

Alice falls into the 21st century

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by **Adi Bloom**

Alice would find it curiouser and curiouser. A new book, which retells Alice in Wonderland for a modern generation, has met with controversy and hostility.

The Looking Glass Wars, by Frank Beddor, producer of the big-screen blockbuster, There's Something About Mary, includes no tea parties, no grinning Cheshire cats, and no white rabbits. Instead, it tells the story of Princess Alyss Heart, escapee from a war-torn Wonderland. On the run from a deadly assassin called The Cat, she crosses through the looking-glass to 1850s Oxford.

The Looking Glass Wars will be published in September, and Mr Beddor is in negotiations over the film and video-games rights. But the reworking of an old favourite has already met with critical disapproval.

Michael Morpurgo, the children's laureate, said: "A story-teller of great originality should not need to take someone else's template. All authors read and read. But we take the spirit of something and weave a wonderful tale. We're not just redrafting."

A new play similarly reimagines Wonderland for the 21st century. In Alice on the Underground, Alice becomes a teenage runaway, following a break-dancing white rabbit onto the London Tube. There, she meets a series of unlikely characters, who sing to her and then vanish at the next stop.

There is the Cheshire Cat, a brothel-keeper in lavish fur coat. His clients accost Alice with a corruption of the Mock Turtle's song: "Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you come with us?"

And the Queen of Hearts becomes a drug dealer, crying "off with her head" as she introduces Alice to crack. Chris Bond, the play's director, said:

"The Alice stories always struck me as having a sinister side. It's these elements we've concentrated on."

Trevor Millum, of the National Association for the Teaching of English, welcomed new versions of the story. "If it's a creative, innovative interpretation, it adds to the stock of literature," he said. "If the original is strong enough, it won't suffer. And if it isn't strong enough, then it deserves to suffer."



A tale across time: Alice's meeting with the duchess, her cook and the baby has been reimagined often to suit the concerns of today.