



# The Seville Communion

*Arturo Pérez-Reverte*

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## **The Seville Communion** Arturo Pérez-Reverte

Someone has hacked into the Pope's personal computer-not to spy on the Vatican or to spread a virus, but to send an urgent plea for help: SAVE OUR LADY OF THE TEARS. The crumbling Baroque church in the heart of Seville is slated for demolition-but two of its defenders have suddenly died. Accidents? Or murders? And was the church itself somehow involved? The Vatican promptly dispatches Father Lorenzo Quart, their worldly and enormously attractive emissary, to investigate the situation, track down the hacker, known only as "Vespers"-and stay alive. Thus begins a sophisticated and utterly suspenseful page-turner that has taken its readers by storm. The Seville Communion is superb entertainment, a rich and intricate thriller that announces another triumph by a master storyteller who excels at the intellectually provocative mystery.

## **The Seville Communion Details**

Date : Published May 6th 1999 by Mariner Books (first published 1995)

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Author : Arturo Pérez-Reverte

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# From Reader Review The Seville Communion for online ebook

## James says

3+ stars to Arturo Pérez-Reverte's The Seville Communion, a Spanish-to-English translated thriller novel with a very intriguing story about the Catholic church, corporate corruption and love. This was a good book, and I'd recommend it to fans of the genre or of translated novels; however, it could have packed even more of a punch, which is why it falls somewhere between a 3 and 4.

### Story

Father Quart works in a special research unit (IEA -- Investigation for External Affairs) within the Catholic church, and he is sent to Seville, Spain, where someone has hacked into the Pope's personal computer to leave a message about helping a church about to be demolished. Quart, a young and handsome priest who follows the rules, finds himself torn between a lustful woman, different sides of the church and a town divided in what to do about the church. The land was deeded to the church hundreds of years ago as long as mass is said every Thursday in someone's honor. But when a ruthless corporation and corrupt town government want to sell the land to make more money, everyone's lives are in danger. The business man's wife is in the papers for cheating on him and the priest who runs the church is suspected of murder. Who's playing games and what's really going on beneath the surface? Quart finds out in the end, but he never really knows who to trust.

### Strengths

The cast of characters is dynamic and complex. Within the church, you've got very different types of priests, and each one makes valid points about why their way is the right way. The woman having an affair almost makes you root for her to be successful against her husband, and her husband even comes off as respectable and honorable at many points. The 3 villains who have been hired to kill the priests are laughable and vivid. The lead priest, Father Quart, has a lot of depth, and you feel his struggle throughout the novel. I'm still unsure why he remains a priest, but it adds great conflict in his story and the church's story.

### b>Suggestions

The plot is very strong, but it is purposely revealed in small amounts to draw readers in. It works, but when you get to the last 50 pages, it unwinds rather quickly with very little backstory given to support why each person made the decisions they made. It is believable, yet you want more to help drive home the complexity of the story and the need for everyone to get what they wish for. With some tweaking and a few additional story points, this would be a very strong novel.

### Final Thoughts

For fans of thrillers and those with interest in the Catholic church, this is a great read. It certainly says many good things and many bad things about the church, and there is a lot of history about Spain to draw comparisons and conclusions about what really happened in the early 20th century. The language is beautiful and the messages are vivid. Very few translation issues if anything to even comment on. I'd read more by this author... definite style!

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## Judi says

A hacker breaks into the Vatican's computer to leave a message for the Pope that says that there i's a church

in Seville that "kills to defend itself." It turns out that there is a church that some want to tear down and to be replaced with a more profitable adventure. And two people have died accidentally. Abhorring any kind of scandal, the Catholic Church gets the IEA (Institute of External Affairs) to look into the matter. They send Father Lorenzo Quart to impartially gather information about the unfortunate incidents of this run down Baroque church called Our Lady of the Tears and to determine the hacker's identity. Quart is not your Father Confessor. He's well dressed, good looking, secretive and a good Intelligence soldier for the Church. Soon he finds that the answers in Seville are not the ones he is seeking.

For me, this was not a fast read, which is a positive statement. Seville is a very enchanting, old place which Pérez-Reverte describes in a style that engages all of our senses. He creates some very unforgettable characters that are reinforced with repeated descriptions. The plot is thick with politics, greed, history, yet moves along at pace that can be compared to a pleasant walk through Seville (which there are many of). I would not call this an action thriller or a "page-turner" as it wanders a bit too much and I did have to go back to the beginning and start again during the second chapter. But there is something that compelled me to the end. The concern with old fashioned faith, love, commitment and the philosophy thereof are intellectually satisfying. There are some humorous scenes and the ending twists a few times. Perhaps the most rewarding surprises are Father Quart's decisions and the true meaning behind the title of the book.

I recommend the book, but with one caveat; read it because it takes you to Seville, not because you are looking for a good hacker mystery.

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### ?????? ?????? says

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### Ms.pegasus says

The set-up is intriguing. A hacker, dubbed “Vespers,” breaks into the Pope's personal email and leaves a cryptic plea to save an obscure historic church in Seville. Political and financial interests including the archbishop of Seville want the church demolished to exploit the value of the real estate. The hacker has been careful to conceal his tracks, and the security breach seems to disturb the Vatican hierarchy more than the contents of the message, despite the disclosure that recently, two deaths occurred during the repair work on the church. The deaths were apparent accidents. A municipal architect fell due to a loose balustrade; the archbishop's secretary was crushed by a chunk of debris from the ceiling. The email drops dark insinuations about the hand of God. The focus, however, is on the hacker, who has elevated the affair to a high stakes

political confrontation between Archbishop Paolo Spada and Cardinal Iwaszkiewicz. The Pope has directed the Institute for External Affairs, a kind of Internal Affairs Department headed by Archbishop Spada, to discover the identity of the hacker. Cardinal Iwaszkiewicz hopes for a misstep that can be blamed on his rival.

From the start, the dissonance between a computer hacker and Vatican emails commands interest which is intensified by the delineation of the political rivalries. Pérez-Reverte involves even the most secular-minded of readers in this maneuvering for power.

He creates a long list of colorful characters. Cardinal Iwaszkiewicz is immediately established as shadowy and dangerous. His department, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, was formerly called the Office of the Inquisition. When introduced into the story, he lingers by the window rather than taking a seat across from Archbishop Spada. There is an electrical outage that shrouds the meeting in semi-darkness. Their conversation is thick with careful formality that exudes even more menace. The third attendee at this meeting is Father Lorenzo Quart, Spada's agent. He's reliable and discreet, "*as precise and stable as a Swiss Army knife.*" (p.7) Hints of his childhood also suggest he is a brittle vessel of guarded emotions. He is the embodiment of religious inversion. Celibacy is the foundation of his pride; obedience is a replacement for piety. Drop-dead handsome and elegantly tailored, Quart is the enigmatic agent dispatched to Seville to conduct the delicate and highly secret investigation.

In Seville more characters appear. Pencho Gavira is an ambitious banker; his assistant Celestino Perégil is a toad-like toady with a gambling problem. Don Ibrahim is a disbarred lawyer whose wistful memories mingle fact and fiction; El Potro del Mantelete is a perpetually benumbed ex-boxer and failed bullfighter; La Niña Puñales is an alcoholic chanteuse scraping by at seedy nightclubs. Gris Marsala is the chief architect and art historian in charge of the stalled restoration project; Macarena Bruner de Lebrija is the banker Gavira's estranged wife; Maria Cruz Eugenia Bruner is the dowager duchess and Macarena's mother; and Don Octavo Machuca is Macarena's godfather and the about-to-retire chairman of Gavira's bank. It's worth the time to keep a notebook of these names while reading the book. There are additional characters drawn from the past as well as the story's present. The author gives each character, particularly the comedic ones, a compelling set of intentions and then releases them to pursue their convoluted schemes. The characters do not disappoint. Some even warm to their roles.

Quart arrives in Seville protesting that he is only there as a neutral observer — a mere reporter of sorts. He is blind to the fact that his very objectivity is what is objectionable to the impassioned supporters of the church. Strip away the emotional connections to history and art and all that remains is a monetary assessment. Obviously, no one provides any clues about the identity of the mysterious hacker. The person with the strongest motive is the parish priest so old he hardly seems a candidate for computer literacy.

Neutrality is a convenient conceit that not even Quart fully believes. There are always consequences. A past investigation by Quart had disturbing results. An activist Brazilian priest was brutally murdered after one of his "neutral" reports. (The ethical position of neutrality is a central theme in Pérez-Reverte's next book).

That the church's supporters are not motivated by religious fervor is a surprising conundrum. Father Ferro, the parish priest, is a battered relic whose religious belief dried up long ago. He rebukes Quart's taunts with a defiant declaration: "*Faith doesn't ever need the existence of God.*" (p.134). Quart dismissively assesses Father Oscar the assistant priest's fervor: "*At your age, life is more dramatic. Ideas and lost causes carry you away.*" (p.132). The story slips from a thriller to variations on the theme of existential crisis.

Pérez-Reverte is most successful at evoking the spirit of Seville. The Plaza Virgen de los Reyes is described

as the “*crossroads of three religions.*” (p.69) White washed walls, the scent of orange blossoms, manzanilla crafted over the centuries, and azure skies dotted by pigeons envelope the senses. In his epigram he offers the usual caution that this is a work of fiction, but adds: “*Only the setting is true. Nobody could invent a city like Seville.*”

The touches of humor that are interspersed are somewhat less successful. The reader is complicit in these attempts, not so much due to the skill of the writing as to the fondness developed for the characters and their foibles. (view spoiler)

Readers of Pérez-Reverte's earlier books will be delighted with his love for art, history and story-telling. Despite the existential exploration that preoccupies much of the story, he also returns to the tonal color of mystery he opened with. His conclusion reverts to a satisfying mix of closure and beguiling ambiguity. Yet, it is clear he is an author in transition. His mind is already focusing on more somber thoughts that draw on his career as a journalist and which are explored in his next book, *THE PAINTER OF BATTLES*. I didn't enjoy this book as much as I enjoyed *THE CLUB DUMAS*, but a book by Pérez-Reverte is always a worthwhile read.

For those of us who have never been to Seville, photos of the actual Plaza Virgen de los Reyes and the Santa Cruz area are worth viewing.

<http://www.aviewoncities.com/seville/...>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa\\_Cr...](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa_Cr...)

The polychrome sculpture of the Spanish baroque period is central to the church's mystique. Gregorio Fernandez and Juan Martinez Montanes are two of the primary artists of the period. This website is one example of the pieces from this period.

<http://caravaggista.com/2011/09/baroq...>

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**Chrissa Vasileiou says**

να ακμα απ? τα βιβλ?α του Ρεβ?ρτε που αποτελο?ν την ιερ? μου "Αγ?α Τρι?δα" των βιβλ?ων του! Μ?α πάλι? εκκλησ?α στη Σεβ?λλη,που "σκοτ?νει" ?ποιον προσπαθε? να τη γκρεμ?σει. ?νας ειδικ?ς απεσταλμ?νος-ιερ?ας του Βατικανο? που καλε?ται να εξιχνι?σει την υπ?θεση. ?νθρωποι που επιδι?κουν το γκρ?μισμα ? τη σωτηρ?α του ναο?,ο καθ?νας για τους δικο?ς του λ?γους.Κι ?λα αυτ? με περιτ?λιγμα τη μοναδικ? ατμ?σφαιρα της ?μορφης Ισπαν?ας,με την ?ρα της σι?στας και τα ?θιμ? της,τα μυστικ? και τη μουσικ? της,τους ανθρ?πους της με τα 1000+1 πρ?σωπ? τους και τις συν?θει?ς τους,τους θρ?σκους,τους φιλ?τεχνους,τους αριβ?στες..να εξαιρετικ? "πακ?το",γραμμ?νο απ? τον μ?στερ της Ισπανικ?ς λογοτεχν?ας,να βιβλ?ο που θα σας μαγ?ψει τ?σο που δε θα θ?λετε να το αφ?σετε απ? τα χ?ρια σας μ?χρι να τελει?σει..Τα ?χει ?λα,σε απολαυστικ? ικανοποιητικ?ς αναλογ?ες.

(και ?ναν ποινικ? κολ?σιμο ιερ?α-πρωταγωνιστ?,που κ?ντεψε να ρ?ξει το Στα?ρο Ζαλμ? και το ρ?λο του ως πατ?ρα Ιω?ννη απ? τον...εκκλησιαστικ? μου θρ?νο! :P)

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## Kelly says

The end is disappointing. He falls into the dark lady cliché trap. But the book is beautifully written, with a touch of Marquez swirling around in there amongst the rest of his wonderful writing. The mystery's concept and development are mostly wonderful. I just think he couldn't decide to what to do with the ending, and he made the wrong choice. But again, great book. Loved it. I will read it again.

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## Margarida says

Este poderia ser um livro excelente. Um padre do Vaticano, um templário do século XX, é enviado a Sevilha, incumbido de uma missão: descobrir o pirata informático, denominado Vésperas, que conseguiu penetrar no computador do Papa.

Parecem, quase, dois romances diferentes. De um lado, temos a parte séria, Lorenzo Quart, o padre, a filha da duquesa, Macarena Bruner, uma história romântica e trágica, a fé, um pároco obstinado em defender uma pequenina igreja no centro de Sevilha; do outro lado, grupo de pequenos vigaristas, com uma candura, uma graça, revestidos de um certo humor, agarrados a uma Sevilha de outros tempos, a touradas, coplas, olés, copos de manzanilla e suspiros nostálgicos e amores pretéritos. Claro que não deixamos de nutrir uma certa simpatia pela Ninã Punãles, pelo Potro del Mantelete e pelo Don Ibrahim.

Poderia ser, mas entre o mistério do hacker e o trio de pintas, resta uma história triste, melancólica, que mostra a luta entre o poder da Igreja e a crença em algo mais profundo.

Todavia, à semelhança de outros romances, o autor termina de forma surpreendente, agarrando o leitor à trama até ao fim.

E o mais engraçado é que existem inúmeras referências a personagens de outros livros de Pérez-Reverte. :-)

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## Algernon says

I may prefer Arturo-Perez Reverte when he writes his historical adventures featuring Captain Alatraste, but his contemporary thrillers are not without merit. **The Seville Communion** is my second one, after **The Club Dumas**, and I had some issues with it, but overall it was quite a memorable journey, one that I intend to retrace by visiting the location soon.

As a thriller set in the clerical world and dealing with mysterious murders, church politics, high finance and crises of faith, the book reminded me more of Umberto Eco rather than Dan Brown. It is more concerned with cultural heritage, spiritual identity and careful characterization, rather than trying to be provocative, speculative and fast paced. In fact one of my main issues is with pacing, where I often felt the plot was having a sedate siesta under the hot Andalusian sun, waiting for the night and the narrow, meandering alleys of the old Santa Cruz district in order to get some progress made. There's quite a lot of time spent in small cafes, eating tapas, drinking Manzanilla and listening to flamenco music, having high brow conversations about astronomy and faith, history and modernism, celibacy, obedience and redemption.

The main story is about a small, derelict baroque church in the old town of Seville, and the struggle between its priest and powerful real estate developers over the location. Two deaths of people directly involved in the

church affairs have been ruled accidental, but an anonymous hacker alerts the Pope in Rome that foul play may be involved. Rome sends a troubleshooter to assess the situation and report back. From this basic premise, Perez-Reverte develops an intricate dance of misdirection and mystery, bringing into the game quite a colourful cast of characters:

- Father Lorenzo Quart - the "Swiss Army Knife" agent of the Institute of External Affairs in Rome: disciplined and impartial, he values control and submission to the Church rules above all. He sees himself as a modern crusader, fighting the battles of the faith without questioning his commanders or the morality of his actions.

*The Nazarene certainly had had guts. Nobody need feel ashamed to carry His Cross like a flag. Quart often regretted not having another kind of faith. Men black with dust beneath their chain mail had once shouted the name of God as they charged into battle, to win eternal life and a place in heaven with their slashing swords. Living and dying had been so much simpler then.*

- Don Priamo Ferro - the impoverished priest of a small Spanish village, now in charge of the doomed Church of Our Lady of the Tears. Fiery, rebellious and uncompromising in his religious fervor, he has no respect for his superiors and would do anything to defend his parish.

- Gris Marsala - an attractive and unconventional older woman, American expat, with studies in the architecture and culture of Seville, she is in charge of the renovation work at the church.

- Macarena Bruner - hot blooded brunette Andaluzian beauty, heiress of an ancient Spanish Grandee family, mysterious femme fatale that is involved both with the church and with the bank that is trying to evict the premises. (Didn't really care for her name, I blame it on Rio , Los del Rio)

- Cruz Bruner - her elderly mother, duchess of El Nuevo Extremo and a trove of other titles with sonorous names but little income, living in the faded splendor of Casa del Postigo, her sumptuous family palace in the center of Seville.

- Pencho Gavira - youngish, ruthless and ambitious vice-president of the Cartujano Bank, husband of Macarena.

- Perengil - his right hand man, a venal private investigator with a gambling addiction.

- Don Ibrahim, El Potro del Mantelete and La Nina Pinales - a trio of small time crooks and losers: confidence trickster, ex-matador / boxer and flamenco singer. They provide some humor relief and a lot of local color and trivia. The author shows off here his book geek credentials by making puns in Latin : ODERINT DUM PROBENT (which can be translated either as "smell before you taste" or "Let them hate me, as long as they respect me")

There are more players in the game I didn't mention here - they are also important to the plot and well sketched - but I'm trying to be brief, and let the readers enjoy meeting each of them. It's quite a big cast of characters for a thriller, and my only complaint is that they are bit theatrical - like actors following a script - especially the villains who prove rather inept and predictable in the end.

Another small gripe is about computers. The book was written when 486 PC's were all the rage and a lot of the general population was still hazy about how they work. This is probably the reason why the author was unconvincing in writing about hackers, with a romantic view of secretive Robin Hoods attacking the establishment with pretty animated tools, reminiscent of 1980's Hollywood movies: *As he switches phone networks, he leaves behind a kind of explosive charge that erases any trace of his route. This hacker certainly knows what he's doing.*

Seville is as good a setting for the action as the Middle Age monastery from **The Name of the Rose** , providing a tumultuous history, a passionate people, a vibrant modern life mixing with a traditionalist older generation. I got a melancholic vibe of the passing of an era, a changing of the guard, the old soldiers fading away and the new ones more concerned with instant gratification and winning by any means. The Catholic Church used to have all the power in Spain, and its struggle for significance in the modern world was



ultimately the main attraction of the book for me, the question of what is worthy of preservation and what belongs in the dumping grounds of history. It is beautifully articulated by Gris Marsala:

*I'm convinced that every ancient building, picture, or book that's lost or destroyed, leaves us bereft. Impoverished.*

To illustrate this statement, the Church of Our Lady of the Tears is more than just an old pile of masonry, it is indelibly tied to one of the most romantic stories of doomed lovers in the tradition of Tristan and Isolde, Romeo and Juliet. They are Captain Xaloc and Carlotta Bruner, who met in Seville at the end of the XIX century - got separated by social conventions and intransigent families, making one leave to make his fortune by sailing to the Carribean, and the other to wait and watch from the tallest tower in town for a returning sail.

The ending was a bit too neat and clear cut for my taste, but the romantic aura of Seville and its histories I think will endure.

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### **Lynn Abbey says**

Okay, so I bought this book thinking it was part of the author's *Captain Alatrisme* series and almost returned it when I realized it was a technological thriller, set in 1995-vintage Seville, with a Vatican priest as the main character. I'm very glad I kept it.

For me, it was less a thriller (though the mysteries are intriguing), more an intense character-study of a very different sort of man. Lorenzo Quart, the priest and protagonist, characterizes himself as "the last Knight Templar," obedient and loyal to an institution that rarely has his best interests at heart. He's not a character who happens to be a priest, but a priest who happens to be a participant in a series of relatively small events that change him in cherished ways.

The backdrop is Seville, Spain -- a city I now want to visit -- and the supporting characters are, I have to believe, as typical of that city as any of Damon Runyon's or Dashell Hammett's characters were typical of their milieux, and just as dignified and memorable.

I read this novel in a translation by Sonia Soto who rendered Perez-Reverte's prose into simple, yet elegant English

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### **Jim Fonseca says**

A mystery with great local color of Seville, Spain. A handsome young priest works for the Vatican's, let's call it "Internal Affairs Division." He is called to Seville to look into the mess surrounding a potential church closing. It's a tiny parish and the diocese can make a lot of money by demolishing the church and selling the land. The problem is that a few diehards want to keep the church open: a crotchety old priest and his young protégée; a glamorous young woman whose antics get her in celebrity newspapers; her mother who has money to support the church; and a renegade American nun who is working on restoring the church statues and artwork. The husband of the glamorous woman is a banker who is in on the financial deal. The banker hires a trio, two men and a woman, a kind of Three Stooges, to spy on the various parties and to make sure the church closes. Three people die in the church in mysterious circumstances. The young priest and the

glamorous woman are attracted to each other and let's just say that everyone in the novel ends up with a lot to confess. Fast-moving and a good read.

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### **Lisa says**

The star of this show was Seville, that Andalusian centuries old charmer wrapped in her robes of every sort of pageantry the history of Europe had to offer. Pérez-Reverte deftly uses the complexity of setting, its layers of contrasts and contradictions to underpin the same aspects of its clerics, the stubborn old priest Don Priamo and handsome, disciplined Lorenzo Quart.

The story-ostensibly a thriller-is set in motion when a hacker makes his way through to the pope's personal computer leaving a message concerning a beleaguered church in Seville that kills to save itself. The church dispatches Quart, its James Bond in a clerical collar, to find out what's going on in Seville. Quart finds Seville awash in romance and beauty. The Andalusian sun glows off the skin of the handsome blue bloods, orange blossoms shimmer under its ray. Yet, there are troubling accidental deaths at Our Lady of Tears, a baroque church in the heart of Santa Cruz. The crumbling church sets in the midst of a real estate gold mine. Its small congregation and priests are trying to hold the vultures - a scheming bank executive and the archbishop at bay. The characters are well enough wrought though only a few truly shine while most are just a bit better than cliché. Gris Marsala, the nun and architecture expert, is interesting. On the other hand Macarena Bruner is not. The author surely wants us to find Quart mysteriously fascinating - again he is not. There is much pondering about the limits of his faith. Far too much is made of his manliness and stunning beauty. Gets a bit overbearing. There is a clownish trio hired to interfere with the priest. They are tedious.

The story is interesting enough. The characters interesting enough. The pace is slow going for a thriller, still it kept my attention.

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### **MTK says**

Το λιγότερο αγαπημένο μου απ' τα βιβλία του Περέρτε, αλλά ακμή κι έτσι, να πολ' ωραίο μυθιστόρημα. Απλ' εμένα το νημά μου διέφυγε.

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### **RK-isme says**

2.5 stars. Poor writing. Weak plot. Conceptually okay - a few ideas to contemplate.

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I am travelling and was given this book on my first day away from home by someone I was staying with. Given that my time has been broken up by a constant flow of social encounters, I have had difficulty reading anything more serious. Hence this review.

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I have often been curious about the novels of Pérez-Reverte. I no longer am. I found much of my reading experience to be spoiled by stereotypical characters, stilted dialogue and a contrived plot. The attempt at creating comic relief through the three inept criminals fell quite flat for me. I have never been a fan of slapstick humour.

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The saving grace for me was the attempt by Pérez-Reverte to include some serious discussion about the nature of history and time. While I would have appreciated a more in-depth discussion, I was pleasantly surprised by the very fact of the inclusion of these ideas in the book.

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The linking of discussions of family history, changing human fate and time relations in astronomy, were meant to give the reader pause and to reflect upon her own place in the world as it spins intractably bringing her onto the stage and then off again. Kinda cool.

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## Lyubov says

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## Miguel says

Primeiro há Lorenzo Quart, o padre enviado de Roma para saber o que se passa em torno da igreja de Nossa Senhora das Lágrimas. E há mais dois padres, Príamo Ferro, o velho cura que se defende a golpes de mau feitio, apaixonado pela astronomia, e o seu jovem acólito, Óscar Lobato, que vai ser transferido por castigo. E Gris Marsala, a freira americana, arquitecta dos andaimes.

E há Macarena Bruner, a duquesa jovem de olhos cor de mel, que guarda o isqueiro na alça do soutien. E Maria Cruz, a velha duquesa, sua mãe, que bebe Coca-Cola de garrafa, a de lata não sabe à mesma coisa, nem os piquinhos são iguais.

Há os banqueiros. Machuco, Don Octávio como é tratado, que passa os dias a despachar na esplanada.

Pencho Gavira, jovem e ambicioso, cuja Vice-Presidência está sob prova de fogo. E como cada criado quer o seu criadito, há Celestino Peregil, o seu homem de mão, sempre ajeitando o capachinho.

Há três outros que se passeiam pela cidade como se fossem anjos de pedra. Don Ibrahim, o meu preferido de todos, exilado cubano, advogado não documentado, sempre de fato branco, chapéu de aba larga e a brasa de um Montecristo a incendiar-se nos lábios. O isqueiro foi uma prenda de Garcia Marquez, o relógio ganhou-o numa noite de póquer a Hemingway, e El Che ensinou-o a fazer cocktails molotov. Acompanham-no Piña Puñales, cantora desvalida de boleros e sevilhanas, caracol desenhado na testa e o crochet enfiado na carteira, e o Potro del Mantelete, ex-toureiro e ex-pugilista, homem de acção, duro e impassível.

Há ainda Carlota e Manuel Xaloc, uma duquesa louca e um pirata das Caraíbas, fantasmas que se buscam um ao outro (“Mi carta, que es feliz, pues va a buscaros”).

Há um hacker, Vésperas, que deixa mensagens no computador pessoal do Santo Padre.

E há Sevilha, cheia de luz e de sol, cheia de noite e de tascas, cheia de igrejas, de praças e de pátios, perfumada de laranjas. “Como nenhuma outra, aquela cidade conservava na esquina das ruas, nas cores e na luz, o rumor do tempo que se extingue lentamente, ou melhor, de nós próprios extinguindo-nos com aquelas

coisas do tempo a que se apegam a vida e a memória.”

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### **Jord says**

I found this book in a resort in the Caribbean, it took me two holidays to actually finish reading it. I was never gripped by it but was curious to see how the plot would evolve. I found it overall disappointing. The characters were superficial and stereotypical, the rich were beautiful, the poor either "greasy" or grotesque. The descriptions of them, particularly of the more interesting trio the boxer, the fake lawyer and the singer were repetitive, page and page over. So were the descriptions of the sunlight on the church, on the river, and everywhere else, even though we are talking about torrid Seville, descriptions of the light must amass a good 10 pages. I liked the bit on astronomy, and the introspective nature of the Father of the Parish, but even that was kept short to the point you could not really get through to the main character of the plot. The vision of the aristocracy seems a rather common-place one of composure and subtle superiority, the clever elderly lady who hacks computers (hardly believable). And even after a fight in the dark where everybody fights and gets punched the beautiful young duchess is the only one who was kept immaculate, lol. That you have to read the very last sentence to get to know who the killer was may seem stylish, but hey hardly original, or is it?

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### **Jane says**

This brilliant story has a surprising ending. The scenes of Sevilla and the dialogue are so vivid. By the way I read it in Spanish where the title is "La piel del tambor." I think this is his best of the so-called mysteries, although they are much more than that. His mastery of all aspects of the Spanish languages, from the 17th-century dialogue in the Capitan Alatriste series, to the Mexican street language and Spanish drug slang to the 19th-century Franglish in "Trafalgar" have earned him a place in the Real Academia de la Lengua. He is my favorite modern writer.

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### **Alexis Vélez says**

Excelente narrativa y completo dominio del diálogo entre personajes hacen casi imposible soltar este libro. El personaje de Macarena Brunner es uno de los más sexys que he leído y su relación de flirteo con el padre Quart te hacen olvidar el tema principal de ésta novela. Otra novela bien escrita y entretenida de mi escritor favorito, recomendada.

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### **John says**

"The stunning novel of suspense," says the strapline on the cover of my edition of this novel. Review quotes elsewhere on the cover and in the first couple of pages of the book repeat that it's a thriller, talk of its "page-turning pace," describe the novel as a noir and Pérez-Reverte as "the thinking man's Robert Ludlum" . . .

All of which must have disappointed a hell of a lot of readers, who'll have discovered instead a book that uses a lightly done whodunnit backdrop to give us more of a novel of ideas than anything else -- the ideas in

question relating to Catholicism, ethics, astronomy and more. In place of the vaunted "page-turning pace" we have a narrative that moves at what in fact is a very measured pace, even meandering on occasion -- which is part of what makes it so very, very engrossing. I was absolutely involved in this tale and its characters; once I'd finished it, my wife laughed at me when I told her how pissed off I was that I didn't have any more of it to read.

The setup in brief:

A hacker breaks into the Vatican network to alert the Pope's very own personal computer to the fact that there's some dirty business going on concerning an ancient small church in Seville. The Vatican couldn't care less about the fate of that church, but for the sake of face dispatches a sort of priestly James Bond, Lorenzo Quart, to investigate the situation and in particular identify the hacker. Quart arrives to find an array of corrupt businessmen who, with the complicity of the mayor and the archbishop of Seville, seek to buy the land the church is on, raze the building and make a bonanza profit selling the real estate for development; ranged against them are the church's curmudgeonly old priest, his callow assistant, an ageing architect/nun who's been managing the building's necessary renovations and an aristocratic but down-on-their-heels mother and daughter. Just to complicate matters, the daughter is married (albeit estranged) to the ringleader of the corrupt businessmen, and Quart finds her, despite his vows, magnetically attractive.

I mentioned that this was a novel of ideas. It's also, in many aspects, a comedy, primarily through the strand of its plot featuring a trio of incompetent crooks hired by the bad guys to nobble the old priest or in some other way ensure that the church falls out of its present hands and into theirs. The antics of this trio are as funny as you'd find in a Carl Hiaasen novel, or in one of Donald Westlake's crime comedies (e.g., his Dortmunder tales), and had me laughing aloud on several occasions.

Of the several Pérez-Reverte novels that I've read, this is the least *flamboyant*: its events won't change the world, there's no rattling swordplay, etc. It's just a rather quiet novel that has so many good things about it that I'd find it hard to count them all. If you come to the book expecting a "stunning novel of suspense" that moves with "page-turning pace," I could quite imagine you might even find *The Seville Communion* a bit dull. For me, I had difficulty putting it down at night and it colored my days. What more could one ask?

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