

Octavo

Marty Neumeier

Harker

(344pp)

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A Renaissance-era artist's diary stands to shock the world, and to change the lives of those who possess it, in the entertaining and revealing novel Octavo.

Marty Neumeier's gripping thriller *Octavo* is about the secret life of Leonardo da Vinci.

Researchers on the run, known only by the code names Scarlett and Artie, stumble upon lost artifacts related to Leonardo da Vinci. The most valuable of their discoveries is a personal journal written by one of da Vinci's star pupils, Francesco Melzi. In it, Melzi details a thrilling portion of the master artist's life in which he and his pupils endeavored to solve the mystery of a brutal murder.

Scarlett and Artie, knowing the value of such information, steal it for themselves to translate, fact-check, and sell. A deal is struck, and their fresh history is doled out piece by piece. In the meantime, the ragtag business partners forge a deeper bond with each other and take meaningful advice from the past.

Octavo is an enthralling novel narrated via immersive email exchanges. Scarlett and Artie's endeavor to bring Melzi's writings to the world, albeit by illegal methods, holds appropriate weight and inspires much thought about the past—and about the possibility of discoveries yet to come.

Scarlett's and Artie's own backstories and vulnerabilities are revealed in snippets alongside each new bit of the journal. While Artie is the more laid-back of the pair, Scarlett's cold personality melts away and she ends up commanding the spotlight. Surprises are in store for their points of contact as well: The project's editor, Peter, finds himself more involved with Melzi's journal than is either safe or comfortable.

The content of the journal fascinates. Melzi's account is upbeat, and he seems entranced by his master's life. The murder mystery is followed in an entertaining manner as the painters and philosophers uncover hidden crimes and end up in skirmishes with authorities. Da Vinci even ends up in hand-to-hand fights on occasion.

Elements of action and suspense bleed into the present, too, as Scarlett and Artie evade a former business partner turned radical who also wants Melzi's journal and is motivated by greed and a twisted view of creatives as inferior. During chase scenes and fights between the parties, tensions flare. And as the full Melzi account is revealed and Scarlett and Artie find new reasons to share it, the novel works toward a curiosity-inspiring ending.

In the engaging thriller *Octavo*, artists and thieves collide for a greater good.

BRANDON PAWLICKI (March 10, 2025)

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