

**JAMES PATTERSON**

**BILLION**

**\$ 1 , 0 0 0 , 0 0 0 , 0 0 0**

**DOLLAR**

**A T H R I L L E R**

**RANSOM**

**DUANE SWIERCZYNSKI**



# **BILLION-DOLLAR RANSOM**

**A THRILLER**

**JAMES PATTERSON  
AND DUANE SWIERCZYNSKI**



Little, Brown and Company

New York Boston London



The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Copyright © 2025 by James Patterson  
Cover design by Gregg Kulick  
Cover art by Shutterstock  
Cover © 2025 Hachette Book Group, Inc.

Hachette Book Group supports the right to free expression and the value of copyright. The purpose of copyright is to encourage writers and artists to produce the creative works that enrich our culture.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book without permission is a theft of the author's intellectual property. If you would like permission to use material from the book (other than for review purposes), please contact [permissions@hbgusa.com](mailto:permissions@hbgusa.com). Thank you for your support of the author's rights.

Little, Brown and Company  
Hachette Book Group  
1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104  
[littlebrown.com](http://littlebrown.com)

First ebook edition: September 2025

Little, Brown and Company is a division of Hachette Book Group, Inc. The Little, Brown name and logo are trademarks of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

The Hachette Speakers Bureau provides a wide range of authors for speaking events. To find out more, go to [hachettespeakersbureau.com](http://hachettespeakersbureau.com) or email

[hachettespeakers@hbgusa.com](mailto:hachettespeakers@hbgusa.com).

Little, Brown and Company books may be purchased in bulk for business, educational, or promotional use. For information, please contact your local bookseller or the Hachette Book Group Special Markets Department at [special.markets@hbgusa.com](mailto:special.markets@hbgusa.com).

ISBN 9780316570022 (ebook)  
LCCN 2025932204

E3-20250718-JV-NF-ORI

# Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

**[Prologue](#)**

[Chapter 1](#)

**[Day One](#)**

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

## **Day Two**

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)



[Chapter 42](#)

[Chapter 43](#)

[Chapter 44](#)

[Chapter 45](#)

[Chapter 46](#)

[Chapter 47](#)

[Chapter 48](#)

[Chapter 49](#)

[Chapter 50](#)

[Chapter 51](#)

[Chapter 52](#)

[Chapter 53](#)

[Chapter 54](#)

[Chapter 55](#)

[Chapter 56](#)

[Chapter 57](#)

[Chapter 58](#)

[Chapter 59](#)

[Chapter 60](#)

[Chapter 61](#)

[Chapter 62](#)

[Chapter 63](#)

[Chapter 64](#)

[Chapter 65](#)

[Chapter 66](#)

[Chapter 67](#)

[Chapter 68](#)

[Chapter 69](#)

[Chapter 70](#)

[Chapter 71](#)

[Chapter 72](#)

[Chapter 73](#)

[Chapter 74](#)

[Chapter 75](#)

[Chapter 76](#)

[Chapter 77](#)

[Chapter 78](#)

[Chapter 79](#)

[Chapter 80](#)

[Chapter 81](#)

[Chapter 82](#)

[Chapter 83](#)

### **Day Three**

[Chapter 84](#)

[Chapter 85](#)

[Chapter 86](#)

[Chapter 87](#)

[Chapter 88](#)

[Chapter 89](#)

[Chapter 90](#)

[Chapter 91](#)

[Chapter 92](#)

[Chapter 93](#)

[Chapter 94](#)

[Chapter 95](#)

[Chapter 96](#)

[Chapter 97](#)

[Chapter 98](#)

### **[One Month Later](#)**

[Chapter 99](#)

[Chapter 100](#)

[Chapter 101](#)

[Chapter 102](#)

[Chapter 103](#)

[Chapter 104](#)

[Chapter 105](#)

[Chapter 106](#)

### **[Six Months Later](#)**

[Chapter 107](#)

[Chapter 108](#)

[Discover More](#)

[About the Authors](#)

## **What's coming next from James Patterson?**

Get on the list to find out about coming titles, deals, contests, appearances, and more!

[The official James Patterson newsletter.](#)



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

# PROLOGUE

# CHAPTER 1

## Transcript of audio conversation (recovered from private Macao-based server)

ONE: Listen to my voice very closely. That is your only job right now. If you have any questions, please wait until the end of my short presentation. I will answer what is relevant.

[*No response.*]

ONE: Excellent. No names, even fictitious ones, will be used at any point during this operation. And that includes this briefing session, the only one we'll have as a group. All of you have been assigned code numbers. They will appear on your home screens. You may refer to me as One.

[*No response.*]

ONE: To set your minds at ease, please know that your voices have all been digitally scrambled. You may answer in the affirmative when I ask you a question directly. Do you understand, Two?

TWO: Stay silent until the question-and-answer portion of the program.

ONE: Well done. Let's hear from Three and Four. Understood?

THREE: Yes.

FOUR [*Under her breath*]: Seriously? [*Pause.*] Yes, One. Three and I understand.

ONE: How about you, Five?

FIVE: Yeah, I got you.

ONE: And, finally, Six?

SIX: Yes. I understand.

ONE: Goody. Now, some ground rules. First: Your numbered code names will stay with you throughout the mission. No trading numbers or changing them. They were assigned to each of you for a specific reason. If this is unclear, speak up now.

[*Pause.*]

ONE: Second rule: The plan must be followed *precisely*. Not a single change will be permitted. If you ignore a step, you will not be paid. If you improvise, you will not be paid. If you involve others, you will not be paid. If you perform a task a minute too early or a minute too late, you will not be paid. You are to perform your tasks at the precise minute—almost to the second. If this is unclear, speak up now.

[*Pause.*]

ONE: Final rule, and this is more of an expectation than a rule. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that one or more people will be killed at some point during our mission. You must not let this throw you. Some deaths are unavoidable and ultimately may serve the greater plan. If anyone has a problem with this, speak now and you will be relieved of your duties.

[*Pause.*]

ONE: Now for the pep talk. The one thing I want you to remember, above all else, is that you *deserve* this. You need to *internalize* that and truly *believe* it. You have earned this. Why? Because, like me, you've all come from nothing. And you are merely taking what is rightfully yours.

[*Pause.*]

ONE: When we have completed our mission, this group will have pulled off the most famous kidnapping in history. Nothing else comes close—not the Lindbergh child, not Patricia Campbell Hearst, not John Paul Getty the Third. *This* is the one they will study in books and films for

decades to come. That will be for many reasons, not least of which is the size of the ransom. Which will be the largest ever: one billion dollars.

*[On the recording, there are a series of excited and astonished murmurs.]*

ONE: Upon successful execution of your part of the plan, you will be paid your share of that one-billion-dollar ransom within forty-eight hours. Then you have the rest of your lives to enjoy what is rightfully yours. If you follow the plan, no one will ever know you were involved. The money will be untraceable, and you will be able to spend it freely anywhere in the world. Are there any questions?

*[Pause.]*

ONE: Excellent. Now you may applaud.

*[There is a confused pause before One breaks out in a hearty laugh, which seems to give permission to the others. They join in the laughter and eventually erupt in a round of applause.]*



# DAY ONE

## CHAPTER 2

*Wednesday, 3:14 p.m.*

ELIZABETH “BOO” SCHRAEDER couldn’t help but smile as she settled the tab at her favorite Beverly Hills salon.

The salon was arguably the most exclusive in LA. Their hair-extension work was unparalleled, and appointments with their stylists were among the most highly coveted on the West Coast. The real draw to potential customers, however, was the salon’s clientele, a list of million-dollar names: Kim. Taylor. Chrissy. Zendaya. What you had done to your hair was not as important as who might be sitting in the next chair.

But Boo didn’t patronize this salon for any of those reasons. She honestly just got a kick out of the place. The Style Circus, she called it when gossiping with friends back home in Arkansas. Only here could some of the world’s most important faces be seen at their most unguarded and vulnerable. The sheer spectacle cracked Boo up, especially as she got a little wine-drunk in the early afternoon.

Now that her two-hour appointment was over, Boo emerged back into reality through the shaded private back entrance behind Burton Way, where her car—an onyx Bentley—would be waiting.

Boo had finally gotten used to the idea of having a driver. She’d resisted for months, but eventually Randolph had put his foot down. Yes, her husband understood that Boo was a woman fully capable of taking care of herself on the mean streets of Beverly Hills. “That’s one of the many reasons I married you,” he’d said. But Randolph also reminded her that being his wife came with all kinds of attention. Some of it was the kind of attention no one wants. And Randolph, as he liked to remind people, was a man with many

enemies.

And Boo had to admit it was nice to be driven home after enjoying a glass (or three) of a 2017 Château Lafite while relaxing in the styling chair.

It helped that Boo genuinely liked her driver, Emily, the epitome of *chill*. LA's notorious traffic, which spiked the blood pressure of even the most seasoned drivers, didn't seem to faze Emily. She didn't waste time with small talk but was happy to engage in a chat. Not quite the same as talking smack with her besties from Fort Smith, Boo knew, but sometimes she was simply grateful for the companionship.

Emily climbed out of the driver's seat the moment she saw Boo. She smiled and moved to open the back door. "See anybody cool this afternoon?" the driver asked with a playful smirk. "Queen Bey, perhaps? She's playing at SoFi Stadium tonight."

Emily didn't see the hulking form crouched behind the Bentley. The form rose, quick as a shadow, a dark object dangling from his right gloved hand.

Boo shouted a warning. "*Behind you!*"

But it was too late.

The figure whipped a leather sap across the back of Emily's skull. Her body bounced off the side of the car and collapsed on the pavement. The attack lasted all of three seconds.

Boo spun around and grabbed the handle of the salon's back door. But it was locked. Guests had to be buzzed in, just like at the front entrance.

Deep down she'd known this, but she had to try anyway.

Before Boo could reach into her purse for her industrial-strength mace—an item that Randolph insisted she carry—the attacker had his burly arms around her upper torso, squeezing tight, letting her know he was in charge.

"Mrs. Schraeder, stay calm."

"Who the hell are you?"

"That doesn't matter. What matters is what I know about you," he said in a tone that was grave yet controlled. "For instance, I know you were army, Seventy-Fifth Ranger Regiment. You have training

and know how to defend yourself.”

“You want a demonstration, asshole?”

“That won’t help you now, so please be cool. Last thing I want to do is hurt you.”

Boo said, “Like you hurt my driver?”

“Your driver will be fine.”

“I don’t know. You hit her pretty hard.”

“I needed the keys.”

“Wait... all of this just so you can steal my Bentley? You’re an idiot, whoever you are.”

Boo tried to turn and get a closer look at the assailant. He was wearing some kind of sheer mask. The material resembled the mesh of a stocking, but the construction was something more advanced—it looked thin, yet it was substantial enough to twist and distort his features.

Boo’s attacker placed his hand on her chin and, as gently as a doctor examining a patient, moved her head so she was facing forward. Then he whispered hot against her cheek: “That’s not what this is.”

Boo said, “You know someone is watching us, right? He’s been watching this whole time. Guy in the green baseball cap, down at the end of the drive. I don’t think you’ve thought this through.”

“He’ll be taken care of. Right after I take care of you.”

“Take care of me how?”

“Don’t worry. This won’t hurt.”

A harsh blast of wetness hit Boo’s mouth and nostrils. It was like being slapped in the face by a wave from an ocean of chemicals. The spray seemed to instantly seal up her airway.

She tried to suck in a breath, but before that could happen and far quicker than she would have thought, her brain stopped recording.