



Neil Gaiman

American Gods
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Q: *American Gods* envisions a world in which the old gods co-exist with the ordinary citizens of the world. What attracted you to this idea?

A: Mostly, how easily it allowed me to talk about the history and the mythography of part of America. If I'd tried to tell the story as more "mainstream" fiction I would have had to take much longer to tell a story over generations.

Q: In Norse mythology, Odin undergoes the trial of nine days hanging on an ash tree. Why did you decide to have Shadow, rather than Wednesday, obtain mystical insight through mortification of the flesh?

A: Wednesday had already hung from his tree. Now it was Shadow's turn.

Q: Throughout *American Gods*, you intersperse short, disparate narratives with the primary story of Shadow's odyssey. Why are these smaller stories integral to the novel as a whole?

A: Well, mostly they allow me to broaden the scope of the story. I wanted to show people coming to America, and bringing their gods with them, and abandoning them, over and over and over...

Q: Shadow reveals the seemingly benign figure of Hinzelmann as a monster, and the ostensibly frightening figure of Czernobog as affectionate and gentle. What is the attraction for you of characters who are the opposite of what they seem?

A: I've never known anyone who was what he or she seemed; or at least, was only what he or she seemed. People carry worlds within them.

Q: Many of your readers are familiar with Greek and Roman gods but ignorant of Norse gods. Was it your hope that *American Gods* might encourage a renewed interest in Norse mythology?

A: Not really. It was more that we are so familiar with the Greco-Roman gods, and it was harder to come up with ways that they could have come to the United States (although as I finished the book several fringe archaeological discoveries gave me ways I could have done it); and that the Norse myths are so bleak, and always end in Ragnarok . . .

Q: In your acknowledgments, you allude to the best line of dialogue in the epilogue, but you don't identify it. Can you let your readers in on the secret?

A: Well, it was my favorite line, and I stole it from Gene Wolfe, in a short story where he has St. Nicholas explaining his relationship to Santa Claus. "He is me, but I am not him." It seemed to encapsulate the relationship between my Odins very well . . .