



## Arkham Asylum: Madness

*Sam Kieth, Michelle Madsen (Illustrator), Dave Stewart (Illustrator)*

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It is the most feared house in all of Gotham. It contains the worst that the city has to offer. It is the place where the Dark Knight's most dangerous and psychotic foes call home. Writer / artist Sam Kieth, the creator of THE MAXX, invites you to spend 24 hours in the most haunted house in the DC Universe, Arkham Asylum for the Criminally Insane in this original Batman graphic novel.

## Arkham Asylum: Madness Details

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Author : Sam Kieth , Michelle Madsen (Illustrator) , Dave Stewart (Illustrator)

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## From Reader Review Arkham Asylum: Madness for online ebook

### Alex ? Deranged KittyCat ? says

**Stars, that's awful drawing!** Just look what they did to my beloved Harley.

She looks like an old hag. She's not even pretty. She's plain ugly.

Everybody in this comic is ugly.

And the story makes no sense in the end. The conclusion is weird for both sides, the Arkham staff and the inmates.

Two bad ones in a row already. >.< Does that mean something to my 2017 reads?

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### Paul says

DC, which, unlike Marvel, still releases original graphic novels every once in a while, released this one, which is written, drawn, and occasionally colored by Sam Kieth, colored the rest of the time by Michelle Madsen and Dave Stewart, and lettered by Steve Wands. It's a slim volume – not quite 100 pages long, and it retails for \$19.99.

The basic plot is simple: A nurse named Sabine arrives for her shift at Arkham Asylum in the morning and ends up staying for 24 hours when she's drafted for the night shift as well. It is, of course, a strange 24 hours. The Joker is doing weird things, and everything kinds of comes to a head while Sabine is there. Kieth is concerned far more with Sabine and the way she and the staff reacts to the weirdness going on at the asylum, so the plot is somewhat inconsequential. In many ways, this book is a nice companion piece to *The Killing Joke*, in that the Joker is trying to drive many people mad, and instead of turning a carnival into a madhouse, he simply uses the madhouse in which he's confined. In some ways, this is a far more disturbing comic than *The Killing Joke*, because Kieth leaves the ending more ambiguous than Moore did. We think that the Joker is proven wrong and that not everyone loses their sanity when confronted with the insane, but then Kieth forces us to reconsider what happens. The idea that Kieth is toying with is an interesting one. Sabine needs the job – she's a young mother and she and her husband don't make much money – but does she need it to the point where it destroys her soul? Is her love of her son enough to resist the insanity that surrounds her? Will defending her child against the Joker drive her to the point where he wants her to go anyway? Kieth brings all of these themes up throughout the book, and although they don't always work perfectly (mainly because Sabine remains somewhat of a blank slate, emotionally – she reacts to things as we expect her to react, and so we don't really get a sense that she might swerve), Kieth is good enough to make the ending fairly gut-wrenching. It's a decent psychological horror story, and there's nothing wrong with that.

The problem with the story is that Kieth doesn't really do anything new with any of the characters. I know that he can't really do too much because this is, presumably, "in continuity" and so he can't change too

much, but he doesn't really give us new takes of the old chestnuts. The book that this is obviously hearkening back to, Morrison's Arkham Asylum (yes, I just compared it to The Killing Joke, but I can compare it to two different books, right?), at least gave us an odder version of the Joker than we usually see, but Kieth's Joker is just the Joker. Even Killer Croc, a malevolent presence on the top floor, is similar to many other versions. Because of this restriction, it's kind of difficult to care too much about what theatrics the maniacs in Arkham pull, even when it directly affects Sabine. Kieth toys a bit with the Joker – his obsession with Antiques Roadshow and old toys in general ought to become canonical – but in the end, he's just the Joker. Kieth also hits all the common notes about Arkham – he brings up the idea that something deeper lurks within its walls, for instance – but it's still Arkham. In other words, it's still ridiculously understaffed even though the greatest concentration of evil in the DCU is concentrated inside it, and it's still a wreck of a building that, even in an economic recession, is an embarrassment in a major American city. The idea of Arkham is always more interesting than the reality, and Kieth doesn't do much with the reality.

The reason I can mildly recommend this is because the ending really does work well, as Sabine comes to understand her warped relationship with Arkham and its patients and why she acts as she does at the end, and because Kieth's art is always fun to look at. His character design is wonderful, as he draws people as slight caricatures that reveal much more about them than if he drew them straight. He shifts from cartoony and benign to cartoony and violent very easily, making the violence stand out and more disturbing. While his Joker looks like the Joker and even Killer Croc, as malevolent a presence he is, is still a big crocodile, Kieth's visual portrayal of Harley Quinn is brilliant, wearing her hair in dreadlocks and laconically jousting with her replacement at Arkham, while Jonathan Crane, with his stitched-up lips, is a creepy demon haunting the halls. Kieth always does a good job moving from relatively simple line work in certain panels to fully painted panels in others, and his range is breathtaking. Kieth doesn't quite earn the final image of horror (which breaks the tension that has been building up inside the asylum), but it's a tremendous visual. While Kieth's writing has been better than in this comic, it's always a treat to look at his artwork and see what fun stuff he's up to these days.

Arkham Asylum: Madness isn't quite great, although it's not bad. Kieth shies away from really delving into madness, giving us the standard insane characters of the DC Universe and not going too far into Sabine's psyche to make a grand statement. Her struggle is a gripping one, but there's a sense that Kieth had an opportunity to really dig in, and he passed it up to give us stories of characters we know far too well. Still, it's a fascinating book because, like Dave McKean, Kieth is an artist who can make madness visually interesting. It's a decent read, just not a brilliant one. But it's still nice that DC actually publishes stuff like this every once in a while!

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### **Shelby \*trains flying monkeys\* says**

I think this is my favorite book with the Joker in it ever. Batman will have to get over it for a few since he didn't show up for work the day this book was made. That slacker.

This is the story of a nurse's workday at the Arkham Asylum. She starts the day with her husband and son driving her to work. She tells her son what a wonderful work place she has and how all the inmates there should be shown forgiveness and caring feelings. Uh yeah.

Once there after gossiping with her co-worker..she admits how really bad it is.

The place is full of the bad guys that Batman has put away.

And of course..my favorite baddie of all.

So what has the Joker been up too since being committed?  
He has taken up arts and crafts!

Including a former guards leg. It's a work of art people! Back off the man.

Plus, he has taken up watching Antiques Roadshow.

Hey, he is the good one for awhile here. Just don't mess with his collectibles.  
There is all kinds of freaky deaky going on at the Asylum. Including hooking up for some nooky in some of the rooms.

....and it all boils down to not screwing with the mom. Joker..you should know better.

This book is dark and fun. Go read it.  
Hulk-boy made me do it.

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### **Sam Quixote says**

Ever wonder what a day in the life of an Arkham Asylum nurse is like? Me neither but here we have it anyway with Arkham Asylum: Madness. And it's fucking boring!

I thought Sam Kieth's art was unusual and quirky when I first saw it in The Maxx but over the years it's just devolved into looking sloppy, lazy and ugly - some of the pages are such poor quality they look like a photocopy of a photocopy! The character designs are among the shittiest I've ever seen: Harley has dreads, Two-Face is a 'roided out thug with a do-rag, and Scarecrow literally has his mouth sewn shut - so how can he speak?!

As for the pitiful non-story, our personality-free protagonist wanders about hearing dull stories about Joker and which doctor is sleeping with which nurse. Kieth writes such an uninteresting, predictable and lame Joker, fucking with a doctor by putting glass in his lunch.

There's nothing but outright stupidity throughout. Why is Killer Croc - who's drawn like an actual crocodile - in a tank full of gallons and gallons of water set at the top of the building? Why not put that shit on the ground floor or basement?! Why are there enormously tall ceilings where clocks are set out of reach of anyone? Why are there therapy sessions at 1am? Why are inmates allowed to wander freely from their cells throughout the night?! Garbage storytelling.

The real madness is DC hiring Sam Kieth to make Batman comics!

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## Colin McKay Miller says

Sam Kieth's *Arkham Asylum: Madness* has no Batman and nothing to pull it above being a relentlessly crappy comic.

Normally I wouldn't have read this. I actually own a first edition of "The Maxx"—Kieth's big claim to fame—but I preferred a different comic in that four-in-one read (the one about a dude riding around a giant, flying gun). Whatever way you put it, I'm not on the Kieth fan boy track. In fact, I think Kieth's artistic style has actually gotten worse since then. What happened is I went looking for the popular *Arkham Asylum* at the library. The librarian spent a long time looking for it, and when she finally returned with this knockoff, I didn't have the heart to say no. I even returned it late so that I could finish, racking up a dime a day in fees. Principles, man.

Anyway, the story follows a nurse who works too much at Arkham Asylum—the place full of locked up Batman villains. She stays because it provides a paycheck for her family and she doesn't have to work the dreaded night shift... until she has to work the dreaded night shift. Of course, things go awry and the staff get overrun, but it's all boring and trite. For example, one of the nurses is forced to have sex with a doctor to keep her job. The doctor is off-screen, in a closet, but you can see it coming from far off—the doctor and the nurse are both chicks! Being gay! In a closet!—and while I hoped Kieth would veer off from an obvious and childish route, he did not. He could have put heart and complexity into the plot point; he could've focused on the demoralizing aspect of such a relationship; but nah, let's make it a passing high-five joke on chicks totally making out, brah! Garbage.

There were several other cliché plot routes, but that's the one I'm notching as the key example of ongoing lazy storytelling. There's more I should remember from the overall plot, but the big thing I recall is no Batman. *But wait!* you say. *If there's an array of villains, then there could be a great level of complexity in the interaction of their skewed standards and beliefs.* Alas then I note the "lesbians in a closet" example above and the conversation ends. About the only part I recall liking was when Kieth delineated Two-Face's halves with different font, so maybe I should be glad he didn't include Batman. If he did, there'd likely be nipples on the Batsuit (and if there's one thing I oppose in life it's nipples on the Batsuit). One star.

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## C.A. Bryers says

The narrative and the art style is all over the place, but I think that worked in this graphic novel's favor. It gave the impression very well that *Arkham Asylum* is a pressure-cooker, a living thing waiting to burst. It was a slow burn to begin with, but little things like the persistent thumps coming from the walls and a clock that inexplicably bleeds pushes the feeling that such a place would be unnerving to those who endure that environment for a living. And since *Arkham Asylum: Madness* shows the asylum through the eyes of its workers, that makes it all the more effective.

Batman is nowhere to be found in this book, and there's no need for him. It's a showcase of the asylum itself, and a handful of its more notorious inhabitants, particularly Joker. If I had one complaint, it would be that the great buildup of tension kind of fizzles and sputters at the end.

Still, though many revere *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*, I found this to be a similar

take on the theme, but ultimately more coherent and readable.

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### **Caitlin says**

**I'm struggling with rating this one because parts of it I loved and parts of it bored/confused me so 3.5 stars it is.**

I honestly think that my expectations were just too high. I was just left wanting more by the end of it. Arkham Asylum: Madness follows the story of a nurse named Sabine who works in Arkham Asylum. I honestly think they're all fucking crazy just for setting foot in that building but guess you gotta get money however you can in Gotham.

Kieth does an excellent job portraying the creepy, fucked up feel of Arkham in both the writing and particularly the artwork.

Batman doesn't show up at all in this but that's honestly a good thing as the focus here is really on the interaction between the psychopaths and the nurses and doctors. The thought of Joker collecting things (and the way that turns out) was so perfectly dark and messed up that I couldn't help but love it.

And Harley! She was so damn wonderful that I was left wanting so much more of her.

But I found that the people who worked at Arkham bored the shit out of me. I mostly liked Sabine but the personal drama between nurses, doctors and guards just didn't interest me.

And I will admit that parts of this book confused the hell out of me. That could easily have been Kieth's intent (God knows I didn't understand Batman: Arkham Asylum - A Serious House on Serious Earth either but McKean's artwork majorly won me over on that one). It just kept me from fully engaging and being super happy with the story.

**Overall, still a very dark and fun story about how the creepiness and dark past and present of Arkham Asylum infects not only the building but all those inside it.**

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### **Jocelyn says**

The art is horrendous, I just can't get past it or in to it. Story seems over the top, with the level of 'homesickness' the nurse displays - her family drops her off at work and she's whining and crying about missing them 15 minutes in. Gonna be a hard pass from me.

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### **Callie Rose Tyler says**

I just love Arkham Asylum, I think it's hard to write a bad comic on the topic.

This story has absolutely no Batman nor does it need him the Asylum itself becomes the main character and the guards, nurses, doctors, and of course super villains who make up the character list are engaging and interesting on their own. The framework of the story lies with a new young nurse who is working a double (24hrs)and misses her son and husband terribly.

The narration is at times hard to follow because it seems to jump around with no way to determine who is speaking. The narration boxes are color coded so it gives you a hint (ex: pretty sure the green box with purple trim is the Joker) but for some of them you can't be entirely sure.

As for the artwork, I understand what Kieth was trying to accomplish but the inconsistency of the art makes it more difficult to get into the story at first. Some pictures are strikingly beautiful and dark while others look like mere sketches, this all adds to the madness the author is trying to project. Sometimes it was unsuccessful but overall I think it worked.

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### **BB says**

2 1/2 stars

..said no Arkham worker ever.

*"She will always belong to Arkham Asylum.  
And she will always be a part of the madness." - The Joker*

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### **Real Supergirl says**

Not Sam Kieth's best work but still really good. His art is, as always, spectacular and haunting. The idea is a fantastic one - it's set in a prison mental hospital for all the villains Batman has put away. Where it falls a little flat is in its narrative arc. It's a little predictable, unusual for the very creative and innovative Sam Kieth. Still, it holds up well enough and it's worth checking out.

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### **Jeff says**

This one follows a day in the life of a nurse, Sabine Robbins, who works at Arkham Asylum and I think Batman's mentioned twice in passing, so welcome to Batman week, Gothamites.

Working at Arkham Asylum, home to Batman's rogue's gallery, has to be one of the more stressful ways to make a buck in comics. Between jobs as a Male Exotic Dancer and a Riverboat Pilot, I once worked in a mental institution which had its own wing for the criminally insane. They didn't have any super villains\* housed there, but every time I went into the wing, the air was always leaden with tension. Imagine not only working in this environment, but having to deal with The Joker, Killer Croc, Man-Bat and the Scarecrow on a daily basis.

Sabine gets dropped off early in the morning by her husband and young son and my dread-o-meter started going off.

You find that Arkham isn't that much different than any other workplace: people complain about the work, people complain about management, co-workers play practical jokes on one another (with a fake bloody foot\*\*), co-workers grabbing a quick one in the broom closet and the Joker offs one of your co-workers on a bi-weekly basis.

The art is a combination of expressionism and what-the-hell-is-thatism (i.e. It resembles something my wife put on the refrigerator when my then five year old brought it home from school.) and almost undercuts the writing.

Fun fact: The Joker is a big fan of Antiques Roadshow. Who knew?

\*There was one guy who had an abnormally huge head who looked like a cross between Hector Hammond and The Leader. Who's to say whether he was scheming about plans for world domination?

\*\*(view spoiler)

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### **Tony says**

Well... I feel this is just lazy in the art and a bit predictable in the story. The main character is dull and really not interesting. There are some stuff that makes no sense (Harley Quinn with dreads, Killer Croc being an ACTUAL croc). I dunno, the Joker doing a very old, not clever prank putting glass in the food... It just feels that it was written in one night and draw in another one.

I wonder what happened with Sam Kieth. I'm just familiar with his Sandman art but it's SOOO much better than this.

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### **Allie says**

I'm a big fan of Sam Kieth. I wasn't disappointed. Was it gripping? No, but it's not meant to be. It's a day spent at Arkham Asylum. And I loved it.

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### **Gavin says**

It was OK. That sums it up pretty well. The art just wasn't doing it for me. It worked with the Joker but the other inmates and staff, nope didn't work. Perhaps that's a sign of how adaptable the Joker is as a character? I enjoyed his storyline, but the story of the nurse 'Sabine' was just a waste of time as were most of the rest of the occurrences here. I suppose it did a good job of conveying just how broken Arkham is in every way...but non-essential unless you like to read about Arkham. No Batman here, not even a cameo, but I guess that's OK too. Don't rush to check this one out, just nothing to really catch you.

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