

Comic Book Review – *Hatter M: The Looking Glass Wars*, Issues 1 & 2

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Hatter Madigan has a huge problem. As royal bodyguard appointed to Princess Alyss, he is duty-bound to protect her at all costs ... but he has lost her. *Hatter M: The Looking Glass Wars* recasts *Alice in Wonderland* as a real event from the 19th century, with Alice falling through the looking glass *into* our world instead of out of it. Instead of a jolly, crazy little hatter, the book portrays Hatter Madigan as a ruthless, highly skilled bodyguard who will stop at nothing in his quest to find and protect his princess. The main tool of his trade is his custom top hat that transforms into a whirling blade o' destruction whenever needed. He's also equipped with blades that pop out of his sleeves like wolverine's claws, as well as long blades protruding from a backpack that don't seem to serve much of a useful purpose other than limited protection and coolness. In short, he's a badass, and he's in an extremely foul mood with his princess missing in a foreign world.

Issue 1 focuses on Madigan's search in Paris, where he promptly loses his hat and his freedom before reclaiming both, while issue 2 moves the action to Budapest, where he follows Alyss's trail as it leads to some other recent arrivals from Wonderland, a few vampires, as well as a pesky reporter interested in Alyss's story. The pacing is brisk and doesn't get bogged down with needless exposition, making this a thrilling ride told mostly through the visuals. While it's a dark and serious tale, a few comedic touches are thrown in to lighten the proceedings, such as the Parisian tendency to lapse into an occasional Pepe Le Pew homage ("le huh?") and Madigan's delight upon entering a hat store ("an armory!"). It's not clear where the story is going next, but it's very clear that it will be worth reading.

The key hook to get most comic fans interested in this book is the artwork by Ben Templesmith, who rose to prominence primarily through his work with writer Steve Niles on the *30 Days of Night* series. Templesmith has a distinctly singular vision and may not appeal to more mainstream sensibilities, but fans of his loose and gory style will find much to appreciate in this series. His art is well matched to the material as he's called on to portray numerous beasties and Madigan's gruesome disposal of them, although the brief inclusion of vampires immediately pulls any *30 Days* fans out of the story as it so closely recalls his past work. As usual, he shoulders all art chores himself, and his dramatic use of color is especially effective in this series. Love him or hate him, there's no disputing that he's a unique talent with an original approach to sequential art.

The Alice story has been re-imagined many times, but this approach is so unique that it feels fresh and exciting. In addition to the core comic pages, each issue of the book includes some historical fiction such as newspaper clippings and correspondence to flesh out the concept, similar to Alan Moore's work in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. The book is written by two relative newcomers to the industry named Frank Beddor and Liz Cavalier, with Beddor also responsible for a trilogy of full-length novels with the same title that will see US release beginning this fall. Beddor and Cavalier are welcome additions to the scene and will hopefully be players for a long time to come.

Reviewed by Caballero Oscura