

Marlborough Public Library Adult Book Club

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Code 6 by James Grippando

Interview with the author abridged from: <https://www.thebigthrill.org/2022/12/up-close-james-grippando-5/>

What was your inspiration for CODE 6?

My first stage play, *Watson*, made its world premiere in late 2019. Based on the life of IBM founder Thomas J. Watson Sr., *Watson* tells the true story of the Nazis' use of IBM technology to process census data and other personal information in the 1930s, which led to the world's first personal information catastrophe: the systematic identification of Jews for extermination.

As I wrote *Watson*, it reminded me of the adage "History repeats itself." Most of us don't worry about Big Data and "data mining"—harvesting our personal information from cyberspace—as much as we should. I didn't want to adapt the play *Watson* into a historical novel, but I loved the idea of writing a thriller set in the modern world of data mining and that also drew on the warnings of the past.

The story gelled when I created the lead character, Kate Gamble. Kate is a young playwright, which provided the hook for incorporation of *Watson* into the storyline. Kate has a unique insight into the world of Big Data, since her father is the CEO of one of the largest data mining tech companies in the world. Through Kate's eyes, the novel addresses the central question: At what price do we open our lives to Big Data?

Why did you decide to write a play within a novel?

I loved Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement*. He wasn't the first writer to wrap a novel around a play, but to my knowledge, every novel featuring a play has one major shortcoming: You can't see the full play performed, because the full play doesn't exist. The reader gets snippets of the play in the novel, but only those snippets that serve the novel.

CODE 6 is a thriller set in the modern world of Big Data, but it is also the story of Kate Gamble, an aspiring playwright, developing her first play. That play is *Watson*, and the novel includes scenes from the actual play. The script for *Watson* is being published simultaneously with the release of *CODE 6*, so readers can also enjoy the full play in a unique companion reading experience.