

Gene Wolfe, _On Blue's Waters_

The SF-Lovers list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 20 Oct 1999

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David Kennedy — 20 Oct 1999, 10:52

If anyone else but Gene Wolfe had embarked on their third trilogy in the same fantasy sequence there'd be cries of complaint at the crass commercialisation. However, it's a new set of books by Wolfe and I for one will happily read anything he writes!

No spoilers other than general comments. Spoiler for the Long Sun series.

I was irritated by the end of the Long Sun books, I felt that the appearance of the inhumani (spelling?) as they approached Green and Blue didn't fit with the rest of the series and was something of a slapped on ending.

Since then I have read, er, memory failure, _The Fifth Head of Cerebus_? (The one with the three interlinked stories of shapeshifters.) This established some context for the ending of the Long Sun books, but I still didn't like it.

I'm happier now. Wolfe addresses this issue directly in the new book, having the protagonist Horn (the youngster Silk knew in the Long Sun trilogy) wonder about the events at the exodus from the Whorl. It looks like this will be a central story element in this series.

The style is quite different from the Short Sun or Long Sun books. As you would expect the narrative isn't linear and straightforward but he doesn't play too many games with the reader. The writing is more transparent than before, with less of the layered imagery of the Short Sun books for example. This is due in part to the story being told by Horn I suppose. He has a markedly different view of the world from Silk (or so he tells us) despite being hugely influenced by him. Once I started to dis-entangle events I enjoyed this book hugely.

Anyway, I'll reserve judgement until I read the rest of the series, but I always find other people's reading of Wolfe's books to be much more incisive than my own!

Anyone want to tell me what they though was worth remarking on? Please? (I _want_ something to look for when I reread it)

David Kennedy

Kevin J. Maroney — 20 Oct 1999, 15:51 · follows David Kennedy

While I think that _On Blue's Waters_ is Wolfe's best novel in 20 years, and that's saying **quite** a lot, thank you, I don't think it's a good place to start. It is the fifth volume in a seven-volume series*, and quite a lot of the emotional and intellectual interest of _OBW_ depends on prior knowledge of the characters and situations as depicted in _The Book of the Long Sun_.

In short, this is **not** the Gene Wolfe book to start with.

I usually recommend _The Fifth Head of Cerberus_ as the Wolfe book to start with; if you read

all of it and don't like any of it, you probably aren't going to like much else of Wolfe. However, if you like it, the odds are excellent that you'll want to read more and will enjoy it when you do.

*Minor and oblique spoiler below

And it's also the 10th volume in a 12-volume series, since The Book of the Long Sun is an indirect sequel to The Book of the New Sun, and the connection between the New Sun and Long Sun narratives is going to become much more important in the final two volumes of The Book of the Short Sun.

Kevin Maroney