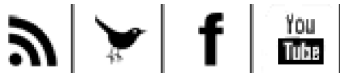




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Rentals Under the Radar: Unauthorized and Proud of It! The Story of Rock n Roll Comics

Andrew Young | 27 June 2012 | [Reviews: Movies](#) | [1 Comment](#)

When it comes to the Music Industry, the late eighties and early nineties were no strangers to controversy. The same can be said about the Comics Industry. With the many publishers that were new on the scene during that time, there were some crazy stories. None were more crazy that at a little publisher called [Revolutionary Comics](#). This company combined the comics world with the music world with their comic title *Rock n Roll Comics*, telling biographical stories about some of the most popular bands of the era as well as the past. They were unauthorized comics. This lead to a great deal of lawsuits and even a landmark Fifth Amendment case. *Rock n Roll Comics* will go down in history probably more for their legal battles than their actual body of work. The tale of Revolutionary Comics, headed up by Todd Loren, is one that could've made for a great comic or movie.



Revolutionary Comics Owner Todd Loren

In 2005, that movie was made. [*Unauthorized and Proud of It! The Story of Rock n Roll Comics*](#), a documentary that recounted the success and eventual demise of Mr. Loren and company, was released on the masses and played many a festival, garnering its own cult following. That cult following translated into a [Special Edition DVD](#) release earlier this year. Hearing the basic back story on this doc, I knew that I would have to check it out. But would it live up to the hype?

The documentary begins with a piece of archival video of Todd Loren, owner of Revolutionary Comics, discussing one of his previous businesses, *Musicade*. It's a bit of a jarring and eerie video as it is well established that Todd is dead. He was murdered in 1992 and the case remains unsolved. But here he is, being interviewed for what looks like a documentary. We then get introduced to the people from Todd's life: his father, his co-workers, writers, artists, his adversaries, etc. Through a large series of interviews, they piece together the tale of Todd's life and eventual death. It begins with the backstory on how Revolutionary Comics came to be. Then the success of *Rock n Roll Comics* is explored. We hear from his collaborators and detractors. How the comics of Guns n Roses, New Kids on the Block and more lead to legal battles about likeness rights and freedom of speech. This builds to the ultimate climax of Todd's murder and the investigation of his death (or lack there of). When we reach the 3rd act of the film, there is no mistake that the death of Todd Loren was not given the right amount of attention and that the police we're not fully interested in doing everything they could to find a killer. Overall, the film is quite extensive with their information. A bit too extensive if you ask me.



The First Amendment is a popular topic when talkin' about Rock n Roll Comics

The film suffers from the dragging sensation that can be compared to a boring university lecture on a hot day in a hall with no windows or air conditioning. The start of the film could've had ten minutes shaved off it. We didn't really need to hear Todd's Dad go on about how much of a visionary he was. It's nice that he has fond memories of his son, but he goes on for quite a bit. It was a hard 10 minutes to get through. Then, when we finally get into the comics, we hear a great deal from his collaborators, Jay Allen Sanford and Spike Steffenhagen. The two wax nostalgic about Loren but hold nothing back. They speak the truth on Todd's business practices. It becomes well established that he was not loved in the industry. In fact he was hated by both rival publishers and artists and writers that worked for him. He used a great deal of underhanded tactics to exploit his workers. He also pissed off a great deal of people in the music industry as he was seen as a vulture profiting off various bands with his unauthorized comics. There are many that can attest to this. The problem is that there's too many. There are far too many stories about Todd Loren being a dick. I feel like they drive this point home a little too hard. It's like the director wanted you to know that a lot of people hated him so when they discuss his murder, it could have a "Who Shot J.R.?" feel (which it doesn't). Needless to say, the most interesting part of the film is also the shortest: the death and investigation of Todd Loren's death. There are a few accounts of finding out the news, a dissection of the bias of the police towards the murder of a homosexual, and a few theories as to who the killer might have been. I feel that when this subject matter is explored, the film begins to pick up. And just as it does, it ends. Not a satisfying experience to say the least.



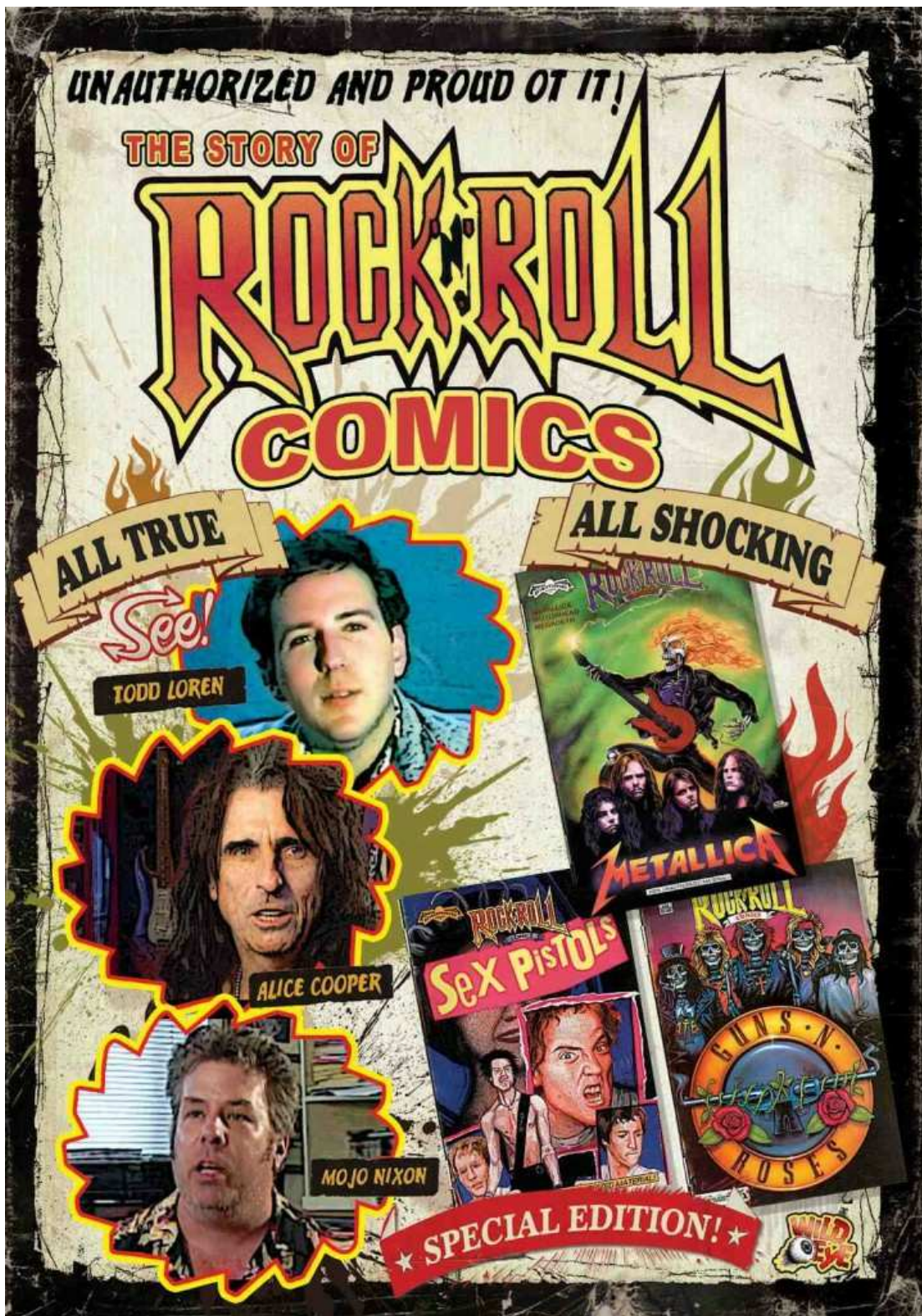
KISS was one of the few bands that actually supported Rock n Roll Comics'.

But there are a few interesting moments peppered throughout the flick, including the fact that one of the musicians who ended up supporting *Rock n Roll Comics*' work was Gene Simmons. Unlike many of his contemporaries that we're trying to sue the company, Simmons reached out to Revolutionary Comics and worked out a cross promotion deal because he liked the KISS Comic they produced. It was nice to see Gene doing something to help out the little guy. Very rarely does he get shown in a positive light when it comes to money. But it was obvious he could see a way for money to be made for all parties involved.

On the flip side of things, the documentary has a very cheap feel as it appears like most of the video, including the interviews that were conducted after the fact, have a cheap VHS quality. This would not necessarily be a problem for me if not for the fact that most of film is all "talking heads". If I have to strain my eyes to watch interview after interview with nothing else really happening, I'm gonna find it hard to sit through over an hour this. I feel that this film could've benefited from better editing and better production values.

In the end, it's safe to say that I was not blown away by this film. Based on the subject matter, this could've been a very interesting, informative and entertaining documentary. But it came off as cheap and self indulgent. The ironic thing is that some of Todd Loren's rivals would've used the exact same words to describe him. So maybe this film is fitting of the legacy of Mr. Loren. Even though it is a tragic tale, it wasn't well represented. I would only recommend this film to those of you who read *Rock n Roll Comics* when they came out back in the day. To everyone else who might be interested in the history of Revolutionary Comics, just read the wiki page. It's just as exciting as this movie.

If you're gonna geek out, **Geek Hard**.



Rock n Roll Comics, and it's creator Todd Loren, get dissected at length in this Documentary.

[Last Column: Rentals Under the Radar – G.I. Joe Series 2, Season 1 \(Operation Dragonfire!\)](#)

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