

REQUIRED READING: THE NEW ALICE BAND

TO REINVENT a classic work of literature is to run a risk; you start with great raw material but, in consequence, you place yourself in danger of looking insignificant or even stupid when considered alongside it. Today sees the publication of *The Looking Glass wars* (Egmont Books), a reworking of **Lewis Carroll's** *Alice in Wonderland* (Penguin), written to appeal to boys. **Frank Beddor**, the author, has already achieved notoriety as the producer behind the US gross-out comedy *There's Something*



About Mary. Hardly ideal preparation, one might think, for tackling a masterpiece of children's literature. It remains to be seen what young readers will make of his book.

Beddor presents a version of events in which his heroine, Alyss, is born in Wonderland, destined to be a warrior queen. Only after a bloody coup is she exiled to another world, renamed Alice and adopted by the Liddell family. It's a neat reversal of Lewis Carroll's original in which Alice arrives in a magical, puzzling world after following a white rabbit down its hole.

The inhabitants of Wonderland – the Cheshire Cat, Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee – are among the most famous in childrens' literature and if, at first sight, their exploits seem a patchwork of the bizarre and the absurd, a closer reading reveals messages running underneath the action. For example, the caucus race between the Dodo and other birds has been seen as a metaphor for politics – where much energy is expended and much noise made but nothing achieved – even more apt in these days of spin than it was when Carroll wrote.

When Carroll first began work on *Alice in Wonderland* he was a quiet, socially awkward 30-year-old don at Christ Church, Oxford. His subject, mathematics, was a clear influence on the linguistic play and logic puzzles in the book, but go to *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll* (University Press of the Pacific) by **Stuart Collingwood** to learn about another, more controversial influence.

The Alice stories were written for 8-year-old Alice Liddell, just one of the many little girls with whom Carroll formed close relationships during his life. Tortured journal entries suggest that Carroll's feelings for these girls were not entirely platonic. His photographs of some of them can be found in *Reflections in the Looking Glass* (Aperture) by **Morton Cohen**; the Alice stories, it seems, were borne partly out of the guilt and remorse felt by a sensitive man struggling with his conscience.

If Alice's strange adventures are not enough for you, though, turn to the insanity they have inspired in **David Icke**. *Alice in Wonderland and the World Trade Center* (Bridge of Love Productions) is his version of the events that led up to September 11.

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