

Gene Wolfe, levels of fame

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 03 Aug 2001, 13:50

I had a conversation with Gene Wolfe a few years ago now, and we got the important topic over with quickly and then just chatted about things that were of more interest and more important in the bigger picture.

He has ridden a camel before.

I don't remember right now how we got to camels, but I'm not straining myself because the one topic I'm trying to tell you about today is "levels of fame," and I do recollect how we got there.

Some short time before the time we were talking, a Chicago area newspaper had run a piece on him. (That's a whole story in itself--like many things, it had a long lead time, and oddly enough I knew about it early on. Well it seems odd to me, you probably think it quite natural.) I asked him how it was received and he said it was good; he would be out watering the front lawn and some car going by would honk, and the smiling people waving, while he looked up at them with a "Who are you?" expression. Strangers at the market saying "Hi Gene!" Stuff like that.

So then we were talking about levels of fame. He said that Stephen King's level of fame is, or looks to be, something like a curse; he remembered when "Steve" used to come to conventions, and then some fans would camp on his hotel door-step. As his fame continued to rocket up, well . . . he stopped going to conventions.

Thus the "King" level is burdensome.

But now Anne McCaffrey, there's a level of fame! Gene Wolfe told me about the times he has seen lines of fans at conventions waiting to get books signed (you've been there, you know what it is like), but the McCaffrey fans--grown women and men, fanning themselves in agitation, murmuring "Anne McCaffrey, Anne McCaffrey." So revved up their faces flush, they burst into tears.

Gene Wolfe is really impressed with that.

So look, you: I'm not telling you what to do. I'm just saying, when you go to the conventions, when you are waiting in the line for Gene Wolfe to sign your copy of THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN, go ahead and let your enthusiasm show. Don't hold it in like some sort of stoic or ashamed fanboy: let your eyes sparkle, hop with excitement, faint if you like, or burst into joyous tears when you reach the table.

I'm talking to you, men. (Of course women can do the same if they like.)

=mantis=