

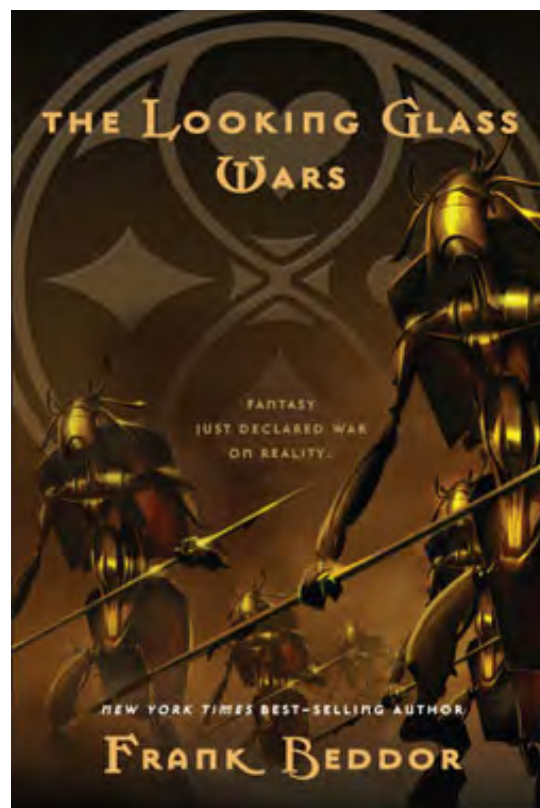
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## Don't miss the GOOD re-imagining of *Alice in Wonderland* by author Frank Beddor...

THE BRYAN HILL PROJECT | Mar 17 2010, 8:03 AM

Frank Beddor's *THE LOOKING GLASS WARS* book series and *HATTER M.* graphic novels aim to make you forget Tim Burton and Disney. With a bold and dangerous take on Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, they just might succeed.



The first thing you notice about Frank Beddor is the joy.

His voice radiates it. He's a man with the calm, paced speech that we only get when we no longer have anything to prove. For a Hollywood producer, even ones as successful as Frank Beddor, that's a rarity. In this case, Frank Beddor's success is defined as being a champion skier, turned actor, turned writer/producer. He was the driving force behind the development of a feature comedy written by a pair of unknown writers Frank met while taking a class in Shakespeare. The unknown writers were Ed Decter and John J. Strauss and their feature comedy would eventually become **THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY**. I asked Frank why he didn't try to turn that blockbuster into a streak with more producing efforts and without judgment, in the same way someone tells you the difference between baseball positions around the diamond, Frank tells me "...in producing, you're the facility of the creative team. I wanted to be a creator."

On that word 'creator' you hear that joy again. The certainty of someone who through toil and what Frank calls a "laser-light-focus" has found what they want to do with their life and takes nearly every step to support that goal. It was that *laser-light-focus* that led Frank Beddor to re-imagine Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" into his epic series of books titled **THE LOOKING GLASS WARS**, a series that turns the "Alice" of Carroll's tale into "Alyss Heart" an exile from Wonderland that finds herself trapped in our world, struggling to remember her true identity and return to Wonderland to seize the throne from her evil Aunt Redd.

The series is beautifully written, a rare piece of youth market fiction that never talks down to its audience. Beddor presents a world where imagination is a power, and Alyss' survival depends on her ability to use that power to change her world before her world changes her. In a time where the largest percentage of youth oriented work is meant to exploit

the insecurities of its readers, *THE LOOKING GLASS WARS*, through the journey of Beddor's re-imagined Alyss, clearly has a message of self-reliance, empowerment and heroism that refuses to be defined by the boundaries of gender.



**From the *HATTER M.* graphic novel (art by Sami Makkonen)**

People have tackled Alice in Wonderland before, but rarely on the printed page. They make cartoons. 3-D films. Clothing lines. Media explorations. They never attack Carroll on his home turf, in prose, where a direct comparison between Carroll and any challenger could easily leave that challenger lacking.

It's like attempting to cover Johnny Cash with an acoustic guitar and a single microphone. Your every instinct says don't try it unless you love

looking like a jackass.

Beddor wins that battle because there's never a sense of fear or hesitation in his narrative. He respects the source material, but from the opening page he makes bold choices from tone to character. Beddor's story charges into and through Carroll's world and you wonder if this is how a champion skier writes a story, constantly moving forward, traveling downhill, building as much speed as possible. The Hatter of Carroll's Mad Tea Party has been transformed by Beddor into HATTER MADIGAN, Alyss' personal bodyguard who travels from Wonderland to our world, searching for Alyss for thirteen years. The Cheshire Cat is presented here as THE CAT, the frightening personal assassin of REDD HEART, Beddor's vision of Carroll's Queen of Hearts. Redd isn't the colorful buffoon of most adaptations. Here Redd Heart is a real threat, with real assassins and in Beddor's Wonderland there's real death.



Two years of research went into beginning the project, and the first novel took five years to write. After producing *Mary*, Beddor had the

financial freedom to begin work on the series, work that included studying Carroll at Oxford, and personally hiring a set of concept artists to help him realize the visual details of the world he wished to create.

One of those artists was Doug Chiang, lead concept designer of *Star Wars: Episodes I-III*. Normally, hearing that a producer hired one of the world's most famous illustrators to personally design inspiration for a book series would seem like a classic Hollywood indulgence, the equivalent of hiring Terry Richardson to photograph Kate Moss holding a pistol because you want to write a story about a female spy.

But that damn vocal joy strikes again and you realize that Frank Beddor wasn't just flexing Hollywood money and contacts. He was sincerely inspired to perform a literary near-miracle, and went into his own coffers to get what he needed to accomplish the task.

It takes a lot of personal discipline not to ask how much it costs to get Doug Chiang to draw something for your office.



“Imagination is an actual power. She (Alyss) can conjure with imagination,” he says. I comment about the strong visual impact of his writing and he deflects the praise to his editor, Callie Poplak of Penguin’s *Dial* imprint, but Beddor’s speech has the same clarity of his prose. The ideas in *THE LOOKING GLASS WARS* aren’t accidental, they’re planted there with thoughtful intention. As much as it is a story, it’s a window into how Beddor sees the world.

“The story is about her coming of age,” Beddor says. “But it’s also about an identity crisis.” It’s an accurate description of the world he’s created, a world that extends to the *HATTER M* graphic novel he co-created with Liz Cavalier, a playing card game that you explore on the book’s website [www.thelookingglasswars.com](http://www.thelookingglasswars.com), and an upcoming MMORPG that will allow players to journey through the *Pool of Tears* and experience the detail of the Wonderland for themselves. It’s a lyrical example of what being an adolescent is, a story revolving around the universal experience of moving from childhood to adulthood while trying to maintain the power of imagination in the face of grown-up responsibility. It’s a story about creativity by a writer that has defined his life through discipline and creativity, and it’s Beddor’s belief in his principles that makes his work worth note.

But even joy has its enemies. Some self-described experts on Lewis Carroll think the books (and the world in them) miss the mark of Carroll’s original intention. I think they’re missing the point. *THE LOOKING GLASS WARS* isn’t meant to be a replacement for Carroll’s original *Alice*. It’s an exercise in imagination about the power of imagination and that’s what makes it worth mention here. It’s not a vampire story. It’s not a story about rich girls finding new ways to be catty to each other. It’s not a story where the female protagonist is entirely defined by the approval of a boy. It’s about the power that comes when you trust your instincts and reject the limitations of others. The audacity of Beddor’s work isn’t in the alteration of classic literature,

it's in the blatant support of personal independence in a pop-cultural world that constantly seeks to make us all lemmings to the easiest narratives, the simplest characters and the most non-threatening ideas.

Lewis Carroll, above everything else, was a writer who enjoyed subversion. He, like most writers who use storytelling as offense against complacency and sameness, wanted his work to do more than entertain. He wanted to fight against all threats to imagination, whether they be evil queens or publishers dedicated to mass-producing banality.

Frank Beddor is taking up that fight and with *THE LOOKING GLASS WARS* gaining a following among readers around the world, with *THE DARK KNIGHT* producer Chuck Roven collaborating with him on the inevitable film version of the book series, it's clear that Beddor's winning the fight on his own terms, powered by that same *laser-light-focus* that helped him pitch *THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY* on a ski-lift to a Fox Executive, closing the deal before their feet touched the powder.

Come to think of it, maybe that winning is why Frank Beddor has all that joy to share.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: [@BryanEdwardHill](#) is a writer, filmmaker and GeekWeek contributor. Currently he's co-writing *BROKEN TRINITY: PANDORA'S BOX* with Rob Levin for Top Cow Productions. You can visit his blog: [www.bryanedwardhill.com](http://www.bryanedwardhill.com) or his short fiction site [www.veryshortfiction.com](http://www.veryshortfiction.com)

**Tim Simmons said...**

I picked up The Looking Glass War from Frank at Comic Con a few years back-- I guess it was before the US publication, as mine is the UK cover-- Tell ya something about that Laser Light Focus: In the madhouse that is SDCC, Frank lured me in with the book's cover (seriously, I really dig that UK edition cover) and pitched me on the story-- what can I say? He sold me. I'm a MISER on the con floor-- getting me to part with \$10 for anything less than 3 trades is near impossible. ...but Frank did it. And I'm glad for it-- TLGW ended up being the gem of my haul that year.