



## The Romanov Cross

*Robert Masello*

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**Nearly one hundred years ago, a desperate young woman crawled ashore on a desolate arctic island, carrying a terrible secret and a mysterious, emerald-encrusted cross. A century later, acts of man, nature, and history converge on that same forbidding shore with a power sufficient to shatter civilization as we know it.**

Army epidemiologist Frank Slater is facing a court-martial, but after his punishment is mysteriously lifted, Slater is offered a job no one else wants—to travel to a small island off the coast of Alaska and investigate a potentially lethal phenomenon: The permafrost has begun to melt, exposing bodies from a colony that was wiped out by the dreaded Spanish flu of 1918. Frank must determine if the thawed remains still carry the deadly virus in their frozen flesh and, if so, ensure that it doesn't come back to life.

Frank and his handpicked team arrive by helicopter, loaded down with high-tech tools, prepared to exhume history. The colony, it transpires, was once settled by a sect devoted to the mad Russian monk Rasputin, but there is even more hiding in the past than Frank's team is aware of. Any hope of success hinges on their willingness to accept the fact that even their cutting-edge science has its limits—and that the ancient wisdom of the Inuit people who once inhabited this eerie land is as essential as any serum. By the time Frank discovers that his mission has been compromised—crashed by a gang of reckless treasure hunters—he will be in a brutal race against time. With a young, strong-willed Inuit woman by his side, Frank must put a deadly genie back in the bottle before all of humanity pays the price.

*The Romanov Cross* is at once an alternate take on one of history's most profound mysteries, a love story as unlikely as it is inevitable, and a thriller of heart-stopping, supernatural suspense. With his signature blend of fascinating history and fantastic imagination, critically acclaimed author Robert Masello has once again crafted a terrifying story of past events coming back to haunt the present day . . . and of dark deeds aching to be unearthed.

## **Praise for *The Romanov Cross***

“In this fascinating, funny, and frightening supernatural thriller, [Robert] Masello skillfully weaves together the story of the deaths of the Russian royal family with the possibility of a new worldwide influenza pandemic. . . . Toss in a pack of slaving wolves, the undead, and a chilling ending, and the result is a terrific, can't-put-it-down read. Fine prose and plotting help solidify Masello's position at the top of this crowded subgenre.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“A former Army epidemiologist contends with greedy locals and the harsh Alaskan terrain in order to prevent the recurrence of a deadly pandemic. . . . Masello weaves several disparate genres—medical thriller, historical novel, ghost story—into a coherent whole. A delicious sense of creeping dread permeates the first act, greatly enhanced by its setting in the stark but beautiful landscape of northwestern Alaska. . . . Tense, taut and impossible to put down.”—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

## **The Romanov Cross Details**

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Author : Robert Masello

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## From Reader Review *The Romanov Cross* for online ebook

### **Bandit says**

I've always made an effort to avoid this sort of books, you know, the action adventure with some history and maybe a conspiracy thrown in. This book might make me rethink that stance. I tried it because the premise was really intriguing and the history, particularly the tragic fate of Romanovs has always been of interest to me. Revisiting the popular premise of Grand Duchess Anastasia's survival, the author utilizes it to create her a fate quite possibly as terrible as being murdered with her family, but this one has a possibly deadly resonance for the future. You can read the book's summary to find out all about that. Why not talk about Anastasia instead, but far the most interesting character here. First of all, the author did a credible job as far as accuracy goes, although I didn't know she had a limp and don't think any of my other reading has ever mentioned it. There is something interesting about the fact that the tragic daughter of the last Tsar became an enduring and popular historical mystery of the 20th century, in no small way owing to the fact that her remains weren't positively DNA identified until 2007 and even that wasn't iron clad if you study the details. There were at least 10 women trying to pass for her at different times, most famous and most insistent being Anna Anderson played in a film by Ingrid Bergman. There was even an animated musical, which is probably how an alarming portion of Americans familiarize themselves with lesser known (to them) historical figures. Out of four Romanov daughters she seems to be the only one who has received such attention. Though one can only hope that if she did indeed survive, she went on to have a happier life than imagined in *Romanov Cross*. Actually that's something of a misnomer, the cross is Rasputin's, given to Anastasia to protect her, which it does, after a fashion. Also, I don't think she would have signed a thing as the Grand Duchess of all Russias, unless it was a recurring typo, what was there to pluralize, it was all one country. For that matter, one of the characters in the present time, Berkeley educated no less, postulated that the universe is 90% dark matter. The standard model of cosmology indicates it's either 84.5% or 95.1%, if you include dark energy. The latter stood out to me mainly for a reason that I've always suspected this type of novels of pandering to the general population and thus being significantly dumbed down, but still in some way educational, so why not get the few actual facts straight. Anyway, aside from that, this actually didn't read dumbed down. It isn't a vocabulary builder by any means and it does overexplain now and again, but it's quite good and extremely entertaining. Normally, I prefer this sort of thing as a movie and I was pleasantly surprised by how well it worked as a book, The characters and the pacing were all nicely done, the descriptions were impressively vivid and Alaska came across exactly as the sort of horrid and inhospitable land one might suspect it of being, there was even a sort of supernatural element. Whiplash of an ending. No sequel. Good, good. Fun was had by all. Recommended.

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### **Sonja Arlow says**

This was a fast paced historic thriller with a good dose of Russian history and a pinch of the supernatural. Just think Dan Brown meets Indiana Jones.

I know nothing about the Romanov family and even less about Rasputin – clearly I slept through every history class during my school years and this book definitely peaked my interest in reading more Russian history.

The story not only carries the history of the start of the Russian Revolution but also a bit of Alaskan folklore

and information about the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918.

Even though the historic and modern day timelines are very loosely linked with a biiiiiiiig stretch of the imagination I still really enjoyed this piece of escapism that left me with some newfound knowledge about the Romanovs and a desire to read more about them.

Now a bit of criticism:

The last 10 pages could easily have been omitted without taking anything away from the main story and even the supernatural element was slightly unnecessary to drive the story forward but all in all a very entertaining read!

I will be reading more from this author.

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## **Jenny says**

This is my favorite type of book. "The Romanvo Cross" by Robert Masello is an excellent read worth a rich story line filled with historical references, believable science and likable characters.

This book is split between two times: present day Alaska and 1910's Russia. The two times intertwine, and I think Robert Masello did a marvelous job keeping both stories separate, but linked.

The main character of the book was Frank Slater, an epidemiologist who has worked in some of the harshest locations on the planet. After a shipping vessel comes into contact with an old casket from an abandoned Alaskan island, Slater is called in for his expertise. Although no one has lived on the island in nearly 100 years, there is still the thread of a contagion spreading to the mainland. In 1918, all of the members of a sect devoted to Rasputin died of the Spanish Flu, one of the deadliest epidemics there has ever been. Slater selects a team of scientist from around the world to study the unique conditions on the island that may have led to the preservation of the Spanish Flu virus in the permafrost entombed bodies.

The second story line in the book is about the ill-fated Romanov family, the last rulers of Russia. The family's relationship with the historically misunderstood Rasputin caused a great deal of turmoil in the upper echelon of Russian government. Ultimately the murder of Rasputin by close members of the royal family sets the stage for the fall of the Romanovs. The sudden decline and kidnapping of the family was presented through the eyes of Anastasia, the famed youngest daughter who for a long time many believed lived through the terrible massacre.

Masello's ability to link present-day epidemiology to the Romanov family was just brilliant. First, I like Frank because he is a reliable character, he has an interesting job and he is up for a little adventure. I also love the science part; being a scientist myself these are my favorite types of books to read. A little history, a little adventure, mix in some science and romance, and sold! You can tell Masello did a lot of research on the Spanish Flu and the Romanovs, which only makes the story much more realistic. Also, by reading this book, it intrigued me to do some of my own research. If a book catches your attention, and you want to dig deeper, then it is a good book. My only small problem with the book was how quickly the romance was introduced. I

like romance, but it seemed kind of thrown in at the last minute.

I recommend this book to anyone who likes a good story with historical figures, real science, and a bit of adventure added for spice.

This book was provided to me for my honest opinion.

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### **Judy says**

The Romanov Cross is the latest thriller by Robert Masello. I will say right off the bat, I am not much of a fan of this genre. I picked it up because I hoped to learn life on Bering Sea islands.

What I liked:

The settings & culture: Although St. Peter's Island is fictional, it gives a peek at Alaskan Indian folklore, tradition and Russian influence on life bordering the Bering Strait. The story begins for Major Frank Slater (the good guy) in Afghanistan. (Personally, I thought this was the best part of the book, plot-wise, I almost wished it had stayed there.)

The history: A portion of the book also reflected the Romanov history from which the book title derives. The reader learns a smidgen about Rasputin and his influence on Alexandra. There is some information to be gleaned about the Spanish flu epidemic.

What I didn't care for:

The characters: They felt only slight better than stock characters. The personalities weren't well-developed.

Point of view: The story was told from three points of view: Frank Slater, "the bad guys" and Princess Anastasia of the Romanovs. I think two POVs would have been adequate. I don't feel the "bad guy" perspective lends much to the story especially since there is little to delineate between them personality-wise.

Actually, this book had potential with the uniqueness of the setting, history and culture. The problem occurred with the overall blandness. It would be like making oatmeal without stirring it to get the lumps out and forgetting to add salt. It has the potential to be good (if you like oatmeal) but only if you put a little extra time and effort into making it good.

2.5 stars

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### **Margaret Wilkening says**

From the time Anastasia Romanov stumbles upon the rocky shore of a remote Alaskan island, beset by wolves, I was hooked on The Romanov Cross by Robert Masello. In a scientific thriller that ties the history

of the failing Russian imperial Tsar with modern epidemiology, Masello does a masterful job of writing an exciting page turner. The plot of the *The Romanov Cross* interplays between the story of how Anastasia receives the cross, then journeys to Alaska in the 1910s, and the race to discover if the cemetery on the now deserted island could possibly contain live virus cells from the devastating Spanish flu virus which decimated world populations at the end of World War I. Thrown into the mix are some local bad boy fishermen, who are outside the law more than within it, and are determined to scavenge whatever they can from the forlorn island.

I was already well within the book when I discovered that the story also had supernatural elements. I was apprehensive about continuing, envisioning zombies and werewolves stumbling through the plot, but I would encourage readers to stay with the book, even if the supernatural is not something you are drawn to. Masello does a very nice job balancing the possibilities of science with the world beyond scientific explanation. *The Romanov Cross* is a great book to put on your to-read list!

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### **Stephanie says**

This is the first book I've read by Robert Masello, and I thoroughly enjoyed the blend of treasure hunting and historical fiction. The story also weaves in the Russian Romanov dynasty and the devastation of the Spanish flu.

The story lines converge when U.S. soldier is sent to Alaska to exhume the bodies of Spanish flu victims to determine whether the virus is, in fact, extinct. At the same time, a group of treasure hunters is also determined to get to the bodies, convinced that one of them holds the emerald cross of the title.

The multiple story lines and the blend of fact and fiction are all handled very well, and it's filled with thrills and suspense throughout.

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### **Jonathan Tomes says**

*The Romanov Cross* by Robert Masello is one of the top five books that I have read as far as entertainment value in the last couple of years. Masello wrote another of my recent favorites, *Blood and Ice*, to which I gave five stars. Both are supernatural thrillers. Masello is almost unmatched in his ability to combine history, science, and the supernatural into a compelling tale. In this one, he manages to combine into a can't-put-down thriller the death of the Romanovs except for Anastasia, the youngest daughter, a resurrection of the Spanish influenza virus, which killed millions back then, and the mysteries of Alaska, from wolf packs to Inuits. I particularly liked that the hero, an epidemiologist, had been kicked out of the Army for punching out his commander when the commander made a snide remark about the death of one of his patients. The characters, from the epidemiologist, to the Inuit mayor that must be involved in the effort to contain the virus, to young Anastasia, are very sympathetic and make you really want to know what happens to each of them. I'd give this book six stars, but my rating system is from one to five. Maybe I could say five plus!

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## **Ines says**

What I liked about this book is that even though there are some “supernatural” parts to the story, the rest seems realistic. People and their actions sound real which is usually something I find lacking in novels taking place in the real world. And the fact that it deals with the possible outbreak of the Spanish flu only makes it even more interesting in my mind.

If you’re wondering where do the Romanovs feature in the Spanish flu outbreak, I am not going to tell you, and you will never guess either.

I find the whole idea of the novel very intriguing and I finished the book wanting to learn more about what happened in Russia and with the Romanovs, just so I could check whether the ideas I got from this book are based in fact or the author made it work for him.

It takes a while for the story to pick up pace, in the beginning you have no idea why are you reading two different stories but once they start coming together, you’re hooked.

And now I’ve said that the story seems realistic, I should add that the storytelling has some horror elements. The horrifying part being they seem possible.

Also, at some point, before you realize there are some supernatural parts to the story, you start wondering how some things would be possible (a pack of wolves surviving on a rather small island for decades?) but once the story gets you to realize there are some unexplained spiritual things happening in this world, you just go with it.

Which brings me to the fact that after reading the book, I was left wondering about the religious/spiritual inclinations of the author. There is a mention of both in the novel, but in a positive way when it’s spiritual, and less positive when it’s religious in the modern-day sense (being a believer of a particular religion).

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## **Debbi says**

I forced myself to make it to the end but this was a disappointing book. I don't mind speculative history but appears the author did very little homework on the Russian Church or piety. The science stuff was interesting but seemed forced and often left me incredulous of its veracity. And, once again, we have the tiresome theme that goes: Native religion = good and noble. Christianity = bad. Wow, I never seen that one before (/sarcasm off). I found myself doing a lot of eye-rolling at the end. One man in all of Alaska can save the day. Really? Can't hand this stuff off to the authorities?

I gave it two stars because I did think the author did a good job of character development. I just wish he had written them into a believable story.

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## **Lyn (Readinghearts) says**

Ever since the DaVinci Code came out, and I saw the movie National Treasure, I have been fascinated by stories that blend action/suspense with a strong historical base. The Romanov Cross by Robert Masello takes



this even a bit further and actually tells two distinct stories. The first is the story of government epidemiologist Frank Slater, who has been tasked through out his career with doing research in the worst places that the U.S. Government can send him. His current assignment is no different as he is sent to a small, isolated island off the coast of Alaska to research a colony that was completely annihilated by the Spanish flu. I found this story to be an adventure tale of the best kind, complete with treasure hunters, colorful local characters, a bit of local Inuit lore, and a race against an enemy buried for over 100 years in the frozen turf.

The characters in this first story were engaging from Frank Slater and his team, all the way to the treasure hunters and their families. I actually felt quite a bit of empathy for Harley, mostly due to the huge impact his decision to pull up the coffin from the sea had on his life. I wondered if he would have done things differently if he could do a "do over". My favorite characters, though, were the members of Frank Slater's team, especially Frank, Nika, and Professor Kozak.

The first story would have kept me turning pages and gotten high reviews, even if it was presented by itself, but this book had a bonus. That bonus was a second story centered around the end of the Romanov Dynasty, and the age old controversy of whether Anastasia Romanov was killed with her family or escaped. Masello takes this myth and wraps it up in a love story between Ana and a young Bolshevik guard who is give the job of guarding her. Here again, he weaves a wonderful story that could stand on its own perfectly, and is, for the most part, perfectly believable.

Blending two stories, as was done here, can be a hit or a miss, but in the case of this book and with the skill of this author, it is definitely a hit. In addition to enjoying both stories, I really enjoyed the way that Masello was able to weave them together with such smoothness and ease. The only part of the story that I didn't feel was necessary was the supernatural element. It's not that it didn't fit, or that it wasn't well presented. It did not detract from the overall story one bit. I just felt that the two stories were excellent by themselves and that the supernatural element was unnecessary.

I have heard others talk about how the ending was a transparent set up for a sequel. Whether a sequel is written or not, I found the ending suitable prophetic and thought provoking. As such, I felt it was perfectly legitimate.

I am actually a bit surprised that this author has not been on my radar before now since I really enjoy reading books of this type and have read several by Steve Berry and Brad Meltzer, along with everything Dan Brown has written. He is definitely on my radar now, though, and I plan to read the other books that he has written.

A big thanks to Netgalley and Random House for furnishing me with a Unproofed copy of this book to read and review.

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## **Dianne says**

The fate of the Romanov family in the hands of Russian rebels has always been shrouded in mystery an intrigue. Robert Masello has put his own, masterful spin on what happened to young Anastasia Romanov, the Grand Duchess of All the Russias while weaving a tale of plague, scientific discovery and greed.

The story switches between the fate of Anastasia almost one hundred years ago and the acts of man, nature, and history in modern times, all coming together on a secluded and frigid island in Alaska, overrun with wolves and long-lived superstitions and beliefs that this was once the secret refuge of Rasputin, the mad

Russian monk.

Scientist and doctor, epidemiologist Frank Slater is in charge of an expedition that goes to this secluded area to investigate a potentially lethal phenomenon: The permafrost has begun to melt, exposing bodies from a colony that was wiped out by the dreaded Spanish flu of 1918. Frank must determine if the thawed remains still carry the deadly virus in their frozen flesh and, if so, ensure that it doesn't come back to life.

There are also two romances blossoming, that between Anastasia and one of her guards-turned-savior, and in the present day, between Frank and the petite, yet strong Inuit village mayor, Niki, as each couple faces life and death challenges.

While Frank and his team plunge forward trying to avoid a possible return of the Spanish flu and its worldwide devastation, petty thieves attempt to steal precious artifacts and jewels discovered in the ancient graveyard.

I was spellbound by this well-told story, completely, from its military involvement, its mystical qualities, the romance, the scientific search, possible world disaster, and even the chase scene through a bitter snowstorm! Read it! Its appeal to many reader-types is widespread! There's something for everyone!

This is a powerfully written tale, full of imagination, mystery, science and action!

This ARC edition was provided by NetGalley and Random House in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Mimi says**

One of the best thrillers I have ever read - an excellent blend of history, current events, germ theory, and not the best choice to read when a friend is under flu quarantine, it made me question every throat clearing. If all of Masello's books are on this par, I will keep an eye out for others.

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### **Books says**

When last have you read a book where the ending...no, the entire story, left you floating on an exhilarating high? When last have you read something that made you feel breathless from all the adrenaline shooting through your body after experiencing scene after scene of explosive, nail-biting action? If your answer is "not for some time", then go get your copy of *The Romanov Cross* by Robert Masello and settle in for the long haul. Boys and girls, this book will keep you lost in its pages for hours!

I don't even know where to begin to tell you how amazing and what an absolutely worthwhile read this book is. A devastating flu epidemic, an emerald cross surrounded by mystery, a ghost on a deserted island, the unforgiving Alaskan backdrop, a religious sect devoted to Grigori Rasputin, modern technology, and old graves desecrated for scientific purposes in a race against time to save present day civilization from the possible recurrence of the Spanish flu virus of 1918...all of this is only the proverbial tip of the ice berg. *The Romanov Cross* has layer upon layer upon layer of secrets and reveals, and one shocking discovery after the other. The best part about this whole book is that it never has a dull moment. It moves at a breakneck pace and is loaded with interesting facts and spot-on historical information. One thing that was clear as day is how

superbly the author did his research for this book; and all the chapters taking the reader back to the early nineteenth century were so believably realistic, it felt as though these characters could still be alive today. To be quite honest, I'm not into historical fiction and I don't know much about history other for that which I was taught at school many moons ago. But face it. Everyone knows who Rasputin is, right? Even if every time he is mentioned in this book the song titled, Rasputin, by Germany hit group Boney-M starts playing in your head. The author really brought Rasputin and the Romanov family back to life in an utterly realistic way. The author did a magnificent job on taking the rumor about Anastacia surviving her family's execution in 1918 and giving it a paranormal and twisted spin to fit in with a modern day storyline. No, no, he didn't turn Ana into a vampire. That would've been too cliché and predictable. He did something far better with her character, and a lot more mysterious and awe-inspiring.

This is one of the rare books where I gained so much historical knowledge (which got me so interested in the Romanov legacy I found myself clicking over to Google to get more background on these royals) and learned some interesting things about the Inuit ways and their superstitions. The author expertly blends a multitude of characters, each with their own background story, to build an unforgettable masterpiece where nothing is what it seems. The story is told from Anastasia's point of view in early nineteenth century, Charlie and Harley Vane – the two scumbag, yet oddly endearing, treasure hunters, and Dr Frank Slater the epidemiologist's point of view.

If all historical fiction books are as interesting and well-written as Masello's rendering of *The Romanov Cross*, I can definitely see myself reading more of this genre. And I'm sure as heck going to read more books by this author. His attention to detail is superb, and without any lengthy explanations he builds the backgrounds in which the different scenes take place, and then places the reader smack-dab in the middle of it. Although there are quite a lot of characters in this story, it is not confusing as the author smoothly transitions between scenes. Whether you're a history buff or not, this book has something for every reader. If you're more into action, adventure, thrills and chills, then this very engaging, brilliant read is without a doubt also for you!

I received a free copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley, in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Melodie says**

I was excited to read an ARC of *The Romanov Cross* for several reasons - the hint of an archaeological mystery, the tension of a thriller and the alternate history the blurb promised.

The plot itself - that Anastasia Romanov somehow ended up on a fictional Alaskan island clutching a cross and what was left of the Russian jewels, as well as a mysterious disease that decimated the inhabitants and eventually brought a team of HAZMAT-equivalent scientists to the island hoping to prevent another Spanish flu - was intriguing. And it did keep me reading. Masello writes characters well even if he does make them dumber than dirt most of the time.

This is certainly true for his main character, Dr. Frank Slater. Slater's been court martialled out of the military for giving illegal aid to a young Afghani girl. His action elicits sympathy at first, but as he blunders from one serious misjudgment after another and eventually causes the entire island to go up in flames, the sympathy evaporates. The guy comes across as criminally incompetent all the way to the end....not the impression a protagonist should make. I should be rooting for him, not wincing and rolling my eyes at his choices.

I braced myself for several inaccuracies regarding the Alaskan setting, and was not disappointed. Although the author mentions the fact there is no road leading to Nome in his afterword, his reliance on that road to heighten tension during a critical car chase completely turned me off at a crucial point. Considering he could've switched out the racing cars with a snow machine race up a froze river with little effort came across as lazy and cavalier. There were several other anachronisms in the setting but this is fiction, after all. (They bugged me because I live in Alaska; for most readers, their impression of the Last Frontier will remain as fictionalized as this book.)

In any case, this was a fun read almost to the end.

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### **Patrice Hoffman says**

The Romanov Cross by Robert Masello is an interesting read that kept my attention the whole way through. A recently disgraced epidemiologist Dr. Frank Slater is tasked with leading his crew on a job that no one wants. This job leads him to the Alaska where an extremely severe health risk has surfaced with the discovery of a grave from a colony that was wiped out by Spanish flu. For those of you who are history buffs, the Spanish flu of 1918 killed millions of people and was one of the deadliest disasters in history. Increased travel during this time helped to spread this deadly virus to many parts of the world including America.

Dr. Slater's team is comprised of people at the height of their professions and are able to decipher if the flu is still a risk to the people of Alaska. The suspense and thrills come in once there is evidence that treasure hunters have been exposed. If rogue treasure hunters aren't enough to entice someone to read this novel I add that there are wolves. Big, scary, tough, mean, killer wolves. Yes!

This novel had interesting characters such as Dr. Slater and Nika who are given enough depth for the reader to root for them. I even found the greedy, insanely stupid treasure hunters to be interesting. There weren't too many characters in this story which I highly appreciate. It often times gets to be too much going on with the introduction of secondary characters who do nothing to move the story forward. Luckily Masello spared us of that gear-grinder in this novel.

In conclusion, The Romanov Cross was really fun to read. It's smooth transitions between history and the present will be fun for readers who enjoy their fiction with a serving of history. The supernatural occurrences add to the suspense in the book in a realistic way since there aren't many quinessential gun battles. Oh! And did I mention there are wolves? Just had to throw that back out there. Overall, I really enjoyed this novel and I look forward to reading others I missed by this author. Fans of Steve Berry will find this book worthy of the space on their to-read lists.

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