

Creator Interviews

Contents

Overview

About the Creators

Creator Interviews


Overview

In their graphic novel *The Lone and Level Sands*, writer A. David Lewis and artist Marvin Perry Mann (aka mpMann) retell a classic story from an unconventional vantage. The Pharaoh of the Book of Exodus is usually seen as one of the great villains of either history, literature, or both depending on how one chooses to read it. In Lewis and Mann's hands, the biblical character both emerges as a complex and conflicted figure and is the focal point of their tale. *The Lone and Level Sands* tells the story of a man trying to rule wisely, love his family well, and deal justly in the face of a divine wrath.

First published in 2005 as a black-and-white book by Caption Box, the book was selected by Archaia Studios Press for re-publication as a hardcover, full-color edition. In this revised endeavor, Lewis and Mann were joined by artist Jennifer Rodgers, whose conceptually and emotionally nuanced colors added further richness and depth to the storytelling.

While multiple awards and critical acclaim followed the book's re-publication in 2006, *The Lone and Level Sands* also received various criticism for being either too religious or too secular. Likewise, is it fictional or is it historical? Apologetic or condemning? Blurring the lines with every page, *The Lone and Level Sands* aims to encourage discussion and thought, holding no one viewpoint above the rest.

As Tom McLean of *Variety* writes, "Those who are intimately familiar with the Bible and those who aren't will both find something to like in this book... There's no sense of being preached to..."



THE LONE AND LEVEL SANDS

Reader's Guide



About the Creators

Emerging from the field of comic book academia, **A. David Lewis** has presented scholarly papers on the comic book medium at conferences across the country and published articles in *The International Journal of Comic Art*, for which he is now an Editorial Board member. He has edited and written for a number of small press comic companies including Red Eye Press with *Valentine*, Sky Dog Comics with *Even More Fund Comics*, and Silent Devil Productions with *Dracula vs King Arthur*. In 2002, Lewis debuted his own title, the dark suspense anthology *Mortal Coils*, which went on to be named a winner in the 2003 *Cinescape* Literary Genre Competition. Following stints as an instructor at both Georgetown University and Northeastern University as well as a conference lecturer, Lewis joined Boston University in 2006 to pursue his PhD in Religion & Literature. Lewis was nominated for a Harvey Award for Best New Talent in 2006.

Marvin Perry Mann began his comics career in 1989 inking *The Trouble With Girls* for Malibu Graphics, going on to illustrate *Ape City* and the hilarious *Girls* spin-off *Lizard Lady*. Returning to comics in 2002, he utilized 3dsmax animation and modeling software to create a 240 page silent comic strip and two related flipbook animations for Mark Stephen Meadows' book *Pause and Effect: The Art of Interactive Narrative*. He has appeared in several anthology comics and the webcomics *Arcana Jayne: Hair of the Dog* with Lisa Renee Jonte (Girllamatic.com) and *Lifelike* with Dara Naraghi (Komikwerks.com).

Colorist **Jennifer Rodgers** is an illustrator with a Bachelor's Degree in Illustration from Moore College of Art & Design. Winner of the Norman Cohn Award for Excellence in Applied Illustration in 2003, she has done coloring work for Sky Dog Comics, trading card illustrations for the *Wars Trading Card Game* from Decipher, and illustrations and design work for role-playing games from Anvilwerks, Blue Devil Games, and Hero Games. She was nominated for a Harvey Award for Best Colorist for her work on *The Lone and Level Sands*.

Creator Interviews

Tim O'Shea — *Silver Bullet Comics*, Mar 2005

Tim O'Shea: How much research did you do in preparation for this graphic novel, or did Dave provide a lot of background at the outset of the project?

mpMann: Dave provided some of his source material, Ozymandias, Exodus, etc. as well as photos from his visit to the British Museum. But, as you might expect, I was not unfamiliar with the story. I went to Sunday School. I saw *The Ten Commandments* and *Prince of Egypt*. I also picked up a thick volume of reference photos.

But as the book progressed it became less a matter of reference and more a matter of staying within what I had already established for earlier pages, whether that was accurate or not. Internal coherence trumps slavish devotion to reality.

O'Shea: What attracted you to the project more--the writer or the subject matter?

Mann: Certainly, it was a little of both. I knew (of) Dave...and had seen his books. I was impressed by his evident intelligence and energy. And I'm always awed by people who can make their comics a reality.

But this project in particular had appeal for me. I liked the exotic romanticism of the setting, and after all, it's not so far removed from a Sword and Sorcery epic. Plus Dave's reversed take on the story, seeing it from Pharaoh's eyes, is intriguing.

What I saw (and I'm not sure if Dave immediately conceived of it in those terms) is that God functions as



illustrator
Marvin Perry Mann

the villain of the piece. God manipulates Pharaoh and is rather brutal in His treatment of the Egyptians. I like characters that have ambiguous motivations and contain contradictions. The God of Moses, like other ancient gods, were so often portrayed as full of jealousy and spite.

O'Shea: In terms of the collaborative effort, how quickly did you two click and how did the collaboration improve/change over time?

Mann: Pretty much right off. We batted the idea around a bit. I was still thinking of a short story and pushing my view (outlined above) which Dave seemed to find simpatico and illuminating of his viewpoint. He did some research and began to realize that what he wanted to do with it would require a good deal more work.

Richard Vasseur – Jazma Online, Mar 2006

RV: What is the story about?

A. David Lewis: Frankly, we're stealing from one of the best-known sources on the planet: The Bible. It's essentially the story of Exodus, except spun so as to watch the events unfold from the perspective of the Egyptian royal family. On top of that, though, the goal was to build in as much historical data on Egypt as possible—not to contradict the biblical story but to refashion it. It's not a preachy book; it's not a "religious" comic. It's a story about people---leaders and family members—and how they react to extraordinary times.

RV: How did you come up with the title?

ADL: Again, I'm stealing from an earlier source. (It's something I love to do: literary homage, which is much fancier and more polite than "stealing.") The title comes from a line of poetry written by Percy Blysshe Shelley. The name of that poem is "Ozymandias," the Greek name for Ramses II, and it basically tells of his downfall. "Round the decay / Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare / The lone and level sands stretch far away." The trick here, though, was that I loved the romantic sound of even that bleak setting, but what I had read about Ramses II historically didn't suggest his kingdom actually fell to ruin. It's an excellent metaphor created by Shelley of the fleeting power held by rulers, but I got more interested with how the legendary, "evil" Pharaoh may have actually experienced the plagues.

writer
A. David Lewis



RV: What is Pharaoh Ramses II like?

ADL: [...] The character of Ramses in our book, though, is pretty human and humane. He doesn't seem to buy into much of the worship assigned to him, and he is committed to his family almost above all other things. Ramses is a fairly good ruler, even though, like Thomas Jefferson or even early Lincoln, he doesn't really put his mind to "the slave issue." It's as though he has only long-term and immediate vision: the future of Egypt and the immediate well-being of his family and friends. When things finally boil over and he has a crisis on his hands, Ramses II has to radically alter his perception.

All in all, we certainly gave the "evil Pharaoh" of the Bible and Qu'ran a really fair shake. But, in terms of his being a real, historical figure, I think we showed him as human, both noble and failed.

RV: Did you and A. David Lewis research this book?

MPM: Dave did deep research for the book, delving into archeology, history, the Bible, the Koran, and Cecil B. DeMille. I'm lazier, but I bought books on ancient Egypt, poked around the Web and looked at a few movies as well. I was influenced by Egyptian art for more than costumes and buildings, though. We tend to think of Egyptian art as very formal, but walls are often over painted and various hands clearly touched a project, resulting in lots of variation in style and look. I took a relaxed approach to type sizes and drawing styles as a result of this. Think of it as "inspired by wall paintings" more than miming them. But the project took over a year to draw [...]

RV: How would you describe your art?

MPM: I've worked hard over many years to give myself permission to drop the comics style I learned as a young man, and loosen up. My drawing is fast and easy and stripped down. It's cartoonish, with a naturalism to it... but not much realism.

.RV: How did you end up being a colorist?

Jennifer Rodgers: I'm an illustrator and I digitally color all of my own work. I always found color to be one of my strengths and, being a fan of comics, I decided to pursue colorist work. Seems to be working out so far! I was lucky enough to meet Dave Lewis at WizardWorld East last year and he gave me a shot at some sample pages. Lone and Level Sands, a very cool book, is my first published work in the comics industry.

RV: What do you think of the art you are coloring on The Lone and Level Sands?

JR: Marv's art is great. He's got a really fresh, quick and dirty kind of style. There is lots of emotion in there too. I like it a lot and I like how my colors work with his art. We make a very good team.

RV: Why is coloring important to a comic?

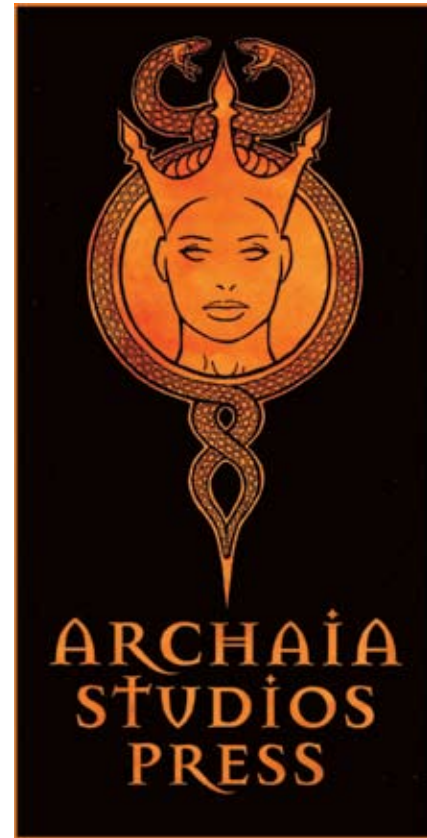
JR: Color really makes the art come alive. It increases the focus and depth of the art, but it can also add to the emotion of the story. Really makes the viewer feel the mood. This was actually one of my main goals with LaLS and I feel that I was pretty successful.

RV: Do you feel colorists are under appreciated?

JR: Absolutely. I don't think too many viewers understand how much color contributes to the final product. I think I'll just leave it at that!



*colorist
Jennifer Rodgers*



THE LONE AND LEVEL SANDS Reader's Guide -
Creator Interviews. Mark Smylie, ed.
Fort Lee, NJ: Archaia Studios Press, 2006.

THE LONE AND LEVEL SANDS is copyright 2005
by A. David Lewis and Marvin Perry Mann.

Second (color) Edition published by ASP Comics LLC
www.aspcomics.com

THE LONE AND LEVEL SANDS and all related
characters are trademarks of Caption Box, and are used
by permission by ASP Comics LLC.

Permission is granted to reproduce this Reader's Guide
for educational purposes.

ABOUT ARCHAIA STUDIOS PRESS

Mark Smylie founded Archaia Studios Press (ASP) in 2002 as the home for his epic fantasy comic book, *Artesia*, winner of ForeWord Magazine's Best Graphic Novel of 2003, and its sequels—*Artesia Afield* and *Artesia Afire*. *Artesia: Adventures in The Known World*, a new RPG based on Mark's creation, expanded ASP into the world of gaming. In 2005, Mark expanded ASP to publish a line of creator-owned titles, including *Robotika* (by Alex Sheikman), *Mouse Guard* (by David Petersen) and *The Lone and Level Sands* (by A. David Lewis and Marvin Perry Mann). Other titles include *The Killer* (by Matz and Luc Jacamon), *OKKO: The Cycle Of Water* (by Hub) and *The Secret History* (by Jean-Pierre Pécau and Igor Kordey, Leo Pilipovic, and Goran Sudzuka). More information can be found at <http://www.aspcomics.com>.