

The Sandman: Preludes & Nocturnes: Questions for Discussion and Writing

Chapter 1: “Sleep of the Just”

1. Who is summoned and imprisoned, and by what means? What consequences does his imprisonment apparently have?
2. Who are his captors, and what was their original intention? Describe Roderick Burgess and Alex Burgess.
3. What purpose(s) do the stories of Ellie Marsten, Daniel Bustamonte, and Unity Kinkaid serve?
4. Who is John Hathaway? What happens to his suicide note, and what are the consequences of its destruction?
5. Who are the Endless, and what do we learn about them in this chapter? What names is the imprisoned one known by?
6. The name Morpheus is derived from the Greek word for “shape”; in English, *morph* can also mean “to transform or be transformed.” Why is *Morpheus* an appropriate name for the god of dreams; how are the meanings of these words interrelated?
7. Describe Morpheus (also called Dream) based on his actions in this chapter—his character, his values and interests, and his powers. What punishment does he inflict on Alex Burgess, and what does this suggest about him?
8. “To sleep the sleep of the just” (*just* as in *justice*) is an idiom suggesting a deep, easy sleep made possible by a clean conscience. How do you think the title of the chapter relates to the story so far? Who is Wesley Dodds, and why does he sleep the sleep of the just?
9. What ideas and themes does the story seem to be exploring so far?

Chapter 2: “Imperfect Hosts”

1. Who are the brothers introduced at the beginning of the chapter, and what role(s) do they apparently serve in? What does Neil Gaiman (the author) probably assume the reader knows about them? (Google their names if you don't know.)
2. Discuss the significance of Abel's name for Dream: “the Prince of Stories.”
3. Who is Doctor Destiny, and what has happened to him? What hint about his significance to the story is given by the Fates later in the chapter?
4. What is “the Dreamtime”? (The term comes from Australian aboriginal myth, but it has a specific meaning in the context of *The Sandman* and is used interchangeably with “the Dreaming” and “the Dreamworld.”) Describe it. What features or characteristics does it have? What has happened to it, and why?
5. Who is Lucien, and what role does he apparently play?
6. What first steps does Dream take to regain his power? How does he gather the items he needs to summon the three Fates (also called Norns, Hecateae, and other names)?
7. Describe the three Fates: their behavior, their characteristics, and their powers. How would you characterize Dream's interactions with them?
8. What do you think Dream's last line in the chapter (“What could possibly go wrong?”) is meant to suggest? What rhetorical devices is this line an example of?
9. Discuss the significance of this chapter's title.

Chapter 3: “Dream a Little Dream of Me”

1. What significance do the songs that appear in this chapter have, and what does their frequent appearance indicate about the nature of reality in the story? What happens when John Constantine tries to play “I Heard It Through the Grapevine” on the jukebox?
2. Describe John Constantine. What things are unusual about him and his life?
3. What has happened to Dream’s pouch, and what effect has it had? What has happened to the burglar who broke into the house before John and Dream’s arrival?
4. Describe John’s feelings toward Rachel.
5. Rachel used to ask John a question: “What’s the point of having something magic if you don’t use it?” How do you think John would answer that question? (“I knew the answer. But I knew she’d never understand.”) Based on her personality and behavior, why do you think she wouldn’t understand?
6. What do Dream’s actions in this chapter show about him?

Chapter 4: “A Hope in Hell”

1. Who is “the Morningstar,” whom Dream watched as he fell (eons ago)?
2. Describe Hell as depicted in this chapter.
3. What does Dream’s brief interaction with Nada suggest about him and about his past?
4. Describe the game that Dream plays to win back his helm. How is the game won, and in what ways can it be lost?
5. How does Dream win his freedom from Hell? Discuss the sense of “ethics” that the denizens of Hell seem to be bound by.
6. What is the expression alluded to in the title of this chapter usually used to express? How is it used in the context of this chapter?

Chapter 5: “Passengers”

1. Who is Doctor Destiny’s mother, and how is that fact significant? Note that he got an amulet of protection (“a lucky charm”) and his ruby (the Stone of Binding or Dreamstone) from her.
2. Describe the nature of dreams and the nature and functioning of the Dreamstone according to Doctor Destiny. How did he commit his crimes?
3. How is Dream able to use his power to travel quickly?
4. What happens when Dream reaches the Dreamstone, and why?
5. Describe Doctor Destiny based on his words and actions in this chapter.

Chapter 6: “24 Hours”

1. What things do the people in the diner seem to have in common? What more general theme does this suggest? What is the main characteristic of Bette’s stories, and why do you think she always writes them this way?
2. What explanation does Doctor Destiny give for his actions? Is this explanation sufficient? What does it really mean—why do you think he does these things?

Chapter 7: “Sound and Fury”

1. How does Dream regain his power? What brings about Doctor Destiny’s downfall?
2. As quoted in the story, the title of this chapter comes from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*: “[Life is] a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Discuss the meaning of this quote. How does this idea relate to the events of the chapter? What perspective does *The Sandman* seem to have on this philosophical view of life?
3. What does Dream do after Doctor Destiny’s defeat? Why do you think he does these things?

Chapter 8: “The Sound of Her Wings”

1. Discuss the way Gaiman (the author) personifies and characterizes death—describe Death’s appearance, behavior, speech, and relationship with Dream. What is surprising about her? What characteristics of mortals do Death and Dream display? Why do you think Gaiman chose to present the characters this way?
2. Discuss Dream’s attitude toward death. What is his conception of the nature of death? In what ways is it revealed in the story? How does his view differ from the view that most people have?
3. What do the various examples of Death’s “work” suggest about the phenomenon of death?
4. What is the significance of this chapter’s title, and what symbolic and thematic meaning(s) do wings have in the story?
5. The pendant Death wears is called an *ankh*. It was originally an ancient Egyptian symbol for the word “life.” How is this ironic or surprising, and how is it fitting?
6. Describe Dream’s mental state. Why is he in this state, and how does Death help him?

Preludes & Nocturnes Review Questions

1. What does the title of this first collection of Sandman stories suggest about its content and narrative function?
prelude: an introductory musical piece; a preliminary to something broader or more important
nocturne: a piece appropriate to the night; a dreamy or pensive instrumental composition
2. A *Macguffin* is an object that exists in a story primarily to drive the plot, not because it is significant in itself. Macguffins can be an inferior approach to storytelling when they are artificial insertions rather than organic, natural elements of a story. What Macguffins are there in these stories? What is your opinion about the effectiveness or appropriateness of their use? ([AV Club’s discussion of Preludes & Nocturnes](#) has some relevant information about this question and is well worth reading for other reasons.)
3. Discuss Gaiman’s development of the following elements in the story. Cite specific examples.
 - **mood** (the dominant emotions of the story) and **tone** (the author’s attitude toward the story’s characters and events)
 - **imagery** and **symbolism**
 - **theme**
 - **setting**
 - **character**
4. Do you see any change or evolution in elements such as **style**, **mood/tone**, and **character** from one chapter to another? Give specific examples and discuss their significance.

5. Discuss the use of mythological **characters**, stories, and **themes** in *Preludes & Nocturnes*. How does Gaiman use these elements to develop a rich and unique **setting** for the story?
6. How do visual elements such as art, lettering, and panel structure affect the reader's experience of the story and contribute to the development of elements such as **character**, **mood**, and **theme**? Cite specific examples.
7. Discuss the **style** and **symbolism** of the title pages, which were originally the covers of the separate issues. How do they reflect elements of the story such as **mood** and **theme**? What function do you think the crude drawings that precede the cover pages of the first seven chapters have?