

REVOLUTION

SCIENCE FICTION

Following the Glow

An Interview with Frank Beddor

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If you think you knew the story of Alice In Wonderland, think again. In a very different and idyllic parallel world known as Wonderland, the Princess Alyss Heart is destined to become Queen, until her exiled Aunt Redd returns, murders her parents and puts Wonderland under her tyrannical rule. The exiled and hunted Alyss escapes to our world where she becomes known as Alice Liddell and tells her story to a friendly pastor. Years pass and the Wonderland rebels eventually find their missing Princess Alyss, persuading her to return and face the perils of the Looking Glass Maze.

Hollywood producer Frank Beddor is best known as the producer of *There's Something About Mary* and is currently transforming Monopoly the board game into *Monopoly: The Movie*. In his debut novel, *The Looking Glass Wars*, he creates a fantasy world that immediately grabs you and presents so many possibilities for storytelling and character growth that it lingers in the imagination.

On par with Middle-earth and Narnia, Beddor's Wonderland is not the surreal world of Lewis Carroll or the colorful sing-along of Disney. It's a place where the power of imagination reigns, but with its own dark secrets and a plethora of fully rounded characters. Beddor weaves an eventful, powerful tale, at once familiar and totally new, that sucks you in and propels you along at a breakneck speed.

Originally published in the U.K. by Egmont, *The Looking Glass Wars* is set to be published in the U.S. on September 26, 2006 from Penguin.

The book is just the start of Beddor's plans for telling the tale of Alyss Heart, with a CD soundtrack in production, online games planned and a spin-off comic series on the shelves.

The comic, *Hatter M*, published by Desperados and distributed by Image, tells the tales of Alyss' bodyguard, the mysterious and deadly Hatter Madigan, as he searches our world for his missing queen. The opening arc has the Hatter in Paris in the 1850s where he encounters mob justice, a mysterious stranger by the name of Jules Verne and a mad magician with designs on his hat. For this is no ordinary hat, it's a weapon of great potential. The book has a very distinctive look thanks to art by Ben Templesmith, who uses his signature wash style to great effect.

I recently had the opportunity to ask Beddor a few questions about *The Looking Glass Wars* and *Hatter M*.



Alan Porter: *The Looking Glass Wars* is one of those concepts that on the surface seems so simple yet has endless possibilities. So where did the idea come from of turning the *Alice In Wonderland* we know on its head? Was it really inspired by a deck of cards in a London antiquarian store as the books' introduction suggests? I've read in interviews that you "discovered" the story rather than created it. Why do you use that particular term. Did you feel the story was just sitting out there waiting to be found?

Frank Beddor: Since you've read the interviews where I explain the origin of *The Looking Glass Wars*, I'll skip that and answer "yes" to your question of whether it

was really inspired by a deck of cards, with the clarification that an incomplete deck of cards was initially discovered in the British Museum. It was only after my introduction to the cards in the museum that I discovered the antiquities dealer with the remaining cards . . . and the explanation.

I use the term "discovered" for the story because that's what happened. I believe stories and images are literally everywhere, waiting to be noticed, to be passed on. If something interests me or excites my imagination, I have to trust that it will do the same for others. I think what I really bring as a writer is the ability to create lucid form, to find the proper frame to communicate the story as I sense it should be told so readers or an audience can experience and hopefully enjoy it as much as I do. So for me, writing is really the discovery of a subtler realm and not absolute creation.

How familiar were you with the works of Lewis Carroll and the *Alice* books before you started working on *The Looking Glass Wars*?

I think everyone is pretty familiar with the books to a certain degree. It is one of the most quoted books in history so cultural references abound. But as far as being a hardcore fan, I'd say my familiarity with the books ranked pretty low.

So why would a bigtime movie producer take the time out to create a rich fantasy world like this and then publish it as a book and spin-off comic series rather than a special effects-laden, big-screen extravaganza?

To try something different. To really explore the world and the characters before they had to be crushed and formulated into a very expensive film where there would be many hands and opinions involved. To keep it private and personal for as long as possible and then slowly share it. To keep it alive and growing. To protect it.



You seem to have a plan to expand *The Looking Glass Wars* into a multi-media franchise with the spin-off comics, the website and the online games. What is the overall vision for the future?

The deeper I go the deeper it gets. My overall vision for the future is to keep exploring. There's 13 years of Hatter's search to cover. There's Redd's backstory as the villainous future Queen growing up a rebellious teen enthralled by Black Imagination. There's books two and three of the *LGW* trilogy. More comics and graphic novels. I do see films eventually, when the material is solidly entrenched enough in the world's imagination to keep the films true to form.

The Alice Liddell of the book is a fascinating character. How closely is she based on your perceptions of the real life Alice Liddell and her relationship with Charles Dodgson?

Some very interesting biographical parallels exist. One important point that I always stress in fairness to Charles Dodgson/Lewis Carroll is that the postmodern academic fascination with the rift which occurred between Alice Liddell/Alyss Heart and Lewis Carroll was in no way related to the rumors of pedophilia. Alyss was quite simply (and rightly so) enraged by his depiction of her in his books. She felt betrayed that he reduced her harrowing exile to the level of a nonsensical children's book. Alyss was indeed angry, and Lewis Carroll guilty, but only of biographic betrayal.

In the book the figure of The Hatter is something of an enigma. Was there an early conscious decision to flesh out his character in the spin-off comic series (*Hatter M*) or was that something that just grew during the development period?

Book One is told through Alyss' point of view. In the course of telling the initial story I wanted to stay to her perspective. In Book One, I spent roughly four chapters on Hatter Madigan's emerging in Paris and realizing he had lost the future Queen of Wonderland. His 13-year odyssey of crisscrossing the globe to find Alyss was only briefly set up and explained, as much as Alyss herself would have learned later in life, but I knew there was much more to tell.

Evidently, so did many of my fans in the U.K. who found the Hatter fascinating and insisted I tell more of his story. This led to the decision to do a comic book series telling the story from Hatter Madigan's point of view.

Are you hoping that the comic book series will draw new readers to the book?

There already seems to be a sort of mandala in place where readers from one medium continue on to the other medium, no matter where they begin. It's a circulating circle of interest that continues to build energy and attract readers to both. Either way, readers seem to want more of the world and that's a great thing.

The book appears to be written for a young adult audience (although like the best fantasy it has a lot to appeal to adult readers too). Was that a conscious decision to try and capture the *Harry Potter* generation of readers?

No. I just wrote the story I wanted to write and it so happened that I sold it to a young adult readers publisher in the U.K. and the states. But interestingly enough, the German publisher started the book as adult fiction. Of course I do hope that it crosses over and it is a story that every age can enjoy.

What's planned for the two follow-up books?

I can't tell you — that's definitely top secret — but plan on plenty of Imagination. And I will tell you the title for book two is *Seeing Redd*.



I understand that the *Hatter M* comic series is designed to bridge between the first two volumes. Are similar bridging series planned, and do you have plans for other related comic book series or graphic novels?

YES to all of the above. We have two more comic book mini-series planned to

complete our trilogy of "Geo-Graphic Novels". Rather than graphic novels we've been playing with the idea of calling them Geo-Graphic Novels since the adventures are broken up geographically and follow specific maps for each volume. The first volume tracks Hatter through Europe, the second follows Hatter's journey aboard HMS *Christina* to San Francisco's Barbary Coast as he is about to embark on a search for Alyss that will take him across the battlefields of the Civil War to a historically suppressed meeting with President Abraham Lincoln. And the third volume will find Hatter in the exotic Far East where he reunites with a fellow Millinery Man.

As I mentioned, I would like to do a comic book series starring Redd. I've always been intrigued by the fact that every villain considers themselves the hero of their own story. So I would like to explore Redd from this angle, from her perspective, as she rages against Alyss, vanquishes Wonderland and sends Black Imagination on to other worlds. Besides, villains are the most fun to write.

The book is a very "visual" read. Did you have a lot of the character designs, as seen in the comic and on the website, in place before you started writing?

As images came to me while I was writing I hired artists like Doug Chiang and Brian Flora to create the art. It was incredibly helpful and made the world even more "alive" by having visual artists inspired by it.

The book has the feel that it was "story boarded" to some extent and, unsurprisingly, has a very cinematic feel to its pacing. Did you plan the novel in the same way as you would prepare for a movie?

I suppose I write in a "cinematic" sense in that my way of storytelling has been very influenced by film. I didn't plan the novel the way I would plan a film, though the process certainly had similarities particularly in storytelling. But I allowed myself much more room to wander and roam with



ideas in the novel than I would have if planning a film.

As it is clearly the central theme of both *The Looking Glass Wars* and *Hatter M*, just how important is the concept of "imagination" to you?

For me, it's the center of the universe. Imagination has always been the fundamental discovery behind *LGW*, 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.

I believe that however 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. Maybe my mission on this planet is to encourage everyone to always remain open to Imagination. And to, of course, Follow the Glow.

When do we get the chance to buy that great Hatter M statue shown on the *Looking Glass Wars* website?

I'm working with Gentle Giant, who does a lot of action figures and collectibles, so the model will be coming soon and will be available through the website. In the meantime, while you are waiting, please go to the website and check out the *Hatter M* online card game, which also debuts on September 20th, at www.lookingglasswars.com.