



*The*

# LOST SYMBOL

SPECIAL ILLUSTRATED EDITION



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DOUBLEDAY

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DOUBLE-SIDED EAGLE ABOVE ENTRYWAY, HOUSE OF THE TEMPLE



## Prologue

HOUSE OF THE TEMPLE

8:33 P.M.

*The secret is how to die.*

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

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

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

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

The assembly of brothers encircling him all were adorned in their full regalia of lambskin aprons, sashes, and white gloves. Around their necks hung ceremonial jewels that glistened like ghostly eyes in the muted light. Many of these men held powerful stations in life, and yet the initiate knew their worldly ranks meant nothing within these walls. Here all men were equals, sworn brothers sharing a mystical bond.

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



Chapter 2

**T**HE ONE WHO called himself Mal'akh pressed the tip of the needle against his shaved head, sighing with pleasure as the sharp tool plunged in and out of his flesh. The soft hum of the electric device was addictive . . . as was the bite of the needle sliding deep into his dermis and depositing its dye.

*I am a masterpiece.*

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

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

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

A single bell chimed on Mal'akh's grandfather clock, and he looked up. Six thirty P.M. Leaving his tools, he wrapped the Kiryu silk robe around his naked, six-foot-three body and strode down the hall. The air inside this sprawling mansion was



heavy with the pungent fragrance of his skin dyes and smoke from the beeswax candles he used to sterilize his needles. The towering young man moved down the corridor past priceless Italian antiques—a Piranesi etching, a Savonarola chair, a silver Bugarini oil lamp.

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

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

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

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

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

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

*My initiation served its purpose.*

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



WOOD CARVING OF TRADITIONAL MAORI WARRIOR



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

*America’s Egyptian obelisk.*

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

This morning at four forty-five, Langdon had plunged into dead-calm water, beginning his day as he always did, swimming fifty laps in the deserted Harvard



LINCOLN MEMORIAL, WASHINGTON MONUMENT,  
AND UNITED STATES CAPITOL BUILDING



Pool. His physique was not quite what it had been in his college days as a water-polo all-American, but he was still lean and toned, respectable for a man in his forties. The only difference now was the amount of effort it took Langdon to keep it that way.

When Langdon arrived home around six, he began his morning ritual of hand-grinding Sumatra coffee beans and savoring the exotic scent that filled his kitchen. This morning, however, he was surprised to see the blinking red light on his voice-mail display. *Who calls at six A.M. on a Sunday?* He pressed the button and listened to the message.

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

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

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

*I hope he’s okay.*

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



THE APOTHEOSIS OF WASHINGTON, U.S. CAPITOL BUILDING

Chapter 21

**T**HE APOTHEOSIS OF *Washington*—a 4,664-square-foot fresco that covers the canopy of the Capitol Rotunda—was completed in 1865 by Constantino Brumidi.

Known as “The Michelangelo of the Capitol,” Brumidi had laid claim to the Capitol Rotunda in the same way Michelangelo had laid claim to the Sistine Chapel, by painting a fresco on the room’s most lofty canvas—the ceiling. Like Michelangelo, Brumidi had done some of his finest work inside the Vatican. Brumidi, however, immigrated to America in 1852, abandoning God’s largest shrine in favor of a new shrine, the U.S. Capitol, which now glistened with examples of his mastery—from the trompe l’oeil of the Brumidi Corridors to the frieze ceiling of the Vice President’s Room. And yet it was the enormous image hovering above the Capitol Rotunda that most historians considered to be Brumidi’s masterwork.

Robert Langdon gazed up at the massive fresco that covered the ceiling. He usually enjoyed his students’ startled reactions to this fresco’s bizarre imagery, but at the moment he simply felt trapped in a nightmare he had yet to understand.

Director Sato was standing next to him with her hands on her hips, frowning up at the distant ceiling. Langdon sensed she was having the same reaction many had when they first stopped to examine the painting at the core of their nation.

Utter confusion.

*You’re not alone*, Langdon thought. For most people, *The Apotheosis of Washington* got stranger and stranger the longer they looked at it. “That’s George Washington on the central panel,” Langdon said, pointing 180 feet upward into the middle of the dome. “As you can see, he’s dressed in white robes, attended by thirteen maidens,



DETAIL: THE APOTHEOSIS OF WASHINGTON, U.S. CAPITOL ROTUNDA

and ascending on a cloud above mortal man. This is the moment of his apotheosis . . . his transformation into a god.”

Sato and Anderson said nothing.

“Nearby,” Langdon continued, “you can see a strange, anachronistic series of figures: ancient gods presenting our forefathers with advanced knowledge. There’s Minerva giving technological inspiration to our nation’s great inventors—Ben Franklin, Robert Fulton, Samuel Morse.” Langdon pointed them out one by one. “And over there is Vulcan helping us build a steam engine. Beside them is Neptune demonstrating how to lay the transatlantic cable. Beside that is Ceres, goddess of grain and root of our word *cereal*; she’s sitting on the McCormick reaper, the farming breakthrough that enabled this country to become a world leader in food production. The painting quite overtly portrays our forefathers receiving great wisdom from the gods.” He lowered his head, looking at Sato now. “Knowledge is power, and the *right* knowledge lets man perform miraculous, almost godlike tasks.”



Sato dropped her gaze back down to Langdon and rubbed her neck. “Laying a phone cable is a far cry from being a god.”

“Perhaps to a *modern* man,” Langdon replied. “But if George Washington knew that we had become a race that possessed the power to speak to one another across oceans, fly at the speed of sound, and set foot on our moon, he would assume that we had become gods, capable of miraculous tasks.” He paused. “In the words of futurist Arthur C. Clarke, ‘Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.’”

Sato pursed her lips, apparently deep in thought. She glanced down at the hand, and then followed the direction of the outstretched index finger up into the dome. “Professor, you were told, ‘Peter will point the way.’ Is that correct?”

“Yes, ma’am, but—”

“Chief,” Sato said, turning away from Langdon, “can you get us a closer look at the painting?”

Anderson nodded. “There’s a catwalk around the interior of the dome.”

Langdon looked way, way up to the tiny railing visible just beneath the painting and felt his body go rigid. “There’s no need to go up there.” He had experienced that seldom-visited catwalk once before, as the guest of a U.S. senator and his wife, and he had almost fainted from the dizzying height and perilous walkway.

“No need?” Sato demanded. “Professor, we have a man who believes this room contains a portal that has the potential to make him a god; we have a ceiling fresco that symbolizes the transformation of a man into a god; and we have a hand pointing straight at that painting. It seems everything is urging us *upward*.”

“Actually,” Anderson interjected, glancing up, “not many people know this, but there is *one* hexagonal coffer in the dome that actually swings open like a portal, and you can peer down through it and—”

“Wait a second,” Langdon said, “you’re missing the point. The portal this man is looking for is a *figurative* portal—a gateway that doesn’t exist. When he said, ‘Peter will point the way,’ he was talking in metaphorical terms. This pointing-hand gesture—with its index finger *and* thumb extended upward—is a well-known symbol of the Ancient Mysteries, and it appears all over the world in ancient art. This same gesture appears in three of Leonardo da Vinci’s most famous encoded masterpieces—*The Last Supper*, *Adoration of the Magi*, and *Saint John the Baptist*. It’s a symbol of man’s mystical connection to God.” *As above, so below*. The madman’s bizarre choice of words was starting to feel more relevant now.

“I’ve never seen it before,” Sato said.

*Then watch ESPN*, Langdon thought, always amused to see professional athletes point skyward in gratitude to God after a touchdown or home run. He wondered