

INTRODUCTION

King Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. . . . He was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali and he was filled with wisdom. . . .

—I Kings 7:13-14

You are about to begin an amazing adventure. It is a voyage of intellectual exploration and discovery. It is a chance to time-travel through secret worlds and discover knowledge that has been hidden (in plain sight) from the time of Egyptian pyramid builders to that of America's Founding Fathers—and through to the present day.

You are about to be initiated into the mystery of the most enthusiastically awaited novel of our time, the sequel to Dan Brown's mega-selling, quantum-blockbusting, much-debated, much-discussed 2003 novel, *The Da Vinci Code*.

The sequel—currently believed to be titled *The Solomon Key*—is widely expected to be published sometime in 2006–7. But you don't have to wait until *The Solomon Key* makes its appearance. By reading *Secrets of the Widow's Son*, you can get a jump start on understanding the intellectual substance of this much anticipated Dan Brown novel. Fear not that this book will be a plot spoiler—just the opposite. This book will allow you to enhance your experience, enjoyment, and engagement with *The Solomon Key* when you finally sit down to read it.

In the following pages, David A. Shugarts will take you on a journey into the fertile jungle of myth and mystery, art and archetype, heretics and hieroglyphics, and legend and lore that is the world of Dan

Brown. As your field guide, Shugarts will point out some of the more interesting bits of history, religion, mysticism, science, cosmology, conspiracy theory, occultism, politics, art, and architecture that Brown is likely to weave into the plot of *The Solomon Key*.

We believe that *The Solomon Key* will be to early American history what *The Da Vinci Code* was to early Christian history, engendering similar kinds of controversy. We anticipate that the public response will bring angry denunciations from some quarters and widespread fascination from others. There will be surprising new perspectives, shocking revelations, and energetic searches to separate fact from fiction. This book, *Secrets of the Widow's Son*, prepares you for all of this.

Perhaps you are one of the millions of people (like me) who looked at Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* hundreds of times before 2003 and never saw a woman in it. But then you read *The Da Vinci Code* and, under the influence of Dan Brown's arguments, you suddenly found the person seated to the right of Jesus looking convincingly female. Maybe you've always believed that Mary Magdalene was a repentant prostitute but had never heard that the Vatican itself rejected this case of identity theft in the 1960s and acknowledged that Pope Gregory the Great may have been mistaken fourteen hundred years earlier when he "conflated" the character of Mary Magdalene in the Gospel account with another woman who was a former prostitute. If this is the case, you may not have previously heard the theory suggesting that Mary was not only *not* a prostitute, but that she was possibly married to Jesus, might have been his partner in all things from theology to the marriage bed, and might have escaped from Jerusalem to France with the child of their "royal bloodline." Then you read *The Da Vinci Code* and you suddenly wanted to know if this version of history was fact or fiction, plausible or impossible.

I expect that when you read *The Solomon Key* you will have a similar kind of experience. You will want to know, for example, if what is said about people like George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Paul Revere is true. You will also want to know more about the Masonic involvements of twentieth century political leaders, including the giants

of modern history like Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. You will also be interested to learn about the connections to Freemasonry of many well-known figures from the European Enlightenment that are likely to figure in *The Solomon Key*—people ranging from Mozart to Lafayette and Voltaire.

If you're like me, then despite having a good liberal arts education, you will be surprised to discover that at least eight signers of the Declaration of Independence were Freemasons; that George Washington took his role as a leader of a Masonic lodge very seriously; that Benjamin Franklin and the leading Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire visited the Masonic halls of Paris together; and that a British captain, also a Freemason, released Paul Revere from British custody on the night of his famous ride, after he determined that Revere *himself* was a Mason. You will suddenly wonder why you never realized that the Washington Monument (and a similar monument on Bunker Hill in Boston, and many others elsewhere) was not just coincidentally shaped like an Egyptian obelisk, but was intentionally designed that way to honor Masonic allusions to ancient Egyptian mystical wisdom. You may have heard Mozart's *Magic Flute* many times, but you may never have known that it was written as a Masonic allegory and is filled with Masonic symbolism. You may have read Rudyard Kipling or seen the film version of *The Man Who Would Be King*, but may not have realized that Kipling, too, was a leading Mason and that *The Man Who Would Be King* is also a Masonic allegory.

You may also have seen the 2004 film *National Treasure*. This entertaining and utterly fictional heist film may have stolen a tiny bit of thunder from *The Solomon Key*. It brought into the popular culture a modern-day story that reached back into the time of Benjamin Franklin and depicted some fanciful legends of the Masons and the Knights Templar and their relevance to the Founding Fathers, themes that Dan Brown is likely to explore in *The Solomon Key*. Brown's prior books have been criticized by many for being too unclear in their mix of fact and fiction. *The Solomon Key* will undoubtedly continue Brown's novelistic style of asserting that certain myths, legends, and speculations are

“factual.” But whatever liberties with history Dan Brown takes in his next book—and he certainly will take many—I expect that once *The Solomon Key* is published, we will find that he has explored these issues in considerably greater depth than the filmmakers of *National Treasure* did.

If at least a significant portion of what you will read in *The Solomon Key* is news to you, you will also want to know why you were never taught these things in school! Or why Brown’s version of history isn’t recounted in the recent bestselling biographies of the Founding Fathers by leading scholars. Reading *Secrets of the Widow’s Son* will fill in many of those blanks and help you develop your own ideas about the wide range of issues Dan Brown’s next novel is likely to touch on.

How does David Shugarts know what Dan Brown is going to write about in *The Solomon Key* long before the book is even published?

First, a quick bit of personal history about my involvement with this book. I am the editor of a book called *Secrets of the Code: The Unauthorized Guide to the Mysteries Behind The Da Vinci Code*, which was published in early 2004. That book grew out of my own interest in *The Da Vinci Code*, and my own personal quest to sort out fact from fiction in Dan Brown’s work after my fascinating experience reading the novel. A good indicator of the power of *The Da Vinci Code* phenomenon is that *Secrets of the Code* went on to become a blockbusting *New York Times* bestseller in its own right, spending more than twenty weeks on the *Times* bestseller list in 2004, appearing in roughly two dozen international editions and on at least seven global bestseller lists. We have subsequently created a whole series of “Secrets” books, designed to bring the expertise of leading scholars and thinkers to the subjects touched on by the Dan Brown novels, in a way that allows readers to develop their own informed perspective on fact, fiction, speculation, and meaning in these novels.

When my co-editor, Arne de Keijzer, and I were neck deep in producing *Secrets of the Code*, we asked our good friend Dave Shugarts to look into a rumor we’d heard that there was a code buried in the dust jacket flaps of *The Da Vinci Code*. As you will soon discover, Dave is pretty good when it comes to cracking codes. Indeed, he has found

hidden codes in almost all of Dan Brown's past books, and, in the chapters to come, shares many of the secrets he has uncovered.

Soon after we asked him to decipher this mystery, Dave came back with the report that there was a series of slightly darker, bolded letters within the text of the jacket flaps, and that by stringing the bolded letters together they spelled out the enigmatic question, "*Is there no help for the widow's son?*"

From that unusual phrase, Dave was able to draw dotted lines to the apocryphal book of Enoch, to Mormonism, to many other esoteric and occult bodies of knowledge. But Dave kept coming back to the most persistent connection—to the history of Freemasonry. According to Masonic lore, a character named Hiram Abiff is the founding father of Masonic societies—at least metaphorically speaking. This Hiram, spelled and translated from different ancient languages in different ways, is, at least conceptually, the same Hiram of Tyre who the Bible tells us was a master builder and the man tapped by King Solomon to build the first temple in Jerusalem. And the first thing the Bible tells us about this Hiram is that he was a "widow's son." There are many other linkages and shades of meaning to the phrase *widow's son* in the rich history of Freemasonry.

For *Secrets of the Widow's Son*, Shugarts worked relentlessly, tracking the footprints of where Dan Brown had been in his prior books and clearing the brush to see where he might be going in the future. *Angels & Demons*, an earlier Brown novel, provided some important clues, as we discovered working on *Secrets of Angels & Demons*. *Angels & Demons* was published in 2000 to almost no notice or acclaim, even though it was the novel in which Dan Brown debuted Robert Langdon, the fictional Harvard professor who would go on to become a "symbologist" as the protagonist of *The Da Vinci Code*. After the success of *The Da Vinci Code*, *Angels & Demons* was republished and became a huge bestseller. In all probability, we will be encountering Professor Langdon again as the protagonist of *The Solomon Key*.

The secret society highlighted in *Angels & Demons* is the Illuminati, but in telling the history of this group, Professor Langdon dwells on

the thesis (erroneous, in my view) that the Illuminati took refuge in Freemasonry and evolved into a kind of terrorist wing of the Freemasons. Throughout *Angels & Demons*, Brown tips his hand again and again about his interest in Freemasonry and its connection to the American Revolution. In *Angels & Demons*—and again in *The Da Vinci Code*—Professor Langdon has occasion to tell the story of how certain symbols associated with Illuminati and Masonic history—such as the all-seeing eye and the unfinished pyramid—found their way into the Great Seal of the United States and onto the back of the dollar bill.

As Arne de Keijzer and I were rushing to finalize *Secrets of the Code*, Shugarts kept turning up more and more indications of Dan Brown's interest in the Masonic movement as the great secret society lying at the heart of the American historical experience. Shugarts was equally convinced that the architecture, art, history, and physical layout of Washington, D.C., would provide Langdon with the same kind of mystical, secretive, conspiratorial, heretical, alternative Christian, and occult material as Paris and London had in *The Da Vinci Code* and as Rome had in *Angels & Demons*.

Armed with hundreds of data points to back up his conclusion, Dave Shugarts announced to us one day in early 2004 that “Dan Brown's next novel will probably be about the Freemasons and will probably be set in Washington, D.C.” Shugarts incorporated brief highlights of his theory about Brown's next book in a piece he wrote for *Secrets of the Code*, which was published in April 2004. We then put out a press release in May calling attention to this intriguing analysis he had done. Very shortly thereafter, in one of Dan Brown's only public appearances of 2004, the novelist himself announced that his next book would, indeed, be set against the backdrop of Masonic history and Washington, D.C. Months later, sources at Brown's publisher confirmed this and released the upcoming book's title, *The Solomon Key*.

I have shared that bit of publishing history in order to illustrate Dave Shugarts's uncanny track record. Any interested reader should also read Dave's pieces in both *Secrets of the Code* and *Secrets of Angels &*

Demons. No would-be Brownologist will want to miss all that Shugarts has deciphered and analyzed in those essays.

Shugarts is not a psychic, nor do we have any “inside information” about Dan Brown. All our work is done at arm’s length, independently, unauthorized by Dan Brown or anyone associated with him. Shugarts is a relentless researcher, a dogged investigative reporter, a dedicated code-breaker, and an intellectual detective in the tradition of Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot. After he finished his work for *Secrets of the Code*, he couldn’t stop himself. He wanted to get to the bottom of the “widow’s son” code he had cracked.

Soon after *Secrets of the Code* was published, Shugarts came to a bagel breakfast with Arne de Keijzer and myself and placed on the table between the cream cheese and the bread basket a stack of thick binders reflecting the research he’d done to connect the themes in Dan Brown’s world. Arne and I listened, fascinated, as Dave took us through a blizzard of ideas and names, showing us how Brown moves from one tantalizing concept to the next, jumping like a living Google search from one period of history to another, across intellectual disciplines from art to religion to alchemy, from a conspiracy in modern times to a legend in ancient times, from the Bible to Gnostic texts to the secret documents of Freemasonry. It was a tour de force that left our heads spinning. We urged Dave to flesh out this body of work into something that ordinary readers (like us) could comprehend. When he did, we knew immediately that Dan Brown fans everywhere would want to learn what Dave had uncovered. Thus, this book was born.

For more than a year, Shugarts has been reverse-engineering Dan Brown’s research, going back to all the original sources, generating vast notebooks of clippings and relevant linkages, and drawing up complex data maps of the facts, conspiracies, secret histories, symbols, myths, legends, urban legends, artworks, monuments, city maps, etc., that are associated with the themes Dan Brown has already explored. As it turns out, almost every theory Professor Langdon has in *Angels & Demons* and *The Da Vinci Code* that appears original, intellectually compelling, worth talking about, or downright shocking comes from a multitude of prior

published sources. For example, the idea that Mary Magdalene may have been married to Jesus Christ is an argument that can be found in dozens of books published long before *The Da Vinci Code*. Brown has the unique ability to weave together ideas that are on the fringe and in the public domain and use his storytelling magic to transform them into novels that then occupy the heart of mainstream culture. He will surely practice this magic again with *The Solomon Key*, because when it comes to the Masons—as Shugarts discovered—there are hundreds and hundreds of books that tell every aspect of this fascinating history, even if many of us have managed to live our well-educated lives without ever coming across any of this material.

Dave Shugarts has mined this vast field of literature to find the items that will be most interesting and accessible to a general audience. In doing so, he has done us a great service on at least two counts and turned *Secrets of the Widow's Son* into a marvelous “dual use” book.

Its first use is as a superb speculative preview of Dan Brown's next book. But I would never be so presumptuous as to expect, with certainty, that what appears here will actually show up in *The Solomon Key*. After all, *The Solomon Key* will be a unique creative work of imaginative fiction, and it's possible that Dan Brown will go in a very different direction than what Shugarts anticipates here. Even the title, *The Solomon Key*, could end up being a red herring. Remember Bishop Aringarosa in *The Da Vinci Code*? His name means “red herring” in Italian. And don't forget that Brown and/or his marketers created very realistic faux Web sites for Robert Langdon, the Depository Bank of Zurich, and other fictional characters and entities that appeared in *The Da Vinci Code*.

It is not only possible but *likely* that, even if Brown writes about the concepts sketched out here, he will layer in numerous other ideas and theories that Shugarts either did not have time to explore or lacked space to include here. This will probably work both ways: Shugarts has revealed theories and historical episodes in this book that, by all logic, Dan Brown *should* use in *The Solomon Key* because they fit perfectly with what we presume to be the content of the book. But perhaps even

the magical Dan Brown has not discovered the same material or, for whatever reason, has decided not to use it. Brown has revealed that he usually ends up working in only one-tenth of the interesting details he unearths when he writes a book, so predicting the exact content of *The Solomon Key* is inherently a speculative undertaking. It is also a remote possibility that Brown will change his mind and *not* publish *The Solomon Key* any time soon—or ever. After all, the book is already significantly delayed past initial publishing industry rumors and expectations.

The material Dave Shugarts has highlighted in this book is material you will find eye-opening and thought-provoking even in the absence of Dan Brown's next book. The second way of reading *Secrets of the Widow's Son* is to realize that it is a book about American history discussed in a way you've never heard before. Even if Shugarts is wrong about some of the topics discussed in Dan Brown's next book, I expect readers will still find their time reading *Secrets of the Widow's Son* well spent.

A final context-setting thought about *The Solomon Key* and the larger picture of where the "oeuvre" of Dan Brown may be going in the future. It appears Brown has read and studied a variety of occult theories of Western cultural history and become fascinated with the story line this alternative version of history tells: It starts back in cave-dwelling times with the prominence of the "sacred feminine" and goddess/fertility cults as the inspiration for the earliest religious and artistic ideas. It comes forward in time through ancient Egypt, where pyramid builders and goddess cult followers acquired secret knowledge of monument building and magic. It moves through Greece, Crete, and other eastern Mediterranean cultures, including the earliest forms of Judaism, constantly combining the engineering skills of the day (the ability to construct great pyramids, temples, and cathedrals), with emphasis on goddess worship, religious mysteries, specialized bodies of occult, mathematical, and magical knowledge, and occasional ecstatic sexual rites as forms of religious devotion.

The thread is then picked up by Jesus (whom Dan Brown has called "the original feminist"), Mary Magdalene, and certain Gnostic circles

among early Christians. Some Romans conflate aspects of their pagan beliefs with these new Christian beliefs. The Knights Templar come next, combining the secret knowledge and relics they found during their occupation of the Temple of Solomon during the Crusades, with their role as builders and organizers who extend their secret society throughout Europe in what some have termed the “world’s first multinational corporation.” After the defeat and massacre of the Templars come all the splinter groups and new secret societies, from Freemasons to Illuminati, from Rosicrucians to alchemists, all allegedly carrying forward elements of the ancient traditions. These beliefs are in contradistinction to the corruption and dogmatic intellectual hegemony of the Church in Europe. Squeezing through this twenty-thousand-year historical tunnel of secrecy, these old ideas become new again when they finally emerge into the light of day during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, reaching their high tide with the American and French revolutions and the victory of democracy over feudalism; science and free thought over religious dogma.

The Solomon Key will be crafted into this context. Even after *The Solomon Key*, it is a reasonably safe prediction that Dan Brown’s next book will be set against some part of this story line as well. And his next book, and his next book after that. Like J. K. Rowling’s equally blockbusting Harry Potter series, Dan Brown’s Robert Langdon series draws from the deepest wellsprings of Jungian archetypes and Joseph Campbell’s collection of universal myths, weaving this material seamlessly into thoroughly modern, easy-to-read action/adventure stories whose pacing is reminiscent of Indiana Jones or the novels of Robert Ludlum. The dark secrets of this version of history—the cover-ups and conspiracies, the buried treasure and relics, the religious beliefs and practices, the signs, symbols, and artworks lying at the very foundations of the human experience—all will provide Professor Langdon more than enough material to keep his symbological decoding practice going through many mysteries and many more books.

To me, the truly interesting question remains not so much whether Dan Brown is “right” or “wrong” (he is writing *fiction*, after all), but

what it is about our contemporary culture, as well as our human psyche, that makes us so interested and drawn to these particular ideas. Moreover, why is it that in our well-educated, sophisticated, information-intensive times, we know so little about some of these historical matters in which Brown either is demonstrably right or at least elicits valid and incredibly thought-provoking speculation?

As I said at the outset of this introduction, this book is not intended to be a plot spoiler. Instead, it is intended to help the ordinary reader participate at a more engaged level in the extraordinary conversation that Dan Brown's books have invited us to have: about American history and our Founding Fathers; about the intellectual origins of Enlightenment philosophy, Christianity, the sacred feminine, the hidden meanings of symbols in our everyday lives; about mystical knowledge, cosmology, the debate between science and religion, and, ultimately, about the meaning and purpose of life itself.

That's a pretty good set of issues for our culture to tackle at this moment in time. Armed with *Secrets of the Widow's Son*, you will be all the more prepared to join that conversation.

—Dan Burstein
June 2005