

## THE ALCHEMIST'S SECRET

Scott Mariani grew up in St Andrews, Scotland. He studied Modern Languages at Oxford and went on to work as a translator, a professional musician, a pistol shooting instructor and a freelance journalist before becoming a full-time writer. After spending several years in Italy and France, Scott discovered his secluded writer's haven in the wilds of west Wales, an 1830s country house complete with rambling woodland and a secret passage. When he isn't writing, Scott enjoys jazz, movies, classic motorcycles and astronomy.

To find out more about Scott Mariani go to [www.scottmariani.com](http://www.scottmariani.com)

Visit [www.AuthorTracker.co.uk](http://www.AuthorTracker.co.uk) for exclusive updates on Scott Mariani.

SCOTT MARIANI

*The Alchemist's  
Secret*

**A V O N**

---

This novel is entirely a work of fiction.  
The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are  
the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to  
actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is  
entirely coincidental.

AVON

A division of HarperCollinsPublishers  
77–85 Fulham Palace Road,  
London W6 8JB

[www.harpercollins.co.uk](http://www.harpercollins.co.uk)

A Paperback Edition 2008

First published in Great Britain as  
*The Fulcanelli Manuscript* by  
Robert Hale Ltd 2007

Copyright © Scott Mariani 2007

Scott Mariani asserts the moral right to  
be identified as the author of this work

A catalogue record for this book is  
available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 978-1-84756-079-7

Set in Minion by Palimpsest Book Production Ltd,  
Grangemouth, Stirlingshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc



**Mixed Sources**

Product group from well-managed  
forests and other controlled sources  
[www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org) Cert no. SW-COC-1806  
© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council

FSC is a non-profit international organisation established  
to promote the responsible management of the world's forests.  
Products carrying the FSC label are independently certified  
to assure consumers that they come from forests that are managed  
to meet the social, economic and ecological needs  
of present and future generations.

Find out more about HarperCollins and the environment at  
[www.harpercollins.co.uk/green](http://www.harpercollins.co.uk/green)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be  
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted,  
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,  
photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior  
permission of the publishers.

SCOTT MARIANI

*The Alchemist's  
Secret*

*Acknowledgements*

Many people have been involved in the process of developing this project from a tiny idea into the book that it is now. You are too many to name, but you know who you are – and sincerest thanks to all of you.

Special thanks to Maxine Hitchcock, Keshini Naidoo and all the super-dynamic team at Avon UK.

SCOTT MARIANI

*The Alchemist's  
Secret*

*'Seek, my Brother, without becoming discouraged;  
the task is hard, I know, but to conquer without  
danger is to triumph without glory.'*

*The Alchemist Fulcanelli*

SCOTT MARIANI

*The Alchemist's  
Secret*

*To Marco, Miriam and Luca*

*The Alchemist's  
Secret*

1

*France, October 2001*

Father Pascal Cambriel pulled his hat down tight and his coat collar up around his neck to protect against the lashing rain. The storm had ripped open the door to his hen-house and the birds were running amok in a panic. The sixty-four-year-old priest herded them back in with his stick, counting them as they went. What a night!

A flash of lightning illuminated the yard about him and the whole of the ancient stone village. Behind the wall of his cottage garden lay the tenth-century church of Saint-Jean with its simple cemetery, the crumbling headstones and ivy. The roofs of the houses and the rugged landscape beyond were brightly lit by the lightning flash that split the sky, then plunged back into darkness as the crash of the thunder followed a second later. Streaming with rainwater, Father Pascal pushed home the bolt of the hen-house door, locking the squawking birds safely in.

Another bright flash, and something else caught

the priest's eye as he turned to dash back to the cottage. He stopped dead with a gasp.

Visible for just an instant, a tall, thin, ragged figure stood watching him from across the low wall. Then it was gone.

Father Pascal rubbed his eyes with his wet hands. Had he imagined it? The lightning flashed again, and in the instant of flickering white light he saw the strange man running away across the edge of the village and into the woods.

The priest's natural instinct after all these years as pastor to his community was to try immediately to help any soul in need. 'Wait!' he shouted over the wind. He ran out of his gate, limping slightly on his bad leg, and up the narrow lane between the houses, towards where the man had disappeared into the shadows of the trees.

Father Pascal soon found the stranger collapsed face down among the brambles and leaves at the edge of the woods. He was shaking violently and clutching at his skinny sides. In the wet darkness the priest could see that the man's clothes were hanging in tatters. 'Lord,' he groaned in sympathy, instinctively taking off his coat to wrap around the stranger. 'My friend, are you all right? What's the matter? Please, let me help you.'

The stranger was talking to himself in a low voice, a garbled mutter mixed with sobbing, his shoulders heaving. Father Pascal laid the coat across the man's back, feeling his own shirt instantly soaked with the pouring rain. 'We must go inside,' he said in a soft



voice. 'I have a fire, food and a bed. I will call Doctor Bachelard. Are you able to walk?' He tried gently to turn the man over, to take his hands and help him up.

And recoiled at what he saw in the next lightning flash. The man's tattered shirt soaked in blood. The long, deep gashes that had been cut into his emaciated body. Cuts on cuts. Wounds that had healed and been slashed open again.

Pascal stared, hardly believing what he was seeing. These weren't random slashes, but patterns, shapes, symbols, crusted in blood.

'Who did this to you, my son?' The priest studied the stranger's face. It was wizened, gaunt almost to the point of ghoulishness. How far had he wandered in this state?

In a cracked voice the man muttered something: '*Omnis qui bibit hanc aquam . . .*'

Father Pascal realized with amazement that the man was speaking to him in Latin. 'Water?' he asked. 'You want some water?'

The man went on mumbling, staring at him with wild eyes, clawing at his sleeve. '*. . . si fidem addit, salvus erit.*'

Pascal frowned. Something about faith, salvation? He's talking nonsense, he thought. The poor soul was deranged. Then the lightning flashed again, almost directly overhead, and as the thunder roared an instant later he saw with a start that the man's bloody fingers were wrapped tightly around the hilt of a knife.

It was a knife like no other he'd ever seen, a cruciform dagger with an ornate gold hilt set with glittering jewels. The long, slim blade was dripping with blood.

It was then that the priest understood what the stranger had done to himself. He'd carved these wounds into his own flesh.

'What have you done?' Father Pascal's mind swam with horror. The stranger watched him, rising to his knees, his bloody mud-streaked face suddenly lit up by another flash of lightning. His eyes were empty, lost, as though his mind was in some other place. He fingered the ornate weapon.

For a few moments Pascal Cambriel was quite convinced that this man was going to kill him. So here it was at last. Death. What would it bring? Some kind of continued existence, he was sure about that, even though its exact nature was unclear to him.

He'd often wondered how he would face death when the time came. He'd hoped that his deep religious faith would prepare him to meet whatever end God intended for him with serenity and composure. Now, though, the prospect of that cold steel sinking into his flesh turned his legs to water.

In that moment, when there was no longer any doubt in his mind that he was going to die, he thought about how he'd be remembered. Had he been a good man? Had his been a worthy life?

*Lord, give me strength.*

The madman stared in rapt fascination at the dagger in his hand, and back at the helpless priest, and he began to laugh – a low gurgling cackle that

rose up to a hysterical shriek. '*Igne natura renovatur integra!*' He screamed the words over and over again, and Pascal Cambriel watched in terror as he started feverishly slicing the blade into his own neck.