

'Da Vinci Code' fails to satisfy

By Kam Williams
Special to Sentinel-Voice
Ridiculed by academic scholars as riddled with inaccuracies and criticized by Christian theologians as blasphemous, "The Da Vinci Code" has, nonetheless, sold a phenomenal 50 million copies since its release in 2003.



Academy Award winner Tom Hanks, left, performs well in a movie that ultimately fails to live up to its marketing hype.

Furthermore, this controversial potboiler has remained on the best-seller list despite author Dan Brown's having admitted to lifting both his central hypothesis and key plot elements from "The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail," a book long since exposed as a hoax.

That reliance on fabrication didn't discourage Brown from prefacing his fanciful interpretation of Biblical history with the guarantee that "all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."

Among the "truths" he goes on to reveal are such long-suppressed secrets as the fact that Christ married Mary Magdalene, had a child with her, and that their bloodline has survived to the present day.

Furthermore, this incendiary tome casts doubt on a fundamental tenet of Christianity by alleging that Jesus was just a mere mortal, and that the Catholic Church has, for centuries, gone to great lengths, even murder, to perpetuate the lies its faithful followers so fervently believe in.

To that end, the Vatican has supposedly relied on a conservative hit squad, known as Opus Dei, to do all its dirty work.

This adaptation of Brown's popular page-turner sticks closely to the source material's preposterous premise. So again, we have a tall tale, which rests upon a litany of pretentiously presented, pseudo-scientific claptrap woven together in an insinuating fashion designed to appeal to paranoid conspiracy theory enthusiasts and the anti-Christian crowd.

However, because the movie is aimed at an audience with the level of sophistication of seventh or eighth

graders, it induced plenty of inappropriate, unprovoked belly laughs from adults at the screening, which this critic attended.

The upshot is that "The Da Vinci Code" can't even be recommended solely for its sheer entertainment value as an escapist summer blockbuster, for this amateurish production is a dull crime caper, which runs an hour too long and trades in tiring talk rather than compelling action sequences.

This comes as a surprise, given its \$125 million budget and impressive crew, starting with producer Brian Grazer, director Ron Howard and scriptwriter Akiva Goldsman, the same collaborating team that won Academy Awards for "A Beautiful Mind" in 2002. Here, the talented threesome fails to recapture any of their old magic, simultaneously squandering the services of a talented cast which includes two-time Oscar-winner Tom Hanks (for "Philadelphia" and "Forrest Gump"), Oscar-nominee Ian McKellen, Jean Reno, Alfred Molina and Jurgen Prochnow.

Hanks stars as protagonist Robert Langdon, a Harvard Professor of Religious Sym-

bology summoned to crack the case of the murder of The Louvre's museum curator Jacques Sauniere (Jean-Pierre Marielle). Langdon links up with Detective Sophie Neveu who conveniently happens to be the victim's adopted daughter. What the fetching Parisian flatfoot doesn't know is that she's also a direct descendant of Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

Sophie is played by Audrey Tautou whom you may remember as the endear-

ingly innocent title character of "Amelie."

Unfortunately, Ms. Tautou displays none of that naïve charm in this outing, appearing overmatched by the English language in a performance, which could have used subtitles under her often-inscrutable dialogue.

Our heroes' nemesis is Silas (Paul Bettany), a self-flagellating albino ostensibly assigned by the Pontiff to make sure Sophie's lineage stays under wraps by any means necessary.

The storyline is repeatedly bogged down by preachy pontificating, most of which comes courtesy of Langdon.

In a most condescending manner, he takes it upon himself to inform us via the doe-eyed Sophie exactly what each Pope-damning revelation and decoded clue means, as opposed to allowing us to interpret them on our own.

Who knows whether Dan Brown was motivated by distaste for Catholicism or merely by money?

Regardless, it seems dishonest for him to foist his debunked heresies on the gullible, unsuspecting public as if they're the God's honest truth, especially when he knows full well his work is pure fiction.

Review-proof revisionist history.

Poor (0 stars). PG-13 for sex, expletives, nudity, graphic violence, disturbing images and drug references.

Story examines families, biases

NEW YORK (AP) - When Brian Copeland, at age 8, moved to San Leandro, Calif., in the early 1970s, the town, which borders Oakland, was 99.99 percent White.

Whiter than Ivory soap, Copeland says in his affecting one-man memoir, "Not a Genuine Black Man," which opened Wednesday at off-Broadway's DR2 Theatre. It's not surprising that Copeland, who's Black, was noticed. In fact, on his first Saturday in the new neighborhood, he was chased by a group of White teens.

Remembrances like it thread their way through Copeland's tale of growing up in a town where people were judged first by the color of their skin. But "Not a Genuine Black Man" has more on its mind than the persistent racism that dogged Copeland's childhood.

It's a story of family. Affectionate portraits of his mother and grandmother. A not-so-happy picture of his rarely seen father, a brute of a man who abused his wife and terrorized his children.

That Copeland, now a radio talk-show host in San Francisco, seems to have turned out so well adjusted is a marvel. He is a genial, accomplished raconteur, able to switch back and forth between the characters in his show.

The catalyst for "Not a Genuine Black Man" is the man's determined mother. A woman with style and class, she did have her quirks. Always claiming to be from Providence, R.I., and not Alabama because it sounded better, for example. And one thing her son never figured out was why she remained so loyal to his father, who eventually disappeared from their lives.

What his mother wanted was respect, Copeland says. And it was her determination to have that respect which brought the woman and her children to San Leandro and later to initiate a lawsuit after being threatened with eviction.

She brought her children up to succeed — and Copeland did. And his success becomes one of the show's themes, particularly in the way other Blacks have responded to his having made it. Some made the accusation that became the title of his show — "Not a Genuine Black Man."

"If you're talking about pigment, then, yes, clearly I am black," Copeland says at one point. "If you're talking about some cultural delineation, I don't know."

The man refuses to be categorized. And it is that refusal to be stereotyped that makes "Not a Genuine Black Man" such an intriguing and entertaining evening.

Trial

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payments between November 2001 and March 2003, but the amount was dropped to \$8,000 because the government received child welfare payments from the father of her son.
She also failed to disclose she had received a \$150,000 settlement of a lawsuit against a department store chain, prosecutors said.

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