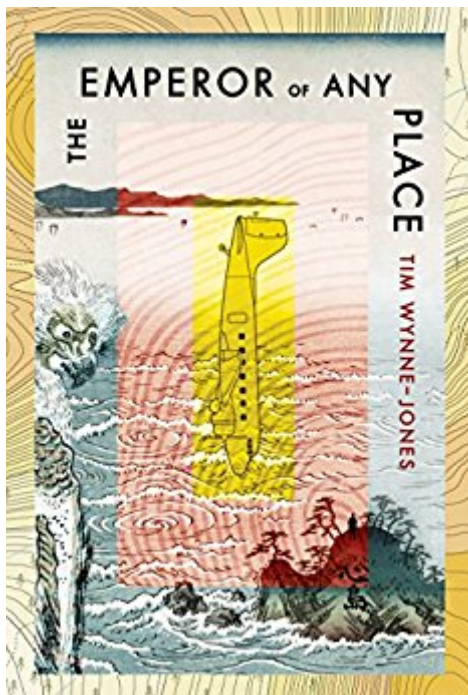


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The Emperor Of Any Place



Synopsis

The ghosts of war reverberate across the generations in a riveting, time-shifting story within a story from acclaimed thriller writer Tim Wynne-Jones. When Evan's father dies suddenly, Evan finds a hand-bound yellow book on his desk—a book his dad had been reading when he passed away. The book is the diary of a Japanese soldier stranded on a small Pacific island in WWII. Why was his father reading it? What is in this account that Evan's grandfather, whom Evan has never met before, fears so much that he will do anything to prevent its being seen? And what could this possibly mean for Evan? In a pulse-quickening mystery evoking the elusiveness of truth and the endurance of wars passed from father to son, this engrossing novel is a suspenseful, at times terrifying read from award-winning author Tim Wynne-Jones.

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Customer Reviews

Tim Wynne-Jones delivers another outstanding story that reaches into family history and lays it out for the reader with masterly skill that will take you back in time with characters that will live on in your heart. This multi-generational story of male relationships revealing fears, strength and

fantastical challenges will sit on your bed stand, wake you up, keep you up until about 3/4 of the way through as you realize the last page is not far away. Then it slows you down and the dilemma of making it to the last page means the story is over, regretfully. It is a story for all ages, that will have you rereading passages, imagining scenes, great food for the imagination as well as a thunderous massage for the heart along the way.

A little difficult initially and on the sad tone but engaging. Great visual pictures of characters.

Although this is clearly marketed as a young-adult book, I was attracted to its subject and so ordered it. And read it with great pleasure, too, all the time wondering why it had this classification. Well, the protagonist, Evan Griffin is still a teenager at 16 -- but in Toronto where he lives, that is apparently old enough not to be taken into care when his father dies. And that's the first thing that is surprisingly mature about the book: it opens with the death of Evan's father, who had brought him up alone since childhood in a remarkably close relationship. Evan can cope remarkably well in the house, but he needs to call in his grandfather to help with the legal work. And there's the problem: "Griff," as he was called, is a retired Sergeant Major of Marines; Evan's father, a Vietnam draft-dodger, rebelled against his spit-and-polish style, and now the grandson has inherited that legacy of hate. Though Griff may be a little stereotypical, there are surprisingly adult themes here. Just before he died, Evan's father had been sent a privately-printed book called "Kokoro-Jima, the Heart-Shaped Island." It is the account of a Japanese soldier marooned on an island not far from Tinian during the Pacific War, and his encounter with an American airman whose plane crashed there. It is a kind of ROBINSON CRUSOE story, and a terrific one, though distinguished by two features. One -- again mature and very instructive -- is the portrayal of both Japanese and American actions in the Second World War, a realistic background that the author makes no attempt to sanitize. The other is the thing that most clearly qualifies the book for young-adult status: the island is also populated by creatures of fantasy -- the ghosts of the unborn, the ghosts of the never-to-be-born, and a monster they call Tengu. Normally such elements would turn me off, but so strong is Wynne-Jones' writing that I took it all in my stride. It soon becomes clear that Griff, whose role in the WW2 story appears only later, is determined to prevent the full publication of the book, which sets him into further conflict with his grandson Evan. Alas, although I was fully prepared to give the book five stars most of the way through, I found that the resolution of this conflict and the eventual rapprochement between old man and boy lacked the density of most of the earlier writing, and involved the last-moment introduction of quite another plot strand. So while I would still

recommend the book for young adult readers, I cannot quite give the five stars on my own.

Composed of a book within a novel, *The Emperor of Any Place* is a heart-wrenching story of conflict and reconciliation, of loss and of discovery, and in the end a story of the healing power of love. Tim Wynne-Jones' latest novel is one that is beautifully crafted, engaging from the first page to the last one, and memorable in the truths it tells and the lessons to be learned from both stories. Having fled to Canada rather than being drafted and having to serve in Vietnam, Clifford E. Griffin III is a gentle, modest man. While reading a mysterious book that will become indispensable to the overall themes of *The Emperor of Any Place*, he dies of hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. His son Evan finds him. Following the funeral, seventeen-year old Evan lives alone at 123 Any Place, the nickname he and his father gave to their address. Although his father is gone, Evan retains the habits and manners he had been taught. So much of grief is unlearning. Estranged from his own father, eighty-one year old Chief Master Sergeant Clifford E. Griffin Jr., Cliff had warned Evan to avoid his grandfather. When Griff calls and tells Evan, he has arrived early to help him settle things, their resulting conflict and eventual respect for and understanding of one another propels the present day portion of the novel. The book within the novel *The Emperor of Any Place* is the diary of Lance Corporal Isamu Oshiro, a Japanese infantryman who was marooned on the island of Kokoro-Jima during the waning days of World War II. Isamu believes in the Emperor and the Japanese way of life. There can be no surrender. A great man should die a shattered jewel. Yet Isamu is also a realist, making sure no one who reads his story misunderstands where his loyalties lie. I realized it was wicked to suggest the Empire might ever be defeated. So let me add the Emperor is in my prayers. It is my fervent desire that we will prevail. Through his eyes, the reader is drawn into the personal stories of both Isamu and of Flight Lieutenant Derwood Kraft. Kraft, an American who was also marooned when the plane in which he was a passenger crashed, survives the early days only through the kindness and ministrations of Isamu. As the two begin to understand one another and form an unlikely friendship, based on both mutual respect and necessity, their attitudes toward enemy combatants begin to evolve. The horror of war and its impact on the combatants are a major theme within Isamu's story. As he writes about the plane crash and the reason he did not react to the noise and fire, Isamu says: the sound of things exploding has become a part of me. The weariness he felt and the relief at being marooned are evident. The truth is, I had just escaped from the war, and I had no desire to go back

Similarly, Derwood Kraft writes "it was my duty to get myself back into the action. I suffered some misgivings about shirking this responsibility I would make no attempt to return to the action if by doing so it would risk Isamu's security." He was my savior. Both Isamu and Derwood have visions of supernatural beings, the evil Tengu and the ethereal Jikininki. As Isamu's narrative progresses, one begins to understand the Tengu represents war "the evisceration and mutilation of men, regardless of their loyalties. The Jikininki, beings who ate memories because they were able to form none of their own since they had never been born, represent the children who will never exist because they were never conceived. The psychological impact of war is evident throughout the novel. In war, sanity is a difficult thing to hold on to." "It is not hard to die [it is] hard to settle, to find a place of rest." The internal conflict that arises when the enemy does not act as anticipated weighs heavily on those involved in the war effort. Isamu writes, after seeing Americans displaying kindness "I lay my head down confused and ashamed war is madness I faded off exhausted by the attempt to care." Just as Isamu and Derwood must learn to cooperate and communicate in order to survive, so must Evan and Griff lay aside their differences, learn to communicate and to understand one another. As their portions of "The Emperor of Any Place" develop, one begins to see the parallels between their story and that of Isamu and Derwood. Tim Wynne-Jones realistically captures the attitudes and mannerisms of the Japanese people and their culture. At one juncture, Oshiro is writing to his wife and says: "I am glad you shouted at me even if it was most impolite of you." When he scavenges items from the wreckage of the American airplane and bumps the dead copilot, he apologizes, thinking, "How grievously I was treating him." The dead, both human and even the Tenju, a monster haunting the island, are accorded respect and a burial in accordance with cultural customs. "we granted the creature both rites, as if he were both Eastern and Western." "The Emperor of Any Place" is an extraordinary novel and one that is almost impossible to put aside. I will be recommending it to my Book Club and to my reading friends.

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