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**Word Games in Dan Brown’s novel: *Origin***

*Origin* is Dan Brown’s latest book that was first published on October 3rd, 2017. In this book, just like his others, Dan Brown uses word games to help the protagonists, Robert Langdon and Ambra Vidal, on their quest. Futurist Edmond Kirsch is killed just as he is about to make an announcement about his great discovery that he claimed would ‘change the face of science forever’ (Dan Brown, *Origin,* First Edition, XIV, 72). Robert and Ambra go on a quest to find out more about this discovery and make it known to the world in honor of Edmond. To do this, they have to figure out a few word games that lead them to their final destination.

The first word game is one that Robert encounters before he meets Ambra and is actually given to him by Edmond Kirsch himself. Kirsch had been a student in Robert’s First Year Seminar class and both of them had a really close bond. Kirsch wanted to meet with Robert after the presentation to talk in private, and thus he gave him a business card with ‘BIO-EC346’ (O, IX, 57) scribbled on the back. He asked Robert to give it to any local driver and they would know where to take him. Robert seemed dubious of the fact that a taxi driver could decipher the code, and Edmond tells him that ‘It’s a painfully simple code’ (O, IX, 57).

Edmond’s presentation was taking place in the [Guggenheim Museum Bilbao](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guggenheim_Museum_Bilbao). Edmond was about to make the announcement as per –

‘Where do we come from?

Where are we going?’ (O, XVII, 87).

It was mainly answering our question ‘about our *origin* and our *destiny*.’ (O, XVII, 87).

As he was about to release his findings, Edward was shot in the forehead and killed right then and there. Ambra Vidal, the director of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, and was hosting Edmond Kirsch’s event. Ambra was engaged to Prince Julián of the Royal Palace and thus the event was being monitored by two agents of the [Guardia Real](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Royal_Guard). When the gunshot went off, the agents rushed to make sure that the to be queen was safe. This is the moment when Robert met Ambra as Winston[[1]](#endnote-1) had tried to warn Robert about the happenings, and so he had tried to rush to Ambra, but was unfortunately late.

Robert and Ambra reach the conclusion that they need to escape from the Museum so that they are able to help Edmond by releasing his findings. Ambra tells Langdon about a conversation she had with Edmond a couple of days ago. Edmond told her how once he was on stage, he would be the one to activate the presentation. He would do it by using his phone. He would dial into his ‘remote server on an encrypted connection’ (O, XXVII, 128) and then put in his forty-seven-character password that would then live-stream his discovery to the theater there and simultaneously to the whole world. He also told her that the password was his favorite line of poetry which was ‘about the future’ (O, XXVII, 129).

On hearing what Ambra had to say, Robert went over to Edmond’s body and pretended to pray so that he could fool the agents and thus take his ‘oversized turquoise phone’ (O, XXVII, 126). He permanently unlocked the phone using Edmond’s fingerprint and pocketed the phone. After taking the phone, Robert and Ambra, with Winston’s help, escape from the museum. They decided to go to Edmond’s home in Barcelona as Winston told them that Edmond might have a book with his favorite poem somewhere in his house. Winston asked them to proceed towards the river from where he could facilitate transportation to the location discussed in ‘BIO-EC346’. When Robert had deciphered the code, he had realized that ‘*BIO-EC346* was not some secret science club at all. It was something far more mundane.’ (O, XXVIII, 135). ‘BIO was indeed a code – although it was no more difficult to decipher than the similar codes from around the world: BOS, LAX, JFK’ (O, XXXII, 147). BIO was the code for the local airport. After that, the rest of the code was not difficult to decipher at all. It was the number was Edmond’s private jet.

The water taxi Robert and Ambra took from outside the Guggenheim, left them a few miles away from the airport. They walked towards Edmond’s jet, which would take them to Barcelona. At Edmond’s house in Barcelona, they were going through his collection of books to look for a poem that might satisfy the criteria for the password. While doing that, Langdon came across a box engraved with ‘The Complete Works of William Blake’. That is when it struck Langdon that ‘*Blake was not only an artist and illustrator…Blake was a prolific poet’.* (O, LIX, 267). He then recalled that Edmond that the line of poetry was a prophecy and he ‘knew of no poet history who could be considered more of a prophet that William Blake’ (O, LIX, 267). Langdon tried to open the cabinet, but it was locked. Langdon smashed the glass only to see that the book was not inside. Instead he found a card in it.

That was when the Guardia guards reached Edmond’s house in the helicopter. They were forced to board that helicopter before anyone got killed. On the helicopter, Robert tells Ambra that he found their ‘mysterious poet’ (O, LXI, 276). He then showed her the card he found in the cabinet. It said that the book was given on loan to the [*La Basîlica De La Sagrada Famîlia.*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sagrada_Fam%C3%ADlia)After seeing that, Ambra ordered Agent Fonseca to take them to the Sagrada Família. At the Sagrada Família they were told by Father Bena that Edmond wanted the book to be open to a specific page, Page 163. On asking which poem was on that page, father told them that there was no poem but an illustration on that page. Langdon was confused as they needed a ‘forty-seven letter line of poetry – not an illustration’ (O, LXIX, 306).

It was then that Ambra suggested how it was a ‘clever decoy’. She explained how ‘Edmond chose page one sixty-three because it’s impossible to display the page without simultaneously displaying the page next to it – page one sixty-two’ (O, LXX, 314). Robert and Ambra read the poem on the page. It was headed ‘*The Four Zoars*’. ‘Seeing the words, Langdon instantly felt a ray of hope. *The Four Zoars* was the title of Blake’s best-known prophetic poem’ (O, LXXIII, 323). While they were going through each and every line of the poem, Langdon flashed through what his professor had told him when they had finished the class on “The Four Zoars.” He had said ‘*Which would you choose? A world without religion? Or a world without science? Clearly, William Blake had a preference, and nowhere is his hope for the future better summarized than in the final line of this epic poem.*’ (O, LXXIII, 324).

Thus, they skipped to the last line of the poem that read, “*The dark religions are departed & sweet science reigns*” (O, LXXIII, 324). This line “was essentially a synopsis of his presentation earlier tonight. *Religions will fade…and science will rule.”* (O, LXXIII, 324). However, when Ambra counted the letters in the line of poetry, she found that it was only 46 letters and not 47 letters. Langdon took a closer look at the line and figured it out at once. It was ‘a code within a code’. It was the *ampersand code*. “The symbol & was a *logogram* – literally a picture representing a word. While many people assumed the symbol derived from the English word ‘and’, it actually derived from the Latin word ‘et’. The ampersand’s unusual design ‘&’ was a typographical fusion of the letters E and T’.” (O, LXXIII, 325). After that, they replaced the & symbol with ‘et’ and thus the line read as follows: “*thedarkreligionsaredepartedetsweetsciencereigns*” (O, LXXIII, 326).

This is how Robert and Ambra figured out the forty-seven-letter password that would enable them to release Edmond Kirsch’s findings to the entire world, and thus fulfill their whole quest. Thus, they went to Edmond’s computing lab and through Winston, released Edmond’s discovery to the whole world.

The use of word games in his novels is a very typical theme of Dan Brown’s. He uses word games in all his novels starring Robert Langdon as one of the main protagonist. All these word games create a pathway that helps the protagonists to reach their final destination. In *The Da Vinci Code[[2]](#endnote-2)* , the curator of the Louvre, Jacques Saunière had been killed and they had found Robert’s name in his daily planner. We later find out that Saunière had left a set of word games to be solved by Sophie Neveu, his granddaughter and Robert which would lead them to the quest of the grail. ‘Most of all *The Da Vinci Code* is about the history of encryption – the many methodology developed over time to keep private information from prying eyes’ (Burnstein, 203)[[3]](#endnote-3). As Michelle Delio says, “Where *The Da Vinci Code* does shine – brilliantly – is in its exploration of cryptology, particularly the encoding methods developed by Leonardo da Vinci, whose art and manuscripts are packed with mystifying symbolism a quirky codes” (Burnstein, 203).

The word game in *Angels and Demons[[4]](#endnote-4)* is used to help Langdon and Vittoria locate the churches that the missing cardinals would be killed in. And in *Inferno[[5]](#endnote-5)* the word games are used by the protagonists to find where a powerful virus is hidden so that they can find it in time and diffuse it before it is released into the entire city. In *The Lost Symbol[[6]](#endnote-6),* Langdon uses word games “in an effort to save his friend, Peter Solomon, a [33rd-degree Mason](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Rite).” It is “one gigantic puzzle” (Beyer, 10). One of the other main goals of the protagonists in the novel is to find the Masonic Pyramid. Thus, *The Lost Symbol* is its own quest, a journey in search of something lost, the discovery of which should illuminate the finder and provide entry into an exclusive esoteric group to whom the World has been revealed (Beyer, 14).

Similarly, in *Origin* the protagonists Robert Langdon and Ambra Vidal decipher the word games and follow the clues that leads them to finding the forty-seven-letter password and thus release Edmond Kirsch’s presentation to the entire world as an honor to him after his death.

In his novels, Dan Brown uses different word games each time. He never repeats a word game in two novels, or even in the same novel. For example, in *The Da Vinci Code,* during his last minutes, Saunière wrote down a few word games so that the secret of the Holy Grail is not lost forever. The first code we come across is one that Saunière wrote using a “STYLO DE LUMIERE NOIRE” (Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, Third edition, VI, 60). It was a marker used “to place invisible marks on items” (DVC, VI, 60). The writing said the following thing:

“13-3-2-21-2-2-8-5

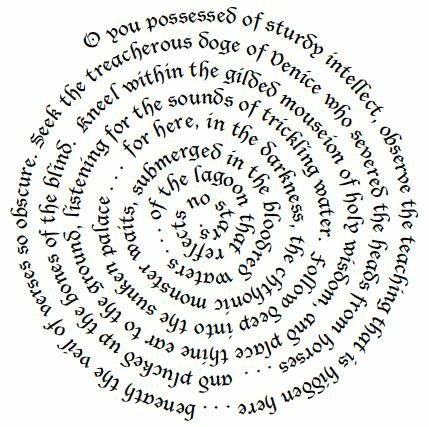
O, Draconian devil!

Oh, lame saint!” (DVC, VIII, 65)

Sophie Neveu, points out that the numbers are in a random order which when arranged in ascending order made the [Fibonacci Sequence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fibonacci_number). *The Da Vinci Code* is the only novel in which Dan Brown mentions the Fibonacci Sequence.

In *Angels and Demons*, a physicist, Leonardo Vetra, of CERN[[7]](#endnote-7) is murdered and his chest is branded with the symbol of a group called Illuminati. “Ancient documents described the symbol as an *ambigram --- ambi* meaning ‘both’ --- signifying it was legible *both* ways” (Dan Brown, *Angels and Demons,* 2006 edition, IX, 39). Similarly, the poem used to reach their final destination, was in the form of Iambic Pentameter. The “Iambic pentameter was a symmetrical meter based on the secret Illuminati numbers of 5 and 2” (AD, LIV, 272). Ambigrams and Iambic Pentameter are only mentioned in *Angels and Demons.*

In *Inferno,* on finding Dante’s death mask, they find another word game that just said ‘*PPPPPPP’.* Robert recognized that as a message and knew that Zobrist wanted them to wipe the letters off the forehead “as a means of moving forward to paradise.” On doing that, he found another poem that was in the form of a spiral called the “[*Symmetrical clockwise Archimedean*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archimedean_spiral)*”* (Dan Brown, Inferno, First edition, LVIII, 254).



[[8]](#endnote-8)

Just like the other books, the Archimedean spiral is exclusive to only *Inferno* and does not come up in any of the other books written by Dan Brown.

In *The Lost Symbol*, ‘Langdon finds on the unfinished stone pyramid in SBB13 a four-by-four set of sixteen symbols. The symbols are illustrated twice more for a total of three times until he provides the Freemason Cipher that helps him decode it. The Freemason Cipher appears only in *The Lost Symbol* among the books written by Dan Brown.

Similarly, in *Origin*, it is for the first time that Dan Brown introduces the idea of a password as long as forty-seven letters. Another feature unique to only *Origin* would be the ampersand. Therefore, we see that in each and every of his books, Dan Brown uses a different word game every time.

It can be said that all of Dan Brown’s novels have two or more word games, except *Angels and Demons* which has only one word game in the entire novel. This is a novel that focuses on the conflict between science and religion. Therefore, there are more elements of science in this novel than word games and codes. The word game in *Angels and Demons,* creates a sense of suspense and keeps the book from being monotonous. The repetition of the same poem throughout the novel creates a sense of importance around the entire word game. It leaves the reader fascinated as to how the entire novel revolved around only a single word game. All the books after *Angels and Demons* had a good number of word games and puzzles, especially *The Lost Symbol* which was almost wholly based on word games. However, in *Origin,* one again saw a decline in the number of word games. In *Origin*, there were only two main word games around which the entire plot of the book revolved. This just results in an increased focus on those two word games as compared to the other novels with a large number of word games in them.

Another thing common to all the Dan Brown novels with respect to word games is the fact that the word games usually act as pointers for the protagonists. By this I mean that the once deciphered, the word games provide the protagonists with a clue as to where their next stop should be so as to help them reach their final destination and fulfill the objective of their whole quest.

In *The Da Vinci Code,* the code“In London Lies a Knight A Pope Interred” (DVC, LXXVIII, 427). On decoding that and running some searches so as to gain some help as to where to go, Langdon realized that the name of the pope was Alexander Pope and that the text actually meant, “In London lies a knight A. Pope interred” (DVC, XCV, 512). Thus this word game led them to London to the tomb of knight A. Pope.

In *Angels and Demons,* the following poem is the only word game in the novel.

“*From Santi’s earthly tomb with Demon’s hole,*

*’Cross Rome the mystic elements unfold.*

*The path of light is laid, the sacred test,*

*Let angels guide you on your lofty quest” (AD, LV, 277).*

From this poem, Vittoria and Langdon find the first marker where the killer killed one Cardinal. From the first marker, they followed the various signs to find the other markers and eventually find the *Church of Illumination.*

In *Inferno*, the first word game we come across is in the edited version of Botticelli’s *Map of Hell*, that they see through the Faraday pointer. This word game that we come across is an anagram. The scrambled letters were “CATROVACER” (I, XV, 66). These letters were found in the different layers of hell, and were not present in the original painting. Another edit that Langdon came across was a poem written along the border was a poem in Italian that said “*la verità è visible solo attraverso gli occhi della morte”* (I, XV, 66). This when translated to English meant, “The truth can be glimpsed only through the eyes of death” (I, XV, 66). Robert then figures out that the word ‘CATROVACER’ was an anagram for *‘Cerca Trova’*, meaning ‘seek and ye shall find’. This then led them to Palazzo Vecchio where hung Giorgo Vasari’s *Battaglia di Marciano.*

Similarly, in Origin the code ‘BIO-EC346’ leads them to the airport where Edmond Kirsch’s private jet takes them to his home in Barcelona where they continued their quest of releasing Edmond’s discovery.

Therefore, we see that Dan Brown gives a significant amount of importance to word games in all the novels in the Robert Langdon series. In every book, the protagonists of the books, Robert Langdon and his newest companion, use the word games to help them reach their final destination and therefore find what they’ve been looking for. The word games also provide an air of mysteriousness and suspense around the whole plot of the book. It plays a vital role in keeping the reader interested in what’s happening in the book and eager to reach the end of the book to figure out the twist in the novel. The word games could also be seen as a test to the skills and intuition of the protagonists.

1. Winston is a ‘synthetic docent’ (O, VIII, 46) with a human voice. He is a type of technology that Edmond had created over quite a few years of research. He had been communicating with Robert and giving him a tour of the museum via a wireless headpiece. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Dan Brown, The Da Vinci Code. (Doubleday: 2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Dan Burnstein, Secrets of the Code: The Unauthorized Guide to the Mysteries Behind the Da Vinci Code. (Squibnocket Partners: 2006). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Dan Brown, Angels and Demons (Pocket Books: 2000). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Dan Brown, Inferno (Doubleday: 2013) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Dan Brown, The Lost Symbol (Doubleday, 2009) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. European Organization for Nuclear Research [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. (I, LVIAII, 255). This is the poem they found on the back of the Dante’s death mask in the form of a symmetrical clockwise Archimedean spiral. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)