



Constant Guests

Patricia Nedelea

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Constant Guests is an intriguing story with an unusual narrative that artfully blends history, fantasy, and romance.

Constant Guests by Patricia Nedelea is an ambitious genre-bending adventure through history with a surreal, yet fitting conclusion.

There are four stories to follow in *Constant Guests*. The first centers on a spoiled Parisian party girl, Isa, who is unable to dream. Shortly upon discovering her parents are actually her aunt and uncle, she finds her mother trapped in a coma only to die moments after awakening. She sets out to find her father and the mystery that led to her mother's fate.

A second plotline picks up and highlights Isa's mother's quest to unite the first Tarot deck. From there, the story rockets further back to 1389 for the creation of the Tarot deck and the enigmatic "fake bishop" Marignolli. A third narrative chronicles a dying man in the year 100 attempting to dictate a monumental story to a pair of scribes, a man who is known to have seen "both sides of the moon."

At first blush, *Constant Guests* seems like a historical thriller akin to *The Da Vinci Code*, but there is more here than meets the eye. The seemingly disparate plot lines provide hints and clues while building up an interesting mythology. The story is actually a blend of historical fiction, adventure, and a tinge of science fiction and fantasy.

Early in the book, much of the information seems contradictory and confusing. For instance, the fake bishop Marignolli is repeatedly described as an impostor, but he admits to having memory loss. The contradiction is cleared up in the final chapters, so it pays to dive in and let the plot unfold. However, Marignolli's plot line is one of the most intriguing. His silent companion, the mystery of his past, the passion that drives him to create the Tarot deck, and his legacy are all vital plot points and are fascinating to follow.

Isa's characterization is more erratic, and it becomes difficult to sympathize with her. She is spoiled and shuns her loving parents, constantly berates people who help her, and refuses to accept responsibility for her actions. This all changes by the book's end, though little is provided to show that transition. The plot relies on several sudden reversals that interrupt the story's flow with confusing revelations, though these can be forgiven in light of a thrilling conclusion. *Constant Guests* ends with a cliffhanger, presumably making room for a sequel.

Constant Guests is an intriguing story with an unusual narrative that artfully blends history, fantasy, and romance, and should engage fans of genre-defying adventures.

JOHN M. MURRAY (July 12, 2016)

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