

Gale-Force #11 - "The Yellow Brick Equation"

Written by Steven Bland

Inside a subterranean laboratory, on a Saturday afternoon in Kansas City, Missouri, the air hummed with sterile efficiency. Elphaba "Elphie" Lumina, a globally recognized scientist, aware of the legend of Dorothy Gale and the Land of Oz, sought a heart for her work – a unique, potent energy source that science couldn't provide.

With a mere smile, Elphie tapped a worn, leather-bound book that was open, revealing an ancient text yellowed with age. The script a dance of forgotten symbols. It spoke of "raw, untapped magical energy" within the Land of Oz itself.

"Magic," she whispered, her reflection in the polished steel of her equipment showing a flicker of a smile. "The universe's final and most potent equation, a power source waiting to be harnessed."

Using a convergence of theoretical physics and arcane decryption, Elphie found the thin spaces between worlds.

The air grew heavy, static. A portal ripped open, not through space, but *despite* it. She stepped through the shimmering curtain, the sterile smell of the lab replaced by the scent of ozone and sweet, strange flowers.

"Finally," Elphie declared to the vibrant, impossible sky. "The power to change everything."

A voice, cold and clear as a winter stream, cut through the silence.

"You seek to *take* what is not yours, Elphaba Lumina."

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Elphie spun around and saw a figure standing in the emerald light, wreathed in shadows, a dark counterpoint to Glinda the Good.

"I seek only to harness a natural resource," Elphie retorted, her scientific training kicking in. "Energy is meant to be used."

"The magic of Oz is not a resource," warned the shadowy figure standing in the emerald light. "It is a living conscious force, and it deems you 'unworthy'!"

Elphie felt a primal rejection, a force that negated her very being. She raised a hand, trying to implement a containment field, a shield of pure science. It was futile. A powerful burst of chaotic magical energy struck her, a maelstrom of light and dark.

"AAARRGGHH," she screamed as the energy fused with her, searing her skin, permanently scarring her. The pain was absolute, a violation of her physical form and her rational mind. Science and magic were now permanently fused within her, a grotesque hybridity.

Meanwhile, at the Country Club Plaza, citizens were fleeing in terror, as the Terrible Toymeister, who had just broken out of prison, was leading an army of clockwork soldiers, their brass gears clicking with malicious precision, marched through the streets firing real bullets explosive shells, and lasers, at everything and everyone.

One of the explosive shells hit the wall of a nearby building. The wall collapsed toward a little girl who was too scared to run.

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Nearby, a man with jet black hair saw the little girl and rushed to her rescue. Reaching her, the man pushed her away. However, it was too late for the child's savior to save himself.

Before the wall could fall on top of the brave man, Gale-Force teleport dashed to his side, converted her flesh and bone to organic tin, and caught it.

"Quickly, get out of the way," the superheroine told him.

"Lady, you won't have to tell me twice," he said before complying.

Gale-Force gently set the wall down. Once the deed was gone, she went to check on the brave bystander she had just saved.

"Are you okay, sir?" The superheroine asked.

"Yes, Gale-Force. Thanks to you," the man responded. "I saw that wall about to fall on top of a little girl, but she was too scared to run and get to safety. So, I pushed her out of the way, but it was too late to save myself."

"That was a very brave thing you did," Gale-Force told him. "But, right now, leave the rest of the heroics to me, okay?"

The superheroine turned her attention to the Terrible Toymeister.

"Toymeister," Gale-Force's voice rang out, a roar that held the ferocity of a king, yet possessed the cold precision of a surgeon. "Playtime is over!"

"Soldiers, disassemble her," the Toymeister commanded.

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Ten clockwork soldiers lunged, their movement precise and rigid. Gale-Force didn't flinch, her senses sharp as a jungle predator's, anticipated every click and turn of their gears. She materialized a heavy fireman's axe – a nod to the tin mimicry of the Tin Woodsman – and moved.

She didn't just fight, she danced.

She swung the axe, cleaving through the first soldier's shoulder joint, the metal shearing under the force. The second soldier's head was sent flying as the blade of her axe struck with surgical accuracy, severing its delicate internal mechanisms. Her eyes glowing with an unnerving, hyper-calculating brilliance, darted from one mechanical menace to another, mapping out their weak points in milliseconds.

"Impossible," the Toymeister shrieked, winding his own brass scepter faster. "They are flawless!"

"They are made of brass," Gale-Force countered, ripping the arm off a clockwork soldier and slamming it into another. "And I... am refined steel!"

She leaped, dodging a projectile hand from a falling robot, her agility allowing her to pivot in mid-air. As a soldier lunged behind her, she didn't even turn, allowing her tin body to withstand the blow, the soldier's claws sparking against her back. She spun, using the momentum to cleave the attacker in half.

With the last soldier falling to the ground in a pile of junk, Gale-Force focused on the Terrible Toymeister. He stared, frozen as the heroine stood tall. She raised her axe.

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"Let's see how your gears hold up, Toymeister," she said, her eyes flashing.

Before he could react, Gale-Force instantly reverted back from her tin form, her axe vanishing as she did so. Then, quickly clicking her heels three times while focusing on where she wanted to be, she teleported and reappeared fifty feet away, standing in the middle of the street.

"Where? Where did - ," the baffled Toymeister said as he looked around.

He was interrupted by a sound that felt like the earth itself tearing. Gale-Force opened her mouth, letting out a powerful roar that echoed off the nearby buildings, buckling the asphalt beneath her feet and sending the remaining clockwork minions tumbling into a heap.

She stood amongst the ruins, a bright, terrifying, and wise defender, the silence that followed her roar speaking louder than the chaos that had preceded it.

Meanwhile, back at her lab, Elphaba Lumina woke up, her reflection in a shattered pane revealing a visage she barely recognized – one side scarred and twisted, the other a stark reminder of who she had been. The pain had given way to a searing embitterment.

"Unworthy?" Lumina snarled to the still air, pulling herself up by a workbench. "Glinda, you arrogant, magical gatekeeper, I am a pioneer of physics and engineering, not some peasant child."

She switched on the wall-mounted monitors and a news report popped up.

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"... And in a stunning display of power, the superheroine known as Gale-Force has just stopped the Terrible Toymeister's rampage in Country Club Plaza and brought him to justice."

Elphaba froze upon seeing Gale-Force on the screen. It was the superheroine sporting the distinctive emblem of Oz that made the scientist's blood run cold.

"And there you are," Elphaba whispered, a bitter smile twisting her face as she recognized Gale-Force from her multiple news reports. "Glinda's champion. If I can't harness the magic, I'll destroy the one she entrusted it to."

The scientist brought up a profile of the superheroine on her screen, marking her with a crimson target.

Lumina turned to her workbench. Her hands moved in a blur of hyper-calculative genius. She wasn't just building tech; she was weaving circuitry. In minutes, she had crafted six weapons designed to neutralize Gale-Force's powers.

"Gale-Force has the wisdom of the Scarecrow, but her brain is just a bio-electric computer," Elphaba spat. "And computers can be crashed!"

The scientist picked up a sleek, oscillating emitter, the Dissonance Array. With a twist of a screwdriver, she tuned it to the specific frequency of cognitive resonance.

"You think you're wise, Gale-Force? Let's see how that intellect holds up when I flood your synaptic pathways with localized chaotic data," Lumina snarled. "I'll turn the Scarecrow's wisdom into a screaming fog of pure confusion."

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The scientist moved to the center of the lab, where a heavy, magnetized rifle sat on a tripod. This was the Molecular Anchor. Elphaba reached out with her magical sight, physically grabbing a strand of ambient energy and weaving it into the weapon's cooling coils.

"The Tin Woodsman's mimicry," she murmured, watching the blue sparks dance. "A clever trick. But metal is rigid by nature. One pulse from this and your 'tin' skin won't be armor anymore – it'll be a cage. I'll jam your molecular bonds until you're nothing but a living statue, frozen mid-swing."

Next to the Molecular Anchor, was a sleek high-tech gauntlet.

"But if you're lucky to try and use your axe against me," she hissed as she placed the gauntlet on her right wrist. "My Energy Shield will dissolve it on contact."

The scientist turned to a pair of heavy canister-like drones: the Apex Overloaders. They were designed to mimic the predatory intensity of the lion, but amplified a thousandfold.

"And that roar..." Lumina's scarred eye flared a brilliant, painful violet. "That 'courage' is just sensory dominance. If you want to play the Lion, you'll have to endure the jungle."

She tapped a command into her tablet and the canisters emitted a blinding strobe of multi-spectrum light accompanied by a high-frequency sonic shriek that cracked a nearby beaker.

"Light to blind the feline eyes, sound to shatter the eardrum," Elphaba whispered, the crackling burn on her face glowing in the dark lab. "I'll overload every heightened sense you have."

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She turned to a hand-held device, the Phase Disruption Trigger.

"If you think you can escape me by teleporting or using Locasta Tattypoo's accursed 'teleport dash'," she said. "I will track the magical energy signature you leave behind and disrupt your point of arrival - -"

Finally, she turned to a spherical device, a Localized Gravity Well.

"- - with this," she added. "A localized gravity well, which will not only prevent you from teleporting, but also nullify your control of wind as well."

Lumina looked at Gale-Force's image one last time before packing everything, except the Phase Disruption Trigger, into a specialized bag and then cutting the power to her lab.

"You took away my chance for a heart, Glinda. Now, I'll take away your champion," the scientist murmured, before defying gravity and taking off.

"Then, I'll take away your crown," she vowed as she flew out of her laboratory, using her Phase Disruption Trigger to track her quarry.

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Back at the Country Club Plaza, Gale-Force began cleaning up the mess from her battle with the Terrible Toymeister. She clicked the heels of her magic silver boots twice. A localized controlled wind vortex – a gentle cyclone – swirled around her, picking up broken toy parts, twisted metal, and shattered glass, depositing them into a tidy, rapidly growing pile near the curb. Then, she commanded the cyclone to pick up the heaviest pieces of the clockwork soldier wreckage and deposit them into a separate, tight, dense pile. Clicking her heels twice once more, the superheroine caused the cyclone to go away.

"I need to make sure the fountain is safe," she noted, her voice full of the Scarecrow's wisdom.

Using the Lion's speed, the superheroine was suddenly by the J.C. Nichols Memorial Fountain, clearing rubble from the water in a flash. After briefly converting her flesh and bone to organic tin, she used the edge of her hand to cut away a piece of jagged metal, demonstrating the proficiency of the Tin Woodsman.

"Thanks, Gale-Force," a store owner called out, sweeping glass from their doorway.

"Be sure to check your foundation," she called back, already moving to the next spot, a streak of speed.

"You're not afraid of the cleanup?" A local reporter asked, catching her for a quick comment.

Gale-Force laughed – a sound that, while not roaring, held the power of the Cowardly Lion, making the reporter jump slightly.

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"Courage isn't just about fighting, sir," the superheroine said. "It's about putting things back together."

With another double click of her boots, she cleared a final pile of debris from the walkway. She took a breath, assessing the area. The Plaza looked pristine, almost as if the battle had been a dream.

"Good as new," she murmured. Soon, her enhanced sensory abilities detected the distinct, chaotic magical/scientific signature of Elphaba's sensors monitoring her.

Suddenly, Elphaba had appeared before Gale-Force, attracting her attention. The scientist's Phase Disruption Trigger had worked flawlessly.

"Found you," Elphaba hissed.

"Who are you? How did you find me? And what are you doing here?" The superheroine asked.

"I am Dr. Elphaba Lumina, Gale-Force. I found you by means of my Phase Disruption Trigger which allows me to track your magical energy signature," the scientist answered. "And I am here to destroy you!"

"And once I've destroyed you," she added. "I will go after Glinda and seize her crown!"

"Not on my watch, you won't," Gale-Force vowed as she converted her flesh and bone to organic tin and manifested her axe.

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As Gale-Force as about to attack, Lumina triggered a Localized Gravity Well which blossomed at the superheroine's feet, pinning her to the ground with a force that threatened to shatter the concrete beneath her.

Gale-Force grunted, pushing against the invisible weight. The tin body was heavy, the Scarecrow's wisdom a frantic heat map in her mind.

She isn't predicting me, Gale-Force realized, her voice, a strained metallic resonance. She's a reactionary hunter. My power is her bait.

"You're a genius, Lumina," Gale-Force roared, bracing her axe against the crushing weight. "You know every action has an equal and opposite reaction! You built a cage out of my own strength!"

"I built a coffin," Elphaba retorted, raising the power output. She activated the Dissonance Array and the Apex Overloaders. A searing high-frequency hum tore through the air, vibrating Gale-Force's tin body until it began to flake and crack. The Overloaders assaulted her nervous system, sending shards of false pain and blinding light into her "Lion's senses".

Gale-Force's vision blurred. The pain was immense. But the "Lion's Courage" wasn't just bravery; it was an emotional override switch. She forced her lungs to draw air, her "Scarecrow" mind focusing past the pain to the frequency of the attack.

If she tracks the magic, I must give her too much to track, the superheroine thought as she used the Scarecrow's intelligence to deduce the origin point of the scientist's sensors.

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Gale-Force stopped fighting the gravity and the pain. She embraced them. She spun her axe – not at Lumina, but into the ground at the center of the gravity well, channeling the full kinetic feedback into the field.

As Lumina sensing triumph, deployed the Molecular Anchor to lock the superheroine's metallic structure permanently, Gale-Force did the unthinkable: she triggered a teleport dash and a "Lion's Roar" simultaneously, a reckless magical feedback loop.

Elphaba's gadgets went haywire. The Anchor tried to jam a target that was suddenly both present and absent, solid and sonic. The Energy Shield Lumina threw up around herself to protect her from the backwash began to flicker and crack under the sheer, unfiltered volume of sensory and magical input.

"Too much noise?" Gale-Force's voice was a chaotic chorus of iron and wind.

The superheroine used the "Apex Predator" instincts (the Cowardly Lion's courage as an override) to sense the microsecond Lumina's scarred eye blinked, a momentary vulnerability in the tracking stream. Gale-Force didn't teleport away; she teleported dashed to the tight, dense pile of the heaviest pieces of the clockwork soldier wreckage. Touching the debris on focusing intensely on the coordinates of Lumina's sensors, while clicking her heels three times with incredible speed, the superheroine teleported the rubble directly into the path of the scientist's sensors.

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The scientist's own machines, overloaded and confused by a hundred different magical signatures, turned on themselves. The Gravity Well collapsed inward, and the Dissonance Array shattered.

Gale-Force surged upward, a silver streak. She landed softly in front of Lumina, who was now blinded by the static feedback.

The problem with tracking a signature, Lumina," Gale-Force said, her tin face reflecting the scientist's horrified, fading amber eye, "is that you eventually become part of the circuit you're measuring."

With a gentle tap of her axe's pommel against Lumina's gauntlet, Gale-Force grounded the electrical build-up. The scientist slumped, the weight of her own counter-measures finally pulling her down into the quiet of the Country Club Plaza.

Soon, police arrived on the scene.

"Elphaba Lumina, you're under arrest," one of the officers said as he handcuffed the scientist. "You have the right to remain silent."

As the police led her away, Elphaba looked back at the superheroine.

"I'll get even with you, Gale-Force," she vowed. "One day, I will destroy you and take Glinda's crown for myself!"

"I doubt you will, Lumina," Gale-Force said. "But I'll be ready the next time you try."

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The superheroine watched as the police drove off with Lumina.

Now to clean up my mess, Gale-Force thought before clicking the heels of her magic silver boots twice to summon a cyclone which gathered up the debris she used to block Lumina's sensors and deposited them back to where she had them. Once the task was complete, she once again clicked her heels twice to make the cyclone go away.

Now to head for home, the superheroine thought, before clicking the heels of her boots three times while focusing on her desired destination.

Gale-Force disappeared from the Country Club Plaza in a flash.

THE END

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