

VERTIGO

ESSENTIAL VERTIGO™

DC COMICS

THE SANDMAN™

the DOLL'S HOUSE-part seven

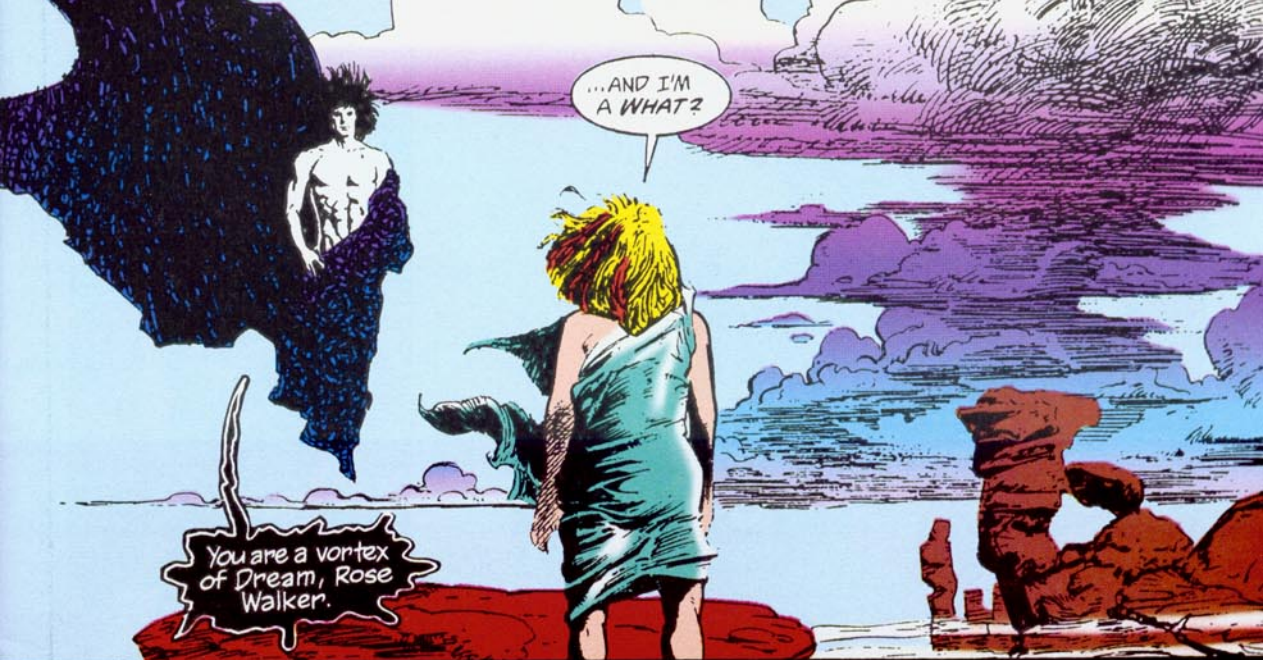


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SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

NEIL GAIMAN
MIKE DRINGENBERG
MALCOLM JONES III

OBI



...AND I'M A WHAT?

You are a vortex of Dream, Rose Walker.

NEIL GAIMAN, WRITER • MIKE DRINGENBERG & MALCOLM JONES III, ARTISTS
ROBBIE BUSCH, COLORIST • TODD KLEIN, LETTERER • TOM PEYER, ASST. EDITOR
KAREN BERGER, EDITOR • CREATED BY GAIMAN, KIETH & DRINGENBERG



AND YOU'RE SAYING THAT BECAUSE I'M THIS--THIS VORTEX--WHATEVER THE HELL THAT MEANS--YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME?

IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?



Yes. That is what I am saying.

I ♥ ST HEARTS



YOU'RE KIDDING, AREN'T YOU?

I MEAN, YOU SAVED MY LIFE. IN THAT CRAZY HOTEL, WITH THAT CRAZY FAT GUY, YOU SAVED MY LIFE. AND NOW YOU WANT TO KILL ME.

SO IT'S A JOKE. YES?



NO. NO, YOU REALLY AREN'T JOKING. YOU WANT TO KILL ME.

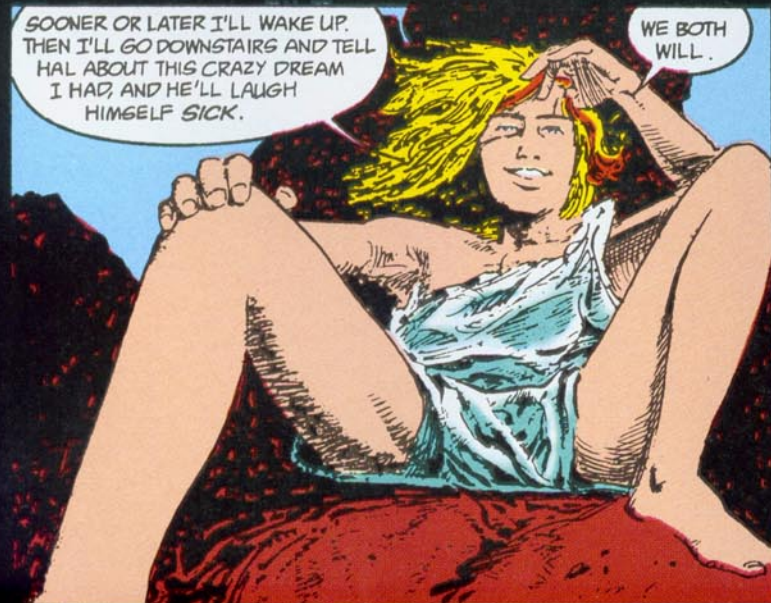


I CAN'T BELIEVE I...

YOU KNOW, FOR A SECOND THERE I WAS REALLY WORRIED.



BUT THIS IS JUST A DREAM. SO WHAT AM I WORRIED ABOUT?



SOONER OR LATER I'LL WAKE UP, THEN I'LL GO DOWNSTAIRS AND TELL HAL ABOUT THIS CRAZY DREAM I HAD, AND HE'LL LAUGH HIMSELF SICK.

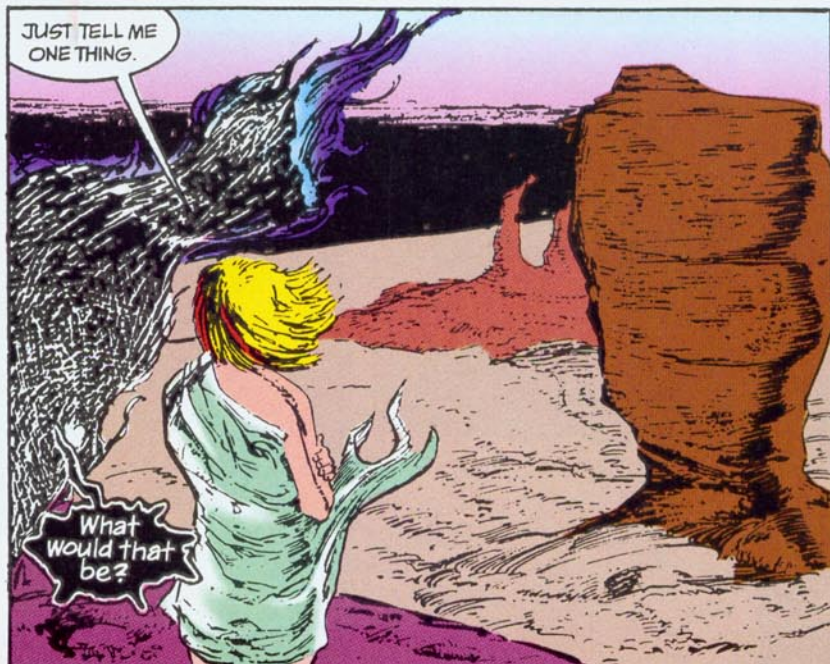
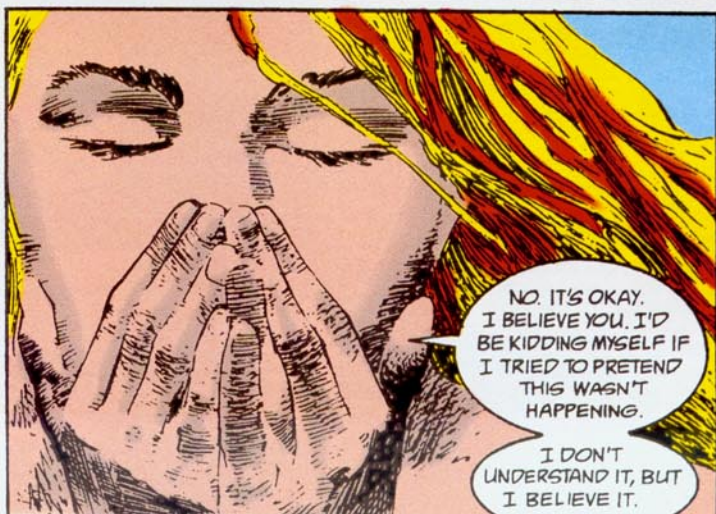
WE BOTH WILL.



Rose, I am sorry, but you are mistaken.

You are right. This is a dream. But not a dream from which you will waken.

Not now. Not ever.

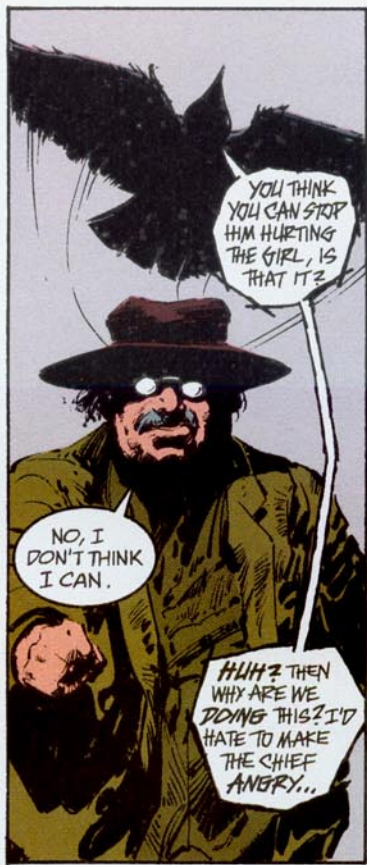




IT ALL SEEMS UNFAMILIAR-- THE DREAMING HAS ALTERED IN THE LAST FIFTY YEARS, MATTHEW.

YEAH? KAARK, I WOULDN'T KNOW.

WE MUST HURRY, MATTHEW.



YOU THINK YOU CAN STOP HIM HURTING THE GIRL, IS THAT IT?

NO, I DON'T THINK I CAN.

HUH? THEN WHY ARE WE DOING THIS? I'D HATE TO MAKE THE CHIEF ANGRY...



I DON'T THINK I CAN HELP. BUT I CAN HOPE, AND I CAN PRAY.

AND BY THE BY, I AM SURE OUR LORD WILL BE ANGRY ENOUGH WITH ME ALREADY, FOR DESERTING THE DREAMING.

NOTHING I CAN DO WILL MAKE IT WORSE.



SO, YOU WERE A BIG SHOT IN THE DREAM-WORLD IN THE OLD DAYS.

FIDDLER'S GREEN. WEIRD NAME. WHO WERE YOU?



WHO?

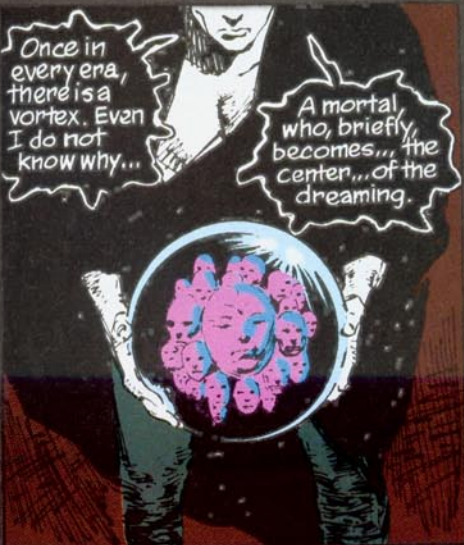
MY DEAR BIRD, YOU SEEM TO BE LABORING UNDER A MISAPPREHENSION.



FIDDLER'S GREEN IS NOT A WHO. IT'S A WHERE.

I WAS NOT A PERSON, MATTHEW. I WAS A PLACE.

LET US MAKE HASTE, FRIEND RAVEN. IT IS GETTING COLDER. WE ARE CLOSE TO THEM NOW.



Once in every era, there is a vortex. Even I do not know why...

A mortal who, briefly, becomes... the center... of the dreaming.



The vortex, by its nature, destroys the barriers between dreaming minds; destroys the ordered chaos of the Dreaming...

Until the myriad dreamers are caught in one huge dream...

Until all the dreams are one. Then the vortex collapses in upon itself.



And then it is gone.

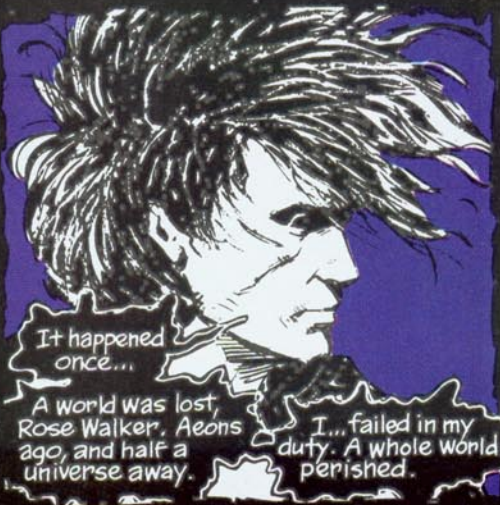
It takes the minds of the dreamers with it; it damages the Dreaming beyond repair.



It leaves nothing but darkness.

It is one of my functions to prevent this from occurring again.

AGAIN?



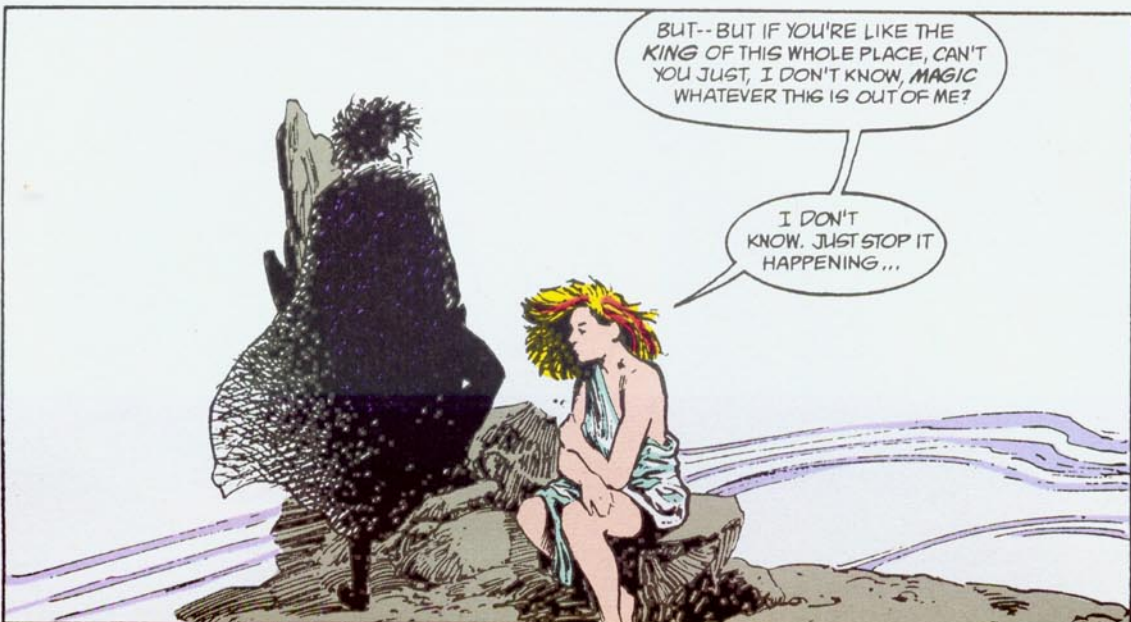
It happened once...

A world was lost, Rose Walker. Aeons ago, and half a universe away.

I... failed in my duty. A whole world perished.



It will never happen again.



BUT-- BUT IF YOU'RE LIKE THE KING OF THIS WHOLE PLACE, CAN'T YOU JUST, I DON'T KNOW, MAGIC WHATEVER THIS IS OUT OF ME?

I DON'T KNOW. JUST STOP IT HAPPENING...

I am the Lord of this Realm, and my wishes are paramount. But I am not omnipotent.

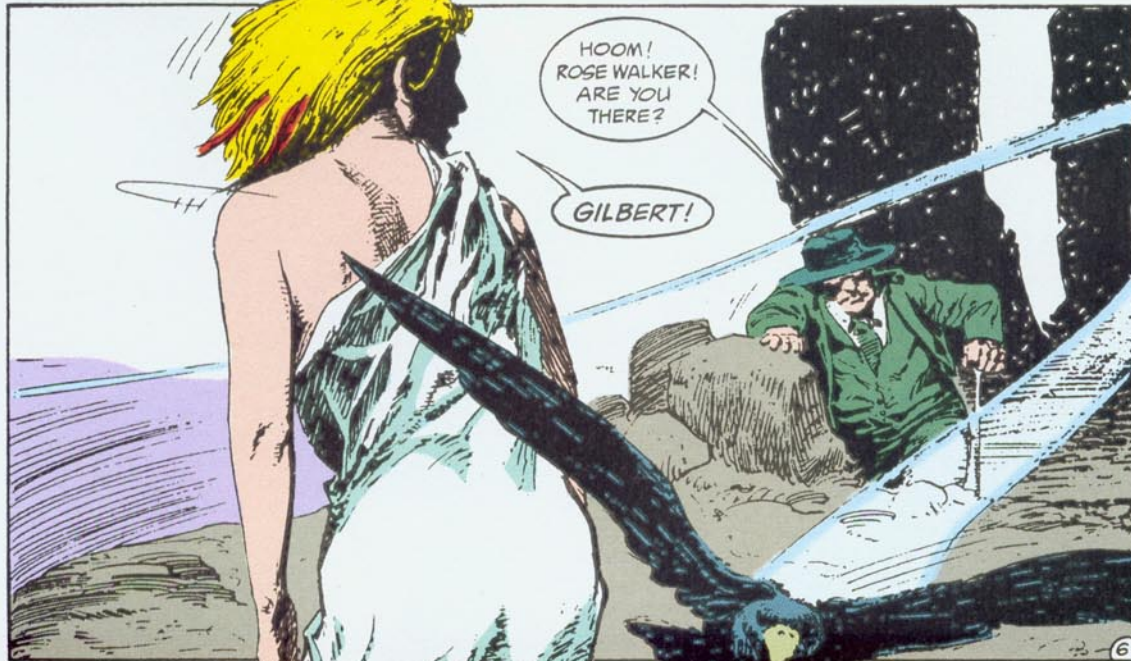
You are of the living, Rose Walker, and you are a vortex. Only when the vortex is dead is the Dreaming safe.

Death is not always a bad thing, Rose...

You could stay here in the dreamworld. Some mortals are given that option. My raven, Matthew, was once a mortal man.

I DON'T WANT TO DIE.

I... I am sorry, Rose.



HOOM! ROSE WALKER! ARE YOU THERE?

GILBERT!

GILBERT!
THANK GOD YOU'RE
HERE! THIS MAN, HE,
HE SAYS HE'S GOING
TO KILL ME, HE--

I KNOW,
ROSE
WALKER.

Fiddler's
Green.



Why did you
leave?

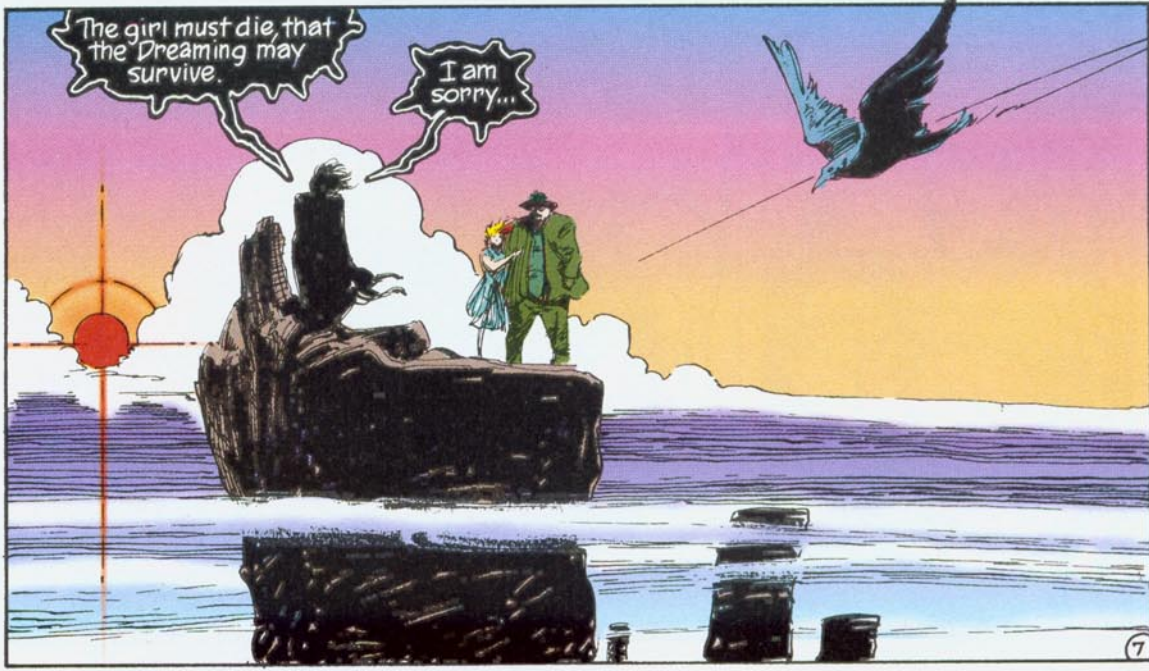
I relied on you.
I trusted you. You
were so steady.
You were the
heart of the
dreaming.

I LEFT BECAUSE I WAS
CURIOUS. AND BECAUSE I
WAS TIRED. LIFE AS A HUMAN
CONTAINS SUBSTANCE I
NEVER DREAMED OF IN
THE DREAMING, LORD.

THE LITTLE
VICTORIES, AND
THE TINY DEFEATS.
I HAD MY
REASONS.

BUT THAT IS OF NO IMPOR-
TANCE. THIS GIRL: ROSE
WALKER.
LORD, I OFFER MY
LIFE FOR HERS.

That
is not an
option.



The girl must die, that
the Dreaming may
survive.

I am
sorry...



"I'M SORRY,
MIRANDA..."

"I DON'T THINK I'VE BEEN A...
VERY GOOD MOTHER..."



DON'T THINK
ABOUT IT, UNITY.
MOTHER.

EVERYTHING'S
GOING TO BE
JUST FINE.



I... I THINK I'M
GOING TO... HAVE TO
SLEEP NOW.

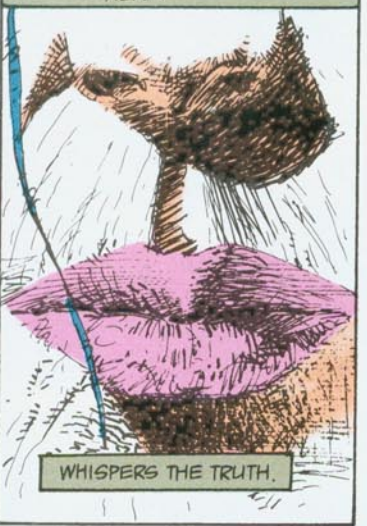
UNITY KINKAID FINDS IT HARDER AND
HARDER TO STAY ALIVE.

LIFE IS SO...

UNITY HEARS A VOICE, HER OWN
VOICE, AND IT WHISPERS TO HER
IN THE DARKNESS.

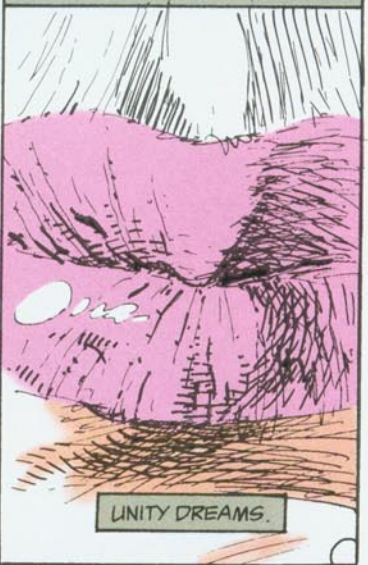


THE VOICE WHISPERS TO HER OF HER
LIFE BEFORE THE LONG SLEEP.
WHISPERS CHILDHOOD DREAMS OF
A TALL, DARK MAN, WHOSE EYES
DANCED LIKE TWIN STARS IN HER
HEAD.



WHISPERS THE TRUTH.

AND THEN SHE GIVES IN TO SLEEP,
HER BREATH SHALLOW AND HALT.
DYING, IN A WORLD SHE FINALLY
UNDERSTANDS...

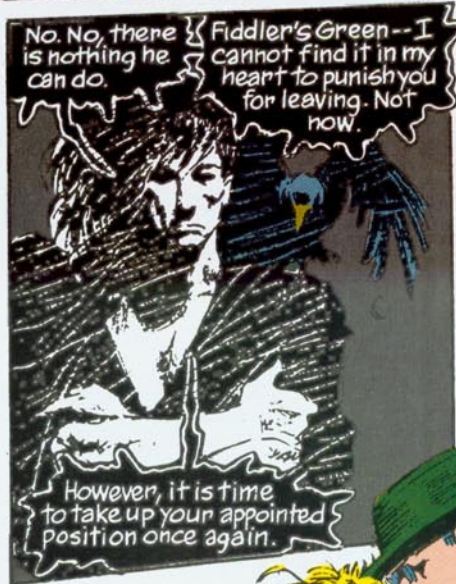


UNITY DREAMS.



GILBERT?

LISTEN, ISN'T THERE ANYTHING WE CAN DO TO STOP HIM?



No. No, there is nothing he can do.

Fiddler's Green-- I cannot find it in my heart to punish you for leaving. Not now.

However, it is time to take up your appointed position once again.

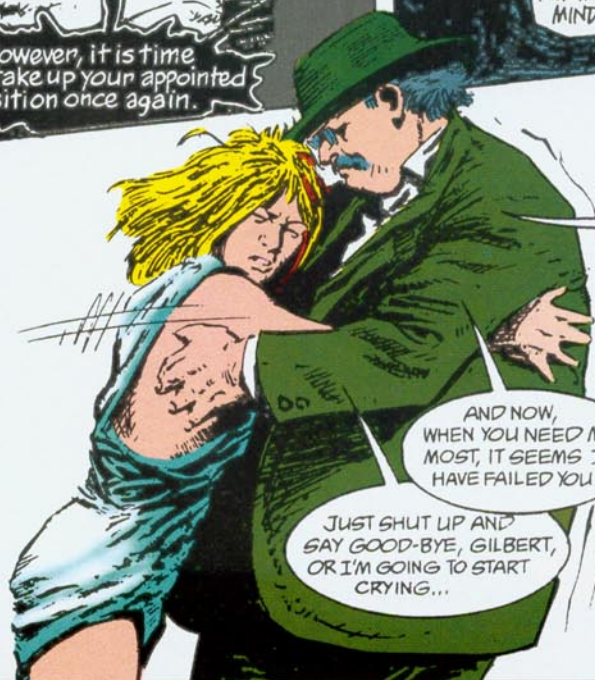


L.H. SAY, MISS WALKER. TAKE IT FROM ME-- DEATH ISN'T THAT BAD. YOU GET USED TO IT. I DID.

I WASN'T HAVING MUCH OF A LIFE, MIND YOU.



Say goodbye



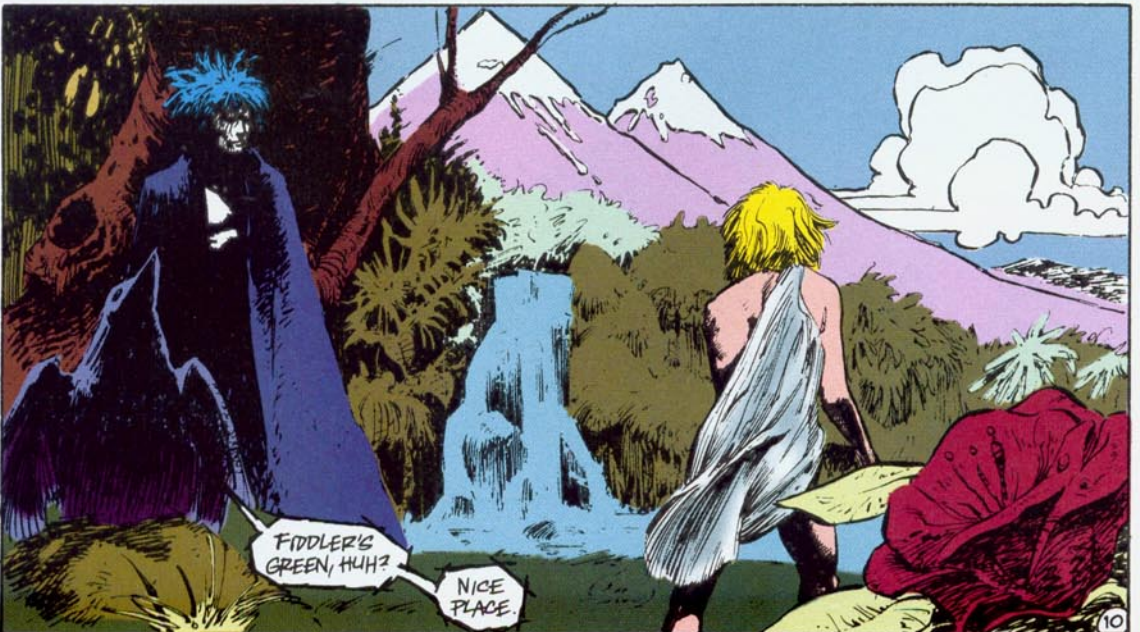
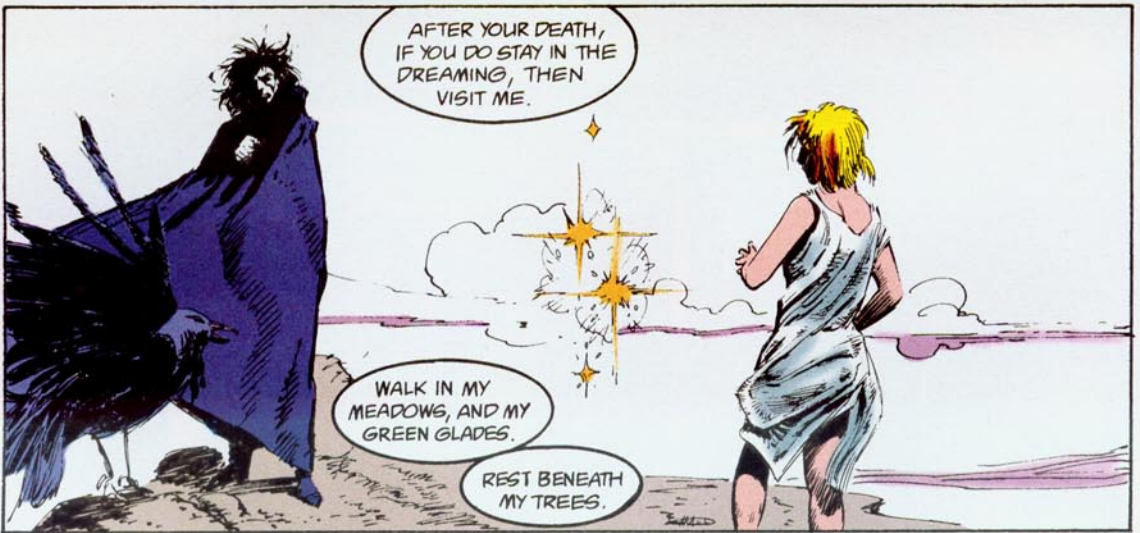
AND NOW, WHEN YOU NEED ME MOST, IT SEEMS I HAVE FAILED YOU.

JUST SHUT UP AND SAY GOOD-BYE, GILBERT, OR I'M GOING TO START CRYING...

... AND I'M NOT GOING TO GIVE HIM THAT SATISFACTION.

I MUST APOLOGIZE TO YOU, MISS WALKER. APOLOGIZE FOR NOT BEING A VERY GOOD HUMAN BEING.









HELLO ROSE.

UM, HELLO. DO I KNOW YOU?



OH, I DON'T LOOK LIKE THIS ANYMORE, DO I? IT'S FUNNY, THE THINGS YOU FORGET.

I'M YOUR GRANDMOTHER, ROSE. I'M UNITY.



WHAT A WONDERFUL PLACE.

YEAH. IT WAS A FRIEND OF MINE.



I know who you are, Unity Kinkaid, but I require you to leave this place. I have business to attend to with this woman.

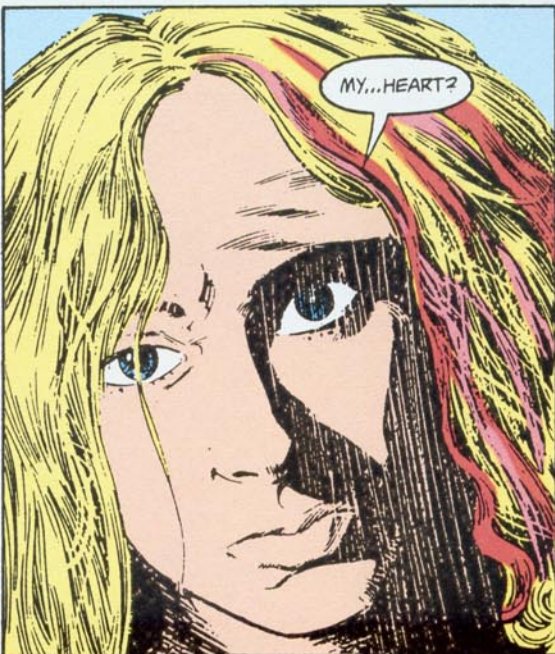
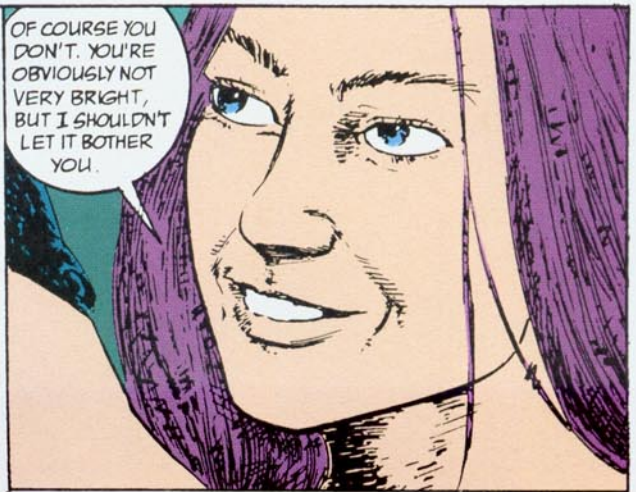


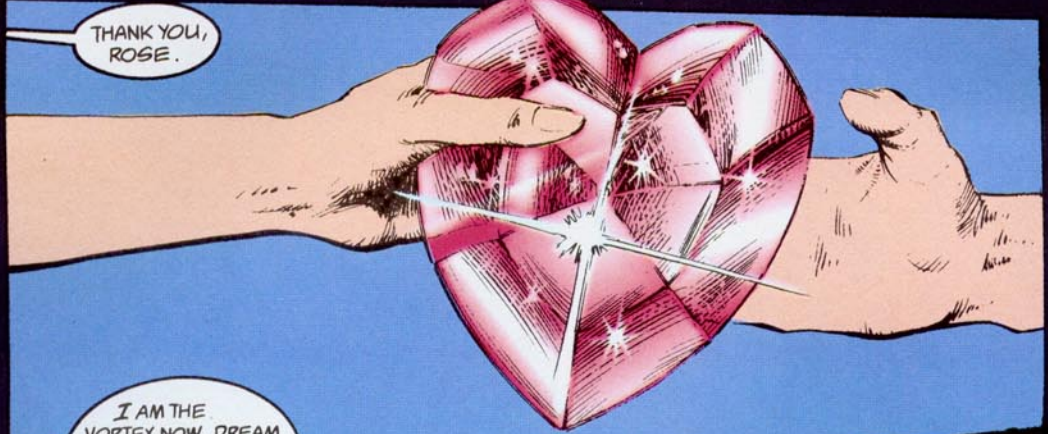
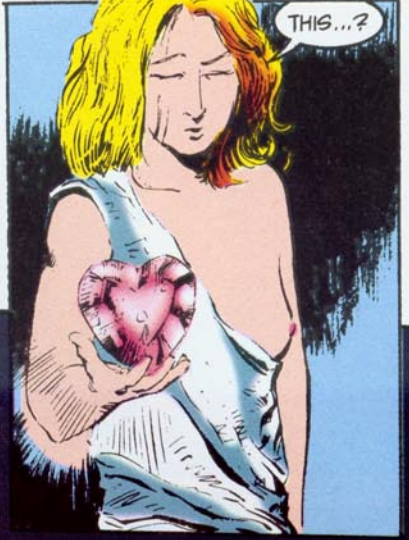
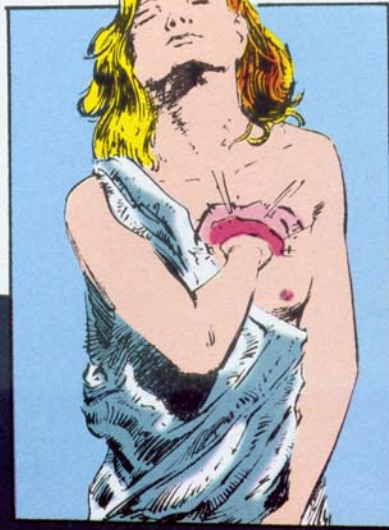
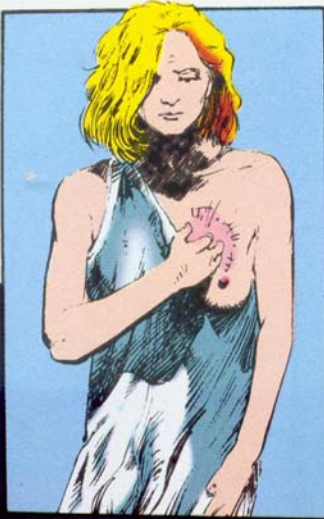
NO. DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME? YOUR BUSINESS IS WITH ME, NOT HER.

Rose is the vortex...

PERHAPS. BUT I SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE VORTEX. IF YOU HAD NOT BEEN IMPRISONED AWAY FROM THE DREAMING, I WOULD HAVE BEEN.







I AM THE VORTEX NOW, DREAM KING. AS I SHOULD HAVE BEEN SO MANY YEARS AGO.

I AM THE VORTEX. AND I AM--



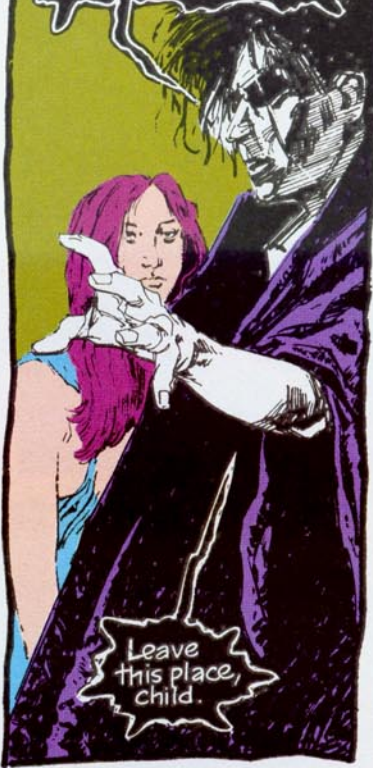


I DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS. I'M SORRY.

ARE YOU STILL GOING TO KILL ME?



There is no need, Rose Walker. There is much here that I do not understand, but the vortex has gone.



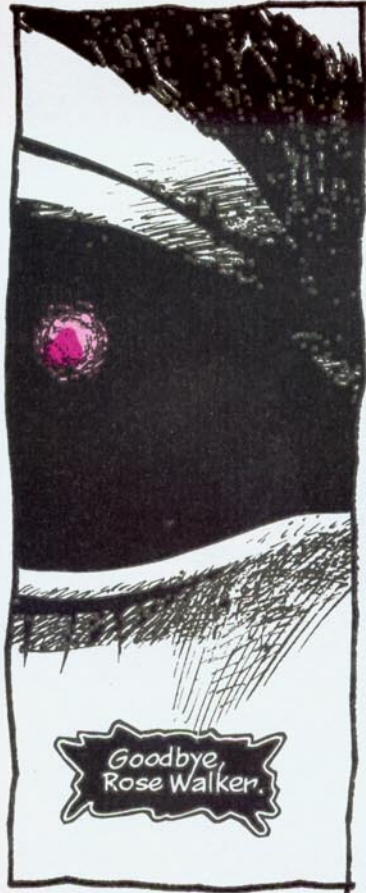
Leave this place, child.

I will bring your brother back from the shores of dream. He will return to consciousness in the morning.



View it as a gift from me to you, Rose.

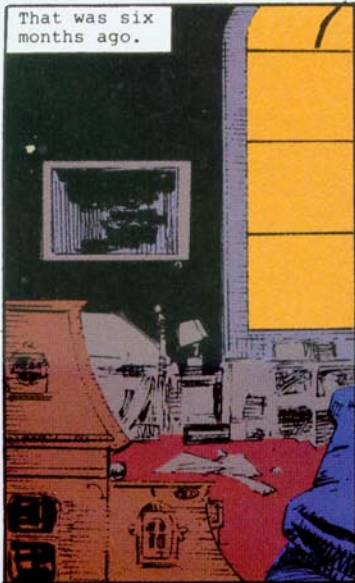
Your family has suffered enough.



Goodbye, Rose Walker.



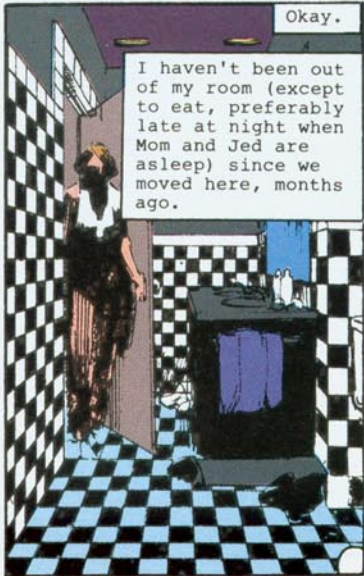
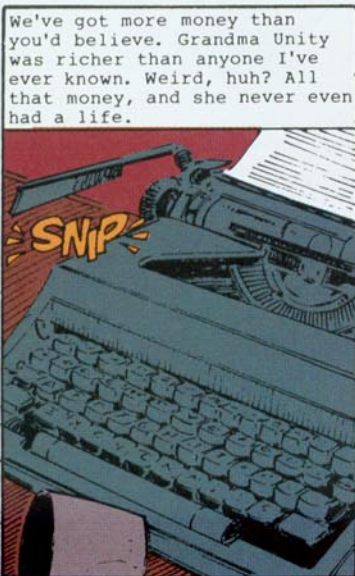
"And then she woke up."



He said that Ken and Barbie split. Ken got himself a new partner, who looks exactly like a younger Barbie, while Barbie's gone sort of seriously weird.

The Spider Women are buying the house from Hal. He said Zelda actually spoke to him the other day.

We're living in a big house Mom bought, just outside Seattle, where she grew up.





I've been reading, playing records, sometimes just sitting, staring into space. Writing this diary, or whatever it is.

Thinking.



A year ago my best friend died. Her name was Judy. She was killed -- or perhaps she killed herself -- in some kind of massacre, in a small-town diner.



She phoned me on the day she died -- she'd just split up with her girlfriend, Donna, and she was in rough shape.

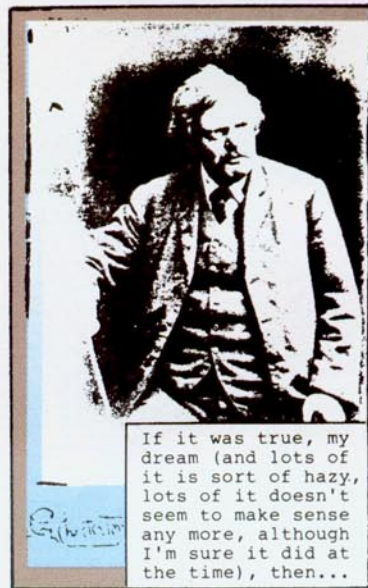
I think about Judy a lot.

I wish I could talk to her about this stuff. Except for Gilbert, she was the smartest person I ever met. But I can't talk to either of them...



Not any more.

Six months ago I had a really weird dream. That was the night that Unity died, and Jed got better.



If it was true, my dream (and lots of it is sort of hazy, lots of it doesn't seem to make sense any more, although I'm sure it did at the time), then...

then...



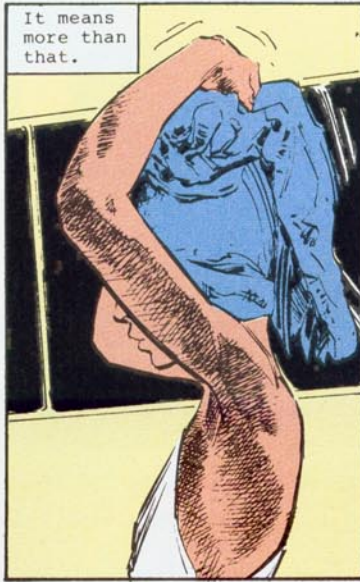
SIX SLAIN IN DINER OF DEATH RIDDLE



Then nothing makes any sense.

If my dream was true, then everything we know, everything we think we know is a lie.

It means the world's about as solid and as reliable as a layer of scum on the top of a well of black water which goes down forever, and there are things in the depths that I don't even want to think about.



It means more than that.

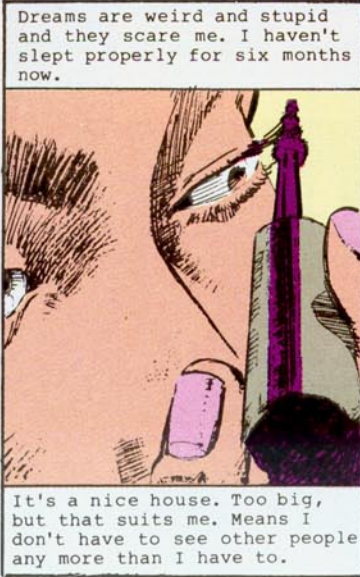
It means that we're just dolls. We don't have a clue what's really going down, we just kid ourselves that we're in control of our lives while a paper's thickness away things that would drive us mad if we thought about them for too long play with us, and move us around from room to room, and put us away at night when they're tired, or bored.



In my dream, I could have destroyed everybody in the world.

In my dream, Gilbert wasn't even a person; he was a place.

In my dream, Grandma Unity gave up her life for me.



Dreams are weird and stupid and they scare me. I haven't slept properly for six months now.

It's a nice house. Too big, but that suits me. Means I don't have to see other people any more than I have to.



That's my story.

Okay.

It's even got a happy ending: Jed and Rose and their mother were finally reunited, and they all lived together in a big old house.



I've been brooding on that night for too long now. Six months.

And I've decided.



My dream. My weird dream. It was just a dream.

That's all. Just a dream.



"And then she woke up."

You know, I always hated stories that ended like that. I always felt cheated.

Six months is long enough to feel sorry for yourself. Isn't it?

You can't feel cheated forever.

HELLO, STRANGER.

HI, ROSE.

UM. HI.

YOUR HAIR LOOKS NICE. REAL NICE.

YEAH. THANKS. I WAS SICK OF IT THE OLD WAY.

SO, UH... WHAT'S THE OCCASION?

I DON'T KNOW. REJOINING THE HUMAN RACE, I SUPPOSE. I CAN'T SIT UP THERE FOREVER.

I THOUGHT MAYBE I'D GET SOME KIND OF JOB, OR MAYBE DO SOME TRAVELING. HUNT DOWN SOME OLD FRIENDS.

THAT'S A GOOD IDEA. I-- WE'VE BEEN WORRIED ABOUT YOU.

MM. SORRY.

YEAH. I'D LIKE THAT.

I...

I FOUND A FOX'S DEN IN THE WOODS. WITH CUBS. I CAN SHOW IT TO YOU -- IF YOU WANT.

"And then she woke up."

I suppose there are worse endings.



Desire? I stand in my Gallery, and I hold your Sigil.

Talk to me.



WHY, SWEET DREAM, THIS IS A SURPRISE-- ALMOST AN *EVENT*, I MIGHT SAY--



Good.
I'm coming through.



YOU ARE--?
OH. BUT OF COURSE. YOU KNOW YOU ARE *ALWAYS* WELCOME IN MY...

...CHAMBERS.

IT'S, UM, LOVELY
TO SEE YOU. CAN I
GET YOU ANYTHING
YOU DESIRE?

My sibling, I
require nothing
from you, save
some answers.

I have been
thinking about certain
events of the last year.
And I have arrived at
some unpleasant
conclusions.

Unity Kinkaid should
have been the dream
vortex of this era.
Yet she wasn't.

The vortex was
instead transmitted
along her genetic line
to her grand-daughter,
Rose Walker.

This is unprecedented
in my experience.

Someone has been
meddling in my
affairs, Desire.
And this has your
stink about it.

ARE YOU ACCUSING ME
OF INTERFERING IN
ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE
FAMILY'S DOMAIN?

Obviously that is
exactly what I am
doing. And I am accusing
you of more than that.

Desire - who was Rose's
grandfather? Who fathered
her mother on sleeping
Unity, fifty years ago?

...WAS I THAT
OBVIOUS?

No. No you
covered your
tracks remark-
ably well.

What did you truly
intend, Desire?

Was I to take the
life of one of our
blood, with all that
would entail? Or
was it more devious
than that?

DOES IT
MATTER, BIG
BROTHER?
IT DIDN'T
WORK.

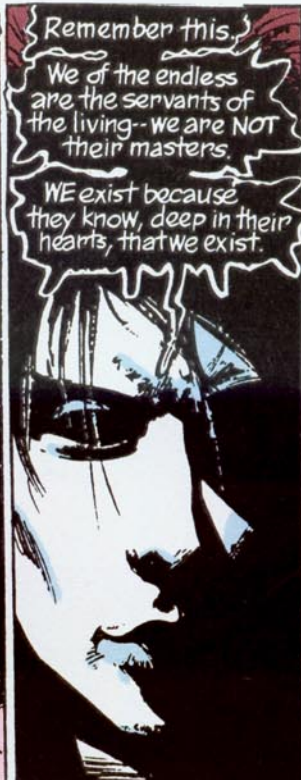


Desire, if you were not of my kin...

BUT I AM.

Yes, you are.

Desire, listen to me carefully



Remember this.

We of the endless are the servants of the living- we are NOT their masters.

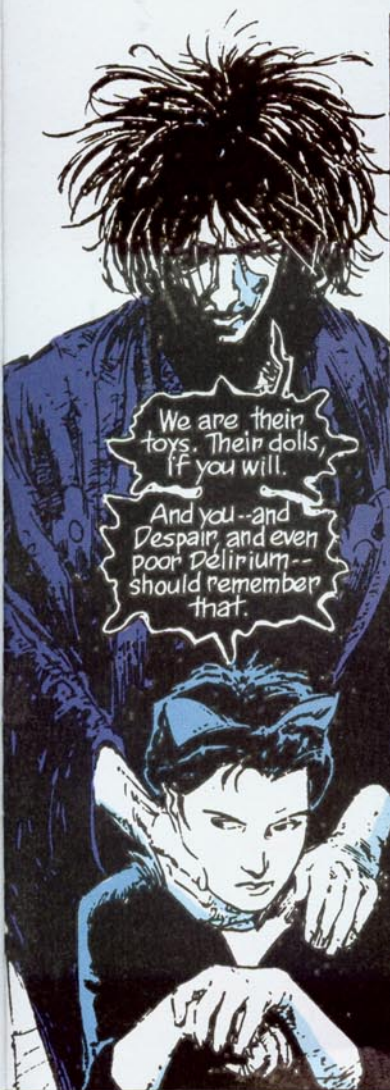
WE exist because they know, deep in their hearts, that we exist.



When the last living thing has left this universe, then our task will be done.

And we do not manipulate them.

If anything, they manipulate us.



I-- I DON'T UNDERSTAND.

We are their toys. Their dolls, if you will.

And you-- and Despair, and even poor Delirium-- should remember that.



I am afraid that you don't.

Very well. I shall tell you something that you WILL understand, sister-brother.



Mess with me or mine again, and I will FORGET that you are family, Desire.

Do you believe yourself strong enough to stand against ME? Against DEATH? Against DESTINY?

NO.



Remember that, sibling, the next time you feel inspired to interfere in my affairs.

Just remember

AND DESIRE WALKS THE
CHAMBERS OF ITS HEART.

IT WALKS THE THRESHOLD, ITS
CITADEL AND ITS PROTECTION;
AND DESIRE WONDERS:

WHAT DID HE
MEAN? THAT
WE ARE THEIR
TOYS?

HUMAN BEINGS ARE THE
CREATURES OF DESIRE. THEY
TWIST AND BEND AS I
REQUIRE IT!

POOR
DREAM...

I REALLY GOT
UNDER HIS SKIN
THIS TIME.

IF I THOUGHT OTHERWISE,
I WOULD CRACK, LIKE
DELIRIUM; OR I WOULD
ABANDON MY REALM, LIKE
OUR LOST BROTHER.

AND DESIRE SMILES, AND
FORGETS, FOR DESIRE IS
A CREATURE OF THE
MOMENT.

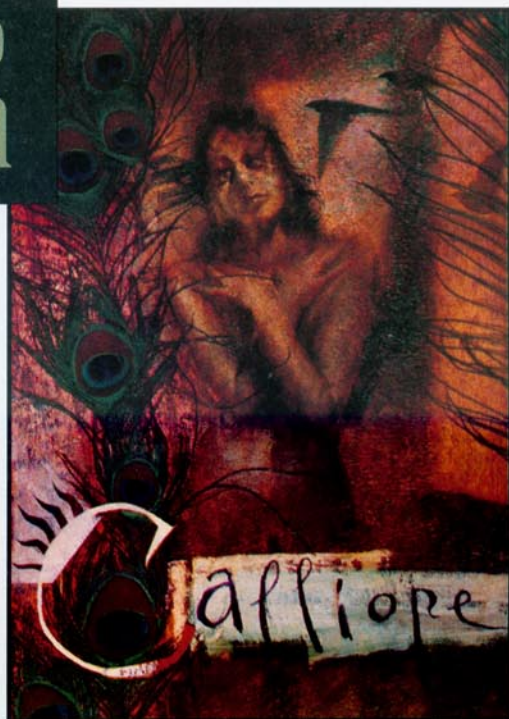
AND DESIRE WALKS THE
ENDLESS PATHWAYS OF ITS
BODY, CERTAIN THAT HE,
OR SHE, OR IT, IS IN SOLE
AND ONLY CONTROL OF
ITS DESTINY.

THE ONLY INHABITANT OF
THE TWILIGHT REALM OF
DESIRE; AND IT FEELS
NOTHING LIKE A DOLL.

NOTHING
LIKE A DOLL
AT ALL.

ESSENTIAL VERTIGO Sandman

COVER ART AND
LOGO DESIGN:
DAVE MCKEAN



Hail and Farewell!

Back when this encore presentation of THE SANDMAN began I told you that I'd be jumping in only when I had something to say. Well, it's that time again.

This issue re-presents "Lost Hearts," the final chapter of *The Doll's House*, and there are a couple of behind-the-scenes things you may want to know. For those of you reading this for the first time, this may not mean much. But, those of you who have the original SANDMAN 16 or the original trade paperback collection of *The Doll's House* may notice some subtle differences in the art for this chapter.

First, a bit of history. When the original *Doll's House* issues of THE SANDMAN were first being published in 1989-90, it began to dawn on more than a few folks that something special was going on. In order to take advantage of that and to promote the series to more people, DC decided to rush out a trade paperback collection containing THE SANDMAN 8-16. This collection was assembled just as issue 16 was being completed. In the confusion created by such an unprecedented activity, something a bit strange happened. The reproduction of the art in both SANDMAN 16 and the collection left something to be desired, namely an accurate reproduction of the inked pages. If you examine them, you'll notice that the inks are sorely lacking in detail. This caused no small amount of consternation to the writer and artists.

A little over a year later, when I took on the job of collected editions editor, Neil Gaiman mentioned it to me as one of the things we should remedy when we had the opportunity and budget for it. After all, the SANDMAN collections are going to remain in print, and they should be the ultimate, accurate document of the stories. Although it was something we both wanted to fix, we knew it would be awhile until the time was right.

Fast forward a few years. Starting with SEASON OF MISTS, we began to publish the SANDMAN collections in hardcover prior to their ongoing life as trade paperbacks. This was a successful program. But one of the criticisms we continued to receive was that the first three collections (PRELUDES & NOCTURNES, THE DOLL'S HOUSE and DREAM COUNTRY) had never been available as hard-

covers, and therefore readers' sets of Sandman collections would never be complete. We finally decided it was time to release hardcover editions of these collections.

Here was my chance. Not only would we be able to have Dave McKean design *The Doll's House* (at the time, the only Sandman-related collection without his wonderful aesthetic), but we'd be able to remaster the story. However, a hurdle still existed. The original art pages, for the most part, had long since been sold. Neil suggested I call Malcolm Jones III to see if he would be willing to try reinking photostats of the pages. Malcolm said yes. He did a wonderful, and incredibly fast, job. You can see the results in this issue and in the "re-mastered" collection of *The Doll's House* (the one with the house on the cover, not the one with the face). A couple of months later Malcolm died. He was a gentleman, and one of the pleasures of my job here at DC was knowing him. I hope you can all appreciate the improvement in the presentation.

There's another reason I'm jumping in here. This issue marks the end of my stewardship of ESSENTIAL VERTIGO: THE SANDMAN. As I mentioned previously, I edit DC's collected editions. This includes trade paperbacks, Archive editions, hardcovers, special slipcase editions and a few other special things you haven't seen yet. You may have noticed that we have been putting out more and more of these things as time goes by. Next year we've scheduled more collections than ever before. In order to give these projects the attention they deserve, something had to give, and it ended up being the two ESSENTIAL VERTIGO titles. I've really enjoyed bringing them to you over the last 18 months or so. I leave you in the very capable hands of Jennifer Lee as I go forward, into the past....

Bob Kahan

Hearing the staccato of raindrops on my desktop.

NEXT ISSUE: "Calliope" kicks off the DREAM COUNTRY collection of self-contained stories.

CALLING ALL FRUSTRATED SANDMAN LETTERSMITHS:

Your shining moment has arrived! Please send any and all SANDMAN-related letters (odes to the perfect panel, storyline comments, embarrassing crushes on fictional characters, etc.) to ESSENTIAL VERTIGO: THE SANDMAN, c/o VERTIGO/DC COMICS, 1700 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

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