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A magician’s illusion depends on the audience’s ignorance of how it works. Faced with a logical impossibility, and a lack of a plausible explanation, the audience reacts in awe. Of course, the audience does not think for a moment that the trick is real; they may know that some simple explanation lies behind the trick, but their inability to discover the secret, combined with the magician’s presentation, suggests but one explanation: magic. Knowing a magician’s secrets, or constantly reminding oneself of the existence of such secrets, can literally destroy the magic. But what if a magician announced how a trick works as he performed it? Would the audience continue watching? What would change about those who did? This conundrum is the core of Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*—a graphic novel that exposes the secrets of its own narrative illusions.

Like magic, fiction has its own known but willfully ignored illusions. We know Elizabeth Bennet is not a real person, and yet, in our minds, she lives. We know her story has already been told, and yet we wonder how she will react to Darcy’s letter, as if the pages could allow something different to happen. To focus on these facts while reading would dispel much of the magic of the story, but this is precisely what *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones* forces its reader to do. By exposing how the comics medium creates these illusions, *The Kindly Ones* transforms every panel into a demystifying reminder of the artificial nature of the story. Yet the reader reads on. “This is a dream, and I want to go on dreaming,” Nietzsche’s dreamer declares (Nietzsche 31). By persisting, the reader becomes the Nietzschean dreamer: one who willingly engages in
known illusions. The reader’s endurance is a triumph of Nietzsche’s Apollo, the creator of illusions: a dream “strenuously and zestfully entertained” in the face of the Dionysian force that dispels illusions by exposing them (44, 31). By destroying its own illusions, or, in Nietzschean terms, by being its own Dionysian force, *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones* forces its reader to become a Nietzschean dreamer in order to continue reading, a transformation that extends beyond *The Sandman* and into the reader’s experience of the entire comics medium.

*The Kindly Ones* wastes no time in beginning the process of shaping its reader. The opening pages force the reader to confront the obvious, but disruptive, metafictional truth that the author determines all. Realizing the author’s power and influence, the reader must now view the story as a complete fabrication, a fact the reader knows but chooses to ignore in order to immerse him or herself more deeply in the story. The reader faces a choice: continue reading fully aware of the story as a fabrication or stop reading.

*The Kindly Ones* forces the reader to confront this decision by opening with a discussion amongst the Fates, a framing technique that presents the story as an object controlled by beings external to it, rather than as a sequence of events determined by the actions of its principle characters. At the climax of an argument about which is the best part of a story, the beginning, middle or end, Atropos says, “Hmmph. I don’t see why that’s exciting. It’s not like anyone notices what we do” (see Fig. 1, bold is Gaiman’s). By complaining that “no one notices,” Atropos calls the reader’s attention to the presence and influence of the Fates. Gaiman’s bolding of the word “notices” reinforces Atropos’s complaint: it emphasizes that the readers should notice the Fates’ work. So what is it that the Fates do? According to the Theoi Project, an online encyclopedia of Greek mythology and art, the Fates “assign to every person his or her share in the scheme of things,” which means they determine how long a person will live and what will
happen in that person’s life. They perform their cosmological task by knitting. Clotho, the youngest Fate, spins the thread that represents a person’s life; the opening panel of *The Kindly Ones* depicts her completing this task (see Fig. 2). Then, Lachesis measures and knits the thread, which determines what will happen in the person’s life; the dialogue in these pages occurs while Lachesis knits. Finally, Atropos cuts the thread, thereby ending the life of the person whom the thread represents. To notice the Fates is to attribute the events of the story to their knitting.

Rather than immediately introducing the story, *The Kindly Ones* opens by introducing those who control it, which calls attention to their control. This invites the reader to see the events of the story not merely as events, but as the work of the Fates.

The reader’s awareness of the influence of the Fates quickly becomes a metafictional awareness of the influence of the author. Allusions to *The Sandman* as a series infuse the Fates’ argument with the presence of the author. Immediately after Atropos’s complaint that “no one notices,” she says:

> And they’re always complaining [sic]: they don’t like the fit of it; Too loose—too tight—too different—too much like everyone else’s. It’s never what they want, and if we give them what they think they want they like it less than ever. “I never thought it would be like this.” “Why can’t it be like the one I had before?” (Fig. 1, bold is Gaiman’s)

On a literal level, Atropos is complaining about the dissatisfaction of people for whom they knit, which, in light of the Fates’ role in the cosmos, means the people whose lives they create and determine. However, the *Sandman* reader feels the metafictional implications behind this complaint, and anyone reading *The Kindly Ones*, the ninth and climactic volume of the ten book series, should be familiar enough with *The Sandman* to catch these implications. Originally, *The Kindly Ones* appeared as issues fifty-seven through sixty-nine of the seventy-five issue monthly
serial *The Sandman* (Bender 269-70). Like most monthly comics, each issue printed a few pages of readers’ letters, so writers of these monthly serials are particularly aware of their audience’s expectations (191). In writing *The Kindly Ones*, Gaiman knew it would be compiled as a novel, and so decided to draw out the story to fit a book rather than a monthly serial, though he knew it would annoy his readers (190). At thirteen issues, *The Kindly Ones* is four issues, or one hundred pages, longer than the second longest collection of *Sandman* stories (265-70). For the serial reader, *The Kindly Ones* lasted four months longer than any other storyline. In light of this, Atropos’s quote becomes multi-vocal, speaking about her own issues but also addressing the readers’ expectations. The quotes at the end of her complaint, “I never thought it would be like this” and “Why can’t it be like the one I had before?” parody the complaints of serial readers, who saw *The Kindly Ones* as an almost offensive departure from the rest of the series (191). By addressing the readers’ expectations and alluding to the serialized form of *The Sandman*, Atropos’s quote calls the reader’s attention to the presence and influence of the real author of *The Sandman*.

The sudden awareness of the author and his relationship to the story draws an implicit equivocation with the Fates. At this moment, the reader has at the forefront of his or her mind two figures with the same relationship to the text. Just as the Fates control everything in the story through their knitting, so the author controls the story through his writing, and, for *The Sandman*, Gaiman had the strongest creative say over what happens in the story (Bender 6-7). Because of this similarity of roles, an awareness of the Fates’ influence doubles as an awareness of the author’s.

In addition to seeing the story as the creation of the Fates, the reader now sees the story as the creation of an author, which means that the story and all that happens in it is a mere
fabrication. Of course, the reader knows that Gaiman invented the story and the world in which it is set. However, confronting the constructed nature of the story while reading it, and while the story itself expects the reader to continue to believe in the reality of its false world, dispels the illusory sense of reality required to make the story immersive and entertaining. The only way for the reader to proceed is with the fabricated nature of the story at the forefront of their mind, in a dual awareness of the fabrication on one level and the story on the other.

This is not a choice *The Kindly Ones* forces the reader to make only once, but nine times. The first panel of every chapter, except the interlude and climactic three chapters, focuses on some kind of cord and contains some kind of multi-vocal dialogue, obvious allusions to the influence of the Fates and, by extension, the author (see Fig. 3). The opening panel of chapter two, for example, shows a phone cord crossing one of the main character’s faces, an allusion to the Fates’ thread of life. The dialogue says, “Well, how long is it going to take?” which is an allusion to the Fates’ discussion at the beginning of the story and to the impatience of the serialized reader. At the beginning of chapter five, a spider’s web crosses the panel, and the two female figures say, “It’s happening very slowly, but it’s happening.” “It takes longer than you think, doesn’t it?” Once again, the cord alludes to the Fates’ thread of life, and the discussion echoes the Fates’ first discussion and the reader’s complaints; here, though, it seems the author responds to those complaints and envisions his readers to be warming up to the story. Starting at chapter eight, the cords become explicit: they are the Fates’ thread with scissors poised to cut. These panels continually remind the reader that Fates, and the author, control the story. This reminder serves as the same challenge that confronted the reader in the opening few pages: the story is a fabrication, will you continue to read it knowing this? The only way to continue reading *The Kindly Ones* is in the full awareness that it is a construction. If the reader wishes to
continue, s/he must become the Nietzschean dreamer: s/he must delight in both the story and its illusory nature. And the reader reads on.

Having exposed the artificial nature of the world the story expects the reader to inhabit, *The Kindly Ones* continues on its Dionysian course by revealing another obvious but willfully ignored illusion: the reality of the characters. Stories in all media expect their readers to give their characters a kind of life, to care about what happens to them and to wonder what they will do. Yet these characters are mere phantasms, and to care about what happens to them approaches the height of absurdity: why care about someone who is not real? *The Kindly Ones* not only forces the reader to confront this fact, but it transforms the way the reader sees the medium so that every image of a character comes to embody this demystifying fact.

The grand disillusion occurs in a conversation amongst a group of women (see Fig. 4). At the moment depicted in the panel, the older woman in the gray dress, Magda, has just finished telling a story during which the medium became that of an illustrated book (see Fig. 5). The panel with the women (Fig. 4) re-establishes the reader in the comic medium and directs the reader’s attention to the dialogue on the right. Because of its linearity, dialogue often serves to direct the reader’s eye through a panel. Here, the eye quickly skims over the brief statements of Rose and Amelia and fixes on the longer exchange between Magda and Helena. Their conversation is as follows:

Magda: I always wondered what happened to the children, after they flew away…

Helena: They’re just made-up people: they didn’t really exist.

Magda: That doesn’t mean they don’t have stories. (Fig. 4, bold is Gaiman’s)

Here, Magda expresses an interest in what happened to some of the characters in the story she just finished telling. Gaiman’s bolding of “children” enacts her interest. The bold also singles out
“children” as the main target of Helena’s rebuttal: that the children are simply made-up. The children in the story, firstly, do not exist and, as indicated in the tense of the word “didn’t,” never have existed. The implication of Helena’s criticism is that wondering about that which never existed is irrational. Magda, Helena points out, has been treating imaginary characters as if they were real; Magda has fallen prey to the illusion of imaginary characters. One bold word attacks the other, each word standing for the argument or feelings of the speaker.

Magda’s response both solves and exacerbates the point with which Helena takes issue. The bold word in the final line of the exchange takes an antagonistic role to the bold word that preceded it: stories are the answer to Helena’s accusation that the children are “made-up.” Although the children never did exist, there may be a story that explains what happened to them, so Magda’s curiosity can be sated logically. This appears to satisfy Helena’s objection, but a deeper investigation reveals that Magda’s appeal to the possible existence of a story only further illustrates the irrationality of her curiosity. Magda suggests that the remedy to her curiosity about made-up people is an equally made-up story. Could she not invent the story herself and so satisfy her own curiosity? She is clearly a capable storyteller, evidenced by her role as the narrator in the recent story. Yet her unsatisfied curiosity suggests otherwise. She has “always wondered” what happened to the children. Her continual unsatisfied desire implies a need for an authentic account. Yet how can any account of what happened to an imaginary person be any more true or authentic than another? Her own invented version of what happened to the children would be as valid as the story she seeks, since both stories would be complete inventions. Thus, the reader must declare Helena the winner of the argument: not only is Magda’s curiosity absurd, but the way in which she intends to sate it is equally, or even more, absurd.
Once the dialogue ends, and the reader’s eyes return the image of the panel, the reader realizes that s/he is prey to an irrationality almost identical to Magda’s. Until the dialogue ends, the linearity of the text has been pushing the reader’s focal point away from the image in the panel. The dialogue balloons are positioned at the edge of the page, so every time the reader finishes a line, his or her eyes go to the edge of the page, away from the images of the characters. Moreover, the dialogue balloons are so closely drawn that they do not allow any of the image in the panel to separate them. Once the dialogue finishes, and the reader understands the absurdity of Magda’s position, the reader’s gaze passes over Helena. The reader sees, somewhat ironically, that Helena is a “made-up” character in a story; she is not a person, but a drawn parody of an imaginary person. The recent shift in medium underscores this point: unlike the written word, where the characters are names, descriptions, and abstract concepts, in comics, the characters appear before the reader. Their appearance literally illustrates their phantasmal nature.

Compresent with this realization is the reader’s discovery that, not unlike Magda, s/he has been wondering about what will happen to the made-up characters in a made-up story. However, the difference lies in that the reader wonders about the characters’ fates within the context of the story, whereas Magda wonders after the story ends. Moreover, the reader has found an authentic account of what happens to these imaginary characters, as The Kindly Ones is by the same author who wrote the rest of The Sandman. But the reader must still confront the absurdity of his or her interest in made-up characters and the absurdity of feeling satisfied with an equally invented account of what happens to those characters.

Once again, The Kindly Ones forces the reader to confront an illusion of fiction that s/he can no longer ignore. Thanks to Magda’s comment, the representation of every character now calls attention to their unreality. One may say that the cartoony representations of the characters
have always illustrated their unreality, but Magda and Helena’s argument make this explicit and, therefore, difficult to ignore. Now, true to Dionysian form, the story itself exposes the characters for the illusions that they are. In order for the reader to continue, s/he must be willing to read with the continual awareness that every character is purely imaginary and, therefore, ultimately insignificant. The only way to continue reading is to become a Nietzschean dreamer—to recognize the illusion and engage in it, to know the characters are imaginary and still care about them.

Aware of the fabricated nature of the story and characters, the reader proceeds to meet the most destructive of the Dionysian comments in The Kindly Ones. Unlike the other disillusioning comments, which challenge the reader on the level of content, this final comment challenges the reading process itself. It forces a reflection on the way one reads a comic—and through this reflection, reveals the artificiality of the form as a whole.

It begins with a conversation with a cat. As Lyta Hall, one of the main characters, searches for her kidnapped son, she finds herself walking through two worlds: downtown Los Angeles and a kind of dreamscape. In the dreamscape, she encounters the cat from the folktale “Puss-in-Boots” (Hildebrandt). The cat tells Lyta how it will trick a shape-changing ogre by betting that the ogre cannot transform into three things the cat will name for it. The final Dionysian challenge occurs during this exchange, which is as follows (see Fig. 6, bold is Gaiman’s):

Lyta: Will the third shape be a mouse?

Cat: Of course.

Lyta: But…don’t they ever learn?

Cat: They can’t. They’re part of the story, just as I am.
What does the cat mean? Gaiman’s bold gives the first clue: “can’t.” The cat says the ogres are incapable of learning, not unwilling. The reason for this appears in the cat’s second sentence: the ogres are part of a story. Here, the cat shows an unusual awareness of its position in a story and the constraints this position implies: it knows the ogres will be deceived because it knows what events constitute the story in which it participates. The cat sees the story in which it participates in what narrative theorist Mark Currie calls the “untensed” mode of narrative time (17). Currie compares this experience of narrative temporality to God’s experience of time: one sees the story as a structural whole constituted by individual moments. The untensed mode stands aloof from the events of the story to see the entire sequence, therein recognizing how each moment plays a role in creating the story. From this perspective, a change in the events that constitute the story, such as the ogres discovering the cat’s trick, creates a different story. Since the cat and the ogre are a part of a specific story, the ogre must be deceived and the cat must do the deceiving. That is how the story happens. How the cat knows this is a different question altogether, but more important than how is “to what effect?”

In order to answer this question, we must first understand Lyta and the reader’s experience of time at the moment of the cat’s statement. Lyta reacts in surprise to the cat’s plan because she has the diametric opposite experience of narrative time. The difference in the negative used by Lyta implies her perspective. Where the cat uses “can’t,” which denotes that the ogres are incapable of learning, Lyta uses the word “don’t.” “But don’t they ever learn?” she says. “Do” implies “can”—to do something, one must first be able to act. This word injects a kind of possibility into the moment; there is no question about whether the ogres can learn, only whether they do learn. Currie calls this perspective the “tensed” mode of narrative temporality. This mode experiences the story as a succession of narrative presents (Currie 17). In this mode, the events of
the story appear to be unfolding at this very moment and so can be affected. Unlike the tensed mode, it is a linear experience of the sequence of narrative events. That Lyta thinks this way makes sense in light of her situation: she believes that there is a possibility that she will find and save her son. From her perspective, the outcome has not yet been decided. However, as the cat points out, the story has already been written; the reader holds the completed novel in his or her hands. As the cat’s perspective suggests, the possibility Lyta feels is an illusion. She is merely experiencing one narrative moment in the larger, determined sequence in which she ultimately does not save her son.

The reader is also engaged primarily in the tensed experience of narrative temporality at the time of Lyta’s encounter with the cat. Comics create a tensed experience of time through dialogue and by placing images in a particular sequence. Every time a reader changes panels, he or she must look at two images representing different narrative moments, and then imagine what happened between those two panels to create a continuous moment. Comics theorist Scott McCloud calls the process of combining different panels into a continuous experience of the story “closure” (66-8). McCloud recognizes the importance of closure to the comics experience when he says, “Comics is closure” (67). Through closure, the reader generates the tensed experience of the story from two disparate moments. At the point when the cat says its cryptic line, the reader has been engaged in closure on Lyta’s story for four pages, and so has “closed” the transitions for eighteen panels. This forward progression in the story indicates that the reader is engaged in the linearity of the story and, therefore, the tensed experience.

In addition to the closure, dialogue serves as the other primary device that enforces linearity in a comic. Although comics create an experience of linearity by sequencing images, the non-linearity of images may sometimes distract from the sequence; one can often see other
panels in the periphery, and these glimpses of the past and future often distract from the sequence. Text, however, requires the eye to focus only on each line in order to derive meaning from it. The composition of the panel in which Lyta and the cat have this exchange assists the dialogue in enforcing linearity (see Fig. 7). The image within the panel does not further the plot in any way: it contains no action or new information. At the point in which the reader enters the panel, and engages in the linearity of dialogue, the image merely shows colored clouds, something the eye does not need to spend much time to grasp. A density of word bubbles rests atop this simple image. Combined with the simplicity of the image, this encourages the reader to engage in the linearity of the story at the moment of the cat’s statement. The linear experience is the tensed experience. Even if the reader knows what will happen to Lyta, his or her engagement in closure and dialogue forces him or her to experience this moment in the tensed mode.

For the reader, the sudden mention of the untensed view of stories, combined with a change in subject in dialogue and a visual equation of characters, changes his or her perception of Lyta: from that of a woman trying to find her son to a character in a fixed and predetermined sequence of events. Immediately following the cat’s cryptic statement that “They’re part of the story, just as I am,” the cat says “Sorry to hear about your son.” This comment redirects the reader’s attention to Lyta’s search for Daniel. The reader who has grappled with the cat’s statement, and discovered what it has to say about stories, will then suddenly see that Lyta too is involved in her own story, that of finding her son. As a character in a story, she, like the cat, is subject to the laws of narrative, notably that her actions and the outcomes of these actions have been predetermined. Immediately after the subject change, more dialogue forces the reader’s eyes to pass directly over Lyta and the cat, the depictions of whom reinforce this discovery. Lyta and the cat bear a striking similarity: they are both silhouettes, and they are about the same size
in height and width. The similarity of depiction enacts a similarity of position: they are both involved in their own stories and, therefore, are both parts of a larger structure. The reader now has two readings of Lyta: the tensed view, in which she is a character searching for her child, and the untensed view, in which her search for Daniel is a fixed sequence of events of which she is the principle character.

At this moment, the panel changes, and this new understanding of Lyta bleeds out of the word balloons and transforms the entire medium, so that every page in the comic comes to embody and illustrate both experiences of time constantly and simultaneously. After the short remaining dialogue, the reader must switch panels. Whenever a reader changes panels, s/he encounters the gutter, or the space between panels, before the process of closure can begin (McCloud 66). In light of the two views of narrative temporality, the encounter with the gutter shows that a panel contains one narrative present. If to change panels is to move from one distinct moment to another, then the gutter is the physical representation of that distinction. However, the gutter on the page in which Lyta encounters the cat is nothing like any other gutter found in the rest of the book, and its uniqueness does more than merely show the separateness of narrative moments (see Fig. 6). This page’s gutter depicts a cityscape that literally blends with all panels on the page. In the panel with the silhouettes of Lyta and the cat, the blue clouds morph into some kind of discarded trash in the gutter, and this trash morphs again into a new image in the final panel. The hill on which the silhouettes of Lyta and the cat stand becomes a trashcan lid in the gutter. If the gutter usually calls attention to how each moment is contained, this gutter not only performs that function, but it also shows how all the panels are linked—but not just in a linear sequence; it links every panel on the page. Lyta’s hair in the panel at the top left becomes a black building in the gutter. The building morphs into a tree in the panel below it, and the tree
transforms into the gray side of another building in the next gutter. Finally, the gray building, which was originally Lyta’s hair in the top panel, dissipates in the clouds in the panel on the bottom left. This blending and linking transforms the encounter with the gutter to a glance at the entire page. To see the page in its entirety is to see the six separate narrative moments contained in it, all of which we can see simultaneously because they are images. This gutter shows the reader the tensed view of time: the page holds a sequence of narrative presents, all linked together as part of the story. The reader can literally see that Lyta is involved in a predetermined sequence of events: each panel shows Lyta in another moment, each one of which was once the present, full of possibility. The page becomes a representation of the untensed view of time, from which the reader can see the tensed view of time laid out before him or her as a sequence of images, a sequence of narrative presents. The cat was right.

Now, the turn of every page begins with the reader’s seeing the sequence of events in its entirety, which is a recognition that the events on those pages are but a part of a fixed structure called a story. This puts the reader in the most difficult position yet: seeing the sequence in its entirety, s/he must then engage in that sequence and generate a continuous present out of the disparate moments that constitute it. And the reader must not face this only challenge once, but with every turn of the page, even with every panel change, for, in both of these, the reader encounters the untensed view of narrative time. On this page in particular, closure is difficult (see Fig. 6). Closure expects the reader to account for the irrational transition between the dreamscape and Los Angeles and to address the logistics of the conversation with the cat amidst an assault from the untensed view of narrative temporality. Yet the reader reads on. To continue reading here is to accept that a story is a sequence of events and to engage in the false present anyway. To continue reading is to accept the role as the one who generates the continuous
experience of the story through the process of closure—despite the constant distracting intrusions of the future and the past. To continue reading is to persevere in the dream despite the harshest disillusionment. It is to become a Nietzschean dreamer who not only persists in the dream but sustains it by a concerted effort.

To finish reading *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, the reader must come to enjoy the artificiality of the story in addition to the story itself, or s/he will be disheartened by the disillusionment that arises from a continual recognition of the story’s artificiality. But is this different from any other comic? The pages of every comic serve as reminders of the untensed view of narrative time, often ruining climactic moments in the story because of the eye’s ability to comprehend images quickly. Every comic book character represents its unreality by its cartoony appearance, and each comic bares the marks of its creator. Perhaps all comics require their readers to become the Nietzschean dreamer: to love the story and its artificiality, to generate the story from its artificiality. However, to return to the magician metaphor, having a secret does not inherently ruin a magic trick. What is unique about *The Kindly Ones* is that it calls attention to its own artificiality. Whereas most magicians, and most comic books, hide the secrets to the illusion on which their success depends, *The Kindly Ones* destroys the illusions it expects its readers to inhabit. Short metafictional quotes, which are the Dionysian voice that “destroys” the Apollonian illusion (Nietzsche 35), work with the medium itself to expose the artificial nature of comics and stories. The exposure forces the reader to recognize and reflect on the unique experience of comics in general. Out of this reflection, a dreamer is made. The dreamer sees how the comics medium creates its illusions, and s/he continues to engage in the story, enjoying both the illusions and the story. The Apollonian dreamer absorbs the Dionysian attacks, which come to reinforce the illusion and strengthens the dreamer’s ability to maintain the illusion. It may be
said that the medium of comics requires readers to be Nietzschean dreamers because of their high artificiality, but *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones* forces and assures this transformation by confronting its readers with the artificiality of both comics and stories while still expecting them to continue reading.
Works Cited


IS IT READY YET? ARE YOU DONE?
NEARLY THERE WE GO.

THERE WE ARE, ALL READY FOR YOU TO MAKE INTO SOMETHING WONDERFUL.

THAT’S ME DARLING GIRL...

WHAT ARE YOU MAKING HIM, THEN?
I CAN’T SAY THAT I’M ENTIRELY CERTAIN, MY POPPY, BUT IT’S A FINE YARN, AND I DON’T DOUBT THAT IT’LL SUIT.
GO WITH ANYTHING, THIS WILL.

HE COULD BE A POET IN A LOVELY SCARF, PERHAPS,
OR A FISHERMAN IN HIS SPECIAL WOOLY SWEATER.

OR A HUNTER IN HIS NICE THICK SOCKS, I’LL MAKE HIM SOMETHING NICE.

AND THERE’S A START TO IT, MY PEARLYDUC.

TEA?
I’D LOVE A CUP, MY DOVE.

TEA FOR THREE, THEN.
CAN’T SAY I’VE EVER BEEN TOO FOND OF BEGINNINGS ME, MYSELF. MESSY LITTLE THINGS, GIVE ME A GOOD ENDING ANY TIME. YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE WITH AN ENDING.

WHOOSH!

Fig. 2. from Neil Gaiman, The Sandman vol. 9: The Kindly Ones (New York: Vertigo, 1996) 1:1.
Fig. 3. from Neil Gaiman, *The Sandman vol. 2: The Kindly Ones* (New York: Vertigo, 1996) 1:1, 2:1, 3:1, 4:1, 5:1, 7:1, 8:1, 9:1, 10:1.
And by and by along crept a great worm, and a strange thing it was, with his wife’s face on the end of its long slimy body, and it crept up beside him and over him and all around him, and it drew all the other worms away. Her teeth were sharp and long.

And she wrapped her slimy worm body around his, and she whispered his name into his ear.

And he screams, kill me, for god’s sake, just get it over with. But she licks her lips with a long worm tongue, and she shakes her head.

A meal this good must never be hurried, she says. Just hold still, boy, and let me enjoy myself.

And she takes her first, gentle bite from his cheek with her sharp sharp teeth...

And that’s the story, as my mother used to tell it.