

Speaking as someone who's tried his hand at writing supernatural and fantasy stories, I can tell you that writing about things that aren't real is just about as difficult as writing about things that are. Imagine trying to wrap your head around things beyond your understanding, like a time before time, or the merging of dreams, or being in two places at once. These are the building blocks of Sandman, yet Gaiman fashions them with such sense and clarity that the unnatural seems natural. That's especially important for this issue when Dream encounters places that baffle even him. Despite his Endless power, his existence is still linear and bounded by the beginning and end of time. His father has no such restrictions. Williams' art is crucial in showing just how far beyond his children Dream's father is, randomly changing his age in an entirely abstract setting, where "effect and cause reverse or disconnect entirely." Existing so far above/outside of time gives him a, shall we say, unique perspective on existence. He's unconcerned about a child's death because in his mind, she still lives in another part of time, though to people who can only move chronologically forward (i.e., the rest of us), this is little comfort. While his way of looking at things proves entirely unhelpful to Dream on this particular problem, it also rewards Dream in the present with forgiveness for past transgressions, thanks to the work of his future self. The nature of Dream's dad also means that while his aid seemingly comes too late, it may actually be revealed to come just in time. Things do look bad for Dream at the moment, though, trapped in the City of Stars, another place "above the real. It exists in the far realms and in actuality," a place where even an Endless can meet his end, and meet it finally. For Dream to admit to himself that he's afraid should tell you what kind of forces he's trying to mess with here, although it's ambiguous whether he fears the city itself or the reminder of ancient mistakes he's about to encounter within it. [Spoiler alert!] In revealing that the mad star who threatens the universe is a byproduct of one of Dream's first, biggest dilemmas, Gaiman continues breaking down Dream's usual front of implacable cool for something more sympathetic. Dream's past unwillingness to kill an innocent despite her threat to the Dreaming and the universe at large proves he had a heart once. That he spared an infected sun even after he killed her and everyone else on her world proves he still has a heart. His brusqueness is thus less a natural part of his personality and rather a way to protect himself from further trauma. So Hope is probably right on the money when she senses Dream's loneliness, which hopefully won't be the last thing she does. The world of Gaiman is dark enough that it's well within the realm of possibility for him to have a young child killed off in such brisk fashion, but Gaiman himself is a writer who believes in hope. Hope the person may or may not live, but what she says—"I'm not nothing. I am...Hope."—has meaning that will probably play out later. The stars have no reason to believe that; no amount of hope will change their fate of extinction, sooner or later. Their decision to go out in glory rather fade out slowly is thus one you can understand, though their indifference to the consequences for the rest of creation is what makes the choice madness. I've already mentioned how critical Williams' art is to carrying out each and every one of Gaiman's high concepts, but it always bears repeating. It's a near impossible task to create something that feels at once transcendent but accessible, yet Williams manages it regularly. He manages to translate not only the idea of an entire world merging together as one, but the pain of it as well. Actually, that emotional component is something we don't talk about enough. Dream's anguish and his constant attempts to repress it give the drama more weight than usual, but more haunting are the emotionless, judgmental expressions of his family and the stars. Next to them, Dream's practically touchy-feely, which is necessary for us to have a heartfelt connection to an already compelling protagonist. Some Musings: - Do the star-folks not realize that Cat-Dream is still Dream, with all the power that entails? I hope the

escape plan revolves around that little detail. - I'm sensing a lot of favoritism when it comes to Destiny. The post The Sandman: Overture #4 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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