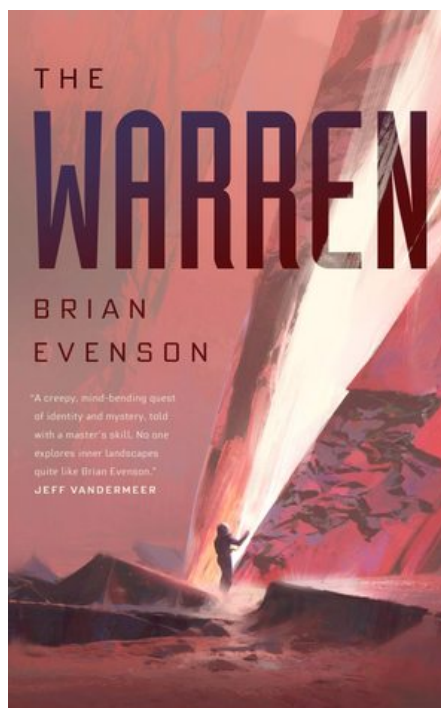




The Warren

Brian Evenson

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X doesn't have a name. He thought he had one—or many—but that might be the result of the failing memories of the personalities imprinted within him. Or maybe he really is called X.

He's also not as human as he believes himself to be.

But when he discovers the existence of another—above ground, outside the protection of the Warren—X must learn what it means to be human, or face the destruction of their two species.

The Warren Details

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Author : Brian Evenson

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From Reader Review The Warren for online ebook

unknown says

Left me wanting answers in the most deliciously frustrating way.

Richard Thomas says

Wow, so good. Disorienting, alarming, and intense.

Bookwraiths says

Originally reviewed at Bookwraiths.

The Warren is a short, suspenseful novella which delivers heaping doses of loneliness, mystery, and utter alienation. Brian Evenson skillfully turning confusion, weirdness, and schizophrenic leanings into an existential horror, where desperately seeking answers and not finding them is all part of the delicious fun.

Simply put, this is a tale starring X — though X isn't even sure if that is really his name. He has many memories from other people imprinted within him. Memories which are incomplete or simply fading away slowly, leaving him confused as to who he is, what he is, and his purpose in life.

It is only when X discovers another being above ground, outside the protection of the Warren, that he leaves the protection of his home to brave the desolation outside. But what will he discover from this other survivor? And will it be the salvation X craves, or something he wishes he had never learned?

This was a strange story, one which drew me in, dangled the promise of amazing twists, entertained me with masterful, minimalistic writing, and disoriented me with its abrupt but skillful conclusion. But even though I enjoyed the journey with the lost, utterly alone X and understood that the confusion in the narrative was intentional and the shifting perspectives deliberate, I was somewhat unsatisfied with the climax of the story, which left me wanting immediate access to the rest of the story — because there had to be more.

But should you read it?

The answer lies in your reading preferences. Do you enjoy Gene Wolfe penned tales? Is existential horror to your liking? Weird tales right up your alley? If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, then *The Warren* is definitely for you. If none of those things peak your interest, you might not love this novella, but I'd still encourage you to give it a try, because it is short and definitely worthy of the small time investment.

I received this book from the publisher in exchange for a fair and honest review. I'd like to thank them for allowing me to receive this review copy and inform everyone that the review you have read is my opinion alone.

karen says

this quote from the book pretty much sums up my reading experience:

At times, I become confused about the order in which things should be told. Parts of me know things that other parts do not, and sometimes I both know a thing and do not know it, or part of me knows something is true and another part knows it is not true, and there is nothing to allow me to negotiate between the two.

i started off digging the premise and the intriguing vagueness of the opening, but i found myself floundering pretty quickly. and yet it was not an unenjoyable flounder.

do i know what this story was about?

i do not.

but *part* of me does.

and that part'll get back to you.

come to my blog!

Lori says

Another barren wasteland. Another amazing novel that probes deep into what it means to be human and whether what you think you are, and what you truly are, really makes that much difference in the long run.

OK....DO NOT READ THIS REVIEW UNLESS YOU HAVE ALREADY READ THIS BOOK AND IMMOBILITY.

If I'm right, I'm about to spoil a whole bunch of shit for you.

Ok, you've been warned!

Soooo many parallels to *Immobility* here. In that novel, the human protagon Horkai had been awakened from storage to go on a mission to retrieve some material that had been "stolen". Accompanying him on his mission were two "mules", an identical pair of human-like beings who couldn't survive prolonged exposure to the harsh conditions outside, with names that shared the same first letter - Qatik and Qanik.

Could they be our X's ancestors, earlier even than those who have been imprinted in him and share thought space within his body?

In *The Warren*, we know X's ancestors were likewise made in pairs for quite some time, sharing the same alphabetic letter in *their* names - we are aware that their names were Ture/Tore, Unnr/Uttr, Vigus/Vagus, and then the solo Wollem, created alone because of a lack of material.

It appears as though our Warren humaniods have been left on their own for a very long time, replicating themselves based off of faulty memories as they each approach the end of their lifespan. Though, they are not really ALONE alone because the Warren's super computer AKA Monitor informs our curious little X that there is one true human left. That human's name is Horak (a misremembered version of Horkai, maybe?), and he is stored away in a different location, one that is above ground, which is still considered toxic to X and his kind.

Are you with me right now? Are you seeing the parallels to Immobility yet? Horak is in storage, Horkai was in storage. The outside is toxic to the identical pairs, and the outside is toxic to X and his ancestors, too. And if you follow the alphabet backwards, we are with X now. Wollem is gone - he left the Warren ages ago to see if he could locate more material, and never returned. Wollem was created by Vigus and Vagus. Vigus and Vagus had been created by Unnr and Uttr, who were created by Ture and Tore. So it's not ENTIRELY crazy to back this thing all the way up to Qatik and Qanik, right?

X is only able to remember as far back as Ture and Tore, but that could be explained easily - maybe Ture and Tore were the first humaniods to IMPRINT themselves, thus being the first pair to ever burn their memories into the two they were creating, thus ensuring that they will always be a part of those who come after them.

It's totally possible that X's group are all that's left of the Immobility clan. Maybe they began as a small group of humans and humaniods that had broken off from that original group. Maybe shit was hitting the fan and some of the people said screw this and made their way across the barren, poisoned land to build a new home of their own....

Maybe The Warren is Immobility's future self.

Boom!

Kyle Muntz says

It makes sense that this is dedicated to Gene Wolfe, who I know is an influence of Evenson's going way back. It's sort of like a more phenomenological companion piece to Immobility, with characters stranded in an unknowable, toxic wasteland full of barely functional technology, but this time rooted in the problem of multiple consciousnesses existing in one body. It's a familiar mode of storytelling for Evenson: to put his characters (who generally don't know who they are or where they came from) in a void, and then what comes after is a slow, faulty exploration of the void, uncovering pieces of information and making connections that may or may not be real. Sometimes they map more, sometimes less, learning things about themselves or the void that function sort of like keys, except they're keys to doors that lead nowhere; and in the end the characters finish as lost as they were before, alone and dying in a hostile wasteland. This is a solid novella with some very striking moments, and pulls together nicely at the end, though this is the first time I've found myself really wanting more than the book gave, and I'll be curious to see if Evenson's next longer work pushes more into new territory.

Danger says

Ponderous. This reads sort've like an Asimov story, hearkening back to one of my favorite shorts of all-time, The Last Question, but, ya know, this is much WEIRDER. This novella poses serious questions with no easy answers, and for its brevity, it isn't a light read. There's a lot of thought gone into these pages, and a lot of reflection shining back off them. The Warren is an exploration of self in the abstract sense, science-fiction on the edge of a fever dream. I liked this book quite a bit.

Basia says

3.5, or thereabouts. A little esoteric. A bit bewildering. But happy I read it.

Richard says

Brian Evenson has a knack for mood setting in his stories, and he delivers atmosphere for days in this existential psychological sci-fi portrait. It's a fascinating little mind-fuck that I'm not sure I fully understand but it definitely kept my interest. It defies description a bit but think of it in the same vein as the movies *Solaris* or *Moon*. However, you know how it can get super annoying when someone keeps answering your serious questions with other questions? That's also what this book felt like.

Aaron says

Supremely strange and surprisingly short (which makes the conceit easier to swallow), this diminutive tale is clearly designed to delight the reader who enjoys confusion, making you work for the answers (as very few are given). It's ultimately an unknowable tale, and that's half the fun; the other half is Evenson's skill at evoking existential horror through shifting perspectives, words unsaid and tales untold, and a fairly stark approach to narrative minimalism. The dedication to Gene Wolfe is the first giveaway as to the nature of this thing: Evenson constructed this in the vein of similarly disorienting works by Wolfe such as *Peace*, *Latro in the Mist*, and *A Borrowed Man*. I won't talk about the plot, as the few spoilers there are should not be spoiled, but this falls somewhere between science fiction, horror, and general weird fiction, and I recommend it to fans of any of the above (and ESPECIALLY to Gene Wolfe fans). I read this hot on the heels of Evenson's first novel, *Father of Lies*, which was recently reissued and also well worth your time. Evenson writes a peculiar brand of horror whether he's using a contemporary setting (as in *Father of Lies*) or a science fiction backdrop (as here), but his voice is strong, his ideas fresh, and I look forward to reading more of his work.

T.E. Grau says

I love the work of Brian Evenson, as it's truly unlike any other, composed of a quality and class that makes me proud to read and write horror. I think he's an important author who can and has been acting as a bridge between speculative fiction and that deemed more "literary," which has benefitted both camps that are

crossing over into rival territory more and more each day, softening the dividing lines. Evenson gets respect outside of the horror scene, and rightfully so, receiving reviews from such bastions of literary legitimacy as The New Yorker and the New York Times and several other eminent publications with New York in their title.

One of the reasons why I love his writing so much is that - depending on the story - Evenson can be difficult to get your mind around, because he's dancing at a different rhythm than your feet are normally accustomed. Moving twice on the downbeat, adding a barely perceptible flourish during a rest. To force another clumsy metaphor, he's not serving up hot dogs and potato salad at a Lion's Club picnic held at the local bottle park, he's carefully plating minimalist, locally sourced Danish cuisine in an avant-garde restaurant outside of Copenhagen that gets covered by Anthony Bourdain.

His work is different from the others in his field, coming from a thoughtful, considered place that searches the darkness for answers, then faithfully presents what he has found, no matter how grim the result. His narrators can be unreliable, or the reality surrounding them are, or both. Nothing is usually as it first seems. There is much mystery in Evenson's horror, and always, always an examination of the human condition, often set in the wider context of our strange and complicated reality, where even the "realness" can often be up for debate.

My first read of The Warren (Tor Books, 2016) took place in small snatches - a few pages here and there, due to a very hectic schedule that left little time for immersive reading - over several months. I reached the 3/4 mark, and couldn't remember where I was in the book, story-wise. I had impressions of the setting(s), and the narrator(s), but I couldn't put the overall story together in my head.

So I started over from the beginning.

On my second read, I ingested the book in two sittings, and it all snapped into place, and the larger, complex pattern made up of what I assumed were loosely related dots shook me with the power of its message. Individual notes coalesced into a symphony. And it was beautiful.

This is a subtly drawn yet astounding book of bleak science fiction horror, written in Evenson's signature style where everything is questioned, even the language of the narrative itself. The Warren is an examination of the nature of being, and what it means to be human in a technologically advanced time on an unnamed planet of dust, underscored with a felt but not necessarily heard bassline that is - at least in my biased interpretation - possibly inspired by the "death by a thousand cuts" impact of religious/political dogma that knows the key to getting someone to truly believe without questioning is to tell them something enough times in a vacuum, where no counter-narrative exists. As cult leaders and evangelists and demagogues and parents and social media and a thousand other influencers have shown us over the millennia, humans can be programmed, and then reprogrammed, and then...

Who is who, and what is what, inside The Warren? What lies outside of it? What or who lies inside of you? Are we the sum of our parts, or are all of the parts still separate, and jockeying for position? Can we leave our own personal warren? Should we leave? Can we trust what we have been told if we choose to leave?

You could always ask the monitor, about this and a great many things. Or the voices inside your head. Or the other person sitting across from you in the room, with a name you can't quite remember. You might be surprised by what you learn.

Michael Hicks says

Although The Warren is short – less than a hundred pages and compelling enough to read in a single sitting – I needed some time to digest its content and figure out what I wanted to say about it. Ultimately, I think the less said about it the better. (And I do mean this in all seriousness, and in the best way possible.)

I went into this book blind, knowing very little about it other than it had a snazzy cover and was another release in Tor's strong line of novellas. I think this is about all you should know about it, as well. It's a good, twisty read and you should probably check it out so long as you can stand not having everything perfectly resolved and all questions neatly answered.

Not enough? OK, fine. Imagine taking some science fiction heavy weights, like Blade Runner and The Martian and tossing them in a heavy-duty blender with Memento for added flavor. The Warren, however, is far from simply a pastiche of these other works, even if I found their influences to be strong. What you end up with, though, is a short work that calls into question the nature of self and self-perception with an utterly unreliable narrator in what is, basically, a locked-room drama.

This warped and fairly grim narrative cares not a whit about delivering the goods in a linear fashion, so readers should go in with scrutinizing eyes and pay keen attention to the details. Brian Evenson raises a lot of questions within his story, most of which are either answered ambiguously at best, or left to the reader to suss out the clues. I enjoyed connecting the various puzzle pieces presented in The Warren, and I suspect that a second read-through would be both deeply rewarding and quite different than the initial journey. This is certainly a story that demands a focused reading, and the closer you inspect Evenson's writing the more satisfying it becomes.

[Note: I received an advanced copy of this title for review from the publisher via NetGalley.]

Brian says

Haunting and brilliant dystopian story telling with the kind of ending that makes you want to make everyone you know read it so you can all shout WTF? together.

Tammy says

The nitty-gritty: A strange and thought-provoking story about loneliness and what it means to be human.

For me, memory is not only at times flawed and corrupted but also overlapped and confused, one personality hiding parts of another, blending too, so that the selves within my head sometimes seem many-headed and monstrous or deformed and impossible to comprehend.

It's been a while since I read a Tor.com novella, but every time I read one, I'm reminded of how much I love these small bites of science fiction and fantasy. **The Warren** is extremely short—barely sixty pages in my eARC copy—but the length didn't really matter, because this story was so atmospheric and emotional. It immediately reminded me of Hugh Howley's **Wool**, a story with a similar feel of desolation and dread. It's one of those stories with a slow build that unsettles the reader little by little.

The Warren takes place on an unnamed planet that seems to have undergone an apocalyptic event, or perhaps the planet just isn't fit for human life. In any case, a man named X is the sole occupant of a space station-like dwelling that he calls the warren, with only a computer voice (called "monitor") to talk to. When the story opens, X has discovered a storage unit outside of the warren that contains a body—a man who appears to be dead, but who stutters awake when X removes him from the container. Although the presence of this person is never really explained, X takes him back to the warren, only to discover he's developed a sickness from the poisonous air of the planet, and now X is sick too.

The man, whose name is Horak, challenges everything X believes to be true about his life in the warren and even his very existence.

OK, so there isn't much of a plot here, but **The Warren** works more as a character and mood study than anything else. The most fascinating thing about X is that he was created by someone named Wollem as a receptacle for all the souls who came before him, and now he shares his headspace with the knowledge and thoughts of all the others of the warren. All X can remember is that Wollem left soon after he created X, and now he is all alone. *Physically*, at least. Inside his head it's actually quite crowded.

When X discovers Horak, they have a long conversation about what being human means, and indeed, which of them is human and which is not. I always love stories that blur the line between human and alien, or human and machine. X is clearly something *other*, but it isn't until a twist near the end of the story that the natures of X and Horak become more clearly defined.

Because it isn't safe to leave the warren, X rarely goes outside, and even then he bundles up in a space suit. But his desire to find answers, and even more important, his desire to find more material in order build the next receptacle (whose name we can only guess will start with a Y) leads him on an odd journey. Unlike most stories, the ending of **The Warren** doesn't really answer anything. And even X seems perplexed by everything he's learned, and puzzled that even after his adventures outside the warren, he's still alive with no real answers. But despite this, I finished the story with an odd sense of satisfaction and a feeling that not all mysteries are meant to be solved.

Big thanks to the publisher for supplying a review copy. This review originally appeared on Books, Bones & Buffy

Benoit Lelièvre says

Well, this was terrifying in all sorts of unusual ways. A little short, maybe but heavy on the existential terror

and alienation. This was my first Brian Evenson and I can't shake the feeling I've started with the wrong book, but I liked the hell out of it. The disembodied narration, the disorientation and loneliness of it were delightful if like me you're into this sort of thing. I haven't read or seen The Martian yet, but I suspect being left alone on a planet is a lot more like Brian Evenson depicts than anything else. While I can't say the existential questions asked in this book are subtle or original, the way they provoke terror in the reader is. Count me in, Brian Evenson. I'm a fan.
