

G.Wolfe _Shadow of the Torturer_

The Usenet list — 17 messages, 11 voices, 22 Jul 1991

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/usenet/52>

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Sci Eng Library — 22 Jul 1991, 18:51

I'm nearly finished reading Wolfe's SOTT and just noticed that it says "Volume One of The Book of the New Sun". Does this mean it goes on (an on)? Is our main main Severian going to adventure his way through ___ more books? PLEASE, will someone let me know the titles? Thanks!

D.Ellis
scilib@ucsd

Eric Yoxthheimer — 23 Jul 1991, 15:51 · in reply to Sci Eng Library

scilib at NOWALLS.UCSD.EDU (Sci Eng Library) writes:

I'm nearly finished reading Wolfe's SOTT and just noticed that it says "Volume One of The Book of the New Sun". Does this mean it goes on (an on)? Is our main main Severian going to adventure his way through ___ more books? PLEASE. will someone let me know the titles? Thanks!

Darn...all my Wolfe books are in storage until I finish moving. The answer is YES, Severian does continue his adventures. I think it goes on for another three books (that's four total), but it might be more. I believe I saw a 'new' Wolfe book in this series the other day...._the_New_Sun_ I think. I know this isn't much help, but I'm sure somebody else in Netland has his/her Wolfe books on a shelf! The title are something like this (it's been years since I read this series):

Shadow of the Torturer
Claw of the Concillitator
Sword of the Licher
Orb of.....
....the New Sun

This is all by memory so sorry for the incompleteness.

D.Ellis
scilib@ucsd

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_____. \ . | . / ..  
( ____|_____O__.. \ | /..  
/ _____|->->->->->->->->---*-----  
|..../( | .. /. | \..  
|....|---| Eric Yoxtheimer . /. |. \..  
|....| John Fluke Mfg. . / . |. \..  
/ _____\ Everett, WA . . . .
```

Darn tootin' these ideas/opinions/views are mine...my cat only influences me during full moons!

Janet M. Lafler — 23 Jul 1991, 16:49 · in reply to Sci Eng Library

In article <9107221851.AA00898 at nowalls.UCSD.EDU> scilib at NOWALLS.UCSD.EDU (Sci Eng Library) writes:

I'm nearly finished reading Wolfe's SOTT and just noticed that it says
"Volume One of The Book of the New Sun". Does this mean it goes on (an on)?
Is our main main Severian going to adventure his way through ___ more books?
PLEASE, will someone let me know the titles? Thanks!

One of the main features of Wolfe's narrative style is that his stories go on and on beyond the point you could reasonably expect them to. If you like his tricks, he's great.

There are four books in the series, _The Shadow of the Torturer_, _The Claw of the Conciliator_, _The Sword of the Lictor_ and _The Citadel of the Autarch_. There is also a companion volume, _The Urth of the New Sun_, which I haven't read but have been reliably informed is awful. That's all the books there are in the series; I think we can count on him not to write any more.

Enjoy.

/Janet

Tom Hamill — 23 Jul 1991, 17:17 · in reply to Eric Yoxtheimer

PLEASE, will someone let me know the titles? Thanks!

Shadow of the Torturer
Claw of the Concilliator
Sword of the Licher

The above are the first three in the series. Spelling is not exact but close enough for government work, and since I don't have my books here, I'm not sure where either of us has gone wrong, and it makes no difference anyway. The fourth book is:

Citadel of the Autarch

Orb of.....
....the New Sun

You are correct, there is a fifth book:

The Urth of the New Sun.

Excellent series, well worth reading as much for the story Wolfe is telling as for the imagery generated by the rhythmic flow of his words.

-----tom

* wcstom at ccs.carleton.ca(tom hamill) [] *

* [] There is no vaccine *

* Disclaimer--I don't know enough to have an [] against stupidity; *

* opinion anyone else cares to hear. However, [] however, euthanasia *

* given what I do know, my opinions are often [] *might* help. *

* outrageous. [] *

Matt Austern — 23 Jul 1991, 18:04 · in reply to Janet M. Lafler

In article <1991Jul23.164922.11000 at Ieland.Stanford.EDU> repnomar at Ieland.Stanford.EDU (Janet M. Lafler) writes:

There are four books in the series, _The Shadow of the Torturer_, _The Claw of the Conciliator_, _The Sword of the Lictor_ and _The Citadel of the Autarch_. There is also a companion volume, _The Urth of the New Sun_, which I haven't read but have been reliably informed is awful. That's all the books there are in the series; I think we can count on him not to write any more.

Awful? Gene Wolfe? Then there's fightin' words. The Urth of the New Sun certainly isn't as good as The Book of the New Sun, but a book could be much worse than The Book of the New Sun and still be very good indeed. Urth of the New Sun still has the calm voice and meticulous craftsmanship and sense of inevitability that I find characteristic of Wolfe's writing.

Actually, I don't think I would call The Book of the New Sun a series, or a tetralogy, so much as a four-volume novel. (And I would call The Urth of the New Sun a sequel.)

Dan'l DanehyOakes — 23 Jul 1991, 18:31 · follows Matt Austern

D. Ellis writes:

I'm nearly finished reading Wolfe's SOTT and just noticed that it says "Volume One of The Book of the New Sun". Does this mean it goes on (an on)? Is our main main Severian going to adventure his way through ___ more books? PLEASE, will someone let me know the titles? Thanks!

Okay... First, informational. Then the titles.

Gene Wolfe set out to write a novella, "The Feast of St. Katherine." It grew, as Professor Tolkien puts it, in the telling to what he expected would be a novel, then a trilogy. By the time he'd finished a first draft, he'd sold it to Dave Hartwell at Pocket/Simon&Schuster, but he'd wound up with a third volume about 50% longer than the first two. With Hartwell's concurrence, he broke V3 into two and expanded some sections that interested him.

This made up THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN, which had always been conceived as a single story. Thus, it's a 4-volume novel, not a "series." The volumes are:

THE SHADOW OF THE TORTURER
THE CLAW OF THE CONCILIATOR
THE SWORD OF THE LICTOR
THE CITADEL OF THE AUTARCH

With an ancillary volume of essays on "the writing of" which grew out of a misprint in LOCUS: THE CASTLE OF THE OTTER.

The series was wildly successful, and deservedly so; Wolfe's play with myth and story in these four volumes is some of the finest in the history of science fiction.

Success breeds profits. Profits breed a demand for sequels. Wolfe wrote a fifth volume, THE URTH OF THE NEW SUN, which is as well-written as the others but frankly unnecessary: it makes explicit a number of things which are deliciously implied in the original novel. Not a bad book, but something like a vermiform appendix.

[T]he literary work is not a manipulable object

completely at our disposal; it is a human voice out of the past, a voice which must be somehow brought to life. Dialogue, not dissection, opens up the world of a literary work. Disinterested objectivity is not appropriate to the understanding of a literary work.

--Richard E. Palmer

The Roach

Craig Becker — 23 Jul 1991, 21:13 · in reply to Sci Eng Library

There are four books in the series, _The Shadow of the Torturer_, _The Claw of the Conciliator_, _The Sword of the Lictor_ and _The Citadel of the Autarch_. There is also a companion volume, _The Urth of the New Sun_, which I haven't read but have been reliably informed is awful.

Awful? Gene Wolfe? Them there's fightin' words. The Urth of the New Sun certainly isn't as good as The Book of the New Sun.

Maybe "awful" has too many bad connotations, but I have to agree that _The Urth of the New Sun_ definitely wasn't as good as the previous four volumes. Frankly, I wish I hadn't read it; this may sound odd, but it kinda retroactively reduced my enjoyment of TSotT, TCotC, TSotL, and TCotA.

Actually, I don't think I would call The Book of the New Sun a series, or a tetrology, so much as a four-volume novel.

Yes indeedy! :-)

-- "You can expect virtually Craig Becker, Object Technology Products --
-- early seventeenth century." VNET: CRAIGB at AUSVM1 --

----- Y. Slide -----
-- off 808/1K-020 zip 3008 ph (512) 823-1756 tl 793-1756 hm (512) 346-5397 --
-- IBM Personal Systems Programming, 11400 Burnet Road, Austin, TX, 78759 --

Janet M. Lafler — 23 Jul 1991, 22:52 · in reply to Matt Austern

There are four books in the series, _The Shadow of the Torturer_, _The Claw of the Conciliator_, _The Sword of the Lictor_ and _The Citadel of the Autarch_. There is also a companion volume, _The Urth of the New Sun_, which I haven't read but have been reliably informed is awful.

Awful? Gene Wolfe? Them there's fightin' words. The Urth of the New Sun certainly isn't as good as The Book of the New Sun, but a book could be much worse than The Book of the New Sun and still be very good indeed. Urth of the New Sun still has the calm voice and meticulous craftsmanship and sense of inevitability that I find characteristic of Wolfe's writing.

Oops. That's what I get for commenting on a book that I haven't read. All I can say is that a Usually Reliable Source, who works at A Bookstore You And I Both Patronize (sorry, everybody else), advised me not to bother with it.

Actually, I don't think I would call The Book of the New Sun a series, or a tetrology, so much as a four-volume novel. (And I would call The Urth of the New Sun a sequel.)

True. I think this is what Wolfe himself calls it.

/Janet

PS You're not **really** mad, are you? Snf.

Viktor Haag — 24 Jul 1991, 20:55 · in reply to Matt Austern

In article <MATT.91Jul23100408 at physics16.berkeley.edu> matt at physics.berkeley.edu writes:

Awful? Gene Wolfe? Them there's fightin' words. The Urth of the New Sun certainly isn't as good as The Book of the New Sun, but a book could be much worse than The Book of the New Sun and still be very good indeed. Urth of the New Sun still has the calm voice and meticulous craftsmanship and sense of inevitability that I find characteristic of Wolfe's writing.

Actually, I don't think I would call The Book of the New Sun a series, or a tetralogy, so much as a four-volume novel. (And I would call The Urth of the New Sun a sequel.)

While I agree with your sentiments, and (to a certain extent) your musing that the four books could work well bound into one volume, I would disagree with your assertion that Urth of the New Sun is a "sequel". I would say that it is more of a commentary, explanation, or companion. For this reason, it doesn't really stand to well on its own, without having read the Book of the New Sun, and I could understand why people are not too keen on it. It is still, however, a good example of how a great writer can be good even when being "not so good".

As to Wolfe's refusal to touch the world again, there are a few shorts that are set in the same environs, one of which (the Map(?)) is in Endangered Species. If you want to see a master at his best, then you should read endangered species -- I would say that it is definitely one of the most important, and impressive collections of short fiction to come out of the genre (whatever that means) in the last 30 years. In my own heart, only Dandelion Wine and a few other books rank up there with this collection of one author's short work.

Brian McElhinney — 24 Jul 1991, 22:01 · in reply to Janet M. Lafler

repnomar at leland.Stanford.EDU (Janet M. Lafler) writes:

One of the main features of Wolfe's narrative style is that his stories go on and on beyond the point you could reasonably expect them to. If you like his tricks, he's great.

Wolfe has said "I like to write every story at the length at which it seems to me it should be told." You accuse him of instead using tricks to pad the page count. What tricks are these? What would your "good" author have done differently? What "reasonable expectations" are betrayed?

There is also a companion volume, *The Urth of the New Sun*, which I haven't read but have been reliably informed is awful.

First "tricks" and now "reliable informants." Did your reliable informant even bother to read the book? Finish the book? Or is said informant's opinion is based on a tabloid headline? "WOLFE BOOK AWFUL. HAS THREE HEADS. SEE PAGE 12."

That's all the books there are in the series; I think we can count on him not to write any more.

What did he ever do to you to inspire such disdain? Were you forced to buy and read his books? Is he taking precious shelf space from your favorite formula fantasy writer, last name of

Anthony? What gives?

You can count on Wolfe to write well, and that's about all. It may *very* well be surprising, strange, and difficult. But it will also be well-crafted, thought out, and unique.

As it happens, Wolfe has said he does not *plan* to write any more *novels* about Urth or Severian. There are already a couple of short stories, and there may be more.

Wolfe is presently working on a multi-volume novel, NIGHT SIDE OF THE LONG SUN. Presumably, you'll find that news distressing. I, for one, am eagerly awaiting publication.

Brian McElhinney "The locked and rusted gate that stood before us, with wisps mce at tc.fluke.com of river fog threading its spikes like the mountain paths, remains in my mind now as a symbol of my exile."--Gene Wolfe

Janet M. Lafler — 25 Jul 1991, 18:34 · in reply to Brian McElhinney

One of the main features of Wolfe's narrative style is that his stories go on and on beyond the point you could reasonably expect them to. If you like his tricks, he's great.

Wolfe has said "I like to write every story at the length at which it seems to me it should be told." You accuse him of instead using tricks to pad the page count. What tricks are these? What would your "good" author have done differently? What "reasonable expectations" are betrayed?

Dear me, what venom.

You misunderstood me, my dear fellow. I have the greatest respect for Wolfe, and I love his work. I just have a funny way of showing it.

I said nothing about tricks being used to "pad the page count." What I meant was that Wolfe has an uncanny ability to keep spinning story when other authors would give up. Wolfe's narrative technique is encapsulated by the title of one of his short story collections, *The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories*. The "...and other stories and other stories" is a wonderful expression of the way his fiction often works; he creates story within story within story, and the reader simply has to have faith that he's going to go back and pick up the loose ends, or else take you somewhere so interesting that you won't mind that he's left those loose ends dangling. Very often he succeeds.

And yes, he uses tricks to accomplish this. Wonderful tricks.

There is also a companion volume, *The Urth of the New Sun*, which I haven't read but have been reliably informed is awful.

First "tricks" and now "reliable informants." Did your reliable informant even bother to read the book? Finish the book? Or is said informant's opinion is based on a tabloid headline? "WOLFE BOOK AWFUL. HAS THREE HEADS. SEE PAGE 12."

I've already posted an article acknowledging my idiocy in presuming to give an opinion on a book I haven't read.

My reliable source did in fact read the book cover to cover, and has read just about everything that Wolfe has published. He's entitled to his opinion, isn't he? (Actually, I don't remember whether he used the word "awful," but he didn't like the book.

That's all the books there are in the series; I think we can count on him not to write any more.

What did he ever do to you to inspire such disdain? Were you forced to buy and read his books? Is he taking precious shelf space from your favorite formula fantasy writer, last name of Anthony? What gives?

What gives is that I respect authors who don't keep on writing sequel after sequel. I appreciate the fact that Wolfe doesn't keep writing Severian books in order to make money. The Torturer series, as some have pointed out is one whole work, a four-part novel; I don't think that Wolfe has so little respect for his own work as to keep writing books in the "series"

BTW, who is this Anthony fellow you speak of? I've never heard of him.

You can count on Wolfe to write well, and that's about all. It may **very** well be surprising, strange, and difficult. But it will also be well-crafted, thought out, and unique.

I basically agree with you here. I don't think that everything he's written succeeds, however. That's not a crime; very few authors succeed all the time.

/Janet

Matt Austern — 25 Jul 1991, 22:33 · in reply to Janet M. Lafler

In article <1991Jul23.225239.22413 at Ieland.Stanford.EDU> repnomar at Ieland.Stanford.EDU (Janet M. Lafler) writes:

There is also a companion volume, *_The Urth of the New Sun_*, which I haven't read but have been reliably informed is awful.

Awful? Gene Wolfe? Them there's fightin' words.

PS You're not **really** mad, are you? Snf.

Well... I'll forgive you this once, so long as you promise not to say nasty things about Lord of Light.

Tim Walters — 26 Jul 1991, 02:46 · in reply to Viktor Haag

|> >

|> >Actually, I don't think I would call *The Book of the New Sun* a series,

|> >or a tetralogy, so much as a four-volume novel. (And I would call

|> >*The Urth of the New Sun* a sequel.)

|>

|> While I agree with your sentiments, and (to a certain extent) your musing

|> that the four books could work well bound into one volume, I would disagree

|> with your assertion that *Urth of the New Sun* is a "sequel". I would say that

|> it is more of a commentary, explanation, or companion.

I would call it a coda -- a recapitulation of the themes of the first four books, reharmonized and unified. Without Severian's return as the Conciliator and meeting with his far earlier incarnation as Apu-Punchau, the work seems unfinished to me.

|> If you want to see a master at his best, then you should read

|> *endangered species*.

A good choice, but I would vote for *_The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories_* or *_The Fifth Head of Cerberus_*.

Tim Walters

R o d Johnson — 26 Jul 1991, 02:52 · in reply to Janet M. Lafler

repnomar at leland.Stanford.EDU (Janet M. Lafler) sez:

There are four books in the series, _The Shadow of the Torturer_, _The Claw of the Conciliator_, _The Sword of the Lictor_ and _The Citadel of the Autarch_. There is also a companion volume, _The Urth of the New Sun_, which I haven't read but have been reliably informed is awful.

Awful! I think it's great, the capstone to the series. And I'm reliable too, so there.

Seriously, if you dislike the religious side of Wolfe, you might find "Urth" less satisfying than the others, as it's more foregrounded there. And it's certainly more confusing (*even* more confusing) than the others. But it ties up some pronounced loose ends from the tetralogy in as neat a way as one could want, has the usual bizarre and convoluted running around, a couple genuinely arresting images, and the usual great prose. Give it another chance.

Viktor Haag — 26 Jul 1991, 13:37 · in reply to Brian McElhinney

One of the main features of Wolfe's narrative style is that his stories go on and on beyond the point you could reasonably expect them to. If you like his tricks, he's great.

Wolfe has said "I like to write every story at the length at which it seems to me it should be told." You accuse him of instead using tricks to pad the page count. What tricks are these? What would your "good" author have done differently? What "reasonable expectations" are betrayed?

Whoa, there, cowboy -- I think what Janet meant was that Wolfe has a habit of teasing the reader by flashing the possibility of a resolution in the air, and then whipping it away with some unforeseen complication. I think that this trait is by and large a device used in the Book of the New Sun to reinforce a point (another article's subject), and for some readers (those who demand neat resolutions along the way to keep them interested) can be very annoying. Of course, she could have been in the middle of being mean and cutting, but knowing Janet from her previous posts and correspondance, I don't think so.

There is also a companion volume, _The Urth of the New Sun_, which I haven't read but have been reliably informed is awful.

First "tricks" and now "reliable informants." Did your reliable informant even bother to read the book? Finish the book? Or is said informant's opinion is based on a tabloid headline? "WOLFE BOOK AWFUL. HAS THREE HEADS. SEE PAGE 12."

There you go again, whipping out the sixgun. We all depend on our friends, or bookstore owners that we know, to tell us about new books, and whether they have read them, and whether they are good or not. Eventually you manage to aquire a small group with similar tastes who all preview for each other; I personally know 2 or 3 people whose opinions I would trust more than most professional reviewers (no offense Chuq!). Again, Janet never struck me as the kind of person to shoot her mouth off -- if her friends have told her that the book is awful, then I believe her. Whether I agree with her friends is another story entirely ...

That's all the books there are in the series; I think we can count on him not to write any more.

What did he ever do to you to inspire such disdain? Were you forced to buy and read his books? Is he taking precious shelf space from your favorite formula fantasy writer, last name of Anthony? What gives?

I am almost positive that Piers is **not** Janet's favourite author! I would suggest something more along the lines of Le Guin, Tanith Lee, John Crowley, Thomas Ligotti, and others with as much brains as talent.

You can count on Wolfe to write well, and that's about all. It may **very** well be surprising, strange, and difficult. But it will also be well-crafted, thought out, and unique.

And sometimes, for better or for worse, his experiments don't succeed as entirely as planned. Soldier of Arete, for example, suffers greatly from '2nd bookism', but is still well polished. There are Doors suffers too much from the unreliable narrator, to the point where the reader may simply give up on the narrator's perceptions entirely.

As it happens, Wolfe has said he does not **plan** to write any more **novels** about Urth or Severian. There are already a couple of short stories, and there may be more.

I don't know about you Bub, but when someone says "books", I usually assume novel or at least lengthy novella. I don't think "short story". I am pretty sure that Janet was saying that Wolfe was not going to write any more "Urth of the New Sun" novels, which is fairly common knowledge.

Wolfe is presently working on a multi-volume novel, NIGHT SIDE OF THE LONG SUN. Presumably, you'll find that news distressing. I, for one, am eagerly awaiting publication.

Good for you. And as soon as you get that six-gun toting, look at me and die, cowboy attitude off your shoulder, people around here might rest a little easier.

Where's the bloody marshall when you need him (Today my jurisdiction ends here ...)

Viktor Haag — 26 Jul 1991, 13:56 · in reply to Tim Walters

In article <947 at cronos.metaphor.com> walters at Metaphor.COM (Tim Walters) writes:

A good choice, but I would vote for The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories or The Fifth Head of Cerberus.

Does anyone know if these are still in print, and if so, where can I secure my copies?

Brian McElhinney — 29 Jul 1991, 22:24 · in reply to Janet M. Lafler

In article <1991Jul25.183429.26778 at leland.Stanford.EDU> repnomar at leland.Stanford.EDU (Janet M. Lafler) writes:

You misunderstood me, my dear fellow. I have the greatest respect for Wolfe, and I love his work. I just have a funny way of showing it.

I'd have to agree. Saying he goes "on and on past reasonable expectations," referring to his writing style as "tricks," and terming an unread book "awful" is a funny way of showing great respect.

I, however, over reacted. I was stupid and melodramatic and insulting. My apologies.

What, in retrospect, I should have stated, is that Wolfe's THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN is an amazing work, full of beautiful prose, strong imagery, unique characters, and fantastic vision. It can be read and greatly enjoyed as fantasy, science fiction, a tale of adventure, or as a

philosophical work on the nature of authority and responsibility. I feel it is one of the few works that every science fiction fan should at least attempt to read. It's that good. If you read it and enjoy it you will likely enjoy the one-book sequel, THE URTH OF THE NEW SUN. It is really more of a musical coda than a sequel, and as such it is naturally less impressive than the original work. Still, it is very worthwhile because it rounds out and concludes resonances in the original story, while adding something of interest on its own.

I don't think that Wolfe has so little respect for his own work as to keep writing books in the "series"

I still don't understand how you equate respect with a lack of sequels. Wolfe thought the original story would be a novella; it grew into five very respectable books. He has stated he may write more short stories about Urth. Who's to say one of them won't turn into a novel?

BTW, who is this Anthony fellow you speak of? I've never heard of him.

Um, well, once again I was being rude. I don't see a tongue-in-cheek marker, so I'll explain that I was referring to Piers Anthony. Which, I suspect, most people in this group would call a low blow. Sorry 'bout that.

Brian McElhinney "You may be imperious, but the effect is always