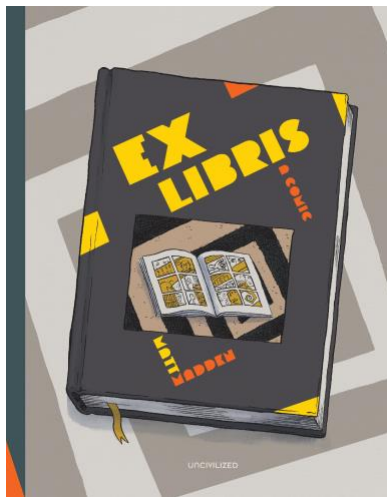


## Review: Ex Libris

by Matt Madden. Uncivilized Books, November 2021. 120 p. ill. ISBN 9781941250440 (h/c), \$22.95.

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You, dear reader, find yourself in an unfamiliar room with nothing but a bookcase full of graphic novels and comic books to soothe your troubled mind as you try to recall the predicaments of your disconcerting situation. This is how the graphic novel, *Ex Libris* by Matt Madden, begins.

As the reader/protagonist picks each new book from the shelves and begins reading, the visual style of *Ex Libris*' illustrations transforms to match the work in hand. One moment you may be thrown into the round-edged, slapstick-infused world of the funny pages, and in the next, you merge into the gritty, shadow-laden world of superhero comics. But even though the illustrations of *Ex Libris* may change, you cannot help but feel that all of these works are creating a single, underlying narrative written specifically for you. What are these comics trying to tell you? Are they forming a hidden message? Is it the secret of why you are in the room? The only way to find out is to keep reading, and just maybe, as the title suggests, the answer will emerge "from the books".

*Ex Libris* will appeal primarily to adult readers, but due to its wonderfully varied illustrations, young adult readers may also find it enjoyable even if they do not pick up on the more complex narrative structures and existential themes. It is also worth noting that the book's slightly larger format (approx. 9 x 12 inches) gives these illustrations plenty of room for detail. As a content warning, this book does include some illustrations of drinking and drug use as well as discussions of violence, but nothing gratuitous or shocking. This work would be a welcome addition to any library's graphic novel collection as a tangible digest and reminder of the wit, wisdom, and creativity that graphic novels can embody.