

# The New Comics: Michael LaRiccia

written by Guest Contributor | January 6, 2016



*"Tangled Planet" (excerpt)*

**MICHAEL LARICCIA** is a Xeric Award-winning graphic designer and comic creator. He is the author of *Tangled Planet*, *Grayskull Grindhouse*, *T00 FAST*, *Black Mane*, *Pirahnaz* and many other titles. LaRiccia freelances in illustration and graphic design on the East Coast, where he lives with his wife and son. He can be found online at his [website](#), and on [Tumblr](#).

## **ON HE-MAN AND FATHERHOOD**

I was a full time graphic designer when I lived in New Jersey, but I never got paid to do comics. Now I live in Maine and I'm a full time dad. I don't clock in anywhere. All the work I do is inspired by what's going on in my life. Being a parent has been front and center for the last few years, so since I moved here I've been inspired to do more family-oriented work. But there's always the two sides of what I'm working on—the crazy adult side, and then the family stuff.

 I used to go to shows all the time and meet people, but focusing on my family has meant that I don't keep up with the business side as much anymore. But I do still try to think of ways to get my work in people's faces. I posted an *X-Men* fan comic online, and then tried a *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* comic, which became *Grayskull Grindhouse*. I ended up doing this revenge love story between He-Man and Clamp Champ (the only black character in *Masters of the Universe*). My son is mixed. I was worried there would be no characters he could relate to—back in the 80s things were more racist, less inclusive.

The plan for this was that basically Clamp Champ becomes He-Man. I was shifting all these characters so that the main characters are people of color, and all of the old guard get killed off, so it rebuilt MOTU in this totally modern lens. I had the ideas that this would be something I could show to my son someday, and it would present a more modern representation of the world we are living in.

## **ON CHILDREN AND PLANETS**

My first book was *Black Mane* in 2005. That was an interesting point in comics, where small publishers were just becoming popular and public, and everyone was doing graphic novels. I had this mindset about making stories that weren't serialized, just a novel or novella. That's great when you don't have kids, but it's not realistic. I continued to do that up until I started *Tangled Planet*.

*TP* is half finished—it's kind of my all-ages book. It 's about a living

planet trying to heal itself, trying to rid itself of the lifeforms on it. The boy in the story and his parents are separated, which is a metaphor for the planet separated from its moon.

I also enjoy creating illustrated children's books. They're not long form, and if you go too long you've sort of defeated the purpose for them. And they're something my son can read. He sees me doing work and its not like I'm going to show him a bloodbath He-Man comic, although he'd probably like it. But a children's book is something I can show him now.

The comic work I do is basically reflecting on my life and the things I'm thinking about, and it's cathartic in that way. But it's a tricky thing because my priorities are my family, my livelihood—and then the art comes after.

### **ON MONEY AND SUCCESS**

✖ Each of my books are dear to me for different reasons. *TOO FAST* was a story I wrote to help me come to terms with a friend's addiction. *Pirahnaz* is a love letter to 90's comics which basically developed me as an artist. and *Tangled Planet* because it was a chance for me to reflect as a parent and the magic of childhood. I'm not making work that's designed to be commercial. I don't know that it could be turned into a movie.

The reality is that you can't make a lot of money doing comics. Some people do, but I think that's the exception—and then once you make money, it might not be as fun anymore.

You have to work like crazy. I didn't realize that till five or six years ago. It dawned on me that even the guys I'm into, they weren't making a living that was comfortable. They were getting exposure, but they didn't have health insurance. I keep seeing these stories of cartoonists asking for help with medical stuff. That sucks!

But that's the reality of the arts. You can be out in the world and thousands and thousands of people love and respect your work, but society isn't willing to spend the money. I'd rather have a good quality of life than be well known.

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