

Anyone read Gene Wolfe: Free Live Free

The SF-Lovers list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 12 Jun 1990

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Eric Sassaman — 12 Jun 1990, 03:26

Has anyone read Gene Wolfe's "Free Live Free"? I enjoyed his "There Are Doors" quite a bit. How would you rate "Free Live Free" on a 1-5 stars scale?

Thanks in advance!

Eric Sassaman
Microsoft OS/2 Systems Support

Joan Frankel — 12 Jun 1990, 21:14 · follows Eric Sassaman

ericsa at microsoft.UUCP (Eric Sassaman) writes:

Has anyone read Gene Wolfe's "Free Live Free"? I enjoyed his "There Are Doors" quite a bit. How would you rate "Free Live Free" on a 1-5 stars scale?

If 5 is the high end, I'd rate it a 2. "Free" is an effort-ful and apparently pointless try at doing what Vonnegut used to do effortlessly. Note this is a "how good is it rating", not a "is it readable" rating. Wolfe wrote it, of course it's literate, readable, etc. It's just not very good.

Pete Hardie — 13 Jun 1990, 02:27 · follows Joan Frankel

ericsa at microsoft.UUCP (Eric Sassaman) writes:

Has anyone read Gene Wolfe's "Free Live Free"? I enjoyed his "There Are Doors" quite a bit. How would you rate "Free Live Free" on a 1-5 stars scale?

I've read it. It's a dense work (like Wolfe's other novels aren't :-) and gets a little confusing because it changes viewpoint often, and it doesn't answer all the questions it raises. It is also very convoluted.

It's got a good beat, and it's easy to dance to. I'd give it a 4.

Pete Hardie

R o d Johnson — 13 Jun 1990, 17:15 · follows Pete Hardie

ericsa at microsoft.UUCP (Eric Sassaman) writes:

Has anyone read Gene Wolfe's "Free Live Free"? I enjoyed his "There Are Doors" quite a bit. How would you rate "Free Live Free" on a 1-5 stars scale?

I've read both. I don't know quite what to say, though, if you enjoyed "There Are Doors". The two are similar in some ways - they both have complex plots (overly so, in my opinion, to the point of being contrived) and characters that are sort of flat. "There Are Doors" is an interesting

attempt to write a character who is much less intelligent than his author, not easy to do but, still sympathetic. I don't know if it works, though; I found it hard to really care what happens to our guy once he gets back to his own world. It felt like an exercise more than a novel.

"Free Live Free" probably works better for me, but the plot machinations get **so** ornate (it's one of those time-travel stories where everything causes everything else) and it takes so much energy keeping up with who did what to whom when, that some of the "pleasure of the text" is lost, and the eventual outcome is kind of an anticlimax.

I would say neither of these is up to Wolfe's best work ("The Fifth head of Cerberus", the New Sun books). They remind me, as I say, of exercises, much as "Peace" seems to me to be an exercise that eventually bore fruit in the New Sun books. They may eventually bear the same kind of fruit in another great Wolfe work, and then again they may not. My sense is that Wolfe is a little lost, looking for something to follow up the success to the New Sun books, a hard act to follow, and he's marking time.

Of course, neither is **nearly** as bad as Wolfe's worst work - "Operation Ares". They're just Generic Wolfe - inventive, exuberant, playful, complex but, not much fun, for me at least.

Rod Johnson
U Michigan Linguistics