

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

Written by Steven Bland

Twenty-seven years ago, under the Norwegian Sea, a water-breathing young woman named Ulla swam through the water venturing from her underwater city of Osloceanus. Soon, she made her way to the North Sea where she found a Viking warrior trapped within a block of ice. Ulla found herself becoming fascinated by the Norseman, who had long red hair and a beard.

He's so handsome and rugged, she thought.

Ulla brought the block of ice with her up to the surface of an island. The day was a sunny one. The sun melted the ice, freeing the Viking warrior, who soon awakened.

"Have I died and awakened in Valhalla?" The Viking asked.

"You're not dead," Ulla answered. "You were trapped within a block of ice, but you're free now. What is your name?"

"I am Eric," the Viking answered.

"You are very handsome, Eric," Ulla answered. "My name is Ulla."

In time, Eric and Ulla fell in love.

Two years later, they had a son named Lars Ericson, who was half-Viking and half-Osloceanid.

Steven
Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

Twenty-four years later, in Osloceanus, a grown-up Lars Ericson was swimming through the underwater city. Lars was a tall, strapping man with long shoulder-length red hair and gills behind his ears. He wore a simple sleeveless red tunic with two aqua blue medallions on his chest, a large golden belt with a Norse water rune colored aqua blue on its buckle, blue leggings, golden greaves, and golden bracers with a dorsal fin blade on each one. He felt like his life was missing something.

A part of me craves adventure, he thought. I long to battle warriors worthy of my mettle.

Soon, he heard a voice calling out to him.

"Lars Ericson," it said. "Follow the sound of my voice."

Lars followed the voice and it led him to an underwater grotto.

"Come inside," the voice beckoned.

Lars obeyed. Upon entering, he saw a trident.

"Welcome, Lars Ericson," the voice said.

"Who are you?" Lars asked.

"I am Njord, Norse god of the sea," the voice answered. "And I have chosen you to be my agent."

"Why?" Lars asked.

"Because you have been deemed worthy," the voice answered. "Seize my trident and power over the oceans and the wind will become yours."

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

Lars reached for the trident and grasped it. The trident soon became attuned to him.

"It is done," the voice said. "And it shall be your duty to crush evil wherever you find it."

"And I shall carry your name as I do so," the transformed Lars said.

"So be it," the voice said.

Lars soon left the underwater cave to begin his mission.

In the present day, inside Dorothy Donaldson's house, Dorothy and her mother were talking.

"When did you know I was Gale-Force?" Dorothy asked.

"Honey, every mother knows her own child," Mrs. Donaldson answered with a smile. "When I first saw Gale-Force on TV, I realized she was you, only taller and slightly older."

"And just as I named you Dorothy Judith Donaldson after Dorothy Gale and her actress, Judy Garland," she added. "You used the character's last name as part of your alter ego's own name."

"Wow," an impressed Dorothy said.

"So, how do you become Gale-Force?" Mrs. Donaldson asked her daughter.

"By focusing on my benefactors, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodsman, the Lion, and Locasta Tattypoo and clicking the heels of my shoes once," Dorothy answered.

"Can you show me?" Mrs. Donaldson asked. "I'd really love to see your transformation."

"Sure," Dorothy replied. "But I'll do it outside."

Dorothy and her mother stepped out of their house.

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

Meanwhile, everything was peaceful in the underwater city of Osloceanus. Suddenly, mud trolls from the Norwegian Arctic's Barents Sea arrived with hostile intentions.

"WE'RE UNDER ATTACK," one of the Osloceanids screamed.

Soon, their leader, King Lutor, arrived as well.

"BOW DOWN BEFORE ME," King Lutor demanded. "YOUR CITY IS MINE! SO SAYS KING LUTOR!"

Soon, Njord arrived.

"NO," he exclaimed. "THE GOOD PEOPLE OF OSLOCEANUS WILL NOT BE YOUR SLAVES! I, NJORD, SWEAR IT!"

Meanwhile, outside the Donaldson's house in a secluded spot, Dorothy prepared to transform in front of her mother.

"Okay, Mom, watch this," Dorothy said.

Focusing on her benefactors, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodsman, the Lion, and Locasta Tattypoo, Dorothy clicked the heels of her shoes once.

"WHOOSH!"

A magic cyclone rose up around Dorothy, transforming her into Gale-Force, before her mother's eyes.

"Incredible," an amazed Mrs. Donaldson said.

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

"As Gale-Force, I have the wisdom and intelligence of the Scarecrow, the tin mimicry and axe proficiency of the Tin Woodsman, the enhanced strength, speed, agility, senses, and roar of the Lion, and the teleport dash of Locasta Tattypoo," Gale-Force replied. "I can demonstrate my tin mimicry so far."

With a thought, Gale-Force transformed her entire body into organic tin. Mrs. Donaldson was impressed.

With another thought, the superheroine reverted back to flesh and blood.

"My boots also allow me to summon and control a cyclone when I click my heels twice," Gale-Force continued. "And I can make the cyclone I summoned go away by once again clicking my heels twice."

"And by clicking the heels of my boots three times and thinking of a place I would like to be, I'm there in an instant," the superheroine added. "Any place in particular where you'd like to go to?"

"Any chance you can take me to Norway?" Mrs. Donaldson asked.

"Sure," Gale-Force answered. "But why there?"

"Because you've been there before when you saved those missing explorers," Mrs. Donaldson replied. "And now I'd like to see it for myself."

"Okay, grab onto me," the superheroine said.

Mrs. Donaldson grabbed onto Gale-Force who clicked the heels of her magic silver boots three times while wishing to be in Norway.

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

An instant later, the superheroine and her mother were at their destination. With three clicks of the magic silver boots' heels at every stop, the two women traveled all over, taking in every sight.

Soon, Gale-Force and her mother arrived at an island in the Norwegian Sea.

"So, Mom, what did you think?" The superheroine asked.

"It was *wonderful*. All of it was wonderful," a beaming Mrs. Donaldson said. "Thank you."

Soon, they noticed something strange about the water around them.

"The ocean," Mrs. Donaldson said. "It's boiling hot."

Gale-Force immediately transformed her body into organic tin.

"Stay here, Mom," the superheroine cautioned. "I'll go down there to check it out."

"Gale-Force," a female voice said. "Stop!"

Suddenly, Glinda, the owner of the female voice, magically appeared before them and the superheroine, realizing that the female voice belonged to her mentor, resumed her flesh and blood form. Mrs. Donaldson was awestruck.

"Glinda?" Gale-Force asked. "Why did you stop me? Something's wrong down in the ocean."

"Yes, my champion," Glinda said. "And the source of the disturbance is coming from near the underwater city of Osloceanus."

"But before you go," Glinda said before getting out a ring with a purplish-red ruby.

"I want you to wear this," the good witch said as she handed the purplish-red ruby ring to the superheroine.

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

As Gale-Force put the purplish-red ruby ring on her right index finger, she was sheathed in a purplish red personal force field.

"This will protect you from the boiling waters and allow you to function underwater," Glinda told her.

"Will it work with my powers?" the superheroine asked.

"Yes," the good witch answered. "And, down there, you will find a new ally named Njord."

"Now, go, my champion," Glinda said.

"You got it," Gale-Force said as she dove into the water.

Mrs. Donaldson turned to the good witch.

"Glinda?" Mrs. Donaldson asked. "Is that you?"

"You've heard of me?" The good witch asked.

"Of course," a beaming Mrs. Donaldson answered. "I know of you, and of the wonderful world of Oz. I have enjoyed every single book that was written by L. Frank Baum"

"I've heard of him," Glinda said. "He, and his descendants have faithfully chronicled our tales."

"I have shared, and still share, that love with my daughter Dorothy," Mrs. Donaldson said. "I'm very proud that she became the superheroine, Gale-Force."

"And I'm proud to have chosen her to be my champion," a smiling Glinda said.

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

Meanwhile, in the deeps of the ocean, Gale-Force swam until she reached Osloceanus and saw the battle between Njord and the mud trolls.

Glinda was right, she thought. This force field *does* allow me to function underwater.

That red-haired guy with the trident must be Njord, she thought. And he's battling an army of mud creatures.

And their king is watching the battle as a magical energy emanates from him. And I'll just bet that energy is what's boiling this water, the superheroine thought as she swam toward the site of the battle.

"BACK! BACK, I SAY," a weakened Njord exclaimed as he fought off the mud trolls. "I MAY BE WEAK, BUT I SHALL PREVAIL!"

"Is this a private party?" Gale-Force asked as she converted her body to organic tin and threw a punch at King Lutor, stunning him and causing him to stop boiling the waters they are in. "Or can anyone join?"

Upon manifesting her axe, she used it to slice through the mud trolls, overpowering them more easily.

The purple force field surrounding me not only allows me to function underwater, she thought. It also *increases* my powers. Impressive.

Mud troll reinforcements arrived and Gale-Force swung her axe as hard as she could, releasing a razor wind that was made more powerful by her purple force field and which obliterated all of the creatures.

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

Njord and Gale-Force compared notes.

"You are truly a splendid warrior, woman," Njord said.

"Thanks. You're not so bad yourself," Gale-Force said.

"What is your name?" Njord asked.

"I'm called Gale-Force," the superheroine answered.

"And I am Njord," Njord said.

"The actual Norse god of the sea?" Gale-Force asked.

"Actually, I'm part Viking, part Osloceanid," Njord replied. "But I do carry his trident and his name in battle."

Unbeknownst to the heroes, Lutor regained consciousness.

"AND YOU SHALL *DIE* IN BATTLE, NJORD," King Lutor exclaimed. "YOU *AND YOUR NEW ALLY!*"

"And you are - -?" Gale-Force asked.

"I AM LUTOR, KING OF THE MUD TROLLS," Lutor answered.

"AND I AM - - YOUR DEATHS," he exclaimed as he renewed his attack.

King Lutor used his magic to conjure up tendrils of mud which came up from the ocean floor to ensnare the heroes.

"WHAT THE - - ?" Gale-Force asked.

"WHAT MANNER OF ATTACK BE THIS?" Njord asked.

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

With the heroes ensnared, the tendrils of mud constricted around each of them.

"AAARRRGHH," screamed Njord.

Nnggghh. Even through my force field, I can feel the tendrils of mud squeezing the life out of me, Gale-Force thought.

"In seconds, *both* of you shall soon perish," King Lutor said.

"NAY, VILLAIN," Njord said as he used his incredible strength and the dorsal fin blades on his bracers to cut himself and Gale-Force free.

"Are you all right, Gale-Force?" Njord asked.

"Yeah, thanks to you," Gale-Force answered before turning her attention to King Lutor. "Now let's get that creep!"

"Indeed," Njord said before he and his ally charged toward King Lutor.

"NO! NONE MAY LAY HANDS ON ME," the king shouted as he conjured up and fired a barrage of mud bullets at the heroes. Gale-Force's tin body and purple force field protected her, while Njord, using the power of his trident, solidified some of the water in front of him to create a shield which he used to protect himself from the bullets. With their protection and combined strength, the heroes staggered the evil king.

"Guess what, your Majesty," Gale-Force said mockingly. "We just did!"

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

Recovering quickly, King Lutor used his magic to conjure up a wall of mud between himself and his enemies.

"Zounds," Njord declared.

"BEGONE FROM MY PRESENCE," the evil king exclaimed as he sent the wall of mud as a wave to sweep Gale-Force and Njord away from him.

The two heroes soon recovered.

"Njord, are you okay?" Gale-Force asked.

"Indeed I am, milady," Njord answered. "But I shall feel *much better* once we have subdued our common foe."

"So will I," Gale-Force said as she and Njord once again turned their attentions to King Lutor and charged toward him.

"No, Lutor," Njord said. "We will *not* be gone!"

"We won't give up until we've beaten you," Gale-Force said. "Or until you've beaten us!"

"The latter can easily be arranged," King Lutor said as he used his magic to conjure up a large armor around himself. Gale-Force watched the transformation closely. With his armor complete, the evil king appeared to resemble a giant golem.

"I WILL SQUASH YOU LIKE THE BUGS YOU ARE," the armored-up King Lutor exclaimed as he intended to act upon his threat.

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

Njord, using his underwater swimming speed, and Gale-Force, using Locasta Tattypoo's Teleport Dash after instantly reverting to flesh and blood, quickly and easily evaded the evil king.

"HAVE AT YOU, VILLAIN," Njord exclaimed as he used the power of his trident to conjure up a giant fist of solidified water which delivered a powerful uppercut to the armored villain, staggering him.

"YEAH! WHAT HE SAID," the superheroine exclaimed she swung her axe as hard as she could many times at the parts of the giant mud armor that weren't covering King Lutor's body, creating many razor winds which destroyed the armor around him, leaving him powerless.

Then, with their combined strength, Gale-Force and Njord delivered punches which rendered their common foe unconscious.

"Well done, Gale-Force," Njord said as the superheroine again reverted to flesh and blood.

"Thanks," Gale-Force said before turning her attention to King Lutor. "Now, we just need to make sure he won't bother you or your people again."

The superheroine went over to the unconscious King Lutor and touched him. Wishing to be at Ozma's palace, Gale-Force clicked the heels of her magic silver boot three times. In an instant, she and the evil king were transported to her desired destination. They soon appeared before Ozma and her guards.

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

"Ozma, may I borrow your Magic Belt?" The superheroine asked.

"Of course," Ozma answered. "But why?"

"I'll explain later," Gale-Force replied. "Right now, I need the Magic Belt so that I can use it on my captive before he can regain consciousness."

Ozma quickly handed Gale-Force the Magic Belt which the superheroine quickly donned.

Wasting no time, the superheroine used the power of the Magic Belt to transform the unconscious King Lutor into a stone statue, unable to move or even speak.

With the evil king immobilized, Gale-Force took off the Magic Belt and handed it back to Ozma.

"My captive was King Lutor, a sorcerer who came from the Norwegian Arctic's Barents Sea," Gale-Force explained. "He led his mud trolls in the invasion of the undersea world of Osloceanus in the Norwegian Sea."

"When I got to Osloceanus, I met a new ally named Njord, who was already in battle with the mud trolls," the superheroine continued. "After Njord and I made short work of the mud trolls, we dealt with their leader. We won, but we didn't want him to renew his attack on Osloceanus and menace its people again. To guarantee that wouldn't - - and *won't* - - happen again, I decided that the best way to do that, would be to turn him into an immobile stone statue. That's why I brought him here, because I knew your Magic Belt could help me carry out that feat."

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

"Since the magic of my belt may not extend to your native world, Gale-Force," Ozma said.

"We will take custody of your captive and decide where to place him."

"Fair enough," said Gale-Force. "And thank you."

Wishing to return to Njord and Osloceanus, the superheroine clicked the heels of her magic silver boots three times. In an instant, she appeared at her desired destination.

"Lutor shouldn't be any trouble now," Gale-Force told her ally. "I saw to it personally."

"I've got to be heading back up to the surface now," Gale-Force said. "I have a few things I need to take care of."

"I'll join you," Njord said.

"But, you wouldn't survive up there," a concerned Gale-Force said.

"I can breathe air just as easily as I can breathe underwater," Njord assured her. "I *am* part Viking and part Osloceanid after all."

"Very well," the superheroine said as she swam up, followed by Njord.

Soon, Gale-Force and Njord reached the surface where they were greeted by Glinda and Mrs. Donaldson.

"Hi, Mom, I'm back," the superheroine told her mother.

"Greetings, my champion," Glinda said. "I trust you were successful in your mission?"

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

"Yes, Glinda," Gale-Force answered. All of the trouble down below was caused by a sorcerous king named Lutor, but we stopped him."

"I took him to Ozma's palace so that I could borrow her Magic Belt and use it to turn him into an immobile stone stature."

Here is his talisman," the superheroine said as she handed it to Glinda. "It aided his mud-based sorcery. Without it, he's powerless."

Gale-Force took off the purplish-ruby ring and handed it back to her mentor.

"Thank you," the superheroine said. "This ring was a great help."

"You should keep it." Glinda said. "No one is more worthy of it than you."

"If I ever have need of it again, I'll let you know," Gale-Force said with a smile.

"Very well," a smiling Glinda said as she accepted the ring.

"Glinda, this is my new ally, Njord, from the undersea world of Osloceanus," Gale-Force said as she introduced her ally to the good witch. "Njord, this is my mentor, Glinda the Good."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Njord," Glinda said as she greeted the Viking-Osloceanid hybrid.

"The pleasure is mine, milady," Njord said as he kissed the good witch's hand.

"Gale-Force has just mentioned this surface world to me," Njord said. "And I would like very much to explore it."

"But, wouldn't you be unable to survive on the surface?" Glinda asked.

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

"That was a question that Gale-Force had just asked me," Njord answered. "I was born to a Viking father and an Osloceanid mother, so I can breathe in the air as well as in the sea."

"Yes, you can breathe air, but for how long?" Gale-Force asked. "Sooner or later, you may need to return to the sea."

Njord soon felt an urge to stamp his trident upon the ground, which he did. Before the eyes of everyone on the island, Njord was transformed into a normal, fully-clothed surface-dwelling man with short red hair and his trident was transformed into a simple wooden stick.

"How did you do that?" Gale-Force asked him.

"My trident was a gift from Njord himself," the transformed Lars Ericson answered. "It grants me control over the sea and water and allows me to direct the way the wind blows. It is attuned to me and has an enchantment which allows me to assume a form that is capable of being on the surface for as long as I wish. However, in that form, I lose my gills and my Osloceanid abilities, until I wish to stamp my wooden stick again."

"You're really serious about exploring the surface world, huh?" Gale-Force asked.

"Indeed I am," the transformed Njord answered.

"Then, there's someone you should meet first," Gale-Force said.

"I'll be back soon, Mom," she quietly told her mother before grabbing the transformed Njord.

Visualizing the inside of S.C.R.E.E.N. Headquarters, the superheroine clicked the heels of her magic silver boots three times. In an instant, she was at her desired destination.

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

Everyone at S.C.R.E.E.N were surprised upon seeing Gale-Force and her new friend. Soon, Director Matthew Steele himself arrived.

"What's going on here?" Director Steele asked.

"Director Steele," Gale-Force said. "Here is someone you should meet and he needs your help."

"Who are you?" Director Steele asked the transformed Njord.

"I am Njord," the transformed Lars Ericson answered.

"I don't believe you," Director Steele said.

"He's right," Gale-Force told him. "And he can prove it. Do you at least have an indoor swimming pool here where he can do so?"

"Yes, in the recreational wing," Director Steele said.

"Then, take us there," Gale-Force said.

"All right, then," Director Steele said. "Follow me."

Gale-Force and the transformed Njord followed Director Steele as he led them to the indoor swimming pool in the recreational wing.

"Okay, we're here," Director Steele told them.

"Okay, Njord, show Director Steele the real you," Gale-Force told the transformed Njord.

The transformed Lars Ericson stamped his wooden stick on the floor and was transformed back into his Viking-Osloceanid hybrid form while the cane was transformed back into his trident.

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

"Incredible," a stunned Director Steele said.

The S.C.R.E.E.N director watched as Njord dove into the swimming pool.

"You may not be able to show Director Steele your physical abilities," Gale-Force told Njord.

"But you can at least show him what you can do with your trident."

With his trident, Njord commanded the water in the pool to grab a nearby towel from a rack and hand it to Director Steele who was absolutely amazed.

"Well, what do you think?" Gale-Force asked.

"I believe you," Director Steele said. "And I will do what I can to help your friend.

"Njord, you can come out of the pool now," Gale-Force told her new ally.

To Director Steele's surprise, Njord leaped out of the pool and onto the floor.

Stamping his trident on the floor, Njord was once again transformed into a normal, fully-clothed surface-dwelling red haired man and his trident once again transformed into a simple wooden stick.

"How do you want me to help your friend, Gale-Force," Director Steele asked.

"Can you give him an identity and possibly set up a life for him while he's on the surface?"

Gale-Force asked.

"I'll see what I can do," Director Steele replied. "Just leave your friend with me."

"It's okay, Njord. Stay with him. He'll help you," Gale-Force told the transformed Njord.

"Very well, Gale-Force," he said as he shook her hand. "And thank you."

"Come with me," the director told the transformed Njord who soon followed him.

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

As the two walk off, Gale-Force clicked the heels of her magic silver boots, wishing to be back to where she left her mother.

"So, what did you think?" Gale-Force asked.

"It was wonderful," Mrs. Donaldson said. "And I even got to meet Glinda, the Good Witch herself and the two of us had the nicest chat."

"And she's just as proud of you as I am," she added.

"Ready to go home?" Gale-Force asked.

"Of course," Mrs. Donaldson answered. "And thank you for sharing this with me."

"You're welcome," the superheroine said with a smile.

Grabbing her mother and visualizing the outside of their house, Gale-Force clicked the heels of her magic silver boots three times and they were transported to their desired destination in an instant. They reappeared in the secluded spot they were in before they left.

Focusing on her desire to change back to Dorothy, Gale-Force clicked the heels of her magic silver boots once.

"WHOOSH!" A magic cyclone rose up around her and transformed her back to Dorothy. Dorothy and her mother walked back toward their house.

Steven

Bland

Gale-Force #9 - "Muddy Waters"

"How about we order out for pizza tonight?" Mrs. Donaldson asked. "And, over pizza, you can tell me all about Ozma's palace and about Ozma herself. How does that sound?"

"Sounds great," Dorothy replied.

A few days later, at the headquarters of the Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor, Captain Chris Simonson introduced Njord, who, in his guise of a normal, surface-dwelling man with short red hair, was clad in his new Harbor Patrol uniform and was carrying his simple wooden stick in a duffel bag over his right shoulder.

"Okay, people, Captain Simonson told the other officers. "I would like for all of you to meet the newest member of our organization."

Captain Simonson turned to the disguised Njord.

"What did you say your name was?" Captain Simonson asked.

"Larson," the disguised Njord answered with a smile. "Eric Larson."

THE END

- 20 -

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