



## Exclusive Interview: Frank Beddor

The author of *The Looking Glass Wars* chews the fat with IGN. (Part One of Two)

**April 25, 2005** - We tracked down Frank Beddor after reading his novel *The Looking Glass Wars* and begged him to speak with us. Not only did Beddor take some time of out his busy day, but he invited us up to his office for an extended conversation. To say that the space is inspiring is a bit of an understatement. Beddor's office is in the corner of the building affording him amazing views down Wilshire Boulevard where busy Los Angelenos shuffle along, going about their lives.

The fourteen-foot-high ceiling caps walls that are covered in literally hundreds of visual cues for "The Looking Glass Wars" universe. There's a photo here, a magazine article ripped from the pages there, single words clipped from newspapers, pictures of actors, locations both historical and commonplace, colors and images all mashed together. The office feels like a collage you might find at a crazed inventor's house or a frenzied musician's or, at the very least, someone who deeply cares about and is decidedly immersed in the world they created.

And what a world it is. Beddor is developing not only a trilogy of novels, but is close to production on a graphic novel based on his character Hatter Madigan *and* is stirring the stew for a possible film trilogy. Beddor himself is no stranger to the movie biz – he's a succesful film producer with one of the highest-grossing comedies of all time on his resume: *There's Something About Mary*.

IGN's Steven Horn sat in an enormous brown leather chair and had a nice relaxed chat with Beddor, the first part of which we present to you below.

**STEVEN HORN: The biggest question I get when I tell people about you and this project is along the lines of: what after your movie producing career pushed you into this arena?**

**FRANK BEDDOR:** That's an interesting question. On a personal level, I was fortunate that I produced such a big and successful movie that I had some financial feedom. 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.

**HORN: What in your background gave you the confidence to say 'I'm going to write a book'? Did you have any kind of training in that?**

**BEDDOR:** I grew up in a theater town, in Minneapolis. The Gottfried Theater was in my backyard. My Mother was really into theater. I had this aspiration to be an actor. But then, I was a skier. As a young kid, I cared about sports and was a lot more driven by sports. That got me onto the United States ski team and I had some success there. Eventually that led to my acting career, my "failed" acting career. What came out of that failure was that I was introduced to some really great teachers (Stella Adler, Larry Moss), and I started reading all sorts of playwrights. Not only did you need to read the plays, you'd have to read the biographies of the playwright to start to understand and feel the themes of their lives and how those themes and experiences influenced their writing. You had to dissect that and articulate that.

The other thing that's really helpful for a creator and as a writer is coming up with backstories. Who is your character, where do they come from, what do they want? [You may go] as deep as you want to go to give you something to pull on to help to make the leap from your life to their life. I found that to be more interesting and rewarding. Also, again, on the personality level, I wasn't good at waking up and hoping someone would call me. I was the kind of person who woke up and said 'I'm going to make something happen.' Writing, like training to ski or producing a movie, you get up and can do it. I need to be able to do it. I don't need somebody calling. I have to be able to do it. On top of all that, it was really more of an experiment. It wasn't really 'Oh, this will become something.' I thought the very least I'll have this book and if I make it into a movie, they'll have to buy the underlying rights even if they don't like the book.

Through my producing, I understood there was some value in the exercise. Early on, the creative undertaking and the rewards of living and building a world overtook all of the other considerations and was like 'Hey, I wonder if I can do this.' I also took two years just to build the world, the rules, the foundation. Two years of outlining without writing a single chapter. Just over and over and over. Does this make sense? Will people be able to suspend disbelief? Will people get sucked into it? What's going to throw them? What are the holes? I spent a lot of time doing that.

**HORN: In those two years, what were your high and your low points?**

**BEDDOR:** (laughs) They're both easy. The high was going to dinner with my girlfriend and telling her how I solved the transportation between Wonderland and our world: the pool of tears and the logic behind the pool of tears. That was a thrilling moment. The lows were much more frequent. The lows were just 'Well, it doesn't work.' I'd wake up in the middle of the night, sweating. There were all sorts of levels of that.



-Automatic Pictures

Beddor commissioned Doug Chiang to inform Beddor's description of the world he created.

**HORN:** That's what I'm interested in. What is it about this story that got you through the lows? Few creative people can bust through and get a finished product. But other people, all of these things are going on in their mind and they just scrap it and walk away. What was so important about telling this particular story that helped you through some of the uglier moments?

**BEDDOR:** There are so many aspects of it. I could say the "war for imagination." The need for myself to get back to creative imagination, to get back to the child, which is part of acting. The whole thing about acting is to allow yourself the inner child and let that come through, don't be afraid to show that. In writing, for me, it's the same thing. The most important thing is that Alyss goes to our world, in one of the most oppressive moments in our society: Victorian London. You have to fit in, you have to be like everybody else. You have to smile when you're supposed to smile. I felt that profoundly as a child. I felt like I needed to be presentable, I had to be proper, I had to be right with what was defined as normal. That held me back in a lot of ways later in my life that I resented, tried to deal with and get over. (Beddor becomes excited, animated) I wanted to tell that story and I wanted to free people's imagination! I wanted people to look at art as an artist and the outsiders as the real creators. The oddballs are the people who see things differently, that break through their everyday looking glass. They have their own image of it. I was always locked in to one perception of myself that I wanted to step to the side and I wanted to use Alyss as my agent to represent freeing my imagination and myself from what society says you should do. Society said 'You produced a movie and you're really successful and you dropped out, what are you thinking? Are you crazy?'

**HORN: So it's extremely personal.**

**BEDDOR:** (laughs) It's extremely personal.

**HORN: I think a lot of people who read the book are going to have the impression that you were inspired by the book, by the works of Lewis Carroll, but it's obvious now that it's all personal.**

**BEDDOR:** Lewis Carroll, his world and what he wrote, is remarkable. As I've said in other interviews, I hated the books growing up. A lot of people have mirrored that thought, in interviews. We come to a point where we're supposed to like them. I respect the wit, writing, and imagination, don't get me wrong, but I didn't enjoy them like I enjoyed *Treasure Island* or "The Hardy Boys" or "Johnny Quest." I didn't think the book was cool, I thought it was a girl's book.

**HORN: As you were writing *The Looking Glass Wars*, did you read other writers? Philosophy? Was it all just coming out?**

**BEDDOR:** I was influenced by a lot of different people. I don't know if you've ever read a book called *The Tollbooth*. It's the story of a little boy who goes into a tollbooth and [is transported to another world so it's a little bit like *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. That was a book I read long ago and it was a bit of inspiration. I did read some of the more contemporary works just to see what people were doing out of curiosity. One of the things I did, because I live in a visual world, is created a bunch of artwork before I wrote about it. I went to Doug Chiang and said "Doug, I need to know what the card soldiers look like. Here's what I'm thinking." He then rendered the card soldiers and I put them up on the wall. Every time I went to write the description or needed to put them in some sort of action, I would know what I could do. What does the Valley of Mushrooms look like? That was a huge piece of inspiration. When I saw the artwork, it helped me realize it's not a little thing, but a vast area, like a state. That started to turn my perceptions. I worked in tandem. I had my concept artist on this shoulder and Lewis Carroll on this shoulder, so I had a lot of helpers.

**HORN: Now the book is coming out soon in the States. How do you feel? Relief? This is just the beginning. What's going on with you right now?**

**BEDDOR:** It's interesting because there was a bit of a lull. The book was published in the UK and I have been supporting that. Now there is book two and the Hatter Matigan graphic novel and I feel a burst of excitement in creating again. I have so many new ideas in the creative process. Most of all, what I'm holding onto is 'I've created a world. This is now my universe. I live in this universe, I want to nurture this universe, I want to expand the universe and most importantly, I want to share the universe.'"

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Part Two of IGN's exclusive interview with Frank Beddor is coming soon. You won't want to miss it as it is MUCH longer than this installment and touches on some pretty incredible concepts. In the meantime, check out some of the **images** surrounding the project and read our **book review** of *The Looking Glass Wars* novel.

-- **Steven Horn**