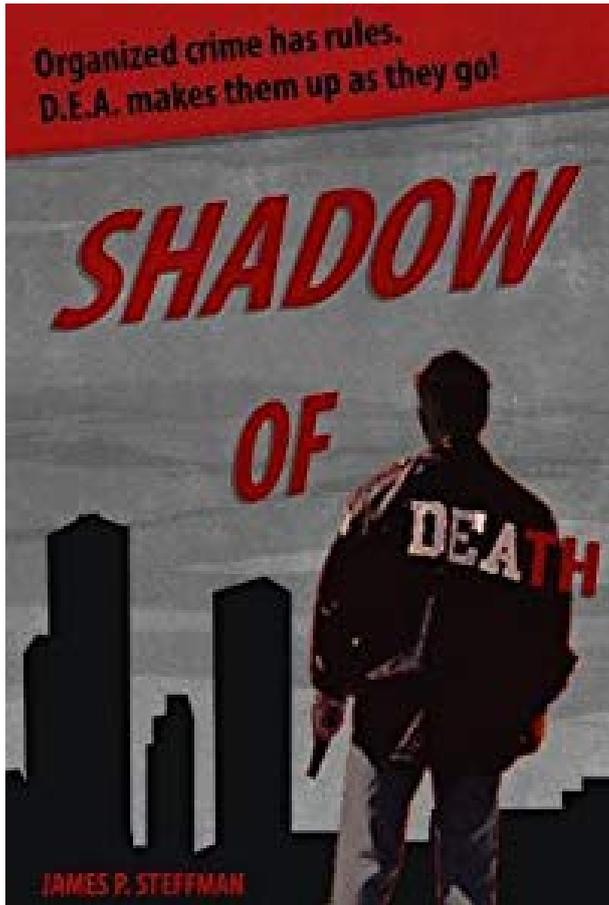


# Shadow of Death



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For self-made businessman Jim Steffman, life was better than he ever expected. Out of grit, a relent work ethic and natural instinct for business, he built a small empire in rural Connecticut.

Gas stations, a car wash, a storage unit facility, and a bar catapulted him from near-poverty to the "good life," with plenty of money and time to enjoy the fruit of his labor. Along the way, he aided friends and employees with generous loans and quick exits from dead-end jobs. Soon after defying town officials, Jim encountered a businessman outside his usual circle. Rich, well-heeled and full of good-humored braggadocio, John Hurley was the personification of easy success, with all of its trappings.

A former pilot, Hurley seemed to make his living as a buyer and seller of precious gems. A friendship developed, and Jim turned to Hurley when a biker gang threatened him and a crooked partner began to raid profits from his bar. From that point on, Jim learned that Hurley had persuasive powers of the upper echelon of a well known New England crime family, but an investigation into Hurley's record revealed nothing suspicious. The equation changed when Hurley confessed to Jim he was a drug trafficker for Mafia clans and one of the FBI's ten most wanted fugitives. When he disappeared after telling Jim his unlikely but true story, the tables turned on Jim. Drug enforcement agents began to hound him for information on Hurley. Fearing that

Hurley would have him killed if he aided the agents in their proposed sting, Jim refused to cooperate. A war followed that would nearly leave Jim dead, driven by a government agency operating outside the law. Lies, threats, seizure of properties, trumped-up charges, attempted murder and bureaucratic corruption, the likes of which Jim had never before encountered would eventually capsize his businesses and drive away friends and family. Jim would survive, but he would never be the same.