



## Inside the World of Hatter M

by Alex Segura

What if the colorful world of *Alice in Wonderland*, full of dancing and singing playing cards and precocious rabbits and Cheshire cats, was for all intents and purposes a lie? And beneath the lie was a much darker and frightening truth?

That's the basic concept behind novelist Frank Beddor's best-selling novel *The Looking Glass Wars*, which will make landfall in the United States sometime late next year after hitting it big overseas.

Comic book fans will get a special treat, as Beddor teams with artist Ben Templesmith to bridge the gap between *The Looking Glass Wars* and the second part of the proposed trilogy with **The Looking Glass Wars: Hatter M**, from Desperado and Image Comics. The tale will take readers deeper into the world of Hatter M, and preview some of the characters and plot points of the next novel, giving fans of the series a can't-miss teaser. We caught up with Beddor to talk about his inspiration for the books and comics.



**Newsarama:** For someone unfamiliar with your past work, what's the basic premise behind **Hatter M**, and how does it fit into the bigger story you're telling with *Looking Glass Wars*?



**Frank Beddor:** The comic book mini-series (Geo-Graphic Novel Volume 1) **Hatter M** tells the parallel story of Alyss's 13 year exile through the travels of her Royal Bodyguard, Hatter Madigan as he crisscrosses the globe in a desperate non-stop search to find the lost princess after they are separated in the Pool of Tears while escaping a bloody coup in Wonderland. For those unfamiliar with the first book of *The Looking Glass Wars* trilogy, the bigger story reveals the true history of Wonderland based upon a stunning discovery which unmasked the ultimate literary lie, a twisted fabrication that had existed for nearly 150 years. While universally accepted that Lewis Carroll was inspired to write his classic children's books to entertain 7-year-old Alice Liddell it is far from true. Lewis Carroll did not tell Alice Liddell the story of Wonderland, she told him! Alice was not born into the Liddell family, she was adopted. Her true identity was Alyss Heart, the future Queen of Wonderland. Lewis Carroll had changed everything and everyone including the identity of her royal bodyguard. Hatter M is not the story of a Mad Hatter. Hatter Madigan is an expert bladesman, a ranking High Cut of the Wonderland Millinery and not the tea guzzling madman of children's lit. Aggressively focused on the one purpose in his life, Hatter's search for Alyss commences immediately and

continues incessantly leaving the whispers and totems of myth in the wake of his non-stop quest.

**NRAMA:** Going back a bit, what led to this entire endeavor? You were a successful movie producer. What made you want to invest so much time into a project like this?

**FB:** On a personal level, I was fortunate that I produced such a successful movie that I had some financial freedom. Separate from the financial freedom, I felt a little empty being a facilitator to the creators. I wanted to be a creator. I loved the juice of having a big movie and everybody laughing, everybody recognizing it, but at the end of the day being the creator is the ultimate wish fulfillment.

In a way, I kind of dropped out. Most people would have cashed out and done a whole series of comedies. I was offered a lot of comedies, none of them at the level of *There's Something About Mary*, a number of them I sold and moved along, but I would be disappointed by the outcome of the development process. While this was all sort of swirling around, I made this discovery of this story, of "The Looking Glass Wars" saga and I started to feel my inspiration. It started to become dream-like. Eventually I just dedicated myself to becoming a creator and not a facilitator.

**NRAMA:** What was the catalyst that made you realize that the Lewis Carroll books had great potential to be expanded upon? why did you think the characters would work better in a darker setting?

**FB:** Truth was the catalyst! *The Looking Glass Wars* had nothing to do with expanding the Lewis Carroll books and everything to do with revealing the truth I first happened to stumble upon in the British Museum. A number of years ago I was in London for the European premiere of *There's Something About Mary*. I went to the British Museum and saw an exhibit of ancient cards. For instance, Napoleon hired artists to hand paint depictions of his many victories in battle. But what caught my attention, at the very end of the exhibit, was an incomplete deck of cards illuminated by an unusual glow, almost as though they were alive. I was intrigued by the exhibit and captivated by the images on the cards. This was a much darker version of Wonderland.



For the remainder of my trip I was preoccupied with the images and told several friends, one of whom suggested I meet with an antiquities dealer he knew who specialized in collecting all sorts of ancient playing cards.

The next morning, on the way to the airport, I stopped at the dealer's shop. When I told him about the unusual exhibit, he revealed that he in fact owned the cards missing from the deck. I was stunned. He brought out this old, worn leather box filled with cards and told me the story as he flipped one card over at a time, revealing the saga of *The Looking Glass Wars*. It was a darker Alice from a darker world and I knew I was meant to tell the story.

**NRAMA:** Was the success of the book surprising? Was it always planned out as a trilogy?

**FB:** The book being a success in the UK was a very pleasant surprise. It was especially gratifying to be nominated for a few awards, Leicester's Book of the Year Award, Carnegie Medal and Staffordshire Young Teenage Fiction Award. The book will not be available here in the US until September 2006 – of course I'm hoping for another pleasant surprise.

**NRAMA:** What made you want to expand on the story in comic book form? Were you a fan of the medium growing up?

**FB: Hatter M** the comic just seemed like a necessary, organic progression from all of the work I did with artists on *The Looking Glass Wars*.

In *LGW* Book 1, Hatter M was introduced but his story was only explored for about 4 chapters. There was so much more to tell about his mad search for Alyss that I realized he needed his own forum -- and comic books would allow this dark, compelling, more mature story to be told best. Hatter M is a classic, archetypal comic book hero with his angst, his loss, his barely suppressed rage as he searches the world. Also, by doing Hatter M as a comic book series I am able to connect to and expand upon the universe of *The Looking Glass Wars* as it was introduced in Book 1 and as it will continue in Books 2 and 3. So for those fans of the series in the UK and other countries who have read Book 1, the comic is a great way to deepen, enhance, and bridge the world. Of course, since *LGW* Book 1 will not be available in the states until next year, Hatter M's adventures will be what introduces American readers to the *LGW* universe. It's a total reversal – but the bridge will be there for anyone wanting to experience more of the world.



I cannot say that I was a major fan of comic books growing up. But much in the same way as I re-discovered Alice in Wonderland, comics hooked me as an adult. Beginning with Alan Moore's *The Watchmen* and Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* series I became enthusiastic about the visual worlds and storylines being offered. It was partly a natural extension of my work in film, but at the same time the enormous potential for creative expression was extremely exciting. Collaborating with artists in such a graphic, expressive medium is a whole new world for me. Getting to meet the fans at the different comic cons has been fantastic. Their enthusiasm, knowledge and loyalty is amazing. I hope that **Hatter M** is something that they will feel deserves their attention.

**NRAMA:** How does the Mad Hatter portrayed in the Carroll books, and later on in other adaptations like the Disney animated film, differ from your character, Hatter M? What are his motivations?



**FB:** No comparison. Hatter Madigan is absolutely unique, an incredibly complex, tortured, stubborn, emotional grown-up hero. The only visual connection to Carroll/Disney etc. is the iconic Hat. But in Hatter's M's case the Hat is much more than some identifying headwear – it is his signature weapon. A career soldier and expert bladesman, Hatter is a ranking High Cut of the Wonderland Millinery. While formidable with blades, his true expertise is with the Hat. Woven and blocked from a material not available in any realm except the origins of wonder, the Hat was awarded to young Hatter upon his graduation from the Millinery. The Hat, when hurled by his expert hand, instantly unfolds into a circle of polished blades to attack or defend. Carnage accomplished, the blades retract and the Hat boomerangs back to its master.

Coming from Wonderland, Hatter must learn to navigate our world. Since Wonderland's language consists of a system of energy and rhythm, Hatter faces no language barriers and is able to transmute and translate everything from Zulu to dolphin as he crisscrosses the globe in search of Alyss. But while he begins his search intent upon the single purpose of finding the lost princess, he gradually comes to

discover that his travels have a purpose above and beyond this initial motivation and that purpose is to protect and serve Imagination. As revealed in *The Looking Glass Wars*, Wonderland's great gift to our world is Imagination. As a traveler from the source of all wonder, Hatter will continually find himself facing off against those who wish to either suppress Wonderland's gift or channel the flipside of Dark Imagination for their own diabolical use. This discovery and service to humanity will act upon Hatter and his own humanity as he continues to develop throughout the series/trilogy.

**NRAMA:** What other characters from the novel will we see? Will readers who have never picked up the book be able to understand and follow the comic book?

**FB:** Actually it will be the exact inverse – characters introduced in the **Hatter M** series will next be seen in Book 2 of *The Looking Glass Wars* trilogy. **Hatter M** is written as a stand alone read – we've inserted plenty of flashbacks and conduits to Wonderland to fill in the gaps for readers who haven't read *The Looking Glass Wars*. If readers want more, *The Looking Glass Wars* will be available in September 2006 to satisfy any rabid curiosity aroused by **Hatter M**.

**NRAMA:** What made Ben Templesmith the best choice to handle the art chores on the book?

**FB:** Initially I was attracted to Ben's use of color and how he conceptualized his characters. I'd liked what he had done in 30 days of Night and saw that he had the ability to do horror which occasionally pops up in Hatter's fantastical journey. But it was all luck and intuition that really brought me to Ben. Since working with him I have discovered his sense of humor and this is coming out more and more. It's not all shadows and solitude for Hatter – much of who and what he encounters is bizarre, twisted and funny. Ben's art nails it every time.

**NRAMA:** Could this be the first of many *Looking Glass War* comic books, or just a one-off?

**FB:** 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 the HMS Christina to South America, but the ship is attacked by Chinese pirates and Hatter finds himself on San Francisco's Barbary Coast 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 Far East where he reunites with a fellow Millinery Man.



**NRAMA:** For someone unfamiliar with your novel, could you give us the basic rundown: What made this a story you had to tell, and what makes it an interesting read? What familiar characters do we see in the pages?

**FB:** Well – I guess I started to answer this question at the beginning of the interview so I'll just take it from there and continue. After my discovery of the cards in the British Museum and the true story behind Lewis Carroll's Wonderland books I began putting all the pieces together and weaving the revelations of just how different the real Wonderland and its inhabitants were compared to the children's lit version the world had known and accepted for nearly 150 years. Carroll's choices in how he changed Alyss's story were so fascinating (he even changed her name!) – the monsters and heros of her lost world became these cheery reinventions. It was such a betrayal on Carroll's part and was in fact, the reason for the rift that eventually occurred between the writer and his muse. For instance – the characters we know as the White Rabbit, the Red Queen, the Cheshire Cat and of course, the Mad Hatter all appear in *The Looking Glass Wars* as they were intended to by Alyss when she told Carroll

her harrowing tale. The White Rabbit was in fact Bibwit Harte, the six foot albino royal tutor for all Wonderland Queens (Carroll had anagrammed his name to create the White Rabbit), while the Red Queen was in truth Alyss's aunt Redd, the revenge maddened usurper to the throne ably assisted by her top assassin, The Cat, a mansize feline who morphs from adorable kitten to giant mutant feline when called upon to kill. So you see, there is a lot of truth to be uncovered. I felt I owed it to Alyss.



**NRAMA:** How did you get in touch with Image/Desperado to publish the book?

**FB:** Paul Jenkins recommended that I share my story with Joe Pruett. It was Joe's enthusiasm and excitement for *The Looking Glass Wars* world and the fact that he is such a maverick that made me believe we should work together.

**NRAMA:** What will the **Hatter M** mini-series touch upon? What will the lead character face or have to go through?

**FB:** Hatter M will track the hero's search for a lost princess as he circles the globe from 1859-1872 in a non-stop quest to save the future Queen of Wonderland and redeem himself. Hatter Madigan is wracked with guilt and shame over having lost Alyss in the Pool of Tears after her mother had elicited what amounted to a deathbed promise that he would keep her daughter safe and make certain that she someday return to Wonderland to rule. Heavy stuff for a Royal Bodyguard to feel he has failed at. But as in most quests, the end-point is not the entire point. As he travels, Hatter M will meet many of history's famous and infamous characters. He will influence

historical battles, save lives and leave behind a legacy of service to Imagination.

**NRAMA:** Did you feel any hesitation when translating (or, going back to the core) such a revered childhood story?

**FB:** None. Lewis Carroll's stories will exist in perpetuity for all who want to read them as they have always been. I've written these books for those readers who want something more – something else – a different world – or even more of what they had already come to love. Imagination has been honored. What better gift can I give back to Wonderland?

**NRAMA:** Do you think there will be any backlash from readers that see the stories of Alice in Wonderland as kiddie fare? What's response been like?

**FB:** The whole point of *The Looking Glass Wars* has been to reveal the truth behind the 'kiddie fare'. So far the response has been enthusiastic.

**NRAMA:** What can readers expect to see in the first issue? Tease us a little bit.

**FB:** Hatter M will arrive in 1859 Paris missing not only Alyss, but also his signature weapon, the Hat. As he attempts to adjust to this strange world he meets Jules Verne and pieces together a theory on how to locate his lost princess. Based on a luminous Glow that he is able to discern hovering around imaginative people and/or imaginative works of art Hatter decides that Alyss, who without a doubt possesses the greatest imagination of anyone, can be located by tracking the Glow wherever and whenever he spots it. His hope is the Glow will lead him to Alyss. Hatter will also encounter Sacrénoir, an evil black magician performing in the ancient catacombs beneath Paris and his army of zombies, raised from the dead, as a bloody cabaret show.

**NRAMA:** Why do you think comic buyers should give the book a chance? What makes it different from anything else on the stands these days?

**FB:** Aside from Marvel's **1602** there are very few comics tackling the period piece, but what really makes Hatter unique is his point-of-view of the period from 1859-1872. Seen through the eyes of a guilt ravaged Imagination warrior from another world, our own history takes on a completely new dimension. The effects of Imagination, both White and Dark are explored in every issue. The meaning and worth of our own Imaginations are always uppermost in the storyline and characters – connecting the reader to their inner world as they join Hatter on his journey to save Imagination. It's different. The art is fantastic. Check it out.

I'd also like to mention our website, [www.lookingglasswars.com](http://www.lookingglasswars.com) and encourage anyone who can to check it out. A lot of time and creativity went into designing it and I think most people will really enjoy it. We're putting up preview pages for Hatter M and there's an animated trailer for the novel. We've developed a card game drawing on characters and elements in Hatter M and LGW and this is going up first as a web based game. We'll be previewing the game and giving out playing decks at GenCon in Anaheim in November. And I will be adding a Gallery showcasing the art I've commissioned from artists like Doug Chiang, Chris Appelhans, Brian Flora, Branislav Hetzel, Matt Wilson, Ryan Meinerding, Kristi Valk, Andrea Wicklund, Catia Chen, Toby Wilson, David Saccheri and Eddie Rainwater.

Upcoming plans will also be posted, under **Curiosities**, check out the Looking Glass Maze Rollercoaster. It would be great to have feedback from anyone visiting the website so sign up and email us -- I'd love to hear their thoughts on the series.

**Hatter M #1** is due in stores in December from Desperado/Image. It will carry a \$3.99 cover price, and run 40 pages.

