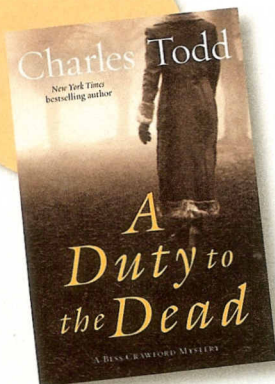


A Duty to the Dead

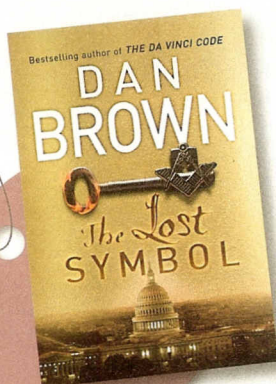
By Charles Todd, William Morrow, \$36 (MPH)



Charles Todd paints a grey picture of wartime Britain where in 1916, the British and French are facing the largest casualties, food is scarce, class division very obvious, and the mood is grim. Nursing sister, Bess Crawford is working on hospital ship, HMS Britannic when it is sunk by the enemy. The Britannic lends a sense of reality to the novel as it was a real ocean-liner, beautiful sister of the Titanic that was dispatched as a rescue ship for the wounded. When the Britannic is destroyed by a German mine, Bess is left with a broken arm and the realization that she can no longer put off her promise to deliver the message of a young officer who didn't make it home. When the message is dismissed by his mother and brother, Bess starts putting the pieces together to form a picture of murder, madness and injustice. With the propriety of turn-of-the-century England, and sense of mystery that brings to mind an Agatha Christie novel, this is a page turner that will have you waiting for another Bess Crawford adventure.

The Lost Symbol

By Dan Brown, Bantam Press, \$48 (hard cover)



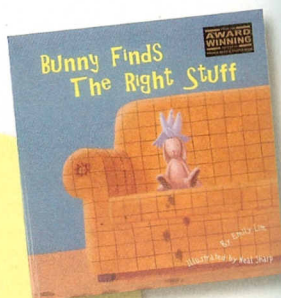
Critics have not been kind to Dan Brown. Maybe, jealousy and envy are rearing their ugly heads as the writer whose "metaphors and similes thud onto the page" makes millions in royalties from print and movie rights. It's true that Brown is no Booker Prize contender, and his prose is passable, but he does tell

a rollicking tale that pushes you to keep on reading. Never mind that later you question the sense of it all. His newest book has had rather good reviews though. Robert Langdon, our symbologist professor (handsomer than Tom Hanks in my mind), is summoned to a lecture that turns out to be a trick to force him to find the location of Ancient Mysteries hidden by the Freemasons. The race is on to save his friend whose hand has been lopped off by the villain described by the New York Times critic as "another one-dimensional, self-mortifying hulk". It's true - what can I say, but this is entertainment, and there's the friend's attractive, brainy sister, and a super tour of Washington's monuments (research took five years, so details are abundant), a lot of deciphering and running from the CIA - all happening in 24 hours. Great fun. Can't wait for the movie to see who will play 50-year-old Katherine Solomon. In the meantime, I bought a book on the Freemasons.

Bunny Finds The Right Stuff

By Emily Lim, Illustrated by Neal Sharp, Mustard Seed Books, \$18.69

It's nice to be lean when you're human, but a skinny stuffed toy is a sad thing. Over the years, Bunny, a toy maker's first creation, has gone saggy and try as he might, he cannot find any suitable stuffing. But Bunny is not alone and this is what lends Emily's new story its warmth. The other soft toys always come to his rescue (brings to mind the inspirational "You raise me up" in Josh Groban's heartfelt baritone) and finally, in true friendship, they each give Bunny a part of themselves. When Emily lost her voice to a rare disorder a few years ago, she wasn't left bereft. She found spirituality, a talent for children's stories and the right illustrator, in other words - the right stuff.



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