Kim Deitch was one of the junior members of the original group of cartoonists who created American underground comics. Though obviously talented, New Yorker Deitch was overshadowed by Crumb, Williams, Moscoso, and the rest of the Zap Crew (see Zap: The Interview Central), as well as West Coast creators such as Gilbert Shelton and Greg “Pogo” Marx. Theaters, artists were discommodified by the social and economic upheavals of the 1970s, especially the nationwide closures of the head shops that were the main market for underground comics. Like his fellow B-stater Bill Griffith, Deitch lasted six years in the storm and found other outlets for his work, such as alternative weeklies and the independent comic books (see Mad). He developed a relationship with the most forward-looking of the indie imprints, Fantagraphics, which has published the majority of Deitch’s interconnected graphic novels. Just as Fantagraphics creators such as the Hernandez Brothers explored complex worlds based on hardcore punk and punk-based American culture, Deitch created a sprawling mythology based on pre-electronic forms of entertainment. The medicine shows of the American frontier, the carnival midway, the Wild West revues—these lead to the dime museums, the nickelodeons, the toonキレイ stories and historians of great comics. As the summer leaves of the trees, they fall upon us, but we had no heads.
The King of Sports, professional wrestling, is going through a boom period. After nearly 20 years of dominance, Vince McMahon’s World Wrestling Entertainment is facing actual competition— not just from rival promotions like All Elite Wrestling and Ring of Honor, but from its own subsidiary brand, NXT. Like AEW and ROH, NXT’s success is based on performers who made their bones on the indie circuit in groups such as AIW, Evolve, PWG, Chikara Pro, GCW, Lucha Underground and more. Whether it’s high-flying athleticism, brutal death matches, or comedic wrestlers like Joey Ryan and Orange Cassidy, there’s something for everyone. Unless you’re Jim Cornette. A fixture of the business since the early 1980s, Cornette has seen it all and done it all, and he is not a fan of the new breed of wrestling. But he is an expert on the old school, as shown by his graphic history Behind the Curtain (IDW). With the aid of screenwriter Brandon Easton and art by Dennis Medri, the former manager, match-maker and promoter gives the lowdown on several legends of the industry. Whether it’s the sad story of Dr. Jerry Graham, the terrifying tale of “The Man Who Knew the Sheik’s Name” or the forgotten details behind the plane crash that nearly killed Ric Flair, Cornette’s got the goods. Perhaps the most touching tale in the book is how racial segregation in Memphis was dealt a serious blow by popular wrestler Sputnik Monroe. The grappler adopted the moniker “Sputnik” in 1957, when the Soviet Union launched said satellite, sending shock waves through the world. But space was the place for many even before the Great Race began. Visitors from other worlds were flying, landing and even talking with earthlings years before the Russians sent their little beeping tin can into orbit. The post-war phenomenon of “flying saucers” provides the background for The Silent Invasion by Larry Hancock and Michael Cherkis. Originally published during the “Black & White Boom” of the early 1990s and re-released by NBM, this series came out years before The X-Files brought Fortean paranoia to the masses. The first volume, Red Shadows, introduces reporter Matt Sinkage as he falls down a rabbit hole of Red spies, double-dealing dudes and G-Men chasing UFOs. The artwork of Cherkis, an ink-splattered mix of Dick Tracy and Tintin, is what made this title stand out from the monochrome mob. By the second volume, The Great Fear, the drawings are smoother, aided by the artist’s use of zip-tone shading (all the more impressive when one recalls that such screens were cut and applied by hand in those pre-digital days). A noir mix of history and hoo-hah that seems even more relevant now than when it was first published, The Silent Invasion is available from Beaumont and Central. Those locations and Eastside are home to the latest book devoted to DC’s most popular horror hero, Swamp Thing. Roots of Terror is a hardback Deluxe Edition containing short stories by contemporary creators such as Tom (Mister Miracle) King and Brian (100 Bullets) Azzarello with a special contribution by Swampy’s original writer Len Wein featuring Kelly Jones’s tribute to Wein’s legendary collaborator, Bernie Wrightson. The best story is the Eisner-nominated “Talk of the Saints” by King and artist Jason Fabok: A weak, faltering Swamp Thing seeks to protect a boy from the beast pursuing them. A chase both grand and goofy is at the heart of Elektra: Assassin. The first solo title dedicated to the popular villainess created by Frank Miller, this ground-breaking limited series came out in 1986, but still looks absolutely modern. That’s due to the artwork of Bill Sienkiewicz, a multi-media riot of ink, pencil, watercolor and Xeroxes, simultaneously loud and lovely and crass and cool, like nothing that had been seen in comics. Years after the likes of David Mack and Dave McKean have furthered the cause of multi-media comics, Elektra: Assassin still shocks and impresses. Its story, a bloody farce of secret agencies wielding physical violence and mind control in the name of global power politics, could be a two-fisted explication of the ideas of Herbert Marcuse. He was a member of the Frankfurt School of philosophers who fled the fire of Nazi Germany for the fying pan of anti-Communist America. His pursuit of “a better world” for the minds and bodies of all made Marcuse a culture hero of the Sixties. Nick Thorkelson’s playful line-work makes Philosopher of Utopia a fun read, even with all the stuff about Heidegger. Look under B M3345t at Central!