

Swamp Thing Study Guide

Swamp Thing by Alan Moore

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Plot Summary

Swamp Thing Volume 1 reproduces issues 21 through 27 of the comic book Saga of the Swamp Thing, which first ran in 1984. Though writer Alan Moore took over writing duties with issue 20, issue 21 is when Moore radically alters the origin of the title character and creates a new kind of Swamp Thing.

In issue #21, a villain botanist named Jason Woodrue, whose supervillain alterego is the plant-man Floronic Man, is hired by someone only identified as "the old man" to dissect Swamp Thing's body and discover the source of his power. Woodrue discovers that Swamp Thing only absorbed the consciousness of Alec Holland, and is not a form of Alec Holland himself. That is, Swamp Thing is truly a monster and has no inner humanity. The old man is killed when Swamp Thing awakens and discovers this revelation, asphyxiating the old man out of rage.

Issue #22 has Swamp Thing returned to his swamp in Louisiana, part of the swamp in a self-induced coma, having no will to live. Woodrue consumes a yam-like tuber that grew from Swamp Thing, and hooks his mind up to a flower that grew from Swamp Thing. The result is that Woodrue acquires the consciousness of the entire earth's vegetation. He goes mad from this overwhelming experience, and becomes convinced that he must eradicate all animal life in revenge for what humans and animals have done to earth and plants through industry, etc.

Issue #23 has Swamp Thing, in a dream sequence, coming to grips with his lack of humanity and existence as a plant-man. This happens as Jason Woodrue, as the Floronic Man, destroying the town of Lacroix by ordering vines to crush houses and plants to produce too much oxygen, causing an atmosphere that explodes in flames after a match is lit.

In issue #24, Swamp Thing confronts the Floronic Man, and defeats his evil plan with simple logic: if all animal life was killed, there would be no beings to exchange gases with plants, and so the plants would die as well. The Floronic Man goes mad, confronted with this knowledge, and is eventually sent to Arkham Asylum by the Justice League of America.

In issue #25, a strange psychic named Jason Blood comes to Baton Rouge to battle a being called the Monkey King. The Monkey King is controlled by an autistic boy named Paul at the Elysium Lawns Center for Autistic Children, which Swamp Thing companion Abby Arcane has just joined as an employee. The Monkey King begins praying on children's fear in the center.

Issue #26 has Jason Blood warning Abby Arcane of the Monkey King. Abby goes to Swamp Thing for help, who can sense the fear in the air, and they head to the center to confront the Monkey King. A demon named Etrigan also arrives to battle the Monkey King.



In issue #27, Etrigan wishes to kill and eat Paul to stop the Monkey King, and Swamp Thing battles the demon to stop him. Paul and Abby flee to the swamp and are confronted by the Monkey King. Paul overcomes his fears and tells the Monkey King he is not afraid of him. The Monkey King literally shrinks in size, to the point that Etrigan makes a bite-sized snack of him. Etrigan warns Abby that some other sinister force is at work but will not elaborate. Swamp Thing returns Paul to the Children's Center.



Foreword by Ramsey Campbell, and Introduction by Alan Moore

Foreword by Ramsey Campbell, and Introduction by Alan Moore Summary

Foreword by Ramsey Campbell: During the late sixties, comics underwent a paradigm shift. They turned darker and edgier, and dealt with themes such as heroin addiction and racial intolerance that would have been unthinkable to approach under the strict Comics Code established earlier in the century. Campbell feels that, though this move toward darker tones and themes was laudable, stories at that time were almost universally poorly written, too shrill, obvious, and melodramatic. However, without this period, we would not have an excellent writer like Alan Moore.

Alan Moore has an unerring ear for dialogue, a concise and clear storytelling style, and great pacing. What he has done with Swamp Thing is something not many have attempted: he has taken over an established character and deconstructed him, rewriting his origin. He has also resurrected a minor DC villain, the Floronic Man, and given him a special importance as the "darker side" of the Swamp Thing's vegetable nature.

After a trip through his own consciousness, Swamp Thing re-emerges into what Campbell calls a "poetic reinvention" of the original character. With lesser writers, this move might endanger the ability of the comic to terrify and horrify like good horror fiction should do, but Moore's writing is accomplished enough to retain profound emotions like terror, awe, comedy, and tragedy. Campbell in fact believes Moore's stint on Swamp Thing stands among the finest examples of contemporary horror fiction.

Introduction by Alan Moore: Writing about the 1980s, Moore points out how horror iconography had permeated into popular culture, at a time in which society had to deal with many real-life horrors, such as AIDS, nuclear proliferation, rises in missing children, etc. Why is horror so popular? Moore suggests it may numb us to real-life horrors, a sort of "inoculation" we hope will prevent a more serious horror. But no matter how prevalent horror fiction is, Swamp Thing is a different kind of horror fiction.

This volume is in face comic book horror, which Moore places into its own category. One consequence of comic book horror is that, in this case, Swamp Thing exists in the same DC universe as Superman and Batman. This presents a problem, because horror usually depends upon a carefully contained and controlled environment; to paraphrase Moore, there is the danger in comic book horror that a punning superhero in green tights may swoop down at any moment. However, the gifted writer can use this huge and fertile universe to his advantage if he avoids such pitfalls.

The other difference in comic book horror is duration. Comic books never end, and any given title or character was probably in print before the average reader was born. Even



a canceled series' hero will make guest appearances and will probably be resurrected with a new title in a decade or so. Swamp Thing is no exception, being first conceived in 1972, canceled, then resurrected a few years later.

Moore lastly provides a summary of Swamp Thing up until he took the writing reins of the series at Issue #21 of the second run. Swamp Thing originally was the story of Alec Holland and his wife, scientists who were working on a "bio-restorative" compound. Their lab was sabotaged and blown up with a bomb. Holland's wife died in the explosion while Holland, in flames, leaped into the swamp covered in his compounds. He emerged as half-man, half-vegetable—Swamp Thing. His nemesis was the evil techno-sorcerer Anton Arcane, and he was given companions in Abigail Arcane, Anton's niece, and private investigator Matthew Cable.

In the second run, Swamp Thing defeats a new manifestation of Anton Arcane (now a monstrous spider-man). However, a government agency lead by one General Sunderland pursue Swamp Thing for the secret to his existence, and eventually Sunderland apparently "kills" Swamp Thing in a hail of gunfire. This is where the present volume begins.

Foreword by Ramsey Campbell, and Introduction by Alan Moore Analysis

Foreword by Ramsey Campbell: Ramsey Campbell, a well-regarded modern horror novelist, introduces the volume by establishing a historical context, such that the reprinted comic books do not exist in a vacuum, so to speak. In a couple of concise paragraphs, Campbell sets the stage for Alan Moore's triumphant entrance into the comic book medium. In this way, the melodramatic, edgy stories of the 1960s and 1970s are important precursors for the work of Alan Moore. Adult subject matter was tackled in these stories; it was up to people like Alan Moore to take this precedent of using adult subject matter and present it in an adult rather than juvenile way.

By comparing Alan Moore's run on Saga of the Swamp Thing with the finest examples of contemporary horror fiction, Campbell is making a case that the comic book medium is a legitimate art form. Because the comic book was originally intended for kids, it has struggled for such legitimacy in the face of many dismissing the medium as mere juvenilia. Campbell wants to make it clear that the comic books reprinted in the volume are not just fine examples within the media, but across all horror fiction media. This is an important declaration, seeing as it comes from a well-respected horror novelist working in a more traditionally accepted medium.

Introduction by Alan Moore: Like Ramsey Campbell's foreword, Alan Moore's introduction aims to provide some context to the comic books to follow. Whereas Campbell examined the historical context, Moore concentrates on a contemporary context, noting that horror fiction has become popular in a time of horror-inducing real world circumstances.



The introduction also serves as a warning of sorts. Comic book horror fiction is different from other types of horror fiction and has to be read and interpreted differently. Like Campbell, Moore is legitimizing the form by separating it into its own category and ascribing rules to this categorization.

Because of the "duration" idiosyncrasy of the comic book medium—their relative endlessness—Moore feels it is his duty to ground the reader in a brief history of the Swamp Thing, including a detailed account of his origin. Only then can the reader appreciate what Moore has done in issue #21 with "reinventing" Swamp Thing by changing that origin.



Book One

Book One Summary

In Washington D.C., a doctor name Jason Woodrue wonders about an "old man" who is elsewhere pounding on a door or window. The old man is gradually covered in blood. The rest of the tale is then told in flashback as Woodrue remembers when he first met the old man. The man had arranged for Woodrue to be released from prison in exchange for performing an autopsy/dissection of Swamp Thing. After Swamp Thing was shot, the man's corporation had brought him to Washington D.C. and encased him in ice. The old man wants to know why Alec Holland's "bio-restorative formula" apparently worked on Swamp Thing when it was not designed to affect human tissue. Woodrue is revealed to be the supervillain the Floronic Man. Like Swamp Thing, he is made of plant tissue, but he sprays on a skin in order to pass for a regular human.

Woodrue conducts the dissection, but finds that, while Swamp Thing has plant lungs and a heart, etc., none of it functions—his organs do nothing. Woodrue fails to make progress and he is threatened with going back to prison. Suddenly, it dawns on him. When Holland had his accident and died in the swamp, the swamp "consumed" Holland, and in doing so took on Holland's consciousness and personality. Woodrue believes that consciousness can be passed along with foodstuffs, like primitive cannibal societies eating their wise men in order to gain wisdom. However, the implication is that Swamp Thing is not half-man, half-vegetable as previously thought, but all vegetable. Swamp Thing has nothing resembling humanity; he is essentially a golem, purely plant.

The old man disallows Woodrue from pursuing any further research although Woodrue is desperate to do so; he has heard enough, and plans to send Woodrue back to prison. Woodrue is furious and plots to kill the man. As the old man takes a peek at Swamp Thing in his cryochamber, who has been regenerating, Woodrue takes over the building's computer system which controls doors, etc., trapping the old man in the room with Swamp Thing.

Swamp Thing regenerates and reawakens. He reads Woodrue's file about how he is not human, and this sends him into a psychotic rage, a rage Woodrue was depending upon for his revenge against the old man. Swamp Thing focuses his rage on the old man, who cannot escape the locked chamber, and Swamp Thing kills the old man just as Woodrue planned.

Book One Analysis

Moore is capable of many literary allusions and references. This book is clearly modeled after one of the original masters of horror, Edgar Allan Poe, and his short story "The Tell-Tale Heart." As in that story, Book One is told primarily in first-person from the perspective of a madman who plots to kill someone identified only as "the old man."



This first-person perspective allows us to step into the mind of a madman, to even comprehend and sympathize with his reasons for murder, and as such this intimacy feels the reader with unease.

Among the first words of the book remark upon the heavy rain falling throughout the murder of the old man. Rain is a common device to evoke a dreary and frightening mood throughout fiction, perfect for this tale of murder.

Beyond the obvious horror element of a murder, the book is full of macabre elements that increase a sense of terror and dread. These include: Jason Woodrue's monstrous real form and the fact he covers it with a spray-on skin; Swamp Thing's dissection, down to the depiction of individual organs; and the fact that the tale is bookended by heavy rain falling, rain being a common device to evoke a dreary and frightening mood throughout fiction, perfect for this tale of murder.



Book Two

Book Two Summary

Abby Arcane and Matt Cable (husband and wife) are searching the Louisiana bayou for any sign of Swamp Thing. They locate him, but he is overgrown and unmoving, as if part of the swamp. They are greeted by Jason Woodrue. Jason Woodrue hides his true identity as the plant-man the Floronic Man by spraying "Flexi-Fresh" from a spray can on his body, which mimics real flesh. Otherwise, Woodrue is a yellow, bark and leaf covered creature. Woodrue explains that Swamp Thing was moved to Washington D.C. for Woodrue to examine, and Woodrue helped Swamp Thing escape by bringing him back to the swamp. This story is of course only partially accurate, with Woodrue conveniently leaving the part out about conspiring to kill the old man. Swamp Thing's problem is psychological, Woodrue goes on, as the monster discovered he is no longer Alec Holland, and thus he has nothing to live for and has surrendered himself to the swamp. Abby is emotional at the news, and disgusted by the way Swamp Thing has "grown into" the swampy surroundings.

Swamp Thing, meanwhile, is lost in his (or Alec's) memories. In a surrealist dreamscape, Swamp Thing remembers Alec's wedding, where he loses his wife Linda, who falls through the floor like a ghost, and dons a Swamp Thing "suit."

Woodrue takes a yam-like tuber growing from Swamp Thing's body and ingests it, as part of his theory that consciousness can be passed on with food. Woodrue is envious of Swamp Thing's serenity and oneness with the swamp, and he wishes to attain this level of oneness with the plant world as well. At the same time, Swamp Thing is battling against monsters for his humanity, symbolized by Alec Holland's skull. The skull talks to Swamp Thing and convinces him that his own humanity is worth fighting for. In the real world, Abby begs for "Alec" to come back to her, and to hell with any so-called scientific evidence, but Swamp Thing is still in his self-induced coma.

Having ingested part of Swamp Thing, Woodrue now connects his mind to a flower that grew from Swamp Thing via an electrical device. In a traumatic experience, Woodrue not only gains the consciousness of Swamp Thing and the swamp, but of flowers and plants around the world, from Alaska and Africa and beyond. This feeling overwhelms him, and Woodrue's humanity is overtaken by earth's plant consciousness. In his insanity, Woodrue decides he must rid the earth of all animal life, and especially humans, considering the damage they've done to the planet and plants. Woodrue feels he has "ascended" and attained the oneness with the plants that he sought.

Book Two Analysis

The first depiction of Swamp Thing in this book is startling; he has surrendered to the swamp and has literally grown into the ground, his fingers extended like vines, etc. Most



importantly, his eye sockets and mouth area have filled up with water. This indicates that he has given up breathing and is truly "dead to the world" in a human sense. Moreover, the water provides a visual transition to the shifting and shimmering world of Swamp Thing's unconsciousness where he battles for his humanity. In these dream sequences, the coloring changes to a lighter and more pastel hue, a decision which both differentiates the dream sequence from reality, but which speaks to the fact that Swamp Thing's memory is hazy and he cannot firmly grasp it.

Woodrue's consumption of Swamp Thing's tuber, and his subsequent mind meld with a flower cut from Swamp Thing, is part of a classic tradition of scientists overstepping their bounds, a la Frankenstein. He goes mad from the experiment and acquires the consciousness of all of earth's vegetation.

In the great tradition of archenemies resembling their heroic counterparts in one way or another, Woodrue/The Floronic Man is an ideal foil for Swamp Thing. They both understand the intense allure of surrendering to the "green world" of pure plant, leaving their humanity behind. However, Swamp Thing in the end holds on to a shred of humanity, and is motivated to continue on because of humanity, despite new revelations about his origin. The Floronic Man is ready to wholly abandon his humanity, and so his ill-fated experiment is a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. Humanity is championed here without a doubt; Swamp Thing is kind and virtuous because of it, while the Floronic Man is cruel and evil without it.



Book Three

Book Three Summary

Swamp Thing is still in his coma as part of the swamp. He is at peace, but something deep in his consciousness tells him something is wrong, and he tries to find out what. Meanwhile, three young men out on a joyride in the bayou are strangled to death by vines controlled by the now insane Floronic Man. Swamp Thing, in his coma, senses the innate wrongness of the Floronic Man/Jason Woodrue in his plant consciousness, comparing it to a cancer, and he tries to remember past events. Memories are fleeting and fragmented, however, and he doesn't quite understand who or what Woodrue is. He remembers the name Abby Arcane and also tries to remember who that is. Abby, meanwhile, is depressed and walking alone in the swamp. The Floronic Man has moved on, but the vines he brought to life are still around. Abby stumbles upon the terrifying image of one of the strangled teenagers, and then the vines grab her. At the same time, Swamp Thing is beginning to piece his past together - his being shot, Woodrue's research, etc.

The Floronic Man, meanwhile, has entered the small town of Lacroix. Now in control of all vegetation, he telepathically orders many buildings in the town to be crushed by huge vines. He kills the local sheriff who tries to shoot him, and then orders a young boy named William Anslinger to fetch a video camera for recording. As the boy records, the Floronic Man grows moss and brambles over all doors and windows in town so no one can escape their homes. Then, he causes all plants to produce oxygen at an accelerated rate. This "hyperoxygenated" state is very volatile, and when a towns person strikes a match, the whole town bursts into flames due to the elevated oxygen levels. Anslinger's family was in one of the houses and he is understandably devastated. Anslinger is sent off to warn the world of the Floronic Man and his plan.

In the comatose state, Swamp Thing becomes coherent. He blames Woodrue/Floronic Man for his agony and for taking away his humanity. He awakes from his coma just in time to save Abby Arcane from death by strangulation from the vine. Meanwhile, the boy Anslinger warns the police in the next town. A couple of calls later, the Justice League of America is informed of the situation. A police officer in the town who watches Anslinger's tape readies his own family for the coming "green apocalypse" by destroying all his house plants and killing his lawn with a toxic herbicide.

The Floronic Man, despite the pleading of the surviving townspeople, declares a new "green millennium" in which all animal life will perish and plants will reign. Swamp Thing arrives at this point and says "No more," setting the stage for a showdown between the plant men.



Book Three Analysis

Book Three sets up what is essentially a race of parallel storylines with a time constraint: Will Swamp Thing make sense of his memories and decide to "live" again in time to stop the Floronic Man? Swamp Thing's status quo at the beginning of the volume is complete inner peace: it will take something extraordinary for him to wake up and rejoin the "red world" of humanity that has done nothing but hurt him in the past.

The parallel storylines - the Floronic Man's rampage, and Swamp Thing's awakening - mirror each other in intensity. Swamp Thing's first kernel of unease comes with just a slight feeling of wrongness in the swamp consciousness. He divines the name "Woodrue" but does not understand the significance of that name. Similarly, the Floronic Man's massacre starts small, by his order for vines to kill three teenagers out joyriding in the swamp. As the Floronic Man's rampage escalates into the destruction of the entire small town of Lacroix, Swamp Thing acquires an escalating sense of comprehension and memories, and also of urgency and wrongness. The Floronic Man is identified as a "cancer" in the plant consciousness, and eventually Swamp Thing heaps the blame for all of his troubles upon Woodrue.

Master storyteller that he is, Moore times Swamp Thing's emergence from his coma at an opportunity for heroism - Abby Arcane being nearly strangled to death by the Floronic Man's vines. Swamp Thing is thus able to "save the day" and emerge in dramatic and heroic fashion. And by linking these two events, the implication is that Swamp Thing arose in part because of desire for a human connection with Abby Arcane, in addition to a wish to save humanity from the Floronic Man. Thus, humanity has won out in Swamp Thing's inner battle.



Book Four

Book Four Summary

High above Earth, the Justice League has gathered in a space station. They watch the Floronic Man declare his "green millennium" and explain his plan about the earth's plant life increasing its oxygen output in order to make everywhere extremely flammable, so all animal life will go up in flames.

The Justice League talk about what to do, but no one has a solution. How do they fight the world's vegetation? Green Arrow laments that they always manage to save big cities like Metropolis and Gotham City, but no one is looking out for small towns like Lacroix, Louisiana. They are not aware of Swamp Thing, who has now confronted the Floronic Man.

The Floronic Man thinks that Swamp Thing is a friend here to help, and so he offers a human woman covered in vines as a gift. Swamp Thing punches him and releases the woman, at which point the Floronic Man calls Swamp Thing a "traitor" and they fight. The townspeople flee while the Floronic Man is distracted, with one older man leaving to fetch "Evangeline." The Floronic Man causes a large wall to topple on top of Swamp Thing, who is knocked out.

Meanwhile, on the space station, the Justice League searches for options to combat the Floronic Man menace. Superman believes there is hope, but several options - Firestorm's atomic restructuring abilities, Raven's telepathic powers, and using "alien vegetables" all won't work.

Back in Louisiana, the Floronic Man goes to attack Abby Arcane, but is interrupted when the older man returns with Evangeline, which is what he named his chainsaw. The Floronic Man easily gets control of the chainsaw, and gets ready to use it on Abby Arcane in a symbolic gesture for what trees have had to suffer.

At this point Swamp Thing reappears and breaks the Floronic Man's arm. Swamp Thing says to the villain that he is in fact hurting the green world, not helping it, with his destruction. The Floronic Man yells that Swamp Thing is lying, and that all he has done is for the good of the plants. Swamp Thing finally defeats the Floronic Man with this logic: if all animal life was gone, how would plants thrive without beings to exchange gases with? The Floronic Man realizes the error of his ways. He loses communication with the vegetation of the world, "uprooted" and forced to go into exile, cut off from plant consciousness. Thus exiled, the Floronic Man goes mad and runs away screaming.

In an epilogue, Swamp Thing explains to Abby Arcane that "Alec Holland" is dead, but Swamp Thing is happy with the state of his existence. A shattered, insane Floronic Man is confronted by Superman and Green Lantern, and taken off to Arkham Asylum, a mental institution for supervillains.



Book Four Analysis

The famed Justice League appears in this volume, the first instance of the problem/opportunity Moore hinted at his introduction - the reality that Swamp Thing lives in a large DC universe full of costumed superheroes and other oddities. The "problem" part of this reality is configured along the lines of this question: why couldn't near-omnipotent Superman or others of his ilk simply swoop down and save the day each and every time? To anticipate this problem, Moore has made the Floronic Man's scheme particularly ingenious and impervious to help from anyone but Swamp Thing. The Floronic Man is acting as an agent of the world's vegetation, vegetation which will simultaneously hyper-produce oxygen in order to make the entire earth extremely flammable. The scheme is custom-designed for Swamp Thing and no one else, as only Swamp Thing can battle at the level of plant consciousness. Moore is thus able to inject excitement in the DC comic book aficionado with the appearance of the Justice League, while keeping them at a distance by their inability to combat the menace.

The appearance of the chainsaw named "Evangeline" is another of Moore's postmodern nods. The Floronic Man even states that modern horror fiction has "canonized" the chainsaw as a weapon through the likes of Texas Chainsaw Massacre films and others. The jagged-tooth silhouette of Evangeline serves as a kind of ominous foreground element when Swamp Thing asks if humans will respect plants. "Evangeline" is probably an ironic reference to the Longfellow poem of the same name, which among other things is a celebration of nature and American landscapes.

Swamp Thing and Abby Arcane share a moment at night after the Floronic Man has been defeated and chased away. Swamp Thing proclaims that Alec Holland is truly dead. Abby asks if Swamp Thing is happy, and he says that he is, after which they share a hug. Despite Swamp Thing's proclamation, this is a very tender, and very human, moment, with Abby's grief over Holland tempered by Swamp Thing's contentment, followed by the universal human gesture of the hug. The book's final panel, a full-page picture of Swamp Thing in the swamp against a setting sun smiling and raising his arms in joy, is in fact an intensely human moment as well. Not only is joy a human emotion, but the fact that Swamp Thing's arms are raised to the sky indicates a kind of reverential love or acknowledgement of a higher power, also a quality peculiar to humans. And so while Holland may be ostensibly dead, Swamp Thing is perhaps more human than ever.



Book Five

Book Five Summary

A mysterious man, Jason Blood, arrives in Baton Rouge. He informs a man that he will die later that day at 5:32 PM exactly, impaled by a swordfish. Later, he buys a ouija board and then checks into a hotel. Meanwhile, Swamp Thing and Abby Arcane are hanging out together in the swamp. Swamp Thing no longer breathes, calling it a habit that took much effort. Abby informs Swamp Thing that she just got a job in Baton Rouge at the Elysium Lawns Center for Autistic Children. One strange boy there, Paul, insists on everyone spelling their words, and he has drawn pictures of a white monster that attacks if one doesn't spell things right.

Walking through town, Jason Blood informs another man, matter-of-factly, that he will be charged with manslaughter later that night and imprisoned. Meanwhile, Abby is estranged from husband Matt and quickly excuses herself from the apartment for work. Matt, unbeknownst to Abby, has the strange compulsion and power to summon demons and monsters when Abby is not around, making his apartment a personal hell when Abby is not around.

Paul flashes back to remember his parents' demise. They were playing with a ouija board, and spelled out the name of a demon. A demon then appeared, a white monkey-like beast called The Monkey King, who killed the parents by scaring them to death. The Monkey King approached Paul and licked him like a happy dog, as if Paul was his master.

Swamp Thing remembers Alec Holland burning to death, and the memory fills him with fear. In fact, he detects the Monkey King by the fear it is creating, though he doesn't know what it is exactly.

Jason Blood figures out with the ouija board that The Monkey King got loose via amateurs playing with the board. This was his reason to come to Baton Rouge: to defeat the Monkey King. Elsewhere in town, Blood's macabre predictions come true when the man who Blood said would be charged with manslaughter is arguing with his wife in the car when he loses sight of the road and slams on the brakes. A swordfish statue he had attached to the roof that his wife bought at auction flies forward and impales the first man Blood confronted, just as Blood predicted it would, exactly at 5:32 PM. Abby Arcane witnesses the accident and is horrified.

That night, the Monkey King appears before Paul in the Autistic Children Center and begins to "consume" the fear of children sleeping in the rooms.



Book Five Analysis

Jason Blood is explicitly tied to the occult, with his disarming manner, red eyes, prophecies of death, and his pursuit of a ouija board. His mysterious appearance spurs the readers' interest on in several ways. We want to know if his prophecy about the swordfish impalement comes true, and in just what manner. We also want to know what such a cosmopolitan sorcerer is doing in the small town of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Finally, what will he do with the ouija board? In just two pages, Moore has laid out several interesting storylines.

The final storyline thread to be laid out, and the primary one, concerns Paul at the Autistic Center, namely his obsession with spelling and his crude drawings of the Monkey King as connected to people spelling. Blood, Paul, and the Monkey King will occupy the next three books.

Abby is characterized as virtuous and kind by her agreeing to work at the Autistic Center, even after her unnerving encounter with Paul. By contrast, Matt her husband is portrayed as callous and cruel by his failure to understand Abby's commitment to the children and his dismissal of the children as little more than beasts. In respect to Matt, the man's alcoholism and his compulsion to summon demons to keep him company are not unrelated. Moore here has literalized the nightmare of alcoholism, which is often described as a kind of personal hell, by giving Matt a very literal hell along with his alcoholism. Hell is further connected with Matt's alcoholism after he crashes his car and the talking fly offers him a deal with the devil.

Paul's harrowing remembrance of his parents' death at the hands of the Monkey King is given particular intensity and horror because of sensual details provided by Moore. The sound of Monkey King feeding on the parents is described as exactly the sound of a head of lettuce being munched on. Also, the sensual detail that Paul remembers most is the stickiness of the Monkey King's snout (presumably made so by the blood of the parents) when the Monkey King licked his cheek.



Book Six

Book Six Summary

Jason Blood confronts Abby Arcane and tells her of the danger of the Monkey King at the Autistic Children Center. He implores her to go to rescue the children, as she is just good and innocent enough to perhaps defy the Monkey King. She doesn't believe him at first and goes to work as usual. Most of the children have been reckless and restless at the Center, all disturbed by the Monkey King's midnight romp. They are all drawing pictures of the Monkey King.

That night, Matt yells at Abby for spending all her time with the autistic children, who he compares to beasts. Matt seems unhinged; Abby is frightened of him and leaves. She runs into the swamp and finds the swamp thing. She feels the fear in the air, and so does Swamp Thing, and Swamp Thing instinctively takes Abby to the Autistic Center as the "source" of this fear.

That night, the Monkey King's modus operandi is revealed: he takes the literal form of whatever is most frightening to someone, and then consumes that fear, leaving the victim in psychological disarray.

On the roof, observing, is a yellow demon-man named Etrigan. As Swamp Thing and Abby reach the Monkey King, Etrigan blasts down through the skylight window to attack the Monkey King as well.

Matt, despondent and angry, gets drunk and takes his car for a ride. On a curve, he crashes into a tree trunk, wrecking his car and leaving himself mortally wounded.

Book Six Analysis

Even though the Monkey King has been visually depicted in Book Five (in Paul's dream, primarily, and thus only to the reader), Book Six continues to build tension about the demon's menace. The fact that the reader is fully aware of what the Monkey King is and the danger he poses to the children of the center, but most of the characters in the book are either disbelieving or unaware of the Monkey King, is a device called dramatic irony. The fact the reader knows of the menace increases fear for the characters' safety, tying the reader closer to them, in the manner of someone watching a horror film and yelling "Don't go through that door!" to a character who is about to get attacked. In the case of Book Six, suspense and tension are furthered by the strange behavior of the children after the Monkey King's attack, their drawing of the same white-furred creature they saw in their dreams, and Jason Blood's ominous warning to Abby.

The Monkey King feeds upon fear, and appropriately there are several creative figures of speech to try to capture fear's essence. Moore begins the volume by quoting James Agee from his "Night of the Hunter" screenplay, stating "for every child, rich and poor,

there's a time of running through a dark place" (p. 128), etc. Then, through the narration of Abby Arcane, fear is further characterized as "dry, prickly, a leaden pressure on the eardrums... a fat, dark worm that writhes in your gut." (p. 133).



Book Seven

Book Seven Summary

Etrigan and the Monkey King wrestle after Etrigan emerged from the skylight window in the last book. The Monkey King gets the upper hand on Etrigan, smashing his face into the ground, but Swamp Thing levels the beast with a strong punch. Swamp Thing commands Abby Arcane to run for the swamp and away from danger with Paul. Swamp Thing not only fights the Monkey King but the various fear monsters he has created from the darkest fears of the children the beast has been feeding upon.

Meanwhile, as from the last book, Matt has gotten into a near-fatal drunken driving accident, and now lies in his wrecked car, trapped and bleeding to death. A talking fly (the insect) appears to him, and offers him a bargain.

In the swamp, Etrigan catches up with Paul and Abby. Etrigan wishes to eat Paul in order to kill the 'master' of the Monkey King, punching Abby away when she tries to intervene. But Swamp Thing is nearby, and before Etrigan can eat Paul, Swamp Thing hits him with an uprooted tree. The two fight. Etrigan scratches off Swamp Thing's arm, but his plant regenerative powers allow him to simply reattach the arm back to the shoulder.

While they battle, the Monkey King finds a hiding Abby and Paul. The Monkey King makes Abby's fear of her husband Matt and his psychosis come alive. Meanwhile, as the real Matt is dying in the car wreck, he accepts the bargain from the talking fly. For the bargain to be complete, Matt swallows the fly.

Back in the swamp, Abby is nearly consumed by her fear, but Paul yells at the Monkey King to stop. He declares he is not afraid of the Monkey King, no matter what form he takes, as he has no power. This declaration shrinks the physical size of the Monkey King. Paul continues to yell that he is not afraid, and the Monkey King shrinks to a size smaller than a hand. Etrigan comes back and promptly eats the now-tiny Monkey King, defeating his evil. This time, Etrigan lets Paul live. Etrigan warns Abby that it was not only a ouija board that released the Monkey King, but another sinister force, and then Etrigan leaves. Swamp Thing takes Paul back to the Autistic Children Center. Abby chases Etrigan, but when she catches up he has turned into Jason Blood. Blood reveals he made a pact with the demon and they now occupy the same physical form. Blood has no answers for Abby as for Etrigan's cryptic warning. In the last scene, a completely healthy and uninjured Matt drives up to Abby and, very kind, invites her for a ride back home, which she accepts.

Book Seven Analysis

The plot of Books Five and Six have finally coalesced, to the point where all the major players are together, facing off in the Center for Autistic Children. Thus, there is a lot of



physical action in Book Seven, in the typical superhero mode of resolving the conflict with a spectacular battle.

The battle is complicated when it is revealed Etrigan wishes to kill Paul, ostensibly the master of the Monkey King, so that the demon cannot be summoned again. This is contrary to Swamp Thing's value for humanity, and so the erstwhile allies collide as enemies in a violent brawl.

Ironically, then, the true resolution to the conflict does not come about with physical violence, but the verbal courage of child Paul, who shouts at the Monkey King that he is not afraid of the demon. This "logic" or "word-based" resolution echoes Book Four's conclusion, in which Swamp Thing defeats the Floronic Man by logically ripping his plan apart.

Parallel to this main plot, Matt has his accident in the subplot. The talking fly is an unusual but perfect creature to deliver a Faustian bargain (that is, "deal with the devil") to Matt. The fly has long been associated with disease, death, and hell, in everything from Emily Dickinson's "I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died" to the demon Beezlebub's nickname as "Lord of the Flies." The fact that Matt consumes the fly to seal the bargain obviously indicates that some sort of demonic evil is now inside of Matt, but the consequences of this will not be known until later. The "cliffhanger" ending of this subplot, meant to propel the reader on to the next issue, speaks to Alan Moore's Introduction, and the fact that comic book horror never really ends.



Characters

Swamp Thing

Swamp Thing is the monster-hero title character. In his original backstory, he started as mild-mannered botanist Alec Holland, who was researching a bio-restorative formula with his wife Linda in the Louisiana bayou. Sinister forces conspired to sabotage his work, and his lab was dynamited with the two scientists inside. Linda died, and Alec, burning alive, fled into the water of the swamp. There, it was assumed that Holland's formula combined with the swampy plant material to save Holland by making him a literal "Swamp Thing."

Writer Alan Moore changes the nature of Swamp Thing's existence, with Jason Woodrue realizing that Swamp Thing only absorbed the consciousness of Alec Holland like a body absorbs nutrients by eating; Alec Holland is in fact long dead, and Swamp Thing is just a monstrous plant golem, and not a human trapped in a monster's body. This revelation forces Swamp Thing to re-examine his existence. His first reaction is insane rage, and then defeat as he surrenders to the swamp. However, he decides humanity is worth fighting for, and he awakens in time to save Abby Arcane, and then the world, from the Floronic Man's plot to kill all animal life on earth.

In this volume, Swamp Thing is just beginning to grasp this new conception of his existence. He has different characteristics from the "old" Swamp Thing - he doesn't breathe, for one example, and he is more in tune than ever with the natural world, able to sense what the swamp feels and turning color when autumn comes.

Part of Swamp Thing's interest is his very human characteristics despite his monstrous form. He seems to care deeply for human life, defending it at great physical cost to himself. He establishes an odd but strong friendship with Abby Arcane. He speaks slowly, but is wise about the world and human behavior. He is simple and virtuous, with a black-and-white value system.

Jason Woodrue/The Floronic Man

Jason Woodrue in many ways is a sort of doppelganger of Swamp Thing. They share many similarities. They are both vegetable-man hybrids, composed of plant material but assuming human form. Their alter egos are both brilliant botanists. In these ways, Woodrue as the supervillain The Floronic Man makes for a very interesting foil to Swamp Thing.

Woodrue's scientific curiosity leads him to discover the true origin of Swamp Thing, that of plant material that merely absorbed Alec Holland's consciousness. One of the consequences of this revelation is that Swamp Thing is more plant than man. Woodrue envies this aspect of Swamp Thing, for he considers the "green" world of vegetation to be a kind of heaven, full of peace and contentment. By linking himself to Swamp Thing



via electrodes and eating some of Swamp Thing, Woodrue hopes to attain this oneness with the plant world. He does so, but it overwhelms him into a kind of madness, and he becomes the tool of an angry planet. This is the classic case, a la Frankenstein, of a scientist trying to play God and overstepping his bounds with terrible consequences.

Woodrue makes it his mission to usher in a new green world, one devoid of any animal life. In this way, Woodrue has completely lost any aspect of humanity in his bid to achieve oneness with the plants. Here is where Swamp Thing sharply differs from the Floronic Man. He values humanity, despite or perhaps even because of the fact that he now knows Alec Holland is dead. Woodrue's insanity is proven by the fact that he has lost touch with humanity. In his final scenes, Woodrue has tried to apply Flexi-Flesh to avoid detection by the Justice League. However, his various roots and brambles have overgrown, and Woodrue appears as a horrid monster with Flexi-Flesh applied over this growth, an appropriate appearance considering his shattered mind.

Abigail Arcane

Abby Arcane is a longtime companion of Swamp Thing. Originally, she is the niece of Swamp Thing's archenemy, the sorcerer Anton Arcane. In this volume, Abby befriends Swamp Thing but is also dealing with severe problems, including estrangement from her husband Matt Cable and dealing with the fact that Swamp Thing is not really Alec Holland but simply a monster. She is a paranoid schizophrenic and sometimes imagines that something terrible is chasing her or observing her.

Matt Cable

Matt Cable is a private investigator, Abigail Arcane's husband, and companion of Swamp Thing. Matt has severe problems. He is an alcoholic, frequently lashing out at his wife, berating her for getting a job at the Elysium Lawns Center for Autistic Children for one example. Perhaps more disturbingly, he has the compulsion to create fantastic and horrifying creatures to keep him company in his apartment.

The Old Man

The Old Man is the unnamed antagonist of Jason Woodrue in Book One. The Old Man is an employee of the agency which shot Swamp Thing in previous issues, and he has charged Jason Woodrue with finding out what Swamp Thing is and how he is alive. The Old Man treats ex-convict Woodrue contemptuously, not permitting him to finish his research after an initial breakthrough. For this, Woodrue plots to and succeeds in killing the Old Man at the hands of an enraged Swamp Thing.



William Anslinger

William Anslinger is a boy resident of Lacroix, Louisiana, a town the Floronic Man destroys in his insanity. Anslinger is charged with videotaping the carnage and then bringing the Floronic Man's message to the world. Anslinger loses his family to the Floronic Man's massacre.

Linda Holland

Linda Holland was Alec Holland's wife who was killed in the original explosion which resulted in Swamp Thing. Linda figures prominently in Swamp Thing's dreams as he attempts to piece together his unconsciousness. Linda's unjust death fuels Swamp Thing's rage and desire to make the world right.

The Justice League of America

The Justice League of America is a legendary team of superheroes who protect the earth from various calamities. It includes Superman, Green Lantern, Firestorm, and many other heroes. They are informed of the Floronic Man's plot, but even their mighty powers cannot stop his scheme.

Jason Blood/Etrigan

Jason Blood is an unnerving human sorcerer who comes to Baton Rouge after sensing the great evil that is the Monkey King. He has made a pact with the demon Etrigan, and as such they frequently become one another, a la Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Etrigan is hundreds of years old and is cruel. Jason Blood is pompous and arrogant, though he does care about humanity enough to warn Abby Arcane of the Monkey King.

Paul

Paul is a boy being treated for autism at the Elysian Lawns Center for Autistic Children. His parents were killed by the Monkey King after spelling out demon words with an ouija board. Because of this, Paul is obsessed with spelling, and he considers a wrong spelling an invitation for the Monkey King to come. He eventually overcomes fears of the Monkey King, thereby defeating the demon.



Objects/Places

Alec Holland's Bio-Restorative Formula

Alec Holland was working on a revolutionary formula that would regenerate damaged plant tissue when he was burned alive in an attack. This formula fell into the swamp, along with Alec Holland's dead body, and Swamp Thing was born. Swamp Thing gets his powers of regeneration, and probably his very existence, from this formula.

Woodrue's Research File on Swamp Thing

In the course of his research, Woodrue discovers that Swamp Thing is not Alec Holland at all, but merely plant material that has absorbed Alec Holland's consciousness. This revelation, as read from Woodrue's report, causes Swamp Thing to go mad and attack the old man in issue #21.

Flexi-Flesh

Jason Woodrue, aka the Floronic Man, uses a can of Flexi-Flesh to apply realistic flesh to his otherwise plant-like body. By using this compound he is able to pass for a human botanist.

Swamp Thing's Tuber

When Swamp Thing surrenders himself to the swamp, he begins to grow yam-like tubers. Following his theory that consciousness can be passed via foodstuffs, Woodrue cooks and consumes one of these tubers. This in part leads to Woodrue acquiring the world's plant consciousness and going on a rampage.

Evangeline

Evangeline is the term of affection an old man in Lacroix uses for his trusty chainsaw. The man tries to attack the Floronic Man with the chainsaw and is quickly subdued. Then, Floronic Man gets the idea to use the chainsaw to cut up humans as revenge for what humans do in cutting down trees.

Ouija Board

The demon known as the Monkey King was first summoned by the parents of Paul, after they spelled the words of demons out on an ouija board. Jason Blood later uses an ouija board to discover how the Monkey King escaped from Hell.



Elysium Lawns Center for Autistic Children

Abby Arcane gets a job at this institution, where she meets Paul. Through Paul, the Monkey King is released into the center where he begins to prey upon the fears of sleeping children. Swamp Thing along with Etrigan face off against the Monkey King in the building.

The Monkey King

The Monkey King is a demon, shaped like a large white-furred monkey, who feeds upon the darkest fears of its victims. Paul is the Monkey King's master, though Paul does not know how to control it. Swamp Thing senses the fear the Monkey King is creating and goes to confront it.

Swordfish Sculpture

This is part of the fulfillment of Jason Blood's grisly predictions about the futures of two residents of Baton Rouge. Predictions of impalement and manslaughter for the men come true when one man slams on the brakes of his car at an intersection, causing the swordfish sculpture on top of his car to shoot out and impale the other man walking in the intersection.

The Fly

A strange talking fly appears to Matt Cable after he had drunkenly crashed his car into a tree and caused mortal injuries to himself. The fly strikes a Faustian bargain with Matt, agreeing to restore Matt to full health if Matt will swallow him. The consequences of this "deal with the devil" are not known in the present volume.



Themes

The Nature of Humanity

Writer Alan Moore is credited with breathing new life into Swamp Thing in part by rethinking the hero's backstory and altering his very nature. In the past, Swamp Thing was considered to be a monstrous version of botanist Alec Holland. Holland's lab was blown up with Holland inside. A burning Holland flung himself into the swamp, where it was assumed the man's bio-restorative formula he was working on regenerated him, combining him with swamp vegetation to emerge as Swamp Thing.

Alan Moore changes all this by having evil botanist Jason Woodrue discover in issue #21 that the swamp vegetation merely "consumed" the consciousness of Alec Holland. Swamp Thing in fact has no humanity, and there is no Alec Holland inside of Swamp Thing to try to recover. Humanity then becomes a crucial aspect of existence for Swamp Thing to grapple with.

At first, Swamp Thing is enraged at the news of his lack of humanity. It not only means he is a mere monster, it defeats the entire purpose for Swamp Thing's struggles pre-Alan Moore, which was to find a way to become Alec Holland the human again. This gives Swamp Thing (initially) nothing to live for, and he lashes out by killing "the old man" that revived him.

Swamp Thing's rage turns to defeat in issue #22. Having nothing to live for, he surrenders to his essence, the swamp, becoming close to just another piece of moss. However, in a dream sequence, he relives memories as Alec Holland and wages a battle for his humanity against fearsome demons. In the dream, his humanity is symbolized by the skeleton of Alec Holland, which eventually morphs into Alec Holland's own talking skull. This skull, through dialogue, convinces Swamp Thing that this shred of humanity is worth fighting for. However, this skull is symbolically consumed by moss, choking its words. This may mean that Swamp Thing's humanity has now been utterly destroyed, or that this shred of humanity has been successfully consumed and incorporated into Swamp Thing.

In Issue #23, Swamp Thing displays very human psychology by retreating into the "green" world of plants, considering the "red" world of humanity too hurtful. Here, he is again using the humanity of Alec Holland, remembering his unjust murder and the murder of his wife Linda. He arrives at a deep and abiding peace in this green world, shirking all humanity. He no longer acknowledges himself as Alec.

However, the interplay is very interesting, because humanity surfaces once again to force Swamp Thing to rise again from the swamp. He remembers Jason Woodrue and how he tried to exploit him, he remembers the accident that spawned him, and perhaps most importantly, he remembers Abby Arcane, who he saves from death by reawakening. In the end, it is humanity which motivates Swamp Thing to continue on...



the promise of a human connection with Abby, the desire to protect humankind from evil, and the very human emotions caused by Alec Holland's memories.

Perhaps as a final statement, one can conclude that "humanity" is a very complicated concept. It does mean having the physical characteristics of a human, as Swamp Thing proves. Swamp Thing is an ostensibly soulless monster who nonetheless exhibits a profound humanity.

The Natural World

As Swamp Thing is made of plant material and comes from the natural world, he has been used as an appropriate defender of ecological concerns, and the first few books in this volume are no exception.

The natural world is crucial to Swamp Thing for several reasons. Most apparently, he feeds upon the energy of the swamp. He must return to the swamp to reinvigorate himself from time to time. However, beyond that, Swamp Thing struggles for any reason to live in this world, and he is eventually able to find peace in the swamp. Compared to the "red" world of humanity and its ills, the "green" world is serene, nonviolent, and beautiful. Swamp Thing is able to deal with the revelation that he has no real humanity by taking comfort in the fact that he is a creature of the beautiful and peaceful natural world. Behind all this as guiding philosophies are beliefs like anarcho-primitivism and naturalism, ideas that humans should shed modern technology and "civilized" society in favor of something more vital and primitive. In this state, it could be argued, humans would be inherently more complete and happy. Swamp Thing represents this temptation.

More germane to the plot at hand, Swamp Thing must battle the Floronic Man's plot to use plants to kill all animal life in a firestorm caused by the production of too much oxygen. Swamp Thing defeats this plot with logic: animals and plants exchange gases in order to thrive together. This solution can be conflated with a larger ecological message, striking a balance between environmental extremists (as represented by the Floronic Man, people who want to hurt humanity in favor of plants) and those who would continue unchecked industrial exploitation of the earth. It boils down to the fact that animals and plants must live together to thrive. In the end, the "plant consciousness" understands this by abandoning its plot and exiling the Floronic Man. In a panel of Issue #24, after the Floronic Man is bested, Swamp Thing asks rhetorically if people will understand the relationship between plants and animals as the plant consciousness had just done. The ominous silhouette of "Evangeline" the chainsaw figures prominently in the foreground, reminding of the destructive power of humanity as it relates to the natural world.

The Power of Dreams

Part of the power of the comic book as it relates to horror fiction is the medium's ability to switch effortlessly between time and space, and this includes reality and the



dreamscape. This not only allows the reader access to the imaginative and potentially terrifying world of dreams, it allows for an intimate window into characters. It can also provide potent symbolism and cryptic images that provide commentary, foreshadowing, or parallels to the "real" world.

For example, Swamp Thing's struggle over his humanity takes place entirely in his subconscious mind. Several events and images in the dream have ramifications for the character. Swamp Thing remembers Alec's wedding, which is distorted by fragments of memory from his lethal accident. Bride Linda disappears (she had been killed in the accident) and Alec is left with but a single red rose, long a symbol of fidelity and love, signaling Linda's goodness and love. Next, Alec dons a "mud suit" which looks just like Swamp Thing. This points to the fact that Swamp Thing's Holland consciousness feels that the monstrous Swamp Thing body is but an outer covering, and that Alec Holland the man is somewhere underneath. However, the suit is torn away and Alec has disappeared, a damning conclusion that Alec is no longer alive or existing anywhere.

Other characters suffer their own private battles in dreams. Indeed, part of the horror of the dream is that it is so very personal, and no one can come to the aid of the victim of a nightmare. Abby is described as paranoid schizophrenic, and sometimes she feels she is being chased by something terrible, only to find nothing there. Matt, meanwhile, has an addiction or compulsion to summon up horrible monsters as companions in times of loneliness or despair, a compulsion which creates a sort of personal hell. It is no wonder Abby and Matt are having problems as husband and wife when their psychological inner lives are so tormented. However tormented, this character psychology is indeed rich, and is a hallmark of Moore's skill in characterization.



Style

Point of View

In a comic book, point of view can be separated into visual narrative and written narrative categories. The "visual narrative" is uniformly third-person omniscient. The reader is often aware, visually, of most everything in the story, and the visual narrative can skip around in time or place with instantaneous ease. The written narrative also features an omniscient narrator, who provides commentary and clarity on the proceedings, information necessary to understand the story or useful in setting the mood. However, often the written narrative is guided by the limited point of view of one of the characters, and this contrast can create irony, tension, and suspense. The written narrative is usually guided by character thoughts, represented by words in boxes rather than the bubbles reserved for dialogue. For example, issue #21 is written from the point of view of Jason Woodrue. The reader is privy to his evil thoughts, his machinations, and his plot to kill the old man. This "inside the mind of a madman" perspective is disquieting and an effective device for horror fiction. By contrast, visually the reader is treated to the old man's death and the Swamp Thing's temporary insanity, when the written narrator Woodrue is elsewhere speaking about it, wondering if the old man's death will be bloody, etc.

The separation between omniscient narrator and individual thoughts/point of view is often messy and poorly delineated, a technique called free indirect speech.

Setting

The time Saga of the Swamp Thing is set in is present day (which, for the title, is the mid 1980s, although very little is present in the contents to "date" the book). Book One takes place in Washington D.C., where Swamp Thing's body has been flown by the evil Sunderland corporation in order to store and conduct tests upon. Books Two through Seven take place in and around the Louisiana bayou, in such small towns as Lacroix, or in Baton Rouge. The setting of the swamp is of course crucial to Swamp Thing's title character, who is composed of swamp material and who cannot stray far from his home in the bayou.

The unusualness of Swamp Thing's setting is wryly pointed out by Green Arrow of the Justice League of America, who remarks that the Justice League is always saving big cities like Metropolis and Gotham City, while no one is looking out for cities like Lacroix, Louisiana. In fact, Swamp Thing is looking out for the town, and it is ironic that the mighty Justice League can do nothing to stop the Floronic Man, who must be bested by the "unknown" Swamp Thing.

Swamp Thing's bayou belongs in the DC universe; as such, there is a huge gallery of characters that the comic has access to. The guest characters that make an



appearance in this particular volume include the Floronic Man, the Justice League, and Jason Blood/Etrigan. As Alan Moore states in the introduction, the challenge with comic book horror is to maintain an exact, contained, horror-inducing setting while at the same time allowing for appearances by superheroes and other characters from the DC universe. Moore succeeds in creating a creepy, foreboding swamp area and similarly strange small towns in order to create an atmosphere of horror. Beasts and demons of all kinds, not only in the real world but in dreams, are possible in this setting.

Language and Meaning

Alan Moore is celebrated for his fine ear for dialogue, a trait which is displayed in this volume. Character speech patterns are differentiated with care. Jason Woodrue, a genius botanist, speaks and narrates with an advanced vocabulary and sentence structure. Meanwhile, monstrous Swamp Thing speaks slowly in monosyllables, the slowness of his speech demonstrated by constant ellipses in between words. This slow speech is not only done in the tradition of classic monsters like Frankenstein, it shows that Swamp Thing is struggling to retain Alec Holland's humanity, as human speech is difficult for him. Another example includes Etrigan's use of archaic vernacular and verse-like dialogue, to show that he is hundreds of years old. Also, Moore will insert many "um"s, "er"s, repetitive words, and pauses with ellipses in order to more realistically portray the cadence and utterances in real speech.

Moore will frequently employ evocative similes and metaphors, like a novelist, and his literary style, perhaps unusual in comic book form, is why many regard his work so highly. In Book One, rain "covers the sidewalks with leopard spots" (Book One, page 13). In Book Two, vegetable man Jason Woodrue mocks human Abby Arcane crying over Swamp Thing as "steak sobbing" (Book Two, page 49). And in book six, Abby Arcane states that "all I knew were the suburbs of fear, and now here I am in the big city." (Book Six, page 133). These inventive figures of speech enliven the work and evoke intended moods, creating interest even in instances where lesser writers may have been merely descriptive or expository.

Structure

This graphic novel reprints issues #21 through #27 of the comic book series Saga of the Swamp Thing, which originally ran in the 1980s. Issue #21 is the issue in which now-famed writer Alan Moore took over the poorly-selling series and reimagined the backstory of the Swamp Thing, creating a new kind of monster. The visual and page structure of the original comic books are retained; that is, one page of the graphic novel is one page of the original comic book.

Individual books, though connected, tend to tell their own story and have their own beginning, middle, and end. They usually end on a "cliffhanger" in which anticipation is built for the next issue in the form of the question "What happens next?" Issues #21 through #24 is the story of the Floronic Man's plot to kill all animal life on the planet,



alongside Swamp Thing's struggle and final inner peace in regards to the nature of his very existence. The Floronic Man's plot is defeated in issue #24. Issues #25 through #27 features the story of the Monkey King, as complicated by the appearance of Jason Blood and his alter-ego Etrigan, and the eventual defeat of the Monkey King by his child master Paul.

As inherent to the structure of comic books, the story is told in a series of visual panels, augmented dialogue interspersed throughout in "dialogue bubbles" and written narration. Panels and the basic design of pages can be altered for dramatic and artistic purposes. A good example of this is on page 104, which is simply a full-page, single paneled picture of Swamp Thing, arms raised and smiling, in his swamp. This panel demonstrates that he has come to peace with the nature of his existence. It is a major moment and is thus given a full panel for full dramatic impact. At other places, panels may be asymmetrical and jagged to provide a sense of unease or madness, or several small panels may be clustered together in order to lengthen a small moment into several frames, like a punch or other physical violence.



Quotes

"In some ways, [writer Alan Moore's] merits are those of the finest tradition of comics: his ear for dialogue, his talent for concise, clear storytelling, his unerring sense of pace and timing." Introduction by Ramsey Campbell

"Do we immerse ourselves in fictional horror as a way of numbing our emotions to its real-life counterpart? Is it some sort of inoculation . . . a tiny dose of something frightening with which we hope to ward off a more serious attack in later life?" Introduction by Alan Moore

"Anyone picking up a comic book for the first time is almost certain to find themselves in the middle of a continuum that may have commenced before the reader's birth, and will quite possibly continue long after his or her demise." Introduction by Alan Moore

"[Jason Woodrue's Narration:] I remember clearly the moment before I began to cut. Since the bio-chemical fluke that had transformed me, I had longed for a chance to examine another human-vegetable hybrid. I could learn so much. So much about myself." Book One, p. 18

"[Jason Woodrue's Narration:] And will there be blood? I don't know. I don't know if there will be blood. It isn't important. It won't spoil things if there is no blood. The blood doesn't matter. The dying's all that matters." Book One, p. 34

"[Abby Arcane:] Matt... what's happened? This is Alec, isn't it? He's... Matt, what's happened to Alec? Matt, look, he's... Oh no, Matt, look, he's rooted! He's rooted into the swamp! And, and... oh look... he's got stuff growing on him and everything!" Book Two, p. 38

"[Jason Woodrue's Narration:] He is perfectly at one with the swamp. He feels what it feels, knows what it knows... What must it be like? To spread out with the water hyacinths in an implacable, choking net, to know the gray dreams of the Spanish moss... I hunger for it." Book Two, p. 46

"[Narration:] He reached Lacroix at 1:32 A.M. Lacroix (Pop. 559) is a small town four miles south of Thibodaux. The destruction began almost immediately. The police house was first... and then the school... and then the church. By 1:38, most of the population was out on the streets. From then on, things got worse..." Book Three, p. 69

"[Swamp Thing:] Woodrue... Let me... up... you are... afraid... to fight... as a man fights... [Jason Woodrue:] I'm not a man. Neither are you, in fact... you're not anything." Book Four, p. 89

"[Jason Woodrue:] The plants will pour out oxygen, and all the animals will die. Only we shall remain. Don't you see? It's the only way. The only way to save the planet from those creatures.

[Swamp Thing:] And what... will change the oxygen... back into... the gasses that... we... need... to survive... when the men... and animals... are dead?" Book Four, p. 95

"[Abby Arcane:] You really don't need to breathe anymore?

[Swamp Thing:] I... never did. It was... only... a habit. I... gave it up.

[Abby Arcane:] But... how does it feel? To just stop breathing?

[Swamp Thing:] Strange. You realize... just how much... effort... it has been... all along." Book Five, p. 109

"[Abby Arcane's Narration:] Fear. It thickens the night into cold, congealed gelatin. It stops the hearts of birds. I used to think I knew fear... I didn't. All I knew were the suburbs of fear... and now here I am, in the big city." Book Six, p. 133

"[Paul:] No! You're not my mom! My mom is D-E-A-D! You're a scummy little monkey and you don't scare me! You're a liar! You just pretend to be things! Well, you can pretend to be a snake or a wolf or a monster and I don't care! You're not frightening me!" Book Seven, p.165

Topics for Discussion

Is Swamp Thing human? What makes Swamp Thing doubt his humanity? What conclusion does he come to regarding his humanity?

How does Swamp Thing stop the Floronic Man from fulfilling his plot to kill off all animal life on earth with excess oxygen from plants?

Why does Swamp Thing emerge from his self-imposed coma in the swamp after Book One? What is his motivation?

Why is Paul, the autistic child at Elysium Lawns, obsessed with spelling?

What is the nature of the relationship between Jason Blood and the demon Etrigan?

How is the Monkey King ultimately defeated?

Why can't the Justice League of America stop the Floronic Man?