

# JOG - THE BLOG

IF THERE IS ONE THING OUR INTERNET NATION NEEDS, ITS ANOTHER COMICS BLOG. IN FACT, I WAS VISITED IN A DREAM BY NO LESS THAN ST. DOUGLAS INTERNET, WHO ASSURED ME THAT MY THOUGHTS ON COMICS WERE MANDATORY TO THE SECURITY OF WORLD FREEDOM. SO HERE WE GO.

9/19/2006

## Tricks pulled from the hat.

### Hatter M: The Looking Glass Wars #3 (of 4)

This is out today. In full color, 36 pages, \$3.99, from Image.

It's the penultimate issue of the first volume of the comics spin-off of a young adult prose fantasy series, a winking revision of various and sundry **Alice in Wonderland** tropes; the first volume of that core series has not yet been released in the US (that's on September 26), though it's been around in the UK for a while. There's also [an online card game](#) you can beta test around with and a second comics series in the works, which is not to be confused with the inevitable future miniseries for **Hatter M**, which is all about the adventures of Hatter Madigan, a royal bodyguard who's searching our world for lost little Alyss, deposed heir to the throne of Wonderland. Such is the magic of the [international multimedia franchise](#); you the reader will potentially need a map as much as any character in the saga, if only to get your bearings as to where you stand in the sprawl.

Hatter M doesn't have as many problems as it could, considering the setup; clearly, creator Frank Beddor (who co-writes the comic with Liz Cavalier) is concerned with each segment of the project standing on its own, which is why in addition to retaining a unique tone, skewing slightly older content-wise, and flaunting the services of an instantly recognizable artist, the comic also expends a generous amount of page time on backstory: of this issue's 32 pages of comics, no less than 18 delve into a premise-setting extended flashback. It's all stuff you're just going to read again if you search out the first prose book (actually, it's stuff you've already read if you've happened to pick up the promotional giveaway Hatter M #2.5 Deep Travel Symposium), but it's a choice that has to be made; Beddor opts for narrative self-sufficiency.

Besides, you won't be seeing this stuff drawn by Ben Templesmith anywhere else. You probably have seen a lot of *Templesmith* around - his highest-profile current duties are on a different Image series, the much-noted Warren Ellis-penned ongoing **Fell**, though he's also up to issue #2 (well, #3 if you count the introductory one-shot) on his solo **Wormwood: Gentleman Corpse** series at IDW. That's a lot of stuff at once, and his style on this project seems a bit looser than usual, character bodies often looking like sketches washed over with color and topped off with the expectedly rounded faces. In the big flashback sequence, an action-heavy affair depicting bloody revolution in Wonderland, a fair number of panels seem to be little more than thumbnails soaked in those omnious, glowing Templesmith hues and the occasional computer blurring effect.

Mind you, this is less intrusive in a Ben Templesmith book than it'd be in something like **Infinite Crisis**, a series that trades in firm realist action from a visual standpoint, and Templesmith is prudent enough to restrict his use of the technique to a flashback, the flutter of memory perhaps understandably obliterating details like background and facial exactitude - but still, the reader is forced to wonder if the book would look this stripped-down in different circumstances. A big double-page center spread of gory action is haggard enough that one can only pause upon reaching it, gawking at characters staggering around in a blurry panorama, some of them detailed and some of them indistinct blobs of ink, while on the right side of the spread the artist attempts to slip in some sequential storytelling by using a table as his panel border; it really does teeter on the fence of nightmarish mental fragmentation and plain old sloppiness, the benefit of the doubt largely being extended to Templesmith due to his ability to conjure an atmosphere in which such things seem moderately fitting. But then, that is part and parcel with a distinctive artist's approach; it doesn't matter if it only 'works' for Ben Templesmith, because Ben Templesmith is the fellow drawing this comic.

Not much else happens in terms of plot; there's less of the humor of prior issues, though Beddor and Cavalier do

still manage a few kernels of corn (Madigan asks a horse he's about to steal "*Are you currently engaged?*" to which the beast replies via sound effect "*NEIGH!*"). Despite being a dark(ish) revision of Lewis Carroll things, the premise doesn't much shy away from its own brand of silliness, bladed hats flying about and men in bowlers transforming into beasts upon huffing Black Imagination. It's all kind of pleasant, kind of tepid, the kind of spin-off that's smart to tie itself down to an individualistic visual viewpoint as a means of shoring up its reason for being; there's a *good* reason why Templesmith gets credited above the writers. He carries it a few steps; his fans can decide whether they want to walk it any farther.

POSTED BY JOG AT 11:59 PM