

Movie review: the da vinci code essay



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Movie Review: The Da Vinci Code By Robin J. Sharpe 30 January 2008

Director: Ron Howard Star Cast: Tom Hanks – Robert Langdon Audrey Tautou

– Sophie Neveu Ian McKellen – Sir Leigh Teabing Jean Reno – Police Captain

Fache The movie version of Dan Brown's best selling novel arrived in the theatres with a huge amount of fanfare and high expectations, which could arguably be considered as unworthy and unfounded. Anyone who actually read the book will realize that it consists mostly of conversations about mostly historical events.

In that sense, unfortunately, director Ron Howard's movie version is very faithful to the book in that it can be perceived as dreary and monotonous. Especially when you consider that the movie is almost 2.5 hours in length. It may be too long, but then again, Howard had the formidable task of squeezing Brown's intricate and wordy novel into a screenplay. The movie is extremely solemn; everything is in hushed but alarmed tones, everything is very serious. Tom Hanks is one of Hollywood's most capable leading men and one of the most likeable actors around.

This movie is a departure from his usual style; very "stiff". He is also usually a very funny actor but "The Da Vinci Code" is noticeably short on humor.

Having said that, it can not be said the movie is devoid of virtues. It's beautifully photographed on real locations, including the interior of the Louvre in Paris. Ian McKellen as Sir Leigh Teabing is a charismatic actor who does much of the talking, particularly on historical matters. It is not until the scenes are over that you realize he delivered a lot of history, mostly of Da Vinci and the Knights Templar, into a relatively short time.

Ron Howard is a Hollywood veteran with a career spanning many decades. He made his introduction as a child actor in the 1960s series of "The Andy Griffith Show", went on to be the teenage icon Richie Cunningham in the 1970s situation comedy "Happy Days". He has matured to become one of Hollywood's finest directors with more than 20 movies to his credit, and he has been the producer more than double that amount. He won two prestigious Academy Award "Oscars" for best picture and best director of "Beautiful Mind" in 2001.

Other notable movies directed by him include "Cocoon", "Parenthood", and "Apollo 13". He is currently shooting the "prequel" of "The Da Vinci Code", Dan Brown's "Angels and Demons" for release in 2009. While giving a lecture in Paris, symbologist Robert Langdon is summoned to the Louvre. The curator has been shot by an albino man in monk's robes. Clues left by the dead man are puzzling and nearly inexplicable, but point to Langdon. French police Captain Fache, in charge of the case, defers to Sophie Neveu who arrives unexpectedly from police headquarters.

In a clever manner, she's able secretly to warn Langdon that Fache thinks he is the murderer, based on the inexplicable clues. Sophie reveals to the American that the dead man was her grandfather, and that Langdon has a locator chip planted by the cops. Langdon and Sophie see each other as allies and escape from the Louvre, but are later spotted and briefly pursued through the streets of Paris. They successfully evade the police and follow one clue after another on a "treasure hunt" that had been devised by Sophie's grandfather, starting at a safe deposit box of the dead man.

Langdon comes to realize that all this has to do with the history of Christianity and the Holy Grail.

By an impressive coincidence the world's leading authority on the Holy Grail, Sir Leigh Teabing lives nearby. He is an old friend of Langdon's, and welcomes them to his chateau full of religious and historical artifacts, even though it's the middle of the night. More is learned there, but Fache and the other cops are still on the trail of Langdon and Sophie. Leigh, who coincidentally has a private jet in his back yard, flies them to London.

It's in England and Scotland that the story plays out. As the title indicates, Leonardo Da Vinci figures in the plot, especially his painting of The Last Supper. Mary Magdalene, the Emperor Constantine and the Knights Templar also have their parts to play in Brown's story. The story is reminiscent of Alfred Hitchcock movies with a pursued couple, a secret or treasure (the Holy Grail, no less), and another link or clue uncovered every few minutes. This is a weakness of both of the novel and the movie in that there are just too many links to the underlying plot. Everyone we see ends up linked to another element of the big secret.

It has the presentation of unimaginative plotting. Howard would have been wise to study the Hitchcock classics, particularly "Saboteur" and "North by Northwest". These movies had fundamental structures similar to that of "The Da Vinci Code", sometimes as many coincidences, but were fast-paced, full of strong characters, and interspersed with humor. "The Da Vinci Code" features a brief car chase at the beginning, but the rest of the movie is sadly

lacking in action, excitement, tension and humor. This is one reason why Ian McKellen is a valuable and well-cast part of the movie.

He is a sardonic, witty actor; his scenes are some of the most entertaining parts of the movie. One would expect that this would happen with Hanks, who is the leading man and more prolific award winning actor, but it doesn't actually play out that way. Furthermore, he and Tautou seem to never develop any interaction. She is extremely attractive, and he is intense, but there really is no "chemistry".

The book and the movie have aroused a storm of controversy, with religious groups who are bitterly opposed to the plot. Their fulminations are misplaced; the book was just a novel, the movie is just a movie. The alternate story of the Christ that they tell isn't at all new. The Big Secret of the novel is fictional speculation in that it may be true, it may not. If it were true, it would hardly have the effect on Christianity that Brown suggests partly because it would be impossible to establish beyond a reasonable doubt.

The novel presented ideas that were almost completely new and unheard of to readers of the modern generation who are not as classically involved in religion as previous generations. Anyone who has an interest in history or religion might enjoy the movie. As a movie, "The Da Vinci Code" worked better than the novel. It is an expensively and carefully produced movie, using real and creative locations, and except for having one too many endings, will leave most in the audience reasonably satisfied. If you haven't

read the novel, you are much more likely to enjoy the movie for its plot than if you have.

Those who are familiar with the book will have the feeling that Ron Howard, in trying to be faithful to a popular book, has not delivered the kind of movie that matches his style and capabilities