



DF REVIEW: HATTER M: THE LOOKING GLASS WARS, VOLUME 1

Hatter M: The Looking Glass Wars, volume 1

by Frank Beddor & Liz Cavalier

Art by Ben Templesmith

Reviewed by Beth Delaney

As if the classic tales of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* weren't surreal enough for readers, here's a modern twist called *Hatter M: The Looking Glass Wars, volume one*. This collects issues 1-4 of the original comic book series by Beddor and Cavalier. This is a surprising version which leaves out the hallucinogenic “eat me, drink me” impairments of the Lewis Carroll story.

The twist is that Alice is not just a girl that falls through a rabbit hole into Wonderland. It's quite the opposite. Princess Alyss Heart, daughter of Queen Genevieve Heart, needs to flee the land of imagination to be kept safe during the war between the Queen and her sister Redd. In this universe, imagination and all forms of creativity leave a glowing aura on objects and people. Imagination comes in two compositions: black and white. The Imagination force can even be experienced like a drug which, when inhaled, is called “sniffing” by the Wonderland authorities. It's the same classic good versus evil dichotomy where white is good and black is evil in this horrifying example of a childhood legend.

When Redd begins to attack the Queen, forcing Alyss to jump through the portal mirror, the Queen assigns her best protector – the top soldier of the Royal Millinery, Hatter Madigan – to accompany Alyss in the strange world. This secret service organization is quite special. Their tools of the trade are blades made of alchemite.



The blades are constructed into hats and other devices to be used in service to the Queen. If you recall, the wands in the *Harry Potter* novels can be used by any magical person but there is one particular wand best suited for an individual wizard or witch; similarly the hats of the Millinery soldiers are best used by an individual member who has spent time training with it. Hatter M's hat is composed of alchemite and also the silk of the Queen's favorite seer, the Blue Caterpillar which adds a telepathic component to the hat's construction.

Alyss and Hatter M get separated while porting and volume one of this series is the tale of the Hatter's tenacious tracking and heroic act of saving an orphanage of little girls who are having their imaginations sucked out. The Hatter's bladesmanship will remind fans of action movies where they see their heroes never run out of bullets. The blades seem to come from all over his body wherever needed. Primarily, he uses his hat which unfolds or flattens into a fan of blades decapitating anyone in his way; there's also a contraption on his back full of swords which can be used individually or also spun like a whirling death fan.



The Hatter travels through Europe in the 19th century in his search for the princess. Besides our favorite Wonderland characters, the Hatter also bumps into none other than Jules Verne. That is the sort of literary delicacy fiction fans will find within the pages of *Hatter M* as they enjoy the mythical adventure.

TempleSmith's art is so distinctive that once you see it you'll forever be able to identify it. Like El Greco fused with Monet, TempleSmith (*Welcome to Hoxford*) takes images with a lot of blurred backgrounds and exaggerates the grotesque where necessary. Such is the case with the vampire-like people that feed on Black Imagination inside the pages of *Hatter M*.

When asked about his style, TempleSmith admitted that critics usually say he can't draw or only look at his first *30 Days of Night* work despite the fact that he has a broad spectrum of talent from that Steve Niles series to a book about the United States Presidents. TempleSmith said the trend towards horrifying imagery and stories might be due to the "growing maturity and complexity of what audiences like." He drew a parallel between this Alice in Wonderland version to other classics that have been remade such as Shakespeare. TempleSmith said, "New interpretations of public domain work are always interesting (which is why it's a shame US corporations refuse to let their old properties go anymore and keep getting copyright extensions.)" Since Hatter M was Beddor's first comic, TempleSmith said the partnership had some growing pains which they overcame as he took Beddor's concept art into the final

stages.

Fans of steampunk are often drawn to the characters of Wonderland since it is one of the best known literary achievements of the 19th century. Even individuals with a flare towards things Gothic have created their own darker and creepier versions of Alice and company finding their own inspirations from Lewis Carroll's original work from 1865. Beddor's *Hatter M* has all the elements that steampunks would find attractive: The tophat which comes with those extra special supernatural secrets; the propeller device secured to his back which holds more swords; and the Hatter's membership in a society of the most distinctive honor in service to the Queen. Templesmith's style distinguishes *Hatter M* from other versions of the characters like the 1948 creation of Batman's villain Jervis Tetch, who uses technology to mind control the citizens of Gotham. Naturally the visage of the Hatter can range from meek to horrifying depending on the artist. And since many Wonderland fans find the fluffy Disney version extremely lacking, Beddor's reimagined version should fill the void with satisfaction.

Critics often ignore the skill of lettering because it's usually only mentioned when it's been done poorly. However Jason Hanley adds magical touches to the speech and thoughts of these characters. In places where imagination is oppressed, the world is shown rather colorless. People who possess some creativity such as the case with a quirky little girl, Hanley overlays her speech bubbles with rainbow gradients.

Though the story and artwork are certainly enough to recommend volume 1 of *The Looking Glass Wars*, there is more. Special features in the back contain treasures such as telegrams from the Russian journalist in the story, notes on how the Wonderland language was deciphered, and even photographic evidence of the Hatter here in our world. These notes were assembled by the Hatter M Institute for Paranormal Travel which is a devout group of historians, cartographers and theorists who have documented the Hatter's travels between 1859-1872. This is the group that allegedly came up with the theories of alchemite coming from the hatters' blood and how the Millinery blades actually work.

As far as reading level, the language and storyline are suitable for rather young readers; the sprinkled in bits of foreign languages have translations right on the same page as they appear. There is quite a bit of graphic bloodshed because of the Hatter's fight scenes but if children are able to read *Harry Potter* without nightmares then this book wouldn't be any different. In fact, the surrealism makes the violence more palatable than bloodshed in other comics such as *Kick-Ass* (Mark Millar) or *Black Summer* (Warren Ellis) which are specifically intended for adults only. Because of the context of this violence, the *Hatter M* series would be most appropriate for readers above 8 years old. The appeal of Alice in Wonderland, her companions and her adversaries is rooted in the often repressed fact that all of us are lost children at heart. You'll find *Hatter M: The Looking Glass Wars* an indulgent comfort to assuage your needs for a darker Wonderland saga.

Rating: 10/10

Highlights:

- *The Looking Glass Wars* is high-quality work from cover to cover. The story and art design present a palpable pace of action as readers root for the protagonist.
- The collected volume contains the fun inserts from the Hatter M Institute for Paranormal Travel. This auxiliary component blends nicely and gives buyers bonuses above and beyond just having a collection of the individual comics. It includes insights and answers to questions that readers will have as they wonder how the technology works and what the impact is when the characters come into our world.
- Beddor and Cavalier successfully added science fiction elements to the the original story which has more phantasmagoric imagery.
- The script which adapts *The Looking Glass Wars* and *Seeing Redd* is complete so fans will hopefully get to see this work brought to the silver screen very soon.