

Lost and Found

Bluewater Productions Publisher Darren G. Davis Takes Comic Approach to Life

By RYAN J. PRADO

When Darren G. Davis discovered 10 years ago that he had tested positive for HIV, his life changed in more ways than the obvious. Certainly, he would be undergoing a medications regimen, enduring waves of confusion, probably even regret. He kept a journal to document the ebbs and flows of his daily questioning, to attempt to work out through writing what no one else could help him with.

Davis had the support of his friends and family, but no one-on-one guidance in terms of the real decisions he would have to make as a result of his contracting the virus. He was, in a sense, lost, but looking to be found. The muse that stole his mind away wasn't what Davis had envisioned his career to revolve around, but just like anything, as he puts it, "you have to make do with what it is."

Little did he know then that the focus of his journal entries would eventually help morph the world's first HIV superhero, Zak Raven, into the graphic novel *Lost Raven*. The stirring, beautifully animated tome follows the contrasts of being shipwrecked on a government-run island, designed for DNA testing on humans for future space travel, and Raven's nightly diary confessions.

"I wanted to figure out a cool way to take my journals and transfer them into a comic book," says Davis. "I came up with this idea of him getting shipwrecked on an island and during the day he can fight monsters, and at night, all he has is this journal that he's washed up on shore with and [he writes about] his stresses of being HIV positive."

The groundbreaking subject matter allowed Davis to speak at Yale University. Twice.

After leaving such distinguished entertainment companies as E!, USA, and Lionsgate before heading to DC Comics, Davis' considerable imagination yielded his debut comic, *10th Muse*. The release became the sixth highest-selling comic book the year it was produced (2000)—beating *Batman* and *Superman*. Davis began producing his own

comics, and in 2007, he founded his independent publishing house, Vancouver, Washington-based Bluewater Productions.

Bluewater produces five titles per month, including the company's two most balmy-hooded series, *Female Force* and *Political Power*, which spotlight empowering women and political figures in the world—Hillary Clinton, Michelle Obama, Joe Biden, and Oprah Winfrey, to name a few—through the animated lens of a comic. These series have generated the most publicity for the company, from media outlets like CNN, *Regis and Kelly* and Fox News. The upcoming Stephanie Meyer *Female Force* title, to be released in November—the same month as new *Twilight* movie *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*—is expected to be the company's highest-selling comic to date.

"It's really taking off," Davis says regarding *Female Force*. "Sarah Palin signed a copy of her comic for us. Bill Clinton's assistant called us asking for a copy of the book for Bill. And we're like, 'Why don't you go buy it?' But still, it's pretty cool. This whole thing is totally baffling to me."

"In theory I think the genre is great because there's only so much you can tell within 22 pages, so they really are talk pieces," he continues. "You pick one up and you read about Sarah Palin and that will either inspire you to learn more, or it will just be something you can talk to your friends about."

Additionally, Bluewater has developed relationships and comics series with such pop culture icons as William Shatner (*The Tekwar Chronicles*), special effects pioneer Ray Harryhausen (*Wrath of the Titans*), and most recently actor/activist Reichen Lehmkuhl (*The Wasps* series). Most of the titles that Davis publishes enjoy the opportunity to be developed into feature films as well. *The Legend of Isis* has been optioned by Paramount Pictures, and *10th Muse* by Universal.

"Comic books don't sell as much as they used to sell," explains Davis. "Circulation is so down on it, and being an independent publisher you're way down on it, so you have to

think of different things to gain interest. With Shatner, we wanted to build on his creation of *Tekwar*, and with Harryhausen we wanted to do sequels to all of his films, rather than just retelling all of his films. We want to do something totally new."

Davis has nothing to worry about. As someone who has never read a comic book in his life, I successfully finished seven in one week's time based on the sheer uniqueness of Davis' stable of writers and artists—and his vision of a new way to expose the avenues of imagination. The Muse, it seems, has never been more viable. ☪

For more information, visit www.bluewaterprod.com.

Check out Just Out's blog (blog-justout.com) for a full transcription of this interview with Darren G. Davis.



Darren G. Davis' Bluewater Productions releases several titles each month, including the *Female Force* series. Notable characters include Insane Jane (left) and the one who started it all, Lost Raven.

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