



Hatter M: The Looking Glass Wars #2

Review by Dexter K. Flowers,
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CREDIT BOX

Words: Frank Beddor & Liz Cavalier
Pencils: Ben Templesmith
Inks: Ben Templesmith
Colors: Ben Templesmith

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Our world is a strange place. So strange that when Wonderland's Princess gets lost here, what her protector finds while searching for her makes their home look dull by comparison.

Hatter Madigan's search for Alyss, Princess and future Queen of Wonderland, has brought him to Budapest. He'll do anything, go through anyone to find her, and when he follows her glow, he finds her onstage, suddenly a violin prodigy, and soon realizes that he isn't the only one looking for her. The regal Baroness Dvonna shows great interest in her, as does a young, upstart reporter named Magda Pushikin. And to complicate matters, though no one sees them, two spectral women appearing only as reflections on glass and on Madigan's blades show a great deal of interest in him and his quest. But it is a rogue gypsy who kidnaps young Alyss mid-performance. Having finally found her, Hatter Madigan slices his way past henchmen, a bear, and a red fez-wearing monkey, who knows his way with both a blade and the Hungarian language, until he finds her in a small church enchanting a small group of vampires with her beautiful music.



But before he can lay one of his many blades to them, the bloodsuckers become quick work for The Baroness and her band of vampire hunters. Alyss is the prize, but if Madigan loses, so does Wonderland, as will all whose lives are lit by the glow of the imagination.

In the first issue of *Hatter M: The Looking Glass Wars*, Ben Templesmith clearly held center stage, driving the narrative with his haunting, quirky artwork. Templesmith is still on his game in issue #2, but writers Frank Beddor and Liz Cavalier have stepped theirs up considerably, introducing new characters, **deepening our understanding of those we already know, and enriching this increasingly bizarre story with one twist after another** until the last page. The added layers of character and plot have made this second issue a much stronger and engrossing read than the first. Smartly, Beddor and Cavalier open the issue with Hatter Madigan's journal entry; it catches the reader up with the premise and what's happened before, as well as establishes tone of what's to come. But it also puts more flesh on Hatter Madigan, turns his sense of failure and disorientation in a world he doesn't understand into something with which the reader can sympathize and identify. The writers have also introduced a few new characters, all of whom are intriguing and a sure bet to thicken the plot and complicate Madigan's quest even further. Solid characterization and nimble plotting are on full display in this issue, but the script also takes some chances with an off-kilter, herky-jerky sense of pacing that fits the tone of the story, engendering in the reader Hatter Madigan's perplexity and bewilderment as he moves through a world he must surely feel is much more strange and dangerous than his own. Finally, Beddor and Cavalier deepen our understanding of their story's bigger picture with some excellent "backmatter"—Magda Pushikin's telegraph news story and two letters between Jules Verne and Victor Hugo—at the end of the issue. Altogether, what was solid writing, though not without a hiccup here or there in the first issue, has become strong and dynamic in the second, and I can't wait to see what's in store for us in the third.

Ben Templesmith's artwork leaves no stop unpulled. The linework is **loose, but controlled, manic yet elegant, his pencil attacking the page as if it were a pin-point brush.** Compared to *Fell*, which by design moves at a tight 4/4 rhythm, here in *Hatter M* Templesmith's framing takes the script's odd time-signature pacing and hits those beats between the beats, particularly in the action sequences where we feel the speed and flow of the fight. Interesting as well is the balance of stark, tightly rendered foregrounds against blurred, hazy backgrounds and action shots. But most worthy of note and praise in this issue are the coloring and special effects. Templesmith incorporates



background photos throughout and makes them eerie by drenching the contours with amped-up color, the most striking a night sky labeled as if it were a planetarium as Hatter Madigan traverses a wire high above the street. And we can feel and breathe in both Alyss' burnished, mustard-colored glow and the sinister blue-gray fog permeating everything else. As Beddor and Cavalier have, Templesmith has added layers of depth and richness, outdoing in this issue the astounding job he did in the first.

An altogether captivating piece of work and a joy to read, *Hatter M: The Looking Glass Wars #2* is a wonderfully frightening dream, and I don't want to wake up.