

The Book of the New Sun

The SF-Lovers list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 28 Nov 1984

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Jim Aspnes — 28 Nov 1984, 09:28

I, too, found it difficult to find a true plot to The Book. It's curious, because Wolfe has done more substantial works (_Fevre Dream_ comes to mind), where he has managed to keep his plot tight and his characters human. Perhaps it's the strange setting or the self-indulgent first-person narrative, but The Book of the New Sun reads like literary doodling. It has points of greatness (the story told by the Ascian is a work of art in itself), and they manage to carry the story limpingly along, but the work as a whole seems more of an anthology than a series of novels.

My praise will flow freely for anyone who can pick out some semblance of continuity of plot and can justify it well. But at the moment it seems very much that the Autarch's clothes are impossible for any but the truly wise to see.

Jim

FEBER — 03 Dec 1984, 10:17 · follows Jim Aspnes

Jim Aspnes recently added a new book to the Wolfe canon, Fevre Dream, which, considering it is by George R R Martin, is fairly suprising. Since arguing ad hominem is generally frowned upon, I will restrict this flame to the following: There seems to be a widely held belief that a narrative can take only one (or maybe two or three, for the more liberal minded) forms, and that everything else is either "literary doodling" or "too long" or "full of big words" etc. etc. I would suggest that before you start attacking a book on literary grounds, you understand something about the subject - Northrup Frye's Anatomy of Criticism is a good place to start. Wolfe's The Book of the New Sun (which is really one book, as its name implies) has an episodic narrative which places it squarely in the oldest literary tradition there is (except for maybe the grunt). What makes it a fascinating work, outside of the clarity of its prose, is the interweaving of themes and motifs. But if you don't get it by reading it, no amount of explication will help.

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