



## REFLECTIONS: TALKING WITH "HATTER M'S" FRANK BEDDOR

by Robert Taylor, Staff Writer

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"Hatter M's" not exactly the kind of book I would pick up. I was still doing comic reviews for Hero Realm when a representative from Desperado Comics offered to send me a sneak preview of their newest comic launch, and I accepted. I only had a title.

When I got the copy, I had no idea who Frank Beddor was. I am not a big fan of Ben Templesmith's work on "30 Days of Night," so I was less than enthused about giving it a try.

And, to my complete surprise, I loved it thoroughly.

Since then I've been spreading the word about the comic series and the book the series is spun off of (yes, I procured a copy even though it isn't available in the United States). Both are masterpieces in their own way. Templesmith's artwork shines instead of taking away from the story, and Beddor's saga is deeply addicting.



Frank took a few moments out of his schedule to sit down and talk up "The Looking Glass Wars" universe.



**Robert Taylor:** Hey Frank, how's life?

**Frank Beddor:** Maddening. Excruciating. The usual.

**RT:** Sounds like fun. So, what is "The Looking Glass Wars?"

**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 has always been wars in Wonderland as the powers behind White and Black Imagination have struggled for control.

**RT:** And when will the first book be published in the United States?

**FB:** September 2006. Dial Books is the US publisher.

**RT:** So, then what is "Hatter M?"

**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.

**RT:** You have an interesting publishing plan with this book. You've got a mini-series and an ongoing series in the works, right?

**FB:** Right. We are beginning with a 4 issue mini-series that introduces Hatter to our world and his initial realization that Alyss, the future Queen of Wonderland, is lost somewhere in this unfamiliar land. Coming from Wonderland, Hatter must learn to navigate our world. Since Wonderland's language consists of a system of energy and rhythm, Hatter faces no language barriers and is able to transmute and translate everything from Zulu to dolphin as he crisscrosses the globe in search of Alyss. But while he begins his search intent upon the single purpose of finding the lost princess, he gradually comes to discover that his travels have a purpose above and beyond this initial motivation and that purpose is to protect and serve Imagination. As revealed in "The Looking Glass Wars," Wonderland's great gift to our world is Imagination. As a traveler from the source of all wonder, Hatter will continually find himself facing off against those who wish to either suppress Wonderland's gift or channel the flipside of Black Imagination for their own diabolical use. This discovery and service to humanity will act upon Hatter and his own humanity as he continues to develop throughout the series.



The ongoing series will be divided into what we are calling Geo-Graphic novels as Hatter's Search and Adventures are each set in specific countries. We currently have two more mini-series or Geo-Graphic novels written -- one set in America during the Civil War and one in the Far East of the 1860's.

**RT:** Tell us a bit more of the storyline.

**FB:** Well...first off. "Hatter M" is not the story of a Mad Hatter. Hatter Madigan is an expert bladesman, a ranking High Cut of the Wonderland Millinery and not the tea guzzling madman of children's lit. Aggressively focused on the one purpose in his life, Hatter's search for Alyss commences immediately and continues incessantly leaving the whispers and totems of myth in the wake of his non-stop quest.

It's not all shadows, violence and solitude for Hatter - much of who and what he encounters is bizarre, twisted and funny. "Hatter M" will track the hero's search for a lost princess as he circles the globe from 1859-1872 in a non-stop quest to save the future Queen of Wonderland and redeem himself. Hatter Madigan is wracked with guilt and shame over having lost Alyss in the Pool of Tears after her mother had elicited what amounted to a deathbed promise that he would keep her daughter safe and make certain that she someday return to Wonderland to rule. Heavy stuff for a Royal Bodyguard to feel he has failed at. But as in most quests, the end-point is not the entire point. As he travels, Hatter M will meet many of the era's famous and infamous characters. He will influence historical battles, save lives and leave behind a legacy of service to Imagination.

**RT:** What are your favorite things to create and write about in the series?

**FB:** I think I most enjoy the mapping of Hatter's encounters with historical figures - the logic and plausibility of him meeting Jules Verne and having a conversation that will later influence Verne to write his own fantastic journies. Making the logic add up and supporting it with lost letters and newspaper clippings to further help the reader suspend disbelief and maybe whisper to themselves that this really could be true.... For me, that's the real fun of it. Keeping the plausibility of this mad search in the air while 'factually' supporting it at every opportunity.

**RT:** Will people unfamiliar with the books be able to readily understand what is going on?



**FB:** Yes. The "Hatter M" series was written as a stand alone. Issue #1 sets up everything a reader would need to know to launch them into the story. But most people -- once they get into into the series -- want to know more and enjoy reading the book as well.

**RT:** How did you get the idea for these "Looking Glass Wars?"

**FB:** 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 antiques 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. Once I discovered the truth behind the deck of playing cards it soon became clear that Lewis Carroll had changed everything. I began putting all the pieces together and weaving the revelations of just how different the real Wonderland and its inhabitants were compared to the children's lit version the world had known and accepted for nearly 150 years. Carroll's choices in how he changed Alyss's story were so fascinating (he even changed her name!) - the monsters and heroes of her lost world became these cheery reinventions. It was such a betrayal on Carroll's part and was in fact, the reason for the rift that eventually occurred between the writer and his muse. For instance-the characters we know as the White Rabbit, the Red Queen, the Cheshire Cat and of course, the Mad Hatter all appear in "The Looking Glass Wars" as they were intended to be by Alyss when she told Carroll her harrowing tale. The White Rabbit was in fact Bibwit Harte, the six foot tall albino royal tutor for all Wonderland Queens (Carroll had anagrammed his name to create the White Rabbit), while the Red Queen was in truth Alyss's aunt Redd, the revenge maddened usurper to the throne ably assisted by her top assassin, The Cat, a man size feline who morphs from adorable kitten to giant mutant feline when called upon to kill. So you see, there is a lot of truth to be uncovered.

**RT:** Why decide to spin the books off into a comic series?

**FB:** 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" 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 in the UK and other countries who have read Book 1, the comic is a great way to deepen, enhance, and bridge the world. Of course, since "LGW Book 1" will not be available in the states until next year, Hatter M's adventures will be what introduces American readers to the LGW universe. It's a total reversal - but the bridge will be there for anyone wanting to experience more of the world.

**RT:** Why choose Desperado Comics?

**FB:** Paul Jenkins recommended that I share my story with Joe Pruett. It was Joe's enthusiasm and excitement for "The Looking Glass Wars" world and the fact that he is such a maverick that made me believe we should work together.

**RT:** Can there be any more spin-offs/sequels in the comic medium?

**FB:** I am planning another comic series featuring Queen Redd - the main villain of "The Looking Glass Wars." 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.

**RT:** Have you been happy with the reception to the comic so far?

**FB:** Ecstatic. Issue #1 sold out and I had the publisher buying back my stock to try and fill re-orders from stores. Reviews have been fantastic. All very exciting.

**RT:** How did artist Ben Templesmith get chosen for the gig?

**FB:** I'm a big fan of "30 Days of Night," so I called him and pitched the character of Hatter M and he got into it.

**RT:** What other comics are you itching to get your hands on?

**FB:** Mike Mingola's new trade paperback of "Hellboy"...coming out in april.

**RT:** What artists do you want to work with?

**FB:** Mike Mingola

**RT:** Okay, you go from producing "There's Something About Mary" to writing a classic young adult book to writing the comic spin-off. What drew you to each medium and what else do you want to experiment with?

**FB:** For me, it always begins with the visuals. The manner in which the visuals are expressed in each medium and how to share what I see? What else would I like to experiment with? Graphic novels and their endless potential fascinate me; it might be the culmination of all three of the previous mediums I have now worked in.





**RT:** What were your first comic books?

**FB:** I never missed an issue of "Mad Magazine."

**RT:** If you could only write one book for the rest of your career, what would it be?

**FB:** At the moment, I would have to say "Hatter M."

**RT:** Sounds about right. How about film? What's the best comic book movie ever made?

**FB:** I might say "Sin City," though I'm not absolutely sure. I will probably think of five more later.

**RT:** Since this book was announced, you've been working the convention experience hard. What's been your weirdest convention experience thus far?

**FB:** I was signing copies of the UK edition of "The Looking Glass Wars" and in the din of the convention I didn't quite hear someone's name correctly so I wrote the wrong name in the book. So I had to sign another one and I figured I would just have to eat the cost of the screw-up. But later in the convention I ran out of books and I had a mad horde of potential readers demanding copies so I offered the 'wrong name' copy at a discount -- someone quickly offered to buy it and wanted me to X out the wrong name and write their name in. Fun. Okay. So the next day a friend of this person's shows up and has an unsigned copy of the book they had bought earlier. They wanted me to write an incorrect name into the book, X it out, and write their name next to it. This is probably how weird trends develop. I want it acknowledged that "The Looking Glass Wars" was ground zero for this one.

**RT:** If you were remembered for only one thing in your career, what would you want it to be?

**FB:** My smile. Just kidding. "The Looking Glass Wars" Universe.