

## **Interview with Neil Gaiman about the illustrated edition of *The Graveyard Book***

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**You've done a lot of collaborations with Dave. Each one is unique. How was this one different, for you?**

The trouble with them all being unique is that they're always different—this was done under strange time constraints, and most of the illustrations were conceived by Dave sitting next to me after he'd read it and saying "Tell me about the beginning of chapter 6," and then doodling, and getting me to describe the Arch to the Egyptian Walk and where exactly Bod was sitting...

**Did you have much input on the way the book is illustrated (besides the writing of the book, of course)?**

I saw some brush-pen work Dave did at a gallery exhibition last year and kept saying "I love that brush pen style... can you use that in *Graveyard Book*?" and he did. But I think he would have done anyway.

***The Jungle Book*, after which you named *The Graveyard Book*, has been described as a series of stories with moral lessons. Did you write the chapters of *The Graveyard Book* as separate stories, and were you aiming to imbue them with moral lessons?**

I must have missed the moral lessons in *The Jungle Book*. Yes, I wrote the chapters of the *Graveyard Book* as separate stories that form a novel. If there are any moral lessons in them, they are for the reader to discover.

**In the book, Bod draws attention to himself when he goes to school by intervening to try and prevent other small children from being picked on by bullies. Were you bullied when you were a boy?**

Sometimes. The worst time—I was about 12—I talked to my dad about it, and he showed me how to fight, and the next time the guy started in on me I hit him, as I'd been taught, and watched him run off in tears with a bleeding lip, and that ended that. But mostly bullying is more insidious, and much harder to stop.

**A lot of the book seems to be about boundaries and the (not always wise) crossing of them, and also how things change as perspective changes. Were those conscious themes?**

Yes. Well, the boundaries are always there—between the graveyard and the world beyond, between life and death, and the crossing of them.

**You did not write the book all at once, in order. How did that come about?  
Did you write it in order after you wrote Chapter Four (The Witch's Headstone)?**

I started with chapter four because it seemed the easiest way to head into the story without having to introduce anyone. Once that was done I wrote the first chapter, and then carried on in sequence.

**Did you have a particular graveyard in mind as you wrote *The Graveyard Book*?**

Several. It's partly Stoke Newington cemetery, superimposed on the landscape of the Glasgow Necropolis, with Highgate West on the back... probably a couple of others there too...

**Was the Sleer inspired by a particular myth or story? It's the sort of thing that feels new and familiar at the same time.**

The Witch's Headstone was inspired by The King's Ankus, one of the Jungle Book stories, in the same way that The Hounds of God was inspired by the Bandar Log story. In the King's Ankus there's a snake who guards old treasure—but the Sleer became much more important to the story than that snake ever was.

**If there were a companion volume made up of other stories or books that *you* have read that inspired or influenced characters or creatures in this book, what would you put in it? What are a few works that you would commend to the attention of readers who are intrigued by this sort of thing?**

*The Jungle Book*, Ray Bradbury's story "Homecoming", and the works of P.L. Travers leap to mind. And I'd point them at Diana Wynne Jones just in case the readers had missed them....

**What music were you listening to while you wrote *The Graveyard Book*?**

Whatever was playing on the iPod. Lots of Thea Gilmore and Jonathan Coulton and Magnetic Fields. Occasionally to get into the mood I'd play St Saens Danse Macabre.

**The song that Mistress Owens sings to Bod: it is your own composition?**

Oh yes. And I knew it would be finished, but I didn't know what the last three lines were until I got to them.

**Have you had or will you have it put to music?**

If I have to, I might, for the audio book. But I like the idea that each person who reads the book will make up their own tune for it...

**It is a captivating story and a lovely book. Thank you for talking to us about it.**