

AN INTERVIEW WITH

Ward Larsen, author of *Fly By Wire*

Tell us a little about yourself, how and when you started writing.

I recently did an essay on Ernest Gann for the compilation work, *Thrillers: 100 Must Reads*. Gann, of course, was the father of aviation thrillers. While researching the piece, I discovered that Gann was an airline pilot who began to write because he had extra time on his overnights. I had to laugh, because I started writing for the very same reason—as an airline pilot, I had a fair amount of dead time in hotel rooms, and writing seemed like a productive way to use it.

What inspired you to write your novel?

Fly By Wire is an idea I've had in the back of my head for many years. Without giving too much away, it's a plot that deals with the integration of technology into our lives—in this case, relating to aviation—and the ability of the “antagonists of the world” to find weaknesses in that reliance.

How did you use your life experience or professional background to enrich your story?

My aviation background is used throughout the story. Truth is, it saved me a lot of research. When I was in the military, I attended the Air Force's Flying Safety Officer course, which trains pilots to act as aircraft accident investigators. It's an interesting field with a lot of pure detective work, which I think comes through in the story.

Are any characters based on people you know?

I never purely take a living person and design a character around him, but I often take traits of individuals I've known, and mesh them into a character. The protagonist's name in *Fly By Wire*, Jammer Davis, is actually a real person, a former pilot in the Marines. Nothing else about the character was drawn from the original—I just loved that call sign.

Would you say that your novel is more plot driven or character driven?

Fly By Wire, I think, has a very original and almost frightening plot concept. I'm not sure if I'll ever come up with a more legitimately troubling premise for a novel. That said, I think some of the minor characters in this work will really keep the reader's interest.

Who is your favorite character? Why?

The defrocked plastic surgeon. I had a lot of fun creating that character—I hope the readers will enjoy reading about him as much as I enjoyed creating him.

What part of writing your book did you find the most challenging?

It's always a challenge not to give things away too soon, to meter the suspense bit by bit so that a reader keeps turning the pages. That's probably the biggest challenge I have in most of my work—a writer always knows where things are heading, but you have to put yourself in the reader's place.

What do you hope that readers will take away from your book?

I hope they will find entertainment value—enjoyment and a few hours' escapism.

What writers have inspired you?

I enjoyed reading Robert Ludlum and Frederick Forsyth, early on. Different writers bring different strengths to the literary table, and there are dozens who have made their impression on me. Tom Clancy's knack for detail. Ken Follett and Jeffrey Archer are terrific at building characters. As a reader, which all writers are at heart, I appreciate them all.

What is the writing process like for you?

I write whenever I find the time—simple as that. I have no set schedule. My first book, *The Perfect Assassin*, took nine years to finish. I wrote the first draft of *Fly By Wire* in nine weeks.

What is the best piece of advice about writing that you've ever received?

Stuart Kaminsky once told me that he always carried an index card with him to write down good ideas that came to him over the course of a day—he could never remember them otherwise. I do it now and it's great. Maybe a phrase or a situation, even a single word I want to use. I write it down and work it into my writing later.

What is the worst piece of advice about writing that you've ever received?

Send an unsolicited manuscript to publishing houses in New York.

What's next for you? Any new books in the pipeline?

Fly By Wire is intended as a series, which is something new for me. I'm working on the second, tentatively titled, *Fly By Night*.