

REQUEST: Gene Wolfe recommendation

The SF-Lovers list — 10 messages, 10 voices, 15 Jan 1993

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/sflovers/107>

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Anthony E Bible — 15 Jan 1993, 18:17

I've seen several favorable comments on the net about Gene Wolfe so I picked up a book of his short stories (_Gene Wolfe's Book of Days_) at the library a couple days ago, and I am enjoying it very much. When I'm done with it I intend to read one of his novels. I'd appreciate suggestions from the Gene Wolfe fans amongst ye.

Thank you.

Tony

Loren Miller — 15 Jan 1993, 23:06 · follows Anthony E Bible

sclera at milori.ccit.arizona.edu writes:

Ah, a real topic. It has been a while, but I think the name is "The Torturer's Apprentice," which starts the Urth of the New Sun series. These are books which will get those endorphins :) flowing. They remind me of a latter-day Iliad.

Erm, that's _Shadow of a Torturer_, and it starts off the Book of the New Sun, but besides those little problems which might make it pretty hard to find the books you're right. It's a great book, and the main reason most people who like Wolfe do so. The rest of them are great too. In fact, they're the reason I joined the SFBC the last time I joined it, so I could get the whole set.

His other series is the Soldier one, _Soldier in the Mists_, and _Soldier of Arete_, which ends with a cliffhanger and unfortunately has not been continued.

His short story writing is impressive and literary, and IMO boring, but his adventure novels also tell wide-ranging stories and really get the reader's (at least this reader's) blood flowing.

Loren Miller

Dani Zweig — 16 Jan 1993, 00:39 · follows Loren Miller

bible at iastate.edu (Anthony E Bible):

I've seen several favorable comments on the net about Gene Wolfe so...
I intend to read one of his novels. I'd appreciate suggestions

That's easy. He's written a number of books, some of which have been well received and some of which have not, but the towering standout among his books is his "Book of the New Sun" tetralogy, the first book of which is "Shadow of the Torturer". The tale takes place so far in the future that it is impossible to tell whether it is science fiction or fantasy.

As a second choice, if you like historical fantasy, "Soldier of the Mists" is the 'diary' of a soldier who, during the Persian Wars, takes a head injury which destroys his capacity for long-term memory: Every night he forgets the events of the past day. The injury has also given him the

ability to see the immortals who have a use for him.

Dani Zweig

Patrick Nielsen-Hayden — 16 Jan 1993, 02:29 · follows Dani Zweig

sclera at milori.ccit.arizona.edu writes:

Ah, a real topic. It has been a while, but I think the name is "The Torturer's Apprentice," which starts the Urth of the New Sun series. These are books which will get those endorphins :) flowing. They remind me of a latter-day Iliad.

You're thinking of THE SHADOW OF THE TORTURER, the first of four volumes that comprise The Book of the New Sun. THE URTH OF THE NEW SUN is a separate work, connected to The Book of the New Sun but not part of it.

This coming April we will publish, in hardcover, NIGHTSIDE THE LONG SUN, the first of (yes) four volumes of The Book of the Long Sun, a new work set several thousand years earlier in the same universe.

Your recommendation of THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS and THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR DEATH AND OTHER STORIES AND OTHER STORIES zeroes unerringly in on two books which are currently out of print. We actually own THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS and will be getting it back into print by and by. Meanwhile, fans of Gene's short fiction can find quite a lot of it in ENDANGERED SPECIES, STORIES FROM THE OLD HOTEL, and CASTLE OF DAYS.

Patrick Nielsen Hayden
senior editor
Tor Books

Keith Warren Rickert — 16 Jan 1993, 04:18 · follows Patrick Nielsen-Hayden

The book titles are:

The Shadow of the Torturer
The Claw of the Conciliator
The Sword of the Lictor
The Citadel of the Autarch
and
The Urth of the New Sun

Wonderful books, the lot of them :)

Keith

Matt Austern — 16 Jan 1993, 05:19 · follows Keith Warren Rickert

bible at iastate.edu (Anthony E Bible) writes:

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Well, I think you have two obvious choices.

First, you might read The Book of the New Sun. It is sometimes called a tetralogy, but I think it's more accurate to describe it as a novel published in four volumes. Either way, though, it is very intricate, with links backwards and forwards between different parts of the book. The language is also very carefully constructed.

Another choice is Soldier in the Mist. This is a slightly difficult book to describe. We might view it as fantasy; alternatively, you could think of it as a novel set in ancient Greece (and nearby parts of the world), but where the ideas of what is and isn't real are those that someone of that time might have had, not those that we have.

Both books, in my opinion, are excellent. And, interestingly enough, an important element in both books is the memory of the main character.

Matthew Austern
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Barry Meikle — 17 Jan 1993, 02:05 · follows Matt Austern

pnh at panix.com (Patrick Nielsen-Hayden) writes:

Your recommendation of THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS and THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR DEATH AND OTHER STORIES AND OTHER STORIES zeroes unerringly in on two books which are currently out of print. We actually own THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS and will be getting it back into print by and by. Meanwhile, fans of Gene's short fiction can find quite a lot of it in ENDANGERED SPECIES, STORIES FROM THE OLD HOTEL, and CASTLE OF DAYS.

And Castle of Days contains "The Castle of the Otter", which I (and a lot of others, I guess) missed on its first small-press go-round. I think "Keen!" is the word I'm looking for here.

Barry Meikle
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meikle at gpu.utcs.utoronto.ca

Klaus Ole Kristiansen — 19 Jan 1993, 13:08 · follows Barry Meikle

loren at wmkt.wharton.upenn.edu (Loren Miller) writes:

His short story writing is impressive and literary, and IMO boring,

I find them very uneven. I have only read one book of Wolfe short stories, Endangered Species.

Some are rather boring.

Some makes little sense, but contains fantastic quotes:

"Long ago, when the universe was old ..."

Wolfe is a great language wizard.

Some are great stories. War Beneath the Tree alone is worth the price of the book. So is When I Was Ming the Meciless. So is In The House of Gingerbread.

Klaus O K

Kai Ivo Quale — 19 Jan 1993, 20:29 · follows Klaus Ole Kristiansen

My personal fave list:

(I have read just about everything by Wolfe, but these are the ones I remember on the spur of the moment.)

Book of the New Sun RAVE! PANT! DROOL! Easily the best he has ever written.

The Island of Doctor Incredible. I don't like collections; I love this Death and other Stories one. and Other Stories

Soldier series Very good.

Free Live Free Good, but extremely confusing. Not for the beginner.

Castlevision Good, but kind of light for my taste.

There Are Doors Not bad (Wolfe is never bad), but I don't think he quite pulled it off this time. I kind of waited for things to start rolling, and then it was over.

Book of Days Ranges from the very good to the so-so.

Fifth Head of Cerberus I found this one rather disappointing compared to his other work. An early effort, isn't it ?

Peace The only Wolfe I've ever found completely unreadable.

Wolfe can be very confusing. The way of reading Wolfe that works for me is to "ride the wave": Don't worry if you haven't got the faintest clue of what's going on - that's normal :-), just relax and enjoy the experience. It IS enjoyable even if you don't understand a thing, sort of like Kafka.

Kai Quale
kai at ifi.uio.no

Andrew Culhane — 29 Jan 1993, 16:33 · follows Kai Ivo Quale

I'm new to this newsgroup, so pardon me if this is an old opinion.

I've read almost everything Wolfe has written. Except for (IMO) Castlevision, and maybe Soldier of Arete, there aren't any bad Wolfe books.

But he is a very demanding writer. If you read a Gene Wolfe story only once, there isn't a chance of a snowball that you'll understand it. I reread The Book of the New Sun once a year or so, and there are still things I discover in it. Now it's possible that I'm just kind of dumb ...

So read anything. Contrary to what a previous poster said, I found his novel Peace outstanding, and I recommend it as a place to start.