

# **The Sandman Vol. 8: World's End Study Guide**

**The Sandman Vol. 8: World's End by Neil Gaiman**

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# Contents

<a href="#">The Sandman Vol. 8: World's End Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">A Tale of Two Cities.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Cluracan's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Hob's Leviathan.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">The Golden Boy.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Cerements.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>



## Plot Summary

Brant Tucker and Charlene Mooney work together and decide to share travel expenses on a drive to Chicago. In the early morning hours of June, it begins to snow and then something runs in front of the car—Brant swerves off the road and the car smashes into a tree. Brant carries Charlene to a distant inn—the Worlds' End—where she receives medical assistance and he drops into a deep and long sleep. Upon awakening, Brant discovers Charlene sitting with several strange beings, including a fairy, a centaur, and some dead-looking persons. They have all sought refuge in the inn from a violent storm raging outside. The people at the table while away the hours swapping stories. Finally the storm outside breaks and the various travelers depart the inn, heading back to their own prior lives. Charlene decides to remain behind and Brant exits to discover he alone retains any memory of her.

The bulk of the narrative is devoted to a series of stories, and stories within stories, that the various travelers at the Worlds' End Inn tell each other to pass the time. Throughout all the stories it should be recalled that Brant Tucker is the overarching narrator, relating the events in the past-tense. The first story is told by Gaheris, and he relates a story told to him by a man named Robert. Robert had adventured through a dreamscape of a city for a prolonged period of time before eventually escaping back to reality, moving to a desolate area, and telling the story to Gaheris who relates it as part of Brant's narrative. The second story is narrated by Cluracan, a fairy ambassador, who insists that the bulk of his narrative is autobiographical, though he does admit to some embellishment. Cluracan travels from fairyland to the city of Aurelia in order to frustrate a proposed alliance of several cities. The political situation is not explored in depth, except that the temporal ruler of Aurelia is also the spiritual leader of the land. Cluracan observes events and arranges for the leader to be ousted. The third story is narrated by a girl who calls herself Jim. Jim has disguised herself as a boy and lived a life upon the sea during c. 1914 as a common sailor. Jim relates a story of sea serpents, storms, and passengers who are apparently immortal. Note that one of the passengers relates a story-within-a-story.

The fourth story is told by an unnamed person directly to Brant—the story is about a young man named Prez Rickard who becomes President of the United States in an alternative reality. Prez is fully dedicated to the greater good and successfully struggles to subjugate his personal desires to the pressures of his office. The fifth story is related primarily by Petrefax, a strange dead-looking humanoid. Petrefax comes from a place where the entire culture is devoted to the disposal of the dead and he tells a story with a complicated narrative involving multiple layers of stories-within-a-story elements. Several stories include minor appearances by Morpheus, though he appears by several names.

Finally the storm breaks and the various travelers depart, returning to their own realities. Some decide to go onwards, while Charlene decides to remain at the inn. Brant returns to his real world and discovers that he alone has any memory of Charlene's existence. He sits in a dingy bar drinking, and relates the overall narrative to an unnamed barkeep.

After he finishes his story, she closes the bar and the two characters go their separate ways.



# A Tale of Two Cities

## A Tale of Two Cities Summary

Brant Tucker and Charlene Mooney work together and decide to share travel expenses on a drive to Chicago. In the early morning hours of June, it begins to snow and then something runs in front of the car—Brant swerves off the road and the car smashes into a tree. Brant carries Charlene to a distant inn—the Worlds' End—where she receives medical assistance and he drops into a deep and long sleep. Upon awakening, Brant discovers Charlene sitting with several strange beings, including a fairy, a centaur, and some dead-looking beings. The people at the table while away the hours swapping stories. Finally the storm outside breaks and the various travelers depart the inn, heading back to their own prior lives. Charlene decides to remain behind and Brant exits to discover he alone retains any memory of her.

Brant Tucker is the narrator of the entire volume and narrates events from the first-person point of view. He is driving to Chicago with his friend Charlene Mooney. They are traveling together to split the travel expenses and Charlene is sleeping while Brant drives through the early morning hours in June. A bizarre snowstorm starts but Brant is too tired to be surprised by the weather. Then something fantastical—not exactly an animal—leaps in front of the car, Brant swerves to miss it, and the car leaves the roadway and smashes into a tree. Brant is stunned but sustains only minor injuries, while Charlene is more-seriously injured. Brant carries Charlene back toward the highway but can't locate the road in the driving snowstorm. He collapses and decides that he can't go on but then has a conversation with a speaking hedgehog who motivates him to continue by pricking his buttocks. Brant carries Charlene further and sees the lights of a distant inn. He gains the inn and discovers it is peopled with fantastic beings including a centaur and a fairy. Brant assumes he is hallucinating as the centaur takes Charlene away; he drinks out of a goblet and then passes out. He wakes in a room, descends to the common room, and finds Charlene seated with several fantastic beings, sharing conversation. Brant learns that the inn is called Worlds' End and that the various travelers have all been stranded by what they call a reality storm, a supernatural event caused by some momentous occurrence and manifesting in different ways in different worlds. The various creatures plan to pass the time of the storm's raging by telling tales to each other. Charlene appears entirely healthy and apparently enjoys the company, so Brant sits down and listens to one Mister Gaheris as he tells a tale.

Gaheris tells a story about a man named Robert; Gaheris explains that Robert had told the tale himself before vanishing. Robert was an introverted mid-level white collar worker, apparently without friends or family. He loved the city in which he lived, however, and spent many hours exploring it in various ways. Once, Robert thought he saw a magical path down an alley but could not actually locate it. He stayed at work late one day and took the train home, not noticing that the train was not his typical train. Aboard the train Robert saw only a strange mystical figure. Exiting the train, Robert



discovered himself to be in a dreamscape city. Robert adventured through the dreamscape city for many, many months before meeting an ancient man. The ancient man explains that he believes they are trapped within the dreaming city's dream, a type of collective subconscious. Later, the old man sees something familiar and runs toward it, vanishing. Robert continued his journey alone before meeting a sad but beautiful woman, to whom he theorized they were caught in a dreaming city's dream. Robert then sees something familiar from the waking world and runs toward it, abandoning the woman whom he perceives could have been his true love. Back in the real world Robert becomes frightened of cities and moved to a desolate landscape, living the life of a hermit, until relating his sad story to Gaheris. The initial segment of the narrative concludes as Gaheris concludes retelling Robert's tale.

## A Tale of Two Cities Analysis

Brant Tucker is the narrator of the entire volume—he opens the narration in the past tense and, technically, relates the entire story from the first-person point of view, which is again reinforced by the graphic novel's closing pages. However, Brant relates the story using the voice of other characters such that from time to time it appears as if the narrator is changing. For example, when Brant begins the telling of Gaheris' tale the visual presentation is such that Gaheris becomes a surrogate narrator. In turn, Gaheris tells Robert's tale. This complex structure is fairly easy to follow because of visual cues and forms one of the more playful aspects of the narrative construction. The visual presentation of Robert's tale is distinctly presented as straightforward narrative, and as Robert enters the dreaming city the visual portrayal appears somewhat like stained glass panes interspersing narrative text.

Although the graphic novel does not establish the fact, the dark stranger Robert meets on the train is Morpheus, the Lord of Dreams, and the dominant and titular character in The Sandman series of narratives; in the current graphic novel Morpheus plays a recurrent but very minor role. The woman Robert meets toward the end of his journey appears vaguely like Morpheus' sister, Delerium, but her identity remains unresolved—however Robert insists that had he touched her he would have been lost forever. Robert's voyage through the dreaming is consistent with other narrative arcs within the series and bears some resemblance to Cluracan's later experiences in the dreaming, or the dream world. Gaheris' story segment sets the pattern for most of the remainder of the graphic novel. Note that the conclusion of the graphic novel relies heavily on the opening scenes where Charlene is established as a real person known to Brant. This segment of the graphic novel originally appeared as issue 51 of The Sandman series.



# Cluracan's Tale

## Cluracan's Tale Summary

Brant travels to the restroom and meets a cadaverous looking humanoid who introduces himself as Klaproth. The two characters return to the inn's great room and again sit at a table to listen to stories. A fairy, Cluracan, volunteers to tell the next tale. He states that he is not good at telling stories and doesn't remember anything fictional, and thus he will instead tell his autobiographical adventures of the past few weeks and days. Cluracan is from the realm of Faerie and is an ambassador of Queen Mab. The Queen sends him to the City of Aurelian with orders to disrupt a pending alliance between Aurelian and other cities of the plains. Cluracan receives much documentation regarding the current political paradigm, but he doesn't bother reading it. Instead, he travels to the distant city which he last visited about 1,200 years previously—he finds it largely wrecked, the people strangled by heavy taxes and draconian laws, and the tone of the place malevolent and depressed. He discovers that through a series of deaths, decrees, and politics the temporal ruler of Aurelian and the spiritual leader of the plains have been united in one person—Mairon, or more grandiloquently Innocent XI, the Psychopomp of the Universal Aurelian Church, and Carys XXXV, Lord of the City of Aurelia. Mairon is a fat and disgusting slob, riddled with scarlet boils, who delights in heavy taxation and ruthless laws. Much loathed by his subjects, he is also much feared by them.

Cluracan is visited in secret by Otho, Mairon's uncle, who declares the cities of the plains detest but fear Mairon. During the ensuing political conferences Cluracan is bored until he feels a prophecy forming in his mind. He tries to hold it in, but it escapes him—he prophesies the downfall of Mairon. Much enraged, Mairon has Cluracan thrown into a dungeon forged of cold iron—from which fairies cannot escape—and threatens to "pop out your eyeballs with my thumbs and piss in the sockets" (p. 56). Imprisoned, Cluracan sleeps and dreams. In the dreaming he meets Nuara, his sister, and tells her of his plight. Nuara intercedes with a being that Cluracan refers to as Lord Shaper; Lord Shaper appears and frees Cluracan from his bonds. Cluracan then travels into Aurelian and assumes many guises via magic, spreading incendiary slander about Mairon. Within hours, the city rises in open rebellion. Mairon and a trusted advisor retreat from the rioting, seeking refuge in the family crypt in a strong tower. In the tower, Mairon vituperates his dead ancestors as an amused Cluracan watches. One of the dead ancestors then regains a semblance of life as an undead thing; it lambasts Mairon and then flings him out of the tower window. Cluracan gazes down at the shattered corpse, watches as vermin start to feast upon it, and recalls the words of his prophecy. He then escapes the city and begins his trip homeward before being stranded, by the reality storm, at the Worlds' End Inn.



## Cluracan's Tale Analysis

Note that Cluracan and Nuala have appeared in previous graphic novels in the series, as inferred by Cluracan's easy familiarity with Morpheus, whom he calls Lord Shaper. Again, the graphic novel assumes an intimate familiarity with earlier volumes in the series as the character of Lord Shaper simply appears and functions in a *deus ex machina* role. Like Gaheris' earlier recounting of Robert's tale, Cluracan's tale features an alternate reality known as the dreaming, wherein Morpheus is very powerful. Cluracan is described by Queen Mab as feckless and she is correct. After having provided him with much background information on the political situation, Cluracan ignores it all and simply travels to Aurelian where he is more or less successful through random chance; a fitting result for a fairy. Once imprisoned in cold iron—a special substance from which fairies cannot escape—Cluracan again relies on chance and fortune to escape.

Cluracan incites rebellion in the city through skill and magic; impersonating various people and spreading various rumors that he knows will enrage the local populace: although feckless, he is not stupid. Note how Cluracan plays with the notion of narrative by stating his story is not a story, but factual, and then later admitting to some embellishment of the facts—of course his statement must be taken with a grain of salt. The visual presentation of Mairon is a graphic highlight of the graphic novel. The segment's introduction of Klaproth, along with his mention of not using honorifics, will be returned to in a later segment of the narrative. In the graphic novel's front-matter, a reference is made to "The Cluracan of Faerie" (p. 1), indicating the name may in fact be a title. This segment of the graphic novel originally appeared as issue 52 of The Sandman series.





# Hob's Leviathan

## Hob's Leviathan Summary

Brant has a brief conversation with an apparent boy named Jim. Brant claims it's June 1993, while Jim claims the date as September, 1914. The next story is told by the seventeen-year-old woman who calls herself Jim and dresses as a boy. Jim was born a bastard in Sydney, Australia, c. 1897, and at the age of thirteen ran away to live the life of a sailor. Jim took employment on Spirit of Whitby sailing to Singapore, transferred to Pyramus sailing to Bombay, and deserted into Sea Witch sailing to Liverpool. Sea Witch is captained by Burgrave, a competent if vitriolic man, and owned by Mister Gadling. Gadling arrives in Bombay to take passage to Liverpool aboard Sea Witch, and this infuriates Burgrave who detests having passengers aboard his fast-sailing cargo ship; as owner, however, Gadling is ascendant. Jim is appointed Gadling's steward. The passage begins fair but after several days a stowaway is discovered and brought on deck. Burgrave begins to fume but Gadling intervenes, putting the stowaway under his protection. The stowaway is a diminutive Indian man who spends much time with Gadling. One evening, the stowaway relates a story to Gadling and Jim about a holy man who discovered a fruit which would give eternal life. The holy man made a present of the fruit to the king, the king made a present of it to his wife, who in turn gave it to her lover the captain of the palace guard, who in turn gave it to his lover a courtesan, who in turn gave it to the king. Enraged and despairing, the king had his faithless wife and the captain of the palace guard killed, gave his kingdom to another, ate the fruit, and wandered the world in sadness. The stowaway concludes the tale illustrates the faithlessness of women; Gadling agrees but Jim is angered by the conclusion.

Later a storm arises and passes, then Gadling tells Jim many things, and then a strange occurrence—a storm of fish—transpires. It develops that the fish are being driven before a colossal sea serpent that passes the ship. Gadling and Jim discuss the sea serpent and Gadling points out that no one will believe Jim's telling of the story. The ship arrives in Liverpool and Jim decides to keep mum about the sea serpent, as does the rest of the crew. Jim overhears Gadling talking to the stowaway, and realizes that both men are somehow immortal, and have lived for hundreds and hundreds of years. The stowaway—perhaps the betrayed king himself—departs whereupon Gadling admits that he knows Jim is a female. Gadling then explains how he is planning a new life with a new identity. Jim then sails away again before Sea Witch encounters a massive storm and is driven ashore on uncharted rocks; the few survivors thus make their way to the Worlds' End Inn, and Jim concludes her tale.

## Hob's Leviathan Analysis

Hob's Leviathan is a play on words, referring to the book Leviathan published 1651 by Thomas Hobbes; it is considered a seminal work of Western political theory. Jim's story includes several interesting narrative elements, not the least of which is Jim's deception



of others regarding her gender. This explains her angry reaction to the stowaways' conclusion that his story demonstrates the faithlessness of women; it is interesting to speculate that the stowaway is the immortal king of the story, but this is not definitely established in the text. The visual portrayal of Sea Witch varies—on p. 70, pane 2 she is illustrated as a barquentine, but elsewhere (e.g., p. 75, pane 7) she appears ship-rigged. In several illustrations (e.g., pp. 84-85, pane 1) she clearly is ship-rigged with an unusual four masts. Note that the illustrations of the stowaway's story features somewhat explicit artwork, including a few exposed breasts, and Jim's story—inclusive of the stowaway's story—is the most sexualized of the collection.

Unlike the two prior story arcs, Hob's Leviathan does not present Morpheus in any role; instead, the monstrous apparition that drives the fish story is a colossal sea serpent—or leviathan; the two-page artwork (pp. 84-85) is unique in the first 149 pages of the collection and is visually quite striking. Ironically, Charlene later refers to the sea serpent apparition as "a giant dick thrusting out of the ocean" (p. 143)—a characterization that Jim disputes. It is interesting retroactively to review Jim's portrayals throughout the story once the surprise twist—that Jim is female—is revealed. Note also the introduction of "Call me Jim" (p. 67)—not something like 'my name is Jim'—echoes the opening line of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. As Jim relates her story in the presence of at least some shipmates (e.g., Harry), she is apparently unconcerned to expose her true gender, apparently convinced that she is currently dreaming her experiences. Gadling, his name evocative of godling, is apparently immortal and has lived previous lives. He explains to Jim a series of business transactions which will allow him to become anonymous once again, and establish a new identity—he plans to go into printing. This segment of the graphic novel originally appeared as issue 53 of *The Sandman* series.



# The Golden Boy

## The Golden Boy Summary

Brant retires for the night and wakes some time later, eating a sandwich on his nightstand. He then exits his room and becomes lost in the inn's hallways, finally surprising a man in an alcove filled with books. The man introduces himself only as a seeker and then quizzes Brant about politics in the world from which he comes. The seeker then explains he comes from an alternate reality where politics diverged from Brant's politics after President Richard Nixon's first term (e.g., c. 1974). The seeker then tells the tale of Prez Rickard, the personage for whom the seeker is seeking. Prez was born 1955 in a town named Steadfast, and his prescient mother named him Prez, short for president. Prez demonstrated patriotism and civic-mindedness from the earliest age, and enthusiastically listened to President Kennedy's inaugural speech in 1961. By age 13 Prez was already instructing community leaders in civics. Besides politics, Prez's love was timepieces and he fixed clocks and made many innovations in timekeeping and timepiece construction. Then, c. 1970, a strange-looking man named Boss Smiley took Brant to a high place, showed him the world, and offered Brant the presidency in exchange for unspecified future favors. Brant declined the offer, stating he would become president his own way. Later President Nixon visited Prez in his bedroom at night, tells Prez he has been selected as the next president, and then delivers a depressing soliloquy about how nobody can make a significant difference in the world. Prez states he will make a difference. Prez is elected to the presidency c. 1972, a few months before his twentieth birthday. Simultaneously various miracles occur, such as blind people being able to see. Prez is an exceptional president and change many lives for the better. Boss Smiley appears some years later and tells Prez not to run for a second term, but he does anyway—and wins.

Shortly after he becomes engaged to a woman named Kathy, but before they are married Kathy is murdered—and Prez is wounded—in an assassination attempt. Prez forgives the would-be assassin and finishes his second term with much success but little personal happiness. Boss Smiley appears again and offers to restore Kathy to life if Prez will align himself with Boss Smiley, but as expected Prez again refuses to compromise his ideals. After eight years of unprecedented peace and prosperity, Prez retires to private life fixing timepieces. He becomes very reclusive and his legend takes on mythic proportions, with various newspapers reporting 'Prez sightings' next to 'Elvis sightings.' Prez finally dies anonymously, though somehow everyone knows he has died. He is met in the afterlife by death—portrayed by a beautiful and sexual young woman. Death presents him to Boss Smiley, now appearing as a godlike being, who demands that Prez worship him. Prez is still nonplussed but before anything develops Morpheus intervenes, appearing from nowhere, and claims that Prez will not be subjected to Boss Smiley's whims. Morpheus opens a mystical door for Prez. Prez gives Morpheus a gift—Prez's father's repaired watch—and then exits through the door.

## The Golden Boy Analysis

Prez's life is obviously meant to be messianic in scope, with several incidents closely paralleling Biblical events in the life of Jesus Christ. These include: the special birth scene; Prez's early precociousness, including teaching civics to community leaders at a very young age; and his trip with Boss Smiley to a high place, where he is tempted with an easy route to worldly success. Throughout his life Prez is special, nearly magical, and always does what is best for others without being overly concerned of his own needs. For example, when a crazy woman murders his love Kathy, Prez immediately forgives her and attempts to save her—she declines. Prez's visual presentation aligns him closely with the American youth counter-culture movement of the 1970s and he can thus be seen as an idealization of American youth ideals, which of necessity are transitory.

Prez's post-life experiences can be interpreted as merely the seeker's opinion, but they are presented as essentially factual: Prez now wanders various alternative realities helping suffering Americas recover. The assassination attempt on Prez bears superficial resemblance to the historic attempted assassination of President Reagan; in *The Golden Boy* the unnamed woman is seeking to gain the attention of one Ted Grant, a costumed hero known as the Wildcat. Though not discussed in the graphic novel, Wildcat has a lengthy history in comic books first appearing in 1942. Not only does Prez forgive the assassin but also reconciles with Ted Grant. The scope of the segment is large; while other stories have concerned limited characters or situations, the seeker's story has the broad sweep of history, and also deals with Prez from his birth to death, a period of perhaps 34 years (nearly 20 years old when elected, served eight years as president, subsequently became legendary). Even so, the seeker's tale features a relatively straightforward construction. Note the visual image on p. 108, pane 3, in which a zombie-like assassin recurs in dreams: her smiley-face button has a blood splotch that many interpret to be a nod to Alan Moore's *The Watchmen*. This segment of the graphic novel originally appeared as issue 54 of *The Sandman* series.



# Cerements

## Cerements Summary

After listening to the seeker's story, Brant rejoins Charlene in the common room. Brant asks Charlene to tell a story but she sadly states she has nothing to offer. A cadaverous-looking man named Petrefex begins to tell the next story. Petrefex is Klapproth's journeyman, and the men come from a place called Litharge, which is a necropolis wholly devoted to the respectful and proper disposal of the dead. Petrefex then begins a tale with multiple levels of narration. He recalls his first days as Klapproth's pupil when he recited the five main methodologies of corpse disposal and was then assigned to attend an air disposal and report on the proceedings. Petrefex joined a burial party led by Master Hermas and observed the ceremony—the corpse of the deceased was processed fully and fed to birds, leaving only a bloody stain on a rocky prominence.

After the disposal, the ceremony was completed by the burial party eating lunch and swapping tales. Hermas' two assistants spoke first. Mig told a story about a hangman in a small town; the law stated that the hangman must face death by hanging but in the story the hangman tricked the town into thinking he was in good health and then died peacefully in bed. Scroyle told a story about meeting a strange traveler who had explained to him the history of the founding of Litharge. Petrefex questioned the truthfulness of Scroyle's story but Hermas stated it didn't matter if it's true or not, the ritual was in the telling of tales. Hermas then related a lengthy and complex story about his own apprenticeship to Mistress Veltis. He recalled how she taught him and told him many stories about her own apprenticeship. In one of her stories, she broke a flask of preserving fluid and, fearing punishment, fled deep into the catacombs beneath Litharge. She came into a cavern filled with cerements and heard a disembodied voice telling her the flask mystically had been repaired and she could return fearing no punishment. Veltis challenged the voice, asking how she could know it spoke the truth. The voice then withered her hand as proof, and Veltis spent the remainder of her life with a withered hand. Hermas then asked Petrefax to tell a story but he declined, which was proper as he was not a member of the burial party but merely an observer. Petrefex then begins to expound on the mystery of Veltis' room full of cerements but Klapproth intervenes and prevents him from speaking. Brant then wonders aloud if they are all dead but Klapproth, intimately familiar with death, states authoritatively that they are not dead.

After Petrefax's tale ends, the characters speculate as to the nature of the reality storm and the inn. Charlene bemoans her unfortunate life, notes that Brant and her once flirted but now are only friends, and is critical of all of the stories previously told. She characterizes them as boys' stories where women are only objects to be seduced or ogled. Jim takes offense at this but Charlene remains defiant. Then strange lights enter the inn's windows and the characters gaze outward to see a vast, spectral funeral procession moving by. The figures are towering and impressive. At the end of the



procession comes lady death, looking sadly at her hands. Brant recalls the death of his father. Clearly, the momentous occasion driving the reality storm has ended, and after the funeral procession passes the storm ends. The inn's stewards announce that the travelers may now return home. Most decide to return to their own home, but Petrefax decides to return to another reality—over Klaproth's objection. Petrefax mounts Chiron and they ride away together. Charlene announces that she will not be returning at all. Instead she wants to stay at the inn and become a servant. Brant finds this idea bizarre, but departs himself. He returns to the 'real world' and finds the car undamaged. Later, he realizes that there is no record of Charlene, the car is registered in his name, and nobody remembers Charlene except for him. He ends up drinking alone in a bar where he meets a friendly bartender, and he tells her his strange experiences. When he completes his story she locks up the bar and the two go their separate ways.

## Cerements Analysis

The narrator is ostensibly Brant, and he recalls how Petrefex had told a story; Petrefex recalls how Hermas had told a story; Hermas recalls how Veltis had told a story—all this within the actual narrative structure, which now is obviously multiple levels of narrative construction. Petrefex also recalls how Mig told a story and how Scroyle told a story which itself included a story told by a stranger. Thus, the narrative complexity featured in the first segments of the graphic novel here finds culmination in complexity. What is remarkable indeed, is that the presentation is clear and the visual and narrative constructions are precise enough that the complexity poses no special difficulty to comprehension. The narrative itself is also very playful—it is obviously fantastic, as 'reality storms' and 'alternate realities' are fictional, yet it is also meta-fictional inasmuch as Hermas tells Petrefex that the truthfulness of Scroyle's story is not significant. Indeed, none of the events are strictly 'truthful' inasmuch as they are fictional, but yet they contain a great amount of truth within them, as does all good literature. The remainder of the graphic novel returns to Brant's principle, autobiographical, narrative. The structure to this point is reminiscent of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, as Stephen King points out in the introduction.

The resolution to the primary narrative arc comes with the conclusion of the reality storm; it dwindles away as the funeral procession passes by. Obviously some vastly powerful but enigmatic being has died. Death walks in the procession and looks sadly at her own hands, nearly ashamed at what she has done. The need for refuge over, the Worlds' End Inn's public rooms clear as the many travelers return to their respective realities. Some, like Petrefax, chose to move on to another reality. Brant returns to his own reality but finds that it has been subtly altered by his experiences, because Charlene no longer exists—and no longer existed. Of special note are the 2-page panes presented on pages 150-151, 152-153, and 154-155, all dealing with the funeral processing. There is an additional 1-page pane on p. 156, also part of the funeral processing. This segment of the graphic novel originally appeared as issues 55 and 56 of *The Sandman* series; issue 55 ending on the graphic novel's page 138 and issue 56 beginning on the graphic novel's page 139. Issue 56 was entitled "Worlds' End," which has been transferred to the graphic novel's title.



# Characters

## Brant Tucker

Brant Tucker is the narrator and protagonist of the graphic novel. He appears as a thirty-something man with shaggy, longish brown hair and brown eyes, and a thin build. He is fairly introverted and possessed of an apparently average imagination and intellect. He is a graphic artist who designs brochures for a software company. Brant relates the narrative in the first-person point of view, using the past-tense. He tells his story to an unnamed female bartender, though this is not apparent until the final pages of the graphic novel. During the graphic novel, Brant is involved in an automobile accident when the car he is driving leaves the road and crashes into a tree. He carries his passenger, Charlene Mooney, to an inn that he finds nearby. Brant and Charlene then spend an unspecified amount of time at the inn where they rest and recuperate, waiting for a storm to pass. While in the inn, they pass the time by listening to the stories of other travelers. Brant sleeps at least twice and eats a sandwich and has some drinks. He spends most of his time in the public room of the inn but spends at least a few hours in a library alcove listening to a story. Brant and Charlene have apparently shared a minor flirtation in the past but Brant seems uninterested in pursuing it. After the storm blows over, Brant returns to the 'real' world and decides to stay in a new city and start a new life. He apparently has no friends and no contact with his family.

## Charlene Mooney

Charlene Mooney is a major character in the graphic novel and, along with Brant Tucker, is a protagonist. She appears as an early-thirties woman with curly red hair, green eyes, and a roundish face of average looks. She generally is quiet and reserved but is not afraid to assert her opinion on several occasions. She has been married and divorced at least once, and has maintained an unsatisfactory, on-again-off-again relationship with her ex-husband; she finds the relationship personally destructive. In the past, she says she has taken acting and writing classes only to discover no aptitude or passion in either. She works for a software company and intensely disliked her job and states she is unhappy with most aspects of her life.

During the graphic novel, Charlene is a passenger during a serious automobile accident and is seriously wounded and knocked unconscious. She is carried to an inn by Brant Walker and then receives medical attention from Chiron, a centaur. Within perhaps ten to twelve hours, she is much recovered and spends the remainder of the graphic novel in the public room of the inn sitting with various other travelers and listening to them tell tales of adventure and mystery. Charlene appears to greatly enjoy the stories during the telling, but at the end of the graphic novel she severely criticizes the collective stories for being male-oriented and fundamentally sexist. Charlene characterizes the few female characters appearing in the stories as fully objectified and sexualized. At the end of the graphic novel, Charlene decides that she will not return to the 'real' world and



instead remains at the inn as a worker. This causes her history to vanish from the 'real' world, such that only Brant Walker remembers Charlene as having ever existed.

## Robert

Robert appears only indirectly in the narrative, but he is the subject of the first major narrative-within-the-narrative related in the graphic novel. Robert's story is related by Gaheris, a traveler at the inn. According to Gaheris, Robert told Gaheris the story, and Gaheris faithfully retells it. Robert lived a fairly anonymous life as a white-collar worker in a large urban area. Robert's only passion was apparently a devotion to the city in which he lived and worked, and he spent most of his free time exploring the city in various ways.

Eventually Robert entered an alternate reality which in many ways was similar to the city but in other ways was somewhat surreal; he wondered if he was dreaming. Robert eventually met an old man who theorized they were not dreaming of the city, but in fact living in the city's collective dream. After several more weeks Robert met a beautiful young woman who beckoned to him, but beyond her he saw a portal leading out of the city's dream. Robert evaded the desirable woman and fled out the door, escaping the city's dream and reentering the actual, physical city. He thereafter moved out of the city to a remote and desolate place where he lived as a hermit. Later Robert met Gaheris, related the story, and subsequently vanished.

## Cluracan

Cluracan is a fairy, appearing as an elfin man of indeterminate age. He has long blond hair, is usually smiling and happy, and has large, pointed ears. He dresses in fairly archaic clothing, looking somewhat medieval in appearance. Cluracan is overly-fond of drink and on one occasion at least drinks himself insensate. Cluracan is a traveler in the inn, stranded by the storm. He is only seen in the public room and tells a story involving himself as the champion and protagonist. Cluracan claims his autobiographical tale is nearly entirely factual but admits to including several elements for verisimilitude—in other words, to make himself appear more heroic. In his story, he is sent by Fairy Queen Mab to prevent a political alliance between several cities from developing. He makes the voyage and finds the distant political ruler to be a disgusting, power-greedy, self-serving tyrant. Cluracan issues a fateful prophecy foretelling the ruler's imminent downfall—for his pains, he is imprisoned. Cluracan is freed from prison by Morpheus, whom he calls Lord Shaper, and then Cluracan goes about the city in various magical disguises sowing political discontent. The populace eventually riots, the disgusting ruler is killed, and Cluracan begins his voyage home—only to be sidetracked by the storm. Note that Cluracan has several similarities with the similarly-named clurichuan of Irish folklore.





## Jim

Jim is the self-given pseudonym of a young girl of seventeen. Jim has curly red hair, light skin, and is heavily freckled; she has an androgynous appearance and form and has spend the past four years passing as a male sailor aboard several different ships. Jim is a traveler in the inn, stranded by the storm. She is only seen in the public room and tells a story that she claims is unbiased and fully autobiographical; in the story, Jim is the protagonist but functions primarily as an observant narrator. In the story, Jim recounts an early and unhappy life as a bastard child in Sydney, Australia. At a young age Jim ran away from home and, posing as a male, became a ship's boy. She spent the next several years on various ships before joining Sea Witch on a fateful voyage. Sea Witch is a cargo ship which takes a passenger—the owner—and then discovers a stowaway. The owner and the stowaway become friends and exchange stories, some of which Jim overhears. During the passage the ship encounters a sea monster and Jim wonders who will believe the tale. At the end of the passage Jim finally realizes that the owner and the stowaway are both somehow immortal, and that they are working to transition from one situation to another to preserve their anonymity as being immortal. Shortly thereafter Sea Witch is lost in an unseasonable storm and Jim, with a few others, comes ashore near the inn.

## Prez Rickard

Like Robert, Prez Rickard does not actually appear in the narrative. Instead, his story is told by an unnamed man who refers to himself only as a seeker. Prez appears as a healthy, beautiful youth with blond hair and clear skin. Prez was born 1955 in a town named Steadfast, and his prescient mother named him Prez, short for president. Prez demonstrated patriotism and civic-mindedness from the earliest age. Besides politics, Prez's love was timepieces and he fixed clocks and made many innovations in timekeeping and timepiece construction. In, c. 1970, a strange-looking man named Boss Smiley took Brant to a high place, showed him the world, and offered Brant the presidency in exchange for unspecified future favors. Brant declined the offer, stating he would become president his own way. Prez is elected to the presidency c. 1972, a few months before his twentieth birthday. Prez is an exceptional president and change many lives for the better. Boss Smiley appears some years later and tells Prez not to run for a second term, but he does anyway—and wins. Shortly after he becomes engaged to a woman named Kathy, but before they are married Kathy is murdered—and Prez is wounded—in an assassination attempt. Prez finishes his second term with much success but little personal happiness. Boss Smiley appears again and offers to restore Kathy to life if Prez will align himself with Boss Smiley, but as expected Prez again refuses to compromise his ideals.

After eight years of unprecedented peace and prosperity, Prez retires to private life fixing timepieces. He becomes very reclusive and his legend takes on mythic proportions. Prez finally dies anonymously, though somehow everyone knows he has died. He is met in the afterlife by death—portrayed by a beautiful and sexual young



woman. Death presents him to Boss Smiley, now appearing as a godlike being, who demands that Prez worship him. Prez is still nonplussed but before anything develops Morpheus intervenes, appearing from nowhere, and claims that Prez will not be subjected to Boss Smiley's whims. Morpheus opens a mystical door for Prez, who exits. Prez is likable and his portrayal has many parallels to the Biblical Jesus Christ.

## Klaproth

Klaproth is a traveler in the inn and appears in several narrative scenes. Klaproth also appears as a character in a story related by Petrefax, but Klaproth does not himself tell a story—in fact, Klaproth is unique in the graphic novel inasmuch as he actually intervenes during Petrefax's story to prevent a portion of the narrative from being revealed. Klaproth appears with white, wrinkled skin and a corpse-like face, which is apparently normal for his species. His species also drinks, eats, and urinates—so apart from the cadaverous appearance, they are apparently nearly human. He dresses in old-style Victorian garb with a touch of gothic mystery in the details. Klaproth is the master of Petrefax and two other students at the inn; they have been stranded by the storm. Although grisly in appearance, Klaproth is quite pleasant in personality and is one of the more social characters presented. Klaproth's culture is devoted entirely to the proper disposal of the dead. They take their work very seriously, even though to them it is just work. Their services are professional and apparently expensive, though their city enjoys quite a bit of business from the surrounding area.

## Petrefax

Petrefax is a traveler in the inn and appears in several narrative scenes. He tells a story involving himself and his master, Klaproth. Petrefax's group is the largest group of stranded travelers, consisting of four—three students and one master. The students are being trained in the art of disposal properly of the dead. Petrefax appears rather corpse-like, with very white skin. He dresses in a strange blend of Gothic and Victorian styles, but is otherwise apparently a pleasant conversationalist. Petrefax's story is autobiographical and involves his attendance as an observer at a funeral conducted by one Master Hermans and his two assistants. Petrefax's attendance is a school assignment and he completes it in a satisfactory way. Part of the observed funeral ritual is the telling of stories, so Petrefax's tell includes several story-within-the-story sub-narratives. He is telling Hermas' tale about Hermas' master when Klaproth steps in and puts a stop to the storytelling, apparently feeling that some secrets must remain secret or at least sacred.

Petrefax is unique in the graphic novel inasmuch as he is the only character who decides at the end of the storm to return to a reality from which he did not originate—he doesn't go home. He doesn't much care where he goes, so long as it's not home. This does not appear to be motivated by a desire to avoid returning home but by a desire to explore something new. Klaproth strongly objects to Petrefax's decision, but objects in vain. Note that Petrefax's future adventures are presented in a spinoff of the series.



## Chiron

Chiron is a centaur and, like all of the other characters, is at the inn when Brant arrives with Charlene. As Charlene is obviously in need of emergency medical attention, Chiron announces himself a surgeon—that is, physician—and administers aid. His aid is fully effective and Charlene is soon up and about. Chiron's position within the inn is somewhat indeterminate. He does not listen to all of the stories but is present in some scenes, while in other scenes he appears rather more like a steward at the inn. He doesn't tell a story and he doesn't much explain his origin, though he appears to know a great deal about the metaphysical workings of the inn. At the end of the storm, Chiron departs—taking Petrefax with him. Note that Chiron is apparently intended to be a portrayal of the Chiron of Greek mythology.

## Morpheus (AKA Lord Shaper)

Morpheus is the immortal anthropomorphic personification of dreams and the title character of the complete series (e.g., *The Sandman*); in some issues of the series he is referred to as Dream or Dream of The Endless; Cluracan refers to him as Lord Shaper. While Morpheus is a dominant character in many of the issues of the series, in the issues collected in this graphic novel he has only a few minor appearances, generally functioning in a *deus ex machine* role; that is, he appears to rectify certain paradigms that prove untenable to the protagonist involved but simultaneously logically inescapable. Morpheus usually appears in a place known as the Dreaming—the world of dreams—though he can manifest in the waking world or other domains.



# Objects/Places

## Charlene's Automobile

The graphic novel opens in Charlene's automobile, a red, midsize, four-door sedan. Details of the car's interior can be seen in the opening pages and it appears like a typical import. Brant crashes the automobile into a tree and then leaves the wrecked vehicle for the remainder of the graphic novel. He mentions at the end of the novel that he returned from the inn to discover the automobile in perfect order—e.g., not crashed—and registered in his own name, even though he knew he had never previously owned it.

## The Reality Storm

The reality storm is described as a cosmic shockwave emanating from an event of great importance. The reality storm manifests on various alternate realities in several ways; on the 'real' earth, it appears as an unseasonable and severed snowstorm. The storm in various guises drives all of the characters in the graphic novel into an inn to seek shelter, and thus forms the plot pretext for the narrative action. The storm abates after a few days.

## The City's Dream

The character Gaheris tells a story about an acquaintance named Robert; Robert's tale occurred primarily in a strange parallel city that he believed to be the collective dream of the city. That is to say, Robert was awake but he was wandering within the dream of the city. The city's dream is presented visually in a very striking manner, looking something like panes of stained glass.

## City of Aurelian

Cluracan's tale transpires primarily in a city he refers to variously as the City of Aurelian, Aurelian, or Aurelia. The city is apparently a dominant city in an indeterminate area known only as the Plains. The city is ancient, inasmuch as Cluracan mentions having visited it once roughly 1,300 years previous to his latest visit. On his latest visit he finds the city much diminished, largely in ruins, and ruled over by a ruthless and greedy tyrant.

## Sea Witch

Jim's story takes place largely upon or around a ship known as Sea Witch. The visual portrayal of Sea Witch varies—on p. 70, pane 2 she is illustrated as a barquentine (and



is so described by Jim), but elsewhere (e.g., p. 75, pane 7) she appears ship-rigged. In several illustrations (e.g., pp. 84-85, pane 1) she clearly is ship-rigged with an unusual four masts. The ship sinks after being driven onto rocks during the reality storm; Jim and a few others alone survive the wreck.

## Sea Serpent

Jim's tale revolves around a gigantic sea serpent, or sea monster, than drives masses of fish before it. The sea serpent is graphically portrayed in a visually arresting 2-page pane on pp. 84-85. The sea serpent does not appear to be malevolent inasmuch as it sees Sea Witch but does not harm the ship. Later, Charlene Morris refers to the sea serpent as "a giant dick thrusting out of the ocean" (p. 143), a characterization that angers Jim.

## Prez's United States

Prez Rickard grows up in an alternate reality where the United States of America apparently diverged from our historical USA around 1972. Instead of Richard Nixon being elected for a second term, Prez Rickard is elected—much to the consternation of Boss Smiley. Prior to Prez' influence, his alternate United States was apparently very similar to our own. After his influence, Prez's United States was a better place than our own.

## Boss Smiley's Heaven

During his life, Prez Rickard is visited a few times by a bizarre-looking individual called Boss Smiley. After Prez dies, he is met by Death who delivers him to Boss Smiley who functions as a sort of demi-god of the world. Boss Smiley invites Prez to start singing praises. Morpheus intervenes and spares Prez an eternal afterlife of praising Boss Smiley. Boss Smiley's heaven thus appears to be a type of purgatory, though the text does not fully explore the concept.

## Litharge

Klaproth, Petrefax, and a few others come from a place they identify as the necropolis Litharge. The city is illustrated in several panes, and the culture there is entirely devoted to the proper disposal of the dead. The inhabitants call themselves necropolitans and note they dress in the clothes of the dead and eat the food offered with the dead by the surrounding countryside.

## **The Funeral Procession**

Pages 148-157 depict a colossal, mysterious funeral procession with Death bringing up the rear, looking rather abashed. As the procession concludes the raging storm ends, too. The characters surmise that the cosmic event causing the reality storm that has stranded them all is in fact the funeral procession. It is, visually, the most striking component of the graphic novel's visual presentation.

# Themes

## Narrative

Although subtly presented, the theme of narration is in fact the dominant theme of the graphic novel. The plotting of the graphic novel presents a series of tales and tales within tales reminiscent of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Within the primary narrative arc, five major stories and numerous minor stories are related. At one point in the narrative, Brant is telling a story of Petrefax telling a story of Hermas telling a story of Veltis telling a story. Much of the visual presentation is also concerned with narration, such that panels of the storytellers sitting at a table in the Worlds' End Inn are interspersed with panels depicting the story they are telling. Sometimes the pane frames of the story-within-a-story are visually distinct, such as the frames on pp. 77-79 and pane 6 on p. 133. In other instances the page background color changes for the story-within-a-story segments, such as the black backgrounds on pp. 124-127, pp. 129-130, and p. 134. The same technique is not used consistently, which allows the graphic novel to retain a crisp and engaging presentation, but generally some visual cue denotes a frame-shift in the narration.

Several other elements support the theme of narrative. The bartender to whom Brant tells his story tells him it's possible he imagined the entire thing. Within Brant's narrative stories happen in dreams, alternate realities, and in the distant past. Some of the narrators even point out deception: Cluracan admits to embellishing the truth while Hermas states that factual details are beside the point. Clearly, the narrative is highly meta-fictional in several aspects and the act of narrative creation is the central act of the graphic novel.

## Strangers

Brant and Charlene know each other but only tangentially; clearly Charlene has desired to have a deeper relationship but Brant has not complied. At one point, Charlene states "Brant felt me up at the office Christmas party" (p. 144, pane 6), and Brant finds this entirely embarrassing. Charlene's closest acquaintance is her ex-husband and their relationship is obviously not rewarding. On the other hand Brant leaves a job and a city without a second thought and settles in Chicago, with a new job, without apparently notifying anyone except his old employer. After having a potentially life-changing adventure, Brant knows no one intimate and ends up discussing the event with an anonymous bartender in a dive bar. Not only are Brant and Charlene comparative strangers to each other, they are comparative strangers to everyone. This theme of isolation is supported strongly by the entire narrative construction inasmuch as nearly everyone in the Worlds' End Inn is a stranger. The various strangers pass the time by telling stories, but there is very little attempt to actually get to know each other. Instead, the characters are simply passing time with strangers—as Chiron says "Isolated



travelers exchange tales, to keep the dark at bay" (p. 142, pane 3). Note the travelers are isolated and the rationale for their activity is not to foster relationships.

## Death

The novel opens with the near death of the narrator and Charlene and closes with an anonymous bartender stating "Some nights are just dead" (p. 162, pane 3). The primary plot element driving the overall narrative situation is a so-called reality storm arising from the death and funeral processing of some cosmic being of apparent significance. In the stories, death often appears either as a personified figure or as a narrative element. For example, Robert knows that if he touches a beautiful woman he will never return to his own reality; an undead ruler kills the Psychopomp as Cluracan watches; Jim tells a story about an apparently immortal—undying—man; Prez's story includes the death of Kathy and the death of Prez; and Petrefax's entire culture is based upon the proper disposal of the dead. Most of the stories-within-the-stories also relate to some aspect of death, be it a village hangman, a king gaining immortality, or a stranger explaining the foundation of Lithargean culture. Brant, the narrator, ponders his father's death and his emotional state toward it and at the conclusion of the novel returns to his real world only to realize that Charlene is effectively dead to it. Then again, perhaps Charlene died in the automobile accident and Brant's subsequent experiences were not factual. In any event, the theme of death runs through the graphic novel and influences most aspects of the narrative, though it is generally viewed as a positive aspect of existence. For example, instead of being a frightening figure death appears as a beautiful young woman.



# Style

## Point of View

The novel is related from the first-person point of view, and is narrated by Brant Walker, a subjective but apparently trustworthy narrator. Toward the end of the graphic novel the reader becomes aware that the previous narration has been delivered by Brant to an unnamed bartender; the bartender comments that Brant perhaps dreamed or imagined the entire series of events, and Brant acknowledges this to be possible but does not accept it as a rational explanation.

The point of view becomes increasingly complicated as the narrative unfolds, because Brant's narration includes numerous characters that, in turn, tell their own stories. These secondary narrators use their own voice, establish their own setting and tone, and relate their story from the first-person point of view. These secondary narrators often include within their stories characters who tell stories—tertiary narrators—and in a few cases a quaternary narration level is introduced. Though this complicates the point of view enormously, the visual presentation and narrative construction make such shifts easily intelligible and the complicated style does not add present appreciable barriers to understanding.

## Setting

The dominant narrative is set within the Worlds' End Inn, a so-called free house that is not part of any country or place—the hostess states "Worlds' End is its own place" (p. 67, pane 5). Thus, the inn is in some type of extra-dimensional space and is clearly supernatural. Brant notes that the size of the inn's common room seems to expand and contract as needed to house the many guests. He also notes there are many rooms and byzantine hallways which apparently shift about from time to time—on one occasion Brant goes to where he believes he will find a stairway and instead finds a library alcove. Thus, the inn is clearly atypical in a traditional sense. However, it does function like an inn; there are sleeping quarters, food and drink are provided, there are serving men and women, and the common room is always full of a variety of people. The inn is thus simultaneously very realistic but utterly fantastic. The inn itself is of course constructed through Brant's narration within a far-more mundane bar. Similarly, a variety of minor settings are used for the various tales told by travelers: a dreamy cityscape, a fantasy city named Aurelian, a variety of ships including Sea Witch, and Litharge, a city called a necropolis. The settings form a rich backdrop against which the stories are told.

## Language and Meaning

The graphic novel is presented in a standard format for the genre, presented in the original English language. The narration is a split between straightforward narrative in the voice of Brant Tucker, and dialogue provided by numerous characters. When



speaking in dialogue, many characters use distinctive idioms and speech patterns. Occasionally, lettering is visually altered to give the appearance of specialized speech patterns—for example, when Cluracan delivers his prophecy he apparently uses a distinctive voice; also, when the dead Carys speaks he apparently uses a raspy, gloomy, frightening voice as indicated by the distinctive lettering. Likewise, Morpheus—or Lord Shaper—has his speech presented in a visually distinctive style indicating a unique voice. The cast of characters is derived from a wide variety of alternative realities with widely divergent customs, cultures, and even time periods—fortunately, they all speak modern English and thus their dialogue presents no special barrier to the reader.

Meaning is derived from a confluence of the written narrative and the visual presentation. The graphic novel does not fully explain many salient details of the narrative and the reader is forced to derive meaning from inference and speculation. For example, the overarching plot device used to drive the narrative is a storm system that drives many characters into an inn. The story is said to have been caused by some cosmic event and the characters assume the event must be a spectral funeral procession, yet the identities of those involved in the procession are not provided.

## Structure

The graphic novel was originally published in six independent volumes as "comic books" in The Sandman series. The original divisions still exist for the first four volumes, while volumes 5 and 6 have been combined in the graphic novel—the original division took place between pages 138 and 139. The first five divisions bear their original titles, while the sixth division gives its original name to the entire graphic novel. Pagination of the volume begins with one on the first page of the front matter and continues sequentially through every page of the volume; thus, the graphic novel proper commences on page 18 and ends on page 162.

The volume includes a six-page introduction by the well-known author Stephen King, followed by four pages of cover galleries. End-matter includes a four page visual biography, basically face sketches and names. Presentation within the graphic novel is visual and straightforward, with pages reading from left-to-right and top-to-bottom, all pages oriented in portrait layout. Most pages feature multiple panes, though there are four two-page drawings and one one-page drawing. While the visual styles vary throughout the graphic novel, especially during the dreaming-city story told first, the traditional approach with speech bubbles, narrative and text boxes, and delineated graphic panes makes accessing the text easy.



## Quotes

Brant: Looking back on it, the thing that still surprises me is my own reaction to it all. Charlene Mooney was asleep in the seat beside me, and I'd been driving most of the night. I'd promised Charlene I'd wake her at 3:00 AM and make her drive; but she was sleeping soundly and I wasn't too tired. Anyway, it was a warm June night. At one point I actually saw an owl, its wings strobing in the headlights. I'd pass a truck maybe every twenty minutes or so. I was cruising at eighty, which would drop to sixty-five when the radar detector sang, and I was humming along to a Buddy Holly tape, only very quietly so as not to wake Charlene, and I'd just driven past a small town with a name like Nowhere, Pop. 453, when it started to snow. I must have been really tired. You see, I didn't think that it was weird that it was snowing in June. I just thought, shit, snow, and slowed down to sixty. As the snow got heavier I turned on my wipers. I don't really like driving in snow. There's something about the motion of the falling snowflakes that hurts my eyes, throws my sense of balance all to hell. It's like tumbling into a field of stars. (pp. 1-2)

I like to believe it was only the cold that made me shiver, only a strand of fog in my throat that caused me to catch my breath. Robert walked away across the moor and I never saw him again. Since that time I have walked with less comfort in cities. There. That's my tale told. What's next? (p. 41)

Psychopomp: Look! It's the fairy. Set down, fairy, it's not your turn to speak yet.  
Cluracan: Both Psychopomp and Carnifex, you've gained great heights through death and lies: but now the dead begin to rise, and debts forgotten time collects. The dogs will chew your carcass yet: amidst your bones the rats will romp, and even history shall forget you, Carnifex and Psychopomp.  
Cluracan: There was a moment of silence, then, in the great hall, you could have heard a silver pin drop to the marble floor. And I thought to myself, oh shit.  
Psychopomp: Bring him here. I don't like you fairy. I don't like the idea of having to explain to the next ambassador your queen sends us that I was forced to execute her last one. But her realm's a long way away. (pp. 54-55)

Dead Carys: You have brought shame on the city.  
Psychopomp: Is—is this more of your trickery, fairy?  
Cluracan: Um. No... not one of mine.  
Dead Carys: You killed my son, hollow priest. You stole my throne.  
Psychopomp: Keep away from me. Keep away... No!  
Cluracan: "But now the dead begin to rise, and debts forgotten time collects." Well, well, well. (pp. 64-65)

Jim: Call me Jim. I'll tell you all a story. It's a true story, too, though you mayn't believe it. And there are times I don't believe it, though I was there and I saw what I saw. Before I tell it, though, I've a question I was wondering if someone here could answer for me.



Where are we?

Hostess: You're at Worlds' End. The inn at the end of the worlds.

Jim: But what country is this? What... place?

Hostess: Worlds' End is its own place, Jim.

Jim: Y'see, there was a storm, come up out of nowhere at midnight—we were swept onto the rocks, where there shouldn't've been rocks neither, nohow. A few of us made it into the ship's boat, and we pulled ashore, but onto what shore none of us could tell. And the storm was still blowing, once we got ashore, but we saw the lights of the inn and in we came. (p. 67)

Lookout: Land ho!

Burgrave: Are you mad, man? There's no land here!

Lookout: But skipper—

Jim: I can see it. Over there—see? That's funny—it's gone...

Canby: Where is it?

Jim: And then the deck lurched and tipped and bucked, and the world went mad.

Jim: Mister Gadling? We saw it. The sea serpent. We saw it.

Gadling: So

Jim: So we've got to tell everyone. I mean, it's real. It's not imaginary. We saw it...

Gadling: 'Course we did. (pp. 83-86)

The Seeker: I am a seeker. I am a follower. Let me tell you of the one I follow. His mother understood that names have power. Names do not define us, but they influence us for good or ill, help to shape and form us. Perhaps she saw a little of the future that day. Perhaps she was merely inspired by a higher power. And she named her newborn...

Mrs. Rickard: Prez—it's short for President.

The Seeker: The boy bore his name with pride. Each morning he would recite the pledge of allegiance. Other children would rise and speak, but he knew that for them the pledge was merely words and sounds, like the alphabet. For the child Prez Rickard, each morning was a moment of dedication, of magic. With all his heart and mind and soul he would pledge himself to something larger than himself. When Prez was six, President Kennedy told the American people not to ask what their country could do for them, but instead to ask what they could do for their country. Prez Rickard knew that already. (pp. 92-93)

Boss Smiley: Hello, Prez Rickard. Well done, thou good and faithful servant.

Prez: I never worked for you.

Boss Smiley: Of course you worked for me. So you got to be president. Well, you served your two terms, and that was that. Now it's business as usual. You've gone away from the world. You're becoming a mythical figure, Prez. You're already a symbol of a more innocent time. And you're dead, into the bargain. You have to be alive to be president. One of the rules.

Prez: So what are you? God? Or the devil?



Boss Smiley: I'm just Boss Smiley. I run your world.  
Prez: So that girl was right. You're not the watchmaker.  
Boss Smiley: If only.  
Prez: And Kathy?  
Boss Smiley: She's... not here anymore. She went away.  
Pres: So there are other worlds?  
Boss Smiley: I believe so. But this is the only significant one. (p. 111)

Charlene: Hullo, Brant. How was your nap?  
Brant: Fine, I suppose. Did I miss anything?  
Charlene: You missed some stories.  
Brant: Well, I heard this weird one about a president. I'll tell you later. Have you told a story, then?  
Charlene: Me? No, I... No. I haven't.  
Brant: The storm's as bad as ever. Did you hear that last thunderclap? Made me think of all those stories they told us as kids, about gods getting angry. So who's going next?  
Petrefax: Excuse me. If I would not be intruding, I would count it a signal honor to tell my tale—if Master Klapproth permits.  
Klapproth: Why should I stop you telling a story?  
Petrefax: Because it is a true story, Master, and because you are in it.  
Brant: Hey, Klapproth, I thought you said there weren't any honorifics where you came from.  
Klapproth: It is no honorific. Petrefax and Kyrielle and Eucrasia here are journeymen under me: I am their master. Tell your tale, Petrefax. (p. 116)

Mig: Right. Stories. If no one minds, I'll take the first shovel: There's a land on the other side o' the mountains, where they punish evildoers by hanging them. A noose, a scaffold, a drop. There's one drawback to this: there are rarely enough hangmen to go 'round. Oh, the big cities, they're all right, there's money to be made by it after all, and somewhere there's always a jack-ketch-in-waiting, ready to administer that final drop. But the smaller towns, where they to get their hangmen from? You're a hangman, no one wants to shake your hand. Shake a hangman's hand, and you know he's sizing you up for the last swing... (pp. 123-124)

Charlene: Why the stories?  
Chiron: It is part of a tradition. Isolated travelers exchange tales, to keep the dark at bay.  
Charlene: But why stories like these? All the ones we've heard... ..it's all Boys' Own stories, isn't it? We've heard a swashbuckling adventure, a sea story, a gangster story, a grisly boys' funeral story, and even a little ghost story. They're boys' fictions. That's what they are. Brant? The story you heard upstairs. What was that, then? A Horatio Alger story of some poor boy becoming president?  
Brant: Something like that. Yes.  
Charlene: See? I mean, sure, they pass the time. They entertain. But how do they help you make sense of anything? The world isn't like that. People don't walk into the dreams of cities The world isn't... like that. I'll tell you something else I noticed: there aren't any



women in these stories. Did anyone else notice that?

Jim: But, well, what about me, missie? There's me. There was my story. That was a woman's story.

Charlene: Oh, please. Look, girl, the whole point of your story is that there wasn't a woman in it. Just a ship full of sailors, and a giant dick thrusting out of the ocean.

Jim: That wasn't my story.

Charlene: Sure it was. I mean, there aren't any real women in any of the stories I've heard tonight. We're just pretty figures in the background to be loved or lost or avoided or obeyed or... whatever. (pp. 142-143)

Barkeep: Has it ever occurred to you that maybe you imagined the whole thing? The bar? The stories? Your woman?

Brant: Often, but...

Barkeep: Yeah, but?

Brant: But then I remember looking up at those people in the sky. I remember crying for my father. I remember Charlene. Nobody else does. But I do.

Barkeep: Hey, listen, I gotta close up now, okay?

Brant: Oh. Sure. Listen, I hope I didn't bore you.

Barkeep: You didn't. Some nights are just dead. Maybe it's the weather. I don't know. It was good to have company. So, drive safely, now.

Brant: I don't drive anymore. It felt weird, driving this care of mine I knew I didn't own...

Hey. Thanks for listening. I suppose you must think I'm crazy.

Barkeep: No. I don't. Maybe I ought to, but I don't. You hear a lot of weird stories behind a bar.

Brant: I suppose you must do. Well, good night.

Barkeep: Good night. (pp. 161-162)

## Topics for Discussion

For Brant, in the 'real' world, Charlene has vanished without a trace except for his own personal memory of her. In this sense, she can be considered to have died. Do you think that the cosmic event causing the reality storm is related to Charlene's 'death' to Brant's world? Discuss.

The bartender to whom Brant tells his story infers that perhaps he imagined the entire thing. Do you think the bartender's explanation is likely? Would you support the hypothesis that Brant dreamed the entire story? Why or why not?

The graphic novel features highly complex narrative construction, such that stories are told within stories within stories. This is especially evident in the Cerements chapter. Yet it somehow works well and the narratives are easily intelligible and accessible. Discuss the construction techniques and visual presentation decisions that contribute to the remarkable success of the graphic novel—what things make the complicated narrative so easy to follow? Could such a presentation succeed in traditional prose fiction?

The Hob's Leviathan chapter features a leviathan—a sea serpent—that Charlene Moody describes as a phallic symbol; Jim takes offense as this characterization. After reviewing the story, what role does the sea serpent play within the story? Is it indeed just a big phallic symbol? Or does it represent something else?

Would you prefer to live in the current United States of America, or one in which Prez Rickard had served two terms as president? Explain your choice.

Death is typically presented as a withered skeletal figure in tattered robes and with a scythe—a fearsome image. In the graphic novel, death is portrayed as a sexual and beautiful young woman of tender and kind emotion. How does this symbolism alter meaning within the graphic novel?

Of all the many stories and sub-stories told in the graphic novel, which was your favorite and why?