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Ethan Van Sciver talks Comicsgate, the industry and his love of cybernetic amphibians

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If you are a comic book fan, you know the name Ethan Van Sciver means many different things to many different people.

Having worked on X-Men, Green Lantern, The Flash and other top-tier books for both Marvel and DC Comics, the 25-year veteran of the comic book industry is one of the most outspoken luminaries in the *Comicsgate* movement much to the chagrin of his and *Comicsgate's* critics and much to the delight of his fans, supporters.

Also a very successful *Youtuber* (<https://www.youtube.com/user/fascistfrog>), Van Sciver is currently working on his own self-published comic book series: *CyberFrog* (<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/ethan-van-sciver-s-cyberfrog-bloodhoney-comic-book--2#/>).

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Culture Of Gaming spoke with Van Sciver recently about the state of the comic book industry, *Comicsgate* itself and his inspirations for *Cyberfrog*.

John Powell: Let's go back to the beginning. What inspired you to create your YouTube channel?

Ethan Van Sciver: "I'm friends with a couple of big YouTubers, fellows who have been at it for a while and have followings in excess of one million subscribers. They told me they'd help me if I ever wanted to try it. I think I was unhappy with Facebook and Twitter as a means of self-expression. They don't offer actual communication, more often miscommunication. You could type, "No, I disagree" into a Tweet and have it be read a dozen different ways by ten thousand different people, their biases in play but YouTube is almost three dimensional."

"Making daily videos is the best way to present yourself as who you actually are, for better or worse and the feedback is much better. Your subscribers become involved in your story and feel like they know you. It's daily work but it's definitely worth it for so many reasons. It also pays you, eventually, so it becomes a part-time job and I love it. I truly enjoy creating a variety of content based on my own interests or moods, and getting instant feedback."

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John Powell: What is your definitive definition of what *Comicsgate* is and stands for?

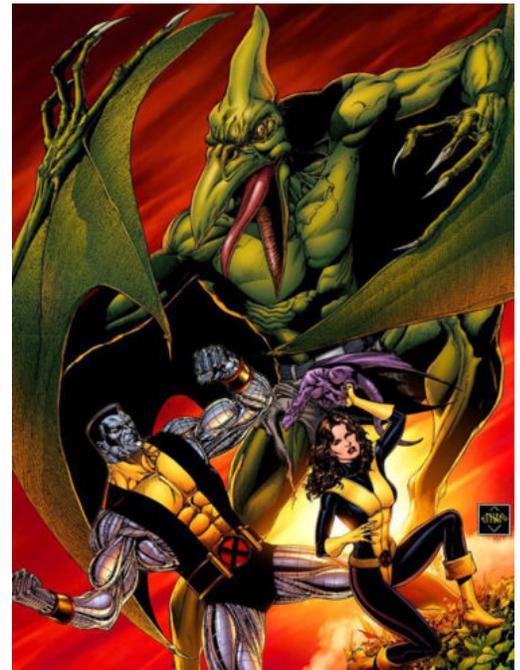
Ethan Van Sciver: "*Comicsgate* is a consumer-led revolt against what is clearly a left-wing dominance in the comic book industry. It's an opportunity for displaced comic book fans, fans who have often quit the hobby, to take control and make or support the comics they'd rather read. It's an opportunity for creators who cannot find work in mainstream comics for political reasons, or any reason, to create again, free from the oppressive social justice warrior harassment and blacklisting that made work difficult or impossible for them."

John Powell: Examining the debate there seems to be two clear sides. In your mind is there also room for a middle ground?

Ethan Van Sciver: "We are the middle ground. Even though many of us share moderate to right views, we're committed to the business of creating neutrality in our stories and art. This isn't a counter to the radical left. It's merely a rational alternative. "

John Powell: Critics have accused *Comicsgate* of wanting to keep minorities, women out of the business. What is your response to those accusations?

Ethan Van Sciver: "Absurd! Just a quick glance at the roster of *Comicsgate* talent reveals a diverse bunch of brave creators, black, Asian, female, Latino...all are welcome. All that is required is a desire to create escapist, apolitical entertainment and put the customers ahead of your own ego. We are in business."



Which would
you choose?
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John Powell: Whether someone supports the movement or not, they cannot deny that *Comicsgate* has had an effect on the industry. If anything, what are the achievements of *Comicsgate* and what have been the failings, if any.

Ethan Van Sciver: "We've definitely attracted a lot of attention. A lot more than I think we need but it's turned out to be a good thing. Because this is a response to a culture war festering within comics, those who actively engage in that war are furious at the popularity of *Comicsgate* and smear us in the most incredible ways. What are our achievements? We've found a great way to market and sell independent books and we're creating a new surge towards independence in comics. Our "failings" aren't failings so much as they are growing pains. Keeping this movement apolitical and neutral and out of the hands of bad actors is a challenge. We had some trouble with the alt-right attempting to co-opt the movement and that needed a response that the majority of us agreed upon but *Comicsgaters* are establishing themselves now. Each creator is developing a relationship with his customer base and learning to market their stories and the product that goes along with it to the customer. There's so much optimism. It's fun to see."

John Powell: As a Canadian looking in from the outside, it appears that for some (not all) of the people on both sides of the issue that it really isn't about comics at all. It is about the last U.S. election and politics. Do you get that sense as well? Why do you think that is or isn't?

Ethan Van Sciver: "Yes. Life turned upside down for my family after the election. I didn't realize exactly how unhinged many of my fellow creators would become. They all knew I was a Republican. It wasn't a problem before but the helplessness they must have felt after the devastating losses they were handed in 2016 caused them to behave in shameful and hateful ways. And then some of my friends became enemies and then those enemies joined with very peculiar gadflies on the fringes of this industry to engage in this culture war with all their might. They couldn't beat Trump but they could punish Ethan Van Sciver. And Mitch Breitweiser. And Chuck Dixon. And Mike Miller. And so they did."

Which would you choose?
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John Powell: What do you make of the marathon weekend Twitter posts of Joe Quesada, the Chief Creative Officer, at Marvel Comics and why do you think there has been an uptick professionals weighing in on *Comicsgate*?

Ethan Van Sciver: "I thought it was incredibly irresponsible and I think Marvel Entertainment should be alarmed by his behavior. His getting involved in demonizing a YouTube critic is proof of the most incredibly unprofessional business culture within comics that goes from the bottom all the way to the top. This isn't something he, as an executive, should EVER comment on, let alone get into a Twitter debate with me or Diversity & Comics in public. And a debate that I think we handily won. Quesada should, and would in a sane and responsible industry, tell everyone employed by him to exercise restraint on social media and stay out of it but this is comics, and comics aren't very spiritually healthy at the moment."

"Why did he get involved? I can only speculate. September 29th is the end of the fiscal year for Disney and one wonders what kind of discussions are happening about the terrible decisions at Marvel Comics, who is responsible and why, and why the shareholders aren't swimming in profits from a company that produces comic books about the most popular characters in the world? Was this a diversion from that? Was this stress related or did Joe Quesada answer the same call from the same group of people that Darwyn Cooke's widow did, to launch a series of attacks on a tiny but growing movement of creators and fans for the purpose of creating more propaganda in left-wing news outlets? The same news outlets publishing hit pieces demanding that "something be done" about *Comicsgate* other than Tweets, and that professionals all need to rise up and speak out against us? Again, I can only speculate. In any case, it's dark and it's sad."

John Powell: Recently, Marvel artist Robbi Rodriguez Tweeted an inappropriate photo to you as part of an insult. Did you ever receive an apology, explanation of any sort and how do you feel about what happened?





Ethan Van Sciver: "No and I didn't expect one. No apology, just eleven or twelve different justifications for it by the organized group of weirdos who have been calling me a Nazi for a year and a half. How do I feel about it? It's degrading, disgusting...as I've said, mainstream comics are spiritually ill. It further justified *Comicsgate* to me and to thousands and thousands of other people so I guess that's better than an apology."

John Powell: You are an industry veteran. What are your predictions for the comic book industry, how things will evolve in the next five years or so?

Ethan Van Sciver: "I can't see the next five years at this rate. I can't imagine things getting better and I don't want to conjure up what's worse but I know I'm a figurehead and a positive force for a lot of people who are looking to me to do right by this movement and I'm a lightning rod to people who want to literally hurt us. So I will do my very best. I take *Comicsgate* seriously and protecting it and these fans feel like part of my job now. I'm just human though. Extremely fallible."

John Powell: If I could snap my fingers and make you the Editor-In-Chief of Marvel Comics what specific changes (books, policies, talent) would you make.

Ethan Van Sciver: "I'd immediately step down! Seriously, I'd fire so many sacred cows over there. I'd replace them with some of the displaced DC Comics editors that didn't make the move out west and I'd instruct them to meditate on Stan (Lee) and Jack (Kirby) and let's start over again. It's 1961 again at Marvel and we need to set the House of Ideas right. Escapism, fun, optimism, super heroics, sex, romance, good versus evil and whatever it was that caused the entire politically oppressed comic book industry of that era to turn to Marvel with hope and excitement again. It could be a new Rebirth."

John Powell: Do you have any future projects in the works?

Ethan Van Sciver: "Well, CYBERFROG will be four books. Each is 48 pages with an additional twenty-page mini-comic, so I'll be devoting all of my energy to that. There's also RAINBOW BRUTE, which I'll be producing in-between CYBERFROG BLOOD HONEY and the second book called CYBERFROG: REKT PLANET. I've got five or six other ideas that I'll happily farm out to other creators once my publishing house, ALL CAPS COMICS, is up and running next year."

John Powell: What inspired you to create Cyberfrog and what does the project mean to you?

Ethan Van Sciver : "I created CYBERFROG at the age of 19, back in 1993. He was a conglomerate of all of the comic book characters that fascinated me at that moment. The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Spider-Man, Spawn, the Savage Dragon and some of the funny books, like MILK AND CHEESE and Peter Bagge's HATE. I created CYBERFROG because I loved comic books so much that I wanted to grow old and fat, bespectacled and bearded drawing them, like all of the photos I'd seen of my artist heroes. I read and was told that comic books would break your heart and many of my favorite artists looked like that had been the case but I didn't believe it would happen to me. And it won't. After twenty years at the Big Two, I've circled back to the creation that's never left my imagination, that's held my heart together, that I created in front of the girl who is now my wife. My mom says, "I've always loved that Frog." He's a part of me and he's changed in the twenty years he's been in hibernation. The world has changed since I last drew him, in 1998. Everything has."



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"So this series means all of that to me. I am so happy that all of this has happened. I have grown old and fat, bearded and bespectacled but I haven't had my heart broken. I love drawing CYBERFROG."

John Powell: Would you ever go back to DC Comics and if so, which heroes would you like to work with the most?

Ethan Van Sciver : "I love DC Comics, they've always been, and continue to be, very good to me and my family but we've moved on. The heroes at DC that I'd like to work with the most are Dan Didio, Jim Lee and Geoff Johns, and all of the other editors who made my twenty years there so fulfilling. I'm grateful to them all."

What do you think of Comicsgate? Let us know in the comments below and get in contact with us over social media to share your thoughts.

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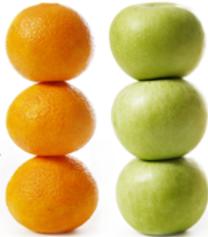
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