



## INTERVIEW: DAVID STEWARD II ON FOUNDING LION FORGE AND GETTING INTO THE ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS

*David Steward II is a technological entrepreneur who has decided to follow his passion and enter the entertainment industry. Specifically, David Steward II is the founder and CEO of Lion Forge Comics. Established in 2011, Lion Forge is dedicated to producing a variety of graphic novels and comic books for digital platforms. More importantly, Lion Forge has proven itself to be a force to be reckoned with by signing deals to make comic books based on NBCUniversal properties (Airwolf, Knight Rider, Miami Vice, Punky Brewster, Saved by the Bell), and create titles based on Quinton “Rampage” Jackson (UFC Light Heavyweight Champion), Claire Sinclair (Playboy’s 2011 Playmate of the Year) and Flex Alexander (actor/comedian).*

*I was able to recently interview David Steward II about his background, why he founded Lion Forge, and his long term goals for his company.*

*You can learn more about Lion Forge by visiting its homepage [here](#), following it on twitter [@lionforge](#), and by Liking it on [facebook](#).*

**Nicholas Yanes:** Like all superheroes and villains, I believe everyone in the comic book industry has an origin story. So, when did you become a fan of comic books? Were there any titles that you loved reading in your youth?

**David Steward II:** As a kid I had a few of *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe* and DC’s source books where I would read about the origins stories and the powers and weaknesses of various characters. I was a casual reader back then.

A few years ago, after seeing the film *Wanted*, I picked up the graphic novel by Mark Miller and it re-ignited my love for comics. From there, I read the *Watchmen* and other titles. When comics started appearing on tablets, I found myself exploring titles, such as *Morning Glories*, *Irredeemable*, and *Green Lantern*. Digital opened up a whole way for me to get into and explore the world of comics.

**On this note, if you could have one superpower what would it be?**

**Steward:** Extreme Healing Factor – I think that this is a great starter superpower. If you look at characters like Deadpool and Wolverine, it not only give you basic immortality but you can pretty much do whatever you want with minimal consequences, whether throwing yourself into the middle of a firefight or adding additional body mods, e.g., an Adamantium skeleton.



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**Yanes:** You went to school at American University for International Marketing. How do you think your education shaped your view of the comic book industry?

**Steward:** I have a degree in business, but I am also a trained professional photographer. I look at my educational background as two-fold. On one hand, I feel like I'm able to look at the industry from an objective business point of view and, on the other hand, I have a strong visual artistic eye.

**Yanes:** What inspired you to create Lion Forge Comics? Also, where did the name come from?

**Steward:** At its heart, the Lion Forge team is made up of creatives that want to deliver great storytelling, characters and graphics to a new generation of fans. With digital content becoming increasingly popular alongside the growing sales of tablets; instead of doing comics in a traditional vertical format, I saw an opportunity to get even more creative in a horizontal one.

As far as the name goes, we believe our artists have come together to refine raw content into legendary characters and tales, similar to the way a furnace, or forge, is used for sharpening and polishing crude material.

**Yanes:** Given that there are already other print and digital comic book publishers, how are you hoping for Lion Forge Comics to stand out?

**Steward:** We're striking in digital comics while the iron's hot. Print publishers are getting into the space too. But I think it's harder for them to make the switch given their fans are accustomed to – and even prefer in many cases – printed products. Further, we have a unique advantage in that we are developing [original IP](#), in addition to [licensed titles](#), giving us an extra opportunity to reach a wider consumer base.

**Yanes:** Despite the internet and globalization, the entertainment industry remains largely rooted in Los Angeles and New York. With Lion Forge located in St. Louis, Missouri, could you take a moment and discuss some of the positives and negatives of being located in the Midwest?

**Steward:** Our headquarters is located in St. Louis, but we have talent across the U.S., as well as globally, in countries such as Mexico, China and India. Our senior editors, Adam Staffaroni and Shannon Denton are located in New York and Los Angeles respectively. Being in the Midwest I believe keeps us a bit grounded, especially in our storytelling. I think if you're strictly on the coasts, you can easily get caught up in industry trends which may or may not be what the rest of the country wants. The Midwest tends to speak for what the rest of the country is thinking.

**Yanes:** In a short period of time, you've managed to work out deals with NBCUniversal, Quinton "Rampage" Jackson, Claire Sinclair, Flex Alexander, and others. Without violating any confidentiality agreements, could you discuss how you went about making these connections and working out these deals?



**Steward:** The NBCUniversal deal was something we actively sought out. We had been on the hunt for nostalgic properties from our youth to bring back. In the case of the Rampage Jackson deal, it came about after we met at a mutual friend's dinner party. Once I found out he was a big fan of comics, it was a perfect match.

**Yanes: Lion Forge describes itself as a transmedia company. In what ways are you using multiple platforms for your media content? And how is this affecting storytelling, if at all?**

**Steward:** Digital distribution affords us a multitude of opportunities to enhance our storytelling in ways that cannot be achieved through print. The ability to put rich media into comics is hugely advantageous to us; you can add anything from animation and video, to music, voice-overs and other interesting things to further immerse the viewer into the book.

So, we are always looking at ways to expand the storytelling experience that you get when you read our comics. Right now we have a few initiatives that we're putting out to market. With *Wonderous* and *Joshua Run*, we have a series of web videos that you can view in conjunction with the each issue, starring Claire Sinclair and Flex Alexander respectively. In addition, we've partnered with Ramon Govea (Black Mast Studios) and have launched an [Indiegogo](#) campaign to do a web series spinoff story from our *Catalyst Prime* universe.

**Yanes: Many publishers are hesitant to embrace digital technologies. Due to piracy and ad-blockers, there are legitimate concerns over how to profit off digital content. How are you approaching this problem? Will you be relying on a model based on subscriptions, sponsors, advertisements or some other source of revenue?**



**Steward:** Our philosophy is, at the end of the day, you can't really stop anyone from pirating anything they want. DRM and other extreme methods end up hurting the consumer experience. We focus on getting our content out to the consumer through as many avenues as possible at a price point we feel will compel our fans to purchase.

In terms of purchasing models, in addition to what we're doing now, we are looking at subscription models, as well as developing content that would be ad-based.

**Yanes: Lion Forge has already accomplished so much in the few years it's been around, but I'd like to hear your thoughts on its future. What are some long term goals you have for Lion Forge?**

**Steward:** Our ultimate goal is to create stories and properties that fans will love, not only now, but they will want to pass the experience on to future generations. Just as characters like Superman and Batman have been integrated in modern American mythology, we would like our characters to be thought of in the same light.

**Yanes: Finally, what are some comics and events that fans can look forward to?**

**Steward:** In addition to our other licensed properties that we've announced, including *Saber Rider & the Star Sheriff*, *Denver the Last Dinosaur*, and *Andre "The Giant"*, we also have some more of our own content. *Sorority Eve* with writer Joelle Sellner and artist Joe Phillips; a kids property, *The Crystal Cadets* with writer Anne Toole, and a project we'll have out around Halloween with writer Cullen Bunn.

**Remember, you can learn more about Lion Forge by visiting its homepage [here](#), following it on twitter [@lionforge](#), and by Liking it on facebook.**

**And remember to follow me on twitter [@NicholasYanes](#) and feel free learn about me at Klout [here](#)**

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