

Brief Lives Study Guide

Brief Lives by Neil Gaiman

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Plot Summary

Delirium, the youngest of the Endless, is seized with the idea of finding her older brother Destruction, who abandoned his duties and has kept himself hidden from the family for 300 years. Delirium asks Desire and Despair to help her find Destruction, but they both refuse. She then asks Dream. Dream is heartbroken by the recent breakup with his mortal lover Nada, but he agrees to accompany Delirium. He tells his librarian Lucien that he has no wish to find his brother, who expressly told them not to come looking for him, but that he would be going on the search solely to spend time with Delirium.

They set off to travel in the real world. Delirium has compiled a list of beings, mortal and god, who knew Destruction and might have some clue as to his whereabouts. Calamity seems to precede them. A long-lived lawyer named Bernie Capax dies in a freak industrial accident; a woman they choose to be their guide dies in a motel fire, and two long-lived humans must run for their lives from destructive forces closing in on them. Finally, after a run in with one of Destruction's old lovers, the goddess Astarte, an encounter that leads to the end of the goddess's existence on Earth, Dream calls a halt to their quest, breaks with Delirium, who is deeply upset by his unwillingness to continue, and returns to the Dreaming.

Death forces reconciliation between Dream and Delirium, and the two set on the search again, this time traveling to their eldest brother, Destiny's realm. Destiny tells them that they will need an oracle to find Destruction, one that is of the family. This leads them to Dream's estranged son Orpheus, whose head still lives in a sanctuary atop a Greek Island. Orpheus tells Dream where Destruction is in return for a boon which he will collect later.

Dream and Delirium confront Destruction on a neighboring island, where their older brother invites them to dinner and tries to explain to them why he left his duties and why he will not resume them. Destruction disappears again and Dream must return to Orpheus, who requests that his father kill him and end his now tiresome existence. Dream has no choice but to honor his son's wish and spill familial blood, an act that will have dramatic consequences for his future.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Brief Lives is the seventh volume of the Sandman series, but it picks up where the fourth volume left off. Dream's relationship with Nada has just ended, and she has decided to be reborn into a new human being, forgetting everything between them. Dream is holed up in his castle, brooding, and it has been raining in the Dreaming, his realm, for days. Delirium, the youngest of the Endless, who was very close to her brother Destruction and who has at times expresses a desire to see him again, will arrive with a proposition that Dream hopes will help put Nada out of his mind.

An old man named Andros scales the rocky shoreline of a Mediterranean island. He reaches the top where his grandson Kris stands with an assault rifle, guarding a small sanctuary. Andros enters the sanctuary, where the head of Dream's son, Orpheus, is still alive, greets him and they watch the sunrise together.

Delirium, the youngest of the Endless, sits with an old vagrant woman in an alley in London. The old woman cannot comfort Delirium, who is unfocused and incomprehensible, muttering about change. Delirium staggers away and into a private party in a gay and lesbian bar. Delirium confuses a young lesbian with black hair for her sister Death. Desire shows up though, and it escorts Delirium back to its realm.

In Desire's realm, Delirium tells the older Endless that she is having a hard time holding herself together, and that she misses her older brother Destruction. She uses Desire's gallery to call Desire's twin sister Despair. Delirium asks Despair if she will help find Destruction. Despair refuses to help, saying that Destruction told them not to try to find him when he left, three-hundred years before. Delirium leaves and Despair remembers one of the last times she saw her older brother. It was the plague year in London, 1665, and Despair met him in the corpse-littered streets. He was of good cheer, telling her that this was her time, but her time was always followed by his. He kissed her on the cheek, a kiss she thought for a moment she still felt on her flesh, three-hundred years later.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The old man Andros bookends the story, and each time it is at dawn, making the book seem to have two beginnings, one where it should be, and one where the reader expects an end. This fits well with the subject of the whole series, the family of the Endless, and it is an irony considering what Destruction will tell Dream in Chapter 8, that even the lives of the Endless are bounded.

The abdication of Destruction, and the ripples of discord that his absence has caused among the Endless are not unknown to those who have read the first six books. In the fourth book, The Seasons of Mist, Destiny does not bother calling Destruction to the family meeting, and Delirium in particular, comments on his absence. The Endless

perform their functions independent of one another, but seem to derive a balance of identity from each other, and even 300 years later, Destruction's flight casts a shadow on the family, particularly on the youngest, Delirium, the twins Desire and Despair, and to some extent Dream.

Delirium, the youngest, first approaches the next two youngest, the twins Desire and Despair, as a young sibling would enlist the help of other young siblings to approach an elder brother. Despair only balks at helping Delirium because she thinks Desire would not approve. It is clear that Despair, who along with Delirium are the only two of the Endless to have experienced a shift in aspect in the past, wishes to see her elder brother again, too.

The Endless are embodiments of the concepts they represent, and as such, they may be killed. However, if they are, as the first aspect of Despair was, a new aspect takes over the role. The Endless have hinted that when the original Despair was destroyed, and the new aspect took her place, it caused great turbulence in the family, similar to that of Destruction's departure.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

In the Dreaming, the realm of Dream of the Endless, a dark storm raged. Dream had just been left by another mortal woman, one in a growing line of women who have left him for one reason or another over the eons. It has been raining for 23 days in the Dreaming, and much of the land was flooding. In the house of Cain and Abel, Abel and the gargoyle Goldie have piled up furniture so they may sit above the water and fish. In the library, Matthew the raven and Lucien talk about Dream's previous lovers. Dream is brooding on a balcony of the castle when one of his gate guards interrupts him to tell him that a visitor has come. Dream tells the guard to send the visitor away, but the guard says that the visitor claims to be his sister.

It is Delirium, and Dream welcomes his younger sister. They sit down to eat, but Delirium quickly broaches the subject of Destruction, and her wish to try to find him. Dream excuses himself and, walking into his gallery, calls Desire, who he suspects has planted this idea in Delirium's head. Desire tells Dream that it had nothing to do with either Delirium's sudden obsession, or Dream's latest failed romance. When Dream returns to Delirium, she is lost in thought. She tells him she is remembering hazily about a time when she was Delight. It was around the time that her transformation occurred, and she was having trouble staying lucid. Destruction had held her and calmed her; he alone had stayed with her through much of the transformation.

Dream calls Lucien and tells the caretaker that he and Delirium will be traveling for a while in the real world. He tells Lucien to contact Pharamond for transportation for them. Delirium is very excited. Lucien pulls Dream aside and asks him if it is truly wise to go looking for Destruction when he said he did not want to be found. Dream tells Destruction that he has absolutely no desire to find Destruction and he does not believe they will. He is taking the trip solely to spend time with his sister.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The woman who has left Dream was called Nada, though when she left she chose to be reborn into a human infant and forget everything about her previous life. Dream had rescued her from Hell, where she had been imprisoned and tormented for 10,000 years. But it was Dream himself who, when she spurned him, condemned her to that torment, and rescuing her from it 10,000 years after the fact did not redeem him in her eyes. This last break between the two of them occurred at the end of book four, *The Seasons of Mist*, and the resumption of the storyline only 23 days later, in this the seventh book might startle the reader. The fifth and sixth books, *A Game of You and Fables* & *Reflections*, contained first a book-length side story that occurs in the Dreaming, and then a series of fables from various times in the past.

Delirium, having failed to enlist the help of Desire and Despair, goes to the next youngest sibling, Dream, who is the middle child in the family, and the youngest male (though Desire could be said to be of both sexes). Delirium mentions her transformation, which was unique among the Endless, for unlike Despair, she was not destroyed, but shifted. She was once Delight, and was the embodiment of joy, and unlike her current aspect, she was quite lucid. The original Sandman series does not contain the story of Delight's transformation into Delirium, but it is hinted at that she was once betrothed, and that the dissolution of that relationship caused her great pain, and the shift to her new aspect.

Dream's insistence that he has no wish to find his elder brother seems genuine at first. But it is quite possible that his ability to hide things from himself, something which Destruction will later comment on, has clouded his perception in this matter. In his confusion about himself, and about the changes he has undergone, he may be suppressing an unconscious desire to find his prodigal elder brother.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Bernie Capax is a lawyer and has been a lawyer for hundreds of years. He is one of few beings on this world that are long-lived. One way or another, he has simply avoided seeing Death. He is a lawyer because people have always needed lawyers, and he has found it easier to slide from one identity to the next when he can maintain the same profession. Bernie gets off a subway train. He is walking to work past a construction site, when a wall crumbles and collapses on him. He is standing over the mess, believing that once again he has cheated death, when Death of the Endless taps him on the shoulder. His body is under the bricks. He has died at last. He tells Death that he did pretty well; he lived 15,000 years. Death takes him away.

Dream and Delirium are in Dublin in the office of a travel agency run by a man named Farrell, who is actually a supernatural being named Pharamond. Pharamond was once a god in Babylonia, but his worship had faded, and now he sustained his life as a provider of transportation in all forms.

Pharamond welcome the two Endless. Dream tells him that they will be traveling in the waking world, in America, and want to arrange transportation. Delirium has a list of contacts, all of whom knew Destruction, and she wants to visit each. Dream glances at her list and sees "The Lawyer, Etain, The Alderman, The Dancing Woman."

Dream and Delirium fly to New York, meeting a woman named Ruby, who has been hired by Pharamond to drive them to each contact. Dream tells Delirium that Delirium is not allowed to Dream.

Etain is waking up groggily. She pours herself a cup of old coffee. She thinks the coffee smells funny but realizes that the smell is gas. She dashes into the living room, snatches her purse up from the couch and dives headfirst out of the plate glass window as the building explodes. As the firemen arrive, she slips away into the crowd, off to find a new life and lay low.

Destruction is oil painting on a deck overlooking the ocean. A talking dog named Barnabas is critiquing his work. Barnabas tells him that something is happening in the back room of the house, which Destruction keeps closed. They go to look in the room, in the center of which is a pool of water, which at the moment is tossing about turbulently. Barnabas asks what it means. Destruction says it means trouble. Hung on the walls of the room are the portraits of the sigils of the Endless, that would normally be in Destruction's gallery.

Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter begins with a small introduction to the concept of mortal individuals who have somehow learned to live exceptionally long lives. Like many of the metaphysical phenomenon in the series, Gaiman keeps their methods vague. In the case of Capax, it is implied that death is simply something he has avoided so much that he has mastered it. Etain's skill seems similar. Gaiman does not imply that the two of them are anything more than regular human beings who are good at continuing to live.

By giving the reader a glimpse of Delirium's list of contacts, Gaiman makes it clear that the side stories of their lives, and the events they experience, are important to Dream and Delirium's quest.

Then Destruction, the object of the quest, makes an appearance. The setting of his villa, on an island overlooking the sea, very similar to the island on which Andros' family guards the head of Orpheus, comes close to giving away the solution to the reader, and many readers will leap to the obvious conclusion that Destruction and Orpheus are in close proximity. This will not be a mystery. What is important is not where Destruction has gone, but what Dream and Delirium will go through to find him, and what they will ask him when they do.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The Alderman watches the aurora as he walks a large circle, checking his Death traps. The south trap is broken and the Alderman knows that death comes from the south. He strips and places his clothes in a pile. He pisses a circle around the pile and the clothes turn to stone. The Alderman transforms into a bear, with the shadow of a man. He then methodically eats his shadow. The bear then pisses around the pile of clothes which turn back to fabric. A shadow becomes a man, who puts on the clothes. The bear sends the man away, toward the south. As the bear lumbers away, it forgets that it was the Alderman.

Dream and Delirium arrive at Bernie Capax's house, where his son tells them that his father has died. He then shows them a secret cabinet Capax kept, full of various passports and papers of identification and money from all over the world. There is also a box in the back of the cabinet filled with gold Krugerrands, and several paintings including a Picasso, a Matisse, and something the son thinks might be a sketch by DaVinci. The son is perplexed about a father that he thought was a boring, unadventurous man.

They set off for Ohio to find Etain, but stop for the night at a motel, each getting separate rooms. Ruby is smoking in bed, watching television. Delirium is searching with her mind to find the others on the list. Etain and the Alderman are insubstantial, and perhaps beyond contact. She cannot sense Capax at all, and concludes he really is dead. She senses the Dancing Woman though, and even sees a vision of her through the eyes of a nearby mortal named Tiffany. Dream is remembering one of the last times he saw Destruction, in Oxford.

Destruction mentions Newton, and how mankind is learning to puzzle phenomenon out using reason. He cryptically tells Dream that this has happened before, on other planes. As soon as mortals learn to connect matter and energy, his time comes to an end. Dream comes out of his revelry when he realizes that the motel is on fire. Ruby has fallen asleep smoking and is dead. Delirium is waiting outside. She asks Dream if she can drive now and he agrees.

Chapter 4 Analysis

For once, Gaiman shows the reader the entire process of a metaphysical event, the Alder Man's transformation into a bear and the sending of his shadow off in his clothes to die. Still, there is description but no explanation. Delirium will later tell Dream that the Alder Man is indistinct, as though he is not in the world. We even learn something of how the Alder Man has cheated death. He keeps what he calls death traps in a wide

circle around him. It is the tripping of one of these traps that gives him forewarning of the danger to come.

Delirium briefly possesses Tiffany, during a conversation that she has with Ishtar at their dance club the day prior to the events in the next chapter. Delirium even says something to Ishtar through Tiffany, though Ishtar only realizes later that the moment occurred. This connection between Delirium and Tiffany reappears later. When Matthew the raven is screaming at Delirium to drive on the right side of the road, Tiffany briefly hears his voice.

During Dream's meeting with Destruction at Oxford, they discuss the progress of mankind. Destruction tells Dream that man's making the connection between matter and energy heralds the coming of the age of fire and flame. Unlike his meeting with Despair following the plague, when Destruction seemed almost giddy at what was to come, here Destruction speaks darkly of the atomic age. In perhaps the key phrase of the conversation, Destruction speaks of man's reasoning out the relationship between matter and energy:

"I have been here before. After a while certain ideas become inevitable." (p. 20)

There are two implications to this statement. The first is that Destruction, along with the rest of the Endless, has seen the rise and fall of many worlds, realities, or dimensions. This idea is brought up several times, and flashbacks of the Endless, in other forms, and in other worlds or realities, occur in several places in the series. It is clear that the Endless are the embodiment of universal concepts in all realities. The second implication of Destruction's statement involves the word "inevitable." He is stating that after a certain point, nothing can stop the arrival of certain ideas, and he is implying that not even he or the other Endless can. Furthermore, he implies that he is unnecessary, that mankind will come up with this form of destruction on its own. He will touch on this later, when he tells Dream that he played his part as Destruction long enough to fulfill his duty. In other words, long enough to reach a point of inevitability.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

An attractive young woman named Ishtar arrives at her friend Tiffany's apartment, carrying a bag of groceries. Tiffany is in a bad way, either hung over or sick. Ishtar cooks her breakfast and tries to prepare her for the day. They discuss their job as exotic dancers and past relationships. Ishtar mentions an old relationship that ended because of trouble with the man's family. They drive to work. They meet up with another dancer on the way into the building and begin talking about temple prostitution. Ishtar talks about how, in Babylonian times, young women would go to temples and be selected by young men to engage in sexual intercourse in order to praise the gods. As she dances her first dance that night, Ishtar reflects on how what she currently does, taking money for lust, is a shadow of the power she derived as a goddess, from ceremonies like temple prostitution.

Delirium is driving recklessly on the highway and is pulled over by a police car. When she tells the policeman that she does not have a license, he tells her that he will have to place her under arrest. Delirium determines that the man is not being very nice to her. The policeman is shouting and being abusive. Delirium tells the policeman that from now on, he will feel invisible insects stinging him at all times. The man doubles up on the ground, trying to fight off the nonexistent swarm as Delirium drives away. Dream summons Matthew the raven from the Dreaming. Matthew is the newest in a long line of ravens that Dream has kept, and he is the soul of a man who died in modern times. Dream asks Matthew if he drove when he was a mortal. When Matthew says that he did, and Dream tells him to instruct Delirium on how to drive properly.

They arrive at the nightclub where Ishtar works. Dream beguiles his way into the club, where Ishtar, who is dancing on stage, sees him. She runs to the dressing room, but Dream follows her. Dream addresses her as Belili and Astarte, and is surprised that "the Dancing Woman" meant her. Dream asks her if she knows where Destruction, who is her old lover, is. She does not know, but she says she still loves him. Dream tells her that he would expect no less from the Goddess of Love. Lastly, Dream tells her that she might be in danger, that there is some force sweeping ahead of Delirium and his search.

Ishtar walks to the stage, telling her manager that she is going to dance, to really dance, for the first time. She begins to dance and Tiffany, sensing that something is wrong, flees the building. The men watch Ishtar as she dances and she begins to glow. They are overcome with desire. Blood pours from their orifices and they keel over dead. An explosion, centered on Ishtar's chest, envelopes the nightclub.

Outside, Tiffany is crying in a lot across the street from the smoldering building. Desire appears, telling Tiffany, who has no way to understand, that Ishtar's last thoughts were of Destruction. Desire gives Tiffany its coat and disappears.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The theme of this chapter is the origin and nature of gods and goddesses. Ishtar, or Astarte, as Dream calls her, sums up the origin and the nature of gods and goddesses just before she dances herself out of existence:

"I know how gods begin, Roger. We start as dreams. Then we walk out of dreams into the land. We are worshiped and loved, and take power to ourselves. And then one day there's no one left to worship us." (Ch. 5, p. 20)

This seems to indicate that the Dreaming, Dream's realm, is the origin of all gods and that Dream himself could be seen as facilitating their existence. They are born in his realm, from the ideas of dreamers, until they grow powerful enough to step out of the Dreaming and into the real world. When no one worships them any longer, they return to the place of their origin. After her final dance, Ishtar's fate is unknown, though both Dream and later Destruction seem to know that she has returned to the Dreaming. The reader is left thinking that Ishtar may have ceased to exist entirely until Destruction tells his younger brother to give Ishtar a message for him, implying that she still exists. When Dream returns to his realm at the end of the book, he tells Lucien to deliver a message to Ishtar, who is in the Dreaming, waiting to "move on." Ishtar had said:

"And in the end, each little god and goddess takes its last journey back into dreams...and what comes after, not even we know." (Ch. 5, p. 20)

There is a great deal of irony in Gaiman's description of gods and goddesses. Destruction will later tell Dream that the Endless are not real but merely ideas created to fill a need. Living beings developed the ability to dream, and Dream, the idea of a caretaker over the world of dreams, came into existence. If gods and goddesses are products of Dream's realm, then they are ideas based on ideas, neither of which could be said to really exist.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Destruction is writing bad poetry in his house by the sea. Barnabas critiques the work severely, making fun at Destruction's clumsy attempts to dabble in art. Destruction hints that he knows that members of his family are trying to find him.

Dream has had enough. He tells Delirium that their quest is over, and that it has only brought misery on the innocent. Delirium feels betrayed. She slinks off into her realm. Dream contacts Pharamond to tell him that their travels are done and to apologize for the death of Ruby.

Dream returns to his realm, locks himself in his throne room, and begins to construct a dream. He steps into the dream, finding himself in a desert with a ghostly city in the distance, and the ghosts of cats slinking about over the sand. The city is Bubastis, the city of the lady Bast, the Egyptian goddess of cats, and an old friend of Dream's. She is there, too. She once told him that she had information on where he might find Destruction. He asks her for the information, but she is forced to admit that she was bluffing before, hoping he would award her delegation the key to Hell. She has heard rumors about Destruction. He helped build the Panama Canal. He was in Paris in the 1930s. She says to find him Dream one would need to consult an oracle. Dream says he did not really want to find Destruction but now he fears he will have to. Bast wakes, curled up in the basement of a forgotten and crumbling temple. She exists now only because of the power she can derive from the worship of cats. Humans no longer remember her.

When Dream returns to the castle, Lucien tells him something is wrong in his gallery. Delirium's portrait has gone black. Dream calls on his sister Death, who is angry with him, and shows it by only addressing Lucien when she arrives. Eventually, she deigns to talk to her brother, telling him that whatever he did to Delirium, he had better rectify. Dream enters Delirium's realm. He apologizes to her for cutting their trip short. He tells her that when he realized that they would have to consult an oracle next, he balked, because he knew where that would lead them. He offers to restart their search, no matter the consequences, and they set out again.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Everyone who knows Dream believes he has changed. Destruction's abdication was perhaps the starting point of his transformation, but there are other decisive events, including his imprisonment by mortals for much of the 20th century, his ordeal with the key of Hell, and his rescue of his former lover Calliope. In this chapter, he asks in contradictory ways, indicative of someone who is battling with subconscious knowledge. His termination of his partnership with Delirium could be seen as the forced, conscious

act of the old Dream. Yet, after he breaks from his sister, he immediately resumes the search for his brother by contacting Bast. He does so in the Dreaming, which is a wise move. His attempts in the real world to contact those who knew Destruction have brought calamity. By conducting the next contact in the Dreaming, he is seeking to have more control over any forces at play and avert further deaths. That Dream should concern himself about mortals who die in his search for his brother, or indeed in any of his actions, is a sign of his transformation. Later, when Dream tells Destruction he was forced to continue the search so Ruby's death would not be in vain, his older brother says:

"300 years ago you would have told me that she was simply mortal, and would have died later, had she not died then." (Ch. 8, p. 8)

When Bast tells him that he will need to find an oracle, Dream again is of a divided mind. When he resumes his search with Delirium, he will make what he knows to be a pointless trip to see Destiny. Dream already knows that the only oracle that can divine anything about the family of the Endless is one that is a member of the family, and he knows that means the oracle will have to be his son Orpheus. Yet he will go with Delirium to Destiny's realm, just to put off the moment when he will have to confront his son.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Destruction arrives back at his villa laden with groceries. He tells a skeptical Barnabas that he intends to try his hand at cooking.

Dream and Delirium decide to visit their eldest brother, Destiny. To enter his realm, they need to find some sort of a maze, and Delirium takes them to a carnival, where they enter the maze of mirrors. All mazes will lead into Destiny's realm, if you know which turns to take. They walk on for some time, finally arriving in Destiny's garden, where a colorful statue of Delirium, when she was Delight, adorns the lawn.

Destiny knows why they have come and urges them to give up their pursuit. When Dream tells him that they mean to see it through, Destiny tells them he has no information on Destruction, and they will need to consult an oracle. Dream says that no oracles can touch knowledge about their family. Destiny tells Dream that there is an oracle that can because he is part of the family, and Dream knows full well who this oracle is. Dream is distraught by the information, and Delirium, in one of her few lucid moments, rounds on Destiny, upbraiding him for believing that everything is in his book. She tells him that there are paths that lie outside his garden, and that there are two sides to every coin.

Dream and Delirium are walking out of the garden when Destiny flips his book open and reads about a meeting 300 years ago, when Destruction told them that he was abandoning his duties and his realm, that he was going, and that they were not to follow.

Dream and Delirium arrive on the island sanctuary where Dream's son Orpheus is guarded by Andros and his grandsons. Dream, who has been estranged from his son for centuries, enters the sanctuary to ask Orpheus about Destruction. He spends a few minutes inside, then returns, telling his sister that Orpheus told him where Destruction is, but that now Dream owed his son something in return. Dream and Delirium ask Andros' grandson to row them to the next island over. There they climb the steep shore and discover a villa atop the island. Barnabas, tail wagging, approaches them, with Destruction just behind him. Destruction greets them and tells them that he has been expecting them and invites them to a dinner he has prepared.

Chapter 7 Analysis

When Dream finally has to confront the knowledge that he will have to seek out his estranged son, the confrontation proves all the more difficult for him because of how well Dream hides information from himself. Destruction will later comment on this, when Dream tells his elder brother that he is not in the habit of forgetting anything, Destruction says:

"Dream, my brother. You forget nothing you have interest in; you forget, instantly, those things you do not care to know." (Ch. 8, p. 18)

It is possible that Dream has already guessed what Orpheus would ask of him in return for helping find Destruction.

When Delirium upbraids Destiny for what she considers to be his arrogance and callousness, she undergoes a brief physical transformation. Her eyes, which are normally mismatched in color, and her hair, which is equally uneven, both return to a more uniform appearance, and she places herself above her eldest brother, who is the tallest of all the Endless by floating off the ground over his head. Delirium implies that, like Dream, Destiny hides information from himself, too. She tells him that there are paths outside his garden and not written in his book, and what's more that he knows this to be true. Yet he acts as though everything that is and can be is in his book.

After Delirium and Dream leave Destiny, a wind blows through the garden and ruffles the pages of his book. They stop on several different locations, giving him brief glimpses of the future. One of which seems to involve Dream's next aspect, Daniel Hall, who, as the Dream King, will appear in white, instead of black.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

They sit down to eat, but neither Dream nor Delirium partake of the meal, despite Destruction's attempts to press various dishes on them. Delirium tells Destruction of their quest, and when Destruction asks why they tried to find him, she says to get him back. Dream says that he did it to accompany Delirium, and then to make sure Ruby did not die in vain.

Destruction tells them that he is no longer needed, that people make their own creation and destruction. Dream inquires as to how Destruction knew of their quest. Destruction mentions the scrying pool and about certain mechanism he put in place to warn him if anyone tried to find him and to attempt to stop them if they did. Dream asks him if these mechanisms could be responsible for the destruction that followed them, including the transfiguration of Destruction's lover Astarte. Destruction says they were, but that he had no way to stop them once Dream and Delirium began their pursuit. Destruction tells Dream that he is flattered that Dream spoke to Orpheus in order to find him. He remarks on how much Dream has changed, though Dream flatly denies it.

They go out into the garden, under the night sky, and Destruction tells them that he left because there are two sides to every coin. He says that the Endless are only ideas, repeating motifs, and that they had no authority to do what they do. He tells them about a conversation he once had with their sister Death. He was feeling dejected and inadequate. He wanted to be more, to understand more. She told him that everyone, even mortals, understand all of existence, but they are forced to hide the knowledge from themselves in order to survive. Dream asks Destruction if he will come back. Destruction says that he will not.

They walk to the backroom of the house, where Destruction borrows a handkerchief from Death to make a bindle. He tells them that he must keep his sword, and the scrying pool, each of which he shrinks to fit on the handkerchief, before tying it to a pole. He gives them each a gift. To Dream, he gives advice to remember what Destruction did 300 years ago and today. He then asks Barnabas if he would like to go with Delirium, to take care of her. When Barnabas asks why he cannot come with Destruction, Destruction tells him he cannot survive where Destruction intends to go. Barnabas agrees to go with Delirium and try to guard her.

They walk back out to the garden. Destruction bids them farewell, and then, with a series of steps, climbs into the sky until he is nothing more than a winking star, then disappears entirely. Delirium asks Dream what they will do now. Dream tells her that now he has a duty to perform. He must kill his son.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Perhaps one of the most beautifully-drawn and poignantly-written chapters in the whole series, the short dinner party between Dream, Delirium, and Destruction is a deeply-philosophical meeting between beings that, if Destruction is to be believed, cannot be said to really exist. Destruction describes the Endless as such:

"The Endless are merely patterns. The Endless are ideas. The Endless are wave functions. The Endless are repeating motifs. The Endless are echoes of darkness, and nothing more. We have no right to play with their lives, to order their dreams and their desires." (Ch. 8, p. 16)

Dream seems stuck on his older brother's shameful act of abandoning his responsibilities. Dream asks Destruction several times why he left, and Destruction continues to rephrase the epiphany that led him to abandon his duties, trying to will his younger brother to understand. Destruction tells Dream that his realm is still there; things are still being created and destroyed, and that he is no longer needed as a guiding force. When he is packing up his sword, which is the symbol of his role as Destruction, Dream asks him why he will not pass the sword on and let another aspect of Destruction resume the role. Destruction tells him he will not drop another being into that mess.

Another point of contention between the two brothers involves Dream's son Orpheus. After the death of his wife, Eurydice, distraught Orpheus sought out Destruction, and Destruction advised him to visit Death. It was the subsequent encounter that granted Orpheus immortality, which Orpheus has regretted for centuries. Dream blames Destruction for facilitating this, and he tells his older brother that Orpheus was just a child and did not know what he wanted and has come to regret it.

When Destruction relates his conversation with Death, where she tells him that everyone not only can, but does know everything, we just pretend we do not to make it all bearable, Dream replies that it sounds unlikely. Destruction says he did not understand at first either:

"That was what I said to her. I said, if they do that, why do they keep wandering around and falling down manholes and tripping on banana skins? Why does it seem like none of us—Endless or mortal, ghost or god—knows what we're doing?" (Ch. 8, p. 15)

Delirium seems to understand this right away, as she was the only one of the Endless, except perhaps Death, to understand what Destruction told them when he left 300 years ago, that every coin has two sides. She repeats the line to Destiny in the previous chapter when she points out that there are paths that are not in his garden and possibilities not written in his book, and it is Delirium, not Dream, who in the end is capable of understanding why Destruction left. Delirium is not distraught that Destruction is leaving again, though she says that she will miss him.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Orpheus watches Destruction leave the nearby island as a shooting star. Minutes later, Delirium enters Orpheus' sanctuary. He greets her as his revered aunt, and she says her goodbyes to him. She leaves and is replaced by Dream. Orpheus asks after his mother Calliope, who Dream had recently freed from imprisonment by a mortal. They talk for some time, and Orpheus, like Destruction, tells Dream that he has changed. Dream again denies it. Finally, Orpheus tells his father that, though he is scared, he is ready. Dream kisses him on the forehead and then closes Orpheus's eyes in death.

Dream walks out of the sanctuary with his son's blood on his hands. Despair appears and asks after Destruction, whom she was fond of as well. Delirium says that Destruction asked after Despair, and Delirium hands Despair a flower, which Despair takes with her back to her realm, where her twin, Desire, awaits her. Desire is surprised that it feels no pleasure in Dream's ordeal. Desire had sworn an oath long ago to make Dream spill family blood, but now that he had done so, Desire was unfulfilled.

Dream returns to the Dreaming, where he visits Andros in the old man's sleep. He tells him that Orpheus is dead, and the charge that Dream had given Andros' ancestors has come to an end. He asks Andros to bury Orpheus's head. Dream returns to his castle. He is so changed by the incident that his gate guards do not at first recognize him. He tells Lucien that he has a message from Destruction to Astarte and that she is currently in the Dreaming waiting to go "on." Lucien promises to deliver the message and to give Etain and the Alderman the all clear.

Dream then washes the blood off his hands as he recalls a conversation with his son after Eurydice's death but before the Maenads had torn his head from his body. Tiffany is on a talk show, talking about how an angel gave her a coat outside of a burning building and saved her life. In its realm, Desire holds the flower that Despair gave it, and thinks of its brother Destruction. On the island sanctuary, Andros buries Orpheus's head beneath a cherry tree.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Desire's surprising empathy with Dream and Desire's disappointment with an outcome that it had long hoped for, is illustrative in many ways of the nature of desire. There is a cliché that the wanting is always greater than the having, and Desire's feelings after Orpheus's death are a good example of this phenomenon.

Dream sheds familial blood, and this act will have dramatic consequences to his very existence, playing a crucial part in the final story line of the series. Merv Pumpkinhead, one of the denizens of the Dreaming, talks to Lucien the librarian about Dream's tendency to overact, and, though Merv may not know it, about Dream's nature:

"Like you accidentally put up one little forest where he was maybe expecting a laundry room and all of a sudden he's acting like it's a matter of life and death. Real life. That's what guys like him never have to face up to. Real life." (Ch. 9, p. 17)

It is possible that Dream, who Destruction says is an idea born out of some need, in this case, the need of mortals to dream, is not capable of successfully mixing with real life. The nature of his transformation has moved him closer to mortals. He gave birth to a mortal son and had to kill that son; he was imprisoned by mortals, and he finds himself caring about the welfare of mortals. All these steps are pushing him toward the climactic end of the series and the end of his existence. It is possible that his sister is correct when she told him, in the fourth book, *The Seasons of Mist*, that the Endless should not get involved with mortals beyond their assigned functions.

Characters

Dream of the Endless, Morpheus, Lord Shaper, the Sandman

Dream of the Endless is the central character in the series. He is the younger brother of Destiny, Death, and Destruction, but elder to the rest of the Endless. He is closest to his sister Death but is also fond of his sister Delirium, who was once Delight. His rivalry with Desire is longstanding, and the two share a mutual enmity.

Dream's appearance varies over time and can also depend on how he wishes to be seen. His natural state is that of a tall, rake-thin man, with modern, Gothic-style clothing and hair. Gaiman began the series in the late 1980s and the Sandman bears a strong resemblance to figures in 1980s Gothic rock, perhaps embodied best by Robert Smith of the music group The Cure.

At the beginning of the series, Dream has been in captivity for over 70 years, and the Dreaming, his realm, is in a state of disrepair. He frees himself, returns to the Dreaming, and the first few books involve his attempt to repair the damage done and recover two magical objects, his helmet, and his ruby, which he lost when he was taken captive. In this the fourth volume of the series, he attempts to right an old wrong, to free the soul of a woman who he condemned to Hell after she spurned him. While in Hell, he is witness to the abdication of the throne by Hell's ruler, Lucifer, who empties the kingdom and gives Dream the key.

Dream manages to dispose of the key, but Nada, the mortal he rescued from Hell, refuses to be his lover. Dream is distraught by the end of the relationship and is eager for the distraction that his sister Delirium brings when she asks him to help her find their long-lost brother Destruction.

Delirium of the Endless

Delirium is the youngest of the Endless. She appears as a young girl of perhaps twelve or thirteen, with mismatched hair and eyes, mesh shirt and stockings and a leather jacket. She controls the realms of confusion and insanity, and she embodies those concepts, for she is scatterbrained, easily distracted or confused, and enjoys coming up with conceptually mismatched ideas or words.

Delirium is the only one of the Endless who has undergone a change in function. She was once Delight and embodied the concepts of joy. The cause of her transformation is never elucidated, though it is hinted that she was once betrothed, and that something occurred in that relationship that caused the radical shift in her personality and function. Her childlike behavior is deceptive, for while she seems to understand mundane matters

the way a child would, she displays deeper insight when confronted with broader concepts.

Destruction of the Endless

Destruction is a member of the Endless formerly responsible for all acts of destruction and, consequently, all acts of creation. He is the third member of the Endless, by age, and is often perceived by the younger siblings as the eldest brother, mostly because of Destiny's aloofness.

Three-hundred years ago Destruction announced he was abandoning his duties and realm. This was an act similar to abdication, except that Destruction intentionally took his trappings of office with him, and with them, any ability of another being to step into his place. He believed there was no more need for a Destruction, that mankind could do their own creating and destroying without his help. He has since been in hiding, and his whereabouts are unknown to even his family.

Destiny of the Endless

The eldest of the Endless, Destiny came into being shortly after existence was created. He never leaves his realm but instead walks his garden, which is said to contain all paths and studies his book, in which is written all possibilities. He is the tallest of the Endless and appears as a thin man in a brown cloak, the hood of which always obscures his face. He is said to be blind.

Death of the Endless

Death is the eldest sister of the Endless. Her role is shrouded in mystery. All that is known, even by the other Endless, is that she escorts dead beings into something further and unknown. She appears as a young, gothically-dressed woman, and she wears a silver ankh around her neck.

Desire and Despair of the Endless

Twin entities Desire and Despair are the embodiments of their names. Desire is a sexually ambiguous creature, neither completely male or female, but desirable to both. Despair is a rotund, short woman, always nude and lacking all pigment. She carries, as her sigil, a hooked ring, which she periodically uses to gouge at her own flesh.

Andros

The elder remember of an ancient order that Dream created to watch over the living head of his son Orpheus.

Lucien

The librarian of the vast library in the Dreaming, which contains all the books imagined but not written, Lucien is also one of Dream's most trusted servants.

Matthew the Raven

Matthew is a raven inhabited by the soul of a dead mortal. He acts as Dream's messenger, assistant, and occasional sounding board.

Cain and Abel

The brothers from the biblical story are denizens of the Dreaming and servants of Dream. Abel has a small gargoyle named Goldie, who is his best friend.

Bernie Carpax

Bernie is an extremely long-lived human, 10,000 years, who Dream and Delirium seek out for information about Destruction.

Etain

Etain is a long-lived human who Dream and Delirium seek out for information about Destruction. She manages to escape the calamity that heralds their arrival and goes into hiding.

Pharamond, Mr. Farrell

Pharamond is a former Babylonia deity, the last survivor of his pantheon, who derives his continued existence by facilitating travel in all forms around the world.

Ruby

Ruby is a human employee of Pharamond who meets her end as she is escorting Dream and Delirium through the waking world.

The Alder Man

The Alder Man is a Lapp visionary who has learned how to avoid death. A friend of Destruction's, he is sought out by Dream and Delirium for information, but, sensing the danger of their approach, hides himself inside the body of a bear.

Tiffany

An exotic dancer and friend of Ishtar, though she does not know her friend is a former goddess.

Ishtar, aka Astarte, aka Belili

The Babylonian goddess of love and fertility, Ishtar is a former lover of Destruction and now works as a dancer in a strip club, deriving her existence from the sexual worship she receives there.

Barnabas

Barnabas is a talking dog who is the pet and companion of Destruction, and who Destruction gives to his sister Delirium when he wishes to travel to realms where Barnabas will not survive.

Bast

The Egyptian goddess of cats, Bast is an old friend of Dream's, who Dream consults about the whereabouts of Destruction.

Orpheus

A great bard and king from Greek mythology, Orpheus is the son of Dream (Morpheus) and the muse Calliope. After the death of his young wife Euridice, Orpheus was torn to pieces by the Maenads and river Hebrus. In Greek Myth, his head lived on, acting as an oracle of Apollo. Gaiman explains his continued existence by suggesting that he made a mysterious pact with his aunt Death.

The Endless

Destruction says that the Endless are concepts or ideas and are not real. They embody the concepts they are associated with and came into being when those concepts, or their opposites, were first experienced by living beings. They transcend cultures, worlds, and even dimensions. They exist in many forms, depending mostly on to whom they are appearing. The family of the Endless are, in order of age, Destiny, Death, Destruction, Dream, the twins Desire and Despair, and Delirium.

Objects/Places

The Dreaming

The Dreaming is the vast realm of Dream. It is the setting of the dreams of mortals and as such is mutable and can contain any type of environment that mortals, or Dream himself can conjure up. The creation that occurs in the Dreaming seems to come both from mortals and from Dream himself. He will sometimes construct Dreams for mortals to travel in, and he will sometimes allow them to construct their own dreams.

The Dreaming contains many permanent residents, some of whom are servants of Dream. Lucien the librarian, Matthew the raven, Cain, Abel, and Eve are all examples. The Dreaming also contains permanent concepts that Dream has constructed, including nightmares like the Corinthian, or locations like Fiddler's Green.

Though it can move about, Dream's castle is always the center of the Dreaming. He will change its location and appearance based on his mood. His mood also affects the weather and other attributes of the Dreaming.

Destiny's Garden

Destiny's Garden is a maze of topiary and statues. The paths created in Destiny's maze are said to mirror all the possible choices of existence. Destiny never leaves the garden but wanders the various paths, his book in hand. Visions can occasionally roam the garden, perhaps on paths relevant to their existence. Dream and Delirium, while walking in the garden, see a vision of Delirium as Delight. All mazes in the real world are said to lead into Destiny's Garden if one but knows which turns to take.

Delirium's Realm

Delirium's realm is a formless mix of colors and symbols. It is rendered as a chaos of activity and includes sound as well as form, with the visions of insane mortals and the prattle of madmen all around.

Destruction's Sword

Destruction's sword is a real sword, but it is also a sigil that represents his office. He implies that leaving it behind or allowing another to possess it would pass both the responsibility and the power of being Destruction upon that person.



The Sigils of the Endless

The sigils are objects possessed by each of the Endless. Destiny has a book, Death an ankh, Destruction a sword, Dream a helmet, Desire a heart, Despair a hooked ring, and Delirium, the youngest of the Endless, has a sigil that is just an indistinct swirl of colors.

The Galleries of the Endless

Each member of the Endless has a gallery in his or her realm. The gallery contains portraits of the sigils of the other members of the family. The portraits are more than simple two-dimensional representations of the sigil, for at times, the Endless will remove the sigil from the portrait and hold it in his or her hand in order to call upon that family member. They may communicate with each other directly through the portraits, but the portraits can also act as doors into the realm of the depicted person.

Lucien's Library

Lucien's library, in the Dreaming, contains every story ever conceived but not written down, including the idle musings and unfinished novels of all the great writers in history. If a living writer dreams up a story, it will appear as a book in the library, but if that living writer then commits it to paper, the book will disappear from Lucien's library.

The Sanctuary of Orpheus

The Sanctuary of Orpheus is a small, domed chapel built above the precipitous cliffs of a small, Mediterranean island, where the order of caretakers founded by Dream to care for the living head of his son, have watched over their charge for countless generations.

Destruction's Villa

Built on an island near the one housing Orpheus, Destruction's small villa is placed similarly, on the top of the island overlooking the sea. However, unlike Orpheus's island, it is implied that there is a village set on Destruction's island, for he goes shopping "down in the village" to buy food to prepare for his meal with Dream and Delirium.

The Suffragette City

The dance club where Ishtar and Tiffany work, its name is a reference to a David Bowie song from the Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars album.

Themes

Responsibility, perceived or actual

When Delirium asks Dream if he will help her look for their brother Destruction, Dream tells her he will go, and she assumes that he, too, wishes to find Destruction. But Dream tells Lucien that he has no intention of finding his brother, and that he is undertaking the journey for the sole purpose of spending time with his sister. The mechanisms that Destruction put in place to impede anyone who tries to find him begin to have serious consequences on those that Dream and Delirium seek, and Dream tells Delirium that he will not continue, as he does not wish to be responsible for any further calamities. But then because of the death of Ruby, Bernie Capax, and Ishtar, Dream feels he must seek out his brother. He feels that not to do so would mean that their deaths, which he feels responsible for, would be in vain.

Destruction tells Dream that their functions as Endless are not necessary. He says that since his abandonment of his realm, mankind has continued to create and destroy. He believes that the realm is still there, but Destruction does not know whether it is more ordered or less ordered without a ruler. He believes it is no longer anyone's responsibility and that it never truly needed to be.

Dream's sense of responsibility forces him to make good on his promise to his son Orpheus and grant him the boon that he requests, even though it means that dream must kill Orpheus, shedding familial blood and bringing difficult consequences down on himself.

The Power of Dieties and Their Origins

The episodes involving Pharamond, Ishtar, and Bast illustrate Gaiman's interesting take on the origins of deities and the ways in which they derive their power.

Ishtar tells her manager, Roger, that gods and goddesses are born in the Dreaming, and that, when they grow powerful enough from being worshiped, they step out of the Dreaming into the real world. Any worship given to them, whether through ritual, prayer, worship, obsession, or other means, strengthens their existence in the same way that a fact may be remembered easily by the mind through reinforcement by study. When Ishtar's followers thinned and then disappeared, she was forced to find any worship she could to keep herself in existence. She sought out dancing, which can draw praise or worship, particularly if it is sexual in nature. She calls this worship a pale shadow of what she received when she was a goddess.

Pharamond is the last surviving deity from the pantheon of a long-dead civilization. Like Ishtar, he draws power to the idea of himself by acting as a facilitator of travel. Any time that someone prays that they'll be able to find a taxi, or that they will not miss their flight, his existence is strengthened. Bast, the Egyptian god of cats, is maintained solely by

her place in the dreams of cats. No humans worship her any longer, and when she wakes from her meeting with Dream, the reader sees that she is a bedraggled figure, curled up on the floor of a long abandoned temple.

Ishtar also relates what happens when deities can no longer maintain their existence in the real world, or when they no longer wish to do so. They return to dreams, where it is likely their existence comes to an end, if nothing occurs to return them into the thoughts of mortals.

The Nature of the Endless

Once Dream and Delirium find their older brother Destruction, they try to convince him to resume his role. But Destruction has no wish to return, and he tries to explain to them again why he left. He speaks about the nature of the Endless, starting first with the oldest of them, Destiny. He says that Destiny came into being near the same time as all of existence. Death, the eldest sister was there as soon as there was a being in existence that could die. Destruction arrived when beings decided to create, Dream when a living being had its first dream. But Destruction says that the Endless are not real, not in the same way that living beings are. They are ideas, wave functions he calls them, created by living beings to govern different aspects of existence. Their creation is therefore similar to that of gods and goddess, except that they represent concepts that transcend individual cultures and even individual realities.

When Dream asks Destruction again if he will return, Destruction tries to explain why he will not by talking about how the Endless help define existence. Destiny defines freedom. Death defines life. Dream defines reality. Destruction himself defines creation, but Destruction implies that the help they give is not actually necessary. They are creations in the minds of living beings, who seek to control the forces of nature by imagining beings that rule over those forces, or over the forces that are opposites of those forces. Destruction tells Dream that what they do is not a responsibility; it is not a right. Living beings create the Endless, but they do not need the Endless.

Style

Point of View

The Sandman series is largely written in third person. It does not focus on one point of view, but ranges all around, though Dream, as the protagonist, receives more time than most. It should be said that writing in first person is extremely rare in the comic genre, and Gaiman follows most of the conventions of the form. He will sometimes abandon speech and thought balloons for sections of free prose, sometimes pages in length. But even this, while unusual in comic books, is not a unique device.

Because the book is also a visual work of art, the style of the artwork used can affect the point of view. Color changes are used to indicate the mood of both the storyline and of the characters. Brief Lives is an unusual volume of the Sandman series because Gaiman sticks with the same artists throughout the whole book. This means that the artwork is consistent from beginning to end. In some volumes of the series, the shift between artists can be distracting.

Setting

As this is the story of a quest, Dream and Delirium's quest to find their brother Destruction, the characters pass through many different settings, and there are numerous flashbacks to the past, both near and distant. Most of the action takes place in the real world, in the United States, when Dream and Delirium are looking up Destruction's old friends, and in the Mediterranean, when they visit Orpheus and then Destruction himself.

There are brief visits to the realms of Destiny, Desire, Despair, and Delirium, but only Dream's realm, the Dreaming, receives attention of any length.

The Endless have unique methods for traveling between the realms. Each of the Endless has a gallery, a collection of portraits that depict the sigils of their other family members. A book for Destiny, the ankh for Death, a sword for Destruction, the dream helmet for Dream, a heart for Desire, the hooked ring for Despair, and a swirl of colors for Delirium. Any of the Endless may contact the other by taking the sigil out of the portrait and calling out. If the Endless that is contacted wishes, the portrait can then act as a gateway into his or her realm.

Language and Meaning

Gaiman's writing throughout the work is direct, though it would be a stretch to say that he keeps entirely to the essentials of the story. His narrative is halting and brief, even when he is describing complicated metaphysical phenomena. He uses some vocabulary that is above secondary school levels, but a reader can face the greatest difficulties

trying to understand the vast amount of historical, mythical, and metaphysical data on which he draws. Gods and goddess come and go in the narrative, their origins and particulars largely left to the reader. Complex metaphysical interactions are left shrouded in darkness. In many ways, this adds to the strength of the series, particularly in that further readings almost always reveal new details.

Because the series is a visual work of art, the lettering and style of the speech and thought balloons have an effect on the words inside. The balloons follow comic conventions in that they are rounded for dialogue and squared for thoughts or narrations. The biggest exception to this is Dream's dialogue, which throughout the series is placed as white text inside black, expressive and jagged speech balloons. This of course makes Dream stand apart from every other speaker. There are a few other exceptions, including Dream's younger sister Delirium, whose speech balloons vary through all the colors of the rainbow, sometimes containing several colors blended together. Delirium's words are lettered by hand, and the letters vary in size and location.

Structure

The series was originally released in weekly series form and consists of nine chapters, each 24 pages in length. Unlike other volumes in the series, *Brief Lives* has no Prologue or Epilogue. The chapters are split based on the storyline, not the characters, so one chapter may jump around, containing many points of view, but each chapter ends on a distinct turn in the story, effectively compelling the reader forward.

The artwork is consistent throughout this volume, and Jill Thompson's distinctive style gives this volume a sense of order and completeness rare in the series. The paneling is varied and interesting, but there are not dramatic intricacies in the layouts. This is to the book's credit. Gaiman sticks to the story and so do the artists.

Quotes

"So, my sister. This is a good time for you. Are you pleased?"

'Pleased, oh my Lord of Destruction? I am neither pleased nor displeased. I simply am.'

'Oh. This won't last much longer. Already the deaths are getting fewer...'

'Plagues come and go.'

'Yes. And then it's my turn.'

Destruction talking to Despair, (Ch. 1, p. 22)

"And I suppose you had nothing to do with my recent troubles?"

'Your little affair, and its messy ending? I hate to disappoint you Dream, but you managed to screw that one up all on your own. Although I did find it extremely amusing.'"

Dream talking to Desire, (Ch. 2, p. 19)

"But I did okay, didn't I? I mean I got, what, fifteen thousand years. That's pretty good. Isn't it? I lived a pretty long time.'

'You lived what anybody gets, Bernie. You got a lifetime. No more. No Less.'"

Bernie Capax talking to Death, (Ch. 3, p. 5)

"As you say, you have been here before. In many times, in many worlds.'

'Aeon after aeon. From the dawn days when time was fresh-minted. And for how much longer?'

'As long as they need us.'

'Are not light and gross bodies intraconvertible? Alas, they are. And from that follows the flames...The big bang. The loud explosions. Then follows my time, brother. The age of fire and flame...'"

Dream talking with Destruction, (Ch. 4, p. 21)

"I know how gods being, Roger. We start as dreams. Then we walk out of dreams into the land. We are worshiped and loved, and take power to ourselves. And then one day there's no one left to worship us. And in the end, each little god and goddess takes its last journey back into dreams...and what comes after, not even we know. I'm going to dance now, I'm afraid.'"

Ishtar, (Ch. 5, p. 20)

"I need to know, Bast.'

'And what would you give me, if I told you? Would you run with me, in the night, under the moon? Would you be my tom?'"

Dream talking with Bast, (Ch. 6, p. 13)

" 'You will not tell me where our brother is to be found?'

'I may tell you only what others have told you; you need an oracle.'

'There are no oracles who can tell of our family.'

'You thought of one, when you spoke to the cat-goddess, did you not? There is, after all,



an oracle who is of the family."
Dream talking with Destiny, (Ch. 7, p. 10)

"My brother? How could you leave?"
'Because there's no such thing as a one-sided coin. Because there are two sides to every sky. Destruction did not cease with my abandonment of my realm, no more than people would cease to dream should you abandon yours. Perhaps it's more uncontrolled, wilder. Perhaps not. But it's no longer anyone's responsibility.'
Dream talking with Destruction, (Ch. 8, p. 11)

"She said we all not only could know everything. We do. We just tell ourselves we don't make it all bearable.'
'It sounds unlikely.'
'That was what I said to her. I said, if they do that, why do they keep wandering around and falling down manholes and tripping on banana skins? Why does it seem like none of us—Endless or mortal, ghost or god—knows what we're doing?'
'And she said?'
'I told you. She said everyone knows everything. We just pretend to ourselves we don't.'
Destruction talking to Dream, (Ch. 8, p. 15)

"Things are created. They last for some little while, and then they are gone. Empires, cities, poems and people. Atoms and worlds. One cannot begin a new dream without abandoning the last, eh, brother? Our sister defines life, just as despair defines hope, or desire defines hatred, or as destiny defines freedom.'
'And what do I define, by this theory of yours?'
'Reality, perhaps?'"
Destruction talking to Dream, (Ch. 8, p. 16)

"Barnabas, my friend. Answer if you wish. Will you go with the Lady Delirium, walk beside her, tread the path that she treads also? Protect and lead and guide her?'
'I can't look after a doggie.'
'You misheard him. I get to look after you.'
'Oh.'
Destruction, Delirium, and Barnabas, (Ch. 8, p. 20)

"Father? I am very scared.'
'You asked for a boon, Orpheus. I can grant it.'
'I am so scared. It's strange. For many thousand years I have prayed for death. I have prayed to all the gods for peace and relief and...I have prayed for an ending.'
Orpheus and Dream, (Ch. 9, p. 4)

Topics for Discussion

How is Dream reacting to the failure of his relationship with Nada? How does his problems with women illustrate Death's belief that the Endless should not go beyond their functions with mortals?

Delirium often seems childlike in her understanding of the world. Give examples of moments that illustrate this. When is she not childlike?

Dream and Desire are the only members of the Endless family that seem to be at war with each other. Why would the concepts of dreaming and desiring be at odds, and how could this illustrate the nature of Dream and Desire's relationship?

When Bernie Capax tells Death that he did pretty good to live 10,000 years, she tells him that he lived one lifetime, just like anything else. Does this make sense? Is quantity completely irrelevant when it comes to living? Give examples.

Explain how the concept of responsibility drives Dream to do what he does throughout the story. How does Destruction's take on responsibility differ from Dream's take?

Explain the nature of gods and goddesses, where they come from, and how they derive their power. How do Ishtar, Pharamond, and Bast illustrate this?

After he tells Delirium that he no longer wishes to track Destruction and returns to his realm, Dream is chastised by his sister Death for his treatment of the youngest of the Endless. Was Dream unfair to Delirium? Did he have good cause to abandon the quest?

Delirium tells Destiny there are paths outside his garden. Destruction says that Destiny's existence defines its opposite, which he says is freedom. How are these two ideas connected? Do they mean the same thing?

Do you agree with Death, when she told Destruction that we all know everything there is to know, we just forget that we know, in order to make it all bearable?