

Q&A DAN BROWN – edited questions

- 1. Art history has been crucial to many of your novels, with famous paintings playing key roles. Which Modern Art paintings or artists should readers study to prepare for your new novel?**

I'd prefer to preserve the mystery by withholding the names of any *specific* paintings, but I will tell you that Langdon is a great admirer of Modernists Gauguin and Picasso. In this novel, as he moved into the world of Contemporary Art, Langdon must come down from his ivory tower, set aside his classical predilections, and navigate a landscape of avant-garde works that challenge his very definition of art.

- 2. You once gave the writing advice: “Create something and throw it out before anyone can see it. Repeat the process until you create something you can’t bear to throw out.” Is throwing out drafts part of your writing process? Have you ever thrown out a whole novel?**

I've heard that some writers “get it right the first time,” but I am definitely not one of them. For every page printed in my novels, I have invariably written at least ten that are discarded. When I speak to aspiring writers, I try to share with them my belief that the single most important skill they can learn as a writer is that of *separation* – that is, being able to read their own work as an “outsider” and ruthlessly delete anything that does not serve their story. I have never thrown out an *entire* novel, but I once had a computer crash that deleted the first one-third of *Angels & Demons* back in 1998. That was a very hard day for me. Ironically, when I finally gathered myself and went back to rewrite the novel, the story evolved into something better. And yes, I now back up on multiple machines.

- 3. Your books are dense with information about history, art, and conspiracy theories, not to mention always set in culturally rich cities. Can you describe your research process and how research fits into your book-writing process?**

For me, research always begins with reading – gathering ideas from history books, newspaper articles, websites, and beyond. Once I've read enough to choose a topic for a novel, the next wave of research is done in person – interviewing historians, visiting possible locations, and gathering the details that I'll need to write the book. The research process is great fun but also very time-consuming, and I always end up with far more information than I could ever use in a novel. For that reason, researching and writing an informative yet compact thriller always feels a bit to me like making maple sugar candy: First you have to tap hundreds of trees, and then you must boil down the sap until you've distilled a bite-sized nugget that encapsulates its essence.

- 4. For readers (particularly young readers) interested in the fascinating aspects of art history, conspiracy theories, and secret history that fill your novels, where would you suggest they go to learn more?**

My original interest in secret history sparked while 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 private clubs, fraternities, and secrecy. For young readers interested in learning more about secret history, I recommend they begin with Manly P. Hall's “*The Secret Teachings of All Ages*” – a beautifully illustrated book packed with codes, mysteries, and lost history.

**5. What were your favorite books growing up?**

I was a huge fan of Madeleine L'Engle. Her *A Wrinkle In Time* remains one of my all-time favorite books. I also loved the Hardy Boys mysteries along with the stories of E.B. White, Roald Dahl, and Mark Twain.

**6. Your books are filled with puzzles and codes for readers to solve. What is your favorite real-life puzzle or code that you haven't managed to crack yet?**

I've always been captivated by the Voynich Manuscript – the mysterious, 15<sup>th</sup> century, encrypted codex that still baffles cryptologists, linguists, and historians. The illustrated manuscript was just re-published in a spectacular new edition, actually, and I've spent a lot of time studying the text, images, and diagrams. Sadly, I've come no closer to deciphering the document's meaning and purpose. I really hope someone can crack it in my lifetime.

**7. Your books have been described as riveting thrillers that are difficult to put down. Do you set out to write page-turners?**

Yes, I work hard to construct fast-paced stories with lots of suspense. For me, the goal is always to create a plot with just the right blend of surprising facts, exotic locales, cliff-hanging intrigue. When I hear that a reader can't put down my book, I know I've done my job.

**8. History is clearly something that you are passionate about. What is it about understanding global history and stories that you find so compelling?**

For me, the single most compelling aspect of history is that history is not always as accurate as we might believe. Throughout the ages, our trusted tales of "what happened" have always come from the same source – the winners. In other words, when cultures clash, the surviving people decide how their story will be told. For this reason, I am passionate about examining hidden histories and secret documents in an effort to unearth alternate viewpoints, lost facts, and new ways to interpret the stories we've all believed since childhood.

**9. Did you always want to be a writer?**

I've always loved writing. When I was five years old, my mom helped me write and publish my first book. I dictated, she transcribed, and we did a print run of one copy with a cardboard cover and a two-hole punch binding. The book was titled: "The Giraffe, The Pig, and the Pants On Fire!" I still have it today.

**10. Back in the 1990s, before you were a household name, you would write to individual readers personally. The author-reader relationship has obviously evolved since then. Do you miss those days?**

I do miss the days of interacting personally with readers. I think it's because I spent so many years as a teacher and loved that face-to-face process. Writing is a solitary journey, and so I am always excited to go out on book tour and meet readers one-on-one. I learn so much by listening to the questions they ask.