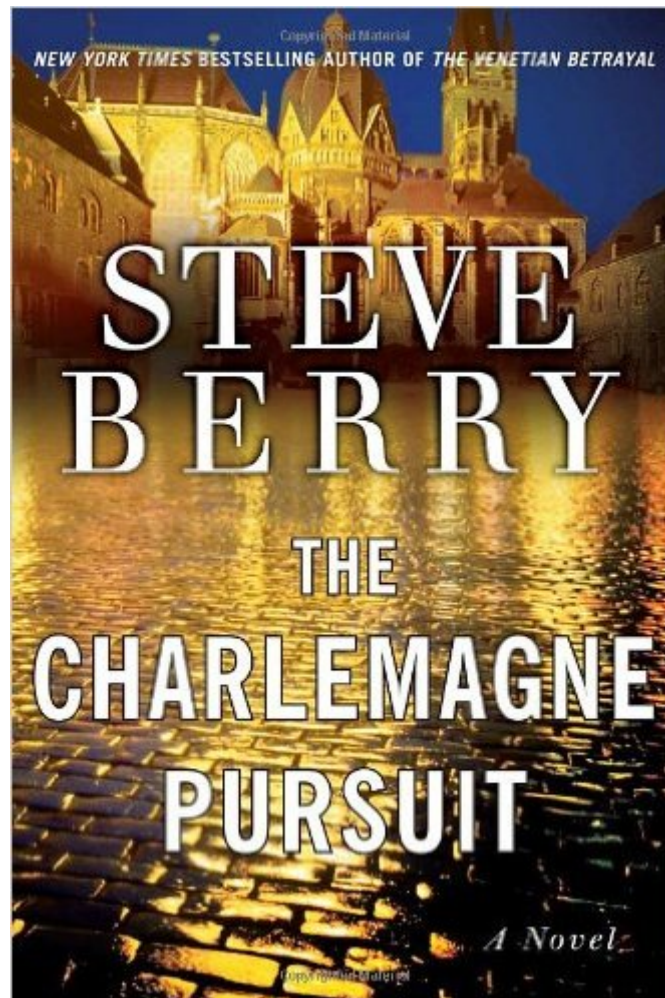


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The Charlemagne Pursuit: A Novel



Synopsis

As a child, former Justice Department agent Cotton Malone was told his father died in a submarine disaster in the North Atlantic, but now he wants the full story and asks his ex-boss, Stephanie Nelle, to secure the military files. What he learns stuns him: His father's sub was a secret nuclear vessel lost on a highly classified mission beneath the ice shelves of Antarctica. But Malone isn't the only one after the truth. Twin sisters Dorothea Lindauer and Christl Falk are fighting for the fortune their mother has promised to whichever of them discovers what really became of their father "who died on the same submarine that Malone's father captained. The sisters know something Malone doesn't: Inspired by strange clues discovered in Charlemagne's tomb, the Nazis explored Antarctica before the Americans, as long ago as 1938. Now Malone discovers that cryptic journals penned in "the language of heaven," inscrutable conundrums posed by an ancient historian, and the ill-fated voyage of his father are all tied to a revelation of immense consequence for humankind. In an effort to ensure that this explosive information never rises to the surface, Langford Ramsey, an ambitious navy admiral, has begun a brutal game of treachery, blackmail, and assassination. As Malone embarks on a dangerous quest with the sisters "one that leads them from an ancient German cathedral to a snowy French citadel to the unforgiving ice of Antarctica" he will finally confront the shocking truth of his father's death and the distinct possibility of his own.

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Customer Reviews

I love a good thriller, and there just aren't enough of them around. So I was thrilled to discover Steve Berry's early novels. I enjoyed the first one or two of his Cotton Malone books as well. But as he has moved from one book to the next, the body count seems to rise, the characterizations have become more stilted, the action choppy, and the plots have tumbled into territory that become laugh-out-loud implausible. (Sure, Berry provides detailed author's notes showing exactly how he develops his plots, and the historical clues that he relies on, but the real test isn't whether he can make a case for it in the author's note, but whether it feels 'natural' to someone reading.) I would probably have given this book a 3.5 star rating if the system allowed it. But the core plot device -- the quest in Antarctica for a mysterious superior civilization that preceeded the Mayans, the ancient Egyptians, et. al., that had a connection with Charlemagne, and that evil forces (in the person of a manipulative U.S. Admiral, Langord Ramsey) want to keep secret for their own reasons -- is just too strained for four stars. Nor is the writing good enough to carry the book over the four-star rating threshold. It's choppy, a la James Patterson, with 94 chapters in only 500 pages, a lot of one-sentence paragraphs, and 8-word long sentences. The perspective keeps jumping back and forth between antiquarian book dealer Cotton Malone and his former intelligence boss, Stephanie Nelle. Each time a gun fires in one location, the action immediately jumps back to the other protagonist. These are all tools that all suspense writers employ, but again, they work best when the reader doesn't realize that they are being used at all.

Steve Berry has the formula for interesting books. 1- His main character, Cotton Malone, is complex and interesting with the plausible background of having once worked for the government but has decided to retire to the life of a bookseller in Europe (good so far); 2- Malone has as a reoccurring circle of friends who seem to have endless connections and unimaginable wealth, all of which he seems to have access to at his beck and call (well, it is fiction); 3- Berry's books are historically-based and often revealing, giving credence to his stories and making the storyline more interesting (it's amazing what you can discover from his books); 4- He makes his stories even more interesting by situating them in fascinating, actual surroundings with great detail and explanation (at least most of the time); So what the problem? Although I look forward to reading each of his books based upon the features above, I know I'm going to be disappointed at the end. Berry seems to take one step too many. His leaps from the realm of possibility into the circle of absurdity...not much, but just enough to deflate me. His character, his supporting cast, his locations, even the situations and premises are all outstanding, but he takes a well-created human character with human skills and human frailties and moves the plot into abnormal, absurd situations. I, for one, would be far more

interested in having Mather seek a long-lost copy of Shakespeare's plays (a plausible notion) rather than a long-lost civilization (okay, if we must). Steve Berry's books are always fun, enjoyable reads, if for nothing more than the interesting, historical facts that surrounds the situation. But the final chapters are flawed. Are the endings satisfactory?

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