

There are Doors Gene Wolfe

The SF-Lovers list — 7 messages, 6 voices, 23 Nov 2000

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Lucy Kemnitzer — 23 Nov 2000, 02:49

I keep seeing Gene Wolfe discussions here, so I keep trying Gene Wolfe.

Usually I bump into pieces out of some immense series (is it Long Sun or New Sun or both?) and I don't even bring them home. I brought home Free Live Free and I was interested but it was slow going and I didn't finish it before it was due. So I brought it home again, and also There Are Doors.

This is a book I definitely should have read when I was a kid, when I was gobbling up Saki and H G Wells's short stories. It has just that feel - or oh, Dunsany or Walter de la Mare: mysterious other worlds you find doors into, ineffable longing, did I say mystery? Unresolved.

I read the whole thing. The writing is very fine. But.

Nowdays I am a prosaic old lady and while I don't demand a neatly finished story, I want the premise to be sensical and real. Ineffable longing can get me started, but that's all.

Lucy Kemnitzer

John Boston — 23 Nov 2000, 04:52 · follows Lucy Kemnitzer

You would probably like his supposedly YA novel THE DEVIL IN A FOREST. It masquerades as prosaic.

John Boston

Ron Henry — 27 Nov 2000, 15:23 · follows John Boston

ritaxis at cruzio.com (Lucy Kemnitzer) read from the teleprompter:

Usually I bump into pieces out of some immense series (is it Long Sun or New Sun or both?)

Both. And don't forget Short Sun now, too, which has rounded the far turn and will soon be coming into the home stretch.

Ron Henry

Joe Slater — 28 Nov 2000, 01:57 · follows Ron Henry

I think it's best to view the New Sun series as a single extended novel, with The Urth of the New Sun as its sequel.

The Long Sun books are more like a normal series, and I think that they are so contiguous with the Short Sun books that they should be seen as one extended series.

I really love the New Sun books. They're beautiful, although a lot of work. It's only on the second or third reading that some things start to make sense. I'll give you an example of what I mean by beauty:

Severian, a callow youth, rescues a stranger whom he discovers to be Vodalus, the famous outlaw. Vodalus gives him a coin as his token. Looking back on this, in one of the later books, Severian muses that he was Vodalus' man from that moment. Just as a soldier is enlisted by taking a coin (e.g., the "Queen's Shilling") so Severian had been enlisted without knowing it. After all, he points out, things work of themselves or not at all, and it is the rankest superstition to think that you need belief to make things work.

Now, isn't that wonderful? Wolfe adds layers of depth and complexity to a simple event; not by making it mean something *later* but by stressing the meaning that was already there. In doing so he puts forward an argument which most of us would accept, but in an entirely new context. Do these social laws have effect even if we don't know of them? We could argue this either way, but who would have thought of describing the question as superstitious?

JDS

Richard Horton — 28 Nov 2000, 03:59 · follows Joe Slater

I think Wolfe is our greatest contemporary SF writer. So I'm biased. Take my words with whatever grains of salt you need.

But why not try the short stories? "Forlesen". "Seven American Nights". "The Other Dead Man". "La Befana". "How the Whip Came Back". "How I Lost the Second World War and Helped Turn Back the German Invasion". "The Rubber Bend". "The Marvelous Brass Chess-Playing Automaton". "The Ziggurat". "Our Neighbour, by David Copperfield". "The Eyeflash Miracles". "Empires of Foliage and Flower". "Tracking Song". "Suzanne Delage". and so on. It's an utterly remarkable list.

Rich Horton

John Boston — 29 Nov 2000, 03:57 · follows Richard Horton

Wolfe's books are vastly more intelligent and literate than most other fantasy series, and they are not prompted by a desire to establish brand name recognition. That doesn't necessarily mean you will like them, but they are simply not comparable to the usual lineup of quests for magic swords/dragons/royalty stuff. If you don't like Wolfe's books, it will be for altogether more interesting reasons. And as others have pointed out, they're not really fantasy, though *NEW SUN* is superficially more like fantasy than the other books.

John Boston

Robert Borski — 29 Nov 2000, 07:09 · follows John Boston

Wolfe is currently 1100 pages into a new work tentatively entitled "The Wizard Knight."

After he finishes it, he hopes to write one or two more Soldier books - or so he's told me.

Robert Borski