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Aardvarks unite!
'Cerebus' powerful

By Chris McCubbin
 Senior Reporter

You're 2 1/2 feet tall, you're covered with short gray fur, and you have a stubby tail, two long, pointy ears and a big, big *big* nose. You are, in short, an aardvark: A two-legged talking aardvark in a world of six-foot-plus barbarians with small minds, short tempers, and big, sharp swords. What do you do?

Sim decided his company needed a mascot. Since he didn't know how to draw a "Vanaheim," he made the mascot a mean-looking little bipedal aardvark.

Dave and Deni put out one issue of a fun magazine. They wanted to call it "Cerberus," after the mythological Greek hellhound, but they misspelled the name when they sent it to the printers. Rather than eat dirt and change the name on the second issue, Dave decided to name his little aardvark "Cerebus."

Comics Now

First, you learn to be smarter than the big goons (no great trick), then you learn to fight. You'll never be bigger or stronger than the goons, but that doesn't mean you can't stick their butts if you're good enough.

Not everybody will hire an aardvark, and your temperament doesn't lend itself to steady employment, so your jobs tend to be... esoteric. You start off studying the black arts, but magic as a trade is only profitable after years of tedious study, and you have a yen for adventure and a taste for the good life.

So you move on to more violent occupations — tax-collector, mercenary soldier, an odd bit of thievery or freelance terrorism. It's a hard life, but you're clever, with a gift for fast-talk that borders on the miraculous.

Then, in your late 20s things get very strange. Suddenly you find yourself thrown in among rich and powerful people who want to give you lots of money and lots of free luxuries and who want you to do as they say. Either that or they want to kill you.

"Cerebus the Aardvark," by Dave Sim, is unquestionably one of the most important comics to appear in the last 15 years. Important in terms of the development of the art and past and present artistic and literary excellence.

In the late '70s Dave Sim, struggling young artist/writer, and Deni Loubert, his then-girlfriend, now ex-wife, decided to start a publishing company. One of Deni's relatives suggested "Aardvark Publishing," another suggested "Vanaheim Publishing." Sim diplomatically decided to christen the fledgling company "Aardvark-Vanaheim."

"Cerebus" the fan magazine bombed, but a few months later the first issue of the comic-book adventure of "Cerebus The Aardvark" appeared.

Along with Jack Katz's "First Kingdom" and Wendy Pini's "Elfquest," "Cerebus" was one of the first "independent comics" to achieve any sort of popularity ("independent comic" translates loosely as "any book not being put out by either DC or Marvel Comics companies"). These three books were directly responsible for the independent explosion of the early '80s, which, in turn, was directly responsible for the (comparative) plethora of high-caliber adult books now available.

"Cerebus" started out as a sword-and-sorcery book with an eye to weird humor. Since then it's grown. Sim deals with politics, economics and religion with an eye for realistic subtleties that have never been seen before in a comic, yet when need be, Sim will throw away both reason and subtlety to the winds and take off on a completely madcap slapstick romp or slide even further away from reality into fascinating surrealism.

He's also one of the best caricaturists alive today. "Cerebus" features regular characters who are take-offs on Groucho Marx, Rodney Dangerfield, the Batman, most recently Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, and probably his most successful character next to Cerebus himself — an improbable blend of Foghorn Leghorn and Michael Moorcock's fantasy hero Elric, Elrod of Melvinbone.

"Cerebus" is one of the most sophisticated, funniest, most exciting works of adult entertainment being produced today. It's perfect for the college mindset. I honestly don't understand why everyone doesn't read "Cerebus."

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Preserving jazz music is goal

By Julie Liska
 Staff Reporter

With a gleam in his eye and a golf hat firmly atop his head, Willie Thomas has come from his home in Flagler Beach, Fla. to Lincoln with hopes of reviving jazz.

Thomas started playing jazz at age 10 and began playing professionally at age 14. He graduated from the University of Alabama with a bachelor's degree in music. After earning a reputation in jazz, Thomas said, his interests slowly developed into music curriculum. He currently is sponsored by the National Association of Jazz Educators.

As part of the second event in Lincoln's celebration of the arts, Lincoln Arts Alive, Thomas will work with students at the university and high-school level during the next week with the intent of rejuvenating interest in jazz. Thomas said he believes it is important to save jazz because it is the only true American music.

"Jazz was formed from the fusion of all cultures in the melting pot," Thomas said.

Thomas's emphasis on university and high school students was not made by mistake.

"I believe it is important to start students out early with jazz so they can become acquainted with some basic traditions and origins of it right away," Thomas said.

Thomas said teaching jazz is a lot like teaching language. For that reason, he begins by teaching the blues because it is the most basic form of jazz.

Initially, Thomas worked with Randy Macquen, director of music for the district, and Rusty White, director of jazz studies, with hopes of forming a pilot program in Lincoln. The plan would allow students with interest and ability to come into schools and interact with students at lower levels. However, Macquen said the idea will be put on hold at present because it is too soon to introduce such a program.

In addition to traveling the country a jazz educator, Thomas owns his own publishing company in Florida. He publishes a text entitled "Jazz... Anyone?" which acts as an aid to teachers of jazz. The text comes with tapes, a text, teacher's materials and other aids.

With "Jazz... Anyone?" students can play jazz along with the tape while following notes at the same time. The text is being used at UNL.

Thomas said jazz is a type of music which allows a great deal of emotional freedom. The implications of this freedom became evident to Thomas after his visit to Poland. "In Poland, freedom is restricted in almost every way, but no one cares what music they listen to. Part of the reason jazz went over so well in Poland was because it provided the opportunity for people's emotional release," Thomas said.

When asked about his opinion of modern music, Thomas said, "I see there being only two kinds of music — good and bad. I believe good music involves some type of emotion or thought."

Although Thomas has no scheduled performances, he made unplanned performances at Chesterfield's Bottomsley & Potts Monday and McGuffey's Thursday.

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