew Keeley <matthew.keeley.1 at gmail.com>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Monday, October 13, 2008 2:30:24 PM

Subject: (urth) Evil Guest Reviewed in Washington Post SF Roundup

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James Crossley — 13 Oct 2008, 22:04 · in reply to Craig Brewer

The Strange Horizons review captures a great deal of what I think about Wolfe, especially recent works such as "Memorare," Pirate Freedom and now Evil Guest. All have hidden depths that make them well worth exploring and reward rereading, but am I the only one who feels that Wolfe is on the verge (if not past it) of making the initial reading experience off-putting?

James

On 10/13/08 12:34 PM, "Craig Brewer" <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:

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aaron — 13 Oct 2008, 22:58 · in reply to James Crossley

For me, An Evil Guest started out as a real page turner and kept my interest all the way through. And I usually become bored with books in a very short time. Wolfe and Jack Vance are two writers who almost always keep me reading. So for me, I do not agree with the latter review.

On Mon, Oct 13, 2008 at 6:04 PM, James Crossley <ishmael at drizzle.com> wrote:
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-Matt

Fernando Q. Gouvea — 13 Oct 2008, 23:02 · in reply to James Crossley

I don't find the initial experience of reading Wolfe off-putting, no. Orson Scott Card once wrote a review (of, I think, *Free Live Free*, but I may be misremembering) saying that for him Wolfe had reached or passed that point. So folks can disagree on that.

I'm a little amazed at the *Strange Horizons* review. I find *An Evil Guest* perfectly accessible on a first reading, and a great deal of fun. It certainly doesn't clarify the moral status of Reis and Chase, but hey, when does life ever do that? (My tendency is to think that both of them are trying to be as moral as they can, though they approach this with very different premises.) There are certainly mysteries all over the place, but not all mysteries need to be explained.

Someone mentioned that there is some sort of connection between Finney's "The Circus of Dr. Lao" and "An Evil Guest" (at the very least because of the name "Woldercan"). But one of the remarkable features of "Dr Lao" is exactly Finney's refusal to come up with any explanations at all. The circus is there and it is what it is, and the novel is concerned with other things. Similarly, "Guest" doesn't explain a lot of its mysteries; perhaps it's just that Wolfe is interested in other things.

It seems to me that "An Evil Guest" is something of a romp, and it can and should be enjoyed as such. Yes, Wolfe's conservative take on a lot of things is evident in it, and yes, there are a lot of mysteries left over after my first reading. So what?

Fernando

James Crossley wrote:

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James

=====

Fernando Q. Gouvea
Carter Professor of Mathematics
Colby College Editor, FOCUS
Mayflower Hill 5836 Editor, MAA Reviews
Waterville, ME 04901
fqgouvea at colby.edu

Usually mathematicians have to shoot somebody to get this much publicity.
-- Thomas R. Nicely, on the attention he received after
finding the flaw in Intel's Pentium chip in 1994

James Crossley — 13 Oct 2008, 23:49 · in reply to Fernando Q. Gouvea

I may have overstated my case by using the word "off-putting," I suppose. I found *Evil Guest* fairly enjoyable to read, after all, even without considering what subtleties might be present in the text. But for someone who's not on the lookout for such subtleties, I'm not sure that the book offers anything that any number of (for lack of a better word) generic potboilers do, and it provides a fair share of obstacles to the casual reader, too, including clunky dialogue and

obscure motivation.

Being an admirer of Wolfe, I realize that many of these apparent flaws are probably calculated and may actually offer inroads to deeper understanding, but it seems to me that once upon a time, Wolfe also offered more superficial pleasures in his prose. Not every book can be written with as rich a vocabulary as the New Sun series, of course, but there's certainly a middle ground between that and the frankly pedestrian writing in this latest novel.

I just get the feeling that Wolfe is taking pleasure in disguising glittering sophistication with the blandest exteriors he can possibly create, almost as if he's smuggling his ideas. "Pirates popular these days? I'll give you a pirate novel that traffics in all the swashbuckling cliches imaginable, and I'll include a straight-shooting narrator/protagonist who explains everything that's happening. Wouldn't want anyone to think I was one of those smarty-pants authors who's trying to make my readers feel dumb. Nope, I'm just a safe, simple yarn-spinner. Buy my book instead of that Star Wars tie-in novel . . ."

James

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Stuart Hamm — 14 Oct 2008, 04:00 · in reply to James Crossley

I can feel his pain...AEG wasn't my favorite...but as an artist/entertainer/musician (?)
I have fans who complain if I don't play my "hits" from my first albums (remember "albums"?)
and those who rip me? a new one for playing the same old stuff over and over....

Garden Party anyone???....

???? Mobile — (415) 786-3624

???? Skype? stuart.hamm

myspace.com/stuhamm

? ??? stuarthamm.net

--- On Mon, 10/13/08, James Crossley <ishmael at drizzle.com> wrote: From: James Crossley <ishmael at drizzle.com> Subject: Re: (urth) Evil Guest Reviewed in Washington Post SF Roundup To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net> Date: Monday, October 13, 2008, 3:04 PM

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