



## The Looking Glass Wars

**Book Review: Frank Beddor's debut novel tells of a dark, war-torn Wonderland and the underground rebellion to restore paradise.**

**April 01, 2005** - *"They crossed the street and came to a corner crowded with smoky gwormmy-kabob grills and crystal smugglers hawking contraband. Dodge tried to call to his senses the aroma of freshly baked tarty tarts. Hadn't his father bought him one on this very corner? His sense-memory failed him. Impossible to enter into the past. Underneath the shouts and horns that echoed through the streets, he heard a disembodied voice speaking "Reddisms" from loudspeakers mounted overhead. The Redd way is the right way. As in the beginning, there was Redd, so in the end Redd shall be. Three-dimensional faces on holographic billboards told of the latest crackdowns and taxations. Piped in from who knew where played the background music of Wondertropolis' freefall into decay. It seemed to come from every crack in the pavement, every pothole in the street, every crevice in the time-battered buildings: a composition on infinite repeat..."* -- Frank Beddor, *The Looking Glass Wars*

When a friend of mine sent me Frank Beddor's debut novel *The Looking Glass Wars*, it went right into the pile of books, DVDs, and CDs that clutters my desk and taunts me with just how much work is yet to be done. Despite my friend's note telling me to read it immediately, I couldn't really get all that excited about what I assumed was going to be another "re-imagining" of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* yarn. Yawn ... so deeper into the pile it went. That was my first mistake. A few weeks later, I grabbed the book for a leisurely weekend read expecting a nice little diversion, a time killer. Second mistake. What I discovered instead was a brilliantly structured, surprisingly dark, mesmerizing and imaginative journey to a Wonderland so intoxicating and visually stunning that I found myself wanting to book a ticket to the land of Naturcide, carnotulips, and cannonball spiders.

Beddor sets the hook of the book right away in his prologue, a dreamy sequence about a meeting between novelist Lewis Carroll and a young Alice Liddell. It is commonly told that Carroll wove his literary world of Wonderland to soothe the young Alice. However, Beddor's controversial prologue posits that it was, in fact, Alice who told the stories to Carroll. Wonderland exists. Alyss (Carroll bastardized the

spelling of her name) was destined to be the warrior queen of Wonderland but found herself exiled after a particularly bloody coup. She lands in Victorian London where she, rockily at first, ultimately assimilates into society and assumes a conventional life. Over the years, her powers of imagination (the ability of which to conjure cements and demonstrates a Queen's power) wane; her queendom becomes a distant memory. If not for the intrepid Hatter Madigan, a member of the Millinery (Wonderland's security force) who tracks Alyss down, she may have become just another society woman sipping tea in a too-tight bodice.

While Alyss was away, Wonderland has been bashed and twisted into an oppressive, dark totalitarian state overseen by Alyss' evil Aunt known only as Redd. While Redd squeezes more and more of the citizens of Wonderland into her warped vision of society, a revolution is brewing in a parallel world. The Alyssians, a motley bunch of former palace guards, warriors, followers of "White Imagination" and assorted exiles, await the return of their Queen Alyss so they may conquer Redd and restore decency and light to their formerly great land.

Part adventure, part fantasy, part violence and blood, Beddor's novel jogs between light and easy moments in the ideal Wondertropolis and the murderous intentions of the oppressive Redd with frequency and ease. With shades of Orwell's 1984 as well as some brilliant new takes on Carroll's characters, *The Looking Glass Wars* will stoke the imaginations of young readers well after it has been completed. You'll meet the murderous and brutal Cat, the young hero and childhood friend of Alyss, Dodge Anders, and the aforementioned Redd who, while evil, is also worthy of admiration for her own powerful (if misguided and sinister) imagination.

Thus the appeal of "*The Looking Glass Wars*" is broad and full of plenty of treats for most young readers as well as fans of comic book narratives. Young women will relate to Alyss' journey and search for self-relevance, the young men will relate to Dodge Anders and the assassin Hatter Madigan, and gadget freaks will revel in heaps of weaponry and innovative transportation devices.

The book is not without a couple of minor annoyances, however. Beddor spends almost too much time at the beginning of the book setting up the paradise of Wondertropolis. Readers seeking action may be disappointed in the amount of time it takes for the story to get going. Also, at times, I found myself wanting more interaction between Hatter Madigan and Alyss ... or maybe it was just more Hatter Madigan I wanted. Not sure. But there is something desperate and fierce about a solitary man on a quest to find an exiled Queen and much more

description and exploration of this character would have been excellent. Sometimes too, Beddor's action sequences unspool in an unconventional, cinematic way, right down to a line pulled out of a thousand action movie clichés: "Seek this!" a character says before delivering the coup de grace to an enemy.

In the end though, I almost hate to publish this review. It would be my preference that every reader go blindly into Beddor's imaginative world, just as I did. Find out for yourself what an AD-52 can do, or just what the Crystal Continuum is, or how digesting "pinkiepins" is not really a good idea. Uncover the Battle of Blaxik and the flora and fauna of Outerwilderbeastia, the jabberwock battles, the Pool of Tears. Unfortunately, United States readers will have to wait a bit for Beddor's novel to come stateside. Currently the tome is not available here though savvy travelers can pick it up in London and in other major European cities.

**About the Author:** After we dug a bit, what we found Beddor's story to be fascinating in and of itself. Producer of the highest grossing comedy ever (*There's Something About Mary*), Frank pulled a disappearing act following the runaway success of that film and started creating Alyss' world. Gone from the Hollywood social scene, absent from countless development meetings, granting very few interviews, and a pursuing a 180 degree career shift, Beddor spent close to five solid years discovering and cataloging his world. If this, the first novel in the Looking Glass Wars trilogy is any indication, Beddor's anti-Hollywood gambit could pay off with the result that this next cycle in his creative life could ultimately be his most rewarding.

**Coming Soon:** We tracked Frank Beddor down in person outside of his Los Angeles office (a forgotten art deco building on Wilshire Boulevard), got invited up, and managed to score a remarkable, exclusive interview. Trust us when we say that what he has in mind next is very ambitious and quite incredible.

-- **Steven Horn**