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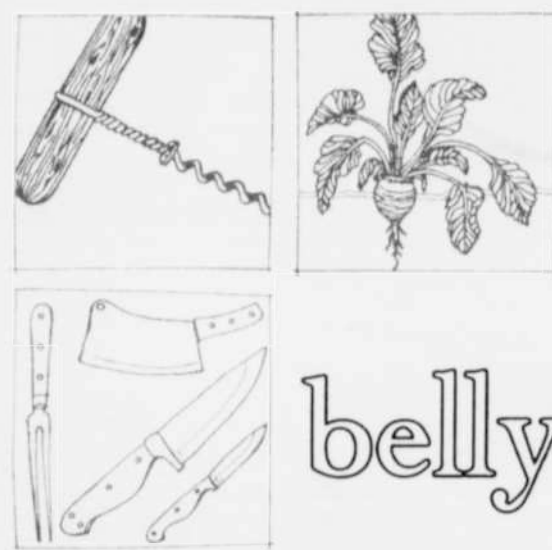
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CULTURE

Gnerds Unite!

Briar Hollow web comic creators eye higher learning

BY RYAN J. PRADO

Imagine, if you can, a world where college students languish in indecision, feigned apathy reigns supreme and the first flutters of romance hinge on countless missed signals. Everyone feels insecure about their place in the bustling hum of society. Twentysomethings become embroiled in fiery debates over multi-sided die RPGs, fantasy video games and fade into sci-fi daydreams when life gets a little too real. If this sounds a lot like real life, then the picture of web comic series *Briar Hollow* is becoming clearer.

Bereft of the superhero quotient—save for perhaps the possession of “super resolve” to suffer the hurdles of adolescence relatively unscathed—the brainchild of Portland artist Terry Blas, along with lifelong friend Kimball Davis, is a sequential study of suburban slings and arrows. With half of Volume 1 having been posted online, a vibrant, colorful and decidedly nerd-chic world has unfolded, laying the foundation for the duo’s second volume: the unveiling of a gay character.

Recently established comics like *Archie* and *Batwoman* generated headlines for their introduction of LGBTQ characters into their serials. In Vancouver, Wash., Darren Davis’ Bluewater Productions has pioneered the gay character with HIV-positive superhero Zak Raven. And though there may be count-

less other gnerd (gay nerds, as defined by Blas and Davis) efforts populating the fertile comic underground of comics, *Briar Hollow* appears to have emerged as the only one dealing not just with the racket of growing up, but also the sensitive issue of anti-gay bullying.

The story for Blas and Davis begins about a year ago when Blas was a student at Pacific Northwest College of Art, enrolled in a graphic novel course. His final project was to make a comic.

“I came up with this idea about these nerds playing a game and fighting about it,” says Blas. “I liked the characters and I kind of kept going with it. It was the first comic I think I created characters for that I’ve ever put out there for people to really see.”

The first *Briar Hollow* page went up on Blas’ website in March 2010, following the recruitment of Davis. The two have been friends for more than 25 years, meeting first as children sharing an affinity for sci-fi, video games and, of course, comic books, in the same neighborhood in Boise, Idaho.

“From an early age we were both sort of interested in artistic things,” explains Blas. “[In Boise] you kind of have to go out and seek what you enjoy. There were a lot of trips to the comics store and a lot of hours drawing together and making up stories. Most



“More than anything, we want this to be a love letter to gay kids and teens and their allies...Anyone who feels like an outcast needs somewhere to go to feel accepted. Hopefully *Briar Hollow* can be that place.”

-TERRY BLAS

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