



**Interview with John Darrin, author of *Screenshot* (Kunati, Inc. ISBN 978-1601641687)**

**Do any of your ideas for characters, events, plot twists, etc. ever come from your readers?**

Yes, readers and friends, both, although I hope my friends are readers, too.

The initial idea for my current book, *Screenshot*, came from a news item my son saw 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. In the book it got pretty embellished with some unusual remote-controlled weapons, and of course, the targets are people. My favorite is the Pediphryer – a liquid taser used to flame-broil a known pedophile.

My next book deals with simultaneous dirty bomb attacks, and the idea for the way the bombs work came from a reader.

**What's the last book you shared with a friend?**

The entire Jack Reacher series by Lee Child. Actually, I just ordered seven of them from Novel Action and sent them to my daughter-in-law.

**What's the best book a friend has recently shared with you?**

*Nuclear Winter Wonderland*, by Josh Corin. One of my critique group friends recommended it.

**If you weren't a writer, what would you be doing?**

Watching TV. Thank God I'm a writer.

And, of course, my day job consulting on radiological emergency preparedness.

**Statistics show that reading, particularly among younger Americans, is on the decline. What implications does this have for you and for authors in general?**

As I understand them, the statistics actually show a decline in reading *books*, while there is an increase in reading if you include all formats. Obviously, the Internet and the proliferation of blogs and other material has a huge impact on reading habits.

We're going to have to adjust how we distribute our work. People are experimenting with all sorts of ideas, from serializing books in e-versions on ad-supported web sites to posting them like freeware and asking for some token payment. And, of course, we have to make our works available on Kindle and the other electronic readers.

There is an upside for authors – with book distribution no longer the sole province of publishers, the focus turns to marketing. If you have a good story and can get the word out, then you'll be successful.

**Are there creative ways you can think of or have implemented to help parents who want their children to read more, or to attract young adults to your books?**

Start early. The sooner children are connected to the written word, the more likely they are to stay connected. Books offer visual possibilities that movies and games can't match. You're working with neurons instead of pixels, and the possibilities inside your head are never limited by screen size or RAM or processor speed or someone else's imagination.

Starting early takes some commitment on the part of the parents, so look for ways to incorporate it into your everyday lifestyle.

**Any genre you haven't yet experimented with writing that you'd like to try?**

Yeah, commercial success. Is that a genre?

I'm planning on trying biography for my fourth book. It's called *My Friends*, and it's already outlined and ready to start. I even posted a summary of it in one of my blogs - <http://jcdarrin.wordpress.com/2009/03/31/my-friends/>.

**If you could team up and write a book with any author that you haven't yet worked with, who would it be and what type of book would you envision?**

Bill Bryson, and it would be a travel book about the two-year RV tour of America that I'm currently on. This is turning out to be an even more amazing adventure than I had dreamed, and Bryson can write travel like few others. I'm trying to document it in a blog, [www.GoPlacesMeetPeopleDoThings.com](http://www.GoPlacesMeetPeopleDoThings.com), and maybe someday I'll put it all together.

**When you are writing a series, how do you keep straight all of the personal details associated with your various characters and their environments?**

Biographies of the characters. You end up creating these as you write, and the only challenge is being diligent about updating them and referring to them as they encounter new situations.

And besides, these recurring characters become some of your closest family and friends. Do you have any trouble keeping track of your spouse or your kids or your best friend? You spend your life with your characters, and while they will surprise you from time to time, you're unlikely to be caught with a, "Guess what? I'm pregnant!" announcement.

**As a relatively new author, what are some of the challenges you've encountered and how have you addressed them?**

The list of challenges could be a Wikipedia entry. A long one. But you handle all of them the same – perseverance. As Woody Allen said – 80% of success is showing up. Keep showing up.

Rejections are the most common challenge. You've got to remember that it isn't personal, and it is just as likely that the agent/publisher already has a full queue as it is they didn't like your book.

One difficult challenge is advice. When an agent or editor or publisher says "maybe you could change this ...", don't automatically assume they know better than you. You'll hear this a million times, and if you try to make the changes, you'll go crazy and the book will end up a mess. I have an old manuscript that went through eight re-writes. I'll be publishing it, hopefully as my third book, and I intend to use an early version, before all the advice got incorporated. Much of the advice you'll hear takes the life out of the book and turns it in to a bad clone of someone else's favorite.

**Are you being mentored, or have you sought the mentorship of an established author? If no, why not and if so, what's the most valuable advice you've received from the mentor?**

Mentoring might be too strong a term, but the founder of my favorite critique group, Derek Armstrong, has been a huge help. He is a successful fiction and non-fiction author, and has read and critiqued my work and been a real book marketing guru.

The most valuable advice, and the hardest lesson, is that the writing is the easy part, the fun part. It's when you stop typing the story that the work begins, and this is where most authors give up.