

Private partnership

INTERVIEW Writer Ashwin Sanghi tells MINI ANTHIKAD CHHIBBER that the collaboration for a book with novelist James Patterson has been a learning experience

After three blockbuster historical thrillers, Ashwin Sanghi joins hands with bestselling novelist James Patterson for a collaboration on Patterson's Private series. On a recent visit to Bangalore, he chatted about the new project, the status of the film adaptation of Chanakya's Chant and Dan Brown's latest. Excerpts.

How did the collaboration with Patterson come about?

A dear friend who has read all three of my books and works for Random House suggested my name to her colleague who handles Patterson's books. Given the fact that all three of my previous titles have been thrillers with short chapters, compelling pace, and unexpected hooks every few pages — traits that are amply evident in James Patterson's writing, the fit seemed a natural one. We discussed the issues involved for about a couple of weeks and topped it off with a signed agreement rather quickly.

Could you tell us about the mechanics of the collaboration?

James Patterson has co-authored all the books in the Private series thus far. This series is about a global detective agency that is called in to solve criminal cases that baffle the police.

The fictional head of this agency is a charismatic chap called Jack Morgan. The series involves criminals being hunted down by Morgan's team in different parts of the world. Private India — the collaborative project between James Patterson and me — will simply be an extension of that franchise to India.

What were your reasons

for accepting the deal?

My previous three books have been thrillers, but with a historical, theological or mythological backdrop. This collaboration is an extension of what I have already been doing — writing thrillers — but with an entirely modern and contemporary backdrop. There is a method to the madness of James Patterson's success. Co-writing with him is a terrific learning experience, particularly in the art of crafting a perfect thriller. The collaboration also gives me an opportunity to access a wider global audience.

What is the status of the project now?

Well, Patterson had provided me with a guideline as well as an existing set of characters that need to be developed in the story. Using his guideline, I developed a plot outline. We discussed the plot outline in detail and froze it after suitable amendments. I have now begun to write the first draft. The second and third drafts will be written by James Patterson. Once both James and I are done with the story, the editors at Random House take over.

How much time do you need to devote to the project?

I expect to complete my share of the project by August this year. I have already been

working on it for the past four months.

Writing is a solitary pursuit — did you enjoy the collaborative process?

Oh absolutely! I have been a fan of Patterson's work, particularly his Alex Cross series. Getting to work with him is almost a masterclass of sorts. The collaborative process requires a great deal of give and take between authors. I see the project as an opportunity to marry the edge-of-seat thrills of a Patterson thriller with the colours, chaos and mysticism of India.

How much of the book is going to be by you and how much Patterson?

Overall story idea, plot and content are from me. Characters, crafting, style elements, and ruthless editing is from James Patterson. I like to think of it as an equal partnership.

What is the status of the film adaptation of Chanakya's Chant?

The biggest challenge that UTV is facing is developing a perfect script that achieves a fine balance between aesthetics and commerce and between the current story and the historical track. The good news is that we're getting there. The bad news is that we haven't reached our goal yet. Unlike yesteryears



ACCESSING GLOBAL AUDIENCE Ashwin Sanghi

when it was possible to develop a movie solely based on star appeal, it is heartening to note that the story and script are now supreme.

From The Rozabal Line To The Krishna Key, there's a toning down. Is it deliberate or did the books demand it?

When I wrote *The Rozabal*

Line, I had no preconceived notions of what a commercial bestseller should be. I have always viewed *The Rozabal Line* as my first love, and probably my best work. The fact, however, is that it is my least read work. My next two novels — *Chanakya's Chant* and *The Krishna Key* — have far outsold *The Rozabal Line*. I believe that every writer

evolves with every successive novel. I view myself as work-in-progress.

What are your thoughts on Dan Brown's latest, *Inferno*, considering you are called India's answer to Brown?

I am waiting for May 14 — the date when *Inferno* is to be released by Doubleday. It is no secret that I have read *The Da Vinci Code* several times. I genuinely believe that *The Da Vinci Code* and *Angels and Demons* are by far, Brown's best works. *The Lost Symbol* was good, not great. I'm keeping my fingers crossed that *Inferno* — as the title suggests — ignites the same excitement within me that Brown's earlier two books did.



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