

= Bizenghast =

Bizenghast is a debut gothic graphic novel series written and illustrated by M. Alice LeGrow . The first seven volumes were published by Tokyopop , with the final volume released in late April 2012 . After placing in Tokyopop 's Rising Stars of Manga competition with her short story " Nikolai " , LeGrow successfully pitched the series to Tokyopop 's editors . She worked on the series from 2004 to 2011 . Set in the haunted New England town of Bizenghast , the story follows Dinah , an orphaned teenager who is tasked with returning each night to an ancient mausoleum to free the ghosts within the building .

Several adaptations of Bizenghast have been released , including a novel by Shawn Thorgersen , animated episodes , and a tabletop roleplaying game . Critics praised Bizenghast for the gothic atmosphere and art , but noted the traditional elements and varying quality of the series .

= = Plot = =

Set in the fictional New England town of the same name , Bizenghast focuses on fifteen @-@ year @-@ old Dinah Wherever . Her parents ' car crash leaves her orphaned at a young age , and as a result , she moves in with her aunt . Dinah can see the ghosts which haunt her aunt 's house , which was a hospital and later a boarding school ; however , her aunt and doctor believe that she suffers from schizophrenia . One day , she and her only friend , Vincent Monroe , sneak out of her aunt 's house to search for materials for his garden . They stumble across an ancient mausoleum , and after Dinah reads aloud from a plaque , she discovers that her name is written on a contract which binds her to return to the mausoleum every night to free the ghosts . If she succeeds , she will win her freedom and a reward . If she fails , she will die and stay in the mausoleum as a corpse .

For every ten ghosts appeased , Dinah and Vincent get a tower guard to help with their task . Over the course of the series , they meet two of the guards : Edaniel , a grinning cat @-@ like creature , and his brother Edrear , who secretly likes Dinah . Vincent dies while in one of the vaults , causing Dinah to become depressed . Later , the hooded angel , which normally guards the entrance to the mausoleum , appears as two stones that talk to Dinah and help her overcome the depression which resulted from Vincent 's death .

Dinah continues searching the vaults and discovers that Edaniel and Edrear 's sister , Eniri , is missing , and that the seed of the mausoleum ? its link to the Host in the afterlife ? has been stolen . Additionally , Edaniel and Edrear 's other sister , Elala , is found dead . After Edaniel and Edrear lock down the mausoleum , they send Dinah home and she discovers that Maphohetka , a girl hanged for witchcraft and who now as a ghost can control minds in the real world , is manipulating Eniri and the townspeople . Unsuccessful in her attempt to stop her , Dinah flees to the mausoleum and receives a special outfit melted from the gold tolls that she and Vincent paid to gain access to the mausoleum . Returning , she confronts Maphohetka , who then orders Edaniel to kill her .

In the ensuing battle , Dinah faces off against her former friend , accidentally decapitating Edaniel in the process . An enraged Edrear attempts to kill her , but eventually halts when Dinah points out that he 's crying for his brother , something that he 's normally unable to do and that 's being caused by Maphohetka 's influence . Knowing that he 's been compromised , Edrear stabs himself with his own sword , leaving Dinah to mourn him and share one kiss . Maphohetka , taking the opportunity , destroys Dinah 's scythe (the only thing she had that could potentially kill her) and ends up mutating into a large monster . After Dinah is captured in Maphohetka 's body , she happens upon the entity 's core , which is Maphohetka 's decayed corpse . Using Eniri 's bracelet to see into the monster , she finds that a piece of the cross Maphohetka was stabbed with during her hanging is still lodged in her chest , allowing Dinah to conclude that the piece is what keeps the evil spirit anchored in the living world . Dinah removes the cross shard , causing Maphohetka to fade away .

Wanting to seek help , Dinah stabs herself with the cruifix piece , allowing her to temporarily ascend into the afterlife . There , she encounters her mother , who gives her another mausoleum seed that Dinah takes back to the living world . Dinah uses the seed to revive everyone killed in the incident and her armor melts into coins that flow out of the fountain . But in the end , Dinah opts to remove

the crucifix piece , killing her .

Dinah walks through her own funeral , bidding her mourning aunt goodbye before wandering outside . On the way , she encounters Vincent , but the two don 't recognize each other until they find the hidden graveyard . Dinah and Vincent become two mausoleum guards alongside a revived Edaniel and Edrear (two young women who happened onto the graveyard having been contracted to the mausoleum) . The series closes with Dinah on top of one of the towers beside Vincent , commenting how " she 's starting to like this town . "

= = Development = =

As a young girl , Mary Alice LeGrow was not interested in comics since she grew up in Weisbaden , Germany where comics were not readily available . In her freshman year of high school , she discovered comics and anime . She heard about Tokyopop 's Rising Stars of Manga competition from a friend at the 2003 Otakon , an anime convention in Baltimore , Maryland ; the stort story LeGrow submitted won a runner @-@ up place in the competition and was published in the 2003 Rising Stars of Manga anthology . She successfully pitched Bizenghast to the Tokyopop editors , and became the second Rising Stars of Manga winner to have an original series published by Tokyopop .

LeGrow worked on the series from 2004 to 2011 . She began Bizenghast when , for an art class assignment , she drew an open door and added the hooded angel statue in another class . In her initial designs , Dinah had simple features and short black hair , and Vincent was one of Dinah 's friends . LeGrow later removed the other friends from the story . She later lengthened Dinah 's hair and depicted her dressed in Lolita fashion ? clothing influenced by the Rococo and Victorian eras . Other changes included Dinah 's hair being altered from straight to curly and the addition of an exoskeleton @-@ like armour to Edrear . Tired of thin female characters in comics , LeGrow designed Edaniel 's girlfriend , Nareesha as " super full @-@ figured " .

When deciding on names for her protagonist , LeGrow considered Molly , Charlotte , Moira , Sally , and Diana before choosing Dinah ? a reference to the pet cat of the protagonist of Lewis Carroll 's novel Alice in Wonderland ; the 1984 comedy film Johnny Dangerously inspired her last name , Wherever . Vincent Monroe takes his name from Vincent Price and the actress Marilyn Monroe . Jane , Dinah 's aunt , shares her name with LeGrow 's sister . Edaniel takes his name from the name Daniel in a middle school yearbook which LeGrow picked at random ; she noted that the editors let her keep him in the story although he appeared a risky character to them . Edrear was initially named Mordred after the character from Arthurian myths . The name of his sister Elala comes from the character Lala Orange of Rainbow Brite , an animated television series . The minor character Prince Ironbound takes his name from the city Ironbound , New Jersey , while Lalibela , a holy town in northern Ethiopia , inspired Bali Lali 's . Another minor character , Dr. Morstan , takes his name from Mary Morstan , Dr. Watson ? s wife . " ?????????? " , the Russian word for marionette , inspired the name of the antagonist Maphohetka .

LeGrow comments that the series " is about life , death and fabulous outfits (not in that order) " and notes that there are " a lot of religious themes " present . The town of Bizenghast " represents a world cut off from that sort of constant access [of technology] . " The series was initially written to span about fourteen volumes and be divided into three seasons : the first seven volumes would make up the first story arc ; the second season , volumes eight through eleven , would center on the mausoleum 's relationship with the other guilds ; and season three would focus on the afterlife and consist of the last three volumes . LeGrow also considered writing a spin @-@ off based on Bizenghast with a guest artist , after she finished the first story arc of Bizenghast . The spin @-@ off would contain chapters not present in the original series , and after her other series was completed , she would continue Bizenghast . LeGrow concluded Bizenghast at eight volumes .

= = = Minor controversy = = =

A minor controversy occurred over a statement published in the July 2007 issue of the Tokyopop

publication Takuhai and in the back of the first Bizenghast volume written by a former Tokyopop editor and not authorized by LeGrow . It read :

Meet M. Alice LeGrow , and please call her Marty . And while you 're at it , call your best friend and tell her that if she 's going to cosplay any of Marty 's characters with you , both of you better do your research , or Marty 's going to be pissed . Because that 's Marty . She doesn 't like sloppiness . Especially when it comes to anime and cosplay . She especially won 't tolerate it if you 're dressing up like Dinah from Bizenghast , because Dinah is her first big market character . Not only that , Dinah 's fabulous . Do Dinah right , or don 't Dinah at all . Understand ?

LeGrow called it " worded in a way that I felt was offensive to me and to cosplayers " and noted that " none of it reflects my opinions . " Fan reaction to learning that the statement was inaccurate was generally relief since " they felt it didn 't mesh with [her] personality . " She stated :

I love cosplayers and I 'm flattered that anyone would cosplay my characters . I certainly wouldn 't want to deter anyone from doing so ... I 'm very open to any kind of cosplay . I 'm afraid the person who authored that piece felt they were doing me a favor and putting an edgy spin on my persona , but had I known about it prior to printing , I would have never allowed it to go into the book .

= = Media = =

= = = Graphic novels = = =

Written and illustrated by M. Alice LeGrow , Bizenghast is published in North America by Tokyopop . As of July 2010 , seven volumes have been released . The first was released on 9 August 2005 ; the most recent was published 1 July 2010 . However , Tokyopop 's North American branch stopped publishing on 31 May , 2011 ; because of it , the final volume of the series is being released through a print @-@ on @-@ demand agreement with RightStuf.com. The series is also distributed in New Zealand and Australia by Madman Entertainment , in Hungary by Mangattack , in Germany by Tokyopop Germany , in Finland by Pauna Media Group , and in Russia by Comix @-@ art .

= = = Books = = =

Three books based on Bizenghast have been released . On 13 February 2007 , Tokyopop also released a 72 @-@ page limited @-@ edition art book , Bizenghast : Falling into Fear (ISBN 978 @-@ 1 @-@ 59816 @-@ 748 @-@ 1) , which included stickers and pinup pages . Running Press published a coloring book based on the series , Color Me Manga : Bizenghast (ISBN 978 @-@ 0762431311) on 12 November 2007 . On 13 August 2008 , Tokyopop published a novel adaption , Bizenghast : The Novel (ISBN 978 @-@ 1 @-@ 4278 @-@ 1030 @-@ 4) , written by Shawn Thorgersen and with illustrations by LeGrow .

= = = Other = = =

Menfond Electronic Art adapted Bizenghast into animated short episodes or " iManga " . The iManga episodes featured music by Divine Madness and Kissing Violet , and premiered on My Space in summer 2007 . Overall , LeGrow praised the adaption . She liked the " kooky " background effects and Edaniel 's voice actor , but disliked Dinah 's " high @-@ pitched " voice which she had imagined as " deeper ... with a slight edge to it . Sort of like Mandy from The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy , but without the sarcasm . " The episodes were also available on Verizon 's V CAST . The television network iaTV acquired the seventeen two- to three @-@ minute @-@ long episodes as part of a " program acquisition deal and strategic ad sales partnership with Tokyopop . "

A tabletop roleplaying game based on the series was created by Clint Krause . Other merchandise included posters , scarves , playing cards , a plushie , postcards , a signed puzzle kit , and T @-@ shirts . Additionally , a two @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half @-@ hour DVD commentary about the first

Bizenghast volume , with Tokyopop editor interviews and bonus material , was planned to be released in mid @-@ August 2010 .

= = Reception = =

Bizenghast was well received by English @-@ language readers . The first volume debuted at the 79th spot on a list of the top 100 best @-@ selling graphic novels of August 2005 with an estimated 1 @,@ 434 copies sold . Daily Variety named Bizenghast one of Tokyopop 's top ten biggest titles . In June 2010 , the seventh volume sold 425 copies , ranking 294th on the list of the top 300 best @-@ selling graphic novels .

Bizenghast received positive reviews from critics . The September 2005 issue of Teen People listed Bizenghast as the Hot Book of the Month . Sheena McNeil of Sequential Tart praised the first volume as " a highly enjoyable read " . Coolstreak Cartoons 's Leroy Douresseaux described the series as " belong [ing] to a fantasy subgenre sometimes referred to as ' pop Gothic ' " and relying on atmosphere and looks . Critics praised the art of Bizenghast as detailed , but did not see it as manga @-@ styled . Anime Jump 's Chad Clayton called the series " heavily steeped in the gothic tradition " and commented that the series " successfully develops an inventive visual style all its own . It seems to owe more to classical art , gothic comics , and even artists like Edward Gorey than it does to manga . " Johanna Draper Carlson , a longtime reviewer for Publishers Weekly , found the art reminiscent " of classic fantasy indy comics " and noted " stock elements " in the story . Reviewers found Dinah 's character design " striking " and with the potential to appeal to fans of the Gothic Lolita fashion . Criticism focused on the writing , " uneven pacing " , flat characters , and the varying quality of the art . Anime News Network 's Zac Bertschy heavily criticized Bizenghast for the " slightly modified generic monster @-@ of @-@ the @-@ week cliché " plot , one @-@ dimensional characters , and art . David Welsh compared Bizenghast to " a cosplay of a horror manga " , and wrote : " It ? s got a handle on the cosmetics , but central elements of story and character are vague and underdeveloped . "

In his review of the novel adaption , Mania Entertainment 's Greg Hackmann disliked the large amount of description , the " inconsistent " narration , and felt that the novel was more of a " novelization in the most literal sense of the word , reading much less like an adaptation in the spirit of LeGrow 's work than a 1 @-@ to @-@ 1 copy of the source material . " Conversely , Sabrina Fritz wrote that the novel adaption was " well @-@ written , [and] engaging " and called it " one of the best light novels on the market " . Another reviewer for Mania Entertainment , Danielle Van Gorder , enjoyed " [t] he detail and perspective in the architectural drawings " and " incredibly detailed costumes " of the art book Falling into Fear .