

CHAPEL NOW, DUTIFULLY PROTECTED BY FOUR SWISS GUARDS. THE GUARDS UNBOLTED THE DOOR AND PULLED IT OPEN. INSIDE, EVERY HEAD TURNED. THE CAMERLENGO GAZED OUT AT THE BLACK ROBES AND RED SASHES BEFORE HIM. HE UNDERSTOOD WHAT GOD'S PLANS FOR HIM WERE. THE FATE OF THE CHURCH HAD BEEN PLACED IN HIS HANDS.

THE CAMERLENGO CROSSED HIMSELF AND STEPPED OVER THE THRESHOLD.

BBC JOURNALIST GUNTHER GLICK SAT SWEATING IN THE BBC NETWORK VAN PARKED ON THE EASTERN EDGE OF ST PETER'S SQUARE AND CURSED HIS ASSIGNMENT EDITOR. ALTHOUGH GLICK'S FIRST MONTHLY REVIEW HAD COME BACK FILLED WITH SUPERLATIVES-RESOURCEFUL, SHARP, DEPENDABLE - HERE HE WAS IN VATICAN CITY ON 'POPE-WATCH'. HE REMINDED HIMSELF THAT REPORTING FOR THE BBC CARRIED A HELL OF A LOT MORE CREDIBILITY THAN FABRICATING FODDER FOR THE BRITISH TATLER, BUT STILL, THIS WAS NOT HIS IDEA OF REPORTING.

GLICK'S ASSIGNMENT WAS SIMPLE. INSULTINGLY SIMPLE. HE WAS TO SIT HERE WAITING FOR A BUNCH OF OLD FARTS TO ELECT THEIR NEXT CHIEF OLD FART, THEN HE WAS TO STEP OUTSIDE AND RECORD A FIFTEEN-SECOND 'LIVE' SPOT WITH THE VATICAN AS A BACKDROP.

BRILLIANT.

GLICK COULDN'T BELIEVE THE BBC STILL SENT REPORTERS INTO THE FIELD TO COVER THIS SCHLOCK. YOU DON'T SEE THE AMERICAN NETWORKS HERE TONIGHT. HELL NO! THAT WAS BECAUSE THE BIG BOYS DID IT RIGHT. THEY WATCHED CNN, SYNOPSIZED IT, AND THEN FILMED THEIR 'LIVE' REPORT IN

FRONT OF A BLUE SCREEN, SUPERIMPOSING STOCK VIDEO FOR A REALISTIC BACKDROP. MSNBC EVEN USED IN-STUDIO WIND AND RAIN MACHINES TO GIVE THAT ON-THE-SCENE AUTHENTICITY. VIEWERS DIDN'T WANT TRUTH ANYMORE; THEY WANTED ENTERTAINMENT.

GLICK GAZED OUT THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD AND FELT MORE AND MORE DEPRESSED BY THE MINUTE. THE IMPERIAL MOUNTAIN OF VATICAN CITY ROSE BEFORE HIM AS A DISMAL REMINDER OF WHAT MEN COULD ACCOMPLISH WHEN THEY PUT THEIR MINDS TO IT.

'WHAT HAVE I ACCOMPLISHED IN MY LIFE?' HE WONDERED ALOUD. 'NOTHING.'

'SO GIVE UP,' A WOMAN'S VOICE SAID FROM BEHIND HIM. GLICK JUMPED. HE HAD ALMOST FORGOTTEN HE WAS NOT ALONE. HE TURNED TO THE BACK SEAT, WHERE HIS CAMERA-WOMAN, CHINITA MACRI, SAT SILENTLY POLISHING HER GLASSES. SHE WAS ALWAYS POLISHING HER GLASSES. CHINITA WAS BLACK, ALTHOUGH SHE PREFERRED AFRICAN AMERICAN, A LITTLE HEAVY AND SMART AS HELL. SHE WOULDN'T LET YOU FOR- GET IT EITHER. SHE WAS AN ODD BIRD, BUT GLICK LIKED HER. AND GLICK COULD SURE AS HELL USE THE COMPANY.

'WHAT'S THE PROBLEM, GUNTH?' CHINITA ASKED.

'WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?'

SHE KEPT POLISHING. 'WITNESSING AN EXCITING EVENT.'

'OLD MEN LOCKED IN THE DARK IS EXCITING?'

'YOU DO KNOW YOU'RE GOING TO HELL, DON'T YOU?'

'ALREADY THERE.'

'TALK TO ME.' SHE SOUNDED LIKE HIS MOTHER.

'I JUST FEEL LIKE I WANT TO LEAVE MY MARK.'

'YOU WROTE FOR THE BRITISH TATLER.'

'YEAH, BUT NOTHING WITH ANY RESONANCE.'

'OH, COME ON, I HEARD YOU DID A GROUNDBREAKING ARTICLE ON THE QUEEN'S SECRET SEX LIFE WITH ALIENS.'

'THANKS'.

‘HEY, THINGS ARE LOOKING UP. TONIGHT YOU MAKE YOUR FIRST FIFTEEN SECONDS OF TV HISTORY.’

GLICK GROANED. HE COULD HEAR THE NEWS ANCHOR ALREADY. ‘THANKS GUNTHER, GREAT REPORT.’ THEN THE ANCHOR WOULD ROLL HIS EYES AND MOVE ON TO THE WEATHER. ‘I SHOULD HAVE TRIED FOR AN ANCHOR SPOT.’

MACRI LAUGHED. ‘WITH NO EXPERIENCE? AND THAT BEARD? FORGET IT.’”

GLICK RAN HIS HANDS THROUGH THE REDDISH GOB OF HAIR ON HIS CHIN. ‘I THINK IT MAKES ME LOOK CLEVER.’

THE VAN’S CELL PHONE RANG, MERCIFULLY INTERRUPTING YET ANOTHER ONE OF GLICK’S FAILURES. ‘MAYBE THAT’S EDITORIAL,’ HE SAID, SUDDENLY HOPEFUL. ‘YOU THINK THEY WANT A LIVE UPDATE?’

‘ON THIS STORY?’ MACRI LAUGHED. ‘YOU KEEP DREAMING.’ GLICK ANSWERED THE PHONE IN HIS BEST ANCHORMAN VOICE. ‘GUNTHER GLICK, BBC, LIVE IN VATICAN CITY.’

THE MAN ON THE LINE HAD A THICK ARABIC ACCENT. ‘LISTEN CAREFULLY,’ HE SAID. ‘I AM ABOUT TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE.’

LANGDON AND VITTORIA STOOD ALONE NOW OUTSIDE THE DOUBLE DOORS THAT LED TO THE INNER SANCTUM OF THE SECRET ARCHIVES. THE DECOR IN THE COLONNADE WAS AN INCONGRUOUS MIX OF WALL-TO-WALL CARPETS OVER MARBLE FLOORS AND WIRELESS SECURITY CAMERAS GAZING DOWN FROM BESIDE CARVED CHERUBS IN THE CEILING. LANGDON DUBBED IT STERILE RENAISSANCE. BESIDE THE ARCHED INGRESS HUNG A SMALL BRONZE PLAQUE.

ARCHIVIO DEL VATICANO
CURATORE, PADRE JAQUI TOMASO

FATHER JAQUI TOMASO. LANGDON RECOGNIZED THE CURATOR'S NAME FROM THE REJECTION LETTERS AT HOME IN HIS DESK. DEAR MR LANGDON, IT IS WITH REGRET THAT I AM WRITING TO DENY...

REGRET. BULLSHIT. SINCE JAQUI TOMASO'S REIGN HAD BEGUN, LANGDON HAD NEVER MET A SINGLE NON-CATHOLIC AMERICAN SCHOLAR WHO HAD BEEN GIVEN ACCESS TO THE SECRET VATICAN ARCHIVES. IL GUARDIANO, HISTORIANS CALLED HIM. JAQUI TOMASO WAS THE TOUGHEST LIBRARIAN ON EARTH. AS LANGDON PUSHED THE DOORS OPEN AND STEPPED THROUGH THE VAULTED PORTAL INTO THE INNER SANCTUM, HE HALF EXPECTED TO SEE FATHER JAQUI IN FULL MILITARY FATIGUES AND HELMET STANDING GUARD WITH A BAZOOKA. THE SPACE, HOWEVER, WAS DESERTED.

SILENCE. SOFT LIGHTING.

ARCHIVIO VATICANO. ONE OF HIS LIFE DREAMS.

AS LANGDON'S EYES TOOK IN THE SACRED CHAMBER, HIS FIRST REACTION WAS ONE OF EMBARRASSMENT. HE REALIZED WHAT A CALLOW ROMANTIC HE WAS. THE IMAGES HE HAD HELD FOR SO MANY YEARS OF THIS ROOM COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE INACCURATE. HE HAD IMAGINED DUSTY BOOKSHELVES PILED HIGH WITH TATTERED VOLUMES, PRIESTS CATALOGING BY THE LIGHT OF CANDLES AND STAINED-GLASS WINDOWS, MONKS PORING OVER SCROLLS . . .

NOT EVEN CLOSE.

AT FIRST GLANCE THE ROOM APPEARED TO BE A DARKENED AIRLINE HANGAR IN WHICH SOMEONE HAD BUILT A DOZEN FREE-STANDING RACQUETBALL COURTS. LANGDON KNEW OF COURSE WHAT THE GLASS-WALLED ENCLOSURES WERE, HE WAS NOT SURPRISED TO SEE THEM; HUMIDITY AND HEAT ERODED ANCIENT VELLUMS AND PARCHMENTS, AND PROPER

PRESERVATION REQUIRED HERMETIC VAULTS LIKE THESE – AIR-TIGHT CUBICLES THAT KEPT OUT HUMIDITY AND NATURAL ACIDS IN THE AIR. LANGDON HAD BEEN INSIDE HERMETIC VAULTS MANY TIMES, BUT IT WAS ALWAYS AN UNSETTLING EXPERIENCE . . . SOMETHING ABOUT ENTERING AN AIRTIGHT CONTAINER WHERE THE OXYGEN WAS REGULATED BY A REFERENCE LIBRARIAN.

THE VAULTS WERE DARK, GHOSTLY EVEN, FAINTLY OUTLINED BY TINY DOME LIGHTS AT THE END OF EACH STACK. IN THE BLACKNESS OF EACH CELL, LANGDON SENSED THE PHANTOM GIANTS, ROW UPON ROW OF TOWERING STACKS, LADEN WITH HISTORY. THIS WAS ONE HELL OF A COLLECTION.

VITTORIA ALSO SEEMED DAZZLED. SHE STOOD BESIDE HIM STARING MUTELY AT THE GIANT TRANSPARENT CUBES.

TIME WAS SHORT, AND LANGDON WASTED NONE OF IT SCANNING THE DIMLY LIT ROOM FOR A BOOK CATALOG - A BOUND ENCYCLOPEDIA THAT CATALOGED THE LIBRARY'S COLLECTION. ALL HE SAW WAS THE GLOW OF A HANDFUL OF COMPUTER TERMINALS DOTTING THE ROOM. 'LOOKS LIKE THEY'VE GOT A BIBLION. THEIR INDEX IS COMPUTERIZED.' VITTORIA LOOKED HOPEFUL. 'THAT SHOULD SPEED THINGS UP.'

LANGDON WISHED HE SHARED HER ENTHUSIASM, BUT HE SENSED THIS WAS BAD NEWS. HE WALKED TO TERMINAL AND BEGAN TYPING. HIS FEARS WERE INSTANTLY CONFIRMED. 'THE OLD-FASHIONED METHOD WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER.'

'WHY?'

HE STEPPED BACK FROM THE MONITOR. 'BECAUSE REAL BOOKS DON'T HAVE PASSWORD PROTECTION. I DON'T SUPPOSE PHYSICISTS ARE NATURAL BORN HACKERS?'

VITTORIA SHOOK HER HEAD. 'I CAN OPEN OYSTERS, THAT'S ABOUT IT.'

LANGDON TOOK A DEEP BREATH AND TURNED TO FACE THE EERIE COLLECTION OF DIAPHANOUS VAULTS. HE WALKED TO

THE NEAREST ONE AND SQUINTED INTO THE DIM INTERIOR. INSIDE THE GLASS WERE AMORPHOUS SHAPES LANGDON RECOGNIZED AS THE USUAL BOOKSHELVES, PARCHMENT BINS, AND EXAMINATION TABLES. HE LOOKED UP AT THE INDICATOR TABS GLOWING AT THE END OF EACH STACK. AS IN ALL LIBRARIES, THE TABS INDICATED THE CONTENTS OF THAT ROW. HE READ THE HEADINGS AS HE MOVED DOWN THE TRANSPARENT BARRIER.

PIETRO L'EREMITA . . . LE CROCIATE . . . URBANO II . . .

LEVANT . . .

THEY'RE LABELED,' HE SAID, STILL WALKING. 'BUT IT'S NOT ALPHA-AUTHOR.' HE WASN'T SURPRISED. ANCIENT ARCHIVES WERE ALMOST NEVER CATALOGED ALPHABETICALLY BECAUSE SO OF THE AUTHORS WERE UNKNOWN. TITLES DIDN'T WORK MANY EITHER BECAUSE MANY HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS WERE UN- TITLED LETTERS OR PARCHMENT FRAGMENTS. MOST CATALOGING WAS DONE CHRONOLOGICALLY. DISCONCERTINGLY, HOWEVER, THIS ARRANGEMENT DID NOT APPEAR TO BE CHRONOLOGICAL.

LANGDON FELT PRECIOUS TIME ALREADY SLIPPING AWAY. LOOKS LIKE THE VATICAN HAS ITS OWN SYSTEM.

'WHAT A SURPRISE.'

HE EXAMINED THE LABELS AGAIN. THE DOCUMENTS SPANNED CENTURIES, BUT ALL THE KEYWORDS, HE REALIZED, WERE INTERRELATED. 'I THINK IT'S A THEMATIC CLASSIFICATION.' 'THEMATIC?' VITTORIA SAID, SOUNDING LIKE A DIS- APPROVING SCIENTIST. 'SOUNDS INEFFICIENT.'

ACTUALLY . . . LANGDON THOUGHT, CONSIDERING IT MORE CLOSELY. THIS MAY BE THE SHREWDEST CATALOGING I'VE EVER SEEN. HE HAD ALWAYS URGED HIS STUDENTS TO UNDERSTAND THE OVERALL TONES AND MOTIFS OF AN ARTISTIC PERIOD RATHER THAN GETTING LOST IN THE MINUTIA OF DATES AND SPECIFIC WORKS. THE VATICAN ARCHIVES, IT SEEMED, WERE CATALOGED ON A SIMILAR PHILOSOPHY. BROAD STROKES . . .

'EVERYTHING IN THIS VAULT,' LANGDON SAID, FEELING

MORE CONFIDENT NOW, 'CENTURIES OF MATERIAL, HAS TO DO WITH THE CRUSADES. THAT'S THIS VAULT'S THEME.' IT WAS ALL HERE, HE REALIZED. HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS, LETTERS, ARTWORK, SOCIOPOLITICAL DATA, MODERN ANALYSES. ALL IN ONE PLACE . . . ENCOURAGING A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF A TOPIC. BRILLIANT.

VITTORIA FROWNE. 'BUT DATA CAN RELATE TO MULTIPLE THEMES SIMULTANEOUSLY.'

'WHICH IS WHY THEY CROSS-REFERENCE WITH PROXY MARKERS.' LANGDON POINTED THROUGH THE GLASS TO THE COLORFUL PLASTIC TABS INSERTED AMONG THE DOCUMENTS. 'THOSE INDICATE SECONDARY DOCUMENTS LOCATED ELSE- WHERE WITH THEIR PRIMARY THEMES.'

'SURE,' SHE SAID, APPARENTLY LETTING IT GO. SHE PUT HER HANDS ON HER HIPS AND SURVEYED THE ENORMOUS SPACE. THEN SHE LOOKED AT LANGDON. 'SO, PROFESSOR, WHAT'S THE NAME OF THIS GALILEO THING WE'RE LOOKING FOR?'

LANGDON COULDN'T HELP BUT SMILE. HE STILL COULDN'T FATHOM THAT HE WAS STANDING IN THIS ROOM. IT'S IN HERE, HE THOUGHT. SOMEWHERE IN THE DARK, IT'S WAITING.

'FOLLOW ME,' LANGDON SAID. HE STARTED BRISKLY DOWN THE FIRST AISLE, EXAMINING THE INDICATOR TABS OF EACH VAULT. 'REMEMBER HOW I TOLD YOU ABOUT THE PATH OF ILLUMINATION? HOW THE ILLUMINATI RECRUITED NEW MEMBERS USING AN ELABORATE TEST?'

"THE TREASURE HUNT,' VITTORIA SAID, FOLLOWING CLOSELY. 'THE CHALLENGE THE ILLUMINATI HAD WAS THAT AFTER THEY PLACED THE MARKERS, THEY NEEDED SOME WAY TO TELL THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY THE PATH EXISTED.'

'LOGICAL,' VITTORIA SAID. 'OTHERWISE NOBODY WOULD KNOW TO LOOK FOR IT'

'YES, AND EVEN IF THEY KNEW THE PATH EXISTED, SCIENTISTS WOULD HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING WHERE THE PATH BEGAN. ROME IS HUGE.'

'OKAY.'

LANGDON PROCEEDED DOWN THE NEXT AISLE, SCANNING THE TABS AS HE TALKED. 'ABOUT FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, SOME HISTORIANS AT THE SORBONNE AND I UNCOVERED A SERIES OF ILLUMINATI LETTERS FILLED WITH REFERENCES TO THE SEGNO.'

'THE SIGN. THE ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT THE PATH AND WHERE IT BEGAN.'

'YES. AND SINCE THEN, PLENTY OF ILLUMINATI ACADEMICS, MYSELF INCLUDED, HAVE UNCOVERED OTHER REFERENCES TO THE SEGNO. IT IS ACCEPTED THEORY NOW THAT THE CLUE EXISTS AND THAT GALILEO DISTRIBUTED IT TO THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY WITHOUT THE VATICAN EVER KNOWING.'

'HOW?'

'WE'RE NOT SURE, BUT MOST LIKELY PRINTED PUBLICATIONS. HE PUBLISHED MANY BOOKS AND NEWSLETTERS OVER THE YEARS.'

"THAT THE VATICAN NO DOUBT SAW. SOUNDS DANGEROUS.'

'TRUE. NONETHELESS THE SEGNO WAS DISTRIBUTED.'

'BUT NOBODY HAS EVER ACTUALLY FOUND IT?'

'NO. ODDLY THOUGH, WHEREVER ALLUSIONS TO THE SEGNO APPEAR - MASONIC DIARIES, ANCIENT SCIENTIFIC JOURNALS, ILLUMINATI LETTERS - IT IS OFTEN REFERRED TO BY A NUMBER.'

'666?'

LANGDON SMILED. 'ACTUALLY IT'S 503.'

'MEANING?'

'NONE OF US COULD EVER FIGURE IT OUT. I BECAME FASCINATED WITH 503, TRYING EVERYTHING TO FIND MEANING IN THE NUMBER - NUMEROLOGY, MAP REFERENCES, LATITUDES.' LANGDON REACHED THE END OF THE AISLE, TURNED THE CORNER, AND HURRIED TO SCAN THE NEXT ROW OF TABS AS HE SPOKE. 'FOR MANY YEARS THE ONLY CLUE SEEMED TO BE THAT 503 BEGAN WITH THE NUMBER FIVE . . . ONE OF THE SACRED ILLUMINATI DIGITS.' HE PAUSED.

'SOMETHING TELLS ME YOU RECENTLY FIGURED IT OUT, AND THAT'S WHY WE'RE HERE.'

‘CORRECT,’ LANGDON SAID, ALLOWING HIMSELF A RARE MOMENT OF PRIDE IN HIS WORK. ‘ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH A BOOK BY GALILEO CALLED DIALOGO?’

‘OF COURSE. FAMOUS AMONG SCIENTISTS AS THE ULTIMATE SCIENTIFIC SELLOUT.’

SELLOUT WASN’T QUITE THE WORD LANGDON WOULD HAVE USED, BUT HE KNEW WHAT VITTORIA MEANT. IN THE EARLY 1630S, GALILEO HAD WANTED TO PUBLISH A BOOK ENDORSING THE COPERNICAN HELIOCENTRIC MODEL OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM, BUT THE VATICAN WOULD NOT PERMIT THE BOOK’S RELEASE UNLESS GALILEO INCLUDED EQUALLY PERSUASIVE EVIDENCE FOR THE CHURCH’S GEOCENTRIC MODEL - A MODEL GALILEO KNEW TO BE DEAD WRONG. GALILEO HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO ACQUIESCE TO THE CHURCH’S DEMANDS AND PUBLISH A BOOK GIVING EQUAL TIME TO BOTH THE ACCURATE AND INACCURATE MODELS.

‘AS YOU PROBABLY KNOW, LANGDON SAID, ‘DESPITE GALILEO’S COMPROMISE, DIÀLOGO WAS STILL SEEN AS HERETICAL, AND THE VATICAN PLACED HIM UNDER HOUSE ARREST.’

‘NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED.’

LANGDON SMILED. ‘SO TRUE. AND YET GALILEO WAS PERSISTENT. WHILE UNDER HOUSE ARREST, HE SECRETLY WROTE A LESSER-KNOWN MANUSCRIPT THAT SCHOLARS OFTEN CONFUSE WITH DIÀLOGO. THAT BOOK IS CALLED DISCORSI.’

VITTORIA NODDED. ‘I’VE HEARD OF IT. DISCOURSES ON THE TIDES.’

LANGDON STOPPED SHORT, AMAZED SHE HAD HEARD OF THE OBSCURE PUBLICATION ABOUT PLANETARY MOTION AND ITS EFFECT ON THE TIDES.

‘HEY,’ SHE SAID, ‘YOU’RE TALKING TO AN ITALIAN MARINE PHYSICIST WHOSE FATHER WORSHIPED GALILEO.’

LANGDON LAUGHED. DISCORSI HOWEVER WAS NOT WHAT THEY WERE LOOKING FOR. LANGDON EXPLAINED THAT DISCORSI HAD NOT BEEN GALILEO’S ONLY WORK WHILE UNDER HOUSE

ARREST. HISTORIANS BELIEVED HE HAD ALSO WRITTEN AN OBSCURE BOOKLET CALLED DIAGRAMMA.

‘DIAGRAMMA DELLA VERITÀ,’ LANGDON SAID. ‘DIAGRAM OF TRUTH.’

‘NEVER HEARD OF IT.’

‘I’M NOT SURPRISED. DIAGRAMMA WAS GALILEO’S MOST SECRETIVE WORK - SUPPOSEDLY SOME SORT OF TREATISE ON SCIENTIFIC FACTS HE HELD TO BE TRUE BUT WAS NOT ALLOWED TO SHARE. LIKE SOME OF GALILEO’S PREVIOUS MANUSCRIPTS, DIAGRAMMA WAS SMUGGLED OUT OF ROME BY A FRIEND AND QUIETLY PUBLISHED IN HOLLAND. THE BOOKLET BECAME WILDLY POPULAR IN THE EUROPEAN SCIENTIFIC UNDER- GROUND. THEN THE VATICAN CAUGHT WIND OF IT AND WENT ON A BOOK-BURNING CAMPAIGN.’

VITTORIA NOW LOOKED INTRIGUED. ‘AND YOU THINK DIAGRAMMA CONTAINED THE CLUE? THE SEGNO. THE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PATH OF ILLUMINATION.’

‘DIAGRAMMA IS HOW GALILEO GOT THE WORD OUT. THAT I’M SURE OF.’ LANGDON ENTERED THE THIRD ROW OF VAULTS AND CONTINUED SURVEYING THE INDICATOR TABS. ‘ARCHIVISTS HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR A COPY OF DIAGRAMMA FOR YEARS. BUT BETWEEN THE VATICAN BURNINGS AND THE BOOKLET’S LOW PERMANENCE RATING, THE BOOKLET HAS DISAPPEARED OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH.’

‘PERMANENCE RATING?’

‘DURABILITY. ARCHIVISTS RATE DOCUMENTS ONE THROUGH TEN FOR THEIR STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY. DIAGRAMMA WAS PRINTED ON SEDGE PAPYRUS. IT’S LIKE TISSUE PAPER. LIFE SPAN OF NO MORE THAN A CENTURY.’

‘WHY NOT SOMETHING STRONGER?’

‘GALILEO’S BEHEST. TO PROTECT HIS FOLLOWERS. THIS WAY ANY SCIENTISTS CAUGHT WITH A COPY COULD SIMPLY DROP IT IN WATER AND THE BOOKLET WOULD DISSOLVE. IT WAS GREAT FOR DESTRUCTION OF EVIDENCE, BUT TERRIBLE FOR ARCHIVISTS.

IT IS BELIEVED THAT ONLY ONE COPY OF DIAGRAMMA SURVIVED BEYOND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.'

'ONE?' VITTORIA LOOKED MOMENTARILY STARSTRUCK AS SHE GLANCED AROUND THE ROOM. 'AND IT'S HERE?'

'CONFISCATED FROM THE NETHERLANDS BY THE VATICAN SHORTLY AFTER GALILEO'S DEATH. I'VE BEEN PETITIONING TO SEE IT FOR YEARS NOW. EVER SINCE I REALIZED WHAT WAS IN IT.'

AS IF READING LANGDON'S MIND, VITTORIA MOVED ACROSS THE AISLE AND BEGAN SCANNING THE ADJACENT BAY OF VAULTS, DOUBLING THEIR PACE.

'THANKS,' HE SAID. 'LOOK FOR REFERENCE TABS THAT HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH GALILEO, SCIENCE, SCIENTISTS. YOU'LL KNOW IT WHEN YOU SEE IT.'

'OKAY, BUT YOU STILL HAVEN'T TOLD ME HOW YOU FIGURED OUT DIAGRAMMA CONTAINED THE CLUE. IT HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE NUMBER YOU KEPT SEEING IN ILLUMINATI LETTERS? 503?'

LANGDON SMILED. 'YES. IT TOOK SOME TIME, BUT I FINALLY FIGURED OUT THAT 503 IS A SIMPLE CODE. IT CLEARLY POINTS TO DIAGRAMMA.'

FOR AN INSTANT LANGDON RELIVED HIS MOMENT OF UN- EXPECTED REVELATION: AUGUST 16. TWO YEARS AGO. HE WAS STANDING LAKESIDE AT THE WEDDING OF THE SON OF A COLLEAGUE. BAGPIPES DRONED ON THE WATER AS THE WEDDING PARTY MADE THEIR UNIQUE ENTRANCE . . . ACROSS THE LAKE ON A BARGE. THE CRAFT WAS FESTOONED WITH FLOW- ERS AND WREATHS. IT CARRIED A ROMAN NUMERAL PAINTED PROUDLY ON THE HULL - DCII.

PUZZLED BY THE MARKING LANGDON ASKED THE FATHER OF THE BRIDE, 'WHAT'S WITH 602?'

'602?'

LANGDON POINTED TO THE BARGE. 'DCII IS THE ROMAN NUMERAL FOR 602.'

THE MAN LAUGHED. 'THAT'S NOT A ROMAN NUMERAL.'

THAT'S THE NAME OF THE BARGE.'

'THE DCII?'

THE MAN NODDED. 'THE DICK AND CONNIE II.'

LANGDON FELT SHEEPISH. DICK AND CONNIE WERE THE WEDDING COUPLE. THE BARGE OBVIOUSLY HAD BEEN NAMED IN THEIR HONOR. 'WHAT HAPPENED TO THE DCI?' THE MAN GROANED. 'IT SANK YESTERDAY DURING THE REHEARSAL LUNCHEON.'

LANGDON LAUGHED. 'SORRY TO HEAR THAT.' HE LOOKED BACK OUT AT THE BARGE. THE DCII, HE THOUGHT. LIKE A MINIATURE QEII. A SECOND LATER, IT HAD HIT HIM.

NOW LANGDON TURNED TO VITTORIA. '503,' HE SAID, 'AS I MENTIONED, IS A CODE. IT'S AN ILLUMINATI TRICK FOR CONCEALING WHAT WAS ACTUALLY INTENDED AS A ROMAN NUMERAL. THE NUMBER 503 IN ROMAN NUMERALS IS- '

'DIII.'

LANGDON GLANCED UP. 'THAT WAS FAST. PLEASE DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE AN ILLUMINATUS.'

SHE LAUGHED. 'I USE ROMAN NUMERALS TO CODIFY PELAGIC STRATA.'

OF COURSE, LANGDON THOUGHT. DON'T WE ALL.

VITTORIA LOOKED OVER. 'SO WHAT IS THE MEANING OF DIII?'

'DI AND DII AND DIII ARE VERY ODD ABBREVIATIONS. THEY WERE USED BY ANCIENT SCIENTISTS TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE THREE GALILEAN DOCUMENTS MOST COMMONLY CONFUSED.'

VITTORIA DREW A QUICK BREATH. 'DIÀLOGO . . . DISCORSI . . . DIAGRAMMA.'

'D-ONE. D-TWO. D-THREE. ALL SCIENTIFIC. ALL CONTROVERSIAL. 503 IS DIII DIAGRAMMA THE THIRD OF HIS BOOKS.'

VITTORIA LOOKED TROUBLED. 'BUT ONE THONG STILL DOESN'T MAKE SENSE. IF THIS SENGO, THIS CLUE, THIS ADVERTISEMENT ABOUT THE PATH OF ILLUMINATION WAS REALLY IN GALILEO'S

DIAGRAMMA, WHY DIDN'T THE VATICAN SEE IT WHEN THEY REPOSSESSED ALL THE COPIES?'

'THEY MAY HAVE SEEN IT AND NOT NOTICED. REMEMBER THE ILLUMINATI MARKERS? HIDING THINGS IN PLAIN VIEW? DISSIMULATION? THE SEGNO APPARENTLY WAS HIDDEN THE SAME WAY - IN PLAIN VIEW. INVISIBLE TO THOSE WHO WERE NOT LOOKING FOR IT. AND ALSO INVISIBLE TO THOSE WHO DIDN'T UNDERSTAND IT.'

'MEANING?'

'MEANING GALILEO HID IT WELL. ACCORDING TO HISTORIC RECORD, THE SEGNO WAS REVEALED IN A MODE THE ILLUMINATI CALLED LINGUA PURA.'

'THE PURE LANGUAGE?' 'YES.'

'MATHEMATICS?'

'THAT'S MY GUESS. SEEMS PRETTY OBVIOUS. GALILEO WAS A SCIENTIST AFTER ALL, AND HE WAS WRITING FOR SCIENTISTS. MATH WOULD BE A LOGICAL LANGUAGE IN WHICH TO LAY OUT THE CLUE. THE BOOKLET IS CALLED DIAGRAMMA, SO MATH- EMATICAL DIAGRAMS MAY ALSO BE PART OF THE CODE.'

VITTORIA SOUNDED ONLY SLIGHTLY MORE HOPEFUL. 'I SUP- POSE GALILEO COULD HAVE CREATED SOME SORT OF MATHEMATICAL CODE THAT WENT UNNOTICED BY THE CLERGY.'

'YOU DON'T SOUND SOLD,' LANGDON SAID, MOVING DOWN THE ROW.

'I'M NOT. MAINLY BECAUSE YOU AREN'T. IF YOU WERE SO SURE ABOUT DIII, WHY DIDN'T YOU PUBLISH? THEN SOME- ONE WHO DID HAVE ACCESS TO THE VATICAN ARCHIVES COULD HAVE COME IN HERE AND CHECKED OUT DIAGRAMMA A LONG TIME AGO.'

'I DIDN'T WANT TO PUBLISH,' LANGDON SAID. 'I HAD WORKED HARD TO FIND THE INFORMATION AND---' HE STOPPED HIMSELF, EMBARRASSED.

'YOU WANTED THE GLORY.'

LANGDON FELT HIMSELF FLUSH. 'IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING. IT'S JUST THAT---'

'DON'T LOOK SO EMBARRASSED. YOU'RE TALKING TO A SCIENTIST. PUBLISH OR PERISH. AT CERN WE CALL IT "SUBSTANTIATE OR SUFFOCATE." '

'IT WASN'T ONLY WANTING TO BE THE FIRST. I WAS ALSO CONCERNED THAT IF THE WRONG PEOPLE FOUND OUT ABOUT THE INFORMATION IN DIAGRAMMA, IT MIGHT DISAPPEAR.'

THE WRONG PEOPLE BEING THE VATICAN?'

NOT THAT THEY ARE WRONG, PER SE, BUT THE CHURCH HAS ALWAYS DOWNPLAYED THE ILLUMINATI THREAT. IN THE EARLY 1900S THE VATICAN WENT SO FAR AS TO SAY THE ILLUMINATI WERE A FIGMENT OF OVERACTIVE IMAGINATIONS. THE CLERGY FELT, AND PERHAPS RIGHTLY SO, THAT THE LAST THING CHRISTIANS NEEDED TO KNOW WAS THAT THERE WAS A VERY POWERFUL ANTI-CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT INFILTRATING THEIR BANKS, POLITICS, AND UNIVERSITIES.' PRESENT TENSE, ROBERT, HE REMINDED HIMSELF. THERE IS A POWERFUL ANTI-CHRISTIAN FORCE INFILTRATING THEIR BANKS, POLITICS, AND UNIVERSITIES.

'SO YOU THINK THE VATICAN WOULD HAVE BURIED ANY EVIDENCE CORROBORATING THE ILLUMINATI THREAT?'

'QUITE POSSIBLY. ANY THREAT, REAL OR IMAGINED, WEAKENS FAITH IN THE CHURCH'S POWER.'

'ONE MORE QUESTION.' VITTORIA STOPPED SHORT AND LOOKED AT HIM LIKE HE WAS AN ALIEN. 'ARE YOU SERIOUS?' LANGDON STOPPED. 'WHAT DO YOU MEAN?'

'I MEAN IS THIS REALLY YOUR PLAN TO SAVE THE DAY?' LANGDON WASN'T SURE WHETHER HE SAW AMUSED PITY OR SHEER TERROR IN HER EYES. 'YOU MEAN FINDING DIAGRAMMA?'

'NO, I MEAN FINDING DIAGRAMMA, LOCATING A FOUR-HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD SEGNO, DECIPHERING SOME MATHEMATICAL CODE, AND FOLLOWING AN ANCIENT TRAIL OF ART THAT ONLY THE MOST BRILLIANT SCIENTISTS IN HISTORY

HAVE EVER BEEN ABLE TO FOLLOW . . . ALL IN THE NEXT FOUR HOURS.'

LANGDON SHRUGGED. 'I'M OPEN TO OTHER SUGGESTIONS.'

50

ROBERT LANGDON STOOD OUTSIDE ARCHIVE VAULT 9 AND READ THE LABELS ON THE STACKS.

BRAHE . . . CLAVIUS . . . COPERNICUS . . . KEPLER NEWTON . . .

AS HE READ THE NAMES AGAIN, HE FELT A SUDDEN UNEASINESS. HERE ARE THE SCIENTISTS. BUT WHERE IS GALILEO?

HE TURNED TO VITTORIA, WHO WAS CHECKING THE CONTENTS OF A NEARBY VAULT. 'I FOUND THE RIGHT THEME, BUT GALILEO'S MISSING.'

'NO HE ISN'T,' SHE SAID, FROWNING AS SHE MOTIONED TO THE NEXT VAULT. 'HE'S OVER HERE. BUT I HOPE YOU BROUGHT YOUR READING GLASSES, BECAUSE THIS ENTIRE VAULT IS HIS.'

LANGDON RAN OVER. VITTORIA WAS RIGHT. EVERY INDICATOR TAB IN VAULT 10 CARRIED THE SAME KEYWORD.

IL PROCESSO GALILEANO

LANGDON LET OUT A LOW WHISTLE, NOW REALIZING WHY GALILEO HAD HIS OWN VAULT. 'THE GALILEO AFFAIR,' HE MARVELED, PEERING THROUGH THE GLASS AT THE DARK OUTLINES OF THE STACKS. 'THE LONGEST AND MOST EXPENSIVE LEGAL PROCEEDINGS IN VATICAN HISTORY. FOURTEEN YEARS AND SIX HUNDRED MILLION LIRE. IT'S ALL HERE.'

'HAVE A FEW LEGAL DOCUMENTS.'

'I GUESS LAWYERS HAVEN'T EVOLVED MUCH OVER THE CENTURIES.'

NEITHER HAVE SHARKS.'

LANGDON STRODE TO A LARGE YELLOW BUTTON ON THE SIDE OF THE VAULT. HE PRESSED IT, AND A BANK OF OVERHEAD LIGHTS HUMMED ON INSIDE. THE LIGHTS WERE DEEP RED, TURNING THE CUBE INTO A GLOWING CRIMSON CELL . . . A MAZE OF TOWERING SHELVES.

'MY GOD,' VITTORIA SAID, LOOKING SPOOKED. 'ARE WE TANNING OR WORKING?'

PARCHMENT AND VELLUM FADES, SO VAULT LIGHTING IS ALWAYS DONE WITH DARK LIGHTS.'

'YOU COULD GO MAD IN HERE.'

OR WORSE, LANGDON THOUGHT, MOVING TOWARD THE VAULT'S SOLE ENTRANCE. 'A QUICK WORD OF WARNING. OXYGEN IS AN OXIDANT, SO HERMETIC VAULTS CONTAIN VERY LITTLE OF IT. IT'S A PARTIAL VACUUM INSIDE. YOUR BREATHING WILL FEEL STRAINED.'

'HEY, IF OLD CARDINALS CAN SURVIVE IT.'

TRUE, LANGDON THOUGHT. MAY WE BE AS LUCKY.

THE VAULT ENTRANCE WAS A SINGLE ELECTRONIC REVOLVING DOOR. LANGDON NOTED THE COMMON ARRANGEMENT OF FOUR ACCESS BUTTONS ON THE DOOR'S INNER SHAFT, ONE ACCESSIBLE FROM EACH COMPARTMENT. WHEN A BUTTON WAS PRESSED, THE MOTORIZED DOOR WOULD KICK INTO GEAR AND MAKE THE CONVENTIONAL HALF ROTATION BEFORE GRINDING TO A HALT - A STANDARD PROCEDURE TO PRESERVE THE INTEGRITY OF THE INNER ATMOSPHERE.

AFTER I'M IN,' LANGDON SAID, 'JUST PRESS THE BUTTON AND FOLLOW ME THROUGH. THERE'S ONLY EIGHT PER CENT HUMIDITY INSIDE, SO BE PREPARED TO FEEL SOME DRY MOUTH.'

LANGDON STEPPED INTO THE ROTATING COMPARTMENT AND PRESSED THE BUTTON. THE DOOR BUZZED LOUDLY AND

BEGAN TO ROTATE. AS HE FOLLOWED ITS MOTION, LANGDON PREPARED HIS BODY FOR THE PHYSICAL SHOCK THAT ALWAYS ACCOMPANIED THE FIRST FEW SECONDS IN A HERMETIC VAULT. ENTERING A SEALED ARCHIVE WAS LIKE GOING FROM SEA LEVEL TO 20,000 FEET IN AN INSTANT. NAUSEA AND LIGHTHEADEDNESS WERE NOT UNCOMMON. DOUBLE VISION, DOUBLE OVER, HE REMINDED HIMSELF, QUOTING THE ARCHIVIST'S MANTRA. LANGDON FELT HIS EARS POP. THERE WAS A HISS OF AIR, AND THE DOOR SPUN TO A STOP.

HE WAS IN.

LANGDON'S FIRST REALIZATION WAS THAT THE AIR INSIDE WAS THINNER THAN HE HAD ANTICIPATED. THE VATICAN, IT SEEMED, TOOK THEIR ARCHIVES A BIT MORE SERIOUSLY THAN MOST. LANGDON FOUGHT THE GAG REFLEX AND RELAXED HIS CHEST WHILE HIS PULMONARY CAPILLARIES DILATED. THE TIGHTNESS PASSED QUICKLY. ENTER THE DOLPHIN, HE MUSED, GRATIFIED HIS FIFTY LAPS A DAY WERE GOOD FOR SOMETHING. BREATHING MORE NORMALLY NOW, HE LOOKED AROUND THE VAULT. DESPITE THE TRANSPARENT OUTER WALLS, HE FELT A FAMILIAR ANXIETY. I'M IN A BOX, HE THOUGHT. A BLOOD RED BOX.

THE DOOR BUZZED BEHIND HIM, AND LANGDON TURNED TO WATCH VITTORIA ENTER. WHEN SHE ARRIVED INSIDE, HER EYES IMMEDIATELY BEGAN WATERING, AND SHE STARTED BREATHING HEAVILY.

'GIVE IT A MINUTE,' LANGDON SAID. 'IF YOU GET LIGHT- HEADED, BEND OVER.'

'I . . . FEEL . . . VITTORIA CHOKED, 'LIKE I'M . . . SCUBA DIVING . . .WITH THE WRONG . . . MIXTURE.'

LANGDON WAITED FOR HER TO ACCLIMATIZE. HE KNEW SHE WOULD BE FINE. VITTORIA VETRA WAS OBVIOUSLY IN TERRIFIC SHAPE, NOTHING LIKE THE DODDERING ANCIENT RADCLIFFE ALUMNAE LANGDON HAD ONCE SQUIRED THROUGH WIDENER LIBRARY'S HERMETIC VAULT. THE TOUR HAD ENDED WITH

LANGDON GIVING MOUTH-TO-MOUTH TO AN OLD WOMAN WHO'D ALMOST ASPIRATED HER FALSE TEETH.

'FEELING BETTER?' HE ASKED.

VITTORIA NODDED.

'I RODE YOUR DAMN SPACE PLANE, SO I THOUGHT I OWED YOU.'

THIS BROUGHT A SMILE. 'TOUCHÉ.'

LANGDON REACHED INTO THE BOX BESIDE THE DOOR AND EXTRACTED SOME WHITE COTTON GLOVES.

'FORMAL AFFAIR?' VITTORIA ASKED.

'FINGER ACID. WE CAN'T HANDLE THE DOCUMENTS WITH- OUT THEM. YOU'LL NEED A PAIR.'

VITTORIA DONNED SOME GLOVES. 'HOW LONG DO WE HAVE?'

LANGDON CHECKED HIS MICKEY MOUSE WATCH. 'IT'S JUST PAST SEVEN.'

'WE HAVE TO FIND THIS THING WITHIN THE HOUR.'

'ACTUALLY,' LANGDON SAID, 'WE DON'T HAVE THAT KIND OF TIME.' HE POINTED OVERHEAD TO A FILTERED CUT. 'NORMALLY THE CURATOR WOULD TURN ON A REOXYGENATION SYSTEM WHEN SOMEONE IS INSIDE THE VAULT. NOT TODAY. TWENTY MINUTES, WE'LL BOTH BE SUCKING WIND.'

VITTORIA BLANCHED NOTICEABLY IN THE REDDISH GLOW.

LANGDON SMILED AND SMOOTHED HIS GLOVES. 'SUBSTANTIATE OR SUFFOCATE, MS VETRA. MICKEY'S TICKING.'

BBC REPORTER GUNTHER GLICK STARED AT THE CELL PHONE IN HIS HAND FOR TEN SECONDS BEFORE HE FINALLY HUNG UP.

CHINITA MACRI STUDIED HIM FROM THE BACK OF THE VAN. 'WHAT HAPPENED? WHO WAS THAT?'

GLICK TURNED, FEELING LIKE A CHILD WHO HAD JUST RECEIVED A CHRISTMAS GIFT HE FEARED WAS NOT REALLY FOR HIM. 'I JUST GOT A TIP. SOMETHING'S GOING ON INSIDE THE VATICAN.'

'IT'S CALLED CONCLAVE,' CHINITA SAID. 'HELLUVA TIP.'

'NO, SOMETHING ELSE.' SOMETHING BIG. HE WONDERED IF THE STORY THE CALLER HAD JUST TOLD HIM COULD POSSIBLY BE TRUE. GLICK FELT ASHAMED WHEN HE REALIZED HE WAS PRAYING IT WAS. 'WHAT IF I TOLD YOU FOUR CARDINALS HAVE BEEN KIDNAPPED AND ARE GOING TO BE MURDERED AT DIFFERENT CHURCHES TONIGHT.'

'I'D SAY YOU'RE BEING HAZED BY SOMEONE AT THE OFFICE WITH A SICK SENSE OF HUMOR.'

'WHAT IF I TOLD YOU WE WERE GOING TO BE GIVEN THE EXACT LOCATION OF THE FIRST MURDER?'

'I'D WANT TO KNOW WHO THE HELL YOU JUST TALKED TO.'

'HE DIDN'T SAY.'

'PERHAPS BECAUSE HE'S FULL OF SHIT?'

GLICK HAD COME TO EXPECT MACRI'S CYNICISM, BUT WHAT SHE WAS FORGETTING WAS THAT LIARS AND LUNATICS HAD BEEN GLICK'S BUSINESS FOR ALMOST A DECADE AT THE BRITISH TATLER. THIS CALLER HAD BEEN NEITHER. THIS MAN HAD BEEN COLDLY SANE. LOGICAL. I WILL CALL YOU JUST BEFORE EIGHT, THE MAN HAD SAID, AND TELL YOU WHERE THE FIRST KILLING WILL OCCUR. THE IMAGES YOU RECORD WILL MAKE YOU FAMOUS. WHEN GLICK HAD DEMANDED WHY THE CALLER WAS GIVING HIM THIS INFORMATION, THE ANSWER HAD BEEN AS ICY AS THE MAN'S MIDEASTERN ACCENT. THE MEDIA IS THE RIGHT ARM OF ANARCHY.

'HE TOLD ME SOMETHING ELSE TOO,' GLICK SAID.

'WHAT? THAT ELVIS PRESLEY WAS JUST ELECTED POPE?'

'DIAL INTO THE BBC DATABASE, WILL YOU?' GLICK'S

ADRENALINE WAS PUMPING NOW. 'I WANT TO SEE WHAT OTHER STORIES WE'VE RUN ON THESE GUYS.

'WHAT GUYS?'

'INDULGE ME.'

MACRI SIGHED AND PULLED UP THE CONNECTION TO THE BBC DATABASE. 'THIS'LL TAKE A MINUTE.'

GLICK'S MIND WAS SWIMMING. 'THE CALLER WAS VERY INTENT TO KNOW IF I HAD A CAMERAMAN.' 'VIDEOGRAPHER.'

'AND IF WE COULD TRANSMIT LIVE.'

'ONE POINT FIVE THREE SEVEN MEGAHERTZ. WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?' THE DATABASE BEEPED. 'OKAY, WE'RE IN. WHO IS IT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR?'

GLICK GAVE HER THE KEYWORD.

MACRI TURNED AND STARED. 'I SURE AS HELL HOPE YOU'RE KIDDING.'

THE INTERNAL ORGANIZATION OF ARCHIVAL VAULT 10 WAS NOT AS INTUITIVE AS LANGDON HAD HOPED, AND THE DIAGRAMMA MANUSCRIPT DID NOT APPEAR TO BE LOCATED WITH OTHER SIMILAR GALILEAN PUBLICATIONS. WITHOUT ACCESS TO THE COMPUTERIZED BIBLION AND A REFERENCE LOCATOR, LANGDON AND VITTORIA WERE STUCK.

'YOU'RE SURE DIAGRAMMA IS IN HERE?' VITTORIA ASKED. 'POSITIVE. IT'S A CONFIRMED LISTING IN BOTH THE UFFICIO DELLA PROPAGANDA DELLE FEDE-'

'FINE. AS LONG AS YOU'RE SURE.' SHE HEADED LEFT, WHILE HE WENT RIGHT.

LANGDON BEGAN HIS MANUAL SEARCH. HE NEEDED EVERY

BIT OF SELF-RESTRAINT NOT TO STOP AND READ EVERY TREASURE HE PASSED. THE COLLECTION WAS STAGGERING. THE ASSAYER . . . THE STARRY MESSENGER . . . THE SUNSPOT LETTERS . . . LETTER TO THE GRAND DUCHESS CHRISTINA . . . APOLOGIA PRO GALILEO . . . ON AND ON.

IT WAS VITTORIA WHO FINALLY STRUCK GOLD NEAR THE BACK OF THE VAULT. HER THROATY VOICE CALLED OUT, 'DIAGRAMMA DELLA VERITÀ!'

LANGDON DASHED THROUGH THE CRIMSON HAZE TO JOIN HER. 'WHERE?'

VITTORIA POINTED, AND LANGDON IMMEDIATELY REALIZED WHY THEY HAD NOT FOUND IT EARLIER. THE MANUSCRIPT IN A FOLIO BIN, NOT ON THE SHELVES. FOLIO BINS WERE A COMMON MEANS OF STORING UNBOUND PAGES. THE LABEL ON THE FRONT OF THE CONTAINER LEFT NO DOUBT ABOUT THE CONTENTS.

DIAGRAMMA DELLA VERITA

GALILEO GALILEI, 1639

LANGDON DROPPED TO HIS KNEES, HIS HEART POUNDING, 'DIAGRAMMA.' HE GAVE HER A GRIN. 'NICE WORK. HELP ME PULL OUT THIS BIN.'

VITTORIA KNELT BESIDE HIM, AND THEY HEAVED. THE METAL TRAY ON WHICH THE BIN WAS SITTING ROLLED TOWARD THEM ON CASTORS, REVEALING THE TOP OF THE CONTAINER.

'NO LOCK?' VITTORIA SAID, SOUNDING SURPRISED AT THE SIMPLE LATCH.

'NEVER. DOCUMENTS SOMETIMES NEED TO BE EVACUATED QUICKLY. FLOODS AND FIRES.'

'SO OPEN IT.'

LANGDON DIDN'T NEED ANY ENCOURAGEMENT. WITH HIS ACADEMIC LIFE'S DREAM RIGHT IN FRONT OF HIM AND THE THINNING AIR IN THE CHAMBER, HE WAS IN NO MOOD TO

DAWDLE. HE UNSNAPPED THE LATCH AND LIFTED THE LID. INSIDE, FLAT ON THE FLOOR OF THE BIN, LAY A BLACK, DUCK- CLOTH POUCH. THE CLOTH'S BREATHABILITY WAS CRITICAL TO THE PRESERVATION OF ITS CONTENTS. REACHING IN WITH BOTH HANDS AND KEEPING THE POUCH HORIZONTAL, LANGDON LIFTED IT OUT OF THE BIN.

I EXPECTED A TREASURE CHEST,' VITTORIA SAID. 'LOOKS MORE LIKE A PILLOWCASE."

FOLLOW ME,' HE SAID. HOLDING THE BAG BEFORE HIM LIKE A SACRED OFFERING, LANGDON WALKED TO THE CENTRE OF THE VAULT WHERE HE FOUND THE CUSTOMARY GLASS-TOPPED ARCHIVAL EXAM TABLE. ALTHOUGH THE CENTRAL LOCATION WAS INTENDED TO MINIMIZE IN-VAULT TRAVEL OF DOCUMENTS, RESEARCHERS APPRECIATED THE PRIVACY THE SURROUNDING STACKS AFFORDED. CAREER-MAKING DISCOVERIES WERE UNCOVERED IN THE TOP VAULTS OF THE WORLD, AND MOST ACADEMICS DID NOT LIKE RIVALS PEERING THROUGH THE GLASS AS THEY WORKED.

LANGDON LAID THE POUCH ON THE TABLE AND UNBUTTONED THE OPENING. VITTORIA STOOD BY. RUMMAGING THROUGH A TRAY OF ARCHIVIST TOOLS, LANGDON FOUND THE FELT-PAD PINCERS ARCHIVISTS CALLED FINGER CYMBALS - OVERSIZED TWEEZERS WITH FLATTENED DISKS ON EACH ARM. AS HIS EXCITEMENT MOUNTED, LANGDON FEARED AT ANY MOMENT HE MIGHT AWAKE BACK IN CAMBRIDGE WITH A PILE OF TEST PAPERS TO GRADE. INHALING DEEPLY, HE OPENED THE BAG. FINGERS TREMBLING IN THEIR COTTON GLOVES, HE REACHED IN WITH HIS TONGS.

'RELAX,' VITTORIA SAID. 'IT'S PAPER, NOT PLUTONIUM.' LANGDON SLID THE TONGS AROUND THE STACK OF DOCUMENTS INSIDE AND WAS CAREFUL TO APPLY EVEN PRESSURE. THEN, RATHER THAN PULLING OUT THE DOCUMENTS, HE HELD THEM IN PLACE WHILE HE SLID OFF THE BAG - AN ARCHIVIST'S PROCEDURE FOR MINIMIZING TORQUE ON THE ARTIFACT. NOT

UNTIL THE BAG WAS REMOVED AND LANGDON HAD TURNED ON THE EXAM DARKLIGHT BENEATH THE TABLE DID HE BEGIN BREATHING AGAIN.

VITTORIA LOOKED LIKE A SPECTRE NOW, LIT FROM BELOW BY THE LAMP BENEATH THE GLASS. 'SMALL SHEETS,' SHE SAID, HER VOICE REVERENT.

LANGDON NODDED. THE STACK OF FOLIOS BEFORE THEM LOOKED LIKE LOOSE PAGES FROM A SMALL PAPERBACK NOVEL. LANGDON COULD SEE THAT THE TOP SHEET WAS AN ORNATE PEN AND INK COVER SHEET WITH THE TITLE, THE DATE, AND GALILEO'S NAME IN HIS OWN HAND.

IN THAT INSTANT, LANGDON FORGOT THE CRAMPED QUARTERS, FORGOT HIS EXHAUSTION, FORGOT THE HORRIFYING SITUATION THAT HAD BROUGHT HIM HERE. HE SIMPLY STARED IN WONDER. CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH HISTORY ALWAYS LEFT LIKE SEEING THE LANGDON NUMBED WITH REVERENCE . . . BRUSHSTROKES ON THE MONA LISA.

THE MUTED, YELLOW PAPYRUS LEFT NO DOUBT IN LANGDON'S MIND AS TO ITS AGE AND AUTHENTICITY, BUT EXCLUDING THE INEVITABLE FADING, THE DOCUMENT WAS IN SUPERB CONDITION. SLIGHT BLEACHING OF THE PIGMENT. MINOR SUNDERING AND COHESION OF THE PAPYRUS. BUT ALL IN ALL . . . IN DAMN FINE CONDITION. HE STUDIED THE ORNATE HAND ETCHING OF THE COVER, HIS VISION BLURRING IN THE LACK OF HUMIDITY. VITTORIA WAS SILENT.

'HAND ME A SPATULA, PLEASE.' LANGDON MOTIONED BESIDE VITTORIA TO A TRAY FILLED WITH STAINLESS-STEEL ARCHIVAL TOOLS. SHE HANDED IT TO HIM. LANGDON TOOK THE TOOL IN HIS HAND. IT WAS A GOOD ONE. HE RAN HIS FINGERS ACROSS THE FACE TO REMOVE ANY STATIC CHARGE AND THEN, EVER SO CAREFULLY, SLID THE BLADE BENEATH THE COVER. THEN, LIFTING THE SPATULA, HE TURNED OVER THE COVER SHEET.

THE FIRST PAGE WAS WRITTEN IN LONGHAND, THE TINY,

STYLIZED CALLIGRAPHY ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO READ. LANGDON IMMEDIATELY NOTICED THAT THERE WERE NO DIAGRAMS OR NUMBERS ON THE PAGE. IT WAS AN ESSAY.

‘HELIOCENTRICITY,’ VITTORIA SAID, TRANSLATING THE HEADING ON FOLIO ONE. SHE SCANNED THE TEXT. ‘LOOKS LIKE GALILEO RENOUNCING THE GEOCENTRIC MODEL ONCE AND FOR ALL. ANCIENT ITALIAN, THOUGH, SO NO PROMISES ON THE TRANSLATION.’

‘FORGET IT,’ LANGDON SAID. ‘WE’RE LOOKING FOR MATH. THE PURE LANGUAGE.’ HE USED THE SPATULA TOOL TO FLIP THE NEXT PAGE. ANOTHER ESSAY. NO MATH OR DIAGRAMS. LANGDON’S HANDS BEGAN TO SWEAT INSIDE HIS GLOVES.

‘MOVEMENT OF THE PLANETS,’ VITTORIA SAID, TRANSLATING THE TITLE.

LANGDON FROWNEED. ON ANY OTHER DAY, HE WOULD HAVE BEEN FASCINATED TO READ IT; INCREDIBLY NASA’S CURRENT MODEL OF PLANETARY ORBITS, OBSERVED THROUGH HIGH-POWERED TELESCOPES, WAS SUPPOSEDLY ALMOST IDENTICAL TO GALILEO’S ORIGINAL PREDICTIONS.

‘NO MATH,’ VITTORIA SAID. ‘HE’S TALKING ABOUT RETRO- GRADE MOTIONS AND ELLIPTICAL ORBITS OR SOMETHING.’

ELLIPTICAL ORBITS. LANGDON RECALLED THAT MUCH OF GALILEO’S LEGAL TROUBLE HAD BEGUN WHEN HE DESCRIBED PLANETARY MOTION AS ELLIPTICAL. THE VATICAN EXALTED THE PERFECTION OF THE CIRCLE AND INSISTED HEAVENLY MOTION MUST BE ONLY CIRCULAR. GALILEO’S ILLUMINATI, HOWEVER, SAW PERFECTION IN THE ELLIPSE AS WELL, REVERING THE MATHEMATICAL DUALITY OF ITS TWIN FOCI. THE ILLUMINATI’S ELLIPSE WAS PROMINENT EVEN TODAY IN MODERN MASONIC TRACING BOARDS AND FOOTING INLAYS.

‘NEXT,’ VITTORIA SAID.

LANGDON FLIPPED.

‘LUNAR PHASES AND TIDAL MOON,’ SHE SAID. ‘NO NUMBERS. NO DIAGRAMS.’

LANGDON FLIPPED AGAIN. NOTHING. HE KEPT FLIPPING THROUGH A DOZEN OR SO PAGES. NOTHING. NOTHING. NOTHING.

‘I THOUGHT THIS GUY WAS A MATHEMATICIAN,’ VITTORIA SAID. ‘THIS IS ALL TEXT.’

LANGDON FELT THE AIR IN HIS LUNGS BEGINNING TO THIN. HIS HOPES WERE THINNING TOO. THE PILE WAS WANING.

‘NOTHING HERE,’ VITTORIA SAID. ‘NO MATH. A FEW DATES, A FEW STANDARD FIGURES, BUT NOTHING THAT LOOKS LIKE IT COULD BE A CLUE.’

LANGDON FLIPPED OVER THE LAST FOLIO AND SIGHED. IT, TOO, WAS AN ESSAY.

‘SHORT BOOK,’ VITTORIA SAID, FROWNING.

LANGDON NODDED.

‘MERDA, AS WE SAY IN ROME.’

SHIT IS RIGHT, LANGDON THOUGHT. HIS REFLECTION IN THE GLASS SEEMED MOCKING, LIKE THE IMAGE STARING BACK AT HIM THIS MORNING FROM HIS BAY WINDOW. AN AGING GHOST. ‘THERE’S GOT TO BE SOMETHING,’ HE SAID, THE HOARSE DESPERATION IN HIS VOICE SURPRISING HIM. ‘THE SEGNO IS HERE SOMEWHERE. I KNOW IT!’

‘MAYBE YOU WERE WRONG ABOUT DIII?’

LANGDON TURNED AND STARED AT HER.

‘OKAY,’ SHE AGREED, ‘DIII MAKES PERFECT SENSE. BUT MAYBE THE CLUE ISN’T MATHEMATICAL?’

‘LINGUA PURA. WHAT ELSE WOULD IT BE?’

‘ART?’

‘EXCEPT THERE ARE NO DIAGRAMS OR PICTURES IN THE BOOK.’ ‘ALL I KNOW IS THAT LINGUA PURA REFERS TO SOMETHING OTHER THAN ITALIAN. MATH JUST SEEMS LOGICAL.’

‘I AGREE.’

LANGDON REFUSED TO ACCEPT DEFEAT SO QUICKLY. ‘THE NUMBERS MUST BE WRITTEN LONGHAND. THE MATH MUST BE IN WORDS RATHER THAN EQUATIONS.’

'IT'LL TAKE SOME TIME TO READ ALL THE PAGES.'

'TIME'S SOMETHING WE DON'T HAVE. WE'LL HAVE TO SPLIT THE WORK.' LANGDON FLIPPED THE STACK BACK OVER TO THE BEGINNING. 'I KNOW ENOUGH ITALIAN TO SPOT NUMBERS.' USING HIS SPATULA, HE CUT THE STACK LIKE A DECK OF CARDS AND LAID THE FIRST HALF-DOZEN PAGES IN FRONT OF VITTORIA. 'IT'S IN HERE SOMEWHERE. I'M SURE.'

VITTORIA REACHED DOWN AND FLIPPED HER FIRST PAGE BY HAND.

'SPATULA!' LANGDON SAID, GRABBING HER AN EXTRA TOOL FROM THE TRAY. 'USE THE SPATULA.'

'I'M WEARING GLOVES,' SHE GRUMBLED. 'HOW MUCH DAMAGE COULD I CAUSE?'

'JUST USE IT.'

VITTORIA PICKED UP THE SPATULA. 'YOU FEELING WHAT I'M FEELING?'

'TENSE?'

'NO. SHORT OF BREATH.'

LANGDON WAS DEFINITELY STARTING TO FEEL IT TOO. THE AIR WAS THINNING FASTER THAN HE HAD IMAGINED. HE KNEW THEY HAD TO HURRY. ARCHIVAL CONUNDRUMS WERE NOTHING NEW FOR HIM, BUT USUALLY HE HAD MORE THAN A FEW MINUTES TO WORK THEM OUT. WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD, LANGDON BOWED HIS HEAD AND BEGAN TRANSLATING THE FIRST PAGE IN HIS STACK.

SHOW YOURSELF, DAMN IT! SHOW YOURSELF!

SOMEWHERE BENEATH ROME THE DARK FIGURE PROWLED DOWN A STONE RAMP INTO THE UNDERGROUND TUNNEL. THE

ANCIENT PASSAGEWAY WAS LIT ONLY BY TORCHES, MAKING THE AIR HOT AND THICK. UP AHEAD THE FRIGHTENED VOICES OF GROWN MEN CALLED OUT IN VAIN, ECHOING IN THE CRAMPED SPACES.

AS HE ROUNDED THE CORNER HE SAW THEM, EXACTLY AS HE HAD LEFT THEM - FOUR OLD MEN, TERRIFIED, SEALED BEHIND RUSTED IRON BARS IN A STONE CUBICLE.

‘QUI ÊTES-VOUS?’ ONE OF THE MEN DEMANDED IN FRENCH. ‘WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH US?’

‘HILFE!’ ANOTHER SAID IN GERMAN. ‘LET US GO!’

‘ARE YOU AWARE WHO WE ARE?’ ONE ASKED IN ENGLISH, HIS ACCENT SPANISH.

‘SILENCE,’ THE RASPY VOICE COMMANDED. THERE WAS A FINALITY ABOUT THE WORD.

THE FOURTH PRISONER, AN ITALIAN, QUIET AND THOUGHTFUL, LOOKED INTO THE INKY VOID OF HIS CAPTOR’S EYES AND SWORE HE SAW HELL ITSELF. GOD HELP US, HE THOUGHT.

THE KILLER CHECKED HIS WATCH AND THEN RETURNED HIS GAZE TO THE PRISONERS. ‘NOW THEN,’ HE SAID. ‘WHO WILL BE FIRST?’

INSIDE ARCHIVE VAULT 10 ROBERT LANGDON RECITED ITALIAN NUMBERS AS HE SCANNED THE CALLIGRAPHY BEFORE HIM. MILLE . . . CENTIO UNO, DUO, TRE . . . CINQUANTA. I NEED A NUMERICAL REFERENCE! ANYTHING, DAMMIT!

WHEN HE REACHED THE END OF HIS CURRENT FOLIO, HE LIFTED THE SPATULA TO FLIP THE PAGE. AS HE ALIGNED THE BLADE WITH THE NEXT PAGE, HE FUMBLED, HAVING DIFFICULTY HOLDING THE TOOL STEADY. MINUTES LATER, HE LOOKED

DOWN AND REALIZED HE HAD ABANDONED HIS SPATULA AND WAS TURNING PAGES BY HAND. OOPS, HE THOUGHT, FEELING VAGUELY CRIMINAL. THE LACK OF OXYGEN WAS AFFECTING HIS INHIBITIONS. LOOKS LIKE I'LL BURN IN ARCHIVIST'S HELL.

ABOUT DAMN TIME,' VITTORIA CHOKED WHEN SHE SAW LANGDON TURNING PAGES BY HAND. SHE DROPPED HER SPATULA AND FOLLOWED SUIT.

'ANY LUCK?'

VITTORIA SHOOK HER HEAD. 'NOTHING THAT LOOKS PURELY MATHEMATICAL. I'M SKIMMING . . . BUT NONE OF THIS READS LIKE A CLUE.'

LANGDON CONTINUED TRANSLATING HIS FOLIOS WITH INCREASING DIFFICULTY. HIS ITALIAN SKILLS WERE ROCKY AT BEST, AND THE TINY PENMANSHIP AND ARCHAIC LANGUAGE WERE MAKING IT SLOW GOING. VITTORIA REACHED THE END OF HER STACK BEFORE LANGDON AND LOOKED DISHEARTENED AS SHE FLIPPED THE PAGES OVER. SHE HUNKERED DOWN FOR ANOTHER MORE INTENSE INSPECTION.

WHEN LANGDON FINISHED HIS FINAL PAGE, HE CURSED UNDER HIS BREATH AND LOOKED OVER AT VITTORIA. SHE WAS SCOWLING, SQUINTING AT SOMETHING ON ONE OF HER FOLIOS. 'WHAT IS IT?' HE ASKED.

VITTORIA DID NOT LOOK UP. 'DID YOU HAVE ANY FOOTNOTES ON YOUR PAGES?'

'NOT THAT I NOTICED. WHY?'

'THIS PAGE HAS A FOOTNOTE. IT'S OBSCURED IN A CREASE.' LANGDON TRIED TO SEE WHAT SHE WAS LOOKING AT, BUT ALL HE COULD MAKE OUT WAS THE PAGE NUMBER IN THE UPPER RIGHT-HAND CORNER OF THE SHEET. FOLIO 5. IT TOOK A MOMENT FOR THE COINCIDENCE TO REGISTER, AND EVEN WHEN IT DID THE CONNECTION SEEMED VAGUE. FOLIO FIVE. FIVE, PYTHAGORAS, PENTAGRAMS, ILLUMINATI. LANGDON WONDERED IF THE ILLUMINATI WOULD HAVE CHOSEN PAGE FIVE ON WHICH TO HIDE THEIR CLUE. THROUGH THE REDDISH FOG

SURROUNDING THEM, LANGDON SENSED A TINY RAY OF HOPE. 'IS THE FOOTNOTE MATHEMATICAL?'

VITTORIA SHOOK HER HEAD. 'TEXT. ONE LINE. VERY SMALL PRINTING. ALMOST ILLEGIBLE.'

HIS HOPES FADED. 'IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE MATH. LINGUA PURA.'

'YEAH, I KNOW.' SHE HESITATED. 'I THINK YOU'LL WANT TO HEAR THIS, THOUGH.' LANGDON SENSED EXCITEMENT IN HER VOICE.

'GO AHEAD.'

SQUINTING AT THE FOLIO, VITTORIA READ THE LINE. 'THE PATH OF LIGHT IS LAID, THE SACRED TEST.'

THE WORDS WERE NOTHING LIKE WHAT LANGDON HAD IMAGINED. 'I'M SORRY?'

VITTORIA REPEATED THE LINE. 'THE PATH OF LIGHT IS LAID, THE SACRED TEST.'

'PATH OF LIGHT?' LANGDON FELT HIS POSTURE STRAIGHTENING. 'THAT'S WHAT IT SAYS. PATH OF LIGHT.'

AS THE WORDS SANK IN, LANGDON FELT HIS DELIRIUM PIERCED BY AN INSTANT OF CLARITY. THE PATH OF LIGHT IS LAID, THE SACRED TEST. HE HAD NO IDEA HOW IT HELPED THEM, BUT THE LINE WAS AS DIRECT A REFERENCE TO THE PATH OF ILLUMINATION AS HE COULD IMAGINE. PATH OF LIGHT. SACRED TEST. HIS HEAD FELT LIKE AN ENGINE REVVING ON BAD FUEL. 'ARE YOU SURE OF THE TRANSLATION?'

VITTORIA HESITATED. 'ACTUALLY...' SHE GLANCED OVER AT HIM WITH A STRANGE LOOK. 'IT'S NOT TECHNICALLY A TRANSLATION. THE LINE IS WRITTEN IN ENGLISH.'

FOR AN INSTANT, LANGDON THOUGHT THE ACOUSTICS IN THE CHAMBER HAD AFFECTED HIS HEARING. 'ENGLISH?'

VITTORIA PUSHED THE DOCUMENT OVER TO HIM, AND LANGDON READ THE MINUSCULE PRINTING AT THE BOTTOM OF PAGE. "THE PATH OF LIGHT IS LAID, THE SACRED TEST. ENGLISH? WHAT IS ENGLISH DOING IN AN ITALIAN BOOK?'

VITTORIA SHRUGGED. SHE TOO WAS LOOKING TIPSY. 'MAYBE ENGLISH IS WHAT THEY MEANT BY THE LINGUA PURA? IT'S CONSIDERED THE INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE OF SCIENCE. IT'S ALL WE SPEAK AT CERN.'

'BUT THIS WAS IN THE 1600S,' LANGDON ARGUED. 'NOBODY SPOKE ENGLISH IN ITALY, NOT EVEN----' HE STOPPED SHORT, REALIZING WHAT HE WAS ABOUT TO SAY. 'NOT THE CLERGY.' LANGDON'S ACADEMIC MIND HUMMED IN HIGH GEAR. 'IN THE 1600S,' HE SAID, TALKING FASTER NOW, 'ENGLISH WAS ONE LANGUAGE THE VATICAN HAD NOT YET EMBRACED. THEY DEALT IN ITALIAN, LATIN, GERMAN, EVEN SPANISH AND FRENCH, BUT ENGLISH WAS TOTALLY FOREIGN INSIDE THE VATICAN. THEY CONSIDERED ENGLISH A POLLUTED, FREE-THINKERS LANGUAGE FOR PROFANE MEN LIKE CHAUCER AND SHAKESPEARE.' LANGDON FLASHED SUDDENLY ON THE ILLUMINATI BRANDS OF EARTH, AIR, FIRE, WATER. THE LEGEND THAT THE BRANDS WERE IN ENGLISH NOW MADE A BIZARRE KIND OF SENSE.

'SO YOU'RE SAYING MAYBE GALILEO CONSIDERED ENGLISH LA LINGUA PURA BECAUSE IT WAS THE ONE LANGUAGE THE VATICAN DID NOT CONTROL?'

'YES. OR MAYBE BY PUTTING THE CLUE IN ENGLISH, GALILEO WAS SUBTLY RESTRICTING THE READERSHIP AWAY FROM THE VATICAN.'

'BUT IT'S NOT EVEN A CLUE,' VITTORIA ARGUED. "THE PATH OF LIGHT IS LAID, THE SACRED TEST? WHAT THE HELL DOES THAT MEAN?'

SHE'S RIGHT, LANGDON THOUGHT. THE LINE DIDN'T HELP IN ANY WAY. BUT AS HE SPOKE THE PHRASE AGAIN IN HIS MIND, A STRANGE FACT HIT HIM. NOW THAT'S ODD, HE THOUGHT. WHAT ARE THE CHANCES OF THAT?

'WE NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE,' VITTORIA SAID, SOUNDING HOARSE.

LANGDON WASN'T LISTENING. THE PATH OF LIGHT IS LAID, THE

SACRED TEST. 'IT'S A DAMN LINE OF IAMBIC PENTAMETER,' HE SAID SUDDENLY, COUNTING THE SYLLABLES AGAIN. 'FIVE COUPLETS OF ALTERNATING STRESSED AND UNSTRESSED SYLLABLES.'

VITTORIA LOOKED LOST. 'IAMBIC WHO?'

FOR AN INSTANT LANGDON WAS BACK AT PHILLIPS EXETER ACADEMY SITTING IN A SATURDAY MORNING ENGLISH CLASS. HELL ON EARTH. THE SCHOOL BASEBALL STAR, PETER GREER, WAS HAVING TROUBLE REMEMBERING THE NUMBER OF COUPLETS NECESSARY FOR A LINE OF SHAKESPEAREAN IAMBIC PENTAMETER. THEIR PROFESSOR, AN ANIMATED SCHOOLMASTER NAMED BISSELL, LEAPT ONTO THE TABLE AND BELLOWED, 'PENTA-METER, GREER! THINK OF HOME PLATE! A PENTAGON! FIVE SIDES! PENTA! PENTA! PENTA! JEEEEESH!'

FIVE COUPLETS, LANGDON THOUGHT. EACH COUPLET, BY DEFINITION, HAVING TWO SYLLABLES. HE COULD NOT BELIEVE IN HIS ENTIRE CAREER HE HAD NEVER MADE THE CONNECTION. IAMBIC PENTAMETER WAS A SYMMETRICAL METER BASED ON THE SACRED ILLUMINATI NUMBERS OF 5 AND 2!

YOU'RE REACHING! LANGDON TOLD HIMSELF, TRYING TO PUSH IT FROM HIS MIND. A MEANINGLESS COINCIDENCE! BUT THE THOUGHT STUCK. FIVE . . . FOR PYTHAGORAS AND THE PENTAGRAM. TWO . . . FOR THE DUALITY OF ALL THINGS.

A MOMENT LATER, ANOTHER REALIZATION SENT A NUMBING SENSATION DOWN HIS LEGS. IAMBIC PENTAMETER, ON ACCOUNT OF ITS SIMPLICITY, WAS OFTEN CALLED 'PURE VERSE' OR 'PURE METER'. LA LINGUA PURA? COULD THIS HAVE BEEN PURE LANGUAGE THE ILLUMINATI HAD BEEN REFERRING TO? THE PATH OF LIGHT IS LAID, THE SACRED TEST . . .

'UH OH,' VITTORIA SAID.

LANGDON WHEELED TO SEE HER ROTATING THE FOLIO UPSIDE DOWN. HE FELT A KNOT IN HIS GUT. NOT AGAIN. 'THERE'S NO WAY THAT LINE IS AN AMBIGRAM!'

'NO, IT'S NOT AN AMBIGRAM . . . BUT IT'S . . .' SHE

KEPT TURNING THE DOCUMENT, 90 DEGREES AT EVERY TURN.

IT'S WHAT?'

VITTORIA LOOKED UP. 'IT'S NOT THE ONLY LINE.'

'THERE'S ANOTHER?'

THERE'S A DIFFERENT LINE ON EVERY MARGIN. TOP, BOTTOM, LEFT, AND RIGHT. I THINK IT'S A POEM.'

'FOUR LINES?' LANGDON BRISTLED WITH EXCITEMENT. GALILEO WAS A POET? 'LET ME SEE!'

VITTORIA DID NOT RELINQUISH THE PAGE. SHE KEPT TURNING THE PAGE IN QUARTER TURNS. 'I DIDN'T SEE THE LINES BEFORE BECAUSE THEY'RE ON THE EDGES.' SHE COCKED HER HEAD OVER THE LAST LINE. 'HUH. YOU KNOW WHAT? GALILEO DIDN'T EVEN WRITE THIS.'

'WHAT!'

'THE POEM IS SIGNED JOHN MILTON.'

'JOHN MILTON?' THE INFLUENTIAL ENGLISH POET WHO WROTE PARADISE LOST WAS A CONTEMPORARY OF GALILEO'S AND A SAVANT WHO CONSPIRACY BUFFS PUT AT THE TOP OF THEIR LIST OF ILLUMINATI SUSPECTS. MILTON'S ALLEGED AFFILIATION WITH GALILEO'S ILLUMINATI WAS ONE LEGEND LANGDON SUSPECTED WAS TRUE. NOT ONLY HAD MILTON MADE A WELL-DOCUMENTED 1638 PILGRIMAGE TO ROME TO 'COMMUNE WITH ENLIGHTENED MEN,' BUT HE HAD HELD MEETINGS WITH GALILEO DURING THE SCIENTIST'S HOUSE ARREST, MEETINGS PORTRAYED IN MANY RENAISSANCE PAINTINGS, INCLUDING ANNIBALE GATTI'S FAMOUS GALILEO AND MILTON, WHICH HUNG EVEN NOW IN THE IMSS MUSEUM IN FLORENCE.

'MILTON KNEW GALILEO, DIDN'T HE?' VITTORIA SAID, FINALLY PUSHING THE FOLIO OVER TO LANGDON. 'MAYBE HE WROTE THE POEM AS A FAVOR?'

LANGDON CLENCHED HIS TEETH AS HE TOOK THE SHEATHED DOCUMENT. LEAVING IT FLAT ON THE TABLE, HE READ THE LINE AT THE TOP. THEN HE ROTATED THE PAGE 90 DEGREES,

READING THE LINE IN THE RIGHT MARGIN. ANOTHER TWIST, AND HE READ THE BOTTOM. ANOTHER TWIST, THE LEFT. A FINAL TWIST COMPLETED THE CIRCLE. THERE WERE FOUR LINES IN ALL. THE FIRST LINE VITTORIA HAD FOUND WAS ACTUALLY THE THIRD LINE OF THE POEM. UTTERLY AGAPE, HE READ THE FOUR LINES AGAIN, CLOCKWISE IN SEQUENCE: TOP, RIGHT, BOTTOM, LEFT. WHEN HE WAS DONE, HE EXHALED. THERE WAS NO DOUBT IN HIS MIND. 'YOU FOUND IT, MS VETRA.'

SHE SMILED TIGHTLY. 'GOOD, NOW CAN WE GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE?'

'I HAVE TO COPY THESE LINES DOWN. I NEED TO FIND A PENCIL AND PAPER.'

VITTORIA SHOOK HER HEAD. 'FORGET IT, PROFESSOR. NO TIME TO PLAY SCRIBE. MICKEY'S TICKING.' SHE TOOK THE PAGE FROM HIM AND HEADED FOR THE DOOR.

LANGDON STOOD UP. 'YOU CAN'T TAKE THAT OUTSIDE! IT'S A---'

BUT VITTORIA WAS ALREADY GONE.

LANGDON AND VITTORIA EXPLODED ONTO THE COURTYARD OUTSIDE THE SECRET ARCHIVES. THE FRESH AIR FELT LIKE A DRUG AS IT FLOWED INTO LANGDON'S LUNGS. THE PURPLE SPOTS IN HIS VISION QUICKLY FADED. THE GUILT, HOWEVER, DID NOT. HE HAD JUST BEEN ACCOMPLICE TO STEALING A PRICELESS RELIC FROM THE WORLD'S MOST PRIVATE VAULT. THE CAMERLENGO HAD SAID, I AM GIVING YOU MY TRUST.

'HURRY, VITTORIA SAID, STILL HOLDING THE FOLIO IN HER HAND AND STRIDING AT A HALF-JOG ACROSS VIA BELVEDERE IN THE DIRECTION OF OLIVETTI'S OFFICE.

'IF ANY WATER GETS ON THAT PAPYRUS---'

'CALM DOWN. WHEN WE DECIPHER THIS THING, WE CAN RETURN THEIR SACRED FOLIO 5.

LANGDON ACCELERATED TO KEEP UP. BEYOND FEELING LIKE A CRIMINAL, HE WAS STILL DAZED OVER THE DOCUMENT'S SPELLBINDING IMPLICATIONS. JOHN MILTON WAS AN ILLUMINATUS. HE COMPOSED THE POEM FOR GALILEO TO PUBLISH IN FOLIO 5 . . . FAR FROM THE EYES OF THE VATICAN.

AS THEY LEFT THE COURTYARD, VITTORIA HELD OUT THE FOLIO FOR LANGDON. YOU THINK YOU CAN DECIPHER THIS THING? OR DID WE JUST KILL ALL THOSE BRAIN CELLS FOR KICKS?'

LANGDON TOOK THE DOCUMENT CAREFULLY IN HIS HANDS. WITHOUT HESITATION HE SLIPPED IT INTO ONE OF THE BREAST POCKETS OF HIS TWEED JACKET, OUT OF THE SUNLIGHT AND DANGERS OF MOISTURE. 'I DECIPHERED IT ALREADY.'

VITTORIA STOPPED SHORT. 'YOU WHAT?'

LANGDON KEPT MOVING.

VITTORIA HUSTLED TO CATCH UP. 'YOU READ IT ONCE! I THOUGHT IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE HARD!'

LANGDON KNEW SHE WAS RIGHT, AND YET HE HAD DECIPHERED THE SEGNO IN A SINGLE READING. A PERFECT STANZA OF IAMBIC PENTAMETER, AND THE FIRST ALTAR OF SCIENCE HAD REVEALED ITSELF IN PRISTINE CLARITY. ADMITTEDLY, THE EASE WITH WHICH HE HAD ACCOMPLISHED THE TASK LEFT HIM WITH A NAGGING DISQUIETUDE. HE WAS A CHILD OF THE PURITAN WORK ETHIC. HE COULD STILL HEAR HIS FATHER SPEAKING THE OLD NEW ENGLAND APHORISM: IF IT WASN'T PAINFULLY DIFFICULT, YOU DID IT WRONG. LANGDON HOPED THE SAYING WAS FALSE. 'I DECIPHERED IT,' HE SAID, MOVING FASTER NOW. 'I KNOW WHERE THE FIRST KILLING IS GOING TO HAPPEN. WE NEED TO WARN OLIVETTI.'

VITTORIA CLOSED IN ON HIM. 'HOW COULD YOU ALREADY KNOW? LET ME SEE THAT THING AGAIN. WITH THE SLEIGHT OF

A BOXER, SHE SLIPPED A LISSOME HAND INTO HIS POCKET AND PULLED OUT THE FOLIO AGAIN.

‘CAREFUL!’ LANGDON SAID. ‘YOU CAN’T---’

VITTORIA IGNORED HIM. FOLIO IN HAND, SHE FLOATED BESIDE HIM, HOLDING THE DOCUMENT UP TO THE EVENING LIGHT, EXAMINING THE MARGINS. AS SHE BEGAN READING ALOUD, LANGDON MOVED TO RETRIEVE THE FOLIO BUT INSTEAD FOUND HIMSELF BEWITCHED BY VITTORIA’S ACCENTED ALTO SPEAKING THE SYLLABLES IN PERFECT RHYTHM WITH HER GAIT.

FOR A MOMENT, HEARING THE VERSE ALOUD, LANGDON FELT TRANSPORTED IN TIME... AS THOUGH HE WERE ONE OF GALILEO’S CONTEMPORARIES, LISTENING TO THE POEM FOR THE FIRST TIME . . . KNOWING IT WAS A TEST, A MAP, A CLUE UNVEILING THE FOUR ALTARS OF SCIENCE . . . THE FOUR MARKERS THAT BLAZED A SECRET PATH ACROSS ROME. THE VERSE FLOWED FROM VITTORIA’S LIPS LIKE A SONG.

FROM SANTI’S EARTHLY TOMB WITH DEMON’S HOLE,

‘CROSS ROME THE MYSTIC ELEMENTS UNFOLD.

THE PATH OF LIGHT IS LAID, THE SACRED TEST,

LET ANGELS GUIDE YOU ON YOUR LOFTY QUEST.

VITTORIA READ IT TWICE AND THEN FELL SILENT, AS IF LETTING THE ANCIENT WORDS RESONATE ON THEIR OWN.

FROM SANTI’S EARTHLY TOMB, LANGDON REPEATED IN HIS MIND. THE POEM WAS CRYSTAL CLEAR ABOUT THAT. THE PATH OF ILLUMINATION BEGAN AT SANTI’S TOMB. FROM THERE, ACROSS ROME, THE MARKERS BLAZED THE TRAIL.

FROM SANTI’S EARTHLY TOMB WITH DEMON’S HOLE,

‘CROSS ROME THE MYSTIC ELEMENTS UNFOLD.

MYSTIC ELEMENTS. ALSO CLEAR. EARTH, AIR, FIRE, WATER.

ELEMENTS OF SCIENCE, THE FOUR ILLUMINATI MARKERS DIS- GUISED AS RELIGIOUS SCULPTURE.

‘THE FIRST MARKER,’ VITTORIA SAID, ‘SOUNDS LIKE IT’S AT SANTI’S TOMB.’

LANGDON SMILED. ‘I TOLD YOU IT WASN’T THAT TOUGH.’

‘SO WHO IS SANTI?’ SHE ASKED, SOUNDING SUDDENLY EXCITED. ‘AND WHERE’S HIS TOMB?’

LANGDON CHUCKLED TO HIMSELF. HE WAS AMAZED HOW FEW PEOPLE KNEW SANTI, THE LAST NAME OF ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS RENAISSANCE ARTISTS EVER TO LIVE. HIS FIRST NAME WAS WORLD RENOWNED... THE CHILD PRODIGY WHO AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-FIVE WAS ALREADY DOING COMMIS- SIONS FOR POPE JULIUS II, AND WHEN HE DIED AT ONLY THIRTY-EIGHT, LEFT BEHIND THE GREATEST COLLECTION OF FRESCOES THE WORLD HAD EVER SEEN. SANTI WAS A BEHEMOTH IN THE ART WORLD, AND BEING KNOWN SOLELY BY ONE’S FIRST NAME WAS A LEVEL OF FAME ACHIEVED ONLY BY AN ELITE FEW . . . PEOPLE LIKE NAPOLEON, GALILEO, AND JESUS... AND, OF COURSE, THE DEMIGODS LANGDON NOW HEARD BLARING FROM HARVARD DORMITORIES - STING, MADONNA, JEWEL, AND THE ARTIST FORMERLY KNOWN AS PRINCE, WHO HAD CHANGED HIS NAME TO THE SYMBOL, CAUSING LANGDON TO DUB HIM ‘THE TAU CROSS WITH INTERSECTING HERMAPHRODITIC ANKH.’

‘SANTI,’ LANGDON SAID, ‘IS THE LAST NAME OF THE GREAT RENAISSANCE MASTER, RAPHAEL.’

VITTORIA LOOKED SURPRISED. ‘RAPHAEL? AS IN THE RAPHAEL?’

“THE ONE AND ONLY.” LANGDON PUSHED ON TOWARD THE OFFICE OF THE SWISS GUARD.

‘SO THE PATH STARTS AT RAPHAEL’S TOMB?’

‘IT ACTUALLY MAKES PERFECT SENSE,’ LANGDON SAID AS THEY RUSHED ON. ‘THE ILLUMINATI OFTEN CONSIDERED GREAT ARTISTS AND SCULPTORS HONORARY BROTHERS IN

ENLIGHTENMENT. THE ILLUMINATI COULD HAVE CHOSEN RAPHAEL'S TOMB AS A KIND OF TRIBUTE.' LANGDON ALSO KNEW THAT RAPHAEL, LIKE MANY OTHER RELIGIOUS ARTISTS, WAS A SUSPECTED CLOSET ATHEIST.

VITTORIA SLIPPED THE FOLIO CAREFULLY BACK IN LANGDON'S POCKET. 'SO WHERE IS HE BURIED?'

LANGDON TOOK A DEEP BREATH. 'BELIEVE IT OR NOT, RAPHAEL'S BURIED IN THE PANTHEON.'

VITTORIA LOOKED SKEPTICAL. 'THE PANTHEON?'

'THE RAPHAEL AT THE PANTHEON.' LANGDON HAD TO ADMIT, THE PANTHEON WAS NOT WHAT HE HAD EXPECTED FOR THE PLACEMENT OF THE FIRST MARKER. HE WOULD HAVE GUESSED THE FIRST ALTAR OF SCIENCE TO BE AT SOME QUIET, OUT OF THE WAY CHURCH, SOMETHING SUBTLE. EVEN IN THE 1600S, THE PANTHEON, WITH ITS TREMENDOUS, HOLED DOME, WAS ONE OF THE BEST KNOWN SITES IN ROME.

'IS THE PANTHEON EVEN A CHURCH?' VITTORIA ASKED.

'OLDEST CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ROME.'

VITTORIA SHOOK HER HEAD. 'BUT DO YOU REALLY THINK THE FIRST CARDINAL COULD BE KILLED AT THE PANTHEON? THAT'S GOT TO BE ONE OF THE BUSIEST TOURIST SPOTS IN ROME.'

LANGDON SHRUGGED. 'THE ILLUMINATI SAID THEY WANTED THE WHOLE WORLD WATCHING. KILLING A CARDINAL AT THE PANTHEON WOULD CERTAINLY OPEN SOME EYES.'

'BUT HOW DOES THIS GUY EXPECT TO KILL SOMEONE AT THE PANTHEON AND GET AWAY UNNOTICED? IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE.'

'AS IMPOSSIBLE AS KIDNAPPING FOUR CARDINALS FROM VATICAN CITY? THE POEM IS PRECISE.'

'AND YOU'RE CERTAIN RAPHAEL IS BURIED INSIDE THE PANTHEON?'

'I'VE SEEN HIS TOMB MANY TIMES.'

VITTORIA NODDED, STILL LOOKING TROUBLED. 'WHAT TIME IS IT?'

LANGDON CHECKED. 'SEVEN-THIRTY.'

IS THE PANTHEON FAR?"

A MILE MAYBE. WE'VE GOT TIME."

'THE POEM SAID SANTI'S EARTHLY TOMB. DOES THAT MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU?"

LANGDON HASTENED DIAGONALLY ACROSS THE COURTYARD OF THE SENTINEL. 'EARTHLY? ACTUALLY, THERE'S PROBABLY NO MORE EARTHLY PLACE IN ROME THAN THE PANTHEON. IT GOT ITS NAME FROM THE ORIGINAL RELIGION PRACTICED THERE - PANTHEISM - THE WORSHIP OF ALL GODS, SPECIFICALLY THE PAGAN GODS OF MOTHER EARTH.

AS A STUDENT OF ARCHITECTURE, LANGDON HAD BEEN AMAZED TO LEARN THAT THE DIMENSIONS OF THE PANTHEON'S MAIN CHAMBER WERE A TRIBUTE TO GAIA - THE GODDESS OF THE EARTH. THE PROPORTIONS WERE SO EXACT THAT A GIANT SPHERICAL GLOBE COULD FIT PERFECTLY INSIDE THE BUILDING WITH LESS THAN A MILLIMETER TO SPARE.

'OKAY,' VITTORIA SAID, SOUNDING MORE CONVINCED. 'AND DEMON'S HOLE? FROM SANTI'S EARTHLY TOMB WITH DEMON'S HOLE?'

LANGDON WAS NOT QUITE AS SURE ABOUT THIS. 'DEMON'S HOLE MUST MEAN THE OCULUS,' HE SAID, MAKING A LOGICAL GUESS. 'THE FAMOUS CIRCULAR OPENING IN THE PANTHEON'S ROOF.'

'BUT IT'S A CHURCH,' VITTORIA SAID, MOVING EFFORTLESSLY BESIDE HIM. 'WHY WOULD THEY CALL THE OPENING A DEMON'S HOLE?'

LANGDON HAD ACTUALLY BEEN WONDERING THAT HIMSELF. HE HAD NEVER HEARD THE TERM 'DEMON'S HOLE', BUT HE DID RECALL A FAMOUS SIXTH-CENTURY CRITIQUE OF THE PANTHEON WHOSE WORDS SEEMED ODDLY APPROPRIATE NOW. THE VENERABLE BEDE HAD ONCE WRITTEN THAT THE HOLE IN THE PANTHEON'S ROOF HAD BEEN BORED BY DEMONS TRYING TO ESCAPE THE BUILDING WHEN IT

WAS CONSECRATED BY BONIFACE IV.

‘AND WHY,’ VITTORIA ADDED AS THEY ENTERED A SMALLER COURTYARD, ‘WOULD THE ILLUMINATI USE THE NAME SANTI IF HE WAS REALLY KNOWN AS RAPHAEL?’

‘YOU ASK A LOT OF QUESTIONS.’

‘MY DAD USED TO SAY THAT.’

‘TWO POSSIBLE REASONS. ONE, THE WORD RAPHAEL HAS TOO MANY SYLLABLES. IT WOULD HAVE DESTROYED THE POEM’S IAMBIC PENTAMETER.’

‘SOUNDS LIKE A STRETCH.’

LANGDON AGREED. ‘OKAY, THEN MAYBE USING “SANTI” WAS TO MAKE THE CLUE MORE OBSCURE, SO ONLY VERY ENLIGHTENED MEN WOULD RECOGNIZE THE REFERENCE TO RAPHAEL.’

VITTORIA DIDN’T APPEAR TO BUY THIS EITHER. ‘I’M SURE RAPHAEL’S LAST NAME WAS VERY WELL KNOWN WHEN HE WAS ALIVE.’

‘SURPRISINGLY NOT. SINGLE NAME RECOGNITION WAS A STATUS SYMBOL. RAPHAEL SHUNNED HIS LAST NAME MUCH LIKE POP STARS DO TODAY. TAKE MADONNA, FOR EXAMPLE. SHE NEVER USES HER SURNAME, CICCONE.’

VICTORIA LOOKED AMUSED. ‘YOU KNOW MADONNA’S LAST NAME?’

LANGDON REGRETTE THE EXAMPLE. IT WAS AMAZING THE KIND OF GARBAGE A MIND PICKED UP LIVING WITH 10,000 ADOLESCENTS.

AS HE AND VITTORIA PASSED THE FINAL GATE TOWARD THE OFFICE OF THE SWISS GUARD, THEIR PROGRESS WAS HALTED WITHOUT WARNING.

‘ALT!’ A VOICE BELLOWED BEHIND THEM.

LANGDON AND VITTORIA WHEELED TO FIND THEMSELVES LOOKING INTO THE BARREL OF A RIFLE.

‘ATTENTO!’ VITTORIA EXCLAIMED, JUMPING BACK. ‘WATCH IT WITH---’

‘NON SPOSTARTI!’ THE GUARD SNAPPED, COCKING THE WEAPON.

‘SOLDATO!’ A VOICE COMMANDED FROM ACROSS THE COURT- YARD. OLIVETTI WAS EMERGING FROM THE SECURITY CENTER. ‘LET THEM GO!’

THE GUARD LOOKED BEWILDERED. ‘MA, SIGNORE, È UNA DONNA---’

‘INSIDE!’ HE YELLED AT THE GUARD.

‘SIGNORE, NON POSSO---’

‘NOW! YOU HAVE NEW ORDERS. CAPTAIN ROCHER WILL BE BRIEFING THE CORPS IN TWO MINUTES. WE WILL BE ORGANIZING A SEARCH.’

LOOKING BEWILDERED, THE GUARD HURRIED INTO THE SECURITY CENTER. OLIVETTI MARCHED TOWARD LANGDON, RIGID AND STEAMING. ‘OUR MOST SECRET ARCHIVES? I’LL WANT AN EXPLANATION.’

‘WE HAVE GOOD NEWS,’ LANGDON SAID.

OLIVETTI’S EYES NARROWED. ‘IT BETTER BE DAMN GOOD.’

THE FOUR UNMARKED ALFA ROMEO 155 T-SPARKS ROARED DOWN VIA DEI CORONARI LIKE FIGHTER JETS OFF A RUNWAY. THE VEHICLES CARRIED TWELVE PLAINCLOTHED SWISS GUARDS ARMED WITH CHERCHI-PARDINI SEMIAUTOMATICS, LOCAL- RADIUS NERVE GAS CANISTERS, AND LONG-RANGE STUN GUNS. THE THREE SHARPSHOOTERS CARRIED LASER-SIGHTED RIFLES.

SITTING IN THE PASSENGER SEAT OF THE LEAD CAR, OLIVETTI TURNED BACKWARD TOWARD LANGDON AND VITTORIA. HIS EYES WERE FILLED WITH RAGE. ‘YOU ASSURED ME A SOUND EXPLANATION, AND THIS IS WHAT I GET?’

LANGDON FELT CRAMPED IN THE SMALL CAR. 'I UNDERSTAND YOUR---'

'NO, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!' OLIVETTI NEVER RAISED HIS VOICE, BUT HIS INTENSITY TRIPLED. 'I HAVE JUST REMOVED A DOZEN OF MY BEST MEN FROM VATICAN CITY ON THE EVE OF CONCLAVE. AND I HAVE DONE THIS TO STAKE OUT THE PANTHEON BASED ON THE TESTIMONY OF SOME AMERICAN I HAVE NEVER MET WHO HAS JUST INTERPRETED A FOUR-HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD POEM. I HAVE ALSO JUST LEFT THE SEARCH FOR THIS ANTIMATTER WEAPON IN THE HANDS OF SECONDARY OFFICERS.'

LANGDON RESISTED THE URGE TO PULL FOLIO 5 FROM HIS POCKET AND WAVE IT IN OLIVETTI'S FACE. 'ALL I KNOW IS THAT THE INFORMATION WE FOUND REFERS TO RAPHAEL'S TOMB, AND RAPHAEL'S TOMB IS INSIDE THE PANTHEON.'

THE OFFICER BEHIND THE WHEEL NODDED. 'HE'S RIGHT, COMMANDER. MY WIFE AND I---'

'DRIVE,' OLIVETTI SNAPPED. HE TURNED BACK TO LANGDON. 'HOW COULD A KILLER ACCOMPLISH AN ASSASSINATION IN SUCH A CROWDED PLACE AND ESCAPE UNSEEN?'

'I DON'T KNOW,' LANGDON SAID. 'BUT THE ILLUMINATI ARE OBVIOUSLY HIGHLY RESOURCEFUL. THEY'VE BROKEN INTO BOTH CERN AND VATICAN CITY. IT'S ONLY BY LUCK WE KNOW WHERE THE FIRST KILL ZONE IS. THE PANTHEON IS YOUR ONE CHANCE TO CATCH THIS GUY.'

'MORE CONTRADICTIONS,' OLIVETTI SAID. 'ONE CHANCE? I THOUGHT YOU SAID THERE WAS SOME SORT OF PATHWAY. A SERIES OF MARKERS. IF THE PANTHEON IS THE RIGHT SPOT, WE CAN FOLLOW THE PATHWAY TO THE OTHER MARKERS. WE WILL HAVE FOUR CHANCES TO CATCH THIS GUY.'

'I HAD HOPED SO,' LANGDON SAID. 'AND WE WOULD HAVE . . . A CENTURY AGO.'

LANGDON'S REALIZATION THAT THE PANTHEON WAS THE FIRST ALTAR OF SCIENCE HAD BEEN A BITTERSWEET MOMENT.

HISTORY HAD A WAY OF PLAYING CRUEL TRICKS ON THOSE WHO CHASED IT. IT WAS A LONG SHOT THAT THE PATH OF ILLUMINATION WOULD BE INTACT AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, WITH ALL OF ITS STATUES IN PLACE, BUT PART OF LANGDON HAD FANTASIZED ABOUT FOLLOWING THE PATH ALL THE WAY TO THE END AND COMING FACE TO FACE WITH THE SACRED ILLUMINATI LAIR. ALAS, HE REALIZED, IT WAS NOT TO BE. "THE VATICAN HAD ALL THE STATUES IN THE PANTHEON REMOVED AND DESTROYED IN THE LATE 1600S.'

VITTORIA LOOKED SHOCKED. 'WHY?'

'THE STATUES WERE PAGAN OLYMPIAN GODS. UNFORTUNATELY, THAT MEANS THE FIRST MARKER IS GONE . . . AND WITH IT---'

"ANY HOPE,' VITTORIA SAID, 'OF FINDING THE PATH OF ILLUMINATION AND ADDITIONAL MARKERS?'

LANGDON SHOOK HIS HEAD. 'WE HAVE ONE SHOT. THE PANTHEON. AFTER THAT, THE PATH DISAPPEARS.'

OLIVETTI STARED AT THEM BOTH A LONG MOMENT AND THEN TURNED AND FACED FRONT. 'PULL OVER,' HE BARKED TO THE DRIVER.

THE DRIVER SWERVED THE CAR TOWARD THE CURB AND PUT ON THE BRAKES. THREE OTHER ALFA ROMEOS SKIDDED IN BEHIND THEM. THE SWISS GUARD CONVOY SCREECHED TO A HALT.

'WHAT ARE YOU DOING!' VITTORIA DEMANDED.

'MY JOB,' OLIVETTI SAID, TURNING IN HIS SEAT, HIS VOICE LIKE STONE. 'MR LANGDON, WHEN YOU TOLD ME YOU WOULD EXPLAIN THE SITUATION EN ROUTE, I ASSUMED I WOULD BE APPROACHING THE PANTHEON WITH A CLEAR IDEA OF WHY MY MEN ARE HERE. THAT IS NOT THE CASE. BECAUSE I AM ABANDONING CRITICAL DUTIES BY BEING HERE, AND BECAUSE I HAVE FOUND VERY LITTLE THAT MAKES SENSE IN THIS THEORY YOURS ABOUT VIRGIN SACRIFICES AND ANCIENT POETRY, I CANNOT IN GOOD CONSCIENCE CONTINUE. I AM RECALLING THIS

MISSION IMMEDIATELY.' HE PULLED OUT HIS WALKIE-TALKIE AND CLICKED IT ON.

VITTORIA REACHED ACROSS THE SEAT AND GRABBED HIS ARM. 'YOU CAN'T!'

OLIVETTI SLAMMED DOWN THE WALKIE-TALKIE AND FIXED HER WITH A RED-HOT STARE. 'HAVE YOU BEEN TO THE PANTHEON, MS VETRA?'

'NO, BUT I---'

'LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING ABOUT IT. THE PANTHEON IS A SINGLE ROOM. A CIRCULAR CELL MADE OF STONE AND CEMENT. IT HAS ONE ENTRANCE. NO WINDOWS. ONE NARROW ENTRANCE. THAT ENTRANCE IS FLANKED AT ALL TIMES BY NO LESS THAN FOUR ARMED ROMAN POLICEMEN WHO PROTECT THIS SHRINE FROM ART DEFACERS, ANTI-CHRISTIAN TERRORISTS, AND GYPSY TOURIST SCAMS.'

'YOUR POINT?' SHE SAID COOLLY.

'MY POINT?' OLIVETTI'S KNUCKLES GRIPPED THE SEAT. 'MY POINT IS THAT WHAT YOU HAVE JUST TOLD ME IS GOING TO HAPPEN IS UTTERLY IMPOSSIBLE! CAN YOU GIVE ME ONE PLAUSIBLE SCENARIO OF HOW SOMEONE COULD KILL A CARDINAL INSIDE THE PANTHEON? HOW DOES ONE EVEN GET A HOSTAGE PAST THE GUARDS INTO THE PANTHEON IN THE FIRST PLACE? MUCH LESS ACTUALLY KILL HIM AND GET AWAY?' OLIVETTI LEANED OVER THE SEAT, HIS COFFEE BREATH NOW IN LANGDON'S FACE. 'HOW, MR LANGDON? ONE PLAUSIBLE SCENARIO.'

LANGDON FELT THE TINY CAR SHRINK AROUND HIM. I HAVE NO IDEA! I'M NOT AN ASSASSIN! I DON'T KNOW HOW HE WILL DO IT! I ONLY KNOW---

'ONE SCENARIO?' VITTORIA QUIPPED, HER VOICE UNRUFFLED. 'HOW ABOUT THIS? THE KILLER FLIES OVER IN A HELICOPTER AND DROPS A SCREAMING, BRANDED CARDINAL DOWN THROUGH THE HOLE IN THE ROOF. THE CARDINAL HITS THE MARBLE FLOOR AND DIES.'

EVERYONE IN THE CAR TURNED AND STARED AT VITTORIA. LANGDON DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK. YOU'VE GOT ONE SICK IMAGINATION, LADY, BUT YOU ARE QUICK.

OLIVETTI FROWNED. POSSIBLE, I ADMIT . . . BUT HARDLY---

'OR THE KILLER DRUGS THE CARDINAL,' VITTORIA SAID, 'BRINGS HIM TO THE PANTHEON IN A WHEELCHAIR LIKE SOME OLD TOURIST. HE WHEELS HIM INSIDE, QUIETLY SLITS HIS THROAT, AND THEN WALKS OUT.'

THIS SEEMED TO WAKE UP OLIVETTI A BIT.

NOT BAD! LANGDON THOUGHT.

'OR,' SHE SAID, 'THE KILLER COULD---

'I HEARD YOU,' OLIVETTI SAID. 'ENOUGH.' HE TOOK A DEEP BREATH AND BLEW IT OUT. SOMEONE RAPPED SHARPLY ON THE WINDOW, AND EVERYONE JUMPED. IT WAS A SOLDIER FROM ONE OF THE OTHER CARS. OLIVETTI ROLLED DOWN THE WINDOW.

'EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT, COMMANDER?' THE SOLDIER WAS DRESSED IN STREET CLOTHES. HE PULLED BACK THE SLEEVE OF HIS DENIM SHIRT TO REVEAL A BLACK CHRONOGRAPH MILITARY WATCH. 'SEVEN-FORTY, COMMANDER. WE'LL NEED TIME TO GET IN POSITION.'

OLIVETTI NODDED VAGUELY BUT SAID NOTHING FOR MANY MOMENTS. HE RAN A FINGER BACK AND FORTH ACROSS THE DASH, MAKING A LINE IN THE DUST. HE STUDIED LANGDON IN THE SIDE-VIEW MIRROR, AND LANGDON FELT HIMSELF BEING MEASURED AND WEIGHED. FINALLY OLIVETTI TURNED BACK TO THE GUARD. THERE WAS RELUCTANCE IN HIS VOICE. 'I'LL WANT SEPARATE APPROACHES. CARS TO PIAZZA DELLA ROTONDA, VIA DEGLI ORFANI, PIAZZA SANT'IGNAZIO, AND SANT'EUSTACHIO. NO CLOSER THAN TWO BLOCKS. ONCE YOU'RE PARKED, GEAR UP AND AWAIT MY ORDERS. THREE MINUTES.'

VERY GOOD, SIR.' THE SOLDIER RETURNED TO HIS CAR. LANGDON GAVE VITTORIA AN IMPRESSED NOD. SHE

SMILED BACK, AND FOR AN INSTANT LANGDON FELT AN UNEXPECTED CONNECTION . . . A THREAD OF MAGNETISM BETWEEN THEM.

THE COMMANDER TURNED IN HIS SEAT AND LOCKED EYES WITH LANGDON. 'MR LANGDON, THIS HAD BETTER NOT BLOW UP IN OUR FACES.'

LANGDON SMILED UNEASILY. HOW COULD IT?

THE DIRECTOR OF CERN, MAXIMILIAN KOHLER, OPENED HIS EYES TO THE COOL RUSH OF CROMOLYN AND LEUKOTRIENE IN HIS BODY, DILATING HIS BRONCHIAL TUBES AND PULMONARY CAPILLARIES. HE WAS BREATHING NORMALLY AGAIN. HE FOUND HIMSELF LYING IN A PRIVATE ROOM IN THE CERN INFIRMARY, HIS WHEELCHAIR BESIDE THE BED.

HE TOOK STOCK, EXAMINING THE PAPER ROBE THEY HAD PUT HIM IN. HIS CLOTHING WAS FOLDED ON THE CHAIR BESIDE THE BED. OUTSIDE HE COULD HEAR A NURSE MAKING THE ROUNDS. HE LAY THERE A LONG MINUTE LISTENING. THEN, AS QUIETLY AS POSSIBLE, HE PULLED HIMSELF TO THE EDGE OF THE BED AND RETRIEVED HIS CLOTHING. STRUGGLING WITH HIS DEAD LEGS, HE DRESSED HIMSELF. THEN HE DRAGGED HIS BODY ONTO HIS WHEELCHAIR.

MUFFLING A COUGH, HE WHEELED HIMSELF TO THE DOOR. HE MOVED MANUALLY, CAREFUL NOT TO ENGAGE THE MOTOR. WHEN HE ARRIVED AT THE DOOR HE PEERED OUT. THE HALL WAS EMPTY.

SILENTLY, MAXIMILIAN KOHLER SLIPPED OUT OF THE INFIRMARY.

SEVEN FORTY-SIX AND THIRTY . . . MARK.' EVEN SPEAKING INTO HIS WALKIE-TALKIE, OLIVETTI'S VOICE NEVER SEEMED TO RISE ABOVE A WHISPER.

LANGDON FELT HIMSELF SWEATING NOW IN HIS HARRIS TWEED IN THE BACKSEAT OF THE ALFA ROMEO, WHICH WAS IDLING IN PIAZZA DE LA CONCORDE, THREE BLOCKS FROM THE PANTHEON. VITTORIA SAT BESIDE HIM, LOOKING ENGROSSED BY OLIVETTI, WHO WAS TRANSMITTING HIS FINAL ORDERS.

'DEPLOYMENT WILL BE AN EIGHT-POINT HEM,' THE COMMANDER SAID. 'FULL PERIMETER WITH A BIAS ON THE ENTRY. TARGET MAY KNOW YOU VISUALLY, SO YOU WILL BE PAS- VISIBLE. NONMORTAL FORCE ONLY. WE'LL NEED SOMEONE TO SPOT THE ROOF. TARGET IS PRIMARY. ASSET SECONDARY.'

JESUS, LANGDON THOUGHT, CHILLED BY THE EFFICIENCY WITH WHICH OLIVETTI HAD JUST TOLD HIS MEN THE CARDINAL WAS EXPENDABLE. ASSET SECONDARY.

'I REPEAT. NONMORTAL PROCUREMENT. WE NEED THE TARGET ALIVE. GO.' OLIVETTI SNAPPED OFF HIS WALKIE-TALKIE.

VITTORIA LOOKED STUNNED, ALMOST ANGRY. 'COMMANDER, ISN'T ANYONE GOING INSIDE?'

OLIVETTI TURNED. 'INSIDE?'

'INSIDE THE PANTHEON! WHERE THIS IS SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN?'

'ATTENTO,' OLIVETTI SAID, HIS EYES FOSSILIZING. 'IF MY RANKS HAVE BEEN INFILTRATED, MY MEN MAY BE KNOWN BY SIGHT. YOUR COLLEAGUE HAS JUST FINISHED WARNING ME THAT THIS WILL BE OUR SOLE CHANCE TO CATCH THE TARGET. I HAVE NO INTENTION OF SCARING ANYONE OFF BY MARCHING MY MEN INSIDE.'

'BUT WHAT IF THE KILLER IS ALREADY INSIDE?'

OLIVETTI CHECKED HIS WATCH. 'THE TARGET WAS SPECIFIC.

EIGHT O'CLOCK. WE HAVE FIFTEEN MINUTES.'

'HE SAID HE WOULD KILL THE CARDINAL AT EIGHT O'CLOCK. BUT HE MAY ALREADY HAVE GOTTEN THE VICTIM INSIDE SOMEHOW. WHAT IF YOUR MEN SEE THE TARGET COME OUT BUT DON'T KNOW WHO HE IS? SOMEONE NEEDS TO MAKE SURE THE INSIDE IS CLEAN.'

'TOO RISKY AT THIS POINT.'

'NOT IF THE PERSON GOING IN WAS UNRECOGNIZABLE.'

'DISGUIISING OPERATIVES IS TIME CONSUMING AND---'

'I MEANT ME,' VITTORIA SAID.

LANGDON TURNED AND STARED AT HER.

OLIVETTI SHOOK HIS HEAD. 'ABSOLUTELY NOT.'

'HE KILLED MY FATHER.'

'EXACTLY, SO HE MAY KNOW WHO YOU ARE.'

'YOU HEARD HIM ON THE PHONE. HE HAD NO IDEA LEONARDO VETRA EVEN HAD A DAUGHTER. HE SURE AS HELL DOESN'T KNOW WHAT I LOOK LIKE. I COULD WALK IN LIKE A TOURIST. IF I SEE ANYTHING SUSPICIOUS, I COULD WALK INTO THE SQUARE AND SIGNAL YOUR MEN TO MOVE IN.'

'I'M SORRY, I CANNOT ALLOW THAT.'

'COMANDANTE?' OLIVETTI'S RECEIVER CRACKLED. 'WE'VE GOT A SITUATION FROM THE NORTH POINT. THE FOUNTAIN IS BLOCKING OUR LINE OF SIGHT. WE CAN'T SEE THE ENTRANCE UNLESS WE MOVE INTO PLAIN VIEW ON THE PIAZZA. WHAT'S YOUR CALL? DO YOU WANT US BLIND OR VULNERABLE?'

VITTORIA APPARENTLY HAD ENDURED ENOUGH. 'THAT'S IT. I'M GOING.' SHE OPENED HER DOOR AND GOT OUT.

OLIVETTI DROPPED HIS WALKIE-TALKIE AND JUMPED OUT OF THE CAR, CIRCLING IN FRONT OF VITTORIA.

LANGDON GOT OUT TOO. WHAT THE HELL IS SHE DOING!

OLIVETTI BLOCKED VITTORIA'S WAY. 'MS VETRA, YOUR INSTINCTS ARE GOOD, BUT I CANNOT LET A CIVILIAN INTERFERE.'

'INTERFERE? YOU'RE FLYING BLIND. LET ME HELP.'

'I WOULD LOVE TO HAVE A RECON POINT INSIDE, BUT . . .'

‘BUT WHAT? VITTORIA DEMANDED. ‘BUT I’M A WOMAN?’

OLIVETTI SAID NOTHING.

‘THAT HAD BETTER NOT BE WHAT YOU WERE GOING TO SAY, COMMANDER, BECAUSE YOU KNOW DAMN WELL THIS IS A GOOD IDEA, AND IF YOU LET SOME ARCHAIC MACHO BULLSHIT--’

‘LET US DO OUR JOB.’

‘LET ME HELP.’

TOO DANGEROUS. WE WOULD HAVE NO LINES OF COMMUNICATION WITH YOU. I CAN’T LET YOU CARRY A WALKIE-TALKIE, IT WOULD GIVE YOU AWAY.’

VITTORIA REACHED IN HER SHIRT POCKET AND PRODUCED HER CELL PHONE. ‘PLENTY OF TOURISTS CARRY PHONES.’

OLIVETTI FROWNED.

VITTORIA UNSNAPPED THE PHONE AND MIMICKED A CALL. HI, HONEY, I’M STANDING IN THE PANTHEON. YOU SHOULD SEE THIS PLACE!’ SHE SNAPPED THE PHONE SHUT AND GLARED AT OLIVETTI. ‘WHO THE HELL IS GOING TO KNOW? IT IS A NO RISK SITUATION. LET ME BE YOUR EYES!’ SHE MOTIONED TO THE CELL PHONE ON OLIVETTI’S BELT. ‘WHAT’S YOUR NUMBER?’

OLIVETTI DID NOT REPLY.

THE DRIVER HAD BEEN LOOKING ON AND SEEMED TO HAVE SOME THOUGHTS OF HIS OWN. HE GOT OUT OF THE CAR AND TOOK THE COMMANDER ASIDE. THEY SPOKE IN HUSHED TONES FOR TEN SECONDS. FINALLY OLIVETTI NODDED AND RETURNED. ‘PROGRAM THIS NUMBER.’ HE BEGAN DICTATING DIGITS.

VITTORIA PROGRAMMED HER PHONE.

‘NOW CALL THE NUMBER.’

VITTORIA PRESSED THE AUTO DIAL. THE PHONE ON OLIVETTI’S BELT BEGAN RINGING. HE PICKED IT UP AND SPOKE INTO THE RECEIVER. ‘GO INTO THE BUILDING, MS VETRA, LOOK AROUND, EXIT THE BUILDING, THEN CALL AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE.’

VITTORIA SNAPPED THE PHONE SHUT. "THANK YOU, SIR."

LANGDON FELT A SUDDEN, UNEXPECTED SURGE OF PROTECTIVE INSTINCT. 'WAIT A MINUTE,' HE SAID TO OLIVETTI. 'YOU'RE SENDING HER IN THERE ALONE.'

VITTORIA SCOWLED AT HIM. 'ROBERT, I'LL BE FINE.'

THE SWISS GUARD DRIVER WAS TALKING TO OLIVETTI AGAIN.

'IT'S DANGEROUS,' LANGDON SAID TO VITTORIA.

'HE'S RIGHT,' OLIVETTI SAID. 'EVEN MY BEST MEN DON'T WORK ALONE. MY LIEUTENANT HAS JUST POINTED OUT THAT THE MASQUERADE WILL BE MORE CONVINCING WITH BOTH OF YOU ANYWAY.'

BOTH OF US? LANGDON HESITATED. ACTUALLY, WHAT I MEANT ---

'BOTH OF YOU ENTERING TOGETHER,' OLIVETTI SAID, 'WILL LOOK LIKE A COUPLE ON HOLIDAY. YOU CAN ALSO BACK EACH OTHER UP. I'M MORE COMFORTABLE WITH THAT.'

VITTORIA SHRUGGED. 'FINE, BUT WE'LL NEED TO GO FAST.'

LANGDON GROANED. NICE MOVE, COWBOY.

OLIVETTI POINTED DOWN THE STREET. 'FIRST STREET YOU HIT WILL BE VIA DEGLI ORFANI. GO LEFT. IT TAKES YOU DIRECTLY TO THE PANTHEON. TWO-MINUTE WALK, TOPS. I'LL BE HERE, DIRECTING MY MEN AND WAITING FOR YOUR CALL. I'D LIKE YOU TO HAVE PROTECTION.' HE PULLED OUT HIS PISTOL. 'DO EITHER OF YOU KNOW HOW TO USE A GUN?'

LANGDON'S HEART SKIPPED. WE DON'T NEED A GUN!

VITTORIA HELD HER HAND OUT. 'I CAN TAG A BREACHING PORPOISE FROM FORTY METERS OFF THE BOW OF A ROCKING SHIP.'

'GOOD.' OLIVETTI HANDED THE GUN TO HER. 'YOU'LL HAVE TO CONCEAL IT.'

VITTORIA GLANCED DOWN AT HER SHORTS. THEN SHE LOOKED AT LANGDON.

OH NO YOU DON'T! LANGDON THOUGHT, BUT VITTORIA WAS

TOO FAST. SHE OPENED HIS JACKET, AND INSERTED THE WEAPON INTO ONE OF HIS BREAST POCKETS. IT FELT LIKE A ROCK DROPPING INTO HIS COAT, HIS ONLY CONSOLATION BEING THAT DIAGRAMMA WAS IN THE OTHER POCKET.

WE LOOK HARMLESS,' VITTORIA SAID. 'WE'RE LEAVING. SHE TOOK LANGDON'S ARM AND HEADED DOWN THE STREET.

THE DRIVER CALLED OUT, 'ARM IN ARM IS GOOD. REMEMBER, YOU'RE TOURISTS. NEWLYWEDS EVEN. PERHAPS IF YOU HELD HANDS?'

AS THEY TURNED THE CORNER LANGDON COULD HAVE SWORN HE SAW ON VITTORIA'S FACE THE HINT OF A SMILE.

THE SWISS GUARD 'STAGING ROOM' IS LOCATED ADJACENT TO THE CORPO DI VIGILANZA BARRACKS AND IS USED PRIMARILY FOR PLANNING THE SECURITY SURROUNDING PAPAL APPEARANCES AND PUBLIC VATICAN EVENTS. TODAY, HOWEVER, IT WAS BEING USED FOR SOMETHING ELSE.

THE MAN ADDRESSING THE ASSEMBLED TASK FORCE WAS THE SECOND-IN-COMMAND OF THE SWISS GUARD, CAPTAIN ELIAS ROCHER. ROCHER WAS A BARREL-CHESTED MAN WITH SOFT, PUTTYLIKE FEATURES. HE WORE THE TRADITIONAL BLUE CAPTAIN'S UNIFORM WITH HIS OWN PERSONAL FLAIR - A RED BERET COCKED SIDEWAYS ON HIS HEAD. HIS VOICE WAS SURPRISINGLY CRYSTALLINE FOR SUCH A LARGE MAN, AND WHEN HE SPOKE, HIS TONE HAD THE CLARITY OF A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT. DESPITE THE PRECISION OF HIS INFLECTION, ROCHER'S EYES WERE CLOUDY LIKE THOSE OF SOME NOCTURNAL MAMMAL. HIS MEN CALLED HIM 'ORSO' - GRIZZLY BEAR. THEY SOMETIMES JOKED THAT ROCHER WAS 'THE BEAR WHO WALKED IN