



Church and State II

Dave Sim, Gerhard (backgrounds)

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Reprinting Cerebus Issues 81-111

Church and State, Volume II, is the second part of a story that exists as a whole and as part three of the Cerebus the Aardvark series. Many consider this volume to be Dave Sim and background artist Gerhard's best visual work to date.

The action picks up right after the cliffhanger at the end of part one of *Church and State*. Cerebus attempts to regain his lost throne amidst warnings of a larger crisis. Mountain climbing, the introductions of Prince Mick and Prince Keef (exactly who you might think they are), the Super Secret Sacred Wars, and an Ascension to Vanaheim mark this second half of the Church and State opus. The major plot lines, which started 10 years earlier in *Cerebus* and *High Society*, are resolved (to some degree). The ending sets the stage for the more restful and introspective volumes--*Jaka's Story* and *Melmoth*--that follow.

Church and State II Details

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Author : Dave Sim , Gerhard (backgrounds)

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From Reader Review Church and State II for online ebook

Rex Hurst says

Church and State II wraps up the largest and most ambitious arc in Cerebus's run. Comprising issues 85 -111 of the series, it brings forth and defines the tone for the rest of the series. Cerebus, our anti-hero, is ultimately a failure. Though surrounded by greatness he is ultimately doomed to fail and will die, as the Judge proclaims "alone, unmourned, and unloved." Oh... spoilers I guess... but considering the end happened in 2004 and was written in 1988, I suppose it should be called foreshadowing, though of a very blunt variety.

This is the time in Cerebus's original publication history when sales began to take a significant drop. There were a number of reasons for this. The first being oversaturation of the market, direct sales meant a lot of smaller players could flood the distributors with fast and cheap products. This caused the whole industry to take a slump in sales, everyone had to deal with a much smaller slice. The second was that Cerebus is not a series that you can just jump into midstream. To understand, beyond the vaguest idea, of what is happening you really do need to absorb it all from the beginning, or at least start at the second volume High Society.

The book takes its time in developing its plot. It makes hints, adds things, but doesn't really get underway for about 300 pages, (thought those pages are beautiful to look at). When I first read it, I thought the story dragged considerably, as I was anxious to get to the good stuff or some sort of explanation, but on a second read (or third, I can't remember) I enjoyed it much more. Knowing the end, I can see much more merit in the journey.

And to keep up with our Roach count. The character now becomes a religious fanatic, the Super Secret Wars Roach. The character is a perfect parody of the superhero genre in comics. He is a deeply fanatical towards the cause he is championing. He is powerful, superhumanly strong, and beats up anyone that opposes him (with the exception of Cerebus himself), but essentially he is ineffective as an agent of change. He changes from one persona to the next, but cannot alter the world. He is, in a sense, a failed Cerebus, as our anti-hero changes everything just by walking near it.

We finally catch a glimpse of the second Aardvark, or Earth Pig born, in the veiled character of Cirin who has founded the Cirinist movement, a female-centric religious fanatic organization, which Astoria (we remember her as Cerebus's Hillary Clinton character) split off from on doctrinal grounds. She formed the rival Kevillist movement and two have been at odds ever since. This division will be explained more in future posts, as it is developed in greater detail in later volumes.

There is a cross-over issue here, with the character of Flaming Carrot popping up during Cerebus's ascent to the moon. Younger readers may not remember, or even have heard about, this indie sensation, as his popularity dried up with the comic book's bust in the mid 90s. The character is a Don Quixote type, a man who reads too many comic books and ends up trying to be superhero with mixed results. The character had a spin off, Mysterymen, which was eventually made into a good film - one that was actually better than its source material. At the time of this meet-up, the character was being published by Aardvark-Vanaheim which produced Cerebus as well. So if anyone is confused as to what the hell is happening in that issue, it was a promotional thing, placed in such a way as to suggest it may be a delusion or mystic vision at Cerebus climbs the Black Tower.

With the Ascension underway we see various aspects of religious thought emerge. Essentially it is a race (in this case literally) to the top of the mountain to see who will meet and then be Tarim. As was mentioned

before the name Tarim refers both to the deity and the prophet. Which they expect to meet and/or become is vague and even the players themselves don't seem to understand. In this author offers a discussion on the nature of messianic figures. In this case it is a job title, not an ordainment of a predestined chosen one by a celestial being. Anyone who fits the qualifications can potentially get the position.

This is partially a reflection of the time of Jesus's crucifixion. Judea at the time was lousy with messiahs. Such as Simon of Peraea, a former slave turned revolutionary and was likewise crucified, Moses of Crete who persuaded the Jews of Crete to walk into the sea, ala his namesake, to return to Israel. The results were disastrous and he soon disappeared. Simon bar Kokhba who lead a revolt against the Romans and died defending his fledgling Jewish state. And so on. Many with signs and portents and miracles attributed to their name. But being eligible for the top job is not enough, one has to have the right stuff. That something extra. This view is demonstrated by the fact that when Cerebus finally ascends to the moon there is another applicant waiting to try and kick him off.

The series steadily develops its major theme of the struggle between male and female aspects of reality. Primarily demonstrated in the argument between Astoria (on trial for the assassination of the Western pope) and Cerebus. Strangely enough their argument descends into an is-to|is-not spat over the correct terminology for their deity Tarim (the masculine) and Terim (the feminine). This verbal jousting, as always, leads nowhere, as one viewpoint cannot win out over another without a physical show of force to beat the other into silent submission. As the author postulates the entirety of life is a flux between male and female, void and form, essences. This struggle is eternal and all concurrent struggles are a reflection, or ripple, of the initial one. This is hinted during Astoria's interrogation, a temporal slip occurs where she is the male Aardvark prophet and Cerebus is the female condemner. This struggle for control, for enlightenment, for peace has been going on as long there has been mankind with no end in sight.

An interesting aspect is that when Cerebus ascends to the higher plane to meet the divine entity, he goes to the moon. Traditionally this heavenly sphere is associated with the feminine and yet the creature he meets there is a male. This does fit in with a yin-yang aspect to the night the sky. The black void is male, but the most prominent feature, the moon, is the female form emerging. And this is represented in both of the messiah claimants who eventually take part in the launch sequence and leave earth. Both physically represent male and female traits. The first, an Alan Moore characiature who is fused with both a male and female apocalypse beast (seen in the first volume of the series), and Cerebus himself is a hermaphrodite- though this is not revealed for a least a hundred more issues.

Which brings us to the story's culmination Cerebus's meeting with the Judge. Personality wise based on playwright Jules Feiffer's character Judge Stern in Little Murders, physically the Judge was based on character actor Lou Jacobi , who played the role. While he is called the Judge, he should be referred to as the judgemental as inevitably all of his pronouncements are negative and pessimistic. The character talks much, discussing the nature of creation between Tarim and Terim and their accidental generation of the Big Bang, interpreted as act of forcible sex (very nice play on words) and reproduction.

The character itself is an exercise in futility. He claims that he is there to observe mankind and to judge them, but he already knows what will happen in Cerebus's future and the eventual extinction of all life in the solar system so what is the point of him observing? What is the point of him judging? For whose benefit? And who set him on the task. In his discussions of Terim and Tarim it is obvious that neither of these entities were responsible. The answer, of course is: Dave, the author, placed him there to be a cut-out, a buffer. As the author eventually becomes a character in his own series, we will have to view him as the ultimate and flawed architect of this universe.

One may see the Judge as a comment on religious exercise in general. All of this effort, all of this strife and death, for ultimately an unsatisfying and pointless encounter. Does how the creation of the world matter? Does knowing the spiritual why of things off-set the reality of what a person needs to do on a day-to-day basis? In the case of our anti-hero, it absolutely does not.

Many have claimed that the author, Dave Sim, is a misogynist who hates women, an all too common term tossed about nowadays. But after reading the Judge's viewpoints here I don't see it. He simply comes across as a person who will offer more than one perspective on an issue. Therein lies the problem. Any deviation from a preconceived societal norm offers immediate attack and ostracization. And Dave Sim was one of the first of many public whippings in the progressive press for thoughtcrime.

Luc says

At the end of this book, Dave Sim writes: "Much of what has been written about Dave Sim remains true today". Looking back, I notice that I wrote that he is an asshat. Wouldn't you know it? It still holds true!

So I have mixed feelings about this book. Parts of it are just weird (like the "Utter Nonsense" issue) and all the ascension stuff is a little too metaphysical for my taste. The Judge characters draw some of Sim's world origin and lays the groundwork for what will reveal to a controversial topic in coming issues.

There's still a lot of those cameos that annoy me. I don't know which I hate most: Prince Keef and Prince Mick or the characters I know are cameos but can't recognize.

Nevertheless, it has a couple of great moments.

Unfortunately, it also reaches some pretty gross lows, mostly during Cerebus's second marriage when the characters go from despicable to reprehensible, borderline unredeemable.

In all long-form series, some readers look for a good place to stop, looking for a place where a series jumps the shark. I think such a reader could stop here (or maybe after *Minds*). Yes, there will be some frustration from not having reached a final conclusion but I think the *High Society* / *Church and State* books are where Sim shone the most.

Elizabeth Wallace says

As with many David Sim books, I don't always know what's going on. And towards the end of the series he got crazy. (Not "fun and interestingly weird" crazy, but "Good holy god what the hell is he talking about and why is he not locked up someplace" crazy.) But this early on in the series he was in his prime; great artwork, fantastic storylines, and enough creepy images to make things interesting.

You'll want to start with the first book, of course, if you want to have any hope of knowing what's going on (good luck with that) but this one always stands out in my head as being one of the best.

Tony says

This novel completes the Cerebus-as-Pope story arc set out in the first C&S. The first half found Cerebus amassing all of the gold in Iest, abusing his power, killing several hundred people, and then getting booted to the lower city.

C&S II follows Cerebus as he attempts to regain power.

I liked this novel a lot - but not quite as much as Society or C&S I. It's not entirely fair to judge it on its own, as both Church and States are the same story, divided for the sake of space and economy. Still, the second half of this story has a few flaws which weren't present in the first.

I read C&S II much faster than the previous 2 Cerebus 'phone book' editions. I'm not sure if it's less wordy than before, or maybe if it's the occasionally sparse layout. This makes the pacing feel a bit off, but I think I might be judging it too harshly since it's been a while since I've read the first.

My main problem is that this seems to be the book in which Sim's 'female void' 'male light' philosophy begins to come into play. At this stage it's not that bad, but apparently it gets far worse as the plot progresses. It makes me wish that I'd been able to come into the series without knowing anything about Sim himself, as then I could take the misogyny as a part of the characters, and not as an overt political statement channeled through a cartoon Aardvark.

These issues aside, the philosophy is interesting, and insofar as this book is concerned, not too off-putting.

Once again the illustration and layout are excellent. Sim plays with the storyboard to get a kinetic response from the reader, conveying complex ideas like disorientation, confusion, dream logic, and surrealism through more than just picture and word, but also through the medium of the graphic novel itself.

Action is conveyed by more than just traditional motion lines, and character pose - when Cerebus is ascending the black tower, you can feel the visceral strain involved.

The plot itself seems a natural conclusion to C&S I. The ending is especially effective. Although Cerebus' actions made me uncomfortable (even more so than kicking a crippled man off of a roof), his character's progression seems natural and justified by the plot.

Sim proves himself able to write surrealism, comedy, drama, and philosophy deftly. He's an excellent crafter of dialog, tension, and action, but it's a shame that his work comes with so much baggage.

The_Mad_Swede says

Collecting issues # 81–111 of Dave Sim's 300 issues limited series *Cerebus the Aardvark* and being the first half of the *Church & State* story arc, this volume picks up right after the previous one, and in effect forms one big book (even the pagination continues from the previous volume, and the title is of course only *Church & State volume II* unlike the later multi-volumes story arc *Mothers & Daughters*). As such it to at least some degree makes little sense reviewing this item separately from its predecessor, and I would like to refer to my review of the first volume which, I would argue, is relevant to this one as well. The ending of this lengthy

tale might not be everyone's cup of tea, but personally I find it both perfect and quite chilling.

Dan says

Short review - it's amazing. This is the longest sub-story in the whole Cerebus project (unless you count Mothers & Daughters as one book instead of four). It starts with Cerebus as houseguest and ends with, well, *everything*.

I mentioned in my High Society review that a lot of core Cerebus was still waiting to be introduced at that book's end. This is where it all happens. We finally see the military force of the matriarchal Cirinists, and learn exactly what Cirin is (ahem). Cerebus' magical nature comes into focus, things like the tiny Cerebus appearing to Astoria, or the sneezing fire (and how good is the sequence where he picks up the one coin supposedly minted by Tarim, and the other coins start ripping their way out of the sacks and flying towards him?), and the preoccupation with cosmology starts. If I remember right, Dave has three attempts at explaining the beginnings of the universe throughout the 300 issues, and I'm not sure any of them have the impact of the amazing double page "that's what left of her" spread here.

It's a running theme of the book that Cerebus is his own worst enemy and Church & State makes that clear. His vanity and greed ruin his chances again and again, not least with the sphere that melts while he is distracted by the artists. It's this quality that make him so manipulable as well. As in High Society, he is set on his path through the book by the actions of others. For someone who doesn't have a huge amount of screentime, Weissaupt is perhaps the most influential character in the series thus far. I love that Dave is confident enough in his worldbuilding to show us the consequences of actions we didn't see, without the overexplanation and infodumping of lesser works.

There is more foreshadowing scattered throughout the book. Dave must have planned this (the first 200 issues at least) down to the smallest details. I am constantly amazed at this laying of groundwork for things that wouldn't be fully explained for another six or seven years. Once again, Elrod's first appearance contains a seemingly throwaway line that means an awful lot more once you've read a few books on, as does one of the sequences in Cerebus' dreams shortly afterwards. Even little things like Boobah thinking something fell in the pantry resonate with knowledge of what's to come. Possibly the most extreme is the way one illustration in the first volume suggests that Dave had a pretty good idea of the way he was going to draw the key moments of issue 300 even back at this point. And as for "You live only a few more years. You die alone. Unmourned. And unloved." - well, we'll see, won't we?

I could sit and pick out highlight after highlight ("Oy should wont to boy drogs wif moy 'alf", "Sounds like my ex-wife" "It is"), but my favourite part of the whole book is the Astoria's trial sequence. The rising tension and sense of something hugely disruptive approaching is expertly handled, and the way the page layout forces you to read quicker and quicker is masterful. In fact, the rhythms of the storytelling throughout are phenomenal, and then Gerhard's appearance partway through the first volume is the final piece of the jigsaw. His backgrounds - hotel, tower, moonscape - are just exquisite. In fact, almost everything here is wonderful. There's philosophy, comedy, cosmology, drama, a sharp understanding of power and institutions, plus the sheer quality of the characterization, the dialogue, the art, the structure - this is quite possibly as good as comics get. Not bad for a funny animal book.

Timothy Boyd says

Fantastic fantasy/comedy comic. Basically a parody on Conan and many other fantasy characters. Highly Recommended

Pablo Martinez says

Everthing set up pretty much since Cerebus 1# blows up here. Dave goes full metaphysical and takes Cerebus from "Likeable douchebag" to a point of no return.

Casey Hansen says

For me this was the best Cerebus book so far, less characters to keep track of and more plot combined with wonderful art. It always amazes me how Sim refuses to deviate from the character of Cerebus no matter how unlikeable he becomes, his "second Marriage" goes to show that Cerebus is still very selfish and does not care about society or its morals. This book was a great end to the overall story started in High Society, recommend reading at least Church ans State Vol 1 before this, High Society helps with character building but I felt it was not essential.

Andrew S. says

Church & State raises the watermark even higher from the formidable accomplishments of High Society. In addition to satirizing politics and religion, Sim digs deeper into philosophy and theology, playing with elements of fable. And yet, he somehow never forgets to be funny and entertaining. I read part II of C&S almost in one sitting. I could not put it down. I was literally inhabiting that world to the exclusion of all else. By now, it is clear that Sim is something of a questing visionary - he demolishes every false idol in sight, not because he wants to destroy things, but because he wants, on a very deep level, to see if anything real remains.

John says

This book continues and completes the story startef in C & S volume 1.

The artwork and comedy are sharp as ever but there is a darker edge to the story's conclusion and events which foreshadow big changes in the tone and philosophy of the book.

There is still much to love about thr book and Cerebus remains interesting, but this is probably the last truely great book of the series.

Andrew says

I started to find that the 'note from the editor' was more interesting than the comic itself. Sim has rants about women, non-smokers...

Hamish says

I feel like I'm becoming a broken record with my Cerebus reviews (I'm rereading the whole thing and it's been a few years since I last looked at them). Same complaints as with past volumes: too decompressed, lack of needed explanations, plot developments that don't really make a lot of sense (seriously, how did the artist, who was super good-natured and we last saw doing sketches at a convention turn into an evil megalomaniac with his head stitched to man-thing and swamp thing parodies?).

That said, these faults bothered me the least in this volume. It moves faster and is way more absorbing than any other part of the series thus far, so I guess the decompression does serve a purpose. And yeah, it's frustrating that a lot of the mystery never gets explained (either now or in the future), but you have to admit that it's a wonderful mindfuck when (no spoilers) somethings falls, not to mention the whole chapter leading up to that. Flaws and all, this is definitely the best volume in the series. Excellent art, rousing climax (even if the bit following the climax is a bit of a let-down), monster mindfucks, bizarre theology, this one has it all. I realize I've given them all 4 stars so far, and this one isn't quite deserving of 5, but I guess it's a higher 4 than the other volumes.

P.S. Sim misses the mark with a lot of his parodies (the Mick/Keith parody in this book comes to mind), but oh my god is that Dark Knight Returns parody hilariously on-point.

Michael says

Truly witty work, parodying political infighting, super-heroes, Mick & Keith, and anything else that strikes Sim's fancy. I'm continually amazed by how great his cartooning is, with wildly creative and subtle page layouts that really move the story forward. Terrific work, although a slightly confused and not 100% satisfying ending. But the first 1200 pages are SUPERB.

Felix says

Ok, phew, I finished this massive, impossibly long story-arc stretched well over a thousand pages and contained in two weighty volumes. Was it worth it? Yes definitely! Wonderful artwork, well-written dialogues and a well-balanced mixture of slapstick-comedy and thought-provoking 'serious' stuff make it a joy to follow Cerebus' rise and fall as he becomes first pope of the Eastern division of the church of Tarim and then, after his opponent, the pontiff of the Western church, has been assassinated, of the now united church.

While the war of the sexes is part of the storyline's background, the book has not yet deteriorated into a mysoginist pamphlet. Rather, while the matter-of-fact way the rape-scene was narrated made me cringe, the ensuing passages+conversations make it clear that it serves a narrative function and is embedded in a critique of an abuse of masculine power. I admit that this critique came as a surprise to me, but a pleasant one at that. It really is pity that the later part of the series became so unbalanced and could not keep up to the high standard of narrative force, complexity and technical brilliance shown here.
