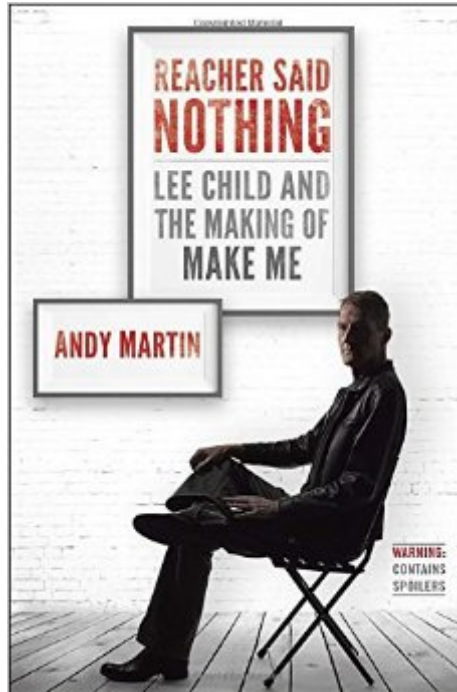


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Reacher Said Nothing: Lee Child And The Making Of Make Me



Synopsis

Fans of Lee Child know well that the muscular star of his bestselling novels, Jack Reacher, is a man of few words and a lot of action. In *Reacher Said Nothing*, Andy Martin shadows Child like a literary private eye in a yearlong investigation of what it takes to make fiction's hottest hero hit the page. The result is a fascinating, up-close-and-personal look into the world and ways of an expert storyteller's creative process as he undertakes the writing of the much anticipated twentieth Jack Reacher novel, *Make Me*. Fueled by copious mugs of black coffee, Lee Child squares off against the blank page (or, rather, computer screen), eager to follow his wandering imagination in search of a plot worthy of the rough and ready Reacher. While working in fits and starts, fine-tuning sentences, characters, twists and turns, Child plies Martin with anecdotes and insights about the life and times that shaped the man and his methods: from schoolyard scraps and dismal factory jobs to a successful TV production career and the life-changing decision to put pencil to paper. Then there's the chance encounter that transformed aspiring author James Grant into household name Lee Child. And between bouts at the keyboard in an office high above Manhattan, there are jaunts to writers' conventions, book signings, publishing powwows, chat shows, the Prado in Madrid, American diners, and English pubs. Can the storyteller get away with this? Lee Child ponders, as he hones and hammers his latest nail-biter into fighting trim. Numerous bestsellers and near worldwide fame say he can. Jack Reacher may be a man of few words, but *Reacher Said Nothing* says it all about a certain tall man with a talent for coming out on top. Praise for *Reacher Said Nothing* • Martin, an unabashed fan of Child's work, conveys his excitement at hanging out with Child. Publishers Weekly • In more than seventy tight vignettes . . . Child, his backstory, and his work come alive. Martin's irrepressible glee about the project is infectious. Recommended for fans of Child's work or aspiring novelists who could benefit from an insider's view of the messy, complicated, and transcendent act of writing. Library Journal • Amazingly enjoyable and genuinely enlightening, largely because Lee Child is as thoughtful and as amusing as you'd think from reading his great thrillers. Sullivan County Democrat • An unusual entry in the annals of literary biography . . . fascinating . . . I could not stop reading. Sarah Weinman, *The Crime Lady* • One-of-a-kind . . . It's funny, serious, a kind of mock-heroic and heroic together. It's quizzical and respectful, sophisticated and self-deprecating. Professor Dame Gillian Beer • Andy Martin is no mere Reacher Creature, as fans of Lee Child's Jack Reacher are known. He's something of a Reacher Teacher. Martin's book is the perfect accompaniment to all things Reacher. It explores, it explains, and it entertains. Like a detective novel, *Reacher Said*

Nothing takes you down alleys and lanes and streets cast in shadowâbut the journey isnât urban, itâs in the boulevards and byways between your own ears. Andyâs writing is a brainiacâs delight.â Sam Fussell, author of Muscle

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Customer Reviews

Initially quite interesting but the digressions grew more frequent as the book went on, occasionally verging on silly when simple concepts were mapped to philosophical and linguistical constructs. Doing an analysis deconstructing particular sentences and then ascribing deeper meanings Child was probably not aware of seems more an exercise of displaying the knowledge of this book's author. This goes on more and more as the book progresses. The first part of the book is fun, entertaining, and enlightening. As Child progresses in his work. "Reacher Said Nothing" loses much of its tight focus and is almost a random collection of academic assertions. Do these really apply? Should they really apply? I suppose it is up to the reader. The book certainly has much to offer, but the reading of it is somewhat hit or miss. Reading it will give you a sense of Child's writing process, but not too much of it. You'll get his opinions on small facets of the book and what it takes for him to write one. I couldn't help but feel as though I was getting the outside of the puzzle and while the frame might grow more and more complete, the middle never comes clearly into focus. The book is probably better if you are a complete Reacher-holic and think the books can do no wrong. As a general detailing of the creative process going into a contemporary bestseller, it is probably the best thing we have, probably by a lot. But it still lags a bit with some of the more obscure academia references, too many invocations of Beckett, and it was a bit annoying digging out the symbolism

that didn't seem to be put in on purpose. One can take piece already written and deconstruct it far past the point of anything that had been in the author's mind. All in all, a fine book whose earlier promise gets lost in the academic musings of the author. Though they always return us to Child, Reacher and the book that he is writing, a good many of them break the spell over and over. If you have an interest, by all means read the book. It's not for a casual trip into the mind and process of Lee Child, but it may be the best we ever get. If you can get past the author's self-indulgences, it's not a bad thing at all.

Andy Martin writes a lot about himself. He tells us what he ate for breakfast. Tells us about his airplane flights. Tells us what he wears, what he drinks, the full names of his friends.

There's a whole paragraph where he tells a friend about an encounter we've only just read. Like a prose version of his Facebook page. Now if Martin were a hulking former MP kicking ass and taking names, we might give a tinker's dam about his personal life. But he's not. So we don't. Doesn't stop him, though. There's enough about Lee Child to make the book interesting, especially for a fan of his. And Martin is occasionally funny. So it's worth reading. But even Boswell understood that the ride-along biographer has to be a foil, not a competitor for the spotlight. We see Child writing the first page. Then, nothing but Martin until Child writes chapter 16. Lots of gaps, lots of banality. Martin tries to sound witty and connected and deeply learned, but comes off sounding like a running Tweet of an expensive haircut. Don't pay much for this book. Better to borrow it from a library. Encourage libraries. Oh, and the Anglo-Saxon word in Maldon is *œofermod*. Its meaning straddles the line between self-confidence and pride. Fairly important word, given the narrator's grating self-involvement.

On September 1, 1994, an aspiring author went to the store and bought the paper on which he would write *Killing Floor*, the first novel to feature the protagonist who would become the legendary Jack Reacher. Oh, what a difference a couple of decades can make. On that date in 1994, Jim Grant had been recently fired from British television and was virtually broke. Hoping desperately that he might find something he could do to support himself and his family, he sat down with a pencil and a pad of paper, attempting to reinvent himself as a novelist. Twenty years later, having created one of the most successful franchises in the history of thriller novels, "Lee Child" sat down at his sleek Apple computer in his very expensive home in New York City (one of several that he has around the world) to begin the twentieth book in the series. In this case, he was accompanied by Andy Martin, a

literary scholar from the University of Cambridge who also happens to be a huge fan of both Jack Reacher and the man who created him. From the first line to the last, Martin would shadow Child through the process of writing the book that became *Make Me*. I came to this book, immediately after reading *Make Me*, both as a fan of the Reacher series and as a writer who was very interested to see how someone much more successful than I at this business approached his craft. It's both encouraging and at the same time very frustrating to see that Lee Child and I work in much the same way, although he obviously makes it work much better than I. It's nice to see, for example, that his work habits are at least as loose as my own--actually maybe even worse. He allows himself to be constantly distracted, especially in the early stages of the process. There's always email to check, coffee to drink, and a fair amount of time spent doing things totally unrelated to the project at hand. Like me, and like most other writers, I suspect, Child would argue that even when he's watching soccer or doing something equally mindless, the novel is constantly working itself out somewhere in the subconscious regions of his mind. As with most of us, that's probably true some of the time and not so much true at others. Fledgling writers who've gone out and bought five or six of those books that purport to tell you the formula for writing a novel, will probably be gravely disappointed to learn that one of the most commercially successful writers of the modern age does virtually none of the things that those books advise: He doesn't outline; he doesn't create complex biographies for each of his characters; he doesn't post notes all over the place tracking the plot; the man just sits down and starts writing without the slightest idea where the book might be going. He figures that it will all work itself out somehow, and so far it has, for the most part brilliantly. It's a lot of fun to watch the new Reacher novel take shape but certainly no fan of the series would want to read this book without first reading *Make Me*. There are way too many spoilers, which is no doubt inevitable in a book like this. One might argue that Martin sometimes gets carried away discussing literary theory and other such matters that might be of interest principally to academics like himself, but that's a fairly small complaint. Martin devotes one chapter of the book to a trip on which he accompanied Child to the 2014 Bouchercon Convention in Long Beach, California. Bouchercon is a Major Deal--a huge convention that annually brings together several hundred crime fiction writers and fans. Child was still in the process of promoting *Personal*, the nineteenth of the Reacher novels, and he was very much in evidence as the convention progressed. I remember that we had a drink together in the hotel bar at that Bouchercon--along with about eight thousand other people, of course. As always, there were a lot of other big names in attendance--people like Michael Connelly, for example--but watching Child and the crowd of writers and fans orbiting around him, I remember thinking that Child was something like a supernova while the rest of us, especially people like me,

were rank pretenders who had drifted in from some galaxy far, far away. I doubt very much that reading this book is going to make me a better or more successful writer. But in the several times I have seen him, Lee Child has always impressed me as a genuinely nice guy, and it's good to see that someone who, like so many of the rest of us, was once down on his luck and only dreaming of being a hugely successful author was smart enough--and lucky enough--to make it work. *Reacher Said Nothing* is a very interesting book that should appeal to large numbers of "Reacher Creatures" and other writers as well.

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