

Michael Bassen

Entertains YA Readers with Debut Science Fiction Tale

by Melissa Fales

Michael Bassen's debut book, *The Evolution of Glory Loomis*, is a YA science fiction tale about a girl who undergoes a major evolutionary transformation over a handful of days. "It's a different take on the familiar storyline of the superhero," says Bassen. "She wears no cape. She can't leap over a tall building. She's just extraordinarily and qualitatively smart. And she's 13 years old."

Bassen grew up in New York City. He graduated from Trinity College, earned a master's degree from Harvard University, and went on to teach English at a Long Island public school for over 30 years. Today he lives in Lincoln, Rhode Island with his wife of nearly 50 years.

In his spare time, Bassen has been a cartoonist, a playwright, a game inventor, and a songwriter, but never an author until now. An avid reader, he decided it was time to try writing. "I thought I'd give it a whirl," he says. "I've found that the nice thing about writing prose, unlike a song or a play, is that you don't need anyone to perform it. Once it's done, you don't have to put it on."

It took Bassen roughly three years to write *The Evolution of Glory Loomis*. "The initial version bears very little resemblance to the finished product," he says.

Originally, Glory was just nine years old. "I felt very limited by her age," Bassen says. "Bumping her up to 13 allowed me to expand the story, make the aspect of language more prominent, and introduce the more complicated issues present with a budding teenager." Bassen jokes that the evolution described in the title could apply to him during the writing process. "As I wrote, I evolved along with Glory," he says.

As Bassen's futuristic coming-of-age story unfolds, Glory transitions into something else. "There's a colossal alteration of her emotional make-up and of her intellect," says Bassen. "She's not really an extra-terrestrial because she's Earthbound, but she's definitely 'other.'" Glory develops an extreme intelligence as well as inherent charm. "I call her a Euphoriagenic transfiguree," says Bassen. "She's contagious. In her presence, people become literally infected by her



charm and they become charming, too, no matter how unpleasant they may be. She has this amazing, positive influence on the world." Unfortunately, the world isn't ready for such a being. "Glory is so 'other' and so special that the world itself needs to change in order to accommodate her gifts," Bassen says. "It's very clear that it's going to take some time for that to happen."

Describing Glory's extreme difference to readers was a particularly challenging task for Bassen. "It's like asking a five-year-old to describe Albert Einstein," he says. "We're so different from her intellectually and emotionally. She's so much more complex. She's on such a higher level."

Bassen felt that focusing on Glory's language would be the most effective way to explain how different she is. "The power of language is one of the things that separates us from other species," he says. "Those with a high command of language seem to control others. Language not only empowers you, it reflects the level of your intellect." Bassen names the language Glory develops for herself "Speaksong," a combination of mathematics, music, and natural language. "I do my best to describe Glory's expressions in 'Speaksong,' but the challenge of describing something beyond your ken is daunting, at best," says Bassen. "How do you describe concepts that are essentially indescribable?"

Readers witness Glory's efforts at communicating with those around her, her attempts to manage her intense, fluctuating emotions, and her ability to adapt to her new intellect. "In a benign world, these changes would be difficult enough," says Bassen. "But Glory doesn't live

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in such a world. In both the short and the long run, her survival is at stake."

The Evolution of Glory Loomis offers three simultaneous storylines. There's Glory, there's a feckless newspaper reporter whose life becomes entangled with Glory's, and there's a dejected, retired teacher whose wife and daughter were killed in a plane crash. "It was difficult to weave their stories together without distracting from each other," Bassen says. "I wanted them to be accessible and read seamlessly."

According to Bassen, his goal with *The Evolution of Glory Loomis* was to present the familiar elements of the common superhero theme without the predictable plot twists and character revelations. "I tried to imagine things I've never seen imagined before," he says. "I think the more interesting sci-fi/fantasy occurs when the storyteller successfully infuses the familiar elements with his or her sensibilities, idiosyncratic twists, and opinions," he says. "If that happens, the story becomes unfamiliarly familiar, which often makes for a more interesting and entertaining result. I hope that's true of *The Evolution of Glory Loomis*. My goal was to make the book entertaining, especially for this age group. If it's not fun to read, who wants to read it?"

Bassen is currently working on a sequel. For more information about *The Evolution of Glory Loomis*, visit www.CedarGroveBooks.com.