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Free Comic Book Day

“Ian” reads his friend’s copies to avoid being seen buying them for himself. “Brad” collects them, but when asked about it, confesses only that they are “research” for his animation work. “Matt” sells plasma to pay for them, but when a date arrives, they are tucked away in a box in the closet.

What dirty little secret are these men so ashamed of? They are all highly trained professionals in their given fields, and they all still read comic books. They enjoy the detailed artwork and intricate plotlines that you cannot get from any other form of entertainment. They know what they like; they just do not share their tastes with any but their closest of friends.

The comic book industry is about to change all of that. On May 4, the day after the big budget, big screen debut of Spiderman, comic book shops worldwide will participate in Free Comic Book Day, hoping to ride his webs of success.

The goal of Free Comic Book Day is for regular readers to bring a friend to their local comic book shop where, for one day only, they will be giving out new comic books from all of the major publishers and many smaller independent ones to anyone walking through the doors. The success or failure of this venture depends completely on the thought that nontraditional fans will go see Spiderman and want to find out more about comic books.

Bill Williams, owner of First Federal Comics in North Austin, shared his concerns about Free Comic Book Day. “The comic book industry doesn’t have a good track record for advertising,” Williams said. “TV Guide, Entertainment Weekly, and other entertainment magazines have expressed interest in writing about Free Comic Book Day, but none have committed. The last thing we need is for this to be a huge failure.”

Others in the industry have been more optimistic. Marvel Comics Editor-In-Chief, Joe Quesada sent out a press release recently concerning the event.

“I’m confident that this industry-wide initiative will meet with amazing results,” Quesada said. “It’s great to see our industry coming together for this incredible push forward into the mainstream!”

The comic book shops do not receive these giveaway issues for free. Each one costs anywhere from 12 to 50 cents. If the project does what it is intended to, manager of Austin Books and Comics, Brad Bankston believes that it will definitely be worth the price.

“We have ordered over 10,000 comics to give away that day,” Bankston said. “We want to show that comic books are a viable art form and form of entertainment. Public awareness will be at its highest after the release of the Spiderman movie, so hopefully this will turn new people on to comics.”

This will be the first time there has been a nationwide campaign to make comic books more mainstream. With the costs of the issues factored in as advertising, every participating store owner is waiting impatiently for the first reviews of Spiderman to come in. An apathetic crowd reaction could cost them thousands of dollars. A blockbuster hit holds the possibility of huge increases in business. Either way, getting rid of the stigma of being a “comic book reader” is what current fans are looking forward to.

“Most people act like there’s something to be ashamed of about reading comic books,” First Federal’s Bill Williams said. “But if they aren’t reading comics, it’s not likely that they’re cracking open Tolstoy either.”