

## Interview Collection Part 2

**I GUESS it's not really surprising to find an actor by the name of Diesel starring in a movie about fast cars, but what you may not know is that Vin chose the name himself and is very reluctant to talk about his early life.**

**Source: Hull Daily Mail, September 14, 2001, Page 6**

**LIZ HOWELL**

I GUESS it's not really surprising to find an actor by the name of Diesel starring in a movie about fast cars, but what you may not know is that Vin chose the name himself and is very reluctant to talk about his early life.

I have seen it suggested that he was born Mark Vincent, but he became Vin Diesel during a short career as a club bouncer in his native New York, and has stuck with that ever since.

He first came to the attention of the rest of the world with his memorable appearance in Saving Private Ryan a little over three years ago and even young children are aware of his deep, gravelly voice, thanks to The Iron Giant.

Boiler Room and Pitch Black followed, but you can see him on the big screen in The Fast and The Furious, a high-octane thriller set around the illicit world of import car racing.

I grew up in New York, revealed Van when we chatted recently. I had a motorcycle in college, but outside of that, The Fast and The Furious was a training ground for the whole car culture for me.

Now, Vin prefers to drive a utility vehicle but then he is rather a big guy and he uses driving time for other things.

I need transportation time in LA to meditate, he revealed. That's the one time you are completely alone and you can roll up your windows or roll down your windows and listen to whatever you want to listen to.

So he doesn't get his own adrenaline rush zooming along the highway then?

Film gives me an adrenaline rush, he admitted. It's a cop-out answer I know, but that whole excitement of making something out of nothing and coming in with a collaborative effort to make a film is what does it for me. Especially to make a film like The Fast and The Furious that is multi-layered and has so many different exciting elements to it.

But, despite the energy of the movie, Vin doesn't really see himself as an action hero.

The whole idea of being labelled an action hero is interesting because it's a relatively new term, he suggested.

The Fast and The Furious is most similar to those 1950s films like Rebel Without A Cause and The Wild One. Back then, those actors, including Charlton Heston and Kirk Douglas, weren't considered action heroes. They were just actors.

I think one of the great things about The Fast and The Furious is, we were conscious we were making a film that paid attention to story and had very flavourful characters and very interesting character relationships, which is probably why the film did so well. I think the public's over the wham-bam, all-for-action, special-effects thing.

And for those of you who loved Pitch Black you might be pleased to know that a sequel is definitely on the way.

Yeah, The Chronicles of Riddick, he confirmed. I'm actually getting the script this week.

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**Fuelled up for power and the passion Movie action hero Vin Diesel talks to Alison Jones about his latest high octane thrills**

The Birmingham Post, September 18, 2001

ALISON JONES

There is something rather fitting about casting an actor named Diesel in a film where the car's the star.

The Fast and the Furious is the surprise blockbuster of the summer. A high octane thriller about illegal road racing that has taken the box office by storm and left the under performing Pearl Harbor choking on its exhaust fumes. It has put the actors behind the wheel, Vin Diesel, Paul Walker, Michelle Rodriguez and Jordana Brewster, on every casting director's A list.

Vin, who made a lasting impression in Saving Private Ryan and the sci-fi horror movie Pitch Black, is already being talked of as a Schwarzenegger or Stallone for the new millennium.

Though the shaven headed New Yorker admits to being flattered by the comparisons he is anxious to point out that there is more to them, and certainly him, than the size of their muscles.

**'Arnold was not an actor by training. He made the most of what he had and did it brilliantly.'**

**'Sly wrote one of the greatest movies of all time and starred in it when he was a nobody, Rocky, then he made whatever choices he did. I am an actor first, indisputably, because of all the years of training, of not getting film roles and hustling my way into off-Broadway plays.'**

**'I started directing out of necessity, because no one was giving me the canvas to be artistic. So my history kind of absolves me from ever just being an action hero.'**

**'Hopefully when you watch my work you'll see I am attempting to bring something more to the table, more depth to the character.'**

In The Fast and The Furious he plays the leader of a gang of highly organised road racers who send their computer-controlled, fuel injected, vehicles hurtling along the night-time streets of LA at death defying speed.

The project was inspired by an article that appeared in Vibe magazine about the shadowy, adrenaline-charged world of import (car) street racing.

**'It was pulled together very quickly,'** said Vin. **'I signed on because of one conversation I had with the director Rob Cohen, who described this scene to me where the camera goes through me into that car and out through the exhaust. I liked the mythology behind that, like a Centaur, half man half horsepower.'**

He describes his character, Dominic Toretto, as **'an alpha male, a care taker'** attributes that the former doorman takes from his own personality.

**'As an actor, to be truthful you have to find a kind of relationship with the role, to find the parallel between your life and theirs.'**

**'Humans are very complex and one of the luxuries of making films is being able to play someone with very clear parameters. You have to know exactly who he is and what his limitations are. If you are the type of person who thinks a lot about life and questions your identity, it can be very therapeutic.'**

In spite of his years guarding nightclub doors and casting out undesirables for wearing trainers, Vin is far from the knuckleheaded, dinner-jacketed archetype.

He actually regards his years of barring the way of the inebriated and inappropriately dressed as excellent training for his work as a director on the short Multifacial and the low budget full-length feature Strays .

**'Being a doorman is amazing for teaching you how to handle people and being effective in speech. I learnt how to read people. I had a friend who had his neck slit from ear to ear because he read someone wrong. It's a survival skill.'**

Now he prefers to learn by watching other experts at work, such as Steven Spielberg on the set of Private Ryan.

The part of Private Carpazo, who is shot while trying to save a stranded family, was written specially for him.

**'That was the highest form of validation. When I was at school I wasn't the kid getting the awards and suddenly I was the subject of a Hollywood fairytale.'**

**'That was when I started believing all those anecdotes about old time actors like Clarke Gable being discovered off a hay truck.'**

He was so keen to learn at the feet of the master that he was not bothered that he was only handed a completed script as he stepped on the plane. **I was thinking about watching Steven work. As a young film maker myself I would have gone out there to shine his shoes.'**

**'His way of directing is very efficient. He is brilliant at knowing which lens to use to capture a mood, at turning just a gesture into a beautiful scene.'**

Vin admitted that he was stunned when, on the first day of filming, Spielberg invited all the actors to come forward to offer any ideas they had.

**'Here is the guy with more accolades than anyone I know and more money than God and he's receptive!**

**'Yet I got why he was receptive. Because although his movie was budgeted at \$67 million and the film I had just made and been at Sundance with cost \$47,000, there was a similarity and that was we both wanted to make magic.' Receptive though the Oscar winning auteur was he decided to ignore Vin's appeals to let him live in the movie.**

**'I hated that I was the first to die. I pleaded with Steven to just make him a boxer and shoot him in the arm and let his tragedy be that he could never box again.**

**'But, looking back, it made sense for him to kill the most formidable character first because you got a sense of the dangers that were present in war.**

**'The producer said afterwards that it was fortunate that I died first because everyone was now in restless anticipation of what I would do next as they didn't get enough of me the first time.'**

The Fast and the Furious is on general release now.

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### **Diesel power**

**Source: Yorkshire Post, September 27, 2001**

THE first action star of the 21st century? Maybe, but Vin Diesel wants to be taken seriously he tells Film Critic Tony Earnshaw.

He enters the room with confidence but no discernible swagger. He glances quickly at the handful of journalists gathered there, weighs up each in turn, pours a glass of water and then sits, his broad frame encased in a suit so sharp it could cut.

Vin Diesel is the man being touted as the replacement for the larger-than-life tough guys of the 80s and early 90s. With Arnie and Sly nudging pensionable age, and the likes of Bruce Willis, Steven Seagal and Jean-Claude van Damme losing their once cast-iron box office appeal, someone new and fresh is required. Vin Diesel could be that one. Big, mean-looking, with presence, charisma and arms as big as the average mans thighs, Diesel is a tough cookie. Even his name - he changed it from plain Mark Vincent - is hard. If he has a weakness, it is his too-small eyes. His searching gaze locks on to everyone separately. It is slightly unnerving.

**You have to take in each one very quickly and then assess the mob**, he says in his trademark growl, like Lee Marvin in The Dirty Dozen. For the uninitiated, the 34-year-old New Yorkers career has taken off big-time in Hollywood since he was selected by Steven Spielberg to join the ensemble cast of Saving Private Ryan. Diesel was Private Caparzo, the first to die in the film when he is struck down by a snipers bullet.

He followed up that inauspicious debut by providing the voice of the metal-gobbling robot in The Iron Giant and in the intelligent sci-fi shocker Pitch Black, playing a killer named Riddick who can see in the dark. Yet Diesel made his first impact in his own films, writing, directing and starring in a handful of ultra low-budget dramas (among them Multi-Facial and Strays) that set the US festival circuit alight. He still harbours ambitions to direct more, particularly a project entitled Doormen, based on his years as a nightclub bouncer but, in the meantime, is soaking up the eye-popping offers from Hollywood.

**"I try to learn as much as I can from every experience. You learn how to read people when bouncing. Ive had friends whove had their necks slit from ear-to-ear from reading a person wrong.**

**"Its a survival skill. It took a while to shake the aggression. One of the things I noticed when I was bouncing was that even when I was going to auditions I always walked around with this 2,000lb gorilla on my back. There was always this huge monster behind me, no matter how cordial Id be. Even when I was trying to be as amiable as possible there was sometimes too much strength there. I had to shake it.**

**Quiet is very intimidating. Self-confidence is intimidating. I still want to tell that story, but right now Im like a kid in a candy shop. Im being offered these amazing roles and its just so hard to turn them down. Id have to turn down multiple roles if I was to go back to directing.**

His turn in The Fast and the Furious, a high-concept B-movie that has taken the American box office by

storm, has elevated him into the pantheon of second league action hero. As Dominic, an ice-cool street racer, he blasts through the streets of LA in a supercharged car, dodging the police and the efforts of an undercover cop (Paul Walker) to nail him.

The film was green-lit off a bike magazine article, so the script kinda had to be pulled together. I signed on after the director described a scene where the camera goes through me and into the car, and the mythology behind that. That did it for me. He speaks in glowing terms of working with Spielberg and of how a role was created for him.

**"The role didnt exist in the script, but I wasnt thinking about that. I was thinking about watching Steven work. I would have gone out there, as a young filmmaker to shine his shoes. At that time the only recognition Id got was in a film Id directed, and I was going out there with that mentality.**

**The most confident directors are the most receptive. On the first day he held up the script and said, This is just a blueprint. I thought, Hes a guy with more accolades than anyone I know, more money than God, and hes receptive? The reason why he was receptive was that, although his film was budgeted at \$63m and the one Id just done was budgeted at \$47,000, the similarity was that we both wanted to make magic. Thats the lesson I learned.** Of his performance in *The Fast and the Furious*, director Rob Cohen said: ***Diesel has what it takes to replace Stallone and Co, now in their fifties, with a face more acceptable to todays youth-orientated market.***" Diesel laughs. Its uncanny - like Lee Marvin resurrected.

**"Im flattered that I can be compared to those guys, but every actors different. Arnold is not the same as Sylvester Stallone. Arnold wasnt somebody who was theatrically trained, but he made the best of what he had. Stallone made one of the greatest movies of all time, and wrote it, and that was Rocky.**

**"I am an actor first, indisputably, from all the time I spent hustling for off-Broadway plays. My history absolves me from just being an action hero. If you see my work you can see that Im attempting to bring more to the table, more depth. I go into every film I do with the same conviction.**

**Id love to do a comedy, but Im not the first person that they go to. Knockaround Guys is a comedy in an American Guy Ritchie kind of way, but not really. Im being presented with [tough guy roles] and its hard for my agent to understand that. Im doing a film next where Im not the tough guy, Im just an obsequious Everyman.** \*The Fast and the Furious (15) is on nationwide release.

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### The X2Day Vin transcript

Well Ladies our Vin was in rare form!! Sporting a lovely XXX tanktop (at least I think that's what it was! Sorry I was drooling over the man and trying to pay attention to what he said!), black sunglasses and nice fitting jeans as he and the host walked around the X games.

Rick Thorne is the host...Vin...well obviously we know who Vin is! LOL!

**Rick:** Welcome back to X2Day. You never know who you're gonna meet here at the X-games. Check it out, Vin Diesel! What are you doing here??

**Vin:** I...I came down to pay homage to one of the most fascinating sports of our era.

**Rick:** Well, did you...did you ever do any of these sports growing up?

**Vin:** Well...I grew up in New York City and you know we couldn't play football or anything so we skateboarded. I dunno...I never had the money for a BMX bike so I always got whatever bike they gave me for Christmas.

**Rick:** Right.

**Vin:** And I would use that for jumping and we'd create these ramps...

**Rick:** Right.

**Vin:** But in New York City it was always cement and you always had cement ground so if you crashed you crashed. You crashed hard.

**Rick:** Yeah cause the concrete doesn't give...

**Vin:** But we boarded like crazy in New York City. I mean, New York feels like one of the original places that it all came...ya know...came together. I remember when there were like classic skateboards...

**Rick:** Right! Old school see through, right?

**Vin:** Ahhhh....

**Rick:** Old school see throughs...

**Vin:** Yeah!

**Rick:** That you could stand on them and they'd go Wahhhhhh Wahhhh (makes this weird breaking motion with his two hands...and I'm still confused about what he's talking about...but maybe I wasn't into skating long enough! LOL)

**Vin:** That's right, that's right! (nods and grins as only our Vin does!)

**Rick:** So you could relate to all of this actually?

**Vin:** It reminds me of...of...of what youth is all about. This is always a...a true expression.

**Rick:** Right

**Vin:** That's what I like about this.

**Rick:** That's cool! Well we're psyched that you're here. Ya know what I'm saying?

**Vin:** Well...we're doing a film called XXX...

**Rick:** What's the film about?

**Vin:** A guy who's an ex...X-games champion. That is...now becomes the new James Bond.

**Rick:** Oh, really?

**Vin:** It's phenomenal. So imagine if you had all the skills of everybody in the X-games. Of all the masses in the X-games...

**Rick:** Yeah...

**Vin:** And you use that to take care of whatever you had to take care of.

**Rick:** That's awesome. Well listen right now we're gonna check out some free style flatland on bikes. We got highlights comin' atcha of park...of bike, park and vert highlights from the X-games. Listen, Vin, you got alotta people noticing you. If you need some protection...

**Vin:** I could use some protection...(Val is lurking in the backgrounds at this point)

**Rick:** (yelling) GET BACK PEOPLE!! BACK!!

(Vin laughs and smiles)

**Rick:** Is that good?

**Vin:** That's good... (Vin grins and say something I can't understand!)

~~~~~Commercial Break~~~~~

**Rick:** So, Vin, you used to ride bikes, right? You said back in the day you guys set up ramps. So you could relate to all this...

**Vin:** Yeah

**Rick:** Did you ever do any freestyle flatland?

**Vin:** I never did...I never did the freestyle flatland, but we would do alotta...it was alotta jumps and stuff...

**Rick:** So you've always been pretty athletic?

**Vin:** Oh yeah, athletic or...stupid... **Rick:** Just stupid? Yeah!

**Vin:** Pretty dumb, yeah (grins)

**Rick:** Me too, dude!! I've always been stupid!

**Vin:** Rebellious, yeah...

**Rick:** Rebellious idiot

**Vin:** You're either born a rebel or you're not..

**Rick:** Which leads back to the movie...

**Vin:** Yes!

**Rick:** I wanted to talk about...

**Vin:** Yes...

**Rick:** When is the...when is the release date on the movie?

**Vin:** July 26th of 2002. So we're here a year early...

**Rick:** Rumor has it you guys are gonna incorporate athletes...

**Vin:** Tons of athletes from this school. We're really reaching out to the athletes that are masters in this sport to create the authenticity. If you're making a film and you want the film to be credible...

**Rick:** Right...

**Vin:** Aside from being entertaining...Like during Saving Private Ryan...we went to bootcamp.

**Rick:** Right...

**Vin:** And that helped the authenticity of the film.

**Rick:** Right...

**Vin:** So this acts as a boot camp

**Rick:** Right...

**Vin:** For XXX.

**Rick:** Right...

**Vin:** So I'm...ya know I'm gonna go to the Swiss Alps and train there for a few weeks with the masters up there. And then I'm gonna go up to Sean Palmer and train with him up in Tahoe...

**Rick:** And chill with him, right!

**Vin:** ...and train with Matt Hoffman and all these different guys...And go through the boot camp of each sport.

**Rick:** Right...

**Vin:** Ummm...If nothing else just to understand the mentality...because it's a true...which I already have...it's a true rebellious...ya know...creative...

**Rick:** Outlet...

**Vin:** It's so artistic. And this stuff...it's like a dance. It's so...it's so profound. Everything that goes into it.

**Rick:** Alright. So be on the lookout, ready?

XXX coming out next summer. Vin, it was nice meeting you and listen in boot camp training with bikes, if Matt doesn't teach you to do that Tummel (don't ask I don't know) Foot Plant, I'll give you my number dude!! I'll fly out, teach the Tummel Foot Plant. Hey listen don't go anywhere you're watching X2Day. Let's walk around check out some other sports. There's some people I want you to meet.

**Vin:** Okay, sounds good.

(both point at the camera)

**Rick:** Stay right there!!

(transcript thanks to CCL)

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## Empire interview

October 2001

**"Sure, I can see the parallels,"** laughs Vin Diesel. **"I've worn a few vests, I've kicked a few asses, and I don't have much hair"**. Yippie-kay-yay motherfuckers, the New Bruce Willis™ is in town.

Weighing in at approximately 200lbs, six feet and 34 years, and built like the bloke who built the brick shithouse with his bare hands, Marc Vincent (real name) is the modern action hero incarnate. He may claim to be "so far from Bruce, Arnold and Sly that I can only be flattered by the comparision", but in the tough guy business, attitude is everything. And make no mistake - attitude is one commodity that Vin Diesel has by the bucket-load.

Flashback, for example, to 1999 and the set of Reindeer Games, aka Deception, aka World War III. **"John Frankenheimer says to me: 'Frankly, Vin, I'm too old, too busy and too fucking rich, to worry about your character,'" Diesel fumes at the memory. "Now, there are some guys you just don't say that to. You know, you don't say that to the guy who is so poor he is sleeping on his friend's couch. You don't say that to the guy who, when he couldn't get any roles, went off and wrote his own fucking movie! And directed his own fucking movie (Diesel's inspired 1994 debut and Cannes success, *Multi-facial*). And you don't say that fucking guy. You don't say that to Vin fucking Diesel!. " Damn straight! " I simply said to him, 'Okay, John.' It was a calm, collected 'okay'. It was a bad okay and Frankenheimer knew it. He said, 'Oh, come here and give me a hug.' But he knew I was gone. He knew it was too late (*Diesel walked*). But hey, I guess hindsight is 20:20."**

If Diesel's arrogant faith in his ability echoes that of his ageing peers, his path to the big league is, no tale of Iron Man contests and soft porn. **"When I was seven, my friends and I used to terrorise the neighborhood,"** he remembers. **"One day we were vandalising a theatre and this lady came out and told us what if we wanted to play there, we'd have to come every day at 4pm and learn our lines."** The acting brains in place, the brawn followed years down the line, with Diesel funding his daily grind of auditions by working part-time as a bouncer. **"And if you bounce in New York night clubs, you better put in the hours at the gym, because you go to work expecting a fight. "**

A number of close calls later - **"My buddy Rock had his neck slit from here to here,"** Diesel grimaces, drawing a finger across the width of his throat - and one Steven Spielberg finally gave him his ticket out in 1998, with a part in (and the chance to shoot some second unit footage for) *Saving Private Ryan*. Vin Diesel had arrived. Just as Bruce Willis was hanging up his grubby singlet, and thanking heaven to M. Night Shyamalan.

Having leant his baritone vocals to *The Iron Giant*, Diesel then impressed in *Boiler Room* (a Gen-X Wall Street) and established his action calibre with David Twohy's *Pitch Black* (that'll be a Gen-X aliens, then). It is, though, another Gen-X spawn that has really lit the touchpaper. **"Some days I'd be hanging out of a car doing 70 mph down a desert road" he says of doing the majority of his own stunts in Rob Cohen's Point Break-esque speedfest. "And I'd suddenly think, 'What the fuck am I doing? Am I fucking crazy?'"**

But with Diesel's future schedule featuring sequels both for *The Fast and The Furious* and *Pitch Black*, as well as Cohen's in development *Triple X* (" a hip-hop James Bond thriller") and -hopefully - *Terminator 3* ("**No script but I met with Jonathan Mostow and I liked what he was saying**") it would seem that 'savvy' is rather more than a word.

"It's funny," Diesel smiles. "On the one hand I am now a target, because for people trying to get a break, I translate as dollars. On the other, the rooms get smaller and smaller every day, and I find myself in the company of people I was so awe before. But that's this business. If you don't move with it, you fade away. Whatever you do, you've got to adapt. Metamorphosis, that's the key." And you don't get more Bruce Willis than that.

## Cool Guys, Hot Racing Cars

German TV guide "TV Movie", issue 21/2001, pp.233-4  
Svenja Hadler

*In the US, "The Fast and the Furious" brought in 141 million dollars with an action spectacle. Right in the middle of it – Vin Diesel. TV Movie editor Svenja Hadler met the rising star.*

Watch out when they step on the gas! The wheels start burning; the streets of L.A. start smoking. Hard-as-nails Dominic Toretto (Vin Diesel) shoots through the night, together with his guys, and the car freaks do illegal battles on the asphalt with each other in their souped-up cars. Unless they're occupied with breaking into trucks – at least that's what the police think; therefore undercover cop Brian O'Connor infiltrates Toretto's gang. He's supposed to gather evidence, and gets a goo hiding: Toretto hammers him down to the ground with his bare fists. Brian can't do anything but flee...

## An hour on the sofa with the superstar

It's exactly that guy named Vin Diesel (34), who lashes out that brutally in his latest film "The Fast and the Furious", who is going to sit across from me in the Park Hyatt Hotel in Hamburg straightaway. I'm waiting for him curiously. Then the door flies open, I turn around – and I am surprised: instead of the grim looking giant I expected, a whirlwind (height: 1,88m) who is in a brilliant mood skips in, belting out Michael Jackson's "Smooth Criminal", his muscles hidden under a white T-shirt. "What an incredible hotel," the Hollywood star calls out and throws himself onto the sofa. "I'll engage the architect; I'd like him to embellish my house in L.A." Incredible! This is said to be the same guy who doesn't smile a single time and scares everyone to

death in the Australian sci-fi shocker "Pitch Black"?

**Action hero has the wind up** At least as surprising as Diesel's appearance is his choice of cars: in "The Fast and the Furious", he thunders across Los Angeles in souped-up racing cars, but in private life, the New York born actor prefers to chug along in a slow truck; that way, it's much easier to "overlook the street and keep to speed limits". Did he do all the stunts in the film himself, at least? "God no – just a few of them. I'm not suicidal. Although once I had to half climb out of the side window of my car at 70 miles per hour." The door to the room opens, and the hot chocolate he ordered is served; he launches into a short song of thanks. Does action man Vin Diesel now even intend to become a pop star? No, no, he doesn't. He doesn't have the time for such things anyway; first of all, he has to concentrate on his newest project, the thriller "Triple X", in which he plays an extreme sportsman. Is he afraid that people want to see him in action films only? Vin Diesel becomes thoughtful: "Yes, you have to be careful with that. Fortunately, I've come to Hollywood in a different way than most of my colleagues."

### **Suddenly, Spielberg was on the blower**

You can say that again: [he was] on a theater stage for the first time at the age of seven, and after [finishing] school [he worked as] a bouncer at several clubs for nine years. He spent his salary on drama lessons. Since no one gave him any roles, he made his first two films himself – he wrote the scripts, directed, and played the lead roles as well. And since he did it that well, one day Steven Spielberg called and offered him a part in "Saving Private Ryan". "No one gave me anything for free. It was hard, sometimes even unbearable. But in the end, it was worth it. Although I'm now considered to be an action star, I see myself as a character actor."

### **Neck massage made in Hollywood**

What does Vin Diesel actually think of Arnold Schwarzenegger, the prototype of an action hero? "For a bodybuilder, Arni has achieved amazing things; with a single sentence like 'Hasta la vista, Baby', he became unforgettable. Even Anthony Hopkins doesn't manage this." He still can't grasp his rise himself: "I try not to brood too much over success; I prefer thinking about new projects. But sometimes, my career just floors me." He laughs, jumps up – and gives me a short neck massage, completely out of the blue. Incredible – this man is really good for any kind of surprise...

translation by Zoe

**Translator's note:** I guess the interview was done in English, which means that the passages in which the original article quotes Vin are translations. For this reason, I can't guarantee that the original wording of Vin's comments was exactly like you find them in my 'back-translation'! If I knew Vin personally, I could have asked him, but...sorry, I don't.

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## **The Fast and Furious Spenders**

### **After a single hit movie, Vin Diesel's next flick will likely earn him \$10 million -- a sum that reflects Hollywood's craving for fresh beefcake**

Hollywood never fails to amaze. Take the wondrous tale of Vin Diesel. For the edification of those like me who, until recently, barely knew he existed, Diesel is the muscle-bound, shaved-head, 34-year-old star of Universal's surprise blockbuster, *The Fast and the Furious*. The low-budget car-chase pic did an astounding \$143 million at the domestic box office this summer.

Diesel is also the target in Hollywood's latest bidding war, with a salary that is fast approaching the gross national product of some island nations. Word in the trades is that Diesel, who made around \$700,000 for his role in *Fast and Furious*, just signed a \$10 million deal with Joe Roth's Revolution Studios to make a movie called XXX, in which he will play a CIA agent who infiltrates a Russian crime ring.

That was before Universal and Fox started vying to showcase Diesel's talents. Now his salary, I've been told by people who know, has been bumped up to \$11 million to star in Universal's *The Chronicles of Riddick*, a sequel to the space action flick *Pitch Black*, a modest hit in which Diesel played a brooding convict on a space mission. (Diesel's agent declined to comment on his client's salary.)

**ACTION STARS DIM.** Diesel must be one happy fellow these days. But all his good fortune raises the question: Why is a shaved-head muscleman who has made only four films worth that much money anyway? The answer is simply that Hollywood seems to be running out of action stars.

Gone are the days when you could count on an action film starring Arnold Schwarzenegger opening nearly every Memorial Day weekend against a Sylvester Stallone movie. Nearly every year saw Bruce Willis or Mel Gibson playing over-the-top cops on a mission. Has anyone seen Claude Van Damme recently?

These guys are getting a little long in the tooth to pull off roles as thick-necked, bulging-muscle heroes with stern glances. The audience just doesn't seem to buy the notion that the 55-year-old Stallone can take on thugs, as witnessed by his sorry showing in last year's *Get Carter*. Heck, Universal is quietly shelving a Stallone movie called *Eye See You*. At least Bruce Willis and Harrison Ford have seen the handwriting on the wall and have opted for nonaction roles, with Ford scoring big with the supernatural thriller *What Lies Beneath* and Willis doing the same with more conventional roles in *The Sixth Sense* and *Unbreakable*.

**SPECIAL EFFECTS.** So, who are the action stars of today? Based on the box office for their last few films, it would be Jackie Chan (with sometimes sidekick Chris Tucker) and Brendan Fraser. It says a lot about the sorry state of Hollywood that the hottest action stars are a duo that couldn't, on a good day, lift one of Arnold's old barbells. Chan, a veteran of three decades of Hong Kong martial arts films, has averaged \$136.4 million in his last three films. Fraser's average is \$120.8 million for his last three flicks.

The common factor behind all these guys' box-office performance is special effects. Anyone who saw Brendan Fraser in *The Mummy* or *The Mummy Returns* sure as heck didn't go to see Fraser's impression of a young Indiana Jones. It was those marching mummies, or whatever they were, and the other assorted creepy things that George Lucas' special effects shop ILM dreamed up. Fraser, who got \$12.5 million from Universal to return for the sequel but was pushing for \$20 million, was told point blank by studio biggies that they didn't need him and could simply fire up those computers to turn out more goblins.

As for Jackie Chan, half the magic of *Rush Hour* and *Rush Hour 2* is his brilliant fighting. The other is Tucker's wisecracking, which means Chan and Tucker together make for one action star. And they didn't come cheap -- Tucker got \$20 million for the second *Rush Hour*, Chan \$15 million plus a hefty piece of the action.

Even Tom Cruise, a huge international star who can carry a romantic movie like *Jerry McGuire*, still needed tons of special effects to turn him into an action hero for last year's *Mission Impossible 2*. Cruise got \$20 million, along with a piece of the revenues, and the movie's budget zoomed to \$130 million. Stars Ben Affleck and Cuba Gooding, Jr. were considered so peripheral to the movie *Pearl Harbor* that, despite their presumed box office draw, each took huge pay cuts so director Jerry Bruckheimer could put in more exploding battleships.

**HOLLYWOOD CALCULUS.** All of which probably helps to justify, at least in some Hollywood folks' minds, the notion that Diesel might actually be worth \$11 million. The Hollywood calculus is actually easy to follow. Stick in a new guy who's heavy on the muscle and light on the age lines, and you save money from the start.

Stallone, even in his box office twilight, still wants \$15 million or so for a film. Arnold won't step in front of the camera for less than \$20 million, despite such recent flops as *End of Days* and *The 6th Day*. So if it is going to cost \$40 million or more in special effects to surround your star, why not lop \$7 million or \$8 million off the budget from the top?

Of course, the real question is this: Can Diesel open a movie? That, after all, is what really matters in Hollywood. A few months back, I got in trouble with some readers of this column by asserting that Julia Roberts was worth every penny of the \$20 million she's paid because she can open a movie. The last seven she has been in have each enjoyed opening weekends that at least covered her \$20 million paycheck. And, by my reckoning, that's the measure of stars today -- they have to have the name recognition and the drawing power to force folks away from their TV sets and into a movie theater.

**DIESEL DOUBT.** Can Diesel do that? I doubt it. In fact, guaranteed box office winners are very few -- maybe Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts. Even the formerly dependable Adam Sandler had that stinker *Little Nicky* last year.

All of which makes me wonder: What makes Revolution Studios and Universal think Diesel is worth all this money? It's hard for me to rationalize even the money Universal paid him to star as the bad guy in *The Fast and The Furious*. I went to the movie to watch the speeding, crashing cars.

Folks at Universal swear Diesel was one of the reasons it went on to do more than \$143 million at the box office. Hollywood insiders say the movie did especially well with African Americans and Hispanics, groups

which traditionally make up a large segment of the action film audience.

But \$11 million for a guy who played second fiddle to a speeding car? Maybe that's why they call Hollywood Tinseltown.

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### Getting to know Hollywood's newest stars

AUDIENCE demographics have it that the viewing public is getting younger each year, so Hollywood has been trotting out young stellar hopefuls in the hope that they can strike viewers' fancy. Let's meet some of them:

**Michelle Rodriguez** scored a knockout in last year's sleeper hit, "Girlfight," in which she played a scrappy female pugilist with convincing credibility. Before her big movie break, Michelle was a complete unknown who didn't even dream of show biz stardom when she was growing up in sweet anonymity in New Jersey.

On an impulse, however, she went to an open casting call for the film, and competed against 350 other starry-eyed aspirants. Incredibly, Michelle clawed her way to the top and clinched the lead role of the two-fisted, angry Diana Guzman.

Her good showing in her very first film outing made Michelle a hot, new property in Hollywood, and she was immediately snapped up by director Rob Cohen for "The Fast and the Furious," where she plays "a tough chick who races cars."

Next up for Michelle is a film based on the "Resident Evil" video game. And, in "3 a.m.," she is cast as a taxi driver opposite Danny Glover and Pam Grier.

For his part, **Vin Diesel** first gained entry into the movie world as a filmmaker. Before that, he worked as a bouncer in a club in Manhattan!

Diesel has had two movies screened at major filmfests. He produced, wrote, directed and starred in his debut short film, "Multi-Facial," which was shown at the Cannes film festival.

Luckily, ace director Steven Spielberg saw the film and tapped Diesel for a role in "Saving Private Ryan." He then went on to provide the voice of the robot in the animated feature film, "The Iron Giant" (1998).

Next, he played a psychopathic convict who escapes from prison in "Pitch Black," and a Wall Street broker in "Boiler Room." Diesel is only 33 years old, but he's already gained a reputation for being a versatile actor.

**Reese Witherspoon** has been around longer than our first two comers, but it's only in her latest film, "Legally Blonde," that she's gotten the huge following and great notices that make for major stardom these days.

And **Britanny Murphy** plays opposite the Michael Douglas in "Don't Say A Word," a suspense-thriller that topped the US box office last week. Murphy plays the attention-calling role of an uncooperative patient who is the key to Douglas' being able to save the life of his daughter.

With gifted newcomers like Rodriguez, Diesel, Witherspoon and Murphy, the US film industry is well-positioned to continue to appeal to young viewers with films characterized by fresh concepts and exciting, new stars.

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### What lies waiting in the dark?

10/14/2001

'SOMETIMES what you can't see can kill you' warns the US ads for Pitch Black. And how true that is. Pitch Black's pulse-pounding pace, plot twists, and top special effects raise it above other films of its genre.

The creative use of both computer-generated and handcrafted artwork makes this fright flick as slick as slick can get.

Co-writer and director David Twohy proceeds to create a highly convincing alien desert landscape, taking into considerations even atmospheric conditions (the cast literally had a hard time breathing) with strange clusters of muddy spires, a horizon of unusual looking trees (which turn out to be something else entirely)

and the savvy use of yellow filters that give the moon's atmosphere an eerie, blistering appearance, making the planet the crew crash on unbelievably real.

More importantly, when it comes to character development, characters that don't get eaten quickly are well-developed, interesting and volatile, especially Riddick (played by Vin Diesel, *The Fast And The Furious*) whose animal/survivalist instincts and ability to see in the dark makes him the group's best asset and second biggest fear after the carnivorous aliens.

The breakthrough star of *Pitch Black* is undoubtedly Vin Diesel. Born on July 18, 1967 in New York, Vin Diesel started his acting career at the age of seven. His acting career started with the movie *Multi-Facial* in 1997, which he directed, wrote, produced, financed and starred in. *Multi-Facial* was later selected for screening at the 1995 Cannes Festival.

He followed up *Multi-Facial* with his first feature-length film, *Strays*, an urban drama in which he cast himself as a gang boss whose love for a woman inspires him to try to change his ways. Written, directed, and produced by Diesel, the film was selected for competition at the 1997 Sundance Festival, which led to a deal with MTV to turn it into a series.

In 1999, Diesel was the voice of the title character of the animated *The Iron Giant*, another critically praised feature. With looks too good to be kept behind the scenes, he then starred with fellow young actors Giovanni Ribisi, Ben Affleck, Jamie Kennedy, and Nicky Katt in *Boiler Room*, an off- Wall Street drama that cast him as one of the members of a shady brokerage firm.

Flexing his well-toned muscles in *Pitch Black*, Diesel's charismatic performance as escaped criminal Riddick steals the film's every scene.

"This character, Riddick, is seemingly this huge, menacing, nefarious, formidable character that is heartless and lacks empathy. We find through this experience that he changes. I like that. I like characters that shine in that moment of darkness, that rise to the occasion. I like the underdog that has been counted out and comes in at the last moment to save the day."

However, 2001 is Diesel's year. Having acted movies of varying genres, Diesel jumps genres yet again as a devious, determined hot-rodder in *The Fast And The Furious*, an action-packed street racing picture. The low- profile movie left skid marks at the box office as it grossed over million dollars in its first weekend alone in the US. Vin Diesel has finally arrived in the world of movie making as a bankable leading man. Catch him in his futuristic and realistically cool *Pitch Black*, showing on Cinemax at the following timeslots.

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### **"The Fast And The Furious" – Interview with leading actor Vin Diesel**

After Vin Diesel's film "*Multifacial*", which he wrote, directed, produced, and in which he played the lead role, was screened at the film festival in Cannes, Steven Spielberg added the role of Private Carpazo to his script for "*Saving Private Ryan*", exclusively for him. Recently, Diesel impressed [the audience] in the sci-fi movie "*Pitch Black*" as well as in the stock market drama "*Boiler Room*". The US No.1 hit "*The Fast And The Furious*" is just another step on Diesel's path to becoming the new, intelligent action star.

**Mr. Diesel, the story of "The Fast And The Furious" is nothing new, yet the realization of it is breathtaking. How could you anticipate that?**

The most frightening thing about the film business is that you can't anticipate anything like that at all. You never know if a film is going to turn out good or bad. The script for "*The Fast And The Furious*" was presented by the studio company. Usually, a script is being worked over for years before it's presented to a studio company. I signed up for the project before I even held the script in my hands. A talk I had with director Rob Cohen convinced me. He described to me how the camera was to move through the character of Dominic and into the engine [of the car]. The way he described the shot, it sounded really mythological. It symbolizes a person who has entirely melted with his machine. I thought it to be very exciting. I signed, and from then on, it was a challenge to come up with a substantial story for that action-packed film. We had enough room to provide the characters with an interesting depth.

**Do you like to take risks in general?**

Well, you always do with films. You are presented an enormous pile of scripts. If you want to be victorious with a good film, you have to take risks. There's no success without any risks.

**Is it difficult for a man of your impressive build to get good roles?**

Yes, especially at the beginning of my career, it was a problem. You have to reject many films for the reason that you're just to be the musclemann with the gun who is hollow on the inside. You have to be very careful with that and pick out those roles that constitute a creative, an artistic challenge as well.

### **Do you like cars?**

Yes, but I don't have much to do with them. I grew up in New York, where a car isn't necessarily a part of everyday life. For me, "The Fast And The Furious" was kind of a crash class, in which I learned to understand that subculture. I used to have motorcycles, and I'm used to the speed, but I couldn't understand what their own car means to young people. Personally, I always invested my money in films, because that was my hobby.

### **What do you feel when you sit in that kind of souped-up car?**

Of course, it's an adrenaline rush. You're sitting inside a rocket. Only the term "cool" can describe this. Personally, I prefer big cars, trucks. I need that elbow-room.

### **You started your career as writer and director. Why did you put that part of your career at rest?**

At the moment, I feel like the much-cited kid in the candy-shop. I'm so happy that I am offered so many great roles. As a director you have to work on a single project for a whole year, while, as an actor, you have the possibility to take part in three or four different films. I learn a lot from the directors I'm working with, and of course, I'm going to direct again. I'm just waiting for the right project.

### **After [your role in] "Pitch Black", in your new movie you're once again [playing] a character the audience at first meets with suspicion until they get to see his new, positive self.**

Exactly, they're prejudged. And that's exactly what makes those roles exciting in my eyes. They are guys who are disadvantaged by society, but who know how to seize their chances. They are the exact opposite of a perfect, intangible hero. Everyone in the audience can identify themselves with these underdogs, and that's why such films are that successful. You take a look at the anti-hero and get on his side. Because he's so much just like us.

### **"The Fast And The Furious" is also a film about the betrayal of a friendship. Is it difficult to find people in Hollywood whom you can trust?**

That's difficult everywhere in the world. It's a universal theme. Of course, on the one hand, Dominic is betrayed, but in the end his instinct was good enough to see the good core inside of Brian – of which he profits at the end of the movie. Dominic and Brian understand each other in the end, they feel a rapport with each other.

### **Do you give a second chance to people who disappointed you?**

That's something I decide from case to case. Everyone gets disappointed frequently. If you don't give them [= the people who disappointed you] an opportunity to make up for it the next time, you're going to live in complete isolation in quite a short time.

### **Are the women in your film just some kind of decoration?**

No, that's not true. The character of Mia is even the moral glue to the film. And Letty doesn't just symbolize the strength of a woman in that scene either; she reveals new sides of her boyfriend Dominic as well. Which doesn't mean that we didn't have great women at the set. I can tell you first hand – they were all great!

### **The internet is full of rumors concerning your future plans. The word is that you're going to be involved in "Terminator 3" and "Batman".**

The rumor about "Batman" is the latest. Rumors like that crop up each and every day. I haven't read any "Terminator" script yet, and I don't know what it is about. Hence I can't say anything about it, no matter how much I'd like to. My next film is going to tell the story of a nihilistic extreme sportsman, who is recruited by the CIA to save a world that doesn't mean a thing to him. Once more, Rob Cohen is going to direct the film. I guess that tells a lot about our cooperation.

Translation: Zoe

## **The Fast and The Furious: Interview with Vin Diesel**

Since the film "Boiler Room", Vin Diesel isn't an unknown person in Hollywood any longer. For the first time, the rising star now plays a role in a big production. In the action movie "The Fast and The Furious", Diesel plays the character of Dominic, a gangster with a heart.

### **Vin Diesel, have you been positive about this project right from the beginning?**

Yes. Usually, a script is being worked over for years until the film studio gives the go-ahead and the film can be done. In this case, though, it was different. The studio gave its okay before even the script was written. The story is based on a magazine article about that subculture, and on the grounds on that article alone, the studio decided to make the film.

### **And what made you interested in it, personally?**

I met director Rob Cohen, and he made the role sound appealing to me. I liked the character of my figure, but above all, that one shot fascinated me where the camera goes through my body during a race. There's something mythological about it. Dominic is like half human, half animal. His obsession, the fast cars, become one with him.

### **Was the shooting exhausting? Did you do the stunts yourself?**

Surely, the most exhausting thing was the scene in which I save the character of Vince from a racing truck. That was also the most dangerous scene, because we couldn't use a stunt double, for it was all close-up shots. So I had to lean half my torso out of the window. When we did the first take, I realized how dangerous it all was. But when you're making a film you want to give your best in each and every scene, and so we did that scene about six or seven times. Six or seven times I risked my life. And if I had died, I wouldn't be sitting here and talking to you now.

### **Please describe your film character Dominic for us.**

Dominic is tough, because he's got the feeling that this is the only way he can survive. And it's the only way he can take care of those he loves. He also takes care of the others, like his sister, for example. He wants her to change her career, her life; he wants her to lead a better life. Even if it's a burden for him, on the other hand, that he has to take care of her. That's the dilemma he finds himself in, and that's what the whole film is about; his family sense tells him to take care of the younger ones although he actually doesn't want to.

### **Speed plays an important role in the film; in the illegal street races as well as in terms of cuts and special effects. Do you like that?**

I've always been fascinated by speed. I drive motorcycles, and when I was younger and a bit less level-headed [than now], I used to drive quite fast now and then. I love the concept of speed and the feeling of freedom that speed offers you.

### **Did you do many of the stunts yourself?**

We had a very good stunt team, who enabled us to do shots ourselves you would normally have done by a stunt double. Everything was prepared very scrupulously, and the experts made sure that we even looked good at it. We come over as very brave and heroic.

### **Your final comment on the film?**

"The Fast and The Furious" shows a world, a subculture, that we haven't seen in a film before. And everything in the film was done very scrupulously, and accurately.

Interview: Philipp Portmann

Translation: Zoe (Thanks to Kate for her help!)

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## **Vin Diesel's star is rising – fast and furious**

By Rachel Lo in Los Angeles

Story by TODAY

October 1, 2001

Talking to Vin Diesel, you'd never guess that he's on the verge of becoming Hollywood's next big thing.

Under the hot California sun, right on the back lot of Universal Studios, Diesel is utterly relaxed.

Throughout the interview, he snacks away on sushi, which he offers to me at least 3 times during my 25 minutes with him.

Which is kinda cool, coming from someone who is now commanding US\$11 million (\$19.4) million per film these days.

Completely without airs, the actor jokes and chats comfortably without waiting for your next question.

Diesel's film career started out with Multi-Facial (1994), a 20-minute short he wrote, directed and starred in, that made it to the Cannes Film Festival.

His next project, Strays (1997), was a feature-length film that played at Sundance, which also had Diesel wearing 3 hats.

When Steven Spielberg spotted Diesel in that film, he created a role specifically for him in Saving Private Ryan.

Diesel has since moved on to prove his box office drawing power with Pitch Black before coming to Fast and the Furious. The role of Dominic Toretto, the charismatic leader of a street-racing gang in Fast, came out of the blue for Diesel.

The actor was having lunch one day with Rob Cohen (The Skulls, Daylight) when the director told him about how he wanted to capture, with his film, the essence of speed like it has never been done before.

Diesel was, as he told me in Los Angeles, hooked before he even saw the script.

His commitment to the project required him to go back to school- racing school, that is. But rather than try to impress us with tales of his newly acquired skills (like, say Hugh Jackman on his Swordfish adventures), Diesel would rather crack jokes about the experience at his own expense.

The self-professed defensive driver told me about how he has to "unlearn" his good driving habits.

He claims to be an experienced driver, but "in the New York City type of way", which is to "stay clear of taxicabs at all cost".

He even revealed a special qualification: he once drove a car that did not have any brakes.

**"I used to have a Chrysler without brakes. I would drive at 5 miles an hour. There was once when I needed to stop before hitting a wall, so I opened the door and put my foot down. Psst..."**

Diesel demonstrates braking with his shoe while making a hissing sound.

Funny guy, that Diesel.

But while Cohen's need for speed drew him to the film, he gives a different answer about what he likes best about the film.

**The movie is cool, the cars are cool. But you know what's the coolest thing about this movie? It is the relationships.**

**"When these 2 strong people (Dominic and Letty, played by actress Michelle Rodriguez) are together, they expose each other's innocence."**

Diesel, who is of mixed heritage, described the multi-cultural make-up of the film's cast as what made the film "shin".

**"Here you have a subculture where no one's excluded.**

**"The racial lines are broken down every way, the stereotypes are diminishing and you can see the ideals; the similarities between the different cultures."**

Funny guy, yes, but did I mention sensitive, new age?

Say hello.

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**Vin Diesel: "Someone who's been tough long enough doesn't have to prove himself anymore!"**

Vinterview from Cinemaxx.de

**Is this film an adventure playground for big boys?**

Yes. This film was kind of a crash course for me, as far as cars are concerned. I didn't use to care about cars; particularly since I grew up in New York. There, almost no one's got a car, because you have to spend thousands of dollars on parking tickets alone. **What was the most intense scene in the film for you?**

The scene where Vincent is hanging at the truck at full speed, almost crashes down on the road, and Dominic tries to save him. I was going at more than 100 km/h – zigzagging along the road next to the truck –,

leaning my torso out of the car, reaching out for Vincent! That was very dangerous.

**With its box-office returns of 150 million dollars, the film is a big success in America...**

Nobody expected that. Next to those 200 million dollar movies of our competitors, our budget of 38 million dollars made us look like a car your mother gives to you because it's no good any more. But we souped it up with new parts and even beat Ferraris with it...

**What were those "new parts"?**

This year, many blockbusters lacked passion – they had special effects, but no soul. We're successful because our film's got a heart, it tells a story; because it hits the nerve of the youth culture – just like the James Dean movie "Rebel Without a Cause" back in the 50s.

**You're celebrated as the new star. How do you feel about this?**

I'm very happy. Years ago, nobody wanted to give me work as an actor, so I made my own films, "Multifacial" and "Strays". Then Steven Spielberg let include a role for me in "Saving Private Ryan". I learned a lot from him – he's striving to create magic on the screen. And that's what I want to do as well. When I'm in the first row now, it means that I'm getting better offers; that I've got more colors to paint with.

**You said that your time as a bouncer in New York nightclubs has made you the man you are today.**

When I was a bouncer, I hated the job. Friends of mine got shot during their work, and you risk getting arrested. Nevertheless, I learned a lot in that job – like a policeman does on the street, or a soldier does at war. And someone who's been tough long enough doesn't have to prove himself anymore, but can show his sensitive side as well. I learned how to talk to people; how to communicate without even saying a word. That's of great help for my acting.

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### **The Fast and the Furious: Vin Diesel about sex and illegal street racing: "I'm a cool guy"**

With full speed to success as an action star: Since the race driver movie "The Fast and the Furious", Vin Diesel (34) is one of the best paid actors in the Dream Factory – for the prequel to the science fiction movie "Pitch Black", he is about to get a fee of 11 million dollars. In our interview, Diesel talks about sex and illegal street racing, Steven Spielberg, and his favorite toy.

**SpielFilm.de: Mr. Diesel, where can a normal person find an illegal street race in Los Angeles?**

Vin Diesel: I dare say that you'd never find such a race. I, on the other hand, would have better chances, because for "The Fast and the Furious", I've gone into the milieu quite intensely. That those races exist is a fact. However, the organizers try hard to keep everything a secret.

**SpielFilm.de: So you're familiar with the milieu.**

Vin Diesel: For the film, I went through kind of a "crash course" in order to be able to understand the world of those illegal race drivers. I'm from New York, where you move by subway or taxi, or spend about 300 dollars a month for parking fees. So I grew up without cars.

**SpielFilm.de: When did you drive a car for the first time?**

Vin Diesel: When I was at college, I began to drive motorcycles – since then, I love speed. Before shooting for the film started, all leading actors took part in kind of a driving school, where we learned the essential rules and stunts for the street racing scenes.

**SpielFilm.de: Please describe the feeling of taking part in an "illegal street race" for us...**

Vin Diesel: It's a gigantic feeling to reach such speed on a normal street. Although, mankind isn't made for things like that.

**SpielFilm.de: You'll have to explain that in detail for us...**

Vin Diesel: Every creature can only move as fast as its body allows. Only humans – due to their high intelligence – are capable of constructing faster vehicles, like cars, for example. But actually, the human body isn't made for anything like that. I guess that's what causes that gigantic feeling: you're driving a damn fast car, and it's dangerous as hell. But as long as you've got the car under control, you're almost flying above the ground and feel free.

**Spielfilm.de: Some people say that was even better than sex...**

Vin Diesel: Well, then those people don't know the first thing about it. (laughs) Driving fast is a staggering feeling, but it can't come up to good sex by far.

**Spielfilm.de: You're a versatile man: in films like "Multifacial" and "Strays" you held all important positions – director, cameraman, leading actor, and producer. Are you planning on submitting yourself to that kind of stress once again?**

Vin Diesel: Definitely! It's just a question of time. Since I'm being offered so many great roles at the moment, I don't have the possibility to go and make my own movie. But there will be quiet times again...

**Spielfilm.de: Isn't it frustrating to lure the masses as an actor, but to still be among the lower ranks as a director?**

Vin Diesel: That's not the way I see it. I started acting at the age of seven – I didn't even think about directing until 20 years later. As a director, I can realize my own ideas, that's the appeal. Of course, my own films don't draw masses into theaters, but I'm successful in another way: I did "Multifacial" with a budget of only 3000 Dollars, and that short was screened at Cannes in 1995! And "Strays" was picked among thousands of candidates for the Sundance Film Festival, and got a big success there. That's enough of a confirmation for my work.

**Spielfilm.de: After Steven Spielberg saw "Multifacial", he offered you a role in "Saving Private Ryan"...**

Vin Diesel: Steven Spielberg was fascinated by that film to such an extent that he even had my role in "Saving Private Ryan" added to the script just for me. It's such things that I see as a big success – even if my own directing projects don't draw masses into theaters so far.

**Spielfilm.de: In your movies, you always play the cool guy. Is that true for your real life as well?**

Vin Diesel: I am definitely a cool guy. Of course, I'm also having some problems, but that doesn't change that fact. I had been working as a bouncer in New York for nine years, and during that time, I had seen many cruel things happen. That has hardened me. When I did the same job in Los Angeles, the manager fired me just after my first night, because I'd had a fight with three guys. **Spielfilm.de: What does such a cool guy do in his spare time?**

Vin Diesel: I love playing Playstation 2. I can keep myself busy with car races like "GT 3" for hours. Well, so the cool guy has been unmasked as the child he is quite quickly. (laughs)

**Spielfilm.de: On the internet, female fans talk about you as "Hollywood's sex symbol". What do you think about this statement?**

Vin Diesel: I think it's cool that women say something like that about me. Which man wouldn't be at least a bit proud about it?

**Spielfilm.de: How about the rumor that we'll see you in "Terminator 3"? Is there something in it?**

Vin Diesel: I haven't even read the script. Nonetheless, the rumor spreads across the internet with terrific speed. I've got no idea if I'm going to play at the side of Arnold Schwarzenegger soon.

**Spielfilm.de: But you wouldn't turn down the role...**

Vin Diesel: First of all, I'd have to read the script. Dennis Hopper once said that he doesn't choose his roles according to their size, but their quality. In my opinion, that's a good attitude; an attitude that I'd like to adopt.

Source: [www.spielfilm.de/specials/2001/VinDiesel/index.html](http://www.spielfilm.de/specials/2001/VinDiesel/index.html)

Interview: Johannes Bonke / Rico Pfirstinger

Translation: Zoe (thanks to Kate for her help)

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**Firing on all cylinders**

Intelligent, articulate and multitalented. Vin Diesel represents a new breed of action hero, writes MARIANNE GRAY

With a name like Vin Diesel, I expected somebody with a touch of the rough and oil under his nails.

But the Diesel I meet is calm and tall (1.93m) in a crisp white shirt, a grey Hugo Boss suit and an accent like he's spent years as a spear carrier in the Royal Shakespeare Company.

We meet at the American Film Festival in Deauville, France. He's there for *The Fast and the Furious*, a jaw-droppingly fast-and-furious film based on a *Vibe* magazine article about LA gangs who illegally race retooled Japanese sports cars.

Diesel stars as a leader of one of the street teams. His real-life squeeze, Michelle Rodriguez (*Girlfight*), is the lone female speed driver, and Paul Walker (*Pleasantville*) is an undercover cop who infiltrates a team as a driver.

**"There was no original script. It began when an executive read an article about a street gang," Diesel tells me in his deep gravelly voice, clinking ice around a glass of apple juice. "When I met director Rob Cohen (Dragonheart) and he explained how he was going to shoot the race scene 'through' my body and into the car, 'through' the car's engine and out of the exhaust pipe, to capture speed in a way it had not been done before, I committed instantly."**

He says that when he saw the racing scene, it reminded him of being a child watching Harrison Ford navigate through meteors in *Star Wars*.

**"I have been known as a bit of a daredevil, although I'm less of one now. As a teenager I would wear roller-blades and hold on to the back of a cab going 90km up Madison Avenue. I used to own a motorcycle, which I would take up to 259km and do stuff like jump down on the tracks in New York. Retarded shit, stupid urban-kid stuff. Now I wouldn't dream of doing that - I have much more at stake."**

So what is at stake for Diesel, now he's a bit of a star, an action hero? There's a snatch of big movies in the pipeline - *Knockaround Guys* alongside John Malkovich and Dennis Hopper; *Diablo* which he co-produced; and the title role in the comedy *Daredevil*. His own production company, One Race Productions, has a deal with a studio and he's developing a script based on his time as a bouncer.

**"Being on top is cool in any aspect, right," Diesel says. "I am normally attracted to the anti-hero role as there is some underdog aspect that I like and hook into. I do not think that people identify with white-washed heroes. When I look at a hero who is too perfect, like Batman, I am completely turned off. But when I look at a flawed hero or character, I can immediately identify with him."**

**"I am flattered ultimately by anyone saying I am the next anything, let alone the next action hero. What I do with that remains to be seen. I started out as an auteur so I don't think I could ever be classified only as an action hero. The great thing is there are other things, because I try to diversify. I am an actor first and don't worry about just being classified as that action guy. There are 20 years of theatrical training on record, and that is all part of my existence."**

**"I did not start off in Hollywood, though I love action films and was empowered by those Sly and Arnolds. I loved those films. Although other actors fascinated me, there is also something to be learned from Arnold that should not be overlooked. Anthony Hopkins could not say 'hasta la vista, baby' and make it work. Actors who understand that, like Mel Gibson, incorporate it into their craft."**

Diesel, real name Mark Vincent the "Diesel" bit, he jokes, comes from being born in a gas station (untrue) - has a background that is mainly classical. He grew up in an intellectual household. One of four (he has a non-identical twin brother, Paul, a film editor), his father was a theatre manager/drama teacher and his mother practised astrology and psychology.

The family lived in heavily subsidised apartments in Greenwich Village, New York, for non-profitmaking artists, and he started acting when he was seven.

**"As a kid some buddies and I vandalised this old theatre in the Village. This lady caught us, shoved a script in my face and said: 'If you want to play here, come every day after school. I'll pay you \$20 a week.' I went to her experimental theatre every day after that. I became ambitious very early. I was an extrovert, the one in the family who was always pushing. I wanted to be everybody."**

**"My English accent? Well, I've always loved the English and English films. My father and I used to have these long conversations about the British approach to acting and the American approach to acting. He was always giving me lessons on the various approaches you can take on the way to becoming a character."**

**"Ultimately that led me to feel confident enough to come up with an approach that worked for me. I used to love working off-off Broadway in some experimental English play, doing the accent, playing the role."**

Apart from off-off Broadway, there was also a decade as a bouncer in New York clubs and a degree at Hunter University, where he concentrated on creative writing and wrote screenplays. A short film he wrote, directed, produced and financed, Multi-Facial, took him to the Cannes Film Festival in 1995. His first feature, Strays, took him to the Sundance Film Festival two years later. But it was Multi-Facial that caught Steven Spielberg's eye after somebody sent him a tape. He invited Diesel, 34 (he says he's 31), to meet him on the set of Amistad and created the role of Private Carpazo for Diesel in Saving Private Ryan. Next came the stock-trading drama Boiler Room, a sci-fi thriller, Pitch Black, and voicing the lead role in the animated adaptation of the Ted Hughes poem The Iron Giant.

**"The main reason I did The Iron Giant is because my brother Paul has a family and two beautiful kids," Diesel says. "He is so far ahead of me that anything I do pales in comparison. I so wanted a five- or six-year-old kid of my own who could go to school and tell friends, 'my dad is the Iron Giant'."**

But ask him about Michelle and he replies that some questions are best answered with a smile of delight.

**"You can write what you think and I don't doubt you would be accurate," he says with a smile of delight. "I have been lucky in that I was unemployed for a while, 20 years actually, sleeping on couches and having to keep the tags on clothes I bought in case I had to take them back to get money to eat, and that I had to be proactive and become an independent filmmaker. I was lucky I was Spielberg-approved and introduced to Hollywood by him."**

**"In the earlier part of my career nobody knew what to do with me, but now I find I can do so many things because I come from origins that are a little ambiguous. I think I represent a certain future but I've learned to take one thing at a time."**

## **Petrolhead**

*Pavement magazine interview*

You may not have heard of Vin Diesel - yet! Despite appearing in a number of major hollywood productions - Saving Private Ryan, Boiler Room, Sci-fi thriller Pitch Black - he is an actor perched on the cusp of fame. But with the release of the blockbuster action flick The Fast and The Furious, he is set to topple into full fledged Hollywood stardom.

As I speak to Diesel on the phone from Germany where he is doing the 'promo thing' for the release of The Fast and The Furious, he has been doing interviews all day. A gravel-inflicted bass at the best of times, sounds tired and worn. He realises that despite having been an actor since he was seven (he is now 33), he is experiencing his last fleeting glimpse at being a relative nobody.

**"I'm not being recognised in europe yet, because The Fast and The Furious hasn't come out so I can do three days anywhere before the paparazzi come out" he explains. "In America, it's a bit different, I'll get noticed right off the bat now. This summer I went to Europe to beat the storm, to just relax for a while and enjoy the last days of anonymity"**

Talking to Diesel, you know he's going to be a big star. My 18-year-old sister knows it too. When I mentioned his name, she screamed in disbelief and declared "Oh my God! I've got all of his movies!" He laughs when I mention this. My sister, it seems, is not alone. A search on the internet reveals a host of 'unofficial' web sites, as well as some guy claiming that a Vin Diesel owes a friend of his \$300 dollars. How does he feel when people devote time and money setting up web pages in his honour?

**"Sometimes it freaks me out, sometimes it makes me feel kinda cool. There are those people that talk about some of the stuff I've done in an insightful way, in a way that shows they are really listening to my work and understanding it, that's a cool feeling. I think it was C.S. Lewis who said, 'People write to know that they're not alone.' And that's part of making films too. We make films to prove we're not alone. So when someone connects and understand what we're doing, it's a good feeling."**

Diesel is under no illusions about the price of fame and at times is guarded, refusing to disclose his real name (The guy on the web looking for his friend's \$300 alleges it is Mark Vincent) or the exact ethnic makeup of his Hispanic/Italian looks. **"I'm multi-cultural,"** he states. End of subject. But for the most part, he seems more amused than concerned by it all.

**"It's always fun to get a bunch of the guys together and pull a list of names off the internet; people that I'm getting married too, people that I'm dating. It's hysterical! Sometimes it's a little bit overwhelming but I don't ever really stop to think of it. I'm constantly thinking about what I'm doing"**

**next. I'm a bit of a workaholic, always thinking about what the next project is.**

Since his stage debut some 26 years ago, Diesel has been single-minded in his chosen career as an actor. **"It's the only thing I know"** he says simply. Completing an English degree at Hunter College, he concentrated on writing screenplays, eventually writing, directing, producing, financing and starring in the short film *Multifacial*, which screened at Cannes in 1995. His first full-length feature, *Strays*, which he directed, produced and starred in, competed in the 1997 Sundance Film Festival creating a role especially for Diesel in *Saving Private Ryan*.

Without knowing his background, you could be forgiven for seeing Diesel something of a 'himbo'. In *The Fast and The Furious*, he plays Dominic Toretto, the charismatic leader of a team of Japanese-import street racers, and it's all sweat and action. He's an imposing, muscle-bound figure, with a booming deep voice and a shaved head. However, Diesel doesn't seem too worried if people take him at face value.

**"I think there are a lot of judgemental people in the world and I think if somebody doesn't know me, they can think I'm all physical and not at all cerebral. But if people know me and know what I've done, they can understand. Sometimes I wish it were that simple. There's a great liberty in being shallow, so I don't go out of my way to convince people otherwise."**

As someone who has been trying to break through as an actor most of his life, Diesel has no intention of giving up his chosen profession any time soon. What does he see as the key to longevity?

**"Shit, I don't know" he confesses. "It's a tough one. I assume it's about never losing that passion for the work. I assume it's never losing that integrity. Definitely choosing the right roles. Right now I'm finally at a place where I can pick and choose roles for literally the first time in my life. I'm kinda like a kid in a candy store, enjoying my new-found freedom. But it's also about being invested in the role and being invested in the film as a whole. There are a lot of actors who just do a role. They don't give a shit about the whole film. I think that's a short-sightedness. Really, it's about hard work. Tom Hanks is a hard worker. Think about his process doing in *Castaway*...You see that this man has already won two Oscars and still working his ass off."**

Vin Diesel is about to be a big Hollywood star. It's a nice thought that 26 years of hard work might be the reason why.

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**:::Vin Diesel:::**

**Proof positive that even Hunter College can't deter your dreams**

The Shield  
Hunter College's Finest  
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You Win Some, You Lose Some  
Text and Interview by Jennifer McLean

Vin Diesel's first step to becoming an actor happened by chance, when at the age of seven he and his friends decided to break into Greenwich Village's "Theatre of the New City" to vandalize it. To their surprise, a woman appeared onstage, offering them each a script and \$20, on the condition that they would attend everyday after school. From there, Vin's fledgling career progressed from the New York repertory company run by his adoptive father, to the Off-Off Broadway circuit. By the time he was 17, he needed a way to supplement his income and with his already well-honed physique, he became a bouncer at some of New York's hippest clubs, a job he would do for the next nine years. It was at this time that he changed his name to Vin Diesel.

Following high school, Vin enrolled as an English major at Hunter College, but after 3 years he decided it was time to further his acting career, so he dropped out and headed for Hollywood thinking an experienced and art-driven theatre actor would be valued. He was wrong and after a year of struggling to break through he returned to New York. His astrologer/psychiatrist mother then introduced him to a book called *Feature Films at Used Car Prices* by Rick Schmidt. The advice within led him to the realization that he could take control of his career by making his own movies. He wrote a short film based on his own experiences as an actor, called "Multi Facial", which was shot in less than three days at a cost of \$3,000. Not only did he write and star in the film, but he also directed and produced it. "Multi Facial" was eventually accepted for the 1995

Cannes Film Festival where it got a tumultuous reception.

Vin returned to Los Angeles where he and a friend worked together to raise almost \$50,000 through telemarketing to fund the making of his first feature, "Straits". Six months after shooting, the film was accepted for the 1997 Sundance Film Festival, and although it received a good reception, the film didn't as well as hoped. Yet again a disappointed Vin found himself back in New York only to receive a dream call from his newly acquired agent.

But "Multi Facial" did go to earn Vin more work. After Stephen Spielberg saw "Multi Facial", he had a role created specifically for the thirty-one-year-old in "Saving Private Ryan" - that of the G.I. who takes pity on a child and is shot by a German sniper. Like Stephen Spielberg's war opus, Diesel champions such ideals as honor, dignity, and loyalty among men. Vin has since been in several big films, such as the lead character in "Pitch Black", the voice of the title character in "The Iron Giant", the must-see "Boiler Room" and last year's blockbuster hit "The Fast and the Furious". He currently has many projects going, including "Diablo", "Doormen" (a film Vin is writing based on his days as a bouncer, which he will also star in), and "Pitch Black 2".

Recently, Mr. Diesel took some time out of his busy schedule to talk to The Shield about his up and coming career.

### **The Shield: What was the appeal of The Fast and the Furious for you?**

Vin Diesel: Intuition is a large part of my process. The Fast and the Furious is what I call a studio-generated script. This film was greenlit from an article in Vibe magazine, so the script had to be pulled together. I signed on because of a conversation I had with [director] Rob Cohen. He said, "Describe to me the shot where the camera goes through [my character] Dom into the car and out the exhaust." That was the one visualization that I needed to be invested in the film.

### **Your character, Dominic, is very much the strong, silent type. Are you like that yourself?**

I think we as human beings are much more complex than any character that has ever been portrayed on film. Part of the luxury of film is being able to play a character who may appear glamorous. I could take one aspect of my personality and make that the seed of the character. So when I look at a character like Dominic from "The Fast and the Furious", I see a character who is strong, who is a caretaker. As an actor, you have to find a relationship with the character.

### **Rob Cohen has called you "the 21st Century's first new action hero", comparing you to the likes of Schwarzenegger and Stallone. How does that feel?**

It depends what that means. I'm flattered by the fact that I could be compared to two men who have been the most successful in that genre. That's extremely flattering. I am an actor first, indisputably. The years before Steven Spielberg wrote a role for me, for "Saving Private Ryan", I was an auteur out of necessity. My history absolves me from just being an action hero. I'm attempting to bring more to the table, more depth to my characters. I don't approach "Saving Private Ryan" any differently to "The Fast and the Furious".

### **You mentioned you began as a writer-director, with your feature "Straits". Will you direct again?**

Right now, I'm like a kid in a candy shop. I'm being offered all these amazing roles, and it's just so hard to turn these roles down. That's what I've had to do. I've had to turn down multiple roles. I can't direct right now, because you're looking at nine to 12 months for just dedicating yourself to something.

### **How did it feel knowing that Spielberg was creating a role for you?**

It is the highest form of validation. When I was in school, I wasn't the kid getting the awards. I didn't get the best-dressed award. To be the subject of a Hollywood fairytale...after that experience, I started buying into all those old anecdotes of the old-time actors, like Clark Gable being discovered on a hay-cart. Nothing could be more outlandish than Steven writing a role for me.

### **How was the experience of working with Spielberg?**

When I got on the plane to go do "Saving Private Ryan", I was handed the script before I got on. The role didn't exist in the script; I wasn't thinking about the role I would play. I was thinking about watching Steven work. I would have gone out there to shine his shoes, as a young film-maker. His way of directing is very efficient. He's brilliant at knowing what lense to use to capture a mood. With the confidence he has, he's brilliant at making a gesture turn into a beautiful scene.

Also what I learned from Steven Spielberg, is that the most confident directors are the most receptive. On the first day of film-making, he took the script and said, "This is just a blue-print! Any ideas you have then come forward." Here's the guy with more accolades than anyone I know, and more money than God. And he's receptive? I got why he was receptive; although his budgets are high, he wanted to make magic. After all the success, all he wants to do is make magic. If that's what he's going for, that must be the thing to go for.

### **Are you much of a party-goer when you're back home?**

I haven't had a drink in two and a half years. I'm one of those people who wants to do everything in his power

to be as good as possible to try to master a craft. If I feel, whether right or wrong, that drinking alcohol at this time in my life could hinder me at all, I will drop that. I feel more intact without it. I feel like I'm able to be more in tune with my emotions. I don't get to escape like I did when I used to drink. I was never a heavy drinker, because of my years of bouncing. I bounced six nights a week. As a bouncer you can't drink. It's an amazing training ground for handling people. It's an amazing training ground for being effective in speech. I try to learn as much as I can from every experience, and I believe I learnt a lot from that. You learn how to read people from bouncing. I've had friends who've had their neck slit from here to here, from reading a person wrong. It's a survival skill.

**You've just completed "Knockaround Guys", with Dennis Hopper and John Malkovich. Is it more of a comedy?**

Yeah, in an American Guy Ritchie kind of way. In a post-Tarantino kind of way.

**And you're about to work with Rob Cohen again, on "punk James Bond" film XXX?**

Yeah. It's tricky because the hardest thing to do is to get that role in "XXX". I wanted it. That's what I've been presented with, so it's hard for my agent to understand that. I'd do a musical if I could. I'd do a re-make of My Fair Lady if they'd let me!

**You're reputedly a big Lord of the Rings fan. How did it feel not to be a part of that?**

If there's any great tragedy that exists in modern times, it was the fact that I was not a part of Lord of the Rings. Had I the power, that I soon hope to acquire, I would've been...I'm not even going to tell you what I would've been!

**You've always been mysterious about your ethnic background. Is that intentional?**

Yeah. Because I want you to come see my movies. In [The Fast and the Furious], I'm of Cuban descent.

**Really?**

It's interlaced there. It's super-super-subtle. We don't have to be cliched. Just because he's of Cuban descent, we don't have to incorporate all the stereotypes. In "Knockaround Guys", I play a Jewish gangster with a Star of David tattooed on my arm. I'm an urban hero for "Pitch Black". My point is, I've been lucky to play all these characters. And I don't hit people over the head with tons of stereotypes to play them.

**You've moved effortlessly from something heavy and prestigious to popcorn action flicks. Did you ever think, "I'm only doing movies like Saving Private Ryan"?**

I'm not that guy. I'm not that pretentious. I grew up in New York with this theatre thing. I grew up with more integrity than I needed. I grew up in an artists' community, where everyone did art for the sake of art. I think that out in L.A., people try to [choose roles] in a pretentious way. That's not my rhythm. I also approach all the films I do with equal conviction. That's what people respond to. I don't do "Saving Private Ryan" and say, "This is a prestigious film; I'm going to act differently". If you see my work, I hope you get that, regardless of the dressing...I'm bringing real shit to the role. That's important to me. That's all I can do. And I think there's a place for films like "The Fast and the Furious".

**Do you think that realness is what audiences are responding to?**

It's because I came into "Pitch Black" and didn't do the bubble-gum sci-fi it could have been. I came into "Pitch Black" and I did real shit. I came into "Pitch Black" and treated it like a real film, with a real character who really had a place in our culture and represented something. You know, the "Pitch Black" character [Richard Riddick] represented anybody who's been ruled out or given up on.

**In "The Fast and the Furious", just as in "Pitch Black", you play a bad guy - yet people are still rooting for you.**

I've kind of been exploring this antihero thing and expanding on it. I do different variations, but I stay within that realm. I'm not really attracted to whitewashed heroes. I'm not really attracted to the picture-perfect, one-dimensional hero. I don't think we get anything from those guys, because they're so unrealistic that you alienate your audience, [so] they never hear what you're trying to say. I think that the flawed heroes are more attractive to me because they're easier to identify with. They're more modern-day mythology, hands down.

**You've surely heard that people are looking to you to replace aging action stars like Ahnuld and Stallone. But you're also replacing dated archetypes who dispatch bad guys with one-liners and kill 100 soldiers with one machine gun.**

It's not a one-liner world anymore. The fact that "Gladiator" gets the critical acclaim it does and the Oscar tells you something. It's not "Saving Private Ryan", but that says something about where we're at. "Gladiator" could have been a cheesy little film, but they approached it with more substance. "Gladiator" could have been Xena: Warrior Princess.

**You have a huge Internet following; Yahoo! alone has 25 clubs devoted to you. Are you aware of that?**

I am aware of it. The fan base I've been lucky enough to accumulate is made up of enlightened people. Just smart individuals. Every now and then, I read some fan mail, and these people can write better than me.

They could be journalists. I read a piece of fan mail, and it sounds like an essay in Vanity Fair. So, it's flattering that I'm connecting to people who are really conscious and know what they're talking about and aren't just saying, "you've got a hot body". To hear these people talk about my roles as though they're in a film class is incredibly flattering. It's good to know that people understand what you're doing.

**There are also some rumors flying around. I think the press has you dating five different women right now.**

And none of them is accurate. Because I'll tell you something: If I'm not playing Sony PlayStation or rereading a classic or watching a goddamned foreign film or watching porn (I'm joking about the porn), my friends and I get on the Internet and find out who I'm dating, and it's always hysterical. It's really very funny. It's too preposterous to fight. They've linked me up with people I've never even met. I assume there's nothing I can do about that...But at this level, I guess it's almost flattering that people care enough to create shit like that.

**Classics? What's the last one you read?**

I don't know if its considered a classic. It's not Steinbeck or Miller or Faulkner or anything like that. It's J. R. R. Tolkien. Lord of the Rings.

**As you become more famous and life becomes less ordinary, is it harder to keep it real?**

I admire the actors who have not fallen victim to celebrityhood too much. I admire those actors who have kept it about the work. I think I read somewhere that Harrison Ford said, "If I talk too much about my private world, when you go to see my movies, you'll be thinking about my private world. You'll be thinking about my breakup". That's why Bill Clinton couldn't be an actor. The more I can keep it about my work and less about my private life - on any level - the easier it is for you to be entertained.

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### **Gallery magazine interview**

When Vin Diesel stands before you, it feels as though the shadow of Mount Olympus has just knocked you into darkness. The 34-year-old actor and self-described "anti-hero" cuts an imposing figure. He looks as though he could tear you limb from limb without breaking a sweat, and talks even tougher, full as he is of stories of train-jumping and sky-scraper-tumbling as a young punk growing up in New York City. But then a five-week-old puppy named Roman crawls into his lap, and Diesel melts before your eyes. "Man, having a puppy is great," he says, "But it is a lot of work."

Currently cutting through the Hollywood stratosphere with a string of box-office successes, like The Fast and the Furious and Pitch Black, Diesel received \$10 million to act in the hip-hop-influenced, James Bond-styled film, xXx. Diesel is currently performing a delicate high-wire act; one that finds him street car racing and strangling aliens on the silver screen, even as he scratches behind the ears of a puppy in real life.

**Gallery: Even when you are playing villains, there's a real heart to your performance.**

Vin Diesel: Yeah, they're multi-dimensional characters, multi-layered. I find myself drawn to anti-heroes, and now what I'm finding is that I'm being drawn to different variations to anti-heroes. The anti-hero in Fast and the Furious, unlike others I've worked with, has no character arc, per se. The understanding that my character has the end of the film is present in the beginning of the film. What's interesting about this character is that it's for the audience to catch up to speed. My character has all of the character insight and conflict from the beginning. He doesn't change and that's fascinating to me.

**G: When other muscle-bound actors like Stallone and Schwarzenegger made their film debuts in the 1970s, they played the kinds of flawed characters you've talked about. But as their careers progressed, they played increasingly super-heroic characters. Do you see that being a problem for you?**

VD: I've heard a lot of people say that I'm going to be the next action hero. Well, that's incredibly flattering, but honestly I don't approach an action film any different than I would something like Saving Private Ryan. If I'm going to be the next action hero, don't think for a moment I'm going to disregard the acting and think that the action can take over for the acting. The acting is what I need to do.

Hopefully people see that in the work. Hopefully you are being entertained by the character. We don't learn anything from the white-washed heroes. We learn from the imperfect. You learn more from the guys like Robert DeNiro in Raging Bull than you do from James Bond.

**G: Just a few years ago, you made your big-screen debut with Saving Private Ryan. You came from out of nowhere. Now you have a certain amount of movie-star cache. How have things changed for**

**you?**

VD: The pressures have definitely increased. Early in your career, you have to make whatever script you get work. What Pitch Black was in the theater, wasn't in the script. You have to take a script and work your ass off to bring it to life. That's your only option when you're starting out. As you move along in your career, you have to be a lot more cautious.

Tom Hanks said to me that the most important thing to learn how to do in Hollywood was to say "No." I didn't know what he meant. I'm beginning to understand a little bit. Everyone will see you as an opportunity to get their film made and you've got to weed through that. You have to be cautious.

**G: What's the strangest part of being suddenly famous?**

VD: I was watching the NBA finals. I was into the game. I'm a fan. I'm a spectator. All of the sudden, a trailer came on for my movie, and I came into the clip, and I was sitting there going, Who the hell is that guy? Put a shirt on!

**G: In films you play reckless, endearing adventurers for the most part. Does any of that creep into your personal life?**

VD: First of all, I worked as a bouncer in New York City for a lot of years, and that is an adventure unto itself. You are a soldier in a way. I mean I used to do things. I used to do road trips without any money and kind of beg my way into a vacation. I was a huge adventurer. We'd go into a Kentucky Fried Chicken and schmooze our way into a free \$1.99 chicken and biscuits. One time we made it all the way from Washington, D.C. to Florida to Atlanta and somehow ended up in Cancun.

**G: But you've mellowed at the ripe old age of 34?**

VD: I do find myself less adventurous now. I find myself looking for quiet, for security, serenity has all of the sudden become more important. But I can still get into trouble.

Recently I went to Cuba. My character in Fast and the Furious is of Cuban decent and - maybe I'm old-fashioned as an actor - I had to go to Cuba. Completely different place, completely magical. I went there and I realized I didn't have any cash. I didn't think I'd need it, because I can go anywhere in the world and use any credit card. Couldn't use my credit cards in Cuba. So stupid. I had this big bill that I had run up at my hotel; and it's not like you can leave without paying. You can't get money wired into the country. You can't get any money anywhere. Nobody is going to waive your charges. It's amazing that as an American you can go to another country and feel powerless. You feel like being an American citizen hurts you. It's a handicap or something.

So we run up this bill in the hotel. No one knows who I am in Cuba because they don't really have movies, no cable TV or anything. We went to this sort of Buena Vista Social Club -style bar at night. We know we have this pending bill. A couple - one gentleman from Tel Aviv who was selling arms or was into (peyote?) distribution or something and this lady who was like a Saudi Arabian princess - comes in and they are kind of hiding out from the law in Cuba, and this guy had a satellite dish. The only guy in Cuba with satellite. And he flipped out, because he had seen Pitch Black the night before.

Anyway, I guess she had some way to get money out of the country - something to do with her connections or being a princess - and she gave us the money to pay our way out of Cuba. She came to our rescue.

**G: No kidding?**

VD: I'm telling you, man, I'm crazy. I'm a New Yorker. I can't even tell you some of stupid shit I did as a kid. The most retarded stuff. If I had a kid now, I'd have a seizure. You wanna know the stuff we used to do? We'd ride in between the trains, and we'd put our hands on one car, while the train was moving, our feet on another car and shimmy up to the top of the train and then come back down. We'd scale the damn trains. Our hearts would beat, man. Asinine. In fact, just the thought of it causes me stress. Got a light?

**G: You seem like the kind of guy who acted like a star before he became a star.**

VD: Now that's smart. You are catching on.

**G: How has actually becoming a star changed your life?**

VD: Well, that's exactly it. People ask my sister, "What's it like having your brother become a star?" And she'd say, "He was always a star." I was an extrovert, the guy who was loud. The second I started getting unwarranted attention - attention without working for it - it changed me, and I started to become introverted. Now, you will find me staying at home. I try to walk into a room undetected. I'm self-conscious about everything. Everyone thinks movie stars are conceited. I used to be conceited. Now I'm not even conceited anymore. I'm covert.

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## **MTV Movie House**

Action hero Vin Diesel takes on his fans' questions and tackles the subjects of sensitivity, regret, nudity and Ja Rule.

**Q: Vin, do you think Xander Cage can take on 007?**

— Donnie

Vin Diesel: Very interesting question. Yeah, XXX can take on 007.

## **MTV Can I ask why?**

Diesel: When you see this movie, you tell me. I'm a man of few words.

**Q: What was it like working on the set with Ja Rule?**

— Jonah

Diesel: Ja Rule, when he came on the set of "The Fast and the Furious," really impressed me because he is an incredible musical artist and he adapted to the film world almost effortlessly. I have a great deal of respect for Ja and he's a friend, so we hit it off immediately. He was committed and he really did his part.

**Q: You and Ja have been working on films together. Have you ever thought about rapping on one of his CDs?**

— Sarah Jayne

Diesel: That's interesting. I was in the recording studio when he was recording "Smokin' and Ridin'." He actually does a shout-out. I think I gotta just stick with acting. I gotta stick with the film business. Unless he has enough time to show me how to do it, I think I'll stay out of his way on the microphone.

**Q: How does it feel to be one of the sexiest men in Hollywood?**

— June

Diesel: Am I one of the sexiest men in Hollywood? For me, I guess I don't think of it like that. I guess I'm just a guy trying to work and trying to create characters, but thank you nonetheless. It makes me feel good to hear you say that.

**MTV: What is it like to read these articles or hear people [say], "Oh my God, he's so hot." Is that strange now?**

Diesel: It is strange, yeah. I was always an extrovert. I was always a guy that had to go out of my way and have to prove myself and I never was the pretty boy. I guess it was new to me. Whenever I read that, I still half don't believe it. But it always makes me feel ... I always feel nervous about it. I always feel humbled by it for some reason. I guess I don't buy into it that much.

**Q: Russell Crowe, Kevin Bacon and Keanu Reeves all have rock bands. Have you ever thought about a recording career?**

— Kyle

Diesel: I actually did think about a recording career ... I'd say about fifteen years ago, and I think I was too young and too reckless to get it together. But now I'm so busy in the film world and I'm so busy trying to make the best films that I can, I don't know if I'd have any additional time to think about a recording career. I mean, of course I'd have to learn how to sing, but I guess anything's possible.

**Q: Would you ever consider doing a movie if you had to do a nude scene?**

— Natalie

Diesel: Yes, I think the nudity in the film would be the least important element to deciding whether or not I would do the film. It would start with the story, and if the story and the character called for nudity, then so be it. Would you ever consider seeing me in a movie that consisted of nudity?

**Q: Vin, I was wondering what you look for in a girl. Do I fit that description?**

— Mory

Diesel: That's a good question. I don't know you, so I don't know if you fit the description, but when I was younger, I used to look for how cool a person was. So I've always appreciated the coolness in a woman and all that that implies.

## **MTV What's cool?**

Diesel: Well there's a great many things that consist of cool, and I used to actually have this list of what I thought was cool. Now in my older age, now that I'm a man, I think cool is indescribable. It's a feeling, it's a flavor, it's an attitude, it's an — honesty. That's cool.

**Q: Vin, I heard you used to be a bouncer and I was wondering you ever had to kick anyone's ass?**  
— Sean

Diesel: Unfortunately, when you're a bouncer in New York City, it can get violent at times, to say the least. That's one of the reasons why you stop bouncing at some point — because of the violence that is demanded of you. So, I did what I had to do as a bouncer and I bounced because I had to earn a living while I was struggling as an actor, trying to get off-Broadway plays. Was it a tough job? Yeah. Does it get physical at times? Yeah. But we all have hard jobs on our way to success.

**Q: Do you ever see yourself in a more sensitive, romantic type of role?**  
— Adrian

Diesel: The first film I did was a film that I directed called "Multi-Facial." It's a short film. If you look at, if you see the film, you'll see my appreciation for sensitivity. The second film I did was a film called "Strays." And if you see that film you'll see my thirst for romance. ... I try to lace all the characters that I play with some sensitivity.

The irony is that the characters I gravitate towards are formidable characters, but usually formidable with the purpose of protecting the character's sensitivity. And that goes for whether it's an animation film like "The Iron Giant" or it's a character like Dominic in "The Fast and the Furious" or it's a character like Xander Cage who's a little less sensitive. But I've learned to appreciate both romance and sensitivity to some degree.

**Q: I heard you were playing with Sam Jackson in "XXX," and he's one badass guy. What was it like playing with him in real life?**  
— Bob

Diesel: As actors, we are always evolving and we're always learning and one of the best ways for us to learn as an actor is by working with actors who have been in the industry and who have gone to places artistically that you haven't gone to yet. I've always been a Sam Jackson fan, so the opportunity to work with Sam Jackson was an amazing thing for me. The opportunity to be in scenes, one on one with Sam Jackson is a dream come true.

I look to all the actors, all the older actors that I've worked with, and try to learn something from each of them, whether it's John Malkovich, Tom Hanks or Sam Jackson, and see what I can learn and incorporate in my craft. For me, it was an amazing thing to work with Sam Jackson, and I hope the energy is reflected in the film with you see the scenes together.

**MTV: Is he also just a cool guy?**

Diesel: Sam and I have been boys for a few years and we've always talked about doing something together. He's amazing. The industry is so much more complex than even just doing the work. When you're in such a global industry like this, such a political industry, it's always good to have mentors and the guys like Sam. Actor's mentors act as people you can go to and say: "I'm deciding whether I should do this picture or this picture. What do you think?" And that's priceless.

**Q: Vin Diesel, I just wanted to let you know that you are fine and I was just wondering how you manage to stay in shape?**  
— Brittney

Diesel: Thank you very much for that beautiful compliment. How do I stay in shape? When I was bouncing I went to the gym and I boxed, and that's all I did. Now I train according to what my character's going to need to know. In "Pitch Black," I stopped weight training and started doing yoga and started doing exercises like pilates and running, and I trained in a way that I could adopt a more panther-like movement to the character. In "XXX" I was training and learning how to do some stunts with snowboards, how to rock climb, which was such a rigorous form of training. ... Because I go from one picture to another, whatever the character calls for is how I'll train for that film. Thank you again for that sweet compliment.

**Q: Vin, are you planning to do any more directing? And if so, what kind of movies would you like to direct?**  
— Michelle

Diesel: Good question. Yes, I plan on doing more directing. I started out in this industry in the independent film world because I had been acting for so long and not landing any roles for over twenty years. I got to a place in my life where the only way I was ever gonna realize my dreams was to actually direct my own

movies, regardless of how amateur or inexpensive they would be. So I started by directing a short film, which I assume you would know about by asking the question, called "Multi-Facial". And then I directed a feature film called "Straits."

I've been fortunate enough to have the opportunity to do so many great characters and directing takes considerably more time than acting in a film. I haven't had that year and a half free break to dedicate to directing a picture. But the great thing about directing is that you could always go back to it. I'm fortunate in that sense. ... I plan to direct "Multi-Facial," which is a feature film version of the short film I did in '95.

**Q: Were you ever up for a role that you turned down that you now regret?**

— Tracey

Diesel: No, not at all. I'm kidding. Honestly, that's not a bad question. ... I don't know yet. I just started turning down movies. I hadn't seen a movie come out that I'd turned down. That's a new thing for me. I guess I'm fortunate enough to be in a place to actually turn down movies now, because you can't do it all. So we shall see. I hope not. I'd hate to regret anything.

**Q: Who gets more ass: 007, Austin Powers or XXX?**

— Chelsea

Diesel: Now you guys OK-ed this question right? 007's made what, twenty movies and this is the first "XXX?" And I still don't know (laughs). Absolutely cruel. See, you know the answer. Otherwise you wouldn't be asking me that question, gorgeous.

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### The xXx Games

**Sports and spies collide in a Vin Diesel-fueled adventure that aims to go beyond Bond.**

by Mark Salisbury

Premiere Magazine 2002 Aug

Vin Diesel, heavily muscled arms bound behind his back, shaved head covered by a sack, is led into the red velvet and gilded splendor of Prague's State Opera by two hulking actors playing U.S. Government agents. Onstage, a rehearsal of Don Giovanni is in progress. Listening from the middle of the empty orchestra is Samuel L. Jackson, who as NSA agent Augustus Gibbons has ostensibly come to Prague to remove his latest recruit, Xander Cage (Diesel), from his assignment. As Cage's hands are released and the sack is taken off, he moves along the row toward Gibbons. But as he begins to speak, Gibbons raises a hand to cut him off, enraptured by the lilting aria (sung by Czech soprano Martina Bauerova).

"Come on, Gibbons," Diesel half snarls, cocking his head toward the stage. "You already broke me; you don't have to get cruel and unusual." Jackson looks up at him almost disdainfully, the left side of his face a mass of scar tissue, and hands him a plane ticket in lieu of a reply.

"Where am I going now?" Diesel asks.

"Home," Jackson says. "Your cover's blown. You're no longer useful."

Behind his video monitor, director Rob Cohen watches the sequence unfold, grinning like a kid. This is day 61 out of 75 in the XXX shoot, and much like those that have gone before, **"it's another day of threading needles and more pressure,"** says Cohen, who nevertheless has been looking forward to this scene, one of three in which the actors are together. **"Sam's the epitome of cool-that's why these scenes are great, because Vin, who is normally the coolest guy around, is now coming to the old bull, the king of cool. The old bull and the young bull-it's wonderful."**

Cool, it seems, is the watchword for XXX, which aims to shake and stir the spy movie cocktail represented for 40 years by the James Bond franchise. The gadgets, guns, girls, and exotic locales (Prague, Bora Bora, Lake Tahoe, the Austrian Alps) may look familiar, but they're seasoned with eye-popping extreme sports stunts and a rough-and-ready hero to whom kids can more easily relate. **"The aim was to find some new ground between Bond and Austin Powers,"** says Cohen, who also teamed with Diesel on the street-racing smash *The Fast and the Furious*. **"We're trying to invent a new kind of action hero, one that's wily and soulful and confident and, much of the time, in over his head. (Bond) has been very important to me since I saw Dr. No when I was 12 and got my first erection when Ursula Andress walked out of the water. I hope I'm going to be able to make something that will impact this new generation as (that series did) me."**

Xander Cage, whose nickname, XXX, is tattooed on the back of his neck, is neither a trained spy nor a

philanderer who beds every receptionist he meets. He is, however, capable of base-jumping a Corvette off a 700-foot-high bridge and motocrossing his way through a Colombian drug plantation while being pursued by a helicopter armed with a cannon. **"It's like the X Games meets Apocalypse Now,"** says Cohen, and indeed an early party scene in Cage's loft features appearances by such real life action-sports stars as skateboarder Tony Hawk, BMXers Rick Thorne and Mat Hoffman, and motocross experts Larry Linkogle and Jeremy "Twitch" Stenberg (Stenberg also helped with the stunt work).

After Cage runs afoul of the law (that Corvette, it turns out, belonged to a senator), he is coerced by Gibbons into joining the NSA and dispatched to Prague to infiltrate a group of Russian gangsters bent on drug trafficking and global destruction. "I recruit him and try to control and manipulate him in interesting ways," Jackson says. **"It's a very cool kind of New Age Bond relationship. My character is a little edgier than (Bond's boss) M ever was, a little more proactive. You can see he's been in the field, he's kind of battle-scarred."** The role required two hours of makeup each day and an opaque contact lens obscuring Jackson's left eye.

But what really distinguishes XXX from 007 is attitude and execution. **"The fun of this character is that he has no idea of how to do surveillance or how to use a gun, but he will learn it almost instantly."**

**"Xander is a rebel,"** says Diesel. **"He doesn't give a shit about anything. There's no family, no girlfriend, no upward mobility thing. That's how Rob sold the story to me, taking a nihilist and through his journey, finding that there is something to care about."**

When the cameras aren't rolling, Cohen and Diesel can often be found huddled deep in conversation. What do they talk about? **"Mostly girls,"** laughs Cohen, a perennially youthful 53-year-old who peppers his speech with expressions like "it's dope" and "bitchin'" and just about gets away with it. **"We like each other's company,"** he says, **"and sometimes it's good to relate to each other as friends, not just director and actor."**

After toiling in Hollywood for more than three decades as executive (he was head of production for Motown's film division), producer ( Bird on a Wire, The Hard Way), and director ( Dragonheart, Daylight), the Harvard-educated Cohen saw his stock rise when The Fast and the Furious grossed \$145 million and made a superstar out of Diesel. **"Vin emerged from my film as an icon,"** says Cohen, whose gift for hyperbole is matched only by his unbridled enthusiasm. **"When we went to the X Games in Philadelphia, he was swamped, because to that generation, The Fast and the Furious is Rebel Without a Cause. They took it to heart-it's them; they're looking at a mirror of themselves. So Vin represents a lot of their hopes and dreams, and that's what a movie star really does."**

Considering that Diesel has made just nine feature films-two of which, Diablo and Knockaround Guys, have yet to be released-the actor's hot-property status has much to do with Hollywood's need to find new action heroes with cross-generational appeal. **"I think in a way that The Rock could turn out to be like Schwarzenegger, Vin could fit a place that in the Die Hard days was occupied solely by Bruce Willis,"** says Revolution Studios head Joe Roth, who agreed to pay Diesel \$10 million for XXX, a considerable hike from the reported \$1-2 million the actor got for The Fast and the Furious. Roth has already promised Diesel \$20 million for a XXX sequel. **"If he can command a movie that goes out and does \$100 or \$150 million in the domestic box office, is he worth it? Will everybody else make money if he gets that kind of paycheck? If he's commanding an action picture, the answer's yes."**

One action picture Diesel will not be making is the sequel to The Fast and the Furious. As the actor mulled over various projects in the wake of that movie's success (including Riddick, which begins filming toward the end of the year and in which he'll reprise his role from Pitch Black), his asking price climbed, and Universal commissioned two scripts for the Fast and the Furious sequel: one starring Diesel's character, Dominic Toretto, one focusing on the cop played by Paul Walker. Money was a factor in the final outcome, although it wasn't the only factor, according to Cohen, who also will not be returning. **"Vin was having problems with (the Fast and the Furious sequel)-it was a complex career decision and an emotional decision, of do we yet again want to start a film that might not have, let's say, a completely realized script in front of us,"** he says. **"And there was a lot of time pressure, because Universal wanted it out for next summer. Vin finally said, 'No matter what they offer me moneywise, I just don't feel comfortable.'" Says Scott Stuber, Universal's copresident of production, "The planets didn't align. We're proud to have been there with The Fast and the Furious and watch Vin explode on the scene, and we're equally proud and excited to be in business with him on Riddick."**

Since making his Hollywood debut in Saving Private Ryan-a role Steven Spielberg created for him after seeing Multi-Facial, a short Diesel wrote, directed, and starred in-the actor has presented himself to the media as something of an enigma. He refuses to talk about his background or even confirm reports that Mark Vincent is his real name, having adopted the Vin Diesel moniker during his nine years as a nightclub bouncer in New York City.

What little Diesel has revealed about himself in past interviews is that he was born (possibly on July 18, 1967) and raised in New York (probably in Manhattan) by a black theater-director stepfather and an astrologer mother, has been acting since he was seven (at the Jane Street Theatre in Greenwich Village), and during his struggling days he also sold tools through telemarketing.

Whatever the truth behind the Vin Diesel persona/brand, this calculated mystique has only helped fuel his appeal. Diesel himself believes that his success has more to do with his multiethnicity than, say, his admittedly impressive physique. **"I think our culture was ready for more of an ambiguous role model or star or whatever word you want to put in there,"** he says. **"I'm very fortunate that the world is this huge melting pot and in this new millenium we were ready to have a multicultural hero."**

**"He has the kind of softness and vulnerability that a Gibson or a Willis can have, and he has the physique and the power of an action hero,"** Roth says. **"I think that combination makes him somewhat unique and attractive to both women and men."**

Of course, there's also the cool quotient. **"I don't want to bullshit you,"** Diesel says, sitting in his trailer wearing a white sleeveless Polo T-shirt and low-slung jeans. **"I may not be that smart. I may not be that good-looking. But cool? Yes. Very cool."** He laughs, a gravelly baritone rumble. **"I'm killing myself, right? I'm saying the worst thing. When doing interviews, how much should you be diplomatic and political, and at what point can you say, 'If I died tomorrow, I'm letting you know, I think I'm a cool mothafucka'?"**

Part of the deal that Cohen struck with Roth when Revolution agreed to pay Diesel \$10 million for XXX was that the movie would be delivered for a summer 2002 release. That meant **"trying to do a film on the scale of a James Bond film, without even close to a finished script, in less than a year, from a dead start,"** Cohen says. Which is why he's cutting XXX as he's shooting it, working with one editor in Prague and another in Los Angeles. Tomorrow, at 4 a.m., he and Diesel will fly to Austria to complete a snowboarding sequence over the weekend, using the second-unit crew that's already shooting there. For Diesel this means working eight days nonstop, but it will save the production around \$750,000 and everyone will be able to leave Prague a week ahead of schedule. The three huge bouquets of flowers in the star's trailer are a gift from a grateful crew.

Such behavior seems at odds with industry stories that have dogged Diesel ever since he locked horns with director John Frankenheimer over a part he ultimately didn't play in Reindeer Games. **"There was a vibe about (Vin) that this guy, basically, was very, very opinionated,"** says Cohen, who admits questioning him about it when they first met. He insists that it's an unfair assessment, and that Diesel is hardly unique among actors in wanting to get the best out of his roles. **"The reality of Vin is that all you have to do is be as competent and talented as he is. If you're less than that and you're called the director, he's going to take you on. And I respect that, because I've seen a lot of directors mishandle actors."**

**"He's a guy who has passion, and people who have passion are sometimes misinterpreted as difficult,"** Stuber says. **"If you don't have it on the same level, it probably frustrates you, because he's questioning things that you should be questioning for yourself."**

**"I like to have directors who are confident, and Rob's confident,"** says Diesel, who admires actors who speak their mind when the need arises. **"If you're in a film, it's your responsibility to make sure it's dope. If it's not, you have to take the heat."**

Back on the set on Monday, the filmmakers have moved to the Charles Bridge, Prague's most famous tourist attraction, spanning the Vltava River. Diesel, who is only needed for one scene, spends some of his off-camera time avoiding the Czech paparazzi. More of a concern is the fact that he hurt his back during a snowboard jump in Austria. **"The jump was four, five feet and then I got another few feet of air,"** he says. **"On the third day I tried to get as much air as possible, tilted a bit forward, nose-dived, and whack! Thank God the snow was soft."** There was also some fun with a Ski-Doo. **"I grabbed it and did this jump,"** he explains excitedly. **"(Executive producer) Arne (Schmidt) was watching, and I told him, 'Get ready for a heart attack.' My little act of rebellion. It was kind of enjoying the Alps the right way."**

Rebelliousness aside, Cohen is keeping close tabs on his \$10 million man's risk-taking. **"I don't let him do anything I don't think he can do,"** he says. **"There's always the fluke accident or stuff you can't control, but if there's a controlled situation and (he can) do something cool, I let him. You can't make a movie like this without some risk; otherwise, Vin does all the dialogue and stuntmen do all the stunts, and that's not why Vinnie is Vinnie."**

Tragically, on April 4, not long after Cohen made these remarks, veteran stuntman and ex-Navy Seal Harry O'Connor was killed doubling for Diesel during a parasailing stunt on the Vltava River. The sequence was being shot by the second unit crew because it had been deemed fairly straightforward-**"there were no timing issues involved, like somebody (making) some explosion happen,"** says Cohen, who had left Prague by that time. **"I wouldn't give a really dangerous stunt to second unit; I would have done it**

**myself, like all the others. (O'Connor's) death put a major dent in all our hearts."**

In Diesel's trailer, there's a mock-up of XXX's poster, which features a striking photo of the star's muscled back, his head almost in profile, his right hand holding a gun. It's an iconic image, suitable for a movie and a character that have enormous franchise potential. Asked how it feels to be promoted in such a commercial way, Diesel (who has said earlier that *"I was an actor before I was remotely concerned about my physique or whatever would be attractive to studio heads"*) gets up and begins pacing the trailer's confines.

**"That is so intimidating to me,"** he says, his voice cracking ever so slightly, **"that I keep it here so I never lose sight of what someone else is expecting from this movie. It's scary, because it's like I can no longer be just a guy sitting across from another cool guy just rapping about shit without every . . . single . . . word being loaded in some way."** He sits down, more in control. **"I love the idea of doing the films, but I don't know how comfortable I will be with what that image promises. I look at that thing and say, 'That's not a poster, that's a declaration of war.' That's how much pressure's out there."**

**xXx marks the spot where Vin gets extreme**

[The Daily Telegraph](#)

06sep02

VIN Diesel is most un-Hollywood -- in the sense he's been in Sydney for three days and hasn't even sailed the Harbour or climbed the Bridge.

**"I'm waiting for someone to design something for the down time,"** he told showbiz editor Michael Bodey.

**"Thank you for telling me things I should be DOING!"** he pointedly said, looking at his PR assistant.

If his current film, xXx, is anything to go by, Diesel would be jumping from the Bridge, even if he's previously said he's a **"thrillseeker, sort of"**.

**"That means I'm a thrillseeker if I'm to be compared to the regular chap,"** he smiles.

And thrills he finds in the action film, xXx, an extreme sports-infused blockbuster that has the New Yorker being called **"the first multi-ethnic action star"** and the new James Bond.

**"I definitely see xXx as a franchise but not as the new James Bond,"** he said.

**"James Bond is James Bond and that's what he is, the father of secret agents. There's so many tags I can't even think about them all."**

What about the "difficult" tag he earned on Pitch Black and Saving Private Ryan?

**"Do I have that still?"** he smiled. **"I thought we lost that. I don't think I'll ever lose the difficult tag -- it would be foolish for me to even try."**

**"My definition of difficult may be different from some people but I don't mind people thinking I'm difficult, people knowing that I'm dedicated to whatever I'm doing, because that comes out of passion."**

And he has projects aplenty, reprising his breakthrough Pitch Black role in Chronicles of Riddick, doing a xXx sequel and becoming Hannibal The Conqueror (with a script by Gladiator writer David Franzoni) in the next year.

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**Oh XXX! Vin's about to shoot off**

[The Sidney Morning Herald](#)

By Garry Maddox, Film Writer

September 6 2002

A huge Hollywood sci-fi film, the sequel to Pitch Black, could be headed for Canada instead of Australia because of an alleged shortage of top-flight crew.

Vin Diesel, the star and producer of The Chronicles of Riddick, said yesterday he wanted to make the \$US140 million (\$257.3 million) film in Queensland.

This was where the star of The Fast and The Furious and XXX largely shot Pitch Black opposite Radha

Mitchell. But it seemed like the Universal Pictures film was bound for Vancouver.

**"I think I've told too many people how great it is to shoot in Australia. Now the studio is telling me there are not enough crews in Australia - they're all taken - which is weird,"** he said.

In Sydney for the premiere of XXX, Diesel was still keeping his fingers crossed for an Australian shoot.

**"I would love to come back and shoot in Australia if for no other reason than the whole character - and the whole film - was created in Queensland and Coober Pedy."**

News of an international crew shortage was a surprise to film industry executives in Queensland and NSW, especially given the uncertainty over another sci-film film that is due to shoot in both states.

The producers of The Fountain are reportedly recasting in Los Angeles after the film's star, Brad Pitt, quit the project.

The chief executive of the Pacific Film and Television Commission in Brisbane, Robin James, said: **"We'd love to see Vin Diesel back. I'm confident that, depending on the start date, there'd be facilities and crew available."**

This was despite an unprecedented number of Hollywood films in production and pre-production in Queensland - a live-action version of Peter Pan, the Benjamin Bratt World War II drama The Great Raid, and George of the Jungle 2.

**"In terms of feature film production from offshore, it has never been better. It's hectic."**

But Mr James said there had been a complete drop-off in foreign television production, which had been "bread and butter" for the Gold Coast studios in recent years.

For various reasons - including American network stockpiling ahead of a possible actors' strike, interest in "more comfortable" programming since September 11, and its ineligibility for Federal Government tax rebates - there was not a single international television co-production or American movie-of-the-week being made in the state.

A spokeswoman for Fox Studios said two top-flight crews were freed up when The Matrix sequels finished shooting last month.

And with The Fountain apparently in limbo waiting for another green light from Hollywood, the next definite booking at the studio was George Lucas's Star Wars: Episode III next March. Depending on its start date, there was also space at Fox Studios for The Chronicles of Riddick, the spokeswoman said.

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## **The good oil on Diesel**

08sep02

[Daily Telegraph](#)

ACTION man Vin Diesel is a song and dance man at heart.

The Hollywood hunk can speed climb, snowboard, motocross and, in his latest movie, ride a missile.

Give him a pair of tap shoes and, look out, Fred Astaire!

**"Nicole Kidman and I are talking about doing a remake of Guys and Dolls,"** Diesel said.

**"This is something I have always wanted to do. She would be the perfect person for it."**

To prove his point, Diesel gave The Sunday Telegraph an impromptu tap dance performance and then sang a few lines of America The Beautiful.

In Sydney to promote his latest film, XXX, he's keen for everyone to know he won't be typecast as a typical action hero, despite being a self-confessed thrill-seeker.

**"When you're an actor in New York theatre, you better be able to do anything, because you don't know what may be the deciding factor for your next role,"** he said.

**"I always want to add legitimacy to each movie. I always do my research."**

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## **Being broad-minded**

September 9 2002

## [The Sidney Morning-Herald](#)

American film star Vin Diesel talks to Brett Thomas about Australia, drinking and meeting Sydney women.

**'Are there any women in this town?'** Vin Diesel, visiting American movie star, hadn't even sat down for his late brunch at the Park Hyatt's Harbour Kitchen and Bar when his thoughts turned to matters perhaps not strictly pertaining to his Sydney promotional duties.

He switched off my tape recorder, looked imploringly at his posse for they were gathered adoringly around him and asked if it could be organised for him to meet some women that night.

**"The women in Sydney are beautiful, but these guys would have me working 24 hours a day if they could,"** he confided before slipping into an unconvincing Australian accent. **"I've got needs, I need them fulfilled."**

There were bright-eyed, yes-sir grins all round from a group which included his American publicist, his personal make-up artist and, most curiously, a tall, handsome chap who seemed to fill the role of Diesel's travelling gentleman's gentleman, the type of essential assistant whose gift is in knowing what his boss wants even before he does.

**"I'm going for the chain-smoking section,"** said Diesel as he reached our table. Before he could even finish asking if it was OK to smoke, his man appeared and delicately rolled from his hand a solitary gasper. **"Yes, you can smoke,"** the man said.

Not knowing what Diesel was in the mood for, beverage-wise, his minders had thoughtfully provided an array of choices: a fruit juice, a coffee, a hot chocolate. Diesel was also presented with a silver platter of freshly made bruschetta. Having once proved his appetite to a reporter by stuffing an entire muffin in his mouth, this proved to be child's play for the bald, 180cm, muscle-bound star. **"I love Australia,"** Diesel chomped, looking out from the restaurant and on to the gleaming blue harbour. **"Look how f\*\*\*ing beautiful it is. I'm amazed I don't have a place here. The thing is, it's hard to get away from America to come here for a weekend."**

You sensed that if it could be done, Diesel would find a way to do it. The 35-year-old former nightclub bouncer, known to his family as Mark Vincent, has become a huge star in the space of two movies action-fests *The Fast And The Furious* and, currently, *xXx*. His asking price has skyrocketed to a reported \$20 million. *xXx* is being viewed as a money-pit franchise with James Bond-like potential and he's even been discussing a remake of *Guys And Dolls* with, of all people, Nicole Kidman.

Just at the moment you expect him to lean over and proclaim "It's good to be the king", he actually does. His man was back again, with an exotic, fruity concoction to add to the drink collection already on the table. Diesel took one sip. **"The king is happy again,"** he growled.

It was unlikely his sudden happiness was caused by a nip of something stronger from the bar. Diesel, you see, has had to give up alcohol. **"I had to stop drinking 31/2 years ago,"** he said. **"Because I'd be a prime candidate for ..."** He paused. **"I learned from Russell [Crowe]. Ha, ha. I'll stay out of that one. I got enough problems, you know what I mean?"**

**"It was a conscious decision that happened after Pitch Black** [the science-fiction movie he filmed in Australia a few years ago, now also being turned into a three-part franchise].

**"What's so funny is the first time I came out here, I was still drinking and having a blast doing it but nobody really cared about what I was doing, so I could get drunk and have fun. Now, it's different. Now everyone cares a little too much and I can't get away with being drunk and being unaccountable for my drunken stupor. Not that I had any real problems drinking. But I'm less apt to be comfortable in public."**

According to Diesel, the new-found focus on his private life has been a considerable downside to the fame he has finally found since dreaming about being a movie star as a little kid doing amateur theatre in home town New York.

While some gossip rags reported his meeting with Kidman about *Guys And Dolls* was in fact a romantic one "I told her that was going to get written up," he smiled buzz on the internet has all but outed him as gay. And he makes no secret of the fact he despises the paparazzi.

Still, there have to be some advantages like the money, for instance.

**"I never see it,"** he said. **"It's a real fun thing to make money when you can't spend it. I always wanted to buy a Mercedes. Not really. I guess I always thought of it as a status symbol, so I bought my sister**

a Mercedes. My little brother and my parents, they go to Europe. They get to spend it. Something's off.

**"My big splurge was I transformed a tennis court into an NBA basketball court at my house in LA and that was cool. But I don't know how to spend money because I never had it. I swear to God, if you've never had money and you get money, you still don't know what the f\*\*\* to do with it. You're so scared about spending money. The fact that this cranberry and club soda I'm drinking right now is free tickles me."**

Diesel spoke about what has happened to him with such wonder and surprise that you almost forget he was brought up by an astrologer mother. Surely, she must have seen it all coming.

**"I got shafted," he boomed. "My mother always said she couldn't do my chart because she was too close and she couldn't do one that was unbiased because of that. I never reaped the rewards of having an astrologically psychic mother."**

**"It's not fair. I've spent my life trying to rectify that injustice."**

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## MEETING MR X

[Urban Cinefile](#)

Sept 12

**Doesn't smoke, doesn't drink, kicks butt and has a career path that includes not one, but two movie franchise characters, the latest being Triple X, the secret agent and reluctant hero made for our cynical times. Andrew L. Urban meets Vin Diesel – alias xXx. (Mr X to you!)**

Vin Diesel is sitting in a small armchair facing the door as I walk in for our interview, the hotel room looking extra spacious with the bed taken out. It's late afternoon on the second day of his Sydney media tour and as I approach, he drops his head back on the chair, eyes closed, mouth open, feigning sleep. But he bucks up, stands, we laugh and shake hands. He's tall – just over 6 foot – but not as bulky as he looks in xXx.

On a glass coffee table in front of him is a large cup and a couple of silver coffee pots. I get a beer. **"I haven't had a drink in three and a half years,"** he says as an aside. It didn't give him a good look, alcohol. So I ask how he gets his kicks. He shrugs and grins....a pause: **"Er ... kicks ? Do movies..."** he laughs, and it's more like a question. Obviously he either has no down time or it's not wise to talk about it publicly. **"Thank God I've got these movies that are fun and I can do things, like go on a 10 week boot camp – that's fun. It's a lot of work, sure, with an 80 day film shoot and tack on another 10 weeks of training, you're looking at 8 months of non stop, every day Triple X. But that's what you gotta do if you want to make a really exciting film."**

The first thing that strikes you about Vin Diesel is his immediacy: he engages in the interview without needing a dance. He is serenely comfortable in his self, but not so much as to be obnoxiously egocentric. In Triple X, he plays a seriously confident thrillseeker, Xander Cage, who makes videos of his death defying feats – not for his own ego, but to sell. Bending and breaking the law, he attracts the attention of the National Security Agency's Augustus Gibbons (Samuel L. Jackson) who's looking for someone just as lean, mean and capable of dealing with Anarchy 99, a group of dangerous thugs in Prague, led by Yorgi (Marton Csokas) and his edgy girlfriend Yelena (Asia Argento). Nothing less than the fate of the world is at stake, and Xander has little option but to agree to the job, or go to jail. That's how agent Triple X is recruited.

Much of the film's appeal – and its original take on the secret agent formula – is due to the character's background and persona. James Bond he ain't; if there's an echo anywhere that resonates with this sort of story, it's in films like The Dirty Dozen (1967) where men who are otherwise due for (or already in) jail are utilised by the authorities for dirty, undercover work. Perfect for our cynical times. Any softening of the Xander Cage badass persona would undermine the character's core appeal to today's main film consumers, Gen X who would not be as ready buy a made-over Xander with a conscience and a desire to do good in the world. How can such a character be retained.

### "a reluctant hero"

**"That's the key. That is the thing we'll have to pay attention to. He's going to have to remain a reluctant hero,"** says Diesel, his voice rumbling like a large ...er...diesel engine. **"And I think the idea is to make it part of the charm of the next film,"** which Diesel will again have a hand in producing. **"You're 100% right: it's critical. We have to keep that individuality."**

Xander Cage, by the way, was not born fully formed in the original script. Vin Diesel had a lot to do with the

character's final form. But that's par for the Diesel course on movies these days. He never did things by halves, and his personality is powerful and robust enough to make a difference when it comes to getting a movie project developed to fit his collar size. **"To play a character right,"** he explains, **"you have to gravitate towards the character, but the character also has to gravitate towards you. You have to pull the character to you, as much as go towards the character. You have to become the character, the character has to become you...So I have a great level of influence, which is why I've started producing these films, to legitimise that influence."**

xXx is the first of a franchise; it was always intended to be. **"In order to create a franchise, I think generally you want to plan that, prior to shooting the first picture. I'm not a huge fan of making a film and if it's successful going back and saying, oooh, let's make more out of this. I would rather plan it out and make it clear what our objective is. With Triple X, our objective was to create a character that could become a character we'd want to see again and again in different situations."**

So Diesel is already working on that. (I didn't want to risk asking if the next Xander Cage movie would be called XXXX ...) But he's also working on the upcoming movie, Riddick (in 2004), a film taking his Pitch Black character, Richard B. Riddick, on another outing. How is he going to maintain two movie franchises? Diesel reacts with a physical joke, clenching both fists, scrunches his face, eyes closed and shakes in alarm for a few seconds. **"Aaaaahhh....well, that's why I've turned down other franchises, I can't do too many of them. Triple X is the action/spy genre franchise, that could last ....well, forever. Riddick is in the sci-fi genre, and I didn't want to do a sequel to Pitch Black, but what is fascinating is recognising that we might have tapped into something with this character, at the beginning of a mythology that is accessible for our generation. For today..."**

**"So instead of doing a sequel in the conventional studio sense – what was really appealing to me was creating a trilogy with the character. In the same way that Lord of The Rings is a trilogy that incorporates the tale of the Hobbit but doesn't demand that you know the Hobbit. Pitch Black will be independent of the trilogy about Riddick. I think there's been a void in mythologies on film...in the 70s we had Star Wars....in literature after the war we had Tolkien's novels, that was kind of our mythology. And there isn't a mythology done with real balls – and that's we plan to do."**

### **"key figures"**

In a relatively short career to date, Diesel has amassed enormous kudos. And an extensive list of key figures who've helped and influenced him. **"So many key figures,"** he sighs with wonder. **"So many people that go uncredited that are all part of it. So many...I think about it all the time. We'd be talking with friends, or having dinner, and I'd think of one or another important figure in my life. Teachers ....for example, who've said the right things that have stuck with me. You know, a teacher who taught me how to write..."** [Diesel spent three years at Hunter College majoring in English before succumbing to the lure of the professional stage.]

**"I remember how he started an essay about capitalism with an opening sentence something like, 'The sound of Scottish bagpipes bring to mind...' and I remember how it made me feel. It made me feel liberal in my writing, it broke down walls. You could write about capitalism and start with bagpipes – or floating comestibles, as he put it! And I remember every acting teacher, Tom Hanks, and Steven Spielberg, my father....a woman called Carol Ferrante, without whose support and belief I might not be here today...and Crystal Fields..."**

Crystal Fields was the first. Diesel broke into theatre at the age of 7. That should read: Diesel broke into a theatre, at the age of 7. He and some friends broke into a New York theatre to vandalise it. A woman stopped them and offered them each a script and \$20, on the condition that they would attend everyday after school. The woman was Crystal Fields. From there, Vin's fledgling career progressed from the New York repertory company run by his adoptive father.

Later, when his first attempt at being a movie star flopped (his theatre training held him back in L.A.), his mother gave him a book called "Feature Films at Used Car Prices" by Rick Schmidt. The book encouraged him to make his own movies. He wrote a short film based on his own experiences as an actor, called Multi-Facial (1994) which he shot in less than three days at a cost of US\$3,000. The film was invited to the 1995 Cannes Film Festival, and when Spielberg saw it two years later, he called Diesel to ask him to join the cast of Saving Private Ryan.

**"Then there are the friends you see in the hallway,"** he says motioning towards the corridor outside where a small group of people usually called minders were mingling, waiting for me to finish, among them George Zakk, who is executive producing Riddick with Diesel. (I had already spoken to George, who was discussing the shoot, complaining that they couldn't get a booking at Fox Studios in Sydney, which is where Diesel was desperately keen to base the production. Too many Star Wars and too many Lord of the Rings bookings.)

**"Seven years ago, George was sleeping on someone's couch..."** His team has been around a while, and they're solid, as they say on the street.

His list of thanks continues to Robert Redford, **"for championing my film at Sundance,"** (Strays, 1997) **"and the investors in that film who came up with extra money to help me finish the film...and so many more..."**

### **"flawed heroes"**

My beer's finished and Diesel has a few things to do so we have to wrap the interview. I ask him one last question: does he have any fears, does he have flaws? **"Hmmm,"** he nods (fatigue is taking over), **"I have many fears and even more flaws. Which is why I probably gravitate towards flawed heroes. Because it's the one thing I can wrap my head around. I think people can learn from them...and I think when some kid is watching Xander Cage, as much as an action film that it is, this is a guy that doesn't drink alcohol, a guy who looks down on someone for smoking cigarettes. Heroism on film is a tricky thing these days ... hero figures are rare; and to be able to relate them, that's the key."**

### **Move over 007 and Batman, XXX is now the man**

2002 Sept 20

[Japan Today](#)

Chris Betros

TOKYO — Vin Diesel is fond of saying **"I'm just a boy from New York"** with a shrug, as if that explains his phenomenal rise from bouncer to action film star currently taking the world by storm in "XXX."

Standing 180 cm tall, the 35-year-old Diesel, with his shaven head, huge biceps and black tanktop, cuts an imposing figure. Flashing a hearty smile, he calls himself a rebel and says he's a lot different from any action star of the past. For one thing, in his short career, he has been a director, producer and writer as well as actor.

**"I'm definitely a new breed, no pretty boy,"** he said in his baritone voice. **"It's my individuality that has let me come this far. I'm a lot like the character Xander Cage in 'XXX' — nihilistic, with a disregard for authority."**

Not that he's a rebel without a cause. Far from it. The events of Sept 11, 2001, shook him up like everyone else. **"I grew up less than a mile from the World Trade Center. I was in LA at the time but my father and mother saw the second plane go into the tower from their living room window. I felt like I had to put on a uniform and do something,"** he said. But his mother, who is a professional astrologer, told him he could do more as an actor.

Diesel, whose real name is Mark Vincent, had just made his mark as a bankable action star in last year's "The Fast and the Furious." The director of that film, Rob Cohen, suggested the idea of "XXX" to Diesel who was reluctant in the wake of the terror attacks. **"We had a talk about the concept and realized that it was time for a new movie hero. It had to be someone who would appeal to youth culture, a working class, proletarian hero."**

And so was born Xander Cage, an extreme athlete-turned-reluctant secret agent who doesn't smoke, take drugs or drink (he prefers cranberry and club soda as does Diesel who has been on the wagon for the past three years). Pressured into service for his country, agent Triple X, as he is called by his boss (Samuel L Jackson), is given the task of infiltrating a gang of terrorists called Anarchy 99 in Prague.

Triple X's skills come in handy as he drives cars off bridges, does jumps with motorcross bikes and snowboards in front of avalanches.

It was a grueling 5-month shoot with some stunt scenes taking two weeks to film. Diesel insisted on doing most of the stunts himself, against the studio's wishes. He thinks his youthful audience would expect no less.

### **New role model for youth**

**"Unlike James Bond, Triple X doesn't want to be a secret agent. He doesn't want to save the world,"** said Diesel. **"We have to assume that today's youth are like that, too. But we have to show them how they can make a difference if they are called to duty. Kids today don't care about James Bond, Batman or any of those other whitewashed heroes."** As if to emphasize that, "XXX" starts with a James Bond-type agent, dressed in a tuxedo, being easily spotted and picked off in a gothic rock club in Prague.

But does the world really want Triple X? Producers certainly hope so. It is already being viewed as a money

tree franchise and Diesel's asking price is rumored to be nearing \$20 million — something even his mother could never foresee.

**"It's a good feeling but overwhelming,"** said Diesel who made his stage debut in Greenwich Village when he was 7. **"People think it just took two movies but it has taken a long, long time. I was an actor for 20 years before I got a break. I had to work as a bouncer for nine years. But once I started to get proactive by writing and directing, doors started opening."**

His break came in 1995, when he wrote, produced, financed, directed and starred in a short film called "Multi-Facial," which was shown at the Cannes Film Festival. It caught the eye of Steven Spielberg who wrote the part of the ill-fated Private Caparzo for Diesel in "Saving Private Ryan" (1998).

**"That was my intro to Hollywood,"** said Diesel. While there is already talk of a sequel to "XXX," Diesel isn't resting on his laurels. Coming up are "Diablo," "Pitch Black" and "The Chronicles of Riddick." *(K's note: TCOR is the Pitch Black sequel :-)*

**"I also want to get back into directing,"** he said, **"but it takes so long — over a year for one film. Before I get back into the director's chair, I want to fulfill all my other fantasies."**

And one of those, he says, is to meet some of **"those stunningly beautiful Japanese women."** So with a wave and smile, Diesel heads out to feel the energy of the streets in Tokyo.

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## **xXx generation**

CKM Magazine  
2002/Oct issue  
by Gergely Buglya

A member of the new generation of Hollywood actors aspires "fast&furious" to be a star. The extreme sportsman-to-be-a-secret agent, Xander "XXX" Cage surfs on the waiter's tray, snowboards before an avalanche and jumps over helicopters with his bike. With the help of Vin Diesel the dream factory dresses/put the spy myth to a robe/gown for the X-generation.

With the extra amount of pyrotechnics and the music of Rammstein, Rob Cohen's action movie will be loudest movie this autumn, especially the 44,5 million dollar opening in the USA, that was the 4th best opening in August ever. Hollywood is in short supply of action heroes. Schwarzi, Stallone and Willis are almost coming with crutches to the shootings, and the studios are vainly looking for the new, fresh faces. The vacuum has finally sniffed up an everyday man, who can be a favorite in all the 5 continents. You can be Italian American, have a colored skin or an European you can easily identify with Vin Diesel, the actor, who as a young actor was sent away from Italian role castings, "to be too dark" and wasn't given any afro-American roles, because he was "too light". His first 20-minutes short movie "Multi-Facial" is also about the future-Vin, the actor trying to find his identity. In 1994 he spent 3000\$ for this 16 mm production, with returning the computer, he wrote on to the shop before the money-return guarantee ended. That time this amount of money exceeded his bouncer's salary, but it was worth, when his film had caught Spielberg's interest in Cannes. *(K's note: 3 years after Cannes.)* The master had also invited Vin to participate in "Saving Private Ryan". Diesel immediately moved Hollywood and made a list with all the actors around his age, and ranked them with his friend to see how many of his colleagues had a more successful career. He did it a broke down apartment, a few corners away from the Beverly Hills hotel, we are talking now.

**CKM: Yesterday, when I landed on the Los Angeles Airport, I immediately saw you on the cover of two magazines. You are even on the bottle of water on the desk. This is your future in Hollywood?**

Vin Diesel: Only according to the studio. In America they want to promote the movie only with my face, but in Europe, Asia, my movie partner, is also on the posters, because there people have no idea who Vin Diesel is. And also I got those magazines, you mentioned. I scanned through them, said thanks to my PR director and tucked them into my back pocket. Its not important to say: "Look, mom, I am in the TV, or on the matchbox. I rather concentrate to my work, and my brain works on my next movie.

**CKM: And what's going to be that, because I heard that you are going to have your first twenty million paycheck?**

V.D.: I am going to get that sum of money for the second part of "XXX", but at first I play Riddick in the sequel of Pitch Black". And for that -if you are interested in- I am going to get 11 million dollars, one million more than for "XXX". Ridley Scott, the director of "Gladiator" gave me my dream role, so next year I am going to be Hannibal... the conqueror carthagian, not the cannibal.

**CKM: And if these shootings are over, you are only going sign for projects with are worth at least twenty million dollars?**

V.D.: No way! My aim is to remain an actor, and gratify my dreams within this job. For ex I am planning the full length version of "Multi-Facial". I will be happy to get money just to cover the production costs, and not dreaming about a salary. The point is to play in such productions, that are entertaining and pull out people for two hours from the reality.

**CKM: Your latest movie fits into this conception. As "The Fast and The Furious" , "XXX" is also a perfect popcorn-flick, but your own directions or "Knockaround Guys" with John Malkovich and Dennis Hopper are totally different productions. How do you choose a role?**

V.D.: One thing is sure, its easier than before XXX. On the screenings of "The Fast and The Furious" the reactions of the audience made me feel very happy, but I felt that it presented a such a secret world, that is not worth to visit agant, is not secret anymore. Besides it would be the third sequel among my first ten movies, and I did not want that. That's why I signed for Ridley Scott, plus also, because I am a big fan of comic books, mythology, fantasy, and this period piece, this historical movie is a mix of all of them. Trust me, not the millions decide.

**CKM: If I think to Russell Crowe and the "Gladiator", then "Hannibal, the conqueror" will mean the end of your private life. But what's the situation now, when "XXX" is the most anticipated movie here, in the United States?**

V.D.: Fortunately I have yet no problems with it. As you can see, there are no bodyguards around me, my car is driven by my childhood friend and there are no paparazzo at my house.

**CKM: Just tell me, where you live and I fix it!**

V.D.: You are uncovered. Now I won't invite you to my party tonight. Just joking, I have no party, because we will fly to Florida tomorrow to continue promoting the movie. But I travel a lot anyway, so paparazzi can grow a beard at my fence. We shot "XXX" in Bora Bora, Austria and we spent months in Prague. And soon starts the shooting of the "Pitch Black" sequel in London (K'S note: production is scheduled to start this December in Vancouver, Canada), then in spring because of Hannibal, I will move to Africa So if I would name Los Angeles my home, I spend the least time at home.

**CKM: When you are moving to a new world, you try to settle in?**

V.D.: I try. Its true, that I did not visit the clubs in Prague - I don't drink any alcohol for three years- but I walked a lot in the parks, because I had my dog with me.

And this is something -I think- from a man, who does not like to talk about himself and his private life. He clean-shaves his head every morning, not to let us see how much hair he has. He said a few times, that he only smokes occasionally (K's note: not true, he admits that he is a chain smoker) - but he was smoking one cigarette after each other at last night's cocktail party. He does not like to be asked about his real name and the name change, about his ethnicity (half afro-American, half Italian American), about his familiar background (he has no connection at all with his real father), or when he is asked about his age (35), or about his relationships (he was linked to Michelle Rodriguez, co-star of TFATF and Pavla Hrbková, Czech model and guys, even). But he does not keep in secret, that he dreamed to be a star when he was a kid.

**CKM: Is that true, that you felt, even when you were young that you were going to be a star, or is it just a some king of legend?**

V.D.: I also read the biographies of actors, and I know, that most of them says, that he knew at that age. But I really drove everyone crazy saying that I was going to be a movie star. They thought that I was a fool, but I had enough self-confidence. Maybe that's why I didn't change when the success came, because I always knew, it was going to happen.

**CKM: Your mother, who is an astrologist, what did she say?**

V.D.: She had me on, she said that she was too close to me to forecast my future.

**CKM: When did the point came in your life, when you dared to confess to yourself that your dream made come true?**

V.D.: When my first film, the 16 mm "Multi-Facial" was screened in Manhattan, where 200 people were crowded in small room. That's where I felt that I have started my way.

**CKM: And now that you made a long distance on that road, what do you think about the section in front of? What are you going to be, the new stereotype of the action heroes, sex symbol or a cult idol?**

V.D.: I haven't thought about that yet, but the sex symbol is very far away from me. I'm a simple guy, who is hungry to make movies and is happy to be in his own skin. And from the action heroes, Mel Gibson is closest to me.

**CKM: As a future superstar, do you get advices from the present hot shots?**

V.D.: Sylvester Stallone gives generously tips. In a good sense, of course. They are mostly related to the

business, but he is the one, who tries to save me from the B-movies.

**CKM: How will be the "Hannibal, the Conqueror" from the other production made in Hollywood?**

V.D.: It will be educative on its own way, because it represents that age and it will be faithful to the knowledge, we have from that period of history.

Nearby a door opens creakingly. Vin gets scared to death, looks around and continues on his growling voice, that always sounds like, he has just waken up.

V.D.: Suddenly in believed that we were in "The Others".

**CKM: I see, you are watching other movies as well. What do you think about James Bond? Will he survive Xander Cage?**

V.D.: I don't think that my character in "XXX" would be an anti-Bond, if not in the sense that he is far away from the retiring age. We had an other approach for the spy movies. Xander Cage is a different kind, hard to handle anti-hero, who does not come from the prestigious social class. He is not that kind of agent, who has certificates of merits and medals at home. He is not Austin Powers, but he is not Bond either. He is urban, multi-cultural, with tattoos and piercing, just as today's young people. Who from us wears bow tie and tuxedo anymore?

**CKM: What interests Xander Cage?**

V.D.: Nothing, but the adventures. He is the type who went to skateboard and neglected the homework.

**CKM: How much of his stunts did you by yourself?**

V.D.: The diplomatic answer would be, that more than the director allowed, but less, than I wanted. But I don't have a word. There was a little bit of motorcycling, parachuting, and snowboarding. But of course, I only could do that in secret, because those producers, who paid my insurance, would get a heard attack.

**CKM: You are in a pretty good shape now and was under the shooting, You can probably thank that to your bouncer past, but are you still working out?**

V.D.: At the age of fifteen, when I started to work out, in was a form of self-realization. And my figure was good for Xander Cage, but I only use the weights to keep my shape. I also run with my dog every day and box with a coach. I can't work out more, because what would happen if one day I were asked to play a guy suffering from anorexia?

**CKM: If not weight lighting, what do you do in your spare time?**

V.D.: I live as everyone else, but its getting harder. If you are famous, everything you do, is suspicious. If you buy a bottle of water, the people wants to know, why. But I like to play basketball, chess and dream about the movie projects I have in my head.

The door opens again, and someone else adds: "Everything this guy said, is true.". In the man with a beard I recognize Rob Cohen, a friend of Vin, the director of "XXX" my next interviewee. But its an other story. Vin must go to an other room - he is very popular among the journalists now. And I can give a sigh on relief, what a luck that the alarms in cars parking outside the hotel did not start to Vin's voice.

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## **Knockaround's in turnaround**

The Toronto Star

By Rita Zekas

DIESEL power: The main reason you'll be seeing Knockaround Guys next month.

The mob caper was shot in Toronto two years ago on the heels of the success of Being John Malkovich. It stars John Malkovich, Dennis Hopper and hotties Barry Pepper, Seth Green, Andrew Davoli and Vin Diesel, who were lukewarm back then.

Pepper's biggest credit was Saving Private Ryan; it was way before he blew everyone out of the ballpark playing Roger Maris in 61\*.

Green's was playing Scott Evil, son of Dr. Evil in Austin Powers; Davoli's was Bringing Out The Dead; and Diesel's was also Saving Private Ryan.

Knockaround languished in limbo until Diesel's XXX became a summer blockbuster. According to the August Entertainment Weekly: "(XXX) is one of the reasons you'll finally see Knockaround Guys, a Mob drama

completed two years ago that had been sitting on New Line's shelf — until one of the film's stars suddenly made it a lot more marketable. Look for it in theatres in October, just when XXX's run should be petering out." Bingo.

Star Gazing was on the Toronto set of Knockaround in November of 1999. It was also shot in Alberta and New York locations. Malkovich and Hopper played aging mobsters and the four youths their sons/nephews/associates, who were sent to pick up money but screwed up the deal and spent the rest of the film trying to make it good.

A knockaround guy, according to the press notes, *"survives by his wit, can't produce college degrees or pay stubs, but has managed to keep himself off the dole."*

Green plays Johnny Marbles, cousin of Davoli's character, Chris Scarpa. Davoli and Pepper, who plays Matty Demaret, are brothers, sons of Hopper. Malkovich is their uncle.

**"It was a dream come true to work with these guys,"** Pepper enthused, **"sitting there one night with Hopper telling me stories of James Dean (on the film Giant). Malkovich couldn't have been a kinder, sweeter man, so down-to-earth. He's elegant and very funny and he'll sit and entertain. He doesn't go back and forth with chef, private trainer and body guard."**

Diesel, who plays aspiring wise guy Taylor Reese, was wearing what looked like a Mr. T starter kit: **"It's mob jewels,"** he explained. **"I'm the best knockaround guy, the knockaround prototype. I have a commitment to that world and I'm better than the other three guys."**

Diesel pumped up for the role. **"I did combat training to get my mind back to an aggressive place — Taylor is a skilled warrior. It's a physical role but there is lots of camaraderie between Taylor and Matty (Pepper's character). Barry and I were two Hollywood novices who performed in Saving Private Ryan and Ryan is built into our history. Only eight people in the world did boot camp, which was only a week but was such a character defining moment in our careers. Barry and I have seen each other at our worst, completely beaten down at boot camp, a week of physical attrition, running five miles a day, eating cat food. This film is like Club Med in comparison."**

**"I've been acting since I was 7, (he's 35 now) and I came from an indie film world and did a lot of theatre. Ryan made me accessible to the film world because I don't have the typical body structure so I could get typecast. I got Ryan because Spielberg saw me in the 20-minute film Multi-Facial (which Diesel wrote, starred in, directed and financed) in Cannes and wrote the role of Private Carpazo for me."**

The four Knockarounds spent down-time played Scrabble with Malkovich.

**"John wins at Scrabble even when he's not here,"** cracked Davoli.

Diesel disputed that. **"I win at Scrabble. I end up winning because I get contested on words, I look like an easy target."**

Not after XXX, he doesn't.

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## **CinéLive n°61 - Octobre 2002** **p 84 - 87**

BULGING BICEPS, STEELY SMILE, FIERY CHARACTER, VIN DIESEL, VIA XXX, IS MAKING A BIG STEP FORWARD IN HIS VERY YOUNG HOLLYWOOD CAREER. THE EX-PRIVATE FROM PRIVATE RYAN AND BORN-TUNER FUELS TO ACTION, WITHOUT COMPROMISES. LET'S PLAY FRIENDS IN MIAMI.

**Cinélive: Do you think you're the best new American hero?**

Vin Diesel: Do I look like a hero? I drink carrot juice and I wear tee-shirts...

**Cinélive: Word has it that you are the genetic result of a strange cocktail of Irish, German, Italian and Dominican blood, among others. Which components did you put forth for XXX?**

Huh? I'd be what? Where did you get the components of that cocktail from? In an article? I learn new stuff about myself everyday...Drop it.

**Okay. Let's come back to XXX. At the beginning of the movie, one of the characters takes off his clothes to reveal a tuxedo, like James Bond often did. Then this same character is shot and surfs a young crowd that pushes him towards the exit. Is it a way to tell the real 007 that it's time to retire?**  
It was in fact a brilliant idea of Rob Cohen. Isn't it cool? Our intention was to create a new kind of secret

agent with whom people can identify. Cause, how many secret agents do you really know?

**Eighteen.**

You're kidding!

**Yes.**

It's really hard to identify with a secret agent. The objective with Rob was to transform Xander Cage into a sort of international secret agent, accessible to all. He has nothing of a real secret agent at first, and especially doesn't want to become one. The only thing is, he finds himself recruited by the NSA to save the world.

**Does an actor unconsciously spy on others to feed his characters?**

I think many actors stifle their personality onscreen. Acting can be extremely therapeutic, depending on the case.

**Is it your case?**

Absolutely. I'm 100% sure of my identity when I play a character. Because the parameters, the setting, the resemblances with my character are crystal clear. Acting is a permanent quest of my identity.

**Rob Cohen likes pushing the audience to ask themselves certain questions, such as how one would react in such extreme circumstances. And it's also a quest for redemption, theme that is dear to him?**

You hit the bull's eye. When watching XXX, the spectator asks himself if he would be able to change his principles, the meaning he gives to his life...Despite all, Cage is still an anarchist, a rebel who finds himself hired by the NSA because he is similar to those he will have to track down and terminate. He is even one of their heroes, they're all fans of Xander Cage's prowess. Later on, you realize that he is not just that, that he has his own ideas, his own feelings. Throughout the movie, he discovers the validity of the values he liked to go against.

**The character played by Samuel L. Jackson says that a " man can change " while talking about Xander Cage. Have you changed more than you thought, throughout filming, if only because of the fatal accident that cost the life of one of stuntmen standing in for you?**

After such a tragedy, I found myself in a bad place. I wasn't there when it happened. The man involved was a great guy; he was part of the team and him not being there anymore was hard on everyone. It shook me up. This kind of event distresses you. But to answer the first part of the question, I realize that I probably took more risks than I should have. My goal was to come as close to a rebel as possible. I wanted to pay tribute to all the extreme sports athletes. So I adopted the image of the bad boy towards the studios, a wild side. I was doing jumps that could have put the movie in real jeopardy, even if I had trained ten weeks prior. So yes, I matured...I hope.

**You're seen as reckless, you're an extreme sports fan in real life...yet you didn't do all the stunts!**

I tried to do as many as I could, which wasn't always smart, to the point where Rob often tried to talk me out of them. Working with him is magic because he wants everyone to feel good. When he trusts you, he also trusts in your instincts, your intuitions. That is the sign of a great director. He let me take some risks. That's why we get along so well [after both turning down Fast and Furious II, they're doing the sequel to XXX, which was decided upon before the release of the first one, editor's note.]

**You're said to be rebellious since a young age, but isn't it a plus to be a little rebellious towards Hollywood?**

You're right, I think it's a plus, but only if you do it in a positive way. Such as questioning institutions that do not want to be questioned, by shaking around values to dust them off.

**In your movie, your character implies that video games educate kids. According to you, can movies educate too?**

I do believe that it can, well, some movies more than others. They can offer an inspiring message. Xander Cage learns something about society, about himself. He speaks to the youth because he's like them, he has a human side, he's an individualist. Unlike James Bond, who fights for his country, he only fights for himself. At least in the beginning. The kids can relate to that. If you're too didactic (educational), you lose their attention. When I watch movies, I try to see myself in the hero. XXX is certainly a fun super-cool movie, but when you scratch the surface, you find out that it also tells the story of how an anti-social can become responsible, something resulting of the September 11th aftermath.

**What are your immediate projects?**

I'm going to film Hannibal the Conqueror under the direction of Ridley Scott, and so wake up an era probably forgotten, the IIIrd century not being omnipresent in history books!

**When you were younger, you wrote screenplays. Did you get involved with XXX's?**

Of course ! I like to get involved. At the start of my career, I had a lot of ideas and people didn't listen to me too much. Nowadays it's more like, "So Vin, what do you think?"

**More than twelve years ago, you produced your first short film. By pushing back your return behind the cameras, are you not getting more apprehensive?**

On the contrary, I think that each movie I do as an actor will make me a better director. As of right now, I'm still learning, especially as executive producer of XXX. Doing all these big budget movies is a huge opportunity.

**Isn't your build a minus for certain movies, or is it just as moldable as you wish?**

You're right, the physique can be an obstacle. I wouldn't want to think of it as such, but facts are facts. I'd like to take on all challenges, but reality's different. I have a physique that pushes me more towards action movies, what I don't regret nevertheless. To escape that, you need good storylines, like Hannibal.

**Or Hellboy, the cartoons character who, according to Guillermo Del Toro, would be perfect for you?**

We did talk about it indeed. But I don't know what happened, I'm not doing it anymore.

**Just like Fast and Furious 2?**

Exactly. That's life!

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**Vin Diesel, the rise of action in Hollywood**

[Le Monde](#)

Samuel Blumenfeld

2002-10-09

Vin Diesel, the rise of action in Hollywood

The "XXX" actor embodies a new type of hero, who is more inspired by video games than patriotism a la Stallone.

One would imagine being in a trap. Vin Diesel enters his room, which he immediately locks, forbidding anybody from entering as long as he hasn't ended the conversation with his interlocutor.

He seizes a cigarette, fiddles with his pack, and makes you admire his magnificent multicolored shirt, put on expert advice of his publicist. The cigarette isn't everything. It also masks an addiction to hot chocolate and fresh apple juice, which long-term effects are difficult to measure, unless they already show themselves in a husky voice that resembles Dark Vador's in The Star Wars. A strong toned voice, with a continuous flow, which intoxicates you with words and gets lost in incredible stories.

Vin Diesel is, since the successes of Saving Private Ryan, Pitch Black, Fast and Furious and XXX, his new film, the new star of American action movies. One will not only have to get used to his car engine's patronymic - he was named Mark Vincent as a child, and inherited from his schoolyard companions this mechanic's patronymic - but to get used to seeing him, during at least a decade, holding several times starring roles in high-scaled productions. Vin Diesel symbolizes a new race of action hero who transcends class, race and genre barriers. Even the sexual orientation barrier, if one considers his success within the gay community. Vin Diesel had moreover tried, unsuccessfully, to get the role of drag queen in Anybody is perfect, of Joel Schumacher, who finally went to Philip Seymour Hoffman.

It wasn't so long ago that Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger dominated the box-office, their testosterone-inflated body builder body shining with its strength and its absence of sex appeal. Rather than hormones, it is the hot chocolate which seems at the origin of Vin Diesel's Herculean strength. The latter expresses an impertinent, underlined sexuality, in XXX at least, by a keen interest for the female sex that he has to maintain under strict control to achieve his secret agent mission.

Vin Diesel is said to be of Italian and African ancestry by some. Others have asserted, with as much happiness, that his origins were Cuba and Porto Rico. The truth is tattooed on his skin, due to the XXX scripted on his nape in Rob Cohen's eponymous movie. Vin Diesel comes from nowhere. He is the human equivalent of a mathematical unknown. **" I am multicultural, and I claim this identity in the name of all these kids who do not fall in a precise ethnic category and fade into indifference. "** Vin Diesel defines himself as a marginal with vague origins, raised in the 1970's in Manhattan in an experimental urban district intended for broke artists. It is with this mathematical unknown that a part of the American youth identifies nowadays.

**A DOMESTIC NOVEL**

It is permanently necessary to sort out Vin Diesel's logorrhea. He can talk to you for half an hour about his father, a theater director of plays off off Broadway - Vin Diesel insists on the two off to make it clear that this

adulated foster father was not involved in the universe of the spotlight-, then to stop, to look at you pointedly, and to let out: **" This man was not my biologic father. I never knew that one. "** The story continues still, without one knowing if it has not just been made up: **" My district was a real melting-pot, of exceptional richness. It was populated by lost, stubborn artists, in whom one could see authentic aristocracy. These people thought that they were better artists than the others and considered themselves cursed. I realized in this environment that I was going to become an artist. It was the only way out. "** The family novel thickens even more. Vin Diesel has a twin brother, **" with blue eyes and blond hair "**. And he has a mother, biological this time, astrologer, and holder of a mastery of psychology. **" She's a really strange person. She never wanted to make my astral chart and thought she was too close to me to be objective."**

For lacking an astral chart, Vin Diesel created his own fate. At 7 years old, he started on stage. At 10 years old, he decided to become a movie star and nothing else. Today, Vin Diesel's dream isn't only to sit durably at the top of the box-office, but to embody a new Charlton Heston, with rougher features and a body infinitely more developed, and to embody, one by one, the great historical figures. **"I want to incarnate Hannibal onscreen. I read everything regarding Carthage. I created a research department that has been working on the film for two months. David Franzoni, the scriptwriter of Gladiator, is working on the film. Hannibal is my dearest dream."**

There was a time when America recognized itself in James Stewart, John Wayne or Gary Cooper. Later, Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger mentioned their Italian and Austrian ancestry to better claim their American patriotism and their commitment to the right-hand side of the political scene. Stallone and, in a lesser measure, Schwarzenegger were the embodiments of a nationalist action cinema. They translated the fantasies of a part of Americans avid to take their revenge on the North - Vietnamese and the Soviet citizens. Vin Diesel, he, embodies a new model of heroism for the first generation of Americans who never went to war. In XXX, Xander Cage is an amateur of strong sensations. A desperado who jumps of a bridge at the wheel of his car, escapes from it by parachute, but not without making sure first that his web cam is connected so that the images will be available on his Internet site. This character, capable of challenging the laws of the gravity, finds his origin in video games, of which the comedian reproduces directly the stunts, often without a stand-in. Vin Diesel is a game person who, like the genie of the lamp, materialized by magic, for a generation without life experience, which floats in the virtual. **" Our culture is henceforth resistant to heroism. I am the antidote."**

### **Vin Diesel has no time for personal life**

He comes equipped with a bald head and a voice that sounds like he just gargled with gravel. You might think small children would be afraid of an actor named Vin Diesel.

"They were afraid, but then I starred in a little movie called 'The Pacifier,'" Diesel says, referring to his 2005 hit, which grossed more than \$100 million at the box office. "Now everywhere I go little kids look at me and say, 'Where is that darn duck? And why did the duck bite you? Did the duck bite hurt? Did you hurt the duck?'"

The frivolity is over, however, and Diesel is pulling another career 180. The former action star turned kiddie flick hero is taking a dramatic tour in "Find Me Guilty," which opened Friday. It's the true story of Giacomo Di Norscio (Diesel), who is offered a chance to shorten his 30-year prison sentence by testifying against New Jersey's Lucchese crime family -- many of whom are close friends. But he refuses to betray "the family" during what becomes the longest criminal trial of its time.

**1. After years of being dubbed "The New Ah-nuld," this new film is a departure for you in that it's a serious drama. Is this a wake-up call to Hollywood with the message being: "Hey, Vin can really act"?**

I hope this is a wake-up call to Hollywood because I wanted to be an actor and not an action star when I came into this business. I started out doing serious character work and I want to return to that in the next few years. Also, I grew up in New York City and I know the world of these people in the movie.

**2. What did you do to research Di Norscio?**

Since this is based on a real person's life, I spent time looking at old footage and wanting to sound, walk and laugh like him. Then I met the real guy when he came to the set and all these attributes were put on the back burner for me. I spoke to a man with a good heart -- despite his career path. You can call him a criminal, but I learned this man has this unbelievable capacity to love. This seemed strange to bring out in a mobster trial movie, but it also makes it interesting.

**3. What's going on with your dream to direct and star in a big-screen epic version of the life of Hannibal the Conqueror?**

I'm getting closer and closer. This is a reality and it's very scary to do something this big. I wake up at 3 in the

morning thinking I'm going crazy. But I can't wait. I even went to meet with Mel Gibson recently and he gave me all kinds of advice. And he gave me one of the most important things, which is his script translator. He's translating my script, which is also in Greek, Latin and Punic, a language we haven't heard for 2,000 years. I also have battles with a cast of thousands. And elephants. I'm crazy.

#### **4. Does all of this leave any time for a personal life?**

Oh, man, a personal life. The truth of the matter is I'm all over the place. I feel like I haven't been home in 10 years. It's really like my cell phone is the only thing that stays consistent in my life. So you're mentioning a personal life? I didn't know they were giving out personal lives in Hollywood. I didn't even know I deserved one!

#### **5. You could just get it over with and start dating Jessica Simpson. She is free, you know.**

[Laughing] Yes, that has always been the dream. It's not about roles or directing. It's about how can I live on the cover of Us magazine each week. Let me get back to you on that one.

Vin Diesel went from action films to a family film, and now takes a dramatic turn in the courtroom drama "Find Me Guilty." -->

### **Vin Diesel**

By Sherry Weiner

At 32, native New Yorker, Vin Diesel's star is quickly rising. A filmmaker, as well as an actor, he's already had his first two films screened at major film festivals. He wrote, directed, produced, starred in and financed his debut film, Multi-Facial, a short, which was shown at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival. Steven Spielberg, after seeing the film, created the role of Private Caparzo for him in Saving Private Ryan. Diesel followed with his first full-length feature, Strays, which he also directed, starred in and produced. A multicultural coming-of-age urban tale, it was made on a shoestring budget and screened at the 1997 Sundance Film Festival.

Diesel most recently lent his voice to Brad Bird's animated feature, The Iron Giant, as the title character. He will next be seen in Ben Younger's Boiler Room opposite Ben Affleck and Giovanni Ribisi followed by Knockaround Guys with Dennis Hopper and John Malkovich. On the directing front, he is currently working on Doormen based on his own experiences as a bouncer at New York City clubs.

Now in David Twohy's (The Arrival) sci-fi thriller, Pitch Black, Diesel plays Riddick, a convicted killer who is being transported back to justice by a lawman (Cole Hauser) who along with six others crash land on a mysterious, seemingly uninhabited, planet. But when night suddenly plunges them into darkness, scary creatures come out and everyone must fight for survival.

In person, Diesel, is much less imposing than his screen persona. Soft-spoken and sincere, Diesel seems genuinely delighted and surprised by his success, which he attributes to being lucky. Dressed in requisite downtown black-long black coat, black T-shirt and black jeans, his shaved head sports some fuzz. Diesel admits he may be growing his hair in for a film. Vin Diesel [Sings] 'I won't sit with my back to the door. It makes me feel like I could get shot. [Laughs]

#### **UNIVERCITY: What's that about?**

Vin Diesel: It's a man thing-you never have your back to the door.

#### **UNIVERCITY: Where do you go inside yourself to play a character like Riddick who's a cold-blooded killer?**

VD: Riddick, in the beginning, is cold and lacks empathy. I think that's a scary place to go- you're playing with dangerous emotions and aspects of your personality that aren't normally tapped. So I listened to classical music-I don't listen to it regularly. I would detach myself from everybody, then walk into the set introspectively and go into character. I could feel people, pull back and be fearful of me. I only did this in scenes that called for that extra-menacing thing. So that's the prep I did. I think real, real actors that go to a place recognize how scary it is. It's not a simple thing that can be turned on and off. Sometimes you're stuck with it for awhile.

#### **UNIVERCITY: What do you look for in a role?**

VD: I look for a beginning, middle and end. If the character doesn't have that, I don't do it. What attracted me so much to this script was I hadn't seen such a great character arc in so long. Here's a character that's seemingly the villain. He's vilified by the "hero", he's affected by the journey, he's affected by the necessity to pull everybody out and he's affected by being "crowned" their last hope. All of this helps to make him become a hero.

#### **UNIVERCITY: When did you first start thinking about becoming an actor?**

VD: I started acting when I was seven. A bunch of my friends were riding around on our banana-seat bikes, terrorizing the neighborhood in '74. We threw our bikes on the stoop and ran into the Jane Street Theater

and started to vandalize it until this woman came out. We thought, 'Oh, shit-we're going to get into trouble.' Instead, she threw a script into each of our faces and said, 'If you want to play here, come at 4 P.M. every day and here's \$20 a week. That was the first time I was ever paid and that was the first time I made an audience laugh without being sent to the dean's office.'

**UNIVERCITY: What do you consider yourself ethnically?**

VD: If you just want a white, black, Latin answer, [Laughs] you just want to classify me. "A", it's definitely not that simple and "B", I will probably be one of a few actors that defies all barriers-at least, I hope I do. So far I have played all types of roles and ethnicities. Whereas, that ambiguity might have been a curse to me earlier in my life, it's actually a blessing now.

**UNIVERCITY: Were you surprised when you got a call from Steven Spielberg?**

VD: It was extremely flattering. There are few days I'll never forget, and that's one of them. My agent called saying that Spielberg saw Multi-Facial, loved it and wanted to write a role for me in Saving Private Ryan.

**UNIVERCITY: Multi-Facial made it to the Cannes Film Festival. What was that experience like?**

VD: Heaven. It was huge. I was so lucky to go over to Cannes. I had never been to Europe before and I was going there with something. It was so exciting. All I could do was invite people to see the film-and there was standing room only every night.

**UNIVERCITY: How did you land your role in the animated feature, Iron Giant?**

VD: Luck. Normally when you have a big studio film like that, they get someone like Arnold. I wanted to do this film so badly because it's a film that could stand the test of time and be an instant classic. And I loved that character. Obviously, I'm attracted to those kinds of characters that are misjudged. When you see Multi-Facial and Strays, you'll understand. Multi-Facial was sent to Brad Bird, the director. He started imitating my voice, [Deep voice] 'Where's Vin Diesel? Where's Vin Diesel? The next thing you know Brad Bird is fighting for me to do the role.

**UNIVERCITY: Are you putting directing on the back burner?**

VD: I'm not giving up directing but it's impossible to do both at the same time. I will never give up directing. I'm working on something now I may direct but I'm keeping it under wraps.

**UNIVERCITY: Have you been offered a lot of tough guy roles?**

VD: I have to be careful not to allow myself to get pigeonholed into those roles. I've been lucky because all of the roles I've picked, even when they're tough, have been gentle giants.

**UNIVERCITY: Where would you like to see yourself five years?**

VD: That's a question I ask everyone I know. I'd like to see myself in a position to make any film I want to make. I admire Mel Gibson because he can make a movie about something as ludicrous as a folk hero, get it made, then make it perfect. I loved Braveheart-and he was able to make it just by his name. There was no George Lukas directing. There were no big stars. Yet he made a great movie. I'd love to be able to make any kind of dream film I wanted to.

## MUSCLE AND FLOW

EVEN VIN DIESEL'S ROCK-HARD PHYSIQUE AND STEELY EXTERIOR CAN'T HIDE HIS SOFT SPOT FOR WONDER WOMAN, GONE WITH THE WIND, AND THE OCCASIONAL SHOW TUNE

Who is the real Vin Diesel? Mark Vincent, the Dungeons & Dragons-obsessed kid who grew up in boho artists' housing in Greenwich Village and telemarketed his little butt off to finance his first film? Or is he fundamentally the Vin Diesel of adolescent boys' imagination: a smooth-domed, titanium-biceped human wrecking ball who went from beating up real thugs in nightclubs to beating up pretend thugs in popcorn flicks like xXx and The Fast and the Furious? Don't look at us for an answer, though you may find it illuminating that he'd rather belt out a show tune than, say, crush a beer can on his head to impress women. This month, you'll see Diesel flexing his downtowniest thespian muscle in Sidney Lumet's courtroom drama Find Me Guilty, a role for which he packed on 20 pounds and glued on a ferret-resembling toupee. Even given all that sensitive stuff, we don't advise you to tease him about his hair. That is, unless your name happens to be Bruce Lee.—ANDREW GOLDMAN

ELLE: When was the last time you cried while watching a movie?

VIN DIESEL: I have a twin brother, so every time I watch Ordinary People, I always imagine that I've lost him out in the ocean somewhere, and I just break into tears.

ELLE: I found this on a highly reputable website: "When Vin Diesel was born, the nurse said, 'Holy crap! That's Vin Diesel!' Then she had sex with him. At that point, she was the third girl he had slept with." Pretty accurate take on your early love life?

VD: It might describe my life in the '80s when I was bouncing at clubs. Most of my confidence came from being with ladies, because I certainly wasn't getting any acting jobs.

ELLE: If we assembled the women you'd slept with in a room, how would you be received?  
VD: With open arms.  
ELLE: Not one solitary girl hurling a coffee mug at your head?  
VD: Oh my God, of course. There are millions of them. "You never called me, you son of a bitch!" But I grew up in a household with a lot of strong female role models. Women are sacred.  
ELLE: Give us a snapshot of some adolescent humiliation.  
VD: When I was 16, Dreamgirls was playing on Broadway. On Valentine's Day I waited on line for five hours to get tickets for me and my girlfriend. I get a little suit, flowers, and go over to her house to pick her up. As I'm waiting for her, she's dropped off by another guy. She told me that he was giving her driving lessons.  
ELLE: I'm sure he was.  
VD: It's experiences like that that make us men a little more callous.  
ELLE: I read you were into Dungeons & Dragons. Is this true?  
VD: I was completely into it for many, many years to the point where if I wasn't bouncing, I was playing all night.  
ELLE: Were you the only kid in America playing D&D regularly and getting laid?  
VD: Probably. Every other moment of my life was about women.  
ELLE: Have you ever watched a movie and identified with a character romantically?  
VD: Clark Gable in Gone With the Wind. Here's this guy saying, "I may be rough around the edges, but I'm the better man for you, and you're still locked over there with pretty boy."  
ELLE: Which actors working now or in the past could kick your ass?  
VD: Bruce Lee.  
ELLE: Who were your very first pop-culture crushes?  
VD: The girls of Charlie's Angels. I was only eight, but still, it was like, What I would do to these girls. Jaclyn Smith blew my mind. She was the most beautiful girl in the world.  
ELLE: I read that you've dubbed your biceps "the kryptonics." Have you ever introduced a woman to them by name?  
VD: No! What do you take me for? I'm much more romantic than that. I'm more likely to sing Broadway show tunes to a girl. ELLE: How much dough could get you to go without sex for a year?  
VD: It wouldn't be a matter of money. I've turned down twentysomething million dollars for movies.  
ELLE: Surely you'd do it for an Oscar...  
VD: I don't know about an Oscar, but I might do it for a character. If it's an amazing role, I'll do anything.  
ELLE: You've inspired me. I'm going to write a brilliant screenplay about a eunuch, and I'm going to make you abstain in preparation.  
VD: I don't want to go too far with the eunuch thing.  
ELLE: People have been surprised to see you wearing fake hair in the clips of your new film, Find Me Guilty. Tell me, your shaved head: a choice or a response to baldness?  
VD: Let's put it this way, we're all going to lose it eventually, so you're better off making a stylistic choice early. Then nobody will be able to fault you for it later when it's your style and you're really losing it.  
ELLE: Your mom is an astrologer. Do you ever feel like she's making up stuff about the stars just to get you to settle down?  
VD: No. She doesn't exert pressure. And she's covered with grandchildren right now. But eventually, you gotta supply the babies.  
ELLE: Have you ever been in the presence of a man whose magnetism with women has put you to shame?  
VD: [Long pause] Have you?  
ELLE: If I walk to the corner deli I feel that way.  
VD: No, I really haven't. And I guess even if I did feel that way, I'd just have to challenge that feeling.  
ELLE: What woman represents your beauty ideal?  
VD: Salma Hayek.  
ELLE: Lynda Carter in Wonder Woman or Linda Evans in Dallas?  
VD: Lynda Carter, clearly.  
ELLE: Jessicas—Alba or Simpson?  
VD: I've got to say Jessica Simpson because she's got an incredible voice. Doesn't she have an incredible voice?  
ELLE: Well...she's not exactly Christina Aguilera.  
VD: Don't be mean. This isn't a time to start critiquing people.

### **Vin Diesel has no time for personal life**

Article By Elena Torres

The pimples, the tacky fashion, the embarrassing haircuts. Imagine if Steven Spielberg saw YOU during that painfully awkward high school phase.

In a way, that's kind of what happened to actor/writer/director Vin Diesel eleven years ago at the Sundance

Film Festival. Spielberg saw the star's first film "Strays" and went on to cast the man who would be Riddick in "Saving Private Ryan," jump-starting the actor's career.

"You look back to the beginning and your first work...I think it's like looking at a high school yearbook," Diesel laughed of the new-to-DVD "Strays."

In the end, however, it seems like the awkward experience of youth ended up working to Diesel's advantage. Spielberg saying Diesel had a groundbreaking approach to filmmaking? Just poor financial planning, Vin acknowledged.

"When I shot this movie, we were on such a shoestring budget. We had four weeks scheduled to shoot and at the end of the third week, we were told that we had no more money and that we wouldn't be able to do the last twenty-five percent of [the flick]," Diesel recalled. "So that night, I went back home and rewrote the script. There was actually going to be a different ending to this movie. [But what we wound up with] all came out of this kind of last-minute request to wrap up the whole picture in day."

That ending? "Intimacy with a woman," Diesel teased.