



## The Wellstone

*Wil McCarthy*

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In his *Nebula Award* nominated novel **The Collapsium**, acclaimed author Wil McCarthy introduced a richly imagined future of boundless possibility, where poverty, war, and even death are banished forever. Only now that world's exquisite perfection propels one restless young man toward the ultimate challenge.

## The Wellstone

For the children of immortal parents, growing up can be hard to do. A prince will forever be a prince--leaving no chance for Bascal Edward de Towaji Lutui to inherit his parents' throne. So what is an angry young blue blood to do? Punch a hole in the shadow he has been living in by rallying his equally disgruntled companions to make an improbable spaceship, busting out of the so-called summer camp in which their parents have stowed them and making a daring escape across the vastness of space. Neer-do-well Conrad Mursk is just along for the joyride--until he realizes this is no typical display of teenage angst. The children are rising up in an honest-to-gods revolution. And, boyo, things are going to get raw.

## The Wellstone Details

Date : Published March 4th 2003 by Spectra Books (first published March 2003)

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Author : Wil McCarthy

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## From Reader Review The Wellstone for online ebook

### Donna says

Interesting story, but too much bad language for me.

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### Frank says

Sehr empfehlenswertes Buch voller theoretisch möglicher Ideen für Technologien die sich noch nicht komplett durch alle SciFi-Geschichten ziehen und somit auch mal ein paar neue Konsequenzen aus selbigen.

Für alle die nicht die hunderttausendste Space-Opera lesen wollen geeignet.

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### Richard says

Tedious and simple-minded. Lots of short loose-ends that are never tied up. First and last chapters do not seem to be a part of the story at all, and make little sense.

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### Ryan says

One of the problems with royalty is that it's hereditary. Which means that, even if you end up with a really good king, like say as good as King Bruno de Towaji of Sol, you still have to end up dealing with his kids eventually. And the children of royalty, more often than not, end up being spoiled little shits.

Of course, while this is very much the story of Prince Bascal, son of royalty and scientific genius, it also deals on a larger scale by looking at the sociological implications of the technology that McCarthy introduced in the first book in the series: when you've eliminated death and aging from society, what happens to the next generation? Those kids who will never get to come into their own, and will never get to replace those who came before.

There's a lot of interesting stuff brought up by McCarthy here; the only problem is he doesn't quite deal with it all, and as a result this feels like only half of a story.

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### Chris says

Like the universe Wil built like the characters from the previous novels didn't like so much the new characters but I don't think you were supposed to. Still like the idea of what would we do if we were in this same situation and how do you get yourself to grow up when no one around you ever dies and gives you a shot at anything?

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## **Shhhhh Ahhhhh says**

I'm sort of iffy about this sequel. It feels like one story, which was going to be altogether way too long, was split in the middle, with this book ending at a strange spot in the larger story. The fact that the entire book exists in memory.. or reverie.. is interesting unto itself, given that it doesn't ever directly tell you how that relates to the 'present' day of the beginning and end, but on whole the story feels profoundly incomplete to me. I rated it 4 stars because, despite that incompleteness and despite what felt like a genre shift almost (from space sherlock holmes to space lrod of the flies), it's still incredibly interesting. I'll be looking forward to where this goes in the next installment.

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## **Keith says**

Sisters Rodeo, Black Butte

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## **Thomas says**

McCarthy, Wil. The Wellstone. Queendom of Sol No. 2. Spectra 2003.

This is a reasonably close sequel to The Collapsium. It raises the question of what to do with rebellious youth in a post-human, post-scarcity world. Answer: Send them to Camp Friendly, a high-tech gulag in deep space. After that, we have to guess whether it is going to be Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn or Lord of the Flies. For me, it was a bit hard to get into, but it got better as it went along. 4 stars.

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## **Andrew says**

The wellstone of the title is merely a somewhat improbable tool used in the mechanics of the story. The book is actually about the effect on society of eliminating death by ageing or disease. While I did not care too much about any of the characters I found after a while that I did want to know how it would end.

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## **Brian says**

A great re-read of a great story. The tech in this novel takes front place but it has intriguing characters as well. Captures the essence of good SF in analyzing what would happen to characters and society given the right initial conditions. Having read and re-read all his novels, I hope McCarthy will publish again soon.

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## **Roddy Williams says**

'In his Nebula Award-nominated novel 'The Collapsium', acclaimed author Wil McCarthy introduced a richly imagined future of boundless possibility, where poverty, war, and even death are banished forever. Only now that world's exquisite perfection propels one restless young man toward the ultimate challenge...

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For the children of immortal parents, growing up can be hard to do. A prince will forever be a prince – leaving no chance for Bascal Edward de Towaji Lutui to inherit his parents' throne. So what is an angry young blue blood to do? Punch a hole in the shadow he's been living in by rallying his equally disgruntled companions to make an improbable spaceship, busting out of the so-called summer camp in which their parents have stowed them and making a daring escape across the vastness of space. ne'er do well Conrad Mursk is just along for the joyride – until he realises this is no typical display of teenage angst. The children are rising up in an honest-to-gods revolution. And, boyo, things are going to get raw...'

Blurb from the March 2003 Bantam paperback edition

McCarthy's sequel to 'The Collapsium' is somewhat disappointing since it lacks some of the wit and panache of its gloriously original predecessor.

Set some years after the events of 'The Collapsium', 'The Wellstone' explores some of the more unexpected ramifications of a society where immortality has become the norm.

The Queen of Sol and her consort Bruno, now have a son; Bascal Edward de Towaji Lutui, a rebellious youth (and talented poet) who has, with some dismay, foreseen his destiny of being forever a Prince and never ascending to the throne.

Tired of his parents' dismissal of his concerns as childish whining, he incites rebellion amongst the disaffected youth. Having subsequently been confined to an artificial planet (an asteroid-sized world endowed with standard Earth gravity and an atmosphere through a process best explained by the Author within the original text) with his entourage of supporters and sycophants, he manages to cobble together a spaceship and escape.

The science is just as stunningly inventive as in the previous novel, but the novel suffers in that one can never really feel any empathy for the Prince. One feels he should be, if not a loveable rogue, then a likeable maniac, but his charms remained somewhere off the page.

Also, by concentrating solely on the Prince's escape and eventual capture it severely reduces the plot to a linear exercise, as compared to 'The Collapsium' which contained multiple diversions, revelations and surprises.

However, McCarthy is such a good writer that this is still an eminently readable and polished piece of work. One wonders if there is a veiled comparison to the current British Monarch and her King-in-waiting. It would be nice to think so, but I can't really see Prince Charles inciting a youth rebellion and heading off across Middle England on a hijacked bus, although I would be vastly impressed if he did.

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## Mike says

I really liked this book. It dealt with a topic, what happens to the children of long lived species, that is often glossed over in books about immortality. The problem reminded me of "the deadman shoes" issue you sometimes see in companies where you have a company with limited growth, so limited chance of advancement for people and the only way it happens is when someone retires.

I found the interplay between Conrad and Bascal worked very well. I couldn't work out whether Bascal was a bad guy or just driven and to what length he would go to keep Conrad in check. He seemed to get more and more desperate as the book went on.

For me I found the start of the book a little slow, but as it went on I wanted to read more and more to see what happened next and then, it just sort of ended. I wanted to know more. Also the Feck plot line just seemed to be in there to break up the ship board scenes, I think that could have been better developed.

The thing I really didn't like where the first and last chapters. Where did they come from? I just didn't see the

point, they looked like a plot line that was going to be there and just wasn't developed. By the end of the book I had forgotten most of what had happened in chapter one.

When I started out reading this book I wasn't going to read anymore in the series but I liked it so much now I think I shall look for Lost In Translation.

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## Jerico says

Another solid 4.5 star book.

This is a sequel, technically, but there's very little from the previous book besides setting that carries over. There are some throwbacks, and a few appearances by characters from the previous book, and knowing the various ins and outs of that book's plot enhances the scale and nuance of this one, but this book is completely self-contained except for a frame story that obviously sets up another volume in the setting.

If *Collapsium* is a Victorian adventure tale, *The Wellstone* is *Lord of the Flies* in a society where immortality (sorry, Immorbidity) is the norm. This book focuses more on the social and generational impacts of the world set up previously, on dynamics between the characters and the difficulties of coming of age in a time when no one dies. While this may sound dry, all of it happens on a log cabin being dragged through the outer solar system by a solar sail. It moves, quickly, and while regularly funny, is less wry than the previous book.

Highly recommended.

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## Chak says

I enjoy the way Wil McCarthy thinks.

I didn't like the main character - Prince Bascal, the son of Bruno and Queen Tamra from the first book in this series, *The Collapsium* - I found him spoiled, thoughtless, boringly reckless, and somewhat gratuitously teenager-like. **However**, I realized he had to be that way for the story to be told the way it was. But it wasn't even the story of Bascal's rebellion (which was the plot of the entire book) which fascinated me, it was all of the *other* stuff surrounding that plot that was so intriguing, and so it goes with hard science fiction.

In *The Collapsium*, we were introduced to a society, the Queendom of Sol, where what we think of as telecommunications, merged with instantaneous space travel via "collapsium" or a lattice of super small black holes designed to facilitate faster-than-light information transfer. Basically, a person can be "faxed" somewhere, anywhere (distance is irrelevant) instantaneously by being destroyed in one place, and reassembled (perfectly, with memories, and their soul intact) somewhere else. A very important by-product of this technology is immorbidity - you *can* be killed, but in absence of that, you'll never actually die because you're being repaired to a "saved" (as in a computer "saving," or warehousing that version of you) state any time you travel.

What Wil McCarthy does with that is basically as "if this, then what else?"

In *The Wellstone* that "what else" is: if everyone is immorbid, what does that mean for children? They never get to fill the jobs that no one retires from (dies), they don't get to take over from where their parents left off, because their parents never "leave off" (die). Their parents always treat them like children. Not for dozens of

years, not for hundreds of years, but for forever. A teenager's struggle to find their own identity, their own place in the world, may take thousands of years, if not forever. Ok, it's a good plot.

But all the other things that service this plot, and this world are *fascinating*. The summer camp the prince goes to with his friends is technologically very interesting - not to them, because there is no advanced technology there - but how it is constructed, literally constructed. Without spoiling anything, the way the kids devise a plan regarding a log cabin is also very, very interesting. The idea of "programmable matter\*," which just kind of seems like something that is just *there* in the Queendom of Sol, is a fantastical, but not altogether out of the realm of future possibility (as it's related to a lot of bleeding-edge tech now). Again, no spoilers (I don't think so, anyway) - matter collectors and what they're collecting the matter for is hardly even mentioned in the story, but it is nothing short of spectacular (and the science behind the concepts is all in the book's appendices and technical notes!). The investigation of crimes, helped along by advanced detection of quantum states, as well as investigation techniques that retain a suspect's privacy, were touched upon in the first book, and mentioned in this book as well, and they kind of blew my mind! There was even a psychobiologic idea in the book that I keep thinking about - neurosensory dystrophia on page 9 -- or "pathways worn smooth in the brain through constant, repetitive stimulation." This is another great example of "if this, then what else" because if people do live thousands of years, this is bound to be a very common, but eventually reversible occurrence. Of course this would be a normal part of life, and to be expected, especially in remote areas! These are just a few examples of the science background that made the book so interesting to me.

Lastly, I loved this quote from page 301

*In all the world -- in all the universe -- there's not a thing worth having that comes any way but dear. You choose what you want, and spend the rest of your life paying.*

\* The book is named after one of the types of programmable matter in the book, Wellstone, which McCarthy informs us in the technical notes is "an actual patent-pending invention, although one that is unlikely to be built or tested in the near future, owing mainly to the nanometer-scale manufacturing tolerances required." It's probably not a coincidence that the first things listed under "summary" on Wil McCarthy's LinkedIn profile are

*Inventor: 17 issued and 11 pending U.S. patents, many also issued in overseas jurisdictions. Developed a patent portfolio valued in excess of \$60 million.*

*Entrepreneur: President and co-founder of The Programmable Matter Corporation and RavenBrick LLC*

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## **Carl Orthlieb says**

A fascinating look at a future where the fundamental materials that we deal with transformed by the creation of synthetic atoms using quantum dots. The impact of that technology to society is felt keenly throughout the novel, not just in one or two ways but through a myriad of applications. I love the fact that the technology shift laid out is so long reaching and self-consistent.

I recommend reading the entire series.

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