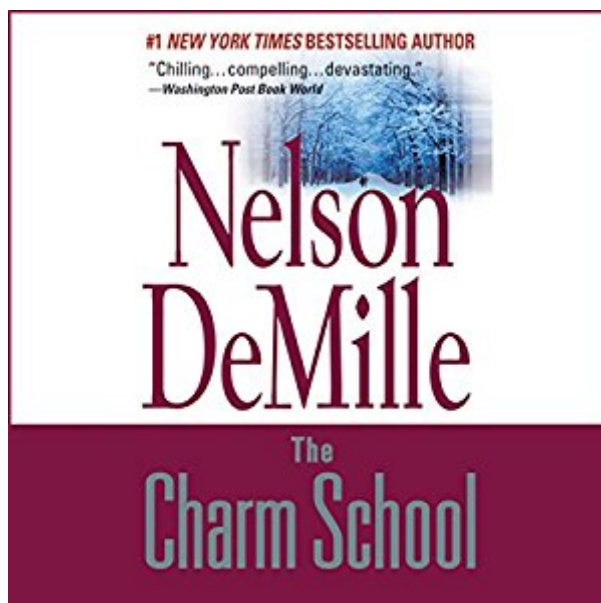


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The Charm School



Synopsis

Deep in the heart of Russia, a group of casually dressed young men are learning a different kind of lesson. The undergraduates sprawled around a game board aren't chilling out on campus: the young KGB agents attending the Charm School are brushing up on their American. When a young tourist goes to the aid of a stranger on a dark Russian road, he is astonished to find a fellow American on the run. The man has been missing for over a decade, plucked from the jungles of Vietnam to become an unwilling tutor at the institution. Now his former students are poised to strike at the heart of America. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I love DeMille and love his books. This is an older title, but I have just gotten around to reading it. It is set in the Cold War era when there was a Commie under every bush. All I could think of while reading this was "Moose and Squirrel must die!" I loved everything about this book except the ending. It's not that the ending was bad, it just wasn't the ending I was expecting or hoping. I always get engrossed in my reading and start relating to the characters and story. This ending left me cold; fell flat. I could see it ending this way in the real world, but not in the world of fiction - or at least DeMille's fiction. Others may disagree and I am sure they will and you will have your own opinion. I wanted a decisive, vengeful ending - it wasn't there. Nevertheless, I recommend this book as it is compelling and entertaining.

In my opinion, this book was one of DeMille's best. I don't know how I had never read it before as it

was written many years ago and yet, big DeMille fan that I am, I read it only a few weeks ago. Maybe it was the title that made me think I wouldn't be interested. DeMille's books often are set in New York and specifically Long Island so I may have taken the title literally and assumed it actually took place at a charm school, perhaps on the Gold Coast or in someplace like Garden City. I couldn't have been more wrong! It involves American Embassy and, yes, intelligence personnel, and takes place in Russia back in the days of the Cold War, when the KGB ruled by fear and people mysteriously disappeared in the night, never to be heard from again. The discovery of a secret operation in Russia is incredible yet plausible as is the resolution, given the politics and international relations considerations. As always with DeMille books, it is well researched and the characters well developed so that you feel present in the action. I highly recommend this books for lovers of intrigue and edge of your seat thrillers.

I just finished reading The Charm School for the fourth or fifth time. It's, perhaps, my favorite novel, especially within the genre of espionage and Cold War. The book has a ring of both accuracy and plausibility. The characters are well defined, but not so much so that you can't use your imagination to round them out. The story is well drawn and suspenseful, yet not so convoluted that you lose the story line and chain of events. I have read all of Mr. DeMille's books, and while I have thoroughly enjoyed most of them, this one stands out because the characters are not as sarcastic and "snarky" as the characters in his recent novels. My only regret about The Charm School is that no one has ever picked it for a movie.

Best DeMille book I've read, and I've read most of them. Full of interesting things, both about Soviet Russia and spies in general. The plot is very suspenseful, exciting, unpredictable and believable. Even the characters are believable and likeable. I like DeMille as a writer but get annoyed when he writes with excessive sarcasm and "smart aleck" comments, particularly with the John Corey novels. I like the humor but he tends to go overboard with it. Fortunately this one doesn't have that characteristic -- dialog was realistic for the setting. Particularly liked the ending.

Perhaps the best story I've ever read. Best DeMille for me and I have read a dozen or so. Wonderfully believable and character development. Lisa is a wee bit overly fragile but pumps up a guy's ego to believe there are beautiful women like her. Helicopter segment was brilliantly written. Love this one.

Excellent and entertaining novel set in the Cold War era. My only complaint is that the female character is completely unnecessary to the plot. Take her out and you'd still have the same book without the distraction of a pretty much implausible relationship between her and the male character. The Charm School was chilling - and I'm sure it's entirely possible that such a place actually existed. Maybe it still does.

Sylvester walks nonchalantly into the apartment, a stack of today's mail in his hand. There is an advertising flyer from the florist. "Say it with flowers." He enters the dining room. Roses on the table. Moving quickly and quietly into the living room, he views a plain wicker basket of plants on top of the tv cabinet, overflowing with an abundance of intensely purple petals. Violets on television. He reflects on the video game he saw being played by a youth at the corner convenience store. Measurable levels of health, strength, weapons, and funds were prominently displayed to the side of the on-screen virtual-reality activity. You must maintain a high level of energy to continue the battle against a tough, well-armed, skilled, and resourceful opponent. Otherwise game over. He sits on a sofa cushion, opens a long envelope, and begins to read the review of a recently cancelled television series, modernized and loosely adapted from the theme from Nelson DeMille's 1989 novel, *The Charm School*. Reality check: You expect a middle-aged, overweight, out-of-shape desk-jockey technocrat, purported to be a mid-level Air Force manager and ex-Jet Fighter Pilot, assigned to an embassy post in the USSR. Someone who sort of reminds you of another DeMille character, the joke-cracking "legal eagle" wise guy--John "Rambo He's Not" Sutter, only all grown up and matured now. What you get instead is the character of Sam "Haul Ass" Hollis, a walking-talking Hardened-Man Dynamo of excess energy and instability, who appears to be on a daily-regimen combination of steroids and "Viagra," yet his is a healthy diet of pure natural foods, rich in body-building proteins, vital nutrients, and source vitamins. Must be the fresh air and exercise. He goes out to explore Moscow only to discover the food is terrible, the service is worse than intolerable, and he can't seem to get decent results in any of his search efforts. As a matter of taste, there's no Cordon Bleu Cooking School influence to be found anywhere; refinement, no Butler academy graduates in the vicinity to lend a helping hand in a pinch; or, for purposes of on-going professional development, ready access to a spare F-15 in reasonably close proximity is simply not there. To add insult to injury, he is badly mistreated by some of the local inhabitants. His rivals bully and intimidate him. Apparently, he doesn't understand the country, or its long history of traditions and local customs. He certainly does not fully comprehend the mentality and brutality of his KGB counterparts. Be forewarned: the plot of the novel may seem far-fetched, preposterous,

even, bizarre at times, "nyet"--impossible. Hollis has the primary mission of locating missing U.S. Air Force pilots from the conflict in Viet Nam, who may have been re-located to Russia, for some inexplicable reason. He asks around for possible leads and follows up on some of the information he receives. His boss, the embassy station chief, Seth "All Systems Go" Alevy encourages Hollis in his duties, provides guidance, and tasks his ex-girlfriend with assisting him. The boss does reveal his conflicted "inner-child" and war-mongering tendencies in the process. For example, he includes weapons of mass destruction in his contingency plans--a worse case scenario, one might suppose. He seeks to make a profit on his business ventures in Moscow, but this is not a high priority. In contrast, he is generous to a fault and is a prolific giver of gifts. Hollis's new girlfriend, then, Lisa "Tsarina" Rhodes is allegedly young, beautiful, scholarly, and sexy. You wonder if she and Hollis didn't fall in love, she might have been a "sleeper," on her way to the pinnacle of the personnel charts within the diplomatic corps. The real trouble begins when Hollis invites Lisa along on one of his fact-finding missions into the vastly remote countryside and isolated villages some distance away from the center of Moscow. Here, you are cautiously reminded, that there are some places in the world where you just wouldn't want to go wandering around without at least two or three Army Divisions, plus some extra Marines, and dedicated air support. I would not want to hazard a wild guess or contemplate any of the more serious implications of Hollis's and Alevy's decision-making process and their ultimately chosen courses of action in a real-world scenario. One can only be thankful and feel humbled that the novel is merely an extension of some kind-hearted, sentimental narrator's hyper-active imagination running rampant, but you can't help but wonder from where the megalomaniac personality and the persecution-complex induced tendencies for revenge and supreme domination springs forth. As if they had gone on some incredible road trip or a mind-blowing ego trip, but really wanted to go on the world's scariest roller coaster ride. You might also be curious what they do to relax, chill out, and calm down afterwards. What would they do for an encore? Another covert military operation? Oddly enough, Sam, Lisa, and Seth do sort of remind me of the three principal characters in "Star Wars," if you really want to stretch the point of an "evil empire" way out there into the farthest reaches of the galaxy. They get to drive around town and drag main in a cool transport vehicle. All in all a considerable amount of team research and "boots on the ground" detail went into producing every single chapter of this novel and packing it with interesting facts and information about the host nation. The reader should bear in mind, however, that the world has changed drastically since the time when the novel was first published. Currently, there are so many extremely dangerous, extraneous trouble-makers in the world stirring the pot who originate in several other high profile countries around the globe. Nonetheless, the U.S. and Russia

remain steadfast and ideologically opposed. They both strive to expand their influence throughout the rest of the world. A stalemate as far as most are concerned.

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