

The Grail Conspiracy: A Cotten Stone Mystery

Joe Moore

Lynn Sholes

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At the end of the search for the Holy Grail in this thrill-a-minute page turner, the chalice that once caught the blood of Christ now spills its dangerous contents over journalist Cotten Stone and biblical history scholar and priest John Tyler's destiny. In their first collaborative effort, and one of the first titles launching the new Midnight Ink imprint of Llewellyn Publications, the authors have penned a winner.

Religion and science battle through a spectacular breath-holding conclusion when the Holy Grail supplies a few precious drops of the blood of Christ to the forces of evil. Using DNA and cloning technology, likeable heroes Stone and Tyler must stop the descendant royalty of an ancient society who plan a sacrilegious Second Coming of Christ.

Like all good thrillers, this one travels the globe, from Turkey and Iraq to Rome, New York, New Orleans, and South Beach. The body count is satisfactory, the tension high, and the conclusion cataclysmic. Without more, the story would be a good one and worth the read. But *The Grail Conspiracy* offers more.

Since Dolly the sheep was successfully cloned, the ethical issues surrounding human cloning have been hashed out in the press, in foreign countries, and among medical and scientific groups. Cloning of beloved deceased pets is presently available. Cloning organs for autologous transplant is being considered, and DNA has been used to determine that Thomas Jefferson fathered Sally Hemmings's children. What next?

The recent interest of readers in religious themes in fiction has been harnessed by these authors, who supply enough knowledge of the news business and the Catholic Church to create a believable story from a fantastic concept. But the book goes a step further, beyond the fictionalizing of previously explored ideas or religious texts. Sholes and Moore suggest a challenging intellectual and moral question: What would happen if a sample of Christ's blood were actually available? Would we clone Christ? How about other important historical figures?

Sholes, author of six previous historical fiction titles under the name Lynn McKee (such as *Daughter of the Fifth Moon*), trains teachers to teach writing in Florida; Moore, a fiction reviewer for several newspapers, is also the author of professional video and audio trade productions, and was trained at a theological seminary. Together, they have written a thriller sure to strike fear in the hearts of ethicists, scientists, and Christians alike in *The Grail Conspiracy*, where *The Da Vinci Code* meets *Jurassic Park*. They've also given readers something serious to think about. In a world where anything can be done, what will the human race decide to do about cloning?

DIANE VOGT (August 18, 2009)

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