

What should I read?

The Urth list — 13 messages, 12 voices, 12 Oct 2011

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6065>

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johnnwoolley at comcast.net — 12 Oct 2011, 20:47

Plunging into the middle of the conversation ...

Ages ago, I read "The Book of the New Sun", and loved it to the point that I was handing out copies of the first volume to anyone I could get to agree to try it. Wonderful, spectacular book. Then I read "The Urth of the New Sun" and was much less impressed; ditto with "The Devil in a Forest". Then "Soldier of the Mist", a pretty fine piece of writing and a really ambitious and strange (and rather challenging) project. The other day I started "The Book of the Long Sun", and once again, Wolfe is just blowing me away with his prose and story-telling and characters (Patera Silk, Chenille, Auk, even the bird!); I've nearly reached the end of the second volume, and am completely loving it.

So ... what else of Wolfe's should I make sure to read? I think I'd better go back and reread "New Sun", and the "Short Sun" volumes seem to be a continuation of "Long Sun". (Right?) But what besides or after those?

-- John Woolley

Jay — 12 Oct 2011, 20:59 · follows johnnwoolley at comcast.net

I'd try tackling his short stories next myself. The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories is a great introduction to them.

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hammstu at sbcglobal.net — 12 Oct 2011, 21:02 · in reply to Jay

Strange Travelers is a great selection of his short stories...and the 1st and last stories are great GW bookends

Sent from my BlackBerry? smartphone with SprintSpeed

-----Original Message-----

From: Jay <miltonwjackson at gmail.com>

Sender: urth-bounces at lists.urth.net

Date: Wed, 12 Oct 2011 16:59:35

To: The Urth Mailing List<urth at lists.urth.net> Reply-To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net> Subject: Re: (urth) What should I read?

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Urth Mailing List

To post, write urth at urth.net

Subscription/information: <http://www.urth.net>

Lane Haygood — 12 Oct 2011, 21:04 · in reply to Jay

New Sun, Long Sun, Short Sun = Solar Cycle.

I personally found "The Wizard Knight" to be below Wolfe's usual quality. Or maybe I just really hated Abel as a protagonist. Either way I don't think they'd make essential Wolfe for me.

I haven't read Pirate Freedom or Home Fires, but An Evil Guest was great.

There Are Doors and the seminal Fifth Head of Cerberus remain two of my favorite non-Solar Wolfe books.

Sent from my iPhone

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Matthew Knapton — 12 Oct 2011, 21:18 · in reply to Lane Haygood

I'm a big fan of The Fifth Head of Cerberus, and also Peace. Peace is crazy. I'm not really sure if it's one of the best books I've ever read or one of the most boring, but I recommend it to people just about every chance I get so I suppose I liked it.

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David Stockhoff — 12 Oct 2011, 21:57 · in reply to Matthew Knapton

Free Live Free blew my mind before TBotNS.

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Antonin Scriabin — 13 Oct 2011, 13:10 · in reply to David Stockhoff

I have enjoyed all of his books that I have read, but his stand-alone novels that most impressed me (like Matthew) were **Peace** and **The Fifth Head of Cerberus**. They are, in my opinion, at the level of the New Sun books; Wolfe at his finest. For a brief, mysterious, and thoroughly entertaining read, **The Sorcerer's House** is also excellent. It is a bit less dense and complicated than those other two I have mentioned.

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Gerry Quinn — 13 Oct 2011, 13:22 · in reply to Antonin Scriabin

From: Antonin Scriabin

I have enjoyed all of his books that I have read, but his stand-alone novels that most impressed me (like Matthew) were Peace and The Fifth Head of Cerberus.

I also think those are his best. And of course he has written a lot of terrific short stories and novellas.

- Gerry Quinn

Marc Aramini — 13 Oct 2011, 13:29 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Just one more thing I wanted to note. I always start with "themes" in any explication - the repetitive inclusion of ghost stories in Peace, for example, made a compelling pattern of ghostliness that matched up with the more discrete hints of the narrator's death. Similarly, in the sun series, from the very first two chapters of Shadow Severian thinks that light will engender life in a brush that will run up a tree, and then near the end of Citadel he thinks of the great green emerald forests that will flourish when the new sun comes.

In Short Sun, the first chapter talks about those hybrids in the vegetable world. In the last non-epilogue chapter of RTTW, Silk is touched by the story of Hyacinth(us), whose blood falls and in dying as a man springs up as a flower. THIS IS THE END OF THE MAIN STORY, it's important in several ways? One of these ways is the obvious one of Hyacinth and her death, recalling Silk to himself. He was headed to the wrong home, now he can head to his home in the stars. This lack of ability to distinguish the actual homeward odyssey can be applied to mankind in this case. We've always known the white fountain would lead to the Green Man future. The story of Hyacinthus is one in which even though the man dies his blood becomes a flower that lives? This is what has happened.

Daniel Petersen — 13 Oct 2011, 14:43 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

I'll chime in on recommending Wolfe's short story collections - I haven't run into one I didn't pretty thoroughly enjoy, but Doctor Death is probably the one that's as consistently rich as New Sun and feels like it prefigures it in many ways. I heartily agree with the recommendation of Cerberus and think that's probably the best next stop. And I must put in a good word for The Wizard-Knight duology against its detractors. It is in some respects rather frustrating or unnerving or annoying or some such thing (which of Wolfe's books aren't?!), but I think it's truly masterful and up there with his greatest stuff - after attempting New Sun and not being sure what I thought, it was Wizard-Knight (and then the collection Innocents Aboard) that got me thoroughly mesmerised and hooked and led me in to the entirety of the Solar Cycle and everything else.

-DOJP

On Thu, Oct 13, 2011 at 2:22 PM, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com> wrote:

From: Antonin Scriabin <kierkegaurdian at gmail.com>

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Cerberus.

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- Gerry Quinn

Antonin Scriabin — 13 Oct 2011, 14:48 · in reply to Daniel Petersen

I have only read the first half of the Wizard / Knight duology, but I very much enjoyed it. It was one of those books that got me sufficiently interested (though not enthralled) during the first 200 pages or so, and then rewarded patience with the last half. By the end of the book, I was completely roped into the story. I have a few other books to read, then I will read *The Wizard*. I can understand why people might be turned off by Wizard / Knight, but I for one thought the first book at least was great.

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James Wynn — 13 Oct 2011, 17:20 · in reply to Antonin Scriabin

Innocents Aboard is probably my favorite short story collection. Although Strange Travelers contains one of my favorite short stories: Counting Cats in Zanzibar.

Fifth Head of Cerberus was the one that changed my opinion of The Book of the New Sun and of Wolfe as a writer. After I read it, I started telling people he was the best SF writer period...ever. I always recommend Peace to readers who are more into naturalistic fiction. It tricks them into following Wolfe.

Pirate Freedom made me think it would be fun to be a pirate. In an alternate universe, fantasy stories set at sea are as popular as stories about boy wizards are here. In that universe, Wolfe is a god.

Antonin:

When you get into The Wizard, you will see why some people --one famous female former-listener in particular-- could not finish the book. But as one of the most unusual fantasies, as a fully developed world, as a defense of Knightly mores, it's really something.

On 10/13/2011 9:48 AM, Antonin Scriabin wrote:

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Matthew Knight — 14 Oct 2011, 01:15 · in reply to James Wynn

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So...Gene Wolfe is Dr. Manhattan?

Sorry; even as a lurker I couldn't resist.

But while I'm here, I'll chime in on Fifth Head and Peace. Very different novels, but both quintessentially Wolfean.