

NEW CANAAN NEWS~REVIEW

Thursday, Aug. 16, 2007

A3

Kids' Action Book Hits Local Bookstore

BY KRISTIANA GLAVIN
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What began as bedtime stories for his children has become a published book for budding novelist Jason Alter.

For roughly a decade, Alter invented the adventures of young racecar driver John Fastramp and his high-tech car the Blue Spider. Each night he told these stories to his 12-year-old son Ross and 8-year-old daughter Lindsay.

His son provided the initial inspiration. "My son is a very big car fan, so I made up a character who had this cool racing car and all sorts of unique gadgets that helped him get of danger and challenging situations," Alter said. "I took [Fastramp] around the world in an around-the-world race. It's entertaining and I'm exposing my children to all different cultures, places, ideas and geographies. The first race took place at the Great Wall of China, probably 10 years ago, and at the time, my son didn't know what the Great Wall of China was."

His wife provided names for the most of the characters.

Alter, a Stamford resident, also took inspiration from his favorite serialized fiction novels as a child, "The Hardy Boys," "Tom Swift and His Motorcycle" and "Danny Dunn."

"The end of chapter drives you to the next chapter," Alter said. "You want to finish the whole thing as quickly as possible to see what happens."

He continued to make up the action tales, adding characters and challenging adventures, until two years ago when his son reached the age of 10.

Upon the urging of family and friends, Alter then spent most of 2005 writing down the stories. It marked his first time writing fiction. He has his doctorate in molecular biology and does a lot of technical writing for his job as marketing director of a biotech firm in Westchester County.

"And (technical writing) is actually a lot easier to write than children's stories," Alter said.

He brought the manuscript to his children's reading coordinator at Northeast Elementary School in Stamford. It was used in the fourth grade's "battle of the books" contest, in which students read many books and answered questions about them. Alter said word about the Fastramp stories spread fast among the students.

The young readers loved the book, he said. Soon after the competition, he created an essay contest based on the stories. Thirteen students took part.

Emily, a Northeast student, urged other students to read the book.

"You should read 'John Fastramp and the Dakota 3000' because there is action at every waking moment and a bit of mystery," she wrote. Her comments are posted on the book's Web site.

Eliana, another Northeast student whose essay comments are posted on the book's Web site, wrote, "I loved the book of John Fastramp and my favorite part was when John got stuck in a hole in the checkerboard and Tom helped him out. I would love to read another John Fastramp book."

Fellow Northeast classmate Jacob also raved about the book in his essay.

"I thought your book was awesome and my favorite character was the Blue Spider," he stated in the posted essay excerpt.

Alter compared their responses to the avid reception that the Beatles music received from listeners in the 1960s.

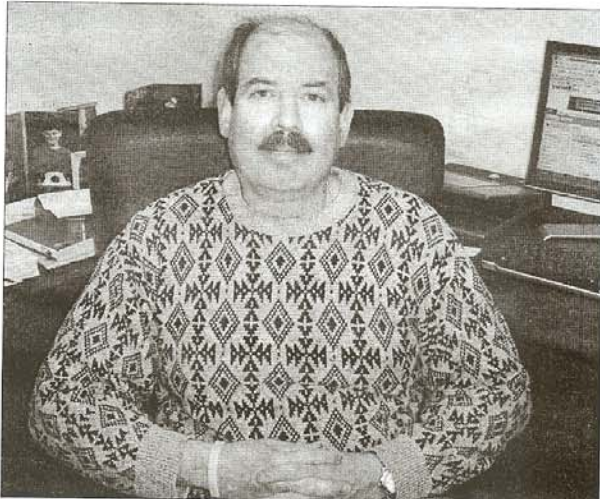
"(Readers) are all very enthusiastic. To the point where, in my essay contest, it was like they were listening to the Beatles," he said. "I know that I'll be successful, it's just a matter of getting enough people out there to try it for themselves."

Students continued talking about the story after the contest, and parents learned of his manuscript. While fourth-graders were the first audience, Alter said the book is appropriate for reading levels from third to sixth grade. Adults enjoy the book as well, he said.

"For children who don't read yet, there's been a lot of parents who have been reading it as bedtime stories," Alter said. "I've even had a parent...who read the book because she wanted to know what her children were going on and on about. And she really loved it."

Alter said parents and students constantly asked him about a sequel or when they would be able to buy the book. Alter tried to find a publisher, but after a year of rejections, he decided to publish it on his own through BookSurge publishing, an Amazon company.

"I learned how difficult it is to publish a book, even if you have a great book," Alter said, mentioning that many of the publishers



Contributed photo

Jason Alter's children's book "John Fastramp and the Dakota 3000" is available at DandyTales in New Canaan.

found the book interesting but didn't take it on. "Everyone's looking for blockbuster books, and it really comes down to the person reviewing book and what they think market wants. I know what kind of response it would get if it was out on a bookshelf."

New Canaan's DandyTales is the first bookstore to stock the novel about Fastramp's adventures in an intergalactic race.

Alter plans to contact and bring the book to independent bookstores in the area and continue promoting it. Alter said he also intends to reach out to New Canaan schools to build further interest. The author is also negotiating with Borders stores in the New York/Connecticut region.

Alter said he ultimately wants to find a national publisher that can distribute the children's book across the country.

"Parents and children uniformly like it," Alter said. "I know it would be very popular if it only had the opportunity for a wider audience. And that's what I'm going to do my best to give it."

The book totals less than 100 pages,

which includes graphics. Alter's friend Kirk Manley, a professional illustrator, designed the picture pages.

So far, Alter has sold close to 60 copies. He said usually about 40 to 60 copies of self-published books are sold to an author's friends and family.

"I'm already at that limit and most of my family has not bought the book. All the books that I've sold have been to friends, people in the community and colleagues," Alter said. "I'm very happy with it. From our perspective, just a few years ago these were nothing more than bedtime stories my children loved, in 2005 these were stories children loved and really enjoyed. Now it's 2007 and it's a book that published."

More information is available at the book's Web site, www.johnfastramp.com.

DandyTales is located at 13 South Ave., and the book is also available on www.amazon.com. Its retail price is \$11. More information on the illustrator is available on his Web site, www.studiokm.com.

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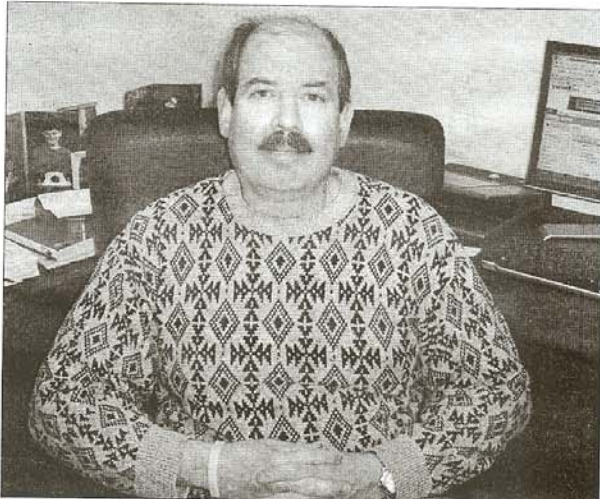
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