

Jon Agee

Hawking a 'Terrific' Book

AFTER DECAMPING FOR SAN FRANCISCO three years ago, longtime New Yorker Jon Agee is back in his old stomping grounds this weekend, to talk up his new picture book, *Terrific* (Hyperion/di Capua, Sept.), which he'll be signing today at table one from 1-1:30 p.m..



Terrific, the 10th book that Agee has both written and illustrated, was three years in the making ("I'm too ashamed to say four," he says). As he describes it, *Terrific* is the story of a cranky guy named Eugene, who gets

stranded on a deserted island with a parrot who knows a lot about building boats. The word *terrific* is Eugene's signature tag line, as events go from bad to worse (originally Agee had Eugene saying a variety of comments, but he settled on *terrific* because "it sounded the most sarcastic").

Agee hasn't attended BEA for at least a decade, but well recalls the experience. "The last time I went," he says, "there were Playboy bunnies in the lobby and people dressed up in costumes. I thought, 'Oh, this is a little different from ALA....'" One of the things he enjoys most about this show is "meeting the people who have been supporting your books, who are out there trying to sell them," he says. "Especially the people who liked the stuff that didn't do very well. And every now and then you bump into an old friend in publishing that you don't see very often, and that's nice."

Next up for Agee: a picture book for fall 2006 called *Nothing*, "about a guy who runs an antique store," and another in his series of wordplay books is due out next spring, with the catchy title of *Smart Feller Fart Smeller*.

Agee says that the "greatest joy" of his chosen career is the stage of thinking about what his next book is going to be. "I'm always drawing and doodling and coming up with ideas—that's the most fun part."

Somewhere in his life, he muses, "I figured out that I'm not just an artist and a painter, but a storyteller. I went to art school and thought I'd become a painter, but I don't think that would have sustained me. I like to weave the little twisted tale."

—Diane Roback