




## Hatter M #3

Review by Dexter K. Flowers, posted September 20, 2006

CREDIT BOX	<p><b>Words:</b> Frank Beddor &amp; Liz Cavalier <b>Pencils:</b> Ben Templesmith <b>Inks:</b> Ben Templesmith <b>Colors:</b> Ben Templesmith</p> <p><b>Story Title:</b> Hatter M, Part 3 <b>Publisher:</b> Image Comics/Desperado Publishing <b>Price:</b> \$3.99 <b>Release Date:</b> September 20, 2006</p>	CREDIT BOX
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The cover of the comic book 'Hatter M' features a close-up, high-contrast image of a character's face, possibly Hatter Madigan, wearing a dark, futuristic helmet or mask. The title 'HATTER M' is printed in a stylized, glowing font at the bottom of the cover.

Protecting Wonderland isn't just his job, it's his obsession. But with its future queen missing, that future is in doubt, and now Hatter Madigan's enemies know his weaknesses.

Baroness Dvonna, known associate of the Baanskratar, a mind control cult, has kidnapped young Alyss Heart, future queen of Wonderland. Hatter Madigan is in hot pursuit with journalist Magda Pushkin, who gives him vital information on Dvonna's whereabouts before she's ditched and the millinery man strikes out on his own. He may have wished he'd brought her along, as his journey is interrupted by the forces of dark imagination who watch his every move from the reflective spaces within mirrors, windows, and water. Subduing him, they plumb the depths of his mind for tidbits about his mission. We're then taken back in time to the siege of Wonderland and the attack on the royal palace by forces led by Redd Heart, the White Queen's evil sister, who wants the throne for herself. After a bloody battle, Hatter Madigan escapes through the Pool of Tears with Alyss and the promise he made to the White Queen to keep her safe until she's old enough to rule. But he is just one man, and his enemies are many.

Writing comics isn't primarily about word balloons. In fact, it's ironic that equally and at times more important aspects of comics writing—panel descriptions, plotting, pacing—don't show up as text on the page at all. With the story in full swing now, the dialogue in *Hatter M #3*, other than key instances in which characters share information that moves the plot from one point to the next, is minimal and workmanlike. But though the talk doesn't sparkle, **Frank Beddor and Liz Cavalier's script shines elsewhere, first with pacing like a buzzsaw, and then a very natural and easy sense of narrative time and**



**timing.** Thirty-two pages of story means anywhere from forty to sixty extra panels, and they use the extra space to slice time up into smaller, more discreet units, each of them pushing the plot forward with actions and reactions that form the backbone of the story. Perhaps more so than the previous two issues, *Hatter M #3* impresses with its visual writing, the confidence the writers have that their panel descriptions can get the job done as much, and in this case much more, than words spoken by characters. But this sort of writing results in merely interesting pictures with no punch without a strong sense of plotting to back it up. Here, it's squarely in the mode of the hero's journey, Hatter Madigan facing ever increasing difficulties until, after a flashback sequence that reveals as much character as backstory, he comes up against his biggest yet in a cliffhanger cut so close to the bone it feels like panel #1 of the next issue.



Ben Templesmith has turned in some fabulous work on *Hatter M*, but from the first to the last page this issue may be his best thus far. Utilizing photorealistic tricks, **blurring the outer edges of his panels while keeping the center in sharp focus, then adding or diminishing light as if this world were lit only by candlelight**, he creates a look one can find nowhere other than his huge

toolbox of skills. We see the world of *Hatter M* through a glass darkly, and we feel how close and claustrophobic it is, how its industrial haze and gaslight contributes to the tension within the story. And yet, there are big spaces within the script for him to take a greater characterization role, as well as shouldering more of the storytelling burden. Hatter Madigan may be the star of the show, but this issue is all about the women. One can't help but love the way that Magda Pushkin stands out from the crowd, Redd's vicious snarl and striking appearance, the White Queen's regal bearing, or Alyss' spunky innocence. But Templesmith saves his best for an uncharacteristically high-impact fight sequence, and the two dark imaginaries, who are eerily elegant and steal the show as they haunt Madigan from reflective surfaces.

What started as an intriguing premise, *Hatter M* has turned into a very well-done and entertaining comic that's hitting its stride.