

Patterson's pledge

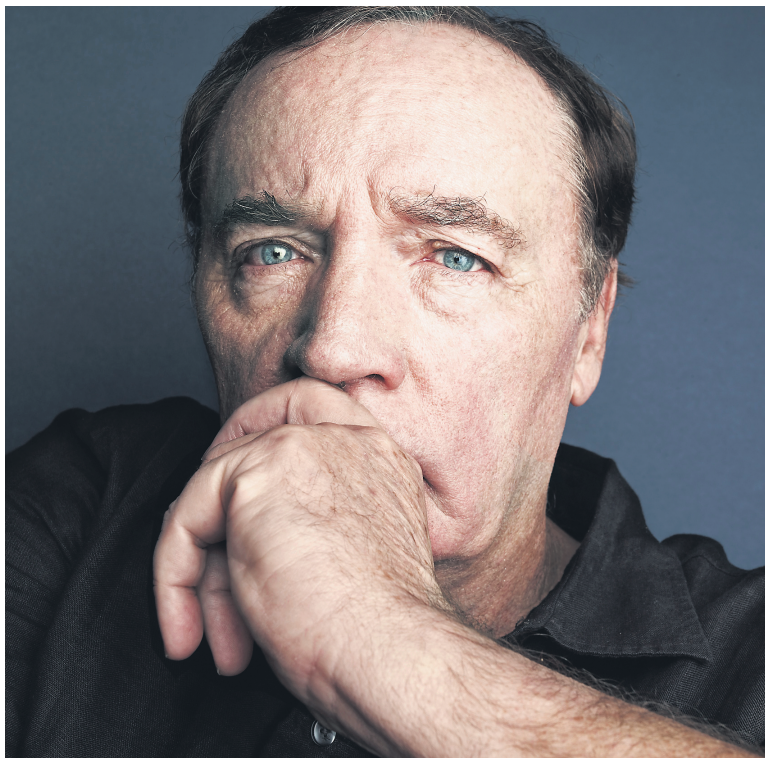
The bestselling author says you cannot do funny when you're writing about serial killers, reports **Heather Zubek**

The world's biggest-selling author and one of its wealthiest sits down next to me. "Hi, I'm James." Of course you are. Best known for his popular Alex Cross, Women's Murder Club and Private series of thrillers, Florida-based James Patterson has sold more than 300 million books. He has even appeared on The Simpsons.

"I ended up carrying Marge away on a white horse," Patterson says during a private lunch with a small group of teacher-librarians and booksellers in a trendy Melbourne restaurant. "I even sent her flowers the next day."

Patterson was in Australia to promote the latest in his popular pre-teens series Middle School. He also took the opportunity to pledge US\$100,000 (\$126,600) to support childhood literacy and independent book stores — both causes close to his heart.

"There is no doubt in my mind that book stores play an essential part in the community by getting kids to read," says Patterson, who has run similar initiatives in the US and UK in which eligible book stores with dedicated children's literature sections can apply for grants up to US\$5000. The grant can be for anything from an a



James Patterson says reading makes kids better citizens.

school book club to buying a storytelling tent.

Patterson fears too many children are living their lives without the influence of

books. He says any such society will be populated with "the apathetic and the narrow-minded".

Researchers from the Australian National University last year found the number of books in the home has a dramatic impact on a child's reading ability. Even if the parents are illiterate, just having a children's book lying around invites discussion and opportunity for imaginative play. Patterson's passion for childhood literacy grew from

watching his own young son become indifferent to reading.

"Jack was a bright little guy, so the summer he turned eight we said 'Instead of mowing the lawn you are going to read for one hour every day'.

"He was reluctant at first, so we said 'Unless you want to live in the garage you will be reading'. Some people would call that tough love but it is love. Books are all about love."

Patterson says making Jack read helped make him "a better person, a better citizen and a really broad thinker" and he's "a huge fan" of encouraging kids in the 7-12 age range to read. "At that age they can concentrate a little better and it's during this time I believe we can create miracles," he says.

Even though the name Patterson is synonymous with adult fiction he has now brought his fast-paced prose into the genre of children's fiction with his Middle School series. The

first, Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life, came out in 2011. The series follows the trials of sixth-grader Rafe Khatchadorian as he begins primary school and copes with the awkwardness and angst of adolescence. The latest is the coming Middle School: Rafe's Aussie Adventure, a collaboration with Australian writer Martin Chatterton.

"My favourite books to write are the kids' books," Patterson says. "I'm allowed to be funny. I'm a really funny guy but you can't do funny when you're writing about serial killers."

He says it's also good to write about kids like Rafe, a talented artist who gets lost in the school system. "Here's a kid who is a brilliant communicator but he communicates through his art, a talent not recognised in a lot of schools."

All Patterson's children's books and many of his adult titles are collaborations — something he is highly criticised for. "Simon and Garfunkel do it, Rodgers and Hammerstein also did it. Why can't writers," he counters.

Patterson also has been critical of the online discounting of books and its impact on booksellers.

"Amazon is very powerful in the US and the UK," he says. "They have shut down book stores. How can these places compete with something as big as Amazon?"

Perhaps by offering a different kind of experience. "In book stores you can touch the books, you can talk to actual people about books. And it's a place where you can take the kids.

To him, book store owners are like missionaries, they are in the business for the love of books, certainly not for the money.

"As individuals we can't do much about global warming or the healthcare crisis back home," he says. "But when it comes to getting kids to read we can all play a part."

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We



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Selfies worth reading

The self-publishing and small indie press industry is thriving with many worthwhile stories deserving attention, including several by WA authors. Here are some you might have missed.

Batavia Shores (Xlibris) is Perth author Ken F Stewart's sequel to his first book, Devlin Pool. Both murder mysteries are set in Geraldton, featuring detectives Barney and Zep. With local flavour adding interest to the multi-layered plot, there is everything from murder, gun-running and drug importation to an indigenous feud for the detectives to unravel. Tony "Wheels" Easterby's **From Baggy Greens to a Blue Suit** (MSB publications) is a great read which relates his experiences in the Army and the RAAF (stationed at Pearce). It's a

charming autobiography packed with interesting photographs, anecdotes of service life and the lucky escapes.

Kelvin Crombie's impressive **Gallipoli: the Road to Jerusalem** (Heritage Resources) sets out not to provide answers but reasons why the Gallipoli campaign led to the defeat and disintegration of the Turkish Empire and then the formation of the Middle East as we know it with its ancient histories and a common ancestor, Abraham. Meanwhile, Terri Spark's **Heron The Gathering** (Author House), presents a science-fiction scenario where Earth "is no longer a refuge for humans", scattered across space and disparate individuals unite to save the universe.

Elaine Fry

SHELF LIFE



HISTORY
Lifeboat #6: The Sinking of the SS Fort Lee
Kevin Gomm
Digger Press, \$22.95
REVIEW **ELAINE FRY**

This very worthwhile read "dedicated to all good sailors everywhere" commemorates the 70th anniversary of the 1944 sinking of the SS Fort Lee by a U-boat. This incident, like many others in the Indian Ocean where ships and submarines fought throughout the war, was overshadowed by higher-profile ones. Through painstaking research, Gomm brings back otherwise forgotten moments of history, giving them the recognition and respect they deserve. Following the stories of the survivors, some of whom were taken to Fremantle, Gomm humanises naval history with photographs, newspaper cuttings and other poignant illustrations that bring those times vividly to life. Expertly crafted, with a wealth of maritime information, including much of local interest.



FICTION
The Nightingale
Kristin Hannah
Macmillan, \$30
REVIEW **MAUREEN EPPEN**

Deprivation, brutality and horror spark deeds of great heroism in the new novel by bestseller Kristin Hannah. In France during World War II, sisters Viann and Isabelle have contrasting responses to German occupation — one attempts to keep a low profile to protect her child, and the other determines on overt and covert resistance. As the German stranglehold tightens, the sisters come to understand how individuals, when united against the odds, can undermine a destructive regime. Zealously researched, Hannah's intricate, well-paced plot and imperfect characters deftly conjure the day-to-day struggle for survival and ultimate freedom.



SELF-HELP
Bye Bye Black Cat
Sylvia Fernandes
VIA Frontiers
ebook, \$9
REVIEW **ELAINE FRY**

Feeling plagued by bad luck? This book seeks to show luck does not exist, that lives can be turned around by identifying and replacing limiting thoughts with empowering ones. Told through a road trip from Adelaide to Darwin taken by twins Joe and Jack, the brothers learn to correct misconceptions about themselves and each other. Their journey represents a metaphorical one in which Jack shares the life-changing mindset he learnt through NLP — neuro-linguistic programming — with depressed and directionless Joe. Changing mental attitudes to embrace opportunities, overcoming limitations formed in childhood, replacing negatives with positives — this book promises happiness to open minds.