THE DOLLAR CODE

Our usual columnist is off reading the latest blockbuster, so we asked *The Da Vinci Code* and *Inferno* author Dan Brown to fill in. But we couldn't afford him…

Words: **Andrew Sawers**

CHAPTER 56

Robert Langdon, the world's leading symbologist, art historian, author and solver of mysterious mysteries, found himself in the offices of his New York City publishing company. Soon, he was shaking hands with the company official who used words and symbols that few could comprehend, but who spoke in a language that everyone understood. *The language of money.*

"Here you are," said the treasurer. The treasurer gave Langdon a mysterious slip of paper, covered in codes and symbols. Langdon immediately noticed a string of numbers – 0 to 9, arranged in a seemingly random order. Or was it?

The first number was a 1 – unity, the singleton, representing uniqueness and a number with unique mathematical properties. Next to it was a zero. Invented by Persians in the 10th century, it meant everything – and yet nothing. As if taunting Langdon with its secret code, the number was also known in ancient times as *a cipher*.

The 2 that followed clearly meant duality. Pairs of opposites. Good versus evil. Debit versus credit, as no less than Luca Pacioli, the 15th-century Venetian inventor of accounting, might have said. The 3 that came next was an

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obvious reference to the trinity and the Egyptian pyramids, but the 2 and the 3 were then followed by a 5. Was this some sort of truncated Fibonacci sequence, a pattern that occurs naturally in nature and is at the heart of the Golden Ratio, used to such effective effect by none less than Leonardo da Vinci himself?

The 7 and the 9 held no mystery for Langdon. He had often lectured for an entire term at Harvard about just the numbers 7 and 9. Then

there was a 4 – *the squarest of numbers!* Equal to two by two, it lent its name to the quadrant – the most powerful tool deployed by management consultants the world over.

The next number, 8, Langdon knew is widely regarded in Eastern cultures as lucky. Not so for convicted rogue trader Nick Leeson whose attempts to masquerade his illicit deals in a Singapore account numbered 88888 met with desperate failure – with ramifications the world still struggled to grasp.

Then a 6. 'Six sigma' is the heart of the industrial drive for perfection. Was this piece of paper aiming to be 99.99966% perfect? If so, that laudable intent was spoiled by the presence of two commas and a dot nestling among the string of numbers.

And in front of the numbers, another symbol, one that needed no decoding. A symbol understood the world over. The universal symbol of wealth – and power. *The dollar sign!*

Langdon tried to make sense of the coded sequence:

$10,235,794.86. What did it mean? The treasurer sensed his unease. "It's your royalty cheque for last month," said the treasurer. Given that tiny clue, Langdon immediately realised: he now had to cross the road and penetrate a secretive organisation – one that dares to operate in broad daylight. *The bank.*

Timing was essential. He had to enter the bank precisely between 9.30am and 3.30pm. One minute too soon, and he would be left vulnerable and exposed on the sidewalk, holding his cheque. A single minute too late, and he would not be able to venture into the bank's inner sanctum – not until *the next working day…* ◊

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