

Lev Grossman and the subversion of fantasy

SPOTLIGHT

Lev Grossman will be appearing at WordFest events on Wednesday and Thursday. Visit wordfest.com for more details.

ERIC VOLMERS
CALGARY HERALD

On Lev Grossman's blog, the writer of *The Magicians* and its recent followup the *Magician King* and books critic for *TIME* Magazine, included a list of distractions that were keeping him sane on his latest book tour. Some were nerdy (iPhone Scrabble,) some hip (Metric's Raw Sugar) and some seemed to belong more to his journalist side than fantasy-author side ("I'm trying to skip drinking one night in three. Well, four. OK let's go one in five. I'll get back to you").

Grossman began his life as an author writing outside the realm of wizards and magic. But the 42-year-old, father-of-two says he's more-or-less found his voice exploring and, some argue, subverting a genre that has traditionally not held much weight in literary circles. The *Magician King* continues the adult-themed story of Quentin Coldwater, the 20-something New Yorker who attended an exclusive magic school in the first novel. Grossman took some time to chat with the Herald.

Q: Did you always know the *Magicians* was going to have a sequel?



Courtesy, Sophie Gee

Author Lev Grossman has found his voice in fantasy.

A: It didn't occur to me during the writing at all that I would write another book set in that world, dealing with those people. But when you are working on a book you activate this little app in your head that is always asking "What happened next?" You run that app and when you're done with that book you shut down the app. But sometimes it's still running in the background, you start thinking about, "Well, not everybody's dead. Some people are alive and something must be happening to them."

Q: A common theme in many of the reviews for your work is that you are somehow subverting the fantasy genre. Is that fair?

A: Subvert is a fair enough word. Although, that sounds like I'm hostile or critical of the genre and nothing could be further from the truth. I ask a lot of fantasy, I'm fantasy's loyal opposition. One of my

formative readings experiences of my life was reading *Watchman*, the graphic novel by Alan Moore. He really, frontally attacked superheroes and the idea of superheroes. He questioned it's most sacred conventions and assumptions. Rather than destroying the genre, he ended up writing the greatest superhero story that had ever been written. If you question the basic assumptions of a genre, it doesn't fall apart it just gets stronger. That's what I hoped to do for fantasy.

Q: Do you also hope to expand the audience of fantasy?

A: It's always helpful when you have a book where book sellers aren't sure where to shelve. I never know where the *Magicians* is going to be shelved, whether it will be in the respectable literary fiction aisle or the fantasy aisle. Anecdotally I think we're breaking down those barriers.

Q: You've been a books critic almost as long as you've been a published author. Does it ever get weird being in both camps, particularly when you're at events such as WordFest.

A: There are moments when it gets odd. There's a funny, unspoken sense that you're meant to play for one team or the other. Obviously, sometimes you run into writers to whom you have given bad reviews and that is a special kind of awkwardness.

EVOLMVERS@CALGARYHERALD.COM

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