

DRAWN TO THE FORM

Phoenix Rising: The Reopening of the Only Kids-Focused Comic Store in North America

Finding appealing and appropriate comics for young readers is not as difficult as it was in the past, thanks to great authors, illustrators, publishers and vendors like the renowned Little Island Comics. Many members of the Toronto comic community were dismayed when the rumour circulated that Little Island Comics, the only kids-focused comic store in North America, was scheduled to close. Sadly, the rumour was true. Thankfully, it didn't stay closed for long! Here's a short history of Little Island Comics, separating the myths from reality.

A Brief History of Little Island Comics

Little Island Comics was opened as a spin-off of longstanding Toronto comic book shop The Beguiling Books & Art. When Little Island opened in 2011, The Beguiling already had been operating a free-standing library services division for about a decade, doing consultation and sales for graphic novel collection development. Because of the library part of the business, there was a warehouse fully stocked with all kinds of graphics for all ages, especially kids and teens, as well as a small but impressive team of specialist booksellers for that area. The Beguiling staff needed to move the library services offices and warehouse that year, and a great space opened up around the corner, but that space had a retail storefront. So, the real estate was part of the reason to open the shop.

Another major factor was the huge boom in comics publishing for young people that started about 10 years ago and continues today. In the 1990s, there just wasn't enough material to fill a whole shop with graphic novels for kids. But by 2010, this youth category really began to emerge



and flourish. This current era is a golden age of illustrated narratives for all ages.

The third factor was the need to create a retail space that was welcoming for kids, parents, and educators. Comics is a diverse medium, but quite often a local comic book shop is a place focused on the kinds of narratives that adult readers enjoy, including much that is far from appropriate for kids! Little Island was a chance to create a space where no one would have to worry about digging through the adult content to find the stuff that's good for a middle-schooler. Many parents who shop at Little Island would never have thought to go into a "regular" comic book shop with their children.

Ever wondered why the store is called Little Island Comics? Andrew Woodrow-Butcher explains that "we wanted to find something that would relate to our original shop but still be clearly for kids. Since "beguiling" is a relatively under-used word, it's often misheard by our customers. And one of the most common mis-hearings of "beguiling" is "big island." We