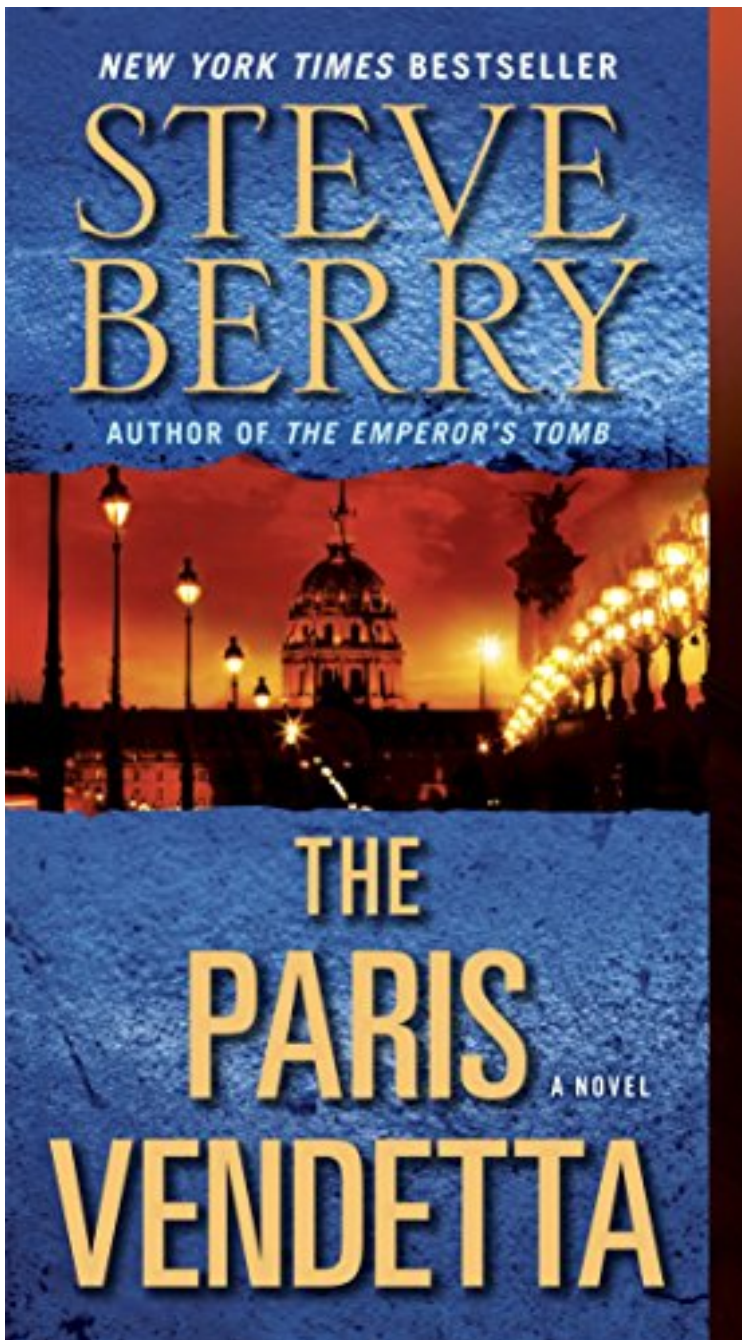


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The Paris Vendetta: A Novel



Par Steve Berry
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurBONUS: This edition contains an excerpt from Steve Berrys The Columbus Affair and a Cotton Malone dossier.When Napoleon Bonaparte died in exile in 1821, he took to the grave a powerful secret. As general and emperor, he had stolen immeasurable riches from palaces, national treasuries, and

even the Knights of Malta and the Vatican. In his final days, his British captors hoped to learn where the loot lay hidden. But he told them nothing, and in his will he made no mention of the treasure. Or did he? Former

Justice Department operative Cotton Malone isn't looking for trouble when it comes knocking at his Copenhagen bookshop. Actually, it breaks and enters in the form of an American Secret Service agent with a pair of assassins on his heels. Malone has his doubts about the anxious young man, but narrowly surviving a ferocious firefight convinces him to follow his unexpected new ally. Their first stop is the secluded estate of Malone's good friend, Henrik Thorvaldsen. The wily Danish tycoon has uncovered the insidious plans of the Paris Club, a cabal of multimillionaires bent on manipulating the global economy. Only by matching wits with a terrorist-for-hire, foiling a catastrophic attack, and plunging into a desperate hunt for Napoleon's legendary lost treasure can Malone hope to avert international financial anarchy. But Thorvaldsen's real objective is much more personal: to avenge the murder of his son by the larcenous aristocrat at the heart of the conspiracy. Thorvaldsen's vendetta places Malone in an impossible quandary one that forces him to choose between friend and country, past and present. Starting in Denmark, moving to England, and ending up in the storied streets and cathedrals of Paris, Malone plays a breathless game of duplicity and death, all to claim a prize of untold value. But at what cost?

Chapter One
Copenhagen Sunday, December 23, the present 12:40 am
The bullet tore into Cotton Malone's left shoulder. He fought to ignore the pain and focused on the plaza. People rushed in all directions. Horns blared. Tires squealed. Marines guarding the nearby American embassy reacted to the chaos, but were too far away to help. Bodies were strewn about. How many? Eight? Ten? No. More. A young man and woman lay at contorted angles on a nearby patch of oily asphalt, the man's eyes frozen open, alight with shock. The woman, facedown, gushing blood. Malone had spotted two gunmen and immediately shot them both, but never saw the third, who'd clipped him with a single round and was now trying to flee, using panicked bystanders for cover. Damn it, the wound hurt. Fear struck his face like a wave of fire. His legs went limp as he fought to raise his right arm. The Beretta seemed to weigh tons, not ounces. Pain jarred his senses. He sucked deep breaths of sulfur-laced air and finally forced his finger to work the trigger, which only squeaked, and did not fire. Strange. More squeaks could be heard as he tried to fire again. Then the world dissolved to black. Malone awoke, cleared the dream from his mind, one that had recurred many times over the past two years, and studied the bedside clock. 12:43 am. He was lying atop the bed in his apartment, the nightstand lamp still on from when he'd plopped down two hours ago. Something had roused him. A sound. Part of the dream from Mexico City, yet not. He heard it again. Three squeaks in quick succession. His building was 17th century, completely remodeled a few months ago. From the second to the third floor the new wooden risers now announced themselves in a precise order, like keys on a piano. Which meant someone was there. He reached beneath the bed and found the rucksack he always kept at the ready from his Magellan Billet days. Inside, his right hand gripped the Beretta, the same one from Mexico City, a round already chambered. Another habit he was glad he hadn't shucked. He crept from the bedroom. His fourth-floor apartment was less than a thousand square feet. Besides the bedroom, there was a den, kitchen, bath, and several closets. Lights burned in the den, where a doorway opened to the stairway. His bookshop consumed the ground floor, and the second and third floors were used exclusively for storage and work space. He found the doorway and hugged the inner jamb. No sound had revealed his advance, as he'd kept his steps light and his shoes to the carpet runners. He still wore his clothes from yesterday. He'd worked late last night after a busy Saturday before Christmas. It was good to be a bookseller again. That was supposedly his profession now. So why was he holding a gun in the middle of the night, every one of his senses telling him danger was nearby? He risked a glance through the doorway. Stairs led to a landing, then angled downward. He'd switched off the lights earlier before climbing up for the night, and there were no three-way switches. He cursed himself for not including some during the remodeling. One thing that had been added was a metal banister lining the stairs' outer edge. He fled the apartment and slid down the slick brass rail to the next landing. No sense announcing his presence with more creaks from other wooden risers. Carefully, he glanced down into the void. Dark and quiet. He slid to the next landing and worked his way around to where he could spy the third floor. Amber lights from Hjøbro Plads leaked in through the building's front windows and lit the space beyond the doorway with an orange halo. He kept his inventory there: books bought from people who, every day, lugged them in by the boxload. Buy for cents, sell for euros. That was the used-book business. Do it enough and you made money. Even better, every once in a while a real treasure arrived inside one of the boxes. Those he kept on the second floor, in a locked room. So unless someone had forced that door, whoever was here had fled into the open third floor. He slid down the last railing and assumed a position outside the third-floor doorway. The room

beyond, maybe forty by twenty feet, was littered with boxes stacked several feet high. What do you want? he asked, his back pressed to the outer wall. He wondered if it had only been the dream that had sparked his alert. Twelve years as a Justice Department agent had certainly stamped paranoia on his personality, and the last two weeks had taken a toll one he hadn't bargained for but had accepted as the price of truth. Tell you what, he said. I'm going back upstairs. Whoever you are, if you want something, come on up. If not, get the hell out of my shop. More silence. He started for the stairs. I came to see you, a male said from inside the storage room. He stopped and noted the voices' nuances. Young. Late twenties, early thirties. American, with a trace of an accent. And calm. Just matter-of-fact. So you break into my shop? I had to. The voice was close now, just on the other side of the doorway. He retreated from the wall and aimed the gun, waiting for the speaker to show himself. A shadowy form appeared in the doorway. Medium height, thin, wearing a waist-length coat. Short hair. Hands at his sides, both empty. The face blocked by the night. He kept the gun aimed and said, I need a name. Sam Collins. What do you want? Henrik Thorvaldsen is in trouble. What else is new? People are coming to kill him. What people? We have to get to Thorvaldsen. He kept the gun aimed, finger on the trigger. If Sam Collins so much as shuddered he'd cut him down. But he had a feeling, the sort agents acquired through hard-fought experience, one that told him this young man was not lying. What people? he asked again. We need to go to him. He heard glass break from below. Another thing, Sam Collins said. Those people. They're coming after me, too. Chapter Two Bastia, Corsica 1:05 am Graham Ashby stood atop the Place du Dujon and admired the tranquil harbor. Around him, crumbly pastel houses were stacked like crates among churches, the olden structures overshadowed by the plain stone tower that had become his perch. His yacht, Archimedes, lay at anchor half a kilometer away in the Vieux Port. He admired its sleek, illuminated silhouette against the silvery water. Winter's second night had spawned a cool dry wind from the north that swept across Bastia. A holiday stillness hung heavy, Christmas was only two days away, but he could not care less. The Terra Nova, once Bastia's center of military and administrative activity, had now become a quarter of affluence with lofty apartments and trendy shops lining a maze of cobbled streets. A few years ago, he'd almost invested in the boom, but decided against it. Real estate, especially along the Mediterranean shoreline, no longer brought the return it once had. He gazed northeast at the Jete du Dragon, an artificial quay that had not existed just a few decades ago. To build it, engineers had destroyed a giant lion-shaped rock dubbed the Leone, which once blocked the harbor and had figured prominently in many pre-twentieth-century engravings. When Archimedes had cruised into the protected waters two hours ago, he'd quickly spotted the unlit castle keep upon which he now stood built by the island's 14th century Genoese governors and wondered if tonight would be the night. He hoped so. Corsica was not one of his favorite places. Nothing but a mountain springing from the sea, 115 miles long, 52 miles wide, 5,500 square miles, 600 miles of coast. Its geography varied from alpine peaks to deep gorges, pine forests, glacial lakes, pastures, fertile valleys, and even some desert. At one time or another Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Aragonese, Italians, Brits, and the French had conquered, but none had ever subjugated the island's rebellious spirit. Another reason why he'd passed on investing. Far too many variables in this unruly French department. The industrious Genoese founded Bastia in 1380 and built fortresses to protect it, his tower perch one of the last remaining. The town had served as the capital of the island until 1791, when Napoleon decided that his birthplace, Ajaccio, in the south, would be better. He knew the locals had still not forgiven the little emperor for that transgression. He buttoned his Armani overcoat and stood close to a medieval parapet. His tailored shirt, trousers, and sweater clung to his fifty-eight-year-old frame with a reassuring feel. He bought all his ensembles at Kingston Knight, as had his father and grandfather. Yesterday a London barber had spent half an hour trimming his gray mane, eliminating those pale waves that seemed to make him look older. He was proud at how he retained the appearance and vigor of a more youth...Revue de presse You don't just read a Steve Berry novel. You live it. (James Rollins) A top-notch, gripping, intelligent thriller in the very finest traditions of the genre (Peter James) Steve Berry always finds intriguing ways to link the past to the present in his fast-paced thrillers. The Paris Vendetta is his best yet. (Harlan Coben) All the Berry hallmarks are here: scale, scope, sweep, history - plus breathless second-by-second suspense. I love this guy. (Lee Child) Sexy, illuminating...my kind of thriller (Dan Brown on THE AMBER ROOM) In Malone, Berry has created a classic, complex hero (USA Today on THE CHARLEMAGNE PURSUIT) 'Pure intrigue. Pure fun.' (Clive Cussler on Steve Berry) Action-packed, fast paced and engaging (Sunday Express on THE VENETIAN BETRAYAL) 'Complex and fast-moving thriller writing, delivered with a great deal of dash, and shades of The Da Vinci Code' (Good Book Guide on THE TEMPLAR LEGACY) International intrigue, swashbuckling action, indestructible hero from the American South...Not to be missed. (Kirkus s,

on THE ROMANOV PROPHECY)