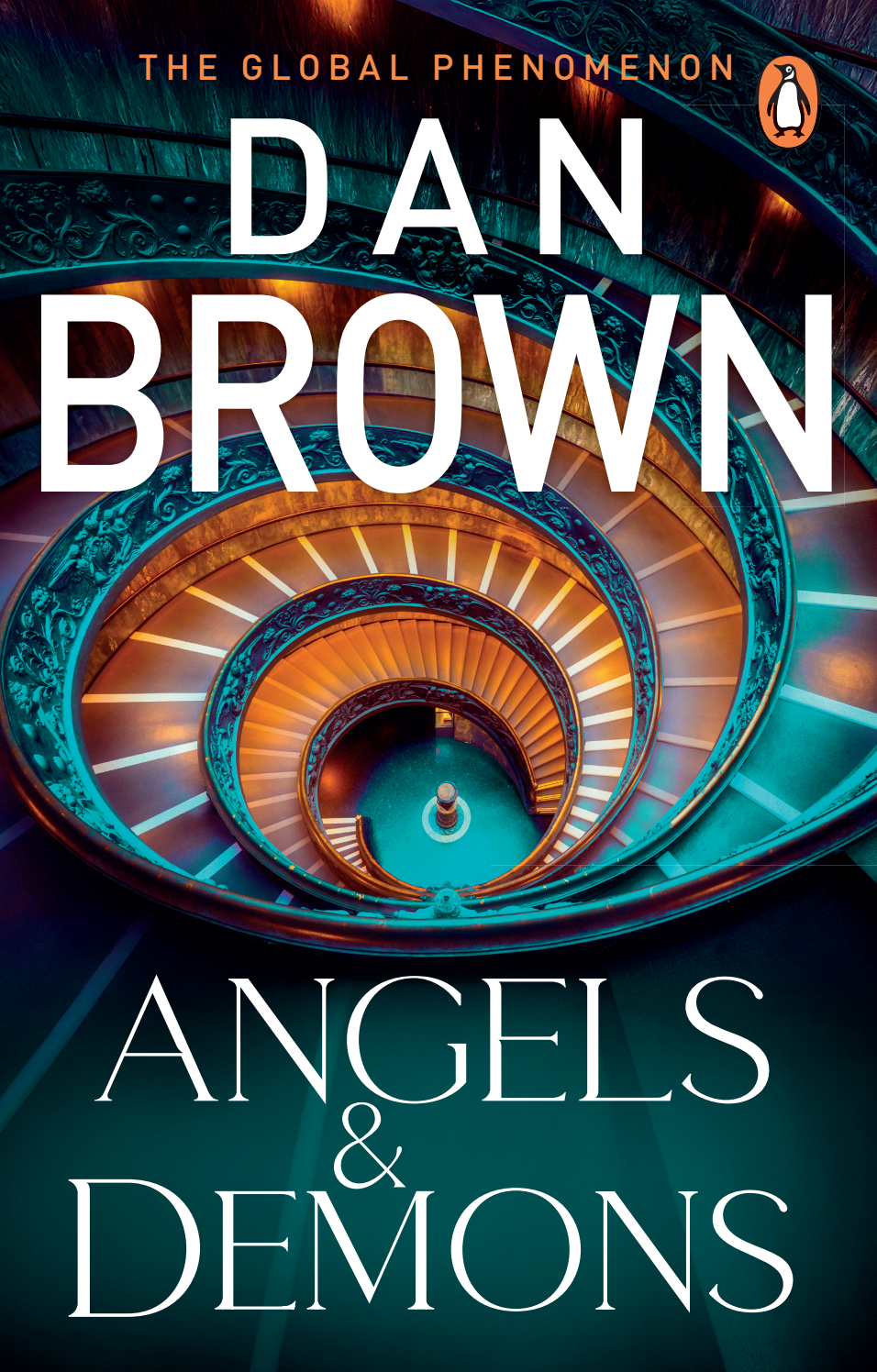

THE GLOBAL PHENOMENON
DAN
BROWN
ANGELS
&
DEMONS

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

THE ROBERT LANGDON NOVELS

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ROME: An ancient secret brotherhood arises once more to launch a devastating new weapon against an unthinkable target . . .

'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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The kidnapping of a friend will lead Langdon into the shadowy world of freemasonry and a hell-for-leather chase across Washington DC.

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Robert Langdon races against time to try to save the world from a terrifying threat, armed only with a few lines from Dante's *Inferno* to help him.

'Jam-packed with tricks . . . A book-length scavenger hunt that Mr Brown creates so energetically'
New York Times

Origin

Langdon must follow a trail marked only by enigmatic symbols and elusive modern art to discover the truth about an astonishing scientific breakthrough, and come face-to-face with a breathtaking truth that has remained buried – until now.

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The Secret of Secrets

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

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ACCLAIM FOR DAN BROWN'S NOVELS

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New York Times

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Sunday Times

'Exceedingly clever . . . Both fascinating and fun . . . a considerable achievement'
Washington Post

'A gripping bestseller . . . Brown has cracked the bestseller code'
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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DAN BROWN

ANGELS & DEMONS



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001

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For Blythe . . .

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FACT

The world's largest scientific research facility – Switzerland's *Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire* (CERN) – recently succeeded in producing the first particles of antimatter. Antimatter is identical to physical matter except that it is composed of particles whose electric charges are *opposite* to those found in normal matter.

Antimatter is the most powerful energy source known to man. It releases energy with 100 per cent efficiency (nuclear fission is 1.5 per cent efficient). Antimatter creates no pollution or radiation, and a droplet could power New York City for a full day.

There is, however, one catch . . .

Antimatter is highly unstable. It ignites when it comes in contact with absolutely anything . . . even air. A single gram of antimatter contains the energy of a 20-kiloton nuclear bomb – the size of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

Until recently antimatter has been created only in very small amounts (a few atoms at a time). But CERN has now broken ground on its new Antiproton Decelerator – an advanced antimatter production facility that promises to create antimatter in much larger quantities.

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One question looms: Will this highly volatile substance save the world, or will it be used to create the most deadly weapon ever made?

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

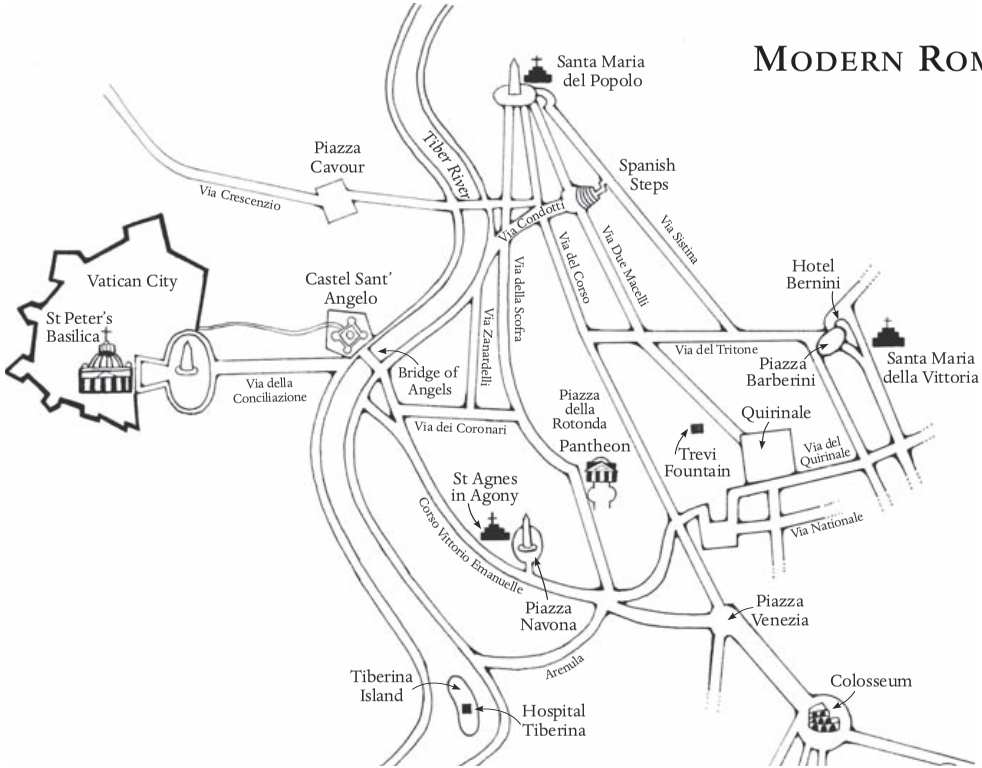
References to all works of art, tombs, tunnels, and architecture in Rome are entirely factual (as are their exact locations). They can still be seen today.

The brotherhood of the Illuminati is also factual.

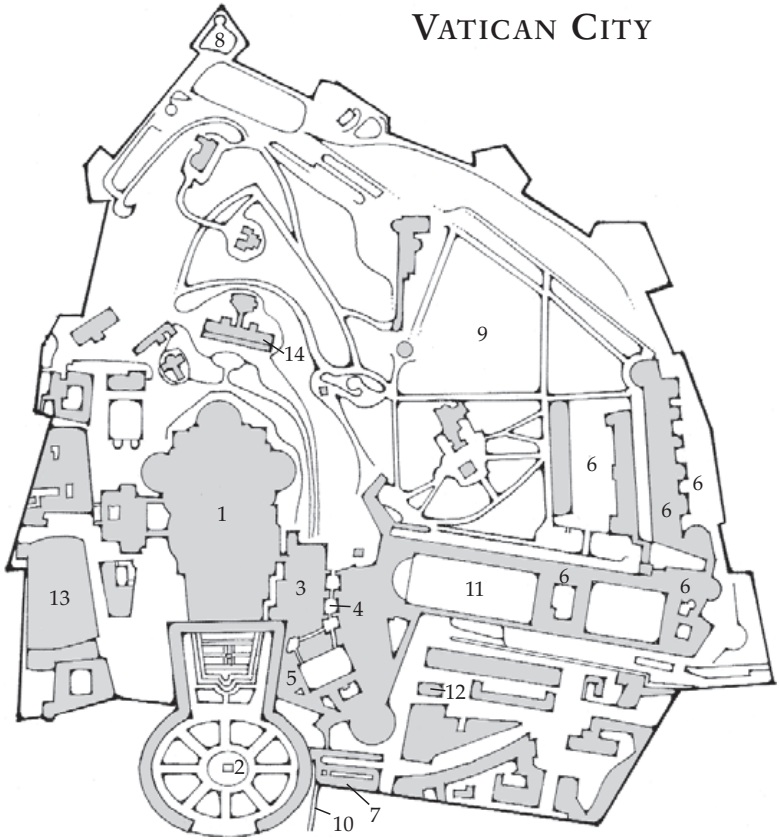
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Modern Rome



VATICAN CITY



1 St Peter's Basilica	7 Office of the Swiss Guard	11 Courtyard of the Belvedere
2 St Peter's Square	8 heliport	12 Central Post Office
3 Sistine Chapel	9 gardens	13 Papal Audience Hall
4 Borgia Courtyard	10 the *Passetto*	14 Government Palace
5 Office of the Pope		
6 Vatican Museums		

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PROLOGUE

Physicist Leonardo Vetra smelled burning flesh, and he knew it was his own. He stared up in terror at the dark figure looming over him. 'What do you want!'

'*La chiave*,' the raspy voice replied. 'The password.'

'But . . . I don't—'

The intruder pressed down again, grinding the white hot object deeper into Vetra's chest. There was the hiss of broiling flesh.

Vetra cried out in agony. 'There *is* no password!' He felt himself drifting toward unconsciousness.

The figure glared. '*Ne avevo paura*. I was afraid of that.'

Vetra fought to keep his senses, but the darkness was closing in. His only solace was in knowing his attacker would never obtain what he had come for. A moment later, however, the figure produced a blade and brought it to Vetra's face. The blade hovered. Carefully. Surgically.

'For the love of God!' Vetra screamed. But it was too late.

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1

High atop the steps of the Great Pyramid of Giza, a young woman laughed and called down to him. 'Robert, hurry up! I knew I should have married a younger man!' Her smile was magic.

He struggled to keep up, but his legs felt like stone. 'Wait,' he begged. 'Please . . .'

As he climbed, his vision began to blur. There was a thundering in his ears. *I must reach her!* But when he looked up again, the woman had disappeared. In her place stood an old man with rotting teeth. The man stared down, curling his lips into a lonely grimace. Then he let out a scream of anguish that resounded across the desert.

Robert Langdon awoke with a start from his nightmare. The phone beside his bed was ringing. Dazed, he picked up the receiver.

'Hello?'

'I'm looking for Robert Langdon,' a man's voice said.

Langdon sat up in his empty bed and tried to clear his mind. 'This . . . is Robert Langdon.' He squinted at his digital clock. It was 5.18 a.m.

'I must see you immediately.'

'Who is this?'

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'My name is Maximilian Kohler. I'm a discrete particle physicist.'

'A *what*?' Langdon could barely focus. 'Are you sure you've got the right Langdon?'

'You're a professor of religious iconology at Harvard University. You've written three books on symbology and—'

'Do you know what time it is?'

'I apologize. I have something you need to see. I can't discuss it on the phone.'

A knowing groan escaped Langdon's lips. This had happened before. One of the perils of writing books about religious symbology was the calls from religious zealots who wanted him to confirm their latest sign from God. Last month, a stripper from Oklahoma had promised Langdon the best sex of his life if he would fly down and verify the authenticity of a cruciform that had magically appeared on her bed sheets. *The Shroud of Tulsa*, Langdon had called it.

'How did you get my number?' Langdon tried to be polite, despite the hour.

'On the Worldwide Web. The site for your book.'

Langdon frowned. He was damn sure his book's site did not include his home phone number. The man was obviously lying.

'I need to see you,' the caller insisted. 'I'll pay you well.'

Now Langdon was getting mad. 'I'm sorry, but I really—'

'If you leave immediately, you can be here by—'

'I'm not going anywhere! It's five o'clock in the morning!' Langdon hung up and collapsed back in bed. He closed his eyes and tried to fall back asleep. It

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was no use. The dream was emblazoned in his mind. Reluctantly, he put on his robe and went downstairs.

Robert Langdon wandered barefoot through his deserted Massachusetts Victorian home and nursed his ritual insomnia remedy – a mug of steaming Nestlé's Quik. The April moon filtered through the bay windows and played on the oriental carpets. Langdon's colleagues often joked that his place looked more like an anthropology museum than a home. His shelves were packed with religious artifacts from around the world – an *ekuaba* from Ghana, a gold cross from Spain, a cycladic idol from the Aegean, and even a rare woven *boccus* from Borneo, a young warrior's symbol of perpetual youth.

As Langdon sat on his brass Maharishi's chest and savored the warmth of the chocolate, the bay window caught his reflection. The image was distorted and pale . . . like a ghost. *An aging ghost*, he thought, cruelly reminded that his youthful spirit was living in a mortal shell.

Although not overly handsome in a classical sense, the forty-five-year-old Langdon had what his female colleagues referred to as an 'erudite' appeal – wisps of gray in his thick brown hair, probing blue eyes, an arrestingly deep voice, and the strong, carefree smile of a collegiate athlete. A varsity diver in prep school and college, Langdon still had the body of a swimmer, a toned, six-foot physique that he vigilantly maintained with fifty laps a day in the university pool.

Langdon's friends had always viewed him as a bit of an enigma – a man caught between centuries. On weekends he could be seen lounging on the

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quad in blue jeans, discussing computer graphics or religious history with students; other times he could be spotted in his Harris tweed and paisley vest, photographed in the pages of upscale art magazines at museum openings where he had been asked to lecture.

Although a tough teacher and strict disciplinarian, Langdon was the first to embrace what he hailed as the 'lost art of good clean fun.' He relished recreation with an infectious fanaticism that had earned him a fraternal acceptance among his students. His campus nickname – 'The Dolphin' – was a reference both to his affable nature and his legendary ability to dive into a pool and outmaneuver the entire opposing squad in a water polo match.

As Langdon sat alone, absently gazing into the darkness, the silence of his home was shattered again, this time by the ring of his fax machine. Too exhausted to be annoyed, Langdon forced a tired chuckle.

God's people, he thought. *Two thousand years of waiting for their Messiah, and they're still persistent as hell.*

Wearily, he returned his empty mug to the kitchen and walked slowly to his oak-paneled study. The incoming fax lay in the tray. Sighing, he scooped up the paper and looked at it.

Instantly, a wave of nausea hit him.

The image on the page was that of a human corpse. The body had been stripped naked, and its head had been twisted, facing completely backward. On the victim's chest was a terrible burn. The man had been branded . . . imprinted with a single word. It was a word Langdon knew well. Very well. He stared at the ornate lettering in disbelief.

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'Illuminati,' he stammered, his heart pounding. *It can't be . . .*

In slow motion, afraid of what he was about to witness, Langdon rotated the fax 180 degrees. He looked at the word upside down.

Instantly, the breath went out of him. It was like he had been hit by a truck. Barely able to believe his eyes, he rotated the fax again, reading the brand right-side up and then upside down.

'Illuminati,' he whispered.

Stunned, Langdon collapsed in a chair. He sat a moment in utter bewilderment. Gradually, his eyes were drawn to the blinking red light on his fax machine. Whoever had sent this fax was still on the line . . . waiting to talk. Langdon gazed at the blinking light a long time.

Then, trembling, he picked up the receiver.

2

'Do I have your attention now?' the man's voice said when Langdon finally answered the line.

'Yes, sir, you damn well do. You want to explain yourself?'

'I tried to tell you before.' The voice was rigid,

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mechanical. 'I'm a physicist. I run a research facility. We've had a murder. You saw the body.'

'How did you find me?' Langdon could barely focus. His mind was racing from the image on the fax.

'I already told you. The Worldwide Web. The site for your book, *The Art of the Illuminati*.'

Langdon tried to gather his thoughts. His book was virtually unknown in mainstream literary circles, but it had developed quite a following on-line. Nonetheless, the caller's claim still made no sense. 'That page has no contact information,' Langdon challenged. 'I'm certain of it.'

'I have people here at the lab very adept at extracting user information from the Web.'

Langdon was skeptical. 'Sounds like your lab knows *a lot* about the Web.'

'We should,' the man fired back. 'We *invented* it.'

Something in the man's voice told Langdon he was not joking.

'I must see you,' the caller insisted. 'This is not a matter we can discuss on the phone. My lab is only an hour's flight from Boston.'

Langdon stood in the dim light of his study and analyzed the fax in his hand. The image was overpowering, possibly representing the epigraphical find of the century, a decade of his research confirmed in a single symbol.

'It's urgent,' the voice pressured.

Langdon's eyes were locked on the brand. *Illuminati*, he read over and over. His work had always been based on the symbolic equivalent of fossils – ancient documents and historical hearsay – but this image before him was today. Present tense. He felt like a paleontologist coming face to face with a living dinosaur.

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'I've taken the liberty of sending a plane for you,' the voice said. 'It will be in Boston in twenty minutes.'

Langdon felt his mouth go dry. *An hour's flight . . .*

'Please forgive my presumption,' the voice said. 'I need you here.'

Langdon looked again at the fax – an ancient myth confirmed in black and white. The implications were frightening. He gazed absently through the bay window. The first hint of dawn was sifting through the birch trees in his backyard, but the view looked somehow different this morning. As an odd combination of fear and exhilaration settled over him, Langdon knew he had no choice.

'You win,' he said. 'Tell me where to meet the plane.'

3

Thousands of miles away, two men were meeting. The chamber was dark. Medieval. Stone.

'*Benvenuto*,' the man in charge said. He was seated in the shadows, out of sight. 'Were you successful?'

'*Si*,' the dark figure replied. '*Perfettamente*.' His words were as hard as the rock walls.

'And there will be no doubt who is responsible?'

'None.'

'Superb. Do you have what I asked for?'

The killer's eyes glistened, black like oil. He produced a heavy electronic device and set it on the table.

The man in the shadows seemed pleased. 'You have done well.'

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'Serving the brotherhood is an honor,' the killer replied.

'Phase two begins shortly. Get some rest. Tonight we change the world.'

4

Robert Langdon's Saab 900S tore out of the Callahan Tunnel and emerged on the east side of Boston Harbor near the entrance to Logan Airport. Checking his directions Langdon found Aviation Road and turned left past the old Eastern Airlines Building. Three hundred yards down the access road a hangar loomed in the darkness. A large number '4' was painted on it. He pulled into the parking lot and got out of his car.

A round-faced man in a blue flight suit emerged from behind the building. 'Robert Langdon?' he called. The man's voice was friendly. He had an accent Langdon couldn't place.

'That's me,' Langdon said, locking his car.

'Perfect timing,' the man said. 'I've just landed. Follow me, please.'

As they circled the building, Langdon felt tense. He was not accustomed to cryptic phone calls and secret rendezvous with strangers. Not knowing what to expect he had donned his usual classroom attire – a pair of chinos, a turtleneck, and a Harris tweed suit jacket. As they walked, he thought about the fax in his jacket pocket, still unable to believe the image it depicted.

The pilot seemed to sense Langdon's anxiety. 'Flying's not a problem for you, is it, sir?'

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'Not at all,' Langdon replied. *Branded corpses are a problem for me. Flying I can handle.*

The man led Langdon the length of the hangar. They rounded the corner onto the runway.

Langdon stopped dead in his tracks and gaped at the aircraft parked on the tarmac. 'We're riding in *that*?'

The man grinned. 'Like it?'

Langdon stared a long moment. 'Like it? What the hell *is* it?'

The craft before them was enormous. It was vaguely reminiscent of the space shuttle except that the top had been shaved off, leaving it perfectly flat. Parked there on the runway, it resembled a colossal wedge. Langdon's first impression was that he must be dreaming. The vehicle looked as airworthy as a Buick. The wings were practically non-existent – just two stubby fins on the rear of the fuselage. A pair of dorsal guiders rose out of the aft section. The rest of the plane was hull – about two hundred feet from front to back – no windows, nothing but hull.

'Two hundred fifty thousand kilos fully fueled,' the pilot offered, like a father bragging about his newborn. 'Runs on slush hydrogen. The shell's a titanium matrix with silicon carbide fibers. She packs a 20:1 thrust/weight ratio; most jets run at 7:1. The director must be in one helluva hurry to see you. He doesn't usually send the big boy.'

'This thing *flies*?' Langdon said.

The pilot smiled. 'Oh yeah.' He led Langdon across the tarmac toward the plane. 'Looks kind of startling, I know, but you better get used to it. In five years, all you'll see are these babies – HSCT's – High Speed Civil Transports. Our lab's one of the first to own one.'

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Must be one hell of a lab, Langdon thought.

'This one's a prototype of the Boeing X-33,' the pilot continued, 'but there are dozens of others – the National Aero Space Plane, the Russians have Scramjet, the Brits have HOTOL. The future's here, it's just taking some time to get to the public sector. You can kiss conventional jets good-bye.'

Langdon looked up warily at the craft. 'I think I'd prefer a conventional jet.'

The pilot motioned up the gangplank. 'This way, please, Mr Langdon. Watch your step.'

Minutes later, Langdon was seated inside the empty cabin. The pilot buckled him into the front row and disappeared toward the front of the aircraft.

The cabin itself looked surprisingly like a wide-body commercial airliner. The only exception was that it had no windows, which made Langdon uneasy. He had been haunted his whole life by a mild case of claustrophobia – the vestige of a childhood incident he had never quite overcome.

Langdon's aversion to closed spaces was by no means debilitating, but it had always frustrated him. It manifested itself in subtle ways. He avoided enclosed sports like racquetball or squash, and he had gladly paid a small fortune for his airy, high-ceilinged Victorian home even though economical faculty housing was readily available. Langdon had often suspected his attraction to the art world as a young boy sprang from his love of museums' wide open spaces.

The engines roared to life beneath him, sending a deep shudder through the hull. Langdon swallowed hard and waited. He felt the plane start taxiing. Piped-in country music began playing quietly overhead.

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A phone on the wall beside him beeped twice. Langdon lifted the receiver.

'Hello?'

'Comfortable, Mr Langdon?'

'Not at all.'

'Just relax. We'll be there in an hour.'

'And where exactly is *there*?' Langdon asked, realizing he had no idea where he was headed.

'Geneva,' the pilot replied, revving the engines. 'The lab's in Geneva.'

'Geneva,' Langdon repeated, feeling a little better. 'Upstate New York. I've actually got family near Seneca Lake. I wasn't aware Geneva had a physics lab.'

The pilot laughed. 'Not Geneva, *New York*, Mr Langdon. Geneva, *Switzerland*.'

The word took a long moment to register. 'Switzerland?' Langdon felt his pulse surge. 'I thought you said the lab was only an hour away!'

'It is, Mr Langdon.' The pilot chuckled. 'This plane goes Mach fifteen.'

5

On a busy European street, the killer serpentined through a crowd. He was a powerful man. Dark and potent. Deceptively agile. His muscles still felt hard from the thrill of his meeting.

It went well, he told himself. Although his employer had never revealed his face, the killer felt honored to be in his presence. *Had it really been only fifteen days since his employer had first made contact?* The killer

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still remembered every word of that call . . .

'My name is Janus,' the caller had said. 'We are kinsmen of a sort. We share an enemy. I hear your skills are for hire.'

'It depends whom you represent,' the killer replied.

The caller told him.

'Is this your idea of a joke?'

'You have heard our name, I see,' the caller replied.

'Of course. The brotherhood is legendary.'

'And yet you find yourself doubting I am genuine.'

'Everyone knows the brothers have faded to dust.'

'A devious ploy. The most dangerous enemy is that which no one fears.'

The killer was skeptical. 'The brotherhood endures?'

'Deeper underground than ever before. Our roots infiltrate everything you see . . . even the sacred fortress of our most sworn enemy.'

'Impossible. They are invulnerable.'

'Our reach is far.'

'No one's reach is that far.'

'Very soon, you will believe. An irrefutable demonstration of the brotherhood's power has already transpired. A single act of treachery and proof.'

'What have you done?'

The caller told him.

The killer's eyes went wide. 'An impossible task.'

The next day, newspapers around the globe carried the same headline. The killer became a believer.

Now, fifteen days later, the killer's faith had solidified beyond the shadow of a doubt. *The brotherhood endures*, he thought. *Tonight they will surface to reveal their power.*

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As he made his way through the streets, his black

eyes gleamed with foreboding. One of the most covert and feared fraternities ever to walk the earth had called on him for service. *They have chosen wisely*, he thought. His reputation for secrecy was exceeded only by that of his deadliness.

So far, he had served them nobly. He had made his kill and delivered the item to Janus as requested. Now, it was up to Janus to use his power to ensure the item's placement.

The placement . . .

The killer wondered how Janus could possibly handle such a staggering task. The man obviously had connections on the inside. The brotherhood's dominion seemed limitless.

Janus, the killer thought. *A code name, obviously*. Was it a reference, he wondered, to the Roman two-faced god . . . or to the moon of Saturn? Not that it made any difference. Janus wielded unfathomable power. He had proven that beyond a doubt.

As the killer walked, he imagined his ancestors smiling down on him. Today he was fighting *their* battle, he was fighting the same enemy they had fought for ages, as far back as the eleventh century . . . when the enemy's crusading armies had first pillaged his land, raping and killing his people, declaring them unclean, defiling their temples and gods.

His ancestors had formed a small but deadly army to defend themselves. The army became famous across the land as protectors – skilled executioners who wandered the countryside slaughtering any of the enemy they could find. They were renowned not only for their brutal killings, but also for celebrating their slayings by plunging themselves into drug-induced stupors. Their drug of choice was

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a potent intoxicant they called *hashish*.

As their notoriety spread, these lethal men became known by a single word – *Hassassin* – literally 'the followers of hashish.' The name *Hassassin* became synonymous with death in almost every language on earth. The word was still used today, even in modern English . . . but like the craft of killing, the word had evolved.

It was now pronounced *assassin*.

6

Sixty-four minutes had passed when an incredulous and slightly airsick Robert Langdon stepped down the gangplank onto the sun-drenched runway. A crisp breeze rustled the lapels of his tweed jacket. The open space felt wonderful. He squinted out at the lush green valley rising to snowcapped peaks all around them.

I'm dreaming, he told himself. *Any minute now I'll be waking up.*

'Welcome to Switzerland,' the pilot said, yelling over the roar of the X-33's misted-fuel HEDM engines winding down behind them.

Langdon checked his watch. It read 7.07 a.m.

'You just crossed six time zones,' the pilot offered. 'It's a little past 1 p.m. here.'

Langdon reset his watch.

'How do you feel?'

He rubbed his stomach. 'Like I've been eating Styrofoam.'

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The pilot nodded. 'Altitude sickness. We were at

sixty thousand feet. You're thirty per cent lighter up there. Lucky we only did a puddle jump. If we'd gone to Tokyo I'd have taken her all the way up – a hundred miles. Now *that'll* get your insides rolling.'

Langdon gave a wan nod and counted himself lucky. All things considered, the flight had been remarkably ordinary. Aside from a bone-crunching acceleration during take off, the plane's motion had been fairly typical – occasional minor turbulence, a few pressure changes as they'd climbed, but nothing at all to suggest they had been hurtling through space at the mind-numbing speed of 11,000 miles per hour.

A handful of technicians scurried onto the runway to tend to the X-33. The pilot escorted Langdon to a black Peugeot sedan in a parking area beside the control tower. Moments later they were speeding down a paved road that stretched out across the valley floor. A faint cluster of buildings rose in the distance. Outside, the grassy plains tore by in a blur.

Langdon watched in disbelief as the pilot pushed the speedometer up around 170 kilometers an hour – over 100 miles per hour. *What is it with this guy and speed?* he wondered.

'Five kilometers to the lab,' the pilot said. 'I'll have you there in two minutes.'

Langdon searched in vain for a seat belt. *Why not make it three and get us there alive?*

The car raced on.

'Do you like Reba?' the pilot asked, jamming a cassette into the tape deck.

A woman started singing. 'It's just the fear of being alone . . .'

No fear here, Langdon thought absently. His female colleagues often ribbed him that his collection of

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museum-quality artifacts was nothing more than a transparent attempt to fill an empty home, a home they insisted would benefit greatly from the presence of a woman. Langdon always laughed it off, reminding them he already had three loves in his life – symbology, water polo, and bachelorhood – the latter being a freedom that enabled him to travel the world, sleep as late as he wanted, and enjoy quiet nights at home with a brandy and a good book.

'We're like a small city,' the pilot said, pulling Langdon from his daydream. 'Not just labs. We've got supermarkets, a hospital, even a cinema.'

Langdon nodded blankly and looked out at the sprawling expanse of buildings rising before them.

'In fact,' the pilot added, 'we possess the largest machine on earth.'

'Really?' Langdon scanned the countryside.

'You won't see it out there, sir.' The pilot smiled. 'It's buried six stories below the earth.'

Langdon didn't have time to ask. Without warning the pilot jammed on the brakes. The car skidded to a stop outside a reinforced sentry booth.

Langdon read the sign before them. SECURITE. ARRETEZ. He suddenly felt a wave of panic, realizing where he was. 'My God! I didn't bring my passport!'

'Passports are unnecessary,' the driver assured. 'We have a standing arrangement with the Swiss government.'

Langdon watched dumbfounded as his driver gave the guard an ID. The sentry ran it through an electronic authentication device. The machine flashed green.

'Passenger name?'

'Robert Langdon,' the driver replied.

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'Guest of?'

'The director.'

The sentry arched his eyebrows. He turned and checked a computer printout, verifying it against the data on his computer screen. Then he returned to the window. 'Enjoy your stay, Mr Langdon.'

The car shot off again, accelerating another 200 yards around a sweeping rotary that led to the facility's main entrance. Looming before them was a rectangular, ultramodern structure of glass and steel. Langdon was amazed by the building's striking transparent design. He had always had a fond love of architecture.

'The Glass Cathedral,' the escort offered.

'A church?'

'Hell, no. A church is the one thing we *don't* have. Physics is the religion around here. Use the Lord's name in vain all you like,' he laughed, 'just don't slander any quarks or mesons.'

Langdon sat bewildered as the driver swung the car around and brought it to a stop in front of the glass building. *Quarks and mesons? No border control? Mach 15 jets? Who the hell ARE these guys?* The engraved granite slab in front of the building bore the answer:

(CERN)
Conseil Européen pour la
Recherche Nucléaire

'Nuclear Research?' Langdon asked, fairly certain his translation was correct.

The driver did not answer. He was leaning forward, busily adjusting the car's cassette player. 'This is your stop. The director will meet you at this entrance.'

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Langdon noted a man in a wheelchair exiting the building. He looked to be in his early sixties. Gaunt and totally bald with a sternly set jaw, he wore a white lab coat and dress shoes propped firmly on the wheelchair's footrest. Even at a distance his eyes looked lifeless – like two gray stones.

'Is that him?' Langdon asked.

The driver looked up. 'Well, I'll be . . .' He turned and gave Langdon an ominous smile. 'Speak of the devil.'

Uncertain what to expect, Langdon stepped from the vehicle.

The man in the wheelchair accelerated toward Langdon and offered a clammy hand. 'Mr Langdon? We spoke on the phone. My name is Maximilian Kohler.'

7

Maximilian Kohler, director general of CERN, was known behind his back as *König* – King. It was a title more of fear than reverence for the figure who ruled over his dominion from a wheelchair throne. Although few knew him personally, the horrific story of how he had been crippled was lore at CERN, and there were few there who blamed him for his bitterness . . . nor for his sworn dedication to pure science.

Langdon had only been in Kohler's presence a few moments and already sensed the director was a man who kept his distance. Langdon found himself practically jogging to keep up with Kohler's electric wheelchair as it sped silently toward the main

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entrance. The wheelchair was like none Langdon had ever seen – equipped with a bank of electronics including a multiline phone, a paging system, computer screen, even a small, detachable video camera. King Kohler's mobile command center.

Langdon followed through a mechanical door into CERN's voluminous main lobby.

The Glass Cathedral, Langdon mused, gazing upward toward heaven.

Overhead, the bluish glass roof shimmered in the afternoon sun, casting rays of geometric patterns in the air and giving the room a sense of grandeur. Angular shadows fell like veins across the white tiled walls and down to the marble floors. The air smelled clean, sterile. A handful of scientists moved briskly about, their footsteps echoing in the resonant space.

'This way, please, Mr Langdon.' His voice sounded almost computerized. His accent was rigid and precise, like his stern features. Kohler coughed and wiped his mouth on a white handkerchief as he fixed his dead gray eyes on Langdon. 'Please hurry.' His wheelchair seemed to leap across the tiled floor.

Langdon followed past what seemed to be countless hallways branching off the main atrium. Every hallway was alive with activity. The scientists who saw Kohler seemed to stare in surprise, eyeing Langdon as if wondering who he must be to command such company.

'I'm embarrassed to admit,' Langdon ventured, trying to make conversation, 'that I've never heard of CERN.'

'Not surprising,' Kohler replied, his clipped response sounding harshly efficient. 'Most Americans do not see Europe as the world leader in scientific

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research. They see us as nothing but a quaint shopping district – an odd perception if you consider the nationalities of men like Einstein, Galileo, and Newton.'

Langdon was unsure how to respond. He pulled the fax from his pocket. 'This man in the photograph, can you—'

Kohler cut him off with a wave of his hand. 'Please. Not here. I am taking you to him now.' He held out his hand. 'Perhaps I should take that.'

Langdon handed over the fax and fell silently into step.

Kohler took a sharp left and entered a wide hallway adorned with awards and commendations. A particularly large plaque dominated the entry. Langdon slowed to read the engraved bronze as they passed.

ARS ELECTRONICA AWARD
For Cultural Innovation in the Digital Age
Awarded to Tim Berners Lee and CERN
for the invention of the
WORLDWIDE WEB

Well I'll be damned, Langdon thought, reading the text. *This guy wasn't kidding.* Langdon had always thought of the Web as an American invention. Then again, his knowledge was limited to the site for his own book and the occasional on-line exploration of the Louvre or El Prado on his old Macintosh.

'The Web,' Kohler said, coughing again and wiping his mouth, 'began here as a network of in-house computer sites. It enabled scientists from different departments to share daily findings with one another. Of course, the entire world is under the impression the Web is U.S. technology.'

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Langdon followed down the hall. 'Why not set the record straight?'

Kohler shrugged, apparently disinterested. 'A petty misconception over a petty technology. CERN is far greater than a global connection of computers. Our scientists produce miracles almost daily.'

Langdon gave Kohler a questioning look. '*Miracles?*' The word 'miracle' was certainly not part of the vocabulary around Harvard's Fairchild Science Building. *Miracles* were left for the School of Divinity.

'You sound skeptical,' Kohler said. 'I thought you were a religious symbologist. Do you not believe in miracles?'

'I'm undecided on miracles,' Langdon said. *Particularly those that take place in science labs.*

'Perhaps miracle is the wrong word. I was simply trying to speak your language.'

'My language?' Langdon was suddenly uncomfortable. 'Not to disappoint you, sir, but I study religious *symbology* – I'm an academic, not a priest.'

Kohler slowed suddenly and turned, his gaze softening a bit. 'Of course. How simple of me. One does not need to have cancer to analyze its symptoms.'

Langdon had never heard it put quite that way.

As they moved down the hallway, Kohler gave an accepting nod. 'I suspect you and I will understand each other perfectly, Mr Langdon.'

Somehow Langdon doubted it.

As the pair hurried on, Langdon began to sense a deep rumbling up ahead. The noise got more and more pronounced with every step, reverberating through the walls. It seemed to be coming from the end of the hallway in front of them.

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'What's that?' Langdon finally asked, having to yell. He felt like they were approaching an active volcano.

'Free fall tube,' Kohler replied, his hollow voice cutting the air effortlessly. He offered no other explanation.

Langdon didn't ask. He was exhausted, and Maximilian Kohler seemed disinterested in winning any hospitality awards. Langdon reminded himself why he was here. *Illuminati*. He assumed somewhere in this colossal facility was a body . . . a body branded with a symbol he had just flown thousands of miles to see.

As they approached the end of the hall, the rumble became almost deafening, vibrating up through Langdon's soles. They rounded the bend, and a viewing gallery appeared on the right. Four thick-paned portals were embedded in a curved wall, like windows in a submarine. Langdon stopped and looked through one of the holes.

Professor Robert Langdon had seen some strange things in his life, but this was the strangest. He blinked a few times, wondering if he was hallucinating. He was staring into an enormous circular chamber. Inside the chamber, floating as though weightless, were *people*. Three of them. One waved and did a somersault in midair.

My God, he thought. *I'm in the land of Oz.*

The floor of the room was a mesh grid, like a giant sheet of chicken wire. Visible beneath the grid was the metallic blur of a huge propeller.

'Free fall tube,' Kohler said, stopping to wait for him. 'Indoor skydiving. For stress relief. It's a vertical wind tunnel.'

Langdon looked on in amazement. One of the free fallers, an obese woman, maneuvered toward the

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window. She was being buffeted by the air currents but grinned and flashed Langdon the thumbs-up sign. Langdon smiled weakly and returned the gesture, wondering if she knew it was the ancient phallic symbol for masculine virility.

The heavyset woman, Langdon noticed, was the only one wearing what appeared to be a miniature parachute. The swathe of fabric billowed over her like a toy. 'What's her little chute for?' Langdon asked Kohler. 'It can't be more than a yard in diameter.'

'Friction,' Kohler said. 'Decreases her aerodynamics so the fan can lift her.' He started down the corridor again. 'One square yard of drag will slow a falling body almost twenty per cent.'

Langdon nodded blankly.

He never suspected that later that night, in a country hundreds of miles away, the information would save his life.

8

When Kohler and Langdon emerged from the rear of CERN's main complex into the stark Swiss sunlight, Langdon felt as if he'd been transported home. The scene before him looked like an Ivy League campus.

A grassy slope cascaded downward onto expansive lowlands where clusters of sugar maples dotted quadrangles bordered by brick dormitories and footpaths. Scholarly looking individuals with stacks of books hustled in and out of buildings. As if to accentuate the collegiate atmosphere, two longhaired

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hippies hurled a Frisbee back and forth while enjoying Mahler's Fourth Symphony blaring from a dorm window.

'These are our residential dorms,' Kohler explained as he accelerated his wheelchair down the path toward the buildings. 'We have over three thousand physicists here. CERN single-handedly employs more than half of the world's particle physicists – the brightest minds on earth – Germans, Japanese, Italians, Dutch, you name it. Our physicists represent over five hundred universities and sixty nationalities.'

Langdon was amazed. 'How do they all communicate?'

'English, of course. The universal language of science.'

Langdon had always heard *math* was the universal language of science, but he was too tired to argue. He dutifully followed Kohler down the path.

Halfway to the bottom, a young man jogged by. His T-shirt proclaimed the message: NO GUT, NO GLORY!

Langdon looked after him, mystified. 'Gut?'

'General Unified Theory,' Kohler quipped. 'The theory of everything.'

'I see,' Langdon said, not seeing at all.

'Are you familiar with particle physics, Mr Langdon?'

Langdon shrugged. 'I'm familiar with general physics – falling bodies, that sort of thing.' His years of high-diving experience had given him a profound respect for the awesome power of gravitational acceleration. 'Particle physics is the study of atoms, isn't it?'

Kohler shook his head. 'Atoms look like planets compared to what we deal with. Our interests lie with an atom's *nucleus* – a mere ten-thousandth the size of

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the whole.' He coughed again, sounding sick. 'The men and women of CERN are here to find answers to the same questions man has been asking since the beginning of time. Where did we come from? What are we made of?'

'And these answers are in a physics lab?'

'You sound surprised.'

'I am. The questions seem spiritual.'

'Mr Langdon, all questions were once spiritual. Since the beginning of time, spirituality and religion have been called on to fill in the gaps that science did not understand. The rising and setting of the sun was once attributed to *Helios* and a flaming chariot. Earthquakes and tidal waves were the wrath of Poseidon. Science has now proven those gods to be false idols. Soon *all* Gods will be proven to be false idols. Science has now provided answers to almost every question man can ask. There are only a few questions left, and they are the esoteric ones. Where do we come from? What are we doing here? What is the meaning of life and the universe?'

Langdon was amazed. 'And these are questions CERN is trying to answer?'

'Correction. These are questions we *are* answering.'

Langdon fell silent as the two men wound through the residential quadrangles. As they walked, a Frisbee sailed overhead and skidded to a stop directly in front of them. Kohler ignored it and kept going.

A voice called out from across the quad. '*S'il vous plaît!*'

Langdon looked over. An elderly white-haired man in a COLLEGE PARIS sweatshirt waved to him. Langdon picked up the Frisbee and expertly threw it back. The old man caught it on one finger and bounded it a few

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times before whipping it over his shoulder to his partner. '*Merci*!' he called to Langdon.

'Congratulations,' Kohler said when Langdon finally caught up. 'You just played toss with a Nobel prize-winner, Georges Charpak, inventor of the multi-wire proportional chamber.'

Langdon nodded. *My lucky day.*

It took Langdon and Kohler three more minutes to reach their destination – a large, well-kept dormitory sitting in a grove of aspens. Compared to the other dorms, this structure seemed luxurious. The carved stone sign in front read BUILDING C.

Imaginative title, Langdon thought.

But despite its sterile name, Building C appealed to Langdon's sense of architectural style – conservative and solid. It had a red brick façade, an ornate balustrade, and sat framed by sculpted symmetrical hedges. As the two men ascended the stone path toward the entry, they passed under a gateway formed by a pair of marble columns. Someone had put a sticky-note on one of them.

THIS COLUMN IS IONIC

Physicist graffiti? Langdon mused, eyeing the column and chuckling to himself. 'I'm relieved to see that even brilliant physicists make mistakes.'

Kohler looked over. 'What do you mean?'

'Whoever wrote that note made a mistake. That column isn't Ionic. Ionic columns are uniform in width. That one's tapered. It's Doric – the Greek counterpart. A common mistake.'

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Kohler did not smile. 'The author meant it as a joke,

Mr Langdon. *Ionic* means containing ions – electrically charged particles. Most objects contain them.'

Langdon looked back at the column and groaned.

Langdon was still feeling stupid when he stepped from the elevator on the top floor of Building C. He followed Kohler down a well-appointed corridor. The decor was unexpected – traditional colonial French – a cherry divan, porcelain floor vase, and scrolled woodwork.

'We like to keep our tenured scientists comfortable,' Kohler explained.

Evidently, Langdon thought. 'So the man in the fax lived up here? One of your upper-level employees?'

'Quite,' Kohler said. 'He missed a meeting with me this morning and did not answer his page. I came up here to locate him and found him dead in his living room.'

Langdon felt a sudden chill realizing that he was about to see a dead body. His stomach had never been particularly stalwart. It was a weakness he'd discovered as an art student when the teacher informed the class that Leonardo da Vinci had gained his expertise in the human form by exhuming corpses and dissecting their musculature.

Kohler led the way to the far end of the hallway. There was a single door. 'The Penthouse, as you would say,' Kohler announced, dabbing a bead of perspiration from his forehead.

Langdon eyed the lone oak door before them. The name plate read:

LEONARDO VETRA

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'Leonardo Vetra,' Kohler said, 'would have been

fifty-eight next week. He was one of the most brilliant scientists of our time. His death is a profound loss for science.'

For an instant Langdon thought he sensed emotion in Kohler's hardened face. But as quickly as it had come, it was gone. Kohler reached in his pocket and began sifting through a large key ring.

An odd thought suddenly occurred to Langdon. The building seemed deserted. 'Where is everyone?' he asked. The lack of activity was hardly what he expected considering they were about to enter a murder scene.

'The residents are in their labs,' Kohler replied, finding the key.

'I mean the *police*,' Langdon clarified. 'Have they left already?'

Kohler paused, his key halfway into the lock. 'Police?'

Langdon's eyes met the director's. 'Police. You sent me a fax of a homicide. You *must* have called the police.'

'I most certainly have not.'

'What?'

Kohler's gray eyes sharpened. 'The situation is complex, Mr Langdon.'

Langdon felt a wave of apprehension. 'But . . . certainly someone else knows about this!'

'Yes. Leonardo's adopted daughter. She is also a physicist here at CERN. She and her father share a lab. They are partners. Ms Vetra has been away this week doing field research. I have notified her of her father's death, and she is returning as we speak.'

'But a man has been murd—'

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'A formal investigation,' Kohler said, his voice firm,

'will take place. However, it will most certainly involve a search of Vetra's lab, a space he and his daughter hold most private. Therefore, it will wait until Ms Vetra has arrived. I feel I owe her at least that modicum of discretion.'

Kohler turned the key.

As the door swung open, a blast of icy air hissed into the hall and hit Langdon in the face. He fell back in bewilderment. He was gazing across the threshold of an alien world. The flat before him was immersed in a thick, white fog. The mist swirled in smoky vortexes around the furniture and shrouded the room in opaque haze.

'What the . . . ?' Langdon stammered.

'Freon cooling system,' Kohler replied. 'I chilled the flat to preserve the body.'

Langdon buttoned his tweed jacket against the cold. *I'm in Oz*, he thought. *And I forgot my magic slippers.*

9

The corpse on the floor before Langdon was hideous. The late Leonardo Vetra lay on his back, stripped naked, his skin bluish-gray. His neck bones were jutting out where they had been broken, and his head was twisted completely backward, pointing the wrong way. His face was out of view, pressed against the floor. The man lay in a frozen puddle of his own urine, the hair around his shriveled genitals spidered with frost.

Fighting a wave of nausea, Langdon let his eyes fall to the victim's chest. Although Langdon had stared at

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the symmetrical wound a dozen times on the fax, the burn was infinitely more commanding in real life. The raised, broiled flesh was perfectly delineated . . . the symbol flawlessly formed.

Langdon wondered if the intense chill now raking through his body was the air-conditioning or his utter amazement with the significance of what he was now staring at.



His heart pounded as he circled the body, reading the word upside down, reaffirming the genius of the symmetry. The symbol seemed even less conceivable now that he was staring at it.

'Mr Langdon?'

Langdon did not hear. He was in another world . . . his world, his element, a world where history, myth, and fact collided, flooding his senses. The gears turned.

'Mr Langdon?' Kohler's eyes probed expectantly.

Langdon did not look up. His disposition now intensified, his focus total. 'How much do you already know?'

'Only what I had time to read on your website. The word *Illuminati* means "the enlightened ones." It is the name of some sort of ancient brotherhood.'

Langdon nodded. 'Had you heard the name before?'

'Not until I saw it branded on Mr Vetra.'

'So you ran a web search for it?'

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'Yes.'

'And the word returned hundreds of references, no doubt.'

'Thousands,' Kohler said. 'Yours, however, contained references to Harvard, Oxford, a reputable publisher, as well as a list of related publications. As a scientist I have come to learn that information is only as valuable as its source. Your credentials seemed authentic.'

Langdon's eyes were still riveted on the body.

Kohler said nothing more. He simply stared, apparently waiting for Langdon to shed some light on the scene before them.

Langdon looked up, glancing around the frozen flat. 'Perhaps we should discuss this in a warmer place?'

'This room is fine.' Kohler seemed oblivious to the cold. 'We'll talk here.'

Langdon frowned. The Illuminati history was by no means a simple one. *I'll freeze to death trying to explain it.* He gazed again at the brand, feeling a renewed sense of awe.

Although accounts of the Illuminati emblem were legendary in modern symbology, no academic had ever actually *seen* it. Ancient documents described the symbol as an *ambigram* – *ambi* meaning 'both' – signifying it was legible *both* ways. And although ambigrams were common in symbology – swastikas, yin yang, Jewish stars, simple crosses – the idea that a *word* could be crafted into an ambigram seemed utterly impossible. Modern symbologists had tried for years to forge the word 'Illuminati' into a perfectly symmetrical style, but they had failed miserably. Most academics had now decided the symbol's existence was a myth.

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'So who are the Illuminati?' Kohler demanded.

Yes, Langdon thought, *who indeed?* He began his tale.

'Since the beginning of history,' Langdon explained, 'a deep rift has existed between science and religion. Outspoken scientists like Giordano Bruno—'

'Were murdered,' Kohler interjected. 'Murdered by the church for revealing scientific truths. Religion has always persecuted science.'

'Yes. But in the 1500s, a group of men in Rome fought back against the church. Some of Italy's most enlightened men – physicists, mathematicians, astronomers – began meeting secretly to share their concerns about the church's inaccurate teachings. They feared that the church's monopoly on "truth" threatened academic enlightenment around the world. They founded the world's first scientific think tank, calling themselves "the enlightened ones." '

'The Illuminati.'

'Yes,' Langdon said. 'Europe's most learned minds . . . dedicated to the quest for scientific truth.'

Kohler fell silent.

'Of course, the Illuminati were hunted ruthlessly by the Catholic Church. Only through rites of extreme secrecy did the scientists remain safe. Word spread through the academic underground, and the Illuminati brotherhood grew to include academics from all over Europe. The scientists met regularly in Rome at an ultrasecret lair they called the *Church of Illumination*.'

Kohler coughed and shifted in his chair.

'Many of the Illuminati,' Langdon continued, 'wanted to combat the church's tyranny with acts of violence, but their most revered member persuaded

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them against it. He was a pacifist, as well as one of history's most famous scientists.'

Langdon was certain Kohler would recognize the name. Even non-scientists were familiar with the ill-fated astronomer who had been arrested and almost executed by the church for proclaiming that the *sun*, not the earth, was the center of the solar system. Although his data were incontrovertible, the astronomer was severely punished for implying that God had placed mankind somewhere other than at the *center* of His universe.

'His name was Galileo Galilei,' Langdon said.

Kohler looked up. 'Galileo?'

'Yes. Galileo was an Illuminatus. And he was also a devout Catholic. He tried to soften the church's position on science by proclaiming that science did not undermine the existence of God, but rather *reinforced* it. He wrote once that when he looked through his telescope at the spinning planets, he could hear God's voice in the music of the spheres. He held that science and religion were not enemies, but rather *allies* – two different languages telling the same story, a story of symmetry and balance . . . heaven and hell, night and day, hot and cold, God and Satan. Both science and religion rejoiced in God's symmetry . . . the endless contest of light and dark.' Langdon paused, stamping his feet to stay warm.

Kohler simply sat in his wheelchair and stared.

'Unfortunately,' Langdon added, 'the unification of science and religion was not what the church wanted.'

'Of course not,' Kohler interrupted. 'The union would have nullified the church's claim as the *sole* vessel through which man could understand God. So the church tried Galileo as a heretic, found him guilty,

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and put him under permanent house arrest. I am quite aware of scientific history, Mr Langdon. But this was all centuries ago. What does it have to do with Leonardo Vetra?'

The million dollar question. Langdon cut to the chase. 'Galileo's arrest threw the Illuminati into upheaval. Mistakes were made, and the church discovered the identities of four members, whom they captured and interrogated. But the four scientists revealed nothing . . . even under torture.'

'Torture?'

Langdon nodded. 'They were branded alive. On the chest. With the symbol of a cross.'

Kohler's eyes widened, and he shot an uneasy glance at Vetra's body.

'Then the scientists were brutally murdered, their dead bodies dropped in the streets of Rome as a warning to others thinking of joining the Illuminati. With the church closing in, the remaining Illuminati fled Italy.'

Langdon paused to make his point. He looked directly into Kohler's eyes. 'The Illuminati went deep underground, where they began mixing with other refugee groups fleeing the Catholic purges – mystics, alchemists, occultists, Muslims, Jews. Over the years, the Illuminati began absorbing new members. A new Illuminati emerged. A darker Illuminati. A deeply anti-Christian Illuminati. They grew very powerful, employing mysterious rites, deadly secrecy, vowing someday to rise again and take revenge on the Catholic Church. Their power grew to the point where the church considered them the single most dangerous anti-Christian force on earth. The Vatican denounced the brotherhood as *Shaitan*.'

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'*Shaitan*?'

'It's Islamic. It means "adversary" . . . *God's* adversary. The church chose Islam for the name because it was a language they considered dirty.' Langdon hesitated. '*Shaitan* is the root of an English word . . . *Satan*.'

An uneasiness crossed Kohler's face.

Langdon's voice was grim. 'Mr Kohler, I do not know how this marking appeared on this man's chest . . . or why . . . but you are looking at the long-lost symbol of the world's oldest and most powerful satanic cult.'

10

The alley was narrow and deserted. The Hassassin strode quickly now, his black eyes filling with anticipation. As he approached his destination, Janus's parting words echoed in his mind. *Phase two begins shortly. Get some rest.*

The Hassassin smirked. He had been awake all night, but sleep was the last thing on his mind. Sleep was for the weak. He was a warrior like his ancestors before him, and his people never slept once a battle had begun. This battle had most definitely begun, and he had been given the honor of spilling first blood. Now he had two hours to celebrate his glory before going back to work.

Sleep? There are far better ways to relax . . .

An appetite for hedonistic pleasure was something bred into him by his ancestors. His ascendants had

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indulged in hashish, but he preferred a different kind of gratification. He took pride in his body – a well-tuned, lethal machine, which, despite his heritage, he refused to pollute with narcotics. He had developed a more nourishing addiction than drugs . . . a far more healthy and satisfying reward.

Feeling a familiar anticipation swelling within him, the Hassassin moved faster down the alley. He arrived at the nondescript door and rang the bell. A view slit in the door opened, and two soft brown eyes studied him appraisingly. Then the door swung open.

'Welcome,' the well-dressed woman said. She ushered him into an impeccably furnished sitting room where the lights were low. The air was laced with expensive perfume and musk. 'Whenever you are ready.' She handed him a book of photographs. 'Ring me when you have made your choice.' Then she disappeared.

The Hassassin smiled.

As he sat on the plush divan and positioned the photo album on his lap, he felt a carnal hunger stir. Although his people did not celebrate Christmas, he imagined that this is what it must feel like to be a Christian child, sitting before a stack of Christmas presents, about to discover the miracles inside. He opened the album and examined the photos. A lifetime of sexual fantasies stared back at him.

Marisa. An Italian goddess. Fiery. A young Sophia Loren.

Sachiko. A Japanese geisha. Lithe. No doubt skilled.

Kanara. A stunning black vision. Muscular. Exotic.

He examined the entire album twice and made his choice. He pressed a button on the table beside him. A minute later the woman who had greeted him re-

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appeared. He indicated his selection. She smiled. 'Follow me.'

After handling the financial arrangements, the woman made a hushed phone call. She waited a few minutes and then led him up a winding marble staircase to a luxurious hallway. 'It's the gold door on the end,' she said. 'You have expensive taste.'

I should, he thought. *I am a connoisseur.*

The Hassassin padded the length of the hallway like a panther anticipating a long overdue meal. When he reached the doorway he smiled to himself. It was already ajar . . . welcoming him in. He pushed, and the door swung noiselessly open.

When he saw his selection, he knew he had chosen well. She was exactly as he had requested . . . nude, lying on her back, her arms tied to the bedposts with thick velvet cords.

He crossed the room and ran a dark finger across her ivory abdomen. *I killed last night*, he thought. *You are my reward.*

11

'Satanic?' Kohler wiped his mouth and shifted uncomfortably. 'This is the symbol of a *satanic* cult?'

Langdon paced the frozen room to keep warm. 'The Illuminati were satanic. But not in the modern sense.'

Langdon quickly explained how most people pictured satanic cults as devil-worshiping fiends, and yet Satanists historically were educated men who

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stood as adversaries to the church. *Shaitan.* The rumors of satanic black-magic animal sacrifices and the pentagram ritual were nothing but lies spread by the church as a smear campaign against their adversaries. Over time, opponents of the church, wanting to emulate the Illuminati, began believing the lies and acting them out. Thus, modern Satanism was born.

Kohler grunted abruptly. 'This is all ancient history. I want to know how this symbol got *here*.'

Langdon took a deep breath. 'The symbol itself was created by an anonymous sixteenth-century Illuminati artist as a tribute to Galileo's love of symmetry – a kind of sacred Illuminati logo. The brotherhood kept the design secret, allegedly planning to reveal it only when they had amassed enough power to resurface and carry out their final goal.'

Kohler looked unsettled. 'So this symbol means the Illuminati brotherhood is resurfacing?'

Langdon frowned. 'That would be impossible. There is one chapter of Illuminati history that I have not yet explained.'

Kohler's voice intensified. 'Enlighten me.'

Langdon rubbed his palms together, mentally sorting through the hundreds of documents he'd read or written on the Illuminati. 'The Illuminati were survivors,' he explained. 'When they fled Rome, they traveled across Europe looking for a safe place to regroup. They were taken in by another secret society . . . a brotherhood of wealthy Bavarian stone craftsmen called the Freemasons.'

Kohler looked startled. 'The Masons?'

Langdon nodded, not at all surprised that Kohler had heard of the group. The brotherhood of the Masons currently had over five million members

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worldwide, half of them residing in the United States, and over one million of them in Europe.

'Certainly the Masons are not satanic,' Kohler declared, sounding suddenly skeptical.

'Absolutely not. The Masons fell victim of their own benevolence. After harboring the fleeing scientists in the 1700s, the Masons unknowingly became a front for the Illuminati. The Illuminati grew within their ranks, gradually taking over positions of power within the lodges. They quietly re-established their scientific brotherhood deep within the Masons – a kind of secret society within a secret society. Then the Illuminati used the worldwide connection of Masonic lodges to spread their influence.'

Langdon drew a cold breath before racing on. 'Obliteration of Catholicism was the Illuminati's central covenant. The brotherhood held that the superstitious dogma spewed forth by the church was mankind's greatest enemy. They feared that if religion continued to promote pious myth as absolute fact, scientific progress would halt, and mankind would be doomed to an ignorant future of senseless holy wars.'

'Much like we see today.'

Langdon frowned. Kohler was right. Holy wars were still making headlines. *My God is better than your God.* It seemed there was always close correlation between true believers and high body counts.

'Go on,' Kohler said.

Langdon gathered his thoughts and continued. 'The Illuminati grew more powerful in Europe and set their sights on America, a fledgling government many of whose leaders were Masons – George Washington, Ben Franklin – honest, God-fearing men who were unaware of the Illuminati stronghold on the Masons.

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The Illuminati took advantage of the infiltration and helped found banks, universities, and industry to finance their ultimate quest.' Langdon paused. 'The creation of a single unified world state – a kind of secular New World Order.'

Kohler did not move.

'A New World Order,' Langdon repeated, 'based on scientific enlightenment. They called it their Luciferian Doctrine. The church claimed Lucifer was a reference to the devil, but the brotherhood insisted Lucifer was intended in its literal Latin meaning – *bringer of light*. Or *Illuminator*.'

Kohler sighed, and his voice grew suddenly solemn. 'Mr Langdon, please sit down.'

Langdon sat tentatively on a frost-covered chair.

Kohler moved his wheelchair closer. 'I am not sure I understand everything you have just told me, but I do understand this. Leonardo Vetra was one of CERN's greatest assets. He was also a friend. I need you to help me locate the Illuminati.'

Langdon didn't know how to respond. 'Locate the Illuminati?' *He's kidding, right?* 'I'm afraid, sir, that will be utterly impossible.'

Kohler's brow creased. 'What do you mean? You won't—'

'Mr Kohler,' Langdon leaned toward his host, uncertain how to make him understand what he was about to say, 'I did not finish my story. Despite appearances, it is extremely unlikely that this brand was put here by the Illuminati. There has been no evidence of their existence for over half a century, and most scholars agree the Illuminati have been defunct for many years.'

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The words hit silence. Kohler stared through the fog

with a look somewhere between stupefaction and anger. 'How the hell can you tell me this group is extinct when their name is seared into this man!'

Langdon had been asking himself that question all morning. The appearance of the Illuminati ambigram was astonishing. Symbologists worldwide would be dazzled. And yet, the academic in Langdon understood that the brand's re-emergence proved absolutely nothing about the Illuminati.

'Symbols,' Langdon said, 'in no way confirm the presence of their original creators.'

'What is *that* supposed to mean?'

'It means that when organized philosophies like the Illuminati go out of existence, their symbols remain . . . available for adoption by other groups. It's called *transference*. It's very common in symbology. The Nazis took the swastika from the Hindus, the Christians adopted the cruciform from the Egyptians, the—'

'This morning,' Kohler challenged, 'when I typed the word "Illuminati" into the computer, it returned thousands of current references. Apparently a lot of people think this group is still active.'

'Conspiracy buffs,' Langdon replied. He had always been annoyed by the plethora of conspiracy theories that circulated in modern pop culture. The media craved apocalyptic headlines, and self-proclaimed 'cult specialists' were still cashing in on millennium hype with fabricated stories that the Illuminati were alive and well and organizing their New World Order. Recently the *New York Times* had reported the eerie Masonic ties of countless famous men – Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the Duke of Kent, Peter Sellers, Irving Berlin, Prince Philip, Louis Armstrong, as well as a pantheon of well-known modern-day industrialists and banking magnates.

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Kohler pointed angrily at Vetra's body. 'Considering the evidence, I would say perhaps the conspiracy buffs are correct.'

'I realize how it appears,' Langdon said as diplomatically as he could. 'And yet a far more plausible explanation is that some *other* organization has taken control of the Illuminati brand and is using it for their own purposes.'

'What purposes? What does this murder prove?'

Good question, Langdon thought. He was also having trouble imagining where anyone could have turned up the Illuminati brand after 400 years. 'All I can tell you is that even if the Illuminati were still active today, which I am virtually positive they are not, they would never be involved in Leonardo Vetra's death.'

'No?'

'No. The Illuminati may have believed in the abolition of Christianity, but they wielded their power through political and financial means, not through terrorist acts. Furthermore, the Illuminati had a strict code of morality regarding who they saw as enemies. They held men of science in the highest regard. There is no way they would have murdered a fellow scientist like Leonardo Vetra.'

Kohler's eyes turned to ice. 'Perhaps I failed to mention that Leonardo Vetra was anything but an ordinary scientist.'

Langdon exhaled patiently. 'Mr Kohler, I'm sure Leonardo Vetra was brilliant in many ways, but the fact remains—'

Without warning, Kohler spun in his wheelchair and accelerated out of the living room, leaving a wake of swirling mist as he disappeared down a hallway.

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For the love of God, Langdon groaned. He followed. Kohler was waiting for him in a small alcove at the end of the hallway.

'This is Leonardo's study,' Kohler said, motioning to the sliding door. 'Perhaps when you see it you'll understand things differently.' With an awkward grunt, Kohler heaved, and the door slid open.

Langdon peered into the study and immediately felt his skin crawl. *Holy mother of Jesus*, he said to himself.

12

In another country, a young guard sat patiently before an expansive bank of video monitors. He watched as images flashed before him – live feeds from hundreds of wireless video cameras that surveyed the sprawling complex. The images went by in an endless procession.

An ornate hallway.

A private office.

An industrial-size kitchen.

As the pictures went by, the guard fought off a day-dream. He was nearing the end of his shift, and yet he was still vigilant. Service was an honor. Someday he would be granted his ultimate reward.

As his thoughts drifted, an image before him registered alarm. Suddenly, with a reflexive jerk that startled even himself, his hand shot out and hit a button on the control panel. The picture before him froze.

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His nerves tingling, he leaned toward the screen for