

### This Ain't Your Mama's Wonderland

Thursday May 25 2006

So I finished *The Looking Glass Wars* last night.

Whoa.

I'll admit right now that *Alice in Wonderland* is one of my all time favorite books, but I don't think it's some sort of treasure that needs to be stored under glass somewhere. I don't have a problem with messing around with classic literature, in fact I really like it when authors do that. Katie Roiphe had a very cool version of Lewis Carroll and Alice Liddell a few years ago with *Still She Haunts Me* and I thought Karen Wallace's take on the Darling family with Wendy was amazing (and totally unexpected – I reviewed it for *Eclectica* last year). I raved about Illusive Entertainment's comic Dorothy over at Bookslut a couple of months ago and there just are not enough good things for me to say about that book. It's the dark version of Oz that I've been craving for ages and the fact that it is so wonderfully illustrated makes it a must read for any fan of Baum's work. (Or any fantasy fan period.) All of this means that when Frank Beddor's reimagining of Wonderland found its way to me I was delighted. And even though the accompanying news articles suggested that some folks were disturbed by his tinkering of the classic, I really didn't care. This was an Alice who kicks ass and that's all I needed to hear.

So here's the deal – Wonderland is real but it's a lot darker than Carroll's book. Queen Redd is pretty much a homicidal maniac, the Mad Hatter is Hatter Mattigan, body guard to the White Queen (Alice's mother) and the Cheshire Cat is really creepy.

And he likes to kill – a lot.

Alice ends up having to run for her life and jumps into a portal that lands her in our world where she eventually gets adopted by the Liddell family. She keeps insisting on telling stories about her real home but everyone says she nuts and it's only Lewis Carroll, a family friend, who seems to believe her. He promises to write it all down, but when she reads his book she sees that he didn't believe her either – he made her life into a silly story. Alice is furious at Carroll and swears she will never speak to him again, creating a rift between her family and him. This was a stroke of genius on Beddor's part as there was a very real and unexplained parting between the Liddells and Carroll. Some historians have

thought that it stemmed from Mrs. Liddell becoming uncomfortable with Carroll's attachment to Alice (and all those creepy pictures he took of children) but no one knows what happened. Beddor explains it all in his version of the story and then continues on with Alice's life and eventual return to Wonderland where she must battle her crazy aunt for power.

Basically it's lots of battles and bloodthirstiness and wicked cool adventures and you really don't have more than a moment or two to catch your breath. But the story is good – it's not all nonstop pointless action, there's a very good story and some wonderful characters as well. It's going to appeal as much to boys as girls and I'm predicting it will be hugely popular when it comes out this fall. I'm looking forward to seeing what other reviewers think about it, but my mind is set. I loved this book and I really think everyone should be getting themselves a copy!