



Neil Gaiman with Sam Weller

SAM WELLER: Hello everybody, and welcome to *Ray Bradbury at 100*. Today we celebrate the centennial of the genius of one of our great imagineers, the late Ray Bradbury, who was born in 1920. I'm Sam Weller, two-time Bram Stoker Award-winning writer and the authorised biographer of Mr Bradbury. I had the incredible privilege of working with Ray intimately for 12 years on four books and a graphic novel. Today's event was originally intended to take place at the remarkable and one-of-a-kind Bath Festival, but in an ironic twist worthy of Ray Bradbury's magnum opus *Fahrenheit 451* we have moved our event to the virtual arena, broadcasting on to screens, into domiciles around the world. A bit of background on Mr Bradbury: Ray Bradbury was born on August 22nd 1920, at 4:50 in the afternoon. Imagine that – he missed 451 by just a single minute. Ray had an older brother and a beloved uncle die during the 1918 influenza pandemic. He lost his dear grandfather when he was just five years of age, and tragically his baby sister when he was just six. Ray came of age always on the precipice of poverty during the Great Depression. It was during these formative, all-important childhood years that Ray Bradbury discovered that creativity, art, story and imagination provided a portal away from these lingering sorrows. The Bradbury family moved to Hollywood when Ray was 13 years old, and he grew up a wild enthusiast of movies, now finding himself at play amidst the golden era of the silver screen. Ray graduated from Los Angeles High School in 1938 and, with no money to attend college and no formal writing training whatsoever, he went on to become one of our great imaginative storytellers. As a young writer, Ray dreamed of being shelved alongside his own heroes: Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, and HG Wells. But along the way he also found himself being shelved among the pantheon of great global literature, alongside everyone from William Shakespeare to Toni Morrison, and our special guest today. Ray went on to write touchstones of imaginative, poetic, humanist literature. He was often labelled a science fiction writer, but this moniker doesn't give you the full picture. He was a fantasist, a poet, a



philosopher and one of our great tellers of tales, a modern mythologist. Ray Bradbury went on to write the aforementioned *Fahrenheit 451*, one of the great works of dystopian literature; *The Martian Chronicles*; *Dandelion Wine*; *The Illustrated Man*; *Something Wicked This Way Comes*; and so many other works of unforgettable storytelling. He wrote volumes of poetry, essays, and designed architectural plans for theme parks and shopping plazas. He was an Academy Award nominee, an Emmy winner, and in 2004 I joined him at the White House where he was given the Medal of Arts from the President of the United States. Today we celebrate the centennial of this remarkable individual. On 1955 Ray Bradbury wrote a book entitled *The October Country*, a collection of short stories that captured a sort of autumnal other world. When Mr Bradbury passed away in 2012, as I often say, he handed the keys to the gates of the October Country to our very special guest today. It is my great honour to welcome Neil Gaiman, the gatekeeper to October Country. Neil Gaiman is the bestselling author and creator of books, short stories, graphic novels, film and television including *Neverwhere*, *Coraline*, *The Graveyard Book*, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, *The View from the Cheap Seats*, and the *Sandman* series of graphic novels, among many others. His fiction has received Newbery and Carnegie Medals, and Hugo, Nebula, World Fantasy, Bram Stoker and Eisner awards, among other awards and honours. He wrote and served as showrunner on the BBC/Amazon Prime mini-series adaptation of *Good Omens*, based on the 1990 book he co-wrote with Terry Pratchett. Originally from England, he lives in the United States, but today he beams to us from a temporary home in New Zealand. Welcome, Neil.

NEIL GAIMAN: Thank you. It's good to be here.

SW: How are you? It's so great of you to do this and to honour Ray. You're just such a generous soul in so many ways. You remind me of Ray Bradbury in that way, so thank you for doing this.

NG: Ray really was so generous. That was one of the things that I loved about Ray, having, you know – I first met him when I was young journalist of no account who happened to be invited to Ray's, I think it was, 70th birthday at the Natural History Museum in the UK. And he treated me like he treated the most important publishers there, like he treated the fancy



VIPs. There was absolutely never any side to him, and we were friends from that moment on.

SW: Well, he was a visionary who predicted the future, so he knew that you were probably the greatest VIP in the room. [Laughter.] Before we get into Ray, how are you doing in the midst of this crisis that I mentioned? Ray lived through, in some ways, the last crisis. How're you doing through this? You're in New Zealand...

NG: Yeah, I'm okay. It's weird. I happen to be in the, as far as I can tell, best place on the planet to be right now, run by sensible grown-ups, and it's a fabulous thing, and I feel very guilty. I'm here because my wife was at the very end of a 14-month tour, and the last place she was going to be was here in New Zealand. So this is where we wound up when it all went down. But one is very very aware, at all times, that the world is not in a good place, and it's very hard to be, right now, to feel half a world away from my friends, from my family, from loved ones. It's great that I'm here with Amanda and with our son Ash, but everything else is very difficult.

SW: Can I ask you how it is being creative in the midst of this sort of anxious moment in history. Are you able to be your normal creative self?

NG: When this started I went, 'Oh, this is going to be so great. I will have nothing to do except make art. I will have nothing to do except write. Nobody's going to expect anything of me; I will knock out novels like tossing pancakes. It's going to be easy and fun.' And then there was a period of about a month where we got some chickens and I fed the chickens. I would look after a four year old and read him a lot of books. I would be sad. And around the point where I decided that actually I was too worried about the world apparently even to make anything, I started making things, and discovered that actually I kind of can. But I can do it almost in the same way that I would read a book. I can do it right now almost as an escape. I just wrote a little *Good Omens* skit, a conversation between Crowley and Aziraphale that Michael and David will record for us in lockdown, and that will broadcast in about a week to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the publication of *Good Omens*. And that was fun. I started editing and writing a very, very silly children's book about frogs in Central



Park, and again it's sort of being done as a kind of weird little escape and also so that I've got something to read my son Ash in a couple of years when this is all over. But, you know, I wish I were one of those people who is doing lots and lots of writing and is unconcerned. Writers are definitely falling into two camps: the ones who are just getting on with it, and the ones who are astonished at their inability to write while everything is so uncertain and the world is so strange.

SW: You know, we talked at the top about Ray being such a generous and really hopeful man, and now that he's no longer with us – certainly he would say he is because his books are here, his books are with us – but the *man* is obviously no longer with us. And so people I think right now would turn to him and ask how we should get through this. How will we get through this? And I think in his absence we turn in many ways to you for advice. You are now in so many ways this voice of comfort and hope and grace. Do you have any thoughts on how we will endure through this?

NG: We will endure through this because people do endure through things. People all over the world endure much, much worse. I found myself unsurprised by this in some ways because my view of the world, my view of what was necessary in the world, changed significantly in May of 2014 when I went to Syrian refugee camps in Jordan and started talking to refugees and realised something I suppose I had known intellectually but had not fully comprehended, which was: these people were us. This was not a – there was nothing different between the people in the camps and the people outside the camps other than their world had become such a nightmare and civilisation had become so fragile that it had broken, and now they had had to – you know, anyone who was in the camps had crossed the desert, had seen people shot and killed around them. Anyone there had gone through an unspeakable nightmare. And I started realising then how fragile everything was, all of our systems. So feeling right now like, we are, yes, you're watching systems break, and that's something that's going to happen. Those systems work when everything works just fine. They even work when things kind of just more or less sort of work okay. Even right now, we are able to do things – I could still fly to England from New Zealand if I needed to. That is still possible right now. And then I remember what it was like just when the ash



cloud went off and one volcano happened, and you couldn't cross the Atlantic for a week. We're in a fragile world, but I don't think that's what Ray would say. I think what Ray would do is what I would also do when talking to a bigger audience, and I would concentrate on humanity; I would concentrate on art; I would concentrate on reminding us of our strength, of our integrity in the sense of we are – you know, we don't break as easily as we think we do. A long time ago I wrote a book called *Fragile Things*, about how fragile things were. I said, 'people break so easily and so do dreams and hearts' and then at the end of the introduction I started talking about how strong the things that we think of as fragile are. I said eggs, you know, you can break an egg, but I remember as a kid doing these weird tests of strength and discovering that an egg actually is a tiny little marble ball. You can stand on them, they would support incredible weights. Butterflies are the most fragile things in the world, but the flapping of a butterfly's wing in Brazil can create a hurricane across the world. Hearts can break, of course, but hearts are the toughest of muscles. Hearts can beat for hundreds of years, or at least more than 100 years, and just keep going. And that's kind of amazing. We are resilient. Right now we're in whatever – I don't think there's an English word for it, but we are in the place between the inhale and the exhale, between the exhale and the inhale. We are at that moment of stasis, of pause. We're in the themata, the cesura, in which we're not breathing. We're not exhaling, we're not inhaling; we're just waiting to see what's happening. And I think Ray would tell us that there is a future ahead and that the future is bright, and he would also say that we create it ourselves. I love the fact that – Ray's science fiction was never science fiction. It was never predictive except by accident. However, he wrote one story called, if memory serves, 'The Toynbee Convector' in which a time traveller goes into the future and comes back and describes this amazing place waiting for them. So people, knowing that there's an amazing place waiting for them, get on with making it. And they make the amazing place, and when they arrive there, in the future, in this amazing place, the guy admits that the Toynbee Convector was a hoax, that there was no time machine, but that what he did was focus the world on what they could do, what they could make and where they could go, and knowing that that was where they were going, went there. And that for me right now feels like the most important story Ray wrote for today. It's not the *Fahrenheit 451* with us all stuck in our walls, stuck in our rooms



not talking to anybody else, interacting with enormous TVs. That's something that he got right that's not a good thing. But the idea that we can create a future that is a hospitable place, and we can just do it by focusing and uniting and going there, that seems the most Ray Bradbury idea of all.

SW: Wow. That was absolutely beautiful. I'm so glad this is being recorded. You know, it's interesting that you should bring up 'The Toynbee Convector', because Ray told me often that the two questions he was asked the most in his travels as a renowned author were where, of course, do you get your ideas? Which I'm sure you get asked that on a daily basis. Seems a rather obvious question but yet people want to ask it all the time, 'Where do you get your ideas?' And then the other question he got asked frequently was, 'Of everything you've created, do you have a favourite?' And he refused to answer that question. He says, 'I have four daughters and eight grandchildren and if I pick a favourite, the others will be hurt. And so I mustn't pick a favourite book or a favourite story because all of my children will be wounded.' But late at night one evening in Hollywood – Ray of course never drove a car in the entirety of his life – and when he became successful he had a car and a driver. And it was very late at night in Los Angeles, and we were in the back of this town car and he turned to me and he said, 'You know I never like to name a favourite story, but,' he said, 'because of the message, I think 'The Toynbee Convector' might well be one of my favourite stories'. And I think you just absolutely summarised why that is. Is it the most elegant and poetic story? Probably not. But is the metaphor of it emblematic of who Ray Bradbury was as a human being, sharing his enthusiasm across the universe? Absolutely. So a question I want to ask you, and I know this story – you wrote about it in an introduction, I believe, to *The Machineries of Joy*, a special edition of *The Machineries of Joy* – what is your own Bradbury reading origin story? It seemed like you discovered Bradbury as a young man, but what is your origin story of that discovery?

NG: I discovered Bradbury as a boy even more than as a young man, which is even better. And I have a few different origin stories, all of them true because it took me a while to realise these were all the same person. I think the first Bradbury story I ever read that made an enormous impact on me, but it would then be another decade before I discovered who'd



written it, was 'Homecoming', which was just in a collection of hardback stories lent to me by my friend Christopher Harris's dad. And I don't even know if he actually lent it to me or if I simply took it and then returned it. And I didn't even take it because of 'Homecoming', I took it because it was a collection of stories that included a story by an author named Nelson Bond, called 'Mr Mergenthwirker's Lobblies' and I loved that title. 'Mr Mergenthwirker's Lobblies', what an amazing title that was. So I read this book and I absolutely saw myself in 'Homecoming' on a level that I had never seen myself in fiction before, possibly or since. Just the little kid, in the house full of cool monsters who knew what was going on and how to do amazing things. And their teeth were white and they could fly and they were filled with amazingness, and then here's this awkward kid who's human, and is broken and pitied by them because he's human. And for me I would just go, I read that story and felt understood because I wanted to be one of the monsters and I wasn't, I was just this human kid. So that was the first, and I probably would have been seven, maybe eight, when I read that. Then there was a copy of Ray's book *The Silver Locusts*.

SW: I love that title so much.

NG: It's so much better than *The Martian Chronicles*.

SW: It truly is. So the British edition of *The Martian Chronicles* is titled *The Silver Locusts*.

NG: And it had a slightly different story collection.

SW: It did.

NG: Which is only significant because for me one of the stories that was only in the British edition, 'Usher II', again, was one of these formative stories for me. I had never heard of Edgar Allan Poe, I didn't know who Edgar Allan Poe was, I didn't care who Edgar Allan Poe was, and now I'm nine years old, I'm reading 'Usher II' and here's a pit and a pendulum, and for the love of god Montresor and orangutan and I'm not really sure what's going on. It's a story that's kind of a prequel, or a spin-off or an alternate thing for *Fahrenheit 451*. It sets the *Fahrenheit 451* world on Mars as a bunch of critics and respectable people are walked



through a house which turns out to be an Edgar Allan Poe-type house of horrors and are murdered, although they all think robots are being murdered, but it's actually them that are being murdered, one by one. And again, there was something in me that responded to that story, responded to the horror, responded to everything that Ray was doing in there. And also made me go, 'Well, now I have to find Edgar Allan Poe'.

SW: Oh my goodness.

NG: I have to go and seek these people out. I have to understand these stories. So that was like a gateway, that was like a light opening. After that I would have been ten years old and at my school Ardingly College in Sussex in England. They had, when I was ten and 11, it had gone by the time I turned 12, they had once a term a travelling bookshop that was set up in the school music hall for a day. And it would set up there; they would put books up on shelves; and you could basically buy a couple of books and they would be put on your school bill. And that, for me, was like being a kid let loose in a magical candy store, because I didn't have the money to buy adult paperbacks, I read whatever I could find. I read everything in the school library, but suddenly I had power. And I remember going through every book because you had to know where your money was going and it was – it came down to a big choice between Ray Bradbury and John Wyndham, and Ray won because the covers at the time were so beautiful. And I've gone back and looked, and I happened to buy my books at the perfect time. All through the 1960s Ray Bradbury's covers were rather dull and photographic in the UK. For the second half of the 1970s into the 1980s, they were very sort of pulp and dry and not particularly amazing. But from like 1969 to 1973 they did these covers that were beautiful. Beautiful lettering, calligraphic, these fabulous images that were kind of small but haunting, and I bought myself, over several terms, *The Golden Apples of the Sun* and *Dandelion Wine*, and I loved *The Golden Apple of the Sun* because they were kind of science-fiction stories, they all took me to amazing places. I was baffled and frustrated by *Dandelion Wine* because I wanted it to be horror, or fantasy, or something, and it seemed to have been marketed to me as if it was fantasy so I was trying to figure out if I was missing the fantastic in there. And yet I loved it. Ray's evocation, I didn't realise this, these were basically just stories of Ray's childhood, by Ray, collected into a shape. Here he



was in Waukegan, Illinois calling it Greentown, Illinois, and this was Ray's world that he was giving me. And after that, after those two books, I obtained everything by Ray that I could, any time I was in a school library, anytime I was in a public library, anytime I had the pocket money to actually buy a book I would buy a book; any books I could borrow I would borrow, so by the time I was 14 or 15 I'd read everything of Ray's that you could easily get your hands on. He was there in my heart.

SW: That's beautiful.

NG: And also he became a writer that I aspired to be in the same way I think that I aspired to be Harlan Ellison. Not that I wanted to do what they did, but they did something that I loved, which was everything. They would write mainstream, and science fiction, and fantasy, and fiction, and nonfiction, and scripts, and here's Ray Bradbury writing *Moby Dick* with John Huston. Here's Ray deciding at an advanced age that he thought he'd write mysteries, and suddenly he's writing mystery novels. Nobody got to tell him what to do. If he wanted to be a poet, he'd be a poet. Whatever he wanted to write was what he wrote, and that was the thing that made me – that I was aspirational towards even as a kid. It was like, I didn't want to be a science-fiction writer, or a fantasy writer, or a children's author, or a nonfiction author. I wanted to be that thing that Ray was where what you did was, you wrote whatever you wanted, as far as I could tell, and it came out. And that seemed to be the best possible way of being an author.

SW: Oh my goodness. You know I knew him so well, he would be in tears listening to you right now and want to say, 'Come here and give me a hug'. I can hear him in my skull, reverberating and echoing. With his big hands, he would hug you with tears in his eyes and say, 'Thank you for that'. Did you come from a family of readers yourself? Were your parents readers, and were books important to your childhood? Obviously they were.

NG: They were. My mother wasn't much of a reader but she kept all - she'd been a reader as a child and she'd kept all of her children's books. So I had a beginning library of every important girls' book published between the 1920s and the mid-1940s, which means that I'm one of the few adult males who can talk about the Dimsie books or whatever, because I



read everything. My dad, I think my dad loved to read but didn't seem to do it very often. He would read when I had – I would occasionally press books upon him and he would always read them. And there would be books around that I never really knew if they were his or not, or if they'd simply been left in our house by people passing through. And at the time, as a child I think I always thought they were my dad's books, and in retrospect the variety of them and the fact that an awful lot of them seemed to have been bought in America meant, I think, that they'd been left in our house by people passing through.

SW: You just said that one of the things you sort of emulated in your own career looking at Ray and others – I know you've been influenced by so many greats that you have given credit to through your own generosity. But you just said that one of the things that you learnt from Bradbury is a sort of fearlessness of artistic boundaries and genres and lines and labels. What, if you think about it, do you think you learned as a prose stylist from Ray's writing?

NG: I learned not to be afraid of poetry. Ray was such an interesting writer. When Ray was at his best, which normally is in short story form, he could encapsulate – throw in a moment of poetry that would break your heart, just let the prose be beautiful. On the other hand, when Ray didn't have a lot to say and had a wordcount he wanted to hit, you could also sometimes see him retreating into poetry and writing a long and beautiful paragraph about leaves skittering across streets and whirling around and being swept up past the chimneys and the eaves and up into the waiting clouds looming like huge thunderheads, and you're going, 'Ray, you're actually just killing time here while you try to figure out what's going on.' You know, and 'you're also really aware that you're getting paid by the word and you're making sure that you've got enough words in here'. And I learned not – one of things I loved about Ray is his long-form fiction is lean. Many of his novels are barely novels. They're 40-50,000 words, they are – his best known novel is probably *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, and *Something Wicked This Way Comes* exists because Ray became friends with Gene Kelly. Gene was a director and an actor, and Ray decided to write Gene a story to act



in. And he loved the idea of a story with a 50-something star, and took a short story of his that was not a good short story.

SW: 'Black Ferris'.

NG: 'Black Ferris'. And one of the things I loved about Ray is that he would keep moving. He would write the next story, so you have a 'Homecoming' next to a 'Black Ferris'.

'Homecoming': one of the great pieces of art. If somebody said to me – it's one of the very few stories that changed my life when I was a kid that I've gone back to as an adult and gone 'You are just as good as I remember. You're probably better 'cause you do even more things.' And then you get a story like 'Black Ferris', which is barely plotted. There's a couple of kids who have noticed that there's a weird kid around who's actually a thief and a burglar, and he became a burglar because they noticed that actually he's the creepy guy who runs a carnival who rode the Ferris wheel backwards and became a kid. And they run after him, and then he gets onto the Ferris wheel to become an adult and they're in trouble, and they break the Ferris wheel. And it goes round, and now it's gone round and he's like a skeleton, 'cause he died! And he's still holding the loot that he ran off with! And it's like 'Ergharurrgh, Ray, okay, it was 3,000 words and you got paid for it. That is what's important.' But he took that story and he took Gene Kelly and he plotted a movie. And the movie that he plotted then, because it was a Ray style... you know, he plotted it into a movie script, which is the novella. And then, when nobody wanted to make that movie, he took his movie script and turned that into *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. He took on the things that he loved, he took elements of *The Circus of Dr Lao* by Charles Finney, and all of a sudden he made something that felt like it had no right to exist as these kids are going up against this hellish circus, and it's about the gulf between an old father and a young son, and it's beautifully plotted, and it is the length of a novel. But I love that it exists through a series of reflections, like the Hall of Mirrors that exists inside that book. This came to exist because of a sequence of reflections... I don't know how I got there. You asked me what influence Ray had on me and somehow I got there.



SW: Oh no, it's incredible. You've written so much about Ray, and you actually wrote an intro to an edition of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, and I think you so aptly articulated that the language is at times quite purple, but you called it a beautiful royal purple.

[laughter]

NG: I did? Good! Yes! That is exactly how I feel. Ray definitely – in my own prose I tend towards stripped down. I tend towards, um, and I think one of the reasons I do that is the years of writing comics just taught me economies. But, as I say, Ray taught me not to be scared of going royal purple when you need to. And I love that. I'm always willing to go there when the occasion demands. And also, the most important Ray lessons which I took away as a young man were just that you write. You do it. The idea of Ray in the library in Los Angeles where you could rent a typewriter for 25 cents an hour, or 25 cents a day, and you'd put your quarter in and you'd type, and that was Ray's source of income, but it was also how he was going to get good. And I love the fact you look at Ray and you don't go, 'Oh my God, you were the greatest writer in the world when you started', cause he wasn't. But what he did was, he kept writing until he got good, and that, for me as a 23 year old, who had maybe finished two short stories that weren't very good or publishable yet, who had written a children's book that nobody was ever going to read... but the knowledge that I could get good because Ray Bradbury could get good, that was huge for me. And he did it by writing, every day.

SW: He really did. You have a four-year-old son now. I imagine you probably haven't introduced Ash to Ray Bradbury. Maybe you have, but if you haven't, what is the story you will go to to introduce Ash to Ray Bradbury?

NG: What a great question. Um. Maybe *The Halloween Tree*? Maybe, it depends what age he becomes a reader for himself who does not rely on pictures. I might very well simply make sure, if I can, that there are copies of *R is for Rocket* and *S is for Space* just knocking around the house ready to be picked up. On the other hand, I would also do a Halloween



reading. And there is a night... you know, Ray wrote some really dark and glorious horror stories.

SW: He truly did.

NG: One of the weird things about Ray is that he's not remembered as a writer of horror. Nobody – if you ask people what Ray Bradbury wrote I don't think anybody says, 'Well, he wrote horror'. However, you could put together 1,000 page volume of the best horror of Ray Bradbury and you wouldn't have scratched the surface, there is so much darkness in there. And I think a lot of the really... it's almost sad that when they did *R is for Rocket* and *S is for Space* for kids, they didn't also do *N is for Nightmare*. Because they could have done some of those *October Country* stories, some of those – what was the story about where they're in the basement at Halloween passing around the things that are meant to represent awfulness? [crosstalk] It's the one where they're holding what they're told are eyeballs and they're like 'no no no it's just grapes, peeled grapes'. And then you realise, no, they're holding eyeballs and this father has murdered his oh my god this is awful. So, you know, I think, depending on what kind of kid he grows up to – and this is merely talking about my son who is the most zombie-obsessed four-year-old I've ever encountered – if he continues this absolute love of the things of horror, I would probably read him some of those stories early on. 'Boys, You Can Grow Mushrooms in Your Cellar', or one of those lovely scary things.

SW; You mentioned *The October Country* which of course was a reimagining of his first book, *Dark Carnival*, which was published out of Sauk City, Wisconsin in 1947 by August Derleth.

NG: By Arkham House?

SW: By Arkham House, exactly. And you're so right that so few people reference Ray Bradbury as a horror writer. You, of course, are referencing it. Stephen King called that book 'the *Dubliners* of American Gothic'. I think it's aptly stated, it's so true. And I think you have some in in the publishing industry, and *N is for Nightmares* should be a book that comes out



in 2021. I know I've kept you a while, you've been really gracious with your time celebrating Ray. I know you met him and knew him, and he loved you and thought so highly of you and your work. He delighted every time he heard your name, and your books came into his mailbox he was thrilled with it. He really adored you. I know he gave you a message by video very late in life, just before his passing. He would be so grateful, Neil, that you've taken the time to do this. As I said at the beginning, I think in so many ways – we just talked about October Country – I think you are the inheritor of those iron-clad keys that lead to the gates of that fantastic dark milieu, if you will. And Ray wrote a beautiful passage introducing that 1955 book *The October Country* describing what the October Country was. And I told you before started, before we started taping, that I think there is no greater authorial voice, no greater reader of work than the mighty Neil Gaiman. You are so fantastic at reading, it makes me wish Charles Dickens had audiobooks, you know, back then. I don't think there's anybody around who can read quite like you do, Neil. Even Ray Bradbury couldn't even come close to the way that you read your work. And I'm wondering if you would gift us all, as a 100th birthday present to Ray, a reading of the passage from his 1955 classic, *The October Country*.

NG: Of course. Like you, I wish that we'd been able to record things back when Charles Dickens was doing his readings. That would be – the things that I'd love to listen to. And before I read this, I just want to say how much I miss Ray. We used to arrange things so that we'd do signings side by side, and whenever I would go to San Diego Comic Con, the San Diego Comic Con people would always just make sure that I was doing my signing next to Ray when he was doing his signing, just so that we got a little bit of time together before the signing and a bit after, and just got to check in with each other. I miss him so much. Okay. "That country where it is always turning late in the year. That country where the hills are fog and the rivers are mist; where noons go quickly, dusks and twilights linger, and midnights stay. That country composed in the main of cellars, sub-cellars, coal-bins, closets, attics, and pantries faced away from the sun. That country whose people are autumn people, thinking only autumn thoughts. Whose people passing at night on the empty walks sound like rain." That's the October Country.



SW: Thank you, Neil Gaiman, thank you. Thank for celebrating Ray's 100th. Be well, and again, we're so indebted to you for your generosity in spending some time talking about the great Ray Bradbury. Thank you so much.

NG: Thank you, Sam.

SW: Bye bye.