

[QPG]



ONE-ON-ONE: QUEER PRESS GRANT

WINNERS **PAM HARRISON** AND **TOMMY RODDY**

Tommy Roddy, last year's co-recipient of the Grant for his *PRIDE HIGH* series, talks to this year's winner, Pam Harrison, about her work, the QPG, and more.

TR: *What sparked your interest in Ancient Greece?*

PH: I first studied toward a Fine Arts degree at Western Kentucky University because in those days there were no degrees involving comic art, and the Joe Kubert School of Comic Art was far out of my reach. Life became more unpredictable and turbulent for me in my early 20s, so it would not be until 2006 that I finally achieved my college degree. The circumstances that sparked my interest in Ancient Greece were accidental. From childhood I'd owned, believe it or not, a 1920 edition of My Book House fairy tales, which had excerpts from *Midsummer Night's Dream* and countless others. I loved the artwork and the stories but never dreamed they'd be a springboard.

At any rate, as a storyteller I'm a jack of all languages, master of none. I fully intended to study languages while I was in college. I studied languages through high school, and all Western offered was Greek and Latin...so my decision to take Greek was a fateful one.

TR: *PRIDE HIGH started out as a collection of short stories and novellas written for friends. How was HOUSE OF THE MUSES originally conceived?*

PH: *HOUSE OF THE MUSES* was originally conceived, front to back, in prose. It was quite

a chunk of a novel. I was having trouble getting my legs under me, though, and went to Writer's Digest School in 2001 with the thing hoping to learn enough to help me rewrite it. When I went back to school to Louisville Technical Institute and learned 3D, I began creating the characters in 3D thinking I'd use these first tentative renders to illustrate the book. My partner and a friend of mine suggested I try doing a graphic novel. Amazingly, it fell together.

TR: *I think the biggest hurdle for me was just getting started. I didn't know many comics creators personally and self-publishing was completely new to me. Even before receiving my grant, just the presence of Prism Comics helped inspire me. What was it like for you when HOUSE OF THE MUSES was just taking shape?*

PH: It was hard. I felt like I was doing it just for myself, at first. I'd offered it up to a couple of lesbian forums I was frequenting and with a handful of exceptions, it was not well-received. The very idea that I was doing the Sappho story in a Teen+ format, and not the accepted and preferred Mature Audiences version--! I've taken some criticism and jeers. I've had a suggestion or two that I should include more pornographic scenes. I've been told I illustrate in 3D because I can't draw (false). I ignored them all. In April 2008 I discovered DrunkDuck.com, and before joining I complained to one of the moderators that they didn't have a Gay/Lesbian category at DD. She told me, "That's because we don't differentiate here. Now, if the story's action, adventure, romance, comedy or what, then bring it on."

I said, "Whoa!" And I joined. I now have the most awesome fanbase of readers!!!

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TR: Now that you're an established comics creator, what's your writing and illustrating schedule like? What's your personal remedy for writer's block?

PH: I work a 40 hour a week job for a newspaper, and I commute home each day, plop down in my chair, take a few deep breaths, then I fire up my computer and work on House of the Muses all evening. :P As for writer's block, fortunately my series is already outlined front to back. If I have to rewrite a scene or something's not working for me I go sit outside and think for awhile. It clears the head.

TR: What are some of your favorite comics?

PH: I'm very old school. Back in my youth my favorites were SUPERGIRL, SUPERMAN, WONDER WOMAN, X-MEN, (I straddled as neatly as I could between Marvel and DC), SPIDER-MAN, and so on. Current faves are a couple webcomics like THE VILLAIN NEXT DOOR and GHOST-RUNNER, and the creator of VND, Roy Duncan, recently turned me on to Eric Shanower's AGE OF BRONZE series. It's fantastic.

TR: Are there any creators out there who have served as mentors either directly or indirectly?

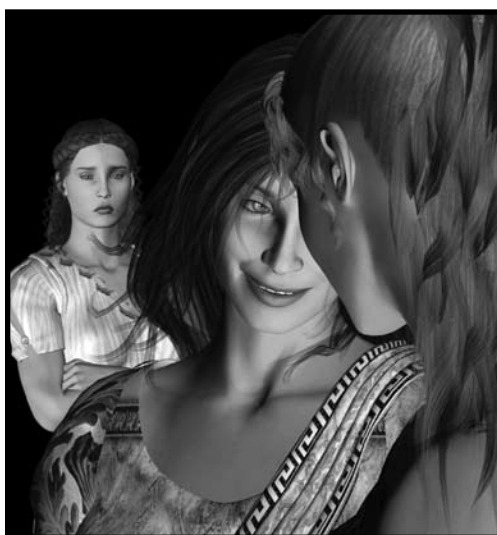
PH: Outside of my wonderful gradeschool/high school art teacher, and later Dick Giordano from DC Comics looking me in the eye back in 1987 and telling me, "These pencils look great. Send a portfolio to DC." I have never had the honor and the privilege of having a mentor. I've had a lot of fellow artists I admired and imitated, particularly Mike Grell. I had some help from the writers at Writer's Digest School, but Fate has had me pretty much slogging along on my own.

TR: Where were you when you first found out about winning the grant? What was your reaction?

PH: I was at work. Patty Jeres had been on the phone with me several times throughout the week because I'd had some questions for her pertaining to some other project I wanted to do, and I got the Prism announcement email asking for a quote. I gave them one, and it appeared on the official press release: 'Harrison, reacting to the news, said, "When I heard the news this afternoon I was overjoyed and ecstatic. As Sappho herself might have put it, 'I was giddy, overjoyed; I felt myself go hot and cold all over'. With all its romance, adventure, humor and pathos, its Teen+ rating and diverse LGBT-straight readership, HOUSE OF THE



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MUSES advances the dream of pushing LGBT comics into the mainstream." What a fabulous day that was!

TR: The Queer Press Grant was certainly a financial boon for PRIDE HIGH, but the grant's influence also went beyond pure dollars. There was a definite bump in interest after the announcement. How has it been for HOUSE OF THE MUSES?

PH: I'm now on sale worldwide through Barnes and Noble and Amazon.com. No, I'm not kidding. I've been finding and receiving book reviews for HOUSE OF THE MUSES, solicited and unsolicited, as far away as New Zealand, Brazil, Germany, and a devoted group of fans in the Netherlands is presently trying to convince Bol.com (their version of Amazon.com) to carry my series. When the economy perks up and interest continues to peak, we might be looking at translations of the series into several languages.

TR: That's great news! Congratulations on receiving the grant and thanks for taking the time to chat!

MEGAN ROSE GEDRIS is a webcomic artist and creator of YU+ME and LESBIAN PIRATES FROM OUTER SPACE!!!. To keep herself from living in a cardboard box, she also works as a graphic designer for WXMI in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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HOUSE OF THE MUSES: THE LATTER DAYS OF SAPPHO OF LESBOS

Reviewed by Megan Rose Gedris

*Some say the Muses are nine: how careless!
Look, there's Sappho too, from Lesbos, the tenth.*

-From an epigram attributed to Plato

In today's society, the word "lesbian" is synonymous with a woman who loves women. But HOUSE OF THE MUSES: THE LATTER DAYS OF SAPPHO OF LESBOS takes us back, thousands of years, to when "lesbian" included all the inhabitants of the large Greek island of Lesbos. This is where Sappho lived.

The first book of six does not feature Sappho at all. We follow the story of Mnasidika of Sparta, a girl with a stolen destiny, and how she made her journey to Lesbos. We hear the tale told from her perspective, through flashbacks of her life. This is Dika's journey from being a slave girl in Sparta to her adoption into the house of Athenaios to become an upper class woman with a slave of her own.

She is betrothed to Euripates (a man), but finds the fair Timas of Phokaia to be far more in her taste. This is not a story that merely hints at lesbianism. Dika has had previous relationships with women, and takes action to make Timas her own.

The author and illustrator, Pam Harrison, has had this in the works for over 20 years. It is obvious that this story means a lot to her. A lot of time has gone into both the writing and art for this comic, and her efforts were well noticed!

This isn't the kind of comic book that you read at the end of a long day, half-awake and looking for something simple to read with lots of pretty pictures. There is a lot of story here. As is the case with many first books, the story gets a little wordy at times as it tries to tell us the entire history of this character. And I was very glad I knew my ancient Greek history. But I have high hopes that, with the history established, the next books will feature more dialog and interaction between the characters, which is this book's strong suit.

The art is absolutely remarkable. I've seen CG rendered 3-dimensional comics before, but they usually end up looking like someone took some screenshots while playing a game of "The Sims". Pam Harrison is skilled in CG, and her characters are all gorgeous (my only criticism is that they are, perhaps, too pretty). The characters are all designed with different features, making it easy to recognize them as individuals.

For anyone who is a fan of historical drama, lesbian romance, and gorgeously rendered CG art, this story was made for you. This is a book that demands your full attention.



WHERE AM I?

THE LIGHT OF HELIOS, THE GOD OF THE SUN, IS BLINDING.



ALL I CAN FEEL IS PAIN.

I AM A SLAVE AGAIN. HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?



WHY CAN'T I REMEMBER?

I AM DYING--I CAN FEEL IT. I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I'VE BEEN HERE--



POSEIDON!
⇒ SOB! ⇐

DELIVER ME!

--AND NO ONE IS LIKELY TO RESCUE ME THIS TIME.



I RESIGNED MYSELF TO MY FATE; TOO WEAK TO CLING TO WRECKAGE ANY LONGER....

AND THAT'S WHEN I STARTED HALLUCINATING.

I RELEASED A FINAL WEARY SIGH, SOBBED ...AND LET GO.

I HAVE HEARD THY PRAYER, CHILD OF SPARTA.

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THOU HAST FACED THE DARK-EST ASPECTS OF THY SOUL....

--AND THOU ART FOUND SORELY WANTING!

WHATEVER HE WAS TALKING ABOUT, HIS TONE FRIGHTENED ME.



--THAT HE MEANT I DESERVED NO SALVATION.

THE FATES HAVE SET THEE UPON A COURSE OF UPHEAVAL THAT WILL TEST THY SPIRIT--



--AND DECIDE THE COURSE OF THY FUTURE!

THOUGH YOU ARE FEARLESS IN THE FACE OF CHANGE,

YOU MUST SEEK THE INNER BALANCE THAT YOU LACK.



I RELEASE THEE FROM THIS FATE. FACE UP TO THE BURDENS IN THY HEART--

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MY OUTSTRETCHED HANDS RELAXED AND I WENT NUMB AT THE WORDS,

FOR I THOUGHT THIS WAS HIS FINAL JUDGMENT--



--AND BEGIN ANEW!!

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