For me, “Alice In Wonderland” is one of those unforgettable tales that has been imprinted onto my imagination for as long as I can remember, alongside such classics as The Wizard of Oz and Star Wars, and remains one of the most beloved stories of our time. So when I heard about Frank Beddor's “The Looking Glass Wars”, which supposedly told the true story of Alice Liddell and a Wonderland that was real, I was definitely intrigued and picked up a copy of the book when it was finally released here in the states two years after its UK debut (2004). Even though the book was somewhat aimed toward a younger audience and was a little rough around the edges writing-wise, I enjoyed “The Looking Glass Wars” enough to read the excellent Hatter M comic book series and have been looking forward to the second volume in the trilogy, “Seeing Redd”.

In “The Looking Glass Wars”, readers are introduced to a world quite different from the one depicted in Lewis Carroll's books. Earth and Wonderland are parallel universes connected by portals (The Pool of Tears). Wonderland itself is a fantastical landscape where magic (White Imagination / Black Imagination) and advanced technology exist side-by-side. Alice Liddell is actually Alyss Heart, future queen of Wonderland whose empire was usurped by her evil aunt Redd. The Hatter is really Hatter Madigan, the queen’s personal bodyguard and expert fighter; the White Rabbit is Bibwit Harte, the Heart family’s tutor; the Cheshire Cat is the Cat, Redd's deadly assassin; Tweedledee & Tweedledum are represented as General Doppelgänger who can split his body into two personas Doppel & Ganger; the caterpillars are actually oracles; and Reverend Dodgson aka Lewis Carroll, is the writer who twisted Alyss' real-life confessions into the fairy tale that became known as “Alice In Wonderland”. There are countless other ‘departures’ from the story readers know, but it's best if you discover those on your own as Mr. Beddor's vivid imagination is one of the major highlights of the series.

As far as the actual plot in “The Looking Glass Wars”, I won't get into any specifics, but basically Alyss finds her way back to Wonderland, joins a group of rebels, and somehow defeats Redd. Needless to say, it’s probably in your best interest to read “The Looking Glass Wars” before starting on “Seeing Redd”, which takes place not long after the first book. In “Seeing Redd”, Alyss is dealing with the difficulties of being queen, which not only includes rebuilding her empire after the devastation wrought by Redd’s reign, but also facing new threats from such enemies as the chauvinistic King Arch of Boarderland, and dealing with her personal feelings for the Captain of the Palace Guard, Dodge Anders. Subplots include Arch's devious plan for taking over Wondertropolis which involves Hatter Madigan and a weapon of mass destruction (WILMA), Homburg Molly (Alyss’ personal bodyguard) discovering who her parents are; Dodge Anders whose duties are threatened by his need for vengeance against the Cat, and of course Redd who may not be so defeated after all...
If you enjoyed “The Looking Glass Wars” I daresay you’re going to like “Seeing Redd” even more, which I think is better than the first book in many areas. The writing for one is tighter and more accomplished; because a lot of setup was taken care of in “The Looking Glass Wars” the pacing is much faster and there’s more heart-pounding action; the fabulous cast of characters return along with some cool new faces such as Arch’s bodyguards Ripkins & Blister, an evil version of Bibwit Harte (Vollrath), and such creative villains as Master Sacrénoir, Siren Hecht, et cetera; and Mr. Beddor’s imagination is wilder than ever. As far as the story, it’s a little bit darker, but still appropriate for PG audiences while also appealing to mature readers, and the ending comes to a nice stopping point even though it’s the middle volume in the series. In short, everything that made “The Looking Glass Wars” such a fun read is multiplied and improved upon in “Seeing Redd” and my only complaint is that I have to wait now for the final book in the trilogy...

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