

ON SALE DATE:

JANUARY 8, 2019



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An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

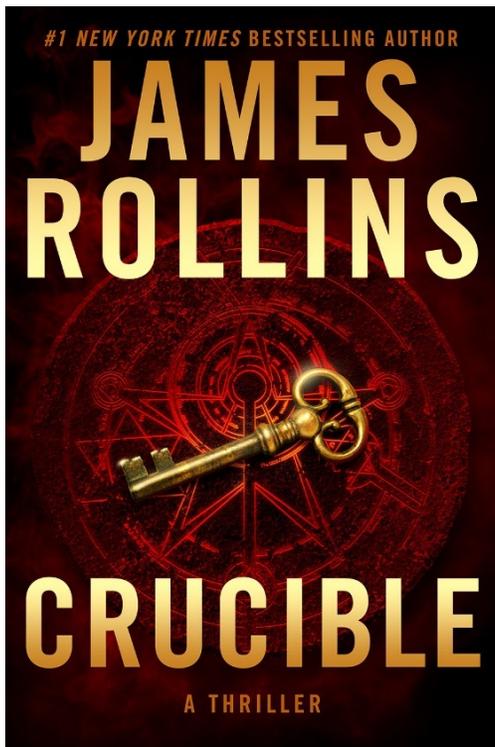
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JAMES ROLLINS:

“What you might end up with if you tossed Michael Crichton and Dan Brown into a particle accelerator together.”

—*New York Times Book Review*



In his newest thought-provoking thriller,

CRUCIBLE

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author James Rollins poses the question

What does it mean to have a soul?

*When an ancient cabal of religious zealots targets the world's most brilliant female scientists, Sigma Force must follow arcane clues back to the Spanish Inquisition to stop their deadly plans derived from one of the most reviled and blood-soaked books known to mankind—**The Hammer of Witches.***

“With artificial intelligence, we are summoning the demon.”

—Elon Musk

(at the MIT Aeronautics and Astronautics Department's Centennial Symposium, 2014)

Out for a drink with his best friend and colleague Monk Kokkalis, Commander Gray Pierce arrives home on Christmas Eve to find his house ransacked, his pregnant lover missing, and Monk's two young daughters vanished into the night. The only witness to this attack is Monk's wife, Kat, who is found beaten, bleeding, and comatose on the kitchen floor.

With Kat unable to speak, a research neurologist offers a radical approach to "unlock" Kat's mind—hopefully long enough to answer a few desperate questions about who might have taken her daughters. But the procedure could be fatal. With no other clues to follow, Gray and Monk must take this chance, because it is not only their families in danger.

Halfway around the world, the U.S ambassador to Portugal is ambushed at a prestigious scientific symposium of women scientists. She and her colleagues are murdered, their bodies burned beyond recognition. The culprits behind this brutal attack are tied to an ancient sect, one that is determined to return the world to a time of darkness and ignorance, to when witches were burned at the stake. To accomplish this goal, the cabal must hunt down a young student who escaped this fiery ambush with a tool of incalculable power—one that in the wrong hands could unleash a demon like no other.

To stop this cabal and learn the truth about the attack upon their families, Gray and Monk must follow arcane clues tracing back to the time of the Spanish Inquisition—and to the dark mysteries surrounding a Medieval text known as the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the Hammer of Witches, a tome used by inquisitors to identify and torture heretical women—those they accused of practicing witchcraft.

In the race to save their loved ones and stop an enemy from unleashing a demonic power upon the world, Sigma must wrestle with the deepest spiritual mysteries of mankind and confront the ultimate question facing humanity: What does it mean to have a soul?

The shocking revelations that Sigma uncovers about the *past* will reveal a frightening truth in the *present*, and a *future* teetering on the brink of apocalypse.

Riveting, thought-provoking, inventive, and timely, **CRUCIBLE** (Morrow, on sale 1/8/2018, ISBN: 9780062381781, \$28.99) is a fiery thriller that brings into focus some of the most complex and troubling issues that have plagued humankind's past; issues that resonate strongly today—all told with #1 *New York Times* bestselling author's James Rollins' trademark blend of cutting edge science, historical mystery, and pulse-pounding action.

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Author Bio: **JAMES ROLLINS** is the *New York Times* bestselling author of international thrillers, translated into more than forty languages. His Sigma series has been lauded as one of the "top crowd pleasers" (*New York Times*) and one of the "hottest summer reads" (*People Magazine*). In each novel, acclaimed for its originality, Rollins unveils unseen worlds, scientific breakthroughs, and historical secrets--and he does it all at breakneck speed and with stunning insight.



James Rollins

The best-selling author, most recently, of 'The Demon Crown' has a fondness for old pulp novels of the 1930s and '40s, especially the Doc Savage stories. 'I became addicted to them in high school.'

What books are on your nightstand?

There's always a mix of fiction and non-fiction, as each night I don't know what might strike my bedtime fancy. Besides a notebook for jotting down ideas in the middle of the night and a large yellow highlighter. The latter is used for both types of books: to mark factual tidbits to incorporate into future books or to note passages of prose that do something unique or are exceptionally well done. What's currently weighing down my nightstand are "The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable," by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, for research; "The Stone Sky," by N. K. Jemisin, for pleasure; and "Infinite Jest," by David Foster Wallace, because I really should finish it.

Who is your favorite novelist of all time?

Even if I hadn't grown up in Missouri, I'd still pick Mark Twain. I am both envious and in awe of Twain's ability and range to incorporate humor, adventure, fantasy, autobiographical details, science and social commentary into his body of work

— oftentimes even within the same sentence. I have a complete collection of his writing, along with Ron Powers's spectacular biography "Mark Twain: A Life," not to mention Oscar Hijuelos's final novel, "Twain and Stanley Enter Paradise," which explores Mark Twain's relationship with the famed explorer Henry Morton Stanley. I even went so far as to put Mr. Twain as a point-of-view character in one of my novels ("The Seventh Plague"), expanding upon that lifelong relationship with Stanley, while also exploring his unlikely friendship with Nikola Tesla. And if that weren't enough proof, at the beginning of my writing career I even stole his name for a pseudonym, choosing James Clemens for my fantasy writing. I figured since Mr. Twain had abandoned his birthright to Samuel Clemens, I might as well borrow it.

What genres do you especially enjoy reading? And which do you avoid?

There's the old adage: Authors should write what they love to read. That's certainly the case for me — and a problem. I

grew up reading a wide variety of genres: science fiction, fantasy, mysteries (both hard-boiled and cozy), spy novels, action/adventure fiction. And that's what I write today, a mix of all of the above. I still remember the head of my publishing house calling me into his office in New York to ask me one question: "What the heck do you write?" Sadly, I didn't have a satisfactory answer. As to what I avoid — very little. If I had to pick one, it would be novels that explore timelines of alternate history. Maybe because I have enough trouble keeping track of the real timeline in my head.

Tell us your favorite action-adventure novels.

Without a doubt, it would be the old pulp novels from the '30s and '40s, specifically the Doc Savage stories written by a stable of authors under the pseudonym Kenneth Robeson. I became addicted to them in high school, when the books were reprinted as Bantam paperbacks. Even today, I have an entire 182-volume collection (which includes the never-before-published "The Red Spider"). Again, the series is an admirable blend of multiple genres, delving into fantasy, hard science, history, adventure and espionage. So basically everything I love to read and everything I love to write.

What books might we be surprised to find on your bookshelves?

I have nearly every book written by the romantic suspense author Sandra Brown. She is the queen of nail-biting, torturous romantic tension — not to mention great storytelling.

Does your previous vocation as a veterinarian make its way into your fiction in any way?

How could it not? Not that it was necessarily planned. As soon as I stopped practicing full time, more and more animals crept into my writing. It took an email from a reader to bring this to my attention. Suddenly my characters had all manner of furry sidekicks: an orphan jaguar cub, a search-and-rescue wolf mix, a military war dog, a young gorilla. It seemed the half of my brain that loved animals could not be suppressed and seeped into the half that loved to spin wild stories.

Who would you want to write your life story?

My dog Duncan — if he had opposable thumbs and the ability to concentrate longer than 17 seconds. Duncan knows my deepest, darkest secrets. So maybe it's best he can't talk. □

An expanded version of this interview is available at nytimes.com/books.

James Rollins talks Sigma Force, Artificial Intelligence and the truth behind the Salem Witch Trials in his newest thriller

CRUCIBLE

***CRUCIBLE* is the 14TH Sigma Force novel. Can you tell us a little about the heroes of this series?**

Sigma Force is a team of former special forces soldiers who have been drummed out of the service for various reasons. But because of special aptitudes and abilities, they've been recruited in secret by DARPA—the Defense Department's research-and-development agency—and retrained in various scientific disciplines to act as field agents for DARPA. Their mission is to protect the globe against various emerging threats. Basically, they're *scientists with guns*.

What's this latest Sigma thriller about?

It starts when the hero of my books, Commander Gray Pierce, arrives home on Christmas Eve to find his house ransacked, his pregnant lover missing, and his best friend's two young daughters vanished into the night. The only witness to this brutal attack is his friend's wife, Kat, who is found beaten, bleeding, and comatose on the kitchen floor. This attack—along with the fiery deaths of a group of female scientists in Portugal—exposes a horrifying danger, a threat that looms ahead of us in real life. Stephen Hawking once described this coming threat as the “worst event in the history of civilization.” Elon Musk fears it will lead to World War III. Even Russian president Vladimir Putin has said that whoever controls this event will control the world. That event is the creation of the first human-like artificial intelligence. As this momentous achievement draws near, a global hunt begins for a young student on the run with a technology capable of unleashing a demon like no other. To stop this from happening and save their loved ones, Sigma Force must solve a mystery tracing back to the Spanish Inquisition and confront the ultimate question facing humanity: *What does it mean to have a soul?*

In your past novels, you've folded intriguing bits of history into your stories. In *CRUCIBLE*, you deal with the persecution of witches, highlighting an ancient text described as the “most blood-soaked book in human history.” What is this infamous book?

Everyone knows about the famous Salem Witch Trials, where twenty people—fourteen of them women—were put to death for the practice of witchcraft. But these deaths were only the final spasm of mass hysteria that had already swept Europe. There, persecutions ran for nearly three centuries, and all told, over sixty thousand “witches” were burned, hung, or drowned.

All of this bloodshed and death can be attributed to the publication of a single book in 1487, a witch-hunter's manual called the *Malleus Maleficarum*—or *The Hammer of Witches*. Written by a German Catholic priest and mass produced by the newly invented printing press, copies quickly spread across Europe and over to the Americas. It grew to become the instructive “bible” for prosecutors to identify, torture, and execute witches. Many scholars deem it one of the most blood-soaked books in history, even comparing it to *Mein Kampf*, as it led to over sixty thousand deaths, most of them women.

But you also reveal that the relationship between witches and the Catholic Church was not as straightforward as it might appear. You tell about a Catholic patron saint—a patron saint of witches. That seems like such a contradiction. Is there really such a person?

There is indeed. Her name was Saint Columba and a cult grew around her in northern Spain during the Middle Ages. According to legend, Columba was a witch from the ninth century, who met the spirit of Christ on the road. He told her she could not enter Heaven unless she converted to Christianity, so she did—but she remained a witch. She was eventually martyred and beheaded for her faith and became known as the “patron saint of witches.” To this day, she acts as a protector for witches, interceding on the behalf of good witches, while fighting against those who would corrupt such craft for evil purposes.

Likewise, during the bloody time of the Spanish Inquisition, you shine a light on one of the inquisitors who became known as the Witches’ Advocate. Who was he?

His name was Alonso de Salazar Frías. He earned the name “The Witches’ Advocate” due to his belief that most, if not all, accusations of witchcraft during the time of the Spanish Inquisition were mere delusions or false testimony drawn from torture. He saved countless lives with his defense of witches. In fact, I was surprised to learn that because of his persuasive arguments, the Spanish Inquisition was one of the *first* organizations in Europe to outlaw the burning of witches.

CRUCIBLE also reveals that this persecution of women continues to this day, a topic that is very much in the news of late.

Back during the witch trials, many of the women accused of witchcraft were healers who used their local lore of plants and herbs to heal the sick. Or they were simply educated women who were curious and who dared to question the natural world. In other words, they were early scientists and naturalists—which was considered to be the sole domain of men. Yet, even today, women in the sciences find themselves enduring discrimination because of their gender: earning less pay, being passed over for promotions, being sexually harassed. Even their work is considered to be less important. Take for example, Dr. Donna Strickland from Canada, who won the Nobel Prize this year for physics. She was only the *third* woman in 117 years to be given this award. So, clearly in such a male-dominated field—in a forum considered to be enlightened and educated—women are still being persecuted for daring to question the world around them.

CRUCIBLE deals with witches. I understand you live in a haunted house. Is that true?

Well, I just moved into a new house that dates back to 1936. Now I’m not that superstitious, but after moving in, I had weird feelings at times: strange cold spots, odd sulfurous smells. I thought to myself, “*Cool, this place is haunted.*” So I asked the realtor: “*Does this house have any history of being haunted?*” Her answer, shocking enough: “*Have you seen THE ghost?*” I was like “*No, tell me more.*” I expected some grisly tale of death, of families fleeing in the night. Instead she says, “*A prior owner had the home inspected by a Fengshui expert who judged the home to be indeed haunted--by the ghost of a raccoon.*” Hmm, I thought “*That sounds about right for a former veterinarian turned writer.*” So to appease this ghost, I now leave my kitchen garbage can open all night. Ghosts gotta eat, too.

CRUCIBLE also tackles the threat of modern witchcraft. What do you mean by that?

Arthur C. Clarke once wrote that “*Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.*” You only have to pick up your iPhone to appreciate this statement. If you took your phone a few decades into the past, it would seem miraculous to people back then. Likewise, in my novel, I shine a light into what’s currently transpiring in computer labs around the world, some of it quite

astounding, especially when it comes to the research into artificial intelligence. We're much farther along this path to a true human-like intelligence than most people realize.

How soon might we reach that point?

A recent poll of computer experts revealed that 42% of them believe this creation will happen within the decade, with half of those claiming within five years. And a handful believe we've already reached that point. Take for example AlphaGO—Google's DeepMind AI player. It beat the world's champion at the Chinese game of Go, a game that is trillions upon trillions of times more complex than chess. No one expected any computer to beat a human at Go for at least another decade. Yet, it took the company only months to train AlphaGO to accomplish this. Then more recently, Google built this program's big brother, AlphaGoZero. This new program *taught* itself this game, all on its own, and in only *three* days, became the world champion, beating even its original version in a hundred out of a hundred games. It did this by developing strategies that no human had come up with after thousands of years of play. And there are even *stronger* programs on the horizon. So be afraid, be very afraid.

But why is the creation of a self-aware AI such a crisis? Why did Stephen Hawking describe it as the "worst event in the history of civilization"?

It's because the first human-like intelligence will not be idle. Instead, it will prove to be very *busy*. It will quickly—in weeks, days, maybe even hours—evolve into an incomprehensible *superintelligence*, a creation far superior to us, one that will likely have little use for humans. When that occurs, there is no way of predicting if this new superintelligence will be a benevolent god or a cold, destructive devil.

You also claim in the foreword to your novel that those who read your book risk dooming themselves forever? Is that true?

Yes. Buried in the heart of the novel is a curse—a curse not cast by any witch but from a danger inherent in the knowledge found within these pages. Once you read this book, you may inadvertently be dooming yourself for all eternity. So read at your own risk.

Speaking of reading, this is the 14th novel in this exciting Sigma Force series. Does a new reader have to have read the earlier books?

Not at all. I tailor each story so a new reader could jump into the series at any point. In fact, only a small fraction of my readership have read my series in order. So anyone interested in this unique set of heroes and the troubles they face, CRUCIBLE is a perfect place to jump on in.

Lastly, I understand, you are also active in your support of American veterans, even earning the Silver Bullet Award for charitable work from the International Thriller Writers organization last year. Could you tell us a little bit about your efforts with veterans?

Sure. My support for veterans first came about after I participated in a USO tour of authors to Iraq and Kuwait in the winter of 2010. Upon coming home, I knew I wanted to do more. First, I worked with USA Cares, which raises emergency funds for vets in need, then most recently I joined US 4 Warriors as an advisory board member. The new charity started as a grassroots effort in San Diego and has since expanded nationwide. Besides helping to promote the social welfare of vets in a wide spectrum of activities, the latest endeavor also involves helping veterans tell their stories...and get published! So as a writer, I'm especially excited as US 4 Warriors expands into this adventure.

JAMES ROLLINS

will appear in the following venues to promote

CRUCIBLE:

PHOENIX

Monday, January 07, 2019 @ 7:00 PM
POISONED PEN
4014 N Goldwater, Scottsdale, AZ 85251

SAN FRANCISCO

Tuesday, January 08, 2019 @ 7:00 PM
BOOKSHOP WEST PORTAL
80 W Portal Ave, San Francisco, CA 94127

SACRAMENTO

Wednesday, January 09, 2019 @ 7:00 PM PST
BARNES AND NOBLE
1256 Galleria Blvd, Roseville, CA 95678

ST. LOUIS

Thursday, January 10, 2019 @ 7:00 PM
ST. LOUIS COUNTY LIBRARY
1640 S Lindbergh Blvd., Saint Louis, MO 63131

DALLAS

Friday, January 11, 2019 @ 7:00 PM CST
HALF PRICE BOOKS
5803 E NW Highway, Dallas, TX 75231

COLORADO

Saturday, January 12, 2019 @ 2:00 PM CST
TATTERED COVER BOOK STORE
2526 E. Colfax AVE, Denver, CO 80206

HOUSTON

Sunday, January 13, 2019 @ 2:00 PM CST
In conversation with Mark Pryor
MURDER BY THE BOOK
2342 Bissonnet ST, Houston, TX 77005

MIAMI

Monday, January 14, 2019 @ 8:00 PM EST
BOOKS & BOOKS
265 Aragon AVE, Coral Gables, FL 33134

VERO BEACH, FL

Tuesday, January 15, 2019 @ 6:00 PM EST
VERO BEACH BOOK CENTER
392 21st ST, Vero Beach, FL 32960

DELRAY BEACH, FL

Wednesday, January 16, 2019 @ 7:00 PM
In conversation with Oline Cogdill
MURDER ON THE BEACH MYSTERY BOOKSTORE
273 NE 2nd Ave, Delray Beach, FL 33444

JACKSONVILLE, FL

Thursday, January 17, 2019 @ 7:00 PM EST
In conversation with Steve Berry
BOOKMARK
220 First ST, Neptune Beach, FL 32266

SAN DIEGO, CA

Wednesday, March 27, 2019 @ 7:30 PM
MYSTERIOUS GALAXY
5943 Balboa AVE STE 100, San Diego, CA 92111

PASADENA, CA

Thursday, March 28, 2019 @ 7:00 PM
VROMANS
695 E Colorado Blvd, Pasadena, CA 91101

FULLEROTN, CA

Friday, March 29-30, 2019
ALPHA'S A DAY OF AUTHORS
Visit <http://adayofauthors.com/>
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