

Comic-lovers'

RELIEF



Mason West Emerald

7-year-old gamer Spencer Latarsky looks for new Pokemon cards to add to his collection.

■ Emerald City Comics offers amusement to gamers, collectors, anime fans and entertainment-seekers alike

By Mason West
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Eugene's Emerald City Comics has stayed alive for 28 years in an industry that is constantly losing customers.

Manager Stuart Bracken has been there for 15 of those years and is almost wholly responsible for the store's current survival. He has seen the comic industry lose customers to more technological advanced media, and he has diversified his store to keep it afloat.

Emerald City Comics carries card games such as Magic: The Gathering and Pokémon. Bracken's store also specializes in Japanese comics and animation, known as manga and anime. Emerald City Comics has the largest collection of anime videos for rent in the state. The videos account for more than around \$1,000 in revenue a month from just \$1.50 for a two-day rental.

Rachel Turpin discovered anime about three months ago and now goes to Emerald City three times a week to rent videos.

"This is one of the best places I've seen," Turpin said.

On top of the store's rentals and merchandise, it hosts monthly events open to the community. The first Sunday of the month there are game demos from 1 to 6 p.m. The Willamette Valley Anime Society meets from 7 to 9 p.m. the second and fourth Fridays of the month. And Magic gamers can play in an unofficial league every Monday from 6 to 9 p.m. These events attract some extra business, but they are

more of a service to the community.

These services reflect Bracken's desire to see comics and the store's other goods as entertainment. He blames the collectable mentality that surrounds comics for their downturn in popularity. Bracken said publishers use fancy covers and paper to entice readers into thinking that an issue will be worth something; issues will be released with a "#1" on the cover for the same reason. But all this glamour only lasts so long before people become disinterested.

“You start at 12 and stop when you discover cars or girls.”

Stuart Bracken
manager
Emerald City Comics

"The life expectancy of a fan is about five years," Bracken said. "You start at 12 and stop when you discover cars or girls."

Bracken was quick to point out some "#1" issues from Valiant comics that were released seven years ago. Two years after those comics were bought for \$2, they were selling for more than \$40. Now he has them on display for \$5 a piece.

The only comics that are valuable, Bracken said, are the comics published before 1970, when they were sold at the supermarket for a quarter. Back then, people would buy their comics and throw them away after reading them or tear out the ad pages. Consequently, there aren't many remaining in good condition.

The owner of Emerald City

Comics, Darrell Grimes, paid \$6,000 at auction for an issue of Action Comics "#1," the first appearance of Superman. It's currently worth around \$40,000.

But here is the oddest of odd cases. Brooke Woolfson, a comic collector, doesn't do it for money. She actually sold back a number of her old issues at a nickel apiece just to get extra cash to catch up on one some missed issues of another series.

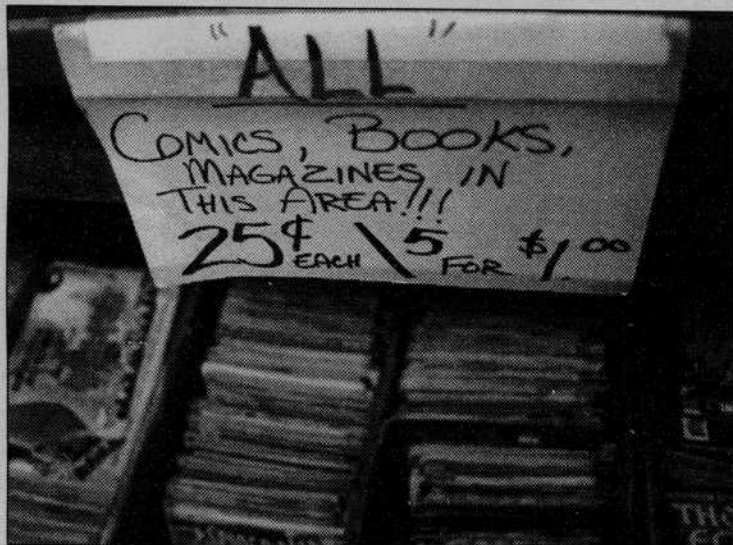
"It's really nice to have a hobby that you can follow up on," Woolfson said. "It's fun to go look for the old back issues."

Back issues are not always that hard to find. Emerald City has collected more than 150,000 throughout the years.

One of the big risks of owning a comic shop is that anything that doesn't sell is the store's problem. Bracken's job is not unlike that of a stock broker. He considers factors about a comic, such as its publisher, artist and writer, and makes a guess as to how many he will need. The only safety net he has is made of more than 200 people who subscribe to at least three continuous titles, but there is a lot of gambling involved, considering that each month, Emerald City Comics carries more than 300 different comic titles.

The risk is lessened by walk-in customers generated from the proximity to the University. In addition, the growing popularity of anime creates a strong client base for the store and creates crossover sales with the manga comic books.

Emerald City Comics is located at 770 E. 13th, inside the Smith Family Bookstore building. The store is open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day of the week except Fridays, when it is open until 7 p.m.



Emerald City Comics employee Wes Taylor surveys the establishment while pricing newly imported CDs from Japan. The store also carries Japanese toys, cards, videos and posters that are hard to find.

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