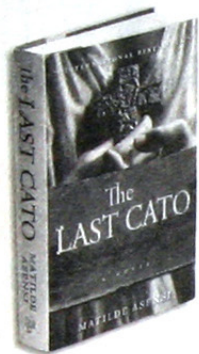


Books

Trail blazed by 'Da Vinci' shows no signs of cooling

Five novels — four already international best sellers — are enjoying the revival of the religious-thriller genre, thanks to the phenomenal success of *The Da Vinci Code*. USA TODAY's **Carol Memmott** looks at the books' *Code*-like appeal:



The Last Cato
By Matilde Asensi
(Rayo, \$24.95, in stores April 4)

Asensi, who lives in Spain, has already published a handful of best sellers in Spain. This is her first to be translated into English.

The hook: An unidentified Ethiopian is found murdered, his body covered with ritualistic tattoos — seven letters and seven crosses. Sister Ottavia Salina, paleographer and head of the Vatican's Secret Archive, is called in to help identify the tattoos' meaning. She joins forces with Capt. Kaspar Glauser-Roist of the Swiss Guard and Egyptian archaeologist



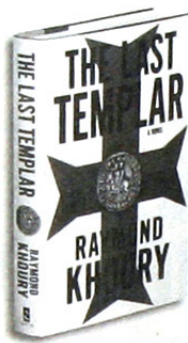
By Teresa Ricart

Asensi: Clues are found in Dante.

Farang Boswell in a search to discover who is stealing pieces of the True Cross on which Jesus died.

What Code fans will like: International travel, puzzles, secret societies and historical treasures. Asensi hides clues to the trio's quest for the True Cross in Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

The places you'll go: Alexandria, Istanbul, Rome, Antioch, Sicily and Jerusalem.



The Last Templar
By Raymond Khoury
(Dutton, \$24.95)

Published in 30 languages; best seller in Great Britain last year. A best seller in the USA since its publication in February.

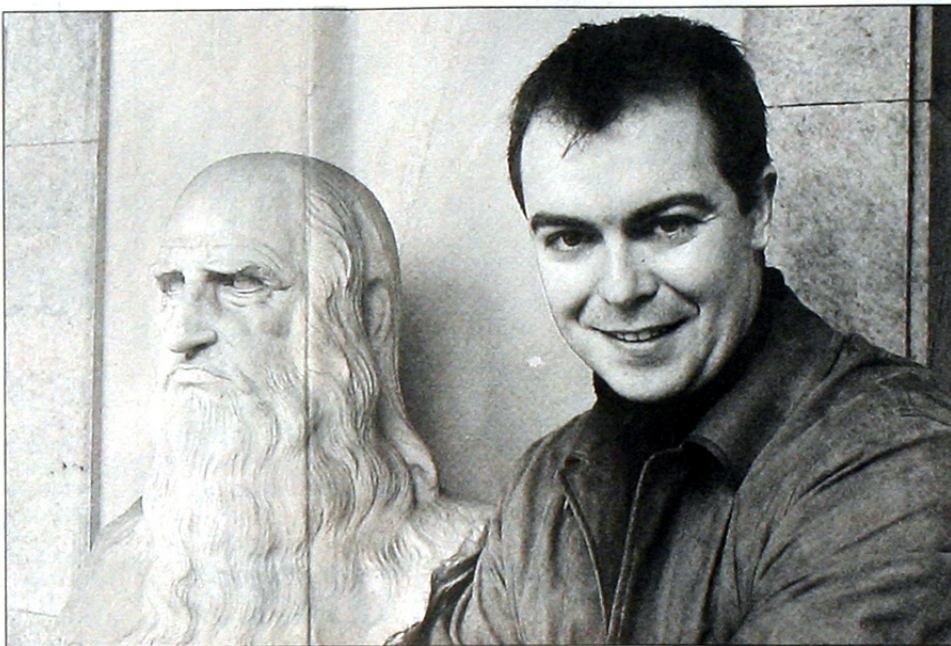
The hook: Four horsemen dressed as Templar knights gallop into the Metropolitan Museum of Art and steal an arcane encoding machine. The theft is witnessed by archaeologist Tess Chaykin, who teams up with anti-terror specialist Sean Reilly to chase down the thieves and the ruthless killers bent on recovering the Templars' secrets about Jesus.

What Code fans will like: Searches for ancient manuscripts and discussions of biblical inconsistencies. Car chases and murders intertwined with Templar history, and theories about Jesus' bloodline.

The places you'll go: New York, the Vatican, Istanbul



Khoury: Cryptograms to solve.



By Eva Pastor

Sierra: The author, joining his pal Leonardo, wrote *The Secret Supper* before Dan Brown wrote his *Code*.

The Secret Supper
By Javier Sierra
(Atria, \$25.95)

A best seller in Spain and Italy. **The hook:** In the 15th century, Father Agostino Layre, cryptographer and expert theologian, is sent to Milan by the Vatican to spy on Leonardo da Vinci and to determine whether heretical messages are encrypted in his current artistic endeavor, *The Last Supper*.

What Code fans will like: Fictional portrayal of Leonardo as he's working on *The Last Supper* at Santa Maria delle Graie in Milan, and Sierra's imagining of how and why Leonardo may have chosen the faces he did to portray the apostles.

The places you'll go: Milan and Rome



Labyrinth
By Kate Mosse
(Putnam, \$25.95)

Already a best seller in parts of Europe, New Zealand, Australia and Canada.

The hook: The protagonists, Alice and Alais, are separated by 800 years. Alice discovers a hidden cave on an archaeological dig in France. In it are two skeletons and a ring with a labyrinth design and a leather packet of mysterious writings. Alais, her 13th-century counterpart, is asked by her father to hide a book of cryptic writings he says holds one of the secrets of the true Grail.

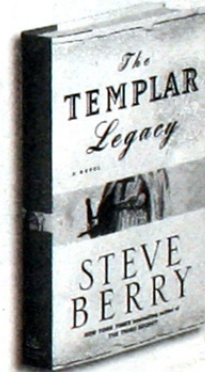
What Code fans will like: It's another Holy Grail adventure but with a twist. Mosse's grail predates the Christian one, finding its roots in ancient Egypt.

The places you'll go: Southwest France



By Roderick Field

Mosse: Ancient Egypt plays a role.



The Templar Legacy
By Steve Berry
(Random House, \$24.95)

This American's fourth novel is sitting high on best-seller lists.

The hook: Cotton Malone, a former U.S. Justice Department operative, now antiquarian book dealer, gets mixed up in a race to locate the hidden treasures and secrets of the Knights Templar, the "spiritualized special forces unit." Legend has it that for centuries the Knights hid secret knowledge on Jesus' death and resurrection.

What Code fans will like: Car chases, gunfights, fisticuffs as Malone tries to stay one step ahead of rogue Templar knights. Lots of cryptograms and anagrams to solve, as well as conspiracy theories to debate.

The places you'll go: Denmark, Southern France



By Joel Silverman

Berry: Car chases and Gnosticism.