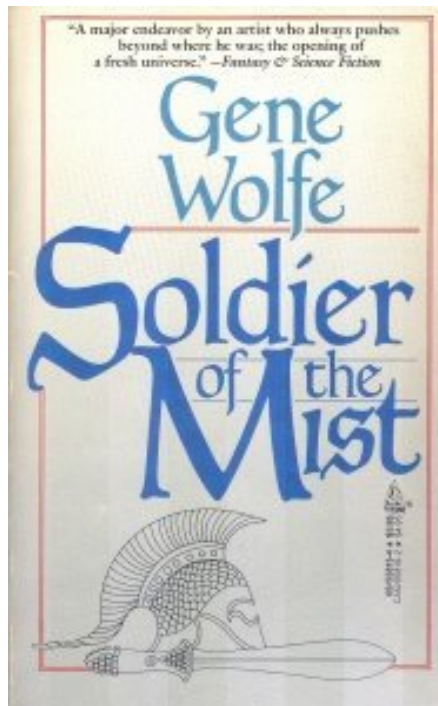




## Soldier of the Mist

*Gene Wolfe*

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# Soldier of the Mist

*Gene Wolfe*

## **Soldier of the Mist** Gene Wolfe

Gene Wolfe has turned to the fantastic historical world of Greece, in 479 B.C., when the gods walked the Earth. Latro, a mercenary soldier from the north, has suffered a head wound in battle and has been separated from his compatriots. He has not only lost the memory of who he is and where he is from, he has also lost the ability to remember from day to day and must live out of context in an eternal present, every day rediscovering the shreds of his identity and the nature of the world around him, aided only by a written record that he attempts to continue daily and must read every morning.

But in recompense for his unhappy condition Latro has received the ability to see and converse with invisible beings, all the gods and goddesses, ghosts and demons and werewolves, who inhabit the land and affect the lives of others, all unseen. Everyone knows that supernatural creatures are constantly around them and sometimes, under special circumstances, can perceive them—but Latro is now constantly able to penetrate the veil of the supernatural, which is both a triumph and a danger.

## **Soldier of the Mist Details**

Date : Published December 31st 1987 by Tor Books (first published 1986)

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Author : Gene Wolfe

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## From Reader Review Soldier of the Mist for online ebook

**Jason says**

5 Stars

"I shook my head. "Knowledge is soon changed, then lost in the mist, an echo half-heard.""

"If I had ever known them, they were lost in the mist, lost forever as though they had never been."

Soldier of the Mist is an incredible gem. It took me a long time to read it as it had to be savored. I have read other books by Gene Wolfe and already considered myself a fan, but to me this book was so much more than the other novels of his that I have read. This is a novel that reads like a historical fiction book with a spattering of poetry. The story combined with the eloquent writing made this seem like old school poetry to me.

What an amazing story and what a journey for our damaged protagonist Latro. This is a story that is a cross between Chris Nolan's Memento and the Iliad. Wolfe has created a work of art that really took me by surprise. The main plot is worth the read in itself. The amazing places that it takes us the icing on the cake. Our hero is a soldier and a slave and a man without a past. He suffers a grievous head wound that should have killed him but thanks to the Gods that intervene he survives. Problem is he cannot remember one day to the next if not for the scroll that he writes everything down in. On the plus side Latro can now commune with the Gods as a result of his wound and what a motley crew do they turn out to be. Simply magical.

A snippet :

""Then you shall have such gifts as are mine to give. Hear my attributes: I am a god of divination, of music, of death, and of healing; I am the slayer of wolves and the master of the sun. I prophesy that though you will wander far in search of your home, you will not find it until you are farthest from it. Once only, you will sing as men sang in the Age of Gold to the playing of the gods.

Long after, you will find what you seek in the dead city.

"Though healing is mine, I cannot heal you, nor would I if I could; by the shrine of the Great Mother you fell, to a shrine of hers you must return. Then she will point the way, and in the end the wolf's tooth will return to her who sent it."

A poem that is relevant to the story:

""Look under the sun, if you would see!

Sing! Make sacrifice to me!

But you must cross the narrow sea.

The wolf that howls has wrought you woe!

To that dog's mistress you must go!

Her hearth burns in the room below.

I send you to the God Unseen!

Whose temple lies in Death's terrene!

There you shall learn why He's not seen.  
Sing then, and make the hills resound!  
King, nymph, and priest shall gather round!  
Wolf, faun, and nymph, spellbound.””

This is a masterpiece of writing and story telling and it does not even matter that more books follow this one.  
My highest recommendations.

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### **Serena says**

I imagine a Romanticized reason to why we call the language of Rome, Latin, is for their latro, or soldiers.  
However, that's not a true linguist root.

I have wanted to read this series for many years, before, in fact, the Percy Jackson books came out, but it's one of those books which I had never much luck in finding. If honest I am touchy about historical fantasy and mythology, if done wrong, I can't seem to keep my temper and it will sour my reading for weeks - if done right (and this is done almost PERFECTLY!) I just adore it to pieces.

Latro wakes after a battle (based on a factual battle in 479 BC which Herodotos relates) with a head injury, he doesn't know his name, his people, his home, or even what side of the battle he had been fighting on! But, it's supposed by the physician that is the Great King's although no one knows his true name, his friend known throughout the book only as the mysterious "black man", who speaks neither Hellenic Greek or the language that Latro naturally writes in, yet remains a loyal if silent friend, with a equally unknown past, while they communicate in a finger language.

It is soon found that Latro has offended Demeter, the Great Mother, and at the dawn of each day he forgets what he knew the day previously. Yet without the mist of memory he sees the divine gods and goddesses of Greece. On his journey he is helped by Io and Pindaros, enslaved by Hypereides, Kalleos and the 'Rope Men' regent, Pausanias.

What Latro's most desires is to find his friends, and, he hopes, countrymen, and this is promised to him by a daughter of Demeter, but the promises and favors of goddesses can be perilous as Eurykles, or "Drakaina" could prove at the end.

There is a certain charm in the use of "translated" places names from Greece by Latro, that gives a sense of displaced wrongness throughout, and pulls sympathy to Latro and his journey.

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### **Alendi says**

Gene Wolfe sí que sabe escribir. Es uno de esos autores con un estilo único, que se distingue en cada uno de sus libros. Una narrativa más elaborada y bonita de lo habitual en el género, esas historias diferentes, estructuradas de un modo un tanto oscuro y que ponen a prueba la atención del lector. Un autor exigente, pero que compensa.

"Soldado de la niebla" es como coger un clásico de mitología griega, la ambientación, la terminología, se nota que están bien estudiados. Además no recurre a explicaciones burdas y extensas para poner en situación

al lector. La información está ahí, y a poco que sepas algo de mitología griega, empezarás a ver muchas de las referencias, aunque admito que buena parte se me escapaban. Sin embargo, y eso es lo bueno, no necesitas entender quién es cada dios ni cada ciudad (pues no los nombra por los nombres con los que los conocemos actualmente) para disfrutar de la novela.

La única pega que le veo es que el final del libro es un corte bastante brusco. La búsqueda de Latro sigue a mitad, y si bien algo ha avanzado, queda la sensación de que no hemos visto más que escenas aisladas de un camino que bien podría ser interminable. Con esto no digo que el libro no merezca la pena, cada capítulo es una preciosidad, pero admito que me siento tentado con coger algún otro libro de Gene Wolfe antes que seguir con esta historia en Soldado de Sidón.

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## Terry says

3.5 to 4 stars

Perhaps I'm finally growing into Gene Wolfe. There are still a lot of things about his writing that irritate me, but now that I've got a fair number of his works under my belt (some even read multiple times) and have a clearer idea of what to expect I am finding myself more able to accept most of these elements as challenging rather than offensive. I've come to expect several things from a book by Gene Wolfe: an unreliable narrator of course (this narrator tends to be a 'hero' with exceptional abilities granted either through birth or the blessings of the gods and is usually irresistible to the opposite sex, a bit of a pill personality wise and often follows some version of the 'innocent fool' template mixed with the more traditional martial hero and who tends to be less interesting than the secondary characters around him); a puzzle-like narrative that obscures more than it reveals and implies more than it states; erudition that can be somewhat oppressive in its range and obscurantism; the encroachment upon the mundane by the supernatural in both physical and immaterial ways (often in the guise of the inexplicable interference of gods or godlike beings with an agenda for the outcome of human affairs...water gods and nymphs are an especial favourite); and finally a favourite chestnut of Wolfe's is the inclusion of some kind of vampire-like creature and/or a shapeshifter. *Soldier in the Mist* certainly partakes liberally of all of these.

I might go so far as to say that Latro, the main character in *Soldier of the Mist*, is pretty much Gene Wolfe's wet-dream of a protagonist. Here we get a narrator so unreliable that he has to sift through his own words each day in order to make sense of them, never mind the poor reader! In this Latro is pretty much the polar opposite of Severian, Wolfe's hero from the New Sun series: where the young torturer-apprentice from the last days of Urth was cursed with an eidetic memory (which he still parsed to his own convenience) Latro is cursed with a loss of short-term memory that makes him unable to remember anything that happened to him on the previous day. This state of affairs was brought about by a head injury suffered by the mercenary in (as we find out through the course of events) the battle of Plataea as he fought for the Persian King Xerxes against the Greek Confederacy. The resulting story follows a format not altogether unlike the movie 'Memento' in which a character in a similar situation was forced to rely on post-it notes, journals, and tattoos to help him remember who he was and that he was on a path of vengeance. For his part Latro has been writing out the events of each day on a scroll and is forced, at least at those times when he is lucky enough either to be reminded by others or happens to read the injunction to "Read This Every Day" that is emblazoned on the outside of his scroll, to go back and read his own composition in order to understand where he is and who everyone around him might be. Like I said...the perfect Gene Wolfe narrator. The reader of course participates in this attempt to make sense of strange and inexplicable events at the same time as Latro does.

To add to the confusion for the modern reader (and really, it wouldn't be a Gene Wolfe book if he wasn't

trying to confuse you now would it?) is the fact that we are placed squarely in the ancient world and Latro tells us the names of events, places and characters in a literal, and sometimes misconstrued, translation of their name. Thus, for example, Athens becomes “Thought”, the island of Achaia is “Redface Island”, and Corinth becomes “Tower Hill”. I have to admit that I found this aspect of the novel to be something that added to the flavour of the text for me as opposed to one that jarred. I suppose I felt that in adding to the strangeness of the names of places that would otherwise seem too familiar to me from other sources I was better able to approach the world of classical Greece in a new and interesting way. The final layer of confusion and obfuscation is added by the fact that in this world the gods and eldritch beings of classical mythology do indeed walk amongst men and are ever ready to utter a gnomic phrase or attempt to further their own mysterious ends by manipulating mere mortals. They are usually invisible to those who walk only in the mundane world, but as strange things begin to come visibly to the fore as we read it becomes apparent that a bizarre side-effect of Latro’s injury is an ability to see this invisible world clearly (though of course it’s always possible that Latro is just having hallucinations). Sometimes these supernatural beings attempt to aid Latro with cryptic guidance while others seem inimical to whatever actions he attempts to take. Either way it becomes apparent that he is a pawn in their great game.

In essence the story is about Latro’s quest to be healed of his malady, or barring that to at least find out where he comes from and return to his native land. Of course, even with a prophecy from the Shining God to guide him (or perhaps because of it) things are not that easy. We follow Latro across the land of the Hellenes as he attempts to follow the path laid out for him by the god with the aid of several new friends and allies he picks up along the way. We are treated throughout to a view of the Greek Confederacy during the time of the Graeco-Persian wars from the point of view of a true outsider. We also glimpse many of the gods and supernatural beings with which their country appears to be densely populated and learn that more often than not human events appear to have been driven by the will of the gods and reflect wars that, while perhaps more grand in their scope, are no less petty in their motivations. I especially enjoyed Wolfe’s characterization of the gods which seemed to be partially Graves-ian in the anthropological and geographical emphasis he placed on their names, powers, and nature, but which didn’t lose its eldritch character for all of that. These are not the relatively clear-cut (though all-too human) versions of the Greek gods most readers may be more familiar with. Beneath the veneer of civilization and regal glory the chthonic hearts of these gods are dark and dangerous indeed. The world of ancient Greece that Wolfe presents is a fascinating one and the struggles and wars of the gods that impinge upon the world of mortals is intriguing, he seems to have a real flair for the numinous and its impact on human life. I think having just finished *The Iliad* was a distinct advantage for me in coming to this book. Not only was I still ‘in the mood’ for the world of ancient Greece, but I was even able to see some of the same concerns (and many of the same characters) even though the events portrayed in *Soldier of the Mist* are happening centuries after the fall of Troy. I also didn’t get the feeling that Wolfe was simply writing modern characters into an ancient setting, his characters were relatable and all displayed familiar aspects of human nature that rang true, but they also seemed to be uniquely suited to (and representative of) their own milieu. I quite enjoyed this book and dove immediately into the sequel *Soldier of Arete*. I haven’t lost all of my reservations in regards to Wolfe’s method and madness, but overall I think I’m becoming more willing to sit back and enjoy the ride...I just make sure to stop and look around a lot more than I might feel is needed for another author.

Also posted at Shelf Inflicted

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## **Evan says**

Imagine *Momento* smashed into *American Gods* but actually set in ancient Greece. And then take away the ending.

You might get pretty close to *Soldier of the Mist*, which turns out to be a very good book. It takes a bit of knowledge about the geopolitical landscape of the time to get everything out of it, but it's not totally required. It does have a sequel, so the lack of ending thing is only partially reprehensible. Overall, worth the read.

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### **Clement Kent says**

I like to alternate books that make me think with easier ones. This book is at the head of the "make me think" list. Wolfe makes the reader work to get everything that's going on (and I'm never sure I DID get everything). So, if that sounds awful to you, skip this book!

On the other hand, if you want a fun and challenging way of learning about Greek mythology on the one hand and the Persian-Greek wars on the other, this is it. I first read it when it came out, without the benefit of the internet; now I would read it with a search engine and Wikipedia at hand, to try to catch all the references. What makes this fun rather than a chore is the way Wolfe has taken historical and mythological narratives we may have found dry in high school and made them live through the eyes of one man experiencing them without understanding them.

A great book, but not for everyone.

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### **Max says**

A fun lark from Wolfe. I wish that I could rate this a 4 (or even 5) for the quality of the prose and the immersive world Wolfe has created, but my enjoyment was hampered at several points by Wolfe's fucked up gender politics. Having read something like 8 or 9 of his books now, I'm seriously sick of Every. Single. Female. Character. being either a naïve child, a magical entity/godess (who is usually trying to kill or seduce the protagonist), or literally a prostitute. I am seriously starting to get the feeling that Gene Wolfe does not view females as fully human. It's fucking horrible.

But I must be honest and talk about how I loved this book. Really loved it. Latro is possibly the first ever Gene Wolfe protagonist I have liked and rooted for. His voice is a pretty awesome creation, and it's fun to watch Wolfe play with his style and take on kinds of writing he has largely avoided in other books. It was also obvious he had a hell of a lot of fun writing this book. He clearly loves the setting, and has always wanted to write about it.

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### **Daniel Polansky says**

Frequent readers (Surely there must be some better use of your...that is to say, one might learn Spanish or perhaps do a puzzle...well, you're here already, might as well stay) will know that I have a complicated relationship with Gene Wolfe. For *The Book of the New Sun*, his marvelous short fiction, and the truly masterful *Peace*, I would argue that Wolfe is one of and probably the foremost living writer of speculative fiction, that is to say, fiction. And yet the rest of his work I confess to finding generally impenetrable, even viewed with the most positive possible spin. (I feel comfortable writing bad things about a beloved literary hero of mine because a) he will never, ever read this and b) Wolfe is of that class of writer who deserves to be discussed not simply with enthusiasm but with serious, studious contemplation, contemplation which may

led to criticism.) Soldiers of the Mist and Soldiers of Arete are the story of the falsely-named Latro, who suffers a wound during the Persian Wars which renders him lose his memory each evening but which also allows him to see the ways in which the gods interact directly with humanity. He wanders about Greece and Asia Minor, trying to find a way to restore his memory and interacting with the heroes and gods of classical Greece. The clever conceit with Latro's memory allows Wolfe to indulge in a late period tic he developed, that of roughly ending a chapter and using the bulk of the next to explain, in his loose way, to the degree that Wolfe ever explains anything, what exactly happened in the preceding entry. In Book of The Long Sun this tendency drove me absolutely apeshit, but here it works much better, and Wolfe does (as he always does) some clever things with Latro's memory and observations. Wolfe is an intentionally frustrating writer, and when that works, it works to great effect. But often it comes off as over coy, his refusal to describe any character in useful detail, or shoving a critical but not particularly clever clue into a dull front half of a paragraph. Here also, in true Wolfe fashion, we have his predilection for long digressions about what are clearly specific interests of his, sword fighting or siege craft, that drag down the narrative and just generally seem unacceptable in a book which often refuses to provide basic information on far more relevant concerns. Finally and most critically, Wolfe's characters here seem terribly thin, really the faintest of possible sketches. One gets the sense that he is not really interested in them, nor for that matter in the prose itself, but only in the skeleton beneath it, in his own love of riddle.

But of course, it goes without saying that he has a genius for said riddles, a genius which few other writers, certainly no one who is considered a direct competitor, can honestly claim. When one of the more significant puzzles does work, and when you are clever enough to understand it, the sensation can be quite thrilling. Which is, I suppose, to say that this is another book which I did not like particularly but reconfirms (needlessly) my faith in Gene Wolfe's unique powers.

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## Liviu says

very good stuff; almost done with it and will talk more soon; next in my GW oeuvre read either the next Soldier or the refresher of long Sun so I can get to Short Sun

finished this a few days ago and while I generally liked it and thought it had very interesting stuff, the premise do wears slightly thin on occasion, especially towards the end; still worth for the ingenuity of the author and the combination of realism and fantasy, but not sure when I will get to the next book as the repetitiveness (Latro wakes up and does not know who he is and what he did, has to read his journal etc) means one takes it in small chunks separated in time

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## Nick says

I read this years ago, and re-read it a few years after that. I was mystified the first time I read it, then taken with certain parts the next. This time I saw the thing as a whole, and a very productive one. In other words, I like it better each time around. The idea of our soldier having his memory erased each time he sleeps, so that he has to meticulously record his fantastic adventures, makes my skin crawl. Could these adventures be simply the product of a warped mind? No matter. Ancient Greece is knocked on its backside by these adventures, and I feel all the more refreshed for it.

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## Panagiotis says

Τέλει?νοντας το πρ?το βιβλ?ο μιας διλογ?ας, η οπο?α μετ? απ? 16 χρ?νια, αναπ?ντεχα, ?γινε τριλογ?α, σκ?φτηκα πολλ? πρ?ματα. Πρ?ματα σχετικ? με την ?δικη μο?ρα που φά?νεται να κινε?ται υπ? τα α?ρατα χ?ρια αυτ?ς της οντ?τητας που ονομ?ζουμε συγκυρ?ες. Μ?πως οι β?ναυσοι, αρχα?οι θεο? ζουν, και πα?ζουν με τις ζω?ς μας; Ειδ?λλως πως εξηγε?ται ο Γο?λφ να μην ?χει μια ?λλη θ?ση στην συνε?δηση του λογοτεχνικο? γ?γνεσθαι;

Ο Λ?τρο, ?νομα που σημα?νει μισθοφ?ρος στα λατινικ?, ε?ναι ?νας νεαρ?ς στρατι?της που ?χει πρ?βλημα με το μνημονικ? του. Κ?θε μ?ρα ξεχν?ει τα π?ντα, και ζει σα να ε?ναι μια καινο?ρια μ?ρα. Ο Γουλφ, του οπο?ου μια απ? τις εμμον?ς που ορ?ζουν τα γραπτ? του ε?ναι η προ?λευση του γραπτο? που κρατ?ει στα χ?ρια του ως εκδομ?νου υπ? το ?νομα Γουλφ, μας λ?ει πως αυτ? που θα διαβ?σουμε ε?ναι το ημερολ?γιο του πρωταγωνιστ?. Γρ?φει κ?θε μ?ρα για να ξ?ρει ποιος ε?ναι και απ? ποιους περιστοιχ?ζεται. Τοποθετημ?νος στην Αρχα?α Ελλ?δα, λ?γο πριν την κλασικ? της περ?οδο, και μετ? την μ?χη των Πλαται?ν, ο Λ?τρο (ο ?διος αμφισβητε? πως ε?ναι το αληθιν? του ?νομα) θα π?ρει τον αναγν?στη σε ?να ταξ?δι. Θα γνωρ?σει πολ? κ?σμο, θα συνομιλ?σει με θεο?ς (μπορε? και τους βλ?πει, και καμι? φορ? κι αυτο? που ε?ναι μαζ? του), απ? την Αθ?να θα φτ?σει στο Αιγα?ο και ο τ?μος θα κλε?σει λ?γο με την πολιορκ?α της π?λης της Σηστο?.

Ο Γουλφ γρ?φει ?πως κανε?ς ?λλος, κι αυτ? δεν το διατυπ?νω με δι?θεση εκθειασμο? του (αν και τον λατρε?ω), αλλ? ως μια διαπ?στωση και αποτ?μηση της γραφ?ς του. Τα ?ρια των συμβ?σεων της μυθοπλασ?ας, β?βαια, ορ?ζουν μια μορφ? απ? την οπο?α κανε?ς δεν ξεφε?γει, εκτ?ς κι αν θ?λει να γ?νει πειραματικ?ς. Ο Γουλφ δεν ε?ναι πειραματικ?ς, δημιουργε? εντ?ς αυτ?ν των ορ?ων, και εκε? μ?σα δεν ?χει ?μοι? του. Πα?ζει με τις λ?ξεις με π?θος και πα?ζει με τις προσδοκ?ες του αναγν?στη, ο οπο?ος καλ? θα ε?ναι να μην σαχλαμαρ?ζει ?ταν διαβ?ζει βιβλ?α του. Κ?θε τι που γρ?φει ο Γουλφ ?χει την θ?ση του και ο προσεκτικ?ς αναγν?στης θα ανταμειφθε? στο τ?λος για την προσ?λωσ? του.

Το?το το πρ?το βιβλ?ο ε?ναι ?να κομψοτ?χνημα που θα πρ?πει να κ?νει πολλο?ς συγγραφε?ς να ντρ?πονται για τις ευκολ?ες στις οπο?ες υποπ?πτουν για να γρ?ψουν μια ιστορ?α. Τ?ποτα δεν ε?ναι αυτ? που φά?νεται, μα ?λα, ?μως, ε?ναι μπροστ? μας, καθ?ς γυρν?με τις σελ?δες. Το, ομολογουμ?νως, ιδια?τερο δημιο?ργημα του Ισιγκο?ρο με μια Βρεταν?α χαμ?νη στις ομ?χλες, φαντ?ζει ως μια απλ?ς χαριτωμ?νη ιστορ?α μπροστ? σε το?το το βιβλ?ο. Ο Γουλφ δε?χνει π?ς πρ?πει να γραφτε? ?να πραγματικ? ιστορικ? μυθιστ?ρημα, ευφ?νταστο, με π?να εμβριθ?, πολυμαθ? και σικ?τη.

## Jerry says

*Soldier of the Mist* is even better than *The Shadow of the Torturer*. It is exquisitely written, around the legends of Greece around the Battle of Plataea and a year or so beyond. Wolfe uses what we know of the legends of the time to build a strange story of memory and gods.

The main character was injured during the battle, and has acquired a misty memory and a shadowy existence.

He forgets everything about a day or a bit less after it happens; to compensate for this he keeps a diary, and the only things we know about him we know through this diary. For the most part, the only things he knows about himself, he knows through that diary, and often he doesn't even know that because he hasn't read it through.

He also can see the world of the gods, and sometimes bring them out of their shadowy existence so that everyone else can see them too. He becomes a sort of chess piece for the gods.

The best part of the story, however, is his interactions with his friends, who he forgets each day until he rereads his diary. Or until they tell him about each other and he decides to trust them. What happens on days he does not write about, we hear about only second hand, with, like him, little sense of how trustworthy or untrustworthy these second hand stories are.

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## **Perry Whitford says**

Latro awakes in a medical tent of the Great King Xerxes' defeated army just after the battle of Platea with a severe head wound and no memory of how he got there.

He is given a scroll and a stylus to write down his experiences, which will be his only way of knowing who he is and where he is going for, as each day dawns, his memory vanishes into the mist.

So begins the most astonishing work of historical fantasy fiction I am yet to read. As you may imagine by the affliction of the protagonist, Wolfe has a whale of a time with Latro; a reliable narrator who never tells a lie, yet who tells a disjointed and baffling story, cursed as he is to forget everyone and everything from day to day.

His amnesia is so complete that he can't recognise the people he travels across most of ancient Greece with, and of course has no recollection of his or their actions before the current day, nor whether they are a friend or foe.

Many readers have already made a comparison with the Christopher Nolan film *Memento* and it's as close as I can think of too. Nolan must have read this book before he wrote that screenplay.

The premise is only one of the joys of this novel though. I love the world of ancient Greece and the theogony of the Olympians. Wolfe takes his tack from Hesiod and Homer, so the Gods are real to the characters and they appear often, particularly to Latro, who as the story evolves is revealed as an unwitting yet willful pawn in one of their internecine struggles, just as he is manipulated by the earthly Spartans and Athenians.

Add to that some incredibly complex but satisfying plotting, Wolfe's simple yet stunning prose, and a continual sequence of strange and wonderful scenes and you simply couldn't ask for more from this kind of story.

There are two further books in this series, both great as well (the second is probably even better than this one). Get hold of a copy of this as soon as you can.

Unlike Latro, you won't forget it!

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## C says

Part one of a duology called "Latro In the Mist" (and now, with a third book, a trilogy) by Gene Wolfe.

I figured I'd review each half as a separate book and leave the combined duology in my "currently reading" list. There was really no way I was going to be able to make myself patiently wait till the end of book two to review them both.

This was a tough one for me. I can't count how many times I fell asleep with this book in hand. I'd bought the book years ago and had it sitting on the shelf waiting for a "rainy day," until I finally realized that on rainy days, I read the same stuff I always read. I had to make myself stop staring at it and feeling guilty, so I decided I **MUST** get it read and I would finish it come hell or high water. Or many, many catnaps.

I give it 4 stars for all of it's positive attributes and take off 1 for the frustration and disorientation that is so very much "reading Gene Wolfe." It was a good book - I'd even say a 'great' book - but it was also a bit more work than my surprised brain was ready for and I tripped internal circuit breakers over and over. I nearly jumped straight at book 2, but I think I may need a mental vacation with something a bit lighter, first.

If, like me, you're really fuzzy on your Greek history, I'd would first advise reading up a bit on the Greco-Persian wars. You don't have to get too in-depth - just something to give you an idea (if you do not have one already) of the time period, places, and major events. An idea of the gods/goddesses of Rome and Greece won't hurt, but are not 100% necessary.

Or, watch the movie **300** - it'll give you some bearings. Latro was a hired Roman mercenary fighting on the side of Xerxes (the other side). The book starts about a year later, shortly after the battle of Platea where the Greeks turned the tables on the Persians and the Persian invasion began to unravel.

In most of his writing, Wolfe uses a device called "Unreliable Narrator" in which you can't believe everything the main character is telling you. In some cases that means the person is understating the truth, in others that they're lying outright. In this book, Latro suffered an injury that destroyed his short term memory and he doesn't know himself. He has a 12 hour span and loses his memories "to the mists" overnight, or sometimes within the day during summer. He has been advised to record everything on a scroll and reread it. Sometimes he does, sometimes he does not, sometimes he reads and catches up on a few days at once. Sometimes he remembers things instinctively (battle strategy, cultural details, etc), sometimes he has no idea.

The book is set up as the entries on the scroll and you are reading his journal, each chapter leaving off where he left off and picking up again where he has sat down somewhere to write. Since he is writing at the end of every day (more or less) and not always reading, the task is often on the reader to string it all together.

His descriptions are often vague/unfamiliar. The names we know today for historical places, gods and people are not used, but instead he calls them by what the people around them were calling them, or what he has mistranslated, or what he thinks they are.

Therefore, you may end up using the glossary in the back of the book. Or, like me, referring to maps and running to wikipedia/websites to figure out what is going on and learn a "gist of history" on the fly. Once I

had a better clue, I was a much happier (and awake) gal.

It's hard not to like Latro. It's obvious there is something about him that appeals to people and gods and they're all drawn to him, and it's hard not to be drawn in to his adventure and quest for self discovery. He's a new interpretation of the Greek/Roman mythology of the man aided/blessed by the gods in his quest. He continually lands on his feet, despite having no understanding of who he is and therefore no politics or guile. Perhaps this illustrates idea that our true self stays dominant despite our loss of "concept" of self. More likely, rumors spread of this man who could communicate and make the gods appear, and people on both sides were drawn to this, seeking to use it to their advantage.

I loved his relationship with Io, his child companion, who is also a fantastic, memorable character. She is a child of wit and intelligence, tragedy and vulnerability, and she has a steadfast loyalty and trust in Latro, who is her perspective, her protector and friend. She is his faithful companion and in many cases a guide, leading some to speculate that she might be "the" Io, or symbolic of her. I adored her, and Latro's love for her made me adore him.

I loved the writing style, apart from the vagueness and work involved. There's much about Wolfe's writing that brings up poetic, beautiful imagery and captures a vivid moment in only a line or two. This made me keep reading - from the description of the water around the ships, to a horrible moment in battle, to a moment of fear and horror... the imagery is wonderful.

So, is it worth reading? I think so (of course, this is expected bias from someone who just read it!).

However, it is clearly an acquired taste. If you want straightforward, I'm sure you've gathered by now this is not for you.

If you like to piece things together and read between the lines, you might love this.

I feel it is worth it, if not for a total change of pace, just for the experience of trying it.

But again, if you've never encountered Wolfe's writing style, brace yourself for some confusion and disorientation and in this case, consider it immersion, as you and the main character are both trying to find your way.

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## Matthew Fray says

My opinion of this book seemed to change depending on when I read it; during the day I found it fascinating, in the evening it seemed uninvolved and humourless. When I got to the end I felt robbed of a proper ending - it quite literally run out of words (the text on the "first scroll" simply came to an end). BUT there was something or, perhaps, a number of things that make me want to read part 2. Firstly, Mr Wolfe creates the period very well, in both the form of the book and the writing. The information on the various Gods and peoples that appear are imparted in context so his research doesn't show. The prose flows very well and there are a number of attractive passages. The downside was that the main character had lost his short term memory (he forgot the previous day when he woke up the next morning, hence he writes the events down before he goes to sleep) and that meant there was a lot of repetative reintroduction of the characters and more importantly you never properly got to know and like his friends (and enemies) and see their relationships

develop.

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## **Dergrossest says**

Echoes of the Author's brilliant Book of the New Sun can be found in this rousing tale of an ancient warrior who wakes up as a prisoner of war after the defeat of the Great King Xerxes during the second Persian invasion of the Peloponnese and has absolutely no idea who he is as the result of a serious head wound. Each morning our hero must read the events of the previous day which he has written down the night before. As a result of this interesting device, there are large gaps in the narrative which make it impossible to be assured of the accuracy of the story we are being told. While I enjoy not knowing whether I can trust what I have read and filling in the missing gaps, this sort of storytelling is occasionally frustrating and may not be for everyone.

Anyway, the other interesting aspect of this book is the fact that our hero's wounds have apparently enabled him to communicate with the Greek gods, all of whom are so interestingly beautiful and terrible at the same time. When combined with the various Athenian, Spartan, Theban, Persian and other characters he meets while attempting to figure who the hell he is, the result is to breathe life into that ancient world which is the foundation of our Western Civilization.

This is a brilliant book which is the most accessible work of Gene Wolfe which I have ever read, which admittedly may not be saying much. Nevertheless, I highly recommend it (even though this is part one of a two-part story).

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## **Jenny (Reading Envy) says**

I'm still wrapping my head around this book, so consider this review a (possibly perpetual) work in progress. My book club discusses it on Monday so I might have more to add at that point.

It is thanks to two Gene Wolfe fans that I have read this book - one for selecting it and one for providing useful resources to help me understand it better. And of course as with anything by Gene Wolfe I've ever read, now that I know more, I feel like to really appreciate this book I would start again from the beginning.

This is different from some of the other books by Wolfe that I have read, those combining science fiction and fantasy, in a far future post-tech landscape. These instead are set in the historical ancient world and rely heavily on actual texts, plus fantastical elements of the mythology. Having only a basic basic knowledge of these ancient times and zero experience with the texts referenced, I may not have had all the background that would have made this an even more enjoyable experience. Gene Wolfe is for smart readers.

The basic premise is that of Latro, a mercenary with a memory loss problem. Because he can only retain about a half of a day at a time, he is constantly transcribing what is happening so he can refer back to it. You really only know that he is not a local, and there is so much between the lines that I point you again to the external resources to understand the book!

The part that will be intriguing to discuss with the book club is whether or not Latro is seeing what he thinks he is seeing. Oh and the ending.

"Pinadros shook his head as if in wonder. 'Is it because you can't remember the past that you're so wise, Latro?'" (104)

Aforementioned resources, thanks to Ed:  
Names in Soldier of the Mist  
Useful blog, particularly the Decoded entries

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## Alissa says

3.5 stars rounded up because by the end, I was hooked.

Drugs work wonders on a person who knows his history, or at least, that was my persistent thought while I was reading this book :)

I'm not being wholly fair, after all the protagonist of this original story suffered a head injury compounded by the curse of a goddess, he has the ability to see "unseen things" and wakes every day with little to none recollection of what passed before. So he writes down as much as he can, and he's consequently a very peculiar narrator.

The tale is set in Ancient Greece and there are lots of gods, city-states, myths and violence. Latro's quest is interesting, but the most intriguing part is seeing the world through his eyes, a man with incomplete and totally unreliable memory, who is often unable to even recognize his own companions, let alone his purpose, all depending on the time of the day and whether he had been able to reread his ever-growing account or not.

The language is elegant but not complicated (thankfully, because following plot and interactions is not generally easy - rightfully so, no spoon-feeding the reader!), and both style and narrative devices convey a vivid picture of Latro's circumstances and the other characters' reactions to his particular predicament and divine-inspired abilities.

Very recommended, it's a compelling blend of fantasy, historical fiction and great authorial craft.

*And it struck me then that the sea was the world, and everything else—the city, the towering crag of limestone, the very ships that floated upon it and the fish that swam in it—was only exceptional, only oddities like the bits of leaf or straw one sees in a globe of amber.*

*I was myself a mariner on that sea, a sailor at the mercy of wind and wave, lost in the mists and hearing breakers on the reefs of a rocky coast.*

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## Kelly Flanagan says

I have to say that not since reading 'Tale of Two Cities' in grade 7, has reading 250 or so pages taken me so long. I am some one that falls asleep reading. I consider reading to have been my first addiction. Way more important than coffee or smokes. But this book was hard. And I will admit that I didn't end up really 'getting' the story in the end. Hopefully those of you who take on this book will have an easier time with it than I did.

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## Randy says

"The gods are strange and cruel."

It's been several years since I've read this phenomenal novel and I recommend it highly, with qualification. You should only read this, or for that matter, any of Wolfe's work, by letting the author tell his tale. I have found for myself, and talking for others, that Wolfe can be extremely frustrating if you are continually trying to "figure out" what's going on.

Let it go. If you let the story unfold, pay close attention, you'll see the wonder of what's going on.

Wolfe has a collection of reoccurring themes and they are all here. If you are at all a fan of myth, ancient history, well-written fantasy, then you should really gird up your loins and get aquatinted with Latro, the Soldier of the Mist.

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