

## Things are looking shaky in comic book land

### Dealers prepare for softer market

#### SPOTLIGHT

By Mark Baldridge  
Senior Reporter

We call them comics, but they're not funny — they're big business.

And they're not just for kids any more. "The average age of a comics collector is 20," said Brian Schur, owner of Cosmic Comics, which has three stores in Lincoln.

"Sixty percent of my customers are 18 to 30 years old. They grew up with comics and comics have changed and grown up as they have," he said.

And if comics are evolving, so is the comics market.

"It used to be the big two, Marvel and DC," Schur said.

"And then there were the little three: Dark Horse, Malibu and Valiant."

Then Image comics came on the scene and broke the comics industry's decades-long hegemony.

"They were the second largest for a while," Schur said.

But just two years after their emergence as a force in the comics world, "the bloom is off the rose at Image," he said.

The comics landscape can change that quickly.

And that has some people in the industry a little worried.

In the early 1990s, the baseball card market experienced what Schur called an "implosion."

The market, which had been experiencing its greatest boom in years, suddenly went soft.

Money and investors from trading cards went into comics. And comics people think the same kind of thing could happen to them.

"You'll see some implosion before the year is over," Schur said.

In Lincoln, this transfer of investment from cards to comics might be seen in the emergence of a brand new comics store, Comic World.

Tim Barrett, owner of Omaha's Ground Zero comics stores, and the owners of Casey's Sports Cards are partners in the new store, which is at 233 N. 48th St.

One of the ways Comic World wants to cover the market bases is by offering games and



Phillip Patton, 12, browses through the selections at Comic World, 48th and O streets. Patton said this was his seventh trip to the new store.

Therese Goodlett/DN

gaming materials.

Barrett said the average price of a comic book went from just 40 cents a few years ago to \$2.19 today.

Jim Perham, sales publications manager at Valiant Comics, said the market was soft, but he wasn't worried.

"There's definitely a downturn right now. But comics is a very cyclical market," he said. "This happens every three to five years."

Valiant, which has been operating for four years, is weathering this small recession well, Perham said.

"We lost some buyers, as everybody did," he said.

"But we've been focusing on readers from day one. We're actually gaining in market share."

Just about everyone seems to agree that the key to avoiding market implosion is to focus on the loyal reader, not the comics collector or "speculator."

The man with the longest experience in the local comics landscape is Larry Lorenz, who has run Larry's Trade-a-Tape at 145 S. Ninth St. for 17 years.

He stresses the importance of knowing what the customer wants.

"You can't return unsold comics," he said.

"You have to order blind. You don't want to

under order, but you don't want to eat them either.

"And you have to order three months in advance," he said.

And with all the new material available, that requires a vast knowledge of the product.

"I remember originally the order form consisted of one page," he said.

"It took me half an hour to fill it out. Now it takes me three days."

"With all the people who sell at flea markets — or out of their homes — the market is pretty saturated," he said. "I think it's kind of at its limit now."

## Primus should be prime at smaller Omaha show

### Band steers away from mainstream

#### Concert preview

Big stage, big show Primus was never meant to be.

Sunday night's concert at the Peony Park Ballroom will offer fans a chance to see Primus on a smaller stage, where the band really belongs.

Primus brings its act to a local audience who is probably most familiar with the band's latest release, "Pork Soda."

After years of panging out its twangs and pitter pats on the bass guitar, the band has worn out its welcome in the alternative music scene.

It all started with "Sailing the Seas of Cheese," two releases ago. Long-time fans clung to greats off that CD like "Say, Baby." But "Jerry Was a Race Car Driver" hit the airwaves and mainstreamed the band to a certain degree.

Primus jumped on the big-band bandwagon, booking larger shows

with more established groups — see U2's ZOO TV.

The band's new tunes lacked cleverness. Even the old tunes grew worn. "Frizzle Fry" sizzled out. "Suck on This" wasn't even fun anymore. "Pork Soda" is just more of the same old regurgitated bass strums.

Primus wasn't made for mainstream.

The band proved their lack of zing at this year's Lollapalooza tour. Primus headlined playing last to a crowd of wound-up, weirded-out, Generation X'rs. The three men on stage looked puny and sounded just as small.

Primus just isn't a climactic band. The trio lacked the effect needed to sum up a hard day of smart drinks and body piercing for the huge crowd.

But the smaller ballroom stage at Peony Park will perhaps give old-time fans a glimpse of the pre-popularity Primus.

Real fans remember the old days when the band produced the likes of "Too Many Puppies." Primus' latest work lacks such lyrical lores.

The Melvins will open Sunday's show.

—Dionne Searcey

## Loveless beats surgery, shyness

### Joins Vince Gill at Friday concert

#### Concert preview

By Jill O'Brien  
Staff Reporter

Patty Loveless, a country singer with a talent for enjoying life and overcoming obstacles, is scheduled to perform Friday evening at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. Loveless is one-third of the University Program Council's country concert lineup. The lineup also features Larry Stewart and Country Music Award-winner Vince Gill.

In an interview from Nashville, Loveless said this month marked the one-year anniversary of an emergency operation that saved her vocal chords and her career.

What started as a tiny blister on one of her vocal chords had enlarged to the point where the entire chord appeared as if it were covered with blood. The diagnosis came just as Loveless was finishing up work on a new album and in the middle of a heavy three-month schedule.

"I had to do a lot of cancelling of shows, and I felt like I was letting a lot of people down — the promoters, the fans who had bought tickets, the band, the crew and the label I had just sung with," she said.

But Loveless received a great deal of loving support from her country music friends, like Dolly Parton, she said.

"When I stopped being so hard on myself and accepted what had to happen at the time, then I was better off," Loveless said.

"I think sometimes when you're trying to be too rough on yourself, things tend to not flow as well," she said.

Three months after the surgery, Loveless was back in the studio and back on the road performing.

Each live show means confronting her shyness, another obstacle that challenges her constantly, she said.

"Back when I was a kid, I was so shy, my mother would try to get me to sing in front of people, and I'd say 'wait a minute,' and I'd run off into the kitchen and then I'd start singing as loud as I could, so they could hear me, but I wouldn't have to face them," she said.

"I still haven't overcome that yet." She may not have overcome that fear, but she has found a better way to face it, she said.

"I try to spend a couple of hours to myself before the show, and also during soundcheck," she said. "I really need to be by myself."

"Fifteen minutes before I go on, if allowed, I try to give myself time to do vocal warm-ups, and sometimes that helps me to know what kind of shape my voice is in. It helps to calm me."

Loveless said another thing that helped to calm her nerves during a show was to make eye contact with members of the audience.

“When I stopped being so hard on myself and accepted what had to happen at the time, then I was better off.”

—Loveless, country singer

“Once I'm looking into their faces, and seeing what their reactions are, it's easy to perform the song to them. I'm communicating with them, somehow, through the song,” she said.

Loveless was born Patty Ramey, the sixth of seven children, in Pikeville, Ky. She changed her name to Loveless after a difficult divorce.

"I was married to a guy named Lovelace, and after the marriage was over, I tended to like the name. So I just changed it to Loveless, because I pretty much was, after that was over."

Now happily remarried, Loveless still hangs on to the name that suits her from the emotional standpoint of her music. Her latest release, "Only What I Feel," is an album of heart-felt songs ranging from traditional country to rock 'n' roll.

While grounded in bluegrass and blues, there was a period of six years when she sang straight rock 'n' roll, she said.

"I'm glad I got to experience it. It

See LOVELESS on 10