

"Citadel of the Autarch" and "Fevre Dream"

The SF-Lovers list — 1 messages, 1 voices, undated

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John Redford — undated

All you people who have been waiting for the last volume of "The Book of the New Sun" to come out before reading any of it no longer have any excuse. The fourth volume, "The Citadel of the Autarch", is now out in paperback. The previous books have all been nominated for Hugos and Nebulas. The only reason they haven't swept all the awards is that the individual books are only pieces of the whole. Read them in order, and fairly soon after one another, because Wolfe has no compunctions about referring to events that took place eight hundred pages before. I wish someone could nominate the entire series for an award, for it would be a welcome change from stuff like "Foundation's Edge" or "Friday". These are competent books, but they are clearly minor compared to Asimov's and Heinlein's earlier works. Wolfe, on the other hand, is at the height of his powers. I won't try to describe the books, since others have already done that, but suffice it to say that Wolfe takes the setting and tone of Vance's "The Dying Earth" (he acknowledges the debt) and fills it with a depth of language and storytelling style that I have never seen in any other author.

Another new paperback worth more than its price is "Fevre Dream" by George R. R. Martin. The setting is the Mississippi in the mid 1800's, the heyday of the riverboats. A rambunctious but down-on-his-luck steamboat skipper is made an odd offer by a pale, mysterious stranger. He will pay for the construction of the grandest boat the River had ever seen, in return for the skipper's cooperation in a quest. The stranger is a vampire, and his quest is to find the others of his kind and unite them in an effort to finally make peace with humanity. What better way to search a continent, than by cruising the endless waterways of the Mississippi and its tributaries? Both river life and the vampires are well drawn. For instance, the boats were all woodburning, and so sealed their own fate by denuding of timber all the riverbanks of the Midwest. Or, if vampires are immortal and have the strength of ten, then why haven't they taken over the world? Because the strength of vampire infants makes childbirth a terrible process, which kills the mother as often as not. This sort of background detail makes "Fevre Dream" a very solid adventure novel.

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