



Authorgraph 229 Guy Bass

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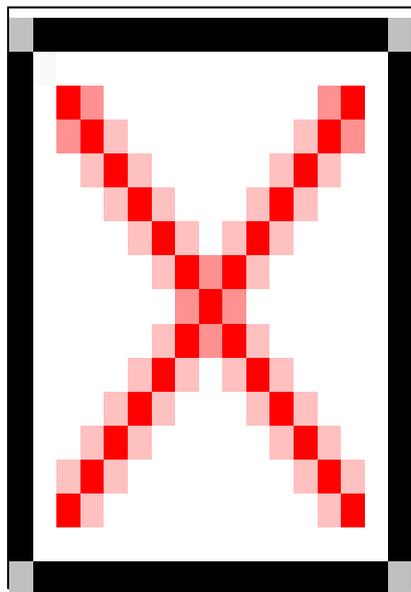
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Guy Bass interviewed by **Damian Kelleher**

Guy Bass has had a busy few weeks. He's been out and about talking about his latest series, **Spynosaur**, and his services are in high demand.



As far as high-concept publishing goes, **Spynosaur** sets the benchmark. When scientists put the brain of super-spy agent Gambit inside the body of a dinosaur, the result is the world's first secret agent dinosaur. Joining him on his missions at spy organization Department 6 is his daughter, Amber (she's a schoolgirl, not a dinosaur) who's training to be a secret agent just like her dino Dad. The high-octane action rolls along in the **Spynosaur** series - we're up to book three already, book four due this summer - and the story is told in a canny combination of comic strip illustration (by artist Lee Robinson) and prose to keep the action zipping along.

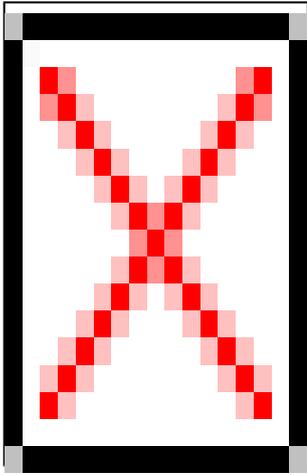
'They're really good fun to write,' Guy admits, 'but then I'm a massive fan of the genre. When I pitched the first three chapters to my publisher, Stripes, my editor, Jane, suggested, instead of telling his origin, could you plot his origin story in some sort of montage? And then I thought, ah, why don't I make this like a Saturday morning cartoon, but in book form? That's when everything just fell into place.'

The combination of comic strip and traditional story has proved a big hit with children who might struggle with novels lacking in illustration.

'As a kid, I found that books that were just text were quite intimidating,' Guy explains, 'so I was quite conscious of including as much illustration as possible to break it up. Obviously I wanted to write this as a book, but I also wanted it to have the pace that you find in comics and animation. That's why I liked the idea of a 'theme tune' that keeps recurring through the series - I wanted them to be singing it in their heads as they read. When you read prose you tend to read it at a steady pace, but when you read a comic you can pick your own pace.'

One of the most appealing aspects of the **Spynosaur** series is the close father/daughter relationship at the centre of the stories. Of course, with a book about a dinosaur spy, we can expect both hilarious antics and nail-biting action. But there's also a tender, caring and occasionally touching relationship between Amber and her father that might surprise fans of the genre.

'Yes, Amber is very accepting of her father,' Guy admits. 'The thing I was most worried about with **Spynosaur** was



that I wanted to create a story with heart. It would have been really easy to make it a funny, rollicking ride, but it had to be more than that. As the series progresses, their relationship shifts. In the next book that's coming out in June, Amber's father acknowledges that in time, she will be a better agent than him - it's about her growing into the role.'

What about Amber's mother, I wonder? Whenever her daughter sets off on one of her top secret missions, Amber is replaced in real-life by an adult older male - Sergei - who fills in for Amber at school by wearing the same clothes, and a frankly unconvincing wig of red hair. It's surreal, preposterous, and very, very funny. But is Mrs. Gambit ever going to get wise? Guy laughs.

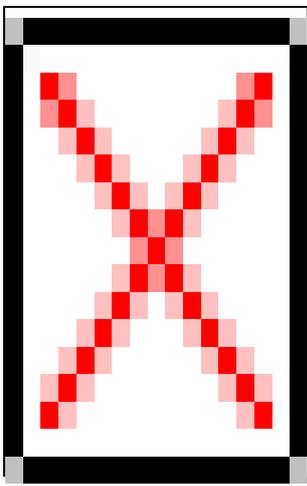
'Oh, she's perfectly happy to walk Sergei home in disguise! Sometimes I wonder if maybe Amber's mother knows about the family's secret life, but she's fine with it. It all reminds me of watching **Bugs Bunny** when I was growing up; it's the inspiration for all this. Elmer Fudd is always trying to kill Bugs, but if Bugs puts on a dress, Elmer thinks he's a beautiful woman. So, despite the fact that Sergei is this crabby-faced old man - he makes no effort to look convincing - he can still pull it off.'

Even so-called 'serious' spy movies and fiction doesn't seem too inhibited by any form of reality, so **Spynosaur** fits neatly within that genre. But what are Guy's inspirations for **Spynosaur**?

'I love the **Bond** movies,' says Guy. 'I tend to pick a genre and then give it a little tweak. I really like the spy genre because it's so familiar - it's been done a million times, but you can still keep it fresh. I like spy stories - you have everything from **Le Carré** through to **Bond** - and some of it is pretty ridiculous. So I knew that **Spynosaur** was in good company.'

Guy's commitment to spies is impressive, but it was another one of his spy creations - a less successful book - that encouraged him to turn his talents to a dinosaur secret agent.

'I wrote a book called **Secret Santa** and very naively thought it was the best idea I'd ever had! But obviously it has Father Christmas on the cover, which means it only sells for two months a year. I had planned a second book but the figures didn't add up, so that's when I knew I had to find a great spy story idea.'



The first **Spynosaur** book is dedicated to Guy's wife, Ruth, who 'puts up with the comics, cartoons and action figures of my adulthood.' This has all the hallmarks of an association that dates all the way back to Guy's childhood.

'I used to read lots of UK comics as a kid,' Guy explains. 'My brother got **Buster** and I used to get **Whizzer and Chips**. Then we were in Cornwall one year on holiday, and my uncle took my brother and me down to this little shop that had a special rack of US superhero comics ' and our lives were changed forever in a fundamental way! It absolutely rocked our world. There was **Marvel**, there was **DC** ' and I am just a huge superhero fan. So yes, my wife does have to put up with a lot. There are lots of books, comics and graphic novels in my study, but there are also three shelves full of action figures too. They're rammed ' the shelves are straining under the weight of it all.'

Of course, every writer has moments when looking up from their screen, or page, that a little distraction can be rather helpful. Does Guy ever interactive with his action figures during these moments, perhaps?

'I have been known to take a robot off a shelf, and turn it into a car and back again,' Guy admits. 'Yes, it's very therapeutic, to be honest. Obviously when you're writing you work alone a lot, but I have all these tiny faces staring at me all the time, non-judgmental superheroes. "Hey Spiderman, what do you think of this?"'

As most of us know, this year we're marking the centenary of women receiving the vote, and hopes are high that 2018 will be a watershed year in terms of gender equality. But what are publishers doing to play their part? One thing I've noticed with the **Spynosaur** books, is that while Agent Gambit features on every cover ' sometimes joined by an adversary ' daughter Amber is strangely absent (and she's only made it to the back cover once). What's going on here?

'I wanted her to be on the cover of the first book, but I think the pressure came from sales,' says Guy. 'I was gutted, because I don't think of the books as being particularly 'boyish' or 'girly'. I was of the opinion that if there was a dinosaur *and* a girl on the cover, then there was something for everyone. I don't believe girls would look at dinosaurs and think, oh no, that's not for me, and I don't believe boys will look at a cover with a girl on it and put it back down again.'

Will she ever make the leap to the front cover? They are a partnership, after all.

'Well, the initial designs for the first cover had them both. I hope she does make it to the cover.' Guy sighs. 'It's not like she's not important?'

The **Spynosaur** series are all published by Little Tiger Press. The fourth book in the series, **No More Mr Nice Spy** (978-1847159090), will be out this June for £5.99.

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