

REFLECTIONS: "HATTER M'S" FRANK BEDDOR

by [Robert Taylor](#), Staff Writer

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REFLECTIONS #226

I believe in magic.

Yeah, I know, we aren't really supposed to admit it as we get older, but part of me still believes that, every now and then, something magical sneaks into our world and causes something spectacular to happen, and no matter how jaded I get with life or how frustrating work gets, I still have that little spark there to believe in. Call them miracles, call them magic, whatever, but I believe in it.

A few years ago I received a random package in my mail from a comic company I had never heard of and a representative from that company who had no way of getting my address. Instead of throwing it into a Ziploc bag and testing for anthrax, I ripped it open and introduced myself to the comic "Hatter M," written by Frank Beddor.



When I opened the comic book I had no idea about that this was a tie-in to the fantasy series of novels "The Looking Glass Wars," all written by Beddor, nor did I know that the miniseries took the characters and places from "[Alice in Wonderland](#)" and turned them on their ear. But I did know something - that comic was magic.

And now the "Looking Glass Wars" books have become a hit both in the United States and England, and the hardcover "Hatter M" miniseries is being released for a plethora of new readers to enjoy.

I believe in magic and, you know, I actually believe in the magic of what Beddor says he encountered in this interview. How else can you explain the magic in those pages?

Robert Taylor: Hey Frank, how's life?

Frank Beddor: Swinging.

RT: So why don't you remind us about just how you got the idea for "The Looking Glass Wars" saga.

FB: A number of years ago I was in London for the European premiere of "There's [Something About Mary](#)." One afternoon, 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 much darker 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.



RT: Now why did you decide to put such an important chapter of the story out as a comic book, "Hatter M," instead of writing it as part of one of the novels?

FB: "Hatter M" the comic 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.

RT: The cover of the hardcover tells us that this is volume one, and the finale left us with a pretty swell cliffhanger. How many volumes do you plan to write of the Hatter's saga?

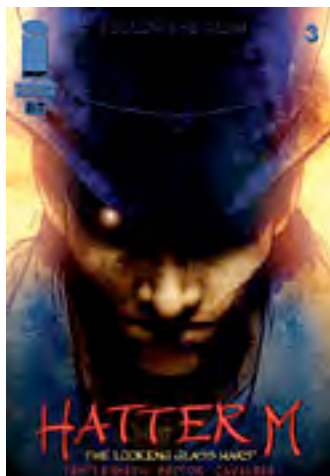
FB: I plan to do a trilogy of geo-geographic novels.

RT: And you want Ben Templesmith on the art, or have different artists on each volume?

FB: I would love to have Ben continue for the full journey if his schedule permits. If this isn't possible there are several other artists that I would be very excited to work with.

RT: Before we go into more detail about Ben's work, let's talk about the story itself. The trade says it was written by you and Liz Cavalier. I'm not familiar with her work, tell me more about her.

FB: While I had uncovered a great deal of information regarding Hatter Madigan's search during my ongoing investigation of the story behind the Wonderland cards, Cavalier had even more.



As an astral traveler and interstellar author, Cavalier's lifelong passion of tracking the myth of a prepotent, otherworldly warrior who appeared in France in 1859 to crisscross the planet for 13 years dovetailed perfectly with my own discovery regarding the truth of Wonderland.

Over time, Cavalier had collected the tattered, annotated maps and coded diaries of a truly mad traveler in search of something

profound. But for her, the ultimate questions remained unanswered. Who was this man and what did he search for? With the publication and revelations of the "Looking Glass Wars," the mystery was finally solved. Upon reading the book she immediately contacted me and strongly suggested we meet to share what we knew. When we finally put all of our pieces together we came up with a saga far beyond either of our wildest imagination.

And that's really quite far....

RT: How much is you and how much is Liz?

FB: Overall, our writing process is combative yet symbiotic. While we both prefer to dominate we also have a lot of fun cooperating and this really propels the writing partnership towards a 50/50 split.

RT: Tell us about the creation of the Hatter character and how you shaped his character.

FB: As readers know from the "Looking Glass Wars," Lewis Carroll took it upon himself to change everything Alyss had told him about Wonderland, including the identity of Royal Bodyguard Hatter Madigan.

In fact, as Cavalier and I discovered, Hatter Madigan was an expert bladesman, a ranking High Cut of the Wonderland Millinery and not the tea guzzling madman of Lewis Carroll lit. 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 Dark 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.

RT: What did you find most difficult in altering your writing style for a comic book?

FB: Probably shaping the arc of each issue to end with a cliffhanger. This was new stuff to me.

RT: What did you find yourself putting in the miniseries that you couldn't put in the novel?

FB: The tone and humor that I would want to find in a comic book. Comic books are not expected to lay it all out in a linear fashion like most novels do. My favorite comic books relish interrupted plotlines and mysterious characters and the fun of an off kilter, freewheeling, unexpected universe.

RT: Even though the first novel was a big hit in England already, it hadn't come out in America yet when the miniseries debuted. Did you have any troubles relating the book to readers or getting publicity?



FB: What helped me most were the comic cons. By going to as many as possible for several years in a row I was able to link the book, which hadn't even come out in the US yet, to the comic series.

Some of the people I met at my first con in San Diego I still see each year and at other cons. The loyalty that came from meeting people in person and early on was amazing and I really think this is what helped to put it over.

RT: Now that the first mini-series is complete, look back on it - is there anything you would have changed knowing what you know now?

FB: Being an absolute pragmatist I do not allow my mind to wander into the depressing land of 'what ifs.'

A lot of choices had to be made and made relatively quickly about how to lay out the initial mini-series and my biggest concern was to make sure it tagged with the novel. Certain choices on graphics and font come to mind, but no one probably noticed but me. These were things that, though not straight up storytelling, did impact how the issues communicated the world. But I did have my chance to rectify these various danglers when I published the hardcopy collection.

RT: And, of course, what are you most pleased with?

FB: Working without a net in the sense that I did not just pull from the already published "Looking Glass Wars," but blew it out further to start creating Hatter's parallel adventures. This first mini-series had its own story to tell and fans found it not only entertaining but meaningful and inspiring.

That's pretty good.

RT: Let's talk about reaction in America to your work, first the miniseries and then the actual "Looking Glass Wars" books.

FB: Predominately, for both the miniseries and the LGW books, the reaction has been quite uplifting and at times a little startling.

The reactions of fans can be likened to someone held under water wishing for some air and then getting it. Overall, the fans of LGW and "Hatter" thank me for opening up a world that they can explore and believe in. It's as though they had wished for a place like this with characters they could champion.

RT: Give us a few teases about what you have coming up in the other two parts of the trilogy.

FB: For those who wish to know more about this traveler from another realm, we have been able to substantiate a good deal of historical information and plan to share this with readers in an origin story revolving around the Wonderland Millinery and the men AND women who train as its Hat wielding agents. While Hatter will continue to meet and interact with historical luminaries in upcoming issues, he will also meet someone from his own past wandering the Earth resulting in dire consequences.

RT: Alright, let's talk Ben Templesmith. How did he climb onboard the project?

FB: I caught up with him via telephone and was able to make a case for "Hatter M."

RT: Why did you feel he was the right match for the story?

FB: [It was] purely intuitional.

RT: What most impressed you about his work on the book?

FB: His use of color and the sense of nothing being exactly as it appears to be.

RT: Alright, ready for the lightning round?



FB: Bring it on.

RT: What was your first comic book?

FB: A chunky little paperback circa '50s of collected Charlie Brown comic strips that I bought at a rummage sale when I was about 7-years-old for a nickel and went home and sat in a tree and read.

RT: Favorite comic book of all time?

FB: "Mad Magazine."

RT: Has there ever been a comic that touched or changed your life?

FB: "The Escapist" by Kavalier and Clay.

RT: What is your biggest strength as a writer?

FB: Probably my ability to wonder about bizarre things and then get other people to actually care about them as well.

RT: Biggest weakness?

FB: Maybe to shut myself down too soon and not really trust how far out something can go and still be sustained.

RT: What comics can you never miss month after month?

FB: I missed too many for too long to have any regimen in place.

RT: Let's say you are writing a weekly comic for one year with three other writers. Who are they?

FB: H.G. Wells, Jack Kerouac and Patricia Highsmith

RT: Never had any of those before, but what inspired your choices. Can you imagine Wells and Kerouac's imaginations and ideals put together with Highsmith's tight pacing and storytelling style? Whoa!

If you could only write one book for the rest of your career,



what would it be?

FB: I suspect it will be some offshoot of the "Looking Glass Wars" since the further I go the more I find. And I'm not getting any younger.

RT: Who would be drawing?

FB: Well, I wouldn't expect anyone else to commit to my "One Book" for years to come, so I see a revolving circle of artists young, old and, in some cases, deceased but re-animated by a desire to graphically participate in my madness.

RT: What is the best comic book movie ever made?

FB: [It] hasn't been made yet. We all know the ones that have been done well, but as far as one standing out as the hands down blow me away best, nothing so far has done that for me.

RT: Weirdest convention experience?

FB: The food.

RT: If you could only be remembered for one thing in your career, what would it be?

FB: Finding and opening the portal to Wonderland.