

Free Live Free

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 23 Sep 1998

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David Wells — 23 Sep 1998, 10:06

CRCulver at aol.com <mailto:CRCulver at aol.com> wrote:

For some reason, there has been not a single post over the last week. So, to get some more activity, I'll ask for a review of the Wolfe book FREE LIVE FREE. Is it worth buying? What style is it? I'd also like to know the basic plot, as long as it doesn't spoil too much.

I too found it very hard going indeed. It seemed to me like a writing exercise which had gotten out of hand to the tune of 500 pages or so (it seemed that long, anyway). Somewhere in Book of Days, Wolfe suggests that even a short story should have more than one idea, and that novels should have many. Free Live Free seemed to me to be too much of a one-trick-pony.

In terms of style/plot (and trying not to spoil too much)

- there is a Good Reason why Wolfe spends so much time in the first few hundred pages describing the rather sad and humdrum lives of some not-terribly appealing characters. The big question is whether having struggled through this, you think the payoff is worth it. As is probably apparent, I didn't.
- The whole book (and I don't think this is really a spoiler unless you've read it!) is essentially an allegory about the properties of composite materials. Yes, I do think this a weird thing to write a novel about ;-).

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Tony Ellis — 23 Sep 1998, 14:11 · follows David Wells

David Wells wrote:

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No offence intended, but having read Free Live Free several times, I can't for the life of me see how you arrive at this conclusion! I'm intrigued - could you explain, please?

John Clute says that it's a re-telling of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, and I can certainly see that.

To throw in my two pence, I have always found Free Live Free fascinating, funny, and - far from being a one-trick-pony - packed with ideas and unusual insights. Christopher R. Culver asked in his original post "what style is it", and I would respond that one of this novel's great strengths is that it doesn't fit into any one pigeonhole. Like "Titus Groan" it's one of those books you can give to someone and say with total confidence "this isn't like anything else you've read before".

Michael Straight — 23 Sep 1998, 10:45 · follows Tony Ellis

On Wed, 23 Sep 1998, David Wells wrote:

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While I agree that that the payoff at the end was not as satisfying as I'd hoped (too abrupt: maybe I didn't understand everything, but I think Wolfe has a tendency to wimp out by hinting at a happy ending instead of trying to show us one--which is a lot harder to pull off), I enjoyed the book overall.

I'm not usually a fan of humdrum, "realistic" characters, but somehow Wolfe got me interested in these four. There are some good hooks in the beginning (What kind of story IS this? Is she really a witch?) and I thought the hijinks (there's no other word for it) in the middle of the book were fun.

Somehow, the tone of the book reminds me a lot of There Are Doors. Do you it's just that they both have a contemporary setting?

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Ha! I think you're joking, but it's a good joke. Wolfe is an engineer, after all. Are you refering to anything besides the effects of Free's device? Tell us more with spoiler warnings!

-Rostrum