



Hatter M Volume Three: The Nature of Wonder writers: Frank Beddor and Liz Cavalier artist: Sami Makkonen

Fantasy has just declared war on reality, or so an early tagline for Frank Beddor's *The Looking Glass Wars* had it. A rich vaguely science fiction-oriented retelling (or unveiling of the truth) of *Alice in Wonderland*, the trilogy has been popular with the coveted Young Adult readership, and set up a world with lots of nooks and crannies for more stories to be discovered.

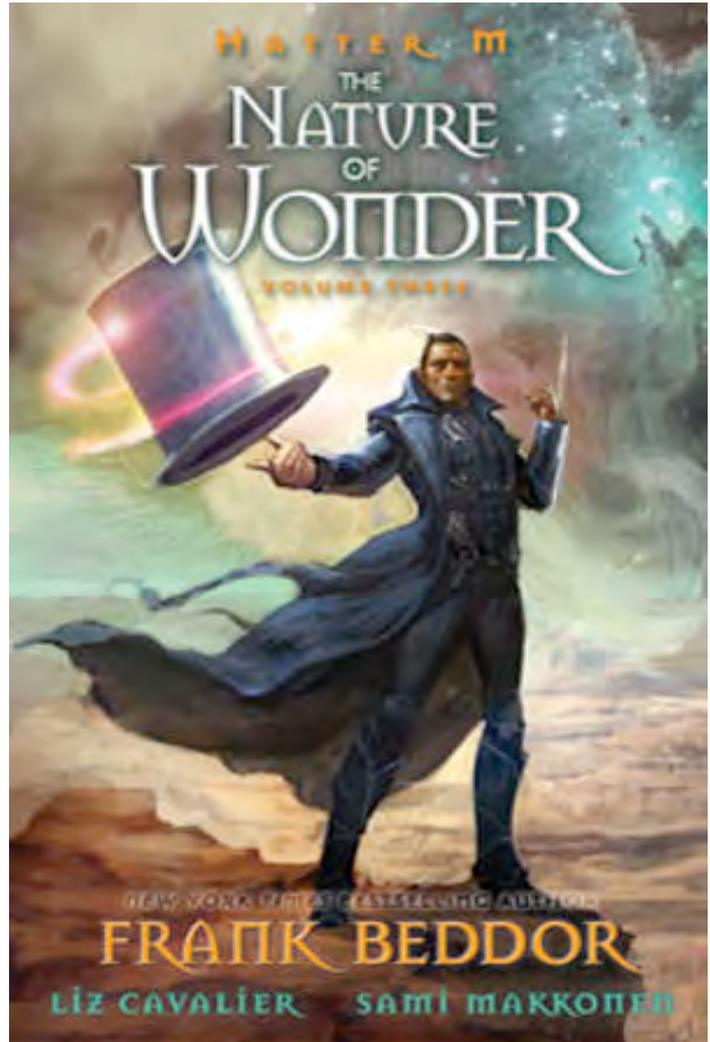
Case in point: in the first novel, royal guardsman Hatter Madigan follows the Princess Alyss through the Pool of Tears and into Victorian England. While the rage and ruin of the Red Queen wreak havoc in Wonderland, Hatter Madigan wanders Earth for seventeen years - seventeen years unexplored in the novels.

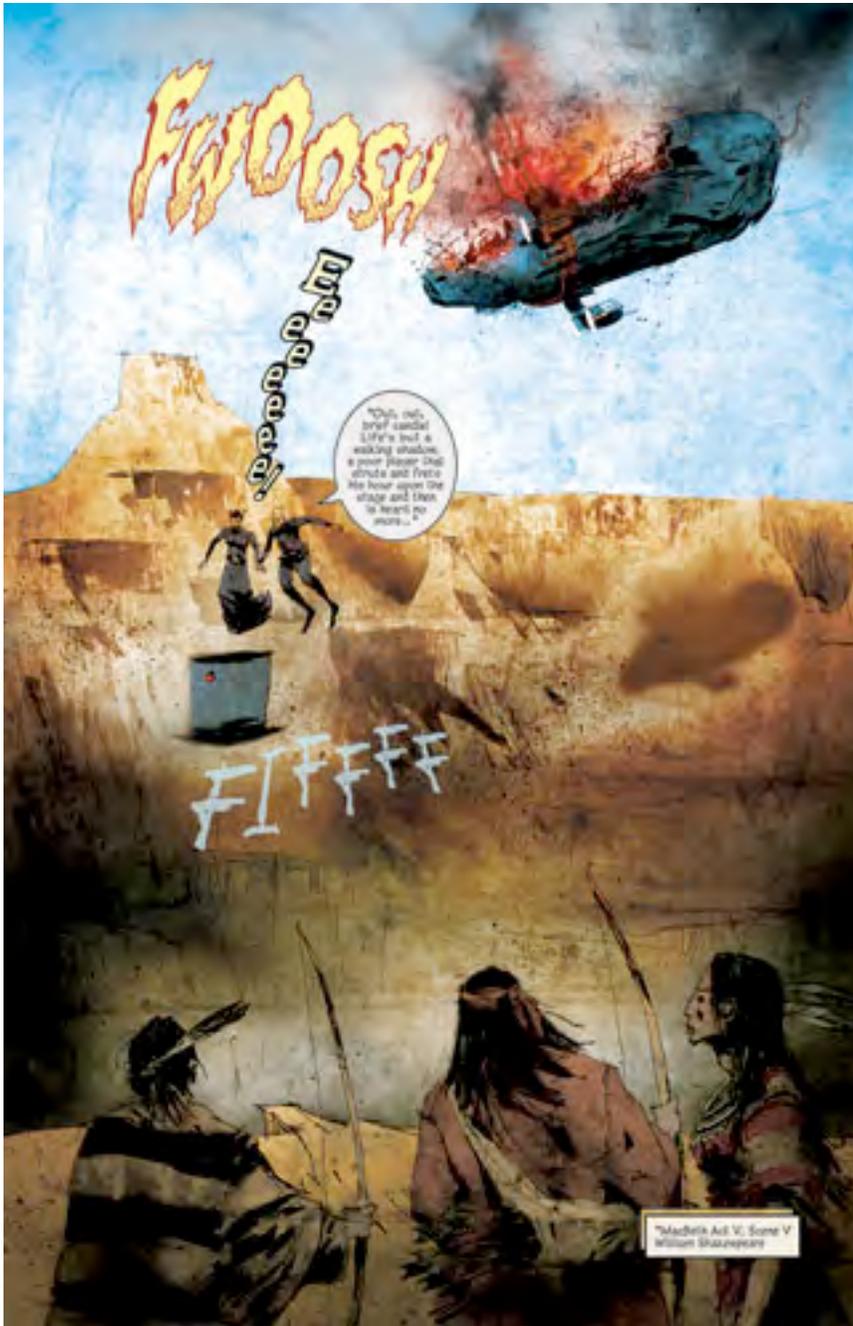
So Beddor, writing partner Liz Cavalier and now artist Sami Makkonen reveal those seventeen years in a series of graphic novels, the third of which, *Hatter M: The Nature of Wonder*, hits this week. With it, Beddor may be countering his own argument: it's not that fantasy declared war on reality; it's just that we turned our backs on what reality could be.

After the events of volume 2, *Mad with Wonder*, Madigan finds himself in the waning days of the Civil War. Escaped from an insane asylum, where the inmates now endlessly re-enact the war in Wonderland as they know it - that's crazy, nobody would re-enact *war* -- Madigan chases "the glow." While he searches for this whit energy that should lead him to Alyss, dark energy has infected a cadre of confederate soldiers, turning them into monsters headed straight for the White House.

The journey has him crossing paths with a 19th Century version of the X-Files, portrayed in an exaggerated fashion that teeters on the edge of parody, filled with soap operatic allusions as if we were coming in late to their adventures.

Technically, I guess, we are, and since Beddor has written three novels, a children's book, an online card game and who knows what else about the Looking Glass Wars, it's interesting to see what other concepts he can offer without losing the core. (He hinted at this in the first *Hatter M* graphic novel, though that has since seemed to fall in line - crediting most dark supernatural powers to the Red Queen's influence.)





It also fleshes out the influence of Madigan's "imaginary" world on ours. Others have crossed over before him, and he also uncovers a parallel tradition from the early days of this continent. Note continent, not nation. Indeed, Beddor would have you believe "flower power" predates the Haight-Ashbury by at least a millennium.

If you haven't read the novels, the graphic novels do a good job of being relatively self-contained. Of course, in some ways you'd have a sense of dramatic irony, knowing the end of Madigan's quest. But Beddor and Cavalier also give us information about his background we've never seen before, exploring his early days looking up to his brother, one of the greatest Royal Guardsmen of them all. Hey, until now, I thought *Hatter* was the greatest.

At times *The Nature of Wonder* veers into ridiculousness, which is a little at odds with Makkonen's scratchy but dreamlike artwork. But Beddor's *Wonderland* has always danced lithely from charmingly insane to grotesque to poignant to back again, all the better to give his target audience a little from every plate.

Or should I say from every tea cup?