



# Beta Testing the Apocalypse

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It would be easy to call Tom Kaczynski the J.G. Ballard of comics. Like Ballard, Kaczynski's comics riff on dystopian modernity, bleak man-made landscapes and the psychological effects of technological, social or environmental developments. Yet while Kaczynski shares many of Ballard's obsessions, he processes them in unique ways. His visual storytelling adds an architectural dimension that the written word alone lacks.

Kaczynski takes abstract ideas capitalism, communism, or utopianism and makes them tangible. He depicts and meditates on the immense political and technological structures and spaces we inhabit that subtly affect and define the limits of who we are and the freedom we as Americans presume to enjoy. Society and the individual, in perpetual tension. Once you've read Kaczynski's comics, it should come as no surprise to learn that he studied architecture before embarking on a career as a cartoonist.

Beta Testing includes approximately 10 short stories, most notably The New, a brand new story created expressly for this book. It's Kaczynski's longest story to date. The New is set in an un-named third-world megalopolis. It could be Dhaka, Lagos or Mumbai. The city creaks under the pressure of explosive growth. Whole districts are built in a week. The story follows an internationally renowned starchitect as he struggles to impose his vision on the metropolis. A vision threatened by the massive dispossessed slum-proletariat inhabiting the slums and favelas on the edges of the city. From the fetid ferment of garbage dumps and shanties emerges a new feral architecture.

## Beta Testing the Apocalypse Details

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Author : Tom Kaczynski

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# From Reader Review Beta Testing the Apocalypse for online ebook

## Joe Collier says

This one really resonated with me. I got rid of my car a few years ago, but I've had periods of commuting that correspond unfortunately too well with Kaczynski's vision. I'm a cynic who loves graphic novels and architecture, and often worry about the apparent downward spiral of society centered around consumerism and selfishness--so you can see how this book, for me, has particular appeal. But I think lots of different people should read it, because he makes accessible some pretty heavy ideas that may provoke some changes in folks' way of engaging with each other and the environment around them.

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## Adan says

A collection of odd and interesting short stories that are incredibly disdainful and contemptuous of modern life, attacking architecture, branding, consumerism, suburbia, advertising, capitalism, and urban environments in turn. Quite good, but ultimately too relentlessly negative for my tastes.

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## Harris says

One of the most affecting graphic novels I've read recently, "Beta Testing the Apocalypse" is a collection of stand alone stories by Tom Kaczynski that are linked by common threads and themes of modern human existence in the urban world and elements of the sciences, history, architecture, and cosmic dread. From paleolithic microsocieties to the megacities of the 21st century to Martian colonies, the human quest for understanding of the universe is examined with a wit, style, and pure invention that I loved. Kaczynski's spare character drawings and sharp architectural landscapes has left me with much food for thought, each story exploring another aspect of existence, the cyclopean power of grain silos, the dichotomies of noise and silence. Every story was great, though my favorites were "100,000 Miles," (an examination of the modern commute and the transit network of the city), "976 Sq Ft," (the cosmic dread of condos and gentrification) and "Million Year Boom" (a "green" corporation attempts to economize the biosphere). I am still wrestling with how best to express my appreciation of Kaczynski's erudite (I can use that word, right?) comics.

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## Forrest says

If Kafka had been born 100 years later and studied architecture, and become a cartoonist, this is what he might have produced. Tom Kaczynski immerses the reader in 21st century angst brought on by gentrification, the commodification of the environment, and the horrors of suburban living (only slightly more terrifying than urban living). This is an angsty collection wherein existentialism bleeds out of the very walls around us. It is also an incredibly smart collection, successfully calling the reader's attention to the ironies and contradictions of modern living, while not being too pedantic about it. Some refer to this as a sidelong segue into science fiction, but it is more a work of magic realism than science fiction. There is a heavy dose of philosophy here, at least implied, particularly something akin to "object oriented" systems in

which man's relation to the objects (especially architecture and artificially-controlled spaces) are of paramount importance to one's view of the world. But do please take this last claim with a grain of salt, as I am only very newly-introduced to the "object oriented" philosophy.

One thing that you will see less of in this graphic novel than in other contemporary graphic novels is the hipster aloofness, bordering on amorality, that infects too many comics nowadays. *Beta Testing the Apocalypse* may be full of angst, but the angst arises because the characters represented actually care about something, unlike those in, say, Clowe's Death Ray or Daly's Dungeon Quest. This is refreshing . . . in an angsty way . . . if such a thing is possible.

Despite my incoherent ramblings, this is a graphic novel that deserves your attention. Like any of the best literature, it will cause you to think, question, reflect on your place in the place in which you live, not in a detached way, but in a way that engages your eyes, mind, and heart. Reading the book, for me, was something approaching a religious experience, and I mean that in all seriousness and reverence. This book deserves to be studied and meditated on, rather than merely read.

You may never look at condos or green-spaces the same way again . . .

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### **Ash says**

highly recommended during a heatwave when you're already kind of paranoid and on edge.

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### **Cori Žydrūnas says**

The most interesting thing about this book was the title.

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### **Jeff says**

It's obvious, but not trite, to compare the comics of Tom Kaczynski to the fiction of J.G. Ballard. Both share an obsession with human adjustment to a world transformed by science and technology, and if Kaczynski has a more obvious sense of humor than Ballard, it all serves to make his work the more enjoyable. Most of the pieces in this volume originally appeared in the pages of the late, lamented *Mome*, and it's good to see them collected and enhanced with some previously unpublished pieces. Kaczynski is a unique talent, reminiscent of Dash Shaw, but in no way lacking for his own original voice. This is some of the best work being done in comics day, and well worth reading for anyone who can appreciate the more idiosyncratic end of the medium.

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### **James says**

This books scratches an itch I didn't know I had. And it does it so well that I did that thing I've written of here in the past: as soon as I finished it, I started it again.

It is a collection of short pieces, some of which appeared in the late, lamented MOME (of which I still do not have all 22 issues, yet). But they are written and drawn with precise psychological force. I don't even know what I mean by that. I'm still blown away.

If you are, like me, interested in what comics can do apart from showing protracted fights between musclebound characters in skintight clothing, then this book certainly demands your attention. It is strikingly intelligent and original. And I'm proud to have a copy of this in my own personal library, and I look forward to many pleasurable re-readings of it for the rest of my natural life.

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### **David Schaafsma says**

Philosophical comics stories contemporary urban society at the edge of apocalypse. A lot about architecture, bleak man-made landscapes and the effects all these things have on us. The back cover description says it is science fiction, a contemporary demonology, a mutant utopia, and an architectural treatise, occult economics, designer ghosts from the future, which seems about right, though I was not blown away by it or insights it seems to convey. A "new or untested eschatology"? Maybe. "Groundbreaking"? Maybe. I'll reread it. But I at least appreciate Kaczynski's attempt to grapple with coming apocalypse, with big ideas with some visual skills,

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### **Sam says**

Picked this up on a complete whim whilst spending a joyful Saturday stalking the shelves of the local library and I am so glad I did. This volume travels across ten short stories encompassing the futility and contradiction of modern life and how it affects each of us, physically and mentally, and where it may ultimately lead. The heavy message of the stories is balanced by the simplicity of the illustration that use basic line drawings and single colours to distinguish between each separate tale. All of the stories are superb but for me I found 976 sq ft and Million Year Boom particularly poignant, the former as it speaks to the changing urban landscape and how isolated this can make us (more poignant for me as I live in a small block of flats with little communication with my neighbours) and the latter given the current trend towards trying to put a monetary value of the natural world as the only way we can determine its value and protect it (as an ecologist this is a concept I struggle with but understand given man's need to 'value' everything). A superb commentary on modern life.

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### **Jon says**

Brilliant. Excellent philosophical work. The writing uses a bit too many pretentious words (sesquipedalian\*\*) a lot of times which can be a bit annoying, but who cares...YOU should read it...and I should get a job and steady girlfriend...

\*\* No, this is a real word, I checked, its pretty awesome, no fuck you, it is..... listen to how it's pronounced.....<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/...>! Words are fun! If you have heard of this word, you are full of shit.....Thank god for the internet though and finding cool words and definitions, I give it three

years top and will all be super genuises!!

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## **J Edward Tremlett says**

"it reminded me of J.G. Ballard, as illustrated by..."

In search of an adequate tagline, the reviewer sits and is defined by the blank, white space in the text box. Fingers flex as the brain flaps through illustrated stories and graphic novels, trying to recall the name of a writer-artist who best fits Kaczynski's style.

Who else has that scritch-a-scratch feel to the figures, while keeping such right, architectural lines on their surroundings? Who else lets the text be the action in the sequences, content to narrate over vistas both strange and familiar, skewed and surreal?

Who talks of localized patches of the end of the world, hungry city states in search of avant-garde architects, and focus groups intent on reclaiming bio-diversity for unseen and possibly sinister motives? Who could turn a car ride to work into a deconstruction of society and the self, or transform a strange dream into a reality-breaking series of interplanetary revelations? Who envisions infectious condominiums?

Is this truly akin to anything else, or has it infected the mind of the reader so well that it only SEEMS that there is another artist out there who's done something similar in the graphic novel field? Has reality been broken and looped back in on itself by this collection?

(Was there a misprint in the reader's edition, or did the last and longest story just come to an abrupt and puzzling end?)

The mind flaps back and forth, struggling to remember the names of people seen in installments of Years Best Graphic Novels, or other artists whose singular visions have been as transformative and compelling, but in different ways.

Eventually, the brain gives up. This is not serving any real purpose. The tagline must remain unfinished, at least for now.

The review will just have to come to an abrupt and puzz

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## **Stewart Tame says**

It's always a thrill to encounter a book this good. I'd never heard of Kaczynski before. Most of these seem to be reprints from Mome, a magazine I've heard good things about, but not read. The title was intriguing, though, and I read a quote comparing his work to the writing of J.G. Ballard, so ... Wow! I was blown away by the first story ("100,000 Miles") alone, and the rest of the book kept that high going. The comparison to Ballard definitely works for me. There are cars, buildings, and even a swimming pool or two running through these stories. Like Ballard, Kaczynski explores odd moods and surrealist imagery and psychogeography. There's a coolness and distance to these stories. Much of the narrative happens in captions rather than dialogue. He has an affinity for finding odd viewpoints, for showing the familiar in ways that

mask that familiarity. In , "100,000 Miles," cars travelling through a city become a metaphor for life. Gary Numan's classic song, "Cars," became my mental soundtrack for the story. This is an absolutely stellar collection of stories, and you can bet that I'll be eagerly awaiting more work from Mr. Kaczynski. I can't recommend this highly enough!

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## **Robert says**

Existential angst collides with dystopian scenarios in this rewarding, imaginative story cycle, largely concerning humankind's uneasy relationships with technology and consumerism, and how quickly our reliance/dependence upon them lead to madness and despair, death and disaster. Pretty high-falutin' subject matter for a mere cartoon book, eh? Kaczynski is a cartoonist architect of ideas, sort of like Jack Kirby as channeled through Daniel Clowes as filtered through the RAW aesthetic, if that makes any sense. He avoids heavy handed didactics with his deft satirical touch, even as he explores some unsettling subject matter. Some highlights include "976 Sq Ft," which presents urban renewal as an almost Lovecraftian force to its hapless young married protagonists; the epic sweep of "The New" (check out pages 103-107 for some swell cinematic visuals); another young couple experiencing The End of The World or maybe not in "Cozy Apocalypse," and 3 perfect little one-pagers all dealing with sound: "Noise: A History," "White Noise," and the formalistic exercise "100 Decibels." Special mention should be made of the overall book design by the author, which is cleverly conceived and executed. Sci-Fi Comics Geeks and Damned Intellectuals (who are often one in the same), enjoy.

Update 6/12/16: just reread and still really enjoyed it—I'd forgotten how downright creepy some of the stories are (esp "976 Sq. Ft."). Plus I actually like when I have to go look up words ("Eschatology").

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## **Natalie Corbo says**

At times the pretentious word choice can be a but distracting, but otherwise the stories are original bits of dystopian fiction. Artistically, the drawings of buildings and people relating to architecture are really the authors strength.

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