

Sandman

### The Complete Series

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*all reviews by [petra](#)*

### Introduction

Neil Gaiman's **Sandman** series is one of the classics of the comics world. Much like an English major confessing that they've never read Shakespeare, when you tell people you haven't read **Sandman** they give you horrified looks and instantly volunteer their collection. And, much like the bereft English major who has never encountered **Hamlet** or **Macbeth**, when you do get around to reading **Sandman**, get ready to be enthralled.

The **Sandman** series was written between the years 1987 and 1996, and compiled into 10 graphic novels of varying lengths. This past year Neil Gaiman delighted fans and issued an eleventh volume in the **Sandman** series.

**Sandman** is a smart series. It is complex and thoughtful. Like all the best stories it's about consequences and challenges and change. Norman Mailer perhaps characterized Gaiman's achievement best when he said, "**Sandman** is a comic strip for intellectuals and I say it's about time." Happy reading.

### Characters

The **Sandman** series introduces the reader to the world of the Endless. They are not gods. Gods fade and die as their worshippers die and the names of their gods are forgotten; the Endless simply are. They are Destiny, Death, Dream, Desire, Despair, and Delirium, and their lost brother Destruction. The narrative of the **Sandman** books leads the reader through the labyrinthine relationships between the brothers and sisters, and their interactions with the human world.

Gaiman populates his world with a variety of characters drawn from a diverse array of mythologies – Christian, Greek, Norse, Egyptian, British. Gaiman has an open door policy on weaving together religion, mysticism, folklore and reality. His immortal gods rub shoulders with mortals who are drawn into Dream's

world. To this rich tapestry Gaiman adds his own characters, including two of my personal favorites, Lucien, Dream's librarian, and Matthew, Dream's somewhat insecure and talkative crow. With all of these threads Gaiman creates his own mythology which weaves in and out of the more familiar tales we know and grew up with.

### **Art**

It's hard to talk about the art work in **Sandman**. Each story tends to be illustrated by a different artist, which is one of the most fascinating aspects of the series, seeing how all of these different artists conceive of the **Sandman** world. The main characters remain identifiable. Each of the Endless has their own speech quirk, reflected in the font and color of their text which mirrors their character. There are several artists who worked fairly consistently throughout the series – Malcolm Jones, III, Mark Dringenberg, Kelly Jones, Colleen Doran, and in many ways they defined the images of the **Sandman** universe – the strong lines, and dark colors, and the sheer energy of the art. Other artists like Charles Vess and P. Craig Russell have worked on the series, and have added their interpretations and visions of Dream and his siblings.

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### **The Sandman: Preludes and Nocturnes (I)**

ISBN: 1563890119

By Neil Gaiman

Art by Sam Keith, Mark Dringenberg, Malcolm Jones, III

DC Comics (Vertigo) 1993

In 1916 Dream is mistakenly kidnapped and imprisoned in place of his sister Death. Without Dream a rash of "sleeping sickness" sweeps the world leaving those affected in half-lives, as sleepwalkers in daylight hours, and sometimes in a coma like sleep. After waiting over 70 years one of his captors makes a careless move and Dream is finally freed to regain his kingdom and take his revenge. He is weak after 70 years of captivity, and he is without his instruments of power – a mask made of the bones of an ancient god, a pouch of dream sand, and a ruby into which Dream had placed much of his power many centuries before. His quest to retrieve his possessions takes him into the human realm, into dreams and down to Hell. The actions he takes to regain his kingdom have consequences which resonate throughout the rest of the series.

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### **The Sandman: The Doll's House (II)**

ISBN: 0930289595

By Neil Gaiman

Art by Mike Dringenberg, Malcolm Jones, III, Chris Bachalo, Michael Zulli, Steve Parkhouse

DC Comics (Vertigo) 1991

**The Doll's House** contains two separate short stories within a larger narrative. The two stories, "Tales of the Sand," and "Men of Good Fortune" introduce people from Dream's past. The stories may initially seem disconnected from the meta-narrative of **The Doll's House** but Gaiman doesn't introduce characters at random, and the past always has consequences for the future.

The broader narrative of **The Doll's House** concerns Rose Walker, Unity Kincaid's granddaughter. Unity Kincaid was one of the children affected by the sleeping sickness during Dream's imprisonment and in her sleep she was raped, and gave birth to a child. With Dream's freedom Unity Kincaid has woken up and is

searching for her child and grandchild. Rose, in her turn, is searching for her kidnapped little brother. Dream is also looking for Rose's brother because he is being held captive by a false Dream King and is causing disturbances in the realm of Dream.

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### **The Sandman: Dream Country (III)**

ISBN: 156389016X

By Neil Gaiman

Art by Kelly Jones, Charles Vess, Colleen Doran, Malcolm Jones, III

DC Comics (Vertigo) 1991

**Dream Country** contains four short stories which explore the nature of the dream, and begin to give some insight into who Dream used to be and how his imprisonment has changed him. "Calliope" is about the muse Calliope, Dream's former lover and mother of his child, Orpheus. She has been trapped by humans who want her to serve as their inspiration. Her quest for freedom, and her desire for revenge pulls Dream into the story. "A Dream of a Thousand Cats" is one of my favorite stories. It explores the power of dreams to shape reality. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" illustrated by Charles Vess is one of the more well known of the **Sandman** short stories, and many people's favorite. The artwork is gorgeous, and the subject of the Faerie court being entertained one last time before they leave the human realm is ideally suited for Vess. "FaÁade" illustrates the consequences of getting what you wish for, and is one of the creepier stories in the **Sandman** universe.

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### **The Sandman: Season of Mists (IV)**

ISBN: 156389041

By Neil Gaiman

Art by Kelly Jones, Mike Dringenberg, Malcolm Jones, III, Matt Wagner, Dick Giordano, George Pratt, P. Craig Russell

DC Comics (Vertigo) 1994

**Season of Mists** sends Lord Morpheus down into Hell in order to free the soul of the woman he loved whom he sentenced to an eternity in Hell (see "Tales of the Sand" in [The Doll's House](#)). Dream goes prepared for battle and instead finds Hell abandoned. Lucifer hands him the keys to Hell and leaves, tired of his exile from Heaven and his rule in Hell. Dream is now faced with the dilemma of what to do with Hell, and what to do about all the denizens of Hell who are loose upon the world, not to mention the dead released back into the world of the living. Dream does not want Hell, he has his own kingdom to run, and there is no shortage of people who would like to inhabit and rule in Hell. But, to whom can Dream give the realm of Hell? And, what about the fact that maybe the world needs a Hell?

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### **Sandman: A Game of You (V)**

ISBN: 1563890895

By Neil Gaiman

Art by Shawn McManus, Colleen Doran, Bryant Talbot, George Pratt, Stan Woch, Dick Giordano

DC Comics (Vertigo) 1993

**A Game of You** tells Barbie's tale. In the waking world she lives in a small, run down apartment, and is perpetually broke. In the dream world she is the hope of an embattled world. She is a Princess leading a hopeless quest to save the world. What happens when the dream world takes over? When you cannot escape your dream self? This volume also introduces Thessaly, who is one of the most mysterious and eeriest characters in the **Sandman** world. She's also one of the most fascinating. She breaks through the barrier of dream to lead Barbie's waking friends into Barbie's dream world to save her, and save the world on both sides of the border. But, what are the consequences of doing that?

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### **Sandman: Fables and Reflections (VI)**

ISBN: 1563891050

By Neil Gaiman

Art by Bryan Talbot, Stan Woch, P. Craig Russell, Shawn McManus, John Watkiss, Jill Thompson, Duncan Eagleson, Kent Williams, Mark Buckingham, Vince Locke, Dick Giordano

DC Comics (Vertigo) 1994

This book is a series of short stories which have been brought together into one volume. They were not necessarily written at the same time. The fact that these stories were brought together to form a volume may explain the somewhat disjointed feel of the book. If you are looking for a book to skip in the series, this would be it, which is not to say that its not worth reading but you won't miss essential plot points if you choose not to. The stories are not part of the meta-narrative of the **Sandman** universe per se, although they do offer insights into Dream's character.

In "Three Septembers and a January" Despair tries to play head game with Dream, and we learn the story of the first and last Emperor of America. In "The Hunt" what seems to be a fairy tale is revealed to be Lucien's (Dream's librarian, whose library contains every book ever written or dreamed) quest to regain a book ("The Merrie Comedies of the Redemption of Doctor Faustus" by Christopher Marlowe) which was stolen from him. "Soft Places" looks at the areas where the geography of dream intrude upon the real world. "Orpheus" gives some back story on Dream's son. "Ramadan" tells the story of a sultan who wishes for his city to never fade and die and thus makes a deal with the Dream King to keep it prosperous and vibrant forever. It also has some of my favorite artwork in the whole series.

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### **Sandman: Brief Lives (VII)**

ISBN: 1563891387

By Neil Gaiman

Art by Jill Thompson, Vince Locke

DC Comics (Vertigo) 1995

**Brief Lives** begins to explain what happened to Dream's brother Destruction, and why his absence has had such impact on the Endless. Previous volumes have demonstrated the highly dysfunctional family dynamic between the Endless, and in **Brief Lives** Delirium asserts that it all went wrong when Destruction left and she wants to find him again to set things right. She petitions all of her brothers and sisters to aid her in her quest, but they all turn her down except Dream, who agrees to go with her because he is nursing a broken

heart (which translate to an endless climate of rain in the Dream realm, to the irritation of the Dream realm's inhabitants). At first Dream goes with Delirium with no intention of really finding Destruction, but events conspire (or are helped along with a healthy conspiracy) to make it imperative to actually find Destruction. Talking about what happens at the end would spoil it, so all I'll say is that they have reverberating consequences for Dream, and Delirium gets to kick a little ass to the surprise of her siblings.

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### **Sandman: World's End (VIII)**

ISBN: 1563891719

By Neil Gaiman

Art by Michael Allred, Gary Amaro, Mark Buckingham, Dick Giordano, Tony Harris, Steve Leialoh, Vince Locke, Shea Anton Pensa, Alec Stevens, Bryan Talbot, John Watkiss, Michael Zulli  
DC Comics (Vertigo) 1995

This is another collection of short stories, connected by a common theme. They, like [Fables and Reflections](#), are not necessary to the overarching plot of the **Sandman** universe. These are the stories of the guests of the World's End Inn. It is a place which exists outside, or perhaps between, time and space. Each of the inn's guests has been caught in a storm, and wait out their time until the storm passes telling stories to entertain each other. Many of the characters are familiar favorites from earlier volumes, and some are new characters.

I particularly liked story of Mister Gaheris in which he is caught in the dream of a city. I also liked the last story in the volume about the caretakers of the Necropolis, literally the city of the dead. The vision that the travelers share at the end of the book is a wonderful foreshadowing of events in the last two volumes. The imagery that Gaiman conjures and the artists translate to page is wonderful.

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### **The Sandman: The Kindly Ones (IX)**

ISBN: 1563892057

By Neil Gaiman

Art by Marc Hempel, Richard Case, DfIsraeli, Teddy Kristiansen, Gyln Dillon, Charles Vess, Dean Ormston, Kevin Nowlan  
DC Comics (Vertigo) 1996

This book blew my mind. If I had to pick a favorite in the series, this would be it hands down, no contest. It is the culmination of all the plot threads that Gaiman has spun in the previous eight volumes. This is when all the events of Dream's life, all the choices that he has made come back to haunt him.

**SPOILER WARNING:** If you haven't read the previous volumes and don't want to be spoiled, don't read further. I can't talk about this story without spoiling earlier stories. Sorry.

The mythological characters that Gaiman populates his books with may seem to be capricious, but they all must obey the rules of their own mythologies. The Kindly Ones, also known as the Hecateae, or the Fates of Greek mythology, cannot harm Dream because he is king in his own realm. But, once Dream spilled the blood of his family when he killed his son, a door was opened for the Kindly Ones to kill Dream. Lyra Hall blames Dream for killing her son, and she seeks the aid of the Kindly Ones to enact her vengeance against

Dream. Thessaly, for reasons of her own, helps Lyra Hall gain her wish. In the end, the consequences of Dream's actions leave him only one path to travel, and he cannot escape the inevitable end.

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a name="sandman10">**Sandman: The Wake (X)**

ISBN: 1563892790

By Neil Gaiman

Art by Michael Zulli, Jon J. Muth, Charles Vess

DC Comics (Vertigo) 1997

SPOILER WARNING: Don't read this if you don't want to know how *The Kindly Ones* ends. Then again, I imagine if you read this far in the series nothing that I am going to say one way or another is going to stop you reading **The Wake**.

**The Kindly Ones** ended on a bang. Dream died. How do you write another book after that? Well, this iteration of Dream died, but Dream is of the Endless, so he can't really die. But, the Dream who takes the dead Dream's place is a different person, and **The Wake** is a chance for the Endless to bury their brother, and for Dream's family and friends to mourn. The transition from Dream that was, to Dream that is, is particularly hard on Matthew, Dream's crow, who would have followed Dream into death, but was denied the chance. It is also a chance for all of the disparate plot lines, and characters of the "Sandman" series to come to some kind of conclusion. **The Wake** doesn't have the wrenching emotional impact of [The Kindly Ones](#), but it is an excellent end to an excellent series, which allows you to come down off of the breathless tension of [The Kindly Ones](#).

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**Sandman: Endless Nights (XI)**

ISBN: 1401200893

By Neil Gaiman

Art by Glenn Fabry, Milo Manara, Miguelanxo Prado, Frank Quitely, P. Craig Russell, Bill Sienkiewicz, Barron Storey

DC Comics (Vertigo) 2003

I was not enthralled with this volume. Then again, I didn't have to wait seven years and think that there was never going to be anymore **Sandman**. I came late to **Sandman**, as in last month, and I knew that when I finished [The Wake](#) there was another volume waiting for me. It's hard to top [The Kindly Ones](#) and [The Wake](#). That said, this is an interesting collection of seven stories, one for each of the Endless. And, if you're hungry for more **Sandman** after [The Wake](#) this is definitely worth reading, but it is not part of the meta-narrative of the previous volumes.

"Death and Venice" is the story of an island of people who try to cheat Death, but Death is patient and has all the time in the world.

"What I've Tasted of Desire" is the story of a woman who got all she wanted from Desire, and then had to live with the loss. As a comment, I wouldn't read this on the bus to work. It's both racy and explicit.

"The Heart of a Star" is the story of the only mortal woman Dream ever loved.

"Fifteen Portraits of Despair" is, well, fifteen portraits of despair.

"Going Inside" is about surviving going inside Delirium's fractured mind and putting her back together again.

"On the Peninsula" is about Destruction. Even though he left his family and his obligations over four centuries ago, sometimes you can't escape who you are, or who you were.

"Endless Nights" is an interesting insight into Destiny's psyche, perhaps the hardest to connect to of any of the Endless.

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### **Related Titles**

#### **Sandman: The Dream Hunters**

ISBN: 1563895730

By Neil Gaiman

Art by Yoshitaka Amano

DC Comics 1999

This is technically neither a graphic novel, nor a part of the [Sandman](#) series. I'm including it here because it works within the [Sandman](#) universe, was written by Neil Gaiman, and has some of the most spectacular artwork I have ever seen. Neil Gaiman adapted the story of **The Dream Hunters** from a Japanese folktale and the book is put together as an illustrated narrative. Gaiman tells the story of a fox who falls in love with a monk, and is willing to sacrifice herself to save him. The narrative is well written, but it is Yoshitaka Amano's artwork that makes the story come alive. Amano is well known for his work on **Vampire Hunter D** and **Chimera**. Here his artwork complements and inspires Gaiman's words. Drawing on the Japanese artistic tradition Amano uses a combination of vivid, bold images alongside fragile, delicate artwork to illustrate Gaiman's story.

*review by [petra](#)*

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#### **Death: The High Cost of Living**

ISBN: 1563891336

By Neil Gaiman

Art by Dave McKean, Chris Bachalo, Mark Buckingham

DC Comics 1994

Death is everyone's favorite older sister. She's sassy, pragmatic and brings real sartorial flair to the concept of the grim reaper. Every so often Death likes to take a day and spend it as a human, to keep in touch with what it means to be alive and what you risk when you die. This time she spends the day in the company of Sexton, a teen contemplating suicide. Along the way Death helps a witch find where she hid her heart, and

gets waylaid by someone who wants to steal her necklace. The inherent message of a possibly suicidal teen spending a day with Death is indeed not subtle. But, for a fairly obvious plot device its not obnoxious, and I never felt like Gaiman was beating me over the head with a message. That might be because Death herself is so endearing not concerned with making a point or teaching a lesson, or it might be a tribute to Gaiman's skill as an author. Either way, this is a good book and a nice addition to the [Sandman](#) universe.

review by [petra](#)

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### **Death: The Time of Your Life**

ISBN: 1563893339

By Neil Gaiman

Art by Chris Bachalo, Mark Pennington, Mark Buckingham

DC Comics 1997

This is the second volume that Gaiman wrote about Dream's older sister, Death. Unlike **Death: The High Cost of Living** this book isn't so much about Death as it is about death and the choices we make while we're alive. Gaiman brings back the characters of Hazel and Foxglove from the [Sandman](#) series. Since we last saw them Foxglove has become a famous singer, while Hazel stays home to look after their son Charlie. When Charlie has an accident Hazel makes a deal with Death to take her in his place, but asks for time to say goodbye to Foxglove who is away on tour. This isn't as upbeat a book as **Death: The High Cost of Living**. It's more thoughtful, and a little more melancholy. They're both good in very different ways, and show different aspects of Death's character. I love Death in "Death: The High Cost of Living", but this book affected me more and had a greater emotional impact.

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### **Taller Tales**

ISBN: 1401201008

By Bill Willingham

Art by Mark Buckingham, Zander Cannon, Duncan Fegredo, Peter Gross, Niko Henrichon, Adam Hughes, Phil Jimenez, Michael Kaluta, Marc Laming, Jason Little, Shawn McManus, Linda Medley, Albert Moneteys, Kevin Nowlan, Andrew Pepoy, Paul Pope, John Stokes, Daniel Torres, Bill Willingham  
DC Comics 2003

Bill Willingham, of [Fables](#), has delved into the [Sandman](#) universe and written a series of stories about the supporting characters of the [Sandman](#) universe. The explorations are fun and whimsical, and a great addition to the [Sandman](#) legacy. "The Further Adventures of Danny Nod, Heroic Library Assistant" is my favorite story in the collection. We get to spend a day in the life of Danny Nod, assistant librarian in Dream's library of imaginary books. On this particular day we follow him around as he retrieves volumes of folk and fairytale that were checked out the night before; each different fairytale has its own distinctive art style to match the story. If you've ever wondered why so many dreams are about sex, or why we sometimes dream in black and white and sometimes in color, or why we sometimes have the same dream night after night, then you need to read "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Dreams . . . But Were Afraid to Ask." The only story in the volume which didn't completely grab me was "The Thessaliad",

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