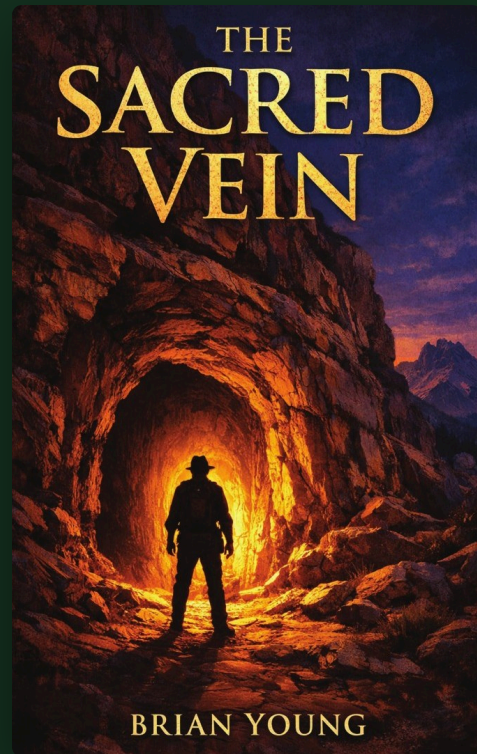


BOOK CLUB KIT

The Sacred Vein

A reading plan, a who's who, discussion questions for all four Parts, themes, a map of the story, what the novel draws on, and a letter from the author



A NOVEL BY BRIAN YOUNG

AUTHOR

Brian Young

SERIES

Book One of the Sacred Vein series

SETTING

Utah, present day: Salt Lake City, the Uinta Mountains, and the Uintah and Ouray Reservation

FORMAT

Novel, four Parts, 33 chapters

GOOD FOR

Adult book clubs, library reading groups, Utah and Western history buffs

Free to print and share with your club.

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Hello, Book Club

Hi. I'm Brian, and I grew up in the mountains this book is about.

My family spent summers on the wild south slope of the High Uintas, and somewhere around a campfire I first heard about the Lost Rhoades Mine and the Spanish gold that was supposed to be up there. I never found any. I did spend years reading about it, which is cheaper, safer, and nearly as much fun.

This book has a cipher, a chase, and a cave. But the questions I kept circling are the ones I hope your club argues about. Who owns the past? What do we owe the cultures whose heritage we study? And what really matters when we strip away the glitter of gold?

I don't have tidy answers. Ammon doesn't either, not at first. If your group lands somewhere interesting, write to me at hello@brianyoungauthor.com. I do free short video visits with clubs when I can, and I read everything. Thanks for taking a chance on an independent author.

Brian

The book in a minute (no spoilers)

Ammon Lundquist is a historian in Salt Lake City and the last of his line still chasing the family legend. For five generations the Lundquists have hunted the Lost Rhoades Mine, the sacred Ute gold said to be hidden in the Uinta Mountains, and the hunt has cost them: Ammon's father and uncle both died up there. When his grandfather dies, Ammon inherits a locked box holding the coded journal of his great-great-grandfather, F.W.C. Hathenbruck, a one-armed German mineralogist who may have found the mine and spent his life protecting it.

The journal leads Ammon to symbols in the foundation of the Salt Lake Temple, to a nervous young hacker named Jonas, and to Aspen Rhoades, a forest ranger whose ancestor was Hathenbruck's partner before the two men fell out. Someone else is following the trail, and the mountains have guardians who have been watching for a very long time.

For discussion leaders: the whole story

Spoilers, including the ending. For whoever is leading the discussion.

Part One: The Inheritance (Chapters 1 to 8)

At Erik Lundquist's funeral in Heber City, Uncle Silas calls the mine "a family curse," and Ammon picks the lock on a box holding Hathenbruck's cipher journal. Jonas West, a data specialist Erik hired, cracks the first layer with the box's motto, "The gold of the mountains belongs to the First," and the decoded text points at the Angel Moroni. At dawn on Temple Square they find Hathenbruck's symbols in the granite and a lion-shaped shadow pointing at the Lion House. In the Uintas, Ranger Aspen Rhoades catches them at a marked bristlecone and sets conditions. Silas reveals that Ammon's father and uncle were murdered. On the first expedition, someone draws a warning beside the fire.

Part Two: The Hunt (Chapters 9 to 16)

Spanish documents from 1651 describe a mission in “the mountains of the Yutas,” and a decoded passage names Carre-Shinob: “Not a mine, not a treasury in the European sense. It is a temple.” Treasure hunter Jeremiah Stone, Ammon’s former partner, has the team under surveillance, until his great-aunt Cordelia shows him letters proving Caleb Rhoades, not Hathenbruck, was the betrayer. Ute elder Robert Colorow hands over the translation key, and satellite imagery reveals a whale-shaped ridge above the spring. In the hidden basin the guardians, led by Thomas Wopsock, take Ammon and Aspen inside: gold, codices, and the burial of Chief Walkara. Jeremiah arrives armed, shoots Thomas, and is arrested when Sheriff Morgan White appears.

Part Three: The Depths (Chapters 17 to 27)

On the descent Jeremiah bolts, falls, and hangs from a ledge with his hands cuffed. Ammon remembers his father, “Whatever happens, be good,” and pulls him up. Jonas traces the Whitmore Foundation’s money to a network that funded treasure hunters for decades and killed the independent ones. Dying lawyer Harrison Cole confesses and names the Consortium and its chairman, Elias Vance. Ammon’s apartment burns; the team goes dark and wins cautious backing from the Ute tribal council. Jeremiah cuts a deal with Vance, escapes from prison, and leads thirty mercenaries against the basin. Twelve guardians hold the cave overnight, Jonas arrives with news that the story is live, and Ammon walks Jeremiah into the chamber, where he surrenders.

Part Four: The Legacy (Chapters 28 to 33)

Two weeks later Ammon is reading Hathenbruck’s second journal, a gift from Thomas. The tribal council approves a framework: tribal authority, academic access under strict protocols, nothing sold. Jonas becomes the reluctant public face of the discovery. At the Rhoades cemetery outside Hanna, Aspen and Ammon admit they have fallen in love. Chairman Cesspooch announces Carre-Shinob to the world. Vance gets twenty-five years; Jeremiah gets life. Ammon gives the second journal to the tribal archive and accepts a seat in a reinvented guardian tradition. Six months on, in spring above Four Lakes Basin, Aspen asks for a life together, and Ammon says yes.

Who’s Who

In order of appearance. Aspen uses they/them pronouns, as the novel does.

NAME	WHO THEY ARE, AND WHAT THEY DO IN THE STORY
Ammon Lundquist	Historian in Salt Lake City, 34, Hathenbruck’s great-great-grandson. Inherits the cipher journal and follows it to the end.
Silas Lundquist	Ammon’s uncle, 63, a retired history professor who lost both brothers to the mountains. The family skeptic, who knows the deaths were murders.
FW.C. Hathenbruck	Great-great-grandfather, a one-armed German physician and mineralogist. Found Carre-Shinob, protected it, and left a coded trail.
Jonas West	Freelance data specialist Erik hired; nervous, funny, and out of his depth. Cracks the cipher, traces the money, and shows up when it counts.

NAME	WHO THEY ARE, AND WHAT THEY DO IN THE STORY
Aspen Rhoades	Forest Service ranger on the South Slope; Caleb's descendant, part Ute through their grandmother. Guide and conscience.
Jeremiah Stone	Treasure hunter, Rhoades descendant, and Ammon's former partner. The antagonist, with an inherited grievance of his own.
Cordelia Stone	Jeremiah's great-aunt, 93, in Price. Keeps the letters that reverse the Rhoades family story.
Robert Colorow	Ute elder and keeper at Fort Duchesne. Hands over Hattenbruck's key and brokers the alliance with the tribe.
Thomas Wopsock	Guardian elder, seventh generation, descendant of the man Hattenbruck called "Hawk." Decides who enters the chamber.
Harrison Cole and Elias Vance	A dying Phoenix lawyer and the developer who chairs the Consortium: the confession, and the face behind forty years of funded hunts.

Pick Your Plan

Most clubs meet once. For two meetings, the natural break is the end of Part Two, where the treasure hunt ends and the murder case begins.

PLAN	READ	WHERE YOU STOP
One meeting	The whole book	Allow 90 minutes. Pick six to ten questions, then finish with "After the last page."
Two meetings, first	Parts One and Two (Chapters 1 to 16)	Jeremiah is in handcuffs, Thomas is in a helicopter, and the chamber is safe.
Two meetings, second	Parts Three and Four (Chapters 17 to 33)	The end. Start with the cliff.

Discussion Questions

Part One: The Inheritance (Chapters 1 to 8)

- 1 The book opens at a funeral, with Silas calling the mine "a family curse" and Ammon whispering into the grave, "I'll find it, Grandpa." Whose side were you on, and did the novel move you off it?
- 2 Erik's note says "some treasures are worth more than gold," and the box reads "The gold of the mountains belongs to the First." What did you think "the First" meant at first? And by the end?

- 3 Hathenbruck hid his symbols in the Salt Lake Temple foundation, and his 1888 letter in Chapter 3 says church leaders knew. How did you feel about a thriller hiding secrets in sacred real places?
- 4 “I know these are their mountains. Were their mountains, before we took them,” Aspen says in Chapter 4. A federal ranger, a Rhoades, and the grandchild of a half-Ute woman: how does Aspen’s “complicated inheritance” complicate the hunt?
- 5 Aspen’s rules in Chapter 6: no digging without permits, the Northern Ute Tribe hears first, and if anyone with legitimate authority says stop, they stop. Are the rules enough? Would you have kept them once the trail got hot?
- 6 Silas tells Ammon his father and uncle were murdered, then admits, “I’m afraid of losing you. The way I lost them.” Is Silas the only sane Lundquist? What does the book think of the one who refuses the family obsession?

Like carrying something I didn’t choose and couldn’t put down.

ASPEN RHOADES, ON GROWING UP WITH THE NAME, CHAPTER 8

Part Two: The Hunt (Chapters 9 to 16)

- 1 Hathenbruck writes that Carre-Shinob “is not what the Spanish believed. Not a mine, not a treasury in the European sense. It is a temple.” When did this stop being a treasure hunt for you, if it ever did?
- 2 Cordelia shows Jeremiah letters proving Caleb was the betrayer and says, “The family has always said what made us feel better about losing.” Which stories in your family got told the way they did because that version felt better?
- 3 Jeremiah reads the letters, is shaken, and by the end of Chapter 10 decides “He was going to be a Rhoades.” What is the novel saying about why evidence fails to change people?
- 4 Robert Colorow tells Ammon, “I’ve heard pretty words from white men before,” and warns that “you haven’t been tested yet, not really.” Why does Robert share the key anyway? How does the book define a test?
- 5 Thomas Wopsock’s condition for the chamber is “you will leave with nothing but your memories,” and his reason for showing it is that “some things need to be witnessed to be preserved.” Is witnessing without documenting enough for a historian? Is it right anyway?
- 6 Of Walkara’s burial, Thomas says, “It was never lost. It was hidden.” Who owns this past: the families who guard it, the scholars who could study it, the public, the man’s descendants? Rank the claims.

Part Three: The Depths (Chapters 17 to 27)

- 1 On the cliff, “a cold, analytical, completely unfamiliar voice” tells Ammon to do nothing. He hears his father instead: “Whatever happens, be good.” Be honest. Did you want him to reach down?
- 2 Thomas later says, “mercy sometimes comes at a high cost,” and Jeremiah’s escape proves it: people are shot because Ammon saved him. Was Ammon right anyway? Can a right choice still cause harm?
- 3 Harrison Cole on the Consortium: “That’s privilege. Insanity with enough money to make itself seem reasonable.” The book ties a modern conspiracy to self-styled heirs of the conquistadors. Earned, or convenient?
- 4 Cole drafted the paperwork that paid Brock’s killers. When Ammon says his confession “counts for something,” Cole answers, “Does it?” and then, “I’ve never been sure.” Does it? How is Cole’s confession different from Jeremiah’s?
- 5 The tribal council hesitates. Thomas calls it wisdom; Chairman Cesspooch says, “Politics is about managing risk.” Then Robert reveals the Whitmore Foundation funded tribal programs: “Blood money,” Thomas says. Was its caution wisdom or cowardice?
- 6 Robert says the tribe always knew about “the Shadow Hunters” but “never had proof.” It takes a white historian, a hacker, and a dying lawyer’s envelope to act. What is the book saying about whose evidence counts?

The treasure isn’t something you take. It’s something you protect.

AMMON LUNDQUIST, CHAPTER 17

Part Four: The Legacy (Chapters 28 to 33)

- 1 Hathenbruck’s second journal: “The gold means nothing. It never did. What matters is the knowledge.” Ammon adds, “He wanted the world to learn. There’s a difference.” What is the difference between knowing and learning here?
- 2 The council adopts “Controlled revelation.” Dr. Vasquez worries about academia’s “long history of appropriating Indigenous knowledge,” and Thomas answers, “understanding and doing are different things. We will be watching.” Does the ending trust the scholars too much, too little, or about right?
- 3 Chapter 29 is Jonas doubting he deserves any credit. Thomas says the guardian tradition includes “those who fight with weapons and those who fight with knowledge. Both are necessary. Both are honored.” Why spend a whole chapter on the sidekick?
- 4 At the cemetery, Aspen says the treasure “was just a catalyst. It revealed what people already were,” and that their mother believed “the Rhoades curse was loneliness.” Was it? Who in the book is cured of it?

- 5 Ammon gives Hathenbruck's second journal, a family heirloom, to the tribal archive: the legacy is "in how we live, not what we possess." Silas tells him, "Obsession tears things down. You've learned to build." Could you have given it away?
- 6 The final page says the sacred vein "was the capacity to choose well." Erik said truth; Thomas said knowledge; the chairman said Carre-Shinob "belongs to no single person, no single nation, no single people." Which does the book earn, and which do you believe?

After the last page

- 1 Who owns the past? Line up the claims the novel puts in play: the guardian families, the Ute Tribe, the Lundquists, the Rhoades, the scholars, the public, and the Consortium's self-styled heirs of the conquistadors. Where does the book land? Where do you?
- 2 Five generations of Lundquists, five of Rhoades, five of Vances, one obsession. What makes Ammon's generation different: character, timing, allies, or luck? Could Brock have done it?
- 3 Hathenbruck comes close to sainthood: he wept for the Ute people, warned the guardians, and left a trail "for those worthy to follow." Is he too good? Cordelia says of her own account, "That's one version." What would a less flattering version look like?
- 4 The novel uses real places and real names, from Temple Square and the Lion House to the Uintah and Ouray Reservation and Walkara himself. Where did you want to stop and look something up? Does a thriller owe readers a clear line between fact and invention?
- 5 Ammon shows Jeremiah mercy twice, on the cliff and in the chamber, and Jeremiah still gets life without parole. Is this a story about redemption or about consequences? Can it be both?
- 6 The dedication is "to those who search, and those who protect: may we all discern when life calls for one, and when the other." Where in your life are you a searcher, and where a protector?

Themes

Who owns the past

"The gold of the mountains belongs to the First." Jeremiah reads "the First" as whoever gets there first. Hathenbruck meant "the first to understand its true value." The guardians mean the people who were here before anyone.

Obsession, inherited

"Let the dead bury their dead," Silas says at the wake, and nobody listens. Three families pass the same hunger down for five generations. The test of whether Ammon escapes it: "Obsession tears things down. You've learned to build."

The stories families tell

“The family has always said what made us feel better about losing.” Cordelia’s letters overturn a century of Rhoades grievance; the Vances built a conspiracy on a prospector’s tale. What do we inherit when we inherit a version of events?

Mercy and its price

“Whatever happens, be good.” Ammon pulls Jeremiah off the cliff on his father’s words; the rescued man returns with thirty mercenaries. Thomas: “mercy sometimes comes at a high cost.” The book won’t call mercy free, or a mistake.

Protect, don’t take

“The treasure isn’t something you take. It’s something you protect.” Aspen’s three rules, Thomas’s “nothing but your memories,” and the council’s framework are versions of one idea: access is a responsibility, not a prize.

Loneliness and partnership

“The Rhoades curse was loneliness,” Aspen’s mother said. Erik’s secrecy, Silas’s cabin, Jeremiah’s motel wall of maps: everyone starts alone. The word the novel keeps returning to is “Together.”

What the Novel Draws On

The Sacred Vein is fiction, and its copyright page says so, but it stands on real geography and a legend with a long life in Utah. Here is what the novel says it is working with; treat the journals, cipher, letters, and chamber as invention, and check the rest before repeating it.

The Lost Rhoades Mine. As the novel tells it, Thomas Rhoades and later Caleb Rhoades brought gold out of the Uintas that funded Mormon expansion, by arrangement between Brigham Young and the Ute chief Walkara. Ammon repeats a legend he calls “probably apocryphal” that the gold leaf on the Angel Moroni came from the mine. The About the Author page says the series grew out of “years of research into the real history of the Lost Rhoades Mine.”

Carre-Shinob. The novel’s Ute name for the sacred mountain, which Hattenbruck’s journal calls a temple rather than a mine (Chapter 9) and the tribal chairman announces to the world (Chapter 31). The chamber, and Walkara’s burial in it, are invention.

F.W.C. Hattenbruck. Presented as a German-born physician and mineralogist who consulted on the temple foundation from 1887 to 1889, lost an arm in a mining accident, and partnered with Caleb Rhoades. His journals, cipher, letters, and photograph with “Hawk” are story devices.

The Uintas and the Ute people. The novel notes that the Uintas run east to west and top thirteen thousand feet. It places Robert Colorow at Fort Duchesne on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, names the Northern Ute Tribe and the Uncompahgre band, and describes a guardian tradition of families protecting sacred sites. The guardians, their symbols, and the events on the reservation are fiction.

Spanish legends and pioneer history. Ammon cites archival reports, which the novel does not source: a 1651 report of a mission “forty leagues north of the Great Salt Lake” and a 1583 report by a friar named Espejo about mountains “that run with the rising and setting sun” (Chapter 9). He also

mentions Cíbola, Franciscan priests, and the Dominguez-Escalante expedition. The temple's forty-year construction and the Lion House as Brigham Young's home are presented as real.

WANT TO DIG DEEPER? FIVE TOPICS TO LOOK UP

The Lost Rhoades Mine · Chief Walkara (also spelled Wakara) · The Uintah and Ouray Reservation and the Ute Indian Tribe · Caleb Rhoades and F.W.C. Hathenbruck · The Dominguez-Escalante expedition

Map of the Story

The book's back pages include a map of the High Uintas and an image of the whale formation.

PLACE	WHAT HAPPENS THERE
Heber City Cemetery and Erik's cabin at the mouth of Daniels Canyon	The funeral, Silas's warning, and the locked box with the cipher journal (Ch. 1)
Temple Square: the temple, the Lion House, the Church History Library	Symbols in the granite at dawn, a lion's shadow, a carved monk, a restricted file (Ch. 3)
The Rock Creek bristlecone grove, South Slope of the Uintas	Aspen catches Ammon and Jonas at a marked tree; the two bloodlines meet (Ch. 4)
Mountain Home: the diner and the ranger station	Aspen's notebook and three rules (Ch. 6); Jeremiah's offer and a bugged network (Ch. 13)
Fort Duchesne, Uintah and Ouray Reservation	Robert's kitchen and the key (Ch. 12); the council (Ch. 22); the siege (Ch. 26); the press conference (Ch. 31)
Lightning Ridge, the whale, and the hidden basin	The shadow priest (Ch. 8); the chamber and Walkara's burial (Ch. 16); the cliff (Ch. 17); the last stand (Ch. 27)
Scottsdale, Arizona: Sonoran Vista Retirement Community	Harrison Cole's confession and his envelope (Ch. 20)
The Rhoades family cemetery outside Hanna	The grandmother's grave, and the kiss (Ch. 30)

The Lundquist line

WHO	WHEN, IN THE BOOK	WHAT THEY FOUND OR LOST
F.W.C. Hathenbruck	Utah Territory, 1870s to 1899	Shown Carre-Shinob by Hawk; stopped Caleb from selling it; died "poor and broken"
Erik Lundquist	Dies at 91 as the book opens	Outlived two sons and left Ammon the box and a note: "some treasures are worth more than gold"

WHO	WHEN, IN THE BOOK	WHAT THEY FOUND OR LOST
Brock Lundquist	Died near Granddaddy Lake, fifteen years earlier	Taught Ammon to “read maps before I could ride a bike”; his “fall” is revealed as murder
Marcus Lundquist	Died a year after Brock	A “hunting accident” with no other hunters nearby; the second death Silas never believed
Silas Lundquist	Age 63 in the story	Stopped searching, kept a folder labeled SUSPECTS anyway, and lives to see the end
Ammon Lundquist	Age 34 in the story	Finds the chamber, chooses to protect it, and gives the second journal to the tribal archive

Next in the Series, and Get the Book

Book Two: *The Shadow Archive*. The story picks up that winter, when a hidden message in an ancestor’s locket suggests that Hathenbruck kept secrets even from his journals.

Book Three: *The Hidden Network*. Two years on, the hunt goes global, with dual expeditions, a cave collapse, and a hostage standoff.

Get the book



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A small favor

If your club liked the book, a short review on Amazon or Goodreads is the most useful thing you can do for an independent author. Two sentences is plenty.

THANK YOU

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