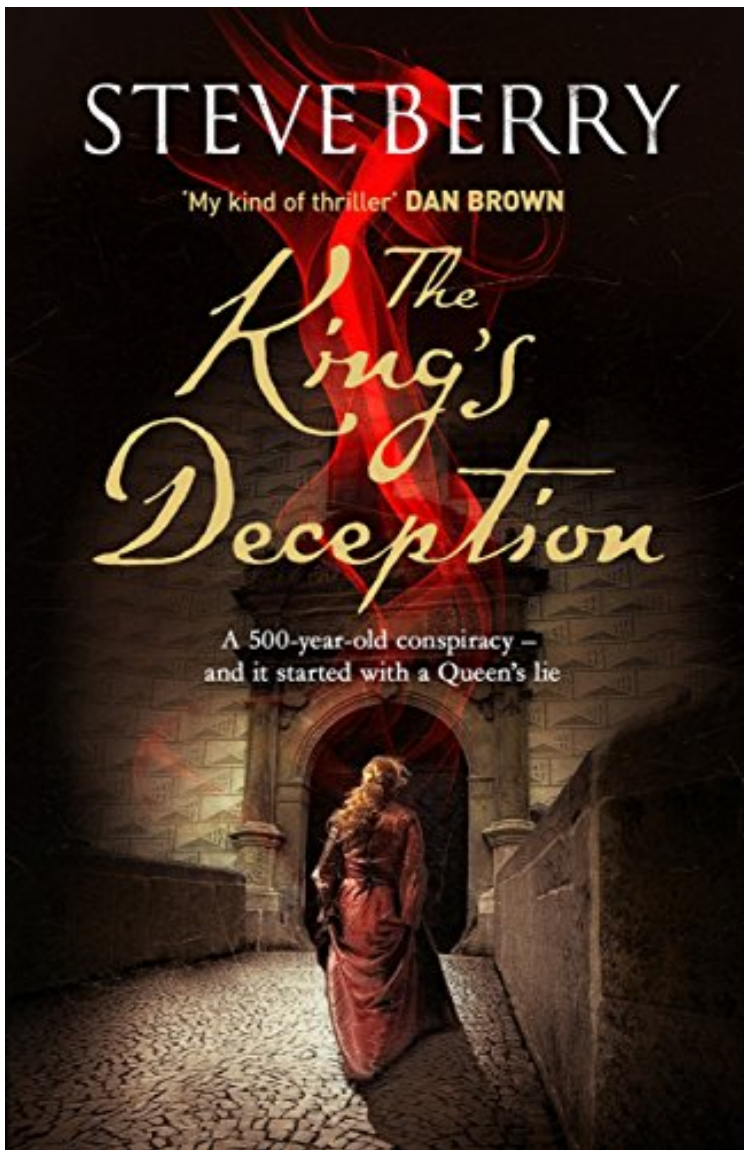


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The King's Deception: Book 8



Par Steve Berry
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThere is a secret from our history - 500 years old - startling in its revelations and devastating in its political impact. A secret that has, thankfully, stayed hidden. Until now.Former Justice Department agent, Cotton Malone, travels to England and finds himself caught in a dark conspiracy born long ago, in the time of the Tudors. Now both the CIA and MI6 seem to be competing to uncover the mystery and, for Malone, supposedly on holiday with his son, Gary, it's not just the action which comes thick and fast. When Gary disappears, Malone is forced into a race against time, as he battles to decipher a puzzle that leads him from the Middle Temple to the chapel at Windsor Castle, from an Oxford college to the sewers beneath Hampton Court. With assassins, traitors, spies, and dangerous disciples of a secret

society closing in, Malone discovers that the solution to the mystery will not only draw him into a lethal trap, but force him closer to his own troubling past. And a shocking revelation.

Extrait 9780345526540 | excerptBerry / THE KING'S DECEPTION

One london friday, november 216:25 pm Cotton Malone stepped up to the Customs window at Heathrow Airport and presented two passports his own and his son Garys. Positioned between himself and the glass-enclosed counter, however, stood a problem. Fifteen-year-old Ian Dunne. This one doesnt have a passport, he told the attendant, then explained who he was and what he was doing. A brief call to somebody led to verbal approval for Ian to reenter the country. Which didnt surprise Malone. He assumed that since the Central Intelligence Agency wanted the boy in England theyd make the necessary arrangements. He was tired from the long flight, though hed caught a few hours of sleep. His knee still hurt from the kick Ian had delivered in Atlanta, before trying to flee from that airport. Luckily, his own fifteen-year-old, Gary, had been quick to tackle the pesky Scot before hed escaped the concourse. Favours for friends. Always a problem. This one for his former boss, Stephanie Nelle, at the Magellan Billet. Its the CIA, shed told him. Langley had called directly. Somehow they were aware Malone was in Georgia and wanted him to escort the boy back to London, handing him over to the Metropolitan Police. After that he and Gary could head on to Copenhagen. In return, theyd received first-class tickets all the way home to Denmark. Not bad. His own were coach. Four days ago hed flown to Georgia for two reasons. The State Bar of Georgia required twelve hours of continuing legal education from all of its licensed lawyers. Though hed retired from the navy and the Magellan Billet, he still kept his law license active, which meant he had to satisfy the annual education mandate. Last year hed attended a sanctioned event in Brussels, a three-day meeting on multinational property rights. This year hed chosen a seminar in Atlanta on international law. Not the most exciting way to spend two days, but hed worked too hard for that degree to simply allow his ticket to lapse. The second reason was personal. Gary had asked to spend the Thanksgiving holiday with him. School was out and his ex-wife, Pam, thought an overseas trip a good idea. Hed wondered why she was so reticent, and found out last week when Pam called his bookshop in Copenhagen. Garys angry, she said. Hes asking a lot of questions. Ones you dont want to answer? Ones Im going to have a tough time answering. Which was an understatement. Six months ago shed revealed a harsh truth to him during another call from Atlanta to Denmark. Gary was not his natural son. Instead, the boy was the product of an affair some sixteen years past. Now shed told Gary that truth, and his son was not happy. For Malone, the news had been crushing. He could only imagine what it had been for Gary. Neither one of us was a saint back then, Cotton. She liked to remind him of that reality as if somehow hed forgotten that their marriage supposedly ended because of his lapses. Gary wants to know about his birth father. So do I. Shed told him nothing about the man, and refused his requests for information. He has no involvement here, she said. Hes a total stranger to all of us. Just like the women you were with have nothing to do with this. I dont want to open that door. Ever. Why did you tell Gary about this? We agreed to do that together, when the time was right. I know. I know. My mistake. But it had to be done. Why? She did not answer him. But he could imagine the reason. She liked to be in control. Of everything. Only she wasnt in control here. Nobody was, actually. He hates me, she said. I see it in his eyes. You turned the boys life upside down. He told me today that he might want to live with you. He had to say, You know I would never take advantage of this. I know that. This is my fault. Not yours. Hes so angry. Maybe a week with you would help ease some of that. Hed come to realize that he didnt love Gary one drop less because he carried no Malone genes. But hed be lying to himself if he said he wasnt bothered by the fact. Six months had passed and the truth still hurt. Why? He wasnt sure. He hadnt been faithful to Pam while in the navy. He was young and stupid and got caught. But now he knew that shed had an affair of her own. Never mentioned at the time. Would she have strayed if he hadnt? He doubted it. Not her nature. So he wasnt blameless for the current mess. He and Pam had been divorced for over a year, but only back in October had they made their peace. Everything that happened with the Library of Alexandria changed things between them. For the better. But now this. One boy in his charge was angry and confused. The other seemed to be a delinquent. Stephanie had told him some. Ian Dunne had been born in Scotland. Father unknown. Mother abandoned him early. He was sent to London to live with an aunt and drifted in and out of her home, finally running away. He had an arrest record petty theft, trespassing, loitering. The CIA wanted him because a month ago one of their people was shoved, or jumped, into the path of an oncoming Underground train. Dunne was there, in Oxford Circus. Witnesses say he might even have stolen something from the dead man. So they needed to talk to him. Not good, but also not his concern. In a few minutes his favor for Stephanie Nelle would be over, then he and Gary would catch their connecting flight to Copenhagen and enjoy the week, depending of course on how

many uncomfortable questions his son might want answered. The hitch was that the Denmark flight departed not from Heathrow, but Gatwick, Londons other major airport, an hours ride east. Their departure time was several hours away, so it wasnt a problem. He would just need to convert some dollars to pounds and hire a taxi. They left Customs and claimed their luggage. Both he and Gary had packed light. The police going to take me? Ian asked. Thats what Im told. What will happen to him? Gary asked. He shrugged. Hard to say. And it was. Especially with the CIA involved. He shouldered his bag and led both boys out of the baggage area. Can I have my things? Ian asked. When Ian had been turned over to him in Atlanta, hed been given a plastic bag that contained a Swiss Army knife with all the assorted attachments, a pewter necklace with a religious medal attached, a pocket Mace container, some silver shears, and two paperback books with their covers missing. Ivanhoe and Le Morte DArthur. Their brown edges were water-stained, the bindings veined with thick white creases. Both were thirty-plus-year-old printings. Stamped on the title page was any old books, with an address in Piccadilly Circus, London. He employed a similar branding of inventory, his simply announcing cotton malone, bookseller, hbro plads, copenhagen. The items in the plastic bag all belonged to Ian, seized by Customs when they took him into custody at Miami International, after hed tried to enter the country illegally. Thats up to the police, he said. My orders are to hand you and the bag over to them. Hed stuffed the bundle inside his travel case, where it would stay until the police assumed custody. He half expected Ian to bolt, so he remained on guard. Ahead he spied two men, both in dark suits walking their way. The one on the right, short and stocky with auburn hair, introduced himself as Inspector Norse. He extended a hand, which Malone shook. This is Inspector Devene. Were with the Met. We were told youd be accompanying the boy. Were here to give you a lift to Gatwick and take charge of Master Dunne. I appreciate the ride. Wasnt looking forward to an expensive taxi. Least we can do. Our car is just outside. One of the privileges of being the police is we can park where we want. The man threw Malone a grin. They started for the exit. Malone noticed Inspector Devene take up a position behind Ian. Smart move, he thought. You responsible for getting him into the country with no passport? Norse nodded. We are, along with some others working with us. I think you know about them. That he did. They stepped out of the terminal into brisk morning air. A bank of dense clouds tinted the sky a depressing shade of pewter. A blue Mercedes sedan sat by the curb. Norse opened the rear door and motioned for Gary to climb in first, then Ian and Malone. The inspector stood outside until they were all in, then closed the door. Norse rode in the front passenger seat, while Devene drove. They sped out of Heathrow and found the M4 motorway. Malone knew the route, London a familiar locale. Years ago hed spent time in England on assignments. Hed also been detached here for a year by the navy. Traffic progressively thickened as they made their way east toward the city. Would it be all right if we made one stop before we head for Gatwick? Norse asked him. No problem. We have time before the plane leaves. The least we can do for a free ride. Malone watched Ian as the boy gazed out the window. He couldnt help but wonder what would happen to him. Stephanies assessment had not been a good one. A street kid, no family, completely on his own. Unlike Gary, who was dark-haired with a swarthy complexion, Ian was blond and fair-skinned. He seemed like a good kid, though. Just dealt a bad hand. But at least he was young, and youth offered chances, and chances led to possibilities. Such a contrast with Gary, who lived a more conventional, secure life. The thought of Gary on the streets, loose, with no one, tore at his heart. Warm air blasted the cars interior and the engine droned as they chugged through traffic. Malones eyes surrendered to jet lag. When he woke, he glanced at his watch and realized hed been out about fifteen minutes. He willed himself to alertness. Gary and Ian were still sitting quietly. The sky had darkened further. A storm was approaching the city. He studied the cars interior, noticing for the first time no radio or communications equipment. Also, the carpets were immaculate, the upholstery in pristine condition. Certainly not like any police car hed ever ridden in. He then examined Norse. The mans brown hair was cut below the ears. Not shaggy, but thick. He was clean-shaven and a bit overweight. He was dressed appropriately, suit and tie, but it was the left earlobe that drew his attention. Pierced. No earring was present, but the puncture was clear. I was wondering, Inspector. Might I see your identification? I should have asked at the airport. Norse did not answer him. The question aroused Ians attention, and he studied Malone with a curious look. Did you hear me, Norse? Id like to see your identification. Just enjoy the ride, Malone. He didnt like the curt tone so he reached for the front seat and pulled himself forward, intending to make his point clearer. The barrel of a gun came around the headrest and greeted him. This enough identification? Norse asked. Actually, I was hoping for a picture ID. He motioned to the weapon. When did the Metropolitan Police start issuing Glocks? No reply. Who are you? The gun waved at Ian. His keeper. Ian reached across Gary and wrenched the chrome handle up and down, but the door would not open. Great things, child locks,

said Norse. Keeps the wee ones from slipping away. Malone said, Son, you want to tell me whats going on? Ian said nothing. These men have apparently gone to a lot of trouble to make your acquaintance. Sit back, Malone, Norse said. This is none of your concern. He reclined in the seat. On that we agree. Except his son was in the car, too. Norse kept his head turned back toward them, his gaze and the gun glued on Malone. The car continued through morning congestion. He absorbed what was whirling past outside, recalling what he could about the geography of North London. He realized the bridge theyd just crossed was for Regents Canal, a corridor-like waterway that wound a snaking path through the city, eventually spilling into the Thames. Stately trees lined the four-laned promenade. Traffic was heavy. He spotted the famous Lords Cricket Ground. He knew that the fictional Baker Street of Sherlock Holmes lay a few blocks over. Little Venice wasnt far away. They crossed the canal again and he glanced down at brightly painted houseboats dotting the waterway. Longboats dotted the canal, no more than ten feet high, designed to fit under the tight bridges. Rows and rows of Georgian houses and flats lined the boulevard, fronted with tall trees less their leaves. Devene turned the Mercedes onto a side lane. More houses rolled past on either side. The scene was not unlike Atlanta, where his own house had once stood. Three more turns and they entered a courtyard enclosed on three sides by high hedges. The Mercedes stopped outside a mews constructed of pastel-colored stones. Norse exited. Devene also climbed out. Both rear doors were released from the outside. Get out, Norse said. Malone stood on cobblestones outlined by emerald lichens. Gary and Ian emerged on the other side. Ian tried to bolt. Norse slammed the boy hard into the car. Dont, Malone called out. Do as he says. You too, Gary. Norse shoved the gun into Ians neck. Stay still. The mans body pinned Ian to the car. Wheres the flash drive? What drive? Malone asked. Shut him up, Norse called out. Devene jammed a fist into Malones gut. Dad, Gary called out. He doubled over and tried to regain his breath, motioning to Gary that he was okay. The flash drive, Norse said again. Where is it? Malone rose, arms hugging his stomach. Devene drew back to swing again, but Malone jammed his knee into the mans groin, then smacked Devenes jaw with his right fist. He may have been retired and jet-lagged, but he wasnt helpless. He whirled in time to see Norse aim the gun his way. The retort from a single shot came the instant after Malone lunged for the pavement, the bullet finding the hedges behind him. He stared up into the Mercedes passenger compartment and saw Norse through the half-open doors. He sprang to his feet, pivoted off the hood, and propelled his legs through the cars interior into the far-side door. The panel flew out and smashed into Norse, sending the phony inspector reeling backward into the mews. He shoved himself through the open door. Ian was running from the courtyard, toward the street. Malones gaze met Garys. Go with him. Get out of here. He was tackled from behind. His forehead slapped wet stone. Pain shuddered through him. Hed thought Devene out of commission. A mistake. An arm wrapped around his throat and he tried to release the stranglehold grip. His prone position gave him little room to maneuver and Devene was hinging his spine at an unnatural angle. The buildings around him winked in and out. Blood trickled down his forehead and into his eye. The last thing he saw before blackness enveloped him was Ian and Gary, disappearing around a corner.

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