



Lora Innes

# Dreams of The Dreamer

by **BEAU SMITH**



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This summer marks my 20th year in the business of comic books. In a lot of ways it does seem like yesterday. There wasn't the technology there is today. There wasn't any Internet or e-mail, and fax machines were not commonplace. I was still having to use carbon paper when I typed my scripts and pitches. A lot has changed.

There's one thing that I'm glad hasn't changed: talented people willing to take the chance and make the effort of creating new comic books

— comic books that mean something to them and, hopefully, to a lot of other people.

Lora Innes is one of those creators.

I was introduced to Lora at Mid-Ohio-Con by my buddy and creator of *Bone*, Jeff Smith. Jeff told me that he had met a really talented young lady who had a great portfolio and that I should have a look at it. Jeff isn't the type to waste my time or his, so I knew he spoke the truth. When Lora showed me her art, I knew instantly that ol' Jeff was right.

At the time, I had a project that I had been working on but had yet to find the right artist for. The project was a college romantic comedy called *Courting Fate*. Within a few minutes of looking at Lora's work, I knew I had found that artist.

We talked about it and she liked it, as well. Lora was smart, focused, and had a streak of my kinda sense of humor. I knew we'd work well together. The best part of the working relationship is that we became good friends. Lora can stand toe to toe with me and dish it out. I admire that.

Recently Lora showed me a project that she was working on called *The Dreamer*. When I looked it over, I knew that she had created something special. Something innovative. Something that would reach a wide audience. Being the ever-thoughtful type that I am, I thought I would share it with you. I managed to whisk Lora away from her drawing board long enough to hang out with me to talk about *The Dreamer*. I figured it best to share with y'all.

Read on:

**Beau:** Love, romance, history, action: *The Dreamer* seems to touch on all these genres, Lora. Could you give us the background on how the idea for *The Dreamer* and its slant on cross-genre began — as well on your own creative self?

**Lora Innes:** I didn't set out to tell a cross-genre story, actually. I was at a place creatively where I felt all choked up inside because I had put pressure on myself to draw what is hot right now: super-heroes like Spider-Man or The Avengers or Batman. I love reading super-hero stories, but big scary monsters and robots and intergalactic battles have never been my favorite things to draw. (Hey, I'm a girl!) I had a heart-to-heart with a good friend of mine, whom I'll call "Mr. B. Smith," and he told me to stop trying to be something I wasn't (always good advice) and to tell a story that I wanted to tell. For the past three years, I had been working at an illustration studio where I was told what to draw every day, so thinking about what kind of story I wanted to tell hadn't been on my mind for quite some time.

I'll just say it out loud: *The Dreamer* began as a dream I had in January about Josh

Holloway. (It was one in a series of dreams I had about *Lost*, and you can read *The Dreamer* #1 and guess the details of this one.) It was one of those "Can I go back to sleep now?" dreams that we have sometimes that are intense and exciting and leave the real world a bit gray in comparison.

I don't remember exactly how I got from Josh Holloway to The American Revolution but I've always loved history. As I started to research the Revolutionary War, I discovered characters tucked away in the corners of history books who were like diamonds in the rough (they aren't names many of us would recognize) — Thomas Knowlton, Nathan Hale, Hercules Mulligan — but their efforts changed the course of history. I read their stories, and *The Dreamer* began to write itself.

I liked the stark contrast in the costumes and personalities that would come out of a story told half in the 18th century and half in the 21st. I decided to use teenagers for the cast, because they're dramatic, full of energy, and willing to take enormous risks. Falling in love as a teen is the most exciting time to fall in love, because you haven't learned the rules of guarding your heart, so it's deep and desperate and consumes you. I fell in love for the first time when I was 17, got my heart broken, and it was the deepest pain I had ever felt in my life. And I think the heartache of young, first love is something that we can all connect to at a really intimate level because we've all experienced it in some form or other.

My intent was never to tell a story that was "cross-genre." *The Dreamer* grew out of my own interests, experiences, and passions. I guess it is unique — a romance between an 18th century Puritan and a teenage drama queen! — but I didn't set out to do something, no pun intended, revolutionary.

**Beau:** By introducing *The Dreamer* as a Web comic, and with technology getting more advanced every day, do you see this format as an enhancement to print or a presentation piece and steering mechanism to have it in the standard print format?

**Innes:** For me, even as a Web comics creator, the Web will never replace print. I love my comic-book collection, I love reading a comic book in bed, I like flipping back and forth through the pages, and, mostly, I love the quality of art that only print can capture.

The Web is great for getting your work exposed to a massive audience, but I find myself constantly at war with the Internet: colors change when a file is uploaded, detail is lost because of the 72-dpi screen resolution, and forget all the programming headaches of just trying to get a page to turn!

I like that people who might never visit a comics shop will get a chance to read *The Dreamer* on the Web, but my hope really is to see it in print someday. *The Dreamer* is a

three-act story, and I hope that it gets attention on the Web, so that it can then be collected and printed in three graphic novels.

**Beau:** What are your goals for *The Dreamer* as an entertainment property?

**Innes:** Well, if I'm allowed to dream, I'd love to see it as a film. And I do think it has film potential. As you said, it has a bit of everything: action, adventure, romance, war, teenage antics, a historical backdrop. It starts out fun and lighthearted, but the stakes rise even by the third issue, and, by the end of the first story arc, it gets quite bleak — it's the stuff great films are made of.

I think it's even written cinematically (with a lot of "end scene" moments), probably because I studied film and animation in college. When I write, I watch a scene play over and over in my mind before I write it down. It's only after it's written that I return to it to break the dialogue into pages and panels. A friend of mine who studied film editing saw the script and she just kept saying, "I can so see this as a film!" as she read through it.

My goal with *The Dreamer* from the start has just been to write the sort of story that I would love, even if I hadn't come up with it myself. The fact that it is a comic book comes less from the premise that "comic book" is the perfect format for this story and more that I love to write and draw. And I think, though it would have to be shortened, it would make a great film: It has a beginning, middle, and end. I've even "cast" an actor or actress for each character to use as reference when I draw. So *The Dreamer* is set up for film already!

**Beau:** What influences in and out of comic books have stoked your creative fires to do *The Dreamer* as well as some of the other projects you've been involved with?

**Innes:** The biggest influence has been history itself. I've read so many history books and done so much research since I started *The Dreamer*, you wouldn't believe it. And the more I read about these crazy people who decided to start a new nation, the less "old" and distant the Revolutionary War seems.

I think a lot of people picture quaint scenes of Betsy Ross sewing a flag or of a 12-year-old boy in uniform playing a fife or of George Washington in a white wig and three-cornered hat, sitting majestically on a horse and equate those serene images to our nation's beginnings. On the contrary, it was a very turbulent time to live: There was no certainty that the Americans would win, and, in fact, they spent the better part of those eight years losing to the British. The more you learn about it, the more you can see how contemporary a dilemma these people were facing: The world had never



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experienced anything like this before. There was nothing old-fashioned about it.

Today, we use the word "revolution" to describe a car company's SUV or Apple's new iPhone, but, really, it was a time when an entire nation of people were turned on their heads. And each of these people's lives who I'm writing about are great stories in and of themselves. I find myself wishing that I could tell more of what happened but I hold back to include only what will further my story so that it stays focused.

Literary influences are: my favorite book of all time, *Les Misérables*; *Johnny Tremain*,

as that book really brought the American Revolution to life the first time for me as a young adult; and Jane Austen's literature.

Movies would be any film that takes you back in time but speaks to your heart today — movies that bring history to life. Some of my favorites growing up were *Young Guns*, *Robin Hood*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Titanic*, *Braveheart*, *Schindler's List*. Even *The Grapes of Wrath*, though it was an "old movie," shook me up when I watched it in high-school history class while studying the Great Depression.

As far as comic books go, on the non-historical side, I give all the credit to J. Scott Campbell and Brandon Chof's run on *Gen 13*. That series came out when I was the same age as the heroes of the tale, and I was hooked. And I wasn't the only one checking my comics shop every single week for the new issue — I had friends who didn't even read comic books waiting for the next issue, as well! *Gen 13* totally tapped into what it meant to be a teenager in the '90s, and I was along for the ride. Not only did these kids look and act cool, but they were worlds apart from other super-hero teens that were being written about at the time. I think *The New Mutants* was over at that point, but I still had some issues, and even *Generation X*, which was contemporary with *Gen 13*, felt stuffy and contrived in comparison. I hope *The Dreamer* has characters that today's teenagers can connect to and relate to in the way I was able to spend time reading about kids who talked and joked about the same things I did.

You asked about projects I've worked on. Most of my professional experience has been with an illustration studio called The Artifact Group. Through them, I've done work on a lot of toy products — like Fisher Price's Rescue Heroes and Hot Wheels — as well as a lot of licensed character work for Nickelodeon, Simon & Schuster, and Scholastic. I've worked on books and products for *Clifford*, *SpongeBob*, *Lazy Town*, and *The Backyardigans*.

I've dabbled my foot in the door of the comics industry but haven't jumped in until

now. I did a project for Avalanche Comics, which hasn't seen print yet. I've also done several projects with a company called Community Comics: one called *Paladins* that was published by Randall House and another called *Hero TV*. You and I worked together on a book called *Courting Fate* that we were never able to get published, but had a lot of fun creating, nonetheless.

**Beau:** Don't give up on *Courting Fate* yet, Lora. A smart publisher will come around sooner or later.

As a new creator, how important is also having the knowledge and ability to market, not only your project, but also yourself?

**Innes:** I would say that it's very important but it's also overwhelming. Doing something on the Web, you have the potential to reach a massive audience of people, but you also have the potential to get lost in the sea that is the Internet. So you're constantly trying to come up with ideas to get the word out on your project in ways that people will actually listen to and not just move on to the next thing.

We can't get away from advertising — it's all around us — so presenting your story in a way that captures someone's attention is a real challenge. Marketing yourself I think comes a lot less naturally for us creative types, since we're usually content to be left alone with our imaginary friends. I feel a lot more comfortable spending an afternoon in a library with people who have been dead for 200 years than I do self-promoting. But it's a necessary evil, I suppose.

I try to surround myself with people who believe in the work I'm doing and let them promote me, instead. No man is an island, and it's nice to be a part of a team using other people's strengths to fill in for your weaknesses.

With that, Lora placed the heel of her hand on my forehead, shoved real hard, and went back to her drawing board muttering something about "looking forward to talking to her imaginary friends that are smarter and better looking than Beau."

As I said at the beginning of this column, I've been at this 20 years, I hope that this will be the start of Lora's first 20 years in comics and a lot more. Give *The Dreamer* a look by stopping by at [www.thedreamercomic.com](http://www.thedreamercomic.com). Tell her Beau sent ya.

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