

Reading Group Guide

Spotlight on:
The Da Vinci Code

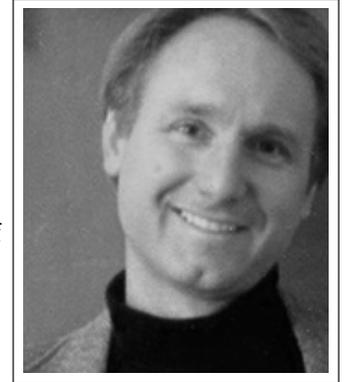
Author: Dan Brown

His mother Constance (Connie) was a professional musician, playing organ at church. Brown's father Richard G. Brown taught high school mathematics at Phillips Exeter Academy from 1962 until his retirement in 1997. Richard was a prominent mathematician—he wrote the bestselling mathematics textbook *Advanced Mathematics: Precalculus with Discrete Mathematics and Data Analysis*, and had been offered a job at the National Security Agency, but declined because he did not want to move his family out of New Hampshire. Richard was also chosen by President George H.W. Bush to receive the "Presidential Award for Excellence in Science and Mathematics Teaching".

Name: Dan Brown

Born: June 22, 1964 in Exeter, NH

Education: Amherst College, B.A., 1986; studied art history at University of Seville, Spain.



Awards:

Book of the Year, British Book Awards, 2005, for *The Da Vinci Code*.

Past Works:

Digital Fortress, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 1998.

Angels and Demons, Pocket Books (New York, NY), 2000.

Deception Point, Pocket Books (New York, NY), 2001.

The Da Vinci Code, Doubleday (New York, NY), 2003.

Brown's work has been translated into numerous languages.

Works in Progress:

A sequel to *The Da Vinci Code*.

Media Adaptations:

Film rights to *The Da Vinci Code* were purchased by Columbia Pictures, Inc.



Author: Dan Brown (2)

Sidelights:

Dan Brown's interest in code-breaking and government intelligence agencies developed after one of his students at Phillips Exeter Academy was detained by the U.S. Secret Service following a night of political debate with friends via e-mail. Though the student was never prosecuted, the incident "really stuck with me," Brown told Claire E. White in an interview for *Writers Write*. "I couldn't figure out how the Secret Service knew what these kids were saying in their E-mail." Subsequent research on government organizations and intelligence data resulted in his debut novel, a techno-thriller titled *Digital Fortress*. It is the story of an attack on a government computer known as TRNSLTR, which is supposed to monitor e-mail between terrorists but can also be used to read the mail of civilians. When TRNSLTR discovers a code it cannot break, Susan Fletcher, a government cryptographer, is called upon to help. What she uncovers is a threat to the nation and its government, as well as to her own survival. According to a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly*, "In this fast-paced, plausible tale, Brown blurs the line between good and evil enough to delight patriots and paranoids alike."

In his second novel, *Angels and Demons*, Brown introduces protagonist Robert Langdon, a well-known Harvard symbologist. Langdon is called in to assist Swiss investigators in deciphering the markings left on the body of a murdered scientist and finds himself in the thick of a terrorist plot against a group of Roman Catholic cardinals working at the Vatican. Inspired by Brown's own tour of the tunnels beneath Vatican City, *Angels and Demons* imagines the resurgence of an ancient secret brotherhood known as the Illuminati—the enlightened ones—that desires revenge against the Vatican for crimes against scientists like Galileo and Copernicus. A reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* noted that, "Though its premises strain credulity, Brown's tale is laced with twists and shocks that keep the reader wired right up to the last revelation." Jeff Ayers, in a review for *Library Journal*, called the novel "one of the best international thrillers of recent years," concluding that "Brown clearly knows how to deliver the goods."

Deception Point, Brown's third novel, revolves around NASA's discovery of a meteor in the Arctic circle that may contain proof of extraterrestrial life. The discovery coincides with the mysterious death of an agency scientist, as well as with an important presidential election. *Library Journal's* Jeff Ayers noted, "Brown... proves once again that he is among the most intelligent and dynamic of authors in the thriller genre." A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor called *Deception Point* "mostly tedious," but added that Brown's "impressive grasp of his material" makes him "a more astute storyteller than most of his brethren in the technothriller vein." David Pitt, writing for *Booklist*, remarked that the "characters range from inventive to wooden" and that the plot "lies somewhere between bold and ridiculous," but praised Brown's "knack for spinning a suspenseful yarn." A reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* also praised Brown's storytelling skills, calling *Deception Point* an "excellent thriller—a big yet believable story unfolding at breakneck pace, with convincing settings and just the right blend of likable and hateful characters."

Protagonist Robert Langdon returns in Brown's fourth novel, *The Da Vinci Code*. The book, which debuted in early 2003 at number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list, has since been translated into over thirty languages. The story begins with the murder of the chief curator of the Louvre in Paris. When a mysterious riddle is discovered planted near the body, French authorities call Langdon in to investigate. Subsequent clues lead the symbolist to the paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci and, as the story progresses, on a long and dangerous quest for the Holy Grail. *Library Journal's* Jeff Ayers called *The Da Vinci Code* an "amazing sequel" through which Brown "solidifies his reputation as one of the most skilled thriller writers on the planet." A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer remarked that while "Brown sometimes ladles out too much religious history at the expense of pacing," he "has assembled a whopper of a plot that will please both conspiracy buffs and thriller addicts." Frank Sennett in *Booklist* praised the novel's "brain-teasing puzzles and fascinating insights into religious history and art," adding that "Brown's intricate plot delivers more satisfying twists than a licorice factory." *New York Times* critic Janet Maslin called *The Da Vinci Code* a "gleefully erudite suspense novel" in which Brown "takes the format he has been developing through three earlier novels and fine-tunes it to blockbuster perfection."



Author: Dan Brown (3)

Sidelights: (Continued)

Brown spent over a year of research before writing *The Da Vinci Code*. Some critics, such as *Bookpage* reviewer Edward Morris, have attributed the novel's appeal to its "plot-related codes and cryptograms that impel the reader to brainstorm with the protagonists." Jo Ann Heydron in *Sojourners* noted that "the book's narrative drive is all the more remarkable because it contains a skeletal history of a real secret society, of which Leonardo Da Vinci and other icons of Western culture are said to have been members." The novel also stirred some debate due to its treatment of Christian theology and biblical characters, particularly Mary Magdalene. In addition, charges were leveled by veteran novelist Lewis Perdue that Brown's 2003 bestseller too-closely resembles Perdue's 2000 novel, *Daughter of God*; Brown maintained that he was unfamiliar with Perdue's book.



Author: Dan Brown (4)

Further Reading:

Periodicals:

Booklist, September 15, 2001, David Pitt, review of *Deception Point*, p. 198; March 1, 2003, Frank Sennett, review of *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 1148.

Kirkus Reviews, September 1, 2001, review of *Deception Point*, p. 1232; January 1, 2003, review of *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 5.

Library Journal, November 15, 2000, Jeff Ayers, review of *Angels and Demons*, p. 124; October 1, 2001, Jeff Ayers, review of *Deception Point*, p. 139; February 1, 2003, Jeff Ayers, review of *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 114.

Newsweek, June 9, 2003, "Page-Turner: A Stolen 'Da Vinci'—or Just Weirdness?," p. 57.

New Yorker, May 5, 2003, Nick Paumgarten, "Acknowledged," p. 36.

New York Times, March 17, 2003, Janet Maslin, review of *The Da Vinci Code*.

People, March 24, 2003, review of *The Da Vinci Code*.

Publishers Weekly, December 22, 1997, review of *Digital Fortress*, p. 39; May 1, 2000, review of *Angels and Demons*, p. 51; September 10, 2001, review of *Deception Point*, p. 56; January 27, 2003, Charlotte Abbott, "Code Word: Breakout," p. 117; February 3, 2003, review of *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 53; February 9, 2004, Steven Zeitchik, "Riding Along With 'Da Vinci,'" p. 18.

Sojourner, July-August, 2003, Jo Ann Heydron, review of *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 58.

Time, August 11, 2003, David Van Biema, "Mary Magdalene: Saint or Sinner?"

Online:

Bookpage, <http://www.bookpage.com/> (April, 2003), Edward Morris, "Explosive New Thriller Explores Secrets of the Church," p. 11.

Dan Brown Web site, <http://www.danbrown.com/> (June 20, 2003).

USA Today Online, <http://www.usatoday.htm/> (May 8, 2003), Ayesha Court, review of *The Da Vinci Code*.

Writers Write, <http://www.writerswrite.com/> (May, 1998), Claire E. White, interview with Dan Brown.*

Contemporary Authors Online, Thomson Gale, 2005.



Reading Group Guide

Spotlight on: *The Da Vinci Code*

Discussion Questions:

1. A number of characters in this novel could be considered “villains.” What motivates each of these individuals? What role do misguided passions play in their actions?
2. As a symbologist, Robert Langdon has a wealth of academic knowledge that helps him view the world in a unique way. Now that you've read *The Da Vinci Code*, are there any aspects of life/history/faith that you see in a different light?
3. Langdon and Teabing disagree as to whether the Sangreal documents should be released to the world. If you were the Grand Master of the Priory of Sion, would you release the documents? If so, what do you think their effect would be?
4. What observations does this novel make about our past? How do these ideas relate to our future?
5. Other than his fear of being framed for murder, what motivates Langdon to follow this perilous quest? Do his motivations change?
6. The novel's “quest” involves numerous puzzles and codes. Did you enjoy trying to solve these puzzles along with the characters? Did you solve any of the puzzles before the characters did?
7. If you could spend a day in any of the places described in this novel, where would it be, and why? The Louvre? Westminster Abbey? Rosslyn Chapel? The Temple Church? Somewhere else?
8. Historian Leigh Teabing claims that the founding fathers of Christianity hijacked the good name of Jesus for political reasons. Do you agree? Does the historical evidence support Teabing's claim?
9. Has this book changed your ideas about faith, religion, or history in any way?
10. Our views on sexuality have changed dramatically since pagan times. Do you think our ideas have changed for the better or worse?
11. Saunière placed a lot of confidence in Langdon. Was this confidence well-placed? What other options might Saunière have had? Did Saunière make the right decision separating Sophie from the rest of her family?
12. Do you imagine Langdon should forgive Teabing for his misguided actions? On the other hand, do you think Teabing should forgive Langdon for refusing to release the Sangreal documents?
13. Does the world have a right to know all aspects of its history, or can an argument be made for keeping certain information secret?
14. Would you rather live in a world without religion or a world without science?



Book: The Da Vinci Code

Discussion Questions: (Continued)

15. What is interesting about the way this story is told? How are the episodes of the novel arranged and linked? In your discussion, you might want to identify where the turning points in the action are—where those moments are after which everything is different. Did you anticipate them?
16. What is the novel's theme? What central message or idea links all the other components of the novel together?
17. For most people, the word "God" feels holy, while the word "Goddess" feels mythical. What are your thoughts on this? Do you imagine those perceptions will ever change?
18. Will you look at the artwork of Da Vinci any differently now that you know more about his "secret life?"



Book: The Da Vinci Code

Frequently Asked Questions:

HOW MUCH OF THIS NOVEL IS TRUE?

The Da Vinci Code is a novel and therefore a work of fiction. While the book's characters and their actions are obviously not real, the artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals depicted in this novel all exist (for example, Leonardo Da Vinci's paintings, the Gnostic Gospels, Hieros Gamos, etc.). These real elements are interpreted and debated by fictional characters. While it is my belief that some of the theories discussed by these characters may have merit, each individual reader must explore these characters' viewpoints and come to his or her own interpretations. My hope in writing this novel was that the story would serve as a catalyst and a springboard for people to discuss the important topics of faith, religion, and history.

BUT DOESN'T THE NOVEL'S "FACT" PAGE CLAIM THAT EVERY SINGLE WORD IN THIS NOVEL IS HISTORICAL FACT?

If you read the "FACT" page, you will see it clearly states that the documents, rituals, organization, artwork, and architecture in the novel all exist. The "FACT" page makes no statement whatsoever about any of the ancient theories discussed by fictional characters. Interpreting those ideas is left to the reader.

IS THIS BOOK ANTI-CHRISTIAN?

No. This book is not anti-anything. It's a novel. I wrote this story in an effort to explore certain aspects of Christian history that interest me. The vast majority of devout Christians understand this fact and consider *The Da Vinci Code* an entertaining story that promotes spiritual discussion and debate. Even so, a small but vocal group of individuals has proclaimed the story dangerous, heretical, and anti-Christian. While I regret having offended those individuals, I should mention that priests, nuns, and clergy contact me all the time to thank me for writing the novel. Many church officials are celebrating *The Da Vinci Code* because it has sparked renewed interest in important topics of faith and Christian history. It is important to remember that a reader does not have to agree with every word in the novel to use the book as a positive catalyst for introspection and exploration of our faith.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF CLERICAL SCHOLARS ATTEMPTING TO "DISPROVE" *The Da Vinci Code*?

The dialogue is wonderful. These authors and I obviously disagree, but the debate that is being generated is a positive powerful force. The more vigorously we debate these topics, the better our understanding of our own spirituality. Controversy and dialogue are healthy for religion as a whole. Religion has only one true enemy—apathy—and passionate debate is a superb antidote.

PARTS OF *The Da Vinci Code* DESCRIBE THE ACTIVITIES OF THE RELIGIOUS GROUP OPUS DEI. HOW DOES OPUS DEI FEEL ABOUT YOUR NOVEL?

I worked very hard to create a fair and balanced depiction of Opus Dei. Even so, there may be those who are offended by the portrayal. While Opus Dei is a very positive force in the lives of many people, for others, affiliation with Opus Dei has been a profoundly negative experience. Their portrayal in the novel is based on numerous books written about Opus Dei as well as on my own personal interviews with current and former members.



Book: The Da Vinci Code

Frequently Asked Questions: (Continued)

ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN?

Yes. Interestingly, if you ask three people what it means to be Christian, you will get three different answers. Some feel being baptized is sufficient. Others feel you must accept the Bible as absolute historical fact. Still others require a belief that all those who do not accept Christ as their personal savior are doomed to hell. Faith is a continuum, and we each fall on that line where we may. By attempting to rigidly classify ethereal concepts like faith, we end up debating semantics to the point where we entirely miss the obvious—that is, that we are all trying to decipher life's big mysteries, and we're each following our own paths of enlightenment. I consider myself a student of many religions. The more I learn, the more questions I have. For me, the spiritual quest will be a life-long work in progress.

THE TOPIC OF THIS NOVEL MIGHT BE CONSIDERED CONTROVERSIAL. DO YOU FEAR REPERCUSSIONS?

I can't imagine why. The ideas in this novel have been around for centuries; they are not my own. Admittedly, this may be the first time these ideas have been written about within the context of a popular thriller, but the information is anything but new. My hope for *The Da Vinci Code* was, in addition to entertaining people, that it might serve as an open door for readers to begin their own explorations and rekindle their interest in topics of faith.

HOW DO ALBINOS FEEL ABOUT YOUR CHARACTER SILAS?

Some readers with albinism have been troubled by this character. I am very sensitive to their concerns. It is important to remember that Silas's skin color has nothing to do with his violent nature—he is driven to violence by others' cruelty... not by anything inherent in his physiology. The vast majority of critics and readers (even some with albinism) find Silas to be the novel's most sympathetic character. I truly believe the novel's portrayal of Silas is a compassionate exploration of how difficult albinism can be—especially for young people—and how cruelly societies can ostracize those of us who look different.

HAS ANYONE IN ORGANIZED RELIGION COME OUT IN SUPPORT OF YOUR NOVEL?

Yes, many people in organized religion have come out in support of this novel, and, of course, many have come out in opposition as well. The opposition generally comes from the strictest Christian thinkers who feel the idea of a "married Jesus" serves to undermine His divinity. While I don't agree with this interpretation, this is immaterial because the dialogue itself is a deeply empowering and positive force for everyone involved. Suddenly, enormous numbers of people are passionately debating important philosophical topics, and regardless of the personal conclusions that each of us draws, the debate can only help to strengthen our understanding of our own faith. Much of the positive response I get from within organized religion comes from nuns (who write to thank me for pointing out that they have sacrificed their entire lives to the Church and are still considered "unfit" to serve behind the altar). I have also heard from hundreds of enthusiastic priests. While many of them disagree with some of the ideas in the novel, they are thrilled that their parishioners are eager to discuss religion. Father John Sewell of St. John's Episcopal Church in Memphis stated it particularly eloquently in the press recently, saying: "This [novel] is not a threat. This is an opportunity. We are called to creatively engage the culture and this is what I want to do. I think Dan Brown has done me a favor. He's letting me talk about things that matter."



Book: The Da Vinci Code

Frequently Asked Questions: (Continued)

THIS NOVEL IS VERY EMPOWERING TO WOMEN. CAN YOU COMMENT?

Two thousand years ago, we lived in a world of Gods and Goddesses. Today, we live in a world solely of Gods. Women in most cultures have been stripped of their spiritual power. The novel touches on questions of how and why this shift occurred—and on what lessons we might learn from it regarding our future.

THE COVER OF YOUR BOOK MENTIONS “THE GREATEST CONSPIRACY OF THE PAST 2000 YEARS.” WHAT IS THIS CONSPIRACY?

Revealing that secret would rob readers of all the fun, but I will say that it relates to one of the most famous histories of all time—a legend familiar to all of us. Rumors of this conspiracy have been whispered for centuries in countless languages, including the languages of art, music, and literature. Some of the most dramatic evidence can be found in the paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci, which seem to overflow with mystifying symbolism, anomalies, and codes. Art historians agree that Da Vinci’s paintings contain hidden levels of meaning that go well beneath the surface of the paint. Many scholars believe his work intentionally provides clues to a powerful secret—a secret that remains protected to this day by a clandestine brotherhood of which Da Vinci was a member.

WHERE DID YOU GET THE IDEA FOR *The Da Vinci Code*?

This particular story kept knocking on my door until I answered. I first learned of the mysteries hidden in Da Vinci’s paintings while I was studying art history at the University of Seville in Spain. Years later, while researching *Angels & Demons* and the Vatican Secret Archives, I encountered the Da Vinci enigma yet again. I arranged a trip to the Louvre Museum where I was fortunate enough to view the originals of some of Da Vinci’s most famous works as well as discuss them with an art historian who helped me better understand the mystery behind their surprising anomalies. From then on, I was captivated. I spent a year doing research before writing *The Da Vinci Code*.

HOW DID YOU GET ALL THE INSIDE INFORMATION FOR THIS BOOK?

Most of the information is not as “inside” as it seems. The secret described in the novel has been chronicled for centuries, so there are thousands of sources to draw from. In addition, I was surprised how eager historians were to share their expertise with me. One academic told me her enthusiasm for *The Da Vinci Code* was based in part on her hope that “this ancient mystery would be unveiled to a wider audience.”

YOU SEEM TO HAVE A FASCINATION WITH SECRET SOCIETIES? CAN YOU COMMENT?

My interest in secret societies is the product of many experiences, some I can discuss, others I cannot. Certainly my research of organizations like NSA, the Vatican, NRO, and Opus Dei continues to fuel my intrigue. At a more fundamental level, though, my interest sparks from growing up in New England, surrounded by the clandestine clubs of Ivy League universities, the Masonic lodges of our Founding Fathers, and the hidden hallways of early government power. New England has a long tradition of elite private clubs, fraternities, and secrecy. On that theme, the next Robert Langdon novel (already in progress) is set deep within the oldest fraternity in history—the enigmatic brotherhood of the Masons.



Book: *The Da Vinci Code*

Frequently Asked Questions: (Continued)

WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF A CONSPIRACY THEORIST?

Hardly. In fact, I'm quite the opposite—more of a skeptic. I see no truth whatsoever in stories of extraterrestrial visitors, crop circles, the Bermuda Triangle, or many of the other “mysteries” that permeate pop culture. However, the secret behind *The Da Vinci Code* was too well documented and significant for me to dismiss.

CAN YOU SYNOPSISIZE THE PLOT FOR US?

Sure. A renowned Harvard symbologist is summoned to the Louvre Museum to examine a series of cryptic symbols relating to Da Vinci's artwork. In decrypting the code, he uncovers the key to one of the greatest mysteries of all time—and he becomes a hunted man.



Reading Group Guide

Spotlight on:
The Da Vinci Code

Reviews:

Booklist Review March 2003

In a two-day span, American symbologist Robert Langdon finds himself accused of murdering the curator of the Louvre, on the run through the streets of Paris and London, and teamed up with French cryptologist Sophie Neveu to uncover nothing less than the secret location of the Holy Grail. It appears that a conservative Catholic bishop might be on the verge of destroying the Grail, which includes an alternate history of Christ that could bring down the church. Whoever is ordering the deaths of the Grail's guardians—modern-day members of an ancient society descended from the famed Knights Templar—must be stopped before the treasure is lost forever. To do so, Langdon and Neveu have to solve a series of ciphers and riddles while evading a tireless French police commander and a ruthless albino monk. Despite being hampered by clunky flashback sequences and place descriptions that read like tourist brochures, the story is full of brain-teasing puzzles and fascinating insights into religious history and art. Ultimately, Brown's intricate plot delivers more satisfying twists than a licorice factory. Copyright 2003 *Booklist Reviews*

Library Journal Review February 2003

Website: <http://www.cahners.com>

Robert Langdon, the Harvard symbologist from Brown's *Angels and Demons*, is back in this amazing sequel. In Paris for a lecture, Langdon is summoned in the middle of the night to meet the head of the French police at the Louvre. The museum's curator has been found dead in a secure section of the gallery, with a message by his body leading to a baffling series of clues hidden in the works of Leonardo da Vinci. In addition, the curator left a specific message to find Langdon. While the police think Langdon is their culprit, he teams up with a French cryptologist to uncover the truth about the hidden messages. The answers lead to discovery of a shocking historical fact, and certain people will do anything to keep it a secret. Brown solidifies his reputation as one of the most skilled thriller writers on the planet with his best book yet, a compelling blend of history and page-turning suspense. This masterpiece should be mandatory reading. Highly recommended for all public libraries. -Jeff Ayers, Seattle P.L.

Kirkus Review January 2003

In an updated quest for the Holy Grail, the narrative pace remains stuck in slo-mo. But is the Grail, in fact, holy? Turns out that's a matter of perspective. If you're a member of that most secret of clandestine societies, the Priory of Sion, you think yes. But if your heart belongs to the Roman Catholic Church, the Grail is more than just unholy, it's downright subversive and terrifying. At least, so the story goes in this latest of Brown's exhaustively researched, underimagined treatise-thrillers (*Deception Point*, 2001, etc.). When Harvard professor of symbolology Robert Langdon—in Paris to deliver a lecture—has his sleep interrupted at two a.m., it's to discover that the police suspect he's a murderer, the victim none other than Jacques Saumière, esteemed curator of the Louvre. The evidence against Langdon could hardly be sketchier, but the cops feel huge pressure to make an arrest. And besides, they don't particularly like Americans. Aided by the murdered man's granddaughter, Langdon flees the flics to trudge the Grail-path along with pretty, persuasive Sophie, who's driven by her own need to find answers. The game now afoot amounts to a scavenger hunt for the scholarly, clues supplied by the late curator, whose intent was to enlighten Sophie and bedevil her enemies. It is not all that easy to identify these enemies.



Book: The Da Vinci Code

Reviews: (Continued)

Are they emissaries from the Vatican, bent on foiling the Grail-seekers? From Opus Dei, the wayward, deeply conservative Catholic offshoot bent on foiling everybody? Or any one of a number of freelancers bent on a multifaceted array of private agendas? For that matter, what exactly is the Priory of Sion? What does it have to do with Leonardo? With Mary Magdalene? With (gulp) Walt Disney? By the time Sophie and Langdon reach home base, everything—well, at least more than enough—has been revealed. Bulky, balky, talky. Copyright *Kirkus* 2003 *Kirkus*/BPI Communications. All rights reserved

Publishers Weekly Review February 2003

Website: <http://www.cahners.com>

What if Jesus Christ had a tryst with Mary Magdalene, and the interlude produced a child? Such a possibility—yielding a so-called royal bloodline—provides the framework for Brown's latest thriller (after *Angels and Demons*), an exhaustively researched page-turner about secret religious societies, ancient coverups and savage vengeance. The action kicks off in modern-day Paris with the murder of the Louvre's chief curator, whose body is found laid out in symbolic repose at the foot of the Mona Lisa. Seizing control of the case are Sophie Neveu, a lovely French police cryptologist, and Harvard symbol expert Robert Langdon, reprising his role from Brown's last book. The two find several puzzling codes at the murder scene, all of which form a treasure map to the fabled Holy Grail, where proof of the Jesus bloodline supposedly can be found. As their search moves from France to England, Neveu and Langdon are confounded by two mysterious groups—the legendary Priory of Sion, a nearly 1,000-year-old secret society whose members have included Botticelli and Isaac Newton, and the conservative Catholic organization Opus Dei. Both have their own reasons for wanting to ensure that the Grail isn't found. Brown sometimes ladles out too much religious history at the expense of pacing, and Langdon is a hero in desperate need of more chutzpah. Still, Brown has assembled a whopper of a plot that will please both conspiracy buffs and thriller addicts. (Mar. 18) Copyright 2003 Cahners Business Information.

Voice of Youth Advocates Review February 2004

When French police discover Harvard professor of symbology Robert Langdon's name hidden in a strange cipher found next to the body of a Louvre museum curator, he becomes their prime suspect for the brutal murder. The only person who believes that Robert is innocent is French cryptologist Sophie Neveu, who helps him escape from the police. While trying to elude capture, the two struggle to unravel the curator's mysterious message, only to find themselves caught between a centuries-old, secret European society and an extremely conservative, controversial branch of the Catholic Church, each of which is determined to possess the curator's secret, even if it means killing Robert and Sophie to get what they want. Brown's best-selling book, which features the hero from his earlier novel, *Angels and Demons* (Pocket Books, 2000), is an absolutely addictive thriller that blends fact and fiction with wonderfully creative results. The fascinating references in the plot to Da Vinci, the Knights Templar, the early history of the Catholic Church, and the Holy Grail might push some teens into researching these topics just to see what, if any, possible real historical basis there might be to Brown's story. Suspense-loving older teens, especially those with an interest in history or art, will definitely find this fast and furiously plotted thriller to be superior reading entertainment. -John Charles 4Q 5P S A/YA Copyright 2004 VOYA Reviews.