

## Audry Taylor and "The Almost Legendary Shannon" Graphic Novel

by Kat Avila

Though Audry Taylor is not of Asian ethnicity, I wanted to interview her for Jade Magazine because of her cross-cultural collaboration with renowned manga writer and artist You Higuri. Taylor and Higuri are working together to produce the graphic novel *The Almost Legendary Shannon*. The Japanese title, "Kagirinaku Densetsu Ni Chikai Joshikosei," translates into "almost legendary high school girl." There is only one other similar collaboration in *shoujo manga* (girls' comics), that is, alternative rocker Courtney Love and D.J. Milky et al.'s gothic *Princess Ai*, published by TOKYOPOP, (c) 2004.

*Shannon* is expected to be published first in Japan, then reprinted for U.S. distribution.

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*It's a fan fantasy to have a manga writer and artist of You Higuri's stature illustrating one's graphic novel. Being an American writer, it couldn't have been easy. What credentials were you able to bring to You Higuri to make her agree to your proposition?*

I think the sheer surprise of finding an American team, myself and my editor/husband David Wise, at her booth in Comiket [in Tokyo, Japan] asking if she'd like to do an American/Japanese collaboration piqued her interest.

As for why she said yes, I hope very much that it's because she likes the story and is interested in pursuing an unusual project like this one. She certainly didn't agree because of my qualifications, seeing as how I'm as far from an experienced, veteran, native Japanese manga writer as one can get!

### Why You Higuri and not another *manga-ka*?

We wanted You Higuri for our project because of her wide range of talents and her remarkable storytelling ability. It's my personal opinion that there's nothing she can't handle and I'm very eager to see what she does with the material we've given her.

Finding the right artist for the project was a very difficult two-year process. During most of that time we were trying to find an American artist because only an insane, obsessed writer would try to overcome all the spatial, language, and cultural barriers involved in working with a Japanese artist...turns out that's just the sort of writer I am.

During the process of searching for an artist in the U.S., I discovered Higuri's *Poison* artbook and it became the benchmark by which my husband and I judged other artists: Can this person draw men as appealing as Higuri? Is their style as lush as Higuri's? Are their paneling skills as strong as Higuri's? I was never satisfied, and eventually we decided, why not just go to Japan and try to find Higuri herself?

By the way --shameless plug coming in!-- I'm in the process of writing a journal of our adventures in Japan and how we came to work with Higuri-sensei, called *Adventures in Manga-Making*. It's on the official *Shannon* website, [www.the-als.com](http://www.the-als.com).

### What is your graphic novel *The Almost Legendary Shannon* about?

A modern-day American teenager pulls Excalibur out of a stone and becomes the future king of the world. Only she'd rather read a good book, or watch paint dry, or get her teeth pulled.

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Excalibur and the legendary Merlin the Magician have great plans for her - which Shannon will do everything she can to screw up. Especially when she falls in love with the man whom she is destined to kill in order to save the world.

### Why another story connected to the King Arthur legend?

This is Shannon's story, and Shannon is not Arthur. If anything, it might be considered a sequel to the Arthurian legend! The King Arthur mythology gets turned inside-out and upside-down in this version. I love twisting old legends.

Also, it seemed like a good choice for a Japanese/American collaboration, since there are some commonalities - the Arthurian knights and Japanese samurai both live by strict codes, the idea of a sacred sword with mystical powers, the use of a lot of magic and folktales. In fact, Higuri-sensei has drawn a sequence in the opening of the story where the Chairman of the Council of Chivalrous Knights defeats an opponent in an extremely Japanese manner - it's incredibly cool.

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