



HEADLINES



Wednesday, November 29, 2006

The Frank Beddor/Looking Glass Wars Interview

By Caleb Gerard

The Looking Glass Wars *is one of the great ones.*

What do I mean by that?

I'm not what you'd consider a "fan" of Alice in Wonderland. I am, however, a huge fan of stories that rework, or update, classic stories... at least in theory. It is sad the number of really bad takes there are on some great stories that I recall.

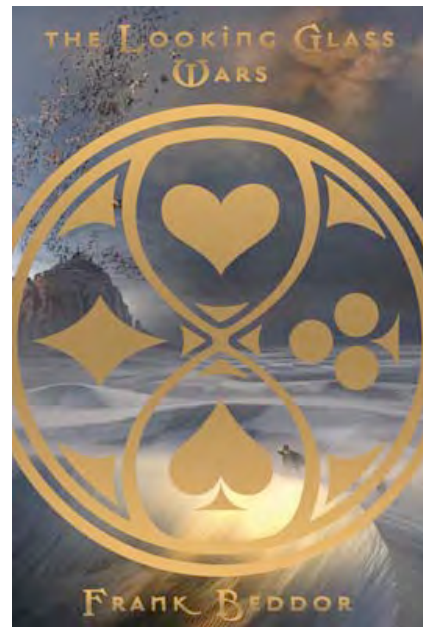
So, I say again: The Looking Glass Wars is one of the great ones.

Frank Beddor took the Lewis Carroll world of "Wonderland" and gave it a slight tweak here and bent it a just a tetch there and then, to use the language of the story, shuffled the deck with the deft of a Vegas card shark.

The world is familiar to even those of us only familiar with Disney's version. But only just. And frankly this is just fine. No...better than "fine".

Volume 1 of Beddor's "LGW" trilogy recently hit the shelves here in the United States and will soon be followed by Volume 2. I was lucky enough to get a copy from the UK earlier this year and have been looking forward to the 2nd book with impatient anticipation.

Comic publisher Image is working with Beddor to bring some of the "in



between” stories to the 4-color medium of comicbooks with the 1st mini wrapping up tomorrow – November 22nd – with issue No. 4.

For more on the comics and, more importantly, the future of the novels and Frank Beddor himself read on...



Caleb Gerard (CG): You’ve made a hard homerun hit with your *Looking Glass Wars* tell our audience about the first book.

Frank Beddor (FB): *The Looking Glass Wars Book 1* is the first of a trilogy that begins in 1859 when Princess Alyss Heart flees a bloody coup in Wonderland. According to extensive documentation, Alyss (aka Alice Liddell) told her story to Lewis Carroll in 1862 resulting in the initial book, *Alice’s Adventures Underground* being published in

1864. *The LGW Book 1* tracks the years 1859-1872, within this period of time *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* were both published.

I named the trilogy *The Looking Glass Wars* because the battles occur not only in Wonderland but in our world as well with the combatant characters traveling and fleeing back and forth via the Looking Glass portals as the war, retribution and bloodshed escalate. There have always been wars in Wonderland as the powers behind White and Black Imagination struggled for control.

CG: The first volume of three is now available in the U.S., a huge market no doubt. Does this mean that Volume 2 is coming soon?

FB: *Book 2: Seeing Redd* is finished and due out Fall of 2007.

CG: Why the delayed release in the States given that you’re American? (A complete shock to me by the way).

FB: The decision to first take *LGW* to the UK was made by both myself and my agent for a few reasons – one being their tradition of so much great children’s literature, the second being the fact that the source material was first discovered in the British Museum and finally, I wanted to have the experience of publishing and touring and promoting my book before I

approached the Goliath of US publishing. And, with the benefit of hindsight, I can now say I am very glad for that experience.

CG: The whole Wonderland mythos is familiar to most via the Disney version. How much of your take stems from Disney and how much from the original source material?



FB: *The Looking Glass Wars* trilogy stems from the true *original source* material that I discovered via a deck of cards on display 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 very, very different 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 Alyss from a darker world and I knew I was meant to tell the story.

CG: To clarify, was the original presentation of these characters as cards and THEN the book?

FB: To clarify – my source material was the incomplete deck of cards I first discovered in the British Museum and eventually the full deck provided by the London antiquities dealer. Carroll's book was his take on what Alyss Heart (aka Alice Liddell) told him. My book – *The Looking Glass Wars* is the book that Alyss had HOPED Lewis Carroll would write so her someone would find her and bring her home. I hope that helps.

CG: Has there been reaction from the Carroll estate and/or Disney to your take?

FB: Disney really has nothing to react to. But there has been quite the outburst from a militant faction of the Lewis Carroll Society. A word of warning: do not piss off these people. Complaints and protests were raised over *The Looking Glass Wars*. On a trip to London following publication I was met at Heathrow by a mad fringe group of protesters chanting, "Off with Frank Beddor's head".

CG: Suddenly all I can think of is "painting the roses red" (or is that Redd?).

FB: Definitely Redd and think 'rock opera'



CG: You've brought one of the characters from the book over to comics. Why Hatter Madigan?

FB: As an adjunct to the novel, the comic book series *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 the bloody coup in Wonderland. Hatter Madigan's non-stop, at times heartbreakingly loyal search across several continents for Alyss is a story that I felt deserved telling. Additionally, *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 four 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 who have read Book 1, the comic is a

great way to deepen, enhance, and bridge the world.

CG: Are there more stories you'd like to tell with these characters outside the novels? More Alyss for instance.

FB: The recently uncovered private journal of Princess Alyss Heart featuring artwork and entries from the years she spent exiled in London is something I am very excited about. My plan is to create a series of stories that tell of Alyss's ongoing, constant and imaginative efforts to escape from her captors (the Liddells and Nanny Prickett) and return to her rightful place in Wonderland.

CG: Why do you consider the Liddells as "captors"?

FB: Alyss in her childlike interpretation of the exile and her circumstances in London considered the Liddells her captors but later came to love them as a second family.

CG: Given that you turned most of the perceptions of the characters on their heads why keep the Red Queen evil?

FB: It wasn't a decision to flip a lot of characters – it was the unearthing of their original character as Alyss told her story to Lewis Carroll and the whole psychology of resurrecting the characters as Alyss knew them to be from what Lewis Carroll had chosen to re-imagine. There is a literary forensic path here that is far from capricious. As it was, it simply turned out that the Red Queen was more evil than anything Lewis Carroll had been willing to expose. Alyss's Aunt Redd Rose Heart was truly a villain for the ages – endlessly complex, cruel and fascinating. In Book 2 readers will get to know her on a much more personal level.



CG: Is Dodge from the source material?

FB: From the original source material? Absolutely. He has several cards depicting him as he grew from boy to portal runner to Alyssian warrior. Perhaps, in a pique of jealousy, Lewis Carroll did not want to give any attention to the boy that Alyss missed so desperately. Maybe he hoped she would just forget all about Dodge along with her other Wonderland atrocities and exist purely in the realm he had re-written for her. Obviously, that is

merely a theory.

CG: Which characters are NOT from the source material?

FB: If you are referring to the deck of cards discovered in London – then all the characters in LGW are from the source material. When I refer to the source material I am not talking about any of Lewis Carroll’s work – but rather the deck of cards and the saga they revealed. Additional characters have been discovered since we opened the doors to the Hatter Institute and you will be meeting them in Book 2 Seeing Redd.

CG: I’ve read some reviews that have found the early relationship between Dodge and Alyss... well, creepy given their age. I admit I did as well when I read the book. Is this simply a case of alien sensibilities/mores that we’re just meant to accept?

FB: I suppose to some there may be a precocious quality to their fantasy of marriage but deep inside both children intrinsically and absolutely grasp the fact that they are destined to be together someday as adults. They don’t know what it all means so they play at it and make believe. But that’s how children prepare for adulthood. It may seem ridiculous or odd (or creepy?!) to some – but as children they are innocently grappling with what will become a major theme of their adult lives – how to come together and be together as Queen and King.

CG: So Dodge is destined to be King?

FB: Don’t be a spoiler



CG: Did you feel a need to somehow include all the recognizable Wonderland characters or was did they all just come in naturally?

FB: As the story unfolded ‘recognizable Wonderland characters’ were re-introduced where applicable. If previously known characters from Lewis Carroll’s work were not inherent to the story of the Looking Glass Wars they were set aside until further research could uncover their true form, nature and name. Stay tuned.

CG: Let’s take a small detour here to Hollywood. Looking at IMDb I see your name associated

with a couple of my favorite movies. As a producer and... stuntman?

FB: I produced *There's Something About Mary* and worked as a stuntman for the skiing sequences in the John Cusack film *Better off Dead*. I had no idea anyone remembered that movie until I started doing interviews for *LGW*.

CG: Two-dollars! Did you do the one ski sequence?

FB: Sorry, no. I was the guy chasing him.

CG: Given this connection to Hollywood I was surprised to not see *Looking Glass Wars* at least in pre-pre-production since it seems a natural big screen film. Anything you can share with us at this time?

FB: The most important thing to me is that the books stand on their own. If I can control the creative direction in various media then I will be happy to explore any and all. What I will not be doing is licensing off the rights, crossing my fingers and hoping it all turns out especially when it comes to a film. At that level of expression I would be even more protective, sensitive and diligent about getting it right.

CG: As stated, the story seems fit for adaptation to film which may be due to the style you write in. Tell me about your novel writing process.

FB: I believe stories and images are literally everywhere. 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.

CG: What are some of you favorite re-imaginings? Currently mine are *LGW* and "Wicked".

FB: What a coincidence – so are mine.

CG: Again from earlier we talked about your comic book story with *Hatter M*. How did this come about?

FB: The initial idea to do Hatter Madigan as a comic book came about from visiting schools in England after



the book came out in England and the kids were wild to know more about Hatter, his search for Princess Alyss and his signature weapon – the Hat.

CG: What other comics do you have coming?

FB: The second *Hatter M* mini-series (America!) will be coming out in 2007.

And I am contemplating a second comic series featuring Queen 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. I may also do a prequel graphic novel telling of Redd's early history and maybe a later one exploring her 13 year rule of Wonderland.

CG: Have you had a chance to read Alan Moore's take on Alice in "Lost Girls"?

FB: Sorry to say, not yet. But I did buy it.

CG: With the first volume now on the shelves here in the U.S. we need some teases of what we readers are going to get in volume 2 (and 3 if you'd like).

FB: I can't say too much but Book 2 is titled *Seeing Redd* so fans can expect to see much more of her Imperial Viciousness. Homburg Molly has a prominent role as Alyss's royal bodyguard and Alyss and Dodge are finally together only to discover that as two headstrong warriors, disagreements can easily escalate. Overall I have tried to expand the geography of Wonderland by introducing neighboring lands, rulers, tribes and rivalries to enrich the world and the storytelling.

I am in the middle of finishing Book 3 and will hold myself back from diverting any of the creative energy. As the wise maxim goes – write it out don't talk it out.

CG: Besides your editor who reads your stuff before publication?

FB: Phia. My cat grins when it's working and claws at it when it's not.