

Dan Brown and “The Da Vinci Cod”

By Michael Wade

It was a Saturday morning, a few years back. Actually, it was in 2002, to be precise. I remember that I was ironing my Wal-Mart work shirts and trousers for the next week’s shifts. The wall phone in the laundry room rang twice before I could turn the iron off. I answered the telephone on the third ring.

“Hello?”

“Michael? This is Dan Brown,” he said.

“Yeah, Dan. What can I do for you?”

“I could use your advice about an idea I’m hatching for a new novel. You know how I value your opinion.”

It was true that I had helped him with the two successful novels he had written, but his frequent calls were starting to become a nuisance. And, I was a little annoyed that he had not given me credit in his books for my counsel.

“What are you doing?” he said.

“I’m writing the great American novel. What else would I be doing on a Saturday morning?”

“Oh! Sorry to interrupt your ironing. This won’t take long,” he said.

Having studied the daily literary reviews like my grandchildren devour the Sunday Comics, like me I knew Dan was well aware of the mixed opinions of my past two

works. The reviewers were split between “God awful horrible” and “You’ve got to be joking.” My works, a coffee table pop-up picture book entitled ***Despot Removers: the Byzantine Assassins***, followed by my foray into mystery writing, ***The Holistic Dentist and the Case of the Enigmatic Absession***, were judged too terrible even to be included on the remainder table at the Family Dollar Store. One reviewer said, “His coffee table book is so bad that no self-respecting cup of coffee would be seen on the same table with it.”

“Okay,” I said, “I’m sitting down. Shoot!”

“I’m thinking of submitting a shortened version of a prospective novel for the annual Seacoast Writers contest. You know, to see how the judges take to my idea. If they like it, I’ll turn it into the whole enchilada,” he said.

“Yeah? I’m listening.”

“Well, this art historian finds an ancient parchment with strange characters on it, in a mysterious out-of-the-way antique shop in the bowels of old Milan. It’s written in ciphers that could only have been by the hand of, none other than, Leonardo Da Vinci.” He went on. “The historian, a world renowned art historian and symbologist, finally decodes the text, and he follows its clues to a secret location where he makes a startling discovery.”

“He finds the Holy Grail?” I asked. “Cuz that’s already been done.”

“No, no. He discovers an ornately designed dogwood box containing the bones of a *Trisopterus Minutus*, a member of the order Gadiformes. The bones are from the actual fish depicted in da Vinci’s ‘Last Supper,’” he said.

“Whoa up, there,” I said. “I don’t recall seeing any fish on the table in that painting.”

“Ah, ha!” he said, “In the original painting, there *was* a fish, a Poor Cod actually, on the floor at the Christ’s feet.”

“Wait one,” I said, letting the telephone receiver bungee to the floor. I went to the bookshelf in the next room and pulled out the dusty copy of ***The Really Big Book of Famous Art*** that I had bought several years ago on eBay. I paged through the plates until I got to Da Vinci’s “Last Supper.” Nope, no fish, and no Christ’s feet, just the shape of a doorway where Dan said the fish and feet were supposed to be.

I grabbed the receiver again in mid-upward bungee. “Dan, there’s nothing in the painting that remotely suggests fish.”

“Michael, remember the art historian, let’s call him Langdon, and the parchment? Well, the parchment turns out to be an actual early sketch of the painting as Da Vinci had conceived it, and it shows the fish.”

“What about the doorway?” I asked.

“Supposedly, a cult of monks cut a doorway through the northern wall upon which the fresco was painted and totally obliterated the image of the fish. Later, the cult bricked up the destructive portal once again. Odd, don’t you think?” he said. “I’m not *saying* anything. I am *inferring* that there was a conspiracy and a cover-up and it has been perpetuated for centuries.”

“What conspiracy? What cover-up?”

“Let’s just say that the struggle between the Evolutionists and the Intelligent Designers is not all that new. Even before Da Vinci’s time it was the Obstanturus

Abintelligencia and the Consiliumin Destinoare pitting their vast resources against the Priory of Pisces,” Dan said.

“The what?”

“The Obstacles to Intelligence and the Intentional Designists, Michael”

“And what the hell is the Priory of Pisces, and where do they fit in?” I asked.

“They’re the ones who hold to the idea that mankind is descended from fish; and more exactly, the Poor Cod. The Priory throughout the ages has defended their idea and protected the sacred relics from their detractors, sometimes with their lives.”

“Sacred relics? You mean the fish bones?” I asked.

“Precisely,” he said. “Do you think it coincidence that G-O-D and C-O-D are so close in their spelling? Moreover, do you not recall the command, ‘Go forth, and I will make you fishers of men?’ It all fits together. Don’t you see?”

“I see that you’re writing a story about fish friars, and I see that you must have smoked your breakfast, Mr. Brown.” I said, thumbing unconsciously through my wife’s Victoria’s Secret catalog. “Why not write an amazing tale of the sacred feminine, instead. You know, sex sells.”

“I can see that you’re not going to be any help,” Dan said. And with that, he hung up.

Four years later, I saw Dan Brown at the local theatrical screening of ***The Da Vinci Code***. His book had become a multi-million best seller, and he no longer called me to ask for advice. He hadn’t noticed me at the theater and I hadn’t attempted to rekindle our bizarre relationship. It was better that way.

Since then, my Saturdays have been much quieter, free from interruptions, and I can concentrate on a pair of sizzling semi-biographies on which I have been feverishly working, ***Honest Tease: the Unlikely Life of Mr. Frank Flirter***, and the equally exciting, yet obviously controversial, ***Chlamydia Jane – Terror of the Old West***. I just know they'll be terrific!

Late, last Saturday evening, while sitting in my usual booth at my favorite local bistro, ***Billy Bob Tanaka's Alligator Petting Zoo and Sushi Bar***, it came over me like so much bubbling flotsam rolling in with a pungent tide. The life of a writer is much like being a short-order cook. "I'll take mine to go."

The End