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ARCHENEMY/HATTER M VOL.2

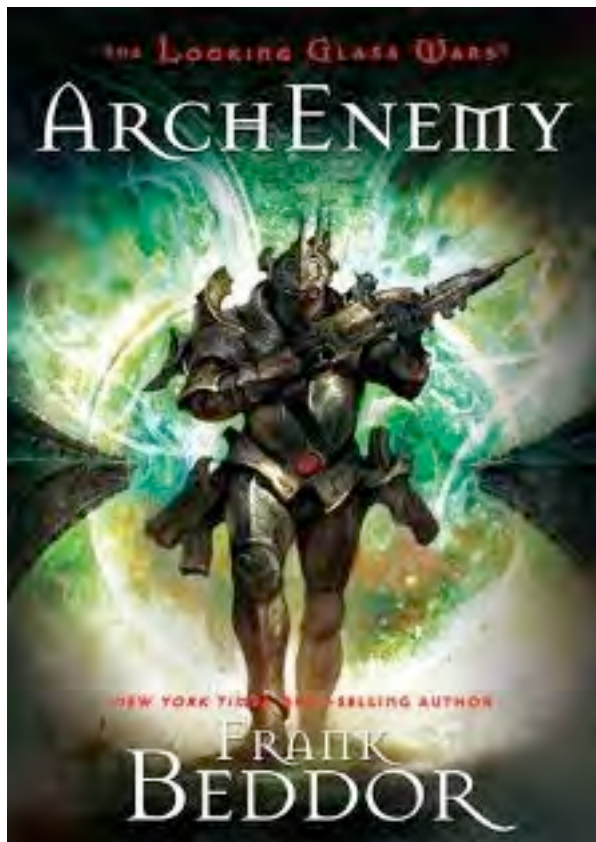
Written by Frank Beddor and Liz Cavalier

Graphic Novel Art by Sami Makkonen

ARCHENEMY Published by [Penguin Books](#)

HATTER M: MAD WITH WONDER Published by [Automatic Pictures Publishing](#)

Frank Beddor brings a close to his LOOKING GLASS WARS prose trilogy as ARCHENEMY hits shelves, but along the way, he expands the backstory of Hatter Madigan in MAD WITH WONDER. Let's take a look at how he tackles each.



At the end of the middle novel, SEEING REDD, King Arch, ruler of the borderlands of Wonderland, had detonated a weapon that deadened the imaginations of Wonderlanders, leaving Queen Alyss Heart, villainess Redd Heart, and a good chunk of the population without their wondrous powers. As book three opens, Arch is on the move, using the united tribes to militarily make his way towards Wonderland's throne. It isn't much of a spoiler to say that he gets there and wrests control of the land for himself, leaving both Alyss and Redd in dire straits as they wait for their powers to come back. But Arch is determined to hold the throne forever, meaning

that he has a plan to neutralize and eliminate imagination in Wonderland permanently. Which means that Alyss and her evil rival Redd may actually have to join forces in order to stop the sneaky King. But how long can that last?

Reading through the final volume of Beddor's take on Carroll, I was struck by a few things about the uber-plot that stuck out to me. The first is that the plotting really is quite tight. The arc that swings across

the three novels plays fair, and you never once get the sense that Beddor is making things up as he goes. By the conclusion of *ARCHENEMY*, you can see that he was planning for his ultimate conclusion all along. And that he had a conclusion in mind that would deliver a strong moral message is just icing on the cake for the younger readers who will find these books and absorb them. But what else jumped out at me is that these books really aren't so much about Alyss. Alyss herself is a plot device. Characters perform their actions because of their allegiances to Alyss, or their antipathy to Alyss, or to remove Alyss from the plot. I felt uneasy about that; a trilogy about Wonderland needs an Alyss that is a compelling character, and Beddor never succeeds in making her one in any of the novels. It's the supporting cast that shines and captures the reader's attention.

In fact, I'd go as far to say that these books are really about Hatter Madigan's journey (and that of his daughter, Homburg Molly). From Hatter's flight through the Pool Of Tears in *LOOKING GLASS WARS* to his allowed capture by Arch in *SEEING REDD* to the graphic novels focused on the characters, it's clear that Beddor is extremely comfortable with, and excited by, his military man with the deadly hat and knives. Madigan opens as a single-minded man, but gets the only full arc in these books. As time passes, he becomes a mentor, a father, and a man conflicted by duty versus family and must decide how to serve those two masters.



MAD WITH WONDER is the second graphic novel focused on Madigan's attempts to find the child Alyss during the first prose novel, *LOOKING GLASS WARS*. He spent thirteen years on Earth tracking her down, and the two books to date have fleshed out that period of his life. *WONDER* finds him traveling to America during the Civil War and running into issues of slavery and the treatment of the mentally ill; indeed, Hatter finds himself institutionalized by a Confederate doctor that refuses to accept that the royal bodyguard isn't either a Yankee

or a Reb. Lots of knife work and hat throwing follow.

I was of two minds about MAD WITH WONDER; it's illustrated in stunning fashion by newcomer Sami Makkonen. To anyone who thought that the second book would be lacking without Ben Templesmith's art, I can assure you that it isn't. Makkonen steps in and does lovely work. Each page is a visual delight, and stylistically, Makkonen isn't far off from Templesmith as it is. On the other hand, there's something of a lack of drama to it all; we know that Madigan eventually finds Alyss and takes her home to assume the throne. So there's a bit of a feeling of standing in place and marking time. In order to make these HATTER M graphic novels worthy stand-alones, they need compelling side stories for Madigan to be involved in, because there's no real threat to him. In the case of book two, Beddor (and co-writer Cavalier) are only partially successful. In particular, a stop wherein Hatter finds something of a brief love interest really falls flat. It needed to be expanded upon a bit and given some flesh on its bones to become truly compelling to the character's "legend."

There's at least one more HATTER M volume coming, though, so we'll see how they address this issue next time out.

In all, I was very impressed by how Beddor used ARCHENEMY to complete his story's journey. It isn't deep, but it sure was a lot of fun. The way that Beddor used his prose sort of forced me to use my imagination to get a clear picture of exactly how things looked and worked in his Wonderland. Considering the subject of these novels, wouldn't you have to say that was exactly the point? Well played, author. Well played, indeed.

[Marc Mason](#)