

Rabbit hole revisited: Beddor finishes Wonderland trilogy

By LOUIS B. PARKS FOR THE CHRONICLE

Oct. 18, 2009, 3:02PM



There's something about Alice. Turns out she's not the young girl who falls down a rabbit hole and into a series of bizarre encounters, as detailed in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. She's really Alyss Heart, the rightful queen of a beleaguered kingdom who must lead a desperate revolt against her murderous aunt.

Fantasy writer Frank Beddor, who also produced the movie *There's Something About Mary*, created Alyss in his 2007 novel, *The Looking Glass Wars*, and continued her story in 2008's *Seeing Redd*. Both books spent time on the New York Times' best-seller list. *Arch Enemy*, the final book of his trilogy, is among the top young-adult titles at amazon.com in its first week.

Though the series has a strong female lead character and a feminist theme, boys and young men have proved to be its most avid readers. They are attracted, no doubt, by the metal playing-card soldiers, deadly flesh-eating roses and near super-human heroes like Hatter Madigan, Alyss' lethal bodyguard, who has a hat that turns into spinning blades.

"I really respond to strong women, and they are underserved (in most entertainment)," says Beddor, who saw a female hero as "an opportunity rather than a disadvantage." But he was also "very aware that I did not want to turn off the boys. So I worked hard to create compelling secondary characters that had interesting attributes that boys would identify with."

Between the books, Beddor expanded the tale with a series of popular graphic novels featuring Hatter Madigan. He also created a Web site, www.lookingglasswars.com, where fans can see videos or play *The Looking Glass Wars* games or even hear soundtrack music for the novels. A coffee-table volume for girls called *Princess Alyss of Wonderland* is filled with removable notecards, tea-party tart recipes and journal entries.

"It's been really organic," Beddor says of his ever-growing alternate reality. "It

started with parts of the story that would not be right for the prose book.”

Beddor began creating Alyss' world after seeing some Napoleonic playing cards in The British Museum in 1998. They reminded him of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, his mother's favorite book, which he had to hear often. Too often.

“I hated it,” he says, “Give me (author) Jack London.”

He plunged into two years of research and planning for *The Looking Glass Wars*, never expecting the series to be a hit.

In Beddor's universe, Carroll wrote the original book to please young Alice Liddell and her two sisters. He intentionally distorted the truth, which was that Alice/Alyss accidentally materialized in England just as her mother, ruler of Wonderland, was murdered by Alyss' vicious aunt, Queen Redd. Alyss tried to convince her Victorian friends of her origins. Carroll's book “was Alyss' last best chance to go home,” explains Beddor, sticking to his tale. “He betrayed her and twisted her story because he didn't think his audience could handle it.”

Thirteen years later, when 20-year-old Alyss is rescued and returned to an almost destroyed Wonderland, she learns she is an orphan queen whose few surviving subjects are fighting a desperate revolt against Redd. She proves she is no genteel English schoolgirl as she throws herself into the fierce fighting.

“I'm heading into my 11th year (on the series),” Beddor says, adding he would have been shocked then to know where it would take him.

“I had aspirations, but I didn't think it would really work. My fallback position was, I'll write this book and it won't be published, (but) I'll pitch the movie one day.”

The mainly male Hatter Madigan comic-book audience may have saved the series from oblivion. Beddor was a first-time writer, and his unusual idea for *The Looking Glass Wars* was turned down again and again by publishers. He finally interested a British children's publisher. The original British hardback did OK but wasn't a huge hit.

Then Beddor, who is visually oriented thanks to his film career, teamed with top comic artist Ben Templesmith to do a series of graphic novels on Hatter.

“My agent and my U.K. publisher said don't do (a graphic novel); you could ruin your audience. In fact, it turned my prose around and broadened my audience.”

Fans of those graphic novels also bought the prose paperback, making it a best-seller. Suddenly, American publishers were interested.

Beddor's own life has been a little bit fairy tale. He was a freestyle skiing world champion (both combination and overall champion) in the early '80s, a Hollywood stuntman (*Hot Dog, the Movie*) and an admitted failed actor (*Amazon Women on the Moon*) before becoming producer of 1998's fourth-biggest worldwide hit, *There's Something about Mary*.

He's glad to reach the end of the trilogy. (Finishing) “is a relief, for sure,” he says.

“There was some grumbling from readers: The second book had a cliff-hanger ending, and it took two years for the third book to come out. I didn't realize how much pressure I would feel to satisfy those fans.”

And he still plans a movie, or maybe several from his company, Automatic

Pictures. Beddor already has a script based on Alyss' story and another in the works about Hatter M. For now, however, he's eager to see what will happen when Disney releases director Tim Burton's sure-to-be-eccentric *Alice in Wonderland*, starring Johnny Depp as the Mad Hatter, next year.

"I have to put on the pause button," he says of his movies. "Johnny Depp and Tim Burton are big A-list talent. I think actually, in a way, it's all good because if (Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*) is good, it's all things Alice. It requires us to be smart in how I position my movies, but certainly it's helping my books."

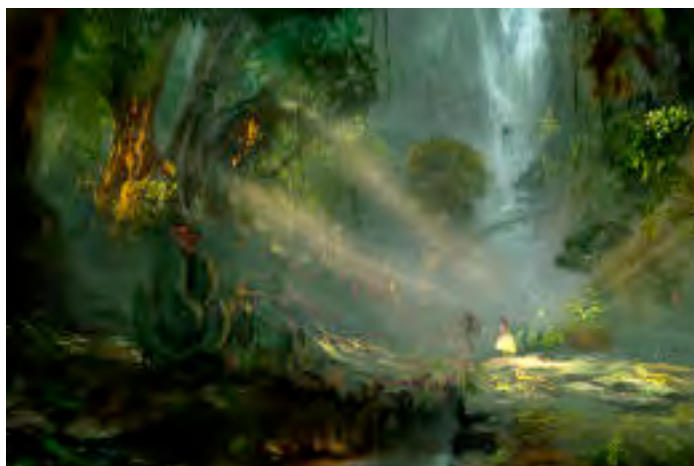
Louis B. Parks is a freelance writer living in Wimberley.



In *Looking Glass Wars*, Queen Alyss Heart told author Lewis Carroll the story of her origin, but he twisted her story to create his own version of *Alice in Wonderland*.



Cat Scratch is Queen Redd's assassin in *Seeing Redd*, the second part of the trilogy



The Everlasting Forest, a background image from *Seeing Redd*.

Resources

SORTING OUT THE SERIES

World champion skier turned movie producer turned fantasy writer Frank Beddor has created so many parts to *The Looking Glass Wars* universe it can be hard to keep it all straight. Find more details on the Web site,

www.lookingglasswars.com.

***The Looking Glass Wars* trilogy**

- **Vol. 1 *The Looking Glass Wars*:** Princess Alyss' mother is killed, and Alyss escapes to Earth for many years, before returning to fight evil Queen Redd.
- **Vol. 2 *Seeing Redd*:** Redd seems to be causing more trouble, but is it really neighboring King Arch who does not believe in females as head of state?
- **Vol. 3 *Arch Enemy*:** More trouble from King Arch in this apparently final volume (available Thursday)

The *Hatter M* graphic novels, starring Hatter Madigan, Alyss' bodyguard

- ***Compilation Vol. 1 : Hatter M.***
- ***Compilation Vol. 2 : Hatter M: Mad With Wonder*** (available Thursday)

Princess Alyss of Wonderland

A coffee-table-style scrapbook of Alice/Alyss' memories as a girl on Earth, with mixed-in history of Alice Liddell, author Lewis Carroll and his original book. Out of print but available through the Web site or sites such as Amazon.com.

On the Web

Games, videos and music are available on the Web site.