

## ART & CULTURE



### Private Eye

In its eighth edition, best-selling author James Patterson's *Private* series explores the maximum city. In a tête-à-tête with co-author Ashwin Sanghi, *Noblesse* India discovers why the Random House publication deserves a place on your book shelf.

By Karishma Rajani

Tell us about the collaboration. What is working with James Patterson like?

Considering each of my novels is a thriller with short chapters, compelling pace and unexpected hooks, all traits that are typical to Patterson's writing, the fit seemed natural. Needless to state, working with him has been a refreshing experience. He provided me with an existing set of international characters to weave into the narrative, following which I developed the plot and wrote the first draft. James worked on the final, giving us a chance to combine our strengths and create a literary

piece that brought out the best from the both of us. Presenting a single voice in a combined narrative was our biggest challenge.

Give us an insight into the book. Does Mumbai make for a thrilling backdrop?

Like its predecessors, this work of fiction explores the adventures of a global detective agency. It conveys the full impact of the maximum city via Bollywood, the mafia, god men, politicians and business tycoons. Mumbai is a study in contrasts—poverty and affluence, spirituality and sleaze, religion and crime, liberalism and conservatism. I couldn't think of a better setting for a thriller.

What is the key Indian element in this book?

Even though *Private India* is a mainstream crime thriller, it is inspired by my deep respect for the power of *Shakti*. I have always wondered why we worship the sacred feminine in our temples but wantonly desecrate that very symbol in our daily lives. As the key element, it links the writer of mythology with the writer of a contemporary crime thriller.

Introduce us to the most interesting character.

The only common figure across the 'Private' novels is Jack Morgan. All other characters in this book have been developed from scratch. Of them, the lead investigator Santosh Wagh, an ex-RAW agent, was the most interesting to imagine and flesh out. A dark, brooding personality, he is the bearer of many secrets. His turbulent personal life, incredible abilities and humble background make him rather intriguing.

How similar is the new book to a typical Ashwin Sanghi novel?

My only concern when I am writing is whether the pages turn on their own or does one need to turn them. That is the question I constantly pose to my editors and publishers with whom I share my manuscripts. At the end of the day, it is a good story that holds a work of fiction together. No amount of rich vocabulary or delicate sentence structure can compensate for the lack of the same. In that sense, *Private India* is just like any other Ashwin Sanghi novel.

In a sentence, tell us why we absolutely must get our hands on the book.

It was Hawthorne who said that, 'easy reading is damn hard writing.' Suffice it to say, the novel is precisely that.

