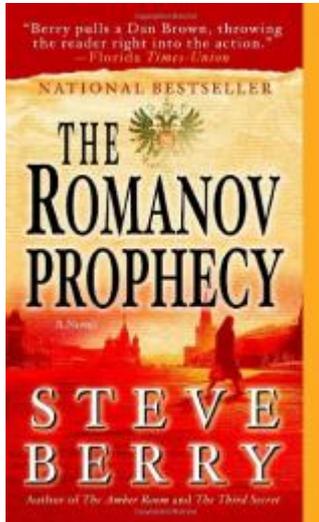


## The Romanov Prophecy

by Steve Berry

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### About the Book

**Ekaterinburg, Russia: July 16, 1918.** Ten months have passed since Nicholas II's reign was cut short by revolutionaries. Tonight, the White Army advances on the town where the Tsar and his family are being held captive by the Bolsheviks. Nicholas dares to hope for salvation. Instead, the Romanovs are coldly and methodically executed.

**Moscow: Present Day.** Atlanta lawyer Miles Lord, fluent in Russian and well versed in the country's history, is thrilled to be in Moscow on the eve of such a momentous event. After the fall of Communism and a succession of weak governments, the Russian people have voted to bring back the monarchy. The new tsar will be chosen from the distant relatives of Nicholas II by a specially appointed commission, and Miles' job is to perform a background check on the Tsarist candidate favored by a powerful group of Western businessmen. But research quickly becomes the least of Miles' concerns when he is nearly killed by gunmen on a city plaza.

Suddenly Miles is racing across continents, shadowed by nefarious henchmen. At first, his only question is why people are pursuing him. But after a strange conversation with a mysterious Russian, who steers Miles toward the writings of Rasputin, he becomes desperate to know more—most important, *what really happened to the family of Russia's last tsar?*

His only companion is Akilina Petrov, a Russian circus performer sympathetic to his struggle, and his only guide is a cryptic message from Rasputin that implies that the bloody night of so long ago is not the last chapter in the Romanovs' story . . . and that someone might even have survived the massacre. The prophecy's implications are earth-shattering—not only for the future of the tsar and mother Russia, but also for Miles himself.

Steve Berry, national bestselling author of the phenomenal thriller *THE AMBER ROOM*, once again delves into rich historical fact to produce an explosive page-turner. In *THE ROMANOV PROPHECY*, the authentic and the speculative meld into a fascinating and

exceptionally suspenseful work of fiction.

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## Discussion Guide

1. In Berry's first novel of suspense, **The Amber Room**, he used as his backdrop a piece of history that is very real but largely unknown to the American audience. In this novel, he uses as his backdrop a much better known piece of history—namely, the execution of Russia's last royal family. Before reading this novel, how much did you know about the Romanovs and their tragic end? Did you find Berry's research enlightening, were you aware of these historical events? How did your prior knowledge—or lack thereof—affect your interest in this backdrop and storyline? In general, would you rather read a novel concerned with 1) a historical incident you know well, 2) a historical incident about which you know something but not too much, or 3) a historical incident with which you are completely unfamiliar?
2. The Prologue in **The Romanov Prophecy** introduces you to the Romanovs, and their concern for succession, and also to Rasputin, whose words become crucial to the story later on. Did you enjoy the Prologue? Did it intrigue you and compel you to read on? How did it add to the overall atmosphere of the book?
3. In **The Romanov Prophecy** bullets fly in the first paragraph of Chapter 1, and we find Miles Lord on the run from then on. Do you prefer when a novel of this type builds suspense slowly and steadily, or when it begins with a bang? Did the first chapter's frantic opening help you sympathize with Lord's disorientation and subsequent struggle for survival? Or did the quick pace exhaust or confuse you as a reader? How did you feel about the pace throughout the rest of the novel?
4. Miles Lord is an African-American, and we learn early on how his complexion sets him apart from others in Russia. Why do you think Berry chose to create a black narrator in Russia? How does Lord's race affect his quest? How does it enhance the book's tension? And how does Berry use it to tell us more about Russia?
5. Early on in the book, the reader learns that Taylor Hayes is not as trustworthy as Lord thinks he is. Throughout the rest of the novel, this provides a great deal of dramatic irony, as Lord continues to trust Hayes implicitly while the reader recognizes he is making a nearly fatal mistake. How does Berry use this device (dramatic irony) to raise tension and to play with readers' expectations? Did you buy into Lord's continuing trust of his boss? And did you think that this source of tension sustained itself over the course of the entire book?
6. Accidentally (or not at all accidentally, if you believe Rasputin's words), Lord comes to partner up with Akilina Petrovna, a circus performer who is proudly Russian, though she has undoubtedly experienced all the worst Russia has had to offer over the years. As their quest comes more and more to follow the path prophesied so many years before by Rasputin, Akilina is much quicker than Lord to accept the predestined or mythical nature of it all. Lord more steadfastly maintains skepticism through much of the novel. Did you feel that Akilina was too quick to accept the prophecy? Did you feel that Lord was too slow? Berry seems to place much of the reasoning behind this difference between them on the national characters of Russia and the United States. What does this tell us about Russians, and about Americans? Do you agree with Berry's analysis?
7. Throughout the novel, Berry basically employs only three points of view—Lord's, Hayes', and Akilina's. Are these three points of view enough with which to tell the story fully? In your opinion, are any of the three unnecessary? Whose point of view was the most interesting to you? Whose was the least interesting? How did the relatively small number of points of view enhance the novel? In your opinion, did it in any way detract from the novel?
8. When Lord and Akilina finally know for sure that Michael Thorn is the Romanov descendent they've been seeking, Lord asks him, "Why haven't you come forward?" Thorn responds: "I was always told not to reveal myself unless the raven and the eagle appeared and the words were uttered. Anything less was a trap laid down by our enemies." Did you find this tough to accept, as Lord does? Clearly it makes sense to Thorn, who is of the mindset that he is part of something much larger than himself. But, in your opinion, is he too respectful of the mysticism surrounding the succession? Should he have stepped forward as soon as the search for a successor began?
9. A number of times throughout the novel, we return to the actual events of July 16, 1918, when the Romanov family was executed and their bodies disposed of. Did you find these sections more or less gripping than the rest of the novel? And how did you feel about the way Berry revealed them slowly, over the course of a few hundred pages, through the words of numerous characters?
10. Obviously, this novel in many ways builds to the revelation of what "really" happened in July 1918—in

Berry's version, Alexie and Anastasia were saved heroically and secretly, and then transported to America. Did you find this a satisfying and fitting conclusion? Did you find it believable? And if you're not convinced by Berry's fictional theory, what do you think really happened?

#### Author Bio

Steve Berry is the *New York Times* and #1 internationally bestselling author of a dozen *Cotton Malone* novels, and several standalones. He has 20 million books in print, translated into 40 languages. With his wife, Elizabeth, he is the founder of History Matters, which is dedicated to historical preservation. He serves as a member of the Smithsonian Libraries Advisory Board and was a founding member of International Thriller Writers, formerly serving as its co-president.

#### Critical Praise

"The fate of Mother Russia ups the ante for Berry's formula: based on international intrigue, swashbuckling action, indestructible hero from the American South. . . . Not to be missed."

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