



Screenshot

A techno-thriller from John Darrin

By [Julie Compton](#) | [Permalink](#)



Debut Author

Sometimes the scariest novels seem to be written by the nicest guys. This certainly holds true for the new techno-thriller **SCREENSHOT** and its author, [John Darrin](#). **SCREENSHOT** is part of a trilogy featuring investigative reporter Seth Mathias who's hot on the trail of a multi-millionaire entrepreneur with a bent for murder and a talent for creating bizarre killing machines, including his latest business plan: interactive pay-per-view executions, live on the Internet. Yet behind this terrifying premise is a mild-mannered writer leisurely exploring the United States by RV and just enjoying life. John took some time from his travels to answer questions about his upcoming release and about his unusual lifestyle.

Tell us a little about **SCREENSHOT, and explain the inspiration for it.**

SCREENSHOT is a techno-thriller. It started as a great story that happened to revolve around the Internet.

The Internet has a huge impact on our daily lives already, and it's only going to get more pervasive. That's both good and bad. We're all aware of scams and identity theft, but the possibilities for evil go well beyond those. My antagonist, Screenshot, takes evil to a new level, hiding behind the anonymity of the Internet and using its global reach to broadcast live assassinations - pay-per-view spectacles targeting bad guys. These victims are criminals themselves, people you would want to see dead anyway, so the audience can watch and cheer the carnage like it was some pro wrestling match. And the problem becomes, how do you catch a virtual murderer?

The inspiration came from a news story about an uproar surrounding a website that allowed people to hunt . . . online. I love this. Someone actually mounted a rifle on a remote-controlled stand, added a webcam, and invited anyone to take potshots at passing animals for a fee. My son pointed this out to me and thought it would make a good story. It got pretty embellished from there and the writing became more fun and interesting as I introduced more and more imaginative remote-controlled weapons, and as the targets became people. My favorite is the Pediphryer - a liquid taser the Screenshot uses to flame-broil a known pedophile.

The other two books in the trilogy should be out by this time next year.

You had some very big changes in your life that eventually led to your fiction writing, and to a whole new lifestyle. Can you explain to readers about these changes and how they came about (and how they led to writing)?



People rarely choose radical change. Generally, it's forced on us. When it happens, the best we can hope for is to influence the change, to implement it in some way that benefits us, or at least minimizes the damage.

Change for me began with unemployment. I was the president of a company that was sold, and then US operations shut down. This left me out of work in a dying nuclear industry. Then my wife, Anne, lost her job in a political upheaval, and we were both suddenly unemployed. We struck out on our own, but a family business we'd backed went bankrupt after a long legal battle, forcing personal bankruptcy on us.

So we started rebuilding again. Just when we were having some success, Anne became very sick. After a year, the doctors finally diagnosed her with Mad Cow Disease and a year after that, she died. That was a ten-year period I think of as the balloon payment on the mortgage of my otherwise really good life.

I took up writing seriously while all that was going on. I was pretty confined by our circumstances, and writing became my outlet. I've always written as part of my work, but I'd never considered it a career until then, and until Anne read my stuff and urged me to do more.

After she died, I found myself alone in a strange town where the only people I knew were medical professionals. I realized that if I didn't make some changes, I would hibernate in my apartment and eventually become the Unabomber. I had no roots left to hold me, so I just gave away everything we had left and bought a motorcycle and an RV, and now I travel full-time, going places, meeting people, doing things.

How far have you traveled in your RV? What's the most interesting spot you've visited (and why)?

I started in Maine, and so far I've worked my way down the East Coast, stopping for a month or two in different places and then moving on. I turned right at Florida and skimmed the Gulf Coast, and now I'm in Arizona. From here I'm heading north up through the Rockies and the Grand Tetons to Wyoming, and then east through the Badlands of South Dakota and on to West Virginia. The trip is planned to take two years and cover 8000 miles, and I'm about halfway through.

Picking the most interesting spot is impossible. Every place I choose is by definition interesting to me. So far, I haven't been disappointed.

I guess I'd go with Lafayette, Louisiana. Cajun country has a whole different culture. I ate crawfish etouffee at Chef Roy's Frog City Café. I floated in a pirogue past a 14-foot alligator. I watched local zydeco musicians play while people did dances from a Discovery Channel documentary. But I'm guessing it's gonna be tough to compete with the Wind River Canyon in Wyoming. We'll see when I get there.

You are a busy guy! In addition to your travels and your writing, you work as a consultant on radiological emergency preparedness, especially homeland security related events. Can you tell us a bit about your work and how it influences your writing?

Yes, I do have a job and I'm glad someone noticed. There does seem to be a shortage of available time, and these pesky clients keep wanting me to do things in return for the checks they send me.

I started working in the nuclear industry right out of college as a radiation safety technician. After a career in nuclear power, I gravitated to homeland security when "dirty bombs" became a hot topic. Now I consult with companies focused on solutions for that market, and spend most of my time talking to local, state and Federal emergency planning and response teams about their needs.

My career has led me all over the world, following some pretty unusual and interesting paths. I've been to twenty-one countries on four continents so far, and worked on some odd projects, like the first decommissioning of a radiological research laboratory and several nuclear reactors, the recovery after the Three Mile Island accident, and even on the treatment of nuclear weapons waste in China.

I think all of that gives me the raw material for my stories. To me, fiction is lots of little non-fictions, rearranged, and all the travel and experience have given me plenty of non-fictions to pick from, to re-arrange into SCREENSHOT and my other stories. My work-in-progress is titled THE ROCKET'S RED GLARE, and it centers around multiple, simultaneous dirty bomb attacks in a spectacular and surprising way. I've got lots of material and some very good contacts for that one.

I understand that you were recently asked to submit an audition video for a cable television pilot. What is the show about, and how did you come to be asked to submit an audition?

Yes, but I am not looking for another new career. No one is going to pay to see my face.

One of the cable channels is making a pilot about radical lifestyle changes, sort of an Extreme Makeover Life Edition, and someone I know in the TV production business arranged for a video audition. That was interesting - probably six hours of taping and another fifteen hours of editing to get a six minute video. But it's just a fling. You're not likely to see me on any red carpets, and I doubt Joan Rivers will be chasing me down for E! News.

What books and authors do you enjoy? What are you reading now?

How can I list them all? It's like asking which breath I took was my favorite. All of them.

I've been an avid reader all my life. I added it up one time, and I'm guessing I've read close to 5,000 books, going all the way back to THE LITTLE TRAIN THAT COULD. I enjoy all kinds, from history to memoirs to travel and adventure. In fiction, I like thrillers, of course, but also literary fiction and humor. I like most of the popular authors that you'd expect, but there are a couple of somewhat obscure ones that bear mentioning. George MacDonald Fraser's Flashman series of humorous historical novels would be what I'd take to the desert island. Neal Stephenson's CRYPTONOMICON is intricate and fascinating, Jack Weatherford's history of Genghis Khan is startling, anything by Larry McMurtry, and Robert Crais writes great thrillers. Right now I'm reading TC Boyle's DROP CITY.

What's next for John Darrin (both writing-wise and in general)?

First, I'm going to finish this tour. It's an amazing adventure.

Along the way, I expect I'll find the place where I'm going to finally park, to settle down and live the rest of my life. Arizona has the current lead in that competition. But I'm keeping the RV as an option, maybe going to Maine in the summer. I've noticed that Arizona has a tendency to get really hot that time of year.

And I'll keep writing. I'm starting on two non-fiction books, and I've got a backlog of fiction to get done. So what's next is: more fun, more writing, more living.



Contributing editor, [Julie Compton](#), originally hails from St. Louis, Missouri, the setting for her debut novel and legal thriller TELL NO LIES. An attorney by profession, Julie most recently worked as a trial attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice in Wilmington, Delaware, but stopped practicing when she moved to Florida with her husband and two daughters. She now writes full time.