

"It's almost required that the moment that someone becomes one of these supernatural beings, they become angsty," Roberson says. "If I became a werewolf, I'd still be the person I am now, I'd just have some personal hygiene issues once a month, or have some self-control issues."

Roberson, who has never visited Oregon, relies in large part on online street views to inform the sense of place inherent in his writing. But his collaborator Allred just moved back to Eugene after a stint on the Oregon Coast. Having one half of the creative duo based in the city where the story is set has its advantages.

Besides advising Roberson on details of Eugene geography and daily life, Michael Allred incorporates real Eugene landmarks into the comic's illustrations, which are in turn brought to colorful life by Laura Allred.

In the Eugene of *iZombie*, vampires troll for dates at the Downtown Lounge. A UO science lab is used as a staging ground for communing with extra-dimensional beings. The Shelton-McMurphey-Johnson mansion at the base of Skinner Butte doubles as the home of a centuries-old Egyptian mummy. And the diner where Gwen and her spooky friends hang out is modeled on Fins Drive-In in Springfield.

But the parade of Lane County landmarks doesn't stop there. Versions of real-world locations like Smith Family Bookstore, Nostalgia Collectibles, Taylor's Bar & Grill, Ya-Po-Ah Terrace and even the Camp Putt mini-golf course all appear in the first two collected paperback

editions of *iZombie*, which encompass the first twelve issues of the series.

Allred says he takes special pride in issue 23, slated for release in March, in which characters will meet at the top of Skinner Butte.

"I would encourage people to take that issue and go to the top, and try to figure out where all the characters are," Allred says with a grin.

Despite his own current lack of Oregon bona fides, Roberson will soon enough have a chance to see in person the locations he has been writing about. This summer, Roberson and his family are moving from Austin to Portland, sight unseen. Roberson says that one of his first orders of business will be a trip down I-5 to hang out with his comic-book partner Allred, and to check out the town where Gwen the zombie hangs her gravedigger's cap.

Prior to starting work on *iZombie*, Roberson says, "I really knew of Eugene only as the place that Ken Kesey was from."

"It's a mysterious town to outsiders," Allred posits. "Other than *Animal House* being filmed here and the Pre legend, pop culture has pretty much ignored Eugene."

In fact, it was Allred's teenage hunt for *Animal House* film locations that convinced him, in part, that Eugene would be a good place to set a comic book series.

"I went out of my way to find all the locations, and that was a huge thrill for me," says Allred. "I'm hoping people reading in Eugene will do the same thing." **EW**

The first three *iZombie* collected editions are available now, priced at \$14.99 each; info at cdcomics.com

ORIGINAL SPIN

He's a successful writer, a novelist more than a dozen times over, but even Chris Roberson admits to being a bit starstruck when his editor at Vertigo Comics paired him with Michael Allred for *iZombie*.

"I've been a fan of Mike's since 1992, 1993?" Roberson struggles to recall. "It was difficult for me to get my head around the idea of collaborating with him. I still will occasionally drop into fan mode, and remind him of something he did in 1994," he says.

But how did the collaboration result in a comic set in Eugene, specifically?

"The reality is that the series editor, Shelley Bond, tricked us both!" Roberson says. "The series was originally set somewhere else on the West Coast." That "somewhere" was Colma, Calif., a community founded to serve as a collection of cemeteries for nearby land-strapped San Francisco.

Bond says he knew that Allred was more likely to sign on for the comic if it was set in his favorite Oregon town, and the DC editor indicated to each creator that the other wanted Eugene as the stage for *iZombie*'s horror-tinged hijinks.

"For the better part of a year each of us thought it was the other guy that wanted to set it there," Roberson remembers.

It seems to have worked out just fine for Allred. "I love this business," says Allred, an industry veteran. "Working with Chris on *iZombie* has definitely been one of the best highlights of my career." — Aaron Ragan-Fore



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