

VERTIGO

ESSENTIAL VERTIGO

DC COMICS

# THE SANDMAN

## PRELUDES & NOCTURNES



NEIL GAIMAN  
SAM KIETH  
MIKE DRINGENBERG



"Gaiman... is the most original, inspiring  
fantasy writer first of all."  
—TOMAS CARROLL

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SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

OBI

ONE. TWO.  
THREE. FOUR...

HER NIPPLES ARE HARD AND  
DARK AND SHRUNKEN ON  
BREASTS LIKE EMPTY POUCHES.

HER HAIR COMES OUT IN  
CLUMPS WHEN SHE MOVES.  
SHE TRIES NOT TO MOVE  
TOO MUCH.

HER SKIN IS FLAKING,  
INFECTED AND INFLAMED.  
BEDSORES COVER HER  
BACK AND LEGS.

TWENTY-EIGHT.  
TWENTY-NINE.  
THIRTY...

HER FINGERNAILS GREW LONG  
AND BRITTLE; THEN THEY BROKE  
OFF. THE RAGGED NAILS RIP HER  
SKIN WHEN SHE SCRATCHES.

HER STOMACH SHRANK, THEN  
BLOATED. THEN IT SHRANK  
AGAIN. HUNGER SUBSIDED TO A  
LOW NAGGING IN THE BACK OF  
HER MIND.

IT'S OK. IT  
GOES AWAY.

RADIO 1

DELAY THE  
PLEASURE.

DELAY THE  
DREAMS.

WILL SHE DISSOLVE IT IN HER  
MOUTH? BREATHE IT? RUB  
IT INTO HER SKIN?

LIKE THE PAIN GOES AWAY. LIKE  
EVERYTHING GOES AWAY WHEN  
THE DREAMS COME.

...SHE FEELS REALITY  
EBBING BACK.

NINETY-SIX. NINETY-SEVEN.  
NINETY-EIGHT...

IT DOESN'T  
MATTER.

SHE'S COUNTING  
TO A HUNDRED.

SIXTY-FIVE.  
SIXTY-SIX...

SHE'LL  
WAIT.



HAVE YOU EVER HAD ONE OF THOSE DAYS WHEN SOMETHING JUST SEEMS TO BE TRYING TO TELL YOU SOMEBODY?

THERE WAS A SMELL OF MAGIC SOMEWHERE, LIKE THE BLUE-SPARKS SMELL OF OZONE AT A FUNFAIR.

I'D JUST HAD THIS NIGHTMARE.

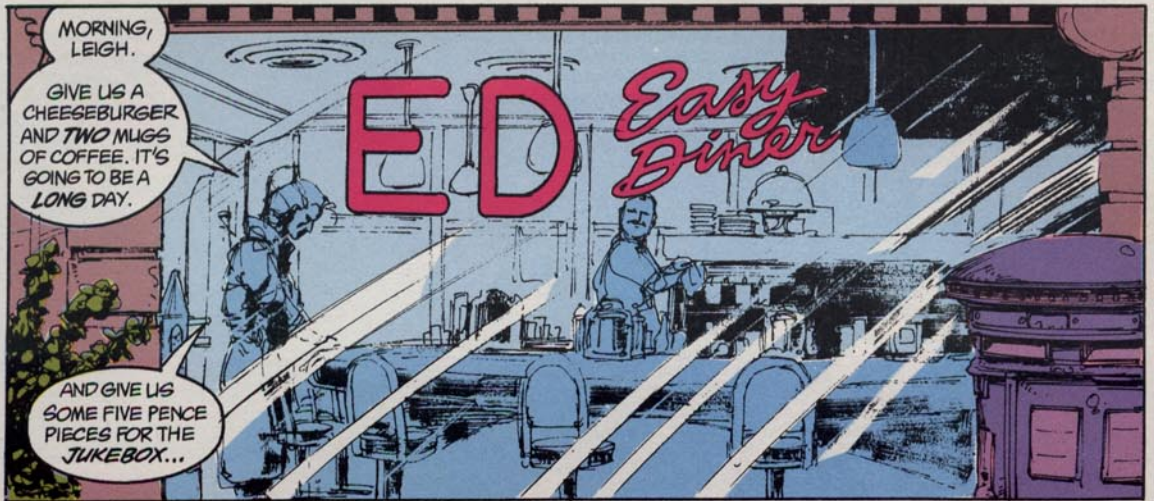
THESE THINGS WITH FACES LIKE APPENDECTOMY SCARS WERE CROCHETING MY INTESTINES INTO BODY BAGS FOR THE BLIND AND DEAD.

...BLAST FROM THE PAST OLDIE BUT GOODIE THE MAN WITH THE MAGIC...

I TOLD MYSELF IT WAS ONLY A DREAM, BUT IT DIDN'T MATTER. THE BASTARDS JUST KEPT ON BLOODY KNITTING.

MIS-TER SANDMAN I'M SO ALONE, AIN'T GOT NO BODY--CLICK



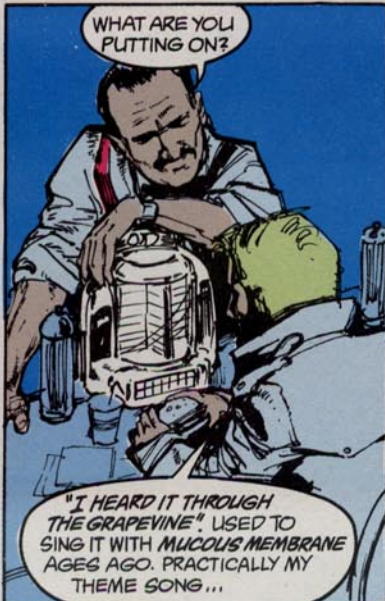


MORNING, LEIGH.

GIVE US A CHEESEBURGER AND TWO MUGS OF COFFEE. IT'S GOING TO BE A LONG DAY.

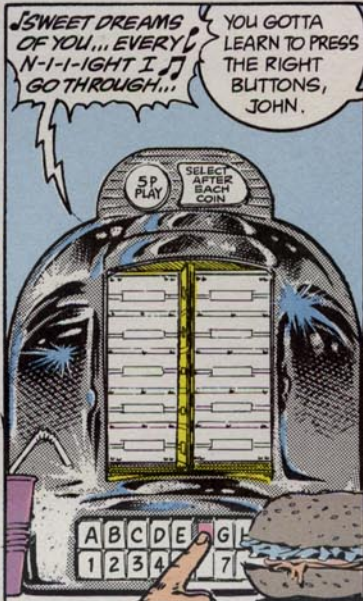
# ED *Easy Biner*

AND GIVE US SOME FIVE PENCE PIECES FOR THE JUKEBOX...



WHAT ARE YOU PUTTING ON?

"I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE". USED TO SING IT WITH MUCOUS MEMBRANE AGES AGO. PRACTICALLY MY THEME SONG...



SWEET DREAMS OF YOU... EVERY N-I-I-I-GHT I GO THROUGH...

YOU GOTTA LEARN TO PRESS THE RIGHT BUTTONS, JOHN.



...THE WHO-OLE NIGHT THROUGH INSTEAD OF HAVING SWEET DREAMS ALL ABOUT YOU...

...SOMETHING TRYING TO TELL ME SOMEBODY...?



SOMEBODY TRYING TO TELL YOU SOMETHING? YUP.

I THINK IT'S YOUR GIRLFRIEND, OUTSIDE. HEHE.

# WHUMP WHUMP

JESUS! MAD HETTIE...



'ES BACK, JOHN.

WHO'S BACK, MAD HETTIE?



YOU ORT TER KNOW, SMART BOY. MORPHEUS. THE ONEIRMANCER. YOU KNOW...

...THE SANDMAN.

'ES BACK.

THE SANDMAN? MAD HETTIE, YOU'VE GOT TO BE PULLING MY LEG.



CHEEKY YOUNG JACKANAPES!

LOOK, THE SANDMAN'S A FAIRY STORY YOU TELL KIDS TO GET THEM OFF TO SLEEP. SPRINKLES MAGIC DUST IN YOUR EYES AND BRINGS YOU...

...SWEET DREAMS.

I'M TRYING TO SAVE THE WORLD, MAD HETTIE, AND YOU WANT TO TELL ME FAIRY STORIES!



NOW YOU LISSEN TER ME, JOHN CONSTANCEEN, YOU LITTEL PRICK!

I SED THE SANDMAN, AN' I MEANT THE BLEEDIN' SANDMAN! 'ES BACK, JOHN. AND 'E WANTS 'IS OWN.

I KNOW.

I'M TWO 'UNDRID AND FORTY-SEVIN YEARS OLD AND I KNOW!

'ES BACK!

FUNNY THING IS, SHE IS TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY SEVEN.

THE SANDMAN, EH?

I SUPPOSE I'LL HAVE TO LOOK INTO IT.

HE LEFT THE PORSCHE HALF A MILE BACK DOWN THE ROAD. HOPES IT WON'T GET **STOLEN**. THERE ARE SOME REAL **THIEVES** AROUND THESE DAYS.

THEY CALL THEMSELVES **CREEPERS**. IT'S A **SPORT**. **BREAKING INTO PEOPLE'S HOUSES** WHILE THEY'RE **STILL AT HOME**.

DURING THE DAY HE'S AN **INVESTMENT COUNSELOR**.

CHECKBOOKS. CREDIT CARDS. CDS. VIDEO TAPES.

HE THINKS OF IT AS HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE **FREE MARKET ECONOMY**.

AND HE...

HE...

HE...

HE **MUST BE DREAMING**.

HER LIPS TASTE OF **ROSES AND PASSION**, AND SHE **HOLDS HIM LIKE HER LIFE DEPENDS ON IT**.

THIS IS **TOO GOOD**.

HE CAN FEEL THE **WARM TIGHTNESS OF HER SKIN**; THE **SCENT OF SEX IS HEAVY IN THE AIR**.

TOO GOOD  
TO BE TRUE.

HE'S HITTING A HUNDRED  
AND FIFTY IN THE  
LAMBORGHINI OF  
HIS DREAMS.

EVERYBODY'S GREEN WITH  
ENVY. THE ACCELERATION  
GOES ON FOREVER.

JESUS.

HE'S DYING FOR THEM  
AND THEY LOVE HIM.

HE'S PURE AND PERFECT  
AND HE'S DYING FOR THEIR SINS.

HE CAN SEE HIS PARENTS, HIS  
BOSS, HIS LOVERS IN THE  
CROWD BELOW HIM.

THEY'RE SORRY NOW. SORRY THEY  
TREATED HIM SO BADLY. BECAUSE  
HE'S THE SON.

LAST SON OF A  
DEAD PLANET.

STRONGEST  
MAN IN THE  
WORLD.

HE CAN DO  
ANYTHING.

ANYTHING.

ABSOLUTELY  
ANYTHING.



FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS I KEEP MEANING TO INVESTIGATE THIS SANDMAN STUFF. I JUST NEVER QUITE GET ROUND TO IT.

ONE THING I'VE LEARNED: YOU CAN KNOW ANYTHING. IT'S ALL THERE, YOU JUST HAVE TO FIND IT.

MY OWN RESEARCHES KEEP ME BUSY ENOUGH.

OOOO-OOOH... ♪  
SWEET DREAMS ARE MADE OF THIS... WHO- ♪  
AM I TO DISAGREE?... ♪

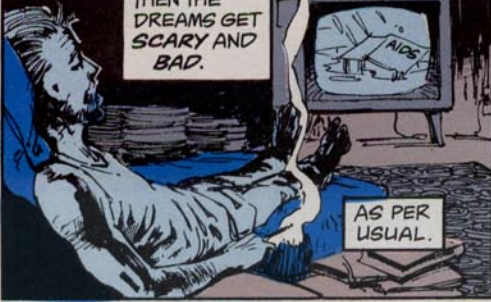


...TO CALL MY OWN... I WANT A DREAM LOVER, SO I DON'T HAVE TO DREAM ALONE...

DREAMS ARE LIKE ANGELS... THEY KEEP BAD AT BAY... ♪

I DREAM A MESS OF LEY-LINES AND LEPTONS, PLASMA FIELDS AND TURF GIANTS.

THEN THE DREAMS GET SCARY AND BAD.



AS PER USUAL.

IT WAS ON THE THIRD DAY THAT HE CAUGHT UP WITH ME.



John Constantine, I presume.







We have been looking for two hours, Constantine. Patience wears thin.

I do not believe it is here.



If it were here, I would be able to feel it.

WE'VE STILL GOT A LOAD OF STUFF TO GO THROUGH YET, BOSS.

KEEP SMILING. IT'LL TURN UP.



HOW DID YOU LOSE THIS POUCH, ANYWAY?

THE OLD "DAEMON KING" HIMSELF, EH?

It was stolen from me. By a man called Burgess.



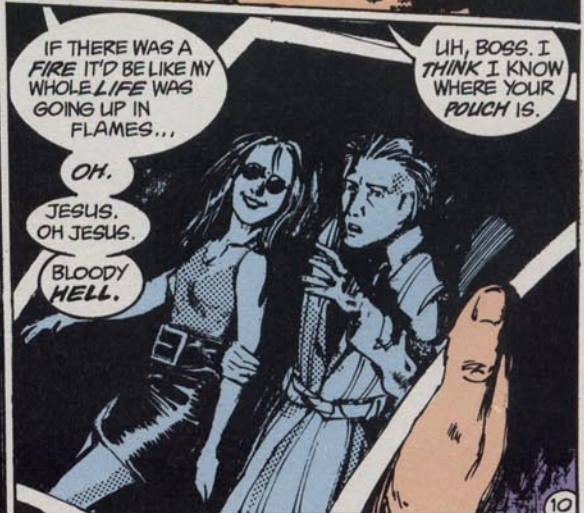
YOU MUST BE OLDER THAN YOU LOOK.



DAMN!



I DON'T KNOW WHY I HANG ON TO ALL THIS STUFF.



IF THERE WAS A FIRE IT'D BE LIKE MY WHOLE LIFE WAS GOING UP IN FLAMES...

OH.  
JESUS.  
OH JESUS.  
BLOODY HELL.

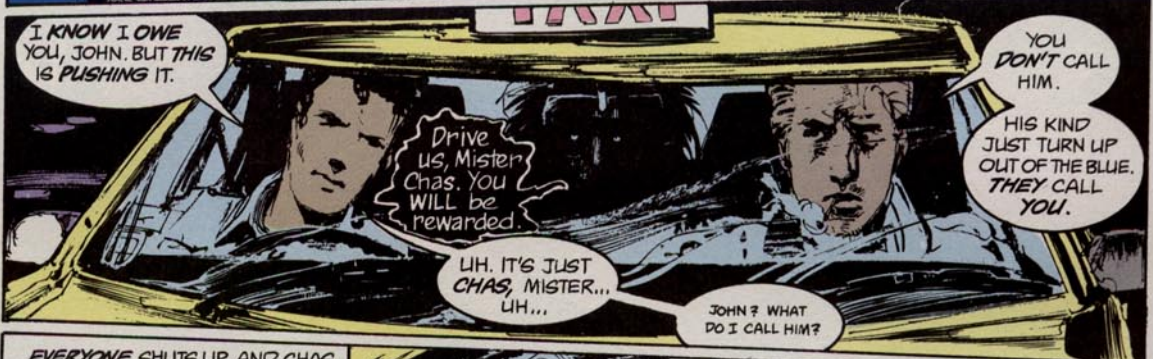
UH, BOSS. I THINK I KNOW WHERE YOUR POUCH IS.



'ERE, JOHN, CAN WE STOP AT A SERVICE STATION? I'M PARCHED. I TOOK OFF WITHOUT ME TEA.

No.

YOU HEARD THE MAN, CHAS, OLD MATE. SORRY. I AIN'T NO MARK FOR THE VENUS OF THE HARSELL...



I KNOW I OWE YOU, JOHN, BUT THIS IS PUSHING IT.

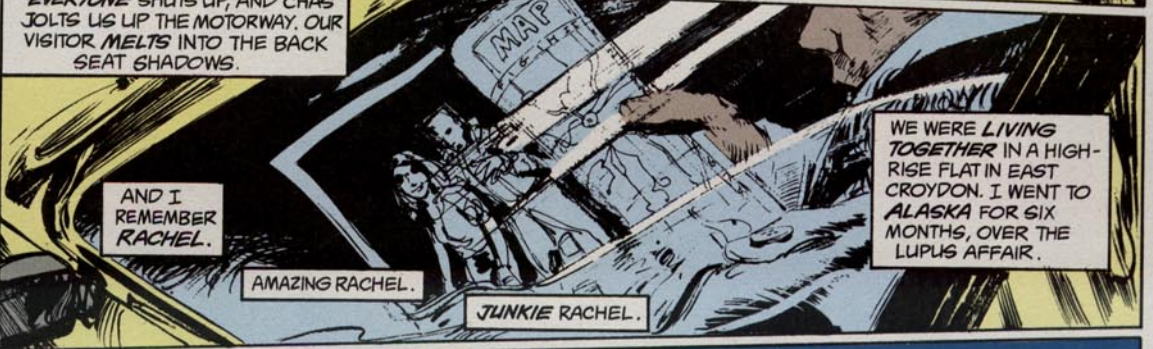
Drive us, Mister Chas, you will be rewarded.

UH. IT'S JUST CHAS, MISTER... UH...

JOHN? WHAT DO I CALL HIM?

YOU DON'T CALL HIM.

HIS KIND JUST TURN UP OUT OF THE BLUE. THEY CALL YOU.



EVERYONE SHUTS UP, AND CHAS JOLTS US UP THE MOTORWAY. OUR VISITOR MELTS INTO THE BACK SEAT SHADOWS.

AND I REMEMBER RACHEL.

AMAZING RACHEL.

JUNKIE RACHEL.

WE WERE LIVING TOGETHER IN A HIGH-RISE FLAT IN EAST CROYDON. I WENT TO ALASKA FOR SIX MONTHS, OVER THE LUPUS AFFAIR.



WHEN I GOT BACK SHE WAS GONE. ALONG WITH ME STEREO, THE TELLY, ME SILVER SURFERS-- ANY OLD JUNK SHE COULD CONVERT TO MONEY.

AND SHE'D LONG SINCE CONVERTED THE MONEY INTO JUNK.

STUPID BITCH.

SOMETIMES I STILL MISS HER.

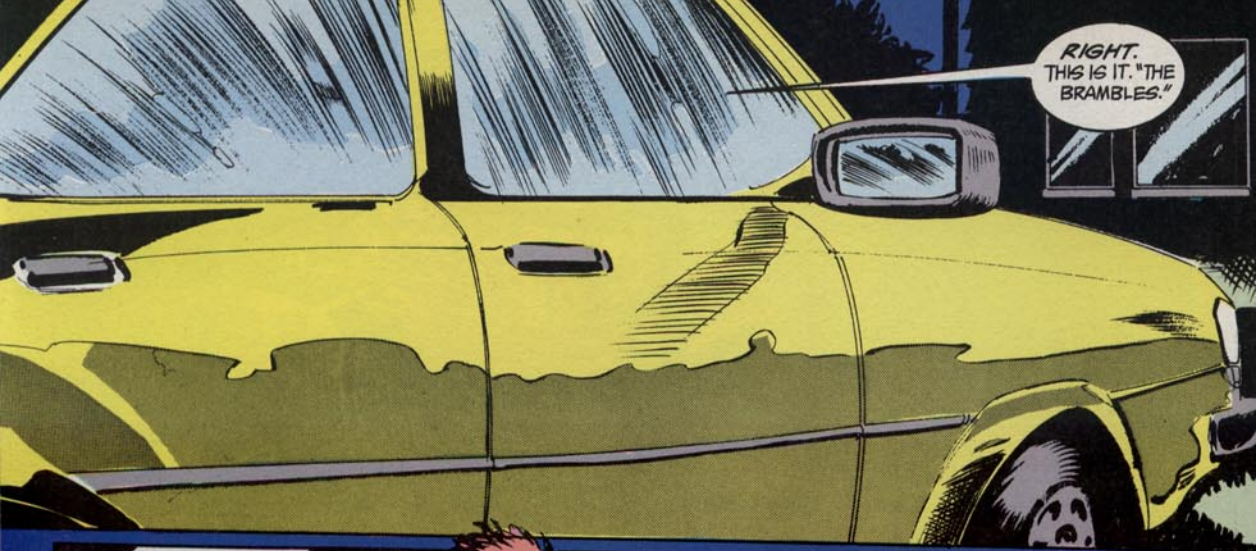
EITHER OF YOU GENTS MIND IF I PUT ON THE RADIO? NO?



I WISH I'D REALIZED THAT SHE'D NICKED THE POUCH AS WELL, THOUGH.

THE CANDY-COLORED CLOWN THEY CALL THE SANDMAN... TIP-TOES THROUGH MY ROOM EVERY NIGHT... JUST TO SPRINKLE STARDUST...

CANDY-COLORED CLOWN? YEAH, RIGHT.



RIGHT. THIS IS IT. "THE BRAMBLES."



WE'LL ASK HER DAD WHERE SHE'S LIVING THESE DAYS, AND GO FIND HER.

NO PROBLEMS, EH?

HER DAD'S ALL RIGHT. RETIRED AIR PILOT. NICE MAN. WE'LL GET YOUR BAG BACK.



The POUCH is HERE

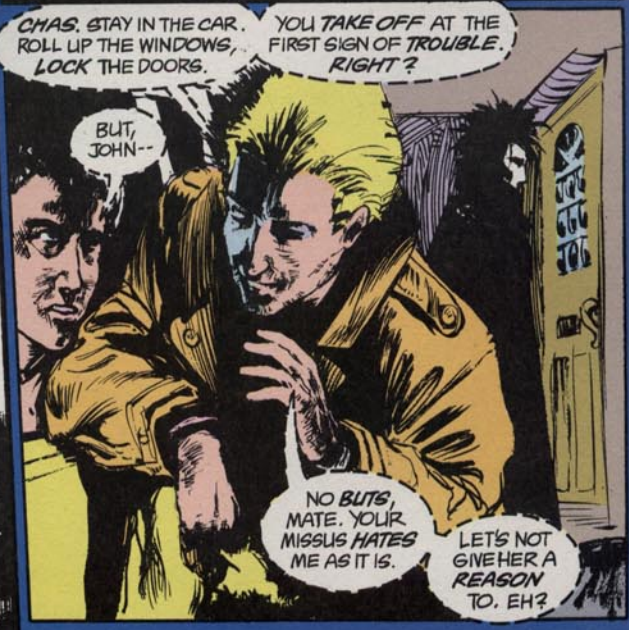
HOW DO YOU KNOW?

I KNOW



The POUCH is here. And MORE than the Pouch...

This house is DANGEROUS, Constantine.



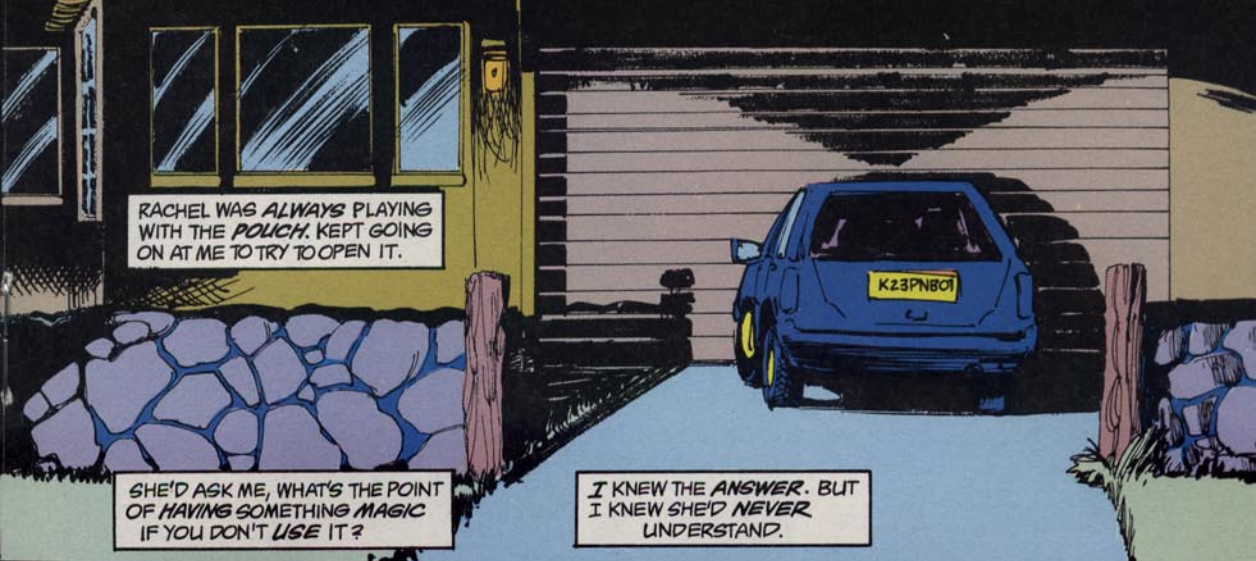
CHAS. STAY IN THE CAR. ROLL UP THE WINDOWS. LOCK THE DOORS.

YOU TAKE OFF AT THE FIRST SIGN OF TROUBLE. RIGHT?

BUT, JOHN--

NO BUTS, MATE. YOUR MISSUS HATES ME AS IT IS.


LET'S NOT GIVE HER A REASON TO, EH?




RACHEL WAS ALWAYS PLAYING WITH THE *POUCH*. KEPT GOING ON AT ME TO TRY TO OPEN IT.

SHE'D ASK ME, WHAT'S THE POINT OF HAVING SOMETHING MAGIC IF YOU DON'T *USE* IT?


I KNEW THE *ANSWER*. BUT I KNEW SHE'D NEVER UNDERSTAND.



WELL, THERE'S NO *ANSWER*. AND IT'S *LOCKED, BOLTED AND ALARMED*.




LET'S GO *ROUND THE BACK*, WE CAN *SMASH A WINDOW*, GET IN *THAT WAY...*



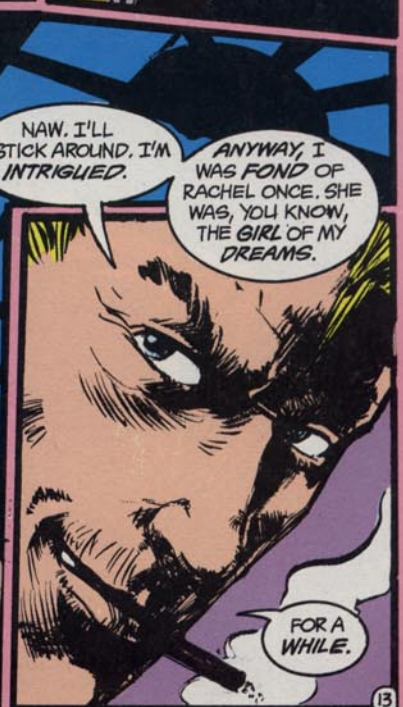
We go in by the *FRONT door*.

*KREEK*



IT SMELLS *STRANGE*. PART OF IT REMINDS ME OF THE MONTH I WORKED FOR AN *UNDERTAKER*; ALL *FLESH AND FORMALDEHYDE*.

'S *WEIRD*: SMELLS ARE A *HOTLINE TO MEMORY*.



NAW. I'LL *STICK AROUND*. I'M *INTRIGUED*.

ANYWAY, I WAS *FOND OF RACHEL* ONCE. SHE WAS, YOU KNOW, THE *GIRL OF MY DREAMS*.

Constantine...

This place is not *SAFE* for you.

Things are free in this house that should *NOT* be loose on *Earth*.

You must not stay here.

FOR A *WHILE*.

THE ELECTRICITY'S CUT OFF. THERE'S SIX MONTHS' WORTH OF MAIL ON THE DOORMAT.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING HERE?

Watch out for the HUMAN.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, WATCH OUT FOR--

AAAH!

THU-DUMP

HUMAN.

IS HE...?

YES.

He's ALIVE. After a fashion.

ELUCK

He's being eaten by dreams.

WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?

You need light. Is that better?

I'VE BEEN OUT OF MY DEPTH BEFORE. SOMETHING TELLS ME THERE ARE SHARKS IN THESE DEPTHS.

I OUGHT TO BE RUNNING AWAY. BUT.

RACHEL...

LH. SURE. THANKS.

MOVIES. OLD DARK HOUSE. HORRIBLE MENACE ON THE LOOSE. "LET'S SPLIT UP." MUFFLED SCREAMS IN DARKNESS...



UH... WE'LL STICK TOGETHER, WON'T WE?



OF COURSE.

UNTHINKING, I REACH FOR THE LIGHT SWITCH...



YECHH.

CHRIST. THERE'S SOMETHING ON THE WALLS.



SOMETHING WET.

AND.

AND.

AND I CAN SEE THE CLOUDS. THEY LOOK KIND OF SOLID. AND THE GROUND BELOW THEM.



THAT LOOKS REALLY SOLID. IT'S A LONG WAY TO FALL.

AND I'M FALLING.



HOW DID I GET HERE?

I DON'T WANT TO DIE. I DON'T WANT TO FALL.

MEMORY FILLS IN: THE PLANE ON FIRE; I JUMPED...?

I WAS: THE PILOT? NO. A PASSENGER, THEN?

I TELL MYSELF IT'S NOT THE FALL. FALLING DOESN'T HURT...

...IT'S WHEN YOU STOP.

CONSTANTINE!

John You're HERE

UH.

...SO REAL.

YAAAAH!

It is NEVER "only a dream," John Constantine. HERE less than some other places...

YOU WERE THERE, TOO.

A DREAM. IT WAS ONLY A DREAM.

More light.

JEEESUS.

WHAT IS THIS STUFF?

A human body. What's left of it. Your woman's father, I would surmise.

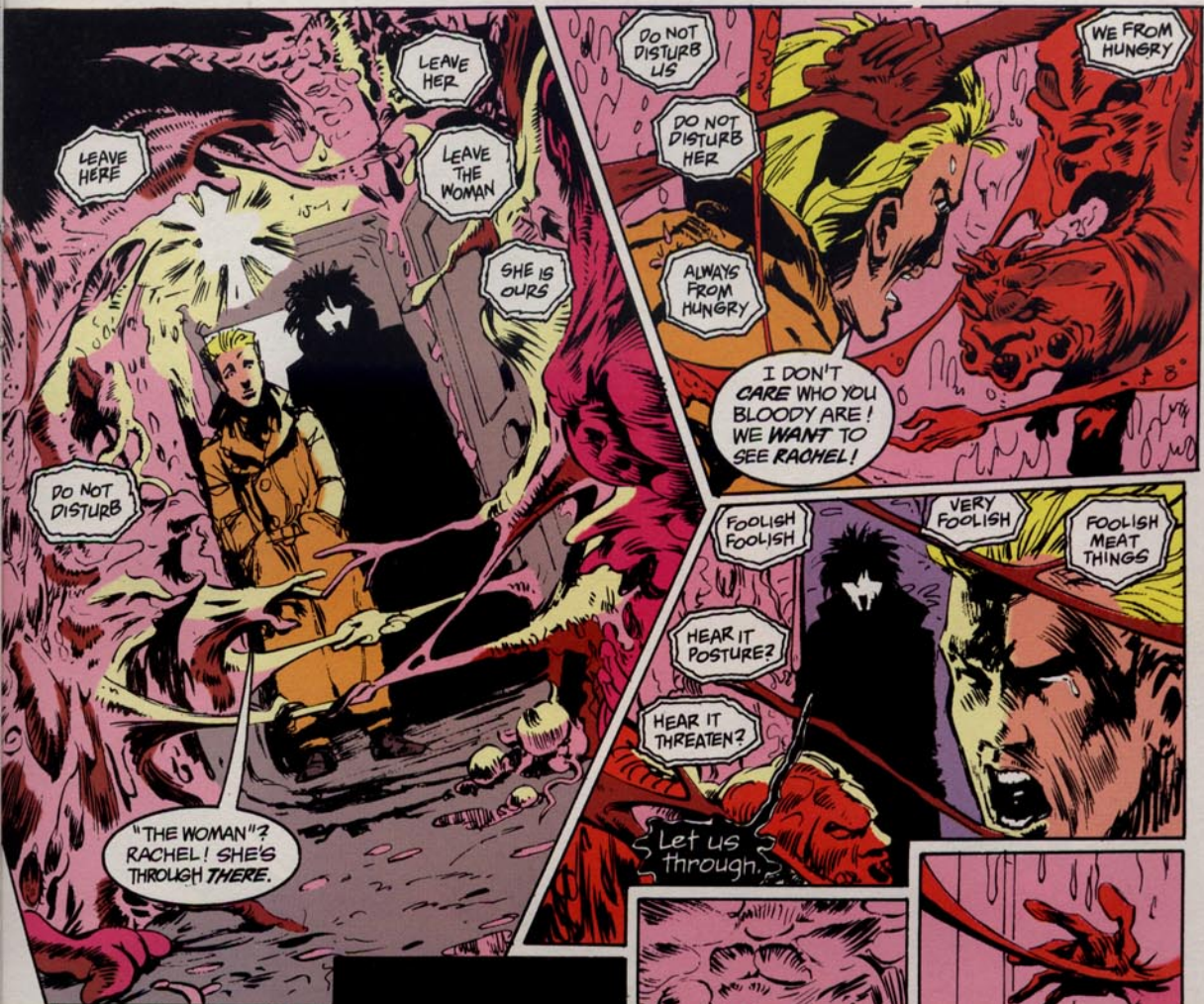
BUT IT- IT'S STILL ALIVE.

That's right.

I FEEL SICK. I CAN FEEL THE HOT DOG AND COFFEE I GRABBED FOR DINNER TRYING TO FIGHT THEIR WAY BACK UP FOR AIR ...

HOW?

The Pouch



LEAVE HER

LEAVE HER

LEAVE THE WOMAN

SHE IS OURS

DO NOT DISTURB

DO NOT DISTURB US

DO NOT DISTURB HER

ALWAYS FROM HUNGRY

WE FROM HUNGRY

I DON'T CARE WHO YOU BLOODY ARE! WE WANT TO SEE RACHEL!

"THE WOMAN"? RACHEL! SHE'S THROUGH THERE.

FOOLISH FOOLISH

VERY FOOLISH

FOOLISH MEAT THINGS

HEAR IT POSTURE?

HEAR IT THREATEN?

Let us through.



WHO SAID?

WHO SPOKE?

NOT HIM

NEVER HIM

HE'S GONE

ALL GONE LONG GONE



This has gone far enough. You have exceeded your bounds.



MASTER...?



MASTER

MASTER

SORRY  
SORRY  
SORRY

DO NOT

CHASTISE  
DESTROY

SORRY

DREAMS,  
RIGHT?

right.

AND YOU'RE  
REALLY THEIR  
MASTER?

WE THOUGHT  
YOU LONG GONE

YES  
YES



yes.

THOUGHT  
SO.



APPA

SEWERS,  
MORGUES,  
GARBAGE.

HELL...

I DON'T WANT TO  
THINK ABOUT THE  
SMELL IN HERE.  
FEAR DROPS, KETONES.

HELLO?  
ALIVE. SHE'S ALIVE.

RACHEL?

JOHN...?  
IS THAT  
YOU?

I'VE  
HAD SUCH A  
WONDERFUL  
DREAM.

DREAM DREAM  
DREEEEM...

WHENEVER  
I WANT TO...

ALL I  
HAVE TO DO...  
IS...

...DREEEEM...

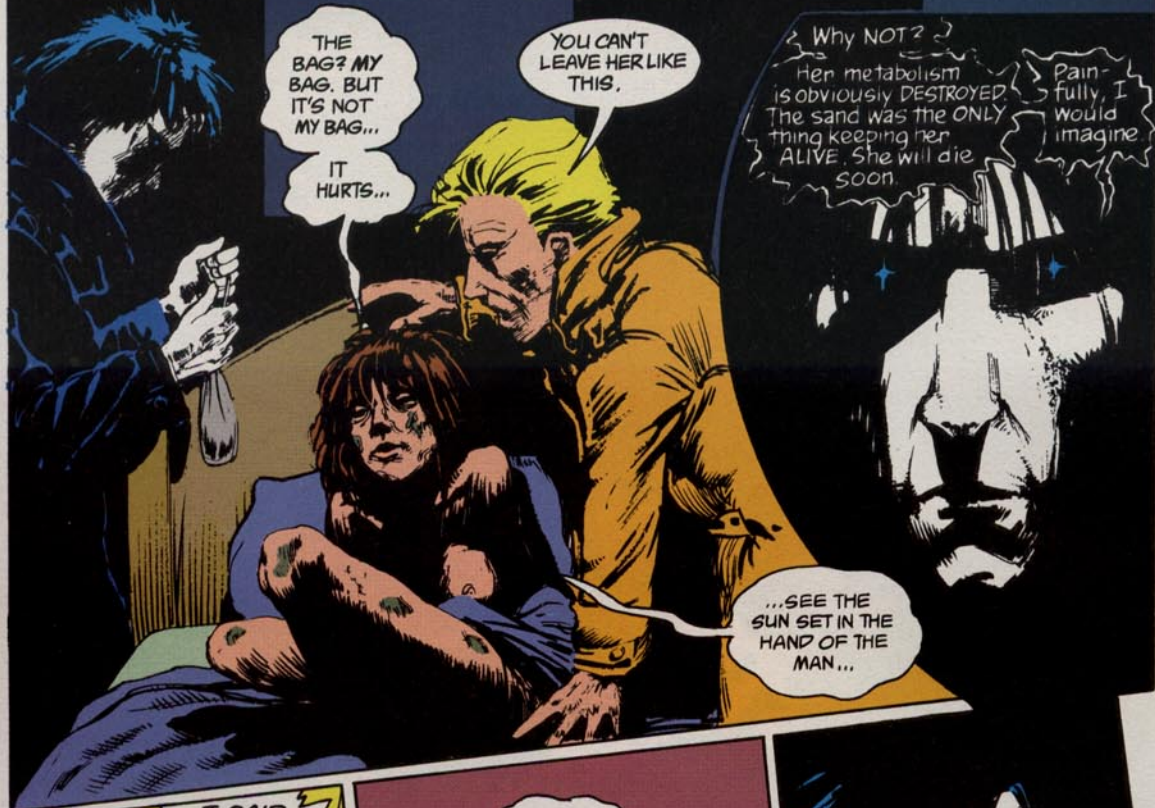
JESUS.

RACHEL.

JESUS.

I have  
the pouch.  
The dreams  
will return  
to their  
proper  
location,  
in time...

We can  
GO now.



THE BAG? MY BAG. BUT IT'S NOT MY BAG...  
IT HURTS...

YOU CAN'T LEAVE HER LIKE THIS.

Why NOT?  
Her metabolism is obviously DESTROYED. The sand was the ONLY thing keeping her ALIVE. She will die soon.  
Painfully, I would imagine

...SEE THE SUN SET IN THE HAND OF THE MAN...



I SAID YOU CAN'T BLOODY LEAVE HER LIKE THIS!



OOU. NN. OUGH.



Very well, Constantine. Go outside.



BUT-- YEAH. ALL RIGHT.

RACHEL.

SWEET DREAMS, LOVE.



THE VEIL TEARS, AND SHE FEELS THE FLESH FLOW BACK ONTO HER BONES AGAIN.

AND SHE KNOWS HE'S WAITING FOR HER.

JOHN.

HULLO, LOVE.

'S BEEN A LONG TIME.



DID YOU MISS ME, THEN?

NAH.

BASTARD. LOVE YOU.

I KNOW.

IT'S THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS.





DID SHE...?

She died peacefully. She died HAPPY.

YEAH. GREAT. THANKS.



YOU'VE GOT YOUR SODDING *SANDBAG* BACK, THEN.

SO. WHERE ARE YOU GOING NOW?

TO HELL...



HEHHH. AREN'T WE ALL, MATE? AREN'T WE ALL?

...I'LL GO WAKE CHAS UP, AND TAKE OFF BACK TO THE SMOKE, THEN. GOT WORK TO DO, EH?

I'LL SEE YOU.



GOODBYE *Constrator*





NEXT:  
GOING TO HELL