

## Through a glass darkly

*Frank Beddor's debut novel offers a twisted take on the story of Alice in Wonderland.*

American film producer and actor Frank Beddor was about 12 years old when he first came across Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland*—and he loathed it. “My grandmother, who was called Alice, loved it, and so did my mother. They introduced it to me and I really hated it. I thought it was a girls’ book, nothing ever happened.” He says his debut novel, *The Looking Glass Wars*, published by Egmont in September (£12.99, 140509879), is his revenge.

*The Looking Glass Wars* introduces us to the “real” Alice, Alyss Heart, and the “true” story of Wonderland, a country riven by civil war and dominated by the deeply vicious Queen Redd. Alyss, heir apparent to Wonderland, escapes death by fleeing to Edwardian England, where she meets the Reverend Charles Dodgson, who writes a “nonsensical” version of her story. Eventually, Alyss finds her way back to Wonderland to try to rescue her people and the forces of good, or White Imagination.

Beddor was inspired to look beyond Dodgson's version of Wonderland by the images he saw on a pack of ancient cards, during a trip to the UK five years ago for the premiere of “There's Something About Mary”—he'd produced the film. “I had time to go to the British Museum and saw this set of ancient cards. It was incomplete, but I then met an antiquities dealer who had the remaining cards—and from that point I started to think about the whole story.”

Throughout *The Looking Glass Wars* there are twisted mirror images of Dodgson's story, including Generals Doppel and Gänger, a white albino professor with big ears, and Hatter Madigan, who does a special line in deadly hats.



**Beddor: act of revenge**

Beddor's film production background is evident in the book's page-turning action and (often) gory detail. “I'm so rooted in acting and theatre that the book is conceived more in a language of cinema than anything else. I started developing this as a film property first but when I saw the richness of the world, I felt a film on its own wouldn't do it justice, and that it needed to be grounded in a literary project.”

Since he found the prospect of writing his debut novel quite daunting, he immersed himself in the world visually, calling on colleagues to create visuals of key landscapes including the Valley of Mushrooms and Redd's fortress. “By the time I came to write it, my whole office and every wall were covered in models and artwork.”

Beddor was determined that the book should first be published in the UK, home of Alice, and his agent Barbara Marshall secured a deal with Egmont last autumn. There will be a trilogy of novels, covering Alyss' journey. “At the end of the first book she is thrust into power, just like her mother was, and the second books describes how she copes with that.”

The author is also creating other storylines, including Hatter Madigan's years on Earth and Redd's 13-year reign, which he is hoping to develop into other media such as video games, graphic novels, and so on—all an extra enticement for young male readers.

Beddor is also chief executive of Automatic Pictures, a film, television, and interactive game production company. He says, “There are lots of opportunities to use different media, to create this as a brand.” A film deal is under discussion, with confirmation expected in the next couple of months.