



Windeye

Brian Evenson

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A short story collection is like a meal. How it's consumed depends on the reader. A lazy Sunday afternoon can vanish as one enjoys a literary dim sum, sampling from this or that part of the book as pages flip by like waiters with trays of bons mots. Or sleepless nights become refrigerator-raiding binges as every devoured work leaves the reader ravenous for another. For those whose imaginations constantly hunger for genuine nourishment, Brian Evenson's *Windeye* is a feast.

Director of the Literary Arts department at Brown University, Evenson has won or been shortlisted for several awards. Most recently, he was a finalist for the World Fantasy Award with his short story collection, *Fugue State*, and *Last Days* won the American Library Association's award for Best Horror Novel of 2009.

Windeye delivers a complex and varied collection filled with contrasting flavors. Ranging from feudal to post apocalyptic themes, it contains some of the best uncanny and horror writing to come out of New England since Stephen King published *The Stand* in 1978. In stories like "Angel of Death" and "The Oxygen Protocol," survivors are unable to comprehend the realities of their hallucinatory worlds. Lacking only the scientific element, Evenson has the potential to raise literary sci-fi to new heights. Other stories, like "Grottor" and "The Anskan House," come straight from the Lovecraftian tradition of hinted evil and unavoidable outcomes. Evenson drips blood and gristle through his tales like Tabasco sauce—enough to give the stories bite, but not to the extent that readers lose their appetites. And never so much that it overwhelms the subtle flavors of loss and searching that tie this collection together.

If there is any dissatisfaction to be found in the banquet Evenson lays out for his readers, it is his strange decision to alter the traditional order in which a proper meal is served. One usually begins with something to prepare the palate, a sorbet or an apéritif. Evenson opens with his title story. Told in five very short chapters, "Windeye" takes a hauntingly eerie, beautifully written, and perfectly timed look through a window into a world where not only a child can be stolen, but an entire existence can be erased. Regardless of how original and well-composed his other stories are, not one conveys the same depth or completeness of this one. *Windeye*, unconventionally, begins with dessert.

JOSEPH THOMPSON (Summer 2012)

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