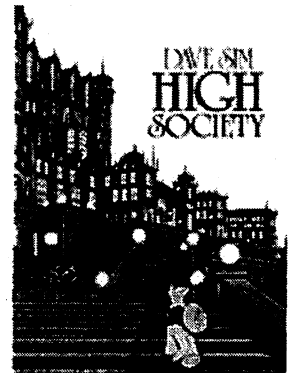


Canadian Independent Publishing: Can Indies Survive?

In the past couple of decades, there has been a lot of Canadian talent that have moved south and become stars of the comic book industry. Names like Seth McFarlane, John Byrne, Ian Boothby and George Freeman come to mind. However some choose to stay in Canada and create great graphic novels here. As a result, there are publishers of comics springing up across the country. Some exist only to publish one title while others may represent a roster of talent. Being an independent publisher in a country like Canada is difficult...the population is spread out over a vast area, and this can lead to isolation, and the feeling that there is no cohesive scene. There are vibrant comic communities in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, with smaller hives of activity elsewhere.

The comic book industry itself has seen a downturn in sales since the mid 1990s, just as interest in graphic novels was increasing in libraries across North America. In Canada, the small presses that exist have not been immune to this tumult. Since August of 2004, the respected indie publisher Highwater Books, known for its roster of new talent and attention to quality, has folded, and Dreamwave Productions, publishers of the Transformers comics have ceased operations. However, there have been some successes. This article will explore a few publishers who have managed to survive creating and publishing in Canada.

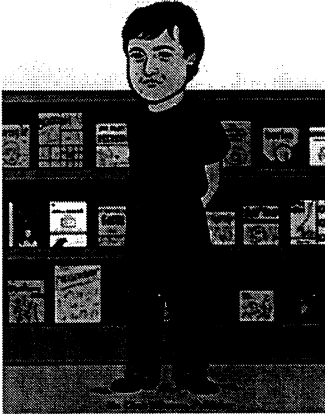
In 1977, Dave Sim created Aardvark-Vanaheim to publish his *Cerebus* comic at a time when self-publishing was unheard of. Initially *Cerebus* started out as a tale of an Aardvark knight that satirized other comic book heroes and tropes, but quickly developed into something more. In the 1980's *Cerebus* was acclaimed for the volumes *High Society* and *Church and State*, and for being an advocate for creator's rights and self-publishing. He used the front and back of issues of *Cerebus* to detail the process of producing a comic and later published *The Cerebus Guide to Self-Publishing*. In the 1990s, Sim used *Cerebus* to promote his increasingly controversial views on politics, religion and women. Anti-feminist screeds alienated much of his fanbase. In March 2004, the 300th and final issue of *Cerebus* was published, ending the longest running Canadian comic series, and what is considered the most successful self-published comic in the industry. However controversial his personal views may be, these are significant accomplishments. Other than the many *Cerebus* titles and reissues, Aardvark-Vanaheim has only published a handful of titles including *Normalman*, *Strange Brew* and the first five issues of *Flaming Carrot*.



Currently, the shining success story of the Canadian scene is Drawn & Quarterly. Based in Montreal, D & Q was founded in 1991 by Chris Oliveros, and in 14 years has grown to be seen as "the most influential art and literary comics publishers in North America ." Most of their titles are

D+Q

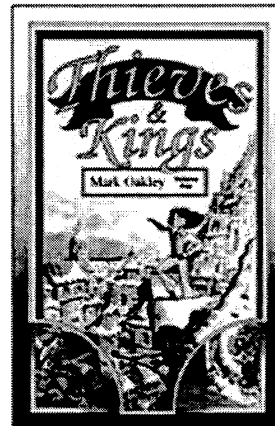
DRAWN AND QUARTERLY PUBLICATIONS



aimed at adult works, but those suitable for teens are definitely worth considering for YA collections. They publish about 20 titles a year, as well as maintain a large back catalog. Their roster includes talented Canadian such as Chester Brown, more recently acclaimed for his *Louis Riel: A Comic Strip Biography*; Seth, a renowned illustrator and creator of the *Palookaville* series, Julie Doucet creator of the *Dirty Plotte* series and *My New York Diary*. Her hard bitten style was inspired by Robert Crumb. Drawn & Quarterly also published international talent such as Jason Lutes, creator of *Berlin* series, who is influenced by European comics; and Adrian Tomine, creator of the Harvey Award winning *Optic Nerve* series. Drawn & Quarterly publications are known for the artistic values and high production quality. Oliveros was also

instrumental in assisting with the problem of inconsistent shelving of graphic novels in bookstores, by lobbying Book Industry Systems Advisory Committee (BISAC) of the Book Industry Study Group, Inc. for a Graphic Novels category in their standardized categories for booksellers. They have also published the coffee table sized Drawn & Quarterly anthologies, which publish the best and brightest in comics.

Another success story is I Box Publishing. I Box Publishing is Mark Oakley, the author, artist and publisher of *Thieves & Kings*. This comic series is a fantasy novel with a manga influenced visual style, and an innovative way of integrating prose his work. *Thieves & Kings* is set in the land of revolves round the adventures of Rubel, an unlikely pirates, kings, soliders, mysterious ladies, and a Wolfville, NS, Oakley has discussed in interviews the internet to his work as an independent publisher: changes to his Quebec printer, and instant fans are all some of the ways that Oakley has used the publishing empire. *Thieves and Kings* contains complex some serious issues and can also be funny. It is suitable for all ages, and Oakley receives rave reviews for his rule breaking comic book, and has managed to create a successful world from a rural town in Nova Scotia.



text and comic art in Oceansend, and hero, who encounters sorceress. Based in importance of the marketing, sending communication with internet as part of his characters, deals with

These examples prove that it's possible to create great work, stay where you are and be successful. Canadian independent publishers probably won't ever become rich –few independent publishers anywhere do. Their creative freedom and critical acclaim are all better indicators of success.