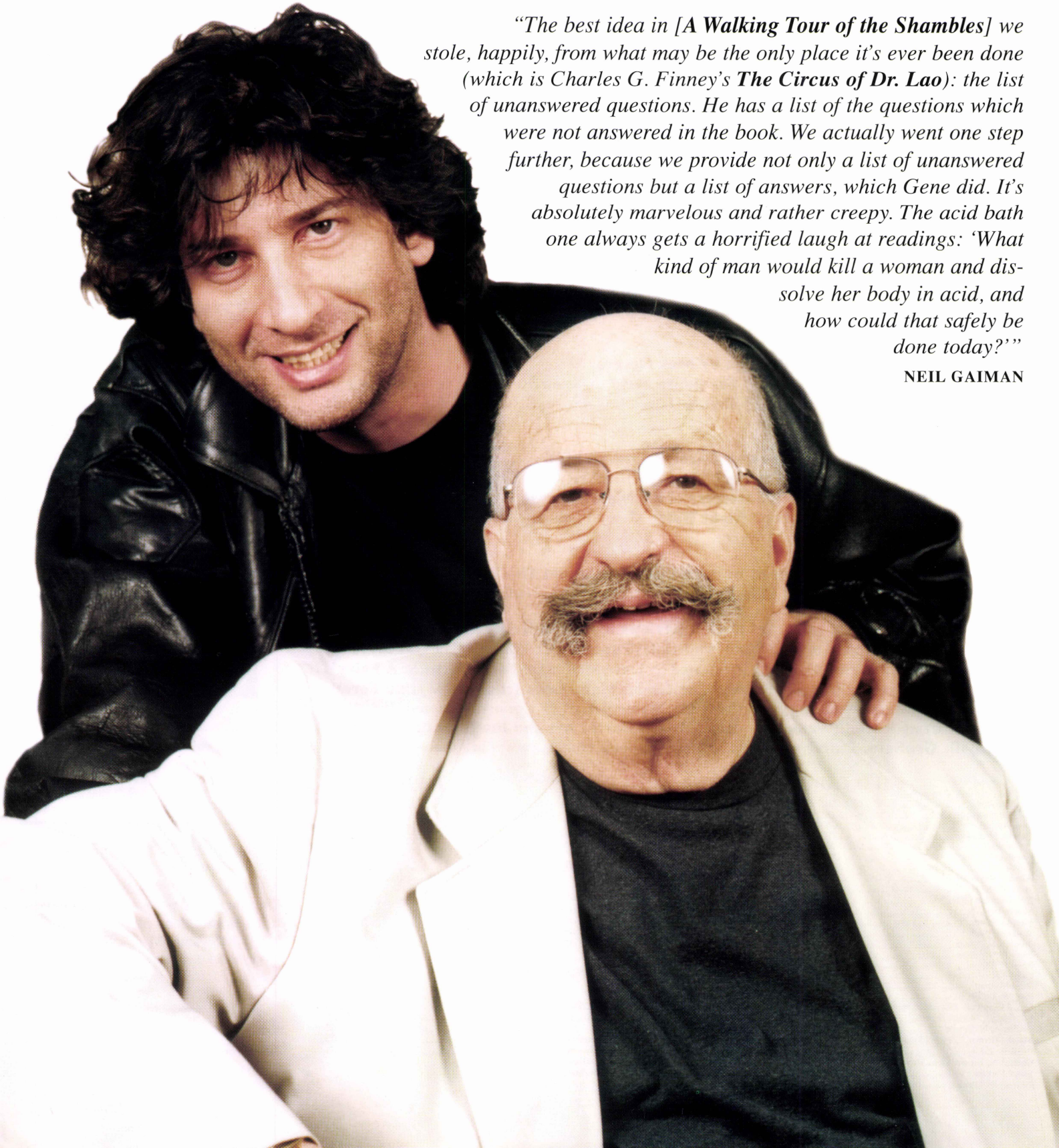


The Wolfe &

*“The best idea in [A Walking Tour of the Shambles] we stole, happily, from what may be the only place it’s ever been done (which is Charles G. Finney’s **The Circus of Dr. Lao**): the list of unanswered questions. He has a list of the questions which were not answered in the book. We actually went one step further, because we provide not only a list of unanswered questions but a list of answers, which Gene did. It’s absolutely marvelous and rather creepy. The acid bath one always gets a horrified laugh at readings: ‘What kind of man would kill a woman and dissolve her body in acid, and how could that safely be done today?’”*

NEIL GAIMAN



Gaiman Show

Gene [Rodman] Wolfe was born May 7, 1931 in Brooklyn, New York and grew up in Texas, where he graduated from the University of Houston in 1956 with a BS in mechanical engineering. He served in the US Army in Korea from 1952-1954, was a project engineer for Procter and Gamble from 1956-72, and senior editor of Plant Engineering from 1972 - 84, when he left to write full time. His first published story was "The Dead Man" (1965) for erotic magazine *Sir*. Most of his early SF work appeared in Damon Knight's *Orbit* series; many collections of his stories have been published over the years.

Wolfe's novels began to appear in 1970, with *Operation ARES*, and include *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* (1972), *Peace* (1975), "Latro" books *Soldier of the Mist* (1986) and *Soldier of Arete* (1989), and *Castleview* (1990); he has also written books for young adults and poetry. His most ambitious and acclaimed works are the 12 books and various stories that share the same "Urth" universe: the "Book of the New Sun" sequence (four books 1980 - 83, with a fifth added in 1987, plus several related stories), the "Book of the Long Sun" (four books 1993-96), and its sequel trilogy "Book of the Short Sun" (1999-2001). "New Sun" volume one, *The Shadow of the Torturer* (1980), won a World Fantasy Award; volume two, *The Claw of the Conciliator* (1981), a Nebula; and volume four, *The Citadel of the Autarch* (1983), the John W. Campbell Memorial Award. Wolfe's other awards include a Nebula for novella "The Death of Doctor Island" (1973), a World Fantasy Award for collection *Storeys from the Old Hotel* (1988), and a World Fantasy Life Achievement Award in 1996. He has been married Rosemary Frances Dietsch since 1956; they have two sons and two daughters, and live in Barrington, Illinois.

Neil [Richard] Gaiman was born November 10, 1960 in Porchester, England. After attending school in southern England, he moved to London, where he worked as a freelance journalist in the early 1980s and sold his first stories to gaming and men's magazines in 1984 and 1985. His first work in the field was co-editing humorous book of SF quotations *Ghastly Beyond Belief* (1985, with Kim Newman). His well-known "Sandman" comicgraphic series began in 1989, and includes "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (1990), the only comic to win a World Fantasy Award. His novels include *Good Omens* (1990, with Terry Pratchett); *Neverwhere* (1996), a novelization of his dark-fantasy BBC series; *Stardust* (1998); and *American Gods* (2001), which won an International Horror Guild award, a *Locus*

Award, and is a finalist on the Hugo ballot. His current children's book *Coraline* (2002) is a bestseller. Other works include *Don't Panic: The Official Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy Companion* (1988), collection *Smoke and Mirrors* (1998), and graphic children's book *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish* (1997, with Dave McKean). Gaiman currently lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota with his wife, Mary McGrath, whom he married in 1985, their son and two daughters.

Wolfe and Gaiman first met in 1983, at the British Fantasy Convention in Birmingham. They and their families became friends when Gaiman and his family moved to the US in 1992. They recently collaborated on *A Walking Tour of the Shambles: Little Walks for Sightseers #16*, published for the 2002 World Horror Convention where they were both guests.

The "interview" is a series of talks with Gaiman interviewing Wolfe, overseen by Charles N. Brown and Jennifer A. Hall.

NG: "The project we just did together was a lovely bit of fun."

GW: "I certainly enjoyed it. There's two versions printed out — one Neil gets top billing, and one I get top billing."

NG: "The fun of it for me was the initial problem-solving conversations. I phoned Gene up and said, 'We've been asked to collaborate on a story.' He laughed hollowly. I said, 'The only way I think we could do it is if we pick some kind of thing that will allow us to do what you did in *Bibliomen*, where we have shorter things that make up something bigger. We could do a tarot deck, a dictionary, a guidebook.' And Gene said, 'Let's do a guidebook.' He could have said yes to a dictionary, and it could have been just as strange and dangerous."

GW: "But that, to my knowledge, has been done more. Ambrose Bierce was the original guy in that area, and it's been done by a number of other people. It's very tempting to define terms, put your own prejudices in as Samuel Johnson did. But I didn't know of anybody who had done a guidebook, other than *The Tough Guide to Fantasy* by Diana Wynne Jones (which I really liked)."

NG: "I think what attracted both Gene and me to it was the incredibly dry tone. Anybody who's ever done any touring anywhere has ended up with one of these little guidebooks: 'You are now looking at this example of 1870s whatever, and this happened here. Now cross the road and you will see....' It seemed one of those things where you could take the style and then insert your own contents."

"For any collaborative work, suddenly you

have an audience. With most writing, you have an audience but it's imaginary — somebody just like you who likes the same kinds of things and likes your jokes, but isn't you and is as smart or smarter, and you're writing for him or her. The joy of our project was, I had my audience. I was writing for Gene. If it made Gene laugh, it worked. And Gene had an audience, too.

"The best idea in there we stole, happily, from what may be the only place it's ever been done (which is Charles G. Finney's *The Circus of Dr. Lao*): the list of unanswered questions. He has a list of the questions which were not answered in the book. We actually went one step further, because we provide not only a list of unanswered questions but a list of answers, which Gene did. It's absolutely marvelous and rather creepy. The acid bath one always gets a horrified laugh at readings: 'What kind of man would kill a woman and dissolve her body in acid, and how could that safely be done today?'"

"The strangest thing is this Gahan Wilson cover with a picture of me and Gene on it. How cool is that?"

GW: "The really cool thing there is, we're in association with Alice in Wonderland, which is where I have always wanted to be! I've always wanted this little upper-class English girl to come up to me, holding a piece of cake in each hand, and say 'Which one should I eat?'"

NG: "Gene and I resort to e-mail when we have to, if I'm on a different continent, but most of the time when we're doing a story the fun of it is posting it to each other, then phoning up and laughing at each others' jokes. We wouldn't have been able to do that with e-mail. It would have been more efficient, but much less fun."

GW: "I'm not sure it would have been more efficient. I'm not nearly as good a writer at e-mail as I am on paper. I'm an old-fashioned guy. I need time to print it out and look at it and revise, scratch my head, pencil out words and pencil in words. The computer drives me nuts. I always remind people who talk about how writing is going to be revolutionized by the computer that Shakespeare wrote with a feather that he had to sharpen every page or so, and look what he did!"

NG: "And you, you started writing in college?"

GW: "I started writing at Texas A&M, for *The Commentator*, which was the literary magazine. I wrote three or four little stories for it. I wish to God I could remember the name of the editor, because I learned more from the student editor of *The Commentator* than I have ever learned from any other editor."

"He was an upperclassman and I was a sophomore, and I expected to be beaten. We

Continued on page 81

Ron Walotsky's death was and wasn't a surprise: we knew he'd been hospitalized in June and had been following his progress almost daily through e-mails; and though his condition was very serious, we had expected him to pull through. So to suddenly hear he hadn't made it was a sad shock. I'd seen Ron at Worldcon and World Fantasy Con last year, and spent most of I-Con with him in April. We talked mostly about growing up in the lower-middle-class neighborhoods of Brooklyn in the '40s, and being Jewish. I was five years older (he told me he was born in 1942, but then artists don't have to be exact), but we shared similar experiences. Ron was one of the warmest and friendliest people I knew. In the early '90s, we ended up talking about masks and I told him I had a collection at home. He tried to sell me one of his crab warrior masks, but when I told him I couldn't really afford it he insisted I take it for free, "so I'll be part of your collection." I ended up trading him a lifetime *Locus* subscription even though he said he wanted nothing in return. I'll miss him.

On a happier note, we had dinner with China Miéville while he was on tour in the Bay Area in July, and showed him the *Locus* offices. A very charming and well-read guy, he was suitably impressed by my collection. We had dinner at the Claremont Hotel, and I was able to regale him with stories of Berkeley in 1968, when the Worldcon banquet was held in the very room we were in. We also had dinner with Eileen Gunn and John Berry, who have been living in San Francisco for several years and will be returning to live in the Seattle area in October. Eileen runs *The Infinite Matrix*, and we learned a lot about the problems of Internet publishing. John Berry still looks too young to have been on the original *Locus* subscription list for 1968. We talked about recent trips to Russia and other travels abroad, and how each trip gives us new perspective on our own country.

Tim Pratt has survived this place a year and is now an assistant editor. Congratulations!

CORRECTIONS

In last month's introduction to Kinuko Y. Craft's interview, we incorrectly linked ASFA to the Spectrum Awards. While Spectrum at one time included ASFA listings, the two are and always have been completely separate entities. The Spectrum Awards Craft has received were presented by the jury of the Spec-

Editorial Matters

trum Board.

E-MAIL PROBLEMS

Unknown to us, our ISP placed a spam filter on our e-mail that prevented quite a bit of legitimate e-mail from getting through to us since June, including subscription, CD-ROM, and back-issue orders. We have recovered the missing mail and are in the process of going through it and straightening things out.

THIS ISSUE



This is Issue 500, and our first with expanded full-color coverage, which we plan to continue regularly. Arnie Fenner did the cover and the color spreads of Ron Walotsky's work and the two interviews. Melinda (Mandy) Himel became our in-house color expert, doing the table of contents, People & Publishing, news, and other pages. Other changes include a redesigned table of contents, courtesy of Arnie. We'll be making other changes in the coming months, most likely beginning with the bestseller pages next issue.

Jenni has been interviewing me since the beginning of the year. What appears here is a small portion of what she's got. We hope it serves to give readers an overview of the roots of *Locus* and some background of its illustrious founder. It seems almost inconceivable that 34 years have passed since that first



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The Wolfe & Gaiman Show

Continued from page 7

were beaten all the time at Texas A&M. You had to take it – bend down, and they whaled away at you with a big wooden paddle. This happened with alarming frequency, and you never got time to heal. What he did was worse. He got my story and he got a blue pencil, and he edited it there in front of me. As I was standing there, with the drops of blood coursing down my face, I said to myself, 'I see what he's doing. He's taking out every word the sentence doesn't require. I'm going to write the next story so he can't do that.' And I tried to do it. I didn't succeed, but he was crossing out less in that second story. If it wasn't for that, I would probably be a bitter old retired engineer, whereas now I'm a bitter old still-active writer.

"I was a college dropout – before it was *fashionable*. I lost my student deferment and I was drafted into the United States Army.

"I had just got home from the service, and Rosemary came to visit our family in Houston from far off Peoria, Illinois. We had lived next door when we were like three, and our mothers had stayed in touch all this time. Of course I was required to date her and take her out places. We got married in 1956. We didn't have any money, and we were living in a 'pointed apartment,' which is a refinished attic. You could only walk down the middle. One room was kitchen and dining room; the other was everything else. Rosemary was a secretary and I was a cub engineer, just starting. (I had gone back to Houston and got a BSME.) I saw a news story that said Gold Medal Books wanted murder mysteries and would pay a minimum of \$2,000 for any book they accepted. I

thought, 'Well, I wrote those stories for *The Commentator*. I could write murder mysteries.' Wrong, but I thought it and I started writing.

"I wrote a full-length murder mystery which nobody would buy, for really good reasons. I wrote a number of stories. And I finally made my first sale to a skin magazine called *Sir* in 1965. I wrote 'The Dead Man', this little ghost story involving a crocodile. I had read an article in *Readers' Digest* about crocodiles, and I put it together with stuff I had taken from Kipling, because I had read a lot of Kipling that was laid in India. I sent it to probably a couple of dozen markets (because *Sir* would have been a bottom market), and *Sir* bought it for \$60.

"Of course I had other stories. I had one called 'The Mountains Are Mice'. I sent it to *Galaxy* and got it back with a form rejection (which is what happened with everything I sent). Fred Pohl was editor then. I was working from an alphabetical list of science fiction markets. The next magazine on it was *If*. Little did I know that *If* was also edited by Fred Pohl. I wrote another cover letter and I put it in a fresh envelope and I sent it to the editor at *If*. I got back a letter from Fred Pohl that said, 'You know, I think the rewrite has really improved this. I'm glad you let me see it again. If you'll take 2¢ a word, I will buy it.' I am God's own fool, but I'm not such a fool that I said, 'No, I want to retain translation rights.' That was my second sale.

"That got me into *Worlds of If*, and *Worlds of If* got me an invitation from Lloyd Biggle, Jr. to join SFWA. In some SFWA publication, I saw that Damon Knight was editing an original anthology called *Orbit* and was looking for stories. I sent him 'Trip-Trap', a riff on the Billy-goat Gruff thing with the troll un-

two-page mimeographed issue in 1968. I don't feel a day older. Actually, yes I do – a *lot* older, almost ancient. I keep looking back at the staff photos and wondering where the time has gone. Jenni collected many of the pieces in the *Locus* 500 section without showing them to me until this month. I'm suitably impressed and wish I really was the person they think I am. Now I'd better stop before I get maudlin.

We have a bit less news this month because of an earlier editorial deadline to get in the extra color and have the issue printed in time for Worldcon. It's also the summer doldrums. We also had to hold conventions to have room for Ron's art and obituary. The updated convention listing is posted at *Locus Online*. The cover price is now \$5.95. We'll be raising subscription rates in the next month or so, so please renew (or subscribe) now.

NEXT ISSUE

October will have the Hugo and Chesley Awards winners, the Hubbard Awards, and interviews with Dan Simmons and probably Jeff VanderMeer. There will be Hugo Voting Figures, photos of the awards ceremony, and the first installment of our Worldcon report. There will also be our usual assortment of reviews, news, people notes, etc.

Since Worldcon is practically in our back yard, the entire in-house staff will be there as well as Mark R. Kelly from Los Angeles and Jonathan Strahan from Perth, Australia. We'll have a *Locus* table. Look for us there!

—C.N. Brown/J.A. Hall

der the bridge, and he bought it. For years after that, the *Orbit* series was my main market. My other sales were stories that Damon Knight had turned down."

NG: "The first novel was *Operation Ares*, and the next thing we get, if memory serves, is *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*."

GW: "That was some time after. I had written a number of *Orbit* stories. I wrote one called 'The Fifth Head of Cerberus', which was *wonderful*. I sent it to Damon Knight. Every year he would have the Milford Writers' Conference, which was only for published writers – either people he was publishing in *Orbit* or people he would *like* to publish in *Orbit*.

"Damon lived in this old Charles Addams house, The Anchorage. If you have seen the cartoons, you know exactly what this house was: a haunted Victorian monstrosity with a whopping front porch that went around three sides of the thing.

"I brought 'The Fifth Head of Cerberus' to the workshop, and while I was there, an editor from Scribners came up to me and said, 'You know, if you would write two more novellas like this, we would publish it as a book.' So I did. That was my first hardcover, and that was the first *good* book I had."

NG: "You did a lot more than add two novellas. Those three stories interweave, reflect, comment on, illuminate, confuse, and do all manner of things to each other."

GW: "Yes. A lot of readers consider it a sort of three-part novel. The second novella is a story told by one of the characters in the third novella, and so on. There's lots of ugly stuff about being buried alive, because I tend to be claustrophobic. I used to have these horrible 'buried alive' dreams, which alternated with my 'being condemned to Hell' dreams, so a lot

The Wolfe & Gaiman Show

of that tended to show up in my fiction. Have you ever tried to do a story based on a dream? I've done a couple of them that worked, but mostly I can't. 'To the Dark Tower Came' was a nightmare story about a tower that stretches between the Earth and the moon and is anchored at both ends. (It's an engineering impossibility, but in a fantasy story you can do it.) The other, 'Kevin Mallone', is about a household that advertises for a 'well-bred but impecunious young couple' who will live in the house and be the master and mistress. The thing is, the gardener is possessed (or may be) by the ghost of a former servant in the house."

NG: "You wrote while doing a real job for 28 years. How did you do it? What was your schedule?"

GW: "I experimented, as I think anybody would. For 17 years I worked as a mechanical engineer. After *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* had been published, I woke up one morning and Rosemary was crying in bed. She was homesick. So I went in to work that day and one of the guys in the office had left his *Wall Street Journal* on his desk. I picked it up and paged through it, and there was an ad for technical editors. I said to myself, 'If this job is in Illinois, I'm going to apply for it.' And by golly, it was in Illinois, so I applied and interviewed for the job. They gave me this form to fill out and it said, 'How much money do you want?' I thought to myself, 'I will ask for so much money, if they give it to me there's no question I am going to quit my job and take this one flat out.' They ended up giving me a thousand dollars a year more than I had asked for. We sold the house in Ohio and I became a staff member on *Plant Engineer*.

"What I did mostly was get up early in the morning and write for one to two hours. One of the good things about working for this magazine was that in ten minutes I could get from my front door to my desk, which gave me more writing time. I often wake up during the night, and I had a rule that if it was after 4 a.m. I got up for the day, and I would write until Rosemary had breakfast ready. Then of course I wrote on Saturdays and Sundays as everybody does, and the holidays."

NG: "Was there a big change when you retired and became a full-time writer?"

GW: "Yes and no. I had written on vacation, and this was like I was on vacation all the time. All I had to do was write. It was really neat. This was cruel to me, but I would set the clock radio to a station that gave traffic reports for commuters. They would be saying, 'Oh, the Kennedy is wall-to-wall today. It's an hour and a half from over here to the Loop,' and I would get up and yawn and stretch and say, 'I don't have to be down there.' So I'd brush my teeth, start the coffee, and go over to the desk and write."

NG: "How different is the person who writes the stories from the person that everybody gets to meet, encounter, look up at on the platform today?"

GW: "I drink blood. Other than that disgusting proclivity, I'm about like this. The difference was when I was working as an engineer. I learned that I had to be very different as an engineer than from being a science fiction writer. I had to be very staid and conventional, the white shirt and the necktie and all this stuff. I had breakaway neckties with clips in them, because if you wore a conventional necktie and it got caught in the machinery, you were dead. With a breakaway tie, you wouldn't get pulled into the gears and have your head and neck turned into hamburger."

NG: "How did you feel when *The Washington Post* basically said 'The Book of the New Sun' is your masterwork?"

GW: "Well, I know that's what everybody thinks. I keep trying to write something better than that. I may never succeed, but you try and top yourself, right? I would like to write something my readers think is better, but I haven't done that. I've done things that I thought were better. I did meet one guy today who said *Soldier of the Mist* is the best thing he had ever read. That's very pleasant."

NG: "The *Post* was very explicitly saying that 'The

Book of the New Sun' plus 'The Book of the Long Sun' plus the new three now had to be seen as a complete sequence, which I'm not quite sure about. Yes, it's set in the same integral universe, but it doesn't give that feeling of movement you get from the beginning of 'The Book of the Long Sun' all the way through the next seven books, or whatever.

"When I was reading 'The Book of the Long Sun', there was a definite feeling of Kipling, and also echoes of Chesterton's very first 'Father Brown' stories. Stuff that you read when young mulches down in the back of your head, and it's there as a tool to draw on."

GW: "Absolutely."

NG: "When you were doing the 'Long Sun' and 'Short Sun' sequences, were there places where you were definitely conscious of doing that, or was it just where the story went that day?"

GW: "There were things I was conscious of, and there were things I was *not* conscious of. It depends on what things we're talking about. Were my later discoveries interesting enough to talk about? No."

NG: "Is feedback important to you? I thought the *Washington Post* article made some very sensible points. It said, 'This is how good Gene Wolfe is, and this is why you haven't heard of him.' One point was that you make no effort in your fiction to be user-friendly."

GW: "What would I do that I don't do, if I were being user-friendly?"

NG: "It goes back to that line I've been using ever

NG: "What's the most important thing about fiction?"

GW: "The most important thing is that it assures the reader that things need not be as they are now. In other words, the most important thing is hope."

since I read it in a letter where you defined good literature: 'My definition of good literature is that which can be read by an educated reader, and reread with increased pleasure.' While 'user-friendly' may have been the wrong word, there is a level on which a lot of fiction these days is expected to give everything up first time to somebody, whether he knows something about the subject or not. You do not do that."

GW: "Phooey! I don't want to write that kind of thing. Rats! I don't like it and it would bore me to write it and I'm not gonna write it. And besides, I don't know everything to give it up. You're going to see things in there that I don't see consciously. I like those things."

NG: "I take enormous pleasure in the fact that people are still arguing about the first four in the 'Book of the New Sun' sequence to this day. 'Was the Autarch Severian's mother?' 'Is the Clute theory valid?' 'Oh, we've got another Australian theory....' You have these dueling theorists, pointing to the text and trying to second- and third- and outguess."

GW: "Yeah, but the thing is, too often people want me to go in and settle their argument. That's exactly what I should not do. I am dealing from this position of presumed expertise. We don't have a level playing field. If Arthur Conan Doyle had gone in and settled all this 'Holmes' stuff, there would be no Baker Street Irregulars today, yet people have made whole hobbies out of being Baker Street Irregulars - why shouldn't they? There's no sacredness to the text."

NG: "What's the most important thing about fiction?"

GW: "The most important thing is that it assures the reader that things need not be as they are now. In other words, the most important thing is hope."

"Sure I've read Barry Malzberg. Barry is very black, but it seems to me one of the things he is say-

ing to people is 'Your life could be much worse. You could be like these lead characters but you're not.' So that's hope too."

NG: "The various things SF can include being predictive, but it can also be cautionary. Much of the bleakest fiction is cautionary - 'Don't go there.'"

GW: "In *A Christmas Carol*, Marley's ghost appears. He's in Scrooge's bedroom but he's also in Hell even while he's in Scrooge's bedroom. And what he is telling Scrooge is 'There's still hope for you. There's no longer hope for me. My life is over. I blew it. You, Ebenezer, formerly my partner, could still pull yourself out.' That's hope."

NG: "Of course what Scrooge winds up getting is visions of past, present, and future, and the future he gets is blacker than anything Barry Malzberg ever came up with."

GW: "You don't give hope the way you give raisins by putting raisins in raisin bread. You give hope the way you give bread when you bake bread. It's *all* hope. I'm quite conscious of doing that. The basic hope is the hope that things can be different. I've been in some godawful situations, and I think people in those situations despair because they come to believe change is impossible. Both science fiction and fantasy can be literatures of hope. We're saying the world doesn't have to be like this, and your life doesn't have to be like this. When you know enough about history and you know enough about prehistory, you realize there are times when it was very different. There were times when Earth's climate was far warmer than it is today, and times when it was far colder than it is today. It's not like we're veering off the map with global warming."

NG: "It's easy to talk about what we're trying to give readers, but what do you take from it as an author? One of the hardest things of yours I ever read - in terms of actually feeling the effort involved spiritually and emotionally, in terms of just the work and how you do it - was in *Castle of Days*, I think, where you printed a prayer you'd written for writing, which I assume was a prayer you said before going off to work. It had that sort of 'four o'clock in the morning' quality. What do you take from writing? What does it give you?"

GW: "Enormous satisfaction. When I think that I have done what I have done the way it *ought* to be done, and that I have really created something that needed to be created and would not have been without me, obviously writing is a dream job. Empty-ump people would *love* to be writers and they can't do it. I can do it. *You* can do it. We're blessed."

NG: "Not only can you lie in fiction, but I think Gene is the master of lying in fiction, both directly and indirectly. *Peace* is built on lies. And I assume that, being who he is, Gene is pretty damn sure what the truth and what the lies are in *Peace*. The rest of us have to get through that as best we can. After three or four times through that text, you begin to be able to say, 'I *think* he's lying about this or that.'"

GW: "I never lie."

NG: "Gene, you create the *trickiest* characters! Like in 'The Walking Sticks'. You not only get to do a wonderful Jeckyll and Hyde riff, but it gives us a narrator whose unreliability cheerfully lies to us all the way through the story. And we *know* he's probably lying. That's part of the joy of the story."

GW: "Well, if he wasn't lying he wouldn't be the guy in this story! He is a type of man that I have met working in industry ten thousand times. He is not going to tell you intentionally anything that is to his own detriment."

NG: "And we figure out where the story is happening sometimes from the places where he contradicts himself or he has to tell you a little bit more than he would have liked. You have a narrator who's lying, but the author isn't."

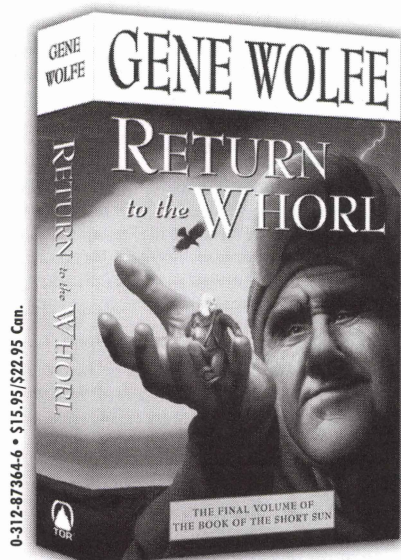
GW: "Remember, I was a journalist on an industrial magazine, *Plant Engineering*. I've been in a ton of industrial plants, in order to talk to ten tons of people who worked in them, including some places that are right out of Dante and some that are so nice you think they must be movie sets, so clean and bright

“WOLFE IS AS FINE A WRITER
AS SCIENCE FICTION HAS PRODUCED.”

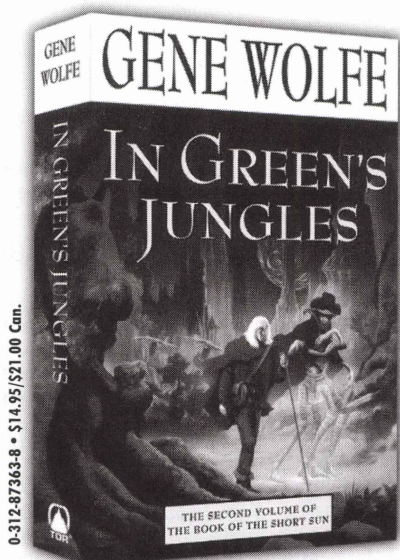
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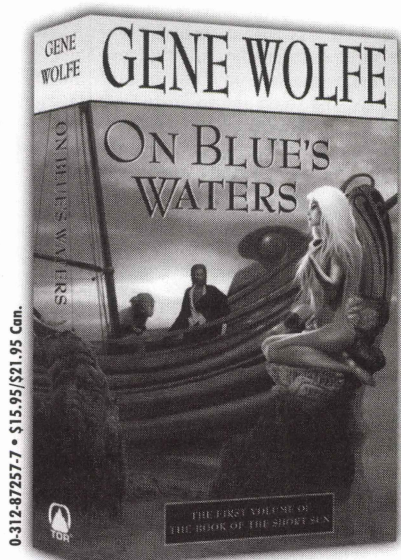
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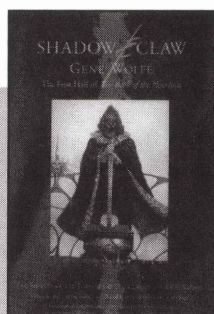
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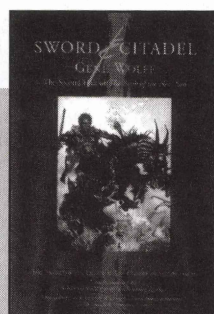
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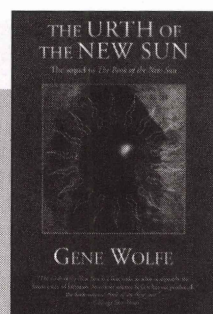
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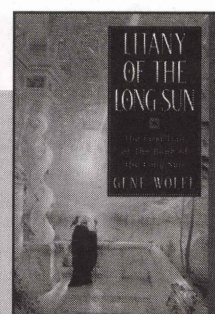
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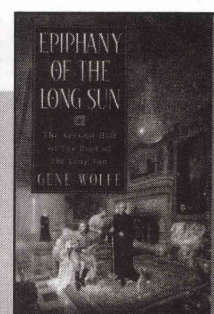
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The Wolfe & Gaiman Show

and cheerful it's got to be Doris Day over there running the milling machine. I was in a rubber tire plant that was a vision of Hell."

NG: "To what extent does that stuff wind up in the fiction?"

GW: "To whatever extent it intrudes when I'm writing. You can't help drawing upon yourself. We take the facts of our lives and try and transmute them into a coherent story. A lot of *Peace* is autobiographical.

"I'm working on 'The Wizard Knight' now, two big books. The first one, *The Knight*, is in fourth draft, and the second, *The Wizard*, is in first draft, and it's going to take a hell of a lot more work. If you ask me what I'll do next, what is the point of my sitting back now and saying, 'Well, when I finish this, maybe two years from now, what I'll do is...' I'm going to change my mind a dozen times between now and the time when I finish it. It's pointless.

"The 'Wizard Knight' books are about an American kid who is switched by fairies into a different universe, a quasi-medieval universe that works on the 'club sandwich' principle: there are several layers. He, of course, is in the middle layer. There's the fairy world below, and up above is the realm of the Norse gods, and so on and so forth. He has various adventures and matures in the course of these, and experiences love and sex, and sex and love. All that good stuff. Actually, he falls desperately in love with the queen of fairies who has switched him, and much of it is his attempt to be united again with her. She's going to take this kid and make a hero out of him."

NG: "In some ways, it sounds like the flip side of *Castleview*, where we got to see Faerie distantly from Illinois."

GW: "He's *there*. By the end of the book, he knows it far better than he knows the America he only vaguely remembers and never knew that well anyway, because he was immature when he left. Suppose you took a boy of 17 and set him down in China for the next 30 years. How much will he know about America? But this is an unfinished work and I'm still tinkering with it."

NG: "How about horror? Here you are as a guest at the World Horror Convention, and I don't recall a full-length work of horror from you (apart from *Peace*, and even that is pushing it). But you've done short stories. There's definitely horror in stories like 'The Tree Is My Hat' or 'The Walking Sticks'. What

is the attraction there?"

GW: "The attraction in all horror is the same. For one thing, it's survivability. The reader comes to the end and has survived the experience. The reader may, to some extent, also feel more qualified to deal with horror in his or her own life. And we all get a certain dosage of horror in our own lives, unless we have very brief lives indeed."

NG: "Despite the fact that I've written a novel that's been nominated for the Year's Best Horror award, I don't actually think of *American Gods* as a horror novel. I don't think I could do a horror novel. I know why I couldn't, but I'm interested to know why I can't see you doing a work of that length."

GW: "I wouldn't want to live there for two years."

NG: "Is there any possibility of your ever completing the *Soldier of the Mist* sequence, the 'Latro' books?"

GW: "That's a possibility, but I don't know. An idea takes you, or some sort of impulse takes you, and that's how you go. Maybe I will write a baseball novel. I've never written a baseball novel.

"See this little cane I'm holding? This is the Egyptian God of the dead, which I received as a token of regard from my friend Neil Gaiman. What does it mean when your friends give you the Egyptian God of the dead? Last night he did not come alive. Anyway, I might write a book-length 'Latro' horror novel. That's a real idea, yeah! You know what those early Semitic gods were like? *Wow*. We can do 'Locked in the Pyramids'.... I've always wanted to do a book in which the Sphinx stood up and walked. The ancient Egyptians would change the face to be the face of the reigning pharaoh; when they got a new pharaoh, the stonemasons went in and they reshaped the face. Think of the possibilities right there - I think we're cookin' here, folks!"

NG: "I get very frustrated with my fans because they don't know anything else. I spend a lot of time trying to say, 'Look, go and read this, go and read that. Understand where I'm coming from. I didn't spring from the brow of Jove! This is the Chesterton line, this is the Zelazny line, this is the Lafferty line, this is the Ellison line. These are the people I came from."

GW: "I've read a lot of Lafferty and I would never deny that I've been influenced by Lafferty, any more than I would deny that I've been influenced by Chesterton. You start writing, imitating someone consciously or unconsciously. You develop your own voice, but I think you always bear some imprint of the people who impressed you when you were young.

If somebody starts absolutely originally, not imitating anyone, he has to begin by inventing speech. Early Lafferty, he was trying to conform, trying to say 'I am a writer like other writers.' Later he decided to abandon the pretense, changing from what I call 'Lafferty with water' to 'Lafferty straight.'

"My earlier influences include H.G. Wells. He snuck completely through my defenses, made me realize a lot of the things I had been condemning as old-fashioned 19th-century fiction were really better than most of the things I was reading then as a kid reading pulp magazines. Actually, my favorite pulp magazine, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, reprinted great old stories, but it didn't emphasize (to me the kid reader) what it was doing. I swear there was a period of two or three years in which I thought it was publishing the stories that the other magazines were too cowardly to put into print, this powerful stuff! My father was a big H.G. Wells fan, so of course I would not read H.G. Wells. Then *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* came out with an entire issue reprinting *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. I, being a dumb kid, failed to notice that the author was Wells. It blew me away! I guess somewhere in the middle of my second rereading (I read it three times without ever standing up and stretching), I realized this was by the author my father kept trying to get me to read.

"I read Lewis Carroll, who I still think is delightful. In those days, people did not insist that little boys could only read books in which the heroes were other little boys, and little girls could only read books in which the heroes were little girls. I read *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Wizard of Oz*, all this stuff, and I enjoyed them because I thought they were good stories.

"Then there was a whole tradition of 'bad boy' literature - there's a lot of it in *Tom Sawyer*. It's died away because kids today watch TV and play computer games, and they don't do things like let the cat down through the chimney or steal pies. Modern kids can't imagine there was a time when most kids went perpetually hungry. They got up hungry and they went to bed hungry."

NG: "I read some analysis of 'Hansel and Gretel' which was all about its psycho-sexual nature. It analyzed up, down, inside out, and sideways, and I thought it completely missed the fact that it's about a family during a famine who did not have enough food for their two children and themselves and so were going regretfully to dump the children. It's about two starving children who descend on this gingerbread house. The trail they leave is eaten by starving birds, and they themselves are immediately picked up by a woman as potential food. It's a story about hunger."

GW: "Academics can be incredibly obtuse."

NG: "One thing I've always wanted to ask you was, how involved were you in the creation of Pringles?"

GW: "I was the engineer on the original Pringles cooker. Pringles was invented by a German madman. He was making them with a kind of scissor and dip mechanism that wasn't adaptable to mass production. There was a four-man team, and I did the cooker that closed around the future potato chips and dragged them through the hot oil and opened them up and dumped them out. The fourth guy, who did the canning machine, they literally drove crazy with all their nitpicking and pressure to do better."

NG: "What do you think about the state of your career?"

GW: "I guess I'm not quite as optimistic now. In 1979, I was working as a technical editor. I had hopes of becoming rich and famous from my fiction. Those hopes have not eventuated. Neil Gaiman is far more famous than I am. I suspect he's also richer."

NG: "I probably am, but that's mainly just thanks to Hollywood. It's not a book thing. Movies are worth silly money is paid, and they do pay it to me. But you are in a very interesting position. If you asked people randomly on the street to name science fiction authors, they would probably not name Gene Wolfe, but if you asked science fiction authors, fantasists, horror writers, at this point they will all list Gene Wolfe. You are the writers' writer."

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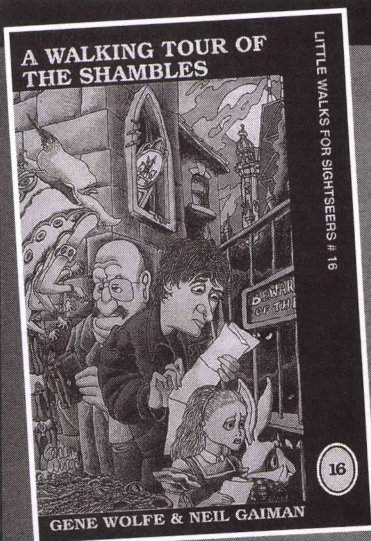
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