7101 Hwy 71 W #200
Austin, Texas 78735
512.288.8555
www.readerviews.com
admin@readerviews.com

Citizen Dick
Richard Arneson
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Reviewed by Ron Standerfer for Reader Views (4/09)

Recently I had the opportunity to review an advanced reader copy of "Citizen Dick," by Richard Arneson, and I have to tell you that this is a seriously funny book! I don't mean funny as in mildly amusing or good for a chuckle or two funny. I mean the kind of spontaneous belly laugh evoking funny that caused my wife to banish me from the living room until I was finished reading it.

So what is "Citizen Dick" all about anyway? Well, that's kind of difficult to explain. One way to describe it is to imagine what would happen if all the characters in Scott Adams' comic strip "Dilbert" suddenly went on a nonstop alcoholic binge; all the while doing drugs and committing outrageous acts of larceny every chance they got. In other words, the book is about a corporate culture run amok.

The hero of "Citizen Dick," if you want to call him that, is Dick Citizen, a serial loser who despised his first name for obvious reasons, and has proven over and over again to be unlucky in love, unlucky in the work place, and unlucky in life. In fact, his only redeeming quality was that he could hit a golf ball long and far; a skill that had thus far failed to win him fame and fortune. Meanwhile, he existed in a Bermuda Triangle of failure, wandering around West Texas with his friend Lennie, a perennial hippy, looking for a place to fit in.

When Dick arrived at the doorstep of CommGlobalTeleVista it was almost a sure bet that his job interview would be brief and unsuccessful. After all, he had no marketable skills and this was a tech company steeped in the culture of finance and engineering. But it didn't turn out that way. The reviewer saw something in him that others did not and finagled him into the corporate communications department. This turned out to be a major mistake because soon thereafter, Dick wrote a phony press release announcing that his company was looking for a meat processing plant to acquire. It was meant to be a practical joke, but somehow the release was distributed to the press. The next morning the parking lot was jammed with TV trucks and reporters, all wanting to know what

CommGlobalTeleVista knew about the meat industry that the rest of the business community did not. Everyone viewed the press release as a fiasco and a major embarrassment; everyone but the CEO, Noble Tud, that is. Tud figured that if the speculative frenzy over the meat company acquisition could be prolonged, perhaps the company stock would rise to a point where he could

retire a wealthy man. Accordingly, he promoted Dick to Vice President of Meat and instructed him to go out and find a meat company to acquire. Whether or not a suitable company was actually found, of course, was immaterial.

Richard Arneson develops his characters with a light and humorous touch, reminiscent of Larry McMurty's Cadillac Jack. All are seriously flawed, yet likable. There is Lima, Dick's constant source of unrequited love, a zaftig Latina barber who is clearly not the sharpest razor in the shop; Big Rod, a blustery senior exec who was previously aced out of the CEO job by Noble Tud and stands to win big if the meat scam works; the conniving Noble Tud himself, whose character faults are only revealed behind the locked doors of his executive suite; and of course, Dick's friend Lennie who finally persuades the love of his life to marry him, even though she is a welder and he is highly allergic to metal. It's all good stuff.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading "Citizen Dick" by Richard Arneson and hope it is released soon so that everyone else can enjoy it as well.