

Megiddo Hits Theaters this Month

In a bold attempt to take Christian films into the mainstream, Matt Crouch spent \$20 million on his newest movie

Megiddo, the sequel to The Omega Code, will open in 450 theaters Sept. 21, and its makers hope to again astonish Hollywood by drawing large numbers of Christians to the box office.

At a cost of \$20 million, Megiddo is one of the most expensive and technologically advanced Christian films ever made, boasting more visually enhanced scenes than Pearl Harbor. It includes helicopters and jet fighters screaming through the sky, massive army encampments in the Valley of Megiddo and a horrifying computer-generated beast who appears in the film's final scenes. The subject matter is dark, but the producers hope the film illuminates the truth of Christ.

"This is a ministry project," said producer Matthew Crouch, son of Paul and Jan Crouch, founders of Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN). "On Sept. 21, I hand this project over to the body of Christ and say: 'Now it's yours. I built you a tract and put it in a neutral location. Invite someone.'"

Crouch is again revving the same grassroots machine that propelled The Omega Code into the Top 10 in its opening weekend (October 1999) and gave it the week's largest per-theater attendance, above such films as Fight Club. The Omega Code's surprise showing brought prominent coverage in major daily newspapers.

Now, Crouch says, it's time to prove that the market is still there.

"Megiddo is more important than the first one," he said. "The Omega Code got attention, but they could say: 'What a fluke. The audience came together because of millennial madness.'"

"If we make Megiddo more financially successful than the first one, they'll say, 'Those guys know where an audience is.' My hope is that Hollywood will say: 'Thanks for identifying that group. Now we're going to make films for them.'"

The headquarters for Gener8xion, Crouch's filmmaking company, is two blocks from the sprawling Universal Studios campus, where more than a decade ago thousands of people marched to protest The Last Temptation of Christ.

Crouch says protests are not the way to go. "Hollywood doesn't care if you protest," he said. "It's a business, and unless you operate in the influence of their system, they don't hear you. Don't write another letter—go buy a ticket [to Megiddo]."

"Whether you like the picture or not, support it. It's biblically sound. If we buy tickets, we get heard by Hollywood," he added.

Crouch is using TBN's airwaves to promote the film, which will show in theaters within TBN's broadcast range. He said 7,000 people have signed up via the Internet to download bulletin stuffers to advertise the film at church. He even saved money by asking TBN viewers to show up as extras for parts of Megiddo.

What people see on the screen will have every element moviegoers expect: evil villains, recognizable actors (including lead actor Michael Biehn of *Aliens*, *The Terminator*, *Tombstone*, *The Rock*), explosions, dazzling effects and a fast-paced story. The film was shot in Los Angeles; Nairobi, Kenya; Rome and Israel. The special-effects budget alone is larger than the entire *Omega Code* budget.

But Crouch doesn't see success entirely in dollars. He says the film is primarily a missions tool. He tells of a rebellious teen-age girl in New Mexico who went to see *The Omega Code* with her friends and ended up starting a Bible study.

"Those kinds of stories are the point," he said. "This is an opportunity to take someone who's not a Christian and let them ask the questions."

Gener8xion is not confining itself to end-times pictures. This year they released *The Champion*, a boxing film starring Christian singer Carman, and are developing *Woman, Thou Art Loosed*, a story about a family torn apart by rape, based on the book and play by T.D. Jakes. In September, Charisma House Publishers will release a book version of *Megiddo*, authored by Paul Crouch and Cynthia Cirile.

Gener8xion is also developing an animated film based on the parable of the Prodigal Son, set in a futuristic environment. Crouch also has bought the rights to Bill Bright's first novel, the story of a 10-year-old boy with the gift of healing.

But those projects may have to wait until *Megiddo* can prove

its box-office power. “[Megiddo] is a real movie,” Crouch said. “The Omega Code was a great first step. Megiddo is a beautifully epic picture.”

In other Christian film news, Namesake Entertainment of Louisville, Ky., which produced last year’s Left Behind movie, announced in July that it had purchased the film rights for The Visitation and Hangman’s Curse, two best-selling novels written by best-selling Christian fiction writer Frank Peretti.

“We are always looking for these kinds of projects in Hollywood, and here it is,” said Hollywood producer Ralph Winter, a veteran of films such as Mighty Joe Young, X-Men and Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home. Namesake has begun a long-term relationship with Winter, who said he expected Hangman’s Curse to be a “slam dunk” at the box office.

—Joel Kilpatrick in Los Angeles