

Hello, and welcome to my 2,000th—just to ensure there’s no debate about typos, that’s two thousandth—review for WCBR. Funny. It just occurred to me that despite the number, this review really isn’t much different from any other, except that it’s slightly shorter thanks to the space I wasted talking about how it’s the 2,000th review. Let’s take a moment to meditate on what kind of metaphor we can glean from that. Okay, that’s enough! Actually, this review does have something special going for it, which is it marks the end of Swamp Thing’s remarkable run. We can talk about a lot of things that made the series a standout, but the one that merits discussion is the way first Scott Snyder, then Soule committed to making the title as strange and superhero-free as it should be. Everything else that’s good about it flows from that: the convincingly eerie tone, the fully-realized characters, and above all else, the conceptual strength of the Green and its many counterparts. You’ll notice I didn’t mention Alec in that list. As a protagonist, he’s been likable enough to follow along, but after all’s said and done, he’s not the reason why you love the title. Most of the time, he’s been a pawn to the locomotive plotting, too busy reacting to threats and other developments to show much personality, as he is here. At best, you know that he’s a stubborn, my-way-or-the-highway kind of guy, as seen when he bullies the Parliament into his aid, despite the desperate need he has for their help. But after that call to action, which happens in the first few pages of the issue, there are no more glory moments. His triumph over Lady Weeds is accompanied by a semi-rousing speech on what the various kingdoms stand for, but is almost mechanical in the way it comes about. It’s all a matter of stalling long enough for the Green to cleanse itself, giving Alec enough strength to overcome. Personal spirit or imagination has very little to do with it. That’s partly why the whole sequence where Alec encounters yet another kingdom, one overseeing the arts, feels rather bizarre. The kingdom’s agent/avatar praises Alec’s creativity and has a lot to say about the nature of story, but neither play a role in the plot. This commitment to metafictional commentary also feels out of place because it’s never been part of Swamp Thing’s thematic interests. The title has explored the conflict between Alec’s duty to nature and his loyalty to humanity, as well as personal and vocational sacrifice, but the contours of storytelling had nothing to do with it. The whole sequence eats up space in an issue that can ill afford it, even with the extra page count. More than ever, you sense that Soule’s blazing through his final story ideas, with some big moments getting only a single panel and a terse caption for you to get by on: Seeder and Miki’s duel and simultaneous fall; Guarav’s dispossession and return to battle (which you don’t even get to see); Etrigan’s inexplicable decision to just show up with a whole demon army and fight on the Green’s side, etc. Why Soule didn’t stretch out these beats, which you would’ve loved to see, instead of creating yet another kingdom, which you didn’t—it’s a mystery. I suppose with this being Soule’s final issue for DC, on what many consider his best work for any publisher, he wanted to end on a poetic note, which I understand. At one point, the avatar of the arts tells Alec, “It’s your decision. Your story, and you can end it however you like—that’s our gift to you.” But Alec doesn’t exercise this option. Instead, he leaves the ending to us, stretching his hand over a book (suggesting that he’s considering the offer to find rest observing stories rather than acting in one), then pauses, giving us a meaningful look. So I suppose the real question is: how do you want Swamp Thing’s story to end? Swamp Thing has been a great venue for Charles Soule, but it’s been an invaluable showcase for Saiz’s talents. Before this series, I knew Saiz as a talented drawer of beautiful men and women, with decent storytelling chops, but the world of Swamp Thing allowed him to show what an imaginative, dramatic artist he can be. His concept work for the Parliament has been particularly extraordinary, which is why it’s so fitting that both the cover and a lot of the issue’s most greatest moments feature the Parliament’s period and

species-spanning avatars in all their glory. Thanks to Saiz's gorgeously rendered art, even the truncated moments have power behind them, which makes it all the greater shame that he doesn't have even more to work with. Some Musings:- It's hard for me to decide which Parliamentarian I like best, but Viking Swamp Thing just stands out to me, especially with those sweet red locks and beard.- So Abby's presence was pretty much unnecessary, no?The post Swamp Thing #40 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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