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Ridley Scott is rolling the dice on a 'Monopoly' movie and here's why

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A **Monopoly** movie? When word first spread about **Universal's** plan to make a film based on the venerable board game, it wasn't hard to predict the smirking suggestion from every skeptic within arm's reach of a computer keyboard: "*Do not pass go, do not collect \$200 ...*"

Then came word that **Ridley Scott**, of all people, was interested in directing the project and, well, observers just didn't know *what* to think. Why on earth would the filmmaker behind "**Gladiator**," "**Alien**" and "**Blade Runner**" be interested in the dapper little cartoon-capitalist called **Uncle Pennybags**?

But **Frank Beddor**, a pivotal figure in the project's odyssey, says doubters should remember that a film's core concept is merely a starting place, not the whole ride. "Everybody reacted the same way when they heard that there was going to be a '**Pirates of the Caribbean**' movie -- and I did too."

I talked to Beddor for a **Los Angeles Times Calender** cover story on "**The Looking Glass Wars**" (you can read it [here on the blog](#)), his reimagining of **Lewis Carroll's** classic characters -- **Alice**, the **Mad**

Hatter, the **Cheshire Cat**, etc. -- as players in a dark fantasy epic of royal intrigue and magical battlefields. Our conversation turned to his interesting role in the Monopoly enterprise and he revealed quite a bit about the premise that lured Scott into the project.



"I wrote the story that got **Hasbro** excited and I attached Ridley Scott," said Beddor, who may be best known in Hollywood as the producer of "**There's Something About Mary**," one of the top-grossing comedies ever. "The project was underway but they were in a little bit of trouble I guess and they were looking for a way to actually turn it into a movie. I had a pretty interesting take and it got Sir Ridley interested ... "

Beddor said his inspiration came from Carroll and the "Looking Glass Wars" experience: "They have this big world and this game -- it's the most famous board game in the world -- and it just really came out of the whole 'Alice' thing. I took the approach of thinking of the main character falling down a rabbit hole and into a real place called **Monopoly City** ... It was the re-engineering of '**Alice in Wonderland**' that got me thinking and then with this it came around full circle and I was able to utilize that. That's a big world. They were searching for that."

I found myself thinking that "Monopoly" as imagined by Beddor might recall special-effects comedies such as "**Bedtime Stories**," "**Night at the Museum**" and "**The Mask**" as the writer continued with his description of the project.

"I created a comedic, lovable loser who lives in Manhattan and works at a real estate company and he's not very good at his job but he's *great* at playing Monopoly. And the world record for playing is 70 straight days – over 1,600 hours – and he wanted to try to convince his friends to help him break that world record.

They think he is crazy. They kid him about this girl and they're playing the game and there's this big fight. And he's holding a **Chance card** and after they've left he says, '*Damn, I wanted to use that Chance card,*' and he throws it down. He falls asleep and then he wakes up in the morning and he's holding the Chance card, and he thinks, '*That's odd.*'"

Yes, this is all going where you think it is. Beddor continued:

"He's all groggy and he goes down to buy some coffee and he reaches into his pocket and all he has is Monopoly money. All this Monopoly money pours out. He's confused and embarrassed and the girl reaches across the counter and says, '*That's OK.*' And she gives him change in Monopoly money. He walks outside and he's in this very vibrant place, Monopoly City,



and he's just come out of a Chance Shop. As it goes on, he takes on the evil **Parker Brothers** in the game of Monopoly. He has to defeat them. It tries to incorporate all the iconic imageries -- a sports car pulls up, there's someone on a horse, someone pushing a wheelbarrow -- and rich Uncle Pennybags, you're going to see him as the *maitre d'* at the restaurant and he's the buggy driver and the local eccentric and the doorman at the opera. There's all these sight gags."

The idea of a human dropping down into the logic and universe of the board game (not unlike "**Jumanji**," I suppose) might work as a film, but how did Scott end up as an interested player? "Well it was that pitch, that's where Sir Ridely got excited. After I pitched it to him, he put out his hand and said, 'What do I have to be part of this movie?' "



Beddor still sounded surprised as he recounted this part. "So I said, 'Do you mean you want to *direct* it?' And he said, 'Yeah, and I will tell you why – it's all the things you just said and the fact that I had these epic Monopoly battles with my family when I was young.'"

Well, I guess it's good that Scott wasn't a

Rock, Paper, Scissors fan or we'd be watching two hours of hand pumping showdowns. I know that's not fair, but even after talking to Beddor I'm still skeptical that I want to spend hours in a darkened theater with Uncle Pennybags and the thimble.

Beddor chuckled. He's heard all the wisecracks and naysayers. "Look, so

much of it is about the execution. You know the visual component is going to be beautiful with Ridley. And you have all of the world editions to deal with -- there are different editions of the game so the city won't be limited to the Atlantic City edition that we know in America. Ridley grew up with the British version"

While Beddor's story was a key moment in the life of the project, **Pamela Pettner** is the screenwriter. "Things will change, it's been a couple of years since I came up with all that. I did my job where I created this world so they could get really excited and get Ridley excited."

I mentioned to Beddor that these days, with the economic turmoil and the populist venom toward Wall Street, it might be an extra challenge to present a film ode to wheeler-dealer culture, renter gouging and fat cats in spats.

"Well it's not about that; it can't be just about the money. To me it's more a metaphor for life, the taking of chances and this character through this process learns that he can do a lot of things. He's completely brave and strategic and risk-taking while playing this game but in real life he's a mess. He won't roll the dice. *That's* the character and journey he has to take."

OK, but is that a journey for the rest of us? I have some childhood memories of Monopoly myself and a lot of them involve everybody walking away from the game long before it was finished.

-- Geoff Boucher