



## Exclusive: Frank Beddor Interview

Part Two of our discussion with the author of *The Looking Glass Wars*

**June 26, 2005** - While US readers are awaiting news on the North American publication of *The Looking Glass Wars*, (already a hit in the UK), IGN arranged an exclusive interview with its author, Frank Beddor. The first item from *The Looking Glass Wars* to hit stateside is the graphic novel *Hatter Madigan*, inked by *30 Days of Night*'s Ben Templesmith.

In the **first part** of our interview with Beddor, Frank talked about some of his influences, his background, and approaches to writing. In part two of the interview, which took place in Beddor's Los Angeles production office, we delve a bit deeper into Beddor's world including how he worked on the project in secret, some of the reviews and notices he's gotten, and the overall scope of *The Looking Glass Wars* universe and how it will spool out to the public.

**Steven Horn, IGN FilmForce: Can you talk about some of the ups and downs that you experienced working on this project? You must have had very good days and some terrible days.**

**Frank Beddor:** I think the creative process works like that. It's the roller coaster of life which mirrors creating something where you have down days, low energy, low creative output, and then something happens. One spark and it snowballs, you ride out that wave, hit the beach, swim hard, then look for the next wave, you miss three waves in a row, then you catch one wave and you go 'whoah, this wave's even bigger!, let's see how far I can ride it!."

*Beddor, a successful film producer (There's Something About Mary) worked on The Looking Glass Wars project for years in relative secrecy.*

"What I kept feeling was 'I have a little secret, I'm going to share this little secret,' no one else knows about it and it was a literal secret because I was paranoid about any external pressure that would influence the creative process. I didn't want any psychological damage from friends saying 'You're writing a book?' which, in this town, translates to 'Oh, I'm sorry.' I didn't want any pressure so I didn't tell any of my friends. I said 'You know what? I'll tell my family, I'll tell my girlfriend, a few people I work with,' everybody signed non-disclosure agreements. When people asked me what I was up to, I would just dance around the question with less meaningful things. Once I had the publishing deal, that somehow made it real. A book is not a book until it's interacting with someone like yourself. You read the book and it's your reaction to it, it's now in your world, it's in your mind. It's not a book until that happens. I didn't want it to be *my* book, I wanted it to be **a** book, a book to share, a real book.

**Horn: Let's talk about the LGW world and how it's going to come out to our world. How much control do you have?**

**Beddor:** I own it solely. No one else can influence it as if it was in partnership with a studio or some other third party financier. I sold only the rights to the UK and Commonwealth for publishing. Then I sold Germany, I sold France, if I didn't want to sell Asia, I wouldn't have to. I want to do it with the right company, the right publisher.

**Horn: Is it possible to maintain that control across all media?**

**Beddor:** Only one person's ever done it and that's George Lucas. I don't think anyone will be able to repeat the kind of control and domination that he had over his creation.



Heeeeeelllooooo Queen Redd!

My approach is from the inside out.

Instead of starting with the movie and with driving the movie hard with marketing dollars into popular culture and then seeing how you can spawn off all these other revenue sources, mine is to create storytelling over all of these different ideas, so if I want to do a graphic novel or if I think about it as a musical or if I want to do it as a series of books or I want to do it as a movie, I can create the architecture, the sequencing as to how it might come out. To sell the movie rights, it just means they are going to request/require all of these other ancillary rights. I want to do a movie, I am a movie producer, but I'd rather do other movies and let the audience discover this slowly, bubbling up from the inside out than hitting them over the head with a hammer to say 'hey, come see our movie.' I want the audience to take ownership and discover it, like you discovered it, that's the purest way

"I had this crazy idea. I wrote the outline for the prequel and I thought that that could be a musical, like *Wicked*, because

it's about two teenage girls fighting for power and a guy gets in the middle of them, who ends up to be King Nolan. That would again extend and connect the story, wouldn't step on the book, wouldn't step on the movie version of the book, but if I did it and that was the entry point and if I did a good job, that would be for a particular kind of audience and they would enjoy it. *Hatter Madigan*, which would be a graphic novel, that's a completely different kind of story, a little bit darker, to a different audience to a smaller, less

expensive medium. I can control that. I can do everything to make a graphic novel and then sell it to a distributor and make a publishing deal. A movie, because of the scope or a big videogame, requires a partnership. I will do that, but I want to be really cautious and selective and bring as many of the pieces together before I make those decisions."

**Horn: Critics are going to look at the book and the graphic novel. Do you care about how they respond or is it enough that the story is out there and other people will discover it?**

**Beddor:** If the question is, do I care about how they respond to it, the answer is of course! I care a great deal because they influence the scope of the audience and who wouldn't want someone to like what they are doing? If they're critical because I am taking an unusual approach, which is a story arc over numerous platforms, in essence creating a franchise, and they look at that negatively or as a producer looking to exploit all of the different mediums, that I don't care about as much because I know the ideas came out of a creative place.

I've gotten some flack for coming up with the roller coaster. Someone said 'That's going to put off a lot of creative people that you created a roller coaster, like they're going to think that that cheapens it. I had a dream about a Looking Glass roller coaster. I grew up about a mile away from an amusement park that had a roller coaster, one of those old wooden ones, it was the coolest thing in the world! So if it's a cool roller coaster, why not? Certain directors secretly want to have a roller coaster at Universal Studios, but they won't tell anybody.

What can you say about that? It's creative. Everything that I've been exposed to, everything in popular culture it all builds on each other and it becomes something new for a contemporary audience. I'm not out in the moors, in a rainstorm, communing with nature, coming up with this stuff on my own. I'm using all of these influences of popular culture because I grew up in the middle of popular culture so that's what I have to create from.

**Horn: And the critics?**

**Beddor:** I've been fortunate and I had some really nice notices. However, I've also gotten slammed. Most of those people slammed the idea of the book, before they had even read it. However, a few people, the two people I am thinking of, Will Brooker, an Oxford Scholar who wrote a book called *Alice's Adventures: Lewis Carroll in Popular Culture* which was a very interesting book, he said that my book was one of the worst books he's ever read. I'm not worried about him though, if an Oxford Scholar likes my book, I'm in trouble. The other was the guy from the Lewis Carroll society who hated it. He said I didn't understand Lewis Carroll. As if that's what I was writing about!"

**Horn: Does stuff like that deter you?**

**Beddor:** It's too late, I'm deep into it. I'm putting it out there." (laughs)

**Horn: What's the time frame that this spools out over? Are we talking about years and years?**

**Beddor:** I hope so. I look at what George Lucas did. He did a "60 Minutes" piece and said something remarkable. He said, 'I think I've earned the right to fail, for the rest of my life.' Can you imagine? I aspire to get to the point in my life where I can say that about this, live for something for 20 years. The LGW world is very large and extendable. I think I'm going to be able to enrich the experience over a lot of different mediums over a long period of time. I want to manage it and I want the audience to be with me, as if in a partnership.



Frank Beddor in a London bookstore, May 2005, reading from his work.

"It's starting in the UK for a very specific reason, because you know, people's perception of the original started there, even though I think in most people's minds, it's Walt Disney's version. A lot of great children's lit is coming out of the UK. It's also a place

to see how people react before I come to America. A little test run. If I got beat up too much, I might be able to have a little thicker skin.

**Horn: What is the status of the game? What type of game are you looking at and what age group are you shooting for?**

**Beddor:** The reason that the game is exciting is that there is a void in the book that the playability of the game, this missing story, would fit really nicely. So I basically have this large jigsaw puzzle and a couple of pieces would fit beautifully into a role-playing game. There is a 13-year reign of the character Redd, which is touched on in the book, but what was going on in those in 13 years? What was she doing, where did she come from? I can explain that, I can delve into that in the role-playing game. That's a pretty exciting idea to have a different medium to express the world in a different way that still connects people if they read the book but if they just play the game, they can still understand it. The problem with doing games is that the publishers are very fearful of launching original properties. They're all interested if I have a movie deal, everybody's interested if I have a movie deal. I have a trilogy of books and a trilogy of graphic novels. One of those stories I think could be a standalone fight/adventure game. I am in the middle of trying to realize that and put that together."

**Horn: What I like about the story is that there are multiple access points to it through different age groups. As you were writing the book, did you take that into consideration or is it just a happy accident?**

**Beddor:** That's just an accident. I had a lot of people turn me down saying 'You can't

write a character who is seven, then 11, then 20.' In Harry Potter, the kids who were buying the book could identify with the characters because they were the same age. In terms of demographic, this is the character, this is her quest, this is her journey. My argument in return was 'If you're eleven, you'll want to see her at eleven.' Whatever's the latest, which was Harry Potter, you're put in that box. If you're outside that box, they say it's not going to work.

**Horn: But don't Harry Potter readers get older?**

**Beddor:** They do. But they always go back to, they reduce it down to, 'where are you launching it? Who is the base?' and what's really remarkable about *The Looking Glass Wars* is that the UK publisher, because they're a children's publisher, they're publishing it 10-14. Germany, they are publishing it as an adult book and they'll pick up the kids after the adults get through it. In the US, I've talked to both adult fiction and children's publishers. I think if I express the world in both a visual way, that'll pull both boys and girls in, and if they read the book, it'll skew across all age groups. It's what I hope. If it doesn't, I'll have a trilogy of graphic novels which is a little edgier, a little bit more male skewing. I also got criticized because some people thought it was too violent, which was a big early criticism.

**Horn: Is it possible to be exposed to one part of the story and not care about the others? I think of *Hatter Madigan*. Is it a complete story?**

**Beddor:** It is going to be a complete world unto itself. It will have arcs like any other long-running series. Each issue will have a beginning, middle, and end. His journey, his quest, takes place over 13 years. That's skipped over in the book. Yes, if I do a good job of filling in the backstory to launch it, you'll understand. If you really wanted to get into it, you would read the book or go onto the website. I'm hoping I can create them so they're standalone and it's just a more rewarding, deeper experience, and more fun.

**Horn: Can you talk about some of the controversy in the UK surrounding your book's publication?**

**Beddor:** The main question was should or shouldn't people revisit the classics. Somebody said to me at a press conference, 'Is there not one classic, Mr. Beddor, that you feel should not go untouched?' I said, 'Well, that's a good question. There is one classic that I hope no one ever touches or remakes.' They said 'Tell us, please. We're very interested in knowing. What is that?' I said 'The film *There's Something About Mary*.' Nothing. No laughter. Crickets! I said of course people should be able to reinterpret, reimagine, and recreate stories to reflect the times.' What's remarkable is how many people have been influenced by Alice and how it's used as a jumping off point, a springboard for all sorts of different things. In the Clift Hotel, in San Francisco, Ian Schrager did a Wonderland-like entrance with oversized chairs. Gwen Stefani's new video is all Alice-influenced. Tom Petty. So I was really curious why it's ok for Jfferosn Airplane to write "White Rabbit," but why people hold on to books and literature. What is it about that that is different from movies? I said I was as outraged by their attempt to defile *Dawn of the Dead* with *Shaun of the Dead*. That's outrageous to us, there's a big

controversy in America. (laughs).

I will say they do care passionately about books, more than we do here, at least broader based and certainly in the media. They want to talk about books, it's kind of their baby, they take great ownership.

**Horn: Did you feel like you were being pigeon-holed as a movie producer?"**

**Beddor:** This only increases the notion of it if I say it, but it was a "one hit wonder" kind of thing. You were lucky. What has he done for us lately? I think I can successfully launch this and interface with all of the people I've worked with in the past. A lot of people are just starting to learn about the property because I haven't been 'out there' tooting my horn. Getting back into the producing chair, moving some properties forward, I need to make a living like everybody else. I think I've discovered a methodology that is repeatable. It's all going to be worth it because other people with other like-minded properties will come to me because of this idea of taking things that are steeped in popular culture, redefining them, telling the story over different platforms giving a much wider experience. Technology is driving entertainment. I'm trying to keep up with technology. If you want to listen to the book on your iPod or you want to listen to this interview or you want to see Hatter Madigan do his thing on my website, it'll happen. I can do little five minute episodes that could be downloaded to your phone. I enjoy that part of the big picture, the mapping of the storytelling. Technology and innovation and great story-telling, that's what I want to keep up with. I hope when people start to see the complexity and the way I mapped this, they'll go 'Hey, can you do that for our property?' That might be new niche, not that I just do gross-out comedies.

**Horn: I'm interested in your belief that Wonderland is the source of all creativity here in our world.**

**Beddor:** This has always been the fundamental discovery behind *The Looking Glass Wars* - the relationship between Wonderland and our world. That Wonderland does exist and that its emanations are what history has termed "inspiration", "creativity", "dreams", "muses", "ideas" - that all of these invisible influences come from Wonderland to people (in varying degrees) who are open to receiving them. These for the most part would be artists, dreamers, inventors and, of course, children. How open you are to Wonderland's unseen influences will determine your level of imagination. Children are wide open until they grow up or are told to grow up, fit in, be like everyone else - leaving only a small percentage of the adult population still believing in the unseen world and open to its endless gifts. Those who remain open are enriched and empowered.

-- Steven Horn