

James Patterson

Man of Words

By Christina Wood

James Patterson has a gift for creating memorable villains. His page-turning novels are disturbingly full of them. That doesn't mean he's a bad guy, himself, though. "People have said to me, 'He must be really creepy,'" his wife Sue admits. Smiling, she shakes her head and indulges in a little eye roll. She knows the truth.

Patterson is a family man who plays golf with his wife and dotes on his son. Their home in Palm Beach is full of light and love. Family photos crowd every surface. "He's so much like Alex Cross," Sue says, comparing her husband to the fictional detective he introduced in the 1993 best-seller, *Along Came a Spider*. "He's a hero in his own way. He's a hero that doesn't need everyone to know he's a hero."

Forget about leaping tall buildings in a single bound; Patterson's output could certainly be considered heroic. The man has sold more than 150 million books worldwide. In a single year, he was responsible for one out of every 15 hardcover novels sold in this country. In 2007, he set a record when his 39th title hit *The New York Times* bestsellers' list. Last year alone, he put eight new books on store shelves, including his first nonfiction title. He expects to publish another eight books this year, among them his first graphic novel. He also has a new videogame out. Another television series is in the works, he recently finished collaborating on a screenplay and there's talk of a Broadway musical. Lesser men might crumble; Patterson just admits to being "moderately busy."

He's also on something of a crusade; the Man of Words is out to get kids excited about reading. "Excitement is the key," he insists. "Unfortunately,

learning to read for most kids is not fun; it's a laborious process." His solution is to guide children to books they'll actually enjoy reading. At ReadKiddoRead.com, the website he's created to inspire a lifelong passion for reading, parents and teachers can find good books that are great reads.

Of course, Patterson being Patterson, he didn't stop there. In 2005, he launched a new series aimed at kids of all ages. His first page-turner for the younger set, *Maximum Ride*, spent 12 weeks at the top of the charts, was an American Library Association "Teens Top Ten" pick, a *London Times* "Book of the Week" selection and a Book Sense Children's Pick.

"He gets so much done, I don't know how he does it," Sue says, "He's incredibly organized. I think that's one of the reasons that he's so successful."

Patterson writes every book, every screenplay, every draft of every story for every audience by hand. There's a pencil holder in his second floor office overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway in Palm Beach; it is completely filled with perfectly sharpened yellow pencils just waiting, like the nails in a carpenter's tool box, to be put to good use.

"I'm like a little machine," he says. "I just love to tell stories." 



Sue and James Patterson