

This week
The Friday Edition
takes a look at the
comics of today . . .
and yesterday.

THE Friday EDITION

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Like Shelly's monster, he was created to discover himself; like Dante in the Inferno, he has challenged the regions of Hell; like Aristotle's Gorgias, he strives to understand love and his place in the natural order.

He is like all great figures in literature; he is the noble soul with which we all identify. He is no ordinary comic book character: He is the

SWAMP THING



The staggeringly bad 1982 movie adaptation made amends for itself by prompting DC Comics to profitably revive the Saga of the Swamp Thing, which had thus far failed to stir the imaginations of comic book readers despite the brilliant artistic treatment by Steven Bissette and John Totleben. Editor Len Wein looked toward Great Britain and hired artist/writer Alan Moore to breathe new life into the slowly decomposing figure.

After a transition issue that cleared out the deadwood from previous issues, Moore's first real contribution of the Saga of the Swamp Thing, "The Anatomy Lesson" took the readers, and industry critics, by surprise. In one fell swoop, Moore redefined the hero's nature — his very *raison d'être*.

Story by Michael Duncan
Plant Elemental
Courtesy of DC Comics

The saga's ascension among the critics, fellow professionals, editors and comic book literati occurred almost overnight. And it's no wonder. In the May issue of *Amazing Heroes*, a comic book fan magazine, Moore revealed his method of "sophisticated suspense" behind what is now one of the highest critically acclaimed comic books on the market.

"The critical thing about writing, if you're doing it properly, is to actually come to a level of psychoanalysis upon yourself. You have to examine your own character and try to work out the areas that genuinely disturb you — the areas that you would rather not think about, talk about, and most certainly write about," said Moore, winner of several Eagle Awards for composition, the most prestigious award in the profession.

Swamp Thing is not a superhero series. It is horror — sophisticated suspense. That alone is enough to set it apart from the mainstream comic book market. Taking the difference one step further is Moore's experimental compositional style.

"The experimental angle is one of the things that I consider to be one of the most important parts of my writing. Characterization and the rest of it are all things I pay attention to, but it's messing around with the structure, messing around with the dialogue, seeing what effect can be achieved. That's probably an attitude that I've at least borrowed from Brian Eno, like the *Oblique Strategies*," Moore noted.

Brian Eno, an avant-garde musician, pioneered the method of finding relationships and patterns in seemingly irrational random placement of components in a given composition.

"I tend to think of Brian Eno as sort of a Zen Master. He said you should treat your accidents as your own intentions. Occasionally you'll get a mistake, something like an ink blot on a canvas, and that will open up so many possibilities that you could not have arrived at anything so perfect if you'd just gone at it by logic. It's not that it would solve every problem. Sometimes you need these random elements dropped in, that will open up new possibilities," said Moore who works out of his home in England.

"New possibilities" is a way to sum the attitude that the artists Moore, Bissette and Totleben share, says Karen Berger, Swamp Thing editor.

"The stories always start with Alan, but Steve (Bissette) does the interpretation of the story that Alan has plotted. It is Steve's input that has evolved the slanting panels and bizarre page layouts that have come to set Swamp Thing apart from the common," she notes.

In the next 10 issues, Swamp Thing will combat the culmination of all evil in a contest for the world. Old theme, right? Expect nothing ordinary.

"What puts Alan leagues ahead," comments Berger, "is his *untraditional treatment of traditional horror themes*."

Issue 50, the double sized annual to be released next year, will resolve "American Gothic" the ongoing battle that this month pitted Swamp Thing against subterranean vampires in "Still Waters."

John Constantine, a Sting look alike whose role in the saga is yet to be defined, has friends who think the evil that's coming is Cthulhu, as identified in the works of H. P. Lovecraft. Another friend thinks it is a massive extra-galactic energy field that was drawn inside a black hole eight billion years ago — nothing supernatural.

Will Swampy win? Will the world be saved from ultimate evil? Probably. But that doesn't mean there won't be any surprises.

"We know where we're going with the story, but it hasn't been all figured out. There's a lot to do yet," noted Berger. "We are all really excited about the shape of things to come for Swampy."