

SYFY WIRE MOVIES

TV

COMICS

VIDEOS

PODCASTS

FANGRRLS



WATCH SYFY SHOWS

BAD ASTRONOMY

SHOP

MORE



Fangrrls



WIDESPREAD CREATOR OUTCRY WON'T BE ENOUGH

TO END

Contributed by

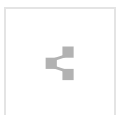


Tricia Erni
Tricia Erni
@triciaer

COMICSGATE

In the current climate of internet discourse, the latest story of online harassment is always just around the corner. That's especially true in the comic book industry. If you've been following most comic creators during the end of August, then you've likely seen the latest developments in the ongoing saga of what's become known as "Comicsgate."

Sep 7, 2018, 2:00 PM EDT



443 Shared

Comics

Comicsgate

Harassment

Comicsgate, for those not in the know, is the name of a group of comics readers who believe their beloved medium has been corrupted by political correctness. It is their stated belief that Social Justice Warriors (SJWs, or people with vested interest in women, POC, and members of the LGBTQ community) have infiltrated the comics industry and are simultaneously profiting off of it and destroying it from the inside. In order to combat this invasion, they have taken to their keyboards to harass, dox, and threaten any creator they believe to be a part of the problem.

The actual timeline of Comicsgate — tracking down where and when it started, who exactly started it, and what the inciting incident may have been — is complicated, to say the least. It may have begun as many as three or four years ago, coinciding with the rise of its mutated brethren Gamergate and the **Sad Puppy** take over of the Hugos. It may instead have begun when **Chelsea Cain** completed her run on Marvel's *Mockingbird*, or when Heather Antos, formerly an editor at Marvel, posted a photo of herself and other staffers enjoying an evening of milkshakes. **We did our best** to track the start of this so-called “movement” earlier this year, but



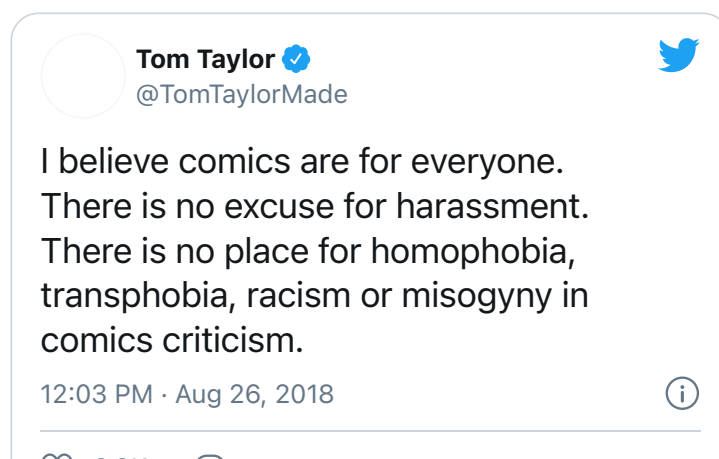
Thank you for
being a friend

Netflix's *La
Revolution* and
why we need
more period
horror pieces

35 thoughts
we had while
watching the
LEGO Star
Wars Holiday
Special

wherever you believe it started, Comicsgate has now entered a new chapter. Much to the chagrin of those involved, many of their heroes are now denouncing them altogether.

In the final week of August, countless comics pros began posting a copied and pasted message to their social media accounts. The message was one of solidarity with marginalized creators who had been experiencing extended harassment, many for more than a year. The message read, “I believe comics are for everyone. There is no excuse for harassment. There is no place for homophobia, transphobia, racism or misogyny in comics criticism.”



It began with Tom Taylor, writer for DC's *Injustice: Gods Among Us*, and quickly spread to dozens of other writers and artists, most of whom have been silent during the bulk of the drama that has been Comicsgate

since it began. As the message spread, eventually posters stopped including the word criticism, instead denouncing bigotry in the comics industry as a whole.

But why did this message of solidarity suddenly appear? Again, it is difficult to trace the specific origins, but earlier that same week Comicsgate set its sights on the heart of the comics community. Beloved artist **Darwyn Cooke** passed away in 2016, but his widow Marsha has remained active online. On August 21, after a member of Comicsgate claimed Cooke would have supported the “movement” if he were still alive, Marsha responded, saying, “Hi guys, this is Darwyn’s wife and I can guarantee he thought you comics gate idiots were a bunch of crybaby losers ruining comics. because you are.”

Marsha was immediately **set upon** by those to whom she was responding, accused of lying about her identity and harassed for getting involved at all. Over the next few days, the situation increased as Marsha took on noted penciller Ethan Van Sciver. Van Sciver has been a visible part of the Comicsgate community, and though he has not necessarily been accused of harassment

himself, he has gone out of his way to point those who do toward their next victims, to stir the pot of discontentment among those involved, and to turn a blind eye when that harassment occurs.

Such was the case with Marsha, who called Van Sciver out directly on Twitter for not silencing his fans' transphobic comments against Eisner award-winning writer **Magdalene Visaggio**, a frequent target of the group. Van Sciver, for his part, then turned the entire situation back onto those marginalized creators who were being attacked, telling them they should apologize to Marsha for "using her as a shield to attack Comicsgate."

From there, the floodgates seemed to open.

First, Jeff Lemire (*Descender*, *Black Hammer*) joined the fray, using his **Twitter account** to state that "Comicsgate is based on fear, intolerance, bigotry, and anger" and that "It's time we all started standing up for one another."

Shortly after, another longtime comics pro,

Bill Sienkiewicz (*New Mutants*), posted his own statement of solidarity **on Facebook**, saying, “Comics sure as hell didn't choose the so-called Comicsgate contingent to promote hateful, misogynistic and plain-old-ugly dogma.

After that, the rest joined in and Taylor's viral tweet began.

It must be made clear that, up until this point, those people most actively fighting Comicsgate were those directly targeted by Comicsgate. Until the events of this past August, there had not been a large-scale denouncement by creators of Comicsgate and its supporters, which left those who were facing harassment and accusations advocating into a vacuum largely devoid of those allies who could have made a difference. The purpose of allies in marginalized communities is to tell harassers and bigots that they do not represent their community. The same is true here and the proof is certainly in the pudding.

Over the first weekend of September, after dozens of messages of solidarity had poured in and creators previously lauded as the ones

who were seemingly doing comics right came out against those praising their work, Comicsgate itself began to unravel. As the community lashed out at these new dissenting voices, they faced further backlash, forcing them to change their arguments over and over. Richard C. Meyer, who goes by the name Diversity & Comics on Twitter and YouTube, began blocking users en masse, a practice he had previously vocally derided when it was used by Comicsgate victims to curtail harassing messages.

In what has become one of the newest and largest conversations stemming from these developments, Comicsgate participants began criticizing the decision to put Eve Ewing, a successful prose writer, in charge of **the upcoming Ironheart series** at Marvel, claiming she lacked the experience to do the job. To them, a job in comics can only come when you have already worked in comics, and Ewing, for all her success in other areas, was apparently not qualified. Writers like Gail Simone, Tom King, and Neil Gaiman have all dismissed such claims, telling their own stories of getting hired to write major books at the Big Two publishers despite limited experience. Predictably, the Comicsgate community then tried to argue

with these creators about the trajectories of their own careers.

This response, however helpful, might be too little too late, as the majority of creators now responding to Comicsgate harassment aren't using the term at all, even in a censored manner, thus keeping their distance from the core of the specific issue at hand.

Marsha Cooke herself even **chided creators** for taking so long to respond to the obvious and ongoing harassment, saying that she agreed with critics: "It is annoying that people didn't get on board the reality of what these idiots are doing until it was a white wife attacked."

While this new influx of widespread creator support is beneficial to a degree, it is, unfortunately, also unlikely to be enough to halt Comicsgate-related harassment for good. Creator support is one thing, but the core of the Comicsgate argument lies at the feet of the publishers, those people who make decisions about who to hire and what projects to add to their slate. It is one thing for creators to denounce the beliefs and tactics of the Comicsgate contingent, but

another entirely for those who hold the purse strings to do so, and to refuse to hire bigoted creators.

Some smaller publishers are already doing so, while others struggle with the balance between their moral compass and their bottom line. Last year, **Vault Comics** released a statement in which they reaffirmed their support for marginalized creators and their commitment to diverse voices and projects. Meanwhile, small press Alterna Comics, faced backlash this past weekend after it surfaced that its **social media policy**, which strongly advises creators against using chain blocking on social media, led to the **dismissal** of one of its letterers (the company has since denied that claim). That policy is part of an agreement between Alterna and its freelance clients to promote their material, and the publisher expressed concerns that creators who chain block thousands of accounts en masse might cut into their sales and alienate customers. The company expressly stated that it does not forbid creators from blocking the accounts of harassers individually, but creators have pointed out that chain blocking is a common tool used to stop harassment online, especially as said harassers utilize a number of anonymous accounts that are

sometimes difficult to block one at a time.

MORE COMICSGATE

The biggest and ugliest pop-culture controversies of 2018

How mainstream comics companies fail female creators

Though the end of Comicsgate is probably not upon us, there are things we can do to combat its effects. Supporting marginalized creators is one. Speaking out against harassment is another, especially if you are privileged enough to be outside of those targeted groups. While we may never see an end to online harassment, it is safe to say that, at least for now, we've turned a page in this particular saga.

