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Swamp Thing: Twin Branches

Maggie Stiefvater
Morgan Beem, Illustrator
DC Entertainment (Oct 13, 2020)
Softcover $16.98 (208pp)
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Maggie Stiefvater's exciting, teen-friendly graphic novel *Swamp Thing: Twin Branches* includes a new origin story for a familiar comic book character.

Alec and his twin brother, Walker, couldn't be more different: Walker is outgoing and popular, while Alec is shy and absorbed in his science projects, which deal with botany and plant memories. When their father puts his marriage in jeopardy through infidelity, the boys are shipped off to stay with their cousins. There, Alec deals with his diabetes, lack of social skills, questions about his future, and an accident that releases his plant experiment into the world. To save his brother, he ingests the experimental plant substance, and the being called Swamp Thing is born.

Glowing depictions of Alec and the other teenage characters are complemented by innovative uses of botanical facts that parallel the story's development. One caption explains "crown shyness," a feature of some trees by which they limit their own growth, in time with Alec battling his own shyness. The tenacity of ivy, and the ways that plants which seem identical early on can develop into very different adults, also lead to unique connections in keeping with the "green" tone of the book. Realistic scenes of underage drinking, vandalism, and adult language stand in contrast to Alec's behavior, but they are sometimes distracting.

Within the book's art, special attention is given to depictions of vegetation, reinforcing parallels between Alec and the plant world. The panels' raw, angular style heightens the intense emotions of the book's characters.

An appealing coming-of-age story infused with horror-movie sensibilities, *Swamp Thing: Twin Branches* makes for, as the Swamp Thing's tagline once read, "sophisticated suspense."

PETER DABBENE (November / December 2020)

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