

The Sandman Study Guide

The Sandman by Neil Gaiman

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Plot Summary

The Sandman comic books follow the mythical figure the Sandman, the king of dreams. The graphic novel *Dream Country* includes four stories. In the story "Calliope," a muse is kidnapped by a writer and freed by the Sandman. "A Dream of a Thousand Cats" tells the story of a misused house cat and her mission to reclaim power for all cats. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the Sandman commissions Shakespeare's famous play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for the fairy folk. Finally, "Façade" tells the story of a woman who gains superpowers but loses her beauty and longs for death.

"Calliope" tells the story of a writer named Richard Madoc who, after the publication of his first novel, has been suffering from writer's block for a year. Madoc trades a supposedly magical stone called a bezoar for one of the Greek Muses, Calliope. Madoc keeps Calliope imprisoned and rapes her, and in turn he is inspired, becoming a rich, famous, and acclaimed writer and director. Calliope begs the other gods for help, but most of the gods are gone or without power. Finally, Calliope's old lover, Oneiros, who is the Sandman, comes to free her. When Madoc refuses to free Calliope, the Sandman floods his mind with ideas, driving him mad and forcing him to free the muse.

"A Dream of a Thousand Cats" is told from the perspective of a small kitten. She goes out to the graveyard to see a Siamese cat speak. The Siamese preaches for cats to dream of a world where cats are dominant over humans. She was once a house cat, and her owners drowned her litter of kittens. She went on a quest to see the Sandman and learn the truth about her inferiority, and she had a vision that cats once ruled Earth. When enough humans dreamed they were dominant, they changed reality. The Siamese now preaches for all cats to dream together that they are Earth's dominant creatures, thus bringing about change to reality again.

In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the Sandman commissions William Shakespeare to write the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the fairy folk, who live in another dimension. Shakespeare's troupe travels to the country to perform the play, and the fairy folk are pleased with the performance. The fairy Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, kills the actor playing his part and takes over his role for the end of the play. At the end of the play, the fairies depart to their home dimension, but Puck stays behind, disappearing into the human world. The players are left to wonder if the whole experience is only a dream.

"Façade" is the story of Ranie Blackwell, a former CIA agent who has been changed by the Egyptian sun god Ra into a metamorph. With her mind, she can manipulate matter and change it into anything she wants. However, her body is now distorted and ugly, and she no longer leaves her house. She meets with a friend but runs out when her mask, which hides her disfigurement, falls off. Back at her home, Ranie is visited by Death. Ranie wants to kill herself, but she cannot because she doesn't know how to die. Death tells her to consult with Ra, the sun. As Ranie gazes at the sun, she turns to powder, finally released from life.



Calliope

Calliope Summary

The Sandman comic books follow a mythical figure called the Sandman, the king of dreams. The graphic novel *Dream Country* contains four stories. In the story "Calliope," a muse is kidnapped by a writer and freed by the Sandman. "A Dream of a Thousand Cats" tells the story of a misused house cat's mission to reclaim power for all cats. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the Sandman commissions Shakespeare's famous play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for the fairy folk. Finally, "Façade" tells the story of a woman who gains superpowers but loses her beauty and longs for death.

"Calliope" begins in May of 1986. Felix Garrison brings writer Richard Madoc a trichinobezoar—a stone made out of swallowed hair that binds together in the stomach. In exchange for the bezoar, Madoc signs his book for Felix, and Felix confesses that he's a big fan of Madoc's work. Madoc says that the bezoar is part of his research. The phone rings, and Felix leaves.

Madoc answers the phone. His agent is pushing him to finish his new novel. The book is nine months late and the publishers are threatening to sue. Madoc says that he's almost finished and hangs up the phone. In reality, Madoc hasn't written anything. He puts the bezoar into a bag and walks through the city.

Madoc goes to see Erasmus Fry, a writer who became famous nearly half a century ago. He finds Fry, an old man dressed in his pajamas, who lets Madoc in. The two enter Fry's study. Fry gives Madoc a drink, saying that he won't waste the good liquor on Madoc. Then, he tells Madoc about bezoars, which are reputed to be magical cures for poisons. Edward IV and Queen Elizabeth, both used bezoars.

Interrupting Fry, Madoc tells him to shut up and confesses his agony over his writer's block. Fry asks Madoc for the bezoar, which Fry recognizes as a trichinobezoar, a certain bezoar made out of swallowed hair. Fry asks if Madoc has brought any clothes and says he'll lend Madoc a coat. Then, he brings Madoc to see the gift he's exchanging the bezoar for.

Fry says he caught "her" on Greece's Mount Helicon in 1927 sixty years ago. He used rituals and plants to catch her and hold her captive. Then, he brought her back to England. Now that his career is over, he does not need her anymore. Fry opens the door to a locked room, and inside, he shows Madoc the muse Calliope. The title page for the story shows Calliope naked, on her knees, in the darkened room.

Calliope asks Fry what he wants with her. Fry introduces Madoc to her, and then he introduces Calliope, the youngest muse, who acted as muse to the Greek epic poet Homer. Fry says that he is giving Calliope to Madoc. Calliope objects that Fry promised to let her go before he died, but Fry says that all writers are liars. Madoc wraps the coat



around Calliope, and Fry requests that, as a favor, Madoc might try to get a publisher to reprint one of his books, titled *Here Comes a Candle*.

Madoc takes Calliope home and locks her in a room. He then rapes her, telling himself that she's not a human being. He is shaken, though, because she acts human. He thinks, perhaps, that he's been tricked, but then he suddenly is overcome with the impulse to write. Three hours later, Madoc is on the third chapter of his new novel.

Calliope prays to the three original muses to save her. Her sisters appear as a hag, a mother figure, and a siren. They sympathize with Calliope, but cannot help her since she has been caught according to prescribed rites. Most of the gods have faded away, leaving only the endless. The muses suggest that one of the endless, the dream-king Oneiros, might help her.

Calliope and Oneiros once had a love affair and a child. The love affair ended badly, so Calliope rejects the idea of asking help of Oneiros. He cannot help her in any case, since he is also trapped. When the three muses leave, Calliope begs for help, even if it's from Oneiros. Calliope remembers her capture. She went to Mount Helicon to remember her past, leaving her scroll by the side of the water. A man appeared, holding moly flowers and the scroll, asking which muse she was. He burned the scroll which effectively bound her.

Madoc returns to Calliope, telling her that he has finished his second novel in five weeks. Calliope asks to be freed, but Madoc refuses, telling her that she's his possession and ordering her to have sex with him. A year later, Madoc's book is critically acclaimed and successful. At a party, he tells a woman he considers himself feminist. When a film company wants him to write a screenplay, he demands to be the director and is rejected. He writes a book of poetry, which is also met with critical acclaim.

Madoc's rise to success continues. He drops his agent for a larger, more successful firm. He writes a play, which becomes a smash hit. The movie producer agrees to let him direct if he'll write a screenplay of his novel, but Madoc has already made a deal with another producer. He buys a new, larger house, moving Calliope secretly in the night. Then, he heads for Hollywood to direct his first movie, which is later nominated for three Oscars.

Meanwhile, Oneiros, the Sandman, visits Calliope, explaining that he has freed himself from his imprisonment. She begs him for help. Back in Hollywood, Madoc learns that Erasmus Fry is dead. He reportedly poisoned himself, leaving a letter asking for *Here Comes a Candle* to be reprinted. When Madoc returns home, Oneiros is waiting for him. Oneiros tells Madoc to free Calliope, but Madoc refuses.

Madoc says that he needs Calliope because he needs all the ideas she gives him. He offers Oneiros money, but Oneiros cuts him off, berating Madoc for his treatment of Calliope, who has been an abused captive for six decades for the sake of "ideas." Oneiros promises Madoc plenty of ideas. Then, Oneiros disappears.



Madoc tells Calliope that he had a nightmare and accuses her of causing it. She denies it, saying that Oneiros, the shaper of form and her former lover, has visited Madoc. Ignoring Calliope's protests that she is a real person, Madoc leaves for a party. He stops at a newsstand on his way, and the owner says he saw Madoc on TV recently. Suddenly, Madoc is overcome with idea. He imagines a story set at a party, while the world outside is destroyed, and critics who are Satanists. He imagines streets made of time, silent women on a train, and a goldfish that is a werewolf. The ideas overwhelm him, and he convulses on the ground.

A doctor comes through the crowd to help the convulsing man. It's Felix Garrison. He brings Madoc to his home. Madoc's fingers are worn to the bone because Madoc had to let out his ideas, so he wrote them on the wall with his fingers and blood. Felix offers Madoc a sedative, but Madoc refuses. Madoc gives Felix his keys and tells him to go to his house and let the muse out of the locked room, setting her free. Felix agrees.

When Felix gets to Madoc's house, he calls out that the woman is free to go. The house seems empty. He walks up the stairs and enters the locked room, but it is empty. Except, on the floor is a copy of the book *Here Comes a Candle* by Erasmus Fry. Felix picks up the book and leaves. Meanwhile, Calliope is with Oneiros. She says that Oneiros has changed and that at one time, he wouldn't have helped her. He says he doesn't hate her anymore and agrees to release Madoc. Calliope says that perhaps she can visit Oneiros in his kingdom, but Oneiros says that she shouldn't. The two former lovers part.

Felix returns to Madoc, who is trying to remember what Calliope said about Oneiros. Vaguely, he connects it with Morpheus, god of dreams, but the memories are fading. Felix tells Madoc that the room was empty and gives him the book, saying he can bring it to the hospital. Everything is gone. Madoc has no more ideas.

Calliope Analysis

Richard Madoc makes Calliope into an "other." Because she is not human, Madoc uses this as an excuse to tell himself that she is not a person. He denies that she has feelings or a right to exist and be free because she is a supernatural figure and not a flesh-and-blood person. This is the same type of reasoning that oppressors of any sort use. Race, gender, or religion are all excuses to consider another person unequal and therefore exploitable. Madoc is an exploiter, using Calliope for his own gain. Truly, it is ironic that Madoc calls himself a "feminist" writer. As Oneiros points out, Madoc's ideas are not more important than Calliope's rights and dignity as a sentient being.

Similarly, Erasmus Fry is an exploiter. He is interested in his own personal gain, not in helping anyone else. Fry only gives up his muse because in his old age he does not need her anymore. He asks for a bezoar in return. Fry is clearly a follower of magic, since he knew the rituals to capture the muse. Fry is collecting these protective "gems" for mysterious reasons of his own.



The fact that Fry keeps Calliope naked shows that he, too, does not consider Calliope human. Not only does he keep her locked up in a room, but he does not even give her the dignity of clothes. Fry gives Calliope nothing, not even the truth. He only uses her for his selfish desires. Both men are the same, willing to sacrifice another's most basic rights for their own benefits.

Calliope herself is a passive character. She is imprisoned, and all that she can do is call for help and plead for mercy. She has no power to help herself. At first, she refuses to get help from her former lover Oneiros, but she changes her mind when she realizes that she has no other hope. Calliope cannot act for herself. She acts only through others. Just as she is the creator of Madoc's books passively, acting through Madoc, she is only rescued passively, through Oneiros as her vessel.

Calliope's power is sexual. Madoc taps into Calliope's inspiration by raping her, and Oneiros helps Calliope because of their previous romantic relationship. Calliope's power is sex, and this is how women have often been seen throughout history: passive contributors to the world, always acting through men, wielding power only through their sexuality.

When the three primary muses appear to Calliope, they appear as the archetypes of women: a hag, a mother, and a siren. These are the roles that women take on throughout life and the one-dimensional ways in which they are often viewed and treated. Aside from Calliope and the muses, there are no other female characters in "Calliope." Women are seen only in their roles as victims and mythic archetypes. The story, then, becomes not so much about women as about men's perception and abuse of women. Of course, these characters are not human women. They are archetypes because they are the "gods" that appear out of the dreams and imaginings of man.

The comic's title character, the Sandman, only appears near the end of this story, as the hero who comes to rescue Calliope. The Sandman is called by the name Oneiros, the name that Calliope knows him by. The Sandman takes on different names to different people at different times. He is immortal, a bringer of dreams, and throughout history he is called many things.

The Sandman's visit to Calliope is juxtaposed with Madoc learning that Erasmus Fry has died of poisoning. The reader infers that Erasmus Fry had imprisoned not only Calliope, but also the Sandman. Fry's death brings the Sandman's escape. The fact that Fry is a collector of benzoars also resonates with his death by poison. The implication is that Fry is not a suicide, but in fact that his protections against poisons have failed him, resulting in his death and the Sandman's escape.

Madoc's punishment, being overwhelmed with ideas, is fitted to his crime. The Sandman tortures Madoc with the very thing that Madoc most wants, the thing that Madoc has sacrificed Calliope's freedom and his own humanity for. Ultimately, Madoc is left with nothing.



A Dream of a Thousand Cats

A Dream of a Thousand Cats Summary

A man and woman retire to bed, leaving their small white kitten alone in the house. A cat appears at the window, talking psychically to the kitten and telling her that "she" will be coming tonight. The kitten protests that she cannot get out of the house, but the cat outside says there is a partly open window. The kitten jumps out to join the other cat.

The kitten and the cat meet other cats along the way. The kitten asks about the one the cats are traveling to see, but no one knows much. The cats are curious but skeptical. They arrive at a graveyard filled with cats, a scene that is the title spread of the story. A Siamese cat jumps atop a statue of an angel and welcomes the cats who have come to hear her words.

The Siamese cat tells her story. At first, the Siamese is a pet of humans, happy enough with her position as a house cat. She meets and mates with an orange tomcat and has kittens. The humans are not happy with the kittens. The Siamese is a purebred, and the kittens are mutts. The man puts the kittens in a bag and drowns them. The Siamese is bound to her young and experiences their deaths. She realizes that she is not free.

The Siamese prays to the King of the Cats, and that night she dreams that she is in a field of bones where she meets a bird with a skull instead of a head. The bird says that she must go to a cave in the mountains to see the ruler of the dream world to find her vision, and the cat journeys to the cave. She journeys through a forest of ghosts and a frozen wasteland. She walks through darkness that saps her sense of self.

Finally, the Siamese reaches the cave, which is guarded by a gryphon, a dragon, and a winged horse. The guardians ask why a small cat should be allowed to see the king, and the Siamese says she will only share her mission with the dream lord. The guardians let the cat through. When she meets the dream lord, he is a black cat with red eyes. He is also recognizable as the Sandman. The cat is frightened but asks to understand what has happened to her. The dream lord says to look into his eyes.

The Siamese sees a vision of the former world. In this world, cats are large and dominate the world. Humans are small, and they groom the cats. Then, at night, the cats hunt the humans for sport, since humans are the most satisfying prey. Then, one human, a pet of a royal cat, has a dream. He realizes that dreams create reality, and he tells the people to dream of a world in which human beings are superior to cats. He preaches that if enough people dream the same dream, it will become reality.

At first, nothing happens, but then enough people dream, and the world changes. The humans dominate the planet. The dream lord explains to the Siamese that the humans did not just change the world. They changed the whole history of the world, the fabric of reality. The cat wakes with her new knowledge.



The Siamese realizes that if human dreams can shape reality, then cat dreams can do the same. It will only take perhaps a thousand cats dreaming the same dream together to change the world. She begs all the cats to dream of a world ruled by cats. The Siamese has left her home and travels the world, preaching to cats everywhere to come together and dream of feline dominance.

As the Siamese cat is leaving the graveyard, the young kitten tells the Siamese that she believes, and the Siamese says that there is hope. However, the other cats are skeptical of the Siamese. They believe that independent cats cannot come together and all dream the same dream. After stopping to hunt a rat, the kitten's friend escorts the kitten back to her home.

The next morning, back at the kitten's house, the human masters are watching the television set, which is playing a cat food commercial. The man tells his wife to turn off the television and asks where his briefcase is. His wife tells him that it's in the hallway. The woman goes in the hall to get the briefcase, and she sees that the kitten is asleep. She tells her husband that the cute little kitten is dreaming, and her husband wonders what cats could dream about. The wife says that it must be dreaming of hunting a small animal, and the husband agrees that it is very cute.

A Dream of a Thousand Cats Analysis

As in "Calliope," Neil Gaiman piques the reader's interest by introducing an unnamed "she" that the characters talk about. In "Calliope," the unnamed "she" that the Madoc and Fry discuss is the muse herself. In "A Dream of a Thousand Cats," the mysterious "she" is the unnamed Siamese cat. By introducing the Siamese in this way, Gaiman creates an aura of mystery, importance, and the supernatural around this character. The scene of the cats gathering from all over, joining each other on their way to the graveyard, increases the reader's anticipation.

The story of the kitten and the cat audience heading to the graveyard creates a framework for the story of the Siamese cat. The Siamese narrates her own story, becoming the voice of the episode. The structure of this story becomes layered. The first layer is the story of the kitten. The second layer is the story of the Siamese and her owners. Then, when the Siamese cat dreams, she brings the reader into a third layer of story that takes place within the dream world. The story moves deeper and deeper into its center, and at the center, at the furthest point of the dream realm and within a cave, there is the Sandman.

The Sandman appears, not in the form the reader is accustomed to, but in the form of a cat. As the world is shaped by dreams, dreams are shaped by the perception of the dreamer. The Siamese is the creator of her own dreams, and so for her, the Sandman is a king of cats, a feline like herself.

After the vision, the Siamese becomes a preacher with the intent to lead and change the thinking of other cats. In the context of the stories, cats are oppressed beings, living



subservient to humans. Cats are an underclass, abused by their masters. The death of the Siamese's kittens is the ultimate affront to cats, who the Siamese realizes live or die at the whim of humans. In this world of oppression, the minds of the masses need to be changed in order to change the world. The Siamese takes on the role of the leader who will push the oppressed to fight their oppressors in any way that they can.

The only means that cats have at their disposal to fight the humans who control them is their minds. The mind, the Siamese claims, has the means to change the world. In the story, the Siamese means this literally, but it is also a metaphor. Changing people's perceptions and beliefs about the world does change the world, because it changes how people act, what they do, and what they build. The Siamese believes in a constructed reality, based on dreams. In reality, the world is constructed by thoughts, dreams, and beliefs.

The end of the story is an example of dramatic irony. The reader knows what the kitten is dreaming about. She is dreaming of hunting humans, and there is a possibility that her dream could change the world and that the "cute" kitten could become dreaded by her masters. The kitten herself is a symbol of the future. She is a young cat, a child, and so her time is the future. Her adulthood is yet to come. The kitten believes in the Siamese, indicating that the vision of the Siamese is a vision of youth and of the future. Humans may yet be the prey of cats, living in a world of cat lords and ladies.



A Midsummer Night's Dream

A Midsummer Night's Dream Summary

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" begins on June 23, 1593. Hamnet, a young boy, is traveling through rural England with his father and a caravan of wagons. The boy asks his father when they will get to the inn to stop, but his father says they aren't going to the inn. The boy asks where they will have their play if they're not heading for an inn. The father says that he does not know.

One of the players calls to the boy's father: "Will!" The father is William Shakespeare. The player asks Shakespeare if he could eat a pork pie during the performance and then sit on it to get a laugh. Shakespeare rejects the idea, telling the actor to stick to the script. Hamnet points out a man on the road ahead of them, and Shakespeare says that the man is their audience.

Shakespeare tells his son to stay with the party while he meets with the stranger. He approaches the Sandman, telling him that the play is just as the Sandman requested and his best play so far. The troupe has come to perform the play as requested. The Sandman says that the location, Wendel's Mound, was a theater long ago, before there were humans in England.

Richard Burbage, one of the actors, approaches Shakespeare and the Sandman. Shakespeare explains that the Sandman commissioned him to write the play. Burbage introduces himself as the leading man. The Sandman asks Burbage to act well, and Burbage says that he always gives his utmost, even though he demeans the play, calling it a mere comedy. Burbage asks where the hall is, and the Sandman says they are to play on the natural stage all around them. Shakespeare tells Burbage to accept the terms, and Burbage heads back to the troupe, telling them to get ready to perform.

The actors prepare themselves, complaining about touring the country and wishing they were back in the city. The young boys dress in female costumes, complementing each other on their beauty. They gather the props for the play and practice their lines for the performance. Burbage reports that everything is prepared and asks where the audience is. The Sandman calls for the portal to open, and from the other side emerges a crowd of fairy folk. The appearance of the fairies, led by Titania and Oberon, is the title page of the story.

The Sandman welcomes his royal fairy guests. Oberon mentions that he thought the fairy folk would never return to the human world. The hobgoblin Robin Goodfellow, also known as Puck, is also with the fairies. The Sandman asks the fairies to sit. Shakespeare calls the actors to their places, and the play is set to begin. Burbage is momentarily frozen as he stares into the crowd of fairies. Then, the prompter gives him his line, and he begins the first scene of the play.



Lady Titania complements the Sandman on the quality of the play. Meanwhile, a small goat-headed spirit named Skarrow sitting on the shoulder of a large blue-green spirit asks what all the fuss is about, wondering if the dream lord brought all the fairies to the human world for a chance to feed on the actors. The larger spirit tries to explain that it's a play, and that Lysander is in love with Hermia, but her father wants her to marry Demetrius. Skarrow still seems confused. On stage, Hermia and Helena bemoan the fact that the man Helena loves, Demetrius, is making unwelcome advances on Hermia.

The play continues, with a play within a play. Meanwhile, backstage, one of the actors complains to Shakespeare that the crowd is full of supernatural beings. Shakespeare reminds him that the creatures are also their audience. In the audience, Puck longs to play a game at the expense of the humans, but Oberon commands Puck to behave. All the fairy folk laugh at the actors' antics.

The actor playing Robin Goodfellow takes the stage, and Oberon ribs Puck that the actor is playing him. Another spirit, Peaseblossom, comments that Puck is more dangerous and psychotic than the play's portrayal. Lady Titania tells the Sandman that she thinks she heard this story sung in ancient Greece and wonders why the Sandman organized this play. The Sandman says he will explain later.

As the play goes on, in the audience, Lady Titania asks about Hamnet, who is playing a small role. The Sandman says that he is Shakespeare's son and they can meet at the intermission. The Sandman also reveals that Shakespeare is writing the plays in exchange for the Sandman granting his desires. The play reaches the point where the characters will start being put under the spell of a love potion. The lovers will each fall in love with the wrong people. The blue-green spirit tries to explain the plot to Skarrow.

Backstage, Burbage reminds Shakespeare that he needs to get money for the performance. Hamnet, getting the donkey's head ready for an upcoming scene, talks to one of the actors. The actor says that Hamnet must be proud of his father, but Hamnet almost never sees Shakespeare. Shakespeare is obsessed with his work and neglects his family. Hamnet's twin sister Judith jokes that if Hamnet died, Shakespeare would just write a play about it. Hamnet is only spending the summer with his father because his mother forced Shakespeare to take Hamnet along.

Meanwhile, Puck is enjoying the play and its truth despite being fiction. The character of Titania wakes and, under the influence of the love potion, falls in love with a man who has a donkey's head. The goat-headed spirit objects that it's not so funny to have an animal's head. He also notes that the women's roles are being played by men. Peaseblossom is upset that one of the characters has his name. The play breaks for an intermission.

Oberon congratulates Shakespeare on the play, and Shakespeare asks for money for his troupe. Oberon gives Shakespeare a bag of gold coins. Meanwhile, Puck sees the actor playing him reading over his lines. Puck kills the actor and takes his mask, intending to take over for him in the play. Also during the intermission, the Sandman expresses his pleasure at the play. Shakespeare says that his rival playwright, Kit



Marlowe, cannot top this play. The Sandman tells Shakespeare that Marlowe has been murdered, and Shakespeare blames it on his friend meddling with politics. Shakespeare is upset and begins to regret his deal with the Sandman for lasting fame.

Lady Titania is plying young Hamnet Shakespeare with tales of the fairy world when the intermission is set to end. The second half of the play begins. Puck performs himself with glee. In the audience, Oberon tells the Sandman that this should be their last visit to Earth, but Titania invites Sandman to the fairy world. Shakespeare is pleased with the performance by Tuck, and he is too caught up in the play to listen to his son tell him about his brief friendship with Lady Titania.

Peaseblossom complains about the depiction of him in the play. On stage, the story begins its conclusion. The Sandman wonders if he's done the right thing. He wants to keep these stories active in the minds of man, and he knows Shakespeare's writings can do it. Shakespeare, though, does not see the price he will pay for their deal. Titania is barely listening and praises the play.

As the play wraps up, Sandman explains that the fairy folk have given him much pleasure, and he wants them to be remembered by mortals throughout the years. That is the reason Sandman has commissioned the plays. Oberon thanks him, reminding him, though, that the play is not true. Sandman says that the play is true, although it is fictional.

The play is concluding, and nighttime is coming. The time for the fairies to leave has arrived. The portal to the fairies' homeland opens. Puck, however, decides to stay in the human world to toy with mankind. After the fairies depart, Puck reads the last lines of the play, begging the audience to think of the play as a dream, if they are displeased, and to clap to show their friendship.

In the morning, the troupe of players awakes on the grassy hill. Shakespeare asks Richard Burbage if the whole event was a dream, but Burbage answers that it was not. He holds the bag of gold coins. However, when he tips it out, he finds the bag full of yellow leaves. Shakespeare says that their payment was playing for such a unique audience. Hamnet tells his father that he dreamed of a woman who wanted him to go off to a far-away land. Shakespeare calls on the players to get to work so that they can get to the next town that afternoon to show their play. Three years later, Hamnet, then eleven, dies. No one knows what has become of Robin Goodfellow.

A Midsummer Night's Dream Analysis

The story of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is the story of a father and son: William Shakespeare and his son Hamnet. Shakespeare is obsessed with the idea of being remembered throughout history for his plays, and he ignores his small son. Hamnet resents his father for ignoring him, and he is easily lured by the pretty stories of Lady Titania.



The Sandman, though he fuels Shakespeare's ambition by offering him lasting fame, also realizes that Shakespeare will be unhappy with this bargain. Ultimately, Shakespeare will lose his young, neglected son, and this loss will become the impetus for perhaps his most-remembered play, Hamlet. Although in the story Shakespeare never shows affection or care for his young son, Sandman's ruminations imply that Hamnet's death will be the price Shakespeare pays for immortality and that once the price comes due, Shakespeare will regret his supernatural bargain.

Ambition is obsession with a goal, and its the detriment of everything else in Shakespeare's life. Later, this will become the theme of another one of Shakespeare's most acclaimed works, Macbeth. Through his deal with the Sandman and the loss of his son, it seems that Shakespeare must learn more about the depths of human desire and human foibles, which will ultimately make him great and fulfill his bargain with the Sandman. Clearly, Shakespeare has no foreknowledge of this future, since he anticipates writing only a few more plays before he retires.

The fairy folk come from another dimension to see this play, about themselves. The fairies themselves are representative of imagination, of an otherworld of mind and magic. The characters of Titania, Puck, and Oberon are present in both the play and in the audience. Shakespeare's plays often contain people who disguise themselves and whose identities become confused. Puck takes on this motif as he melds himself with his double, putting on a mask that represents him and becoming the representation of himself. He is in disguise, but he is disguised as himself.

Puck is fascinated with human beings. He is thrilled with the play's level of truth, although it tells stories that never happened. Both Puck and the Sandman comment on this fact. The play, though fictional, tells core truths about the nature of mankind, about love, and about the world. This is the value of fiction and of imagination, and it is what attracts Puck to humankind. Perhaps that means that imagination is also the downfall of humankind, since Puck is a vicious being and a danger to the earthly world.

Shakespeare is famous for including a "play within the play," where players perform a play that somehow comments on the action of the play. In Gaiman's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Shakespeare's play becomes a story within the story. The small boy that is Titania's attendant in the play is echoed in the character of Hamnet, who the real Titania finds attractive and wants to lure to the fairy realm. His early death may indicate that he ultimately exits the world for the fairy realm. While Shakespeare retreats into one world of the mind and of imagination, his son retreats into another, similar realm, but one from which he cannot return.

The Sandman is a more active character in this story than in the other stories in Dream Country. He is an integral part of the storyline from the beginning, and as the one who commissioned the play, he takes an active role in Shakespeare's story. Ultimately, although he has some qualms, the Sandman seems to choose to sacrifice Shakespeare's happiness for his own desires. The Sandman says that he wants to preserve the great stories and the memories of the fairies, who are now gone from the

world of men. These stories and memories are the stuff of imagination and of the depths of the human mind.

The Sandman is the king of dreams, and so he, like the fairies and like Shakespeare's plays, is a representative of imagination. The realm of dreams is a realm of stories, where great truths can be told disguised as fiction. A dream is like a play, as Puck's final monologue in Shakespeare's play implies. A Midsummer Night's Dream is, after all, a play about a dream, and so it falls within the realm of Sandman.



Façade

Façade Summary

A woman, hidden in shadow, lights a cigarette. Her hand seems rough and orange. She thinks about cigarettes. They are supposed to be deadly. She wishes that the cigarettes would kill her. She doesn't get high from a cigarette, but the act of smoking seems normal. It makes her feel like a normal person. She wishes that she were dead.

The woman picks up the phone to call a man named Mulligan, identifying herself as Rainie Blackwell. Rainie is depressed. She tells Mulligan that the previous day, she couldn't stop crying. Then she asks whether her check is coming. Mulligan tells her that it's not the last Wednesday of the month yet. She asks Mulligan what he looks like, and he describes himself, a normal guy. She tells him that she looks like the photographs in her file, and he says she was cute back then. For the first time, the reader sees Rainie's face, distorted and pale. She says that she can look and even feel like a normal person, and asks Mulligan to meet her. He tells her that it's against Company policy.

Mulligan ends the phone call, saying that he has checks to process. Rainie thinks that she should have waited to phone him. Now, she can't speak to him for another week. Mulligan is her only contact with the outside world, and the Company is her only link to life. A photograph shows Rainie as she used to look: young, blonde, and beautiful.

Suddenly, the phone rings. The title panel shows Rainie, startled and afraid, staring at the ringing phone. For the first time, she is clearly visible, with one orange, cracked, dry side, and one purple, scaled side. Her face is white and distorted. Rainie answers the phone. The caller is Della Kariakis, an old friend of Rainie's from five years ago. Della remembers seeing Rainie at a cryptography course years ago and says she got Rainie's number from someone named Triangle at the Company. Della is still working for the Company, and Rainie explains that she's been pensioned off because of physical problems.

Della invites Rainie to lunch, and they make a date to meet the following week. After Rainie hangs up, she lights a cigarette, thinking about her preparations for the meeting. She will have to make a face for herself. She lies in bed thinking about it. The faces give her dreams, bad dreams and terrible ones. The bad dreams are just nightmares, but the terrible dreams are the good ones. Then, she wakes and finds herself back in her real life. That's what's so terrible.

Rainie dreams of her past. She is beautiful again, and she is in Egypt with Triangle. He points out a tomb where Rex Mason became a superhero and tells her that she must go in to become America's superhero. The tomb doesn't smell in her dream, but in reality, she could smell death. She sees the Orb of Ra, a glowing white sphere on a staff. The Egyptian sun god Ra appears to her in the dream, although he did not appear in reality.



Ra tells her that he gives powers to mortals to help him fight the serpent Apep. Rainie wants to reject the "gift," but she can't. She is transformed.

Rainie can change into anything, but she can't create flesh because it rots away. Instead, she makes a silicate face. Eventually, it will get hard and fall away. All around her apartment are the empty masks of previous faces. She creates a false face and false hair, and she wears long clothes and gloves that cover her body. Rainie goes to meet Della at the restaurant.

When Rainie arrives, Della says how great Rainie looks. She doesn't seem to have aged at all. Rainie explains that she can't take off her gloves because of a skin disease, and they order food. Della is still working for the Company. She was hoping to talk to Rainie, her only friend who isn't an active part of the CIA. Della is pregnant by a married man in another department, and she has to keep the pregnancy a secret until her lover can get a divorce. She needs someone to talk to, so she looked up Rainie. Rainie promises to keep Della's secret.

Some handicapped boys walk past the window, and Della says that she's afraid her baby will be a "freak" like them, since she's thirty-six. Rainie objects that they aren't "freaks," and Della says that they creep her out. Suddenly, Rainie's face falls off into her plate of spaghetti, revealing her deformity. Rainie covers her face and rushes out of the restaurant.

Rainie gets back home, but she left her purse and keys at the restaurant. She changes the door lock to magnesium and breaks into her apartment. She phones Mulligan, but the person who answers says he's been transferred to another department. Rainie begs to talk to him, but she can't get through. She hangs up the phone and casts off her outer coverings. Her legs are visible for the first time, one made of wood and the other stone. Then she sits down and thinks. She decides to kill herself, but she doesn't know how.

Death—a pale, black-haired woman wearing an ankh (the Egyptian symbol for life) around her neck—walks in and asks if Rainie wants to talk. Rainie is shocked. The woman says that she heard Rainie crying and that the door was open. Rainie offers her a cigarette, and the woman comments on the dried face that Rainie uses as an ashtray. Rainie explains that when she needs to look normal, she makes a face. She cannot bring herself to throw them away. Death says that people always hang onto old identities but that after a while, it's important to let go.

Rainie begins to cry. She confesses that she wants to kill herself, but she is not human anymore. She doesn't have blood. She can't be poisoned. Guns won't kill her. Even a nuclear explosion might not kill her. Death tells her that everything dies eventually, even her. The field that holds her together will collapse. Death reminds her of Algon, a two-thousand-year old metamorph, like Rainie. He died in a volcano. Rainie is amazed that this stranger could know about Algon. Then, Rainie realizes she's talking to Death.

At first, Rainie is thrilled that Death has come for her, but Death denies it. One of Rainie's neighbors died, she said, and Death heard Rainie crying. Death says that she



is all over the world, bringing death. For some, death is welcome, and for many it is not. Still, death is inevitable. Death has existed from the moment the first living thing came into being and will exist until the last living thing is gone from the universe.

Rainie is distressed that she is not going to die yet, and that perhaps she'll have to live for thousands of years. Death finally agrees to help Rainie, but she cautions her that death doesn't mean oblivion. Death says that Ra is still creating Metamorphae like Rainie to fight a battle that is long ended. She tells Rainie to talk to Ra for help. Rainie protests that she can't go to Egypt, and Death reminds her that Ra is the sun and that the sun is in the sky, about to set.

Rainie looks out the window and begins to talk to the setting sun. She begs to be normal, and in her mind she hears Ra tell her to look at him. She looks up into the sun, about to set over the skyline. Rainie sees the face of Ra behind the mask of the setting sun. Her face fills with joy, and her body begins to crumble. Death wishes her luck, as Rainie dissolves into dust. The phone rings, and Death answers it. It's Mulligan, calling Rainie back. Death tells him that Rainie is gone, that she's not living there anymore.

Façade Analysis

In the opening of "Façade," cigarettes are symbolic of death. When Rainie smokes, even though the nicotine does not affect her she is embracing death. By introducing Rainie's character hidden in shadows and smoking cigarettes, Gaiman ties Rainie to blackness and death. She is created by the sun god, but Rainie is cast into darkness instead of into light.

Rainie's problems are self-inflicted. Her contact with the Orb of Ra has given her superpowers that allow her to transform into anything she wants and to change any substance by simply willing it to change. Instead of doing anything with her powers, for good or evil, Rainie has chosen to sink into herself. She is obsessed with the person that she used to be, with the masks of her former self that she cannot bear to throw away.

Rainie is based on a character from another comic book series, Metamorpho, which follows Rex Mason, a superhero with similar powers to Rainie. Why can't Rainie let go over her past and become a hero like Rex Mason? She considers herself a freak. Even though she objects to the word when Della uses it, Rainie calls herself a freak when she's talking to Death. Rainie has lost her physical beauty and become different from other people. She isolates herself because of her own perception of her freakishness.

In a way, Rainie has already passed from one phase of existence to another. Her transformation into a superhero is symbolically a death and rebirth. She becomes a new and different person. In her new life, though, Rainie cannot let go of the old life. As Death tells her, Rainie creates her own hell. When Rainie is reborn with superpowers, what could be considered a heavenly world of power is instead a world of torture and terror. Will passing through to another phase of existence really help Rainie with her



problems? She desires oblivion, but Death warns Rainie that there is no oblivion waiting for her. Instead, Rainie will enter a dream country. In this new existence, will she continue to suffer her own anxieties and horrors? All her problems are internal, and death cannot separate her from herself.

Rainie's excursion into the world, meeting Della for lunch, gives her an opportunity to break out of the depression that she's mired in. Rainie puts on her face, her old identity, in order to go into the world. She hides what has happened to her instead of embracing it. Perhaps she could confide in her old friend, but Rainie literally covers up who she is with a mask, clothing, and gloves. When Della unkindly refers to people with deformities as "freaks," she plays into Rainie's worst fears. In Rainie's mind, she is a freak just like the kids walking past the restaurant. This episode pushes Rainie even deeper into herself. She cannot unveil truths about herself to her friend.

When Rainie's mask falls off, she does not give Della a chance to accept her or to deal with the situation. Rainie flees. She seeks death and oblivion instead of facing who she is, or what the world might think about her. Rainie's identity, it seems, can be contained in a silicon mask. She has no real sense of self beyond what she looked like before being changed by the Orb of Ra. When her outer appearance is changed, Rainie loses everything. She has no core personality, no internal strength to hold onto and make a new identity.

Rex Mason also was changed by the Orb of Ra, and he became a superhero. Triangle tells Rainie to follow in Rex's footsteps to become a superhero for America. What is the difference between Rex and Rainie's reactions to being changed by the orb? Rex is a man, and Rainie is a woman. For Rex, external appearances aren't so important to his life. Gaiman seems to be commenting on the importance society places on a woman's physical beauty. Rex becomes more powerful and capable after being changed, but Rainie collapses because her physical beauty is gone. She cannot use power without beauty.

Rainie lives a life of falseness. She can create flesh, but she cannot create real flesh, only meat. She can create a realistic mask, but at the end of the day, it is just a mask. She cannot accept herself, and society cannot accept her. When Death comes for Rainie, she acts as a wise guide for the troubled character. Death is sympathetic and all-knowing. She understands that Rainie is making herself miserable by clinging to the past, and she tells Rainie how to find the release she is looking for, even though she knows death won't be what Rainie expects. Since the sun god created Rainie, the sun god can release her.

Rainie is a tragic character. Her tragic flaw is her inability to accept herself, in the face of a disapproving society. Rainie's goal is death, and she achieves that goal. However, the achievement is bitter sweet. Rainie does not ask Ra for death at the end of the story. She asks Ra to be normal. That is something that Rainie can never have again, and she can also never have the oblivion that she craves in the absence of normalcy.



Characters

The Sandman/Oneiros/Morpheus

The Sandman is Morpheus, the god of dreams. He is one of the few gods who has not disappeared, because he is eternal. Although the Sandman is a supernatural figure with power over people's minds, he is also a person with his own motives. In "Calliope," the Sandman shows pity and understanding for Calliope. Even though she has hurt him in the past, he forgives her. He is repulsed by Madoc's self-centered behavior and willingness to degrade another being for his own benefit.

In "A Dream of a Thousand Cats," the Sandman takes the shape of a cat and guides the Siamese by giving her a vision of a past world, an alternate world where cats were dominant over humans. The story of the Sandman emphasizes the power of dreams and the idea that imagination creates reality. The Sandman is also known as a shaper of forms, and this is what the Sandman describes in "A Dream of a Thousand Cats," the ability for thought to create form.

Sandman's most active role is in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." He commissions William Shakespeare to write the famous play of the same name in order to preserve the memory of the fairy folk for humanity throughout all time. The Sandman makes this bargain with Shakespeare, knowing that Shakespeare will regret what his desire for fame will cost him. Although the Sandman has qualms about the bargain, he seems resigned to the idea that mankind will always make the same bad choices, seeking the wrong things, whether the Sandman is a party to them or not.

Richard Madoc, from Calliope

Richard Madoc is a self-serving writer who gets what he deserves in the story "Calliope." Madoc trades a supposedly mystical stone for the muse Calliope. He holds Calliope captive and rapes her so that he can cure his writer's block and write inspired epic books, poems, plays, and films. Madoc dehumanizes Calliope by telling himself that she is not a human being, and therefore she is not a person. He rationalizes his treatment of her by imagining that Calliope's feelings don't matter, since she is not "real." He gains wealth and fame through his actions and is unable to give them up.

When Madoc is visited by the Sandman, he is frightened, but he will not free the muse. He must hang on to her because he feels that he has nothing without the ideas that she gives him. Madoc is too insecure to work through his problems. He comes to rely on Calliope almost like a drug to help him get what he wants.

Because of Madoc's refusal to free Calliope, the Sandman overwhelms him with ideas, filling his head with too many ideas to write them all down. Madoc goes into a kind of seizure in the middle of the street, unable to function with all of the ideas running through his head. He wears his fingers down to bloody stumps by writing the ideas on



the wall. Only to save himself does Madoc finally free Calliope, and once she is gone, all of Madoc's ideas have deserted him. He is ultimately empty and alone.

The Siamese, from A Dream of a Thousand Cats

The Siamese begins life as a house cat. She is a purebred Siamese, but one night when she is in heat, she has sex with an orange tomcat. She admires the tomcat's strength and power. Afterward, the Siamese gives birth to a litter of kittens. She is devastated when her human owners drown the kittens. The Siamese wants to understand why she is powerless. Like Calliope, the Siamese is being kept for another's benefit, and she seems to have no options to save herself.

The Siamese travels to the dream realm in her sleep and meets the Sandman, the dream lord, who appears to her as a cat. During her journey, she undergoes trials that test her mettle and prepare her to complete her quest of understanding and of freeing herself from oppression. Through her vision, the Siamese comes to realize that the world is shaped by sentient thoughts, by the dreams that are dreamed each night.

The Siamese becomes a preacher who travels the world, talking to cats. She beseeches all cats to dream of a cat dominated world. The Siamese believes that if a thousand cats all dream the same dream, they will change the fabric of reality. Cats are contrary beasts, and many of the cats doubt that a thousand cats could all do the same thing at the same time. However, the kitten, a symbol of youth and the future, believes in the Siamese and dreams her dream. One cat at a time, perhaps the Siamese will manage to change the world and finally avenge the deaths of her kittens.

William Shakespeare, from A Midsummer Night's Dream

William Shakespeare is admittedly a brilliant playwright. Even the fairy folk, who seem to look down on human beings, admire Shakespeare's writing in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." His greatest desire is to have his plays live on beyond him and to achieve great fame as a playwright. Because of his ambition, he has made a deal with the Sandman that his plays will live on in greatness in exchange for writing two plays for the supernatural king of dreams. Because the reader has knowledge of the historic William Shakespeare, the reader knows that his ambitions will come true. This creates a kind of dramatic irony in the story, because the reader has foreknowledge that the characters lack.

Shakespeare is also neglectful of his son. He does not pay attention to what his son is trying to tell him, and according to Hamnet, Shakespeare only brought Hamnet with him because his wife forced him to. Shakespeare barely acknowledges his son during the story. However, the reader learns that Hamnet will die in a few years. The reader's knowledge that Shakespeare later writes the tragedy Hamlet, combined with Hamnet saying that his father would probably write a play about him if he died, leads the reader



to conclude that Hamlet, perhaps Shakespeare's most famous play, is rooted in the death of his son.

Urania (Rainie) Blackwell, from Façade

Rainie Blackwell is a superhero. After being exposed to the Orb of Ra, Rainie gains power to manipulate matter at its most basic level. She can create nearly anything she wants out of nothing, at least temporarily. She can perform feats of magnificent power. However, she does not leave her house or talk to anyone. She is on disability, afraid to go out in the world or show herself to other people. Rainie Blackwell wants to die.

Rainie is horrified at how she has changed. She cannot see the benefits of the power that she's acquired. She has lost her beauty, and she is no longer a normal person. Instead of embracing her uniqueness, Rainie focuses only on what she's lost and on the fact that she is not like other people. Her desire to fit in with others leads her to become a recluse and ultimately to kill herself.

Rainie creates silicone masks of her face in order to go out into the world whenever she needs to interact with other people. These masks eventually dry up and fall off, but Rainie keeps them all. Her apartment is filled with masks. These are the faces she puts on for the world, images of her former self. She keeps the masks because she cannot let go of her former self and her former beauty, although the masks themselves are only pale replicas of what Rainie wants.

Felix Garrison, from Calliope

Felix Garrison is a doctor. He is an admirer of Richard Madoc's work, and he obtains a bezoar for Madoc, although he does not know why Madoc wants it. When Madoc is overwhelmed by the flood of ideas visited on him by the Sandman, Felix takes care of Madoc.

Erasmus Fry, from Calliope

Erasmus Fry studies mystical arts. At the young age of 27, Fry knows the proper rituals to capture and bind a muse, Calliope. Fry uses Calliope to become a famous and wealthy author, keeping her captive and raping her. Fry seems to have no conscience. He trades Calliope for a bezoar to protect him from poison, even though he has promised Calliope that he would free her. The story implies that Fry also has the Sandman held captive and that at Fry's mysterious death from poison, the Sandman escapes.



Calliope, from Calliope

Calliope is the youngest muse, known for her beautiful voice. She is the muse who inspired Homer to write his epic poems. In 1927, Erasmus Fry captures Calliope and holds her captive, raping her to force her to inspire him. Fry becomes a famous author. When he is in his eighties, Fry trades Calliope to another writer, Richard Madoc, in exchange for a bezoar to protect him from poison. Calliope is held captive, helpless, as Madoc's muse until Oneiros saves her.

Melete, Mneme, and Aiode, from Calliope

Melete, Mneme, and Aiode are the primary muses. Calliope calls on them to help her when she is imprisoned, but the muses can do nothing for Calliope. They tell Calliope that most of the gods are gone.

The Kitten, from A Dream of a Thousand Cats

The story "A Dream of a Thousand Cats" begins and ends with a small kitten who sneaks out of the house at night to listen to the Siamese cat speak. The kitten believes the Siamese, and at the end of the story she dreams the Siamese cat's dream of cat dominance.

The Tomcat, from A Dream of a Thousand Cats

The Siamese cat has a lover who is a tomcat, and she bears his kittens. Because the tomcat is not a purebred, the Siamese cat's owners drown her kittens.

The Human who Dreams, from A Dream of a Thousand Cats

In the Siamese cat's vision, a blond-haired male human has a vision of a human-dominated world and convinces the other humans to dream his dream to change reality.

Hamnet Shakespeare, from A Midsummer Night's Dream

Hamnet is William Shakespeare's young son. Hamnet resents his father because Shakespeare is obsessed with his plays and pays no attention to his young son. Lady Titania takes a liking to Hamnet, and Hamnet talks with her during the play's intermissions. Afterwards, Hamnet is full of stories about the fairy realm. Hamnet dies a few years later, and it seems implied that Hamnet is ultimately lured into the fairy world.



Lady Titania, from A Midsummer Night's Dream

Lady Titania is the fairy queen who comes to see Shakespeare's play, in which she is a character. The Sandman has invited Lady Titania to the performance, and she is curious about his motives. She enjoys the play, and she is taken with Shakespeare's young son, Hamnet. Lady Titania tells Hamnet all about the joys of the fairy world, likely attempting to lure him back with her. Hamnet dies at a young age, perhaps an indication that he comes to Lady Titania's fairy world after all.

Auberon of Dom-Daniel, from A Midsummer Night's Dream

Auberon is the fairy king, consort of Lady Titania, who accompanies her to view Shakespeare's play "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the request of the Sandman. Auberon is impressed with Shakespeare's writing. When Shakespeare asks for money for the company, Auberon gives him a bag of gold which, in the morning, turns out to be filled with yellow leaves.

Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, from A Midsummer Night's Dream

Puck is a hobgoblin who is a servant of Auberon. Puck is reputed to be vicious and even psychotic. He is taken with Shakespeare's play, and he decides to murder the actor playing him and take on the role of impersonating himself. When the rest of the fairies leave for the fairy realm, Puck stays behind in the human world. No one knows what ultimately becomes of Puck.

Richard Burbage, from A Midsummer Night's Dream

Richard Burbage is the lead actor in Shakespeare's theater troupe. Burbage plays the role of Oberon in the play, performing for the real fairy spirit Auberon. Burbage is a conceited actor and believes that his true greatness is in playing tragedies.

Peaseblossom, from A Midsummer Night's Dream

Peaseblossom is a tree-like spirit who is in the audience of Shakespeare's play A Midsummer Night's Dream. Peaseblossom is offended that one of the fairies in the play shares his name.



The Large Blue-Green Spirit and Skarrow, from A Midsummer Ni

Skarrow is a small goat-headed spirit who sits on the shoulder of a large blue-green spirit. They are part of the audience of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Skarrow has trouble following the play and understanding the concept of a play, and he's more interested in eating human beings than watching them perform. The large blue-green spirit tries to explain to Skarrow what is going on.

Mulligen, from Façade

Mulligen is the only person that Rainie talks to. Mulligen works for the CIA, and he is the person who sends Rainie her disability checks. Mulligen refuses to meet with Rainie in person and will only talk to her on the phone once a week.

Della Kariakis, née Potter, from Façade

Della is an old friend of Rainie Blackwell's from the CIA. Della is pregnant by a married man, and she needs a friend to talk to. She calls up Rainie after getting her phone number from a mutual acquaintance. Della does not know anything about Rainie's situation, and Rainie says she suffers from a skin condition. While they are talking, Della says that she is afraid her child will be a "freak," and Rainie can't help but associate herself with the freaks that appall Della. When Rainie's false face falls off during their lunch, Rainie runs away, horrified.

Triangle, from Façade

Triangle is a member of the CIA and the person who gets Rainie Blackwell to go into the pyramid where she becomes a superhero. Triangle also gives Rainie's phone number to her old friend Della.

Death, from Façade

Death is a supernatural being like the Sandman. Where the Sandman's realm is the dream world, Death's realm is death. Whether a death is good or bad, Death is there. Death facilitates passage out of this world and on to somewhere else. Death appears to Rainie Blackwell as a comforter. Although at first Death says that she cannot interfere in Rainie's life and that it is not Rainie's time to die, Death shows Rainie how to achieve her goal of dying.



Ra, from Façade

Ra is the Egyptian sun god. He changes Rainie Blackwell into a metamorph, and in the end of the story, he allows Rainie to die.



Objects/Places

The Trichinobezoar, from Calliope

The trichinobezoar is formed when swallowed hair is bound together in the stomach. This and other bezoars supposedly have magical powers to prevent death by poison.

Moly Flowers, from Calliope

Erasmus Fry uses moly flowers to bind and capture the muse Calliope.

Calliope's Scroll, from Calliope

Erasmus Fry captures the muse Calliope by burning her scroll.

Mount Helicon, from Calliope

Mount Helicon is where Erasmus Fry captures the muse Calliope while she is bathing in a stream.

The Graveyard, from A Dream of a Thousand Cats

The Siamese cat speaks to all the other cats in a graveyard.

The Angel Statue, from A Dream of a Thousand Cats

The Siamese cat perches atop a statue of an angel when she addresses her feline audience.

The Dream Realm, from A Dream of a Thousand Cats

The Siamese cat travels to the dream realm to meet the dream lord. In this realm, there is a desert of bones, a ghost forest, a frozen wasteland, and a dark void where the Siamese loses her self.

The Cave, from A Dream of a Thousand Cats

The dream lord dwells in a cave on a mountain in the dream realm.



Wendel's Mound, from A Midsummer Night's Dream

The Sandman asks Shakespeare's troupe to perform their play at Wendel's Mound rural England. The location is a deserted green and hilly landscape.

The Portal, from A Midsummer Night's Dream

The fairy folk who come to watch Shakespeare's play enter and leave the world through a portal, a door to another dimension.

The Bag of Gold Coins, from A Midsummer Night's Dream

Auberon gives Shakespeare a bag of gold coins for the performance of the play, but in the morning, the troupe finds that the gold coins have turned to yellow leaves.

Puck's Mask, from A Midsummer Night's Dream

The actor playing Puck wears a mask for his part. The spirit Puck kills the actor and steals the mask, impersonating himself for the rest of the play.

Cigarettes, from Façade

Rainie Blackwell smokes cigarettes and wishes that they would kill her, even though poisons cannot damage her anymore.

Masks, from Façade

Rainie Blackwell creates silicone masks to disguise her deformities when she goes out into the world. When these masks dry up and fall off, she keeps them and uses them as ashtrays or other household objects.

The Orb of Ra, from Façade

The Orb of Ra is a glowing white sphere that changed Rainie Blackwell into a shape changer and manipulator of matter.



Themes

Ambition

William Shakespeare in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and Richard Madoc in "Calliope" both suffer from the same ill: ambition. Shakespeare wants to write plays that contain great truth and will live on through the ages. Madoc, similarly, wants to write great works of literature and become an acclaimed, famous, rich artist. These men do not rely on their talents. Their desires outstrip their abilities. Each man turns to a supernatural being for assistance. In other words, they "cheat."

Ambition is a dangerous thing. As The Sandman notes, mortals never realize what they're giving up to achieve their dreams. Shakespeare has already lost the love of the young son who will soon die. Madoc loses his very humanity through the act of dehumanizing another. He becomes a monster, entrapping and abusing another being. Ultimately, Madoc loses the ideas that he fought to gain and suffers the torture of The Sandman's wrath because of his treatment of Calliope, but the real loss is the loss of his soul.

Ambition is about being obsessed with yourself, to the exclusion of those around you. Shakespeare cannot spare a moment for his young son, and Madoc cannot even see that Calliope is a real being, with thoughts and feelings, who deserves respect. Both men become blind to the world, while their eyes are focused on another world, the world of their writing. The irony is that great writing requires a depth of understanding of the human soul, and while both men become brilliant writers, neither can understand humanity.

Oppression

In "A Dream of a Thousand Cats," the cats are oppressed creatures. They are an underclass of society, living at the pleasure of the wealthy upper class. They may be pets, not work animals, but their lot in life is little more than slavery. The Siamese cat's owners are just that: owners. They don't like her choice of lover, so they kill her children. The idea of such a thing happening to a human being is nearly unimaginable.

By personifying the cats, Gaiman makes them representative of all oppressed people. They do not realize that they are oppressed because they are so immersed in the system of oppression. It takes a traumatic event to make the Siamese recognize her oppression. The systemic oppression of "A Dream of a Thousand Cats" can be read from a communist point of view. The oppressed people (or cats) can only overcome their oppression through a rebellion, through banding together to fight against the oppressors. In the world of Sandman, the cat rebellion is one of dreams, dreams that make reality. Still, it is a bloody rebellion, where the oppressors become the prey of the oppressed.



Oppression runs through "Calliope," as well. Like the cats, "Calliope" belongs to an "other" class. The cats are not given legitimate status as people because they are cats, another species. They are somehow lesser than the human. Madoc considers Calliope to be the same way, somehow lesser because she is not human. By dehumanizing Calliope, Madoc rationalizes his oppression, just as the cats' owners dehumanize the cats to rationalize their oppressive behavior. The cats are "just animals," and Calliope is "just a muse."

The Price of What You Want

The characters in Dream Country all have goals. In "Calliope," Richard Madoc craves fame and fortune through his writing, and to get this, he wants ideas. In "A Dream of a Thousand Cats," the Siamese seeks world domination for cats. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Shakespeare wants his writing to live on eternally. In "Façade," Rainie wants, simply, to die. The characters all pay a price for their desires.

Richard Madoc is driven insane by The Sandman in retribution for his actions. He wants ideas, and the master of dreams overwhelms him with ideas until he can barely function. Madoc, however, pays a greater price achieving his desire. He wants to be famous and renowned, and he becomes famous and renowned. Long before he is first deluged with ideas and then drained of them, though, Madoc loses his humanity. He pays the price for his fame the first time he rapes Calliope, when he gives up his conscience.

William Shakespeare is similar to Madoc. Although he does not give up his humanity, he gives up his family, becoming distant and inaccessible. Shakespeare loses his son, and this loss happens long before Hamnet dies. In "A Dream of a Thousand Cats," the Siamese pays a different kind of price for what she wants. She gives up her comfortable home and life in exchange for a never-ending journey. When she finds the answer to her questions, she realizes that she must become a wanderer and a preacher. She must give up all comforts to get what she wants.

Rainie's ambition is different from the other characters'. She wants to die. Rainie finally achieves this goal, and the reader does not see the price that she must pay. However, from what Death says, the reader can infer Rainie's price. Death is not what Rainie believes it will be, much as fame is not what Madoc and Shakespeare think it will be, and much as becoming a superhero is not what Rainie thinks it will be. Rainie craves oblivion, but she will not gain oblivion. She cannot escape herself.



Style

Point of View

Each story in Dream Country focuses on a protagonist. Madoc is the protagonist of "Calliope," and his story is told by a third-person, semi-omniscient narrator. The reader is able to see Madoc's thoughts and his rationalization of the imprisonment and abuse of Calliope. However, the point of view shifts to Calliope when she calls on the other muses for help, and also at the end of the story, after Calliope is freed from Madoc. The point of view is only semi-omniscient, however, since the reader only sees Madoc's thoughts. Similarly, the reader goes inside Rainie's mind in "Façade." However, she narrates her own thoughts, feelings, and dreams. Since the whole story is exclusively from Rainie's point of view, guided by her narration, the perspective is first person.

In "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "A Dream of a Thousand Cats," the narration is third-person limited. The cats' thoughts are not an omniscient narrator peering into the cats' minds, but the cats' mode of speech. The reader experiences the thoughts and dreams of the Siamese, but only as the Siamese herself narrates them to her audience.

While the tale of the Siamese provides layers of dream experience blanketed within each other, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" does something similar with Shakespeare's play. The tale of the fairies is told by a third-person limited narrator, since the audience sees only what an invisible observer might see. Shakespeare's play is performed by the players, and within the play, another play is performed by players acting as players, creating a play within a play within the book. The point of view melds the Sandman's perspective of both fairy folk and human nature with Shakespeare's.

Setting

The title of this series is Dream Country, and the dream country is the common setting for all of the stories. The dream country is a world of the mind and a world of the imagination. It is a place of dreams, but it is also a place of storytelling, a place of the subconscious. In "Calliope," the dream country is the land from which ideas flow. Though Calliope is a muse, the king of dreams is the one who can open the floodgates and allow the ideas to bombard Madoc. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Shakespeare's work also comes from the dream country. It reveals the unknown and presents truths through things that never occurred. Shakespeare's work itself is a dream.

In "A Dream of a Thousand Cats," the Siamese travels through the dream country to seek the counsel of the king of dreams. The dream country is a place of wisdom. It is also a place of strength and power, since dreams are the stuff that will allow cats to change reality. The journey of the Siamese into the dream country is a journey deep into the subconscious mind, to the center of the self. In this context, the king of dreams that



the Siamese consults, The Sandman himself, seems to be the Jungian collective unconscious, a core wisdom at the root of the subconscious of all people.

In "Façade," although The Sandman is not a visible character, the dream country that Sandman rules is evident. Rainie travels to the dream country, where she struggles with her own inner demons. Rainie's dreams are self-obsessed, like Rainie herself. She relives her rebirth as a superhero all the time struggling against change, although change is inevitable.

Language and Meaning

Throughout Dream Country, Gaiman uses language, in the written word, to reveal character, but he also uses visual language. In "Calliope," Erasmus Fry is snide and arrogant, lecturing the tortured Madoc on arcane arts, but he is also buried in harsh shadows, his bulging eyes, smirking teeth, and crooked nose brightly breaking through the dimness. Even the name "Erasmus Fry" smacks of villainous arcane arts. Calliope speaks with a ring of formal poetry. When she prays to her sisters, she uses formal, archaic phrases such as "It is I," and "To whom can I speak?"

The character of the Sandman is cast in a blue-black shadow, and his skin is the palest white. Death is also the palest white and the darkest black, this height of contrast separating these characters out as immortals. The Sandman's dialogue is set apart by black, irregularly shaped dialogue bubbles; his voice is not a human voice. Similarly, Ra's voice is godly, set off by Egyptian-looking letters in a yellow, sun-colored bubble. Death's voice, in contrast, is human, plain black lettering in smooth white bubbles.

The cats' language in "A Dream of a Thousand Cats" is spoken psychically, as thoughts. The cats also speak with their own words, slightly different phrasing than humans would use. "Can you not scent it?" asks one cat. "Scent" becomes a verb in cat language, since scent is such an important element of cat life. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Gaiman uses the language of Shakespeare, contrasting the less formal dialogue of the comic with the formal words of the play. Shakespeare's words take on new meaning, as when Puck reads the lines: "If we shadows have offended, think but this, and all is mended: that you have but slumbered here, while these visions did appear." The lines refer, not only to the play that Puck is taking part in, but also to the theater company's experience of the fairy audience and to the reader's experience of the comic.

Structure

The graphic novel is divided into four stories, "Calliope," "A Dream of a Thousand Cats," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and "Façade." The title character of the series, the Sandman, is only a minor character in these stories, acting as a god who intercedes into human affairs. In the last story, the character of Death, who regularly appears in Sandman comics, intercedes in the story, and the Sandman is absent. Each story begins with an introduction of three to five pages before the story begins. The introduction is divided from the bulk of the story by a title and credits page. This page



acts as part of the story as well as a title page, including images and text that connect the introduction with the rest of the story.

Each of the stories in Dream Country has a different protagonist and follows his or her story through an arc. "Calliope" is the story of Richard Madoc, a grasping man who rises to fame and then loses everything because he cannot let go of what he has. "A Dream of a Thousand Cats" is the story of an oppressed cat who becomes an activist, preaching for change. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is the story of William Shakespeare's deal with the Sandman to become a great writer, and "Façade" is the story of a woman who gains superhuman powers but prefers death to the loss of her beauty.

The stories in Dream Country are tragedies, because the protagonists ultimately lose what they were looking for or discover that they do not want it. The only exception is "A Dream of a Thousand Cats." Although the story of the Siamese is sad, the Siamese herself is not a tragic hero, but a heroic figure working to overcome oppression.



Quotes

"Will you shut up? I haven't written a word in a year—nothing I haven't thrown away! Do you know what that's like? When it's just you, and a blank sheet of paper?" —Richard Madoc, "Calliope," page 14

"She's not even human, he told himself. She's thousands of years old. But her flesh was warm, and her breath was sweet, and she choked back tears like a child whenever he hurt her." —"Calliope," page 18

"She has been held captive for more than sixty years. Stripped of all possessions. Demeaned, abused, and hurt. I...know how she must feel. And you will not free her because 'you need the ideas?' You disgust me, Richard Madoc. You want ideas? You want dreams? You want stories? Then ideas you will have. Ideas in abundance." —The Sandman, "Calliope," page 27

"I...I want to understand. Why could they take my children from me? Why do we live as we do? I don't understand." —The Siamese, "A Dream of a Thousand Cats," page 50

"Then a human arose amongst them. A golden-furred male, bred and raised in the pleasure gardens of one of the sybaritic feline ladies. And the human had a dream, and an inspiration. And it walked amongst its fellows, and it told them... 'Dream! Dreams shape the world. Dreams create the world anew every night.'" —The Sandman, "A Dream of a Thousand Cats," page 53

"Little one, I would like to see anyone—prophet, king or god—persuade a thousand cats to do anything at the same time." —A cat, "A Dream of a Thousand Cats," page 59

"He doesn't seem like he's really there any more. Not really. It's like he's somewhere else. Anything that happens, he just makes stories out of it. I'm less real to him than any of the characters in his plays. Mother says he's changed in the last five years, but I don't remember him any other way. Judith—she's my twin sister—she once joked that if I died, he'd just write a play about it. 'Hamnet.'" —Hamnet, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," page 75

"I wonder, Titania. I wonder if I have done right. And I wonder why I wonder. Will is a willing vehicle for the great stories. Through him they will live for an age of man; and his words will echo down through time. It is what he wanted. But he did not understand the price. Mortals never do. They only see the prize, their heart's desire, their dream... But the price of getting what you want, is getting what once you wanted." —The Sandman, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," page 81

"Things need not have happened to be true. Tales and dreams are the shadow-truths that will endure when mere facts are dust and ashes, and forgot." —The Sandman, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," page 83



"They say that cigarettes will kill you, eventually. Fine. That's just fine. I only wish they'd do it faster. I draw the smoke into my lungs, extract the nicotine and the tar. It doesn't do anything for me, but I like the smoke. I like the ash. The way it falls. I like breathing out the smoke. I like smoking cigarettes. It's something normal people do." —Rainie, "Façade," page 89

"You people always hold on to old identities, old faces and masks, long after they've served their purpose. But you've got to learn to throw things away eventually." —Death, "Façade," page 105

"Where is she now? I wouldn't like to say for certain. No. She's not living here any longer." —Death, "Façade," page 111



Topics for Discussion

In what ways is Calliope a human woman, and in what ways is she inhuman?

What would a feminist reader like and dislike about the portrayal of women in "Calliope," "A Dream of a Thousand Cats," and "Façade"?

Can you make a case that Calliope is only a figment of Richard Madoc's imagination?

In what ways are the characters of William Shakespeare from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and Richard Madoc from "Calliope" similar? In what ways are they different?

In what ways are the Siamese from "A Dream of a Thousand Cats" and Calliope from "Calliope" similar? In what ways are they different?

Why does the Sandman appear to the Siamese as a cat? Why does he appear to humans in human form?

Why does William Shakespeare ignore his son in "A Midsummer Night's Dream"?

What is Rainie's disability in "Façade" that prevents her from continuing to work for the CIA? Is it a physical disability or a mental one?

Why does Rainie save all of her masks, and why does she cry when Death suggests letting go?