

DAN
BROWN
THE
DA VINCI
CODE



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*For Blythe . . . again.
More than ever.*

Acknowledgments

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Fact:

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

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

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

Prologue

Louvre Museum, Paris
10:46 P.M.

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

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

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

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

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

Only fifteen feet away, outside the sealed gate, the mountainous silhouette of his attacker stared through the iron bars. He was broad and tall, with ghost-pale skin and thinning white hair. His irises were pink with dark

red pupils. The albino drew a pistol from his coat and aimed the barrel through the bars, directly at the curator. 'You should not have run.' His accent was not easy to place. 'Now tell me where it is.'

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

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

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

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

Saunière could not breathe.

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

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

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

Saunière recoiled. *The others?*

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

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

same lie before their own deaths. It was part of the protocol.

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

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

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

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

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

The click of an empty chamber echoed through the corridor.

The curator's eyes flew open.

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

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

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

Then he was gone.

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

gripped him was a fear far greater than that of his own death.

I must pass on the secret.

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

An unbroken chain of knowledge.

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

Shivering, he pulled himself to his feet.

I must find some way . . .

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

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

Chapter 1

Robert Langdon awoke slowly.

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

Where the hell am I?

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

Slowly, the fog began to lift.

Langdon picked up the receiver. ‘Hello?’

‘Monsieur Langdon?’ a man’s voice said. ‘I hope I have not awoken you?’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You need a vacation, Robert.

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

hair. Although his female colleagues insisted the grey only accentuated his bookish appeal, Langdon knew better.

If Boston Magazine could see me now.

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

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

The students in the crowd nodded enthusiastically.

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

She held up a copy of *Boston Magazine*.

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

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

The crowd applauded.

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

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

The hall erupted in laughter.

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

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

The crowd laughed.

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

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

Groaning in disbelief, he picked up. ‘Yes?’

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

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

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

'Who exactly is he?'

But the concierge was gone.

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

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

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

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

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

'May I come in?' the agent asked.

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

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

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

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

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

'We found your name in his daily planner.'

'I trust nothing is wrong?'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Positioned?' the agent offered.

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

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

Chapter 2

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

Pain is good.

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

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

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

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

‘Yes?’ a male voice answered.

‘Teacher, I have returned.’

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

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

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

'All four concurred. Independently.'

'And you believed them?'

'Their agreement was too great for coincidence.'

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

'The prospect of death is strong motivation.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'As they have for centuries.'

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

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

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

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

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

Even so, Silas knew, absolution required sacrifice.

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

Although Silas already had worn his *cilice* today longer than the requisite two hours, he knew today was no

ordinary day. Grasping the buckle, he cinched it one notch tighter, wincing as the barbs dug deeper into his flesh. Exhaling slowly, he savoured the cleansing ritual of his pain.

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

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

Castigo corpus meum.

Finally, he felt the blood begin to flow.

Chapter 3

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

Jacques Saunière is dead.

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

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

Outside, the city was just now winding down – street vendors wheeling carts of candied *amandes*, waiters carrying bags of garbage to the curb, a pair of late-night lovers cuddling to stay warm in a breeze scented with

jasmine blossom. The Citroën navigated the chaos with authority, its dissonant two-tone siren parting the traffic like a knife.

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

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

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

The driver shook his head. 'Interpol.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As they entered the deserted park, the agent reached under the dash and turned off the blaring siren. Langdon exhaled, savouring the sudden quiet. Outside the car, the pale wash of halogen headlights skimmed over the crushed gravel parkway, the rugged whir of the tyres intoning a hypnotic rhythm. Langdon had always considered the Tuileries to be sacred ground. These were the gardens in which Claude Monet had experimented with

form and colour, and literally inspired the birth of the Impressionist movement. Tonight, however, this place held a strange aura of foreboding.

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

Arc du Carrousel.

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

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

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

Musée du Louvre.

Langdon felt a familiar tinge of wonder as his eyes made a futile attempt to absorb the entire mass of the edifice. Across a staggeringly expansive plaza, the imposing façade of the Louvre rose like a citadel against the Paris sky. Shaped like an enormous horseshoe, the Louvre was the longest building in Europe, stretching farther than three Eiffel Towers laid end to end. Not

even the million square feet of open plaza between the museum wings could challenge the majesty of the façade's breadth. Langdon had once walked the Louvre's entire perimeter, an astonishing three-mile journey.

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

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

An indecipherable confirmation came crackling back.

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

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

La Pyramide.

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

ancient structure and modern method – a symbolic link between the old and new – helping usher the Louvre into the next millennium.

‘Do you like our pyramid?’ the agent asked.

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

‘Mitterrand was a bold man,’ Langdon replied, splitting the difference. The late French president who had commissioned the pyramid was said to have suffered from a ‘Pharaoh complex’. Single-handedly responsible for filling Paris with Egyptian obelisks, art and artefacts, François Mitterrand had an affinity for Egyptian culture that was so all-consuming that the French still referred to him as the Sphinx.

‘What is the captain’s name?’ Langdon asked, changing topics.

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

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

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

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

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

‘You’re not coming?’

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

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

The agent revved his engine and sped off.

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

As he moved toward the mist of the fountains, Langdon had the uneasy sense he was crossing an imaginary threshold into another world. The dreamlike quality of the evening was settling around him again. Twenty minutes ago he had been asleep in his hotel room. Now he was standing in front of a transparent pyramid built by the Sphinx, waiting for a policeman they called the Bull.

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

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

Do I knock?

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

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

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

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

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

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