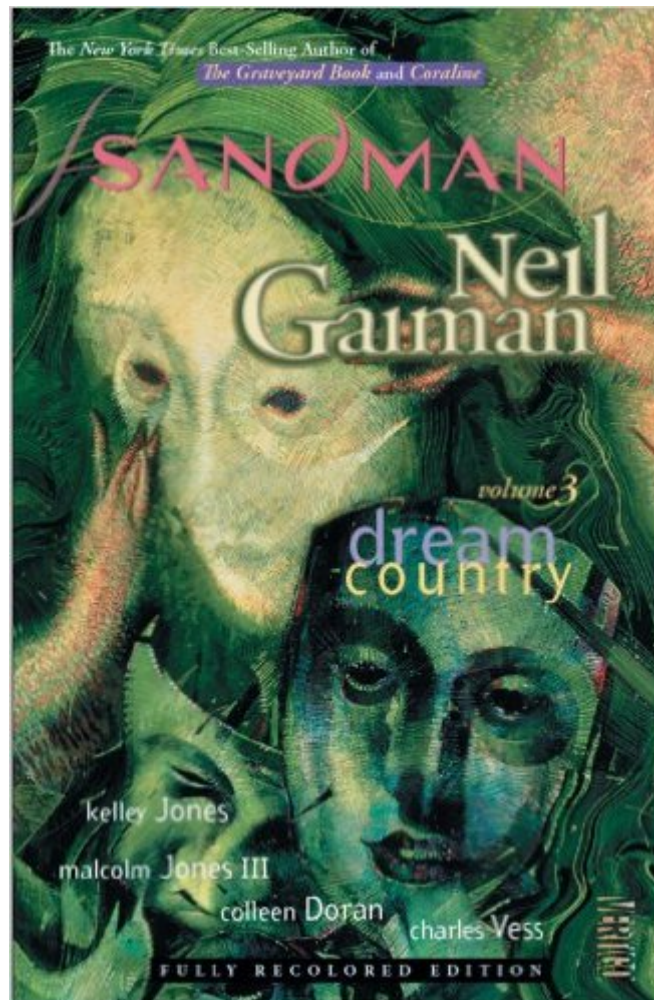


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The Sandman, Vol. 3: Dream Country



Synopsis

The third book of the Sandman collection is a series of four short comic book stories. In each of these otherwise unrelated stories, Morpheus serves only as a minor character. Here we meet the mother of Morpheus's son, find out what cats dream about, and discover the true origin behind Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. The latter won a World Fantasy Award for best short story, the first time a comic book was given that honor. This volume includes issues 17-20 of the original series and features completely new coloring, approved by the author, of issues 17 and 18.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Dream Country" contains 4 unrelated stories about Dream and Death. The first story, "Dream of a Thousand Cats" is an amusing tale, but it does not deserve an entire issue to tell. It could have easily been one of the stories told to Rose by the old women in "Kindly Ones" and taken up only a few pages. The second tale "Calliope" is much better, but is still missing that Gaiman magic. It does however, introduce us to one of Sandman's great loves and mother of his only child. It's a good story, but it's unoriginal. The third tale is the real treat. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" takes off from a chapter in "Doll's House" where Dream tells William Shakespeare to write 2 plays for him. Shakespeare and his troop of actors perform *Midsummer Night's Dream* on a grassy hill in the English Countryside for the actual fairies that are represented in the play. It's a wonderful story and the art is just breathtaking. The last one, "Facade", doesn't include Dream. Instead it focuses on an obscure super-heroine of the 60's and how she longs for a normal life which is granted by Death. It's a moving story, the kind of super-hero tale that only Neil could write. Super powers may be great,

but being a normal person would be much more appealing sometimes. All in all, Dream Country is not the best collection of Sandman stories, but "Midsummer Night's Dream" is the single best Sandman issue and actually won a slew of awards. It's worth checking out for that tale alone.

Yeah, I know it's not the first volume in the series. But I don't think Neil Gaiman really hit his stride until Dream Country. As this collection is a bunch of stand alone short stories, I think it makes an excellent book get people hooked on the Sandman. There's Calliope, a one-hit novelist's muse really is one of the muses. He rapes and abuses his muse -- bad news when her ex comes to the rescue. Creepy, creepy story. Best of all, the collection includes the script to this story. A Dream of A Thousand Cats... A charming tale that shows what cats dream of, and why those dreams will never be reality. A Midsummer Night's Dream .. The real Oberon, Titania and Puck (and other fairies) attend the first performance of Shakespeare's classic play. Simply magical with superb art by Charles Vess. Facades ... The life of a has-been superheroine. It takes a silly and forgotten character and makes her painfully human. All of these stories are must-reads -- each told with different styles. What a wonderful way to sample what comics can be.

This collection contains two of Gaiman's best short stories. "Dream of a Thousand Cats," with its gorgeous artwork by Kelley Jones and Malcolm Jones III, is one of the great ironic cat stories. And "A Midsummer Night's Dream," which actually won a World Fantasy Award. The Award committee was so chagrined by the notion of a comic book winning the prize that they changed the rules to prevent such an abomination from ever happening again. Ah, what fools these mortals be. The collection also includes, as a bonus, a copy of Gaiman's script for another story, "Calliope," in which the magician shows us how the illusion is created. In one of his panel descriptions we see the key to his method: "NOW I WANT TO GET ACROSS THE RAPE, AND THE HORROR AND THE DOMINANCE, FAIRLY SUBTLY, DOING ALL THE WORK IN THE READER'S HEAD." Yes, indeed. That's where Gaiman always does his best work. In the reader's head

"Mythologies take longer to die than people believe. They linger on in a kind of dream country that affects all of you."- Death of the Endless, in "Facade", herein "Calliope" in some ways is the most interesting entry; Gaiman has also included his script for Calliope, as annotated during his conversations with the artist. Gaiman emphasizes that this isn't the One True Way of scriptwriting - but a student would have to look long and hard to find a better published example. The script supplies both dialogue and detailed descriptions of the accompanying visual images the artist

should capture, also documenting their origins. (Failing author Rick Madoc's workspace, for instance, is based on Gaiman's own, without the Groucho Marx statue.) Calliope and Dream were once lovers, but the fate of their son (one of the key elements of the Sandman mosaic, in FABLES AND REFLECTIONS) caused a rift between them that never healed. Like Dream, Calliope has spent much of the 20th century as a mortal's prisoner - in her case, Erasmus Fry captured her as she made a nostalgic visit to Greece in 1927, and rather than wooing her, forced her to provide inspiration. Now an old man, Erasmus as the story opens has sold her to Rick Madoc, who wants to break his writer's block before the deadline of his second novel falls due. (Forced inspiration involves Madoc raping Calliope, telling himself she's not really human.) Tasting success, Madoc gets greedy, and continues to exploit Calliope as he rises to fame and fortune - and enough time passes for Dream, an ultimate source of inspiration with a gift for epic vengeance, to escape his *own* unfortunate incarceration. "A Dream of a Thousand Cats" is the message preached by a mother who learned the true depths of the falsehood of feline independence, when her humans drowned the litter sired by her first lover, a stray tom whose bloodline wasn't 'good enough' for a purebred Siamese. In her grief, she sought the heart of the dreaming for justice, revelation, and wisdom. A dead crow there, denying first justice and then wisdom, directed her to the king of dreams - another aspect of Dream, just as Nada and the last Martian saw him differently than the usual artist's portrayal. The truth the nameless mother brought back from the dreamworld - of how humans came to dominate cats, and what it *really* takes to change the world - is very powerful, despite the savage irony of the long odds against her. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (by Neil Gaiman and William Shakespeare) picks up the thread of Dream's working relationship with Will Shakespeare, begun in "Men of Good Fortune" in THE DOLL'S HOUSE. (The bargain is concluded in the last story of THE WAKE.) The artist, Charles Vess, later collaborated with Gaiman on his full-length novel of Faerie, STARDUST. Lord Strange's Men - the acting company in which Shakespeare worked as both actor and playwright before joining the Lord Chamberlain's Men - have left London to tour the provinces after their patron's death (historical fact; Gaiman cannot typically be caught out in any continuity error). Here at Wendel's Mound in Sussex, Dream has called in one of the chips owed him by Shakespeare in exchange for inspiration. (Dream sees nothing unusual in the choice of stage, as this was a theatre long before the coming of Shakespeare's people to the island. "The Normans?" "The humans.") A performance of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' for the *real* Auberon and Titania, whose people have long since left the mortal plane, but who have accepted Dream's invitation to a single night's entertainment, in thanks for the diversion their people have provided for Dream in his eternal existence. This story

marks the first overlap between Faerie and the Sandman storyline, introducing not only the royals, but the shadowy figure (noted, with a most-wanted flavor, as being still at large) of the Puck. [As the real Peaseblossom says, "'I am that merry wanderer of the night'? I am that giggling-dangerous-totally-bloody-psychotic-menace-to-life-and-limb, more like it.'" "Shh, Peaseblossom. The Puck might *hear* you!" The by-play in the audience is well written.]The characters of Lord Strange's Men are dead-on accurate, with Richard Burbage (technically the best actor) taking Oberon's part, Shakespeare as Duke Theseus, and Will Kemp (the strongest comedian, whose insistence on ad-libbing eventually caused his break with the company, as Shakespeare preferred people to stick with his scripts) as Bottom the weaver. The *real* price Shakespeare has paid for his inspiration, though, can be seen in his relationship with his young son Hamnet, experiencing a rare few weeks of his father's company - in the silent part of the boy servant over whom Oberon and Titania quarrel in the play, an irony that deepens as we see the reaction of the real Fair Folk to him. The Puck can't resist the temptation of playing himself on stage..."Facade"

Urania Blackwell was once the superhero Element Girl, long forgotten by the intelligence agency that persuaded her to use the Orb of Ra to trade her humanity for superpowers, then shelved her. The one shape she can't take for long is that of an ordinary human; 'putting on her face' involves forming short-lived clay masks from her own substance, to be able to pass. She has lost the will to live, existing as a shut-in on a "company" pension, and has only 2 kinds of dreams - bad and terrible. (Ordinary nightmares are only bad dreams; the *terrible* dreams are those in which she lives a normal life, then wakes to find that she's still a metamorph.) Death, not Dream, appears in this one, but not to end Urania's life - she heard Urania crying while collecting a neighbour woman who'd fallen from a ladder. After all, as Death points out, she just has a job to do; people make their own fates, and put their own interpretation on her job, whether as gift or punishment.

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