



★ The Marchenoir Library

A. Degen

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Transcendent and surreal, A. Degen's *The Marchenoir Library* mixes superheroes and humor.

Taking inspiration from the comic book tradition of pulpy, attention-grabbing graphics, this is a tale told as a collection of covers to stories that were never actually produced. A few pages of character profiles introduce the dramatis personae, which include a variety of unusual supporting characters and villains. Then, a showcase of imaginary comic book covers opens the door on a rich, inspired fictional world.

The main character, Marchenoir, is a cigarette-smoking costumed superheroine and ex-singer/songwriter who's prone to romance and dangerous situations—sometimes both at once. Every second page comes a pair of cover images, one devoid of text, the other describing a scenario in a few sentences and asking an urgent question about the ultimate fate of Marchenoir or her companions as they battle some member of her rogues' gallery. Some questions involve traditional good versus evil verbiage: can Marchenoir “escape,” “defeat,” “stop,” or “survive”? Others indicate the bizarre, and often hilarious, sense of humor that inhabits the book: “Can Marchenoir’s sisters save her from being a performing animal?”; “Can Marchenoir save her sister and void the terms and conditions?”; “Can she make music that people will listen to in this cultural climate?”

These snapshot glimpses of Marchenoir's world illuminate a vibrant superheroic ecosystem that's bursting at the seams with fancy artistic vision. One villain has either “existed throughout known history or retroactively placed himself there,” and another appears human, but is “in reality a cursed set of false teeth” that animates dead bodies. The book's art is just as surreal and humorous, with sight gags galore. *The Marchenoir Library* is intelligent and irresistible.

PETER DABBENE (July / August 2020)

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