



ANGELS AND DEMONS

BOOK EXCERPTS

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.

CHAPTER 1

High atop the steps of the 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?"

"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 World—Wide—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 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 Nestle'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 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 waterpolo 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 backwards. 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.

“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.

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.

CHAPTER 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, 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 World Wide 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.

"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 back yard, 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."

CHAPTER 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. "Perfectamente." 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."

"Serving the brotherhood is an honor," the killer said.

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

CHAPTER 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?"

"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 200 feet from front to back—no windows, nothing but hull.

"250,000 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 a 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."

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 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.

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 25."

CHAPTER 5

On a busy European street, the killer serpented 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 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.

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 11th 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 renown not only for their brutal killings, but also for celebrating their slayings by plunging themselves into drug—induced stupors. Their drug of choice was 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.