



Angels & Demons

Tom Hanks, Ewan McGregor, and Ayelet Zurer Star in a Film Written By David Koepp and Akiva Goldsman, Based on the Novel By Dan Brown, and Directed by Ron Howard

By Josef Woodard

Tuesday, May 19, 2009

It may have earned box office hosannas on opening weekend (the hoped-for result) and the reflexive scorn of the Catholic Church (the prayed-for result), but *Angels & Demons* remains guilty of the artistic sins of mediocrity and sapping power from its predecessor. Author Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* stirred great interest and ire, both in book form and its easier-does-it Tom Hanks/Ron Howard-ified movie version. But the follow-up, *Angels & Demons*, is a more muted sensation. Suddenly, it seems that Brown turned what could have been a semi-revelatory project into the gilded, secret passageways of shtick.

So goes the inevitable movie version. Presumably, the material tosses a variety of elements into the narrative cauldron, including science, religion, academic inquiry, and on-the-spot detective work, each element feeding off of, while inducing friction with, another. Instead, the film plays like a breathlessly paced pastiche of Indiana Jones and the *Bourne Supremacy* franchise, with the intrigue and antiquity of Rome and the Vatican City as a playground. Pass the popcorn and stifle the yawn, please.

Hanks, the scholar-turned-irreverent-whistleblower on the Catholic Church's dirty history, is once again drawn into a crazy fray, like the would-be bookish Indiana. There has been a cardinal-napping in Rome, reportedly by the nasty anti-Vatican Illuminati, and a potentially catastrophic anti-matter device has been set to blow at midnight. Hanks has a harried busman's holiday, chasing all over Rome's ancient sites and secret byways, while trying to suss out who inside the Vatican might be the mole. To spice up the multicultural stew, the casting director picked on standard non-Americans—the Scottish Ewan McGregor, German Armin Mueller-Stahl, and Swedish Stellan Skarsgård.

On some level, *Angels & Demons* could be seen as a heaven-sent tourist teaser, an invitation to the exoticism of Rome for a good time (barring anti-matter matters). But the cheesy back lot feel of the film might also make it a plug for Universal Studios, which, under this summer's lean economic conditions, might be a likelier travel option. Cheaper yet, head down to the multiplex to take in this mildly entertaining new epistle in the Hollywood gospel according to Hanks and Howard.

For showtimes, check the Independent's movie listings, [here](#).