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## **Book Review: *The Looking Glass Wars* by Frank Beddor**

It appears that all this time everything we thought we knew about Wonderland and that girl called Alice is about to be completely flipped onto its head. Curiouser and curiouser indeed! Frank Beddor, best known for producing films whose credits include *There's Something About Mary*, has begun a somewhat arduous task – to tell the world the truth about Wonderland. Doesn't that sound odd?

Apparently, the character that many have come to know as Alice Liddell, sometime muse of Lewis Carroll, is in fact Alyss Heart, eventual Queen of Wonderland. Yes, that's correct. She comes from Wonderland even though Carroll's works would have us believe otherwise – that she was a mortal girl who stumbled upon an entrance to the aforementioned magical world. Most of us will be able to recall countless bits and pieces of Alice's adventures – through books, films, cartoons, and other such media.

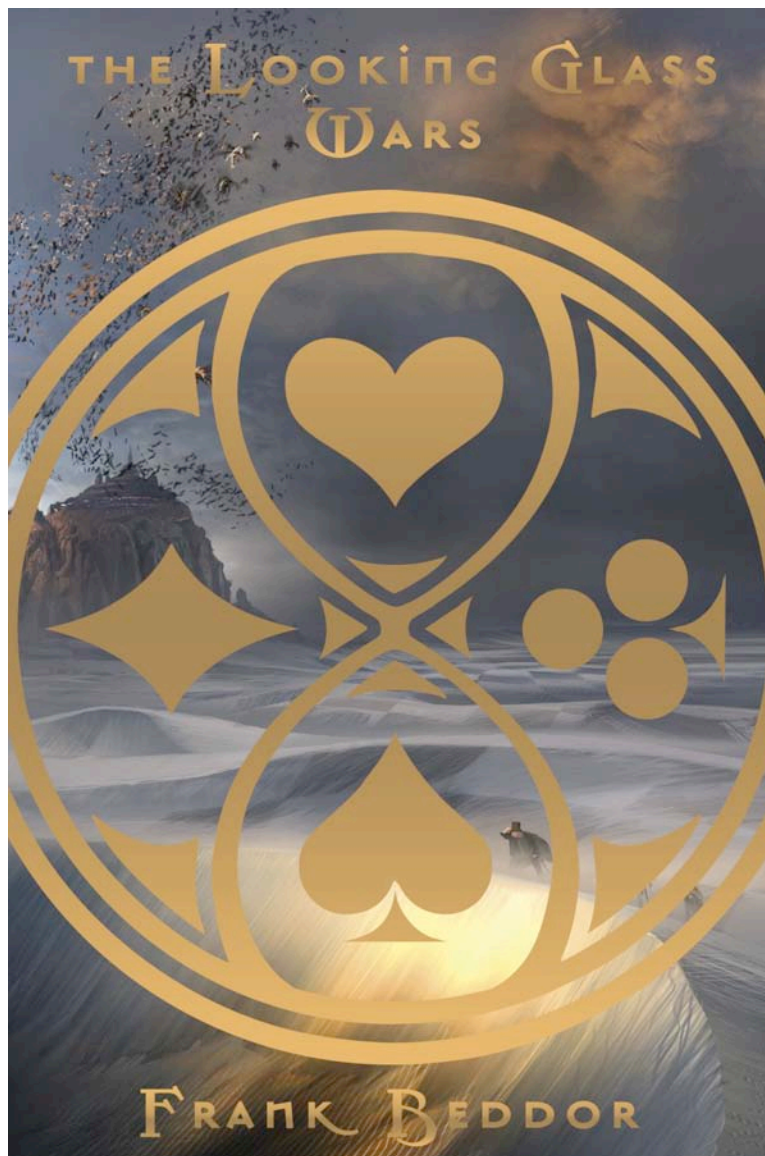
So, we've determined that Alyss is not your ordinary girl, even for Wonderland. She is a princess, her parents being the current monarchs. At the beginning of Beddor's account, a very spoiled queen-to-be is celebrating her seventh birthday, and with the help of her imagination is conjuring all sorts of amusing things. Magic is an essential part of life in Wonderland, as is having an active but well-intentioned and disciplined imagination.

Sadly, this glorious festive occasion is to be thrown into chaos courtesy of Alyss' evil aunt Redd, sister to her mother, Queen Genevieve. Redd, resentful of her sister's position, has planned a coup and to protect Alyss (seeing as she is future queen), for her own good she is whisked off and thrown into the Pool of Tears by her bodyguard, Hatter Madigan. This pool takes Alyss to Victorian England, but she is separated from Madigan who ends up elsewhere in the mortal world.

Poor Alyss! Victorian England is not kind to her, and people seem to be constantly incensed at her claims to be from this other world. Imagination is not tolerated and she is desperate to go home. Hope eventually comes along in the form of Reverend Charles Dodgson (whose pseudonym Lewis Carroll we are more acquainted with).

He is fascinated with her tale and eager to write it down. Alyss is far from pleased with the final result (well, the beastly man does spell her name incorrectly after all! Hmph!) and it is then that she resigns herself to a 'normal' existence, turning her back on the realm of imagination.

Wonderland is not faring well either. Redd has usurped the throne and her subjects who previously enjoyed a life of happiness now live in fear and misery. They must deny their true queen, who would be hunted down should she return. Yet, there are those who remain staunchly loyal to their true queen and hope for her return.



To accompany this book, there is also a CD soundtrack to add another level to the narrative experience. Beddor worked with Canadian music supervisor Androo Mitchell to select and collaborate with the artists for the soundtrack. His stipulation was that the album had to work independently of the novel and he issued the following directive to the musical artists: "This is what this character or this chapter means to me, but what I really want is for you to make it personal for you."

The result only adds to the concept of Beddor's Wonderland, either by enriching the main narrative, or creating several retellings of Beddor's idea. A lot of the tracks on the CD echo a sound that came into prominence in the mid to late 1990s but the effect – the emotional journey that Alyss experiences is vividly rendered.

*The Looking Glass Wars* also makes use of various media for narration, some of which is not entirely traditional to Wonderland. Alyss even has her very own [MySpace page](#), being the resourceful and modern girl that she is.

There is also the official [Looking Glass Wars website](#) which has all sorts of interesting things to look at, like storyboard artwork, selected tracks from the soundtrack to listen to online, information about the Hatter M. comic (about Alyss' bodyguard), a trailer about the book, and many more delightful treats related to this mythic universe.

Is the world ready for yet another Wonderland tale, you might ask? Absolutely! Though this is specifically aimed at children from the ages of 10 upwards, it should attract a much wider audience. It has themes that both adults and children will find enticing – the journey to find one's way back home, find one's true self, and having the courage to be oneself where others would have you conform.

It will be interesting to see how the rest of the trilogy develops, and to learn more about the 'truth' of Wonderland. Beddor is currently working on the second novel in the series entitled *Seeing Redd*, and also a screenplay for a full-length feature film.

**~G. E. Mahadeo**