



The Columbus Affair: A Novel (with bonus short story The Admiral's Mark)

By Steve Berry

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A family's secret, a ruthless fanatic, and a covert arm of the American government—all are linked by a single puzzling possibility:

What if everything we know about the discovery of America was a lie? What if that lie was designed to hide the secret of why Columbus sailed in 1492? And what if that 500-year-old secret could violently reshape the modern political world?

Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Tom Sagan has written hard-hitting articles from hot spots around the world. But when one of his stories from the Middle East is exposed as a fraud, his professional reputation crashes and burns. Now he lives in virtual exile—haunted by bad decisions and a shocking truth he can never prove: that his downfall was a deliberate act of sabotage by an unknown enemy. But before Sagan can end his torment with the squeeze of a trigger, fate intervenes in the form of an enigmatic stranger. This stranger forces Sagan to act—and his actions attract the attention of the Magellan Billet, a top-secret corps of the United States Justice Department that deals with America's most sensitive investigations. Sagan suddenly finds himself caught in an international incident, the repercussions of which will shudder not only Washington, D.C., but also Jerusalem. Coaxed into a deadly cat-and-mouse game, unsure who's friend and who's foe, Sagan is forced to Vienna, Prague, then finally into the Blue Mountains of Jamaica—where his survival hinges on his rewriting everything we know about Christopher Columbus.

Don't miss Steve Berry's short story "The Admiral's Mark" and a sneak peek of his new novel, *The King's Deception*, in the back of the book.

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

“An engrossing stand-alone thriller from bestseller Berry.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“This being a Berry production, every alliance is of course fragile, and the bonds among even the heartiest teammates are up for grabs. So is the ultimate goal, for the author gradually reveals that Columbus’ lost gold mine is only chicken feed compared to the real bonanza at stake. Less *The Da Vinci Code* than *American Treasure*. Think of Nicolas Cage, tearing up the scenery as Tom Sagan, to the background beat of popping corn and you’re halfway there.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

Praise for Steve Berry

“Berry raises this genre’s stakes.”—*The New York Times*

“As always with Steve Berry, you’re educated about significant things while your knuckles are turning white and the pages are flying by.”—#1 *New York Times* bestselling author David Baldacci

“For those in need of a comparison, think Jack Bauer and the hit television series *24*, with twists, turns, schemes and counter-schemes manifesting themselves by the second. . . . Berry’s on a roll.”—*Los Angeles Times*

“I love this guy.”—#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Lee Child

“Forget Clancy and Cussler. When it comes to this genre, there is simply no one better.”—*The Providence Journal*

“Steve Berry writes with the self-assured style of a veteran.”—#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Dan Brown

About the Author

Steve Berry is the *New York Times* and #1 internationally bestselling author of *The Lincoln Myth*, *The King’s Deception*, *The Columbus Affair*, *The Jefferson Key*, *The Emperor’s Tomb*, *The Paris Vendetta*, *The Charlemagne Pursuit*, *The Venetian Betrayal*, *The Alexandria Link*, *The Templar Legacy*, *The Third Secret*, *The Romanov Prophecy*, and *The Amber Room*. His books have been translated into 40 languages with more than 18,000,000 copies in 51 countries.

History lies at the heart of every Steve Berry novel. It’s this passion, one he shares with his wife, Elizabeth, that led them to create History Matters, a foundation dedicated to historic preservation. Since 2009 Steve and Elizabeth have traveled across the country to save endangered historic treasures, raising money via lectures, receptions, galas, luncheons, dinners, and their popular writers’ workshops. To date, nearly 2,500 students have attended those workshops. In 2012 their work was recognized by the American Library Association, which named Steve the first spokesman for National Preservation Week. He was also appointed by the Smithsonian Board of Regents to serve on the Smithsonian Libraries Advisory Board to help promote and support the libraries in their mission to provide information in all forms to scientists, curators, scholars, students, and the public at large. He has received the Royden B. Davis Distinguished Author Award and the

2013 Writers for Writers Award from *Poets & Writers*. His novel *The Columbus Affair* earned him the Anne Frank Human Writes Award, and his historic preservation work merited the 2013 Silver Bullet from International Thriller Writers.

Steve Berry was born and raised in Georgia, graduating from the Walter F. George School of Law at Mercer University. He was a trial lawyer for 30 years and held elective office for 14 of those years. He is a founding member of International Thriller Writers—a group of more than 2,600 thriller writers from around the world—and served three years as its co-president.

For more information, visit www.steveberry.org.

From the Hardcover edition.

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CHAPTER ONE

Tom Sagan gripped the gun. He'd thought about this moment for the past year, debating the pros and cons, finally deciding that one pro outweighed all cons.

He simply did not want to live any longer.

He'd once been an investigative reporter for the Los Angeles Times, knocking down a solid six-figure salary, his marquee byline generating one front-page, above-the-fold story after another. He'd worked all over the world—Sarajevo, Beijing, Johannesburg, Belgrade, and Moscow. But the Middle East became his specialty, a place he came to know intimately, where his reputation had been forged. His confidential files were once filled with hundreds of willing sources, people who knew he'd protect them at all costs. He'd proved that when he spent eleven days in a DC jail for failing to reveal his source on a story about a corrupt Pennsylvania congressman.

That man had gone to prison.

Tom had received his third Pulitzer nomination.

There were twenty-one awarded categories. One was for “distinguished investigative reporting by an individual or team, reported as a single newspaper article or a series.” Winners received a certificate, \$10,000, and the ability to add three precious words—Pulitzer Prize winner—to their names.

He won his.

But they took it back.

Which seemed the story of his life.

Everything had been taken back.

His career, his reputation, his credibility, even his self-respect. In the end he became a failure as a son, a father, a husband, a reporter, and a friend. A few weeks ago he'd charted that spiral on a pad, identifying that it all started when he was twenty-five, fresh out of the University of Florida, top third of his class, a

journalism degree in hand.

Then his father disowned him.

Abiram Sagan had been unrelenting.

“We all make choices. Good. Bad. Indifferent. You’re a grown man, Tom, and have made yours. Now I have to make mine.”

And that he had.

On that same pad he’d jotted down the highs and lows. Some from before, as editor of his high school paper and campus reporter at college. Most after. His rise from news assistant, to staff reporter, to senior international correspondent. The awards. Accolades. Respect from his peers. How had one observer described his style? “Wide-ranging and prescient reporting conducted at great personal risk.”

Then his divorce.

The estrangement from his only child. Poor investment decisions. Even poorer life decisions.

Finally, his firing.

Eight years ago.

And the seemingly nothing life since.

Most of his friends were gone. But that was as much his fault as theirs. As his personal depression had deepened he’d withdrawn into himself. Amazing he hadn’t turned to alcohol or drugs, but neither had ever appealed to him.

Self-pity was his intoxicant.

He stared around at the house’s interior.

He’d decided to die, here, in his parents’ home. Fitting, in some morbid way. Thick layers of dust and a musty smell reminded him that for three years the rooms had sat empty. He’d kept the utilities on, paid the meager taxes, and had the lawn cut just enough so the neighbors wouldn’t complain. Earlier, he’d noticed that the sprawling mulberry tree out front needed trimming, the picket fence painting.

He hated it here. Too many ghosts.

He walked the rooms, remembering happier days. In the kitchen he could still see the jars of his mother’s jam that once lined the windowsill. The thought of her brought a wave of an unusual joy that quickly faded.

He should write a note and explain himself, blame somebody or something. But to who? Or what? Nobody would believe him if he told them the truth. Unfortunately, just like eight years ago, there was no one to blame but himself.

Would anyone even care he was gone?

Certainly not his daughter. He hadn't spoken to her in two years.

His literary agent? Maybe. She'd made a lot of money off his ghostwriting. He'd been shocked to learn how many so-called bestselling fiction writers could not write a word. What had one critic said at the time of his downfall? "Journalist Sagan seems to have a promising career ahead of him writing fiction."

Asshole.

But he'd actually taken that advice.

He wondered—how do you explain taking your own life? It is, by definition, an irrational act. Which, by definition, defies explanation. Hopefully, somebody would bury him. He had plenty of money in the bank, more than enough for a respectable funeral.

What would it be like to be dead?

Were you aware? Could you hear? See? Smell? Or was it simply an eternal blackness. No thoughts. No feeling.

Nothing at all.

He walked back toward the front of the house.

Outside was a glorious March day, the noontime sun bright. Florida was truly blessed with some terrific weather. Like California, without the earthquakes, where he lived before his firing. He'd miss the feel of a warm sun on a pleasant summer's day.

He stopped in the open archway and stared at the parlor. That was what his mother had always called the room. This was where his parents had gathered on Shabbat. Where Abiram read from the Torah. The place where Yom Kippur and Holy Days had been recognized. He recalled the sight of the pewter menorah on the far table burning. His parents had been devout Jews. After his bar mitzvah he, too, had first studied the Torah, standing before the twelve-paned windows, framed out by damask curtains his mother had taken months to sew. She'd been talented with her hands, a lovely woman, universally adored. He missed her. She died six years before Abiram, who'd now been gone three.

Time to end this.

He studied the gun, a pistol bought a few months before at an Orlando gun show, and sat on the sofa. Clouds of dust rose, then settled. He recalled Abiram's lecture about the birds and the bees as he'd sat in the same spot. He'd been, what, twelve?

Thirty-eight years ago.

But it seemed like last week.

As usual, the explanations had been rough and concise.

"Do you understand?" Abiram asked him. "It's important that you do."

“I don’t like girls.”

“You will. So don’t forget what I said.”

Women. Another failure. He’d had precious few relationships as a young man, marrying Michele, the first girl who’d shown serious interest in him. But the marriage ended after his firing, and there’d been no more women since the downfall. Michele had taken a toll on him.

“Maybe I’ll get to see her soon, too,” he muttered.

His ex-wife had died two years ago in a car crash.

That was the last time he and his daughter spoke, her words loud and clear. “Get out. She would not want you here.”

And he’d left the funeral.

He stared again at the gun, his finger on the trigger. He steeled himself, grabbed a breath, and nestled the barrel to his temple. He was left-handed, like nearly every Sagan. His uncle, a former professional baseball player, had told him as a child that if he could learn to throw a curveball he’d make a fortune in the major leagues. Talented left-handers were rare.

But he’d failed at sports, too.

He brought the barrel to his temple.

The metal touched his skin.

He closed his eyes and tightened his finger on the trigger, imagining how his obituary would start. Tuesday, March 5, former investigative journalist Tom Sagan took his own life at his parents’ home in Mount Dora, Florida.

A little more pressure and—

Rap. Rap. Rap.

He opened his eyes.

A man stood outside the front window, close enough to the panes for Tom to see the face—older than himself, clean-cut, distinguished—and the man’s right hand.

Which held a photograph, pressed to the glass.

He focused on the image of a young woman lying down, arms and feet extended.

As if bound.

He knew the face.

His daughter.

Alle.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Eunice Bosse:

Nowadays reading books become more than want or need but also work as a life style. This reading behavior give you lot of advantages. Associate programs you got of course the knowledge the actual information inside the book in which improve your knowledge and information. The info you get based on what kind of book you read, if you want get more knowledge just go with knowledge books but if you want sense happy read one having theme for entertaining such as comic or novel. Typically the The Columbus Affair: A Novel (with bonus short story The Admiral's Mark) is kind of publication which is giving the reader capricious experience.

Caroline Petrie:

The book with title The Columbus Affair: A Novel (with bonus short story The Admiral's Mark) possesses a lot of information that you can study it. You can get a lot of help after read this book. This specific book exist new understanding the information that exist in this reserve represented the condition of the world right now. That is important to you to know how the improvement of the world. That book will bring you throughout new era of the globalization. You can read the e-book on the smart phone, so you can read it anywhere you want.

Patrick Walker:

Typically the book The Columbus Affair: A Novel (with bonus short story The Admiral's Mark) has a lot details on it. So when you read this book you can get a lot of advantage. The book was compiled by the very famous author. McDougal makes some research before write this book. This particular book very easy to read you may get the point easily after perusing this book.

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