

Gene Wolfe's The Book of the New Sun

The Usenet list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 10 Nov 1984

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Ian Kaplan — 10 Nov 1984, 01:51

While reading some of the repartee concerning Harlan Ellison (including those oh so sage comments from the oh so ever present Chuq), I saw several references to Gene Wolfe's four book series, collectively known as "The Book of the New Sun". There seems to be relatively wide agreement that these are excellent books. I too have read all four of the New Sun books, plus most of Wolfe's other books. From this I guess it could be concluded that I like Wolfe, and it is true. I liked the New Sun books because of the writing style, Wolfe's descriptions and the action element of the story. In these books Wolfe has woven an incredibly complex plot whose central point I hoped would be revealed in the last book. For me at least, this did not happen and the books remain enigmatic. In the last few pages of the last New Sun book, "The Citadel of the Autarch", the new Autarch, whose previous career we have followed, states that he is leaving the Book of the New Sun behind on earth and going to meet the extra-terrestrials. While on this flight he will rewrite the book a second time. Since he has perfect memory, he can reproduce the book exactly. He says that if you don't understand the book, read it a second time, just as he is writing it a second time. I have not done this yet.

Even though the plot of Wolfe's New Sun seems to be only a collection of strange events, I believe that it is clear that the books contain more. I just have not discovered it yet. The question I pose to you out in net land is what ties the events in the book together.

Those of you who believe Wolfe to be such a great writer presumably see what I have missed. If you don't, I wonder if perhaps you are confusing Wolfe's obscurity with literary greatness. I like Wolfe, but I am not yet convinced that he is a great American writer.

Well I hope that this will provide much interesting discussion and perhaps some enlightenment for

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