

GRAVE CONCERNS

ZOMBIE COMIC BOOK SERIES WANTS EUGENE'S BRAAAAINS

BY AARON RAGAN-FORE

Eugene can be a contradictory place. Some find numerous opportunities here, seeing Eugene as a community full of music, culture, good food and outdoor adventure. Others characterize the city more prosaically, as a nice place to live, but maybe a little ... lacking in diversions.

Count cartoonist Michael Allred in the former category. "Growing up in Roseburg, Eugene was always the exciting place to go," he says. Allred, creator of the independent critical-darling comic book *Madman*, moved on to college in Utah (where he met his wife, comic-book colorist Laura Allred) and eventually lived for a time in Eugene. He later relocated to various points all around the country, and even to Europe. But Eugene always held a special place in his heart.

Now Allred is the artist of a comic book series that is not only set in Eugene, but also embraces the line our city walks between the everyday and the extraordinary.

Published by DC Comics' imprint for adults, Vertigo, *iZombie* follows the adventures of Gwen Dylan, a UO dropout who hangs out in a diner, makes her living digging graves in an eco-friendly cemetery and who just happens to be an undead zombie.

Gwen, helped along by her friends Ellie the ghost and Scott the were-terrier (yes, you read that right), solves supernatural mysteries, eats the occasional brain and dodges an ancient order of monster hunters ... all punctuated by routine trips to the diner for chocolate and coffee.

Comparing his work to a cross between *Archie* comics and *Scooby-Doo*, *iZombie* series writer and *New York Times* best-selling author Chris Roberson, who lives in Austin, Texas, says that balancing the mundane and the fantastic sides of Eugene is one of his goals. Roberson's stories cleverly subvert the standard monster-movie formula by showing how the undead spend their down time.



ON THIS PAGE: On the cover to *iZombie* #5, Gwen the zombie's troubles hit her like a ton of dirt.

OPPOSITE: In the world of *iZombie*, Eugeneans are unaware they're rubbing elbows with zombies, vampires, ghosts and were-beasts in locations like the Downtown Lounge and the UO campus.

Art by Michael Allred, colors by Laura Allred.