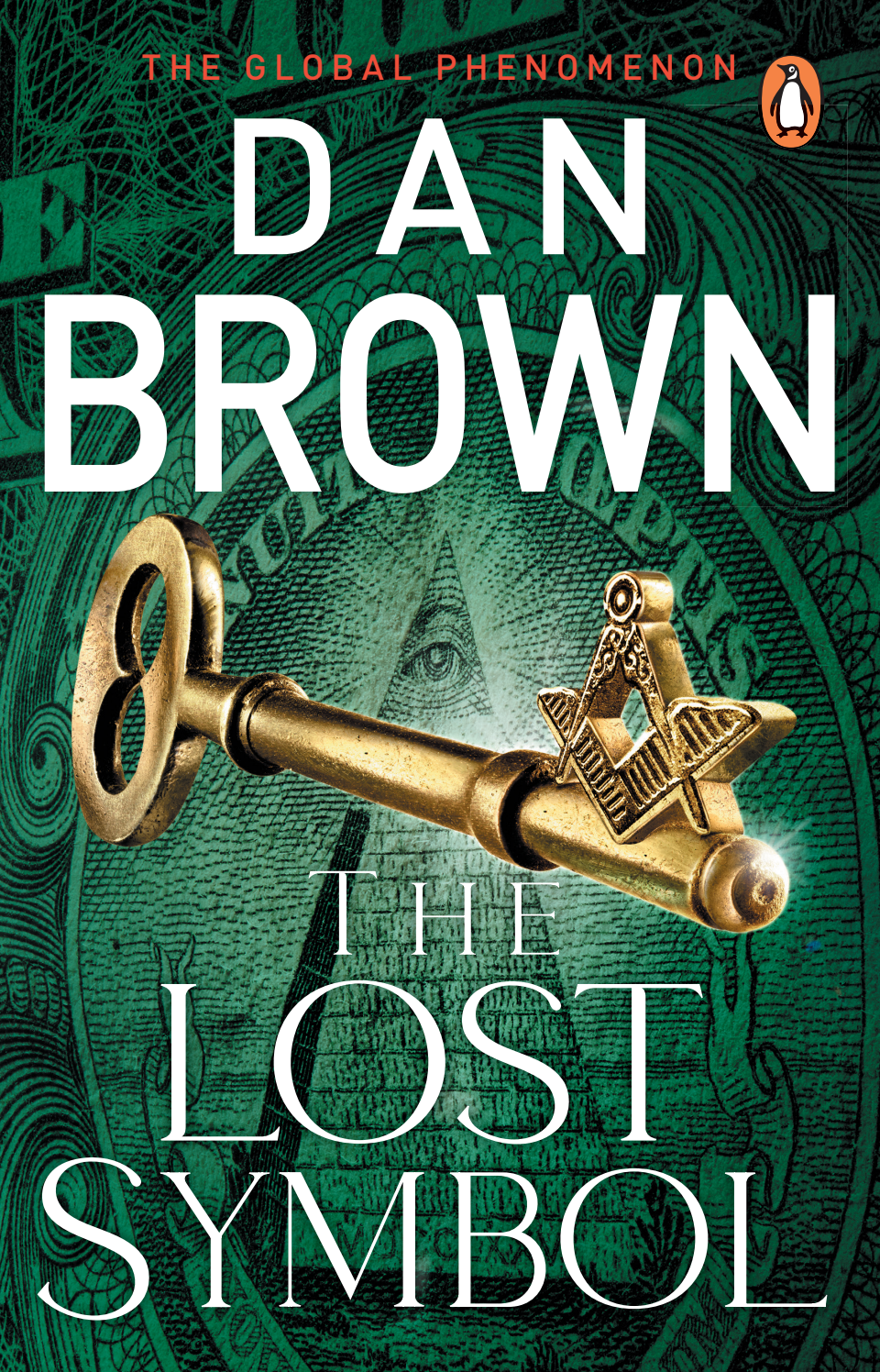
THE GLOBAL PHENOMENON

DAN BROWN



THE LOST SYMBOL

DAN BROWN

is the bestselling author of *Digital Fortress*, *Deception Point*, *Angels & Demons*, *The Da Vinci Code*, *The Lost Symbol*, *Inferno*, *Origin* and *The Secret of Secrets*. Three of his Robert Langdon novels have been adapted for the screen by Ron Howard, starring Tom Hanks. They have all been international blockbusters.

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BY DAN BROWN

Digital Fortress

An impossibly complex code threatens to obliterate the balance of world power forever . . .

'Fascinating'
Washington Post

Deception Point

An apparently miraculous scientific discovery might change the future of the planet if its truth is revealed . . .

'Thundering'
Chicago Tribune

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'Heart-racing'
San Francisco Chronicle

The Da Vinci Code

PARIS: A quest almost as old as time itself for an object thought lost forever becomes a deadly race against the clock . . .

'Blockbuster perfection'
New York Times

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Robert Langdon must unlock the secrets of one of Europe's oldest cities to save the woman he loves . . .

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Washington Post

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Guardian

'Robert Langdon remains a terrific hero, a bookish intellectual who's cool in a crisis and quick on his feet . . . The codes are intriguing, the settings present often-seen locales in a fresh light, and Brown keeps the pages turning'
Entertainment Weekly

'Dan Brown is the master of the intellectual cliffhanger'
Wall Street Journal

'As engaging a hero as you could wish for'
Mail on Sunday

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THE LOST SYMBOL



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For Blythe

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THE LOST SYMBOL

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To live in the world without becoming aware of the meaning of the world is like wandering about in a great library without touching the books.

The Secret Teachings of All Ages

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FACT:

In 1991, a document was locked in the safe of the director of the CIA. The document is still there today. Its cryptic text includes references to an ancient portal and an unknown location underground. The document also contains the phrase '*It's buried out there somewhere*.'

All organizations in this novel exist, including the Freemasons, the Invisible College, the Office of Security, the SMSC, and the Institute of Noetic Sciences.

All rituals, science, artwork, and monuments in this novel are real.

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Prologue

House of the Temple
8:33 P.M.

The secret is how to die.

Since the beginning of time, the secret had always been how to die.

The thirty-four-year-old initiate gazed down at the human skull cradled in his palms. The skull was hollow, like a bowl, filled with bloodred wine.

Drink it, he told himself. *You have nothing to fear.*

As was tradition, he had begun this journey adorned in the ritualistic garb of a medieval heretic being led to the gallows, his loose-fitting shirt gaping open to reveal his pale chest, his left pant leg rolled up to the knee, and his right sleeve rolled up to the elbow. Around his neck hung a heavy rope noose – a 'cable-tow' as the brethren called it. Tonight, however, like the brethren bearing witness, he was dressed as a master.

The assembly of brothers encircling him all were adorned in their full regalia of lambskin aprons, sashes, and white gloves. Around their necks hung ceremonial jewels that glistened like ghostly eyes in the muted light. Many of these men held powerful stations in life, and yet the initiate knew their worldly

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ranks meant nothing within these walls. Here all men were equals, sworn brothers sharing a mystical bond.

As he surveyed the daunting assembly, the initiate wondered who on the outside would ever believe that this collection of men would assemble in one place . . . much less *this* place. The room looked like a holy sanctuary from the ancient world.

The truth, however, was stranger still.

I am just blocks away from the White House.

This colossal edifice, located at 1733 Sixteenth Street NW in Washington, D.C., was a replica of a pre-Christian temple – the temple of King Mausolus, the original *mausoleum* . . . a place to be taken after death. Outside the main entrance, two seventeen-ton sphinxes guarded the bronze doors. The interior was an ornate labyrinth of ritualistic chambers, halls, sealed vaults, libraries, and even a hollow wall that held the remains of two human bodies. The initiate had been told every room in this building held a secret, and yet he knew no room held deeper secrets than the gigantic chamber in which he was currently kneeling with a skull cradled in his palms.

The Temple Room.

This room was a perfect square. And cavernous. The ceiling soared an astonishing one hundred feet overhead, supported by monolithic columns of green granite. A tiered gallery of dark Russian walnut seats with hand-tooled pigskin encircled the room. A thirty-three-foot-tall throne dominated the western wall, with a concealed pipe organ opposite it. The walls were a kaleidoscope of ancient symbols . . . Egyptian, Hebraic, astronomical, alchemical, and others yet unknown.

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Tonight, the Temple Room was lit by a series of

precisely arranged candles. Their dim glow was aided only by a pale shaft of moonlight that filtered down through the expansive oculus in the ceiling and illuminated the room's most startling feature – an enormous altar hewn from a solid block of polished Belgian black marble, situated dead center of the square chamber.

The secret is how to die, the initiate reminded himself.

'It is time,' a voice whispered.

The initiate let his gaze climb the distinguished white-robed figure standing before him. *The Supreme Worshipful Master.* The man, in his late fifties, was an American icon, well loved, robust, and incalculably wealthy. His once-dark hair was turning silver, and his famous visage reflected a lifetime of power and a vigorous intellect.

'Take the oath,' the Worshipful Master said, his voice soft like falling snow. 'Complete your journey.'

The initiate's journey, like all such journeys, had begun at the first degree. On that night, in a ritual similar to this one, the Worshipful Master had blindfolded him with a velvet hoodwink and pressed a ceremonial dagger to his bare chest, demanding: 'Do you seriously declare on your honor, uninfluenced by mercenary or any other unworthy motive, that you freely and voluntarily offer yourself as a candidate for the mysteries and privileges of this brotherhood?'

'I do,' the initiate had lied.

'Then let this be a sting to your consciousness,' the master had warned him, 'as well as instant death should you ever betray the secrets to be imparted to you.'

At the time, the initiate had felt no fear. *They will never know my true purpose here.*

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Tonight, however, he sensed a foreboding solemnity

in the Temple Room, and his mind began replaying all the dire warnings he had been given on his journey, threats of terrible consequences if he ever shared the ancient secrets he was about to learn: *Throat cut from ear to ear . . . tongue torn out by its roots . . . bowels taken out and burned . . . scattered to the four winds of heaven . . . heart plucked out and given to the beasts of the field—*

'Brother,' the gray-eyed master said, placing his left hand on the initiate's shoulder. 'Take the final oath.'

Steeling himself for the last step of his journey, the initiate shifted his muscular frame and turned his attention back to the skull cradled in his palms. The crimson wine looked almost black in the dim candlelight. The chamber had fallen deathly silent, and he could feel all of the witnesses watching him, waiting for him to take his final oath and join their elite ranks.

Tonight, he thought, *something is taking place within these walls that has never before occurred in the history of this brotherhood. Not once, in centuries.*

He knew it would be the spark . . . and it would give him unfathomable power. Energized, he drew a breath and spoke aloud the same words that countless men had spoken before him in countries all over the world.

'*May this wine I now drink become a deadly poison to me . . . should I ever knowingly or willfully violate my oath.*'

His words echoed in the hollow space.

Then all was quiet.

Steadying his hands, the initiate raised the skull to his mouth and felt his lips touch the dry bone. He closed his eyes and tipped the skull toward his mouth, drinking the wine in long, deep swallows. When the last drop was gone, he lowered the skull.

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For an instant, he thought he felt his lungs growing tight, and his heart began to pound wildly. *My God, they know!* Then, as quickly as it came, the feeling passed.

A pleasant warmth began to stream through his body. The initiate exhaled, smiling inwardly as he gazed up at the unsuspecting gray-eyed man who had foolishly admitted him into this brotherhood's most secretive ranks.

Soon you will lose everything you hold most dear.

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1

The Otis elevator climbing the south pillar of the Eiffel Tower was overflowing with tourists. Inside the cramped lift, an austere businessman in a pressed suit gazed down at the boy beside him. 'You look pale, son. You should have stayed on the ground.'

'I'm okay . . .' the boy answered, struggling to control his anxiety. 'I'll get out on the next level.' *I can't breathe.*

The man leaned closer. 'I thought by now you would have gotten over this.' He brushed the child's cheek affectionately.

The boy felt ashamed to disappoint his father, but he could barely hear through the ringing in his ears. *I can't breathe. I've got to get out of this box!*

The elevator operator was saying something reassuring about the lift's articulated pistons and puddled-iron construction. Far beneath them, the streets of Paris stretched out in all directions.

Almost there, the boy told himself, craning his neck and looking up at the unloading platform. *Just hold on.*

As the lift angled steeply toward the upper viewing deck, the shaft began to narrow, its massive struts contracting into a tight, vertical tunnel.

'Dad, I don't think—'

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Suddenly a staccato crack echoed overhead. The carriage jerked, swaying awkwardly to one side. Frayed cables began whipping around the carriage, thrashing like snakes. The boy reached out for his father.

'Dad!'

Their eyes locked for one terrifying second.

Then the bottom dropped out.

Robert Langdon jolted upright in his soft leather seat, startling out of the semiconscious daydream. He was sitting all alone in the enormous cabin of a Falcon 2000EX corporate jet as it bounced its way through turbulence. In the background, the dual Pratt & Whitney engines hummed evenly.

'Mr. Langdon?' The intercom crackled overhead. 'We're on final approach.'

Langdon sat up straight and slid his lecture notes back into his leather daybag. He'd been halfway through reviewing Masonic symbology when his mind had drifted. The daydream about his late father, Langdon suspected, had been stirred by this morning's unexpected invitation from Langdon's longtime mentor, Peter Solomon.

The other man I never want to disappoint.

The fifty-eight-year-old philanthropist, historian, and scientist had taken Langdon under his wing nearly thirty years ago, in many ways filling the void left by Langdon's father's death. Despite the man's influential family dynasty and massive wealth, Langdon had found humility and warmth in Solomon's soft gray eyes.

Outside the window the sun had set, but Langdon could still make out the slender silhouette of the world's largest obelisk, rising on the horizon like

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the spire of an ancient gnomon. The 555-foot marble-faced obelisk marked this nation's heart. All around the spire, the meticulous geometry of streets and monuments radiated outward.

Even from the air, Washington, D.C., exuded an almost mystical power.

Langdon loved this city, and as the jet touched down, he felt a rising excitement about what lay ahead. The jet taxied to a private terminal somewhere in the vast expanse of Dulles International Airport and came to a stop.

Langdon gathered his things, thanked the pilots, and stepped out of the jet's luxurious interior onto the foldout staircase. The cold January air felt liberating.

Breathe, Robert, he thought, appreciating the wide-open spaces.

A blanket of white fog crept across the runway, and Langdon had the sensation he was stepping into a marsh as he descended onto the misty tarmac.

'Hello! Hello!' a singsong British voice shouted from across the tarmac. 'Professor Langdon?'

Langdon looked up to see a middle-aged woman with a badge and clipboard hurrying toward him, waving happily as he approached. Curly blond hair protruded from under a stylish knit wool hat.

'Welcome to Washington, sir!'

Langdon smiled. 'Thank you.'

'My name is Pam, from passenger services.' The woman spoke with an exuberance that was almost unsettling. 'If you'll come with me, sir, your car is waiting.'

Langdon followed her across the runway toward the Signature terminal, which was surrounded by glistening private jets. *A taxi stand for the rich and famous.*

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'I hate to embarrass you, Professor,' the woman said, sounding sheepish, 'but you *are* the Robert Langdon who writes books about symbols and religion, aren't you?'

Langdon hesitated and then nodded.

'I thought so!' she said, beaming. 'My book group read your book about the sacred feminine and the church! What a delicious scandal that one caused! You do enjoy putting the fox in the henhouse!'

Langdon smiled. 'Scandal wasn't really my intention.'

The woman seemed to sense Langdon was not in the mood to discuss his work. 'I'm sorry. Listen to me rattling on. I know you probably get tired of being recognized . . . but it's your own fault.' She playfully motioned to his clothing. 'Your uniform gave you away.'

My uniform? Langdon glanced down at his attire. He was wearing his usual charcoal turtleneck, Harris Tweed jacket, khakis, and collegiate cordovan loafers . . . his standard attire for the classroom, lecture circuit, author photos, and social events.

The woman laughed. 'Those turtlenecks you wear are so dated. You'd look much sharper in a tie!'

No chance, Langdon thought. *Little nooses.*

Neckties had been required six days a week when Langdon attended Phillips Exeter Academy, and despite the headmaster's romantic claims that the origin of the cravat went back to the silk *fascalia* worn by Roman orators to warm their vocal cords, Langdon knew that, etymologically, *cravat* actually derived from a ruthless band of 'Croat' mercenaries who donned knotted neckerchiefs before they stormed into battle. To this day, this ancient battle garb was donned by modern office warriors hoping to

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intimidate their enemies in daily boardroom battles.

'Thanks for the advice,' Langdon said with a chuckle. 'I'll consider a tie in the future.'

Mercifully, a professional-looking man in a dark suit got out of a sleek Lincoln Town Car parked near the terminal and held up his finger. 'Mr. Langdon? I'm Charles with Beltway Limousine.' He opened the passenger door. 'Good evening, sir. Welcome to Washington.'

Langdon tipped Pam for her hospitality and then climbed into the plush interior of the Town Car. The driver showed him the temperature controls, the bottled water, and the basket of hot muffins. Seconds later, Langdon was speeding away on a private access road. *So this is how the other half lives.*

As the driver gunned the car up Windsock Drive, he consulted his passenger manifest and placed a quick call. 'This is Beltway Limousine,' the driver said with professional efficiency. 'I was asked to confirm once my passenger had landed.' He paused. 'Yes, sir. Your guest, Mr. Langdon, has arrived, and I will deliver him to the Capitol Building by seven P.M. You're welcome, sir.' He hung up.

Langdon had to smile. *No stone left unturned*. Peter Solomon's attention to detail was one of his most potent assets, allowing him to manage his substantial power with apparent ease. *A few billion dollars in the bank doesn't hurt either.*

Langdon settled into the plush leather seat and closed his eyes as the noise of the airport faded behind him. The U.S. Capitol was a half hour away, and he appreciated the time alone to gather his thoughts. Everything had happened so quickly today that Langdon only now had begun to think in

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earnest about the incredible evening that lay ahead.

Arriving under a veil of secrecy, Langdon thought, amused by the prospect.

Ten miles from the Capitol Building, a lone figure was eagerly preparing for Robert Langdon's arrival.

2

The one who called himself Mal'akh pressed the tip of the needle against his shaved head, sighing with pleasure as the sharp tool plunged in and out of his flesh. The soft hum of the electric device was addictive . . . as was the bite of the needle sliding deep into his dermis and depositing its dye.

I am a masterpiece.

The goal of tattooing was never beauty. The goal was *change*. From the scarified Nubian priests of 2000 B.C., to the tattooed acolytes of the Cybele cult of ancient Rome, to the *moko* scars of the modern Maori, humans have tattooed themselves as a way of offering up their bodies in partial sacrifice, enduring the physical pain of embellishment and emerging changed beings.

Despite the ominous admonitions of Leviticus 19:28, which forbade the marking of one's flesh, tattoos had become a rite of passage shared by millions of people in the modern age – everyone from clean-cut teenagers to hard-core drug users to suburban housewives.

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The act of tattooing one's skin was a transformative

declaration of power, an announcement to the world: *I am in control of my own flesh.* The intoxicating feeling of control derived from physical transformation had addicted millions to flesh-altering practices . . . cosmetic surgery, body piercing, bodybuilding, and steroids . . . even bulimia and transgendering. *The human spirit craves mastery over its carnal shell.*

A single bell chimed on Mal'akh's grandfather clock, and he looked up. Six thirty P.M. Leaving his tools, he wrapped the Kiryu silk robe around his naked, six-foot-three body and strode down the hall. The air inside this sprawling mansion was heavy with the pungent fragrance of his skin dyes and smoke from the beeswax candles he used to sterilize his needles. The towering young man moved down the corridor past priceless Italian antiques – a Piranesi etching, a Savonarola chair, a silver Bugarini oil lamp.

He glanced through a floor-to-ceiling window as he passed, admiring the classical skyline in the distance. The luminous dome of the U.S. Capitol glowed with solemn power against the dark winter sky.

This is where it is hidden, he thought. *It is buried out there somewhere.*

Few men knew it existed . . . and even fewer knew its awesome power or the ingenious way in which it had been hidden. To this day, it remained this country's greatest untold secret. Those few who *did* know the truth kept it hidden behind a veil of symbols, legends, and allegory.

Now they have opened their doors to me, Mal'akh thought.

Three weeks ago, in a dark ritual witnessed by America's most influential men, Mal'akh had

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ascended to the thirty-third degree, the highest echelon of the world's oldest surviving brotherhood. Despite Mal'akh's new rank, the brethren had told him nothing. *Nor will they,* he knew. That was not how it worked. There were circles within circles . . . brotherhoods within brotherhoods. Even if Mal'akh waited years, he might never earn their ultimate trust.

Fortunately, he did not need their trust to obtain their deepest secret.

My initiation served its purpose.

Now, energized by what lay ahead, he strode toward his bedroom. Throughout his entire home, audio speakers broadcast the eerie strains of a rare recording of a castrato singing the 'Lux Aeterna' from the Verdi Requiem – a reminder of a previous life. Mal'akh touched a remote control to bring on the thundering 'Dies Irae.' Then, against a backdrop of crashing timpani and parallel fifths, he bounded up the marble staircase, his robe billowing as he ascended on sinewy legs.

As he ran, his empty stomach growled in protest. For two days now, Mal'akh had fasted, consuming only water, preparing his body in accordance with the ancient ways. *Your hunger will be satisfied by dawn,* he reminded himself. *Along with your pain.*

Mal'akh entered his bedroom sanctuary with reverence, locking the door behind him. As he moved toward his dressing area, he paused, feeling himself drawn to the enormous gilded mirror. Unable to resist, he turned and faced his own reflection. Slowly, as if unwrapping a priceless gift, Mal'akh opened his robe to unveil his naked form. The vision awed him.

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I am a masterpiece.

His massive body was shaved and smooth. He lowered his gaze first to his feet, which were tattooed with the scales and talons of a hawk. Above that, his muscular legs were tattooed as carved pillars – his left leg spiraled and his right vertically striated. *Boaz and Jachin*. His groin and abdomen formed a decorated archway, above which his powerful chest was emblazoned with the double-headed phoenix . . . each head in profile with its visible eye formed by one of Mal'akh's nipples. His shoulders, neck, face, and shaved head were completely covered with an intricate tapestry of ancient symbols and sigils.

I am an artifact . . . an evolving icon.

One mortal man had seen Mal'akh naked, eighteen hours earlier. The man had shouted in fear. 'Good God, you're a demon!'

'If you perceive me as such,' Mal'akh had replied, understanding as had the ancients that angels and demons were identical – interchangeable archetypes – all a matter of polarity: the guardian angel who conquered your enemy in battle was perceived by your enemy as a demon destroyer.

Mal'akh tipped his face down now and got an oblique view of the top of his head. There, within the crownlike halo, shone a small circle of pale, untattooed flesh. This carefully guarded canvas was Mal'akh's only remaining piece of virgin skin. The sacred space had waited patiently . . . and tonight, it would be filled. Although Mal'akh did not yet possess what he required to complete his masterpiece, he knew the moment was fast approaching.

Exhilarated by his reflection, he could already feel his power growing. He closed his robe and walked to

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the window, again gazing out at the mystical city before him. *It is buried out there somewhere.*

Refocusing on the task at hand, Mal'akh went to his dressing table and carefully applied a base of concealer makeup to his face, scalp, and neck until his tattoos had disappeared. Then he donned the special set of clothing and other items he had meticulously prepared for this evening. When he finished, he checked himself in the mirror. Satisfied, he ran a soft palm across his smooth scalp and smiled.

It is out there, he thought. *And tonight, one man will help me find it.*

As Mal'akh exited his home, he prepared himself for the event that would soon shake the U.S. Capitol Building. He had gone to enormous lengths to arrange all the pieces for tonight.

And now, at last, his final pawn had entered the game.

3

Robert Langdon was busy reviewing his note cards when the hum of the Town Car's tires changed pitch on the road beneath him. Langdon glanced up, surprised to see where they were.

Memorial Bridge already?

He put down his notes and gazed out at the calm waters of the Potomac passing beneath him. A heavy mist hovered on the surface. Aptly named, Foggy Bottom had always seemed a peculiar site on which to build the nation's capital. Of all the places in the New

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World, the forefathers had chosen a soggy riverside marsh on which to lay the cornerstone of their utopian society.

Langdon gazed left, across the Tidal Basin, toward the gracefully rounded silhouette of the Jefferson Memorial – America's Pantheon, as many called it. Directly in front of the car, the Lincoln Memorial rose with rigid austerity, its orthogonal lines reminiscent of Athens's ancient Parthenon. But it was farther away that Langdon saw the city's centerpiece – the same spire he had seen from the air. Its architectural inspiration was far, far older than the Romans or the Greeks.

America's Egyptian obelisk.

The monolithic spire of the Washington Monument loomed dead ahead, illuminated against the sky like the majestic mast of a ship. From Langdon's oblique angle, the obelisk appeared ungrounded tonight . . . swaying against the dreary sky as if on an unsteady sea. Langdon felt similarly ungrounded. His visit to Washington had been utterly unexpected. *I woke up this morning anticipating a quiet Sunday at home . . . and now I'm a few minutes away from the U.S. Capitol.*

This morning at four forty-five, Langdon had plunged into dead-calm water, beginning his day as he always did, swimming fifty laps in the deserted Harvard Pool. His physique was not quite what it had been in his college days as a water-polo all-American, but he was still lean and toned, respectable for a man in his forties. The only difference now was the amount of effort it took Langdon to keep it that way.

When Langdon arrived home around six, he began his morning ritual of hand-grinding Sumatra coffee beans and savoring the exotic scent that filled his

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kitchen. This morning, however, he was surprised to see the blinking red light on his voice-mail display. *Who calls at six A.M. on a Sunday?* He pressed the button and listened to the message.

'Good morning, Professor Langdon, I'm terribly sorry for this early-morning call.' The polite voice was noticeably hesitant, with a hint of a southern accent. 'My name is Anthony Jelbart, and I'm Peter Solomon's executive assistant. Mr. Solomon told me you're an early riser . . . he has been trying to reach you this morning on short notice. As soon as you receive this message, would you be so kind as to call Peter directly? You probably have his new private line, but if not, it's 202-329-5746.'

Langdon felt a sudden concern for his old friend. Peter Solomon was impeccably well-bred and courteous, and certainly not the kind of man to call at daybreak on a Sunday unless something was very wrong.

Langdon left his coffee half made and hurried toward his study to return the call.

I hope he's okay.

Peter Solomon had been a friend, mentor, and, although only twelve years Langdon's senior, a father figure to him ever since their first meeting at Princeton University. As a sophomore, Langdon had been required to attend an evening guest lecture by the well-known young historian and philanthropist. Solomon had spoken with a contagious passion, presenting a dazzling vision of semiotics and archetypal history that had sparked in Langdon what would later become his lifelong passion for symbols. It was not Peter Solomon's brilliance, however, but the humility in his gentle gray eyes that had given Langdon the courage to write him a thank-you letter.

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The young sophomore had never dreamed that Peter Solomon, one of America's wealthiest and most intriguing young intellectuals, would ever write back. But Solomon did. And it had been the beginning of a truly gratifying friendship.

A prominent academic whose quiet manner belied his powerful heritage, Peter Solomon came from the ultrawealthy Solomon family, whose names appeared on buildings and universities all over the nation. Like the Rothschilds in Europe, the surname Solomon had always carried the mystique of American royalty and success. Peter had inherited the mantle at a young age after the death of his father, and now, at fifty-eight, he had held numerous positions of power in his life. He currently served as the head of the Smithsonian Institution. Langdon occasionally ribbed Peter that the lone tarnish on his sterling pedigree was his diploma from a second-rate university – Yale.

Now, as Langdon entered his study, he was surprised to see that he had received a fax from Peter as well.

Peter Solomon
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Good morning, Robert,

I need to speak with you at once.
Please call me this morning as soon
as you can at 202-329-5746.

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Peter

Langdon immediately dialed the number, sitting down at his hand-carved oak desk to wait as the call went through.

'Office of Peter Solomon,' the familiar voice of the assistant answered. 'This is Anthony. May I help you?'

'Hello, this is Robert Langdon. You left me a message earlier—'

'Yes, Professor Langdon!' The young man sounded relieved. 'Thank you for calling back so quickly. Mr. Solomon is eager to speak to you. Let me tell him you're on the line. May I put you on hold?'

'Of course.'

As Langdon waited for Solomon to get on the line, he gazed down at Peter's name atop the Smithsonian letterhead and had to smile. *Not many slackers in the Solomon clan.* Peter's ancestral tree burgeoned with the names of wealthy business magnates, influential politicians, and a number of distinguished scientists, some even fellows of London's Royal Society. Solomon's only living family member, his younger sister, Katherine, had apparently inherited the science gene, because she was now a leading figure in a new cutting-edge discipline called Noetic Science.

All Greek to me, Langdon thought, amused to recall Katherine's unsuccessful attempt to explain Noetic Science to him at a party at her brother's home last year. Langdon had listened carefully and then replied, 'Sounds more like magic than science.'

Katherine winked playfully. 'They're closer than you think, Robert.'

Now Solomon's assistant returned to the phone. 'I'm sorry, Mr. Solomon is trying to get off a conference call. Things are a little chaotic here this morning.'

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'That's not a problem. I can easily call back.'

'Actually, he asked me to fill you in on his reason for contacting you, if you don't mind?'

'Of course not.'

The assistant inhaled deeply. 'As you probably know, Professor, every year here in Washington, the board of the Smithsonian hosts a private gala to thank our most generous supporters. Many of the country's cultural elite attend.'

Langdon knew his own bank account had too few zeros to qualify him as culturally elite, but he wondered if maybe Solomon was going to invite him to attend nonetheless.

'This year, as is customary,' the assistant continued, 'the dinner will be preceded by a keynote address. We've been lucky enough to secure the National Statuary Hall for that speech.'

The best room in all of D.C., Langdon thought, recalling a political lecture he had once attended in the dramatic semicircular hall. It was hard to forget five hundred folding chairs splayed in a perfect arc, surrounded by thirty-eight life-size statues, in a room that had once served as the nation's original House of Representatives chamber.

'The problem is this,' the man said. 'Our speaker has fallen ill and has just informed us she will be unable to give the address.' He paused awkwardly. 'This means we are desperate for a replacement speaker. And Mr. Solomon is hoping you would consider filling in.'

Langdon did a double take. 'Me?' This was not at all what he had expected. 'I'm sure Peter could find a far better substitute.'

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'You're Mr. Solomon's first choice, Professor, and

you're being much too modest. The institution's guests would be thrilled to hear from you, and Mr. Solomon thought you could give the same lecture you gave on Bookspan TV a few years back? That way, you wouldn't have to prepare a thing. He said your talk involved symbolism in the architecture of our nation's capital – it sounds absolutely perfect for the venue.'

Langdon was not so sure. 'If I recall, that lecture had more to do with the Masonic history of the building than—'

'Exactly! As you know, Mr. Solomon is a Mason, as are many of his professional friends who will be in attendance. I'm sure they would love to hear you speak on the topic.'

I admit it would be easy. Langdon had kept the lecture notes from every talk he'd ever given. 'I suppose I could consider it. What date is the event?'

The assistant cleared his throat, sounding suddenly uncomfortable. 'Well, actually, sir, it's tonight.'

Langdon laughed out loud. 'Tonight?!'

'That's why it's so hectic here this morning. The Smithsonian is in a deeply embarrassing predicament . . .' The assistant spoke more hurriedly now. 'Mr. Solomon is ready to send a private jet to Boston for you. The flight is only an hour, and you would be back home before midnight. You're familiar with the private air terminal at Boston's Logan Airport?'

'I am,' Langdon admitted reluctantly. *No wonder Peter always gets his way.*

'Wonderful! Would you be willing to meet the jet there at say . . . five o'clock?'

'You haven't left me much choice, have you?' Langdon chuckled.

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'I just want to make Mr. Solomon happy, sir.'

Peter has that effect on people. Langdon considered it a long moment, seeing no way out. 'All right. Tell him I can do it.'

'Outstanding!' the assistant exclaimed, sounding deeply relieved. He gave Langdon the jet's tail number and various other information.

When Langdon finally hung up, he wondered if Peter Solomon had ever been told no.

Returning to his coffee preparation, Langdon scooped some additional beans into the grinder. *A little extra caffeine this morning,* he thought. *It's going to be a long day.*

4

The U.S. Capitol Building stands regally at the eastern end of the National Mall, on a raised plateau that city designer Pierre L'Enfant described as 'a pedestal waiting for a monument.' The Capitol's massive footprint measures more than 750 feet in length and 350 feet deep. Housing more than sixteen acres of floor space, it contains an astonishing 541 rooms. The neoclassical architecture is meticulously designed to echo the grandeur of ancient Rome, whose ideals were the inspiration for America's founders in establishing the laws and culture of the new republic.

The new security checkpoint for tourists entering the Capitol Building is located deep within the recently completed subterranean visitor center, beneath a magnificent glass skylight that frames the Capitol Dome.

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Newly hired security guard Alfonso Nuñez carefully studied the male visitor now approaching his checkpoint. The man had a shaved head and had been lingering in the lobby, completing a phone call before entering the building. His right arm was in a sling, and he moved with a slight limp. He was wearing a tattered army-navy surplus coat, which, combined with his shaved head, made Nuñez guess military. Those who had served in the U.S. armed forces were among the most common visitors to Washington.

'Good evening, sir,' Nuñez said, following the security protocol of verbally engaging any male visitor who entered alone.

'Hello,' the visitor said, glancing around at the nearly deserted entry. 'Quiet night.'

'NFC play-offs,' Nuñez replied. 'Everyone's watching the Redskins tonight.' Nuñez wished he were, too, but this was his first month on the job, and he'd drawn the short straw. 'Metal objects in the dish, please.'

As the visitor fumbled to empty the pockets of his long coat with his one working hand, Nuñez watched him carefully. Human instinct made special allowances for the injured and handicapped, but it was an instinct Nuñez had been trained to override.

Nuñez waited while the visitor removed from his pockets the usual assortment of loose change, keys, and a couple of cell phones. 'Sprain?' Nuñez asked, eyeing the man's injured hand, which appeared to be wrapped in a series of thick Ace bandages.

The bald man nodded. 'Slipped on the ice. A week ago. Still hurts like hell.'

'Sorry to hear that. Walk through, please.'

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The visitor limped through the detector, and the machine buzzed in protest.

The visitor frowned. 'I was afraid of that. I'm wearing a ring under these bandages. My finger was too swollen to get it off, so the doctors wrapped right over it.'

'No problem,' Nuñez said. 'I'll use the wand.'

Nuñez ran the metal-detection wand over the visitor's wrapped hand. As expected, the only metal he detected was a large lump on the man's injured ring finger. Nuñez took his time rubbing the metal detector over every inch of the man's sling and finger. He knew his supervisor was probably monitoring him on the closed circuit in the building's security center, and Nuñez needed this job. *Always better to be cautious.* He carefully slid the wand up inside the man's sling.

The visitor winced in pain.

'Sorry.'

'It's okay,' the man said. 'You can't be too careful these days.'

'Ain't that the truth.' Nuñez liked this guy. Strangely, that counted for a lot around here. Human instinct was America's first line of defense against terrorism. It was a proven fact that human intuition was a more accurate detector of danger than all the electronic gear in the world – the *gift of fear,* as one of their security reference books termed it.

In this case, Nuñez's instincts sensed nothing that caused him any fear. The only oddity that he noticed, now that they were standing so close, was that this tough-looking guy appeared to have used some kind of self-tanner or concealer makeup on his face. *Whatever. Everyone hates to be pale in the winter.*

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'You're fine,' Nuñez said, completing his sweep and stowing the wand.

'Thanks.' The man started collecting his belongings from the tray.

As he did, Nuñez noticed that the two fingers protruding from his bandage each bore a tattoo; the tip of his index finger bore the image of a crown, and the tip of his thumb bore that of a star. *Seems everyone has tattoos these days,* Nuñez thought, although the pads of his fingertips seemed like painful spots to get them. 'Those tats hurt?'

The man glanced down at his fingertips and chuckled. 'Less than you might think.'

'Lucky,' Nuñez said. 'Mine hurt a lot. I got a mermaid on my back when I was in boot camp.'

'A mermaid?' The bald man chuckled.

'Yeah,' he said, feeling sheepish. 'The mistakes we make in our youth.'

'I hear you,' the bald man said. 'I made a big mistake in my youth, too. Now I wake up with her every morning.'

They both laughed as the man headed off.

Child's play, Mal'akh thought as he moved past Nuñez and up the escalator toward the Capitol Building. The entry had been easier than anticipated. Mal'akh's slouching posture and padded belly had hidden his true physique, while the makeup on his face and hands had hidden the tattoos that covered his body. The true genius, however, was the sling, which disguised the potent object Mal'akh was transporting into the building.

A gift for the one man on earth who can help me obtain what I seek.

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5

The world's largest and most technologically advanced museum is also one of the world's best-kept secrets. It houses more pieces than the Hermitage, the Vatican Museum, and the New York Metropolitan . . . combined. Yet despite its magnificent collection, few members of the public are ever invited inside its heavily guarded walls.

Located at 4210 Silver Hill Road just outside of Washington, D.C., the museum is a massive zigzag-shaped edifice constructed of five interconnected pods – each pod larger than a football field. The building's bluish metal exterior barely hints at the strangeness within – a six-hundred-thousand-square-foot alien world that contains a 'dead zone,' a 'wet pod,' and more than twelve miles of storage cabinets.

Tonight, scientist Katherine Solomon was feeling unsettled as she drove her white Volvo up to the building's main security gate.

The guard smiled. 'Not a football fan, Ms. Solomon?' He lowered the volume on the Redskins play-off pregame show.

Katherine forced a tense smile. 'It's Sunday night.'

'Oh, that's right. Your meeting.'

'Is he here yet?' she asked anxiously.

He glanced down at his paperwork. 'I don't see him on the log.'

'I'm early.' Katherine gave a friendly wave and continued up the winding access road to her usual parking spot at the bottom of the small, two-tiered lot. She began collecting her things and gave herself a

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quick check in the rearview mirror – more out of force of habit than actual vanity.

Katherine Solomon had been blessed with the resilient Mediterranean skin of her ancestry, and even at fifty years old she had a smooth olive complexion. She used almost no makeup and wore her thick black hair unstyled and down. Like her older brother, Peter, she had gray eyes and a slender, patrician elegance.

You two might as well be twins, people often told them.

Their father had succumbed to cancer when Katherine was only seven, and she had little memory of him. Her brother, eight years Katherine's senior and only fifteen when their father died, had begun his journey toward becoming the Solomon patriarch much sooner than anyone had ever dreamed. As expected, though, Peter had grown into the role with the dignity and strength befitting their family name. To this day, he still watched over Katherine as though they were just kids.

Despite her brother's occasional prodding, and no shortage of suitors, Katherine had never married. Science had become her life partner, and her work had proven more fulfilling and exciting than any man could ever hope to be. Katherine had no regrets.

Her field of choice – Noetic Science – had been virtually unknown when she first heard of it, but in recent years it had started opening new doors of understanding into the power of the human mind.

Our untapped potential is truly shocking.

Katherine's two books on Noetics had established her as a leader in this obscure field, but her most recent discoveries, when published, promised to make

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Noetic Science a topic of mainstream conversation around the world.

Tonight, however, science was the last thing on her mind. Earlier in the day, she had received some truly upsetting information relating to her brother. *I still can't believe it's true.* She'd thought of nothing else all afternoon.

A pattering of light rain drummed on her windshield, and Katherine quickly gathered her things to get inside. She was about to step out of her car when her cell phone rang.

She checked the caller ID and inhaled deeply.

Then she tucked her hair behind her ears and settled in to take the call.

Six miles away, Mal'akh was moving through the corridors of the U.S. Capitol Building with a cell phone pressed to his ear. He waited patiently as the line rang.

Finally, a woman's voice answered. 'Yes?'

'We need to meet again,' Mal'akh said.

There was a long pause. 'Is everything all right?'

'I have new information,' Mal'akh said.

'Tell me.'

Mal'akh took a deep breath. 'That which your brother believes is hidden in D.C. . . . ?'

'Yes?'

'It can be found.'

Katherine Solomon sounded stunned. 'You're telling me – it is *real*?'

Mal'akh smiled to himself. 'Sometimes a legend that endures for centuries . . . endures for a reason.'

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6

'Is this as close as you can get?' Robert Langdon felt a sudden wave of anxiety as his driver parked on First Street, a good quarter mile from the Capitol Building.

'Afraid so,' the driver said. 'Homeland Security. No vehicles near landmark buildings anymore. I'm sorry, sir.'

Langdon checked his watch, startled to see it was already 6:50. A construction zone around the National Mall had slowed them down, and his lecture was to begin in ten minutes.

'Weather's turning,' the driver said, hopping out and opening Langdon's door for him. 'You'll want to hurry.' Langdon reached for his wallet to tip the driver, but the man waved him off. 'Your host already added a very generous tip to the charge.'

Typical Peter, Langdon thought, gathering his things. 'Okay, thanks for the ride.'

The first few raindrops began to fall as Langdon reached the top of the gracefully arched concourse that descended to the new 'underground' visitors' entrance.

The Capitol Visitor Center had been a costly and controversial project. Described as an underground city to rival parts of Disney World, this subterranean space reportedly provided over a half-million square feet of space for exhibits, restaurants, and meeting halls.

Langdon had been looking forward to seeing it, although he hadn't anticipated quite this long a walk. The skies were threatening to open at any moment, and he broke into a jog, his loafers offering almost no

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traction on the wet cement. *I dressed for a lecture, not a four-hundred-yard downhill dash through the rain!*

When he arrived at the bottom, he was breathless and panting. Langdon pushed through the revolving door, taking a moment in the foyer to catch his breath and brush off the rain. As he did, he raised his eyes to the newly completed space before him.

Okay, I'm impressed.

The Capitol Visitor Center was not at all what he had expected. Because the space was underground, Langdon had been apprehensive about passing through it. A childhood accident had left him stranded at the bottom of a deep well overnight, and Langdon now lived with an almost crippling aversion to enclosed spaces. But this underground space was . . . airy somehow. *Light. Spacious.*

The ceiling was a vast expanse of glass with a series of dramatic light fixtures that threw a muted glow across the pearl-colored interior finishes.

Normally, Langdon would have taken a full hour in here to admire the architecture, but with five minutes until showtime, he put his head down and dashed through the main hall toward the security checkpoint and escalators. *Relax,* he told himself. *Peter knows you're on your way. The event won't start without you.*

At the security point, a young Hispanic guard chatted with him while Langdon emptied his pockets and removed his vintage watch.

'Mickey Mouse?' the guard said, sounding mildly amused.

Langdon nodded, accustomed to the comments. The collector's edition Mickey Mouse watch had been a gift from his parents on his ninth birthday. 'I wear it

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to remind me to slow down and take life less seriously.'

'I don't think it's working,' the guard said with a smile. 'You look like you're in a serious hurry.'

Langdon smiled and put his daybag through the X-ray machine. 'Which way to the Statuary Hall?'

The guard motioned toward the escalators. 'You'll see the signs.'

'Thanks.' Langdon grabbed his bag off the conveyor and hurried on.

As the escalator ascended, Langdon took a deep breath and tried to gather his thoughts. He gazed up through the rain-speckled glass ceiling at the mountainous form of the illuminated Capitol Dome overhead. It was an astonishing building. High atop her roof, almost three hundred feet in the air, the Statue of Freedom peered out into the misty darkness like a ghostly sentinel. Langdon always found it ironic that the workers who hoisted each piece of the nineteen-and-a-half-foot bronze statue to her perch were slaves – a Capitol secret that seldom made the syllabi of high school history classes.

This entire building, in fact, was a treasure trove of bizarre arcana that included a 'killer bathtub' responsible for the pneumonic murder of Vice President Henry Wilson, a staircase with a permanent bloodstain over which an inordinate number of guests seemed to trip, and a sealed basement chamber in which workers in 1930 discovered General John Alexander Logan's long-deceased stuffed horse.

No legends were as enduring, however, as the claims of thirteen different ghosts that haunted this building. The spirit of city designer Pierre L'Enfant frequently was reported wandering the halls, seeking

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payment of his bill, now two hundred years overdue. The ghost of a worker who fell from the Capitol Dome during construction was seen wandering the corridors with a tray of tools. And, of course, the most famous apparition of all, reported numerous times in the Capitol basement – an ephemeral black cat that prowled the substructure's eerie maze of narrow passageways and cubicles.

Langdon stepped off the escalator and again checked his watch. *Three minutes.* He hurried down the wide corridor, following the signs toward the Statuary Hall and rehearsing his opening remarks in his head. Langdon had to admit that Peter's assistant had been correct; this lecture topic would be a perfect match for an event hosted in Washington, D.C., by a prominent Mason.

It was no secret that D.C. had a rich Masonic history. The cornerstone of this very building had been laid in a full Masonic ritual by George Washington himself. This city had been conceived and designed by Master Masons – George Washington, Ben Franklin, and Pierre L'Enfant – powerful minds who adorned their new capital with Masonic symbolism, architecture, and art.

Of course, people see in those symbols all kinds of crazy ideas.

Many conspiracy theorists claimed the Masonic forefathers had concealed powerful secrets throughout Washington along with symbolic messages hidden in the city's layout of streets. Langdon never paid any attention. Misinformation about the Masons was so commonplace that even educated Harvard students seemed to have surprisingly warped conceptions about the brotherhood.

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Last year, a freshman had rushed wild-eyed into

Langdon's classroom with a printout from the Web. It was a street map of D.C. on which certain streets had been highlighted to form various shapes – satanic pentacles, a Masonic compass and square, the head of Baphomet – proof apparently that the Masons who designed Washington, D.C., were involved in some kind of dark, mystical conspiracy.

'Fun,' Langdon said, 'but hardly convincing. If you draw enough intersecting lines on a map, you're bound to find all kinds of shapes.'

'But this can't be coincidence!' the kid exclaimed.

Langdon patiently showed the student that the same exact shapes could be formed on a street map of Detroit.

The kid seemed sorely disappointed.

'Don't be disheartened,' Langdon said. 'Washington *does* have some incredible secrets . . . just none on this street map.'

The young man perked up. 'Secrets? Like what?'

'Every spring I teach a course called Occult Symbols. I talk a lot about D.C. You should take the course.'

'*Occult* symbols!' The freshman looked excited again. 'So there *are* devil symbols in D.C.!'

Langdon smiled. 'Sorry, but the word *occult,* despite conjuring images of devil worship, actually means "hidden" or "obscured." In times of religious oppression, knowledge that was counterdoctrinal had to be kept hidden or "occult," and because the church felt threatened by this, they redefined anything "occult" as evil, and the prejudice survived.'

'Oh.' The kid slumped.

Nonetheless, that spring, Langdon spotted the freshman seated in the front row as five hundred

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students bustled into Harvard's Sanders Theatre, a hollow old lecture hall with creaking wooden benches.

'Good morning, everybody,' Langdon shouted from the expansive stage. He turned on a slide projector, and an image materialized behind him. 'As you're getting settled, how many of you recognize the building in this picture?'

'U.S. Capitol!' dozens of voices called out in unison. 'Washington, D.C.!'

'Yes. There are nine million pounds of ironwork in that dome. An unparalleled feat of architectural ingenuity for the 1850s.'

'Awesome!' somebody shouted.

Langdon rolled his eyes, wishing somebody would ban that word. 'Okay, and how many of you have ever been to Washington?'

A scattering of hands went up.

'So few?' Langdon feigned surprise. 'And how many of you have been to Rome, Paris, Madrid, or London?'

Almost all the hands in the room went up.

As usual. One of the rites of passage for American college kids was a summer with a Eurorail ticket before the harsh reality of real life set in. 'It appears many more of you have visited Europe than have visited your own capital. Why do you think that is?'

'No drinking age in Europe!' someone in back shouted.

Langdon smiled. 'As if the drinking age *here* stops any of you?'

Everyone laughed.

It was the first day of school, and the students were taking longer than usual to get settled, shifting and creaking in their wooden pews. Langdon loved

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teaching in this hall because he always knew how engaged the students were simply by listening to how much they fidgeted in their pews.

'Seriously,' Langdon said, 'Washington, D.C., has some of the world's finest architecture, art, and symbolism. Why would you go overseas before visiting your own capital?'

'Ancient stuff is cooler,' someone said.

'And by ancient stuff,' Langdon clarified, 'I assume you mean castles, crypts, temples, that sort of thing?'

Their heads nodded in unison.

'Okay. Now, what if I told you that Washington, D.C., has *every* one of those things? Castles, crypts, pyramids, temples . . . it's all there.'

The creaking diminished.

'My friends,' Langdon said, lowering his voice and moving to the front of the stage, 'in the next hour, you will discover that our nation is overflowing with secrets and hidden history. And exactly as in Europe, all of the best secrets are hidden in plain view.'

The wooden pews fell dead silent.

Gotcha.

Langdon dimmed the lights and called up his second slide. 'Who can tell me what George Washington is doing here?'

The slide was a famous mural depicting George Washington dressed in full Masonic regalia standing before an odd-looking contraption – a giant wooden tripod that supported a rope-and-pulley system from which was suspended a massive block of stone. A group of well-dressed onlookers stood around him.

'Lifting that big block of stone?' someone ventured.

Langdon said nothing, preferring that a student make the correction if possible.

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'Actually,' another student offered, 'I think Washington is *lowering* the rock. He's wearing a Masonic costume. I've seen pictures of Masons laying cornerstones before. The ceremony always uses that tripod thing to lower the first stone.'

'Excellent,' Langdon said. 'The mural portrays the Father of Our Country using a tripod and pulley to lay the cornerstone of our Capitol Building on September 18, 1793, between the hours of eleven fifteen and twelve thirty.' Langdon paused, scanning the class. 'Can anyone tell me the significance of that date and time?'

Silence.

'What if I told you that precise moment was chosen by three famous Masons – George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Pierre L'Enfant, the primary architect for D.C.?'

More silence.

'Quite simply, the cornerstone was set at that date and time because, among other things, the auspicious Caput Draconis was in Virgo.'

Everyone exchanged odd looks.

'Hold on,' someone said. 'You mean . . . like *astrology*?'

'Exactly. Although a different astrology than we know today.'

A hand went up. 'You mean our Founding Fathers believed in astrology?'

Langdon grinned. 'Big-time. What would you say if I told you the city of Washington, D.C., has more astrological signs in its architecture than *any* other city in the world – zodiacs, star charts, cornerstones laid at precise astrological dates and times? More than half of the framers of our Constitution were Masons, men who strongly believed that the stars and fate were

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intertwined, men who paid close attention to the layout of the heavens as they structured their new world.'

'But that whole thing about the Capitol cornerstone being laid while Caput Draconis was in Virgo – who cares? Can't that just be coincidence?'

'An impressive coincidence considering that the cornerstones of the three structures that make up Federal Triangle – the Capitol, the White House, the Washington Monument – were all laid in different years but were carefully timed to occur under this *exact* same astrological condition.'

Langdon's gaze was met by a room full of wide eyes. A number of heads dipped down as students began taking notes.

A hand in back went up. 'Why did they do that?'

Langdon chuckled. 'The answer to that is an entire semester's worth of material. If you're curious, you should take my mysticism course. Frankly, I don't think you guys are emotionally prepared to hear the answer.'

'What?' the person shouted. 'Try us!'

Langdon made a show of considering it and then shook his head, toying with them. 'Sorry, I can't do that. Some of you are only freshmen. I'm afraid it might blow your minds.'

'Tell us!' everyone shouted.

Langdon shrugged. 'Perhaps you should join the Masons or Eastern Star and learn about it from the source.'

'We can't get in,' a young man argued. 'The Masons are like a supersecret society!'

'Supersecret? Really?' Langdon remembered the large Masonic ring that his friend Peter Solomon wore

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proudly on his right hand. 'Then why do Masons wear obvious Masonic rings, tie clips, or pins? Why are Masonic buildings clearly marked? Why are their meeting times in the newspaper?' Langdon smiled at all the puzzled faces. 'My friends, the Masons are not a secret society . . . they are a society with secrets.'

'Same thing,' someone muttered.

'Is it?' Langdon challenged. 'Would you consider Coca-Cola a secret society?'

'Of course not,' the student said.

'Well, what if you knocked on the door of corporate headquarters and asked for the recipe for Classic Coke?'

'They'd never tell you.'

'Exactly. In order to learn Coca-Cola's deepest secret, you would need to join the company, work for many years, prove you were trustworthy, and eventually rise to the upper echelons of the company, where that information might be shared with you. Then you would be sworn to secrecy.'

'So you're saying Freemasonry is like a corporation?'

'Only insofar as they have a strict hierarchy and they take secrecy very seriously.'

'My uncle is a Mason,' a young woman piped up. 'And my aunt hates it because he won't talk about it with her. She says Masonry is some kind of strange religion.'

'A common misperception.'

'It's not a religion?'

'Give it the litmus test,' Langdon said. 'Who here has taken Professor Witherspoon's comparative religion course?'

Several hands went up.

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'Good. So tell me, what are the three prerequisites for an ideology to be considered a religion?'

'ABC,' one woman offered. 'Assure, Believe, Convert.'

'Correct,' Langdon said. 'Religions *assure* salvation; religions *believe* in a precise theology; and religions *convert* nonbelievers.' He paused. 'Masonry, however, is batting zero for three. Masons make no promises of salvation; they have no specific theology; and they do not seek to convert you. In fact, within Masonic lodges, discussions of religion are prohibited.'

'So . . . Masonry is *anti*religious?'

'On the contrary. One of the prerequisites for becoming a Mason is that you *must* believe in a higher power. The difference between Masonic spirituality and organized religion is that the Masons do not impose a specific definition or name on a higher power. Rather than definitive theological identities like God, Allah, Buddha, or Jesus, the Masons use more general terms like Supreme Being or Great Architect of the Universe. This enables Masons of different faiths to gather together.'

'Sounds a little far-out,' someone said.

'Or, perhaps, refreshingly open-minded?' Langdon offered. 'In this age when different cultures are killing each other over whose definition of God is better, one could say the Masonic tradition of tolerance and open-mindedness is commendable.' Langdon paced the stage. 'Moreover, Masonry is open to men of all races, colors, and creeds, and provides a spiritual fraternity that does not discriminate in any way.'

'Doesn't discriminate?' A member of the university's Women's Center stood up. 'How many *women* are permitted to be Masons, Professor Langdon?'

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Langdon showed his palms in surrender. 'A fair point. Freemasonry had its roots, traditionally, in the stone masons' guilds of Europe and was therefore a man's organization. Several hundred years ago, some say as early as 1703, a women's branch called Eastern Star was founded. They have more than a million members.'

'Nonetheless,' the woman said, 'Masonry is a powerful organization from which women are excluded.'

Langdon was not sure how *powerful* the Masons really were anymore, and he was not going to go down that road; perceptions of the modern Masons ranged from their being a group of harmless old men who liked to play dress-up . . . all the way to an underground cabal of power brokers who ran the world. The truth, no doubt, was somewhere in the middle.

'Professor Langdon,' called a young man with curly hair in the back row, 'if Masonry is not a secret society, not a corporation, and not a religion, then what is it?'

'Well, if you were to ask a Mason, he would offer the following definition: Masonry is a system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.'

'Sounds to me like a euphemism for "freaky cult." '

'*Freaky,* you say?'

'Hell yes!' the kid said, standing up. 'I heard what they do inside those secret buildings! Weird candlelight rituals with coffins, and nooses, and drinking wine out of skulls. Now *that's* freaky!'

Langdon scanned the class. 'Does that sound freaky to anyone else?'

'Yes!' they all chimed in.

Langdon feigned a sad sigh. 'Too bad. If that's too freaky for you, then I know you'll never want to join *my* cult.'

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Silence settled over the room. The student from the Women's Center looked uneasy. '*You're* in a cult?'

Langdon nodded and lowered his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. 'Don't tell anyone, but on the pagan day of the sun god Ra, I kneel at the foot of an ancient instrument of torture and consume ritualistic symbols of blood and flesh.'

The class looked horrified.

Langdon shrugged. 'And if any of you care to join me, come to the Harvard chapel on Sunday, kneel beneath the crucifix, and take Holy Communion.'

The classroom remained silent.

Langdon winked. 'Open your minds, my friends. We all fear what we do not understand.'

The tolling of a clock began echoing through the Capitol corridors.

Seven o'clock.

Robert Langdon was now running. *Talk about a dramatic entrance.* Passing through the House Connecting Corridor, he spotted the entrance to the National Statuary Hall and headed straight for it.

As he neared the door, he slowed to a nonchalant stroll and took several deep breaths. Buttoning his jacket, he lifted his chin ever so slightly and turned the corner just as the final chime sounded.

Showtime.

As Professor Robert Langdon strode into the National Statuary Hall, he raised his eyes and smiled warmly. An instant later, his smile evaporated. He stopped dead in his tracks.

Something was very, very wrong.

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7

Katherine Solomon hurried across the parking lot through the cold rain, wishing she had worn more than jeans and a cashmere sweater. As she neared the building's main entrance, the roar of the giant air purifiers got louder. She barely heard them, her ears still ringing from the phone call she'd just received.

That which your brother believes is hidden in D.C. . . . it can be found.

Katherine found the notion almost impossible to believe. She and the caller still had much to discuss and had agreed to do so later that evening.

Reaching the main doors, she felt the same sense of excitement she always felt upon entering the gargantuan building. *Nobody knows this place is here.*

The sign on the door announced:

SMITHSONIAN MUSEUM SUPPORT CENTER
(SMSC)

The Smithsonian Institution, despite having more than a dozen massive museums on the National Mall, had a collection so huge that only 2 percent of it could be on display at any one time. The other 98 percent of the collection had to be stored somewhere. And that somewhere . . . was *here*.

Not surprisingly, this building was home to an astonishingly diverse array of artifacts – giant Buddhas, handwritten codices, poisoned darts from New Guinea, jewel-encrusted knives, a kayak made of baleen. Equally mind-boggling were the building's

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natural treasures – plesiosaur skeletons, a priceless meteorite collection, a giant squid, even a collection of elephant skulls brought back from an African safari by Teddy Roosevelt.

But none of this was why the Smithsonian secretary, Peter Solomon, had introduced his sister to the SMSC three years ago. He had brought her to this place not to *behold* scientific marvels, but rather to *create* them. And that was exactly what Katherine had been doing.

Deep within this building, in the darkness of the most remote recesses, was a small scientific laboratory unlike any other in the world. The recent breakthroughs Katherine had made here in the field of Noetic Science had ramifications across every discipline – from physics, to history, to philosophy, to religion. *Soon everything will change,* she thought.

As Katherine entered the lobby, the front desk guard quickly stashed his radio and yanked the earplugs from his ears. 'Ms. Solomon!' He smiled broadly.

'Redskins?'

He blushed, looking guilty. 'Pregame.'

She smiled. 'I won't tell.' She walked to the metal detector and emptied her pockets. When she slid the gold Cartier watch from her wrist, she felt the usual pang of sadness. The timepiece had been a gift from her mother for Katherine's eighteenth birthday. Almost ten years had now passed since her mother had died violently . . . passing away in Katherine's arms.

'So, Ms. Solomon?' the guard whispered jokingly. 'Are you ever gonna tell anybody what you're doing back there?'

She glanced up. 'Someday, Kyle. Not tonight.'

'Come on,' he pressed. 'A secret lab . . . in a

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secret museum? You must be doing something cool.'

Miles beyond cool, Katherine thought as she collected her things. The truth was that Katherine was doing science so advanced that it no longer even resembled science.

8

Robert Langdon stood frozen in the doorway of the National Statuary Hall and studied the startling scene before him. The room was precisely as he remembered it – a balanced semicircle built in the style of a Greek amphitheater. The graceful arched walls of sandstone and Italian plaster were punctuated by columns of variegated breccia, interspersed with the nation's statuary collection – life-size statues of thirty-eight great Americans standing in a semicircle on a stark expanse of black-and-white marble tile.

It was exactly as Langdon had recalled from the lecture he had once attended here.

Except for one thing.

Tonight, the room was empty.

No chairs. No audience. No Peter Solomon. Just a handful of tourists milling around aimlessly, oblivious to Langdon's grand entrance. *Did Peter mean the Rotunda?* He peered down the south corridor toward the Rotunda and could see tourists milling around in there, too.

The echoes of the clock chime had faded. Langdon was now officially late.

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He hurried back into the hallway and found a

docent. 'Excuse me, the lecture for the Smithsonian event tonight? Where is that being held?'

The docent hesitated. 'I'm not sure, sir. When does it start?'

'Now!'

The man shook his head. 'I don't know about any Smithsonian event this evening – not here, at least.'

Bewildered, Langdon hurried back toward the center of the room, scanning the entire space. *Is Solomon playing some kind of joke?* Langdon couldn't imagine it. He pulled out his cell phone and the fax page from this morning and dialed Peter's number.

His phone took a moment to locate a signal inside the enormous building. Finally, it began to ring.

The familiar southern accent answered. 'Peter Solomon's office, this is Anthony. May I help you?'

'Anthony!' Langdon said with relief. 'I'm glad you're still there. This is Robert Langdon. There seems to be some confusion about the lecture. I'm standing in the Statuary Hall, but there's nobody here. Has the lecture been moved to a different room?'

'I don't believe so, sir. Let me check.' His assistant paused a moment. 'Did you confirm with Mr. Solomon directly?'

Langdon was confused. 'No, I confirmed with *you*, Anthony. This morning!'

'Yes, I recall that.' There was a silence on the line. 'That was a bit careless of you, don't you think, Professor?'

Langdon was now fully alert. 'I beg your pardon?'

'Consider this . . .' the man said. 'You received a fax asking you to call a number, which you did. You spoke to a total stranger who said he was Peter Solomon's assistant. Then you willingly boarded a private plane

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to Washington and climbed into a waiting car. Is that right?'

Langdon felt a chill race through his body. 'Who the hell is this? Where is Peter?'

'I'm afraid Peter Solomon has no idea you're in Washington today.' The man's southern accent disappeared, and his voice morphed into a deeper, mellifluous whisper. 'You are here, Mr. Langdon, because *I* want you here.'

9

Inside the Statuary Hall, Robert Langdon clutched his cell phone to his ear and paced in a tight circle. 'Who the hell are you?'

The man's reply was a silky calm whisper. 'Do not be alarmed, Professor. You have been summoned here for a reason.'

'Summoned?' Langdon felt like a caged animal. 'Try kidnapped!'

'Hardly.' The man's voice was eerily serene. 'If I wanted to harm you, you would be dead in your Town Car right now.' He let the words hang for a moment. 'My intentions are purely noble, I assure you. I would simply like to offer you an invitation.'

No thanks. Ever since his experiences in Europe over the last several years, Langdon's unwanted celebrity had made him a magnet for nutcases, and this one had just crossed a very serious line. 'Look, I don't know what the hell is going on here, but I'm hanging up—'

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'Unwise,' said the man. 'Your window of

opportunity is very small if you want to save Peter Solomon's soul.'

Langdon drew a sharp breath. 'What did you say?'

'I'm sure you heard me.'

The way this man had uttered Peter's name had stopped Langdon cold. 'What do you know about Peter?'

'At this point, I know his deepest secrets. Mr. Solomon is my guest, and I can be a persuasive host.'

This can't be happening. 'You don't have Peter.'

'I answered his private cell phone. That should give you pause.'

'I'm calling the police.'

'No need,' the man said. 'The authorities will join you momentarily.'

What is this lunatic talking about? Langdon's tone hardened. 'If you have Peter, put him on the phone right now.'

'That's impossible. Mr. Solomon is trapped in an unfortunate place.' The man paused. 'He is in the Araf.'

'*Where?*' Langdon realized he was clutching his phone so tightly his fingers were going numb.

'The Araf? Hamistagan? That place to which Dante devoted the canticle immediately following his legendary *Inferno*?'

The man's religious and literary references solidified Langdon's suspicion that he was dealing with a madman. *The second canticle.* Langdon knew it well; nobody escaped Phillips Exeter Academy without reading Dante. 'You're saying you think Peter Solomon is . . . in *purgatory*?'

'A crude word you Christians use, but yes, Mr. Solomon is in the *in-between*.'

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The man's words hung in Langdon's ear. 'Are you saying Peter is . . . *dead*?'

'Not exactly, no.'

'Not exactly?!' Langdon yelled, his voice echoing sharply in the hall. A family of tourists looked over at him. He turned away and lowered his voice. '*Death* is usually an all-or-nothing thing!'

'You surprise me, Professor. I expected you to have a better understanding of the mysteries of life and death. There *is* a world in between – a world in which Peter Solomon is hovering at the moment. He can either return to your world, or he can move on to the next . . . depending on your actions right now.'

Langdon tried to process this. 'What do you want from me?'

'It's simple. You have been given access to something quite ancient. And tonight, you will share it with me.'

'I have no idea what you're talking about.'

'No? You pretend not to understand the ancient secrets that have been entrusted to you?'

Langdon felt a sudden sinking sensation, now guessing what this was probably about. *Ancient secrets.* He had not uttered a word to anyone about his experiences in Paris several years earlier, but Grail fanatics had followed the media coverage closely, some connecting the dots and believing Langdon was now privy to secret information regarding the Holy Grail – perhaps even its location.

'Look,' Langdon said, 'if this is about the Holy Grail, I can assure you I know nothing more than—'

'Don't insult my intelligence, Mr. Langdon,' the man snapped. 'I have no interest in anything so frivolous as the Holy Grail or mankind's pathetic debate over

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whose version of history is correct. Circular arguments over the semantics of faith hold no interest for me. Those are questions answered only through death.'

The stark words left Langdon confused. 'Then what the hell is this about?'

The man paused for several seconds. 'As you may know, there exists within this city an ancient portal.'

An ancient portal?

'And tonight, Professor, you will unlock it for me. You should be honored I contacted you – this is the invitation of your lifetime. You alone have been chosen.'

And you have lost your mind. 'I'm sorry, but you've chosen poorly,' Langdon said. 'I don't know anything about any ancient portal.'

'You don't understand, Professor. It was not *I* who chose you . . . it was *Peter Solomon*.'

'What?' Langdon replied, his voice barely a whisper.

'Mr. Solomon told me how to find the portal, and he confessed to me that only one man on earth could unlock it. And he said that man is *you*.'

'If Peter said that, he was mistaken . . . or lying.'

'I think not. He was in a fragile state when he confessed that fact, and I am inclined to believe him.'

Langdon felt a stab of anger. 'I'm warning you, if you hurt Peter in any—'

'It's far too late for *that*,' the man said in an amused tone. 'I've already taken what I need from Peter Solomon. But for his sake, I suggest you provide what I need from *you*. Time is of the essence . . . for *both* of you. I suggest you find the portal and unlock it. Peter will point the way.'

Peter? 'I thought you said Peter was in "purgatory." '

'As above, so below,' the man said.

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Langdon felt a deepening chill. This strange