

Gene Wolfe and the Severian series

The SF-Lovers list — 5 messages, 5 voices, 11 Feb 1991

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DMARKFIE — 11 Feb 1991, 16:13

On the subject of Gene Wolfe, are there any people out there who have read _The Shadow of the Torturer_ and the other books in the series? I have not found many people who have read GW at all, let alone this series.

Any comments? Thoughts?

I've got most of the whole story of Severian and IMHO I found it a very hard read. Very slow, very plodding at times. I realize that Gene Wolfe has won awards, etc. but personally I did have trouble. I enjoyed Shadow it was just one of those books it seemed to take forever and Claw of the Conciliator and Sword of Lichter hit me the same way but, I suppose on the flip side Wolfe must have been doing something right for me to keep buying and reading. (or is it just that masochistic streak rising to the top?)

Dave Markfield
dmarkfie at indymed.bitnet

Mark Brown — 11 Feb 1991, 19:54 · follows DMARKFIE

DMARKFIE at INDYMED.BITNET writes:

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Or, it may just be a love of great writing. Wolfe is easily one of my five favorite writers.

The NEW SUN series (SHADOW, CLAW, SWORD, CASTLE and URTN) is **not** an actioner. His point is as much to play with the language, and show you his world, as it is to tell the story (which is not necessarily about Severian). He has a way of describing the commonplace such that it appears new, fresh, and downright different at times. **All** of his characters are fully-fleshed, including several minor ones; you cannot tell which of these people will be important later (just like in real life)(and some of them are!) and which are there just for color.

His plots, well, let's just say that you have to be on your toes, look at everything carefully; everything is used.

Wolfe's written some lesser stuff - FREE LIVE FREE comes to mind immediately. His quality is so high in general, though, that I will easily buy everything he writes.

Mark Brown
IBM PSP
Austin, TX.

Mike Thome — 11 Feb 1991, 23:04 · follows Mark Brown

DMARKFIE at INDYMED.BITNET writes:

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Not at all an uncommon experience with GW's works. My personal feelings about his novels run the gamut from interested frustration through near-awe (for, say, There Are Doors and The Book of the New Sun respectively). The four parts of TBotNS stand out as one of my over-all favorite pieces of fiction.

Gene Wolfe is not only one of the most literate authors out there (especially when compared to the hacks that make up the bulk of the field), but (in my experience) also is one of the very few writers in any genre who is willing to experiment with truly different writing styles and devices. Some are certainly less successful (or at least less accessible) than others and sometimes readability suffers for the experimentation. But then, Pynchon, Joyce and Rushdie aren't exactly light reading, either.

Bottom line: IMHO, Gene Wolfe novels are usually **very** much worth the time and effort.

Andrew Merritt — 13 Feb 1991, 12:42 · follows Mike Thome

DMARKFIE at INDYMED.BITNET writes:

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When I first started reading the series, I was expecting a Fantasy type story and also found it hard going, and stopped reading. I came back later, realising that it is Science Fiction, and everything was much easier. Curious. I am not sure what all this means! It may be to do with how easy it is to fit what is going on into a mental model of the world in the book; things fit better if you realise it is set in a future Earth, not a fantastical planet.

Andrew

Dick Smith — 17 Feb 1991, 05:32 · follows Andrew Merritt

I made a half-joking comment to Gene Wolfe sometime between the publication of the 3rd and 4th books of this 4-logy, about being impatient with Sevarian's progress. His reply:

"Sevarian is a very slow walker."

Just in case you are wondering, I greatly enjoyed the Book of the New Sun. I'm less sure about

some of Wolfe's later works, but that's for a different posting.

Dick Smith