

Inferno (2016)

Rated PG-13. Running time: 2 hours 1 min.

Our content ratings: Violence 5; Language 1; Sex/Nudity 2.

Our star rating (1-5): 3

*This only have I found:
God created mankind upright,
but they have gone in search of many schemes.*

Ecclesiastes 7:29

In this current adaptation of a Dan Brown potboiler the talented Ron Howard and Tom Hanks lend their considerable weight to what is basically a popcorn flick for art lovers. The plot about demented souls wanting to unleash a deadly virus that will reduce the exploding population back to a mid-20th century level, thus preventing mass starvation and chaos, is comic book stuff, but the views of Florence, Venice, and Istanbul, inside and out, are spectacular. The travel bureaus of those cities should be sponsoring the film. However, I don't think it will make a favorite list of either filmmaker, belonging instead to the "I did it for the cash" list.

Howard for the third time directs Hanks as famous symbologist Robert Langdon, such a wiz at art puzzles and riddles that he often is called in to unravel something nobody else can figure out. The film begins with Dante-quoting biotech billionaire Bertrand Zobrist (Ben Foster) chased through the streets of Florence and up into a bell tower. Cornered, he steps out a window, plunging to his death below. We learn that World Health Organization agents are after him because he has created a vial of a virus so deadly that it can wipe out most of the world's bloated (in his view) population. The vial is

not on him at his death, so, where is it?

Suffering from apocalyptic nightmares, Landon wakes up in a hospital where an implausibly young English female doctor tends to him. He cannot remember how he got there, so she tells him he is in Milan. As Dr. Sienna Brooks (Felicity Jones) is talking, a female carabinieri (Ana Ularu) rushes down the corridor toward Langdon's room and shoots one of the other doctors standing just outside it. Brooks quickly locks the door of his room, giving her enough time to hustle the gown-clad Langdon away to safety. The amnesiac Langdon soon is searching for clues to the whereabouts of the vial, his trek leading him to Botticelli's painting *Map of Hell*; the death mask of Dante (a security camera video shows him stealing it); then up to the Palazzo Vecchio in Venice where he finds clues in the HUGE Vasari painting *The Battle of Marciano*. The deadly woman cop also shows up there in pursuit of them.

Also, chasing after them are those who had been after Zobrist. WHO Director Elizabeth Sinskey (Sidse Babett Knudsen) and her French colleague Christoph Bouchard (Omar Sy). In this version of WHO the usually money-strapped agency is equipped with a police force and helicopters. The more age-appropriate Sinskey apparently has a past romantic relationship with Langdon. Showing up late in the proceedings is a sinister man named Provost (Irrfan Khan), head of a shady consulting group. I'm not sure whose side he is on.

The trail ends in Istanbul at the ancient Hagia Sophia where a strange musical concert is being held in a watery subterranean chamber—and where the timer connected to the plague vial is about to go off.

The film does not deal with the drastic result of over-population, this being just a plot device, but apparently the book does, even offering a plot twist that fans of the book are angry about because the filmmakers changed the ending so drastically. From what I have read, the book is more ethically

engaged than the film, Howard and company opting for thrills and a happy ending over ethics and meaning. This is the kind of a film best seen at a cheap-seats theater or when it is released to a small screen format—unless you feel that you must stay current with your friends at work.

This review with a set of questions will be in the Nov. 2016 issue of VP.