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UNAUTHORIZED AND PROUD OF IT! – The Story of Rock N' Roll Comics

June 12, 2012 by [Fatherland Almighty](#)

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“We wanted this to be a history of rock n’ roll told completely out of chronological order.”

“You gotta fight for your freedom every goddamn day of your life or you’ll lose it!”

“He was just a dislikable fellow.”



I have very fond memories of Rock N' Roll Comics. They were obtainable at a Fry's (what Kroger grocery stores are called in Arizona) somewhat near my neighborhood as a kid on the magazine rack back when you could get comics at grocery stores and they'd all be obnoxiously creased from kids pulling down on them from all the way in the back to see which ones were there. Boy, did that make wanting to buy any such comics in disrespected shape like that quite the ordeal! Anyway, we'd buy these and take them to middle school and pass them around under our teachers' radars, thinking how cool it was that they wear swearing, smoking, drinking, and banging chicks IN COMIC BOOKS (hey, we were only 12 and this sort of thing floored us)! And of course many young'uns in our society utilize the music they listen to as a large detail in determining their pubescent identity, so it was only further reinforced to see some bands we totally admired yucking it up in comics. Well recently me and my buddy Dewtron were reminiscing about how cool these comics were and wondered where we can find them and hoped assholes weren't selling them for exorbitant amounts on eBay. Fortunately, through the many PR emails I get for Forbidden, I happened to get one regarding this documentary. I don't have to mention twice that I JUMPED at the opportunity to see it, review it, and proudly add it to my massive DVD collection!

Little did I know the tumultuous history of these comics and its creator, Todd Loren, (born Stuart Loren Shapiro, a name he would grow to refuse to answer to, according to his father). Loren was a vehement First Amendment advocate, and with that mindset he created a vast array of black-and-white VERY loose "bio" comics books with plenty of facts and plenty more conjectures and straight-up fabrications. Loren, along with a very charismatic and no-bullshit partner in Jay Allen Sanford began selling vintage comics through mail order ads waaaaay before the internet age via a business in San Diego called Comicade, which begat Musicade, that specialized in bootleg (which he touted as "import") music merch from shirts to patches to buttons to posters that we've all seen and perused at swap meets and county fairs. So Loren gets the bright idea to mix his two favorite passions and founded the publishing company Revolutionary Comics, under which Rock N' Roll Comics is born, with a mere two-thousand dollars. Loren wasn't afraid to start fires and certainly wasn't afraid of lawsuits, even ones brought forth by large corporate music labels. Attaining the ire of Guns N' Roses and New Kids On The Block (ironically, two bands that are often talked about more negatively than positively nowadays!) were among the greatest

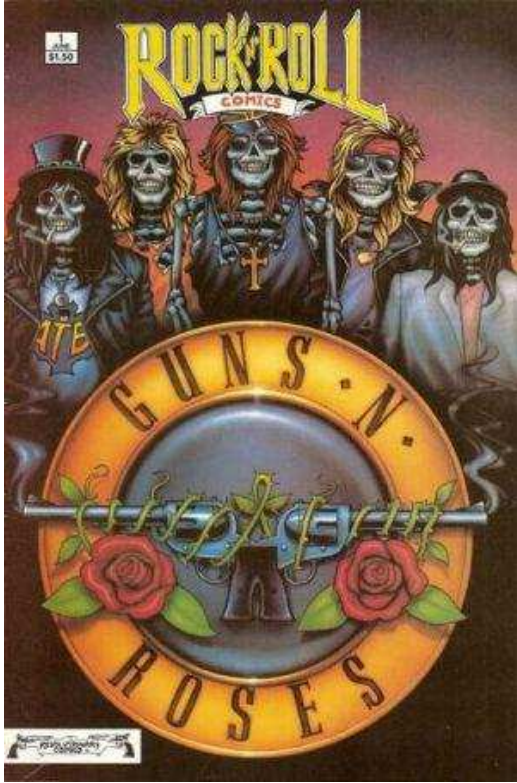


blessing for his young company, as I'll explain shortly.

With an entourage of (at the time) struggling artists and writers dying for any bone to be thrown at them, Loren's vision came to fruition in many shifty, lowbrow ways. He would put the contract on the back of their rather meager paycheck in tiny, illegible print and thus when the staff would sign the check they would sign the contract and forego all intellectual property rights over to Loren. False promises of raises after certain future dates and other bogus tidings were told left and right to his staff, and many people who worked with him directly or indirectly (other publishers, industry journal writers, etc.) have little to no kind words about him. An off-screen voice tells us "We didn't get paid shit. We got paid enough to survive, but we loved what we were doing".

Lawsuits, lawsuits, lawsuits. Loren spent a great deal of time in court defending his integrity, particularly against Winterland Group who had New Kids On The Block under their wings, and by golly, The First Amendment did indeed prevail when a judge ruled that Loren had the right to publish unauthorized biographies on whomever. The only safe territory that Loren could not use without permission was

the band's trademarked logo, so he simply modified it to look nothing like the original, off-limits version. Material was written through piecemealing various sources together, whether it was scouring articles on the bands from a variety of sources to interviewing people who had attended the band's live shows or even interviewing road crew. The artist of the Motorhead comic interviewed Lemmy two years after the comic's release and much to her dismay Lemmy said there were several factual errors and offered to annotate the text himself. When she got his "corrected" version oddly there really weren't any errors (I suppose he just re-wrote the text differently, but the meat and potatoes of the story hadn't been changed). Alice Cooper, who actually contributes anecdotes to the documentary, states



that there were so many things in his comic that never even happened but he was a good sport about them since creating a mystique about whether or not those events really did occur only adds to the urban legend of controversial artists like himself, Ozzy Osbourne, and Marilyn Manson. Cynthia Plaster Caster, the legendary multi-band groupie who, yes kids, made plaster casts of rock star's cocks (did that thus make them "cock star's"? Boy that was terrible...), mentions the incident when she "performed" on Jimi Hendrix and his pubic hair got stuck in the mold for 15 minutes and according to legend they remained that way forever. It became immortalized in the comic about Hendrix. Alice Cooper also tells that while some bands like Dave Matthews Band may indeed have cemented their place in rock history, you couldn't really write a comic for a band like that since nothing exciting ever happened with them (he does mention the "human shit overboard" incident) in comparison to many of the bands Loren did decide to tackle. In particular, The Parents Music Resource Center led by Al Gore's wife Tipper Gore and her crusade to censor music for perversion and corruption of youth (indeed, the "PARENTAL ADVISORY EXPLICIT LYRICS" adornments on physical media music are her greatest triumphant claim) were a favorite target of his, and comics were made demonizing this organization that set out to demonize music in the supposed Land of The Free, and featured John Denver, Frank Zappa, and Dee Snider at the Congressional hearings during the hoopla surrounding The PMRC's embarrassing witch hunts.

We tend to not associate the comic book industry with tragedy, but Todd Loren's life ended in such a way and far too young. First off, he was gay in an era where it still wasn't okay and safe yet to be open about it. It was simply unspoken about amongst his circle. Having not shown up to his office one morning and also not answering his landline, his father went and knocked on his door to no avail. A locksmith was called to remove his locks and then his father discovered his body stabbed 15 times. Evidently the neighbors didn't call cops when they heard banging and screaming because they thought he was having sex. Everybody was suspecting each other within Loren's group. Sanford says someone suspected him even though he was across the country. Andrew Cunanan, who had murdered fashionisto Gianni Versace among others, was later even thought to be a suspect (even though Cunanan took his own life and became a household name only after the pursuit that followed the Versace murder which was years later than Loren's killing). A repeat offender was found with Loren's car in San Francisco but there was no substantial evidence linking him to the murder and he claimed the car was given to him by someone else in San Francisco. Loren's friends claim the San Diego Police Department brushed it off as "just another" gay crime and didn't do nearly enough to pursue it. Sanford said he found an unsigned piece of paper in a notebook on a dresser in Loren's bedroom apologizing for the murder that stated that "I had to do it." among other ramblings. Sanford was shocked the San Diego Police didn't find this piece of paper after allegedly combing every inch of Loren's bedroom for evidence. He told the police department to come get the note, which they never did, and a week later he called again to remind them. It still remains an open and unsolved case to this day.

Remembered fondly by some, reviled by other, Loren's company gave many artists their first break and several went on to work for larger, more "reputable" companies such as DC Comics and Mad Magazine. Some never worked again. The company continued for a few years after Loren's death. There were around 500 titles when Revolutionary closed down after declaring bankruptcy. Todd's

comics appealed to people who weren't into superheroes and often had a general disdain for comics. They were an entirely different form of literature in their own right. Many of the bands continue to revere the comics, with Motley Crue including a small reproduction in a CD box set, Kiss's comics appearing in The Kiss Museum, and Anthrax selling theirs in their fan club. Original copies are always being sold on eBay and other sites for selling and trading music memorabilia. Fortunately, a company called Blue Water Comics (www.bluewaterprod.com) has reprinted several of the comics in graphic novel format for a new generation to enjoy and the legacy of



these uproarious books can endure!

This DVD is certainly not short on extras, ranging from interviews with several former Revolutionary staff to the original two-minute and one-minute Musicade commercials and news clips of Loren's murder and other various news stories featuring Loren's works. The highlights include three extensive cover galleries spanning all things Revolutionary and informative liners notes by Sanford and friend Rob O'Connor with photos of Loren and several comic covers, a testament to why packaged media still cannot be beat! I thoroughly enjoy this DVD inside and out and highly applaud Wild Eye Releasing for such a thorough and poignant look at a fond set of memories of mine, the music industry, and the comic book industry from simpler times before Google, Wikipedia, Facebook, eBay, iPhone, and Blu-ray players. You owe it to yourself to check this out; it'll make chuckle, sigh, and possibly even cry! Underdogs of the world, unite! (FA)

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