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FOR THE PLANET MEMBER
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Yick. Whoa! Yick.
KOCKROACH by Tyler Knox. WILLIAM MORROW.
2007. HARDCOVER. \$23.95.

OK, let me be honest: I took a couple of classes with Tyler Knox. I believe Knox once drove me home from an Iowa Writers' Workshop holiday party (not that I was in the workshop, just taking a class or two). So perhaps I shouldn't be reviewing this clever new novel, another in what I'd call the "MFA graduate moves to New York and must dominate city by writing about it" genre. Because Knox has literary smarts, he dedicates this *Metamorphosis*-upended novel "For G.S." One can only assume that's Kafka's Gregor Samsa, the man-become-cockroach. In *Kockroach*, however, the bug (species *Blattella germanicus*) wakes up human and, after doing some gross cockroachy eating things, names himself Jerry Blatta.

Knox swiftly transforms the amusing reversal into a commentary on corruption, on the city, on human power — and on how an amoral insect might just become the most powerful person in the country. While that may or may not be a barb aimed at various current politicians, the narrative itself brings to life a certain New York, the city of the 1950s, the Times Square (as one character describes it) "of pinball palaces and shady dance clubs, of the grand old Sheraton-Astor and the fleabag junkie haunts that surrounded it, of the Broadway theaters where I never set foot and the Roxy Burlesque, with its second-rate strippers playing to a third-rate crowd ... High heels and low brims, angry taunts and pearl-handled switchblades, jazz fiends looking for green, Benzedrine addicts looking for God." That description goes on for many more words, the montage of images showing Knox's research but also a style that brings Michael Chabon to mind far more than Franz Kafka. The tale quickly turns into a spooling out of Edward Hopper's characters in *Nighthawks* — the people themselves becoming threads in Knox's rather conventional depiction of gender relations and power dynamics. *Kockroach* is a mob tale, really, and a portrait of the city with sly references to Jerry's past life mixed in (for instance, he survives a huge conflagration — of course). It's a clever idea and, if someone who has ridden in Knox's car can say this, a generally fascinating ride. — *Suzi Steffen*

graphic novels

Between the Hudson and the East

DMZ VOL. 1-3: ON THE GROUND, BODY OF A JOURNALIST, PUBLIC WORKS by Brian Wood and Riccardo Burchielli. DC/VERTIGO. 2006 & 2007. PAPERBACK. \$9.99 EACH.

New York City is a place that gets inside your head. Live there even for a little while, and you get attached to the place, where everyone has their own version of the same few blocks and there's always something new to see. Brian Wood (whose *Channel Zero* you also ought to read) and Riccardo Burchielli's *DMZ*, a spectacularly imagined series collected into three paperbacks so far, is a particular heartbreaker for a NYC-lover, all burned-out buildings and nightmarish blocks. In a bleak future, the U.S. has split; militias have taken over most of the country, calling themselves the Free States. The United States of America still holds New York City's outer boroughs, and in the middle is the DMZ: Manhattan. It's still a Manhattan of millions of stories and hundreds of small worlds, but little else is the same, as photographer Matty Roth finds out when his new Liberty News internship falls to pieces as soon as he lands in Manhattan.

DMZ's first volume, *On the Ground*, concerns Matty's learning to live in the DMZ, meeting its residents and hearing their stories, convincing Liberty News to take him seriously and coming to feel as if he can't leave this strange, broken, wonderful place; the second, *Body of a Journalist*, is chiefly about Matty coming to understand the part he plays and the power he can, potentially, wield by using his connections inside and outside the DMZ. (Volume two also includes two separate, brief and wonderful pieces about life on the island.) The third volume, *Public Works*, is a single story about Matty trying to get inside a Halliburton-like reconstruction company called Trustwell. It's less immediately enthralling; it lacks the freshness and exploratory qualities of the first two collections, when Matty is still learning his way around, and its parallels to the war in Iraq seem almost too overt. But *DMZ's* depiction of life in a war zone, of the way people fight to survive and to help or hinder each other, is breathtaking. Wood's sometimes economical, snappy writing and Burchielli's inspired, fearless depictions of a brutal existence are vivid and textured. There's something daring about making New York, which feels like it belongs to everyone, into no man's land — except for these few men and women who tirelessly try to keep it ticking. — *Molly Templeton*

