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WITH NEW ALBUM

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SKIN&EARTH

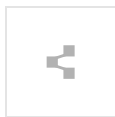


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On Friday, September 22nd, Canadian electro-pop artist, Lights, released a brand new album. Consisting of 13 tracks (12 full-length songs and an intro) the album, titled *Skin&Earth*, was a two year labor of love from the singer-songwriter, and a massive risk. Unlike her previous albums, *Skin&Earth* tells the story of a young woman trying to survive in a post-apocalyptic world, fighting against the pessimism of those around her, attempting to believe in something bigger, in something out beyond the boundaries she knows to be safe. It's a lofty story, to be sure, but it becomes much bigger when you discover that the story isn't just being told in song. It's also being told through a comic book.

"I've always wanted to see a perfectly high album/comic concept, especially all coming from the same artist and I just decided to be the one to do it and put the energy and time in to do it, and what happened was kinda crazy," Lights told SYFY FANGRRLS in an interview ahead of the album's release. "I never really thought it would be possible, but it's been cool to see the comic in the flesh and everything. It's just blowing my mind every day."



Thank you for
being a friend



Skin&Earth #3

The series is being published in six monthly issues by Dynamite Comics (the first three have been released, and it will continue through December). It's a brand new venture for the artist and a huge undertaking. Lights isn't just the writer on the project. She's also the artist, colorist, and letterer. This wasn't always the plan. Initially, she had intended only to do the art herself and to hire someone else to do the rest, but some advice from one of the best in the business convinced her otherwise.

"I actually approached Brian K. Vaughn ... kinda fully knowing he'd say no, but I went to the top first," she recalls. "But he was like, 'I think you should do it. You're a writer. You write songs.' And because Brian K. Vaughn told me to do it, I was like, 'well, I guess I have to do it.' So he kind of gave me the faith in myself to try it."

Vaughn also offered some advice on where to start, and how to put a book together. Since she had no experience writing comics before this, Lights sought advice from books and Youtube videos, but it was Vaughn's

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discussion of his own process that helped the most. And it's an influence you can see in the finished product, as she works to ensure that no page is overly crowded by too many panels or too much dialogue, a layout similar to that used in Vaughn's own work on books like *Saga*, *Paper Girls*, and *Y the Last Man*.

Skin&Earth #2

Lights has spent the better part of two years working on this project, and while she might be new to comic book writing, she's no stranger to the medium as a fan. She started, as many of us do, with newspaper comic strips, following the adventures of *Calvin and Hobbes*, or exploring the absurdities of the *Far Side*. Eventually, she made her way to the world of indie comics, which is where she encountered Vaughn, as well as books like *The Wicked + The Divine*, *Bitch Planet*, *Sex Criminals*, *Monstress*, *Descender*, and others. While she's a fan of Wonder Woman, Lights says superhero comics have never really grabbed her, preferring books with people who feel more real, despite their otherworldly circumstances. It's what she wanted her own comic to evoke. "These are characters who have their issues, who don't have their sh*t figured out and are volatile

but they're passionate, and what I'm drawn to in books too. That's what I feel like I am, and I just wanted to write a character that I related to."

Using a comic book to expand the story of *Skin&Earth* also made the most sense in terms of cost. "To make videos takes money and support from a crew. To make a show is the same thing. You know, it takes interest and probably an investor. But a comic, as long as I have the vision and the time to put into it, and the skill set, then it's free," says Lights. "You don't need a budget. You've got unlimited production value. I can come up with an entire world and not worry about going over budget. Any costume you want, anything you can visualize you can do in comics. And that's the beauty of it. It's raw art. You just have to dream it."

Skin&Earth #2

When she initially started to work on the project, Lights kept it a secret for a long time, slowly writing songs and introducing the concept to her collaborators over a period of time. When they and the label seemed excited about how the album was coming together, she sprung it on them.

Luckily, they were on board. "I was excited to know how people were going to react and everyone was so stoked," she recalls. "This is a fresh idea and you can never have too much raw art for an artist."

Then came a new challenge. How do you make a comic when you've never done one before? The label wasn't in the business of publishing comic books, of course, so they had to find a publisher who was as invested in the project as they were, someone who could help navigate that world and ensure the comic would be as successful as the album it supported. Lights pitched a number of publishers and eventually found Dynamite, home to long-running titles like *Red Sonja*, and tie-in series to both television shows and music acts.

"They just have a such a cool variety of mixed genre comics that I think the idea really appealed to them, so they jumped right in," says Lights about working with the publisher. "I've been so grateful to them because they've been so patient with me in teaching me how to deliver a comic. I didn't know anything about that. They really coached me through how to deliver my first comic and that was so helpful. I love them."

The comic and the album tell the same story, one influencing the other. Each of the six comic book issues corresponds to one of the first six tracks on the album in order, weaving a tale across mediums. Individual lines can be found in both the comic and its corresponding song. But it's not just story that is influenced by the music. All of the art works together to evoke similar feelings, similar emotions, and even similar colors. "Take *New Fears*, for example," says Lights. "When I listen to the song, I hear purples and burgundies. I always think there's a visual tie into sonic location. And that palate is in the first chapter of the comic. So it ties in in a bunch of ways. Visuals in the comic will work their way into the lyrics of the songs, so listening to them together will suddenly make all kinds of sense."

Despite that deep interplay between the two, Lights was careful to make sure neither

relied on the other to make sense. You can pick up the comic and get a complete story without ever listening to a note on the album, and you can listen to the album and never realize a visual element exists. According to Lights, every song has two meanings, one that fits the overall story, and one that can easily be applied to real life. It all depends on the listener.

Now that the hard part is behind her, Lights is looking to the future. She's not jumping right into a tour for the album, instead choosing to wait until it's had a chance to settle and the comic story has completed. That doesn't mean she's not touring, though, as she's already embarked on a number of shows supporting the band PVRIS, choosing to do something a little smaller before headlining. She's also started attending a handful of comic book conventions (she recently made an appearance at Fan Expo in Toronto) and is especially excited to see fans showing up dressed as En, the main character of *Skin&Earth*.

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As for whether or not we can expect more projects like this from her, Lights says definitely, but only if she's got the time to devote to it. "The sheer amount of work that I've put into it is mind-boggling. The amount of hours I've put into it -- it's very rare that I'll have the time to do that again, but I will always want to try. I have to make sure I have the time to get a project like this done," she says. "It's not necessarily going to be a comic, but it's really opened my eyes to the idea that we are capable of doing mixed media stuff as artists and there are people who are interested. I've been so stoked as to how receptive the fans have been to the idea, how excited they've been to explore the world. That's inspiring to me. That means you can explore anything and people are willing to give it a shot."

