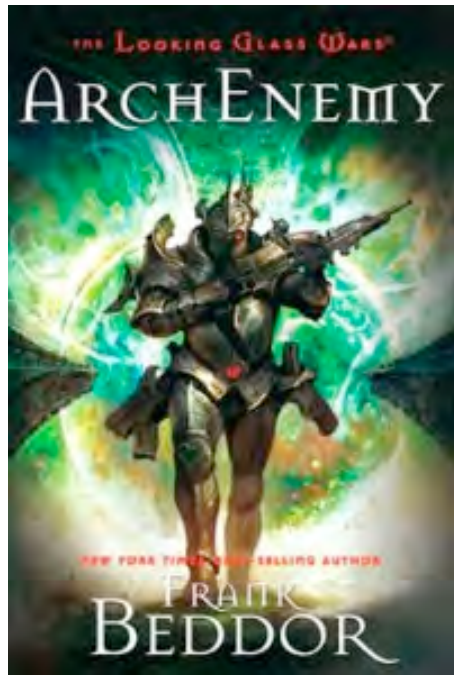


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Review: Frank Beddor's Arch Enemy

5 DECEMBER 2009 COMMENTS (0)



I've been looking forward to writing my review of this book for quite some time now. Some overtime at Ye Olde Daye Jobe, mixed with some health problems, has prevented that for quite some time. However, the long-awaited review has arrived!

Firstly, **Arch Enemy** being the concluding novel in Frank Beddor's *Looking Glass Wars* trilogy, there may be some spoilers in this review for the first two volumes. Read with caution.

Here is a synopsis (taken from the LGW [website](#)):

The war for Wonderland has become a war for Imagination!

King Arch has declared himself King of Wonderland as Alyss searches wildly for the solution to the metaphysical disaster that has engulfed her Queendom. The power of Imagination has been lost!

Alyss's search for answers takes her to London where Arch's assassins threaten Alice Liddell and her family. But after coming to her adopted family's assistance, Alyss discovers herself trapped in a conundrum of evaporating puddles. The shimmering portals that exist to transport her home through the Pool of Tears are disappearing! What is happening in Wonderland? Deep within the Valley of Mushrooms the Caterpillar Oracles issue this prophecy: "Action shall be taken to ensure the safety of the Heart Crystal. For Everqueen." But who is Everqueen?

As the metamorphosis of Wonderland unfolds, enemies become allies, bitter rivals face-off, and Queen Alyss and Redd Heart must confront their pasts in this thrilling, no-holds-barred conclusion to the New York Times best-selling series.

I discovered the first volume of this engaging trilogy a year or so ago. Aptly titled *The Looking Glass Wars*, it caught my attention both because of the unique steampunk-y robots on the cover, and because I've always loved the story of *Alice In Wonderland*. Who wouldn't want to fall down the rabbit hole – if only for a little while?

The idea that Alice – or Alyss, as is the "correct" spelling of the name in the series – was originally from Wonderland and only arrived in London to meet Lewis Carroll in the first place because of a palace coup... That is such a unique twist on an old story (and I'm a sucker for those) that I couldn't help but pick up the book.

The premise is that Alyss' Aunt Redd, who had been banished years before for dealing in "Black" Imagination (magic, essentially), has sent her ultimate henchman – the Cat – to begin a masterful first stroke in a civil war. Redd succeeds in killing the current King and Queen of Hearts, but not before the family's most trusted

advisor, Hatter Madigan, escapes with the young Princess Alyss to Earth. In their traveling, they are separated and Alyss ends up being taken for a street orphan in Victorian London. She is taken in by a loving family who raises her, during the course of which she meets young Mr. Carroll whom she trusts (wrongly, as it turns out) with her story.

The first volume is about getting Alyss back to Wonderland and back on the throne. The second, called *Seeing Redd*, is a tale of Alyss' life as a young ruler, beleaguered by not only the usual trials of running a kingdom but also by the resurrected foot soldier's of Redd's army – not to mention a brand new enemy. The last volume is *Arch Enemy*.

So let's talk about that last volume. *Arch Enemy* is ultimately a satisfying conclusion to the story. It wraps up all of the loose plot threads into a nice neat package and hands it to you like a holiday gift. The ending is like the predictable, but still satisfying, gift of fuzzy socks and warm pajamas that you receive every year from your dear Aunt Edna. You knew you were going to get it, you just had to wait until the right time for it.

That's how I feel about this book. The caterpillar's prophecies were suitably cryptic, but there's no hiding what their scheming is aiming toward. The same is true of the resolution of the problems with Imagination in Wonderland and the final battle for control of the kingdom. That struggle isn't quite as much fun when you already know who's going to win. (But just in case you haven't figured it out yet, I won't tell you here.)

All in all, *Arch Enemy* is an absorbing read and a great ending to the trilogy. There are real emotional struggles going on – especially those of Hatter Madigan and Homburg Molly. I was moved most especially by Molly's point of view in the last two books. There is also a really interesting look at prejudice and equality happening in this last volume – in regards to those talented with Imagination versus those who are not. And throughout all three, there was the unifying theory that through imagination and determination, anything is possible.

Things I loved: Hatter Madigan's hat-of-a-thousand-weapons. The Pool of Tears. Homburg Molly's earnest, gangly attempts at becoming her own person. The Cat. The caterpillar's hookahs. The Chessboard Desert. When Redd's old hideout is made into a museum. Redd's reaction to her home being made into a tourist attraction. The art. My goodness! The awesomeness of the art! This series is worth picking up for the art alone.

The only thing that disappointed me about *Arch Enemy* is that I found myself nodding along with the concluding events instead of being surprised by them. This is marketed as a young adult novel, so perhaps the Disney ending shouldn't be too big of a surprise; but I feel as if Mr. Beddor wasn't giving the kids enough credit. Not everything needs to be a tied up with a big pink bow.

Despite the fact that the conclusion doesn't quite match up to the surprises in the rest of the series, I still believe this trilogy is worth the read. If you like the tale of Alice in Wonderland, coming of age stories, steampunk, the Victorian era, or really (**really**) kick-ass hats, then I'd recommend *The Looking Glass Wars* for you.

Rating: ★★★★★

FTC Disclaimer: While I picked up the first two books of this series on my own, the publisher did send me a review copy of the last volume, *Arch Enemy*. I was delighted, but I would have bought my own copy if they hadn't. They also sent some really, really awesome art. Be jealous.