As it says on the back cover, this book is intended to be a reference for Dan Brown's fictional book, *The Lost Symbol* (2009). John Michael Greer is one of many authors that have attempted to give the reader some reasonable understanding of the historical basis underlying the novel. There are quite a few entries, and it is not hard to understand why unfamiliar subjects could confuse some readers. Keeping in mind the numerous entries, one can easily appreciate the need for a reference guide to Dan Brown's novel.

Entries such as “Abramelin, the Mage,” “The Sacred Magic of ‘Boaz’” “Hermes Trismegistus,” “Jachin,” “octateuon,” “Philosopher’s Stone,” “quadrivium,” and “Zohar” are words that are not used in everyday conversations. Instead, they are specialized terms for arcane, esoteric subjects that the average reader of a fictional novel might not be familiar with. In addition, many readers might not realize that these words have real meanings, symbolic and otherwise, and weren't created simply for the purpose of sounding mysterious. The roots of some of these words might be familiar, such as “quadra-” as four, “octa-” as eight, and “tri-” as three. However, the rest of the word phrase is not likely to mean anything to a lay reader. So it is possible that some readers might inadvertently think that these words were created by the author. For example, J.K. Rowling, the author of the famous Harry Potter book series, mentions the “Philosopher’s Stone” in her books. However, the “Philosopher’s Stone” is not something that Rowling created out of thin air. Although *Secrets of the Lost Symbol* provides a reference that is similar to Rowling's use of the word, the book places the term within historical and sociocultural context. By offering readers a better understanding of the history of alchemy, a precursor of modern chemistry, this particular entry explains how alchemy relates to Western history. As a result, readers' knowledge base expands, allowing them to see how the introduction of a “Philosopher's Stone” furthers the plot in fiction.

Words such as “Astrology,” “Cabal,” “Crowley, Aleister,” “Freemasonry,” “Plato,” “lamp,” “Temple of Solomon,” and “three” are much more likely to be phrases or words that are used on a daily basis. Often, people formulate their own definitions when they hear the
symbolic history that is not often realized in today's world. Thus, Secrets of the Lost Symbol informs readers that not everything is as straightforward as it might appear.

There may be an additional benefit to having read Greer's book without having read The Lost Symbol. I found myself understanding other terms that I read about or saw that was unrelated to Brown's novel. For example, two particular entries, “Boaz” and “Jachin,” discussed pillars. At first, the entries were unclear to me until I realized that these terms were referring to Tarot cards. On some Tarot cards, there are two pillars of different colors, one black, and the other white. For the first time, I understood their symbolic meaning, which I had not fully understood before. Another definition that I found helpful was the entry for “Crowley, Aleister.” Much has been said about Aleister Crowley. However, to his credit, Greer presented a brief and unbiased biographical entry about him, whereas other writers provide opinionated, and often negative, accounts regarding Crowley's personality or specific works. Secrets of the Lost Symbol is an easy to understand reference to occult, mystical, and historical terms or phrases that you may have heard before, but have been either afraid to ask or lacked access to an easy to understand definition to satisfy your curiosity. In addition, the book does not specifically reference Dan Brown's use of the entries, which makes Secrets of the Lost Symbol a suitable book for understanding these concepts aside from a specific literary use. It is purely a reference book that does not support or decry the subjects contained within it. The definitions are neutral to any specific religious viewpoint, and they summarize concepts that could be hard to describe to people who are not well versed in the study of esoteric topics or the history of the development of Western magical tradition.

Some of the best fiction contains some basis of reality. For example, writers will discuss the physical environment as recorded by witnesses or archaeological evidence, current events, history, people's personalities (fictional or nonfiction), unusual skills, or an understanding of human nature. By allowing readers to connect with the reality of their world, writers enable the reader to immerse himself or herself into the author's realm, developing a connection between the author and his or her audience. Given the various types of definitions mentioned in Secrets of the Lost Symbol, I can visualize how Dan Brown's novel used them to weave a tale of intrigue that captures the readers' imaginations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Michael Greer (Maryland) has been a student of monster lore and the occult since 1975. He is also the author of several books, including Natural Magic: Potions and Powers from the Magical Garden, Circles of Power: Ritual Magic in the Western Tradition, and Inside a Magical Lodge. He has written articles for Renaissance Magazine, Golden Dawn Journal, Mezlim, New Moon Rising, Gnosis, and Alexandria.

A student and practitioner of geomancy and sacred geometry for more than twenty years, fluent in Latin and medieval French for the past five years, and a Certified Tarot Grand Master, Greer has studied geomantic texts from the Middle Ages and Renaissance, learning and testing out the techniques that were used when geomancy was at its height. Greer is an active member of five fraternal and two magical lodges. He lives in Seattle, where he studied the legends and monster lore of the Pacific Northwest and attends lodge meetings in a building with its own resident ghosts.