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Comics 'n' Controversy

Was Rock 'N' Roll Comics publisher Todd Loren a shameless shyster making a buck off famous bands, or a music lover who fiercely defended the First Amendment? Probably a lot of Column A and a little of Column B, according to *The Story of Rock 'N' Roll Comics*, a 2005 documentary on the controversial comic line and its founder – which just finally got a DVD release (From Wild Eye Releasing, available [here](#)).

I still have a bunch of Revolutionary's Rock 'N' Roll Comics issues that I collected in the early '90s for their biographies of the likes of Metallica, Guns N' Roses, Alice Cooper, AC/DC, Nirvana and Aerosmith. Sometimes their black and white tales weren't the best rendered stuff out there, but it was a great way to learn more about bands that didn't have a biography out, or had one but you didn't want to invest the time and money in it (a big deal when you're a teenager). They were all over comic shops and record stores two decades ago.

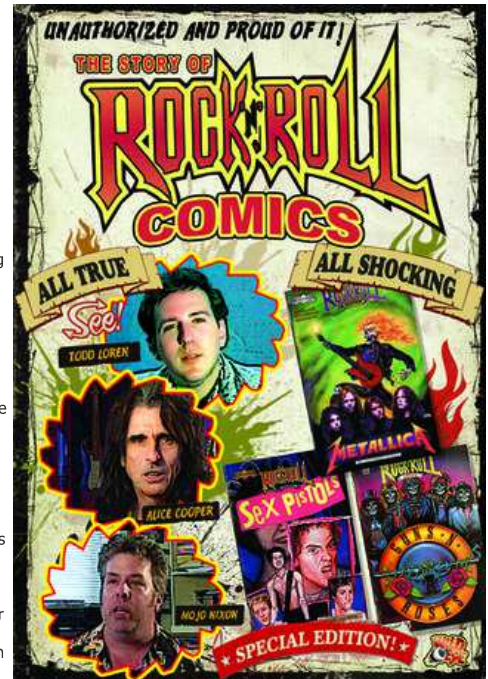
The Story of Rock 'N' Comics details the beginnings of the San Diego company, which was the brainchild of Todd Loren, who had previously been running a mail-order rock merch company and saw an opportunity. The company was almost immediately successful when its first issue on G N' R resulted in a cease and desist order that was reported on in *Rolling Stone*, making the issue sell out. From there the company continued to grow, starting other lines of music-themed and biography comics, and continued to court controversy, facing legal action by the likes of Bon Jovi and New Kids on the Block, which claimed the titles amounted to bootleg material.

The doc features interviews with former writers and illustrators, musicians Alice Cooper (who waxes somewhat philosophical on how cool the titles were) and Mojo Nixon (who recalls getting in trouble for jumping up on the Revolutionary Comics table at the San Diego Comic Con and playing made-up songs), and Loren's father and business partner Herb Shapiro. Their opinions of Loren range from scam artist who ripped off his employees, to crusader for free speech. Loren put "Unauthorized and Proud of It" on the cover of the comics, wrote inflammatory editorials against censorship and fought in court, resulting in key decision in his favour that ruled comics are a legitimate form of journalism and should be legally protected as such.

The Story of Rock 'N' Comics also deals with Loren's murder in 1992. His father found beaten and stabbed to death, and the case remains unsolved. Though Loren angered a lot of people during his 32 years, it's believed that he was killed by a [multiple murderer](#) who ran in the same social circles as him. The movie also illustrates how because Loren was gay, that they didn't put much effort into the investigation and ignored a lot of evidence.

The movie's obviously low budget works given the indie spirit of Rock 'N' Roll Comics, and it's unflinching when it comes to its subject. By many accounts, Todd Loren was jerk who styled himself a crusader but had no problem screwing over others. That said, *The Story of Rock 'N' Comics* makes a good case for him being just the kinda guy it takes to make such a controversial concept work and keep it going through legal turmoil. And that he was definitely a guy who had an impact on the industry by – regardless of his real motives – fighting in court for the legitimacy of comics as literature, and for helping push indie comics into the spotlight.

The DVD has some meaty extras, including some extended interview segments and news pieces on both the lawsuits and Loren's murder. *The Story of Rock 'N' Roll Comics* is definitely for a niche audience, and has a less than stylish true crime T.V. special feel to it, but if you're a former reader, comic geek or like a controversial true story, it's worth watching. Unlike the comics themselves, the story of Todd Loren is anything but black and white.



-Dave Alexander

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