

**GREY AREA Will Self** (*Atlantic Monthly Press*, \$22) The smart, technically adroit Self has written nine short stories, all with arrestingly bizarre situations taken to their logical—often too logical—

conclusions. Time and again, Self takes an interesting idea, gives it a few permutations, and then settles for a flat punchline. Concept is all. But when we can't see the literary machinery working, the results are striking: "Chest" is a strangely poignant look at the upper class in a pollution-scarred future; "Incubus" eerily details a graduate student's sleeping with her mentor; and the tour de force "Scale" charts the disintegrating life of a morphine-addicted man working on a thesis about the M40 highway. For the moment, Self is too talented a writer to ignore, but too clever a stylist by half to fully enjoy. **B-** —*Michael Giltz*