



The Malta Exchange

Steve Berry

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A deadly race for the Vatican's oldest secret fuels New York Times bestseller Steve Berry's latest international Cotton Malone thriller.

The pope is dead. A conclave to select his replacement is about to begin. Cardinals are beginning to arrive at the Vatican, but one has fled Rome for Malta in search of a document that dates back to the 4th century and Constantine the Great.

Former Justice Department operative, Cotton Malone, is at Lake Como, Italy, on the trail of legendary letters between Winston Churchill and Benito Mussolini that disappeared in 1945 and could re-write history. But someone else seems to be after the same letters and, when Malone obtains then loses them, he's plunged into a hunt that draws the attention of the legendary Knights of Malta.

The knights have existed for over nine hundred years, the only warrior-monks to survive into modern times. Now they are a global humanitarian organization, but within their ranks lurks trouble — the Secreti — an ancient sect intent on affecting the coming papal conclave. With the help of Magellan Billet agent Luke Daniels, Malone races the rogue cardinal, the knights, the Secreti, and the clock to find what has been lost for centuries. The final confrontation culminates behind the walls of the Vatican where the election of the next pope hangs in the balance.

The Malta Exchange Details

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From Reader Review The Malta Exchange for online ebook

Susan Johnson says

3.5 stars

The Cotton Malone books are like reading Indiana Jones. You want some popcorn and then kick back to enjoy a fast paced action adventure. Malone is a retired special agent from the U.S. who is now running an antique book store in Copenhagen. He still does freelance cases and is hired by the British for this one. The adventure involves the Knights of Malta, Charlamagne, Napoleon, a Vatican Conclave and Mussolini. It leaves you breathless just reading the cast of characters. Berry's novels are so interesting because not only are they a thrill a minute but there is so much much history packed into them. He does an amazing amount of research.

This one centers around a disgraced Cardinal who wants to be the Pope. The lengths he'll go to are without limits and dead bodies pile up everywhere. Luckily, Malone is on the case and things get resolved. This is a fun book with great history thrown in.

Thanks to NetGalley for a copy of this book in exchange for a fair review.

Dubi says

The pope has died and a disgraced cardinal exiled to Malta has a plan to get himself elected to the church's highest office. Luke Daniels has been dispatched to find out what the cardinal is up to. Meanwhile, the British are trying to procure long-lost correspondence between Churchill and Mussolini that controversially discusses the fate of Malta during WWII. Cotton Malone has been hired to get the letters.

Things quickly start to go wrong on both ends -- hidden documents resurface, secret organizations are vying for them, bodies are dropping, the papacy is hanging in the balance, and... well, it's Steve Berry and Cotton Malone doing what they do best, which is sure to be a nice treat for long time fans and a worthy adventure for new readers.

When Alfred Hitchcock coined the term McGuffin, what he had in mind was simply that thing the bad guys want so badly that they'll do bad things to get their hands on it. Hitchcock didn't believe the substance of the McGuffin was important as long as the audience believed it was important enough to the bad guys to commit further misdeeds.

What Hitchcock did not envision was that his classic double chase would become so conventional that audiences could spot it a mile away, knowing exactly how it would unfold -- the good guys had something the bad guys wanted, the authorities mistakenly pursued the good guys rather than the bad guys, so the good guys had to unmask the bad guys to exonerate themselves.

That familiarity caused a sea change in how these thrillers were crafted. The McGuffin became the main attraction rather than a mere distraction. Stories had to be crafted to create a fictional universe in which to expound on a specific subject. You didn't read The Da Vinci Code to see if Robert Langdon would evade Fache long enough to finger Silas and the Teacher (especially because you knew in advance that he would) -- no, you read it to see Langdon solve the puzzle that revealed the secrets of the Holy Grail.

Likewise in *The Malta Exchange* -- with several overlapping chases, never mind how Cotton and Luke untangle themselves from the Knights, the Secreti, the Entity, and various intelligence agencies, we want to know how they solve the puzzle they find in the obelisk and what secrets are so damning that the likes of the Pope, Napoleon, Mussolini, et.al. would go to such extreme lengths to possess them.

For Steve Berry, now 14 entries into his Cotton Malone series, in addition to a number of shorter stories, the McGuffin is the draw. He most often draws from enduring historical myths or mysteries, whether it be about Charlemagne, Alexander the Great, Queen Elizabeth, Lincoln, Jefferson, the Knights Templar, or in this case the Knights of Malta, with ramifications relevant to current affairs, whether it be the Middle East, energy resources, constitutional amendments, etc.

In the *Malta Exchange*, several historical myths and mysteries intersect. One rises to the fore, but all prove to be interesting -- I cannot say more for fear of spoilers. As usual, Berry explains afterwards what is based on fact, what is based on scholarly speculation, and what is pure invention on his part.

Plot and character are not abandoned -- the recurring characters are already well known, with the Luke Daniels character advancing more than anyone else, possibly being groomed to take over from the semi-retired Cotton Malone. The characters unique to this book are well drawn as well -- with such a familiar set of protagonists in an established formula, those story-specific characters alone can make or break it, and in this one they help make it.

The plot takes a satisfying twist about 75% the way through. Up to that point, it's paint by numbers for Berry, the action designed to set the stage for exposition of his historical McGuffins. This has been a problem for Berry in some of his more recent efforts because it has become so formulaic. The big reveal saves him this time around, being at once something one might have predicted but not obvious enough to be too predictable.

But as much as I liked it, I have to limit my enthusiasm to four stars. The primary McGuffin, the historical myth that ultimately proves to be Berry's central theme, is solved on the basis of pure invention rather than tangible historical evidence (even though its substance is historically accurate) and this territory has already been covered in another widely-read book that shall remain nameless for fear of spoiler. And it does take that big reveal to redeem the mechanics of the plot.

Still, I'm still hooked on Berry's work, having read all of his novels to date, and looking forward to more. Thanks to NetGalley for providing an advanced reading copy of *The Malta Exchange*.

Judy says

A little dry with all the Catholic history. This would be a difficult stand alone. The characters are not fleshed out and unless you have read the previous Cotton Malone's, you wouldn't get the full effect of the relationship between the characters.

Sahitya says

There's just something so easy about reading a book with characters you are very familiar with and you

know exactly what you are getting into. I've been reading Berry's Cotton Malone series for more than 7 years now and these spy thrillers/action adventure novels have become my comfort reads. So, when I got approved for this advance copy (which I wasn't exactly expecting), I was so so happy I can't describe the feeling. And the book definitely lived up to all my expectations.

Cotton and even Stephanie are well established characters and there's hardly anything that they can do now that will surprise me. Cotton is resourceful and brave and despite being a retired spy and current rare bookseller, nothing ever keeps him away from a mission. I love how much he trusts his instincts and never takes anyone at their word unless he can prove it himself. The other thing I really liked in this book was that Luke is given an equally important part to play. His storyline happens parallel to that of Cotton and it gave me a good chance to get to know him better. He maybe young and slightly brash, always struggling to live up to the legend that is Cotton Malone, but he also respects the older man and is always remembering his mentor's words while trying to get out of tricky situations. He also seems to get into such situations too easily but it was amusing to watch him figure his way out. I have a feeling that we might be seeing more of Luke in the upcoming books.

Though I really like the characters of the series, that's not why I read a Steve Berry book – it's for the extensive history lesson I know I am going to get. In this installment, we get to know more about the history of the Catholic Church – the role that Constantine played in cementing the church as a power player in the world, the Nicaen Creed, the evolution of the Hospitallers, Napoleon's siege of Malta, the role of the popes during the rise of Fascism and Mussolini in Italy and so much more. Knights of Malta play an important role in this story and it was very interesting to know more about their history and also that they exist to this day, as one of the smallest sovereign nations in the world. The island of Malta is also described beautifully in detail and I couldn't resist looking up google for the pictures. As always, Steve Berry succeeds in adding one more place to the list of unending places I would love to visit in my lifetime.

The story takes place just a day before the Conclave is about to begin in the Vatican and that time constraint makes sure that the plot is very fast paced. We are also introduced to two new characters – twin brothers one of whom wants to be the next pope and is ready to resort to all sorts of cunning machinations to achieve his goal. I was very invested in the mystery right from the get go and did not see any of the twists coming, which was a pleasant surprise. The ending is not as explosive as I would have liked, but I also kinda saw it coming because it was happening at the Vatican.

If you love Steve Berry and Cotton Malone, you already know that you are going to read this one and I assure you that it's thrilling and interesting and a lot of fun. If you are new to the series, it might work as a standalone because the mystery and history elements are very fascinating and the author gives us just enough backstory to be able to understand where the characters come from, but I also feel you might miss the experience of actually getting to know them from the beginning.

Joe says

After an extended run of books/missions on American soil, Cotton Malone is back on the international stage where he belongs - solving today's political turmoil within the gray areas of history. What did Mussolini hide and why are people willing to kill for it? The action takes place in Italy's Lake Como region and Rome, the Vatican City, and the island of Malta.

The plot is classic Steve Berry, a spy thriller wrapped in historical fact and educated conjecture. What is

different about *The Malta Exchange* are some strong opinions the author has about organized religion and the Catholic Church in particular. I don't necessarily take issue with Steve Berry's opinions, but they do clutter the plot and weigh down the ending. This is still one of my favorite series, but it is starting to feel a bit stale.

Joan says

Cardinals begin to arrive at the Vatican after the sudden death of the pope; a conclave is about to convene to select a new pope, but the assembled cardinals are unaware that one among them seeks to ensure his own selection no matter what the cost.

Meanwhile, Cotton Malone is at Lake Como, Italy, to retrieve several legendary letters that have been missing since 1945. The letters, written between Winston Churchill and Benito Mussolini, disappear almost as soon as Cotton retrieves them and sets him in the sights of the Knights of Malta who are intent on ensuring that the long-lost Nostra Trifectà remains secret.

With hidden documents, secret organizations, and ruthless machinations, how will Cotton fare in his quest? And what will transpire in the conclave?

The familiar, expected characters appear in this, the fourteenth outing for Cotton Malone. A captivating plot, surprising reveals, unexpected twists, and a strong dose of history all combine to make this book a worthy addition to the Cotton Malone canon. As this tale spins out its web of deceit, intrigue, and conspiracies, readers will find much to appreciate in this compelling thriller.

Highly recommended.

Skip says

Every once in a while, I wonder if I have read the same book as other reviewers. This book was SO BORING. And I rounded the rating up from the 1.5 stars it really deserved. There are two basic plots: (1) retired Cotton Malone is working freelance to find a lost document last possessed by Benito Mussolini, with a deep dark secret of the Catholic Church that is supposed to have cataclysmic consequences. He is being pursued by two different adversaries, the Church's secret police and the Knights of Malta. (2) Magellan Billet's Luke Daniels is on Malta tracking a cardinal scheming to become the next Pope, with a thumb drive of evidence to blackmail his peers once cloistered in the upcoming Conclave. The cardinal's identical twin seems opposed to this elevation. I am not a big Luke Daniels fan, and Berry is now giving him equal billing with Cotton. Too little plot bulked up with too much unnecessary history, especially Mussolini.

Joyce says

5 stars

This book has it all: a Vatican conclave, nefarious and corrupt cardinals, another cardinal vying for the top

spot, rogue Maltese Knights, turncoat British agents and of course Cotton Malone, Stephanie Nelle and Luke Daniels, along with an assortment of other intriguing and colorful characters.

Kastor Cardinal Gallo has gotten in trouble with the Pope. Now that Pope is dead in sudden circumstances and the conclave to elect a new Pope is going to commence very soon. Cardinals from all over the world are gathering. Meanwhile, both sinister and good forces are trying to locate a mysterious document that was supposedly hidden by Mussolini in the late 1930's or so. The document originated in the 4th Century with Constantine the Great. It is very important to the Vatican, so both the bad guys and Cardinal Gallo want it. (However, the jury remains out as to whether Cardinal Gallo is a good or bad guy...)

At the same time Cotton is on the trail of some letters between Winston Churchill and Benito Mussolini. Little does he know that the two trails will soon merge.

This is a fast-paced, high action thriller from the bear chasing Malone all the way through to the end of the story. It is very well written and plotted, as are all of Steve Berry's novels. The story flows smoothly, with hardly an un-needed word. The story transitions are flawless and inserted into the story at well-crafted intervals. The reader gets to take a fast tour around Rome and Malta and their environs. There are some exciting twists and turns and some nice, big surprises. The thing I love about Steve Berry's novels is that the reader gets an in-depth lesson in history. The history of the Knights of Malta and the Maltese influence of the story were very interesting as were all the little tidbits inserted throughout the book. Very good – and fascinating!

I want to very much thank NetGalley and St. Martin's Press/Minotaur Books for forwarding to me a copy of this great book for me to read, enjoy and review.

Bill Donhiser says

Another great Cotton Malone adventure. A page-turner and action-packed. Cotton takes on Vatican secrets and various sects, including a Cardinal who wishes to become Pope and is willing to kill to get there. Well worth the read

OutlawPoet says

So, I should start by saying that I've never before read a Cotton Malone novel. Being new to the series, a couple of the relationships were a little lost on me.

Still, I largely enjoyed the book.

For me, the history was everything - to the point where I enjoyed the historical sections more than the modern-day ones.

I did enjoy the Vatican secrets (Hey, I'm Catholic!), but the characters never really swayed me. Again, I put this down to my being new to the characters and not knowing their histories.

It was a good read. It was action-packed, things went boom, and it did keep my going until the end.

I may go back and read prior books in the series, though, and play a little catch up.

Matt says

Finally released today!

First and foremost, a large thank you to NetGalley, Steve Berry, and St. Martin's Press for providing me with a copy of this publication, which allows me to provide you with an unbiased review.

Steve Berry returns with another Cotton Malone thriller, sure to impress series fans that those readers who love peeling back some of the mysteries history has left unsolved. Cotton Malone arrives on Malta with a mission to intercept a collection of letters that could ruin Britain if they see the light of day. These letters were written between Winston Churchill and Italian dictator Benito Mussolini during the Second World War, pertaining specifically to the possession of Malta. While this mission does not seem too difficult, there is more to the story than meets the eye, particularly as it relates to Malta. Long guarded by a security force, the Knights of Malta, the country has been the gem sought by many autocratic leaders, including both Mussolini and Napoleon Bonaparte. However, it is not simply the land they seek, but a secret that could change the face of world domination. This secret, *Nostra Trifectà*, holds information that many within the Vatican have long hoped would never be found, as its contents could change the Church forever. Vatican City is abuzz, with the death of the recent pope and a conclave about to begin. Over one hundred cardinals are making their way to cast ballots to elect a new leader for the world's Catholics, but there is a twist. One contender seeks to use a great amount of information he has amassed to turn the tides in his favour, while using the secret enforcement arm of the Vatican to keep all hurdles out of his way. While Malone discovers what is going on, he is joined by others from his former employer, the Magellan Billet, to stop this and finally uncover the *Nostra Trifectà*. It will take more than brains and a little brawn to discover the secrets hidden in Malta and bring them to Vatican City before the doors of the Sistine Chapel are closed for the commencement of the Papal Conclave. Will this be one adventure through history's lesser-known mysteries that even Cotton Malone will not solve? A highly captivating story that will hold the reader's attention until the final pages, as they seek to decipher fact from fiction. Recommended for those who enjoy Steve Berry's work, as well as the reader who finds solace in historical mysteries where much of the accepted truths are put to the test.

There's nothing like a Steve Berry novel to get the brain working. He is able to pull on the lesser-known parts of major historical events, pulling the reader into the middle of an adventure, where there is much to learn. Berry's protagonist, Cotton Malone, has been a wonderful staple throughout the series, moving from an active role as a Magellan Billet agent to a quiet bookseller with a passion for rare documents. While Berry does not offer a great deal of back story or development, Malone is effective in this book by showing his attention to detail when it comes to ciphers and hidden codes. Malone is able to lead his group through mysteries while always flexing his muscles when needed. Berry's use of a number of secondary characters, both returning from the series and unique to this book, to help move things along, particular as it relates to those who serve as antagonists throughout. The story is interesting on multiple levels, as it tackles some of the events surrounding Mussolini's fall from grace, the history of the island of Malta, as well as papal conclaves and the role the Catholic Church has long played in the world. Juggling these plots, Berry is able to advance many interesting historical possibilities, as well as injecting some history that may not be readily known to the reader. As with all of his novels, Berry embeds both fact and fiction within the narrative, leaving the reader to decide what to believe, at least until Berry sets the record straight at the end of the story.

Tackling the power of the Catholic Church and how a collection of documents, *Nostra Trifectà*, could derail much of what is known or expected, as well as the power that the pope and his entourage. Set against the mysterious island of Malta, I was able to enjoy the second book in as many months on this island that lays between Italy and the African continent. I am eager to see what else Berry has in store for Malone and the other members of the Magellan Billet in the coming months. It's always nice to see something that bears Steve Berry's name, as the reader is guaranteed a jam-packed read.

Kudos, Mr. Berry, for another winner. I learn so much with you at the helm and your ability to tell stories is second to none.

Love/hate the review? An ever-growing collection of others appears at:
<http://pecheyponderings.wordpress.com/>

A Book for All Seasons, a different sort of Book Challenge: <https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/...>

Debbie says

I can't believe I'm writing this but I did not enjoy this read. Cotton Malone and the Catholic Church - a perfect mix for me. But alas it was not perfect. Not enough Cotton. Luke...why? He just isn't interesting to me. And too much fact. It overwhelmed the story. I love history. I love the story of the Catholic Church. But not here. Steve Berry is a great writer and I look forward to his next work.

Lynn Horton says

Cotton Malone is one of my favorite thriller protagonists, and I'm always delighted when Berry releases a new book. The Malta Exchange has all of Berry's trademarks: clear writing, witty dialogue, self-deprecating humor, fast pace.

The reason I'm giving it three stars instead of four is that this book hops around a lot, and there's SO MUCH history (I love history; one of my minors is in church history, another in European history) and church history (I have a master's from one of America's finest seminaries) that the story bogs down, and there's a good bit of repetition. For the first time, after reading all of the Cotton Malone books, I skimmed over vast blocks of prose.

But still, Cotton Malone is Cotton Malone, and this is a lively thriller that's worth the read.

Robert says

Berry goes full leftist, inventing out of whole cloth an ugly slander against the Catholic Church in particular and all religion in general. It's a shame, since the storytelling itself is still tight - going to interesting locales and tying in plausible historical pseudo-events - but when in the final pages Cotton Malone passively watches the destruction of fantastical (invented) historical documents and ponders what a 'hard decision' it was, that is in direct contrast and contradiction to the ending of his previous novel, when Cotton Malone intentionally does the same thing himself. Irony, like truth and shame, is lost on leftists.

Steven says

Thanks to Netgalley and the publisher for an advanced copy, provided in exchange for my honest review.

I'm a huge fan of Steve Berry and his Cotton Malone series. It's in my top favorites. Sadly, to me, this entry fell short of Berry's usually high standards.

It wasn't the plot that fell short, as the plot was a really entertaining one. Papal conclave, secrets that could devastate the church, twisty betrayals and double agents... all check. Sadly, the big twist was predictable, and I saw it coming from the moment they introduced the second character involved.

Also, Berry usually excels at weaving the history lesson into the story in a way that doesn't feel like an infodump or a lecture, but in this one, it felt very "plot point/action moment, long history lesson, plot point, long history lesson, plot point, long history lesson"... just alternating between the two, rather than weaving them together.

Cotton and Luke didn't feel as deeply developed as they usually do, Stephanie was barely in it, and Cassiopeia wasn't in it at all.

It had its strong points as well, though. The history was fascinating. The locale and details of the church's history on the island of Malta was very interesting, and was definitely a cool concept for a book.

I just feel like, overall, it wasn't as cohesive or developed or well-woven as his books usually are, so I give it 3.5 stars, rounded up.
