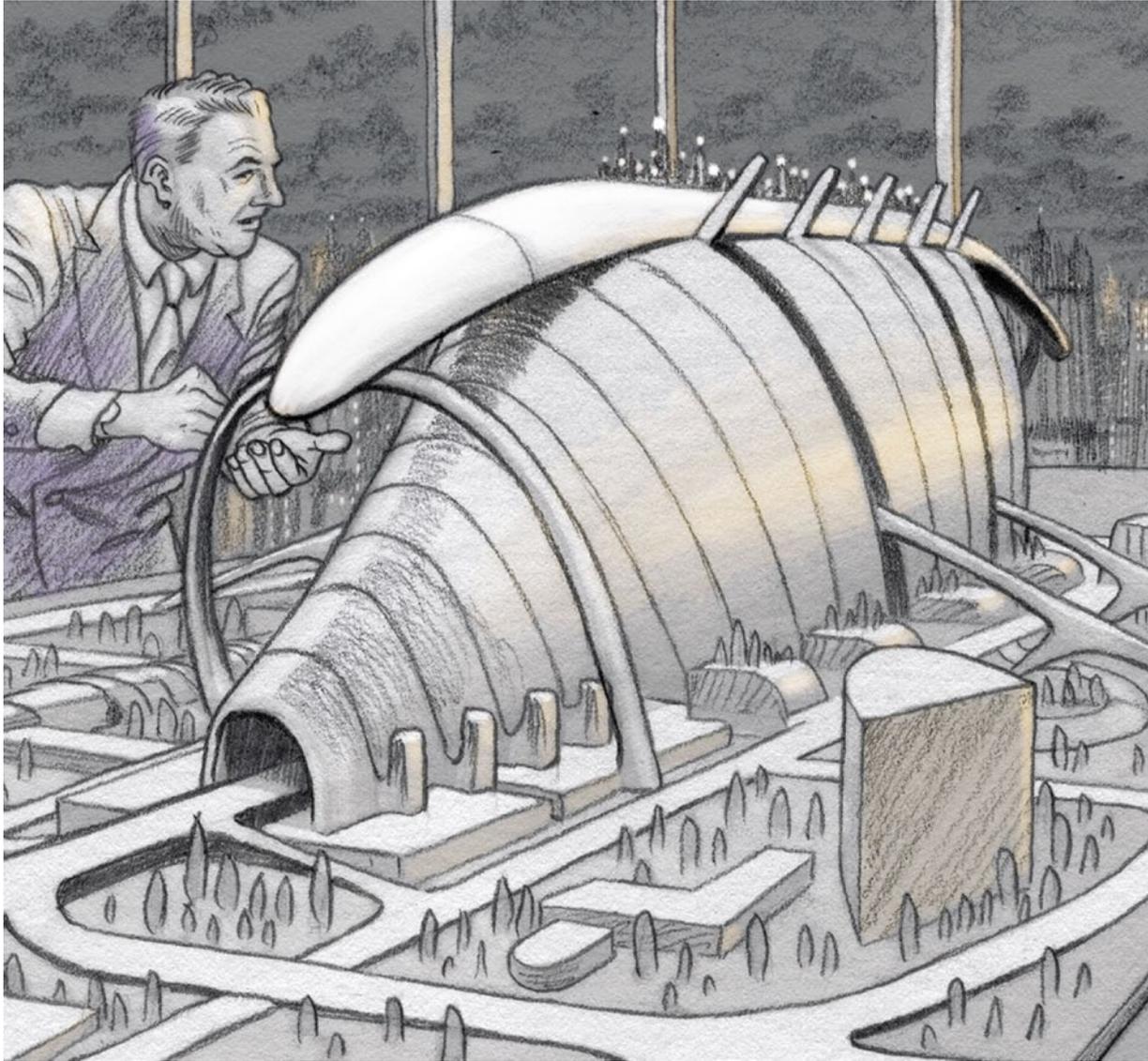


# The Case for Kem Roomhaus



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Image **Dave Taylor**

**Kem Roomhaus presents his design for Wayne Central Station.**

*Batman: Death by Design*, a graphic novel by Chip Kidd (story) and Dave Taylor (art), was inspired in part by the demolition and subsequent replacement of New York's original Penn Station in 1963. The book satirizes present-day architecture affairs by way of a Dutch architect, Kem Roomhaus, whom Batman characterizes as a 'genius' and a 'narcissistic creep'. Hired to design Gotham's new Wayne Central Station, Roomhaus roams the city using words like 'maxi-minimalism', erecting 'site-specific stunts' (as one socialite/self-proclaimed 'urban preservationist' calls his buildings), and vocally fearing the magnitude of his own brilliance. Though Kem bears little physical resemblance to Rem, it doesn't take Allusion-man to catch the reference. Naturally, architecture blogs and mags got hip to *Batman*, recommending the comic to architects and their groupies – a sentiment I echo. My question is, though, where are the 'I'm with Roomhaus' T-shirts?

In Gotham, as on Earth, Roomhaus is too easily dismissed as a villain. Granted, one of his buildings cracks in half (actually, the inspector's fault), but Batman never retracts

the (backhanded) props he gives Roomhaus; and Roomhaus's design for the station, which replicates the ribcage of a humpback whale, is rather ingenious – a nod, perhaps, to the work of his contemporary, Santiago Calatrava? When asked for his opinion, Kidd agrees the proposal has merit: 'The way Dave designed it, it looks great. It's just too out there, ahead of its time.' Taylor comes from a background of architects, his father among them, and says he realized the design by visualizing an architect's ego. So *maybe* Roomhaus is not a scoundrel but, indeed, a complicated visionary who overcompensates with bravado for being unjustly vilified. Yes, he's lampooned, but so too is the immature preservationist. Likewise, the *Gotham Gazette's* new architecture reporter, Roomhaus's most vocal critic, is entitled to his opinion, but should it necessarily mirror the reader's? Of my fictional colleague, I ask: Skewer the starchitect, who sometimes promises too much, or the society that encourages him to build glass houses only so that we may throw stones?