

Welcome to another edition of The Lerner Podcast. I'm joined today by Haiko Hörnig and Marius Pawlitz, creators of the comic series The House Divided. The first book, *The Accursed Inheritance of Henrietta Achilles*, is just out, and the second will be coming in November.

Thank you for joining me for today's episode of The Lerner Podcast. I would like to ask each of you: what makes Henrietta, the protagonist of A House Divided, so special.

HH: I think what makes Henrietta special is that in a way she isn't really that special. She's a pretty normal kid. I mean, sure, there's been a lot of tragedy in the past. Henrietta lost her parents in the war, and she grew up in an orphanage, and one day people come and tell her that she inherited a gigantic magical house from an uncle she never even knew--a great wizard who apparently died and left everything to Henrietta. She finds out that the house isn't empty. There are several parties--bandits, soldiers, kobolds other magical monsters--who fight against each other and who are all looking for a secret that is hidden somewhere in her house. So Henrietta is thrown into this crazy conflict, and she really doesn't have any special powers. So she has to solve problems with intelligence and bravery and compassion, instead of resorting to violence. I think that's what makes her really special.

MP: That's right, it's more or less she's a normal girl but in an un-normal situation, and she has to deal with it somehow.

I think it's interesting many graphic novels and comics do seem very much directed at boys and this is a nice story that will appeal to boys and girls. Was that intentional?

HH: Absolutely. In the beginning we thought about it and we consciously decided to have a girl protagonist for several reasons. One was that we felt like there were so many adventure stories who featured boys and I mean, there are great adventure stories with girls as well. Sure. But I think there can always be one more and wouldn't hurt. We just love the idea of having a story that wasn't really targeted or for any specific gender. We just wanted to make like an engaging, fast paced, funny, action-filled story that basically everybody could enjoy. And, and we just felt strongly about having a cool female protagonist, a strong female protagonist who might not be incredibly powerful in the physical sense, but just a really smart, smart girl who has to navigate a very difficult situation and take on responsibility. I hope that basically everybody can find like a character that he or she really likes and latch on to them.

MP: The range of different characters is pretty wide.

I have to say, as I read it, I really wanted to know the backstory of many of the other characters. How did they come to get stuck in this house? What started this battle between them really? What were their motivations? They're all so interesting, just as soon as you meet them.

HH: Thank you. I mean, that was the plan. Though there's like no way we can really flesh out everybody or tell the story of everybody involved because there's just so many different characters in the house. But we would love to basically give you just enough that you can maybe think about them a little bit

more or imagine your own backstory for them, or maybe we just come back at a later point and tell the stories of those side characters. And we have some ideas for that as well. But first, we have to finish Henrietta's story. She's really important. And some of those characters like Captain Booner or Flemming, you will learn a bit more about their specific backstories. And how those two characters might have met before the house, and we learn much more about them in Book Two. That's a teaser for you.

That's very good to know. For anyone listening, Book Two comes out this fall. What do you hope readers will learn or discover from reading your book?

HH: I think that's very, very different for every reader. I hope everybody gets something out of it. And I mean, the main thing is just to be entertained by hopefully a funny and engaging story. But the thing I hope some people can take out of it: in the beginning, Henrietta really feels like the wizard's magical house is kind of forced upon her. Like, they just take her to this crazy house with this huge conflict. And she goes along with it because she feels like she has to and only later, she understands that she actually does have a choice. She actively decides to take on the responsibility. And I think that that specific feeling of not having a choice and having to go along with the decisions of adults is something that many kids and many adults can actually relate to. And, just like Henrietta, they learn that growing up means actively choosing some responsibilities.

MP: Yes, I can just agree to that. Pretty rounds up everything.

What were some of your influences on A House Divided?

MP: Oh, man, there's so many. But I think role playing games like Dungeons & Dragons is maybe one of the biggest influences we had. And, movies, many movies like old Disney movies like *The Beauty and the Beast* or *Tangled*, Studio Ghibli movies. They have so rich and atmospheric, original atmospheric worlds. We just wanted to have that also in our story. And this was, yeah, maybe the biggest influences for us.

HH: Especially visually, right, Marius? When we were thinking or trying to create the visual style for the comic, we were really looking at the techniques people use in animation actually. You have these lavish backgrounds and you have in front of those beautifully painted backgrounds, you have very, almost simple characters with thick outlines. So they really pop in front of those backgrounds that way. And we kind of stole that style from animation in general.

MP: Yeah, just because it works so well. And yeah, it makes everything pop up.

Absolutely. Reading the book very much feels like watching the stills from an animated movie.

MP: Yeah, this was the idea behind it.

I have to ask what's up with the quiche. People who haven't read the book might not know that quiche features prominently - and there's even a quiche recipe at the end of Book One. Rumor is that Book Two will also have a recipe. What inspired this approach and what other recipes are coming?

HH: So I think the inspiration behind that is twofold. At the time, when we created the story, when I wrote the script, I had a colleague in shared a studio space and he just started bringing quiche. Like, every week. He had a new recipe book or something like that. And I had so much quiche in one week, like never before, and it's really delicious. Somebody really knows how to do it. I love quiche. And then there's the other part is actually a little nod to another great comic that we are both fans of, Bone by Jeff Smith. In Bone, there are those red creatures and they would love to make a beautiful, delicious quiche out of one of the bones and we thought that that might be a nice nod to just put a quiche into our story as well. It just fit, because in the story when you when you see the quiche for the first time, the bandits just stole it from one of the soldiers who baked it. And after we had so much quiche in the story, we thought about "Hey, wouldn't it be fun to have a have the actual recipe for that specific quiche in the book?" So you can take a little bit out of the story and just make it yourself and and live the story outside of the book.

MP: Yes. Just take a part and make it a little bit more real life.

HH: Yeah, we were really lucky that we had a friend who created that recipe specifically for us in the book. And when we did the first book signing tour in Germany, one of the comic book shop owners baked that quiche for us, and it was amazing.

MP: It was exactly the style we had drawn it, it was one to one. It was just mind blowing.

HH: It's amazing to see things from the book in real life. And we were just, we've actually never seen that as a bonus feature for many comics. I'm sure some books did it before us, but I didn't know any specific examples. So when we did the quiche recipe, we thought wouldn't it be fun to have like another recipe that is somehow tied into the story for every book? And I think we can maybe tease that in Book Two it's going to be a beverage, to be exact--a potion. Of course. I mean, the magical potion that is featured in the book and story and you can brew that potion yourself.

MP: Yeah.

And then you can drink it while you're eating quiche.

HH: Exactly! The goal is to have a full meal after all the books are finished, and you have full recipes, you can make just a great meal for you and your family and your friends, read the books and eat the food. It's going to be splendid.

MP: Exactly.

So what is next for both of you?

MP: Well, we're just finishing the third book. I'm just sitting on the corrections right now. This is the last thing that needs to be done. And then we will start with Book Four. And this is the only major project this year I think, for me.

HH: It's really important to to get the fourth book, to stick the landing, right? It's so much fun to tell the whole story. And now we're trying to end the story in a surprising and really satisfying way for our

readers. And whatever comes after that. . . We have another idea for further stories in the house and Henrietta stories. But we're not really allowing ourselves to think too much about them right now because we just have to focus to really finish three and four. And then we can allow ourselves to dream about further adventures.

MP: Yeah, creating 100 hundred pages is really time consuming and you need to stay focused. It's really important. Otherwise you do too much stuff sideways and it's not so good.

Wonderful. Well, for everyone listening you can take a look at the podcast show page to see art from the books. It's available wherever books are sold right now. And we'll look forward to having four books, four recipes and a full meal to go along with that. Thank you both so much for joining me today on the learner podcast and we look forward to seeing the rest of your books.

HH: Thank you, Rachel.

MP: Thank you.

Thank you for joining us here on The Lerner Podcast. Tune in again next time for more author interviews and the stories behind the books.