



It was with some trepidation that I entered the room with Lee Child who I greatly admire – so imagine my utter surprise and delight to find out that Lee’s interview with me on behalf of Crimesquad.com is the only pre-arranged interview he agreed to during the Festival weekend. It wasn’t long before we got down to brass tacks...

G.S. - The title of the latest Reacher novel is very apt. Where did it come from?

L.C. - It was one of those titles that came to me the night before I started work on the book. Sometimes they are obvious and sometimes they take a lot of work. I was watching baseball and I saw it in my head this two word title and I thought that works on three separate levels. There’s the basic testosterone challenge with the big guy saying ‘make me’ it’s also a tradecraft work for someone who’s working undercover and there’s the idea they might be “made” or identified and I felt there was also a kind of romantic aspect to it for female readers with Reacher saying “make me” which is kind of irresistible.

G.S. - ‘Make Me’ is set across many different locations although most of the action takes place in Mother’s Rest. Why did you move it around so much when you usually keep it quite contained?

L.C. - I never have a plan, outline or synopsis or anything, so it just evolves as I write. The idea was there would be this hidden mystery in or near Mother’s Rest which is a very tiny isolated place. I felt it needed some kind of extra dimensions of action and location which meant travel. It also gave it something of a chase thriller where Reacher and Chang were chasing truth and information while being chased by the bad guys. I thought it would also emphasise Mother’s Rest more if they started there, then had a long diversion and ended up back there for the resolution.

G.S. - The isolation of Mother’s Rest was a strong factor. Why did you choose this as the main location?

L.C. - I always like to incorporate almost a military challenge. How do you approach a place which has clear line of sight all round. At one point Reacher says ‘it’s like approaching an island on a boat.’ You’re visible because it’s extremely flat territory and you can’t sneak up.

G.S. - You also feature something called the Deep Web. Is that real or fictitious?



L.C. - It's totally real. There's the Dark Web where you have all the defunct sites which no longer work and is kind of like industrial archaeology. The Deep Web is what we were really talking about. Whereas most of the internet is dependent on Google and other search engines, the Deep Web is the exact opposite. They want to operate without any attention at all. It's a fascinating world and nobody knows how big it is because they can't find it. There are various estimates the Deep Web is ten or a hundred times bigger than the visible part. As far as I can tell, the three legged stool analogy used in the book is pretty accurate.

G.S. - You approach some heavyweight morality issues in the novel, particularly assisted suicide which Reacher approaches with his own logic and morality code. What are your thoughts on that?

L.C. - Pretty much the same as Reacher's, actually, pretty much the same as Chang's. She makes the point that perhaps it shouldn't be too easy. Let people make the final decision. If suicide is too easy, people will go off half-cocked without sufficient thought. If you do jump through a few hoops that kind of prove that you want it. Reacher's logic is 'fine, let them have it'.

G.S. - Other interviewers and commenters often liken you to Reacher. Which of his traits do you least like?

L.C. - That's a good question and one I haven't been asked before. I think that what Reacher is, is completely committed to rootlessness and that would actually be very difficult to do in real life. Constantly moving with no fixed address, I think would be so divorced from reality and hard to sustain. But he manages fine and he would have it no other way.

G.S. - What news is there on the film side of things, is there going to be another Reacher movie?

L.C. - There are plans to start shooting in October down in New Orleans and it'll be 'Never Go Back' which was released a couple of years back and is the one where Reacher may or may not have a daughter. As far as I know they're going ahead with that, unless there's a horrendous problem that prevents it.

G.S. - What about the novels and Jack Reacher which you most credit for their popularity?

L.C. - It's got to be Reacher himself. I always intended it to be about Reacher not me, he's the brand. Very few people go into the bookstore and ask for the books by title or for the new Lee Child. They ask for the new Jack Reacher.



What it is about him that's so popular is a question I've worked on for years. Ultimately what it is; is he does the right thing. Generally speaking, people are full of goodwill and everybody in the world would like to do the right thing and the problem is that for one reason or another we can't. We lack the power or we're inhibited or there's a context where we can't function. It's very reassuring and fun to see somebody do it on the page where you can be that guy at least for the duration of the book.

G.S. - There's also the idea of the cowboy riding into town, saving the damsel and riding out again isn't there?

L.C. - That is an idea that's been around for thousands of years so you've got to conclude that if a storyline has been around for so long then it must be something that's of great interest to humanity in general. The Reacher character is an ancient one which has been market tested for two or three thousand years.

G.S. - You've said to me in a previous interview that you read around two hundred books a year. What are you currently reading?

L.C. - I'm just about to start the new Sara Paretsky and then I have the new Belinda Bauer. There's some fantastic talent in the crime fiction genre at the moment. Sara Paretsky has been around forever and is a perennial favourite of mine while Belinda Bauer is not that far into her career, but she's already got several great books under her belt. I love my old favourites, but in particular I love finding new writers, Claire Mackintosh for instance. That's why I love coming to things like Harrogate. Obviously I like to meet my readers but I also like to be terrified by the new writers who are snapping at my heels with fantastic talent and determination and it really makes me work harder. Because I start work on the first of September, this is the perfect time for me to get geed up and really in the groove. With talent like we've got at the moment you can never get complacent. There's a herd coming after me and if I falter half a step they're gonna bury me.

G.S. - Which three crime books have left a lasting impression on you?

L.C. - They are all going to be relatively obscure. I loved this book by a Canadian thriller writer in the very early sixties called 'The Damned and the Destroyed' by Kenneth Orvis which was a really terrific book. Then there was a book by Clare Francis called 'Night Sky' which had a great 'Oh-My-God!' moment in the middle of it. Then I would probably say 'Silence of the Lambs' by Thomas Harris. Day of the Jackal was sort of year zero for the modern thriller, in a way you could say Silence of the Lambs was another year zero.



After the interview, Lee turned things around with a couple of questions of his own.

L.C. - You're a reader and a reviewer, why are you a Reacher Creature, what is it that you have responded to over the years?

G.S. - I love Reacher's sense of deduction which at times is Sherlockian as he has a wonderful deductive mind. He also has the brawn to back it up. I love how you twist it in novels like '61 Hours' which I think may be my favourite of yours, you had the ticking clock which the reader knew about but Reacher didn't and you used Reacher's size against him by putting him in a fight situation in a tunnel where he was bent double and fighting a short but powerful opponent. You don't rehash the same things all the time and your latest book tackles the morality minefield which is assisted suicide. There are so many things in the books to enjoy. Also Reacher is the white knight, guys want to be Reacher and women want to sleep with him.

L.C. - The other thing I would ask any reader and especially a specialist reader like a reviewer is what should I be reading? In the last year or two what's the greatest book you've read?

G.S. - There's a lot of emerging authors at the moment. Col Bury has just released a fantastic debut novel called 'My Kind of Justice', Mike Craven's 'Born in a Burial Gown' is another gripping debut and Amit Dhand's as yet untitled debut is one I'm really looking forward to. I had the privilege of judging a competition where entrants submitted 2,000 words from the start of their novels and Amit Dhand was a clear winner in a field which has seen at least two other entrants secure publishing deals.