



21st Century Fox

... Mulder, that is. The 90s' sexiest conspiracy nut is back to get all post-9/11 on our asses. In a world exclusive, **Empire** heads to the Vancouver set of the new X-Files movie to find out if the truth is still out there...

WORDS **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

RESearchers find dolphin with extra legs... University sequencing genes for danger fungus... The ghost of Arborfield Hall..." **EMPIRE** IS either flicking through a copy of the *Fortean Times*, or standing in the office of paranormal investigator Fox Mulder, scanning the clippings tacked to the wall. As it happens, the latter's the case — and there's plenty of evidence to prove it. Two bowls filled with the shells of sunflower seeds (Mulder's favourite snack). Some basketballs (he's a New York Knicks fanatic). A pro-Obama newspaper article (he's a Democrat). Exotic spiders in a case. A map of the United States with coloured markers pinned to it. And, dominating the room, a very familiar poster with the words "I Want To Believe" printed beneath a hovering spaceship.

From the look of this room, Mulder hasn't changed a bit since we last saw him in the final, 21st episode of *The X-Files*, back in 2002. But, as the faithful few who stuck with the nine-season TV show through its last wobbly years will recall, that episode saw the dogged FBI agent's world crumble beneath him. After getting closer to the truth than ever before (and learning that an alien invasion of Earth was scheduled for 2012), he was brought up on bogus charges by the military and sentenced to death. With the aid of his former partner (and seemingly new lover), Dana Scully, he escaped prison and the two became fugitives. Which is why, in the second X-Files movie, this office is not located in the dingy basement of FBI headquarters, but in the back of a cosy, rural house where Mulder is hiding out as the action begins.

"We pick up the characters in the present day," says Frank Spotnitz, the X-Files veteran who co-wrote the film with series creator Chris Carter and is **Empire's** tour guide for the day. "It's early 2008 — not the summer, but the start of the year, with lots of ice and snow. The tone is not exactly true horror, but the TV show was always about supernatural scares and this definitely has that. It's got a very personal, emotional story with Mulder and Scully, but it's creepy and disturbing as well..."



Scully begins the movie happily working as a doctor in a spooky Catholic infirmary... it doesn't last.



“THIS WILL STAND ALONE AS BOTH A SCARY THRILLER AND A FUN ACTION MOVIE.”
DAVID DUCHOVNY

IF THE NEXT LOCATION WE'RE ESCORTED TO IS ANY INDICATION, "CREEPY" IS AN UNDERSTATEMENT. IT'S AN ANCIENT-LOOKING BUILDING IN DOWNTOWN VANCOUVER WHICH WAS a mental hospital before it was abandoned 15 years ago, and boasts a ghost lodging on the third floor. Fortunately, tonight's action is being shot only one level up, where the corridors have been dressed with crucifixes, stained-glass windows and statues of weeping saints. This, in the film, will be Our Lady Of Sorrows Hospital, the Catholic infirmary where Dana Scully works as a doctor.

During a scene she's shooting, which involves Scully, a bed-ridden boy and a vulture-like priest, Gillian Anderson wanders over to explain how it feels to play the flame-haired icon again. "It was odd at first, as I'd consciously chosen a lot of parts that were different from Scully. Now, coming back to her, sometimes my brain fights that and I have to struggle to do things I'd programmed myself not to. But it's great working with David again. We put on our costumes again for the first time, looked at each other and went, 'Oh! It's Mulder and Scully!' And we love chatting nonsense together. Last night there was a conversation between David and Chris and I about the degree to which you get bloated after you eat sushi..."

There ensues a discussion with the easygoing Anderson that freewheels from dying her locks ("I'm not crazy about being a redhead; I get much more uncomfortable in public spaces"), to fans of a deranged nature, to Simon Pegg (who in *Spaced* had the major horn for Scully, as the actress enjoyed reminding him on the set of the upcoming *How To Lose Friends & Alienate People*).

One topic we've been repeatedly warned by the studio is off-limits, however, is the movie's plot. With everyone

■ Briefing

Released: August 1
Budget: \$35 million (estimated)
Director: Chris Carter
Starring: David Duchovny, Gillian Anderson, Amanda Peet, Billy Connolly, Xzibit, Callum Keith Rennie
Story: Details are under tighter security than the secret files in the Cigarette Smoking Man's Pentagon store room. But we do know that the movie takes place in the present day, with FBI agents-turned-fugitives-from-the-law Mulder and Scully pulled back into a dangerous mystery. Amanda Peet and rapper Xzibit play federal agents, and Billy Connolly appears as a mysterious and "very dark" new character. Whatever goes down, things are guaranteed to get spooky...

we speak to during our 13 hours on set, even the most innocuous probing leads to an intake of breath, an uneasy glance around the room and a quick, "I'm not sure I'm allowed to say." With no trailer or even *title* forthcoming just four months from release, this is starting to make the Indiana Jones IV lot look like Blabbermouth Central.

"There has been *extreme* effort in trying to keep things secret," says executive producer Brent O'Connor. "We on the crew joke about how none of us has ever done a show where you can't have a script. But it works: no leaks." Spotnitz elaborates: "The script is in a safe, the safe's in a room with a video camera, and that's the only place you can read it. Even most of the actors have only read the scenes they're in. We've also been operating under fake codenames: first Done One, then Crying Box, with director Rich Tracers, which is an anagram of Chris Carter."

But not even riddles and vaults can deter hardcore X-philes. Call-sheets have somehow ended up on the internet — as did, one day in December, a verbatim radio-to-radio conversation between two crew members about a missing prop. Most talked-about was a spy photo that surfaced in January, clearly showing a figure wearing a prosthetic werewolf head on The X-Files set.

Despite O'Connor's hushed admission that there is "a circumstance which Fox security are pursuing", no-one will be drawn on whether the latter is an authentic leaked image or a wind-up by the production. "There's so much speculation on the internet, which serves us brilliantly," grins Spotnitz. "If the truth is out there, it's mingled with so much untruth that no-one can give it any credence."

Nuisance or not, at least the rabid speculation proves there's still a market for The X-Files' brand of spooky business. The first movie, *Fight The Future*, hit screens in 1998, at the peak of the show's popularity, making

The truth is down there: Scully investigates (note movie-style blowout on the flashlight budget).



Creator/director Chris Carter gets spooked on set (alien robot Bigfoot just out of shot).



The FBI scour the tundra for... well, we'd love to tell you. But then we'd have to abduct you.



\$190 million worldwide. Twentieth Century Fox first approached Carter about a second feature back in 2003. But as a disagreement over profit participation morphed into a lawsuit and Anderson and Duchovny went off to try new things — the former small indie projects, the latter rom-coms and new TV hit *Californication* — it looked like we'd seen the last of them. Last spring, however, with the legal issue resolved, Fox gave Carter an ultimatum: now or never. Carter, who'd spent his hiatus surfing and climbing mountains, opened his laptop once more. By the end of this summer, we'll know whether he made the right choice.

"It's exciting that people are watching so closely, and also terrifying. But I defy anyone to say that The X-Files isn't still relevant," insists Carter. "As a society we're even more frightened than we were post-9/11. It is a paranoid time. People sense the government is up to something."

Speaking of paranoia, Spotnitz hints that if the film is successful, they'll return to finally wrap up the labyrinthine conspiracy plotline that spanned the TV series, with the 2012 alien invasion possibly unfolding on our cinema screens in the same year. For now, the men in black, ET embryos and killer bees have been shelved. So, expect instead a self-contained yarn that involves the following: a frantic footchase with Mulder pursuing someone (or something) through a rainstorm; an explosive car-chase involving a vehicle flipping upside-down on a snowbank; the return of a few fan favourites (hopefully Robert Patrick's Agent Doggett and the surly Mitch Pileggi); and the introduction of characters played by Amanda Peet, Xzibit and Billy Connolly. Yes, *that* Billy Connolly.

"He's funny as hell, but there's nothing funny about what he does here," says Spotnitz. "Billy's been getting a kick out of doing something this straight and dark."

IT'S NEARING 3AM AND THERE'S STILL NO SIGN OF FOX MULDER HIMSELF, ALTHOUGH THERE IS A MIDGET SCAMPERING ABOUT IN KIDS' PYJAMAS, DOUBLING FOR THE NOW-DEPARTED child actor. But suddenly word comes through that David Duchovny is en route from his hotel to begin his long night of filming. **Empire** is escorted to "the chapel", the site of Our Lady Of Sorrow's confessional box, to await the star, who appropriately has his own confession to make.

"You know, even though we went around doing press for the first movie saying, 'You don't need to see the TV show to see this,' that was pretty much a lie." Duchovny leans back, turning on his trademark lazy smile. "My hope for this one is that that statement would be true. That this will stand alone as a scary thriller, in the tradition of *Silence Of The Lambs*, and as a fun action movie. If we get to do more movies, then we can get back into the arcs and the mythology and all that stuff. But with this, we're getting back to what made the first couple of seasons of the show great, before we got wrapped up in our own storytelling. The horror-movie-of-the-week aspect."

Still munching sunflower seeds, still hunting for answers. Has Mulder changed at all? "Well, it's 15 years on from when he was introduced, so playing him the same way would be like having a 50 year-old stripper on screen. But he's still on a quest. The essence of this character is to believe. So he's active, he's searching. I wouldn't believe it if he weren't. If everything falls away, that's what the guy does, whether or not it's his job anymore."

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» The X-Files 2 is out on August 1 and will be reviewed in a future issue.