

The Da Vinci Code

Dan Brown

FOR BLYTHE... AGAIN. MORE THAN EVER.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, to my friend and editor, Jason Kaufman, for working so hard on this project and for truly understanding what this book is all about. And to the incomparable Heide Lange—tireless champion of *The Da Vinci Code*, agent extraordinaire, and trusted friend.

I cannot fully express my gratitude to the exceptional team at Doubleday, for their generosity, faith, and superb guidance. Thank you especially to Bill Thomas and Steve Rubin, who believed in this book from the start. My thanks also to the initial core of early in-house supporters, headed by Michael Palgon, Suzanne Herz, Janelle Moburg, Jackie Everly, and Adrienne Sparks, as well as to the talented people of Doubleday's sales force.

For their generous assistance in the research of the book, I would like to acknowledge the Louvre Museum, the French Ministry of Culture, Project Gutenberg, Bibliothèque Nationale, the Gnostic Society Library, the Department of Paintings Study and Documentation Service at the Louvre, Catholic World News, Royal Observatory Greenwich, London Record Society, the Muniment Collection at Westminster Abbey, John Pike and the Federation of American Scientists, and the five members of Opus Dei (three active, two former) who recounted their stories, both positive and negative, regarding their experiences inside Opus Dei.

My gratitude also to Water Street Bookstore for tracking down so many of my research books, my father Richard Brown—mathematics teacher and author—for his assistance with the Divine Proportion and the Fibonacci Sequence, Stan Planton, Sylvie Baudeloque, Peter McGuigan, Francis McInerney, Margie Wachtel, André Vernet, Ken Kelleher at Anchorball Web Media, Cara Sottak, Karyn Popham, Esther Sung, Miriam Abramowitz, William Tunstall-Pedoe, and Griffin Wooden Brown.

And finally, in a novel drawing so heavily on the sacred feminine, I would be remiss if I did not mention the two extraordinary women who have touched my life. First, my mother, Connie Brown—fellow scribe, nurturer, musician, and role model. And my wife, Blythe—art historian, painter, front-line editor, and without a doubt the most astonishingly talented woman I have ever known.

FACT:

The Priory of Sion—a European secret society founded in 1099—is a real organization. In 1975 Paris's Bibliothèque Nationale discovered parchments known as *Les Dossiers Secrets*, identifying numerous members of the Priory of Sion, including Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo da Vinci.

The Vatican prelature known as Opus Dei is a deeply devout Catholic sect that has been the topic of recent controversy due to reports of brainwashing, coercion, and a dangerous practice known as "corporal mortification." Opus Dei has just completed construction of a \$47 million World Headquarters at 243 Lexington Avenue in New York City.

All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.

Prologue

Louvre Museum, Paris 10:46 P.M.

Renowned curator Jacques Saunière staggered through the vaulted archway of the museum's Grand Gallery. He lunged for the nearest painting he could see, a Caravaggio. Grabbing the gilded frame, the seventy-six-year-old man heaved the masterpiece toward himself until it tore from the wall and Saunière collapsed backward in a heap beneath the canvas.

As he had anticipated, a thundering iron gate fell nearby, barricading the entrance to the suite. The parquet floor shook. Far off, an alarm began to ring.

The curator lay a moment, gasping for breath, taking stock. *I am still alive.* He crawled out from under the canvas and scanned the cavernous space for someplace to hide.

A voice spoke, chillingly close. "Do not move."

On his hands and knees, the curator froze, turning his head slowly.

Only fifteen feet away, outside the sealed gate, the mountainous silhouette of his attacker stared through the iron bars. He was broad and tall, with ghost-pale skin and thinning white hair. His irises were pink with dark red pupils. The albino drew a pistol from his coat and aimed the barrel through the bars, directly at the curator. "You should not have run." His accent was not easy to place. "Now tell me where it is."

"I told you already," the curator stammered, kneeling defenseless on the floor of the gallery. "I have no idea what you are talking about!"

"You are lying." The man stared at him, perfectly immobile except for the glint in his ghostly eyes. "You and your brethren possess something that is not yours."

The curator felt a surge of adrenaline. *How could he possibly know this?*

"Tonight the rightful guardians will be restored. Tell me where it is hidden, and you will live." The man leveled his gun at the curator's head. "Is it a secret you will die for?"

Saunière could not breathe.

The man tilted his head, peering down the barrel of his gun.

Saunière held up his hands in defense. "Wait," he said slowly. "I will tell you what you need to know." The curator spoke his next words carefully. The lie he told was one he had rehearsed many times... each time praying he would never have to use it.

When the curator had finished speaking, his assailant smiled smugly. "Yes. This is exactly what the others told me."

Saunière recoiled. *The others?*

"I found them, too," the huge man taunted. "All three of them. They confirmed what you have just said."

It cannot be! The curator's true identity, along with the identities of his three *sénéchaux*, was almost as sacred as the ancient secret they protected. Saunière now realized his *sénéchaux*, following strict procedure, had told the same lie before their own deaths. It was part of the protocol.

The attacker aimed his gun again. "When you are gone, I will be the only one who knows the truth."

The truth. In an instant, the curator grasped the true horror of the situation. *If I die, the truth will be lost forever.* Instinctively, he tried to scramble for cover.

The gun roared, and the curator felt a searing heat as the bullet lodged in his stomach. He fell forward... struggling against the pain. Slowly, Saunière rolled over and stared back through the bars at his attacker.

The man was now taking dead aim at Saunière's head.

Saunière closed his eyes, his thoughts a swirling tempest of fear and regret.

The click of an empty chamber echoed through the corridor.

The curator's eyes flew open.

The man glanced down at his weapon, looking almost amused. He reached for a second clip, but then seemed to reconsider, smirking calmly at Saunière's gut. "My work here is done."

The curator looked down and saw the bullet hole in his white linen shirt. It was framed by a small circle of blood a few inches below his breastbone. *My stomach.* Almost cruelly, the bullet had missed his heart. As a veteran of *la Guerre d'Algérie*, the curator had witnessed this horribly drawn-out death before. For fifteen minutes, he would survive as his stomach acids seeped into his chest cavity, slowly poisoning him from within.

"Pain is good, monsieur," the man said.

Then he was gone.

Alone now, Jacques Saunière turned his gaze again to the iron gate. He was trapped, and the doors could not be reopened for at least twenty minutes. By the time anyone got to him, he would be dead. Even so, the fear that now gripped him was a fear far greater than that of his own death.

I must pass on the secret.

Staggering to his feet, he pictured his three murdered brethren. He thought of the generations who had come before them... of the mission with which they had all been entrusted.

An unbroken chain of knowledge.

Suddenly, now, despite all the precautions... despite all the fail-safes... Jacques Saunière was the only remaining link, the sole guardian of one of the most powerful secrets ever kept.

Shivering, he pulled himself to his feet.

I must find some way....

He was trapped inside the Grand Gallery, and there existed only one person on earth to whom he could pass the torch. Saunière gazed up at the walls of his opulent prison. A collection of the world's most famous paintings seemed to smile down on him like old friends.

Wincing in pain, he summoned all of his faculties and strength. The desperate task before him, he knew, would require every remaining second of his life.

CHAPTER 1

Robert Langdon awoke slowly.

A telephone was ringing in the darkness—a tinny, unfamiliar ring. He fumbled for the bedside lamp and turned it on. Squinting at his surroundings he saw a plush Renaissance bedroom with Louis XVI furniture, hand-frescoed walls, and a colossal mahogany four-poster bed.

Where the hell am I?

The jacquard bathrobe hanging on his bedpost bore the monogram: *HOTEL RITZ PARIS*.

Slowly, the fog began to lift.

Langdon picked up the receiver. "Hello?"

"Monsieur Langdon?" a man's voice said. "I hope I have not awoken you?"

Dazed, Langdon looked at the bedside clock. It was 12:32 A.M. He had been asleep only an hour, but he felt like the dead.

"This is the concierge, monsieur. I apologize for this intrusion, but you have a visitor. He insists it is urgent."

Langdon still felt fuzzy. *A visitor?* His eyes focused now on a crumpled flyer on his bedside table.

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF PARIS
proudly presents
AN EVENING WITH ROBERT LANGDON
PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLOGY,
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Langdon groaned. Tonight's lecture—a slide show about pagan symbolism hidden in the stones of Chartres Cathedral—had probably ruffled some conservative feathers in the audience. Most likely, some religious scholar had trailed him home to pick a fight.

"I'm sorry," Langdon said, "but I'm very tired and—"

"*Mais, monsieur,*" the concierge pressed, lowering his voice to an urgent whisper. "Your guest is an important man."

Langdon had little doubt. His books on religious paintings and cult symbology had made him a reluctant celebrity in the art world, and last year Langdon's visibility had increased a hundredfold after his involvement in a widely publicized incident at the Vatican. Since then, the stream of self-important historians and art buffs arriving at his door had seemed never-ending.

"If you would be so kind," Langdon said, doing his best to remain polite, "could you take the man's name and number, and tell him I'll try to call him before I leave Paris on Tuesday? Thank you." He hung up before the concierge could protest.

Sitting up now, Langdon frowned at his bedside *Guest Relations Handbook*, whose cover boasted: SLEEP LIKE A BABY IN THE CITY OF LIGHTS. SLUMBER AT THE PARIS RITZ. He turned and gazed tiredly into the full-length mirror across the room. The man staring back at him was a stranger—tousled and weary.

You need a vacation, Robert.

The past year had taken a heavy toll on him, but he didn't appreciate seeing proof in the mirror. His usually sharp blue eyes looked hazy and drawn tonight. A dark stubble was shrouding his strong jaw and dimpled chin. Around his temples, the gray highlights were advancing, making their way deeper into his thicket of coarse black hair. Although

his female colleagues insisted the gray only accentuated his bookish appeal, Langdon knew better.

If Boston Magazine could see me now.

Last month, much to Langdon's embarrassment, *Boston Magazine* had listed him as one of that city's top ten most intriguing people—a dubious honor that made him the brunt of endless ribbing by his Harvard colleagues. Tonight, three thousand miles from home, the accolade had resurfaced to haunt him at the lecture he had given.

"Ladies and gentlemen..." the hostess had announced to a full house at the American University of Paris's Pavilion Dauphine, "Our guest tonight needs no introduction. He is the author of numerous books: *The Symbolology of Secret Sects*, *The An of the Illuminati*, *The Lost Language of Ideograms*, and when I say he wrote the book on *Religious Iconology*, I mean that quite literally. Many of you use his textbooks in class."

The students in the crowd nodded enthusiastically.

"I had planned to introduce him tonight by sharing his impressive curriculum vitae. However..." She glanced playfully at Langdon, who was seated onstage. "An audience member has just handed me a far more, shall we say... *intriguing* introduction."

She held up a copy of *Boston Magazine*.

Langdon cringed. *Where the hell did she get that?*

The hostess began reading choice excerpts from the inane article, and Langdon felt himself sinking lower and lower in his chair. Thirty seconds later, the crowd was grinning, and the woman showed no signs of letting up. "And Mr. Langdon's refusal to speak publicly about his unusual role in last year's Vatican conclave certainly wins him points on our intrigue-o-meter." The hostess goaded the crowd. "Would you like to hear more?"

The crowd applauded.

Somebody stop her, Langdon pleaded as she dove into the article again.

"Although Professor Langdon might not be considered hunk-handsome like some of our younger awardees, this forty-something academic has more than his share of scholarly allure. His captivating presence is punctuated by an unusually low, baritone speaking voice, which his female students describe as 'chocolate for the ears.' "

The hall erupted in laughter.

Langdon forced an awkward smile. He knew what came next—some ridiculous line about "Harrison Ford in Harris tweed"—and because this evening he had figured it was finally safe again to wear his Harris tweed and Burberry turtleneck, he decided to take action.

"Thank you, Monique," Langdon said, standing prematurely and edging her away from the podium. "*Boston Magazine* clearly has a gift for fiction." He turned to the audience with an embarrassed sigh. "And if I find which one of you provided that article, I'll have the consulate deport you."

The crowd laughed.

"Well, folks, as you all know, I'm here tonight to talk about the power of symbols..."

The ringing of Langdon's hotel phone once again broke the silence.

Groaning in disbelief, he picked up. "Yes?"

As expected, it was the concierge. "Mr. Langdon, again my apologies. I am calling to inform you that your guest is now en route to your room. I thought I should alert you."

Langdon was wide awake now. "You sent someone to my *room*?"

"I apologize, monsieur, but a man like this... I cannot presume the authority to stop him."

"Who exactly is he?"

But the concierge was gone.

Almost immediately, a heavy fist pounded on Langdon's door.

Uncertain, Langdon slid off the bed, feeling his toes sink deep into the savonniere carpet. He donned the hotel bathrobe and moved toward the door. "Who is it?"

"Mr. Langdon? I need to speak with you." The man's English was accented—a sharp, authoritative bark. "My name is Lieutenant Jerome Collet. Direction Centrale Police Judiciaire."

Langdon paused. *The Judicial Police?* The DCPJ was the rough equivalent of the U.S. FBI.

Leaving the security chain in place, Langdon opened the door a few inches. The face staring back at him was thin and washed out. The man was exceptionally lean, dressed in an official-looking blue uniform.

"May I come in?" the agent asked.

Langdon hesitated, feeling uncertain as the stranger's sallow eyes studied him. "What is this all about?"

"My *capitaine* requires your expertise in a private matter."

"Now?" Langdon managed. "It's after midnight."

"Am I correct that you were scheduled to meet with the curator of the Louvre this evening?"

Langdon felt a sudden surge of uneasiness. He and the revered curator Jacques Saunière had been slated to meet for drinks after Langdon's lecture tonight, but Saunière had never shown up. "Yes. How did you know that?"

"We found your name in his daily planner."

"I trust nothing is wrong?"

The agent gave a dire sigh and slid a Polaroid snapshot through the narrow opening in the door.

When Langdon saw the photo, his entire body went rigid.

"This photo was taken less than an hour ago. Inside the Louvre."

As Langdon stared at the bizarre image, his initial revulsion and shock gave way to a sudden upwelling of anger. "Who would do this!"

"We had hoped that you might help us answer that very question, considering your knowledge in symbology and your plans to meet with him."

Langdon stared at the picture, his horror now laced with fear. The image was gruesome and profoundly strange, bringing with it an unsettling sense of déjà vu. A little over a year ago, Langdon had received a photograph of a corpse and a similar request for help. Twenty-four hours later, he had almost lost his life inside Vatican City. This photo was entirely different, and yet something about the scenario felt disquietingly familiar.

The agent checked his watch. "My *capitaine* is waiting, sir."

Langdon barely heard him. His eyes were still riveted on the picture. "This symbol here, and the way his body is so oddly..."

"Positioned?" the agent offered.

Langdon nodded, feeling a chill as he looked up. "I can't imagine who would do this to someone."

The agent looked grim. "You don't understand, Mr. Langdon. What you see in this photograph..." He paused. "Monsieur Saunière did that to himself."

CHAPTER 2

One mile away, the hulking albino named Silas limped through the front gate of the luxurious brownstone residence on Rue La Bruyère. The spiked *cilice* belt that he wore around his thigh cut into his flesh, and yet his soul sang with satisfaction of service to the Lord.

Pain is good.

His red eyes scanned the lobby as he entered the residence. Empty. He climbed the stairs quietly, not wanting to awaken any of his fellow numeraries. His bedroom door was open; locks were forbidden here. He entered, closing the door behind him.

The room was spartan—hardwood floors, a pine dresser, a canvas mat in the corner that served as his bed. He was a visitor here this week, and yet for many years he had been blessed with a similar sanctuary in New York City.

The Lord has provided me shelter and purpose in my life.

Tonight, at last, Silas felt he had begun to repay his debt. Hurrying to the dresser, he found the cell phone hidden in his bottom drawer and placed a call.

"Yes?" a male voice answered.

"Teacher, I have returned."

"Speak," the voice commanded, sounding pleased to hear from him.

"All four are gone. The three *sénéchaux*... and the *Grand Master* himself."

There was a momentary pause, as if for prayer. "Then I assume you have the information?"

"All four concurred. Independently."

"And you believed them?"

"Their agreement was too great for coincidence."

An excited breath. "Excellent. I had feared the brotherhood's reputation for secrecy might prevail."

"The prospect of death is strong motivation."

"So, my pupil, tell me what I must know."

Silas knew the information he had gleaned from his victims would come as a shock. "Teacher, all four confirmed the existence of the *clef de voûte*... the legendary *keystone*."

He heard a quick intake of breath over the phone and could feel the Teacher's excitement. "The *keystone*. Exactly as we suspected."

According to lore, the brotherhood had created a map of stone—a *clef de voûte*... or *keystone*—an engraved tablet that revealed the final resting place of the brotherhood's greatest secret... information so powerful that its protection was the reason for the brotherhood's very existence.

"When we possess the keystone," the Teacher said, "we will be only one step away."

"We are closer than you think. The keystone is here in Paris."

"Paris? Incredible. It is almost too easy."

Silas relayed the earlier events of the evening... how all four of his victims, moments before death, had desperately tried to buy back their godless lives by telling their secret. Each had told Silas the exact same thing—that the keystone was ingeniously hidden at a precise location inside one of Paris's ancient churches—the Eglise de Saint-Sulpice.

"Inside a house of the Lord," the Teacher exclaimed. "How they mock us!"

"As they have for centuries."

The Teacher fell silent, as if letting the triumph of this moment settle over him. Finally, he spoke. "You have done a great service to God. We have waited centuries for this. You must retrieve the stone for me. Immediately. Tonight. You understand the stakes."

Silas knew the stakes were incalculable, and yet what the Teacher was now commanding seemed impossible. "But the church, it is a fortress. Especially at night. How will I enter?"

With the confident tone of a man of enormous influence, the Teacher explained what was to be done.

When Silas hung up the phone, his skin tingled with anticipation.

One hour, he told himself, grateful that the Teacher had given him time to carry out the necessary penance before entering a house of God. *I must purge my soul of today's sins*. The sins committed today had been holy in purpose. Acts of war against the enemies of God had been committed for centuries. Forgiveness was assured.

Even so, Silas knew, absolution required sacrifice.

Pulling his shades, he stripped naked and knelt in the center of his room. Looking down, he examined the spiked *cilice* belt clamped around his thigh. All true followers of The Way wore this device—a leather strap, studded with sharp metal barbs that cut into the flesh as a perpetual reminder of Christ's suffering. The pain caused by the device also helped counteract the desires of the flesh.

Although Silas already had worn his *cilice* today longer than the requisite two hours, he knew today was no ordinary day. Grasping the buckle, he cinched it one notch tighter, wincing as the barbs dug deeper into his flesh. Exhaling slowly, he savored the cleansing ritual of his pain.

Pain is good, Silas whispered, repeating the sacred mantra of Father Josemaría Escrivá—the Teacher of all Teachers. Although Escrivá had died in 1975, his wisdom lived on, his words still whispered by thousands of faithful servants around the globe as they knelt on the floor and performed the sacred practice known as "corporal mortification."

Silas turned his attention now to a heavy knotted rope coiled neatly on the floor beside him. *The Discipline*. The knots were caked with dried blood. Eager for the purifying effects of his own agony, Silas said a quick prayer. Then, gripping one end of the rope, he closed his eyes and swung it hard over his shoulder, feeling the knots slap against his back. He whipped it over his shoulder again, slashing at his flesh. Again and again, he lashed.

Castigo corpus meum.

Finally, he felt the blood begin to flow.

CHAPTER 3

The crisp April air whipped through the open window of the Citroën ZX as it skimmed south past the Opera House and crossed Place Vendôme. In the passenger seat, Robert Langdon felt the city tear past him as he tried to clear his thoughts. His quick shower and shave had left him looking reasonably presentable but had done little to ease his anxiety. The frightening image of the curator's body remained locked in his mind.

Jacques Saunière is dead.

Langdon could not help but feel a deep sense of loss at the curator's death. Despite Saunière's reputation for being reclusive, his recognition for dedication to the arts made him an easy man to revere. His books on the secret codes hidden in the paintings of Poussin and Teniers were some of Langdon's favorite classroom texts. Tonight's meeting had been one Langdon was very much looking forward to, and he was disappointed when the curator had not shown.

Again the image of the curator's body flashed in his mind. *Jacques Saunière did that to himself?* Langdon turned and looked out the window, forcing the picture from his mind.

Outside, the city was just now winding down—street vendors wheeling carts of candied *amandes*, waiters carrying bags of garbage to the curb, a pair of late night lovers cuddling to stay warm in a breeze scented with jasmine blossom. The Citroën navigated the chaos with authority, its dissonant two-tone siren parting the traffic like a knife.

"*Le capitaine* was pleased to discover you were still in Paris tonight," the agent said, speaking for the first time since they'd left the hotel. "A fortunate coincidence."

Langdon was feeling anything but fortunate, and coincidence was a concept he did not entirely trust. As someone who had spent his life exploring the hidden interconnectivity of disparate emblems and ideologies, Langdon viewed the world as a web of profoundly intertwined histories and events. *The connections may be invisible*, he often preached to his symbology classes at Harvard, *but they are always there, buried just beneath the surface.*

"I assume," Langdon said, "that the American University of Paris told you where I was staying?"

The driver shook his head. "Interpol."

Interpol, Langdon thought. *Of course.* He had forgotten that the seemingly innocuous request of all European hotels to see a passport at check-in was more than a quaint formality—it was the law. On any given night, all across Europe, Interpol officials could pinpoint exactly who was sleeping where. Finding Langdon at the Ritz had probably taken all of five seconds.

As the Citroën accelerated southward across the city, the illuminated profile of the Eiffel Tower appeared, shooting skyward in the distance to the right. Seeing it, Langdon thought of Vittoria, recalling their playful promise a year ago that every six months they would meet again at a different romantic spot on the globe. The Eiffel Tower, Langdon suspected, would have made their list. Sadly, he last kissed Vittoria in a noisy airport in Rome more than a year ago.

"Did you mount her?" the agent asked, looking over.

Langdon glanced up, certain he had misunderstood. "I beg your pardon?"

"She is lovely, no?" The agent motioned through the windshield toward the Eiffel Tower. "Have you mounted her?"

Langdon rolled his eyes. "No, I haven't climbed the tower."

"She is the symbol of France. I think she is perfect."

Langdon nodded absently. Symbologists often remarked that France—a country renowned for machismo, womanizing, and diminutive insecure leaders like Napoleon and Pepin the Short—could not have chosen a more apt national emblem than a thousand-foot phallus.

When they reached the intersection at Rue de Rivoli, the traffic light was red, but the Citroën didn't slow. The agent gunned the sedan across the junction and sped onto a wooded section of Rue Castiglione, which served as the northern entrance to the famed Tuileries Gardens—Paris's own version of Central Park. Most tourists mistranslated Jardins des Tuileries as relating to the thousands of tulips that bloomed here, but *Tuileries* was actually a literal reference to something far less romantic. This park had once been an enormous, polluted excavation pit from which Parisian contractors mined clay to manufacture the city's famous red roofing tiles—or *tuiles*.

As they entered the deserted park, the agent reached under the dash and turned off the blaring siren. Langdon exhaled, savoring the sudden quiet. Outside the car, the pale wash of halogen headlights skimmed over the crushed gravel parkway, the rugged whir of the tires intoning a hypnotic rhythm. Langdon had always considered the Tuileries to be sacred ground. These were the gardens in which Claude Monet had experimented with form and color, and literally inspired the birth of the Impressionist movement. Tonight, however, this place held a strange aura of foreboding.

The Citroën swerved left now, angling west down the park's central boulevard. Curling around a circular pond, the driver cut across a desolate avenue out into a wide quadrangle beyond. Langdon could now see the end of the Tuileries Gardens, marked by a giant stone archway.

Arc du Carrousel.

Despite the orgiastic rituals once held at the Arc du Carrousel, art aficionados revered this place for another reason entirely. From the esplanade at the end of the Tuileries, four of the finest art museums in the world could be seen... one at each point of the compass.

Out the right-hand window, south across the Seine and Quai Voltaire, Langdon could see the dramatically lit facade of the old train station—now the esteemed Musée d'Orsay. Glancing left, he could make out the top of the ultramodern Pompidou Center, which housed the Museum of Modern Art. Behind him to the west, Langdon knew the ancient obelisk of Ramses rose above the trees, marking the Musée du Jeu de Paume.

But it was straight ahead, to the east, through the archway, that Langdon could now see the monolithic Renaissance palace that had become the most famous art museum in the world.

Musée du Louvre.

Langdon felt a familiar tinge of wonder as his eyes made a futile attempt to absorb the entire mass of the edifice. Across a staggeringly expansive plaza, the imposing facade of the Louvre rose like a citadel against the Paris sky. Shaped like an enormous horseshoe, the Louvre was the longest building in Europe, stretching farther than three Eiffel Towers laid end to end. Not even the million square feet of open plaza between the museum wings could challenge the majesty of the facade's breadth. Langdon had once walked the Louvre's entire perimeter, an astonishing three-mile journey.

Despite the estimated five days it would take a visitor to properly appreciate the 65,300 pieces of art in this building, most tourists chose an abbreviated experience Langdon referred to as "Louvre Lite"—a full sprint through the museum to see the three most famous objects: the *Mona Lisa*, *Venus de Milo*, and *Winged Victory*. Art Buchwald had once boasted he'd seen all three masterpieces in five minutes and fifty-six seconds.

The driver pulled out a handheld walkie-talkie and spoke in rapid-fire French. "*Monsieur Langdon est arrivé. Deux minutes.*"

An indecipherable confirmation came crackling back.

The agent stowed the device, turning now to Langdon. "You will meet the *capitaine* at the main entrance."

The driver ignored the signs prohibiting auto traffic on the plaza, revved the engine, and gunned the Citroën up over the curb. The Louvre's main entrance was visible now, rising boldly in the distance, encircled by seven triangular pools from which spouted illuminated fountains.

La Pyramide.

The new entrance to the Paris Louvre had become almost as famous as the museum itself. The controversial, neomodern glass pyramid designed by Chinese-born American architect I. M. Pei still evoked scorn from traditionalists who felt it destroyed the dignity of the Renaissance courtyard. Goethe had described architecture as frozen music, and Pei's critics described this pyramid as fingernails on a chalkboard. Progressive admirers, though, hailed Pei's seventy-one-foot-tall transparent pyramid as a dazzling synergy of ancient structure and modern method—a symbolic link between the old and new—helping usher the Louvre into the next millennium.

"Do you like our pyramid?" the agent asked.

Langdon frowned. The French, it seemed, loved to ask Americans this. It was a loaded question, of course. Admitting you liked the pyramid made you a tasteless American, and expressing dislike was an insult to the French.

"Mitterrand was a bold man," Langdon replied, splitting the difference. The late French president who had commissioned the pyramid was said to have suffered from a "Pharaoh complex." Singlehandedly responsible for filling Paris with Egyptian obelisks, art, and artifacts.

François Mitterrand had an affinity for Egyptian culture that was so all-consuming that the French still referred to him as the Sphinx.

"What is the captain's name?" Langdon asked, changing topics.

"Bezu Fache," the driver said, approaching the pyramid's main entrance. "We call him *le Taureau*."

Langdon glanced over at him, wondering if every Frenchman had a mysterious animal epithet. "You call your captain *the Bull*?"

The man arched his eyebrows. "Your French is better than you admit, Monsieur Langdon."

My French stinks, Langdon thought, but my zodiac iconography is pretty good. Taurus was always the bull. Astrology was a symbolic constant all over the world.

The agent pulled the car to a stop and pointed between two fountains to a large door in the side of the pyramid. "There is the entrance. Good luck, monsieur."

"You're not coming?"

"My orders are to leave you here. I have other business to attend to."

Langdon heaved a sigh and climbed out. *It's your circus.*

The agent revved his engine and sped off.

As Langdon stood alone and watched the departing taillights, he realized he could easily reconsider, exit the courtyard, grab a taxi, and head home to bed. Something told him it was probably a lousy idea.

As he moved toward the mist of the fountains, Langdon had the uneasy sense he was crossing an imaginary threshold into another world. The dreamlike quality of the evening was settling around him again. Twenty minutes ago he had been asleep in his hotel room.

Now he was standing in front of a transparent pyramid built by the Sphinx, waiting for a policeman they called the Bull.

I'm trapped in a Salvador Dali painting, he thought.

Langdon strode to the main entrance—an enormous revolving door. The foyer beyond was dimly lit and deserted.

Do I knock?

Langdon wondered if any of Harvard's revered Egyptologists had ever knocked on the front door of a pyramid and expected an answer. He raised his hand to bang on the glass, but out of the darkness below, a figure appeared, striding up the curving staircase. The man was stocky and dark, almost Neanderthal, dressed in a dark double-breasted suit that strained to cover his wide shoulders. He advanced with unmistakable authority on squat, powerful legs. He was speaking on his cell phone but finished the call as he arrived. He motioned for Langdon to enter.

"I am Bezu Fache," he announced as Langdon pushed through the revolving door. "Captain of the Central Directorate Judicial Police." His tone was fitting—a guttural rumble... like a gathering storm.

Langdon held out his hand to shake. "Robert Langdon."

Fache's enormous palm wrapped around Langdon's with crushing force.

"I saw the photo," Langdon said. "Your agent said Jacques Saunière *himself* did—"

"Mr. Langdon," Fache's ebony eyes locked on. "What you see in the photo is only the beginning of what Saunière did."

CHAPTER 4

Captain Bezu Fache carried himself like an angry ox, with his wide shoulders thrown back and his chin tucked hard into his chest. His dark hair was slicked back with oil, accentuating an arrow-like widow's peak that divided his jutting brow and preceded him like the prow of a battleship. As he advanced, his dark eyes seemed to scorch the earth before him, radiating a fiery clarity that forecast his reputation for unblinking severity in all matters.

Langdon followed the captain down the famous marble staircase into the sunken atrium beneath the glass pyramid. As they descended, they passed between two armed Judicial Police guards with machine guns. The message was clear: Nobody goes in or out tonight without the blessing of Captain Fache.

Descending below ground level, Langdon fought a rising trepidation. Fache's presence was anything but welcoming, and the Louvre itself had an almost sepulchral aura at this hour. The staircase, like the aisle of a dark movie theater, was illuminated by subtle tread-lighting embedded in each step. Langdon could hear his own footsteps reverberating off the glass overhead. As he glanced up, he could see the faint illuminated wisps of mist from the fountains fading away outside the transparent roof.

"Do you approve?" Fache asked, nodding upward with his broad chin.

Langdon sighed, too tired to play games. "Yes, your pyramid is magnificent."

Fache grunted. "A scar on the face of Paris."

Strike one. Langdon sensed his host was a hard man to please. He wondered if Fache had any idea that this pyramid, at President Mitterrand's explicit demand, had been constructed of exactly 666 panes of glass—a bizarre request that had always been a hot topic among conspiracy buffs who claimed 666 was the number of Satan.

Langdon decided not to bring it up.

As they dropped farther into the subterranean foyer, the yawning space slowly emerged from the shadows. Built fifty-seven feet beneath ground level, the Louvre's newly constructed 70,000-square-foot lobby spread out like an endless grotto. Constructed in warm ocher marble to be compatible with the honey-colored stone of the Louvre facade above, the subterranean hall was usually vibrant with sunlight and tourists. Tonight, however, the lobby was barren and dark, giving the entire space a cold and crypt-like atmosphere.

"And the museum's regular security staff?" Langdon asked.

"*En quarantaine*," Fache replied, sounding as if Langdon were questioning the integrity of Fache's team. "Obviously, someone gained entry tonight who should not have. All Louvre night wardens are in the Sully Wing being questioned. My own agents have taken over museum security for the evening."

Langdon nodded, moving quickly to keep pace with Fache.

"How well did you know Jacques Saunière?" the captain asked.

"Actually, not at all. We'd never met."

Fache looked surprised. "Your first meeting was to be tonight?"

"Yes. We'd planned to meet at the American University reception following my lecture, but he never showed up."

Fache scribbled some notes in a little book. As they walked, Langdon caught a glimpse of the Louvre's lesser-known pyramid—*La Pyramide Inversée*—a huge inverted skylight that hung from the ceiling like a stalactite in an adjoining section of the entresol. Fache guided Langdon up a short set of stairs to the mouth of an arched tunnel, over which a sign read: DENON. The Denon Wing was the most famous of the Louvre's three main sections.

"Who requested tonight's meeting?" Fache asked suddenly. "You or he?"

The question seemed odd. "Mr. Saunière did," Langdon replied as they entered the tunnel. "His secretary contacted me a few weeks ago via e-mail. She said the curator had heard I would be lecturing in Paris this month and wanted to discuss something with me while I was here."

"Discuss what?"

"I don't know. Art, I imagine. We share similar interests."

Fache looked skeptical. "You have *no* idea what your meeting was about?"

Langdon did not. He'd been curious at the time but had not felt comfortable demanding specifics. The venerated Jacques Saunière had a renowned penchant for privacy and granted very few meetings; Langdon was grateful simply for the opportunity to meet him.

"Mr. Langdon, can you at least *guess* what our murder victim might have wanted to discuss with you on the night he was killed? It might be helpful."

The pointedness of the question made Langdon uncomfortable. "I really can't imagine. I didn't ask. I felt honored to have been contacted at all. I'm an admirer of Mr. Saunière's work. I use his texts often in my classes."

Fache made note of that fact in his book.

The two men were now halfway up the Denon Wing's entry tunnel, and Langdon could see the twin ascending escalators at the far end, both motionless.

"So you shared interests with him?" Fache asked.

"Yes. In fact, I've spent much of the last year writing the draft for a book that deals with Mr. Saunière's primary area of expertise. I was looking forward to picking his brain."

Fache glanced up. "Pardon?"

The idiom apparently didn't translate. "I was looking forward to learning his thoughts on the topic."

"I see. And what is the topic?"

Langdon hesitated, uncertain exactly how to put it. "Essentially, the manuscript is about the iconography of goddess worship—the concept of female sanctity and the art and symbols associated with it."

Fache ran a meaty hand across his hair. "And Saunière was knowledgeable about this?"

"Nobody more so."

"I see."

Langdon sensed Fache did not see at all. Jacques Saunière was considered the premiere goddess iconographer on earth. Not only did Saunière have a personal passion for relics relating to fertility, goddess cults, Wicca, and the sacred feminine, but during his twenty-year tenure as curator, Saunière had helped the Louvre amass the largest collection of goddess art on earth—labrys axes from the priestesses' oldest Greek shrine in Delphi, gold caducei wands, hundreds of Tjet ankhs resembling small standing angels, sistrum rattles used in ancient Egypt to dispel evil spirits, and an astonishing array of statues depicting Horus being nursed by the goddess Isis.

"Perhaps Jacques Saunière knew of your manuscript?" Fache offered. "And he called the meeting to offer his help on your book."

Langdon shook his head. "Actually, nobody yet knows about my manuscript. It's still in draft form, and I haven't shown it to anyone except my editor."

Fache fell silent.

Langdon did not add the *reason* he hadn't yet shown the manuscript to anyone else. The three-hundred-page draft—tentatively titled *Symbols of the Lost Sacred Feminine*—proposed some very unconventional interpretations of established religious iconography which would certainly be controversial.

Now, as Langdon approached the stationary escalators, he paused, realizing Fache was no longer beside him. Turning, Langdon saw Fache standing several yards back at a service elevator.

"We'll take the elevator," Fache said as the lift doors opened. "As I'm sure you're aware, the gallery is quite a distance on foot."

Although Langdon knew the elevator would expedite the long, two-story climb to the Denon Wing, he remained motionless.

"Is something wrong?" Fache was holding the door, looking impatient.

Langdon exhaled, turning a longing glance back up the open-air escalator. *Nothing's wrong at all*, he lied to himself, trudging back toward the elevator. As a boy, Langdon had fallen down an abandoned well shaft and almost died treading water in the narrow space for hours before being rescued. Since then, he'd suffered a haunting phobia of enclosed spaces—elevators, subways, squash courts. *The elevator is a perfectly safe machine*, Langdon continually told himself, never believing it. *It's a tiny metal box hanging in an enclosed shaft!* Holding his breath, he stepped into the lift, feeling the familiar tingle of adrenaline as the doors slid shut. *Two floors. Ten seconds.*

"You and Mr. Saunière," Fache said as the lift began to move, "you never spoke at all? Never corresponded? Never sent each other anything in the mail?"

Another odd question. Langdon shook his head. "No. Never." Fache cocked his head, as if making a mental note of that fact. Saying nothing, he stared dead ahead at the chrome doors.

As they ascended, Langdon tried to focus on anything other than the four walls around him. In the reflection of the shiny elevator door, he saw the captain's tie clip—a silver crucifix with thirteen embedded pieces of black onyx. Langdon found it vaguely surprising. The symbol was known as a *crux gemmata*—a cross bearing thirteen gems—a Christian ideogram for Christ and His twelve apostles. Somehow Langdon had not expected the captain of the French police to broadcast his religion so openly. Then again, this was France; Christianity was not a religion here so much as a birthright.

"It's a *crux gemmata*," Fache said suddenly.

Startled, Langdon glanced up to find Fache's eyes on him in the reflection.

The elevator jolted to a stop, and the doors opened.

Langdon stepped quickly out into the hallway, eager for the wide-open space afforded by the famous high ceilings of the Louvre galleries. The world into which he stepped, however, was nothing like he expected.

Surprised, Langdon stopped short.

Fache glanced over. "I gather, Mr. Langdon, you have never seen the Louvre after hours?"

I guess not, Langdon thought, trying to get his bearings.

Usually impeccably illuminated, the Louvre galleries were startlingly dark tonight. Instead of the customary flat-white light flowing down from above, a muted red glow seemed to emanate upward from the baseboards—intermittent patches of red light spilling out onto the tile floors.

As Langdon gazed down the murky corridor, he realized he should have anticipated this scene. Virtually all major galleries employed red service lighting at night—strategically placed, low-level, noninvasive lights that enabled staff members to navigate

hallways and yet kept the paintings in relative darkness to slow the fading effects of overexposure to light. Tonight, the museum possessed an almost oppressive quality. Long shadows encroached everywhere, and the usually soaring vaulted ceilings appeared as a low, black void.

"This way," Fache said, turning sharply right and setting out through a series of interconnected galleries.

Langdon followed, his vision slowly adjusting to the dark. All around, large-format oils began to materialize like photos developing before him in an enormous darkroom... their eyes following as he moved through the rooms. He could taste the familiar tang of museum air—an arid, deionized essence that carried a faint hint of carbon—the product of industrial, coal-filter dehumidifiers that ran around the clock to counteract the corrosive carbon dioxide exhaled by visitors.

Mounted high on the walls, the visible security cameras sent a clear message to visitors: *We see you. Do not touch anything.*

"Any of them real?" Langdon asked, motioning to the cameras.

Fache shook his head. "Of course not."

Langdon was not surprised. Video surveillance in museums this size was cost-prohibitive and ineffective. With acres of galleries to watch over, the Louvre would require several hundred technicians simply to monitor the feeds. Most large museums now used "containment security." *Forget keeping thieves out. Keep them in.* Containment was activated after hours, and if an intruder removed a piece of artwork, compartmentalized exits would seal around that gallery, and the thief would find himself behind bars even before the police arrived.

The sound of voices echoed down the marble corridor up ahead. The noise seemed to be coming from a large recessed alcove that lay ahead on the right. A bright light spilled out into the hallway.

"Office of the curator," the captain said.

As he and Fache drew nearer the alcove, Langdon peered down a short hallway, into Saunière's luxurious study—warm wood, Old Master paintings, and an enormous antique desk on which stood a two-foot-tall model of a knight in full armor. A handful of police agents bustled about the room, talking on phones and taking notes. One of them was seated at Saunière's desk, typing into a laptop. Apparently, the curator's private office had become DCPJ's makeshift command post for the evening.

"*Messieurs,*" Fache called out, and the men turned. "*Ne nous dérangez pas sous aucun prétexte. Entendu?*"

Everyone inside the office nodded their understanding.

Langdon had hung enough NE PAS DERANGER signs on hotel room doors to catch the gist of the captain's orders. Fache and Langdon were not to be disturbed under any circumstances.

Leaving the small congregation of agents behind, Fache led Langdon farther down the darkened hallway. Thirty yards ahead loomed the gateway to the Louvre's most popular section—*la Grande Galerie*—a seemingly endless corridor that housed the Louvre's most valuable Italian masterpieces. Langdon had already discerned that *this* was where Saunière's body lay; the Grand Gallery's famous parquet floor had been unmistakable in the Polaroid.

As they approached, Langdon saw the entrance was blocked by an enormous steel grate that looked like something used by medieval castles to keep out marauding armies.

"*Containment security,*" Fache said, as they neared the grate.

Even in the darkness, the barricade looked like it could have restrained a tank. Arriving outside, Langdon peered through the bars into the dimly lit caverns of the Grand Gallery.

"After you, Mr. Langdon," Fache said.

Langdon turned. *After me, where?*

Fache motioned toward the floor at the base of the grate.

Langdon looked down. In the darkness, he hadn't noticed. The barricade was raised about two feet, providing an awkward clearance underneath.

"This area is still off limits to Louvre security," Fache said. "My team from *Police Technique et Scientifique* has just finished their investigation." He motioned to the opening. "Please slide under."

Langdon stared at the narrow crawl space at his feet and then up at the massive iron grate. *He's kidding, right?* The barricade looked like a guillotine waiting to crush intruders.

Fache grumbled something in French and checked his watch. Then he dropped to his knees and slithered his bulky frame underneath the grate. On the other side, he stood up and looked back through the bars at Langdon.

Langdon sighed. Placing his palms flat on the polished parquet, he lay on his stomach and pulled himself forward. As he slid underneath, the nape of his Harris tweed snagged on the bottom of the grate, and he cracked the back of his head on the iron.

Very suave, Robert, he thought, fumbling and then finally pulling himself through. As he stood up, Langdon was beginning to suspect it was going to be a very long night.