

Who's the target audience for this title?

I'd say our target audience is anybody who loves sword-slinging action, tortured romance, fantastic artwork, scrumptuously sexy characters, epic fantasy, or a heavy dose of sarcastic teenage angst.

When will *The Almost Legendary Shannon* be published, and by whom in Japan and in the U.S.?

Shhh, it's a secret. We'll let you know as soon as we're ready. All I can say at this point is we're definitely arranging to have it published in both countries - Japan first and America soon after.

Shannon follows in a *shoujo manga* storytelling tradition of a woman taking on a man's role....

Stop right there! I love that tradition in *manga* and have been an avid reader of stories of that genre, but *Shannon* never takes on a man's role. She takes on a role that everyone assumed would belong to a man but that *Excalibur* always knew would belong to a woman, so *Shannon* doesn't really fit the category. For *Shannon*, taking up the sword ends up being as natural and feminine as getting pregnant would be.

There's no question I've been influenced by all the manga I've read over the years.

Any guesses as to why other *manga-ka* might use this formula?

I think there are probably many reasons why *manga-ka* put women into men's roles. To be adventurous, for comedy, to break or explore taboos. There are still a lot of taboos in Japanese culture for women, and some similar taboos here in the U.S. They're well worth exploring.

Are you influenced by *manga* you have read or *anime* you have seen?

There's no question I've been influenced by all the *manga* I've read over the years. My first exposure was at 4, then I unfortunately lost all connection with it until at the age of 12, when the ability to tell an epic story aimed at a fantasy audience in comic format was reintroduced to me by Wendy and Richard Pini's great *Elfquest*, which was actually influenced by *manga* years before most people here knew what it was. Then a few years ago, I read the *Nausicaa Perfect Collection*, after which I read every *manga* I could get my hands on. I haven't been in control of my sanity since.

You read comics from around the world. Anything you'd like to share about Japanese comics, Korean comics, Hong Kong comics, Asian comics in general, in contrast to the comics of other countries?

Asia's having a huge impact on the world of comics right now and frankly, I'm relieved. European comics have been doing quite well in recent years and are still fresh and innovative, but here in the U.S. we've been having a terrible drought. The only thing we've had of interest are some small underground comics and a few major rebels, *Sandman* for example, in an otherwise stale industry. Japanese comics have thoroughly permeated the culture here-- we'll be feeling the impact for years to come through the next generation of artists and writers, and Korean comics are about to make a big bang of their own. And I'm sure those are just the tip of the iceberg.

You previously said - at the *Shannon* panel at this year's FanimeCon in San Jose, California - "Boy's love will be kept down to a dull roar." But won't that be disappointing to all the You Higurii fans who associate boy's love with her work?

I think the BL genre and its fans are great - they're so fun and so passionate. But since its conception *Shannon* has been, among other things, a girl-loving-the-man-who-absolutely-loathes-her story. I was well aware of Higurii-sensei's expertise at male-male love stories when I approached her, but I also knew that she was capable of telling a wide range of stories and I

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figured that it was up to her to decide if she would like to give my nearly boy-loveless story a chance. But I don't think fans of her male pairings will be too disappointed since there will be plenty of *bishies* with complex relationships that will prove quite slash - ahem - available for fantasizing about in the reader's own imagination.

I'd also like to add that we designed *Shannon* to appeal to as broad an audience as possible in the hopes that we could expose more Americans to this great medium through characters that they could relate to and a setting that is both familiar and exotic at once. With any luck, the *otaku* and the newbies alike will be drawn in by Shannon's sword-slinging adventures.

Will you be doing any more comic conventions in the near future to promote *Shannon*?

We love the idea, but it's still a little early in the process; the only reason we broke the news at FanimeCon was because Higur sensei was attending. We definitely want to give out some goodies at Yaoi-Con this year, though whether or not we'll be able to participate depends on whether we're in Japan at the time. Next year, however, we have big plans for the conventions, so those who love cosplay, freebies, and sneak peeks please look forward to it!

You lived in Misawa, Aomori Prefecture, in northern Japan as a child. What were your initial impressions of Japan? Final thoughts when you left?

I lived three years, from 3-6, on the military base in that area with my family. My earliest memories in life are of dancing around giant ice sculptures of sumo wrestlers during snow festivals and sliding down the coldest, fastest ice slides I'd ever known in my short life. There were also brilliant paper lanterns dangling in the streets like little spirits drifting in the wind - and the food! Winter is still one of my favorite times of the year in Japan - along with Spring, Summer, and Fall!

I was a huge fan of Takara Jenny dolls--I could never relate to the duller American Barbie, and I spent a great deal of my time watching Japanese cartoons and reading Japanese *manga*, even though I didn't understand anything except on a purely emotional level. I remember seeing all sorts of things, from *Golion* --this was before it was brought to the U.S. as *Voltron*, the anime version of *Little Women*, *Doraemon*, the color series of *Tetsuwan Atom*, and the *Unico* movies. When I left, I was very disappointed because I left behind my friends and access to all of my favorite things. It was nice to go back after all these years.

Are you fluent in Japanese?

I speak, read, and write Japanese like an amateur ("jozu ja arimasen") [trans. "I'm not that good"]. I'm taking lessons to remedy that dilemma, but for now I'm putting my trust in some very good translators. It's great to work with a native speaker because they bring with them a great deal of understanding about their own culture. I'd like to know as much as I can about the world my collaborators work in.

Besides Japan, you've also lived in Hawaii, Utah, Disney World in Florida, and Iran. I was especially interested in your experiences in Iran. How long did you live there? What was Iran like?

My parents tell me that I learned to walk on the marble floors of Iran. I was something of a rarity - a blonde, pale, blue-eyed little girl. Apparently my father showed a photo of me to an Iranian associate and the man offered to make me the future wife of his young son (I was 2 and the boy was 8). He promised that I would get very good treatment, as I would be the "first" or "head" wife! My dad politely declined. Years later, I'm thinking that there might be an interesting, complex story in that experience, even though the manhwa *Gung* has covered that area pretty well.

Any country or countries you still want to visit?

Any country I haven't seen. China, Italy, most of Europe.... I'd like to stand in front of the Taj Mahal and imagine what it would have been like to be the woman it was built for.

Since it seems you've done a lot of traveling, where do the hottest guys live? I like French guys because they seem to be such gentlemen.

Canada. They wear so many layers you can strip off and they have such rosy cheeks.

Audry, thank you so much for your time. Good luck to you and You Higur sensei with the graphic novel *The Almost Legendary Shannon*!

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