



Quick on the draw

How the Outaouais became a comic-book hub **By Daniel Drolet**

THE ROOM, WITH ITS SINGLE WINDOW, its small fridge and microwave, its used and mismatched furniture sitting on a dirty blue linoleum floor, has the look and feel of a student apartment. A vintage grey Arborite table splattered with ink sits in the middle. Around it, in a messy swirl, are pots of paint, half-finished bits of artwork, a row of drawing tables, and books scattered willy-nilly on shelving made of cement blocks and wood planks.

Under the gaze of a life-sized cardboard comic-book character looking down from one wall, André St-Georges, 25, and Christian Quesnel, 34, cut open a box that has just been delivered. It's full of newly published books. St-Georges pulls one out and proudly shows it to Quesnel. It's a comic book—or "graphic novel" as they are now sometimes called—by Iryngo Nan Ma, a.k.a. Yan Mongrain, and the latest to be published by *Premières Lignes*, a publishing house based in a small, cluttered room in a cultural centre on Leduc Street in old Hull. It's also the latest piece of evidence



Top: Christian Quesnel (left) and André St-Georges: The upstart comic-book artists are at the heart of a scene developing in old Hull
Above: An illustration of Laval Street done by St-Georges

that the Outaouais has quietly become a hotbed of comics in Canada.

Within the past 10 years, a number of converging factors have conspired to make it so. The Université du Québec

en Outaouais (UQO) has begun offering what is possibly Canada's only university degree in comic-strip creation and is drawing talented creators to the region from across the country and abroad. Two major annual festivals—the Salon du livre de l'Outaouais in March and Le Rendez-vous international de la BD