



ONE DAY
LAYDOWN
On Sale
12/29/2009



William Morrow

An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

10 East 53rd Street, New York, New York 10022

Media Contacts: Dee Dee De Bartlo, 212.207.7498 / diana.debartlo@harpercollins.com
Danielle Bartlett, 212.207.7011 / danielle.bartlett@harpercollins.com

BESTSELLING AUTHOR AND VETERINARIAN JAMES ROLLINS
EXPLORES BRAVE NEW WORLD OF GENETIC MANIPULATION AND
COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE WITH

ALTAR OF EDEN

By James Rollins

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR ALTAR OF EDEN:

“Readers who detect something different in this novel, a sense that the author is perhaps more personally invested in his story than usual, aren’t imagining things: Rollins is a practicing veterinarian, and his affection for animals comes through pretty clearly.
...Rollins is as sure-footed on new ground as he is in the familiar Sigma Force world. –*Booklist*”

With **ALTAR OF EDEN**, Rollins breaks away from the thriller writer pack and distinguishes himself as **the** authority on smart, science-based thrillers. As a practicing doctor of veterinary medicine who studied evolutionary biology, Rollins uses his medical and scientific knowledge to write novels that meld cutting edge science and technology with history and religion, and creates books that are as authentic and smart as they are entertaining.

This winter, Rollins takes a step away from his wildly popular SIGMA series and delivers his first stand-alone thriller in more than five years with **ALTAR OF EDEN** (William Morrow, on sale 12/29/2009, ISBN 13: 9780061231421, \$27.99), a provocative look at genetic experimentation that includes the same breakneck pacing, gripping suspense and complex characters that make his SIGMA novels bestsellers. In addition, Rollins is particularly close to this novel as the main protagonist is a veterinarian, a career he practiced for many years and still practices on a charity basis.

Following the fall of Baghdad, two Iraqi boys stumble upon armed men looting the city zoo. The floodgates are opened for the smuggling of hundreds of exotic birds, mammals, and reptiles to Western nations, but this crime hides a deeper secret as **ALTAR OF EDEN** begins. Amid a hail of bullets, a hidden underground weapons lab is ransacked--and something even more horrific is set free. Seven years later, Louisiana state veterinarian Lorna Polk is called in for her expertise when the Department of Homeland Security's Border Patrol unit uncovers a ring of black market smugglers at the U.S. border carrying puzzling cargo—conjoined twin monkeys, a lion cub with saber teeth, a featherless Amazon parrot.

While each animal seems to have a completely different mutation from the next, they all share one uncanny trait: super-intelligence. With U.S. Marshall Jack Menard on her side, Lorna will uncover mysteries of fractal intelligence, genetic engineering, and a secret history tied to the *Book of Genesis* to expose a horrifying secret that traces back to mankind's earliest roots. In the face of global terror and a genetic nightmare, Lorna will have to risk all to survive.

Rollins explores how research into genetics and DNA have spurred scientists to find out what makes humans human and how to manipulate intelligence through genetic experimentation. But more importantly, Rollins contemplates how scientific research and technology—if used by the wrong people—could produce appalling results. Readers will be enthralled with non-stop action and riveting scientific drama, but also left with a telling message about the consequences of man's quest for knowledge.

James Rollins and his SIGMA force series have grown in critical and commercial popularity, with the most recent entry in the series, **THE DOOMSDAY KEY** hitting #2 on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Reviewers and peers alike have praised Rollins and the series, with the *Chicago Sun-Times* declaring "Rollins combines real-world science with high-octane action to create rousing stories of adventure that are as exciting as any movie," with *Booklist* adding, "'A case could be made that this guy doesn't write novels—he builds roller coasters.'" And fellow bestselling thriller writer Steve Berry declares, "Every James Rollins delivers mach-speed mayhem; throat-clutching suspense; high-style adventure; and a terrific story told terrifically."

#

[Q&A]

PW TALKS WITH JAMES ROLLINS

Inside the Cardboard Box

Bestseller James Rollins delivers his sixth Sigma Force thriller, *The Doomsday Key* (Reviews, Apr. 27).

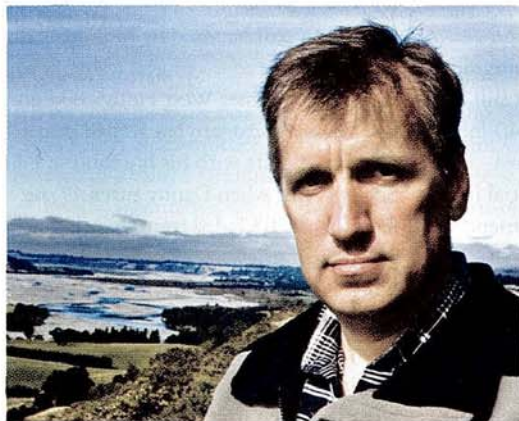
How do you get started on a book?

It starts with a box, a cardboard lawyer's file box. Into that box goes anything that might make a story: a stray idea that pops into my head, an article from the latest *Scientific American*, a note jotted while watching the History Channel and so on. Once a month, I sift through that box and

one time physically. Those two camps simply don't know how to communicate to the other. Their minds are wired completely differently.

But what do you do?

Before I begin writing, I know where the story starts, where it ends and several road markers in between. However, I don't necessarily know how



© DAVID SYLVIAN

I'll get from Point A to Point B. One of the joys of writing is that discovery along the way. Nothing is more satisfying than the surprises of story and character that arise during that journey. In fact, I get more excited to return to the keyboard when I have no idea what I'm going to write that day. Some writers fear the "tyranny of the blank page." I love it.

cull anything that no longer interests me. But during that process, by pure chance, odd bits end up next to each other on the floor: a piece of history that ends in a question mark, a bit of science that makes me go "what if?" And in that moment, I discover a possible story.

Do you know when you start where you're going to end up?

Here you raise a common author conundrum: do you outline your stories or do you write organically? I've sat on conference panels where authors on both sides of this divide have discussed their process. In the end, the panel usually ends up in a fistfight—sometimes figuratively,

You've written a book every year since 1999; ever want to just take a year off?

Actually, I've written *two* books every year since 1999. It's a poorly kept secret, but under the pen name James Clemens I've written the fantasy novels *Wit'ch Fire*, *Wit'ch Storm*, *Wit'ch War*, *Wit'ch Gate*, *Wit'ch Star*, *Shadowfall* and *Hinterland*. And this year, I'll be writing *three*: a middle school book, a Sigma Force novel and a stand-alone thriller. Will I ever take a year off? Not likely. I love to write—living half in this world, half in another. Some psychiatrist could have a field day about this, but before they lock me up, I'm going to keep writing.

—ALLEN APPEL

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: JAMES ROLLINS

www.jamesrollins.com

James Rollins is the bestselling author of five Sigma Force thrillers (*Sandstorm*, *Map of Bones*, *Black Order*, *The Judas Strain*, and *The Last Oracle*), the novelization of Lucasfilm's blockbuster movie, *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, and five individual adventure thrillers. His first young adult adventure, *Jake Ransom and the Skull King's Shadow*, was released in Spring 2009 with the sequel coming in 2010. His novels have been deemed perfect "summer reads" by reviewers in publications as diverse as *People magazine*, *USA Today*, and *Publisher's Weekly*.

Known for building high-octane adventures on a solid science foundation, Rollins juxtaposes the familiar with the exotic and then turbo-charges his tales with suspense. Always mindful of history's legacy, Rollins reveals how secrets, some hidden for centuries, can change the course of human events. His novels explore how advancing technology can impact society, not only through the concrete threats of unchecked development, but also through the spiritual and moral challenges that result. "The true terror of technology is not the cogs and the wheels, but how it will change us," he explains.

The exotic locales of James Rollins' novels have emerged as a hybrid between imagination, research, and his extensive travels throughout the United States and Europe, as well as New Zealand, the South Pacific, China, Southeast Asia, Africa, Australia, and South America. In recent years, much of Rollins' travel has involved meeting readers in small and large groups, at writing and fan conferences, and even aboard seagoing seminars.

As a boy, James Rollins immersed himself in the scientific adventures of Doc Savage, the wonders of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, and pulps featuring *The Shadow*, *The Spider*, and *The Avenger*. From there sparked the desire to become a writer. Already an accomplished storyteller, spinning elaborate tales that often were at the heart of pranks played on his brothers and sisters, Jim went on to hone his writing skills.

Before he would set heroes and villains on harrowing adventures, Jim embarked on a career in veterinary medicine, graduating from the University of Missouri and establishing a successful veterinary clinic in Sacramento, California, where he still volunteers today. This hands-on knowledge of, and interest in, medicine and science help shape the research and speculative nature that set James Rollins' books apart.

In 2005, Rollins joined with other luminaries in the genre to create International Thriller Writers, Inc., to recognize and promote the thriller genre, provide opportunities for mentoring, education, and collegiality among authors and industry professionals, and to grant awards for excellence in the genre. Jim is currently the Co-President of ITW, serving alongside Steve Berry.

When Jim is not writing, touring or teaching seminars, he can be found spelunking, scuba diving, hiking, and/or traveling. Jim and his two- and four-legged family members live amid chew toys and paleontological treasures in Northern California.

###

ALTAR OF EDEN

James Rollins on the Truth behind the Tale

Your SIGMA series has been incredibly popular. In fact, the most recent entry, THE DOOMSDAY KEY, hit #2 on the *New York Times* bestseller list. What drew you to write a stand-alone thriller now?

After writing six Sigma novels, I was ready to tackle an independent story, one free of baggage and recurring characters. It was also a chance to return to my writing roots. My first five novels were stand-alone adventures. Each book was an attempt to capture some of the spirit of adventure found in the pulp novels that I grew up reading, paired with the wild imagination of writers such as H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, and H. Rider Haggard. My first novel (*Subterranean*) was compared to Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. My second (*Excavation*) was described as a modern update to Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. And it's no coincidence that *Altar of Eden* begins with a quotation from H.G. Wells. The quote comes from his novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, where strange experiments are performed on animals.

Where did the story of ALTAR OF EDEN originate?

It started with lunch. I was having a conversation with my editor at HarperCollins. She asked me a question that I heard too often while I was still a practicing veterinarian: Why haven't you ever written about a vet, something like James Herriot's *All Creatures Great and Small*? My short answer was "Because not enough people die in those Herriot novels." Back then, I was working fourteen to sixteen hours a day as at vet, and I didn't want to go home at night and write about one. I wanted to spin exciting stories of suspense, adventure, and exotic locales. So I told my editor at that lunch that if I were ever to tackle a veterinarian story it would still have to be a thriller. Based on that conversation, the story began to build in my head. *What if a veterinarian stumbled upon an exotic animal smuggling ring...but something wasn't quite right with the animals?* From there, the story grew quickly. And yes, like in all my novels, many people *do* die.

In this book the main character is a veterinarian. For many years you were a practicing vet. What made you want to have a protagonist share your former profession?

Because I still love the profession. I always wanted to be a veterinarian. I remember in third grade getting that assignment all teachers eventually inflict upon their students: to answer *what do you want to be when you grow up?* I sat at my desk as a third grader, scratching my head. I knew I wanted to be a veterinarian, but I had a big problem. I didn't know how to spell it. So I did the one thing all third graders are loath to do. I looked it up in the dictionary. I was *that* determined to be a veterinarian. And though I've stopped practicing full time, that passion still creeps into my writing. My characters often have animal sidekicks: an old German shepherd, an orphaned jaguar cub, a wolf-hybrid rescue dog. So I thought it was high time to bring a veterinarian onto the main stage.

And I see you decided to make Dr. Lorna Polk a woman. Actually, you have a huge female following. How are you able to get inside the mind of a woman so well and what made you want to write from the point of view of a woman for this book?

When I was in veterinary school, half of the class was composed of women. Since then, that percentage has continued to grow. So I thought it would be appropriate to tell the story from such a fresh perspective. I also grew up with three brothers...and more importantly, three sisters. When it comes to getting inside the mind of a woman, they keep me honest. They're still my best first readers. And since I was breaking ground writing a new subgenre anyway—the first *veterinary thriller*—I thought I'd have a woman take the reins in what is normally a male-dominated genre. But I didn't want to write a female Rambo. I wanted to flesh out a real woman with a rich history, one tied to New Orleans where the story takes place. So Lorna Polk came into being.

Another aspect of your thrillers that appeal to women is the romantic themes throughout your series. Does Lorna have a romantic interest?

She does. Jack Menard is an elite member of the Border Patrol. And like Lorna's family, he has roots in the New Orleans area. But unlike Lorna's history of plantations and Garden District mansions, his family is Cajun and have their roots buried deep in the bayous and swamps of that region. And though the characters come from two different worlds, they also share a dark history from their youth, one they sought to keep secret. But some secrets refuse to stay buried.

Much of the book is set at ACRES, the Audubon Center for Research of Endangered Species. What is this center for? You say it's not open to the public, but have you visited? If not, where did your ideas for this center come from?

ACRES is a real facility associated with the Audubon Zoo in New Orleans. The research building is located within a secluded thousand acres alongside the Mississippi River. The main goal of ACRES is to use cutting-edge science to preserve endangered species and hopefully pull them from the brink of extinction. To this end, they employ techniques such as artificial insemination, embryo transfer, even cloning. Back in 2003, they were the first to successfully clone a wild African cat. They named the kitten Ditteaux (pronounced Ditto). I love their sense of humor and knew Lorna would have to work at that facility.

One of the true scientific gems you include in ALTAR OF EDEN is the idea of "genetic throwbacks." What exactly is a genetic throwback and is it possible for my next kitten to be born with saber-tooth fangs?

The scientific term for "genetic throwback" is atavism. It's a real phenomenon where a genetic trait, lost for generations, returns in an individual. In this novel, one of the many creatures featured is a python born with reptilian limbs, a *throwback* to a time before the snake's ancestor lost its legs. I thought I was making this creature up, but a couple of months ago, I stumbled upon a scientific article about a Chinese snake born with a fully functional reptilian limb poking out of its flank. For the curious, a quick Google search will bring up a picture of this snake. It just goes to show that nature is full of surprises.

Another concept that you include in ALTAR OF EDEN is the idea of a higher, collective intelligence. Do you believe in the notion that animals can think together? Do you believe this type of intelligence already exists?

Something is definitely going on, something beyond our current understanding. One of the scientific phenomena explored in this novel is the *human-animal bond*—the strange and deep affinity humans have for animals, an affinity that goes beyond mere affection or need for companionship. The presence of animals has a profound effect on people: petting a cat triggers an immediate drop in blood pressure, animals brought into hospital wards boost immune responses in patients and accelerate healing times. Yet, it remains a mystery *why* we have this bodily reaction. Current research is exploring the roots of this strange bond. In this novel, I offer my own theory. But to tell you more would ruin the story.

As a veterinarian, how do you feel about the genetic experimentation that is one of the foundations of ALTAR OF EDEN's plot?

As with the case at ACRES, innovative research into genetics can be of great benefit, holding the potential to save hundreds of species from extinction. But with all such technologies there are risks of abuse. It's one of the themes I love to explore in fiction, to look beyond the cogs and wheels of new technologies and consider the moral implications of abusing that technology. And such a challenge is not unique to this century. I open this novel with a very telling quote from H.G. Wells: *The study of Nature makes a man at last as remorseless as Nature*. It's a question faced by any scientific inquiry: where to draw the lines. In my novels, I love to step over those lines and explore the strange and dangerous territory on the far side.

In ALTAR OF EDEN you delve into the concept of private military contracts with a scientific research company called Ironcreek Industries who are experimenting with some pretty scary things. There has to be some sort of regulation for this type of experimentation, RIGHT?!?!

While there might be some regulation for labs within the United States, once you cross the borders it becomes a scientific free-for-all out there. With so much government money currently being poured into private military contracts—both to defense contractors and to the broader scientific community—competition has grown fierce and with it come abuses: including corporate espionage, vandalism, outsourcing to third-world countries to avoid regulations and safety standards, and unfortunately even darker crimes. While Ironcreek Industries was invented for this novel, its abuses are far from fictional.

Your SIGMA series is set across the globe and finds your characters in far flung locales such as Antarctica, Tibet and Africa. Most of ALTAR OF EDEN is set in New Orleans. Why did you choose to center most of the story in one locale? And why New Orleans?

I love New Orleans. I've visited the city at least a dozen times—both before and after Katrina. I've toured alligator farms, traveled the bayous by airboat, walked its cemeteries by candlelight, visited plantations in the middle of July's swelter, stolen bread from Commander's Palace, and avoided guessing what that smell was on Bourbon Street. There is simply no other city like it in the United States. Despite the hurricane, the city abides. There remains an unmistakable vibrancy to the place, a rich blend of cultures, and a haunted quality that has been speaking to authors for ages.

You are known for your extensive and intensive research. What amazing adventures did you undertake in researching/mapping the plot of ALTAR OF EDEN?

For the first time as an author, I got to follow the old adage: *to write what you know*. Of course, that applied only to the veterinary aspects of the story. For other details, I spent way too much time out in the swamps, learning such details like alligators like marshmallows, raccoons are good swimmers, and July is a very bad month to be out in the bayou. I also just listened. It's amazing the stories and tales I heard from locals (many of them shocking and unfit for print). And of course, I ate my way through the culinary masterpiece that is New Orleans. Such is the sacrifice an author must make.

I'm sure many fans of the SIGMA series are panicking, wondering when they are going to see Gray Pierce, Painter Crowe and the rest of SIGMA again. Why don't you quell their fears, when can we see the next SIGMA?

It comes out next summer (July 2010). In that book, a major storyline that has been building over the course of the series comes to a head, and all Hell breaks loose...in this case, literally. It's titled *The Devil Colony* and it's a huge story.

What else is on the horizon for James Rollins?

Always another book or two or three. In the spring of 2010, the second novel in my kid's series debuts, titled *Jake Ransom and the Howling Sphinx*. Then, as mentioned above, the next big Sigma book comes out in the middle of summer. I also have two short stories in a pair of upcoming anthologies. Then next winter, I have another surprise in store, something I'm not at liberty to discuss yet. So there's much more to come!

You're a busy guy, do you ever sleep?

Sleep? I've never heard of such a thing. Tell me more.

#