Gaiman, Neil (1960 – )

From Gale Biographies: Popular People


Born November 10, 1960, in Portchester, England; son of David Bernard (a vitamin company owner) and Sheila (a pharmacist) Gaiman; married Mary Therese McGrath, March 14, 1985, (divorced, c. 2008);
British author Neil Gaiman is best known for writing the popular comic book series *The Sandman*. He has also written novels, fiction for children, and scripts for television, radio, and film, as well as the occasional nonfiction work. Known for reinventing mythology, history, and cultural icons but with his own revisionist touches, Gaiman received much acclaim for his work. Describing Gaiman, Robert Wilonsky of the *Riverfront Times* wrote “Gaiman is, in fact, among the most daring writers around--audacious, almost to the point of arrogance. Who else would take it upon himself to rewrite our myths, rescue our gods, and refine and defile history to the point of recreating the entire universe in his own black-clad, pale-faced image?” Gaiman's best-selling novel *American Gods* was adapted into a TV series that premiered on Starz in April of 2017.

**Early Life and Career**

Born on November 10, 1960, in Portchester, England, Gaiman was the son of David and Sheila Gaiman. His father owned a vitamin company while his mother was a pharmacist. Raised in Sussex with his two younger sisters, Gaiman told CNN, “I was always the weird one. It never occurred to me that I was weird. The lovely thing about being the first child is that nobody has anything to measure against, so nobody knows they're weird.” He knew he wanted to be a writer from an early age and looked up to authors like C. S. Lewis and Michael Moorcock as his heroes. Gaiman received his education at Ardingly College, from 1970 to 1974, then the Whitgrift School, from 1974 to 1977.


From 1988 to 1996, Gaiman wrote 75 issues of the comic book series *The Sandman*. The series was targeted at an adult audience, sold more than a million copies a year, made Gaiman a cult star, and brought him much critical acclaim. Inspired by DC Comics' *Swamp Thing* as envisioned by Alan Moore, Gaiman used mythology and history, including such figures as William Shakespeare and G.K. Chesterton throughout stories that also featured adult themes and issues of modern day life. Many reviewers believed that Gaiman reinvented the comic book/graphic novel medium with *The Sandman*. Though he stopped writing *The Sandman* in 1996, he did write a few more graphic novels featuring Sandman in the early 2000s.

While writing *The Sandman*, Gaiman began writing other comics and graphic novels. Among the most popular was his 1990 comic miniseries *The Books of Magic*. This comic focuses on Timothy Hunter, a boy who learns he has great magical powers with the help of four mystery men. Gaiman also wrote graphic novels such as *The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of Mr. Punch*, illustrated by Dave McKean, whom he first worked with on the 1991 graphic novel *Violent Cases*. *The Tragical Comedy* is based on the classic children's puppet play Punch and Judy, though Gaiman's version explores its violence through the filter of adulthood.

**Wrote Novels for All Ages**

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Gaiman ventured into traditional fiction, becoming a respected novelist and children's author. His first novel, *Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch*, was cowritten with Terry Pratchett, had a comic tone, and was published in 1990. Gaiman then published the best-selling fantasy novel *Neverwhere* in 1996. This novel focused on a city worker in London who finds a secret world beneath the subway system. *Neverwhere* was later adapted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for television, but Gaiman was unhappy with the cheaply produced production.

In 1999 Gaiman found great success with his novel *Stardust*, based on his 1998 graphic novel *Stardust: Being a Romance within the Realms of the Faerie*. *Stardust*, which was originally written longhand with a fountain pen by the author, was a new fairy tale which dealt with common mythological themes such as faeries, witches, and magical creatures. The plot focused on a man looking for a star which fell to Earth so he can give it to the woman he loves.

Of the novel, Gaiman told Rob Elder of the *Oregonian*, “If anything, I'm a classicist. That's why I enjoyed writing *Stardust*; it was the joy of creating a new fairy tale.” Critics also praised the novel, with Kurt Lancaster of the *Christian Science Monitor* noting, “In a literary world that seems so full of Grishams and Clancys, it's delightful to find a fresh tale that evokes not just contemporary fantasy but such otherworldly classics by Spencer and Shakespeare.” *Stardust* later became a feature film.

By the time Gaiman put out *Stardust*, he had already published his first children's book, 1997's *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish*. The story focused on a kid who is often ignored by his father and decides his father is worth only two fish and a fishbowl owned by a friend. The child makes the trade, but his mother demands the return of her husband. The book was extremely well received, and publications such as *Newsweek* named it one of the best children's books published that year.

Before returning to children's fiction, Gaiman wrote another novel, the critically lauded *American Gods*, published in 2001. The magical realist, if not surreal, novel covered 20,000 years of American history. Gaiman looked at how the gods and goddesses brought by the many immigrants to the United States felt when they were abandoned and live on as blue-collar workers on the fringes of the modern life in the United States. Reviewing the book in the *Edmonton Sun*, Robert J. Wiersema called it "a sprawling, diverse and impressive work, drawing skillfully on dozens of mythological traditions, dancing through history and geography with abandon.” Gaiman also wrote and directed *A Short Film About John Bolton*, released in 2002.

**Writings Adapted for the Big Screen**

Also in 2002, Gaiman published one of his best-known fiction books for younger readers. Called *Coraline*, the 162-page novel is the dark adventure tale of a nine-year-old girl who finds a secret door in her new home, a house subdivided into three apartments. When she goes through the door, she finds a mirror image of her home and everyone from her life. This includes another set of parents who look exactly like her own except that they have buttons for eyes. While Coraline is showered with attention and gifts, she longs to return to her own world, but when she does, she finds that her parents are missing. She must save her parents as well as the souls of dead children.

The creative fantasy novel was praised by critics, including Sara O'Leary of the *Vancouver Sun* who wrote, “It seems to me that a lot of books written for young adults talk down to them. They also quite often seem to be peculiarly humourless. Gaiman falls into neither of these traps. Instead, this is a story you can almost imagine him telling for the sheer joy of it.” *Coraline* was also immensely popular with
readers both young and old, and Gaiman went on several well-attended book tours where he read the book cover to cover for audiences. *Coraline* was adapted for a film released in 2009 to much critical praise and box-office success.

After *Coraline*, Gaiman published several children's books, two novels for adults, and saw several film projects reach fruition. For children, 2003's *The Wolves in the Walls* tells the story of Lucy who knows wolves are in the walls of her family's home but her family does not believe her until it is almost too late. For adults, he published *Snow Glass Apples*, also in 2003, and the best-seller *Anansi Boys*, in 2005. The latter was seen as the epitome of the Gaiman novel, set in London but shaped by West African and Caribbean folklore. *Anansi Boys* contains, as Mike Doherty wrote in the *National Post*, "ordinary people who become enmeshed in extraordinary circumstances, mystic connections between people and places, bizarre dreamscapes where psychic battles are waged, and a preoccupation with the importance of stories." Gaiman also wrote two screenplays. The animated experimental *Mirrormask* hit theaters in 2005. With Roger Avary, Gaiman brought the mythical *Beowulf* to life for film viewers in 2007.

While Gaiman published a collection of short fiction, *Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders*, in 2006, much of his printed output consisted of works for younger readers in the early 2000s. Among his books for young readers put out in this time period were 2005's *Interworld*, 2007's *M Is for Magic*, and 2009's *Crazy Hair*. While *Interworld* was a fantasy novel about a boy who can jump through alternate universes written with Michael Reeves, *M Is for Magic* was a collection of stories for children. *Crazy Hair* was written for Gaiman's daughter Maddy who called him "Mr. Crazy Hair." The picture book consists of a poem about a girl named Bonnie who wants a man to keep his out-of-control hair in line. The man warns her that his hair has been growing since he was two and has any number of people trapped inside. When she tries to comb it despite his warnings, she too becomes ensnared forever. Gaiman won the prestigious Newbery Medal in 2009 for his 2008 book *The Graveyard Book*, a novel for young readers about a boy who is raised by ghosts.

As Gaiman became a star among young readers, he also began working on comics again and wrote both a musical and a nonfiction book about the mythology of China. Gaiman appreciated his success and his ability to put the projects he chose to work on into fruition. He told Wilonsky of the *Riverfront Times*, "I'm a lucky writer. I know too many writers, many of whom sell more books than I do, who consider themselves trapped... I am in this amazingly enviable position, because I write Neil Gaiman stories, and people know that you will get something entertaining, something you've not read before, and you will probably get something that isn't anything like the last thing. And if you don't like it, that's OK, because you'll probably like the one after that."

**Continued Career**

Gaiman continued to expand his reach in 2011 by penning an episode of the popular BBC television show *Doctor Who*. A lifelong fan of the show, Gaiman was excited to write an episode of the long-running series. In an interview with the BBC, Gaiman said of writing the episode, "It was easy, it was like coming home honestly. I don't remember enjoying anything quite as much for years." The author received a Hugo Award in 2012 for the *Doctor Who* "The Doctor's Wife." He again wrote for the series in 2013.

The start of the 2010s also marked a new era in Gaiman's personal life. On January 3, 2011, the author married musician Amanda Palmer in an unplanned ceremony at a friend's home. On his Web site, Gaiman

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wrote about the event, saying, “Probably getting married in a friend's parlour, with a dozen friends around who weren't really expecting this but who threw themselves into making a wedding for us out of nothing, and a daughter and a son lending their support and love, isn't how everyone would plan a wedding. But we'd been engaged exactly a year, and it felt incredibly right to improvise a wedding as we went along. So we did it. And were as happy as any two people had ever been.” The couple had a son, Anthony, born in September of 2015.

In 2013, Gaiman released the novel *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, which was voted book of the year by the British National Book Awards. The book follows a man who returns to his hometown for a funeral and reflects on the past and the present. As Gaiman continued to produce writings, the cable network Starz announced it had greenlit a television adaptation of his much acclaimed novel *American Gods*. The show premiered on Starz in April of 2017. Gaiman also released a nonfiction book of history around the same time titled *Norse Mythology*.

**Selected writings**

**Nonfiction**

- Duran Duran: The First Four Years of the Fab Five, Proteus (New York City), 1984.
- *The View from the Cheap Seats*, William Morrow (New York City), 2016.

**Novels**

- *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, William Morrow, 2013.

**Graphic novels and comic books**

• Signal to Noise, Dark Horse Comics (Milwaukie OR), 1992.
• The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of Mr. Punch, VG Graphics (London), 1994.
• Angela, Image (Anaheim CA), 1995.
• Stardust: Being a Romance within the Realms of the Faerie, DC Comics, 1998.
• Sandman: The Dream Hunters, DC Comics, 1999.
• Harlequin Valentine, Dark Horse Comics, 2001.
• Murder Mysteries, Dark Horse Comics, 2002.
• The Eternals, Marvel Comics (New York City), 2007.
• The Facts in the Case of the Departure of Miss Finch, Dark Horse Comics, 2008.
• Coraline, HarperCollins (New York City), 2008.
• Sandman: Game You Titan, 2011.
• Sandman: Season of Mist Titan, 2011.
• Miracleman Marvel, 2015.

Short stories

• (With Gentle, Mary ) Villains!, ROC (London), 1992.
• (With Mary Gentle; Roz Kaveney) The Weerde: Book One, ROC, 1992.
• Angels and Visitations: A Miscellany, DreamHaven Books and Art (Minneapolis MN), 1993.
• Smoke and Mirrors: Short Fictions and Illusions, Avon, 1998.
• Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders, Morrow, 2006.
• Trigger Warning: Short Fictions and Disturbances, Morrow, 2015.

Juvenile fiction

• The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish, Borealis/White Wolf (Clarkson GA), 1997.
• (With Reaves, Michael ) Interworld, Eos (New York City), 2005.
• Fortunately, the Milk, HarperCollins, 2013.

Plays


Periodicals

Age (Melbourne Australia), July 11, 2009, sec. A2, p. 29.
Riverfront Times (Missouri), July 19, 2000.
Star Tribune (Minneapolis Minnesota), October 14, 2005, p. 13F.

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