



TAKE ON ME

The Director's Cut

Brian P Coppola

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As my personal commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the start of the 300-issue "Cerebus" saga (1977-2004), I wrote a 5-page story outline and commissioned artists and storytellers Gerhard ("Ger") and Carson Grubaugh as collaborators.

With me more or less cheering from the sidelines, waving my billfold, they turned the idea into an actual, physical, real-life 5-page story.

The views expressed here in *The Director's Cut* are mine.

Brian P Coppola
July 2019

This document is provided at no cost and with no obligation, and high-resolution scans of the 5-page story are likewise available.

If you are inclined to make a gesture of appreciation for the available copies of the artwork done by Gerhard and Carson, please consider a charitable donation in any amount to the *Pride Stables*.

Pride Stables offers therapeutic horseback riding to people with disabilities. Ger and his partner Shelly ("Shel") both volunteer at *Pride*.

See the site for how to make a donation (www.pridestables.com).



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The content of TAKE ON ME: The Director's Cut is copyright © 2019 by Brian P Coppola, except where otherwise indicated. Pages from "Cerebus the Aardvark" are copyright © Dave Sim and/or Gerhard, and reproduced either from scans of the art that I currently possess or they are the version downloaded from the "Cerebus Downloads" site. I have no idea who owns the copyright on the pages that appeared in *Epic Illustrated*, but I have a few of them, and one of them is included here. And the rest are commissions done by Dave Sim, Gerhard, and Carson Grubaugh, as noted.

"His First Fifth" aka "Guttersnipe" (*Epic Illustrated* 26 p 44; Oct, 1984) by Dave Sim and Gerhard (11 x 17 in, ink and watercolor on Bristol Board)

"Set a Spell" (2013) was drawn and colored by Gerhard from a 1939 photo by Dorothea Lange (30 x 24, ink and watercolor on archival paper), from a print purchased at shorpy.com

"Uh... GUYS... I'm Right Here..." (2018) was drawn by Carson Grubaugh based on an idea suggested by me (22 x 17 in., two 2-ply Strathmore 500 Bristol boards taped together, ink over blue-line print)

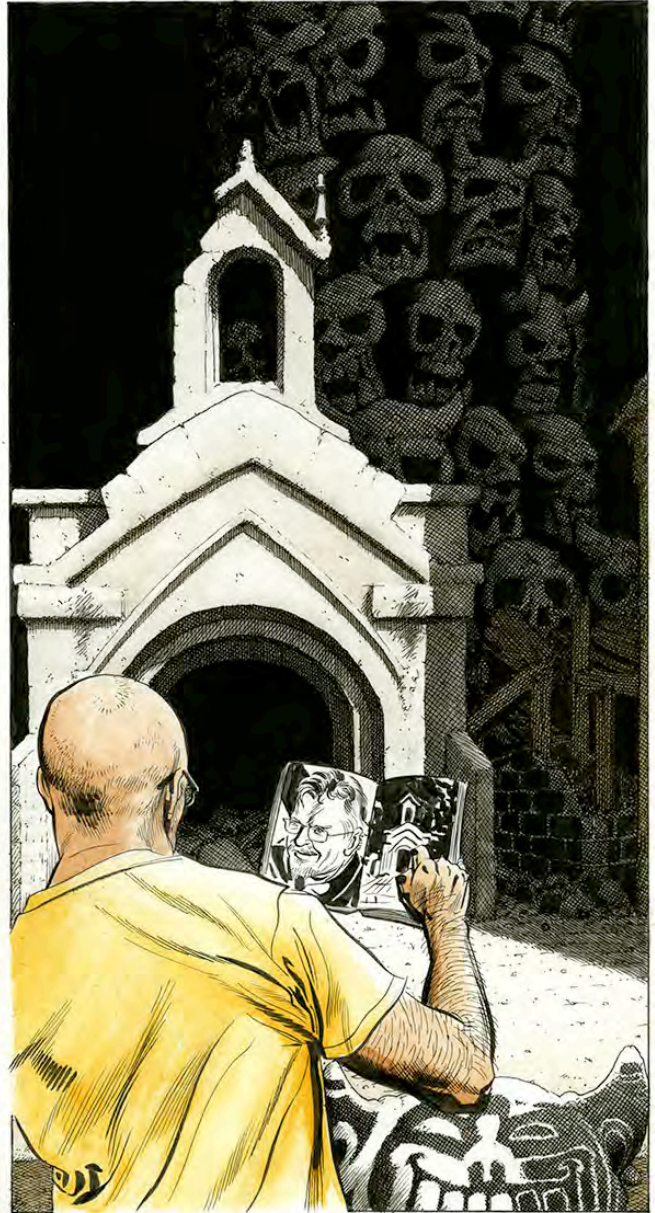
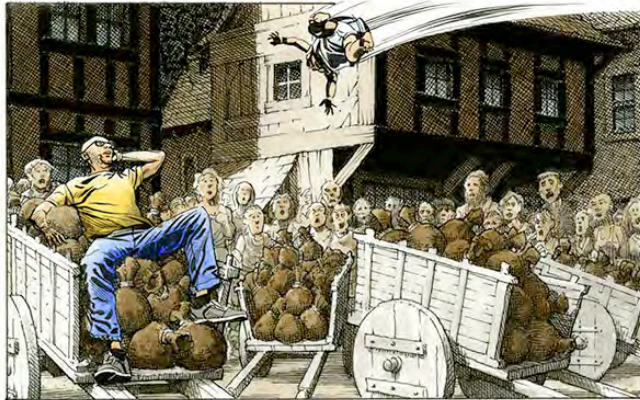
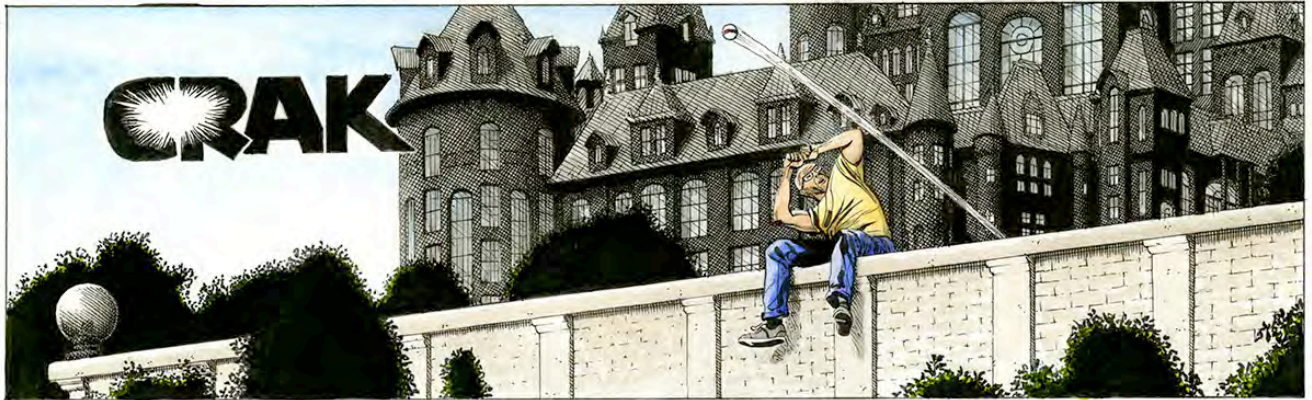
"Take On Me" p 1 (2019) by Carson Grubaugh and Gerhard, written by Brian P Coppola (5 pp; 11 x 17, ink, ink wash, and watercolor on board)

Cerebus #29 p 19 and p 20 (reimagined, 2006) by Dave Sim and Gerhard (11 x 17 in, ink & watercolor on Bristol Board)

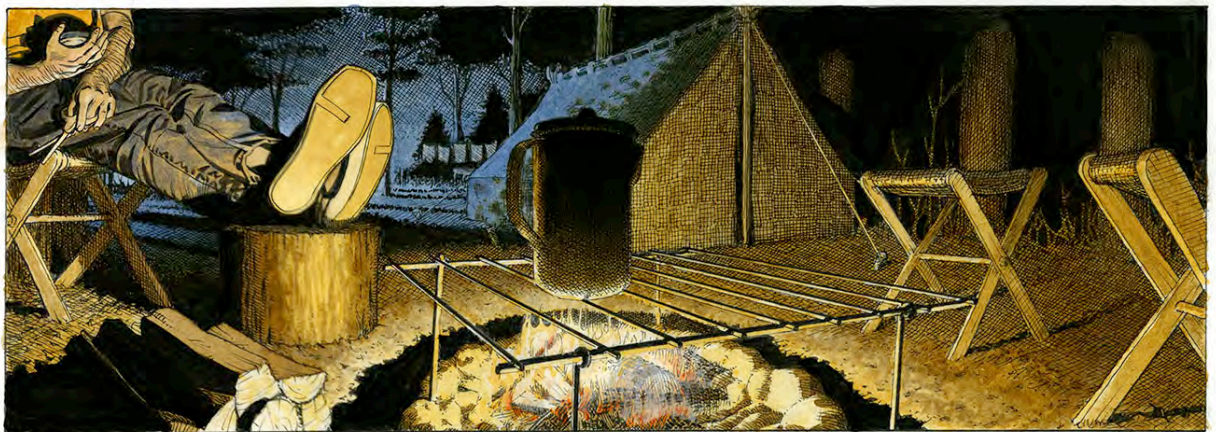
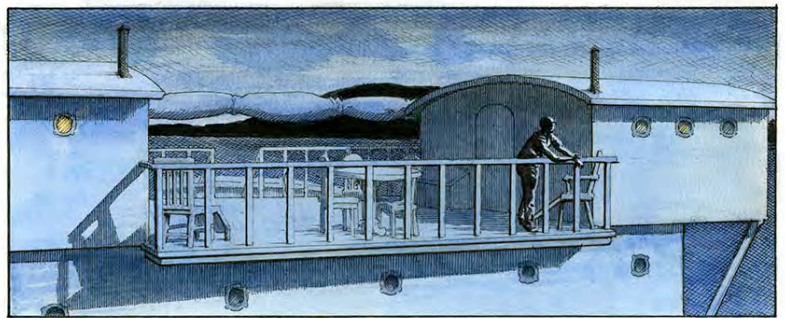
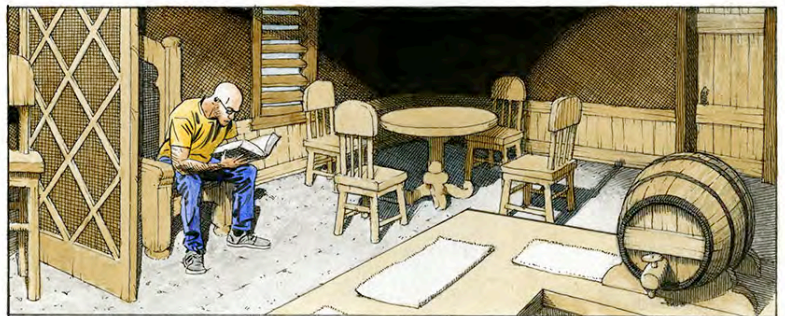
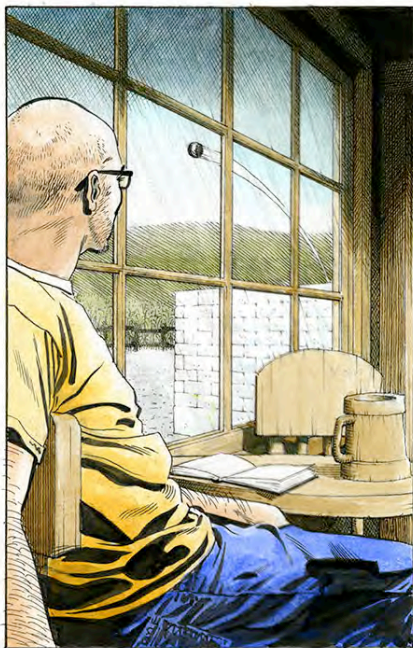
"Collateral Damage" from the *World Without Cerebus* Series (2007) by Gerhard (10 x 14 in, ink & watercolor on textured paper)

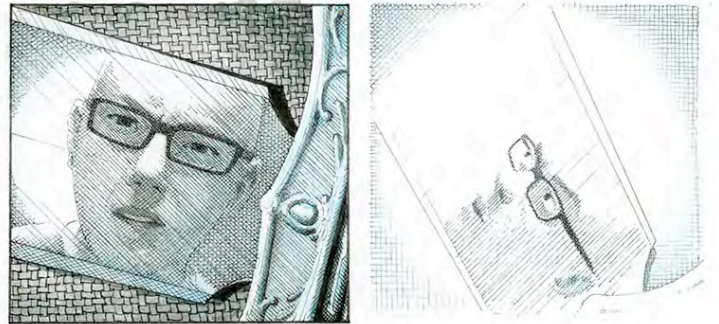
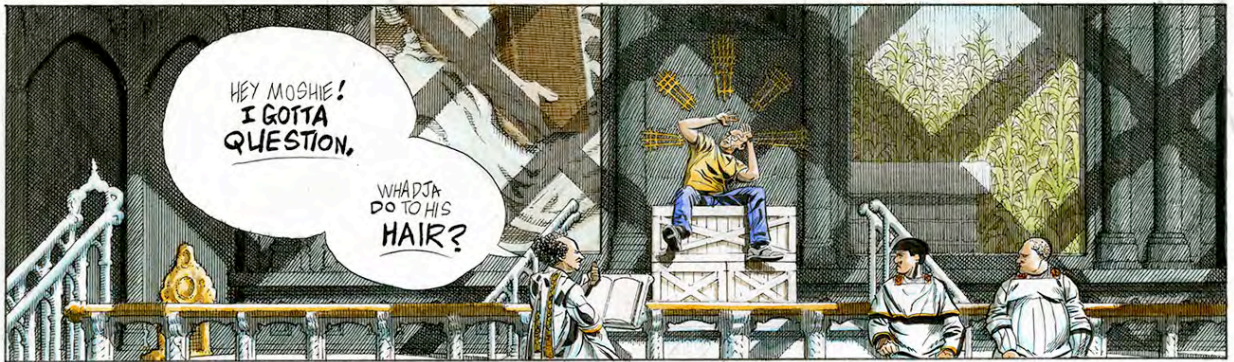
"What Happened Between Issues 299 and 300?" (2004) by Dave Sim and Gerhard (6.5 x 17 in, ink and tone on Bristol Board)











TAKE ONE

Famous the Aardvark

Let's review: in 1977, a comic book fan, fan-artist, and creative fellow named David Victor Sim (b. 1956) started an epic project. A radical proponent for creator's rights, against a historical backdrop of work-for-hire that has dominated the creative arts since, well, forever, he set out to create and self-publish what ended up as a ca. 6000-page graphic novel, *Cerebus the Aardvark*, in 300 issues. He is listed in the *Guinness Book of Records* for the most consecutive issues of a comic book that were written and drawn by the same person (1977-2004). This is a feat beyond imagining.

As a 27-year project, my description does exceptional disservice to "Cerebus the Aardvark," but it's a starting point. If you are reading this, you know already. Otherwise, you have the Internet; you can do the rest yourself. Dave's contributions to the comic book form are considerable, impressive, and rock-solid.

Dave's homegrown publishing company (Aardvark-Vanaheim) evolved over time. His eventual co-creator, an incredibly talented draftsman named Gerhard, joined the book at issue #65 and continued through to issue #300. Dave plotted and wrote the book, and he (by and large) laid out the pages or

at least the concepts. In general, he did the finished figures (characters), the lettering, the word balloons and other sound effects, then passed on the rest of the page, with all of the environment and context to complete, to Gerhard.

Although their artistic styles are nearly orthogonal, you end up with a magical “peanut butter & chocolate” effect when they combine their talents, and it is a case where the whole ends up greater than the sum of the parts.

After a third of anyone’s generous lifetime on one project, Dave has pursued a series of artistic interests outside *Cerebus*, including his noteworthy reflection on the historical development of the Holocaust (*Judenhass*, 2008) and inadequacy of the term “anti-Semitism” relative to the more tell-it-like-it-is term, *Judenhass* (“Jew hate”).

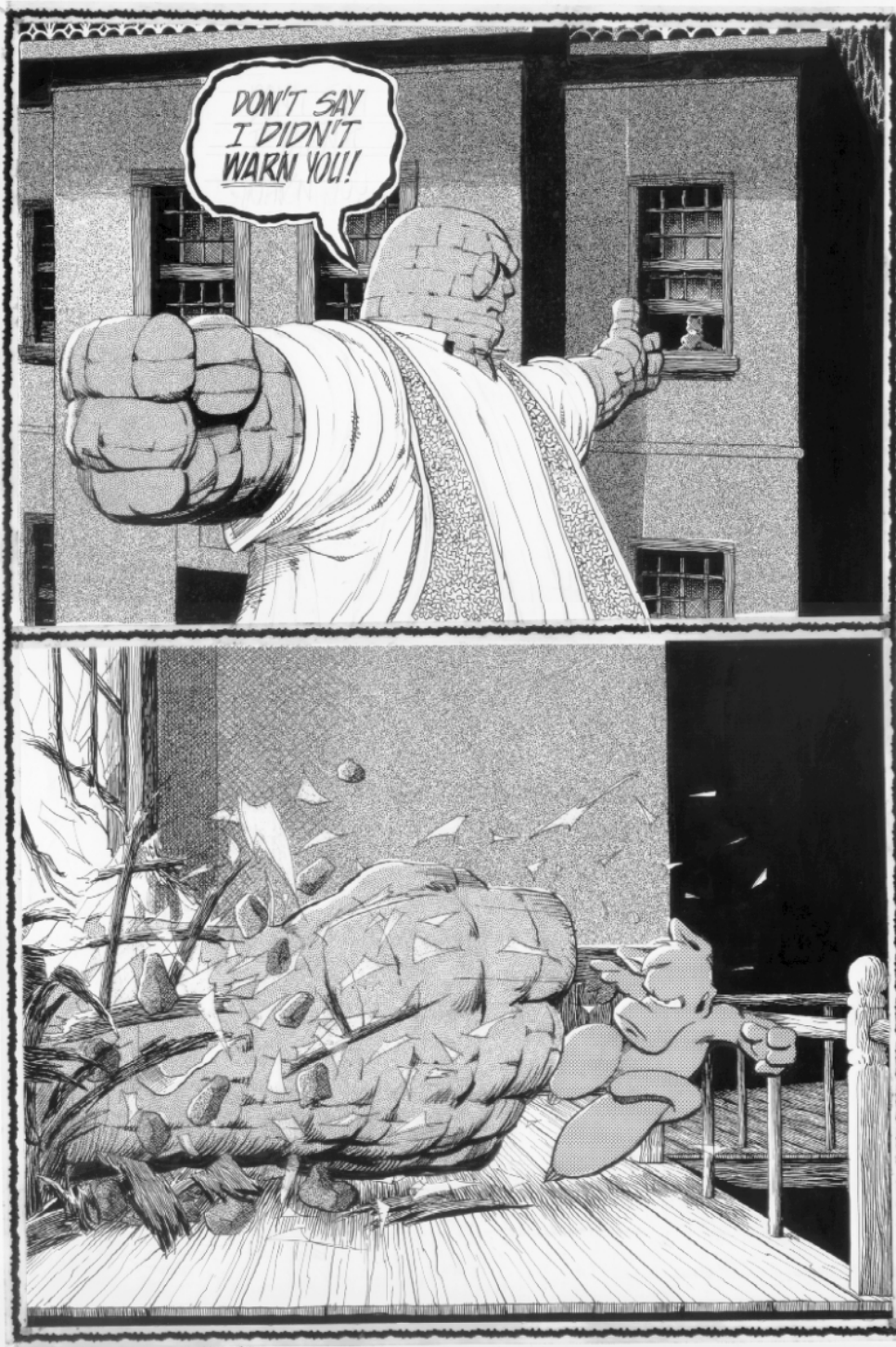
Gerhard divested himself of his interest in A-V a few years after #300 came out and is now a freelance artist.

I have been, and always will be (your friend... *oh, sorry, that’s what Mr. Spock says*) a strong advocate for the *Cerebus* series and what it represents in the history of the medium.

About 2000 or so pages of the original art were sold, over the years, and I have about 10% of them. It’s pretty cool art.

The sense of both of these guys as artists and storytellers can be found on every page they created. Sifting through my own inventory, page 11 from issue 80 stands out as an easy favorite.

Among artists whose work I collect, I also take advantage of their willingness to consider commissions. Although my own drawing skills fall squarely in the “don’t give up your day job” category, working with talented people who can develop and actualize an idea is great fun. Dave and Gerhard did a few commissions for me while the book was running, and then a few afterwards.



"Cerebus the Aardvark" 80 p 11 (Nov 1985)
by Dave Sim (1956-) and Gerhard (1959-)
11 x 17 in, ink and tone on Bristol Board
Coppola Collection

Dave is a fan of the photorealistic comic strips of the early-to-mid 20th century, and he was working on an illustrated history of the genre (*The Strange Death of Alex Raymond*) when the wrist on his drawing hand started having problems.

The *Alex Raymond* project stalled, and Dave ended up identifying a talented young artist named Carson Grubaugh to take over the drawing chores, under his close scripting and layout/design. Their other project is called *You Don't Know... Jack*. I'm not 100% sure I know what that one is about.

I have collaborated with Gerhard quite a bit since 2004, and asked him to work on a few crazy commission ideas. He pulls these things off beyond even unreasonable expectations, and that description is so inadequate that it is really is rather like looking up in the Sistine Chapel and saying "hey, nice ceiling... a 'pull my finger' cartoon."

OK, that's the set up and all the players.

I like *Cerebus the Aardvark*, a 6000-page graphic novel that came out in 300 issues and 16 collected volumes between 1977-2004.

I collect original art and have worked on commissions with artists (in general), perhaps more with Gerhard than any other.

Dave Sim is working on *The Strange Death of Alex Raymond* and *You Don't Know... Jack* in collaboration with Carson Grubaugh, who has replaced Dave's wrist as the representational artist in these A-V projects.

The year 2017 was the 40th anniversary of the first appearance of *Cerebus* #1, and I wanted to commission something to commemorate that.



"Set a Spell" (2013)

by Gerhard (1959-) from a 1939 photo by Dorothea Lange (shorpy.com archive)

30 x 24, ink and watercolor on archival paper

Coppola Collection

TAKE TWO

A Leap of Faith

Although Dave Sim committed to 300 issues for the *Cerebus the Aardvark* series, he has also stated that the story he had in mind was summed up by the end of issue #200, making issues #201-300 one incredibly long epilogue to the story. And it is true that the dangling threads in the overall mythos were wrapped up by #200. Dave went “meta” by entering the story as a character to make a point about the role of creators in stories and the control they have over their creations.

As issue #200 is winding up, the Cerebus character is shown having an inner monologue with Dave. Dave plays himself, perfectly aware of himself as the writer and artist. Cerebus, on the other hand, is interacting with his creator, and has no context whatsoever for understanding what that means.

This same theme is perhaps best played out in a terrific book called “Flatland” (Edwin Abbott, 1884), in which the inhabitants of a 2D universe cannot conceptualize what it is like to exist in 3D. Using “Flatland” as a comparison is delightful and apt, given that a comic book page is a 2D universe. An implication that Abbott leaves as an open question is that there is no reason to think the universe ends with the 3D existence we perceive, but that a

higher dimension is as unknowable and incomprehensible to us as the 3D universe is to the 2D Flatlanders. Abbott's work is poetic in its beauty.

As it is in *Flatland*, the metaphor that Dave is playing out is explicitly religious, and he makes the clear point through his own Flatlander, Cerebus, that we cannot understand it, anyhow, when our creator is revealed to us. At this point, quite playfully, Dave imagines that what is true for Cerebus could be true for us: as inherently unknowable and incomprehensible, our creator might just as well be a couple of guys at drawing boards as anything else. The nature of unknowable (*versus* simply unknown) makes all stories true as none can be falsified.

And a whimsical creator, pushing a pen around on a blank canvas, is also the point that Philip K Dick makes in *The Adjustment Bureau*, or even the compelling argument that we all live in a Matrix-like simulation (because we are on the verge of creating VR/AI that is indistinguishable from our perception of reality, the odds of this being the first time it has been done are vanishingly small). And it turns out that living in a simulation solves some standing anomalies such as the finite speed of light and the observations of quantum entanglement. You have an Internet; you can look it up.

The scenario at the end of issue #200, which is where the formal *Cerebus the Aardvark* story ends, sets up what could have been a *magnum opus* 100-page satire on religious belief that might have rivaled "Life of Brian" or "Book of Mormon."

Unintentionally, it did; but that's someone else's story to tell.

You want to see some old school Western fundamentalism in action, though? Google "Life of Brian – 1979 Debate" and pull up the 4 segments from the BBC program on *YouTube*; everything that happens after the two non-Python panelists show up is *TV Worth Watching*. Forty years is a long, and not so long, time ago.



Cerebus the Aardvark #200, p. 17 (Cerebus Downloads)

As issue #200 wraps up, Dave makes the point about how belief requires a leap of faith, which is explicitly what he asks his creation to do on page 17 (all of the page images from issue #200 are courtesy of “Cerebus Downloads” as I do not own any of them; as of this writing, you can download all 6000 or so pages for USD \$99).

Dave (panel 1): *Now all you have to do is jump off the rock you’re...*

Dave (panel 2): *Listen, I hate to interrupt your... parade, but we’re running out of space here.*

Dave (panel 3): *You just have to jump off the rock you’re standing on...*

Dave (panel 4): *You’ll drift down through the “whiteness” for a while and the next thing you know you’ll be right outside the tavern...*

Dave (panel 5): *So jump already.*

Turns out, when you see things from the creator’s perspective, one dimension up, things look different than from the creation’s perspective. That white space is the white space of the drawing board, and the creation (in the mind of the artist) is running through this narrative and you (the creator) get to decide what gets codified (drawn).

As a creation (if you accept that you are a creation, but let’s run with that for a moment), then Dave’s proposition is that you cannot know the mind of your creator because your perspectives are so different (another assumption, but let’s run with that for a moment, too). Cerebus (the creation, living in a 2D universe) cannot get past the things that he knows (his 2D perspective) and cannot even begin to understand the references made by his creator in the 3D universe (musing that “we’re running out of space” in this issue of the comic book you are in, for instance).

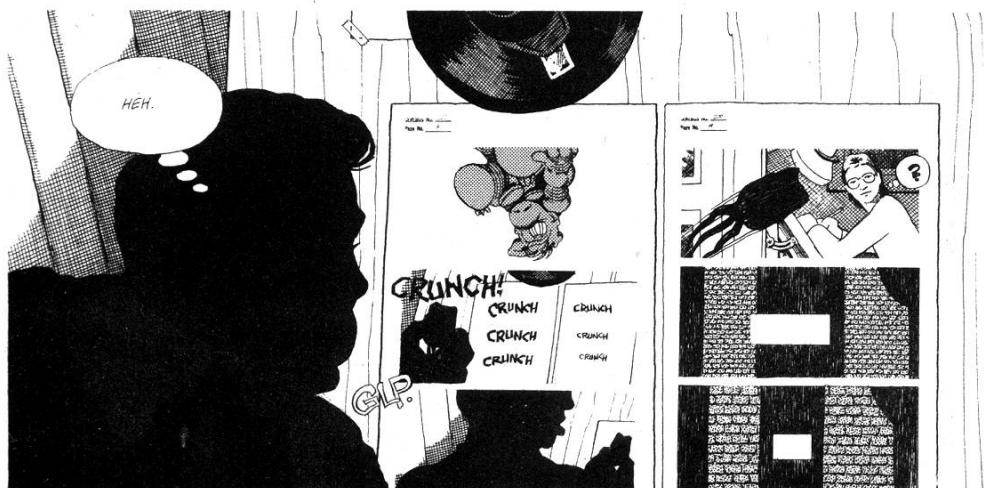
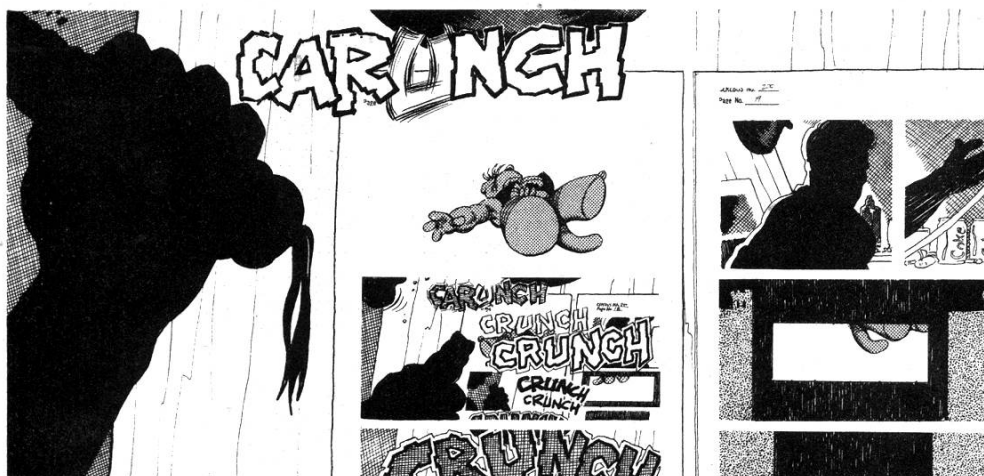
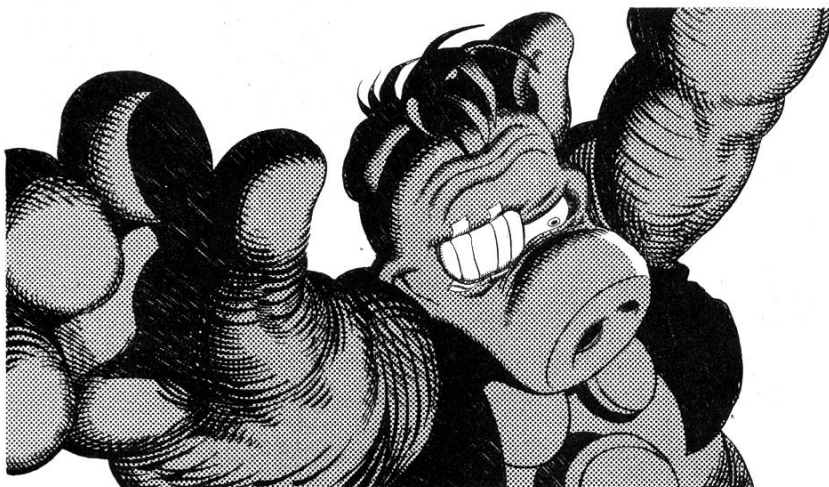
So you hear what you hear and you try to understand whatever clues you can make out from your revealed creator, and when it comes time for action, you just have to take a leap of faith. “Dude... just jump...” Dave’s proposition, not mine, on the consequences of page 17.

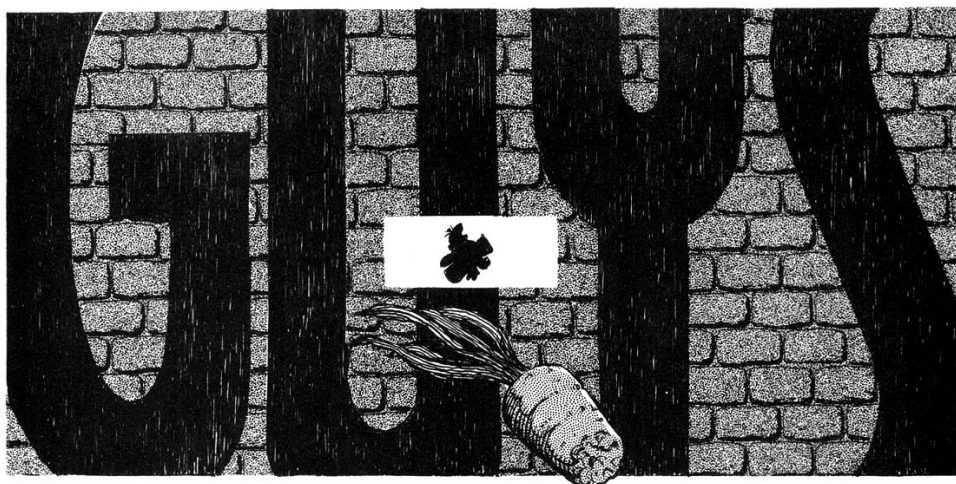
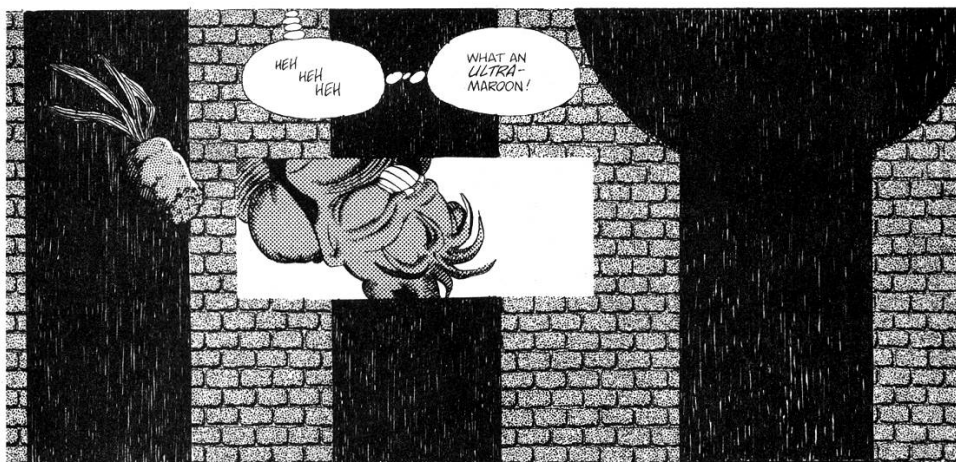
Dave really “sticks the landing” as issue #200 wraps up, raising some heady issues that are as relevant to creating art as they are in other metaphorical contexts. I am running with Dave’s story, not mine, so I will leave aside for now the assumptions needed for page 17 to make sense: (1) that you have to accept you are an intentional creation, (2) that you cannot know the mind (perspective) of your creator, and then (3), that taking the leap of faith is ultimately hypocritical to these assumptions because you are still making a guess about the unknowable and incomprehensible mind of your creator.

I will return to that last point later. But I am now at one of my favorite comics pages ever: page 18 of issue #200 – where Cerebus takes his leap of faith.

Cerebus is codified (drawn by his creator) in the first panel. But now we see life from the mind of the creator, and we realize that what had been codified is still dynamic in the mind’s eye. The top panel captures the fall, but the fall continues. Dave crunches a carrot at the codified panel, but a moment later, in panel 2, Cerebus is (still) tumbling and Dave is (still) chewing as time moves forward. Cerebus tumbles (still), Dave finishes the carrot, and tosses the stogie past Gerhard. All of this is captured on the page that is on the page, *ad infinitum*. Have you seen the intro to the terrific series “Black Mirror”? This is the point where you see the >crack< happen as reality breaks.

On page 19, we are fully in the creator’s world. The creator is out of the shadows and is revealed. The page is drawn and everything is in synch (note the lack of tone in the Cerebus figures; this is now “just” a drawing, in contrast with the imagined reality on the previous page).





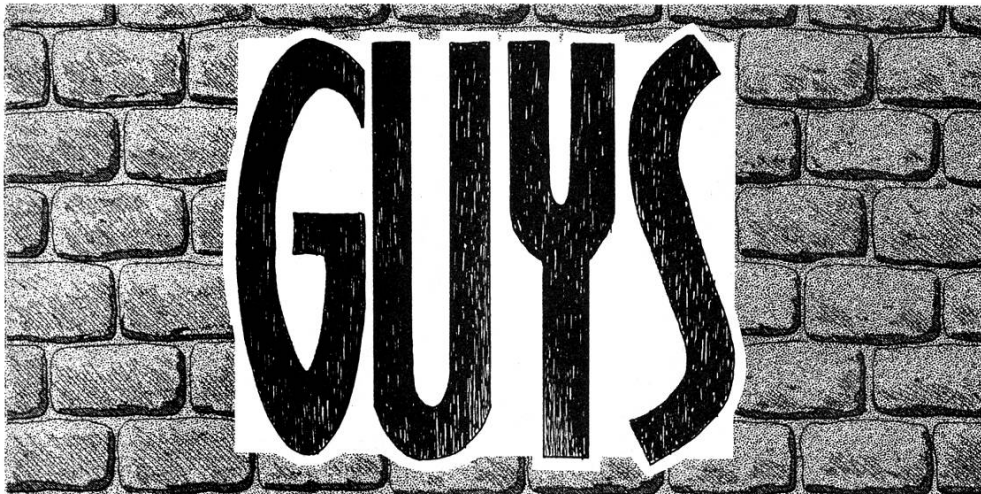
And what is Dave's take on those assumptions, here?

On these pages, he comes down squarely on the side of the assumptions of religious belief being (1) that you have to accept you are an intentional creation, (2) that you cannot know the mind (perspective) of your creator, and (3) that taking the leap of faith is ultimately hypocritical to these assumptions because you are still making a guess about the unknowable perspective of your creator. The dialogue is revealing and a revelation.

On page 19, Dave is playing the role of that famous historical philosopher, Bugs Bunny (note the carrot), and quotes the bunny from the endless situations where he has duped an antagonist into a leap of faith and bending to his will: (to quote the bunny) "what a maroon... what an ultra-maroon..."

This page and Dave's mocking is critical to understanding the message. Your belief that you can know the mind of your creator (and truly hear its voice with understanding) and what you need to do is take a leap of faith (and follow what you think you are hearing) is not a legitimate conclusion. These are not, in fact, in any way, knowable. Regardless of what you think you hear, you are living in Flatland and cannot, by definition, comprehend a perspective that relies on understanding and experiencing the next dimension up... and never mind the dimensions that follow that one.

And do not even get me started on whether the audience is *created* by an author, or *vice versa*, cuz a tree just fell in the woods (heh... *Something Fell*). Some other day, we can follow through with the creation/creator assumption and decide whether or not a creation can have free will or not. Cerebus is told that his action is a leap of faith, but in reality it is predestination, literally at and in the hands of his creator. It's God's plan (see *Adjustment Bureau* for more on that). This scenario was setting up a meditation on religious beliefs that later ended up (in the words of the bunny) taking a left turn at Albuquerque. Issue #200 ends on page 20 with a little reminder, as the carrot has landed; and the epilogue kicks off.



GUYS



ALCOHOL
IS FREE

AND THERE'S
NO 'LAST CALL'



COMING THIS
COLD WINTER TO
A COMIC STORE
NEAR YOU

TAKE THREE

It's No Better To Be Safe Than Sorry



In and around January 2018

In *Take Two*, I explained why one of my favorite comic book sequences ever appears on the last couple of pages of *Cerebus* #200 (October 1995 release).

The sequence immediately struck me as sharing a great deal with the iconic music video for the a-ha hit “Take On Me,” in its rotoscoped depiction of comic art pages as a dynamic narrative in which the action of the world is being captured.

You can go check it out on *YouTube*; I’ll wait. Warning: the video contains 1980s hairstyles and fashion.

If you like coincidences, a-ha was producing the music for “Take On Me” at the same time Gerhard was working on his first issue of *Cerebus*. Gerhard’s first issue (#65) carries an August 1984 release date; the a-ha song was first released in September 1984.

The title is repeated and twisted around in the verse: “Take On Me... Take Me On.” It is super catchy and a completely non-sensible construction that is nonetheless as memorable as it is ambiguous. The rest of the lyric is filled with comparable uncertainty and choice.

Repeat, after me: it's no better to be safe than sorry.

In 2019, the song was used to great effect in the Season 4 finale of “The Magicians” and in the Season 2 finale of “Marvel’s Cloak and Dagger.”

The song title’s story is a bit ordinary. To begin with, a-ha is a Norwegian band, and “Ta på meg” is an idiomatic expression in Norwegian that means, “to hold onto me” or “to touch me” in that *take-me-I’m-yours* sort of way. The figurative translation of the Norwegian expression is “take me,” while the literal translation is “take on me” (making the “take me on” word order a clarification of the underlying meaning).

The two word orders make the expression interesting because (poetically) they evoke such different emotions. We use the expression “to take on” in many ways, including to take on or adopt a persona or a role. So to “take on me,” while grammatically weird, can connote a request to walk a mile in my shoes and to understand my point of view. Flip that around, and “take me on” is a common expression of challenge or confrontation. Together, “take on me/take me on” can be the challenge of understanding another person’s perspective. Or, maybe you just like the melody. I am definitely a lyrics guy. As you watch the video, with this idea of understanding different perspectives in mind, you see the comic character struggling to be a part of the real world and *vice versa*.

As I said, these themes are playing out at the end of *Cerebus* #200.

Flash forward twenty-something years, and Carson Grubaugh does a *take on* Dave Sim as Carson’s wrist *takes on* the art chores for drawing “The Strange Death of Alex Raymond” and “You Don’t Know... Jack.” Dave has a singular vision as a creator, but needed to stop (only) part of the creative process. Carson picks up the challenge of understanding another person’s perspective.

Take On Me; Take Me On.

Carson’s work has exactly 0.00% to do with *Cerebus the Aardvark*, which did not stop me from thinking in terms of Carson being /quote/ drawn into the world /unquote/ of Dave and Ger’s creative work. And the gateway between worlds was established in those last few pages of *Cerebus* #200.

Does that sound like the idea for a commission? I contacted Carson and he totally got it. I think I might have only had to say “draw yourself being drawn into the world of Dave Sim, via the gateway between worlds in *Cerebus* #200. You know: take on me; take me on.” I am only taking inspiration credit, here, for kicking this conceptual snowball from the top of the hill; the visualization and the details are all Carson’s.





And that was it.

“Uh... GUYS... I’m Right Here...” (2018) by Carson Grubaugh (1981-), Produced on two 11” x 17” 2-ply Strathmore 500 Bristol boards taped together, inked over a blue-line print.

You see the character of Jack (I think) reading issue #200 of *Cerebus* (cover shown) and she gets to page 18, as we see what she is visualizing in the upper left, and then on to the rest of page 18.

Now, as this story goes, she is reading some background on Dave Sim, the person behind the *You Don’t Know.... Jack* project for which the real “she” has been posing for the photo-references that Carson is using as he draws the comic under Dave’s direction.

Look... I did not say this was going to be easy.

Moving from page 18 to page 19, Jack is now intervening and the reality of issue #200 takes a twist. Dave has a new comment at the top of the page now that he has been covered up (unrevealed).

And now, frankly, it would take far too long to explain the text in that word balloon, but you get the gist of Dave now being removed from the picture as Carson replaces (takes on... does a take on...) him.

The new reality from page 19 is overlapping even more with the original page 19, as we see Carson supervening on the page. The tumbling *Cerebus* is displaced, and panel two is now a meta-panel that has Carson drawing the pages that we are looking at, talking to Dave about making a book together now that he is in his world.

Keep an eye on this one scene with Carson at the drawing board because I will be talking about it again.

Old and new realities collide at the bottom right: the flying carrot stub, the GUYS logo, Dave Sim (peeking through) and the cover to “You Don’t Know... Jack.”

And Jack is aware and has been privy to this conversation, as she exhorts “Uh... GUYS... I’m Right Here...”

Well, we know that Jack utters the “Uh...”, while the “Guys... I’m Right Here...” is as legitimately Dave’s as it is Jack’s.

The concept is really beautifully executed, as is the drawing.

Carson notes:

“I don’t have any of the Letratone tapes Ger used for the greys, and from Sean’s posts it sounds like they aren’t anywhere near archival, so I tried to mimic them by hand. The noise ones are easy enough, but boy! – that even pattern over Cerebus was a beast. Not perfect, but it works well enough from viewing distance. Same with Ger’s toothbrush effect for the cover of #200: too hard to re-create using the original method, so I just stippled the thing.”

TAKE FOUR

Take On Me

And that leads me to my 40th anniversary commemoration of *Cerebus the Aardvark*.

The Big Idea: Carson Grubaugh is now the drawing hand of Dave Sim. And the first meaning for the title of this story, “Take On Me” (a direct reference to the song), is that Carson has stepped into the overall world defined by *Cerebus* and will take on the Dave Sim role. You saw that idea played out, already, in the 2018 Carson commission in *Take Three*.

The Big Plan: I write a 5-page story that gets produced in the classic Dave’n’Ger style, except with Carson doing the general layout and figures and then handing the pages off to Ger. And having been the fortunate recipient of hand-colored commissions in the past, so there will be none of this in black and white only stuff. After all, Gerhard’s first work on *Cerebus* was on the color stories in *Epic Illustrated* (the first of which I have three pages from).



"Take On Me" p 1 (2019)
 by Carson Grubaugh (1981-) and Gerhard (1959-)
 and written by Brian P Coppola (1957-)
 11 x 17, ink on board (colored by computer version)
 Coppola Collection



"His First Fifth" aka "Guttersnipe" (*Epic Illustrated* 26 p 44; Oct, 1984)
 by Dave Sim (1956-) and Gerhard (1959-)
 11 x 17 in, ink and watercolor on Bristol Board
 Coppola Collection

The Big Story: the opening scene is set in Carson's art class, as class is getting out. The coloring in "the real world" is done in sepia wash (think: *Wizard of Oz*). Carson is picking up an art prop, a white sphere, while cleaning up after class, and gets accidentally whacked on the head by a kid carrying a bag that has a copy of a *Cerebus* trade paperback in it. He drops the sphere, which means...

...something fell.

The phrase "something fell" is a trope from *Cerebus the Aardvark* that always preceded something important happening.

So, something fell and the scene transits to world of *Cerebus*, in color, with the sphere becoming the "Big White Glowing Strange Thing" (the BWGST is something that, we know, causes or eases transits). And if all that seems too unfamiliar to you, well, you are just going to have to take a leap of faith.

During the 5 pages, Carson ends up traveling through the entire *Cerebus* series, featuring one panel from each of the 16 collected volumes ("phonebooks") depicting him in an iconic scene or setting. Ultimately, through, there is no place like home, and he transits back in the end.

Here is my script for page 1. Thanks to two clever artists, improvements were made in the final execution.

Page 1. Carson is at work, putting away still-life props. The last few students are filing out. The color scheme is sepia (a bit like Ger's recent *Grinning Cat* stories) as homage to the *Wizard of Oz*.

Like any good patron, or maybe more like Stan Lee, I make a cameo as one of the art students in class. And given that *Cerebus* started in 1977, it is going to be my 1977 self (during College, when I did take some art classes). I am easy to spot.

A white sphere gets knocked off the prop table. Carson stoops over to pick it up.

At the same time a student with a portfolio and a book-bag gets the portfolio stuck on a desk and whacks Carson in the head, the white sphere is on the loose, on a collision course with the book bag, from which the *Cerebus* trade paperback has spilled onto the floor.

The sphere lands on the open page, it is from the issue with *Cerebus* #5, p 17 showing (the Pigt lair).

Student: "Sorry, Mr. Carson."

Carson (dazed, holding his head): "It's fine...something..."

The white sphere is now a Big White Glowing Strange Thing.

The trip through the BWGST is the equivalent of Dorothy's ride in the twister, and everything comes out color on the other side.

Book Reference: *Cerebus*

Carson is now kneeling on the floor of the statue room from issue #5 with the fully intact statue (in Living Color). Carson is holding the back of his head, the glowing BWGST floats in mid-air, but does not emit light that causes shadows – and he finishes his sentence: "...fell."

Carson stands, a bit bewildered. Figure out the positioning in the room, so that there was either the lighted outline of the open archway that enters the room casting its shape on the wall or onto the floor.

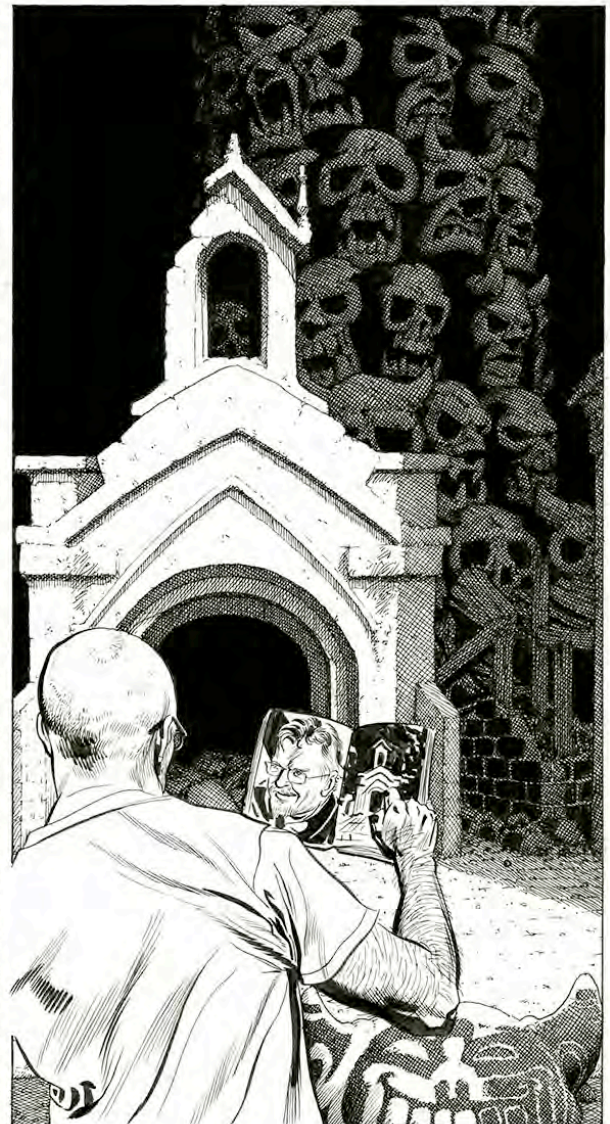
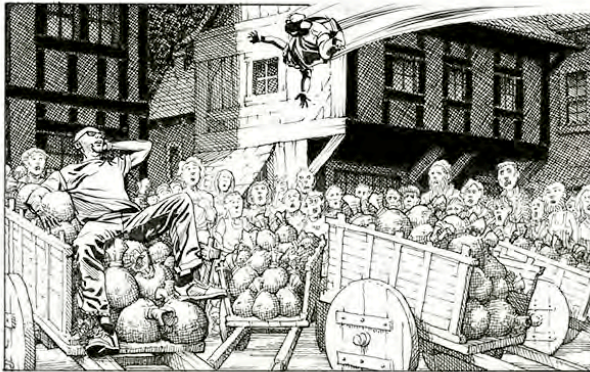
The last two frames on this page will show the movement of the BWSGT towards Carson; the transition to the next scene is managed by the glow.

In the last panel, that arch-shaped stream of light is now occupied by the silhouette of *Cerebus*, sword raised, about to enter the room.

End with a glowy panel edge.



Cerebus the Aardvark #5, p 17 (Cerebus Downloads)



"Take On Me" p 2 (2019)
 by Carson Grubaugh (1981-) and Gerhard (1959-)
 and written by Brian P Coppola (1957-)
 11 x 17, ink on board
 Coppola Collection

Starting with page 2, each panel is representative of a scene from each of the collected volumes, in order, with Carson inserted.

Page 2.

Book Reference: *High Society*

Cerebus #29, p 19 was the first piece of original comic art I ever bought, in October 1982, after getting my first real paycheck. There was a 50% off coupon for original art from A-V, so I paid the outrageous sum of \$25 for this page. I picked up the companion page (p 20) years later, when Richard and Wendy “Elfquest” Pini sold it at an auction.

Ger and Dave did the re-imagination of pp 19-20 from issue 29 for me. The wickets game; that joke about insanity being a politically expedient gambit as long as you play the long game is one I still find funny.

I have great nostalgia for these pages. Years later, for the “World without *Cerebus*” series that I am commissioning from Gerhard, I wanted the aftermath of the wickets ball flying out from the Upper City and landing in the Lower City as one of the scenes. Note the bouncy pockmarks on the street.

No more need to show transitions. We get it. Now, each panel is a story unto itself.

Perhaps a glowing panel edge; maybe not.

Carson is sitting on the wall surrounding the Regency, and is ducking out of the way as the just-hit wickets ball flies past where his head would have been.

POV: perhaps from the outside of the wall looking back and slightly upwards, the wall with Carson ducking, ball flying at us in the foreground, Regency in the background.



"Collateral Damage" *World Without Cerebus* Series (2007)
 by Gerhard (1959-)
 10 x 14 in, ink & watercolor on textured paper
 Coppola Collection

Page 2 (continued).

Book Reference: *Church & State I*

Outside of the hotel from issues 65-66, where bags of gold are piling up.

Carson is in the foreground, his back to us, or perhaps sitting nestled among some bags of gold on a cart with the hotel in the background.

If he is on the far right, his head is cranked left and looking up, following an object that has just hurtled past him: a baby (Cerebus #66, p 4).

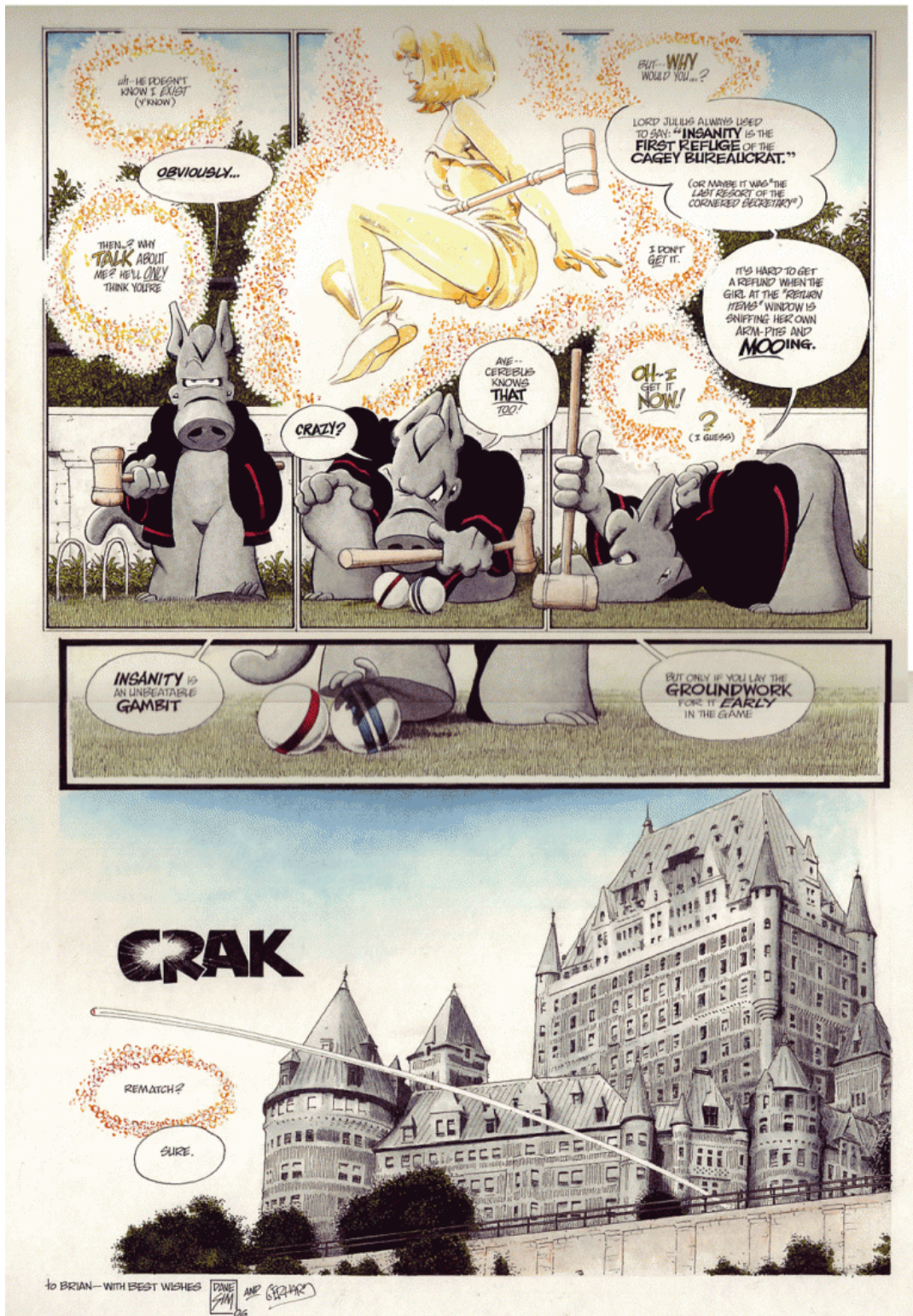


Cerebus #29 p 19 (Aug 1981)

by Dave Sim (1956-)

11 x 17 in, ink & tone Bristol Board

Coppola Collection



Cerebus #29 p 19 (reimagined, 2006)
 by Dave Sim (1956-) and Gerhard (1959-)
 11 x 17 in, ink & watercolor on Bristol Board
 Coppola Collection

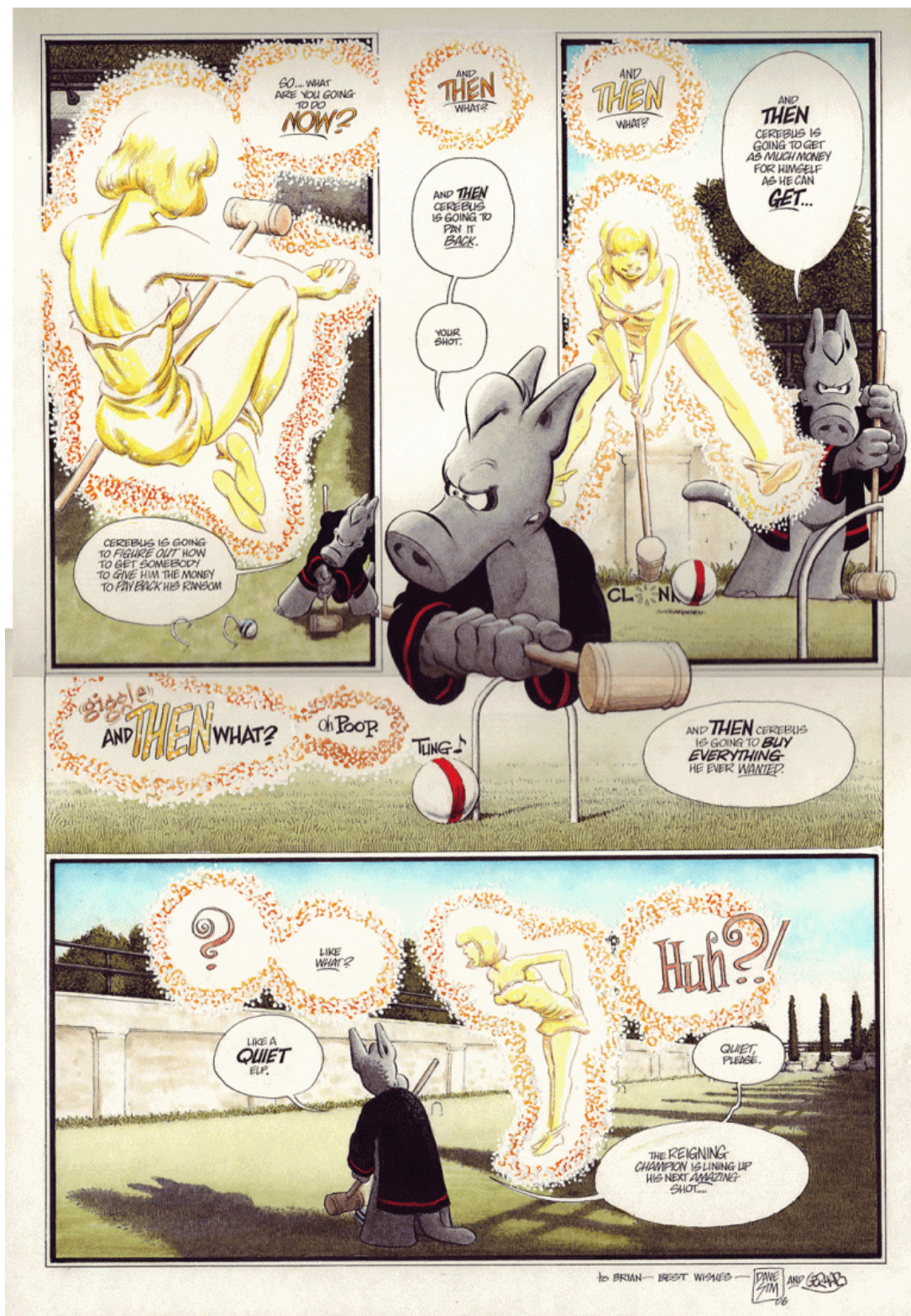


Cerebus #29 p 20 (Aug 1981)

by Dave Sim (1956-)

11 x 17 in, ink & tone Bristol Board

Coppola Collection



Cerebus #29 p 20 (reimagined, 2006)
 by Dave Sim (1956-) and Gerhard (1959-)
 11 x 17 in, ink & watercolor on Bristol Board
 Coppola Collection



Page 2 (continued).

Book Reference: *Church & State II*

The moody dark interior of the prison cell where Astoria was held and interrogated (issues 93-97), empty shackles on the wall.

We see Carson's dark outline in contemplation (Cerebus # 93 p 20).

Book Reference: *Jaka's Story*

The setting is the cover to Cerebus #118: dark tower in the background, destroyed church entrance, the stone plaza, the half of a horned head.

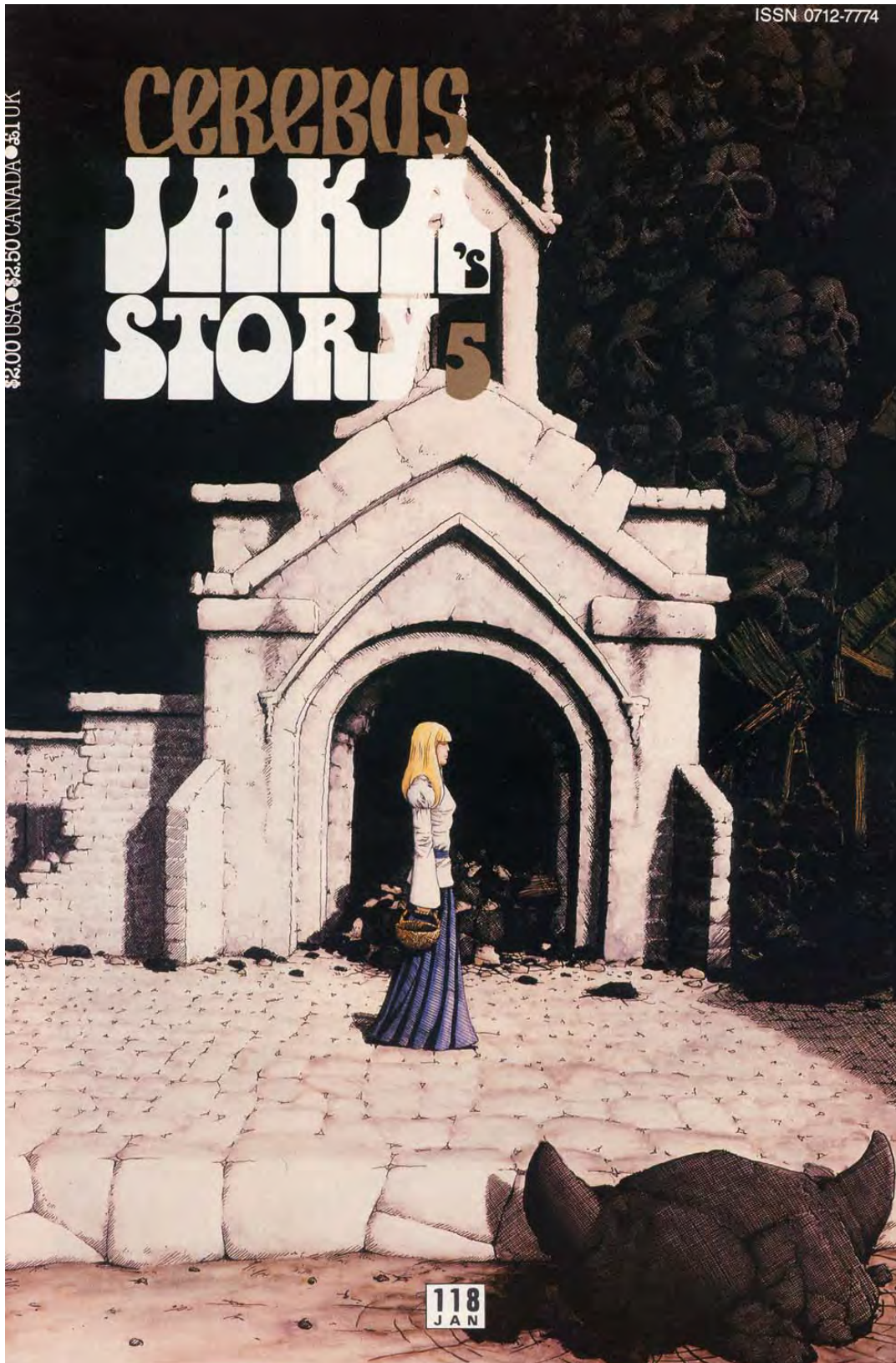
We are looking at this over Carson's shoulder, because we see for the first time that he has his sketchbook out, and he is capturing the scene we see.

Of terrific note in the final version of that panel: Carson thought to include a portrait of Gerhard in the sketchbook.

This insertion was a nice surprise, and reminiscent of the time Gerhard inserted me as a character in a painting hung on the wall as part of a commission he did for me.



N E X T . S O



Cerebus the Aardvark #118, cover (Cerebus Downloads)



"Take On Me" p 3 (2019)
 by Carson Grubaugh (1981-) and Gerhard (1959-)
 and written by Brian P Coppola (1957-)
 11 x 17, ink on board
 Coppola Collection

Page 3.

Book Reference: *Melmoth*

Cerebus #140 (evening outside of Dino's) POV is sitting at one of the tables on the patio, presumably Carson (but he does not show up in this panel except, perhaps, as the closed edge of the sketch book on the table), the shadows on the road signify that Oscar and Reginald have just passed (or are about to, depending on which way the lights work outside the porch).

Book Reference: *Flight*

The cover to Cerebus #151 is possibly my favorite one from all 300 of them. Thanks to Gerhard, it is in my possession to ~~have~~ enjoy.

The flying book is the only character, and its motion is vividly displayed against the strong and static space constructed by the library. Pure, pure Gerhard; and yet, he disliked it!

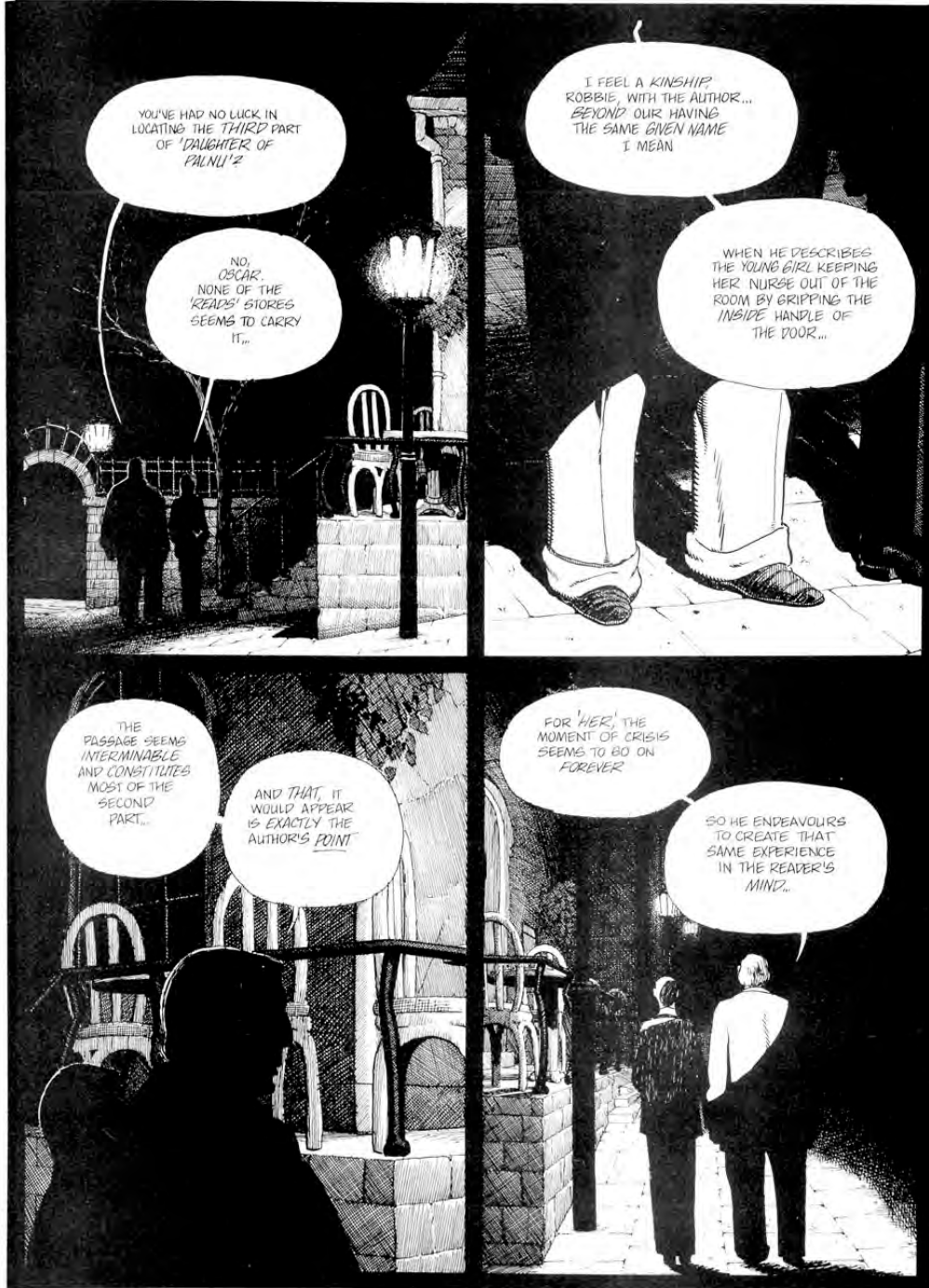
In the "Cover Treasury" book, Ger writes: "I spent a lot of time working out the composition and perspective of this piece, but I could not get the color right. It was too orange, not the mahogany hue that I wanted, but there was nothing I could do to fix it. I hated it so much that when I hung the cover on its clip, I hung it face toward the wall." Dave's response is cute: "In those situations you take the hint and just hope it's still on its hook, face to the wall, when you come in tomorrow. It's HIS cover."

I personally think the color is really representative of what highly polished wood looks like when it is lit by the glaring sunlight (or a fire burning outside), and this adds considerably to what I like about it. In fact, I always imagined that while Cirin was purging the library, her minions were having a book bonfire outside. That POV is still one of the "World without Cerebus" ideas in the queue, but it plays a role here.

Carson is in the library, perhaps framed by one of the Gothic windows as he looks out into the courtyard, where a bonfire of books is ablaze.

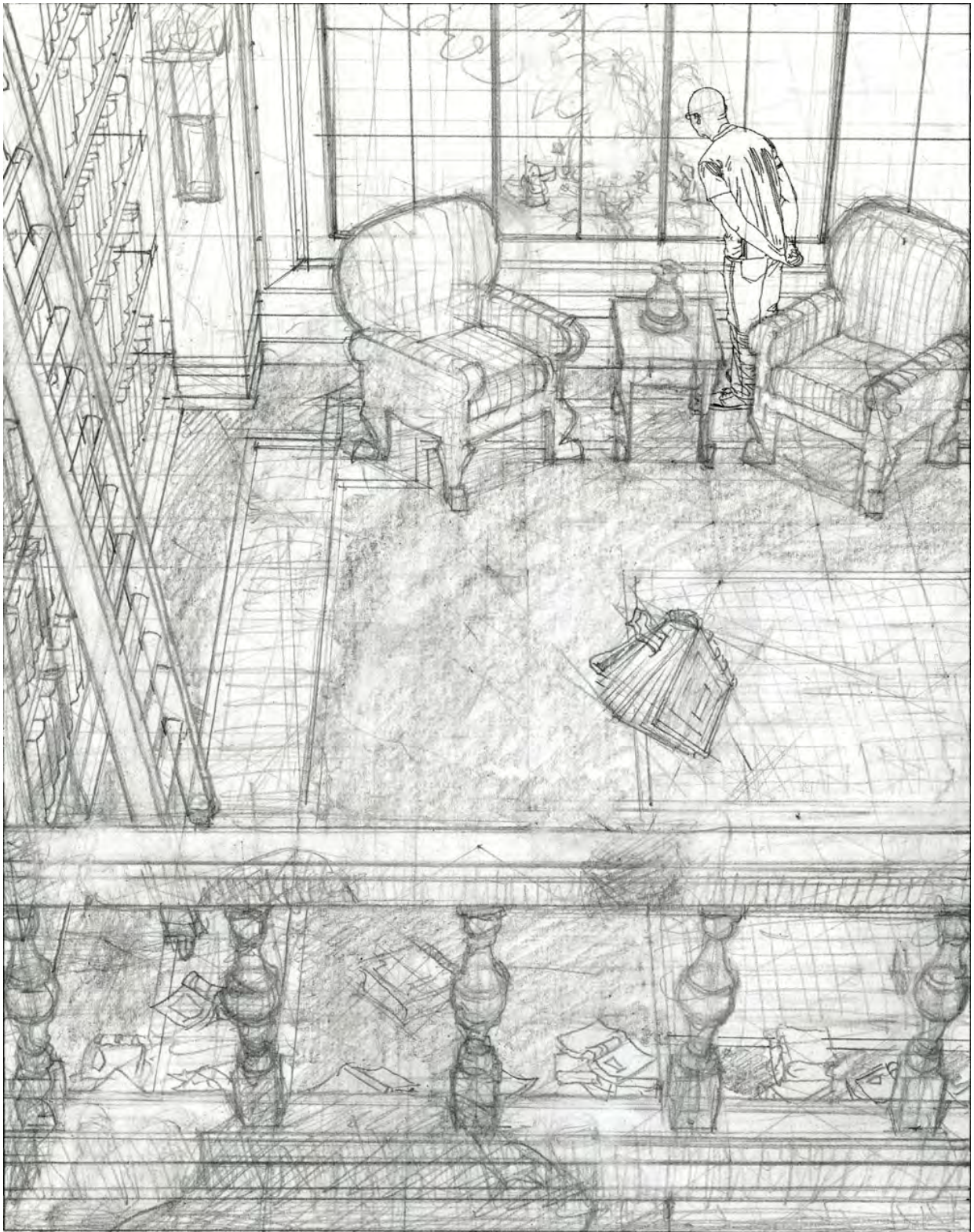
As a reflection in the window, a big book flies past his head behind him.

refused. We went to a small cafe in the Lower City where he insisted on drinking absinthe. He walked there and back with some difficulty but seemed fairly well. Only





"Cerebus the Aardvark" 151 Cover (Oct 1991)
by Gerhard (1959-)
11 x 17 in, ink and watercolor on Bristol Board
Coppola Collection



"Take On Me" p 3 (2019) ink and pencil draft of library
figure by Carson Grubaugh (1981-) and all the rest by Gerhard (1959-)

Page 3 (continued).

Book Reference: *Women*

Cerebus #174 p 7, outside the throne room where the great deliberation between Po, Astoria, Cirin(Cerna), and Cerebus is going to take place.

There is a moment where the robed Po is walking through the streets, there is a crowd, and Cerebus is about to fall from the sky. So POV from just above the crowd, we see the shadow from the flying Cerebus cast on the ground as Carson is looking up at him, while just off to the side, the fully robed figure of Po has just walked by and has everyone else's attention.

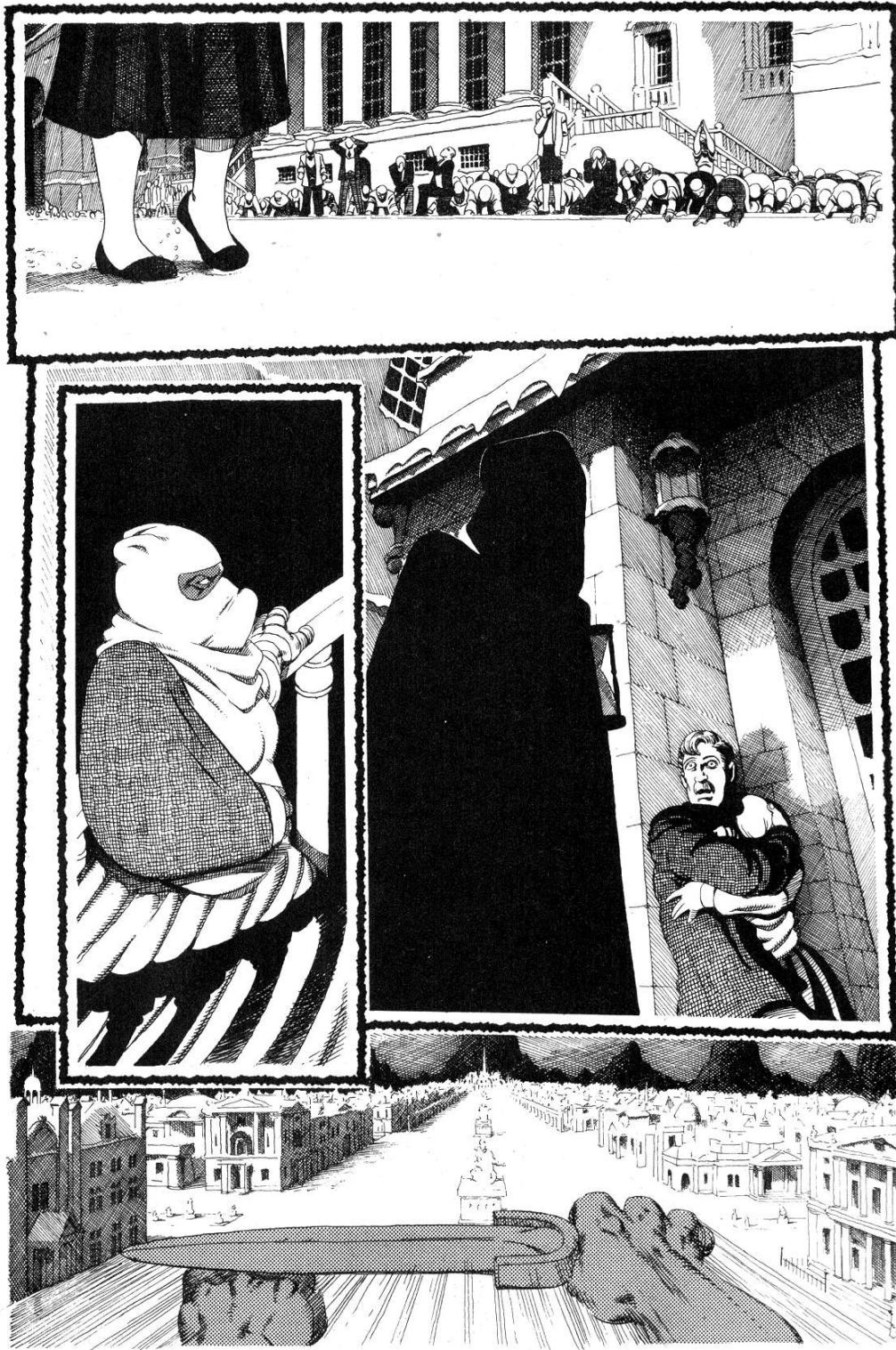
Book Reference: *Reads*

Cerebus #183, p9 (one of many) and POV is Carson's, looking into a window at the bloodstained floor where the fight is in progress, although we do not see the principals.

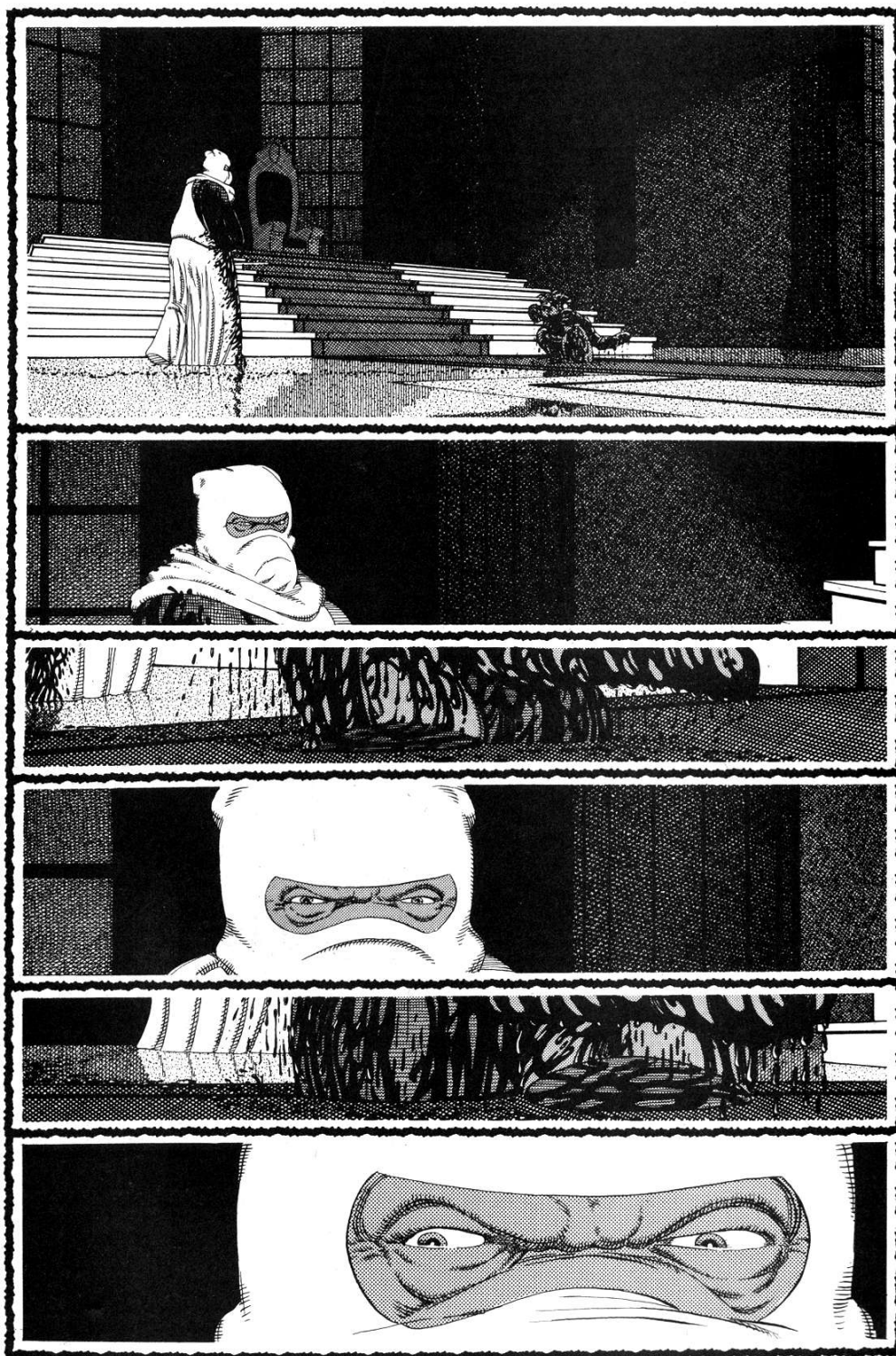
We do not see Carson, but only his reflection, with the room beyond. His hand is raised to his mouth, biting his finger in anxiety.

It's possible, I suppose, we could see Cerebus's ear flying by, as the eyes in the reflected face follow it across the room.

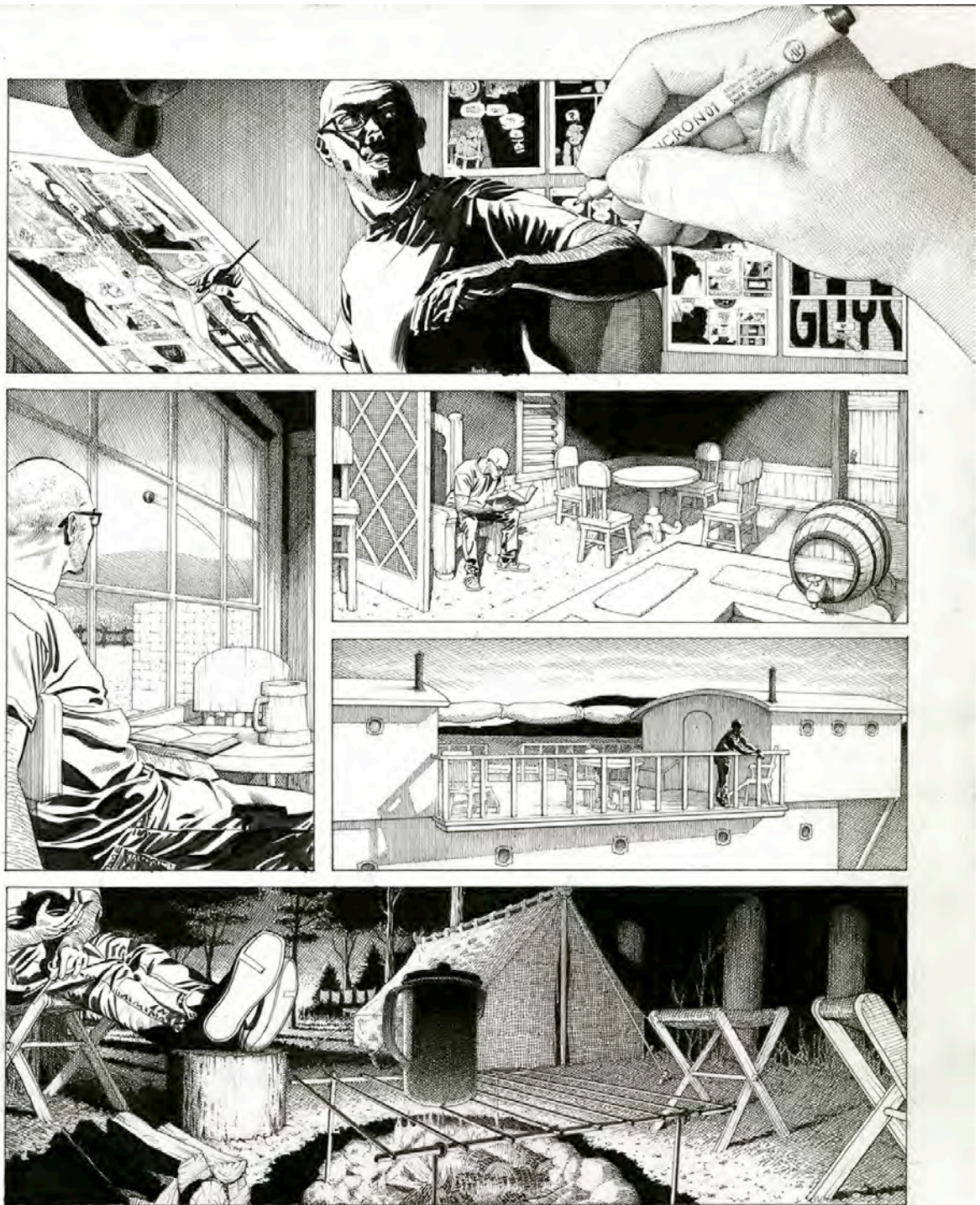
Aside to *Avengers* movie fans, this issue's title is "Endgame."



Cerebus the Aardvark #174, p. 7 (*Cerebus Downloads*)



Cerebus the Aardvark #183, p. 9 (Cerebus Downloads)



"Take On Me" p 4 (2019)
 by Carson Grubaugh (1981-) and Gerhard (1959-)
 and written by Brian P Coppola (1957-)
 11 x 17, ink on board
 Coppola Collection

After leaving *Reads*, Carson then lands in *Minds*, where issue #200 is located. And after what I said in *Take Two* about my admiration for pp. 17-20, there's no way we are not scooting straight to the finale of issue #200 for the next panel in *Take On Me*.

Recall that we have been there before, with Carson, as described in *Take Three*, the 2-page commission featuring Jack.



Detail from: "Uh... GUYS... I'm Right Here..." (2018)

And now: the rest of my commentary on the conundrum of creators and their creations continues.

The underlying assumptions in taking the leap of faith are ultimately hypocritical as long as you make the assumption that there is "creator;" I do not think you can rationally escape it and I think that these compositions point right at it. You are simultaneously saying you cannot know the mind of creator, by definition, because creators live one dimension up from you, and

yet your leap of faith is predicated exactly on a belief you have in the intent of creator (your faith is always in something).

When you choose to believe in “creator” (a definite article or possessive pronoun is intentionally missing here, by the way, as “a” or “the” or “my” or “your” or “their” all cause the reading of this text to differ wildly), you make some assumption(s) about the morality of creator, and (the point was made, clearly and strongly at the end of issue #200) you are never really thinking it is a guy at a drawing board who mocks you as an ultra-maroon.

Whatever choice you make about yourself, and your behavior, is predicated on some assumption you make about that creator’s morality (applying your rules about the way reality operates about a dimension you cannot comprehend and therefore cannot know)...

Or, alternatively, there is no free will at all: you are not making choices at all because you are strictly a scripted creation at the end of creator’s pen nib, brush, and whim. *Baby, you were born that way.*

This dimensional conundrum was the metaphorical lesson in *Flatland*, as I described earlier. Abbott told the story about the perspective (assumptions) of 2D beings in the context of our 3D world. It is an allegory.

In his book, we dwellers in the 3D world can understand the intrinsic impossibility of the 2D beings ever really being able to understand us dwellers in a 3D world. That said, he was, by most accounts, using the allegory as a lesson for us 3D beings who cannot possibly understand the hypothetical 4D ones, or the signals we ascribe to them (or whatever the next dimensional layer represents; after all, how can we know?).

A physical example is useful. To a 2D being in a 2D world, there is no possible way to understand how four points can be mutually equidistant from each other in your 2D environment (because it is a tetrahedron; living in a

plane, you cannot actually even imagine it, you lack every referent). You can see how three points can be equidistant in an equilateral triangle, but the placement of a fourth point that is equidistant to those is utterly impossible to imagine without access to and understanding of the third dimension.

So, 3D dweller: give it a try. Do you think you can conceptualize the simplest, inanimate 4D object? Great. Start with a tetrahedron (four points mutually equidistant) and tell me where a fifth point goes that satisfies the equidistant condition. Keep thinking. You get back to me about that. I'll wait, but I will not be holding my breath.

Only beings in 4D space have the proper perspective, and it is as obvious to them as the tetrahedron is to us, relative to the perception of our 2D colleagues. And this conundrum exists for the *simplest* object.

And, well, as long as I am here digressing, let me recommend that you put this fantastic book on your reading list. It's what the last hundred pages of *Cerebus the Aardvark* might have been.

"I, Lucifer: Finally, the Other Side of the Story" by Glen Duncan (Grove Press, 2004). Here's the Deal: God is about to pull the plug (on everything), and He's giving His most Fallen Angel one last chance to make good. Lucifer has one month inside the body of suicidal author Declan Gunn (anagram of the author) to redeem himself. Let me tempt you (*heh*) with two PG-friendly passages:

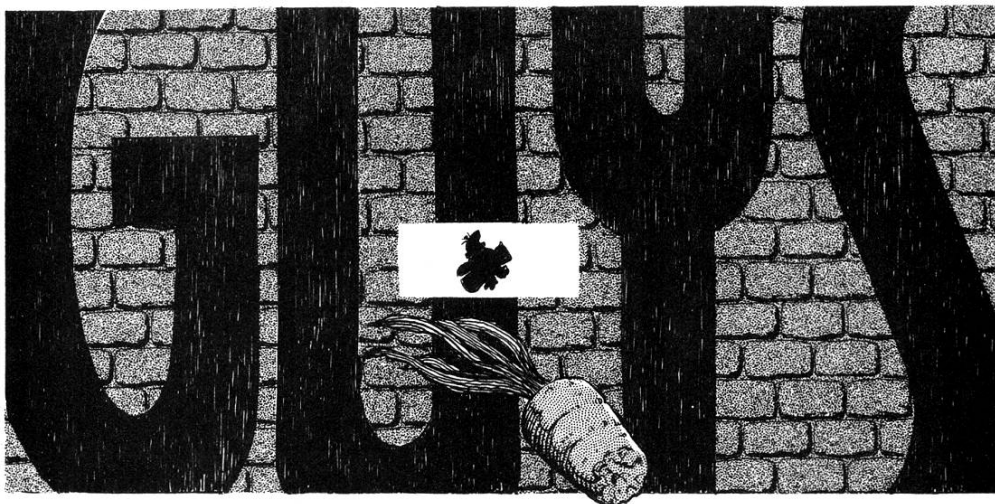
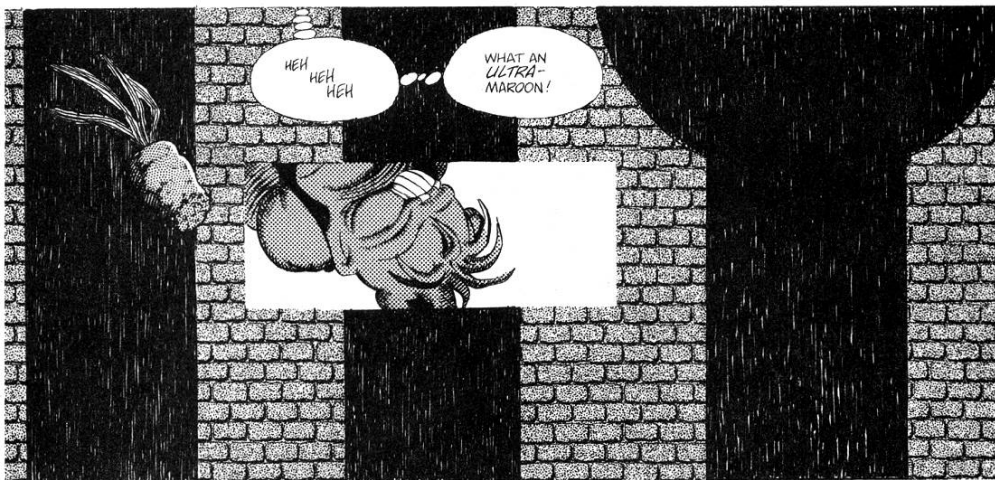
"There's a common misconception about me. It's a slander spread by the Church, namely that if you make a deal with me, I'll cheat you. Poppycock, of course. I never cheat. Never have to. Ask Robert Johnson. Ask Jimmy Page. Humans are so deaf and blind to the ambiguities of their own languages, they concoct their wishes in terms so permeable that I can always grant them in a way they never imagined. I want to be as wealthy as my father. Fair enough. Nelchael crashes the markets, Dad's bankrupt, and thanks for the soul, brother. A boneheaded example, obviously, but you'd be surprised how wide open your leave yourselves. (The punters who come off best with me are smart, dirty

rotten scoundrels to start with, willing to sign over their afterlife care in exchange for the chance to become even dirtier, rottener scoundrels while still rightside of the grave.)”

“... Thing was: nobody was going to Heaven. I remember St. Peter getting his new uniform and ticket-punch. Time passed. He’d wished he’d brought a magazine. The turnstile booth grew... oppressively familiar. Whereas we were taking on extra staff downstairs. Every day a gala day. I was down to a three-and-a-half-hour week. Spent the rest of my time lying in a hot hammock and dabbing away tears of mirth. I sent Him a telegram. Far be it from me to tell You Your Own business and all that, but... Stony Silence. Still no sense of humour. On the other hand, it wasn’t long after that regrettably indulgent quip that I noticed the goalposts were on the move. Without so much as a nod or a wink. It was the coveters first, peeling off to Purgatory when they should have been hurtling straight down to us. Then every other one-theft-only thief. The odd regretful adulterer. ...”

Now, back to page 4 of *Take On Me*.

You start with the terrific take on reality and its creation from the end of Cerebus #200 (p 19) and the commission Carson did for me.





"Uh... GUYS... I'm Right Here..." (2018)

by Carson Grubaugh (1981-) 2 x 11 x 17 in. 2-ply Strathmore 500 Bristol boards, ink over blue-line print
Coppola Collection

And, here we go again.



"Take On Me" p 4 [Panel One] (2019)

Page 4.

Book Reference: *Minds*

Our POV is inside the last pages of Cerebus #200, in addition to the 2018 Carson Commission, where we all live simultaneously: comic, artists, and audience.

We have been here before.

We see Carson in the studio area where the drawing boards for Dave and Ger are located, and where the pages from #200 are seen, and where we encounter Carson drawing a page, that has himself drawing a page of himself in the room we have seen before, but now we take the pull-back from the reaction shot that we saw in the 2018 Carson Commission– and pull back again ... oh, you get it.

Reality: it *really* gives me a headache.

Book Reference: *Guys*

Carson is inside the bar, at a table, ca. issue #202, looking outside in the direction of the Five Bar Gate playing court. Lots of stuff can be on the table (tankards, glasses half-filled). Perhaps you can see the ball from the game flying by, and the shadows of those who have left the bar to go watch.

Book Reference: *Rick's Story*

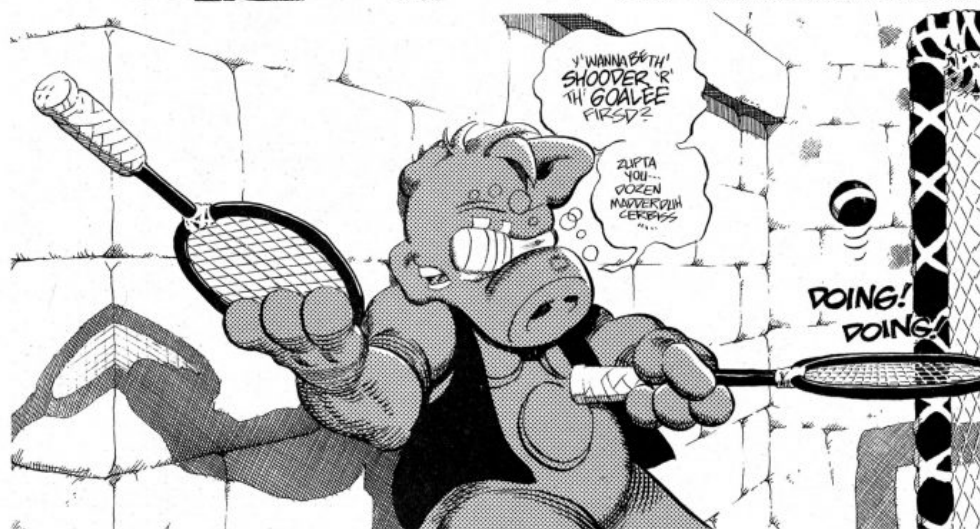
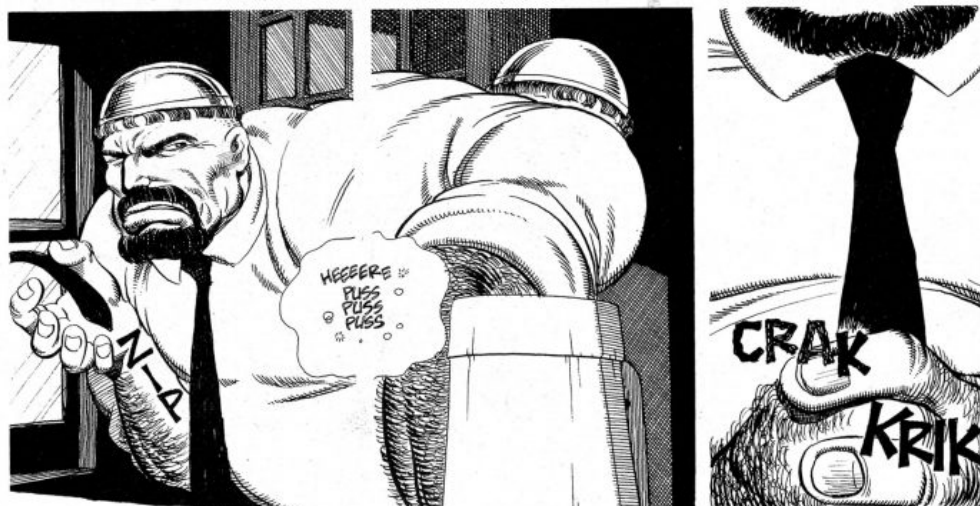
We are looking from behind the bar, ca. issue #222, over towards the seat where Rick is writing his book. The book is open, being studied intently by Carson.

Book Reference: *Going Home*

Carson is on the deck of the boat, moored for the evening (issue #249, p 14). Sitting at the table, the lighted portholes show clearly against the darkness. We know there are conversations taking place.

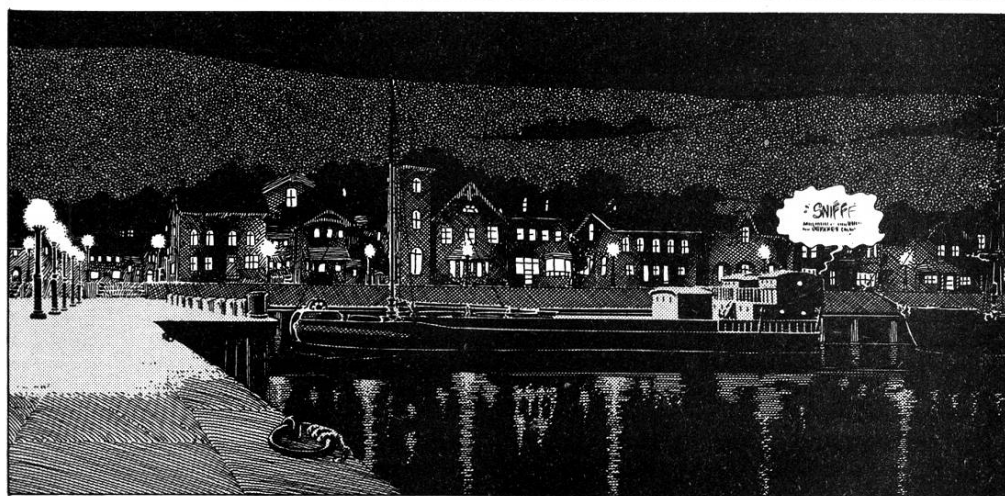
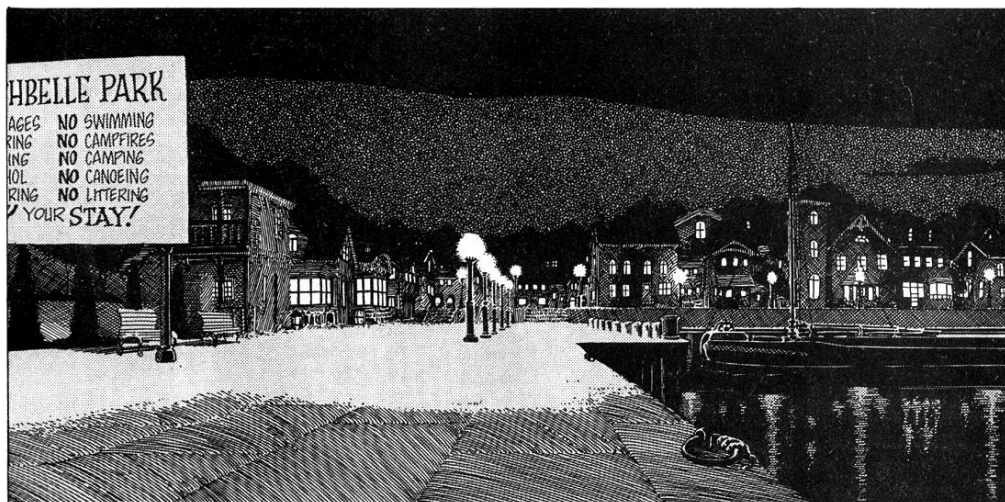
Book Reference: *Form and Void*

In their tent at the Ham Earnestway campsite, (issue #253, pp. 18-19) Jaka has just clipped Cerebus's hair as he checks it out in a hand-held mirror. Carson is now there, and we see the scissors and mirror.





Cerebus the Aardvark #222, p. 18 (Cerebus Downloads)



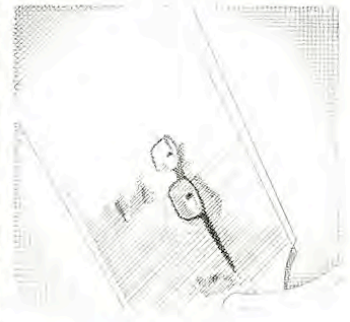
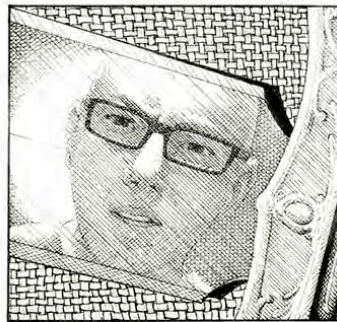
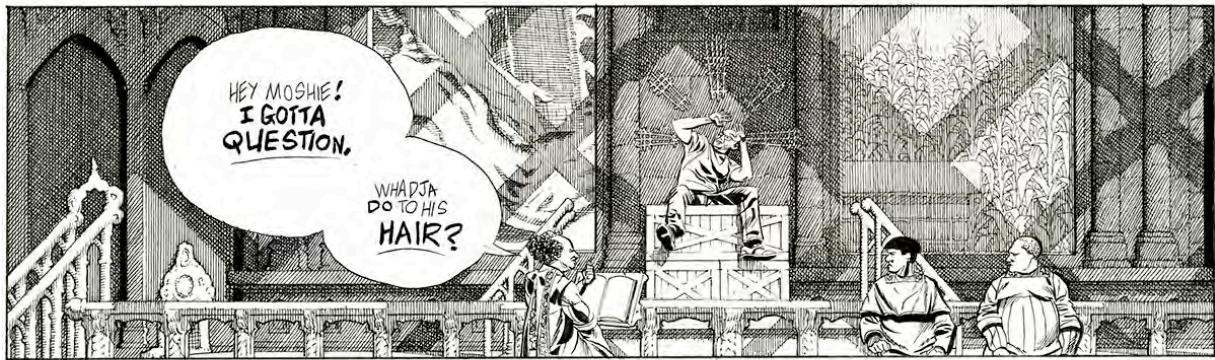


444



445

Cerebus the Aardvark #253, pp. 18-19 (Cerebus Downloads)



"Take On Me" p 5 (2019)
 by Carson Grubaugh (1981-) and Gerhard (1959-)
 and written by Brian P Coppola (1957-)
 11 x 17, ink on board
 Coppola Collection

There are two books remaining on Carson's trip through the 1977-2004 world of *Cerebus*, namely *Latter Days* and *The Last Day*. And my "shooting script" got some dialog, again.

Page 5.

Book Reference: *Latter Days*

The Three Wise Guys bound Cerebus in and around Cerebus #270.

And for the first time in this little story, Carson is going to be Cerebus (bound to *Cerebus*, get it? I thought so...).

The dialog (by Carson) underscores another interesting point Dave makes, that goes way, way back in the *Cerebus* series, about how some characters are being perceived by other characters in ways that may be different than the way a member of the audience (readership) might.

There was always a question about how Cerebus was perceived by those in the story (as opposed to us... and who's to say who was better informed?). Some saw him as the aardvark we saw; to someone else, he's a kid in a bunny suit; to someone else, he's a deformed child.

The Three Wise Guys only notice that the central character's hair is changed.

It's a nice point. Even the perception of color has been demonstrated, quite convincingly, as influenced by cultural and geographical upbringing. There is a great 4-part 2012 BBC documentary where you can experience this for yourself ("Do You See What I See?" produced by *Horizon*).

How the heck do we know how someone else sees or understands what anything is, or what it means, through the lens of their own personal experience and ... and, oh, please, don't get me started again on reality versus Reality versus "reality" (to borrow one of Dave's favorite postmodernist constructs).

Moving on.



Cerebus the Aardvark #270, pp. 18 (Cerebus Downloads)

The penultimate issue, Cerebus #299, came out on the day before my birthday, in February 2004. On the last page, we fans got a real treat as a fighting-mad Cerebus goes full-on barbarian, grabs a little dagger, and sets off to eviscerate his son ("Shep-Shep"), who has been dabbling in weird science.

I just had to own that last page.

And on top of that, I also wanted page 1 of #300 as I figured it would be its perfect companion, no matter what happened next. So I made the offer for it sight-unseen.

Amused, Dave and Ger asked me to wait until I saw it to decide. Yeah. Whatever.

Almost immediately, and before any of the rest of us ever saw page 1 of issue #300 in print, I also asked Dave and Ger if they would do a sketch for me as an homage to the famous "What Happened Between Issues 20 and 21?" story, as a bridge between these two pages/issues... whatever was happening.

They must have laughed, as there ended up being not too much open space between Issues 299 and 300, as you can see.

But they did make a clever bridging sequence: Cerebus raises his right arm between the last panel in 299 and the first one in 300 (and needless to say, I got much more than a sketch from those guys).

The centerpiece is also terrific because it reads from bottom to top, which I suspect Scott "Understanding Comics" McCloud would have a field day with.

The pages were committed to be displayed that summer, so I did not actually take possession until December. You can see that the "in between" half-page was done in September.



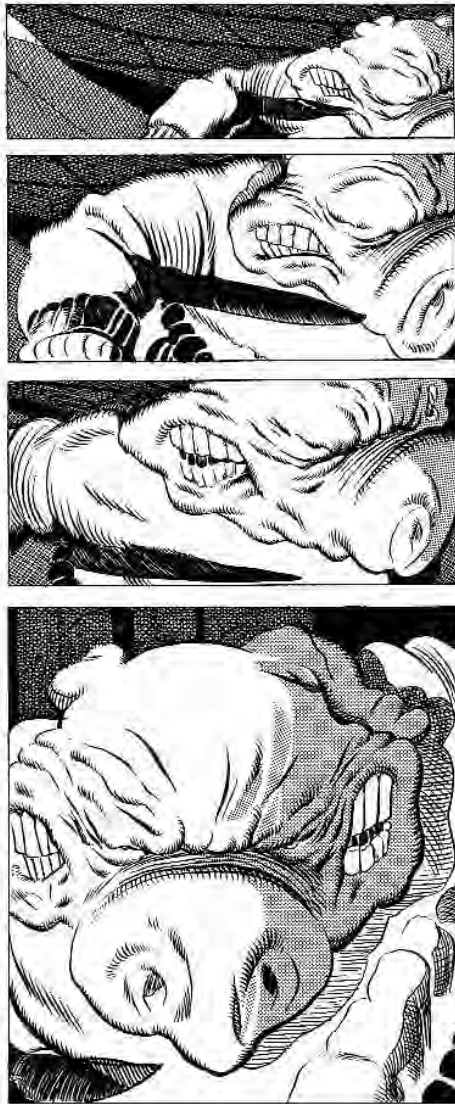
"Cerebus the Aardvark" 299 p 20 (Feb 2004)
by Dave Sim (1956-) and Gerhard (1959-)
11 x 17 in, ink and tone on Bristol Board
Coppola Collection

Cerebus the Aardvark 300
Page 1

TO BRIND - *Wagner & G. G. G. G.*



"Cerebus the Aardvark" 300 p 1 (Mar 2004)
by Dave Sim (1956-) and Gerhard (1959-)
11 x 17 in, ink and tone on Bristol Board
Coppola Collection



TO BRIAN P. COPPOLA — THANKS FOR
ALL YOUR YEARS OF SUPPORT

DAVE SIM AND GERHARD

15 SEPTEMBER 04

"What Happened Between Issues 299 and 300?" (2004)
by Dave Sim (1956-) and Gerhard (1959-)
7 x 17 in, ink and tone on Bristol Board
Coppola Collection

Page 5 (continued).

Book Reference: *The Last Day*

So we end Carson's grand tour in Cerebus #300, which gets three panels, and then we bring him home.

Panel A: Carson reaches for the little dagger that has fallen on the floor

Panel B: Carson's reflection in the little dagger

Panel C: Carson and the return of the BWGST in the reflection in the dagger

Last panel: Carson is back in the studio, and back to sepia (as in the final scene of *Wizard of Oz*).

Carson (has the white sphere in his left hand; things always invert with that dang BWGST): "Home... (softly) ... and this is my room..." (this is Dorothy's last line of dialog at the end of the *Wizard of Oz*)... there is also a sideways allusion here to the entire last arc of the *Cerebus* series and the title of Book 13 (*Going Home*).

Student: "Sir, are you OK? You drifted off for a moment."

And this "drifting" reference is a significantly more obscure allusion to an all-time favorite, final movie moment of mine, used to commemorate Carson's passage (take it as you might) from one world into the other, particularly at the staging of Cerebus's death:

"It's time for you to leave now. Time for you to go back to where you came from. Back to the place where all the spirits came from, and where all the spirits return. This world will not longer concern you."

– *Dead Man*, 1995

Dead Man is a terrifically under-appreciated movie starring Johnny Depp, the fantastic Gary Farmer, and includes performances by John Hurt, Iggy Pop, Alfred Molina, Billy Bob Thornton, Gabriel Byrne, Crispin Glover, and the last US film appearance by Robert

Mitchum. And also features an original Neil Young soundtrack, which he improvised much of as he watched the pre-edited (!) film during its production. A black and white “art house” type of movie, it has been described as a “psychedelic western.” Contemporary reviewers were quite critical at the time, but it now shows up on the “movies you missed” lists. I enjoy re-watching it every 5 years or so. It was released the same year as “12 Monkeys” and “Heat,” making 1995 one of only a few years with three recommendations on my own all-time film list.

You have to see the movie to catch what I mean by the drifting reference (Carson has drifted off... from the student’s point of view, but also from our perspective away from Cerebus’s world, too). Passage and transition: the clip from the last scene of *Dead Man* that I am referencing available on YouTube.

Another great line from *Dead Man* worthy of inclusion: “The eagle never lost so much time as when he submitted to learn from the crow.”

Fortunately, my twin eagles (Gerhard and Carson) recognized and ignored the more crow-like suggestions I cawed about along the way and turned them into good ideas.

Un grand merci, mille mercis, mes amis.

Carson lifts the sphere from the copy of the *Cerebus* volume that clocked him.

The End.