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Film Clips: The Looking Glass Wars: Thoughts on the Inevitable Movie

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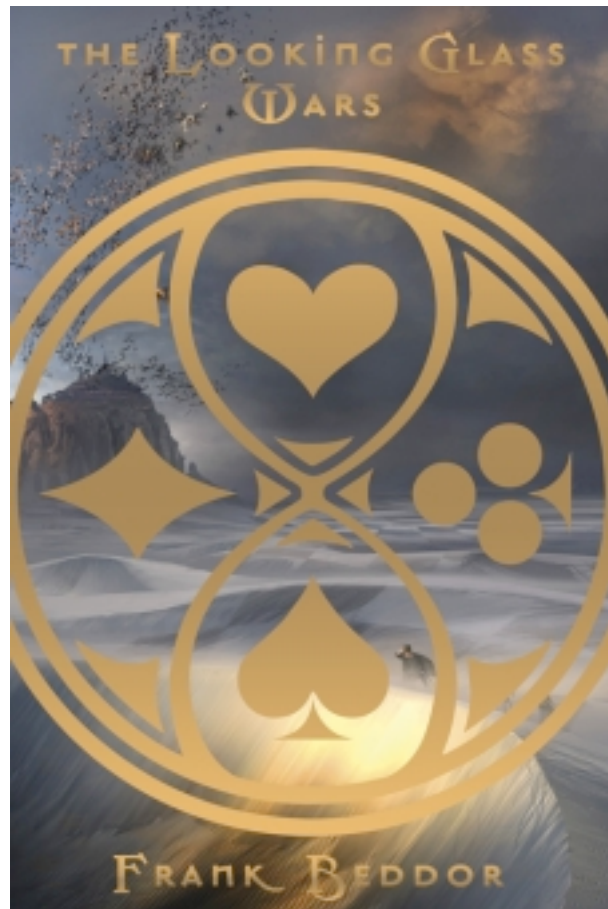
Perhaps it seems a bit premature to speculate about the cinematic future of *The Looking Glass Wars*. After all, the book was only released two weeks ago in the United States, in spite of being a huge hit over in the UK for nearly two years. But the book's author, Frank Beddor, is a film producer (*There's Something About Mary*), and the book is so clearly written with a film version in mind that it's impossible, while reading it, not to imagine it on the screen.

After all, how many books do you know that have a [trailer](#)? And a [card game](#)? And a [successful comic spin-off](#)? And a [soundtrack](#)? And given the enormous success of *Harry Potter*, and that books like *The Golden Compass*, *Eragon*, *Inkheart* and *The Spiderwick Chronicles* are being made into films, it doesn't seem much of a reach to think that it's only a matter of time before someone snatches up *The Looking Glass Wars*.

The book is another in the trend of re-imaginings of classic tales *ala* Gregory Maguire (*Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*). Where *Wicked* (in the book version, at least) turned *The Wizard of Oz* stories on their ear, though, giving us full-fledged, conflicting political and philosophical systems, characters with hidden motivations and complex alliances, and a plot with some unpredictable twists and turns, *The Looking Glass Wars* is more of a one-dimensional tale. The premise is that Beddor, after years of painstaking

research, has uncovered the truth about Alice Liddell, to whom Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* were dedicated. Alice, the book posits, was really Alyss Heart, princess of Wonderland. Her mother, Queen Genevieve, was violently overthrown by Redd, her psychotic older sister, in a bloody coup staged on the princess' seventh birthday.

Alyss escaped with Hatter Madigan, the royal bodyguard, to our reality, but once there the two became separated, and Alyss, relegated to an orphan asylum, eventually ends up adopted by the Liddells. No one believes Alyss' tales about Wonderland, until she meets Reverend Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), who writes a fantasy novel about her stories -- devastating young Alyss, who thought he really believed her. Thereafter she accepts the Anglicized spelling of her name, Alice, gives up her coveted imagination, and grows up. Back in Wonderland, Queen Redd learns that Hatter Madigan and Alyss survived, and Alice, now a young woman engaged to a prince, gets sucked back into Wonderland again, where she must fight to reclaim her throne. There's also a love interest for Alyss in the form of



the young princess' childhood friend Dodge Anders, son of the head of the Royal Guard, who, after Alyss disappears, grows up to become a leader of the underground resistance fighting Queen Redd, who call themselves The Alyssians in Alyss' honor.

The book is a fast read (one review I read compared the writing style to *The Da Vinci Code* -- a bit harsh, but I can see the point), and focuses more on the violence and war than on developing any character motivations. Redd could be a much more intriguing character if we knew more about her (the second book in the trilogy, which Beddor just finished, is called *Seeing Redd*, and is supposed to focus more on that character, so perhaps we'll get to see her a bit more fleshed out eventually). The other most intriguing character, Hatter Madigan, the royal bodyguard whose top hat is a weapon (and who wears bracelets that turn into wickedly sharp blades) has already become a spin-off character, spawning a popular series of comic books called *Hatter M* -- a hit in the States even before the book was published here. The series focuses on Hatter Madigan's travels throughout the United States as he searches for Alyss for thirteen years.

How good of a movie could be made of the book? Perhaps a pretty good one, at least visually. The book doesn't have as much politically to say about modern societal issues as does *Wicked*; there's very little subtly under the surface and not enough of an arc to Redd to make her anything more than a relentlessly violent and bloody dictator who exists solely to drive the plot. The plot does move along at a nice clip, though, with plot points so neatly placed that one imagines Beddor plotting the script adaptation (and a video game, perhaps?) even as he wrote the novel. Beddor has stated that he won't just sign the rights to *The Looking Glass Wars* away, that any adaptation into film media would have his hand in it. When asked [in a recent interview at IGN who his dream director would be](#), Beddor neatly sidestepped around the question.

One issue a film adaptation of this book will have is this: Who is its target audience? Amazon lists the book at an age 9-12 reading level, but Alyss as a heroine for kids that age to latch onto is not nearly as strong or compelling a character as Lyra in *The Golden Compass* or the title character in *Eragon* (both also the first in trilogies, the former already written, and the latter in progress), nor would she likely appeal to older teens and young adults in the way that Elphaba does in *Wicked*. The book, while somewhat black, isn't as bleak a fantasy story as, say, Guillermo del Toro's dark fable *Pan's Labyrinth*, either. A weakness in the storyline, too, is that once Alyss falls into Victorian England, her story becomes a pretty generic orphan tale with little excitement to it. Minimizing that part of the story, therefore, would be crucial to keeping the plot engaging for a movie audience. Also, the Wonderland of *The Looking Glass Wars* isn't quite as fanciful and captivating as the Wonderland of Carroll's imagination, perhaps because in the latter we see Wonderland through the amazed eyes of a young girl fallen out of prim and proper Victorian England into a fantasy world, whereas in the former, Alyss is already a part of that world and so, perhaps, overlooks the very wonder that makes it special until it is lost to her.

The potential for a film version of *The Looking Glass Wars* to be a fun, interesting movie depends on a couple factors: (1) The screenplay needs to leave room for evil Queen Redd to be a better-drawn character, perhaps drawing from what will hopefully be a more fleshed-out character in the second book; (2) The right director -- and I'm not sure who I'd suggest (but it would have to be someone who is not Uwe Boll or Michael Bay, please) who thinks in technicolor visuals, and who can take a story in which plot is the foremost element and make us care about the characters, who are largely secondary to action in the book; (3) How the script would handle the weaknesses of the book's storyline to keep the film exciting; and (4) The casting, especially of Hatter Madigan and Queen Redd, and to a lesser extent, of Alyss and Dodge Anders. So, readers out there who have read the book and loved it (or hated it) -- here's your chance to chime in. Who would be your dream director for a film adaptation of *The Looking Glass Wars*? And who would you cast in the key roles?