

A curiouser and curiouser reinterpretation of Alice's world

Excelsior native Frank Beddor makes literary waves with his reimagining of Lewis Carroll's novel.

David Gustafson, Star Tribune

Last update: September 26, 2006 – 12:59 PM

Excelsior native Frank Beddor is probably the only writer in the world who has been threatened with execution by a militant faction of an "Alice in Wonderland" society.

Now a Hollywood producer in Los Angeles, he earned the death sentence with his recent book, "The Looking Glass Wars," a reinterpretation of the whimsical children's story as a dark tale of war and violence.

When Beddor arrived at Heathrow Airport in London following publication of the novel abroad, he was accosted by angry members of a Lewis Carroll society.

"Four of them were chanting 'Off with Frank Beddor's head!' I thought, you've got to be kidding me, come on," Beddor said.

"The Looking Glass Wars" reimagines Alice as the bold and independent Alyss Heart, the heir to Wonderland who flees her murderous aunt through the Pool of Tears only to find herself lost and alone in Victorian-era London. Eventually, with the help of royal bodyguard Hatter Madigan, she must return to Wonderland to battle aunt Redd for the throne.

While the novel upset traditionalists in the United Kingdom, home of Wonderland author Carroll, it will likely receive a warmer welcome in the United States, especially in Minnesota, where Beddor enjoys a home-turf advantage.

"The Looking Glass Wars" has just been released here, and Beddor is celebrating with a tour that includes a special stop next week at his childhood haunt, Excelsior Bay Books, as well as Minnetonka.

Beddor left the west metro decades ago to attend college in Utah. Soon after he joined the U.S. ski team, then worked as a stuntman before moving to Los Angeles, where he "naively thought, 'Oh, well, obviously I'll just have an acting career,'" he said. "That really didn't go anywhere. I've been out here ever since."

Beddor, now a successful Hollywood producer (he was behind the hit comedy "There's Something About Mary"), says he enjoyed an idyllic boyhood in the west metro, which at that time was mostly farmland.

Frequent outings to the Chanhassen Dinner Theatre and the Old Log Theatre in Excelsior influenced him eventually to move west and pursue a career as an actor, he said.

"I have this memory of the vitality that came out of the theater and the allure of this place where they created these plays," he said.

Excelsior Bay Books, he remembers, "was the one place I could ride my bike to in Excelsior and hang out when I was a kid."

Incidentally, he said he read "Alice in Wonderland" at about the same age, and he hated it.

"I've been criticized for calling it a 'girlie' book," he said. "The press has run with it, but they never follow up with the fact that I was a brash, swaggering 10-year-old, and my appreciation for Lewis Carroll's wit and imagination has increased immeasurably since."

David Gustafson • 612-673-7739 • dgustafson@startribune.com