



I'll Play Your Game... - Just Pull Me Under

Secretia catches up with comic book writer and artist, Daniel Schaffer, as he explains the dizzy heights and watery depths of Indigo Vertigo, his new collaborative work with Queenadreena's KatieJane Garside.

I've been reading comic books for years. What started with a crush (yes, I said crush) on Garfield when I was twelve has grown to a sizeable collection that mostly focuses on the alternative offerings – those away from the archetypal superheroes. From my reading, this isn't the first time someone from the music industry has stepped onto the pages of a graphic novel: Neil Gaiman worked with Alice Cooper for *The Last Temptation of Alice*, Rob Zombie crawled onto the shelves last year with *The Nail*, and even KISS got in on the act a few years back (a convenient way to live out their cartoonish appearance now they're older). So I wondered how Dan Schaffer's collaboration with KatieJane Garside, who is better known as the face of Queenadreena, came about? "By accident, really," he starts. "We come from different ends of the artistic spectrum, but our basic creative drives seem to be on the same frequency, and we're both a bit out-of-kilter in similar areas. It was virtually impossible to resist the urge to create some kind of symbiotic expression of that."

Before working with Katie, he had viewed collaborations between writers and artists as cold and mechanical, at least for the artist. "You get the script and you follow the rules to the letter. I'd never been interested in that, which is why I've been flying solo on *Dogwitch* for the last three years. Katie's approach to the creative process of making a graphic novel is a million miles away from standard practices, though, and I couldn't turn down an opportunity to work with her. There were no scripts or directions – the whole process was organic from beginning to end. It was like touching two live wires together, the book just kind of exploded out of us. One day we were talking, the next day there's this book sitting there. *Indigo Vertigo* is full of fancy digital art and clever writing, but at its core it's as open as a fresh wound, it reaches out through a frame of intimacy. I had to tell this story in order to follow the conjoined thoughts and ideas of Katie and myself to their conclusion, openly, without conceit or premeditation."

So, what *Indigo Vertigo* is about? "The press release states that it's about the love/hate relationship people tend to have with their personal demons, but that's just the starting point. It's designed to be partially a subjective experience, so you have to bring something of yourself to the book and interpret the words and images on your own terms. There are multiple layers of imagery and symbolism,

and two narratives running parallel, one constructed with words and the other with pictures. The ultimate meaning of the story hangs between the two and the idea is that you have to come to your own conclusion about what it's actually about. The title itself refers to many various dualities within the book, the relationship between, for example, thought and motion, mood and inertia. It also refers to the creative process of the book itself. It's an ambiguous title, I know, but it is ultimately decipherable."

Indigo Vertigo follows one character through a hallucinatory environment where the past and present are viewed back to back and are subject to variations in her perception. "She's part Katie, part me, and part anyone who reads the book. She has definite thoughts and actions, a specific style and look, and she's guided very carefully, but those attributes surround a certain vagueness, an emptiness that's left for the reader to fill. This character connects, or tries to connect, through disclosure. Or you could call it confession. It's an unconditional offer to anyone and everyone. She's not crying for help, she's not preaching morality, and she's not spilling her guts for sympathy. You may empathise with her, you may hate her, or you may be more interested in the floating fish. It doesn't matter because she's saying, Come as you are. I sure as hell did."

Will this book appeal to both *Dogwitch* and Queenadreena fans? "I hope so," he says with a shy smile. "Katie's writing here is similar to her song lyrics, it's just that this time they're presented to you in a visual framework as opposed to an auditory one, so the Queenadreena followers should know what to expect. Any *Dogwitch* readers who understand what Violet Grimm has stood for these last three years ought to appreciate my need to do something far away from standard comic book conventions and formulas. So, yeah, I think they'll like it too, even if only because it's so far off the beaten track."

Indigo Vertigo is a daring, introspective work for the comic book genre: a direct result of the chimeric partnership forged between the writer and artist. As the storyline unfolds you find yourself becoming more and more aware of that scratchy-scratchy noise in the shadowed parts of your own mind. Batman has left the building.

Words: SECRETIA

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