

James Patterson's *Private* partnership

The author on working with Ashwin Sanghi, the highs and lows of seeing the film versions of his books, and his recipe for global bestsellers

By NILIMA PATHAK
Special to Weekend Review

Teaming the world's biggest selling thriller writer James Patterson with India's bestselling author Ashwin Sanghi can be termed a coup of sorts. Published recently, their book *Private India* (Random House India and Cornerstone, a division of Random House, UK) is the latest in the global bestselling *Private* series.

Private India combines the trademark suspense and fast-moving plots of Patterson's writing complemented with exhaustive research and gripping storylines of Sanghi's thrillers.

Patterson is famous for his *Private* series, which is based around an exclusive detective agency, Private, led by Jack Morgan with offices across the globe. His books include: *Private Number 1 Suspect*, *Private Games*, *Private London* and *Private Berlin*. His latest book is an extension of that franchise in India and is set against the Mumbai backdrop with the full impact of maximum city through Bollywood, the mafia, god men, politicians and business tycoons.

The author says, "Writing my *Private* series of books has given me the opportunity to work with local authors on thrillers set all over the world. With its vibrant and chaotic cities, and rich history and heritage, there could be no better place to set *Private*'s next adventure than India."

And with Sanghi (of *Chanakya's Chant* and *The Krishna Key* fame), he could not have asked for more.

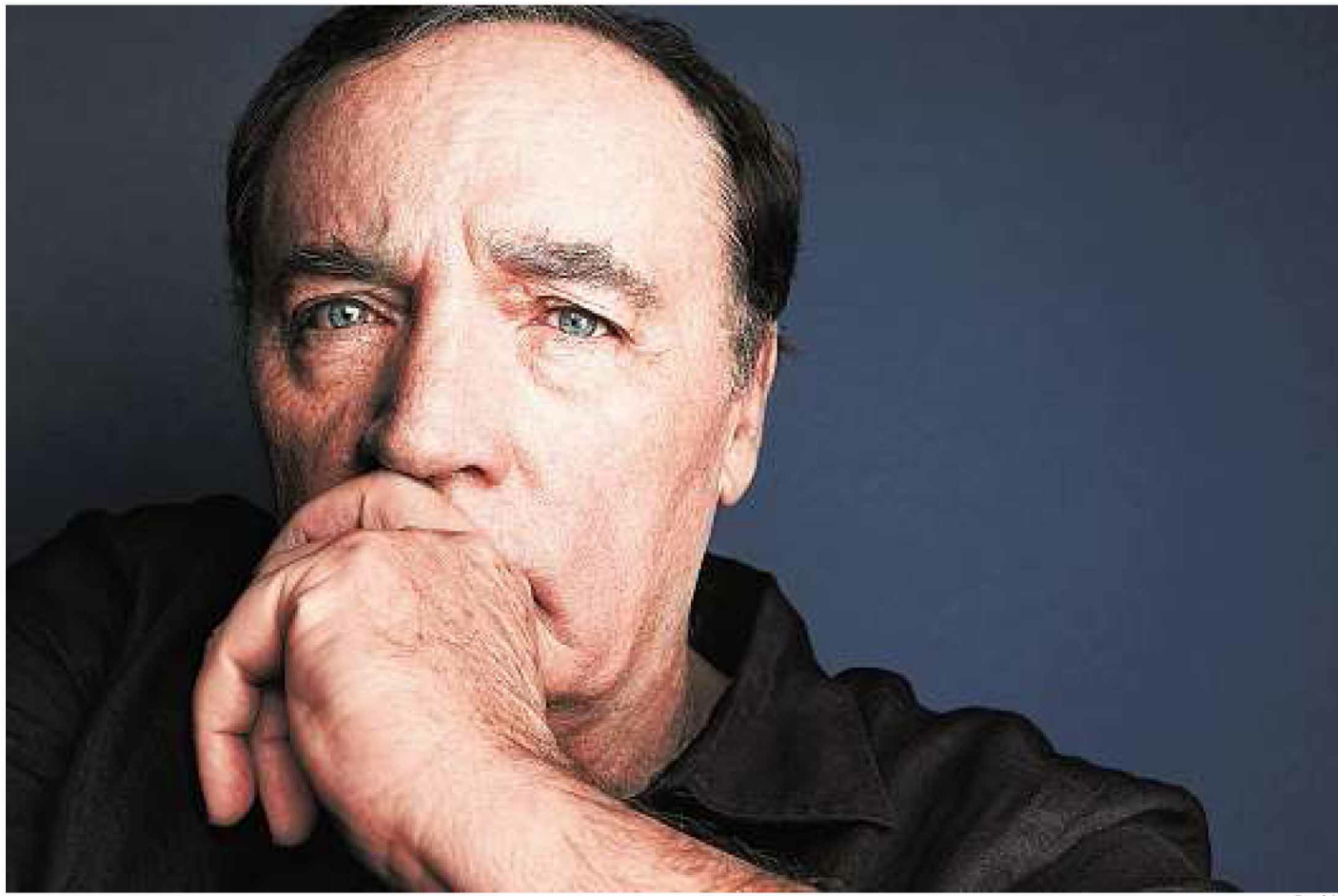
Patterson has authored books behind six films on Hollywood fast track. He has won awards including the Edgar, the BCA Mystery Guild's Thriller of the Year, the International Thriller of the Year award and the *Reader's Digest* Reader's Choice Award.

Excerpts:

■ **How important is India in the context of your future readership?**

My Indian readers are very important to me and Random House is looking at different initiatives for the market — including releasing the new Alex Cross book, *Hope To Die*, straight into paperback format in India (while it is hardback in the rest of the world).

■ **How was your experience in working along with Ashwin Sanghi?**



Rankin

Best of both worlds James Patterson (above) and Ashwin Sanghi used their respective strengths to 'hit the right notes' in the novel

It was wonderful to work with Ashwin on this project. I was looking for a collaborative writer in India and Ashwin's name was suggested. With his historical knowledge and his love of a fast-paced plot, there could have been no better writing partner.

■ **Even though you are a veteran, what was the toughest challenge you faced while writing along with him?**

There actually weren't any tough challenges and the process worked very smoothly. I provided a guideline, along with a list of international characters to be woven into the story, before Ashwin came back with an outline, which we discussed in detail. Ashwin then wrote a first draft and I did the second.

■ **Were there moments when you mar-**

velled at Sanghi's writing skills?

I think that the best moment was when I first received Ashwin's ideas and saw how a *Private* adventure would fit in Mumbai.

■ **Are there any TV/film plans for the *Private* series?**

There is at present a TV adaptation of *Private* in progress for CBS.

■ **Your favourite book-to-screen experience where you found both the book and the film equally good?**

Sure. *Silence of the Lambs*. And the recent *Cross* film. Alex Cross took his first trip to Hollywood in many years, and it was quite a ride. Tyler Perry, Matthew Fox, Ed Burns and the rest of the cast did a great job. And audiences gave the film unanimous 'A' ratings to Cinema Score on their way out of the theatre.

■ **And some translations of books to films that made you feel let down?**

I feel like some projects didn't quite live up to their potential. But I have hopes for a couple of projects in the works: the very first *Maximum Ride* movie, which has Avi Arad (producer of *Spider Man*), Catherine Hardwicke (director of *Twilight*), and Don Payne (writer for *The Simpsons*) on board, and two TV series being developed with CBS for *Private* and *Zoo*.

■ **What are the key reasons for your success as a global bestseller?**

I make reading the book an 'experience' and keep my chapters short. I always outline the book before starting to write it. I am always open to change during the writing process, always write with confidence and I know who I am writing for and what they want.

■ **Is your passion for writing as strong as before and do you still write nearly 365 days a year?**

Pretty much. Somebody said you're lucky if you find something you like to do and it's a miracle if somebody will pay you to do it. I start to write at 5.30 every morning and don't stop until lunch.

■ **Your next book?**

My next book in the *Private* series will be *Private LA* and then *Private Vegas*. My new Alex Cross book *Hope To Die*, will be out in November.

■ *Nilima Pathak is a journalist based in New Delhi.*



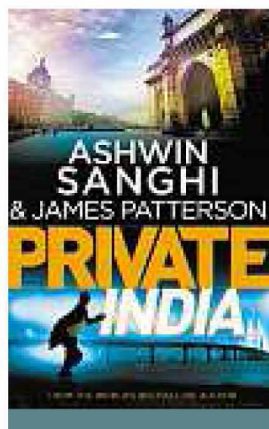
Less is more

Ashwin Sanghi, co-author of *Private India*, says:

"You need more than one voice to create a harmony, right? That's what we've tried to do with *Private India*. My insider's perspective on India and its culture along with my passion for research and fast-moving plots were complementary to James Patterson's proven formula for creating larger-than-life characters and building conflict. Multiple voices work well in a choir as long as they sing the right notes. I think you'll find that we hit the right notes with *Private India*. This book has given us a chance to combine our respective strengths and present something that represents best of both.

Writing thrillers is not only about inspiration and imagination but also about craft. I have realised that there are a few simple rules that make a Patterson thriller: amplify character traits; eliminate fluff; build twists and suspense ever so often; never compromise pace; build conflict until the very end. There are some chapters in this book that are just about a paragraph long. It stems from the Patterson style of saying absolutely nothing that does not advance the plot. That is the key takeaway for me from this collaboration: less is more!

Excerpt from the book



Private India

By Ashwin Sanghi and James Patterson, Cornerstone, 384 pages, £18.99

Fourteen minutes was what she had to clean each room. Start in the bathroom, change the towels, change the bed, clean the cups, dust and vacuum.

And though she would never have admitted it to her colleagues at the Marine Bay Plaza, Sunita Kadam took pride in meeting (and especially bearing) that fourteen-minute time limit. In fact, on her house-keeping cart was a stopwatch she carried for that very purpose. She picked it up as she arrived at room number 1121 and knocked smartly ... then began the stopwatch.

Twenty seconds. No answer. With a deliberate jangle of master keys she let herself in.

"Hello? Housekeeping."

Again no answer. Good. And what's more, the room was tidy. Though an evening dress hung from a handle of the closet, the bed looked as if it hadn't been slept in. Nets at the window billowed beneath a blast of air conditioning, giving the room a clean, aired feel. Six minutes to service this room, thought Sunita. Maybe seven. Unless, of course, there was a nasty surprise in the bathroom.

From her cart she collected towels and toiletries and went there now, clicking on the light at the same time as she reached for the door handle and pushed.

She came up short. The door would only budge an inch or so. Something on the other side was preventing it from opening.

Inside, the fluorescents struggled, flickering as she pushed the door. With an exasperated sigh she gave it one last shove and there was a splintering sound. Something heavy fell on the floor on the other side and, finally the lights came on — and Sunita Kadam saw what was inside.

On the tiles lay a woman's corpse.