



WORDS
Tara Crutchfield

PHOTOGRAPH
Tyler Williams Photography

HOCUS POCUS COMICS

There is magic on the pages and in the minds of Hocus Pocus creators Dwight and Rebecca MacPherson. The Lakeland couple met and fell in love through a comic book – now they make their own.

CREATIVE ROOTS

"I love literature; I'm a literature nerd first," said Dwight MacPherson. "I love the way you can create a movie in a book." Influenced by the work of Alan Moore and Chris Claremont, Dwight has been interested in comics since childhood. He remembers reading Moore's "Swamp Thing Annual #1" and wanting to grow up to make comics. He used to draw as a child but soon turned to words. "I couldn't draw fast enough to get what was on my mind on the paper, and it frustrated me," he said. Dwight began writing in a stream of consciousness, growing discipline as he got older until he could plot out and complete stories.

In the tenth grade, he and a group of friends created and published a comic. They Xeroxed the pages and sold it at a local comic shop called Geppi's Comic World in Clearwater. They printed one hundred copies and sold them all. "Steve Geppi is such a nice guy – he probably bought the one hundred copies," Dwight said, grinning.

Dwight was born in Michigan and moved to Lakeland at age nine, attending Dixieland Elementary. His family moved around Florida, with Dwight leaving the state for the military. He spent 14 years in the Army before being injured during active duty. He then moved with his sons to Tennessee to be near his parents.

The Army sergeant would create the story that would later catch Rebecca's eye while stationed in South Korea. He used his time to study historical records and research pirates like Captain Kidd, Bartholomew Roberts, and Blackbeard. "I wanted to create a timeline where I could put all three of these pirates together," he said. Dwight wrote the comic book "Dead Men Tell No Tales" about the three pirates searching for the lost relics of Christ.

Rebecca MacPherson, originally from New York, was raised in Los Angeles. She has always had a deep appreciation for music, literature, film, and plays. "My earliest memories have always been of family and music playing in the background. My mom always had the radio on," she said. Rebecca heard everything from The Beatles and Broadway tunes, to instrumentals and Led Zeppelin. "I had a really eclectic upbringing, and I knew I wanted to do either music, or I wanted to be on stage." Her mom used to tell her that she would run around the house, acting things out, and writing plays. It wasn't only the Top Ten radio tunes that influenced Rebecca. Her grandmother had all the classics in her library – Rebecca read them all. "The Wind in the Willows" and other classic literature were influential to her and continue to be. Clive Barker's "Weaveworld" stoked her imagination to write, she said.

With a background as an independent producer of TV, film, and theatre production for 20th Century Fox Studios and Tribune Studios, Rebecca has done everything from work in wardrobe at the Apollo Theatre and many impressive gigs during her seven years as a freelancer in LA. She worked on theatre productions, in PR, and as a personal assistant for Overbrook Entertainment to A-list actors, as well as an Assistant Director. "That was an amazing creative time for me," she said. "That's what I always wanted to do from a child, I wanted to be in the entertainment business, and I knew I wanted to be a part of that world that created the magic that I grew up seeing. [...] I loved it; it just fed my imagination so much."

LOVE AT FIRST COMIC

While working at Meltdown Comics on Sunset Boulevard, Rebecca noticed a striking pirate display, with one eye-catching book entitled "Dead Men Tell No Tales." She bought the book and enjoyed it so much she reached out to its publisher to try and get in touch with the author, Dwight L. MacPherson. The two began corresponding online and over the phone, as Rebecca wished to option the rights to the comic. Bonding over shared interests, the two discussed

- CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 -

"The Twilight Zone," "Star Trek," literature, poetry, writing, and art. "I had to keep pinching myself," Dwight said. "Over the course of a year, we knew we were meant for each other," said Rebecca.

"That's how we met – through a book," said Rebecca with a smile.

They decided to meet at a comic book convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, called HeroesCon. They eventually got married, and Rebecca moved from LA to Tennessee with Dwight and his sons. After a few years, the family decided to move back to Lakeland.

"That's how we met – through a book," said Rebecca with a smile.

FUELED BY IMAGINATION

In January of 2017, the MacPhersons launched a new venture – Hocus Pocus Comics. "We decided to do our own thing and tell our stories that we wanted to tell," said Rebecca.

When deciding on a moniker to be the essence of their creative brand, Dwight thought back to J.R.R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings," specifically, how Tolkien imagined the character Gandalf. "Gandalf doesn't do magic – magic is part of his nature," he said. "I've always been fascinated with magic in fantasy. Where does it come from? Where does the power come from? To me, imagination is powerful – that's the source of magic, and so that is the way that I approach magic in my books. Imagination is what creates the magic." After trying on a few names like Alakazam and Open Sesame, they landed on Hocus Pocus Comics.

Their eclectic catalog of books includes "The Imaginary Voyages of Edgar Allan Poe," "Elevator," "Houdini's Silver Dollar Misfits," "Terra Somnium," "Vampire Squid Boy," and an upcoming graphic novel, "The Key."

From the minds of the MacPhersons, you'll find stories both timely and timeless. Dwight described them as "an amalgamation," and indeed, they are. Many reference historical characters or take a page from a literary classic. In their debut comic, "The Imaginary Voyages of Edgar Allan Poe," the MacPhersons explore the celebrated storyteller through a tale set in a fictionalized dream world complete with mythological gods and monsters, "created by his genius... and his madness!"

"What's really cool about 'The Imaginary Voyages of Edgar Allan Poe' is I can also incorporate my love of mythology and epic stories," said Dwight.

For his part, Dwight is the President, Publisher, and Creator of Hocus Pocus Comics with Rebecca working as Vice President, Administration, and Managing Editor. The pair work together, joining their genius to create lively stories that anyone can enjoy – whether a comic book fan or not. "This is a marriage of art and literature. It's a comic book, but it has themes that you can relate to as well," said Rebecca.

FROM MIND TO PAGE

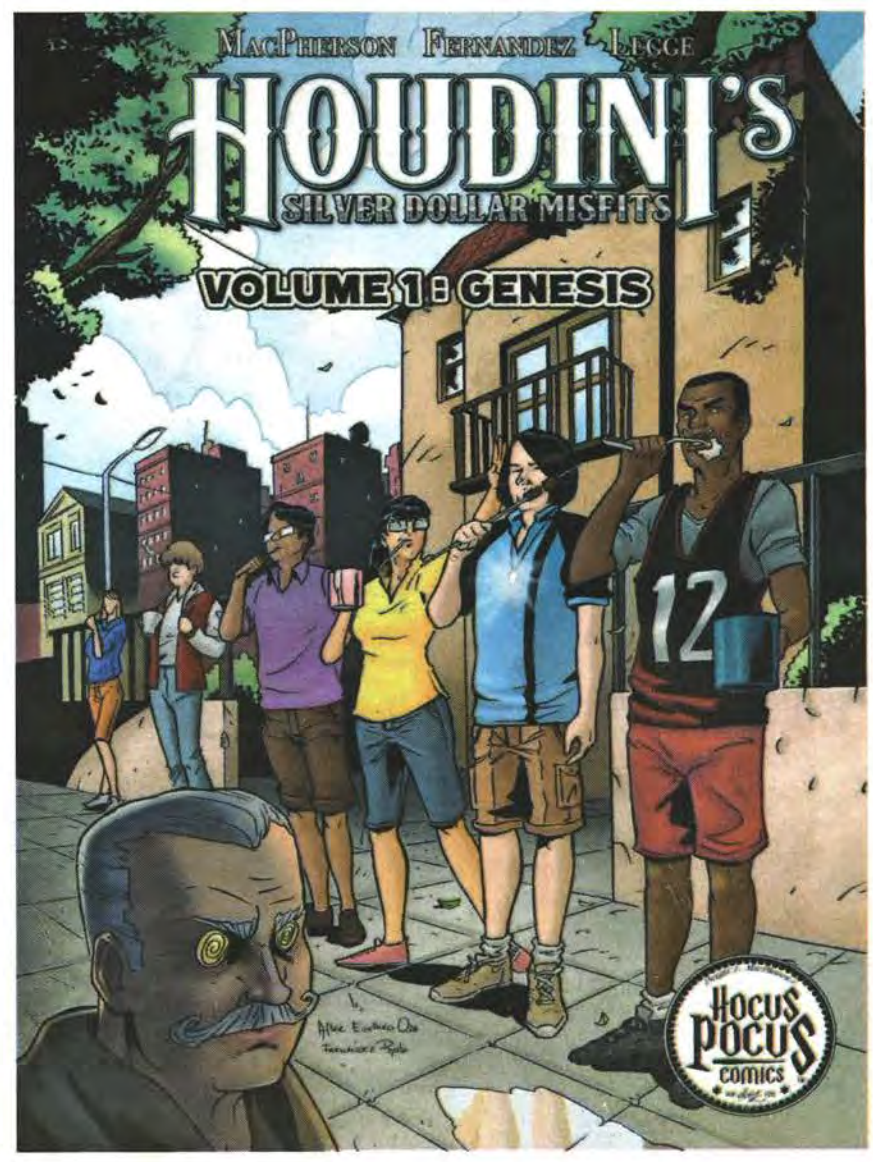
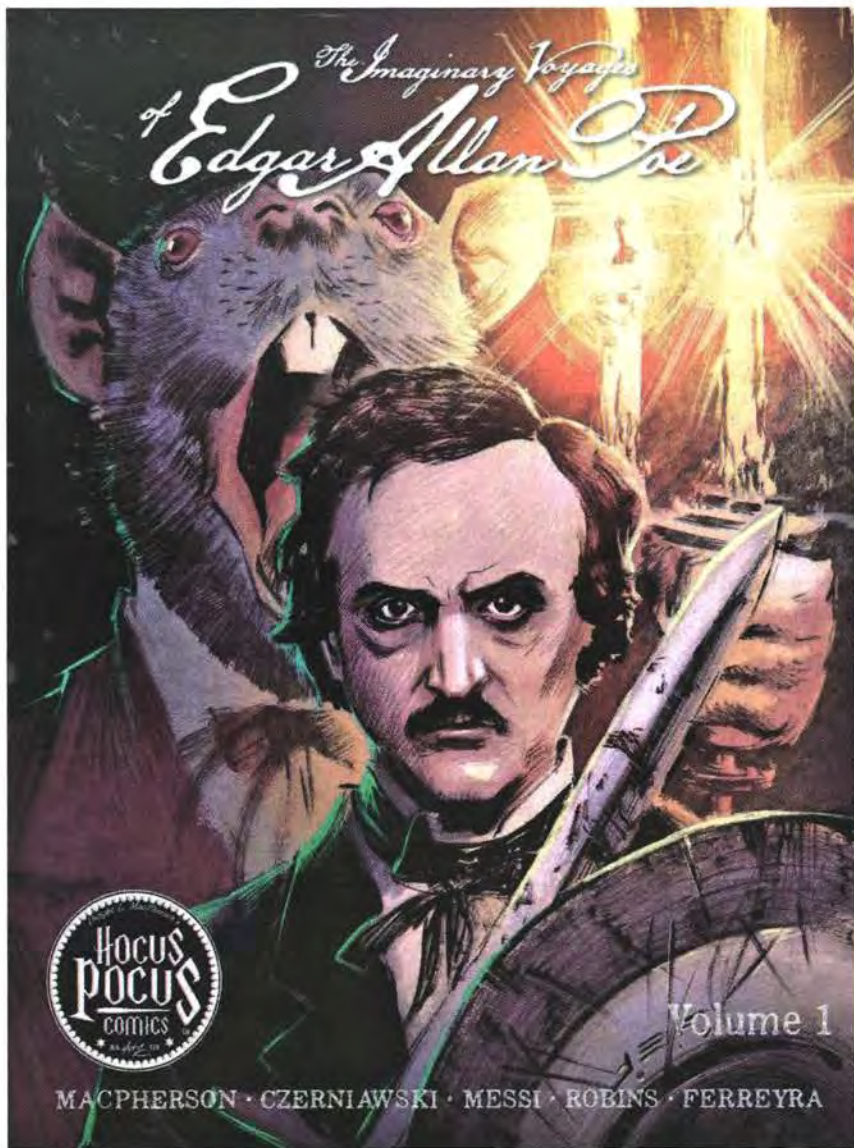
"We do it the way we want to do it," said Dwight. "We're involved in the whole process from character sketches to penciled pages, to colors, lettering, production, and design of the book itself." Rebecca added, "We get to take our time with it. [...] We're willing to do one book a year, maybe two, to really tell the story like we want to tell it, and have it look beautiful."

When Dwight tells her an idea, Rebecca imagines it as a movie, "That's how I see things, cinematically," she said. Dwight and Rebecca use the magic that is their imaginations to develop the skeleton for a compelling story. The comic book creators say the storytelling sweet spot lies between not assuming your reader knows your ideas while also not spoon-feeding them information.

The next step is to write it out as a screenplay with detailed direction, which isn't too tough for the cinematically-minded Rebecca. "Writers are always looking, and we're always thinking about people's quirks," she said. She noted a writer must convey the smallest details and mannerisms of a character, so the reader can imagine just how they might move their hair from their face or scratch their head.

With a graphic novel, these details and directions are equally crucial for the artist. "The artist does not share your imagination," Dwight said. "He can't see the screens inside my head, so the more description I can give, the better." The MacPhersons work with the artist, approving character sketches and panels of sequential art, then have it inked and colored before working with their production manager to send files to the printer. They publish Hocus Pocus Comics through Amazon.

- CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 -



INSPIRATION THROUGH EDUCATION

Education has been a big piece of the MacPhersons' focus. "I learned that reluctant readers are far more likely to read comics," said Dwight. The MacPhersons have a son with autism who was reluctant to read. So, they gave him comic books. "He devoured them and went on to read the classics," he said.

Dwight admits he didn't think about the union of comics and education until a book signing at Barnes and Noble. About 25 teachers came to have him sign their books – books they had been using in their classrooms. Feedback from the teachers lit a fire within the comic book writer. "I want to inspire the next generation," he said.

"I want to inspire the next generation," he said.

MacPherson had the opportunity to speak with Special Education majors at Texas Tech University, who were enchanted with his book, "Houdini and the Silver Dollar Misfits." "All the stars have disabilities, which you would think would be a disability but ends up being a strength," he said of the book. "I've heard it called 'Scooby-Doo meets the X-Men.'" They now use the graphic novel in their curriculum.

"Comics are being used on the collegiate level so much now and in classrooms as well. That's where I wanted to infiltrate because the mainstream comic industry wants to make movies and TV shows – that's their focus. My focus is on education. I want to get my books into classrooms so that they can inspire young readers," Dwight said. Many Hocus Pocus Comics are based on historical fiction or literature. "Elevator," for example, incorporates a modernized re-imagining of Dante's "Inferno." The MacPhersons hope these books inspire children to become more involved in the subject. Dwight added, "Hopefully, it will inspire them to create on their own."

To aid in their educational efforts, Hocus Pocus Comics Education Coordinator, Tim Smyth, a former teacher and

current college professor, set them up with the United States Department of English and Language's Virtual Exchange Program. The MacPhersons do Flipgrid presentations and workshops on their books, which the department then sends to schools worldwide. "This is our legacy; this is what I'm leaving behind. When I'm long gone, you'll see my videos, you'll hear my voice – but you'll see our words, which is more important to me," said Rebecca.

Before the current health crisis, the MacPhersons were preparing to offer in-person classes. On the advisory board for George Jenkins High School, Dwight will mentor students in English and Rebecca in TV and Film Production when safely able to do so.

Rebecca put it succinctly during a Department of Education Flipgrid presentation arranged by Smyth. "The future of education is through informative content combining pictures and art. Graphic novels are the embodiment of this concept, and we are excited to be on the forefront of this new wave of education!"

COMING UP...

Currently, Volume 1 of "The Imaginary Voyages of Edgar Allan Poe" is on sale, with Volume 2 set to be released in December. In the Spring, HP Comics will release Volume 3 and put them together as an Educators Package complete with study guides. These will be available either as physical copies or printable PDFs.

Their newest project, currently being written, a graphic novel called "The Key," will be released in the Fall of 2021. Rebecca described the book, whose main characters will be Lucas Hart and Lena Johnson, as "a mystery which touches on interracial issues so prevalent in today's climate."

Hpcomics.net
info.hpcomics@gmail.com
FB @hocuspocuscomics
IG @hp.comics
TW @hpcomics_



WILD

HAVEN October



PRSRT STD
U.S. Postage Paid
Manasota
Permit #1092
Postal Customer
EGRWSS