

Anyone read Gene Wolfe: Free Live Fr

The SF-Lovers list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 25 Jun 1990

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Eric M. VAn — 25 Jun 1990, 20:37

Ahh, Free Live Free. Give it a 3 for Wolfe, a 4.5 for the world at large. By way of comparison, I'd give There are Doors a 2.5 and 4, respectively. It's worth noting that Free Live Free is the Wolfe novel that There Are Doors is most like, easily, but Free Live Free is much sunnier.

I thought it was a ton of fun. I agree with the critical consensus that the plot machinations, especially at the end, don't really add up/work. The Tor editions contain an appendix, a chronology to help explicate the time-travel stuff, that Wolfe put together reluctantly at the request of his editors. Which is where I might point out that there's **two** versions of the book: the original (and by Wolfe, preferred) from Mark V. Ziesing - a handsome, oversize, illustrated hardcover (still in print), and the later text in hardcover and paperback from Tor. The later version, rewritten a bit by Wolfe at the request of editor David Hartwell, omits a chapter and condenses the early action so as to get the mystery-novel plot moving quicker.

I found neither point to be a problem in my first reading, by the way, but that's probably because I knew and loved Wolfe and trusted him to take me where he wanted to take me. I think Hartwell was editing with the new-to-Wolfe reader in mind, and was hoping that this could be a breakout book for him. (Ironically, it's his latest and weakest in years - Castlevue, which offers a gripping read, some typically amusing Wolfe conundrums (and their concomitant loose ends and lacks of explanations) and not much else, that was an alternate choice of the BOMC).

As far as some of the other comments re Wolfe in this thread, I just have to differ about Peace: I think it's one of Wolfe's three masterpieces, and arguably the finest fantasy novel ever written (adjective chosen with care: The Lord of the Rings remains the **greatest** fantasy novel ever written, I think). Last time I asked him, it was his own favorite of his books.

And we ought to mention the short story collections, all of which are superb. It's hard to imagine now, but back before The Book of The New Sun there were those who wondered if Wolfe was another Bradbury or Ellison, basically a short story writer (since Operation Ares was weak, The Fifth Head of Cerberus actually three linked novellas, and Peace, by most, unread)!

[In defense of Operation Ares, we do have to mention that the MS. as published was about half of what Wolfe wrote, and that the editing was done rather rapidly by Gene, if I recall correctly, that is.]

We should also mention Pringle's potato chips, since Gene, back long ago in the real world, headed the team that designed the machine that makes them!

By the way, David Hartwell tells me that Gene is at work on a science fiction novel that he (uncharacteristically, I might add) refuses to say more about. Might this be the major Wolfe work we've waited for since The Book of the New Sun? (There's another novel, a straight mystery he wrote some years ago, that should be out within the next year.)

