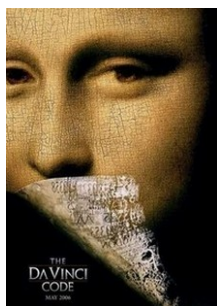


23 May 2006

By: Carmen Ivanov, Associate Editor



'Da Vinci' Cracks Box Office Code: "It shows that the Christ has a lot of box-office muscle."

Da Vinci Code rang up 224 million dollars in the three-day take

The film, adapted from Dan Brown's international best-selling book and starring Tom Hanks, rang up 224 million dollars in the three-day take, according to box office tracker Exhibitor Relations Co. Inc. Only "Star Wars: Episode III -- Revenge of the Sith", released last year, has done better -- at 253 million dollars, according to the industry daily The Hollywood Reporter. Many Christians and the Roman Catholic Church are disgruntled about the provocative premise of the film -- that Jesus Christ had a child with Mary Magdalene and that the Catholic church had hidden this "secret history". But neither a few local boycotts nor at best lukewarm reviews could dampen what is proving a commercial success for director Ron Howard. In the North American market, "The Da Vinci Code" scored the largest opening weekend this year with a three-day take of 77.1 million dollars, eclipsing "Ice Age: The Meltdown", at 68 million dollars, and burying Tom Cruise and his "Mission Impossible III" at 47.7 million. However, that only put "Da Vinci" in 13th place in the best opening weekends of all time in the United States and Canada. But "you can't compare 'Da Vinci Code' to similar films, which are no sequels, no science fiction with special effects," said Gitesh Pandya, an expert on the North American box office. "It's among the biggest ever," Pandya said. "The 'Da Vinci' opening is the second-biggest ever for a non-franchised film, if you take off all the sequels, the Spidermans and Harry Potters, the only movie that opened bigger was 'The Passion of the Christ'." Released in 2004, "The Passion", produced and directed by Mel Gibson, reaped 83 million dollars in its first weekend. Like "Da Vinci", this film provoked controversy over its treatment of religious themes, Pandya said. "It shows that the Christ has a lot of box-office muscle," he added. Before the final box-office receipts were released Monday, the entertainment industry press already was aglow about the commercial success of "Da Vinci", a film with a 125-million-dollar budget and gargantuan promotion campaign. "Thriller finds global Grail" reads the headline in Variety, the closely watched trade bible which last week had trashed the film in a review as "a stodgy, grim thing". The Hollywood Reporter's headline crowed over the film's opening box-office sales sweep: "A Da Vinci masterpiece". These trade papers noted that the controversy surrounding the film, which had been banned in some countries, had not stopped it from toppling records in two countries with solid Catholic traditions: Spain and Italy. In Italy, according to Variety, "Da Vinci" represented 70 percent of the tickets sold over the weekend. Pandya pointed out that it remains to be seen whether the film will become the year's biggest-grossing film, although Brown's book has sold more than 40 million copies. "So many people read the book and wanted to see the film right away, that they may have gone ... already," he said. "Da Vinci" should have another strong performance next weekend, coming in at second place against the debut of "X-Men 3", he predicted. "But then after that, it will be difficult to stay strong," he said. "It looks that the word of mouth is pretty good, but not great."