

Just finished "Shadow of the Torturer"...confused as hell.

The SF-Lovers list — 11 messages, 9 voices, 05 Apr 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/sflovers/147>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Soundcage — 05 Apr 1998, 13:02

I finished Wolfe's "The Shadow of the Torturer" last night. I have no idea where this story is going. I feel the same way I did after finishing "Chapterhouse: Dune" and "Stars in My Pocket...".

To those who've read the entire Book of the New Sun: does it get better than this or can I expect to be confused all through the series?

Coyu — 05 Apr 1998, 13:25 · follows Soundcage

I have no idea where this story is going.

What specifically are you confused about?

It is possible that Severian has some presentiment about his future. In fact, Wolfe will use every SF device applicable to make sure of it.

Endymion9 — 05 Apr 1998, 17:39 · follows Coyu

I love Gene Wolfe and The Book Of The New Sun is my favorite all time series. However, I advise all readers new to Wolfe, don't make the destination the end-all, enjoy the journey. If Wolfe to sit you down and clearly explain all his obscure references forget it. He reminds me of the Alfred Hitchcock tv series where the end was never clearly shown. Usually a show prompted discussion and differing opinions on what happened.

Wolfe takes you on a grande journey, if you don't enjoy the trip, then you're not going to enjoy Wolfe IMO.

Dennis

Ken Luther — 05 Apr 1998, 20:03 · follows Endymion9

Hey, I just finished SotT last week :). While I was reading it, I got the sensation that I did when reading The Gormenghast Trilogy - that the story is more about the setting, the people, and the environment than it is about some linear plot progressing from Point A to Point B to Point C. It was enough to intrigue me, and I'm looking forward to reading Claw of the Conciliator soon...

Ken Luther

Mark Dillon — 05 Apr 1998, 20:33 · follows Ken Luther

I've read THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN twice (took detailed notes the second time). By all means, try it.

I have to admit, though, that I still prefer the work he did in the early 70's: THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS and stories like "The Death of Doctor Island," "The Hero as Werewolf," "The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories," and "The Changeling" mean far more to me than anything Wolfe has written since: they have a quiet anger and compassion that have haunted me for decades, and I reread them constantly. I'd recommend them to anyone, whereas THE NEW SUN, while admirable, seems more like an interesting technical exercise designed for habitual SF/fantasy readers.

But in regards to your question: yes, Wolfe clears up his mysteries and ties up his loose ends; that fascinating vagueness, those eerie hints scattered throughout THE SHADOW OF THE TORTURER, are all explained away in great detail. Oh, well....

Mark Dillon

John VanSickle — 05 Apr 1998, 21:12 · follows Mark Dillon

Mark Dillon wrote:

But in regards to your question: yes, Wolfe clears up his mysteries and ties up his loose ends; that fascinating vagueness, those eerie hints scattered throughout THE SHADOW OF THE TORTURER, are all explained away in great detail. Oh, well....

Not to mention that Severian's upcoming career change is stated rather explicitly near the beginning of the first book. That's as near to a spoiler as I dare get.

John

Soundcage — 06 Apr 1998, 04:23 · follows John VanSickle

What specifically are you confused about?

I just find myself rereading passages (and entire chapters sometimes) because the language makes my head hurt. Also I find myself looking for any and all symbolism (which I admit freely that I'm terrible at...for me a banana is almost always a banana) in the plot points of the book.

It is possible that Severian has some presentiment about his future. In fact, Wolfe will use every SF device applicable to make sure of it.

This much I got right from the beginning (thank goodness). It's the way he gets there that's got my head spinning.

J. B. Cattley — 06 Apr 1998, 08:56 · follows Soundcage

I finished Wolfe's "The Shadow of the Torturer" last night. I have no idea where this story is going.

That's the whole idea.

To those who've read the entire Book of the New Sun: does it get better than this or can I expect to be confused all through the series?

Yes. Both. _Excellent_ writing, but don't look for any definite answers, because you won't get them. It ain't the being there, it's the getting there.

Coyu — 06 Apr 1998, 15:20 · follows J. B. Cattley

I just find myself rereading passages (and entire chapters sometimes) because the language makes my head hurt.

Is it the words, or the sentence structure? Wolfe has a partial glossary in _Castle of the Otter_, which is included in _Castle of Days_. There's also a _Lexicon Urthus_, by Michel Andre-Driussi, but there's a lot of extraneous cabalistic stuff in it, which the text does not support. It's also filled with spoilers.

Also I find myself looking for any and all symbolism (which I admit freely that I'm terrible at...for me a banana is almost always a banana) in the plot points of the book.

You don't have to read it for symbols. The coin is a coin, the sword is a sword, the roses are roses. They have other functions, sure. Wolfe designed these books to be re-read, so don't worry about getting everything straight on the first sweep.

Matt Austern — 06 Apr 1998, 18:19 · follows Coyu

soundcge at erols.com writes:

To those who've read the entire Book of the New Sun: does it get better than this or can I expect to be confused all through the series?

You won't understand it all the first time; don't worry about it.

The problem isn't symbolism, but interconnections: lots of links both backward and forward. It's a wonderfully intricate book.

daryl — 07 Apr 1998, 06:35 · follows Matt Austern

To those who've read the entire Book of the New Sun: does it get better than this or can I expect to be confused all through the series?

The narrator suffers from an inability to forget. That will necessarily lead to the inclusion of a lot of extraneous detail (from an adventure-saga perspective) because Severian has not had the experience of trying to decide what is important enough to remember.

My advice: go with the flow. Keep an open mind, and the current will take you where you want to go. All things come to he who waits.

Re: symbolism, don't bother. It takes place in a future so far removed from the present that our cultural context is well-nigh irrelevant.

I'd pay more attention to the questions raised by such concepts as that of a professional torturer with a high standard of ethics, or by Severian's conflicting loyalties.

Besides, TSotT is just the first volume in a _very_ long novel [novelissimo?], so you have a ways to go. Half the fun (or more) is in the journey; the destination is the reason for the telling, but not the point of the reading. Can't be more clear without spoiling it for you.

And no, sf doesn't get better than this. If you feel that you are in over your head, maybe wait a couple years until you have some more life experience [I am assuming that you are relatively young] that will give you some insight into Severian's dilemmæ.