



Broken Frontier...In his new comic, *Contraband*, TJ Behe takes readers one small step into the future. Do you remember watching those old sci-fi movies with dystopian futures? Worlds where technology has evolved faster than humanity's ability to control it responsibly? People who have become completely de-sensitised thanks to the constant exposure to any sort of sex, violence or deviation at the click of a button? Not long ago, a place and time like that seemed only a distant possibility. Today? Maybe just a little closer...In his new comic *Contraband* TJ Behe takes readers one small step into the future. Blackmailed by the creator of a controversial mobile video channel, Toby finds himself scouring the globe for an activist trying to sabotage "Contraband." On a concept level, *Contraband* is as visionary as the technology Behe writes about. Extrapolating from our world of camera phones and youtube.com, *Contraband* offers a disturbing view of the future. This world is almost indistinguishable from our own and the result will give all but the most desensitised readers a moment of pause. Despite this heady material, Behe writes a mature story without being gratuitous. By no stretch is this an all ages read, but the more mature material (including a vicious beating) is handled in a subdued manner that emphasises the immorality of the moment, as opposed to the actual graphic reality. Occasionally, the language choices are awkward, with some cursing left intact, while at other points, self-censored with asterisks. I'll preface my biggest criticism of the book by mentioning that this is a 33 page preview of a longer graphic novel. Within this chunk of story, the narrative moves out of linear sequence from two different environments at three different points of time. It also tends to be a little heavy on exposition. For a 33-page story, I found it a little disorienting every time the focus shifted. That being said, would I have been able to more fully immerse myself into this world given some more room? My gut feeling is yes, as Behe has clearly devoted a lot of effort into developing his vision of the world of tomorrow. Regardless of this challenge, *Contraband* is not a story that leaves you five minutes after reading it. From the painfully-close-to-home prologue straight through, Behe offers a skewering, clever and disturbingly sharp critique on 21st century life. I indirectly alluded to Elliot's art on *Contraband* earlier, but I'd be remiss not to spend at least a few lines on it directly. It has a feel that is well suited to the black and white page, giving the characters approachability much in the same way you would find in a work by Andi Watson, Craig Thompson or Alex Robinson. There's a reality and weight to the characters, without approaching a hyper-realism that would sensationalise the very subjects *Contraband* is skewering. In terms of setting, Elliot picks and chooses his battles - at time, offering very deep, detailed cityscapes and at others, less engaging minimalist panels. Some of this minimalism goes to an excess, even in so far as to confuse the storytelling of certain scenes. *Contraband* offers an insightful critique of modern society, that just might make a few readers think twice the next time they pick up their mobile.