

**JAMES**

**PATTERSON**

**AND JAMES O. BORN**



**A MICHAEL BENNETT THRILLER**

**PARANOIA**



## About the Authors

**James Patterson** is one of the best-known and biggest-selling writers of all time. Among his creations are some of the world's most popular series, including Alex Cross, the Women's Murder Club, Michael Bennett and the Private novels. He has written many other number one bestsellers including collaborations with President Bill Clinton and Dolly Parton, stand-alone thrillers and non-fiction. James has donated millions in grants to independent bookshops and has been the most borrowed adult author in UK libraries for the past fourteen years in a row. He lives in Florida with his family.

**James O. Born** is an award-winning crime and science-fiction novelist as well as a career law-enforcement agent. A native Floridian, he still lives in the Sunshine State.

[A list of titles by James Patterson appears at the back of this book](#)

# Why everyone loves James Patterson and Detective Michael Bennett

'Its breakneck pace leaves you gasping for breath. Packed with typical Patterson panache ... **it won't disappoint.**'

**Daily Mail**

It's no mystery why James Patterson is the world's most popular thriller writer. Simply put: **Nobody does it better.**'

**Jeffery Deaver**

'No one gets this big without **amazing natural storytelling** talent – which is what Jim has, in spades.'

**Lee Child**

'James Patterson is the **gold standard** by which all others are judged.'

**Steve Berry**

'Patterson boils a scene down to the single, telling detail, the element that **defines a character** or moves a plot along. It's what fires off the movie projector in the reader's mind.'

**Michael Connelly**

'James Patterson is **The Boss**. End of.'

**Ian Rankin**

James Patterson & James O. Born

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PARANOIA





POLICE DEPARTMENT  
One Police Plaza  
New York, NY 10038



PERSONNEL FILE

Req #: 2014-PI-10945  
File #:

TO BE FILLED IN BY IMMEDIATE SUPERIOR:

**Detective**  
**MICHAEL BENNETT**

6 FOOT 3 INCHES (191CM) 200 POUNDS (91KG)  
IRISH AMERICAN

**EMPLOYMENT**

Bennett joined the police force to uncover the truth at all costs. He started his career in the Bronx's 49th Precinct. He then transferred to the NYPD's Major Case Squad and remained there until he moved to the Manhattan North Homicide Squad.

**EDUCATION**

Bennett graduated from Regis High School and studied philosophy at Manhattan College.

**FAMILY HISTORY**

Bennett was previously married to Maeve, who worked as a nurse on the trauma ward at Jacobi Hospital in the Bronx. However, Maeve died tragically young after losing a battle with cancer in December 2007, leaving Bennett to raise their ten adopted children: Chrissy, Shawna, Trent, Eddie, twins Fiona and Bridget, Ricky, Brian, Jane and Juliana.

Following Maeve's death, over time Bennett grew closer to the children's nanny, Mary Catherine. After years of on-off romance, Bennett and Mary Catherine decided to commit to one another, and now happily raise the family together. Also in the Bennett household is his Irish grandfather, Seamus, who is a Catholic priest.

**PROFILE:**

AMENDED REPORT

BENNETT IS AN EXPERT IN HOSTAGE NEGOTIATION, TERRORISM, HOMICIDE AND ORGANIZED CRIME. HE WILL STOP AT NOTHING TO GET THE JOB DONE AND PROTECT THE CITY AND THE PEOPLE HE LOVES, EVEN IF THIS MEANS DISOBEYING ORDERS AND IGNORING PROTOCOL. DESPITE THESE UNORTHODOX METHODS, HE IS A RELENTLESS, DETERMINED AND IN MANY WAYS INCOMPARABLE DETECTIVE.

COURTESY • PROFESSIONALISM • RESPECT

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## CHAPTER 1

RALPH STEIN TRIED to swallow. His throat was too dry. He'd been in tight spots before, but nothing like this. He needed to buy time. He wasn't sure what he'd do with it, but the longer he kept this guy's attention, the greater the chance that he might get out of this. Or so he hoped.

Ralph cast a reassuring look over at Gary Halverson. But Gary was past the point of reassurance. Sweat poured down his face, making his thin hair stick to his forehead. The gray stubble on his chin glistened with perspiration.

"This isn't necessary," Ralph said to the guy.

"I agree," the tall man with close-cropped brown hair mumbled. The guy looked pretty calm to Ralph. A real pro.

Ralph tried to keep the fear out of his voice, but it didn't work. "I can get some cash. I can give you more money than whoever's paying you to do this."

"Not about the money." The man checked the two propane tanks he'd placed right in front of Gary and Ralph, and the cord he'd used to secure their hands to kitchen chairs. He showed no emotion and no real interest in chatting with Ralph.

Ralph figured both the cord and the timer were made of some kind of non-synthetic material that would burn away and leave no evidence. He looked around the kitchen. The walls were decorated with photographs and cartoons of sharks. Ralph's favorite was a cartoon of a shark in an NYPD uniform. A street artist had drawn it for him when he was a patrol officer in Times Square. His eyes fell on the crayon portrait that his sister's little granddaughter had drawn for him. She was an absolute doll. Ralph caught the sob before it came out.

"How'd you know about us? Who sent you?" Ralph figured there were plenty of people who could've sent the guy, but why would anyone bother to track him down in Florida now? "C'mon, I can tell by that weird-looking timer you're fixing to those propane tanks that you're no ordinary street hood. You have to know Gary and I were both cops. Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

The man, who looked to be in his late thirties, stopped his work and sighed. He turned and said in a quiet voice, "It *does* mean something. Thank you for your service. Now please stop talking. This is a done deal. You're kinda bumming me out."

Ralph perked up. "You're from Brooklyn, right? I never miss an accent. Especially from back home."

The man continued working, ignoring Ralph.

Ralph kept it up. "Were you in the military? In World War II, Brooklyn led the country in recruits. Not so much these days. New York has fallen off as a supplier of soldiers." He looked at the man, hoping to spark some conversation. He got nothing.

The man finished adjusting a small green-and-brown device attached to one of the propane tanks. Then he looked up at Ralph and put his finger to his lips, prompting him to keep quiet.

Ralph tried to think things through. The man was probably thirty years younger than him. He was in shape and carried a Beretta 9mm. When he'd knocked on the door of Ralph's little two-bedroom rental house in Hollywood Beach, Ralph had figured him to be a tourist looking to find a bridge back over to town, or maybe the easiest way to get down to Miami. That was his first mistake. He'd lost his edge in his old age.

Gary said, "I already sent the email, Ralph. Considering what the doctors said, I'm no worse off."

One of the first things the man had done after he'd pulled the gun was to make Gary write a good-bye email to his niece. Now Ralph watched as the man pulled the keyboard away from the computer on the kitchen counter and tossed it out the front door.

Ralph mumbled, "What the hell?"

Gary snorted. "It's the difference in assignments. You did most of your time in narcotics, Ralph. I did a stint in homicide. He's got my

fingerprints on the keyboard. They'll ID me from that. He tossed it outside like it was blown there by the blast. It's pretty inventive, if I do say so myself."

The man looked up and nodded at Gary. Just a little sign of respect. He pressed a plunger on the little gadget he'd attached to the propane tank on the right. Then he turned the knob on each tank until they could all hear the hiss of the escaping propane.

Then the man was gone. Silently and gracefully ducked out the open door and disappeared.

Ralph prayed the asshole didn't know his sister, Rachel, lived right down the street. She didn't need to be involved in this foolishness. When he thought about it for a moment, he realized *he* hadn't needed to be involved in it either.

## CHAPTER 2

RACHEL STEIN CONNORS liked to stroll down the boardwalk on Hollywood Beach in the afternoons with her two grandchildren to visit her big brother, who'd moved into a little house nearby about a year ago. Ralph had spent eight years telling her he was going to retire from the NYPD and move to Florida. Now that he'd finally done it, she made sure to see him every day. Even though he was twelve years older than her, he was a great big brother. He deserved the best retirement in the world.

As Rachel walked, she held the hands of her five-year-old grandson and three-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter. They were both excited to visit Uncle Ralph's house, with all the cool drawings and photos of sharks he had up on his wall.

Suddenly, the little girl froze and scooted behind her grandmother's sundress. Rachel looked up and saw a golden retriever being walked by a young woman. "It's okay, sweetheart, he's on a leash," she said in a soft voice. The little girl had recently conflated things overheard from a news report about a dog who'd mauled a girl in the Broward County town of Miramar, and she'd decided all dogs were dangerous.

The woman paused, realizing that the little girl was scared, and pulled her dog close. She encouraged the children to pet him, reassuring them that her dog was friendly. Rachel went with it, hoping it might be a way to cure her granddaughter's phobia, and was pleasantly surprised when both kids started to pat the dog gently. As the woman leaned down, Rachel spotted her brother's house across state road A1A, over the woman's shoulder.

She saw the flash a moment before she felt the explosion. She heard it too, but the visceral shock to her system was from the blast

wave. The entire house seemed to burst at once.

Rachel fell to the sidewalk, still staring at her brother's home, now engulfed in flames. As soon as she gathered her senses, she reached out and grabbed both of her grandchildren. She turned them away from the scene just as she started to feel heat from the quickly spreading fire.

People on the beach were shouting. A blue Mazda, going south on A1A, swerved into an unoccupied bus bench. Everyone seemed to have their phones out, either taking photos or calling 911.

Rachel flinched as more noises came from inside the house. Nothing at all like the initial blast, but loud pops and crackles.

Two thoughts hit her at the same time. Her brother was dead. And if this woman hadn't stopped to let the kids pet her dog, they all would be dead too.

Then she started to cry.