

# Journey Planet



# Journey Planet 49

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# Editorial by Chris Garcia

I was at work when Len Wein died. I saw a post on Facebook, and I had this serious bummer feeling for the first couple of hours of the day. I knew Len a little, had even been seated next to him on the legendary Match Game After Dark at the 2006 WorldCon. He was a great guy, and I was going to be sad, but I wasn't hit like when so many other science-fiction and comics folk had passed.

Then, for some reason, I was thinking of Bernie Wrightson, more than a year dead, and then it hit me like a ton of bricks: Swamp Thing was an orphan.

Swamp Thing had been one of my favorites since I was a kid. *House of Secrets*, his own comics, the movie, the television series, all of it was something that I loved. I didn't get a lot of the Alan Moore stuff when I first read it, but as I grew, I found what he was doing as a certain near-magic within the view of the reader's mind. The idea of Swamp Thing is so rich, with ties to science fiction, fantasy, gothic literature, environmentalism, identity, and generally philosophy. There is one of the most fascinating origin stories, and the starting point for so much of the modern DC take on magic.

This issue is a labor of love. I've wanted to do it since that day I sat bawling after realizing that both the creators of Swamp Thing had left and gone away. I wanted to dig into the history of the character, the depths of influence, and the media takes on the character. We've got some great help with the exploration. Co-editor Pádraig's managed a coup: the return of Neil Gaiman to the pages of *Journey Planet* for the first time since his art in issue 1! Chuck discusses a period from Swamp Thing's history that Len Wein wants us to forget, and then later he takes on the other swamp monsters of comics. Derek McCaw interviews the actor

who played the physical body of Swamp Thing from the recent, too-soon-cancelled Swamp Thing show on DC Universe. Helena Nash being all sorts of AWESOME translates Rannian dialogue! Me? I'm tackling a possible inspiration for Swamp Thing's bodily image, and I explore his momentary relation to Greenpeace. I got to do a piece I'd had on my mind for ages as a cover too.

I'm using my shelter-in-place time to edit zines, do podcasts, and starting to get ready for NASFiC, where I'll be the Editor Guest of Honor. A bunch of Team Journey Planet and The Drink Tankers will be in the house! I'm hoping I can get a couple of panels that explore us being awesome! I'm also going for a tour of the Columbus Museum of Art, come hell or high water!





SNEAK PREVIEW OF...

JOHN CONSTANTINE

# HELLBLAZER

Jamie Delano and John Ridgway demonstrate brilliantly that English horror didn't vanish with the fog and gas-lit cobblestones of the Victorian era. Instead, it lives on amongst the litter-haunted shopping malls and vandalized tower-blocks of today, a new horror to suit a new England. Riveting, spine-chilling stuff.

—Alan Moore



**A Hell of a  
Thing Safely  
on the Shelf  
by James  
Bacon**



One of my favourite comic characters first appeared in *Swamp Thing* -- the idea and concept of John Constantine, brought to us by the genius that is Alan Moore.

Alan Moore has written many comics, and when I look at them, and I have many on my shelves, it is undeniable that his work is brilliant, but when I look at the oeuvre of brilliance, when push comes to shove and I were to be asked which comics I would forego first, it must be *Swamp Thing*. This is in no way to diminish Moore's work, it is without doubt that this was not only a breakthrough body of work, but redefined and created a much greater brand for *Swamp Thing*. His stories contained so much depth and thoughtfulness, and I was encouraged as a young reader to ensure I had read them, and indeed, the first copies I read were black-and-white Titan Graphic Novels, although Pádraig did secure me a colour collected edition at one stage from DC Comics. Always a hard fan, Pádraig. It is hard not to love one's friends' addictions, to look on and enjoy their enjoyment and of course, benefit, for I was reading so much during these years.

Anyhow, the Titan Editions, featuring gaudy covers and thick white paper, reprinted the original issues which were unattainable and very expensive, and a general lack of reprinting, meant that I had it in a very mixed way, and this was quite some time after I had been reading *Hellblazer*.

In many regards, it was always going to be hard for me to love *Swamp Thing* as much as I loved *Hellblazer*. I just loved John Constantine, and it is all Garth Ennis's fault. At a convention in 1992 when I was 17, Garth had heard me rave about American comics, but he did not mock me, or dismiss me. Instead, he found a quiet moment and from an inside pocket produced a piece of art, a cover for a comic, a Glenn Fabry cover, *Hellblazer* #52, and he said that this was an American comic he was writing, and so I was quickly convinced, my fickle youth ignoring previous protestations. I remember afterwards Steve giving me this knowing look and a nod, saying I would really like them, and of course, I did not even realise at that stage that he was working on them.

*Hellblazer* was amazing straight away, starting as I did at issue #41. Will Simpson, whom I knew from *2000 AD*, was doing the art, and I was so impressed. And then came issue #49, and it was a joyful Christmas issue, and by Steve Dillon. The last few pages though, were Garth and Steve walking home after a session, and I knew it was them, and was taken by their friendship and that such a realistic and natural thing could be in a comic felt amazing but also so unique, real people in the pages. Steve's run on *Hellblazer* was excellent. Garth's run? I loved it all. Will Simpson who also soon came down to Dublin and later John Higgins' artwork. It felt like a different type of read, love, sex, racism, violence, hurt and of course John Constantine, all seemed magical yet grounded. I thought Kit was amazing, and was so pleased that she got to tell her own story, with *Heartland*, but the damburst of comics also presented so many options and so my friends guided me, as best they could, but everyone recommended *Skreemer* and Pádraig insisted I read it





I went through Alan Moore's run on the comic, and was so impressed with how encompassing it was of the DC universe. I have always loved when comics feature other characters, but not in a crossover sort of way. Moench and Jones run on Batman around the 400s for instance, was incredible for that, and in many ways, Moore had a great hand, so much more than Millar many years later.

I picked up the Veitch and Alcalá issues, as back issues mind, to read all the Constantine appearances, these were easier to find than Moore's issue 37. This was before the element about issue 25. Was that blonde bloke Sting or Constantine? The first ret-con I encountered perhaps. Issue 76 was a must as it led onto issue 10 of *Hellblazer*. Of course, I was collecting *Hellblazer* as back issues but between knowing the shopkeepers well, and some good luck, I was in an excellent place to gorge myself on comics, and some back issues were cheap. *Sandman* wasn't at this point..



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**“I was collecting *Hellblazer* as back issues but between knowing the shopkeepers well, and some good luck, I was in an excellent place to gorge myself on comics”**

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As I approached the *Swamp Thing* issue of *Journey Planet*, looking through the great body of comics that are *Swamp Thing*, I also gave serious consideration to tracking down the Mark Millar writings. Then as luck would have it, this *Swamp Thing* fanzine became the focus in January, and with some synchronicity, a huge amount of back issues of *Swamp Thing* turned up in the Comic and Book Exchange in Notting Hill. They were priced accordingly, the Moore issues up there at around £4 to £6, and most issues £3 to £4, but I know the system and watched them get reduced. As they did, I did my best to learn what issues were Millars, and how



that worked, and they had a lot of them, and suddenly the post issue 100 issues were moved into the 50p boxes, (this is no shame and this is how the shop works: they sell or reduce and I have found phenomenal comics for 50p) and I weighed up the run, what there was of it. There were 23, from 140 upwards, some of the Morrison and Millar co-writes, and although not the whole run of 31 comics. This wasn't bad, and many of the covers were by artists I liked, and there I was thinking, "I could redeem myself by finding a run of *Swamp Thing* that I could write about. And I love Millar's work."

I took a break and went for a coffee, and did some research, and was immediately excited. An American flag in the style of a swastika . . . was this an alternate USA perhaps, where *Swamp Thing* takes on the Nazis or a homage – "The Man in the Low Swamp" – but why the sudden stop how did this work, why was Morrison involved, and do I recognise the other writer? I read that Millar lost interest, "got bored," when he wasn't allowed a free hand. That he wanted to have cross-overs, but it lost its way as he did. And I knew then that I would not buy them that day, but would think about it, I did buy other comics, however.

But then, everything changed. You know. I have been worried, I wonder what has happened to the lovely staff in that shop. How they are faring, the shop is closed, and the world is having a bit of a moment where with no flights or tourists, things seem to be cleaning up, from an ecological standpoint, but it is at a dreadful human cost, rather than with willing and keen and collaborative good will.

Even though the character may have been a fleeting momentary thought in Alan Moore's mind, it was a great character created and I have enjoyed reading the pages of the comic. It is interesting because as an end point, I think I will return to where I began: Garth Ennis. I had the chance to interview him a few years ago.

**James Bacon:** *Hellblazer* is now going to DCU as John Constantine, some readers may remember the violence and sex that was in the pages of your run. If you were allowed, what sort of reboot would YOU give John Constantine?

**Garth Ennis:** I probably wouldn't bother. I went off the character some time ago. I've known a few too many charming rogues who leave chaos in their wake to find Constantine's routine all that impressive. Not that I don't understand the appeal- I tend to cut people like that dead, but I have a couple of friends who allow themselves to be fucked over again and again by the same predator, and their explanation is always 'Yeah, but you know . . . he's a mate . . .' The 'mate,' meanwhile, continues on his merry way knowing full well that he'll be able to circle back and take advantage again when the dust settles. Constantine's refrain about how some people are born victims and there's nothing you can do to save them; therefore, you may as well use them, cuts no ice with me. That's why I like Frank Castle: you know where you are with Frank.

I know where I am with Chris, Chuck and Pádraig. Working damnably hard on this issue, and their love of the character and stories, and I know it is important, and it is important to me. As I get older I realise there are more and more comics being produced that are not for me, and this is a good thing, because we need more comic readers, and it helps see comics that I will love come to fruition, but most importantly, as someone who appreciates comics as art, it is vital to me that I do not like all of it, that I discern what I like for myself, and welcome when others love things that I do not, because that is to be human. To be human is to have differing feelings and emotions for stories and art, and that feels quite important for some reason, not so much the arguments, although I love a safe and friendly argument with pals, as opposed to being dismissed. I am always happy to take a recommendation.

But you know, I also know where I am with V and Evey, Mina and Allan, Halo, Laurie and Dan and Edward and Jon and Walter and Adrian, Michael, Roxy, Alice and Dorothy and Wendy, Tom and Dhalua and Tesla. I am not so sure with *Swamp Thing*.

That's okay, you can all love him. It's fabulous to see.



Sting appears in *Swamp Thing* #23

# Interview with Neil Gaiman by Pádraig Ó Méalóid



Begun on Sunday 8 December 2019, and finished Sunday 5 April 2020

**Pádraig Ó Méalóid:** I see you commenting on Steve Bissette's post about *Swamp Thing*. I'm involved with a fanzine called *Journey Planet*, and next year we're doing an issue about *Swamp Thing*. Might it be possible to talk to you about it?

**Neil Gaiman:** Sure!

**Pádraig Ó Méalóid:** What was your first experience of *Swamp Thing*?

**Neil Gaiman:** My first experience was an ad for *Swamp Thing* #1 in another comic. And I bought *Swamp Thing* #1 at Goddens, our local corner shop, when I was 11. I borrowed the, what, 8 pence it cost, from my father. I bought all the *Swamp Things* I could, although when Nestor Redondo came onto the art it stopped being exciting for me. Bernie Wrightson art and Len Wein stories were joyful and perfect things.

[Note: *Swamp Thing* #1 is cover dated November 1972, so presumably originally appeared on the shelves three months before that.]

**Pádraig Ó Méalóid:** Did you give up on it, at some point?

**Neil Gaiman:** *Swamp Thing* #17 was the last one I bought of the original run, per the Covers Gallery. I kept hoping it would get better...

[Note: *Swamp Thing* #17 was cover dated July 1975. Volume 1 of *Swamp Thing* only ran a few more issues, to *Swamp Thing* #24, cover dated September 1976.]

**Pádraig Ó Méalóid:** What else were you reading at the time, do you remember, by the way?

**Neil Gaiman:** I'd gone from *Batman* to *The Brave and the Bold* (with *Phantom Stranger* in it) to *Phantom Stranger*. *House of Mystery* and *House of Secrets* and *Unexpected* followed on. Loved Jim Aparo, but Wrightson was too weird for me until I saw *Swamp Thing* #1, and then I was in love.

**Pádraig Ó Méalóid:** Was it mostly horror comics you were reading then?

**Neil Gaiman:** I was mostly disappointed by horror comics, the sub-EC twist ending stories: I loved *Phantom Stranger*, though. Was a fan of Len Wein's writing.

I was reading every comic that reached the groceries and newsagents of the Sussex town I was living in. (So not a lot of Marvel titles, for some reason.)

When I went to Portsmouth to stay with grandparents, I would get the Alan Class black and white reprints of US horror comics (and *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents* and so on), lots of Ditko and Kirby. But those were mostly only sold in seaside resorts in the summer...





**Pádraig Ó Méalóid:** There's a whole thing about comics distribution in the UK, and especially what turned up at seaside shops, that I doubt we'll ever get to the bottom of.

**So, instead, let me ask you, what was it that appealed to you about *Swamp Thing*, at the beginning?**

**Neil Gaiman:** The art and the writing. The story. The feeling that this was something important. I wasn't aware that Len and Bernie were doing a sort of run through the tropes of horror because this was the first time I'd encountered a lot of them.

**Pádraig Ó Méalóid:** What was your next encounter with *Swamp Thing*, after the original DC series was cancelled?

**Neil Gaiman:** Victoria Station W H Smiths. London 1983. *The Saga of the Swamp Thing*. The Arcane saga ...

**Pádraig Ó Méalóid:** I see that the reappearance of Anton Arcane was in *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* #17, cover dated October 1983, so an interesting bit of synchronicity, if you stopped reading *Swamp Thing* at #17, and resumed reading *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* at #17, eight and a bit years later. By that stage you also had the classic production team of Stephen R. Bissette on pencils, John Totleben inking, Tatjana Wood doing the colours, and John Costanza lettering, with Len Wein as editor. All they really needed by then was someone to write it well, to try to revive their flagging sales. When Alan Moore took over with issues #20 and #21, what was your reaction?

**Neil Gaiman:** I wasn't buying it yet. I was picking it up, looking at it, putting it down. I noticed a pile of comics with a *Swamp Thing* on top. By about *Swamp Thing* #23 I had started actually to read them. It wasn't until the one with the *House of Secrets* reprint that I paid money and bought one.

I could see that what Alan was doing was wonderful, and what Steve and John and Co. were doing was wonderful. But it wasn't my *Swamp Thing*. And then, with the reprint, it reached out and included what I had loved and somehow made it okay for me to admit to myself that I loved it. And I was buying my first comic since I was 17.

**Pádraig Ó Méalóid:** That *House of Secrets* reprint was in *Swamp Thing* #33, from October 1984, just before your own 24<sup>th</sup> birthday. So, were you one of those terrible people who read comics off the racks, but didn't buy them, until you finally saw the light? And was this your first encounter with Alan Moore's work?

**Neil Gaiman:** I was. It wasn't about being cheap (although God knows I was broke then) but because I'd stopped buying comics when I was 17. I bought reprints of *The Spirit* from Warren and Kitchen Sink and that was all. I did not buy comics. I think I was actually (correctly) scared that if I did there was no coming back. So I didn't buy them.

And then I bought "Abandoned Houses." I bought "Pog." I bought anything still in the pile on Victoria Station. I went into the back of Forbidden Planet and bought all the ones I'd read but not bought. I borrowed "The Anatomy Lesson" and the one before that from ... argh! I've forgotten his name. Assistant editor on *Penthouse* who was a huge Alan Moore fan, and had everything Alan has done in *Captain Britain* and *Warrior* and lots of *2000 AD* and I was doomed.

**Pádraig Ó Méalóid:** Was it *Swamp Thing* that drew you towards writing comics, do you think?

**Neil Gaiman:** Probably, yes. Or at least, it was *Swamp Thing* #9 that made me realise that a well written comic was as good as a well written anything. And Len was a good writer back then.

[Note: *The Saga of Swamp Thing* #1, Cover Date May 1982, In Store Date February 11, 1982]

# Derek Mears: A Guest to Your Memories by Derek McCaw

*When the streaming service DC Universe was announced, one of the most exciting offerings was an ongoing TV series based on Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson's creation, Swamp Thing. Produced by James Wan and Mark Verheiden, it promised to be a dark, faithful interpretation of the most famous runs of the comics.*

*When casting was announced, they could not have chosen a better actor to play the monster who thought he was a man but became a hero – Derek Mears. Long known for portraying creatures on screen – perhaps most famously Jason Voorhees in the remake of Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, Mears is an actor specializing in monsters with humanity at their core. As you will read, that was a deciding factor here.*

*But for reasons still unclear to fandom, Swamp Thing the series was not renewed, and its initial 13-episode run was cut down to 10. And yet . . . what we have is often exactly what was promised: the best of the comics brought to life, with Mears at its core.*

*He was kind enough to answer my call and talk about the comics, the character, and the series as a whole.*

**Derek McCaw: Do you remember the first time you ever saw Swamp Thing as a character?**

**Derek Mears:** Strangely enough, though I've been a comic book reader for many years, the two comics that people would recommend to me that I'd never officially read were *Swamp Thing* and Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*. When I got cast for *Swamp Thing*, of course I was doing all my research for the character, getting the back issues and anything I could get my hands on.

But as I was going through some of the back issues, there was an issue of *Swamp Thing* with Batman in it – I think it's #7 – and I thought, wait a second, I've seen this! Back when I was 4 or 5, I remember I was learning how to read. My mom would go to get her hair done, and right next door was a 7-11. While she was getting her hair done, I was allowed to go over and get a couple of comic books and a Slurpee. I'd go back and try to figure out, looking at pictures, things that I liked, and "read," but I couldn't read yet.

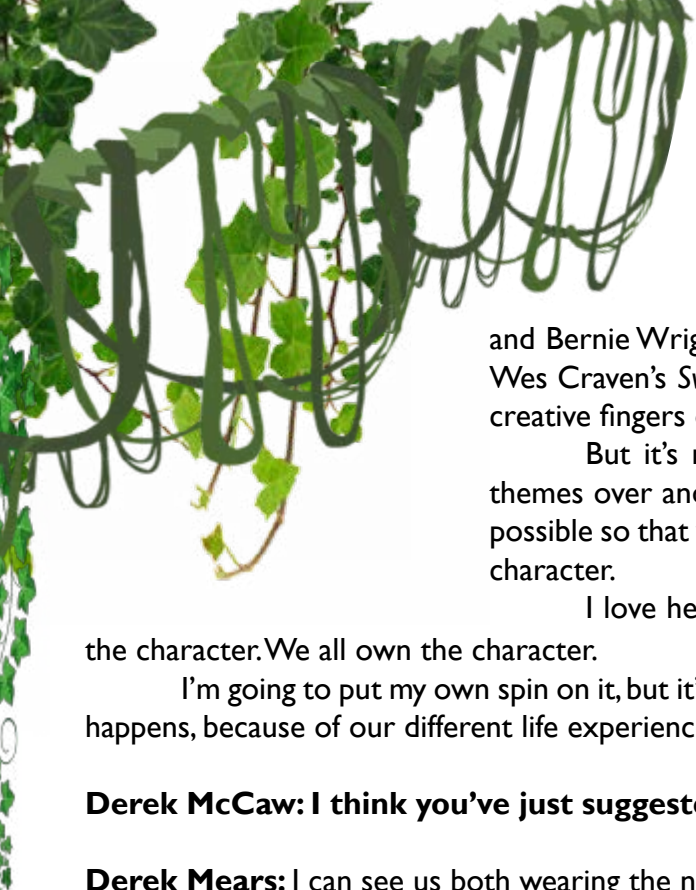
I got it because of Batman. And seeing Swamp Thing, he had a trench coat on and a fedora, thinking, "Is this Ben Grimm the Thing? What's going on? He's SCARY." I remember trying to figure out what was going on with the story, through the pictures and not being able to read. I was intrigued; 4-year-old me thinking, oh, okay, he's a monster but he's good. Oh, he's friends with Batman!

It's such a weird full circle. As an adult, getting to play that character, because that was Swamp Thing. It was just mind-boggling. So yes, I didn't realize it, but my first time seeing Swamp Thing was before I could even read.

**Derek McCaw: Once you'd done the research – reading all the comics – were there any stories that really stood out for you?**

**Derek Mears:** Yes, the stories from the Swamp Thing fans.

In my creative process, when I'm doing a character that's an iconic character or a redo, I use any source materials that are out there, whether it's comics, novels, TV, or film. But I really discovered with Swamp Thing something else that I would add in. Because when I was cast, through social media I got so many wonderful, beautiful messages from Swamp Thing fans, saying, "You're the right guy for this, we're really happy you're doing this," which was completely heartwarming to me.



A lot of them would send me some of their personal stories, of what *Swamp Thing* meant to them. You have to realize that when we love these iconic characters, we have our own personal relationship to them. And my responsibility is – I’m a guest to your memories. My job is to do the best job possible and take the spices that I’m getting from Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson, Alan Moore and John Totleben and Steve Bissette, and Wes Craven’s *Swamp Thing* – all the different artists that have EVER put their creative fingers on a *Swamp Thing* story.

But it’s not just that. It’s fans as well. They’re responding to certain themes over and over. I realized I’m just a guest. My job is to do the best job possible so that whoever takes it next can continue that positive mythos of the character.

I love hearing people’s personal stories and remembering I don’t own the character. We all own the character.

I’m going to put my own spin on it, but it’s like if you and I were both to play Pinocchio. No matter what happens, because of our different life experiences, there’s going to be something different to it.

**Derek McCaw:** I think you’ve just suggested our two-man show, *Two Dereks Playing Pinocchio*.

**Derek Mears:** I can see us both wearing the nose.

**Derek McCaw:** You mentioned Wes Craven. So, you had seen the movie?

**Derek Mears:** Behind his desk in his office, Wes used to have one of those giant posters of *Swamp Thing*. It was so beautiful, because during the time of the Boston tragedy, with the marathon bombing, my friend Adam Green helped put together a big auction to raise money for the victims, and a bunch of friends from the horror community pitched in different items. Wes donated that poster, before he passed, to raise money to help people. I thought that was beautiful.

I did *Cursed* for Wes, and *The Hills Have Eyes II*, that Wes produced. He was such a kind, gentle, sweet human being. So low-key, but also so funny, which a lot of people don’t know. His sense of humor was just so dry and biting. I loved it.

**Derek McCaw:** What was the audition process like?

**Derek Mears:** I was on the short list for the character; I guess there were six people they thought of that they were “if we’re doing this, we think they’d be good.” Originally, I went in to meet the first time, and I have a bad habit of focusing on the work and not the who’s who in the room. I did my audition, hung out and talked with everybody afterwards.

And my reps after that meeting said, “Hey, you did good. They really liked you. They want you to come back in. This time they’re going to have you read again, but they’re going to have an actress for you to play off.”

And I said, “Okay, cool.” I didn’t realize the gravity of the show. I thought they were doing a quick kiddy version of *Swamp Thing*. How are you going to do that properly? They’re not going to pull that off! I wasn’t really jazzed at the time.

So, I was all, “We’ll see,” and my reps were like, “What are you talking about? You were in the room. It’s a James Wan project.” And they started listing off the credentials of everyone in the room, the projects they had been a part of, and told me no, they’re doing a hard R gothic horror romance, with a large budget for the original 13 episodes.

I then realized they were going to take the character seriously, and basically use Alan Moore’s run as the bible to the show. And then I said, “Oh my gosh, THAT sounds phenomenal!”

Then of course the next time going back in, I got a little nervous knowing all that. First time, eh, whatever. Second time... uhhhhh uhhhhh... “I didn’t realize how grand this is!”

Luckily it worked out, and I am fortunate that I got to do a little run of *Swamp Thing*.



**Derek McCaw: What did you bring to it that made you the right guy?**

**Derek Mears:** Being able to survive in the green suit? Who's the sucker who won't complain, that we can torture, and wear this mossy iron maiden? THAT guy.

I'm honestly not sure. Maybe they needed someone who could survive wearing the suit and emote through the make-up? Whatever it was, I'm extremely lucky to have played the character.

**Derek McCaw: You joked and called it the mossy iron maiden. Was there a moment, a difference, between when they showed you the suit and you put it on when you said, "Oh my God, I am Swamp Thing"?**

**Derek Mears:** We had a camera test the first time we put everything on, it wasn't completely done. I was incredibly sick. I didn't tell anybody. I was trying not to pass out. With the suit off, of course, just trying to breathe. Oh, we're going to do what? Okay, let's put it onnnn...

I've got to tell you, out of all the different crazy outfits I've worn over my career, it is the best thing I've ever worn. It moves so well. The way you can emote through the make-up is just phenomenal. The first time putting it on, just staring in the mirror, it's kind of the beginning of a hero's journey, where you're in the normal world and the call to adventure is there.

But you don't know what's ahead of you, so you're basically wearing this muckman outfit, looking in the mirror and thinking, "what's going to happen?" Because you also have a lot of questions that there are no answers to yet. It's similar to improv where you have to come up with them or figure them out on the go.

I was staring at the mirror and visualizing this eight-month journey that's ahead of me. Where's it going to go? I was just surrendering to the unknown, which is exhilarating but also terrifying. Again, going back to what we were saying about fans and expectations, the thing you don't ever want to do is, you don't want to tarnish someone else's memory or a dream of a character. You want to respect that and elevate it to the next level.

Thinking, okay, I'm going to do this. I hope people like it. I hope I like it. Annnnd here we go!

Luckily, it's the best thing thus far in the 20 years or so of my career that I've got to be a part of.

**Derek McCaw: It took me a couple of episodes, but I could really see the human under the make-up, look and see your eyes, and say, "Yeah, that's Derek." We saw the man – or the plant that thinks it's a man – under the monster, and that was exciting. The same thing with your voice ...**

**Derek Mears:** Yeah, I was really particular about the voice. We went through some different incarnations. By the time we finished the 10 episodes and went into the ADR room to finalize all the voice work, it was funny. The head of the ADR said, "Hey, do you remember all those different voices we went through, you tried to experiment with? Remember your very first choice? That's the one we're going to go with."

I was ecstatic.

**Derek McCaw: I think about the voice. It stuck with me as a kid. When you're a kid you read one comic book like fifty times because you don't have a lot, and I had an issue of Swamp Thing, and it stuck with me that he didn't talk a lot because it hurt. That was back before they established that he was a plant who thought he was Alec Holland, he was a human who became a muck-encrusted monster, and that affected his vocal cords. Did that affect the voice you chose?**

**Derek Mears:** Not the pain side of things, but being that we had the Alan Moore twist – the existential crisis of is Alec Holland Swamp Thing or is Swamp Thing Alec Holland, who's who, how do they fit together? I did take into consideration, I was having a conversation with a fellow actor, during the shoot when I said by episode 4 or 5, I was going to start smoothing out on the voice.

We were just comparing notes, and it made me jump for joy, because at one point I got a note from the showrunner through the director at the time, "hey, Mark (Verheiden) was just saying that around episode 4 or 5, maybe the voice should start smoothing out ..."

I was like “oh my god! We’re on the same page! I had already planned that!”

Basically, when we’re learning new things, learning a new task, we are carving those neural pathways. We’re growing that branch of that vine out, and literally he is trying to learn how to talk in the very beginning. He is figuring out those neural pathways to speech, so it is getting easier and easier, but it’s still broken up and chopped.

I wouldn’t say it’s on the painful side, but . . . imagine communicating in a way that you haven’t been used to communicating as a plant. There’s discovery and there’s trials, and it’s that existential birthing, in a sense. If I haven’t experienced that, how would I feel like? How would I move?

**Derek McCaw: It seemed to me that at the beginning of the series, they were playing with more of the original Len Wein take on the character, and then it became “The Anatomy Lesson.” Did you know that’s where it was going from the beginning? Because sometimes producers pull those kinds of surprises on actors a few episodes in.**

**Derek Mears:** I didn’t know where it was going (in the season), but I did know that we were going to do “The Anatomy Lesson.” That was one of the things that was difficult doing the interviews before the show came out. Interviewers would make statements like, “Oh, you and Andy Bean (Alec Holland) are sharing a role!” Well, yes and no, but not really. But I can’t say that, because it would blow the twist if they didn’t know it.

And a lot of people in the cast and crew didn’t know what the twist was in “The Anatomy Lesson.” That Swamp Thing had the memories of a man but wasn’t. They thought it was body horror where a guy was trapped inside, the original Swamp Thing where he was trapped inside this monster. It blew a lot of people’s minds.

Because of cutting the season short, “The Anatomy Lesson” wasn’t originally going to be the big reveal of the show. When the episode order got shorter, that became our mainstay. I felt like I would sound incredibly unintelligent, because I would sit there being interviewed before it came out and I just had to eat it and not say anything.

I couldn’t explain to journalists about the existential crisis he was dealing with, because that became our big secret for the season. And I can’t blow it out of the bag, so I just sounded like a big dumb-dumb face, “It was fun. It was great.” There were times I had to stop the interview and say, “I don’t know how to answer what you’re asking without blowing anything, and I don’t want to ruin it for fans.” Uck. It was a nightmare.

**Derek McCaw: It brings up an interesting parallel, because Jason Woodrue (aka the Floronic Man) does become what people think Swamp Thing is. He is a man who has transformed, but he is still Jason Woodrue. But we could spend hours opining that we didn’t get to see that. What were your favorite moments in the series?**

**Derek Mears:** Honestly, there’s a ton on camera, but my favorite thing about the show was the cast and crew. We all felt it was a special show, and that it wasn’t your average run-of-the-mill TV show. Because it didn’t matter if you were the PA up to the main producer, everybody realized that everyone brought something unique to the show, and everybody treated each other with such kindness and respect.

Going to work every day was an absolute treat. Even when people had days off, they would come in and just hang out, which is unheard of. We would do things all together. There was really no separation. It was just a beautiful, creative environment. In my opinion, for all TV and film, that’s how it should be.

I explain in interviews, when people give me compliments, they’re very flattering, but I interject and say, “I appreciate what you’re trying to say, but you have to realize that we’re a team. We’re telling these stories together.”

When you’re doing a TV or film job, the analogy is like you’re trying to make a rainbow. Each different department is a single color. I’m just blue, and you can’t make a rainbow with just blue. Everyone has to come together. It was just a safe, creative environment that Atomic Monster, our producers, created for us. I can’t thank them enough for that experience.

**Derek McCaw:**The CW's Crisis on Infinite Earths did include a shot of you.You are canon. If the CW found a way, or if J.J.Abrams' rumored Justice League Dark project came to fruition, would you return to the role?

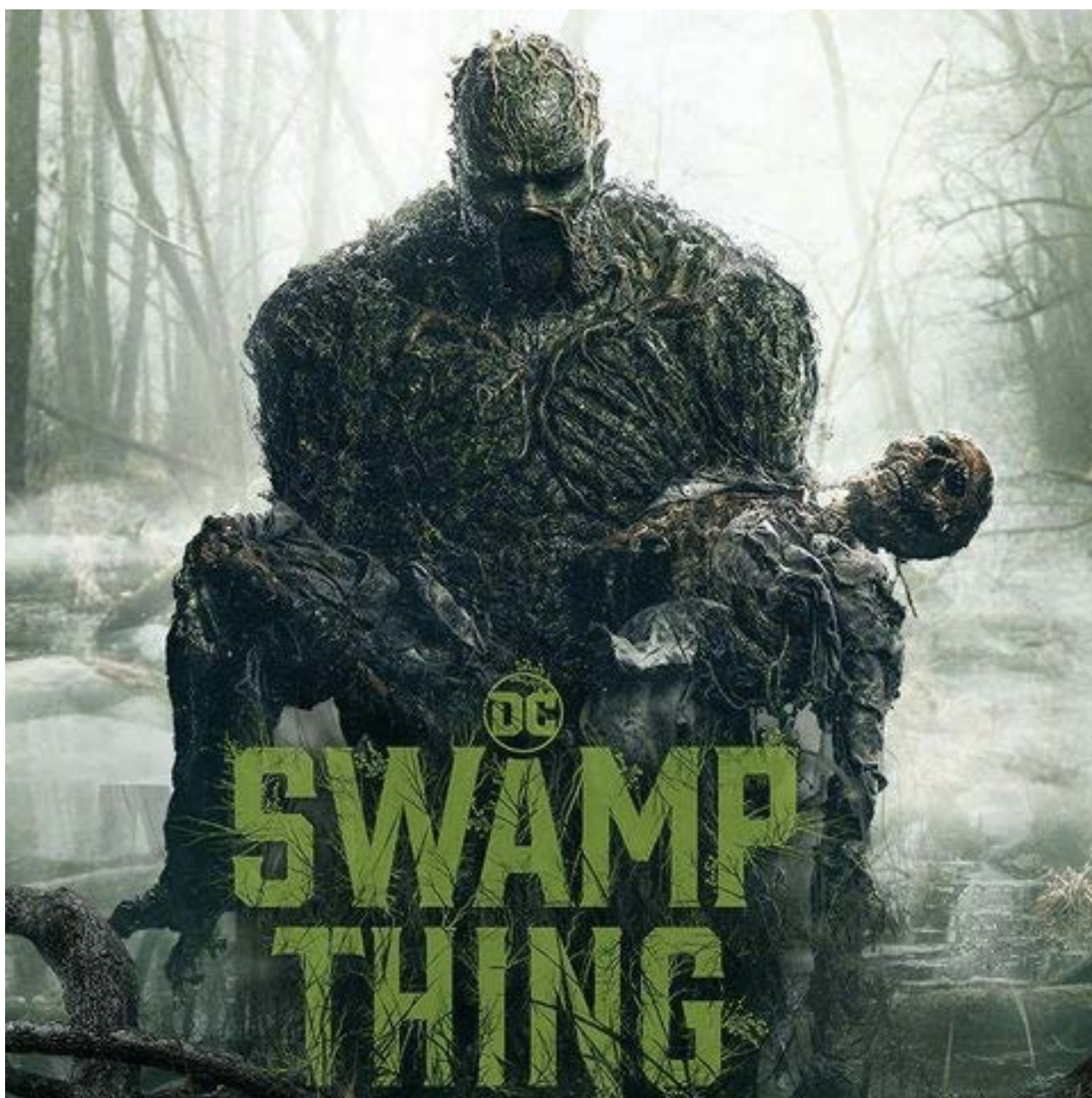
**Derek Mears:** It all depends. I have no idea. There are so many moving parts with my own career, and other shows, that I really have no idea. But I've gotten to the point career-wise in general that I'm just surrendering and see where things take me and moving on from there.

**Derek McCaw:** I think you touched on this earlier, but why do you think that the character of Swamp Thing resonates and has such staying power?

**Derek Mears:** There's an uncertainty to all of us where we question life, who we are and where we come from. It's that ongoing question of "What am I? Who am I? What makes me ME?"

We're constantly exploring and finding new ways to define or pacify ourselves with answers, but really, we don't know. I think a lot of people relate to Swamp Thing because there are times when we feel like the outcast. He allows us to explore our own humanity and vulnerability.

Swamp Thing is the mirror that we look at every morning when we question ourselves.







# Greenpeace & Swamp Thing

## by Chris Garcia

I've got issues with Greenpeace. Yes, I do support a lot of environmental matters, but I am highly critical of many things they've done, notably damaging the Nazca lines and the stupid crusade against GMO crops. Still, I like a lot of the things they stand for, and one of the reasons was a commercial in the late 1980s, a commercial that really seems strange when you consider the times in which Swamp Thing was living.

Okay, go to YouTube and view it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qelZUuy-a24>

Now that you've experienced it, let's talk.

If you love the 1980s Public Service Announcement style of acting, then this is the one for you. There have been waves of types of PSA works over the decades, starting with the early 1900s silent morality shorts, which morphed into the pre-television film strips discouraging everything from smoking to pre-marital sex. The acting never progressed much beyond the level of emoting required by those early silents. They were terrible, and when television came that was the style that most acting relied on. If you look at early television PSAs, they're so stiff, so over-the-top, and most of all, so sterile. They're designed largely for television networks and stations to be able to say they're not adding to the moral denigration of the youth, and thus they had to play it so careful.

By the 1960s, the world of filmmaking had progressed, but PSAs did not follow. The 1970s were quite possibly the decade that saw this method of acting take its strongest flowering. The entire genre of the Afterschool Special was based around not only the idea of being gigantic PSAs (and melodramas, as it were), but they employed much the same acting techniques. Everything was either fretfully heavy, or super-light and airy when things had to take off a bit of the weight. Yes, intermittently you got a gem like *The Wave*, but mostly they were garbage.

The 1980s saw that trend continue, and the commercial PSA would get slightly more abstract, less reliant on the acting that we had come to expect. The big change really happened with the anti-drugs movement, completely changing when Rachel Leigh Cook smashed up the kitchen in her commercial in the 1990s. In 1989, things were still very much in that badly acted, overly simple situations realm.

In 1982, there was a Swamp Thing movie. It was fun, and it was dark. It was very much a Wes Craven film of the time, only toned to be more in-line with the DC comics of the 1970s like *House of Mystery* and *House of Secrets*. It's a damn fine film, one which plays off the performances of Ray Wise (Leland Palmer) and San Jose's own Adrienne Barbeau. After its release, we saw Swamp Thing lumber back to the comics.

More on that in a minute...

So, in 1989, a new Swamp Thing movie came to studios, and the idea was to do three things: first, make more money off the character. Second, they wanted to give a starting point for a series. Finally, it was all about bringing camp to the Swamp Thing character. They put Heather Locklear in the thing, which was cool,

but overall, the whole thing was just a piece of fluff. As often happened when a new franchise was launched, they tied in a series of public service announcements with the release. Now, with the environmental themes of *Swamp Thing*, an anti-litter campaign makes a lot of sense, no? And, with the campy tone of the film itself (and I REALLY had to check to make sure it's wasn't Bruce Campbell trying to out-Bruce Campbell himself) going with the traditional PSA method of acting was a good idea.



The kids are terrible. I mean, they're just awful. You can tell they're doing their best, and when Swamp Thing, played by the masterful Dick Durock, comes on the scene, it 100% feels like they are sending up the way that public service announcements are so stupid. This could literally have been an SNL bit instead of actual-kinds of real.

Now, I can tell you I saw this ad on USA Network, which would release the series in 1990. I am betting it was either as a part of *USA Cartoon Express*, the greatest block of cartoons on cable at the time, or on *USA Up All Night*. Since they were going to be showing the *Swamp Thing* series, it would make sense that they were the ones to show it. I already knew about Swamp Thing, but I am 100% certain many four-to-ten-year-old kids encountered him for the first time here, and I'm betting that more than a few of them went out and bought issues of *The Saga of The Swamp Thing*.

The campy tone of the film was 100% opposed to much of the history of the comic title. While you could say campy 1967 Batman bore a resemblance to much of Batman history in general, you can't really say that about Swamp Thing. A kid who saw that PSA, then went out to the local comics shop, rooted around the quarter bin, and picked up a copy of *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* from 1984 or so would have been in for quite a shock. Alan Moore's run could not have been more different than the way the commercial had portrayed Swamp Thing. It would be much like a kid discovering Tracy Lords from her role in *Cry Baby* and then exploring her back catalog.

The funny thing is this is SO light for Greenpeace. Litter? Seriously? They were going after whaling ships, often literally, and here they are with a silly PSA about a kid tossing a solo cup into a swamp and a monster that would have felt at-home on a *Creature Features* episode as the spokesman. Perhaps they were simply looking for whatever they could get, but really, I don't think it did any one any favors.







# Swamp Thing Joins the Challengers of the Unknown (or Not) by Chuck Surface

In 2016, *Justice League Action* premiered on Cartoon Network. Each episode featured two fifteen-minute segments during which members of the Justice League faced off against any number of villains. The series lasted for one season and although the format was geared toward younger viewers, references to Silver Age heroes and concepts kept older fans interested as well. One aspect of the show startled me, however, the inclusion of Swamp Thing as a full-fledged member of the Justice League. He plays well with others, shooting vines left and right, and smiling. Yes, I said smiling. During DC's New 52, Swamp Thing worked with Justice League Dark, a combination of mystical outsiders not quite right for full JL membership. I was okay with that, because this was the brooding Protector of the Green, the Erlking I've known and loved for decades, not smiling – I can't get over the smiling – and voiced by Mark Hamill, the only redeeming factor.

And then I remembered. This wasn't the first time DC tried casting Swamp Thing in such a light. Swamp Thing's always been part of DC's main continuity, and he's always interacted with other characters in that universe, but there was brief period when editorial staff wanted him to fill more mainstream shoes, less horror and more superhero. I'm speaking about when Swamp Thing joined the Challengers of the Unknown. Here's what happened.

*Swamp Thing* #1 hit shelves in 1972. A year before, Gerry Conway and Bernie Wrightson had crafted a short-story version for *House of Secrets* #92. Now writer Len Wein and Wrightson expanded upon the original, reformulating the character and moving events into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 1970s, the Comics Code Authority loosened rules that had been dictating comic content since 1954, so horror comics enjoyed a renaissance during the early and mid-1970s. Marvel Comics published *The Tomb of Dracula*, *Werewolf by Night*, *The Monster of Frankenstein*, *The Son of Satan*, and *Man-Thing*, for example. DC went with *House of Mystery*, *House of Secrets*, *The Witching Hour*, *Ghosts*, and *Swamp Thing*. The first twenty issues were excellent, including runs from Wein and Wrightson, and then Wein and Nestor Redondo, and finally David Michelinie and Redondo. With issue #21, the mood changed.

Sales were flagging, and writers working on later issues – David Michelinie, Gerry Conway, and David Anthony Kraft – introduced science-fiction and superhero related elements. Most notably they revealed Swamp Thing's brother, Edward, and concocted a serum that transformed Swamp Thing back into Alec Holland! The series ended with #24, although a projected #25 entitled "The Sky Above" was to introduce



Hawkman into the title. Editor-in-Chief Carmine Infantino, says Kraft, wanted Hawkman “to become a co-star in *Swamp Thing*, in the hope of attracting superhero fans.” Although completed, the issue never appeared and the series died.

The Hawkman option didn’t fly, but attempts at *Swamp Thing*’s foray into heroddom continued briefly. From 1976 to 1977, *The Challengers of the Unknown* came to life again after years of inactivity, from issues #81 to #87, written by Gerry Conway. At first, Alec Holland connected with the team living on borrowed time, but he ran out of the formula keeping him human and reverted to *Swamp Thing*. With the Challengers, *Swamp Thing* encountered an old enemy, M’Nagalah, and his group of monstrous cultists, alien fungi, mutant lizards from the future, and Rip Hunter and the Sunset Lords. The final issue sees the team traveling to 12,000,000 AD to face mutants and Lawspeaker, leader of the rebellious Sky Riders. Are you stunned that this revival didn’t last long, dying, I suspect for reasons beyond the oncoming DC implosion that finished off many series? As if all that weren’t enough, *Deadman* joined the team as well. Nobody knew it, however, since they could neither see nor hear him. I’ve seen fine work from Gerry Conway, but as Horace notes, “Even Homer nods.”



Thankfully, in 1982 DC began running *The Saga of Swamp Thing* to mark the release of the *Swamp Thing* film, and efforts at “superhero-zing” the character were abandoned. When Alan Moore took over writing duties with issue #20, *Swamp Thing* finally begins evolving into an arboreal demigod . . . hold on a minute. With issue #21, “The Anatomy Lesson,” Moore reveals that *Swamp Thing* never had been Alec Holland, but a separate being with his memories, whose birth sprang from Holland’s fiery death. What then are we to make of that period when *Swamp Thing* with chemical aids regained his humanity? What about the *Challengers of the Unknown*? Continuity check! Continuity check! Relax. We’re to make nothing of it at all. Walter Bitterman from Collegeville, Pennsylvania, wrote to series editor Len Wein about these questions. I cite from the letter page of *The Saga of Swamp Thing* #6:



Dear Len:

I'm glad to see *Swamp Thing* back again, though I was a little disappointed in the first issue, being a fan of the original run in which we were left with a normal Alec Holland and not with the *Swamp Thing*. I was hoping for an explanation of how he transferred back. I'm sure some of the unpublished stories from the first run (e.g., the *Hawkman vs. Swamp Thing* story promised for issue #25) and would love to see them in this book.

I hope to see Matt, Abigail, and Bolt again. Your mystery man Mr. G. can't be Nathan Ellery so he's either from the Conclave or Colossus.

Wein replies quite abruptly:

*Sorry, William, but you comprise a minority of one in your fondness for those last stories in 1976, in which some misguided soul tried to turn **Swamp Thing** into a crypto-superhero. As far as we're concerned, the stories published after issue #21 **never happened**, that is Alec never became predominately human, he never had a brother, there was never any Colossus, etc. The rabidly continuity-minded among our readers may consign these stories to "Another Earth" or to the trash heap – it's their choice. As for Matt Cable and the rest they may turn up some time in the future – but remember that the current storyline takes place **six years** after the previous saga . . . and when we meet Matt and company again, we will find them much changed! And now you've seen that your guesses about our "mystery man" were – Sorry again! – way off base.*

Consign those final issues of *Swamp Thing* and the short-lived *Challengers of the Unknown* to your long boxes, friends, because that's the only place they retain any meaning. Move along. Nothing to see here, like when Disney pared down the Star Wars Expanded Universe but on a massively smaller scale, of course. Thank you, Len, for this and for everything.

Alan Moore would have fun years later, when in *Swamp Thing Annual #2*, Swamp Thing encounters Deadman who expresses that it's nice to see him again, referring to their shared experiences with the *Challengers* . . . maybe.

Or maybe not.





# Swamp Thing #57: Rannian-English Translation

## by Helena Nash

I wasn't much aware of Moore's Swamp Thing at the time it came out. I was all about his run on Captain Britain, but his American comics were quite hard to get hold of at my local newsagent, so I simply didn't see them on sale. And anyway, I was way more of a Marvel kid than a DC fan.

But then I came across an eye-catching issue of *Crisis on Infinite Earths* at a comics mart around Christmas 1985. *Crisis* proved to be my gateway to the vast swathe of weird and wonderful DC characters which the miniseries showcased. Inevitably I picked up *Swamp Thing* #50, as I'd read somewhere that it linked into *Crisis*, even though it didn't bear the all-important crossover banner at the top. *Swamp Thing* #50 was a strange issue to start my association with Swampy and chums, since it seemed to be the culmination of an epic storyline. But for a certain sort of reader, myself included, that's just the sort of thing to send me racing off to the back-issue boxes so I could figure out who everyone in the story was, like the weird rhyming yellow demon and the bloke who looked like Sting in a raincoat.

Anyway, *Swamp Thing* was now on my radar, and the next issue I found was #57, the one where he looks like a rust-red cactus on the front. Story summary: 'Mysteries in Space,' in which Adam Strange jumps into an Australian toilet and teleports back to the planet Rann, accidentally dragging Swamp Thing along for the ride. Adam reunites with his Rannian missus and her dad, Swampy wanders into town and gets attacked by the spooked locals, Adam shoots Swampy with his ray gun a lot while thinking sweaty thoughts about his wife's naked body. There's also some stuff about ecological catastrophe, Thanagarians, and Adam's creeping suspicion that he's nothing more than an exotic hairy primitive in the eyes of most of the Rannians he's sworn to defend.

So far, so Moore. But here's the fun part – much of the Rannian dialogue is written in alienese. It's all *ililoc* this and *voryegger* that. It was written so consistently with an apparent pattern and syntax that I suspected it was more than just random letters struck on a keyboard. So aged 18, with friends and the internet all several years in the future, I had nothing better to do for a day than sit down and translate it, using context and the visual cues on the panels as my guides.

And there, inside a mylar bag along with *Swamp Thing* #50, the scrappy piece of paper with my Rann-English dictionary sat until yesterday, when I saw that Chris and Chuck were editing the Swampy issue of *Journey Planet*.

I must have borrowed my friend Ian's issue #58 at some point, because I also have some later notes on extra words from that following issue, which is how come I have 'SMALSH-YEGGER = SWAMP-THING' written down, plus a few extra words of Rannian that don't appear in #57.

Below are my best efforts at translating issue #57, followed by a partial Rannian-English dictionary.





# Approximate Translation of Rannian in Swamp Thing #57

## Page 6

ADAM! DUSS MAOL QU?  
Adam! What happened to you?

## Page 7

### Panel 1

ADAM ILILOC BA!  
Adam, talk to me!  
MASMAT! OBSO QU... BAAN GLISPIN DOH-HEGER. BAS DRAAT OL HEGER RANAGAR.  
???? ! Listen... fetch the vehicle. We must transport him to Ranagar.  
BAS OBSI, SARDATH-CHAT.  
We obey, Lord Sardath.

### Panel 2

TERTEL BU?  
My daughter?  
DUSS MOAL OLT?  
How is he?  
O-OL DHUMER, CLAAB OL REKEKI FAO.  
H-he's alive, but he's cold.  
FAOR APIC-ZETA FAOR HOORD OL?  
Did the Zeta-beam hurt him?

### Panel 3

BA THOM EESSU. APIC-ZETA THO FAOR BREMEL OL HOORD CLAAB ...  
I don't think so. The Zeta-beam did not cause the damage, but .  
..  
SARDATH-CHO! OL ILILOC! OL ILILOC INGLISH! FAO OL ...?  
Sardath! He speaks! He's talking English! Is he ...?

### Panel 4

THO. REKEK FAO WEER. UNSA RANAGARI MEMEP FAO FAOR ALDRAAN OL.  
No [????] Rannian [????] him.  
VIER! GLISPIN DOH RETTE!  
Look! They're bringing the vehicle!



IU, ADAM ...  
Oh Adam ...

Panel 5

BAS GLISPIN HEGE, SARDATH-CHAT.  
We have brought the vehicle, Lord Sardath.  
AEL! WOAL BAS OL GLAY AYMOR.  
Good! Let's get him aboard.  
FAO THOM HOORD OL...  
Don't hurt him...

Panel 6

IU, SARDATH-CHO ... FAORI OL AEL-FAO?  
Oh Sardath, will he recover?  
SASSU, ALANNA. SASSU ...  
Shush, Alanna, shush.

## Page 10

Panel 4

D-DUSS MAOL OLT? FA ADAM AEL?  
W-what happened to him? Is Adam alright?  
SA. ADAM FAO AEL. QU DRAL OL VIER, TERTEL BU.  
Yes, Adam is fine. You can see him, my daughter.

Panel 5

IU SARDATH-CHO! BA ONAMAO QU!  
Oh Sardath! I love you.  
BA ONAMAO QU, EMSEC, ALANNA.  
I love you too, Alanna.

## Page 11

Panel 1

ADAM! IU, ONAMAOL BU ...  
Adam! Oh, my love ...

Panel 4

ADAM, DUSS MAOL? DON-HEGER QU APIC-ZETA WU, CLAAB  
QU REKEKI FAO.  
Adam, what happened? The Zeta-beam teleported you here.  
But you were cold.  
UH... BA THOM ESESSEN DUSS MAOL. UL TIMTI FAO BA  
DATTO EPOCHAM  
APIC-ZETA. EPOCHAM RIRRIN. EPOCHAM GLUST ...  
Uh, I don't remember what happened [????]. I hit something  
in the Zeta-beam.











AAN! TERTEL  
BU DOH RETTE  
URTH-CHAN!



AEL,  
SARDATH-CHAT.  
OL WA ILILOC  
THANAGARRU,  
WO?

⊂ ⊃ ⊂ ⊃ ⊂ ⊃ ⊂ ⊃  
⊂ ⊃ ⊂ ⊃ ⊂ ⊃ ⊂ ⊃

Page 13

Panel 6

“... CLAAB APOCHAN MASRAUT FAO OL!”

“... but somebody’s gotta do it!”

Page 14

Panel 1

UUUEEEE! VORYEGGER! UTU STAM BU!

Aaiiee! A monster! [????] me!

Panel 3

FAU QUIER OL! HOORD DAT! HOORD DAT VORYEGGER!

Do you see that! Shoot it! Shoot the monster!

Panel 5

BA HOORD OL! AEL! CLAAB OL DHUMER YAT. DATTO OL.

I hurt it! Good! But it still lives. Hit it!

Page 15

Panel 1

AAN! DUSS MAOL?

Ahh! What’s happening?

Panel 3

THO! THOOOOO!

No! Nooooo!

Page 19

Panel 6

HUHUHUHUH

Hahahaha.

UK-UK-UK-UK-UK-UK!

Ook-ook-ook-ook-ook-ook!

GLUSTIC URTH GRUSNACH...

Stupid Earth monkey...

# Dictionary

Rannian	English
AAN	AHH
AEL	GOOD
AEL-FAO	RECOVER/GET BETTER
AELSMAT	CAREFUL
AGAR	CITY
ALDRAAN	
ALMASSO	
APOCHAN	SOMEBODY
AP	TO?
APIC-ZETA	ZETA-BEAM
AYMOR	ABOARD/INSIDE?
BA	I/ME
BAAN	YOU (pl)?
BAS	WE
BREMEL	CAUSE
BU	MY
CHECHEDER	AMBASSADORS?
CLAAB	BUT
DATTO	HIT/KILL
DHUMER	LIVES/IS ALIVE/BREATHES
DOH	COMES?
DOH-HEGER	VEHICLE/TRANSPORT?
DRAAT	MUST?
DRAL	MAY/CAN
DUSS	WHAT/HOW
EMSEC	TOO/ALSO
EP	AND
EPOCHAM	SOMETHING
EESSEN	KNOW/REMEMBER?
EESSEU	THINK/BELIEVE (SO)?
FAO	IS/ARE/DO/BE
FAOR	DID?
FAORI	WILL
FABRET	FORGET
GLAY	CARRY/GET?
GLISPIN	VEHICLE?

GLUST	
GLUSTIC	STUPID?
GRUSNACH	MONKEY?
HAKKESTRANG	HAWKPEOPLE?
HEGER/HEGE	TRANSPORT?
HOORD	HURT/PAIN/DAMAGE
ILILOC	TALK/SPEAK
ILILOCTA-UNULACON	TRANSLATOR DEVICE
IU	OH
LEPS	FROM
LERM	
MAMOON	PLEASE
MAOL	HAPPENED (TO)
MASRAUT	MUST/GOTTA
MEMEP	
MURRN	SWITCH ON
OBSI	LISTEN/OBEY?
OBSO	LISTEN/OBEY?
OL	HE/HIM/IT
OLF	THEY/THEM
OLT	HE/HIM/IT
ONAMAOL	LOVE
ONAMAOL	LOVER/LOVE
QU	YOU
QUL	YOURSELF
RAFTI	WASHED/DRESSED?
RANAGAR	Capital city of Rann
RANAGARI	The Rannian language
RARN	HERE
REKEK	
REKEKI	COLD/WEAK?
RETTE	BRING?
RIRRIN	
SA	YES
SARDATH-CHAT	SARDATH (formal)
SARDATH-CHO	SARDATH (familiar)
SASSU	OF COURSE/SHUSH?
SMALSH-YEGGER	SWAMP THING
STAM	
TERTEL	DAUGHTER
THO	NOT/NO
THOM	DON'T/NOT
THOSMAL	NOTHING
TIMTI	
TOMTEL	STAY/REMAIN
TRA	YES
UL	
UNSA	
URDOBAKTI	



## Further Reading

Since I couldn't help myself, I just Googled 'Swamp Thing 57 Rannian' to see if anybody else had had a go at this, and it turns out that annotator Greg Plantamura has. You can read his translation of that self-same issue (and the next) on his very thorough *Swamp Thing* site: <http://www.angelfire.com/pop/bay55/SwampThing/SwampBook057.html>. Looks like we pretty much agree on most of it, whilst some sections remain tantalisingly out of reach of both our efforts. Where's a functioning *ililocta-unulacon* when you need one.







**I Wish I Could Ask Bernie  
By Chris Garcia**

I have always loved Swamp Thing, and it's in the design of the creature that I first found an appreciation for what character design is all about. Every visual element of a comic book character plays into the way that we see them. Superman is always chest out. When he's flying he looks up and puts the rest of his body behind him as if he's presenting a missile. When he's standing still, and when I hear the word: Superman, I picture him holding a flag for some reason. He's modeled on the famed strongman, Zishe Breidbart. Conrad Veidt's portrayal in *The Man Who Laughs* is the clear influence for the Joker, not only the crazy smile, but the way he stands, presenting a calm insanity, an almost regal craziness. In a way, you can point to many influences for most comic book characters, and when considering Swamp Thing, I find an image that must have been an influence: Charles Stanton Ogle as Frankenstein's Monster.

Now, there are many stories here to tell, so let me start with the easiest: *Frankenstein*. There was a doctor, he created a monster. The monster did what monsters do, but in the final analysis, Dr. Frankenstein was the monster. This story, arguably the first science fiction novel of the modern age, was hugely influential on everything that came after. My favorite science fiction story pre-1900, "Rappaccini's Daughter," is in the same vein.

There have been countless adaptations of *Frankenstein* over the last two hundred years. One of them, and one that I believe is the most impressive, was a film. Well, several of them were films. In fact, I'd go so far as to say a WHOLE BUNCH of them were films. The first of them was done by the Edison studios in 1910. This was a ten-minute exploration of elements of the *Frankenstein* story, while cutting a lot of the horror. It's a lovely film, and Charles Ogle plays the Monster, and the design of the Monster is amazing. There's a vegetable quality to him, as if he had been birthed of a bramble patch. The hair is amazing, and it seems to be the defining feature, as if it's slowly coalescing on top of his head.

And the first time I saw it, I thought that it was the origin of Swamp Thing's look.

The idea that a *Frankenstein* image would influence Bernie Wrightson is far from revolutionary. Wrightson created what is, without a doubt, the finest graphical interpretation of the Monster that has ever been. Created for Marvel Comics, the fifty drawings Wrightson did were . . . wow. Incredible details, and a read on the Monster that feels so fresh. And then looking at the first appearances of Swamp Thing, I thought, "Wow, there are so many elements of Ogle's Monster here that they must have been an influence."

Except, I recently realized, I had missed one small detail. When Swamp Thing was created, Edison's *Frankenstein* was lost.

This is kind of a crazy story.

After the 1930s, people thought that Edison's *Frankenstein* was lost. They didn't know that at least one copy existed, in the collection of Alois Dettlaff. He bought it from his mother-in-law in the 1950s, and had no idea it was a lost film. In those days, it was harder to get such information, and even an avid collector (and Alois had a collection so nice it was acquired by the Library of Congress) could live their life without ever knowing they had an otherwise lost film. He made a copy of it in the 1970s that was on nitrate film stock! Eventually, he made a DVD and shopped it around, so until the 1990s there was no way for Bernie Wrightson to have seen Edison's *Frankenstein* . . .

. . . except . . .

. . . in the 1960s, there was the first rumbling of what would become modern film history and restoration. It started with the discovery of and attempt at capturing the Library of Congress's Paper Print collection by Kemper Niven in the 1950s, and ramped up throughout the 1960s. People started plowing through the film-related materials, especially those held by the Library of Congress. Someone, I believe Edward Conner, found a copy of the old inhouse organ The Edison Kinetogram. On the cover was an image of Charles Ogle, standing in a position where his head seems to sprout from his upper chest, his hair a mass surrounding him. His face was somehow both comically broad, but also somewhat sinister. It's a fascinating look, and seeing it, I got the feeling that it was THIS image that had influenced Wrightson, and it would have been at least lightly available, and to anyone who had as much love as Bernie for *Frankenstein*, it likely would have been something he saw.

I wish I could ask him.

Sigh.



# *The* EDISON KINETOGRAM

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SCENE FROM  
FRANKENSTEIN

FILM No. 6604



A photograph of a swampy forest. The ground is covered in a thick, green, mossy or algae-like mat. Several large, dark brown tree trunks with buttresses are scattered throughout the scene. The background is filled with more trees and dense foliage, creating a sense of a deep, wooded area.

**Swamp Thing's Kin:  
A Brief Nod to Other  
Swamp Dwellers**

**by Chuck Serface**



If you ever go back into Wooley Swamp, son, you better not go at night!  
There's things out there in the middle of them woods  
That'd make a strong man die from fright!  
There's things that crawl, and things that fly,  
And things that creep around on the ground!  
And they say the ghost of Lucias Clay gets up and it walks around . . .

-- "The Legend of Wooley Swamp"  
The Charlie Daniels Band

Long has humanity feared swamps, not only alligators, quicksand, poisonous plants, and other real dangers, but the ones our collective conscious has created over centuries that are even more frightening than the ghost of Lucias Clay. When I lived in Ukraine, my university colleagues learned that I love science-fiction, comics, anything weird, and taught me about Slavic legends, many of which involved swamps and marshes. Bolotnik, for example, rules such wetlands, appearing as an elderly man covered with dirt and vines, or as a man with frog's arms and a large mouth. He and his wife, Bolotnitsa, lured people to their dooms. Another figure, Dziwozona, kidnapped babies unless their mothers were wise enough to tie a red ribbon around their hands. This female demon took different shapes, including an old woman wearing a red hat with a fern twig attached to it or a beautiful woman. Finally, the vodyanoy, diminutive old men with algae-encrusted hair and beards, or toad-like behemoths, gleefully drowned their victims while capturing their souls.

Other cultures generated swamp legends as well. The American indigenous Abenaki feared the Swamp Woman whose cries compelled listeners to lose their way. The Australian bunyip guards wetlands, and the British Tiddy Mun brought pestilence when the citizens of Lincolnshire drained fenlands, thus threatening its home. Not all were dangerous for the sake of dangerousness, it seems, but dangerous as a warning to those who would harm their habitats. Beware the guardians, indeed.

Unsurprisingly, swamp monsters have been prominent in American horror, both in literature and in comics. Swamp Thing certainly wasn't the first, nor will any be the last. Here I'll discuss a few favorites. I'm grateful to Pádraig Ó Méalóid who pointed me toward *Comic Creator #6 Presents Swampmen: Muck-Monsters and Their Makers*, an amazing source that focuses mainly on muck-monsters, eschewing zombies, spirits, or animal-based creatures. I gleaned much information from this issue, but I won't limit myself to one type as the editors and writers of that magazine have.







“It”

Appearing first in *Unknown* (August 1940), Theodore Sturgeon’s short story has been adapted to comics and other media. This monster formed mysteriously from the remains of Roger Kirk, a man who’d gone missing in the swamp. Oh, Roger. If only you’d been in Ukraine with me to hear the many warnings inherit in their stories. During its rampage, the beast murders a hunter, terrorizes a young girl, and then finally dissolves in water. So much for “It.” Many credit Sturgeon for influencing the breadth of swamp-related horror comics.

### Pre-Code Swamp Horror Comics

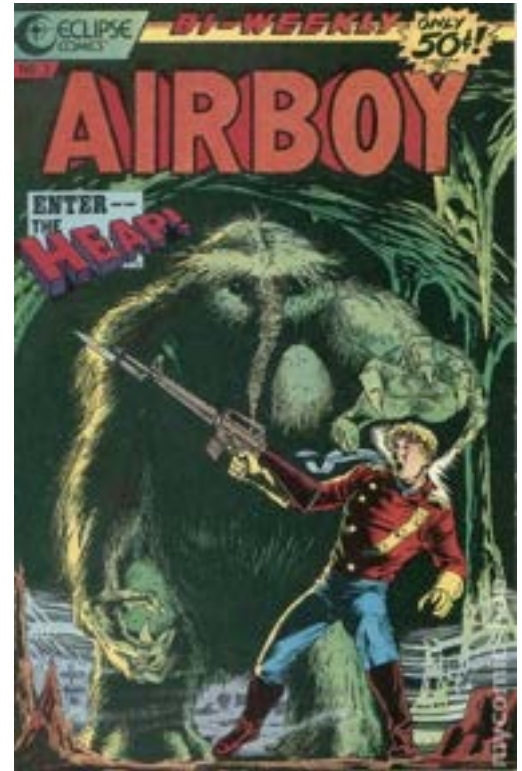
Recently, Yoe Books released *Swamp Monsters*, an anthology edited by Steve Banes and Craig Yoe. Inside readers will encounter, among others, “The Swamp Monster,” “The Swamp Horror,” “Dead Woman’s Swamp,” “Beast of the Bayous,” “Creatures of the Swamp,” and “Bride of the Swamp.” Before the Comics Code Authority ruined all our fun, 1950s publishers released quite a few horror comics from EC’s stable to others such as *Forbidden Worlds*, *Ghostly Weird Stories*, *Web of Evil*, *Adventures into the Unknown*, and *the Unseen*. Themes and purposes mirrored those from myth or legend, with monsters fulfilling guardian duties or existing merely to run amok. Once again, watch your step when crossing swamps! Stephen Bissette’s introductory history, “Creatures of the Swamp: What Music They Make,” adds to this volume’s worthiness. Once again, watch your step when crossing swamps! Stephen Bissette’s introductory history, “Creatures of the Swamp: What Music They Make,” adds to this volume’s worthiness.



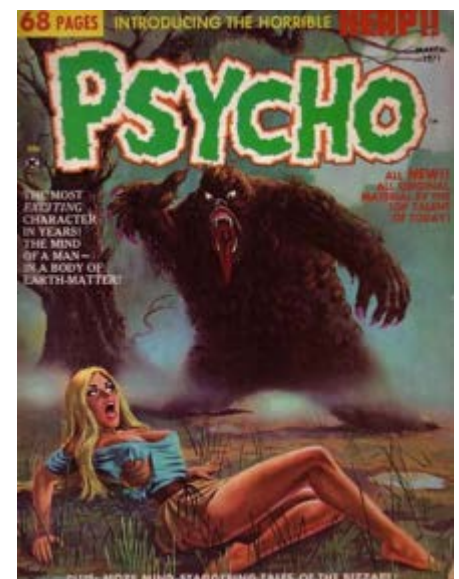
## The Heap

Four Heaps have popped up over the decades, one from *Spawn* #73, where we meet Eddie Beckett, a dead man who through the magic of “neoplasm” combines with soil and garbage, and voila! Villain! The other three Heaps deserve longer mentions.

- (1) Baron Eric von Emmelman dies, melds with bits of forest and trash, and rises as the carrot-nosed Heap, an instant favorite who graced the pages of Hillman’s *Air Fighter Comics* starting with issue #3 (1942) which later became *Airboy Comics*. From World War I fighter pilot to a walking grass pile: not necessarily a career choice for most, but this one lasted 11 ½ years with the first Airboy and company. Later this Heap enjoyed a resurrection when in 1986 Eclipse Comics revived Airboy, when the Golden Age original’s son inherited the name. How could writer Chuck Dixon not invite the Heap back to the party? He’s only the first swamp monster to regularly come back for more. No one-issue or one-story wonder is he.



- (2) Next comes my sentimental favorite. This take-off was the brainchild of Harvey Kurtzman and Will Elder, designed specifically for their story “Outer Sanctum” from *MAD* #5 (1953). He’s just what you’d expect from pre-code *MAD*. Saucy but kind of cute.



- (3) Skywald Publications ran a horror magazine, *Psycho*, a knockoff of Warren’s *Creepy* and *Eerie*, and our final Heap arose in issue #2 (1971), fabricated from the corpse of Jim Roberts, a pilot (we’re not straying far from type, I know) and toxic waste. He only lasted about two years.





## Solomon Grundy

“Born on a Monday,” rising from Slaughter Swamp outside Gotham City, Solomon Grundy once was Cyrus Gold, a criminal who died then lay moldering, accumulating swamp materials, for fifty years before rising to torment the Golden Age Green Lantern and the Justice Society of America. Since then he’s confronted Superman, Batman, the Justice League of America, being ranked high among other DC villains, a true fan favorite. We who belong to a certain generation will remember his time with Legion of Doom on the Saturday morning hit, *Super Friends*. Later, Bruce Timm adapted him for the animated series *Justice League* and *Justice League Unlimited*. Grundy’s come a long way since *All American Comics* #61 (1944). May he never die on Saturday and get buried on Sunday.





## The Glob

Inspired by *Airboy Comics*, Roy Thomas created the Glob who first went toe-to-toe with the Hulk in *The Incredible Hulk* #121 (1969). He told artist Herb Trimpe, "Let's do the Heap."



## Marvin, the Dead-Thing

Speaking of Warren Publications, did you not think they'd get into the swamp-monster game? Al Milgrom and Esteban Maroto created Marvin, the Dead-Thing for *Eerie* #46. The story involves, yes, the usual cadaver and the requisite swamp-muck, but wait! Milgrom and Maroto have added suicide and a girlfriend. No one cared about poor, lonely Marvin, so he tied a rock around his neck and jumped into a river. Upon rising as the Dead-Thing, he went to his worksite, not the first place I'd choose, and a mob immediately confronted him. One girl befriended him, however, before someone from the mob shot her accidentally. Marvin takes her back to the swamp, and just like him she turns into a monster, "Girl-Thing." The pair returned in *Eerie* #129 to witness murderers discard an infant into the swamp. You guessed it. The child becomes a swamp beast, and baby makes three.

## Man-Thing

“... for whatever knows fear burns at the Man-Thing’s touch!” How cool is Man-Thing? Making a swamp outside Citrusville, Florida his home, carousing with Howard the Duck, and guarding the Nexus of Realities. Although created by Stan Lee, Roy Thomas, Gerry Conway, and Gray Morrow, Steve Gerber -- who also gave us Howard the Duck, Hellcow, and the Elf with a Gun – really brought Man-Thing to life through *Adventure into Fear* and 39 issues of *Man-Thing*. Although developed about the same time as Swamp Thing, Marvel’s monster was not intended to replicate that phenomenon. Indeed, both were independent of each other, believe it or not. Reviewing Man-Thing’s origins will prod memories of almost any swamp-creature story you’ve read, however. Look up *Savage Tales #1* (1971), where to save his life biochemist Ted Sallis injected himself with a super-soldier serum he’d been designing. He then drives off from his lab only to crash into the swamp. His body catches fire, the chemicals react with the swamp, and the rest is history. Unlike Swamp Thing, Man-Thing has no personality but reacts empathically to others, most notably against fear which causes his touch to burn those feeling that mind-killing emotion. Arguably, he’s the loneliest of all swamp denizens.



I didn’t intend this list to be exhaustive, but merely to represent how trends and motifs generate and regenerate – I mean, dead people, mysterious processes, maybe a special potion, you get it, right? -- and how swamps continue to excite dread across peoples and generations all over the world. If after experiencing any of the above you still long for that cabin on the edge of the Everglades, be my guest. I might not stop by next Thanksgiving, however.





