



Adler

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Paul McCaffrey, Illustrator

Titan Comics (Mar 30, 2021)

Softcover \$16.99 (128pp)

978-1-78276-071-9

A cast of famous fictional and real-life characters navigates a high-stakes, Victorian-era adventure in the exciting graphic novel *Adler*.

Irene Adler, first introduced in Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, takes the lead role in this book. She's assisted by Jane Eyre, Marie Curie, and Lady Havisham. They battle against the machinations of Ayesha, a character from the 1887 novel *She*. Other characters include Carmilla, a vampire first introduced in a 1872 novella; Nikola Tesla; and a Queen Victoria kept alive by the skills of a certain Doctor Jekyll.

It's great fun identifying these players, but the plot, involving a large-scale threat to humanity, keeps the focus on their current actions, not their origins. The story is clever and fast-paced, and its emphasis on women is refreshing and inspired. There are a few minor missteps in the storytelling and visuals, like abrupt transitions between scenes or movements that don't always track from one panel to the next, as in a scene where one character, Rudolf, pulls a sword on Carmilla. But these are forgivable trade-offs for the dynamic art and rousing action story.

Adler inhabits a unique world, melding the historical and the fanciful. Comparisons to *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, a comic book series that made similar use of fictional precedents, are inevitable, but with plenty of literary ground to mine, *Adler* feels fresh throughout. The book features a bonus gallery, but doesn't provide information on the characters' literary origins, a curious omission given the now-obscure status of some.

Adler is pure entertainment, establishing a strong, intelligent heroine and a foundation that leaves the door open for future (past) adventures.

PETER DABBENE (March / April 2021)

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