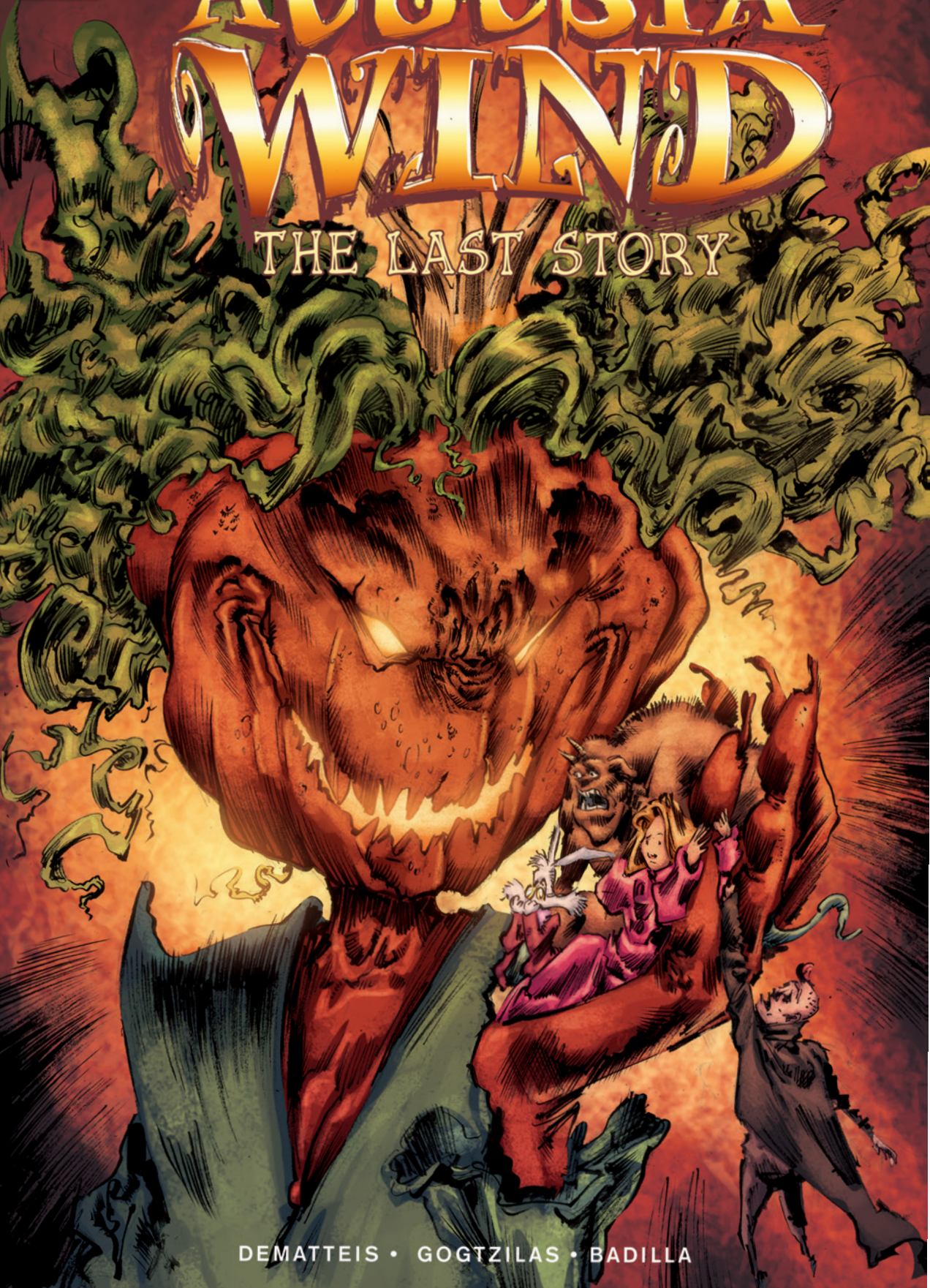


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2
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The Adventures of **AUGUSTA WIND**

THE LAST STORY



DEMATTEIS • GOGTZILAS • BADILLA

The Adventures of AUGUSTA WIND

THE LAST STORY

STORY SO FAR:

From the cosmic diary of
Miss Information:

In search of the missing Tellers, Augusta Wind and her friends arrive on Gloomworld, where children who have fallen into their own nightmares are trapped forever. After an encounter with warm-hearted Mrs. Gorrd and her Night Terriers, the companions are ambushed on the edge of Faller Valley—

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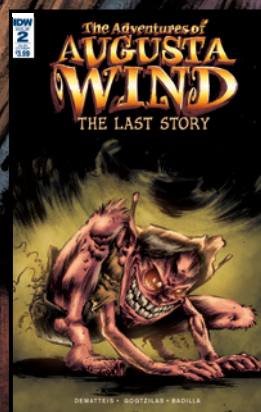
Publisher: TED ADAMS



REGULAR COVER

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SUBSCRIPTION COVER

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A dark, chaotic scene inside a circus tent. A witch with wild black hair and a purple robe is in the center, looking distressed. She is surrounded by several children with grotesque, screaming faces. Some children are on the ground, while others are being held or are part of a large, glowing, fiery mass on the right. The background shows the interior of a red and yellow striped tent with various props and a ladder.

AH ...I SEE
THE EFFECTS OF THE
TERRORBERRIES' POISONS
ARE BEGINNING TO WEAR
OFF—AND YOUR LITTLE
COMPANY IS STRUGGLING
TO WAKE!

THEN ALLOW ME
TO WELCOME YOU ALL.
I AM MARISH, QUEEN OF
FALLER VALLEY—AND
THESE ...ENTHUSIASTIC PETS
GATHERED 'ROUND ME ARE
MY LITTLE NASTEEZ.

BUT IT'S NOT
THEM YOU CAME
TO VISIT, IS IT?
NO, IT'S THE BOY:
YOUR OLD AND
DEAR FRIEND—



—SADLEY
MISTAYKIN.

WH-WHAT
HAVE YOU DONE
TO HIM?

DONE? WHY,
MY DEAR CHILD,
ALL I'VE DONE IS
WHAT I DO FOR
ALL THE CHILDREN
THAT COME TO
MY VALLEY—

—WELCOME HIM
WITH OPEN ARMS.
AND THE SAME
HOSPITALITY I'VE
OFFERED SADLEY—



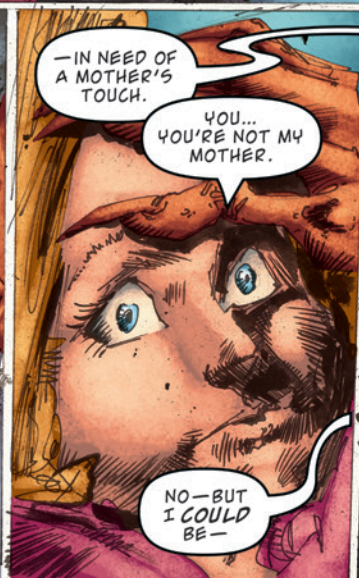
—I NOW OFFER
TO YOU AND YOUR
FRIENDS.

I KNOW ALL ABOUT
YOU, AUGUSTA WIND.
ABOUT YOUR POWER TO
BEND AND SHAPE THE
STORIVERSE IN WAYS
FEW OTHERS CAN.

BUT I KNOW
SOMETHING ELSE,
AS WELL. BENEATH
THAT POWER—



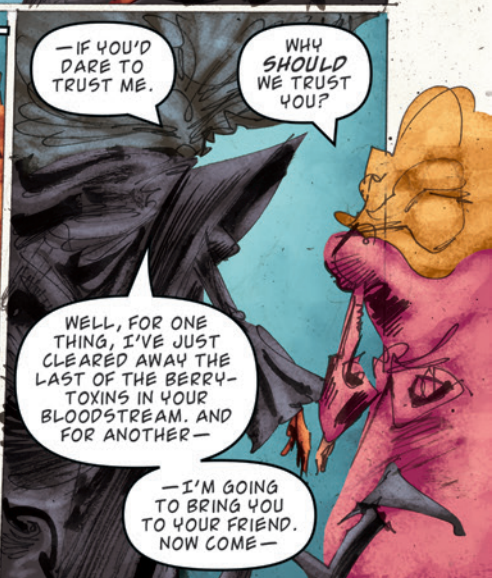
—YOU'RE JUST
A CONFUSED,
VULNERABLE
LITTLE GIRL—



—IN NEED OF
A MOTHER'S
TOUCH.

YOU...
YOU'RE NOT MY
MOTHER.

NO—BUT
I COULD
BE—



—IF YOU'D
DARE TO
TRUST ME.

WHY
SHOULD
WE TRUST
YOU?

WELL, FOR ONE
THING, I'VE JUST
CLEARED AWAY THE
LAST OF THE BERRY-
TOXINS IN YOUR
BLOODSTREAM. AND
FOR ANOTHER—

—I'M GOING
TO BRING YOU
TO YOUR FRIEND.
NOW COME—



—TAKE MY HAND.

STILL BEWILDERED FROM HER ORDEAL, THE GIRL OBLIGED...

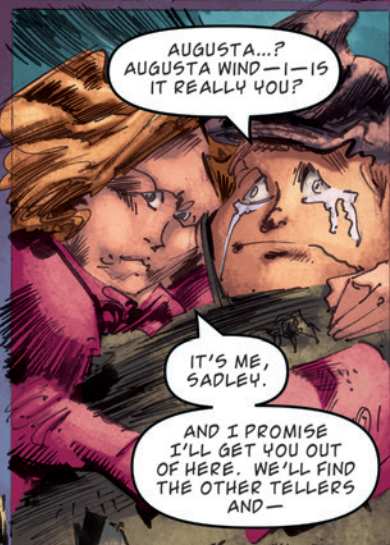


...BUT FEELING THAT COLD FLESH—IF IT WAS FLESH—PRESSED AGAINST HER OWN, AUGUSTA WAS OVERCOME WITH FEAR AND REVULSION.

WHATEVER THIS CREATURE WAS...

SADLEY...?

...SHE WAS NOBODY'S MOTHER.



AUGUSTA...? AUGUSTA WIND—I—IS IT REALLY YOU?

IT'S ME, SADLEY.

AND I PROMISE I'LL GET YOU OUT OF HERE. WE'LL FIND THE OTHER TELLERS AND—



I'M AFRAID YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW THINGS WORK ON GLOOMWORLD, CHILD.

NO ONE ESCAPES FALLER VALLEY.

NOT EVEN ME.



WHAT ARE YOU SAYING...?

ONCE, LONG AGO, WHEN I WAS JUST A LITTLE GIRL, I FELL INTO THIS PLACE...AS ALL THESE OTHER CHILDREN DID—

SHRIPPP



—PLUMMETING, HELPLESSLY, THROUGH MY OWN NIGHTMARES. AND WHAT I FOUND HERE—

—WAS HORROR: RAW AND FORMLESS. A TIDAL WAVE OF MONSTROUS THOUGHTS AND UNSPEAKABLE FEARS. A DEVASTATING WHIRLWIND—

—OF PURE CHAOS. BUT, OVER TIME, I TOOK THAT CHAOS IN MY HANDS AND BROUGHT FORTH ORDER. THE FALLEN CHILDREN AND THE FORGOTTEN NIGHTMARES LEARNED TO LIVE IN HARMONY—



—UNDER
MY RULE.

"BUT HOW," AUGUSTA INQUIRED, AS THE QUEEN
LED THE COMPANY (OMNIPHANT AND THE
OTHERS—STILL IN SOMETHING OF A STUPOR—
BARELY ABLE TO WALK) ACROSS THE VALLEY...

...TO A CASTLE UNLIKE ANY EVER
IMAGINED IN DREAM OR NIGHT-
MARE, POETRY OR PROSE, "COULD
ONE LOST LITTLE GIRL TAKE
COMMAND OF SUCH A PLACE?"

"SHE COULDN'T," QUEEN MARISH
ANSWERED. "NOT WITHOUT HELP.
NOT WITHOUT THE **GREAT
LIBERATOR**." AUGUSTA ASKED
WHO THIS GREAT LIBERATOR
MIGHT BE—BUT SHE ALREADY
KNEW THE ANSWER.

"THE LIBERATOR," MARISH
SAID, "HAS BEEN KNOWN BY
MANY NAMES, BUT YOU KNOW
HER AS THE **STORY KILLER**."

"HE," MARISH WENT ON, "TAUGHT ME HOW TO
BRING SHAPE AND FORM TO GLOOMWORLD. SHE
SAVED THE CHILDREN FROM BEING DEVoured
BY THEIR OWN NIGHTMARES. SAVED THE
NIGHTMARES FROM DEVOURING EACH OTHER."



"HE?" OMNIPHANT SNARLED.
"SHE?" MAKE UP YOUR MIND!"

"THE LIBERATOR HAS TAKEN MANY FORMS, OMNIPHANT: MALE AND FEMALE, YOUNG AND OLD. BEAST, ANGEL. SKY, SEA AND STARS. HE IS EVERYTHING— AND SHE IS BEYOND EVERYTHING."

"YOU SPEAK OF THIS KILLER," OMNIPHANT REPLIED, "AS IF HE'S EQUAL TO THE **SLEEPER HIMSELF!** BUT HE'S NOT! HE'S A SOULLESS MONSTER! A—"

"SILENCE!" QUEEN MARE HOWLED—AS HER GUARDS, THE TOWERING CREATURES CALLED **LAMENTINELS**, DREW THEIR WEAPONS AND LUMBERED FORWARD. "YOU WILL NOT SPEAK OF THE LIBERATOR IN THIS WAY! SHE RAISED ME UP FROM NOTHING! PLACED THIS CROWN UPON MY HEAD! AND OUR WORLD IS FAR BETTER FOR IT!"

"BETTER?" A STUNNED AUGUSTA SAID. "THESE CHILDREN ARE TRAPPED HERE! TORTURED BY YOUR NASTEEZ IN THAT INSANE AMUSEMENT PARK!"

QUEEN MARISH SIGHED AND SHOOK HER HEAD—AS IF SHE UNDERSTOOD PROFOUND AND DISTURBING THINGS AUGUSTA NEVER COULD. "THERE ARE NIGHTMARES," SHE REPLIED, "AND THERE ARE **NIGHTMARES**. BELIEVE ME WHEN I SAY THAT THIS NIGHTMARE IS FAR PREFERABLE TO WHAT GLOOMWORLD WAS—"