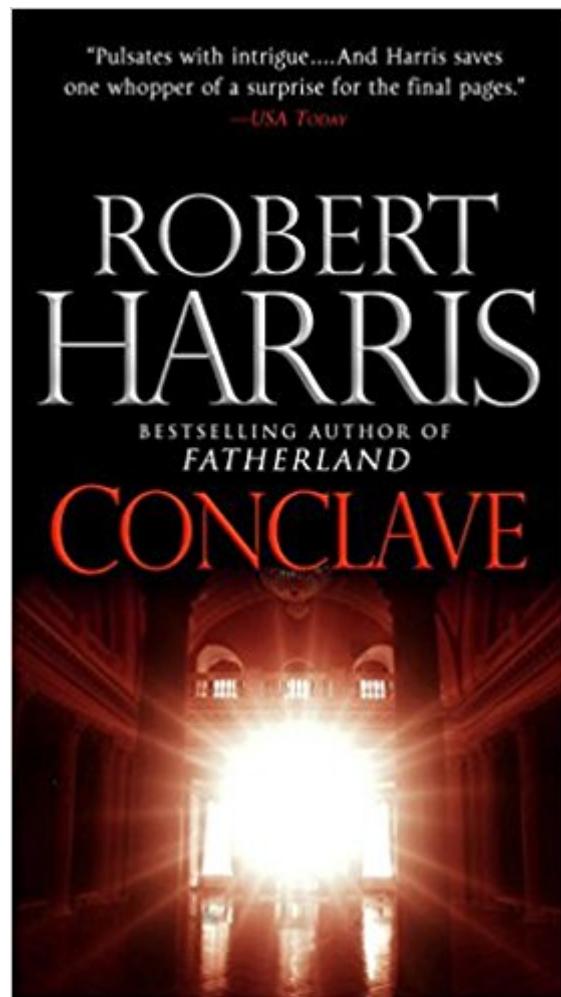


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# Conclave: A Novel



## Synopsis

The best-selling author of *Enigma* and *Fatherland* turns to today's Vatican in a ripped-from-the-headlines novel, and gives us his most ambitious, page-turning thriller yet--where the power of God is nearly equaled by the ambition of men. The pope is dead. Behind the locked doors of the Sistine Chapel, one hundred and eighteen cardinals from all over the globe will cast their votes in the world's most secretive election. They are holy men. But they have ambition. And they have rivals. Over the next seventy-two hours one of them will become the most powerful spiritual figure on Earth. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Harris has written a gripping, smart book. . . . This could become the Catholic version of *The Satanic Verses*. • Vanessa Friedman, *The New York Times Book Review* “Splendid. . . . Harris does not disappoint. . . . Whether you have faith in God, the Church, or neither, *Conclave* will keep you richly entertained. • Dennis Drabelle, *The Washington Post* “Triumphant. . . . I am about to use a word I have never knowingly used in any review of any book ever. During my 25-odd years of writing about books I have done my best to avoid clichés, slipshod summaries, oracular pronouncements and indeed anything else that might appear emblazoned on a book jacket. Nonetheless, there is only one possible word to describe Robert Harris’ new novel, and it is this: unputdownable. • Ian Sansom, *The Guardian* “A gripping read in the

authentic Harris mould . . . *Conclave*, though, is more than a crime novel, it is also a psychological and political thriller . . . The more one looks, the more cunning the book seems. *Conclave* is a triumphant addition to Harris' acclaimed output. •David Grylls, *The Sunday Times* "A gripping read. There are plenty of plot twists, revelations and high politicking to hook readers in. . . . An ecclesiastical version of *House of Cards* . . . *Conclave* is admirably brisk and its final twist is great fun." •Robbie Millen, *The Times* "A slick and fast-paced thriller . . . This entertaining and satisfying page-turner tells the tense story of the Machiavellian machinations of ambitious men, locked in a power-struggle that can only end in a puff of white smoke and power." •Huston Gilmore, *The Daily Express* "Ambition and intrigues are familiar ground to a former political journalist . . . gripping." •Rachel Cooke, *The Observer* "Fast-written and suspenseful, it's elegantly written entertainment from a first-rate storyteller." •Simon Humphreys, *The Mail on Sunday* "Despite papal fiction being such a crowded church, Harris, in *Conclave*, contrives a twist involving the number of cardinal-electors that seems to me completely new." •Mark Lawson, *The Guardian* "The novel begins to grip like a vice and manages to convey all the drama of an election without resorting to melodrama. He pulls off the difficult trick of making his cardinals seem no less holy for all their human foibles and, although this ruminative and low-key novel is very different from Harris' other books, it is well up to their standard." •Charlotte Heathcote, *Sunday Express* "The smartest bestselling author at work today . . . [Conclave is] a modern-day story that explores the power, glory and skullduggery behind the process of electing a new pope." •Richard T. Kelly, *Esquire* (UK) "Another high-class Harris thriller." •James Walton, *Reader's Digest* (UK) "An impressive outing from an extremely versatile author." •Publishers Weekly "Robert Harris, creator of grand, symphonic thrillers from *Fatherland* to *An Officer and a Spy*, scores with a chamber piece of a novel set in the Vatican in the days after a fictional pope dies....An illuminating read for anyone interested in the inner workings of the Catholic Church; for prelate-fiction superfans, it is pure temptation." •Kirkus Reviews, starred review

ROBERT HARRIS is the author of ten best-selling novels: *Fatherland*, *Enigma*, *Archangel*, *Pompeii*, *Imperium*, *The Ghost Writer*, *Conspirata*, *The Fear Index*, *An Officer and a Spy*, and *Dictator*. Several of his books have been adapted to film, most recently *The Ghost Writer*, directed by Roman Polanski. His work has been translated into thirty-seven languages. He lives in the village of

Kintbury, England, with his wife, Gill Hornby. From the Hardcover edition.

Having recently reviewed the author's magnificent Cicero trilogy, it was quite an adjustment to jump to the present day and focus upon the selection of a new Pope by the college of Cardinals. But Harris is such a fine writer, who so thoroughly does his research, and skillfully can explain concepts (whether the Roman Senate or the Church's Curia) to the uninitiated, that this was an easy transition. While I don't believe the current volume is as strong as some others Harris has written, there is no question that this man can spin a yarn that will entrap the reader, and maybe educate him a bit as well. The pluses are many, including those identified above. Few writers are as skillful in building suspense while explaining procedures in this setting unfamiliar to most of us. He is particularly effective here in showing how the Cardinals were "politicking" while they were supposed not to engage in this very practice. He concisely explains through the characters what the Curia ("the heart and brain of the Church") is and how it functions in selecting a new Pope. The reader comes to understand such terms as "apostolic constitution" and "in pectore" or secret selection of a new Cardinal. I found the disagreements between the progressive and traditional wings of the college, which has been going on since at least the papacy of Pope John XXIII in the 1960's, and which has prompted fears of an eventual "Great Schism," to emerge with some clarity from the story. However, even an author as skilled as Harris faces tremendous difficulties in rendering the election of a Pope as an exciting event. As one Cardinal mentions, it is "a laborious routine." Vote after vote occurs, each one virtually identical to the others. There is also a lot of praying going on which is not too stimulating to read. Basically, the action is limited to the Sistine Chapel and the Cardinals' dorm. So the basic story is not too exciting, though interesting. Apparently to liven things up, Harris resorts to what I shall term the "surprise" and the "really big surprise." While the surprise (that involves terrorism) works well I think, given what Europe has recently experienced (especially France), the really big surprise right at the end I thought highly ill-advised and verging on sensationalism. It also immediately ends the novel so the reader is left to construct his own final conclusion to the story. These are just my personal reactions, but they do play a role for me in dropping to four stars rather than five. Nonetheless, a fine thriller well worthy of reading. Once again, a fine job by Berryville Graphics in Virginia in producing the book.

I thought I had the "twist" spotted (early) and was reading along half resentful that the plot was so transparent. Nevertheless, I appreciated the well researched look into the dynamics of the Church at its highest quarters. Then, the last pages of the novel. Wow. Okay, well done, Mr. Harris. Well

done. Clever, and, somehow, plausible.

Robert Harris never disappoints in delivering a well-crafted page-turned chock full of interesting characters and engrossing details. While the ending feels a little rushed, overall the material is quite absorbing and the overall story very satisfying.

This was a terrific, fast read. I was totally taken in by the story and read it pretty much straight through. While I spotted clues to the ending, I didn't guess the final twist. Very enjoyable and highly recommended read.

I can't wait to talk to someone about this book. I was fascinated/loved the first 95%. The insight on the Vatican was intriguing. I just can't decide what I thought about the ending... I would absolutely say - Read It!

Another hit for Robert Harris! I suspect he wrote closer to the bone than the Vatican would like. Politics is messy everywhere but Mr. Harris throws in some twists you won't expect.

Robert Harris is a masterful storyteller: his plotting is excellent as is his writing. He obviously does a lot of research so that you feel you have learnt something, but quite painlessly, as he keeps up the momentum of the story. I appreciate the intelligence of his writing and his insights into contemporary issues.

Compelling. I could not put it down. The descriptions of the art in the Sistene Chapel made me want to pull an art book out and look at the scenes. The characters were fully formed, even Benitez, in retrospect. I want to read more by this author.

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