



King City

Brandon Graham

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Joe is a catmaster, trained to use his cat as any tool or weapon. His best friend, Pete, falls in love with an alien he's forced to sell into green slavery, while his ex, Anna, watches her Xombie War veteran boyfriend turn into the drug he's addicted to. King City, an underbelly of a town run by spy gangs and dark dark magic with mystery down every alleyway.

King City Details

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From Reader Review King City for online ebook

P D says

Graham's art style—just a bit off-kilter—goes perfectly with the setting: King City, a place full of people who are just a bit off-kilter, beginning with the protagonist, Joe, whose weapon of choice is a near-omnipotent cat. It's a strange world and fun to explore; the ending goes in a direction I wasn't expecting at all, but which suits Joe's ethos more than the alternative, I think.

And the puns. So many puns.

Jarrahs says

King City collects Brandon Graham's comic series about a Cat Master (!!!) named Joe, who spies, fights demons, and helps his friends in the gritty and bizarre King City. With the help of his supergenius weaponized cat, Earthling, Joe can pick locks, infiltrate gang hideouts, and beat up bad guys galore. Though he's an adept fighter and spy, Joe is also quite juvenile. He relies on his friend, Pete, for a place to sleep, and he can't seem to get over his ex, Anna. Both Anna and Pete have their own sub-plots involving aliens, futuristic drugs and more.

King City is in no way feminist. Fitting with his immature character, Joe objectifies the women in the comic, so there are plenty of panels of close-ups of breasts and asses. There are also some cringe-worthy jokes, including a transphobic exchange near the beginning. Apparently Brandon Graham has since said that he would have done things differently were he writing this book now. Although recent events make me doubt Graham's sincerity.

I adored *King City* for the wacky, creepy, and funny world, where every sign is a pun, where cats are (still adorable) weapons, where young adults are struggling to get through day-to-day life - just like we all do - only with more aliens and demons. However, because of the way Graham has recently treated black women comics creators, I will not be picking up any of his other work.

Steven says

If you love cats, or action, or sci fi, or adventure, or life, this is the book for you.

Ken-ichi says

Part of the magic of comics (well, independent comics) is that in some ways they are more immediately personal than prose. The labor put into creating them is more obvious, as are the many quirks of the artist. It's like conversing with a stranger who isn't treating you like a stranger, who assumes a level of intimacy that you may not share. When it works, it's magic. When it doesn't work, man, it's awkward.

Sadly King City landed in the latter camp for me. Graham clearly put a lot of himself and his love of comics into the visual style, the city, and the endless puns, but a lot of the book's potential went unrealized. In a book about a totally zany scifi/fantasy city where anything can happen and everything IS happening, there was a ton of empty space. In worlds like this I feel like a Hieronymus Bosch / Geoff Darrow / Where's Waldo approach would better convey the mad claustrophobia, and not the manga-style minimalism Graham employs. There was also no plot, or character development, which can be ok if there are other things to explore in a book, but the novelty of a cat that can be used as a weapon wears off pretty quickly. I think my favorite part of the book was his innovating cussing, "fuck a shit sandwich" being one of my favorites.

Koen Claeys says

Talking about a missed opportunity... All the elements for a brilliant comic are present (beautiful art, impressive pages, strong humor,...) but sadly Graham neglects to hold the reader's attention. The story just isn't compelling enough despite all the original ideas. The further the story progressed, the more my enthusiasm dissapeared like snow before the sun. In the end I just couldn't give a damn and quickly went through the last 20-30 pages.

Mateen Mahboubi says

Similar to Multiple Warheads. Enjoyed the world that Graham built for King City.

Sabrina says

Rather than try to write a book-column-worthy compare and contrast proper review, I'm just gonna make three lists:

What I liked:

The story was not predictable. That's always a good thing.

The artist has a clear knowledge of anatomy and movement, and he wasn't afraid to break the rules. The figures are well-drawn and never stiff.

All the characters have distinct personalities. That's also always a good thing.

A great deal of creativity went into this book, from the weird use of a cat as an all-purpose-weapon to the endless puns and tricks in the backgrounds.

The backgrounds. I'd carefully study each one, looking for all the little drawn jokes to be found in fliers pasted on telephone poles, store displays, T-shirts on characters, wall and sidewalk graffiti, and little sketches and labels intended purely for fun.

The characters actually changed clothes. The lack of this irritates me to no end, and manga is just as guilty of it as comics.

The use of other languages in the background and sound effects. Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and some French and German. That's cool.

Sound effects. The artist has a wide library of hand-lettering fonts, and I liked his unconventional FX-ing.

For example, as a sound effect for someone tying a shoe, the FX was a dress-shirt-tie in a little FX bubble. Neat!

The omake, like a full-page crossword or two-page-spread board game, complete with character pieces you can cut out and use.

Neither the hero nor his BFF get their chosen girls, romantically. No conventional love stories, here!

Panel layouts are interesting and varied, and changed to fit scene mood and action. Nice.

The uber-plot ending to defeat the big Cthulhu monster wasn't the main point of the story at all, and how the author resolves the problem reflected that. Because...

This story is about the characters. It's completely character-driven, and you all know how much I love that.

What I noticed but don't have an opinion about:

No use of screen tone or pattern. Everything is white, black, or a shade of gray.

The oversize book printing is great for finding hidden details, but makes the book heavy and unwieldy.

No use of crazy exaggerated expressions. I kind of like this, because it shows that emotions can be portrayed with less cartoony art. But crazy exaggerated expressions can be **VERY** funny and effective. It's an interesting toss-up.

The characters. I didn't like or love-to-hate anyone. *Ouch.*

What I didn't like:

This is not in any way an equal-opportunity fanservice book. That's true for almost every manga and comic I've read, but this book is particularly noticeable because there is **SO VERY MUCH FANSERVICE** for those who like women. Literally 2 out of 3 pages will have fanservice on it. Girls in skin-tight clothes, boob shot, butt shot, crotch shot, panty flash, finger-sucking, gratuitous female mouth close-up, etc. In contrast, fanservice featuring men gives us a handfull of pages with a shirtless supporting character who is at least nicely built, then a couple shirtless moments with the rather stick-thin male lead character, and one comedic butt-shot of same. Also a handful of background/FX-y funny little cock-and-balls drawings. *points to the first adjective in that last sentence there* Granted, this book IS drawn by a straight man, and granted, the double-standard of entertainment industry says fully naked women are fine, but fully naked men--particularly "are-you-happy-to-see-me?" ones--are not allowed. Humph.

All the women in this book but two are drawn the same way: thin, beautiful, shapely butts, large if at least somewhat normal-sized breasts, full-lipped Angelina Jolie-type mouths...usually open. Oh, and wearing skin-tight pants. If they ARE wearing pants, of course. There are two--TWO--women in the book who do not fit this type. One is a plump waitress who is in two panels, and whose face we never see because her hair is in the way or her back is to us. A supporting character insults her after she walks away, but at least he doesn't say something about her weight. The other is a supporting character's supporting character who never says a word in the entire book. The top half of her face is covered with a cloth mask. All we see of her face are two blank round circles for eyes, and lipsticked lips. (Not Angelina Jolie lips, though.) At one point, this woman gives the skinny MC a kiss on the cheek, and he makes a disgusted look and wipes it off with his cat.

Too much toilet humor. Ugh.

Needs more world building. The setting and events raise a lot of questions that remain unanswered at the end.

Supporting characters need more development. Aside from the three main supporting characters, we barely know anything about the others. Particularly the deus ex machina ones. If they're going to save the day, I'd like to know more about them...then they'd be less deus ex machina, hmm? And WTH was with the "owls" gang, anyway?

Blah main characters. I'm listing this here, too, because I didn't like not having a strong reaction to anyone.

They were sort of interesting, but I didn't particularly care if the hero won or not, or if the ex kept her current angsty boyfriend, or what. On the other end, there was no one I wanted to see go down in a blaze of satisfying defeat, no one be creeped out by, nor feel disgust towards whenever they appear because they are so very repellent. Everyone was just...*yawn*

I've been trying to think of what else I didn't like for the past five minutes and can't come up with anything, so I guess that's mostly it. Hmm. The likes list has more individual items than the dislikes. But the first two dislikes are really big in my mind, and I'm actually pretty philosophical about fanservice. There's just SO MUCH OF IT in this book, and it's so completely in your face. *gags*

Overall, I did like the book and don't regret reading it. I enjoyed the backgrounds and the creative elements to the story. Oh, and one thing I will give a definite star: the MC's BFF wonders to himself if he'd be so fond about the damsel in distress (and I quote) "if you looked like a plant with teeth?". It's nice to see some non-comedic acknowledgement that attraction is a driving force behind a lot of guy's actions.

So. *King City*, by Brandon Graham. Go ahead and read it. The art is fun, and the story has its moments. Be prepared for prodigious amounts of womanly T&A. *snort*

Jorge Ponce says

This is one of the best things that I've ever come across. Wow. Just wow. I can't remember the last time I read/saw/experienced something where it was so palpably obvious the writer/drawer/creator was just having so-much-f*king-fun! "Multiple Warheads", you're next.

David Katzman says

This is one helluva kickass graphic novel. It collects the twelve individual issues of *King City* released in 2011. Brandon Graham creates a fantastical sci-fi/fantasy realm where just about anything goes. Beautiful black and white illustrations with a touch of manga and a whole lotta quirky. Outrageously inventive. Thoughtfully constructed, frame by frame. Packed with more puns per page than a novel by Flann O'Brien.

King City stars an ... uhm ... Expert Thief/Escape Artist/Cat Master/Dude. I said *Cat Master*!!! What more could you possibly need to know?!?!? He was selected, you see, to ... train with these Cat Masters and was ...adopted by this cat who ... when he injects the cat with ... these drug things ... well, the cat can do just about anything you can imagine. Cat Periscope, Cat Machine Gun, Cat Cleaver of Death, Cat-a-chute ... I mean, seriously. Do you need *any* other reason to run out and buy this? I think not. It's just about the coolest comic of all time. Admittedly, the main character is a bit overly obsessed with the female anatomy. Admittedly. He's a bit juvenile. But HE'S A CAT MASTER!!!! And he did have his heart broken. And his best friend is a one-woman/water-breathing-alien kind of guy, so they sort of balance each other out.

It's just ... one last time ... **CAT MASTER!!!!**

Kyla says

King City came recommended by a reviewer I've grown to trust, so you can imagine my disappointment to find that this graphic novel fell flat for me.

In concept, this story is something I should've enjoyed greatly: a cat is used as a multi-function weapon/tool and there are lots of visual and linguistic puns heavily sprinkled throughout. I think the reason the book fell flat for me, though, is because there's a great universe here to explore and expand upon, but the story focuses on four central characters without fleshing out (for all except Max, arguably) who they are--their histories, what makes them tick, internal dialog, etc. Even the brief look back at the cat master's training doesn't enhance his character. It doesn't explain how he was chosen, what his life was like before that, or anything else that puts the *King City* world into a more personal context. If I can't connect with the characters, I can't connect with the story's universe.

The concept for the series is solid, though. If there was ever to be a reboot, I'd give it a try.

Paul says

Overly juvenile and crude in its objectification of women *King City* (KC) really failed my expectations. While the book is good in parts (clever puns, funny dialog and a few likable side characters), overall KC didn't stick this one. Not only is the plot's dénouement horribly resolved but after the story is over Graham continues to basically blabber in a phudo intellectual meta-level appendix for 30 pages (some of which is interesting when seen as supplementary materials, but the bulk of which is fluff). The story was fundamentally anticlimactic. It does not surprise me that Graham wrote this while also writing porn because Graham can't go a page without falling back to something sexual. For the cat master idea and clever puns 4 stars at 25% (being generous) for the rest 1 star. (4*0.25+1*.75=2). So over all it was, if I am being generous, ok, 2 stars.

Jeff Jackson says

Rambling, charming, and slyly funny throughout, Brandon Graham's opus involves a Cat Master, chalk addiction, water-breathing sex slaves, pesky tentacle demons, and the utter devastation of your former significant other finding someone new and moving on. There's more whimsy than drama, but Graham keeps the story ambling along and knows when to throw in a welcome digression. He's particularly brilliant at world-building, drafting accomplished cityscapes and laying out pages in consistently inventive ways. Weirdly, he seems challenged when drawing human forms and faces. I'm not normally fond of puns, but they're one of the main pleasures here and pulled off - like everything else - with an assured light touch.

Eric Mesa says

If you go to <http://www.comicpow.com/2014/02/05/li...> you can read the review with accompanying images.

Here's the text:

Regular readers of Comic POW know I'm a huge fan of Brandon Graham. When I discover a new creator that I like, I tend to binge on their works. Fortunately for my bank account, Brandon Graham has a pretty small canon of work in which he is both writer and artist. Prior to working on Multiple Warheads his major non-porn was King City.

King City started off on Tokyo Pop and then the American division went belly up. The story was left untold until Image Comics picked it up for the second half. The story is, in my eyes, a cross between Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction and Brian Lee O'Malley's Scott Pilgrim. From Pulp Fiction it takes a couple low level gangsters – a professional burglar and a human smuggler who are best friends and then spends a large portion of the story dealing with their lives outside their jobs. From Scott Pilgrim it borrows a world that's **ALMOST**, but not quite our world. One of the characters is a veteran of the Korean Zombie war. The cat burglar literally uses a cat that can become nearly any device with the right injection.

Where King City benefits from the blending of the two is that it ends up able to be a lot more serious than Scott Pilgrim even while residing in a strange (at times silly) world. While I thought the Scott Pilgrim graphic novels did a good job of having a climax that showed growth in the character as well as the reason why he acted like an ass, it was, in the end, a silly book for adults who grew up playing video games in the 80s. King City is, first and foremost, a book about living in a big city. I'd known a big about Graham's past and I correctly guessed that this book was written while he was living in New York. The book constantly leaves the reader feeling that the city doesn't care about its inhabitants. You're left to look out for yourself or hope you have some good friends to help you out. There's also the feeling that there's a lot more going on in the city than you can know. Part of this is communicated through Joe's story. Who would guess that in their city is a burglar who gets around by injecting his cat and giving it special powers? Additionally, he's constantly entering secret hideouts of various gangs and crime families in King City. He even lives in a complex rented out by a Bigfoot that's only known to others in his line of work. Finally, whenever Graham does two-page spreads you can often see lots of extraneous things going on in the city – no matter what happens to our main characters, there are others with their own lives doing their own complex dances before their lives end.

The war against Korean Zombies may be ridiculous, but Graham uses it to examine how war leaves us damaged. Not only does Max have a busted leg, but he's become addicted to chalk as a way to forget the crazy things he saw during the war. And the drug causes its users to become brittle like chalk. When they die, the dealers come and collect the person to sell the chalk. It's a poignantly tragic story in the middle of silliness, but it doesn't feel out of place. All the characters in King City are young adults with young adult problems – exacerbated by the weird world they live in. It could also almost be compared to Rent in the tone and the age of the characters (although with less AIDS).

Interestingly, I found the most serious story to involve the secondary character, Pete. Remember that character Dumb Donald from Fat Albert? (Image of Dumb Donald and Pete)

He spends a lot of the beginning of the book wearing that toque and we never see his face. He starts off the book picking up a girl he's going to sell into human trafficking as he always does. For some reason he falls for her and after he delivers her to his bosses, he starts having regrets. And we end up seeing his face for the first time. Brandon Graham really makes that moment mean something to us just with that simple act. And he spends much of the rest of the comic with the toque on, until another key moment. It's Brandon's attention to the effects of these small moments that really transforms King City from yet another (admittedly awesome) wandering book full of puns (as Multiple Warheads has thus turned out to be since its time as a

porn comic).

Surprisingly, I found Joe's narrative to be the least compelling. That's not to say that it wasn't good. It definitely hangs with the other narratives like Anna dealing with Max's drug addiction and her desire to help him even more than he wants to help himself. But Joe seems to have the least true adversity. He is getting over a breakup with Anna, the perfect girl for him, and his memories tell us it was all his fault. He's doing burglar stuff, but that's mostly secondary to the story. He's our conduit to Pete, Anna, and Max and he's our reader stand-in, explaining the world to us. He eventually hooks up with someone involved in an organization that's trying to stop some evil form taking over the world, but it's wonderful and meaningless sex. He never has any true obstacles. He's still a fascinating character and insight into a world in which people fight with cats, but I quickly found myself wanting to spend more time with Pete and Max.

If you want to be transported to somewhere that's just slightly not here and see the story of a few young adults and how they deal with this crazy world, I highly recommend checking out *King City*.

Seth T. says

I've written before about expectations and how they cheat us of our reading experiences. Whether a positive or negative bias, these prejudices do unquestionable damage to the natural formation of opinion. A strong positive predisposition toward a book can push us to massage problems in a work to reflect our existing good will toward it—or, if the work too abruptly veers from our expectations, those expectations can lead to a sense of betrayal that wouldn't otherwise come about. A negative feeling toward a book can likewise either sour us unfairly toward the work or too easily endear us when things turn out better than we might have guessed.

And this isn't just a dynamic that exists before a book is opened. Expectation is interlaced throughout one's experience of a story in a manner both complex and largely unpredictable. What we expect of a book is a force that plays in every moment of a book's consumption, from taking in its cover to its method of introduction to its characterization to those characters' arcs to plot points along the way to its use of thematic elements to its climax to its conclusion. And to any number of other parts and pieces along the way. While reading a book, our expectations will naturally shift as we assimilate new information with our experiences and awareness of other stories and formulae.

So while we may try to give books a fair shake, it's impossible to approach things from an entirely neutral vantage. This is all very elemental critical theory of course and probably doesn't surprise a single one of you. I only mention it so that you'll be well on alert to my own predispositions in regard to *King City*.

Among the myriad tastes and experiences that influenced how I would approach reading *King City*, there were two major (and conflicting) things that exerted some force on me. The first was the excitement/praise cycle that caused me to buy the book. If it wasn't for tremendous word of mouth, I wouldn't have been aware of *King City* in the least—let alone have been persuaded to spend of my limited budget to secure a copy. That right there is the kind of good feeling toward a book that I mentioned earlier, usually a boon but sometimes an albatross. In any case, I was excited for *King City* when the package arrived in the mail. Opening the book, however, led immediately to a sense of betrayal, as Brandon Graham's visual sense conjured a whole host of predispositions—none of which were conducive to a just approach to his work.

So I took a couple weeks to let those dueling expectations dim before I read a single page of *King City*. I think that was probably the right decision.

King City is a wonky, sly-futuristic extrapolation of a ton of implausibilities caked in that kind of alt-formal art style I (rightly or wrongly) associate with a skate-punk, indie DIY aesthetic. It's the art style that made me put down the book for two weeks. Generally, this visual method means cluttered, cacophonous pages filled with too much Stuff and disastrous visual storytelling. The characters are cartoony and not always super consistent. There's nothing necessarily wrong with the style save for the fact that I just don't have the patience for it.

But Graham's work in *King City*, though often busy and often manic, surprised me by being easy to follow and sometimes even a raucous joy to experience. There's a lot going on in this book both visually and narratively, but it doesn't bog down in overly detailed renditions of scenery. It may be that the importance of *King City* as its own kind of character gives meaning to all those flourishes that would otherwise be decorative trivialities.

While *King City* is principally concerned with Joe, a spy-thief and cat master, and his feline companion Earthling, the city he's returned to on Page 1 is nearly as important. *King City* in Graham is like L.A. in Chandler or Tokyo in Murakami or New York in Auster—only hopped up on two fistfuls of crazy. The city is populated by ninjas, mercenaries, spies, hoods, thieves, cults, aliens, and weirder things. There are secret passages into even the most mundane places. There are hideouts and tentacles and drugs made from humans. And puns. There are *a lot* of puns. If puns aren't your thing, then *King City* is not your thing. For that matter *King City* might not be your thing either. A knack for wordplay may be low-ball humour, but that's only tip-of-iceberg here. Graham has built a world that, while thriving on sex and violence, glories more than anything in a sense of humour and comic timing. Personally, I found very winning the particular joy Graham exhibits in giving his characters the stage and ability to make so consistently with the funny.

So far as story is concerned (and it really isn't too concerned), *King City* reflects on cat master Joe as he returns from a couple years away. He had fled the city after a bad break-up and holed up on The Farm, where he learned the Way of the Cat and received his boon companion, Earthling, whom he carries around in a bucket. Joe is doing some sneak-thief work to ingratiate himself to the locals while he tries to find his feet in a city that's changed while he's been away. Meanwhile, his old friend Pete Taifighter (who wears constantly from a collection of wrestling masks) has decided to cross his employers *Transporter*-style after having grown a conscience. Meanwhile still, Anna Greengables (Joe's ex) is painting graffiti moustaches and worrying over her drug-conflicted ex-mercenary boyfriend, who's got bad PTS from the last Xombie war. And then, on top of that, there's a death cult and tentacle monster and the fate of the world. Or at least *King City*.

It's a good mix of everything and kitchen sinks and bathroom scales and old-timey refrigerators. *King City* boasts a healthy menagerie of wild abandonments and ridiculousness and tempers it with a lot of heart. More heart than I would have expected from something that wallowed in so much indie-skater-punk aesthetic. Brandon Graham, in a word made of three words, defied my expectations. In a good way. Or maybe in the best way. *King City* was a wonderful experience.

Note

If there's one major issue with the book (and by major, I really just mean a triviality that's kind of a shame), it's with the printing. Most pages are crisp and lovely, but a good handful show easily-visible jpeg artifacting. It gives the linework on those pages a blurry feel that dims the enjoyment slightly. Below, I've provided an example of what I'm talking about. I've upped the contrast a little to take into consideration monitors that are too bright:

[Review courtesy of Good Ok Bad]

Stephanie Griffin says

How much did I dislike this book? A LOT. Should have read the notes in the back where the author states he started out writing PORN COMICS. Also, he's not as clever as he thinks he is.
