



LINE OF FIRE *REVIEWS*

Sunday Slugfest - Hatter M: The Looking Glass Wars #1

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By: Keith Dallas

Print This Item

Writers: Frank Beddor & Liz Cavalier

Artist: Ben Templesmith

Publisher: Image Comics

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Hatter M*, a four issue mini-series, will debut in December.

Ariel Carmona Jr.:



Judson Miers:



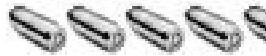
Shaun Manning:



John Hays:



Ariel Carmona Jr.



Plot: Royal bodyguard and expert bladesman Hatter Madigan is in Paris France circa 1859, relentlessly searching for Alyss, lost princess of wonderland. He is aided in his quest by his main weapon, his hat: a magical boomerang of sorts which when hurled by his master unfurls into a deadly circle of blades.

Comments: Essentially this is a "fish out of water" story taken to an extreme level but infused with science fiction and fantasy elements. The familiar story of "Alice in Wonderland" has been transformed into a Matrix like journey as Madigan pops in the scene like a Terminator, or another well known icon about to start his quest in a strange land. Thinking he is being tracked by Wonderland "seekers," he takes down a pair of harmless kites, only later realizing his error. This occurs after a showdown with the local police, and the protagonist accomplishes this with the flair of a Wolverine with deadly blades protruding from his hands, but unlike Logan, they protrude also from his entire body. It isn't exactly first known how Madigan, a being from another world can read French when he stumbles upon the local hat shop, unless he possesses some magical intuition which allows him to deduce the meaning of the words. Later though we see that he can translate the spoken word, so a mere shop sign proves to be a small obstacle. Moreover, a mysterious glow accompanies those characters who possess imagination or a

positive influence on our protagonist, and this quality is later attributed to the likes of writer Jules Verne who makes a cameo in the comic. After taking down a gang of xenophobic hooligans, Madigan loses his hat (not for the first time and probably not the last as his expression, "damn hat" becomes a familiar refrain) and is thrown in a Paris prison. During the trial scene, I don't know about you, but if I had a blade stuck in my nose and I was bleeding profusely like the judge, the last thing I would be concerned about is "bringing that monster to justice" but that's just me, other people with a blade through their nose may react differently. Luckily, minor flaws in the writing such as these do not detract much from the overall flow of the book. Traces of humor abound, such as in a whimsical scene when Madigan jumps through the court window and in a take on Superman mythology, onlookers yell, "It's a pigeon, It's a dirigible, It's le monster!"

It is when the journey shifts to the catacombs beneath France that the comic went up another notch for me, by bringing in the supernatural elements of the performance and introducing us to the opening book's villain whose powers seem otherworldly with the ability to raise the dead. I reached that delicious point where fiction, fantasy and artwork all blend into one and the book went up one more bullet in rating. Prior to this I was riveted by Madigan's quest and impressed by the narrative, and the quality of the artwork, but after this I really started to enjoy the reading experience. The writer masterfully intertwines pop culture with the macabre when the dead wake up hungry, ready to feast.

Final Word: I would buy this book, and re-read it. The beautifully painted pages and the artwork by Templesmith and the artistic team is eye catching and bold, and the narrative by Frank Beddor which is only the beginning of the saga based on his book, especially the final battle with the book's villain and his undead henchmen, is fantastic. I would recommend it to friends who are skeptical over the ability of comics to tell a pleasurable and meaningful story. Is there any better endorsement?



Judson Miers



Setting the story straight...: I have NEVER been a fan of *Alice in Wonderland*! In fact, it was always one of the main reasons why I hoped I didn't have a daughter. Maybe it's because I didn't ever read the actual book, maybe it's because Disney has been known for not actually using the source texts for its materials, maybe it's because of the way that Looney Tunes also used some of the same materials in such a way that a little boy just wouldn't enjoy. I don't really know what my reasons were, but I just didn't have any interest to read anything about Alice, even when imprisoned in my bedroom for scaring my grandmother with a snake in my pocket!

The Set-Up: What if everything Lewis Carroll wrote were actually a lie! What if the Mad Hatter (more properly known as Hatter Madigan) were actually the Royal Bodyguard of the future queen of Wonderland, Alyss? The infamous hat is actually a weapon thrown in battle which unfolds into a spinning circle of blades. The rest of his arsenal is a cross between Doc Ock (but with blades instead of tentacles) and Wolverine (forearm-mounted retractable swords). That's the overall premise here...

Critique: Actually, I really liked it! The premise is different enough to be interesting, the story is laid out well enough to be compelling, but...the artwork is sort of Jae Lee-ish mixed with Frank Miller. I'm more into the more JRJR, Bagley, etc. style of artwork. Other than the artwork, I couldn't find one thing I would change! If you're been reading any of my reviews, you know that's high praise indeed...

Shaun Manning



Lewis Carroll's *Alice and Wonderland* is a favorite inspiration for creators looking to make something new out of something familiar because..., well, there's just so much raw material to work with. In a world where every person and event contains several natures and conflicting interpretations, a writer can choose to emphasize one aspect where Carroll highlighted another. He can bring a subtlety from the source material into the main thrust of a new narrative. Or, he can just make something up, shoving the dreamlike characters into whatever situation he can imagine. And the amazing thing about *Alice* spinoffs is that quite a lot of them are good.

Frank Beddor's *Hatter M: Looking Glass Wars*, starring the "Mad Hatter" character from his recent novel, is an entertaining if somewhat meandering story about Princess Alyss's bodyguard searching for her in the real world. Upon emerging in mid-nineteenth century Paris, the Hatter immediately loses his hat—quite a large problem, considering it is his keenest weapon. Things only get worse as Hatter M's misunderstanding the world around him leads him to be labeled "Le Monstre," and bundled up off to jail. It only stands to reason that, when he escapes the clink, his next activity should be fighting zombies.

Beddor and Cavalier's story is fun mostly in its absurdity. Favorite scenes include Hatter M in the hat shop ("An armory!"), in which the proprietor takes his client's request for intelligence on the missing princess to be perfectly normal; a rather furious Hatter attacking some kites; and the bizarre confrontation in the courtroom. The quest for Alyss is not particularly compelling, but it does serve to move the protagonist along through his series of calamities.

The story, though, is both aided and hindered by the art. Ben Templesmith's work here is beautiful but not always functional. At more than one point it is impossible to tell what's going on in a scene, though the hazy abstractions are always quite nice to look at.

A simple but amusing book, *Hatter M: Looking Glass Wars* should appeal to fans of all things Alice and devotees of Ben Templesmith's art.



John Hays



I'm torn on this one. While I really like the concept and the art, the pacing was extremely slow. I really like the idea of Hatter running into famous historical figures, but I would prefer for those encounters to last longer, perhaps entire issues. I would also like some more in-depth accounts of what Hatter's abilities are, since we saw the Wolverine claws and the speed to avoid gunfire.

The art was terrific. I really enjoyed Templesmith's sketchy style. It definitely added to the moodiness of the tale. I also liked the fact that the colors were rich without covering up the details of the pencils. My only request would be to have a few more splash pages to really let Templesmith show his stuff.

So overall, I really like the concept, although I would like it to be explained a bit more. Is Hatter staying in our world? Is the puddle going to take him back to Wonderland? Are we ever going to see what is going on with Alyss? I'll be very interested in seeing how this concept is received by the comic community.