

## Interview Collection Part 4

### Building a Better Spy

2002-08-09

Entertainment Today

*After years of hard work, Vin Diesel joins director Rob Cohen for XXX, a youth-skewing remolding of the secret agent genre*

by Keith Ryan Cartwright

While Vin Diesel is still busy meeting the foreign press at a junket in Hollywood, his partner George Zakk slips out early and is in the midst of tooling his way home through the evening traffic of Los Angeles. With the release of XXX, one of the most highly anticipated action films of the summer, less than a week away the pair actually seem happy to finally find themselves being pulled in every direction imaginable.

After six years of reminding each other to simply “focus on one film at a time,” Diesel’s star power in Hollywood (he bankrolled \$10 million as Xander “XXX” Cage and is purportedly going to earn \$20 million for the sequel) has unsuspectingly, at least to those outside his inner circle, catapulted him to the threshold of being a box office megastar. And while Diesel is finally becoming the star he always envisioned himself as, One Race Productions—the production company he oversees with Zakk, who served as executive producer for the \$90 million XXX—is also steadfastly making a name for itself.

Despite all the media fervor surrounding the film—junkets aside, Diesel flew to Indianapolis on Sunday for the Brickyard 400 and he taped a Tonight Show appearance Monday afternoon before heading off to the film’s premiere—Diesel and Zakk have consumed themselves in the details of the pre-production for The Chronicles of Riddick, the franchise born from Diesel’s role in the dark sci-fi thriller Pitch Black, and they’re already in the early stages of development for Hannibal the Conqueror. As if that wasn’t enough, they’re almost assuredly going to be the subjects of another enthralled go-round with the media for the October release of New Line’s Knockaround Guys, which re-teams Diesel with his Saving Private Ryan co-star Barry Pepper, among others.

For the most part, however, Zakk has been the one to maintain his focus in terms of the conceptual art of creating the various creatures that Diesel—or his character Riddick, that is—will battle in Chronicles, a film they hope to begin principal photography on later this year. **“I see this summer as pre production on Riddick and Hannibal,”** says Diesel. **“(We’re) trying to get those things done on time. That’s the reality. [It’s] funny, I’m not like at home going, ‘Yeah, this feels good.’ I’m trying to make sure that The Chronicles of Riddick is amazing and I’m trying to do everything in my power to ensure Hannibal the Conqueror (is also good.) So that’s where my head’s at.”**

Adds Zakk: **“I get brought back into the XXX reality when I walk into the sound studio and see Rob Cohen making magic or like now. There’s a lot going on with the release of this film, and it’s a weird feeling.”**

It’s an emotion, no doubt, that Zakk is more than happy to be feeling these days. After all, he and Diesel aren’t all that far removed from the “pro-active” time when the pair resorted to running their then-upstart production company out of a one-room Studio City apartment. Back in those days Diesel manned the phones in a telemarketing room selling tools, while Zakk initially ran their office from a pay phone located outside the Casa Vega restaurant on the corner of Fulton Street and Ventura Boulevard.

**“I couldn’t get incoming calls,”** Zakk remembers, **“but, for the most part, it all was about dialing out.”** He worked the pay phone from 9 a.m. until 7 p.m., if that’s what it took, inviting any and every agent that would take his calls to a monthly screening of Multi-facial, the now-famous 20-minute short Diesel wrote, directed, financed and starred in, as well as trying to raise money for their first full-length project, Strays.

**“The company grew a bit from the short film days,”** recalls Zakk of the lean years of 1996 and ’97, **“which now it meant we could have our own phone. And, I’ll tell you what, the phone was a fax phone and it barely worked.”**

**“All the money that was made back then, whether it was from working as a waiter or in Vin’s case telemarketing, went back into film, always back into filming. If you had \$50 you would no sooner buy fax paper if you didn’t steal it from another production company, or worry about getting a second phone line. Do you buy more books for knowledge of filmmaking? Do you take that screenwriting course or that workshop?”**

**“I would be telemarketing 14-18 hours a day just to make money to make movies,” Diesel explains. “I would work a whole year, save up all my money and not buy a new car, but invest all that money into a movie. So I’ve always been adamant about spending my time accordingly. ...I’m just a regular guy. I come from a family of hard workers and we just think about the work, that’s the most important thing.”**

Although it may very well have been a challenge, Diesel and Zakk persevered though their financial struggles — if they weren’t sleeping on someone else’s couch they had a pair of mattresses laying on the bedroom floor. Nevertheless, there were a few rather poignant moments.

First there was Diesel’s trip to the prestigious Cannes Film Festival to screen *Multi-facial*. Then came Sundance, when Diesel and Zakk were invited to premiere *Strays* (a trip that was documented for CBS’ news program *48 Hours*). But it was a call from Steven Spielberg that changed everything.

The Oscar-winning director watched a VHS tape of *Multi-facial* late one night and decided almost immediately to write Diesel into his soon-to-begin filming World War II epic *Saving Private Ryan*. The call and subsequent casting of Diesel as Private Caparzo did more than validate the New York-born Diesel as an actor.

**“All you heard was, ‘Steven Spielberg saw your film,’” Zakk explains. “The fact that he even took 10 or 15 minutes to even watch it, you wanted to do back flips. It didn’t matter what the response was. All that mattered was that he saw the film. When he validated that film... it opened a lot of eyes.”**

Following the release of *Ryan*, Diesel lent his foreboding voice to *The Iron Giant* and took on roles in *Boiler Room*, the soon-to-be-released *Knockaround Guys* (Oct. 11), the then-titled *El Diablo* (which currently looks to be renamed *This Man’s Dominion*). And then came the so-called overnight success of *The Fast and the Furious*.

**“The first day I saw *Multi-facial* in the theater,” Zakk recalls, “I said to myself, ‘This man is going to be one of the biggest stars in the world, if not the biggest.’ It didn’t take more than a short (film) to know that this guy is going to be huge. I never got how the industry didn’t get it. ...If you were going to make *Rocky* today, he’s the only guy that can play the role. He’s incredible. He’s resourceful. He’s an amazing actor and he has an unbelievable charisma. And I never got it when we bopping around from agency to agency and they were all saying, ‘Well, we really don’t know where he fits in. We don’t get it.’ It’s like, ‘What don’t you get? That you’re an asshole?’”**

**“Our goal has always been to make another movie,” Zakk continues. “When the company was conceived, it was to make movies. It wasn’t about what film they were going to put him in, it was about what film are we going to make. Whether I had a producer title or not, it was always the responsibility of our company to make sure that it was a story worth watching.”** Zakk and Diesel hope that audiences answer yes to that question with regards to XXX.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## How Vin Diesel is changing the way Hollywood looks at race and casting

2002-08-09

Entertainment Today

by Brent Simon

When Vin Diesel made the jump from *The Fast and the Furious* fulcrum to XXX leading man, it meant a lot more than a quadrupled payday and \$10 million earnings, though that’s certainly not chopped liver. It marked a huge turning point in the way that Hollywood is beginning to look at race; after all, here was a major studio betting a \$90 million movie—indeed, an entire franchise—on not only a promising but essentially unproven commodity, but also an African-American unproven commodity. Or is that Hispanic? Or Italian-American?

Diesel’s multi-ethnic look—and his dodginess about it and other personal details in interviews—are shrewdly calculated to play the best card to every possible demographic (his production company is even named *One Race Productions*). *“Vinnie has incorporated a kind of hip-hop ambiance to his stardom. He has this cluster of characteristics that range from ferocity, attitude, antiestablishment and hip-hop to pure... surprising vulnerability,”* says director Rob Cohen, who adds that he wouldn’t have done XXX if Revolution Studios and Columbia Pictures hadn’t stepped up with the extra money for Diesel, because *“it’s like knowing there’s a Sean Connery in the world and not wanting him for Dr. No. We had to get him.”*

Of course, Diesel’s intriguing multi-ethnic look wouldn’t matter much if he weren’t also chiseled, graced with

a distinctive bass profundo and hadn't scored a huge, out-of-left-field commercial smash last summer in the form of *The Fast and the Furious*. In fact, the crossover success of that film seems to have changed Hollywood's thinking in terms of multi-ethnic casting. Gone—for the moment at least, and only in certain youth-skewing movies—are token minority friend roles, replaced by a broader spectrum of colors and creeds more representative of urban America.

**"I think [that's true,]"** says XXX executive producer George Zakk, also Diesel's partner at *One Race*. **"That's owed a lot to Rob Cohen (who helmed both *The Fast and the Furious* and XXX) in seeing and being ahead of the curve, and I'd like to think that Vin helped envision that and talked about how (his character Dominic) was in a gang with all types of ethnicities. It was a blue-collar film that spoke directly to the youth."**

*"Oh yeah,"* agrees Cohen, *"we changed everything [without] even completely knowing. All I knew at first was that I was being true to the street racing world, which is multi-ethnic — dominated by Asian-Americans, Vietnamese-Americans, Japanese-Americans and by Hispanic-Americans, and all countries of origin. When I looked at that world the first thing I thought is, 'All right, first we're gonna take a documentary approach. What I saw that night out in San Fernando Road is what in fact I'm gonna put on film.' Paul Walker's journey was mine, exactly. What came out of that was finally, finally the Hollywood recognition that its most loyal and dedicated audience is not white suburban kids. Its multi-ethnic urban kids; they go to the movies religiously, and *Fast and the Furious* not only proves that they went religiously, but they would go repeated times if you gave them something with dignity, something with truth that resonated in them. I think we did that, I know we did that, and I know they responded, so all of a sudden everybody says, 'Oh, you get this kind of Hispanic girl and a black guy and a multi-ethnic this...'"* Cohen trails off with a slight smile, realizing he's inadvertently crafted a blueprint that's now beyond his control.

**"He's an Everyman,"** continues Zakk of Diesel. **"He's a hero, [or an] antihero if you will. There's no color, and at *One Race* we believe anyone can play any role. ... In *Pitch Black* it seems like every race has adopted Riddick as their own; in (the upcoming) *Knockaround Guys*, he's Jewish and fascinating; in *Fast and the Furious* he was Cuban. But ultimately Vin always comes off as nondescript — or invisible, as he would put it."** Not to Hollywood's casting agents, ever mindful of a trend, even if it may happen to have some unintentionally positive consequences.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## Diesel... Vin Diesel Is 'XXX'

8-9-2002 - 9:45 AM | Movies

By Fred Topel

[MadBlast](#)

After the success of *The Fast and the Furious* and the high anticipation for XXX, Vin Diesel is being touted as the new action hero. But Diesel hopes that his versatility will show in upcoming projects, including the drama *Knockaround Guys* and *Hannibal*, in which he'll play the ancient general.

**"I hope the fact that I do films like *Knockaround Guys* ensures that I won't get pigeonholed,"** Diesel said. **"It's not the worst thing in the world, you know. I'm flattered because the whole action-hero term is such a new term. Sidney Poitier, Kirk Douglas, they weren't considered action. Clark Gable in *Gone with the Wind* is probably the most action you were going to get in 1939 but he wasn't considered an action hero. But if that is the term they want to use, I am flattered that they think that many people would enjoy my work. What you do with that power or that positioning is up to the artist. I don't know if I could ever get *Hannibal* greenlit if I didn't have the box office response that I've gotten from *The Fast and the Furious*, or that we hope that we'll get from XXX."**

In XXX, Diesel plays Xander Cage, an extreme athlete who videotapes stunts like driving cars off bridges and parachuting to safety. The NSA recruits him to be secret agent XXX, so he puts his skills to the test in spy missions, snowboarding down an avalanche and jumping motorcycles through barbed wire. Diesel did as many of the stunts as the producers would allow him to do himself.

**"All the stunts were difficult for their own reasons,"** Diesel recalled. **"What I found particularly difficult was on *Ahab*, [a missile-equipped speedboat], I was standing up on *Ahab*, in the river in Prague. That was very, very difficult because if I would've slipped off, I would have died of hypothermia in 10 minutes."**

For those stunts he could not do, Diesel appreciated the prowess of his stunt men. **"There's only a few guys that shave their head [like me] and can be responsible for putting all that together. I love my stunt guys because I couldn't do everything. I push the envelope as much as I can. I push it to the**

**point of having the studio come down and say, 'Hold back, Vin. You're pushing too much. You're putting the film in jeopardy.' I couldn't do it without the stunt team."**

Diesel relishes in the success he's had because it was such a tumultuous journey to get here. He got his first acting job through vandalizing a New York theater, but just deciding to use his charismatic powers for good wasn't enough. He didn't just magically get discovered. He got himself discovered.

**"I chased this. I chased performing and I chased acting. I wanted everything that I am right now. I planned, I worked hard, it's been an arduous road and I've done everything as dedicated as someone can be. When I came out to L.A. when I was 21 years old and tried to be a star, I failed after a year and went back to New York with my tail between my legs, but I didn't give up then. I still found another way to do it and I made a short film. I spent \$3,000 of my money at a time when \$3,000 dollars was a lot of money. When I could have done things with that, I applied it to a film. I invested it in a film. And I came and worked on the phone telemarketing. A lot of the Boiler Room character comes from me telemarketing selling tools over the phone. So, a buddy of mine and I saved \$47,000 and we went to New York and made a film again, when someone else might've bought a new car. So, I always invested in film and I chased it because in my mind, this is always who I was. I did chase it and I love what I do. I love more than anything being able to make a movie that takes you out of your reality for two hours."**

Even if he had never achieved success, Diesel said he would never have stopped acting because he simply could not stop. **"This may sound hooky or full of sh\*t, but I act because I have to act. The happiness that I derive from acting is a coincidence, a by-product. I have acted all my life, when the chops were down, because it's something I have to do. I don't really know why. Maybe because its therapeutic, maybe because its like a fighter in me that has to fight because it just comes out of them, I don't know. I just do it because I have to. Part of it could be attributed to my upbringing, but I don't think so. We are born like dogs, in a certain way, with a ranking in the pack."**

Yet if Diesel's upbringing was not integral to his need to act, it was vital to his developing love of film. **"My father didn't take us to baseball games or basketball games. We didn't have the money to do all that so our father and son experience was he'd take us to movies and at the end of the movie we'd go get a dollar fifty plate of chicken lo mein on 42nd street and rap about the movie. He would have us see musicals. We'd be talking about My Fair Lady or Guys and Dolls on one level and then a Sidney Poitier directed movie like Uptown Saturday Night. Just everything."**

Along with movie stardom has come sex symbol status, which surprised Diesel the most. **"The funniest thing I read about me, someone wrote, 'Is he attractive? No, not exactly.' I was like, 'Oh really, I'm not? I didn't know that!' Like 'He's so ugly I kind of like him.' I never thought of myself as a sex symbol, so it's kind of weird. It actually makes me blush because it's so bizarre."**

And Diesel has now joined the \$20-30 million club of actors whose marquee value is so strong, they almost have to be paid such extravagant fees. Yet Diesel hopes to balance the rules of Hollywood with his own values. **"Money is an interesting topic because I think what happens is, and I have been learning this as I move along, the guys need the money to free the world they can exist in. It's bizarre. I mean, you think of these guys like Tom Cruise or whatever and they have their own private jets so that they can fly comfortably and it's like why the hell do you need a jet? Then you slowly start to imagine if you have Tom Cruise on a commercial flight and he starts picking his nose, he has trouble."**

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## **An Interview with Vin Diesel**

A one-time bouncer, Vin Diesel is destined for super-stardom with the upcoming release of XXX. In person, Vin surpasses expectation, leaving skid marks on those that focus solely on his good looks and physical prowess and underestimate his drive, passion and intellect. Dedicated to the craft of movie making and excited about his burgeoning career, Vin is carving a place for his celluloid dreams in Hollywood (and I'm wiping the drool from my chin). We met at the Four Seasons in Beverly Hills.

**MS: The character you portray in XXX (Xander) is really confident, are you that confident?**

VD: I think I've had to rely on my confidence because so much of my life, I've had nothing else. Not that I don't have my insecurities. The building blocks of that confidence are bricks of insecurities.

**MS: The women in the audience, they screamed every time you took your shirt off, they went wild...**

VD: Is that a bad thing?

**MS: I guess not, but how do you react to that?**

VD: I wasn't in the theater, I haven't seen XXX with anybody.

**MS: But when you hear that you're becoming a huge sex symbol, how do you react? Is it a surprise the way it's kind of developed?**

VD: A little bit, you know, as a kid I wasn't a pretty boy. I was never being chased by women, so I guess it's a different thing.

**MS: Do you find it very difficult?**

VD: My life sucks. (Laughter)

**MS: Over the past few days, there's been a huge buzz – “Vin Diesel's the new action star, Vin Diesel is Hollywood's new sex symbol, Vin Diesel is Hollywood's first multi-racial action hero...”**

VD: That's good – keep going.

**MS: That you're poised on the brink of super-stardom and I was wondering, do you accept all of those freely, do you welcome that?**

VD: I don't know if I'd have a say, one way or another. I literally go make movies that I hope will take you out of your reality for a couple of hours, that's my sole objective as an actor, as a filmmaker, as somebody that's been dedicated to this for almost 30 years.

**MS: You were a bouncer for a few years? Has that experience helped you at all?**

VD: When you bounce for many years, you know how to speak in a way as amiable as possible, but there's something that you can add to it that's always threatening, always menacing and for a while there, bouncing was hurting me in auditions cause I would go in and be like “Hi, I'm Vin Diesel. I'm here for this role.” But it was like I had a nine-foot guerilla behind me saying that if you didn't like me, I was going to beat the shit out of you. I was saying “Hi, my name is Vin Deisel,” the same way I would say “No you can't come in tonight”. And so I had to lose that. But, I found that I was able to draw on that strength and conviction.

**MS: You've said that you'd prefer to be called an actor than a “movie star” – is that correct?**

VD: Yeah – ideally, but it doesn't really matter that much to me. The key is that I have the ability to make movies, the idea that right now I can make a film called Hannibal and I can have the studio want to make a film called Hannibal – that's the objective.

**MS: So are you willing to lose those muscles and get really fat or really skinny for a role?**

VD: Of course. Absolutely.

**MS: What was it like working with Sam Jackson?**

VD: Amazing. I met Sam shooting Saving Private Ryan in London. We met at a restaurant called Nobu and I didn't know him and I sat down and I'm from New York and so when you're from New York you order a California Roll and Miso Soup. And I ordered and he was sitting next to me and he said “Ah man, you gotta order something better than that. Where you from? New York?” And the waiter came over and he ordered for me and he ordered some great, weird, funky things, but it was good and we became friends and realized we had an affinity, we both had done theater. I was always a fan of his from early on I had followed his career. And then, this opportunity came up.

**MS: Do you have any dream projects?**

VD: Hannibal is very, very, very dear.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## **Diesel thunders to stardom**

*Vin Diesel claims to be oblivious to his meteoric rise to fame. But the fact of the matter is that a carefully orchestrated campaign is under way to harness his image and make him the world's next superstar*

Jamie Portman  
Times Colonist (Victoria)

Saturday, August 10, 2002

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. - The head is a shaved bullet. The muscular torso is a riot of tattoos, with the letters XXX engraved prominently on the back of that bull-like neck. The inscrutable, vaguely oriental face and the graceful insolence of the body language spell out Attitude with a capital A. The baritone voice is strictly from the gravel pit. There's an aura of menace -- both physical and sexual -- which delivers the not-so-subliminal message: don't mess about with me. He doesn't kiss women so much as devour them. And no physical exploit seems to faze him -- whether he's parachuting out of a stolen car as it plunges off a bridge or hurtling a motorcycle through a Colombian drug plantation while being pursued by a cannon-toting helicopter.

This is one formidable dude -- anti-Establishment, anti-Authoritarian, and untamable. And, if we are to believe the people behind the summer's big new action flick, XXX, he is the screen's next big action hero and super spy, and the actor portraying him is destined to be Hollywood's next huge superstar. The film opened in Victoria on Friday.

So is Vin Diesel excited by that prospect? **"It probably intimidates me more than anything because I don't know what superstardom is,"** he says warily.

Loss of privacy is his biggest concern. Obsessive about his personal life, he has never been prepared to confirm even the most basic facts about himself -- that his real name is Mark Vincent and that he was born in New York City in July, 1967.

Filmmaker Rob Cohen, who directed Diesel both in last year's sleeper hit, *The Fast And The Furious*, and XXX, says that a year ago his star was the epitome of "cool" and now he's the epitome of "hot." This morning, Diesel shrugs off that comment, saying he's "totally unaware" of such matters, and that anyway he's been too busy this past year with XXX and other projects to ponder his changing status.

Who is he kidding? You have trouble believing his claim that he's oblivious to such hype: for instance, after earning less than \$2 million for *The Fast And The Furious*, he was sufficiently aware of his growing market value to demand \$10 million and an executive producer's credit before signing for XXX and to win a guarantee of \$20 million for a sequel. It's not coincidence that he's the subject of major profiles this month in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *Gentleman's Quarterly*; rather it's part of a carefully orchestrated campaign to validate that superstar status. Indeed, when he's shown the current issue of *GQ*, with his hulking presence filling the cover, he beams happily. **"I'm not oblivious to that!"** he exclaims. **"I like that!"**

He's come a long way since Steven Spielberg gave him his first big break by casting him in *Saving Private Ryan*. He's come even further since the days when he worked as a bouncer in various New York clubs for a hundred dollars a night. Such employment helped shape the formidable persona -- 225 pounds of testosterone packed into a six-foot-one-frame -- which he now delivers so effortlessly on the big screen, but he came to dislike the work. **"At first it was an interesting job . . . but the novelty wore off after a while. You lose friends and you realize that you're going to work every night to fight."** The one saving grace was that it left him free in the daytime to audition for acting roles and take courses at Hunter College.

Cohen sees Diesel as one of a kind. ***"Once in a while an unconventional character will come along, and that can be everybody from Marlon Brando to Diana Ross to Barbra Streisand, where they're not in the conventional mode of beauty. Yet, suddenly they pull the whole culture towards them in offering a new aesthetic. Vin is a sexy man. Somehow the culture has come up with the idea that this bald, gravel-voiced mesomorphic bear-like character with a soft heart and a certain kind of charm is actually sexy."***

Cohen also talks of his star's "vibrational attraction" which makes him irresistible to both males and females, and cites a vulnerability beyond the tough-guy stance. ***"He is not Teflon or titanium. He can be hurt."***

Cohen is convinced that XXX will complete Diesel's conquest of Hollywood. He also thinks the film will give the suave and debonair James Bond a run for his money because it turns the spy genre on its ear by offering in Diesel's characterization a renegade government agent who wouldn't be caught dead wearing a tuxedo or sipping a martini.

The guy's name is Xander Cage -- or "Triple X" for short -- and he makes a living selling videos of his outrageous, thrill-seeking, law-breaking exploits. When Xander makes the mistake of stealing a U.S. senator's car and sending it off a bridge, he falls into the clutches of the National Security Agency and master manipulator portrayed by Samuel L. Jackson, who gives him the option of either going to jail or going to work as an undercover agent in Prague, where he will infiltrate a lethal gang of Russian gangsters and save the world.

Diesel initially turned XXX down. For one thing, he wanted more money (\$10 million) and for another, he wanted a better script. He got his \$10 million and was also convinced by Cohen that once writer Rich Wilkes revised the screenplay, this would be a part worth playing. Diesel recalls being subjected to an intense selling job over a cranberry juice and soda at Hollywood's trendy Marmont Hotel. **"Rob started talking about this concept for the guy and where he was coming from . . . how he was a nihilist and the least**

**likely person to be heroic, a guy indifferent to public matters and definitely all government matters. And then they recruit this guy and force him into becoming a secret agent, and he learns how to be patriotic and proactive, and they take these skills that he has used in a reckless fashion and turns them into secret agent efficiency."**

Diesel tends to talk slowly and deliberately, weighing reporters' questions cautiously. Today he's wearing faded jeans and has abandoned the muscle-displaying tanktop that is his normal garment in favour of a slightly more discreet V-necked T-shirt. The movie tattoos are absent. So, on this occasion, is his dog -- a 175-pound Belgian mastiff, a breed that is a favourite choice of macho masters.

He's in an affable mood -- and more self-revelatory than usual. Questions about his childhood are not normally welcomed -- although it's a matter of record that he never knew his biological father and that he was raised in a New York artists' commune by his mother, an astrologer and psychologist, and his stepfather, an African-American drama teacher, and that his first acting opportunity came at the age of five when he played a horse in Cinderella.

But today, Diesel is ready to tell us that his love for reckless behaviour began when he was a kid. **"I did all sorts of retarded things as I grew up -- bad things."** Things like donning a pair of rollerblades and holding onto the back of a cab going up 8th Avenue at 80 kilometres an hour. Or zig-zagging his motorcycle at high speeds through Manhattan traffic -- a feat he claims to be more dangerous than any of Xander Cage's movie stunts.

There's also an unexpected personal note concerning Sept. 11. **"I grew up not far from the World Trade Center towers, so from the apartment I grew up in, my mother saw the second plane go into the tower."** He found himself experiencing the same patriotism that XXX does in the movie. **"I felt I wanted to put on a uniform like every other American."**

But the barriers are always ready to go up. Recently, Diesel told Gentleman's Quarterly that he considered himself "100-per-cent multicultural" a statement that prompted GQ to conclude that Diesel was indulging in some shrewd myth-making here and setting himself up as "Hollywood's first multiracial action hero." But ask Diesel to expand on this, he turns coy and evasive. Defining his ethnicity more precisely is a no-no; speculation gives him origins as far ranging as Italy, Africa and the Far East.

Today, he asks to read the quote attributed to him and becomes ecstatic.

**"This is perfect!"** he exclaims. **"It's exactly what I feel."** He won't elaborate. **"The whole point is to say that I'm 100-per-cent multicultural, and any explanation would take away from that statement. It's a powerful statement and one that I'm very proud of."** End of explanation.

But he revels in his imperfections -- and in the imperfections of the characters he portrays. **"In movies of the '80s and '90s, the heroes were whitewashed heroes."** He's different. **"The characters I play are these imperfect anti-heroes, and there's something universal in that."**

## **In 'xXx,' Vin Diesel is Gen-X answer to James Bond**

By AMY LONGSDORF  
For the [Courier-Post](#)  
Sunday, August 11, 2002

Vin Diesel is about to share a fashion tip. No, the star of The Fast and the Furious and xXx isn't into dishing about designers and stylists.

But Diesel always likes to look his best, and, as recently as three years ago, that wasn't always an easy thing for him to do. For most of his '20s, he worked as a bouncer and a tele-marketer in order to stay afloat in New York City. When he was at his lowest ebb, he'd only buy clothes he could return.

**"I was always broke and I always hustled,"** he says. **"I'd shop at the Gap, and if things got really hairy at the end of the month, I'd return the shirt."**

Needless to say, Diesel hasn't had to return any shirts to the Gap lately. Since helping to re-invent the hot-rod movie with the \$145 million-grossing The Fast and the Furious, Diesel has watched his career rev up in a big way.

For the much-anticipated xXx, which opened Friday, the actor netted a \$10 million payday. He's expected to receive double that amount for his next features - The Chronicles of Riddick, a sequel to 2000's sleeper hit Pitch Black; Hannibal, the saga of the Carthaginian conqueror; and a xXx sequel, which is already in the planning stages.

In many ways, xXx is the perfect follow-up to Rob Cohen's *The Fast and the Furious*. Directed once again by Cohen, the movie stars Diesel as Xander Cage, an extreme sports athlete who is enlisted into the spy game by a mysterious operative (a scar-faced Samuel L. Jackson).

During the course of the movie, Diesel gets to look cool as he drives a stolen car off a bridge, speeds off on a motorcross bike while being chased by a helicopter, and surfs down a long flight of stairs using a waiter's tray.

Ask Diesel what makes him the ideal choice to play the "blue-collar James Bond" and he fingers the tinted blue shades which cover his eyes.

**"It's a tricky, tricky situation,"** says the 6-foot-1-inch, 225-pound actor, who is clad for today's interview in Beverly Hills in baggy blue jeans and white tank top. **"In the '80s and '90s, we all went for heroes that were white-washed."**

**"What we're finding now, in a world where Eminem is such a big-selling artist and where rap is so prolific, is that we're at a place where our youth is not anti-government, but very outspoken, very independent. I think that my characters came around at just the right time. I have a respect for their strength and individuality."**

(For the record, Diesel, 35, refuses to reveal his own ethnicity or confirm that his birth name is Mark Vincent. **"I feel 100 percent multicultural,"** he says. **"And that's all I'm going to say about that."**)

To hear his filmmaking associates tell it, Diesel is an overnight sensation who won't be gone in 60 seconds.

xXx director Rob Cohen says, **"Vinnie has intensity, attitude and this incredible hip-hop vibe. The big surprise is that he also has vulnerability. His vulnerability is what makes him so charming and irresistible."**

When Sony pictures initially balked at paying the actor his asking price of \$10 million, Cohen made the point a deal-breaker. **"I told them that if I couldn't get Vinnie, I wouldn't make the movie,"** says the director.

**"It would be like having Sean Connery for *Dr. No* but making it with another actor instead. It was inconceivable to me."**

xXx leading lady Asia Argento calls the actor **"the best kisser in the world, better than anyone else I've ever had. The most attractive thing about Vin is his brain. That's his most attractive muscle."**

(Also for the record, Diesel is reportedly still on the market. The never-married actor refuses to comment on his personal life but when asked about whether he's dating the rapper Eve, he says, **"Eve is a very good friend, and a very special, special, special woman."**)

More Diesel fuel comes from the normally reticent Jackson. **"Vin has this very distinctive voice and an undiluted intensity,"** notes the actor. **"A lot of things about him you can't quite put into words. That's exactly what makes a star a star. As soon as I saw him in *Pitch Black*, I knew he was going to be big."**

Jackson isn't the only person who seems to believe Diesel is destined for greatness. The actor himself never doubted he'd make it to the top. **"I've known I'd succeed as far back as I can remember,"** says Diesel.

The actor was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He was raised by an astrologer/psychiatrist mother and an adoptive drama teacher father in an artist's housing project in New York's Greenwich Village.

Diesel reportedly found his way onstage the first time after attempting to trash the inside of the Theater for the New City, a small off-Broadway house. **"We were terrorizing the neighborhood,"** he recalls of his exploits. **"Me and some friends were vandalizing this theater and playing around in the mezzanine."**

**"A woman came out and summoned us over. I thought she was going to get us into trouble and call the cops. But she said, 'If you guys want to play here, come every day at four o'clock and I'll give you \$20 a week. Know your lines!'"**

Diesel took theater director Crystal Field up on her offer and began showing up after school. **"It was the first time that I was ever able to make a whole audience laugh without getting sent to the dean's office,"** he recalls.

Afterward, Diesel began popping up in assorted off-off-Broadway plays, eventually supporting himself as a bouncer at some of New York's hottest nightspots.

Unsatisfied by a stint at Hunter College, Diesel decided to try his luck in Hollywood. When he couldn't land a single job, he headed back to Manhattan.

For his birthday, his mom gave him a manual about independent film financing called *Feature Films at Used Car Prices*. Using the tome as a guide, he wrote *Multi-Facial*, a 1994 short film based on his own

experiences as an actor.

Shot in three days for about \$3,000, the film earned the attention of no less a figure than Steven Spielberg. So impressed was Spielberg by Diesel's performance, he offered him a key role in Saving Private Ryan.

**"When I was shooting Saving Private Ryan, one of the things that Tom Hanks said to me was that the hardest thing to learn in this business is how to say no,"** says Diesel, who turned down a \$20 million offer to appear in The Fast and the Furious sequel.

**"I have been offered a lot of money but, you know, you have to kind of stay true to whatever you're doing. Your integrity is all you have."**

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

### Access Hollywood Transcript from 8/12

**Pat O'Brien:** Vin Diesel's rise from a young actor, to a \$20 million dollar a movie payday is a story so unbelievable, that if written as Hollywood fiction it would have been tossed out the window. How Diesel became the man behind the wheel, is tonight's inside story.

*(cut to "Breakin in the USA" video)* As a teenager, Vin had the rap down. Breakdancing in his sweats, he "crush grooved" his way to the beat. Although this low budget instructional video was shot almost 20 years ago, when he had a full head of hair, even then Vin always knew there would be more.

**Vin***(audio, then cut to interview with Tony):* If you really believe you have something to contribute, then you believe it and you should dedicate your life to it, and that's what I did.

*(cut to baby pic & high school pic)* **Pat:** Born in New York City, Diesel known as Mark Vincent then, got his break in the most unlikely of ways.*(cut to video of The theater for The New City)* As a 7 year old kid, he and his twin brother Paul, tried to break into this theater literally.*(cut to clip of theater director)* Crystal Fields, the artistic director caught the young rebels. They thought she called the cops. Instead she offered them a job.

**Crystal Fields:** I told him, 'hey your running around like a lunatic, why don't you do something creative like be in a play?'*(cut to pic of a playbill, highlighting his name)* The place could have been trashed, but he was very receptive. I think frankly, way down deep, why did he pick a theater to come into?

*(cut to video of Triple X behind the scenes)* **Pat:** Diesel had been bit by the acting bug. But at 17, he failed to make much head way. So to make ends meet, he took a job bouncing at New York nightclubs like the Tunnel.

*(cut to old vinterview)* **Vin:** We fought every night. Umm, you literally went to work to fight, it was stupid.

*(cut to video of the Nutty Professor primere)* **Pat:** After seeing a friend almost murdered on the job, *(cut to clips of Multi Facial)* Vin knew he had to get out. His solution, make this film with \$3000 of his own money.

*(scene from Multifacial)* **Vin** *(in a stereotypical heavy Hispanic/New York accent):* "Oh look who is talking now, huh? Conya, when you first met me, you didn't seem to care. You liked the brand new car..."

**Pat:** It was the best money he ever spent. "MultiFacial", a short chronicalling the life of an out of work actor, not unlike Diesel, *(cut to video of Steven and French Rivera)* caught the eye of Steven Spielberg at the Cannes Film Festival of 1995.

*(cut to scene of MF)* **Vin:** Yo, I can't wait til I do enough real work, real acting work where I don't have to sweat commercials, you know what I'm saying?

*(cut to clips of Saving Private Ryan)* **Pat:** Spielberg casting SPR at the time, not only offered Diesel a role, but specifically tailored the role of Private Caparzo for Diesel.

*(scene from SPR)* **Vin w/little girl in arms:** Captain, the decent hing to do is at least take her down the road to the next town.

*(cut to clip of Vanity Fair Oscar Party)* **Pat:** Diesel, finally on the map, could hardly believe his luck.

*(interview w/Nancy O'Dell)* **Vin***(estatically):* Oh my God, why do you make me feel so good? What did I do to deserve this? *(in a more calm state, but w/ heavy NY accent)* Well you know I've been watching this show for years, and this is really nuts. *(Incredibly deep voice)* And now I'm over here, they finally invited me over here!

*(showing clips of PB, BR, TF&TF, and some primeres he attended)* **Pat:** Diesel was officially invited to the party, landing roles in Boiler Room, opposite Ben Affleck. And playing the antihero in Pitch Black. But the film that Diesel fueled Vin to stardom was 2001 The Fast and The Furious.

*(scene from TF&TF)* **Vin** *(speaking to P.Walker):* Smoke 'em.

*(more clips from TF&TF)* **Pat:** The low budget car thriller that shocked Hollywood when it made a stunning \$144 million. *(cut to clips of XXX)* With XXX's impressive opening weelend, cementing Vin's status as a potent bow office force, he is now faced with the burden of competing with his own success.

*(cut to interview with Tony from last week)* **Vin:** Honestly, I don't look at it in terms of pressure.*(cut to scenes of XXX)* I think about it now in terms of opportunity. I think I now have the opportunity, Thank God, to manifest some of the dreams I've had as a kid.

*(cut to Pat in the studio)* **Pat:** Some movie folks. As for Vin's family, he has never met his biological father. He was raised by his mother, an astrologer, and his step-father a drama teacher.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## **Vin Diesel: Just a Guy From New York**

[Teen Hollywood](#)

August 12, 2002

by Lynn Barker

In the action hero genre, hot, buff Vin Diesel is the flavor of the month. He garnered international attention as a tuff but emotional street racer in *The Fast and the Furious* and has chosen to play a new kind of super spy in *XXX*. In his deep voice, roughened by hours of interviews, he talked to the press in L.A. about his new film, how he was affected by the events of 9-11 and his pet project *Hannibal* (the guy hiking through the alps with elephants, not the Anthony Hopkins dude who eats fava beans). Vin has often been seen with his huge dog which was absent from this press event.

### **TeenHollywood: Where is your dog?**

Vin: The dog is too big to bring now. This isn't a normal dog. He's a 170-pound beast. His name's Roman and he's an Italian Mastiff. They used these as war dogs.

### **TeenHollywood: You were a bouncer for several years. Did dealing with people on that level help you with the b.s. of Hollywood?**

Vin: As an actor you want to pull from all of your experiences. I think the bouncing actually hurt me in earlier years. When you bounce you speak with a certain strength and it's hard to leave that strength behind even if you are trying to be amiable or pleasant. You can come into a room and say, "Hi, my name's Vin Diesel" and you have the threat of 'if you don't like me, I'll punch ya in the face' kind of feel which is not what you really want to do when you're going on auditions. It could almost be detrimental in the Hollywood game.

### **TeenHollywood: Audiences are cheering this movie. They go nutz for you. Are you ready for this?**

Vin: I have no idea. I hope I'm ready. I think if I keep it about work, I'll be ready for anything that comes with it. I think because I work back to back in films that I never get the time to reflect on it. Maybe I need to take more time to reflect on where I'm at. I've never seen *XXX* with an audience. The premiere will be the first time.

### **TeenHollywood: You've gone from cool guy to "hottie".**

Vin: I don't think it will kill me. I've survived worse.[laughs] I don't know how it happened. It's news to me. It's crazy. I wasn't a pretty boy in school. It could be in part due to the fact that the characters I play are representative of culture now or rebellious angst. The characters I play are anti-heroes and don't pretend to be perfect.

### **TeenHollywood: What about those fake tattoos?**

Vin: It takes about two hours every day to put them on but they last sometimes for two or three days. It's harder to take them off than put them on.

### **TeenHollywood: You do a lot of your own stunts.**

Vin: Maybe this is left over from my *Saving Private Ryan* days but you think about the idea of going to boot camp for a character role. If you don't understand character construction, it seems like a waste of time. Pointless torture. Even for the *XXX* character, he has to be fearless to some degree and I think it helped the character construction for me wanting to push the envelope and do more than they [the studio] would have wanted me to do.

### **TeenHollywood: Are you fearless?**

Vin: No. I'm not fearless. I'm scared of my own shadow.

### **TeenHollywood: You are someone everyone can identify with. A lot of people are calling you the next big action hero.**

Vin: I approach each role, whether it's an ensemble piece or huge action piece, with the same conviction. I'm still going to go through the same process. I tend not to worry about whether the film I'm in is an action film. In the '50s and '60s with *Spartacus* and Charlton Heston and John Wayne and Marlon Brando films, all those weren't considered action heroes. They were considered actors in high intensity films. I just want to do good work, quality work and my objective is to take you out of your reality for two hours. I'm just a regular kid from New York.

**TeenHollywood: Did you advise any of the music artists or athletic non-actors in the film about the craft?**

Vin: I'd like to think that when I do a picture it's a collaborative effort. I make myself available to anyone in the same way that Tom Hanks made himself available to any of us in Saving Private Ryan. If I could help anybody out I would. That's always been my style because I want everyone to shine. I want the person that comes in for two days of work to shine. I want everyone to steal the scene.

**TeenHollywood: Have you always been into extreme sports?**

Vin: I didn't always know about extreme sports but I quickly became a fan after researching for this film. I love snowboarding. I did some of the jumps in the movie.

**TeenHollywood: How do you go from being a star of your films to executive producer?**

Vin: That is just wanting to be that much more hands on. Wanting to have a little bit more say in what kinds of films I'm in. It's also the prerequisite to being a producer on Hannibal and being a producer on another picture.

**TeenHollywood: Hannibal, the guy crossing the alps with the elephants, right?**

Vin: Hannibal is a character I've always wanted to play and not unlike Mel Gibson might have always wanted to play the Wallace character in Braveheart or a character like that, a Scottish folk hero. Hannibal re-defined war strategies. He was the classic underdog in third century B.C. The only guy who ever thought of attacking Rome and he did it in a shrewd way. You've got a multi-ethnic army, Vikings fighting alongside Nubians all under his command. A fascinating character. So I'm doing Hannibal with Revolution, the same studio that did XXX. Should go into production Spring of 2003.

**TeenHollywood: We're coming up on 9-11 again. Did that event have a significant impact on your life?**

Vin: I grew up in a building where, if you looked out the window, you would see the World Trade Center. My mother watched the second plane go into the World Trade Center from the apartment I grew up in. It's interesting that Sept. 11th happened when it did in relation to XXX. There is some relevance. The Xander Cage character is the least likely in the world to be patriotic. The least likely to want to save the world. But, coming out of this experience, we all felt that frustration. We all, no matter where we are in our lives, wish we could do something, be proactive, make a difference and Xander Cage ends up making a difference with nothing more than his resources.

**TeenHollywood: Did the MTV movie awards mean anything to you?**

Vin: Of course. That's the people. That's the fans. You want to make movies for the people first and foremost. I had dinner with Jim Cameron and he said, "Vin, you have to make sure you are making movies for the people, forget everything else." MTV is a representation of making movies for the people.

**TeenHollywood: What about a XXX sequel?**

Vin: From the beginning Rob [Cohen, the director] and I wanted to make the best picture we could in order to make it a franchise film. I've chosen this franchise over others. [We think he means Fast and Furious].

**TeenHollywood: Is there a standout moment during the shooting of the film?**

Vin: It was on a Saturday and we'd worked all week. The studio said that if I worked over the weekend, got in a helicopter and flew from Prague to the Austrian alps, the crew could get home a week earlier. And so we went to the Austrian alps and snowboarded the whole day and got some great shots and jumps in. The helicopter was transporting all the crewmembers back. They left Rob and I up on the slopes and all you could see was white mountains with no one around. It was a special moment there, just two guys who had come from The Fast and the Furious and now creating this (XXX). That was a special moment.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

**Ladies, write to Diesel (and his dog)**

August 12, 2002

[Chicago Sun-Times](#)

BY CINDY PEARLMAN

There is nothing XXX-rated about Vin Diesel's love life. Yes, because you want to know, this column asked Hollywood's hottest property if he had a significant other. Diesel says that we should not believe rumors that he's dating supermodels with names you can't pronounce.

So does he have a girlfriend or should women send cards and letters? **"Send cards and letters,"** Diesel says with a warm, hearty, New York laugh. **"I'm looking. You just have to like big dogs who possibly wander into bed with you in the morning."**

Diesel says his personal life revolves around his 175-pound mastiff, Roman, **"who clearly doesn't behave and is the most expensive dog I've had in my life. When I travel, I fly people to take him places while I'm working. He goes to doggie camp, so he can socialize with other pups. He's like my kid. He even has his own room that's now being converted into my editing room, but don't tell him. Shhhhh."**

Hey, it won't hurt now that he has the cash to pay people to watch Roman after the \$46 million "XXX" took in at the box office this weekend. **"They began talking sequel before we finished, which makes me happy,"** says Diesel.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

### **'XXX' Trounces Box Office Again!**

August 16, 2002

[ETonline](#)

VIN DIESEL and his 'XXX' continues to squash the competition in theaters! From his life-threatening stunts to his single status, the charming ladies man gives all the "xxx"-rated 411 to our MARIA MENOUNOS.

**MARIA MENOUNOS: First of all, every time you took your shirt off, the girls went crazy. Are you ready for this?**

VIN DIESEL: That's a good question. I guess so. I don't know how someone prepares for what you're talking about.

**MARIA: It's going to be called "Vin Mania" -- that's going to be our headline!**

VIN: This is going to sound retarded, but I go into it trying to make the best film I can, so whatever people can take away from it ... I concentrate on making whatever film I'm working on at the time, so I never get enough time to reflect or hang around for the applause.

**MARIA: Were girls crazy about you in high school? Were you popular back then?**

VIN: I was never the pretty boy; I always had to work real hard. I always had to run a little bit faster to catch up with the girl before she went in the subway.

**MARIA: I knew before coming to this, all the girls were like, "Vin Diesel, you're going to interview him, oh my goodness!"**

VIN: It's crazy. It's probably because of the characters I play. It probably has nothing to do with me. I think I play characters that speak to our generation and represent our generation. I play these anti-heroes that are colorful and imperfect. I think that the audience is gravitating towards that.

**MARIA: You play them with such realism that I think people just assimilate you into the character. They think that you are Xander Cage. Are you?**

VIN: I try to play every character I commit to with as much realism as possible. That's just part of whatever acting process that I go through to become that character, to transform into that character.

**MARIA: Did you have a lot of training to do for this?**

VIN: I had a lot of stunt training to do. Three months before production started, there was motocross training, snowboarding and speed climbing -- I was doing all these crazy things. At one point the studio came down and said, "Vin, you gotta stop doing these jumps on this motocross -- you could jeopardize the whole film." So I had already started developing that rebellious attitude even as the actor in the film.

**MARIA: Have you done any motocrossing before? Any snowboarding?**

VIN: I had snowboarded four times in my life. While I was shooting this, I was doing jumps!

**MARIA: Was there ever a point when you were nervous about a stunt you were about to perform?**

VIN: I got nervous when they brought in the helicopters and the squibs -- I had to ride the bike down this road and there were squibs going off on either side and there were cameras riding alongside. I had no helmet on, and things were flying in my face. I had to go as fast as I could go and had to jerk the bike around. Like I said, there were helicopters on my tail. That was pretty scary, because the stunt guy that had done it before I did, crashed his bike. So I had to get up and do it. That was a little nerve-racking. Also, at the end of the movie, I had to stand up on this contraption, this missile. I wasn't fastened to the missile at all, so if I would

have fallen, I would have gone right into the river and they wouldn't have been able to get me.

**MARIA: Do you know how to swim?**

VIN: It was so cold that I would have died from hypothermia in two minutes. There were a lot of scary moments in the movie, but it lent itself to the character.

**MARIA: What was more nerve-racking for you -- the kissing scenes or the stunt scenes?**

VIN: The stunt scenes ... (Lifting up sunglasses) trust me, the stunt scenes.

**MARIA: So you enjoyed it as well?**

VIN: I loved the kissing scenes!

**MARIA: She (ASIA ARGENTO) said you were the best.**

VIN: (laughs) What can I say to that? She's incredible. She's an incredible kisser. She lives up to that Italian passion.

**MARIA: When you were younger, did you look at action movies and say, "I can do that"?**

VIN: I think when I was young, I looked at movies and said, "I can do that." I started acting at a very young age, when I was 7 years old. It was never one genre or another, it was just about being an actor. I gravitate towards characters, so I gravitated towards the 'XXX' character and it happens to be a huge action film. Here's a guy who's a nihilist that can care less about the world and doesn't like the world the way it is. Then he's recruited by the CIA to save the world. I did what I could for my country.

**MARIA: You've been thrust into this "sex symbol" status. You clearly are a little uncomfortable with all of it. How do you handle it?**

VIN: I guess I get a little shy about the whole thing. I'm not normally shy, I think I've become shy. I think this has all become so overwhelming ... I had to work so hard. And now when I hear these comments, I don't know how to file them. I don't know what to do with them.

**MARIA: Every girl in America is going to want to know, so I have to ask -- are you available?**

VIN: Yes. Are you? (laughs)

**MARIA: (laughs) I'm not the one ... sitting over there. If I was sitting over there, you could ask me. What do you look for in a woman?**

VIN: What do I look for in a woman? What does every guy look for in a woman? If I knew that, I'd be married by now. I never thought I'd be 35, just be on TV, and someone would ask me what I look for in a woman. Isn't that fascinating? Honestly, I've always wanted a girl to be cool. I like strength in a woman. I like independence. I like individuality. As long as she's a good person.

## **Frustration fueled Diesel's rise in action flicks**

August 22, 2002

By Alisha Davis

[CNN Headline News](#)

(CNN) -- Headline News anchor Alisha Davis recently caught up with "XXX" star Vin Diesel to talk about the training he did for the hit movie.

**DAVIS: You've got the No. 1 film in the country. Congratulations. But before you were the franchise star you are now, you got your start in Hollywood by producing your own movie because you weren't getting parts. Is that right?**

DIESEL: Yeah, that's absolutely right. I started creating roles out of frustration. I started directing and writing out of frustration, the frustration of not being able to work.

When you think of other artists, when you think of musicians and painters, they've got a certain autonomy that an actor doesn't necessarily have. An actor needs a script, needs a director and needs a studio to fund the film. So if you're not proactive, if you're not strategic, if you're not resourceful, you could spend many, many, many years sending out pictures and resumes.

**DAVIS: And so instead, you made a short film. Steven Spielberg saw it and cast you in "Saving Private Ryan." Then came "The Fast and the Furious" and now "XXX." How did you prepare for "XXX"? It's a very stunt-heavy role. Now you're obviously already pumped, but did you do anything special?**

DIESEL: We started training 10 weeks prior to shooting. If we didn't do that, I wouldn't have been able to do any of the stunts because I had never done many of them before. In that training period, I learned how to do jumps on the motocross. Everything from motocross to speed climbing was all done in that 10-week preparation process.

**DAVIS: And I read that you trained with Navy SEALs?**

DIESEL: Yeah, I trained with Navy SEALs down in San Diego, which was amazing. Those are the rewards, when you're able to get a glimpse of these different lifestyles, when you're allowed to go behind the scenes of the Navy SEALs operation to see how these guys train and what kind of people they are.

I just walked out of the Navy SEALs with this huge admiration for these guys because they're so dedicated to what they do. I could go on forever about them.

**DAVIS: Looking to the future, you are all signed up for a "XXX" [sequel], and I heard you got \$20 million for that.**

DIESEL: Well, I didn't get it yet. I don't get anything until I do it. And I'm doing "The Chronicles of Riddick" next, and then I'm doing "Hannibal" for the same studio, so the "XXX" sequel will be after that.

**DAVIS: Well, when you do get that \$20 million check, what are you going to buy with it?**

DIESEL: Well, I've been trying to get a house for my parents if I can convince them to change their lifestyle, which is a lot harder than I thought. Hopefully, I can get them a dream country house.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## **A man full of Vin and vigour**

[The Straits Times](#)

2002-08-20

He has been in films like Pitch Black and The Fast And The Furious. But it is XXX that is sealing Vin Diesel's appeal as a Hollywood hottie and pin-up material

LOS ANGELES - Everyone now knows that Vin Diesel, star of the new XXX action flick, is the next biggest thing on Hollywood's list of super spies.

So, what is the brash former bouncer-turned-movie-star doing, admitting that he is not the fearless man he is made out to be?

**'I'm afraid of my own shadow,'** the tattooed muscleman with the shaved head told reporters.

Then, as if to convince everyone that he has this touchy, feely side, he let out a little yelp, 'Oooh.'

That high-pitched cry is from the actor who plays an extreme sports hero of the Internet culture, Xander Cage, also known as XXX.

In the film, super-spy Cage is recruited by a secret agency to wipe out anarchists.

He drives a Corvette off a bridge and parachutes to safety, as well as jumps over an exploding cocaine factory on his dirt bike, dodging bullets all the while.

Move over, James Bond. XXX is tailor-made for kids who get their kicks from digital music and computer files, and not vinyl grooves and hi-fi stereo.

And Diesel is the new movie sex symbol.

Movie-tracking firms say women are flocking to cinemas to see XXX in unusual numbers for an action film.

It took the No. 1 box-office slot for two weekends since it opened in North America on Aug 9.

Is it the husky voice? The lean-on-me shoulders? The sexy bald pate?

*'You can have too many pretty boys around. Sometimes, you want a real man,'* says Michele Zipp, editor-in-chief of Playgirl, which put Diesel on its April cover.

*"He pretty much is the definition of man. He has the deep voice, yet the sweet smile. He's large, very muscular - we'd love to melt into his arms. He's smart and sexy."*

For 28-year-old Janelle Brown of San Francisco, it is more the attitude. After writing a Salon.com column headlined Vin Diesel Is Hot, she got 'tons of e-mail from women saying: 'I'm glad to know I'm not alone'.

It seems there is an epidemic of women who are slightly ironically lustful of Diesel, she said.

Diesel worked as a bar bouncer before turning to movies. That career helped him to build his rugged persona on display in XXX.

**'When you're bouncing, every single thing you say has to be reinforced with a subtle threat,'** Diesel said.

**'You come into a room and say, 'Hi, I'm Vin Diesel' and you have the threat of 'If you don't like me, I'll punch you in the face', which is not really what you want when you're going on auditions,'** he added.

Director Steven Spielberg put Diesel in Saving Private Ryan, which led to an independent film, Boiler Room, where he played a hard-charging broker alongside Ben Affleck.

In both, Diesel's performances were a stand-out.

Then came The Fast And The Furious, with Diesel as the leader of a gang of freight-truck hijackers. But, of course, his Dominic Toretto was a bad guy with a really good heart.

There were other movies in between, like thriller Pitch Black. But it has been in the last year, with the buildup for XXX, that has turned Diesel from being just another cool leading man to a certified Hollywood hottie and magazine cover boy.

**'I don't know how it happened,'** he said. **'It's news to me. It's crazy, 'cause I wasn't a pretty boy.**

**'It could be in part due to the fact that the characters I play are, you know, representative of our culture now or representative of angst.**

**'The characters I play are anti-heroes and don't pretend to be perfect.'**

Unlike Bond, always a British agent and proud of it, XXX is reluctant to join a group he despises most - government cops - but he feels an obligation to his country.

After a series of training exercises to measure his mettle, XXX goes after the bad guys whose headquarters are in Prague and who operate under the name, Anarchy 99.

The terrorist group has a plot to launch a series of missiles from a roving submarine navigating the world's oceans. It figures that if it can blow up enough cities, it can plunge the world into chaos.

Daily Variety has said that XXX should have been titled \$\$\$, and not XXX, because 'few film projects in recent times have been so brazenly customised and tooled for maximum (box office) power.'

But the young people that XXX targets do not read newspaper reviews, anyway. It is, after all, a new age.

Here is a posted message on a Yahoo! board: XXX is going to kick @\$\$, so Vin, keep up the good work... You're (sic) a very good actor and a very hot actor... I just know XXX is going to be good. I've been waiting since the first preview.'

Watch out James, XXX is in the house.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## Deconstructing Diesel

Rolling Stone  
2002/Sept  
*The dope on Mr. XXX*

Vin Diesel comes on so strong as maverick agent Xander Cage in XXX that he nearly lives up to his hype. Rob Cohen, who directed the film, says his friend is "the right actor at the right time." Maybe so. Diesel certainly works hard in XXX, but he works even harder at perpetuating his own myth. Off camera, he is more of an international man of mystery than Austin Powers. In the interest of separating truth from scam, here are ten things you need to know about Vin Diesel:

1. His name is not Vin Diesel. He was born Mark Vincent on July 18th, 1967, and invented the name to build his confidence when he worked as a club bouncer in New York.
2. He won't cop to much about his family. He was raised (along with twin Paul and a younger brother and sister) in Westbeth, an artists' housing project in Lower Manhattan, by his astrologer mother and his adoptive father, an acting teacher who is African-American. His biological dad has been absent his entire life, and Diesel won't talk about him except to say, "I know he's alive, but that's all."

3. He is building a myth about his multiracial lineage. Is he African-American? Italian? Hispanic? Diesel won't say. He wants to be all-inclusive. That's why he calls his film company One Race.

4. He's a relentless self-promoter -- like you're surprised. In 1994, Diesel had the moxie to write, direct, star in and self-finance (for \$3,000) a short called Multi-Facial, which he followed with an indie feature called Strays. Steven Spielberg saw the short and cast Diesel in Saving Private Ryan. Diesel then voiced the metal monster in Iron Giant, sold stocks in Boiler Room, kicked alien ass in Pitch Black and rode The Fast and the Furious to box-office glory.

5. His mythmaking is working, even if it is by default. Says producer Dan Cracchiolo, "Sly, Arnold, Jean-Claude... we just used 'em up." And so what if Diesel's buffed, tattooed, shaved-head thing is as much of a magnet for gay men as it is for women? Says director Jonathan Mostow, "Vin's gonna be very rich." He got \$10 million for XXX, to be doubled for the sequel. He won't do The Fast and the Furious 2, but not, he claims, because the studio wouldn't pay him \$25 million. Creative differences, you know.

6. Some see him as a pain in the ass. In 1999, he was reportedly sacked from Reindeer Games for bugging director John Frankenheimer, who died of a stroke in July. According to Diesel, Frankenheimer told him, "Frankly, Vin, I'm too old, too busy and too fucking rich to worry about your character." Some, like Cohen, view this as pugnacious integrity.

7. His sex life is off-limits. Cohen says Diesel "picks [women] carefully. I like candy and he likes candy, but he prefers to [operate] in private." Michelle Rodriguez, Diesel's Fast and Furious co-star, was an exception. Says Cohen, "She got turned on by Vin when they did that scene in the garage." Maybe, but a colleague who worked with Rodriguez on Blue Crush claims, "Michelle felt he was kind of a pig, grabbing her ass and stuff. She felt she was a sexual hood ornament in that film."

Cohen says that during the shooting of XXX Diesel "had a beautiful relationship in Prague" with Czech model Pavla Hrbkova. "He just went back to Europe to be with her," he says. A Prague native who worked on XXX says Hrbkova confided during filming that she and Diesel hadn't yet been intimate. The source adds that "Vin told [Hrbkova] she shouldn't talk to anybody about him."

8. His Los Angeles lifestyle is covert, cautious. Cohen says that Diesel "lives cloistered with his sister behind walls, with a big Italian mastiff attack dog." The house is in the Hollywood Hills. Cohen adds, "Vin is a guy who keeps his friends from the New York hood," including George Zakk, who helps run Diesel's company and is working on the upcoming Hannibal (as in the conqueror, not the cannibal), along with Diesel's sister, Samantha (Cohen says she "looks like a female Vin").

9. He needs career guidance. With Knockaround Guys coming in October (it's been on the shelf for two years) and Diablo reportedly in need of re-shoots, plus all those sequels (Riddick/Pitch Black 2, XXX 2), the feeling is that Diesel needs to upgrade his creative collaborators fast, or he could be the next Jean-Claude Van Damme. "Arnold had Jim Cameron," remarks a veteran producer. "Without Jim, Arnold would be nothing. If Rob Cohen is going to be Vin Diesel's Jim Cameron, then sayonara."

10. He deserves the last word on himself. Diesel recently let slip this telling comment to his actor pal Adrien Brody: "I'm trying to make the most with what little I have."

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## Vin Diesel XXX

NW Magazine

Step aside, 007. Vin Diesel is the hottest screen spy in XXX, playing a thrill-seeker-turned-reluctant-agent, opposite Samuel L. Jackson. "I'm flattered by any comparison that people make to James Bond," says the star, who jets into Australia for a promo tour this week.

**"I'm flattered by whatever title anyone wants to give me at all, as long as they appreciate my work,"** he adds.

Fame has already struck Diesel in a big way, since he starred in the surprise hit blockbuster The Fast and The Furious last year. **"Now the bar of soap I used in the shower yesterday is being sold on Ebay today!"** he laughs. **"Life has already changed for me quite a bit and I have to move house every three months or so now until people find out where I live. I feel like a fish out of water. I'm just this kid from New York and now I'm in the spotlight, so it's pretty weird. And nothing can prepare you for it,"** he says, shaking his head. **"I'd read lots of actors' biographies, but fame isn't anything you can train for. And in a way, it's not a surprise. I've always had the confidence from when I was a child that I was going to make it."**

Diesel, 35, shrugs off the obvious comparisons to fellow action stars Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone. **"I don't want to be stereotyped and I'm certainly not modeling my career on those guys, although worse things could happen. But I'd really like to model my career on Mel Gibson,"** he says.

An unlikely sex symbol with his bald head and unusual facial features, Diesel has been linked to a string of beautiful women, including his Fast And The Furious co-star Michelle Rodriguez. He was recently photographed with 18-year-old Czech model, Pavla Hrbkova, but says he isn't dating anyone at the moment, despite recent rumours he was seeing Nicole Kidman. **"I'm extremely romantic,"** he says. **"But there's no-one special in my life right now."**

Raised in Lower Manhattan by his mother, an astrologer, and stepdad, a drama teacher, Diesel, has never met his biological father. Money was tight growing up, and by 17 he was working as a bouncer in nightclubs around New York.

Now earning USD\$10 million (and upwards) per movie, he's a long way from the days of sleeping on his friends' couches. **"It's not about the money,"** he insists, although he allegedly demanded an unprecedented USD\$30 million to star in the sequel to The Fast and The Furious (not even Tom Cruise asks for that kind of dosh!) But Diesel says he turned the role down. **"Did you see The Fast and The Furious? Yes? Did you see XXX? If you had to choose a franchise, which would you choose?"** he asks, rhetorically.

Hollywood might be dumping truckloads of cash on the actor, but don't expect him to agree to star in every splashy, sequel-ready blockbuster in town. **"Sylvester Stallone advised me against doing too many franchises which was really good advice. And when I was shooting Saving Private Ryan, Tom Hanks said to me, 'One of the hardest things to learn in this business is how to say no.' And I understand what he's saying because you've got to stay true to whatever you're doing."**

And at the moment, that means playing action heroes. **"I'm very proud of XXX. I loved that my character was recruited by the CIA to save the world, but he still remains an anti-hero. But I don't see the movie as anti-Bond. I realise it's an original approach to the spy genre because he's not your typical secret agent and I relate to that anti-authority kind of attitude."**

Although his stepfather was a drama teacher, Diesel's acting career began by accident. **"I was seven years old and my brother and I were terrorising the neighborhood. We vandalised this theatre. We were playing around and this woman comes out in the spotlight, this heavysset woman who summons us. I thought she was going to get us in trouble and call the cops on us. She said, 'If you guys want to play here, come every day at four o'clock. Here's \$20 a week. Know your lines.' That was the first time I was ever able to make a whole audience laugh without getting sent to the dean's office."**

Although his perfect pecs and chiseled arms have become his trademark, Vin says he isn't too focused on pumping up his muscles in the gym. **"I train specifically for each role. For XXX I familiarised myself with the different extreme sports [he starts off being an extreme sports athlete in the film], sometimes taking three weeks just to work on one. But I don't want to be too big because the next role might call for me to be an anorexic,"** he says. **"Generally, I work out at home a couple of times a week."**

Diesel has a wild side, but says it's nothing like his XXX alter-ego. **"I'm not as wild as he is, that's for sure. But growing up in New York, I guess I was a bit of a thrill-seeker. I did some pretty crazy things, like going up 8th Avenue on rollerblades with my fingers hooked underneath a stranger's taxicab going 40 mph in traffic. I was 18 at the time,"** he recalls.

**"Nowadays I make films like XXX. Believe me, that's wild enough."**

Five things you need to know about Vin Diesel

- His name is not Vin Diesel. He was born Mark Vincent on July 18th, 1967. He came up with the name to build up his confidence working as a nightclub bouncer in New York.
- Although he's tried out some extreme sports, Vin says he didn't specifically work-out for XXX. "You don't have to weight-train after you've been holding on for dear life in an action sequence while trying to look cool at the same time."
- In real-life Vin is tattoo-free. "It took two hours to put the body art on and they lasted for two or three days. It was actually harder to take them off."
- The actor won't say whether his heritage is black, white, Hispanic or Italian. That's why he calls his film company One Race.
- He can plant an amazing smooch. "I'm sure past boyfriends won't like it, but he's the best I've ever kissed," confirms his XXX co-star Asia Argento.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## Vin Diesel gives Aussie actors thumbs up

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

September 5 2002

American action film star Vin Diesel tried hard to do his job on the red carpet last night but his screaming fans were intent on making their presence known.

The 35-year-old star was at the premiere of his latest film XXX at Fox Studios in Sydney where he is on a promotional tour.

Despite ear-piercing screams from about 300 of his mainly teenaged followers, forcing him to break several times from answering the inquiries of the media throng, Diesel still managed to squeeze in a good wrap for his Australian acting colleagues.

Diesel said he had respect for Australian actors, citing their down-to-earthness and willingness to work hard.

**"They're understated and extremely committed,"** he told journalists.

**"The Australian actors that I have worked with have brought 150 per cent to every film that they've done and for me that's the best thing to have, people that want to work as hard as they do."**

Diesel found it hard to choose which of Australia's actors was his favourite, singling out Mel Gibson as his idol and also praising the talents of Cate Blanchett, Russell Crowe and Nicole Kidman.

**"Cate's amazing and I think Russell's amazing. I think Nicole's unbelievable, the list goes on and on,"** he said.

**"Mel has been my idol for years, for the last 20 years."**

Australian singing star Kylie Minogue, however, hasn't done enough to enter Diesel's good books despite the pop singer's recent surge in popularity in the US.

Asked whether he'd noticed Minogue and what he thought of her, Diesel responded: **"What do you think of her?"**

**"I don't know much about Kylie. Should I know more?"** he asked.

In XXX, Diesel (whose real name is Mark Vincent), plays an extreme athlete, turned super agent.

The hyped-up premiere had all the bells and whistles, including both male and female scantily clad models, elaborate staging and pyrotechnics.

The grand finale of Diesel's public appearance was a large XXX sign lit up by three flaming torches.

Diesel got one last chorus of screams before departing, when he thanked the crowd.

**"Thanks for making a knucklehead from New York, a kid from New York, feel really good,"** he said.

**"I will always remember tonight."**

## 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.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

**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.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## 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."**

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## 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."**

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## 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 charcater. 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, ooh, 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."**

### **New James Bond is Diesel driven**

12sep02

[Daily Telegraph](#)

Former bouncer Vin Diesel has gone to extra lengths to become Hollywood's new action man, says MICHAEL BODEY

Apparently Vin Diesel recently told his pal, fellow actor Adrien Brody: **"I'm trying to make the most with what little I have."**

If true, it is an off-the-cuff admission that cuts to the reality behind the inexplicable career of the former New York bouncer born Mark Vincent.

"Diesel" is the action star of the day, behind Tom Cruise.

He led the street car gang piffle The Fast and the Furious to huge success last year but balked at a lucrative sequel due to "creative differences".

Now he stars as extreme sports bad boy Xander Cage in the explosive action film, xXx, already one of the

US summer's box office winners.

In the process, Diesel's elevated himself from the muscly lead of B-grade sci-fi pic Pitch Black to leading man playing "the new James Bond".

Diesel admits xXx is "definitely a franchise film but not as the new James Bond".

**"I see James Bond as James Bond and that's what he is, the father of secret agents,"** he adds.

Xander Cage, on the other hand, is a reluctant secret agent, an anti-authoritarian thrill seeker who becomes an agent through necessity.

Diesel has become a star through persistence. His first, self-funded, short film, Multi-Facial attracted Steven Spielberg's attention. After being cast in Saving Private Ryan, Diesel slowly moved forward in Pitch Black, Boiler Room, and Iron Giant before launching with The Fast and the Furious.

Hollywood needed a new action star and Diesel says people are attracted to his character's **"Xanderism philosophy"**.

**"They were getting into the idea this guy was a rebel,"** he says. **"Here's a guy who's not supposed to be a hero, who is a reluctant hero and has contempt for government and establishment and institutions yet becomes the saving grace."**

Diesel has used a similar anti-establishment guise to establish his now-lucrative career.

His private life remains very private and his background vague. He won't discuss his lineage. Hence, he's been dubbed the first "multi-ethnic action star" even if he hasn't hit with Asian markets that want more beauty and charm from their male leads.

**"There are so many tags I can't even think about them all."**

Chief among them was the "difficult" tag. **"Do I have that still? I thought we lost that,"** he laughs. **"I don't think I'll ever lose the difficult tag; it would be foolish for me to even try."**

**"People know that I care only about the picture and only about how great that picture will be and I won't settle and I'll always look for ways to improve,"** says Diesel. **"I expect a lot from people and if that is difficult, that's fine. I don't want to be too easy."**

He has learnt. While in Sydney there was a sparkling enthusiasm from him that suggested he's enjoying making the most of what he's got.

Ten weeks' training on snowmobiles, motocross bikes and fighting skills before the xXx shoot was inspiring rather than enervating, he admits.

**"They started nicknaming me Air Diesel on the set because anything I got a hold of I was jumping and if they weren't shooting I was practising jumping,"** he recalls with a grin. **"I was like such a rebel on set but it was part of the character."**

The characters ahead will consolidate or break Diesel. He begins filming the Pitch Black sequel, Chronicles of Riddick, in November before the xXx sequel and Hannibal, based on the marauding Asian conqueror.

**"It's in a nice place, brewing and being created right now by David Franzoni who wrote Amistad and Gladiator."**

Diesel says of the potential blockbuster, Hannibal. **"I'm so excited about it ... Oh my God, when I think about how much work it's going to be and how big, it blows my mind."**

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

### **Triple the action**

12sep02

[The Curier Mail](#)

OTHERS may be surprised that Vin Diesel, all-action leading man of XXX, has emerged as Hollywood's latest sensation.

Others perhaps, but not Diesel (real name Malcolm Vincent). *(K's note: Mark!!)*

The bald, teetotal actor's show business ambitions were clear 32 years ago, when, as a three-year-old, he was taken by his mother to see Ringling Bros/Barnum and Bailey's circus at Madison Square Garden in his

home-town of New York.

**"Mum tells the story of how, when the lions had finished their act at the start of the show, she looked at where I should have been sitting in the bleachers, and saw I wasn't there," Diesel says.**

**"I'd gone down to the stage area and was trying to open a locked gate to get on stage. Mum says she asked me what I was doing, and I said, 'I'm waiting to do my show now'."**

Diesel – a slimmer, more youthful looking version of Telly Savalas – is on a 48-hour stop in Sydney to promote XXX, the nickname of the new film's tattooed, head-shaven character of Xander Cage who is **"a walking advertisement for anti-authoritarianism"**.

The grungy extreme sports professional Cage becomes a new-age sort of James Bond when he's recruited by a National Security Agency veteran (Samuel L. Jackson) to infiltrate a gang of cutting-edge thugs calling themselves Anarchy 99.

The group is headed by a brutal ex-Russian Army commander named Yorgi (played by Australian-resident New Zealand actor Marton Csokas), and his beautiful girlfriend, Yelena (Italian actress Asia Argento).

XXX, which requires Diesel to perform some heart-stopping action sequences, including ski-ing in front of an avalanche, hasn't been out of a top-3 spot in America's highest grossing movies since it opened last month, and already there's talk of a sequel that will double the actor's pay cheque to \$US20 million (\$3.7m).

Yet, in the harbourside hotel where he's affably doing non-stop interviews for Australian and New Zealand press, Diesel confesses he's not all-action off screen.

**"I'm interested in my work, and I love talking about my work to those I'm going to be working with, the directors and the other actors and the directors of photography,"** says the actor with biceps like car tyres and a voice deep enough to register on the Richter scale and made even smokier by his tobacco habit.

**"I'm interested in the creative side of the business, so if I'm not working, I'm really still working talking about it wherever I can."**

A-level success (and a fee reputed to be \$US10 million a movie) has come to Diesel after nine features, including two which have not yet been sold for distribution.

He's made international magazine covers this year as "the next action hero", but he's been building a following over the past four years with roles in Steven Spielberg's Saving Private Ryan, The Iron Giant (as the voice of the giant), Boiler Room, Pitch Black (filmed on the Gold Coast and at Coober Pedy), and The Fast and the Furious.

But it was a short film he made himself, Multi-Facial, as writer, director and star, unveiled at the Cannes Film Festival in 1995, that he believes started his climb towards stardom after years working "off-off-off-off-off Broadway" in New York theatres.

He'd spent nine years earning a living as a nightclub bouncer in New York, and made Multi-Facial in his off-duty hours.

Influential filmmakers such as Steven Spielberg (who wrote a role for him in Saving Private Ryan) and director Brad Bird (who hired him for The Iron Giant) saw the short film and wanted to work with the actor.

He says his role in XXX came about because of another relationship he'd made with a film executive, Ted Field, whom he'd met when he took his self-funded feature film Strays (still to be released) to the Sundance Film Festival.

Strays was funded with \$47,000 Diesel and a friend had saved from their jobs as tele-marketers in Los Angeles.

Rob Cohen, who directed The Fast and the Furious, a summer hit in 2001, was again his director on XXX, and Diesel says the director knows how to draw the best out of him.

**"Rob understands how to get me involved conceptually,"** Diesel says.

**"I think movie scripts are an imperfect medium, and the whole concept behind a film script is to remain unrelenting in your attempt to attain perfection."**

**"The script does not make allowances for your own personality, or the things you bring to a performance."**

**"Rob will discuss that with me. We can rap about films conceptually."**

Diesel spent almost three months working on the \$US90 million XXX, mostly around Prague in the Czech Republic.

Cohen has described the film and Diesel's character as a "total reinvention of the spy film for a new generation". Diesel declares: **"I'm not trying to be James Bond"**.

When he's finished travelling the world (Japan is next, then Mexico) promoting XXX, the actor will slip back into the role of Riddick he created in Pitch Black for a sequel to be called The Chronicles of Riddick.

**"We're creating a mythology about Riddick. David Twohy (who wrote the original) has written an amazing script,"** Diesel says.

**"I'm just disappointed that we can't bring the \$US150 million movie back to Australia."**

Diesel says he loved every moment of the three months he spent living in a 22nd-floor apartment at Surfers Paradise while he was working on Pitch Black three years ago.

**"I love Australia, and working with the people here like David Egby (director of photography on Pitch Black) and Dean Semler (director of photography on XXX),**

**"But it's become so popular we can't get studio space back here to do the next Riddick movie."**

Diesel is busy, with Hannibal the Conqueror, (being written by Gladiator author David Franzoni) also slated for filming in the northern spring.

Diesel loves working away from his home in central Los Angeles.

**"It's much easier to act when you're not thinking about your daily routine,"** he says. **"It's easier to become someone else if you don't have to go home after work. I'll work anywhere."**

XXX's success seems guaranteed to keep things that way for the actor who has seen a childhood dream come true.

He's been given the key to the gate – and he's found it fits.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## **Diesel power**

Sunday Times  
South Africa  
2002-09-15

*Hollywood's man of the moment talks to MARIANNE GRAY about the new antihero and his role in the testosterone-soaked xXx*

Vin Diesel resembles some kind of high-octane club bouncer with his shaven head, solid body and smarting muscles, but when he talks in his low, slow gravel-and-grit voice, it somehow comes out as sense and sensibility.

Imposing but genial and intelligent, Diesel did indeed toil for many years as a bouncer, but he plotted his course so deftly that the sequel being made from his biggest hit, The Fast and the Furious 2, can now not afford him. He went from earning \$2-million as a street-racing legend in last year's original The Fast and the Furious to a price tag befitting the size of his meaty biceps, which have been compared to a testosterone version of a cleavage - \$20-million (about R210-million) for the sequel of his latest film, xXx.

Now comfortable in the niche left vacant by the greying action heroes of yesterday, like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Clint Eastwood, Diesel seems to be here for a while.

Once described as the "sexiest ugly man in movies since Anthony Quinn", he looks a lot better than his name would indicate.

In xXx, the noisy, save-the-world, stunt-filled spy thriller, he plays the lawless Xander Cage, a character nicknamed Triple X for the tattoo across the back of his neck. His job has something to do with ferreting out mad European-trash anarchists with access to weapons of bio-terrorism and stopping them from world domination and destruction.

Samuel L Jackson, Asia Argento and The Lord of the Rings's Marton Csokas co-star, and Rob Cohen (The Fast and the Furious) directs.

**"What Xander doesn't know is that he's been 'scouted' by Agent Augustus Gibbons (Jackson), a veteran agent with the National Security Agency,"** says Diesel. **"Gibbons and the NSA are facing a desperate situation in Prague, where their undercover operative has been killed by a gang of thugs calling themselves Anarchy 99, headed by an ex-Russian Army commander, Yorgi (Csokas), and his**

**beautiful but tough girlfriend, Yelena (Argento). Enter Xander!"**

Hmmm. Although this is not much of a girls' movie, it has done brilliantly with American teens, and there are plans to launch Xander Cage as an alternative James Bond. Diesel believes the timing of this new kind of action star couldn't be better.

**"In the '80s, we had heroes that were whitewashed, who were morally perfect," he points out. "I think now the public doesn't really gravitate toward those heroes. We need more flawed heroes and antiheroes for us to invest in.**

**"I think Xander speaks to our generation. I was attracted to the concept of a guy who is solely concerned with his own thrill-seeking endeavours. He couldn't care less about political affairs outside of the ones that directly affect him. I liked the idea that someone like Xander could be called on to step into the shoes of a secret agent. Taking a guy who's the least likely to want to save the world, and having him do just that, fascinated me."**

The role has made him the next big thing. A year ago, Diesel - his real name is believed to be Mark Vincent - was almost unknown. Now the actor is unavoidable after more than a decade of trying to get noticed in Hollywood. He will shoot the xXx sequel after he has played Hannibal in an epic about the Carthaginian general who famously led his elephant army across the Alps. He will also shoot the sequel to the sci-fi thriller Pitch Black. In addition, Knockaround Guys, a crime comedy co-starring John Malkovich and Dennis Hopper, will be released soon. He's also planning a feature-length version of the 20-minute film he made about a multi-ethnic actor (himself) who can't get a part no matter what racial background he assumes, and developing a script based on his days as a bouncer.

We first noticed Diesel in 1998 in Saving Private Ryan, in which he played an Italian-American GI, followed by his role as a zealous stockbroker in the well-received Boiler Room. He was also the voice of the title character in the animated fantasy The Iron Giant.

**"I've been working my ass off all my life. Before I got paid to make movies, I was paying to make movies. I'd work and save and make a movie with my earnings - not buy a new car or get a fancy apartment. But whether paying or getting paid, the happiness is from the same thing: making movies. Making movies and doing the stunts."**

If you thought The Fast and the Furious was great stunting, slip into a cinema and at least see the first stunt in xXx.

The film opens with Diesel's character stealing a Corvette, leading the cops on a chase, turbo-gliding the car over the rail of a high bridge, riding the vehicle down like a surfboard and landing where his pals await. It's just one of many great stunts in xXx. It's also a showcase for Diesel, a classically trained actor with the added mystique that he does more of his stunt work than most other stars.

**"For xXx I had to go into training, even though I reckoned riding my motorcycle in Manhattan as a teen was probably crazier than any stunt I've ever done. At times I have been known to be a bit of a daredevil, although I'm less of one now.**

**"For the film I trained with Navy Seals, and in speed-climbing, snowboarding and motocross. I wanted to push the envelope, but I could not have done it without my stunt team. The amazing things were done by professionals. We shot at the Barrandov Studios outside Prague, in the Czech Republic, where they have some of the best stuntmen in the world."**

Diesel may do screen stunts, but he doesn't mess around much in interviews. With his exotic looks - olive skin and full lips - he's widely assumed to be of Italian and African heritage, but he resolutely refrains from identifying his ethnicity. One Race is the name of his production company, and he refers to himself simply as "multicultural".

**"I support the idea of being multi-cultural primarily for all the invisible kids, the ones who don't fit into one ethnic category and find themselves lost in some limbo," he says.**

Diesel is fairly invisible himself when it comes to personal details. He grew up in a multicultural, intellectual household. He was one of four (his twin brother, Paul Vincent, a film editor, has blond hair and blue eyes), and his stepfather, whom he still idolises, was a theatre manager/drama teacher, while his mother combined astrology and psychology. He never knew his biological father.

From the age of five, he felt most at home on stage. **"There was some-thing refreshing about having my identity become crystal-clear (playing) a role," he says. "Then the name Vin Diesel came out of the bouncing thing.**

**"We all had nicknames. It was a wonderful thing to detach a little bit, both by name and by acting. Nowadays I detach every year when I go on a little trip with a buddy. I call it a month of anonymity. I'll**

go to Europe; I'll go to some happening city. After the city is onto the fact that I'm there, I'll leave and go to some obscure place and just walk the streets and not worry about anything.

"I was unemployed for a while - 20 years, actually, sleeping on couches and scrabbling cash to eat. I've learnt to be proactive and become an independent filmmaker and survive and keep my head on.

"When you stumble across a great actor-director relationship like the one I found with Rob Cohen on *The Fast and the Furious*, you are quick to get back into that environment again. A big part of my attraction to *Triple-X* was to work with Rob again. And we're planning more - watch this space!"

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

### **Beware: Diesel slick**

15 September 2002

Stuff

*XXX-rated action star Vin Diesel tries to convince Jo McCarroll he's the hottest thing in his hotel room.*

As the blonde entered the hotel room, Hollywood action star Vin Diesel put down his mineral water and uncoiled himself from his low chair.

"**Hel-lo,**" he purred, with a voice like gravel and a butt like granite. Sliding his hand down the small of her back, he drew her towards him to brush her cheek with his lips. "**What a** (suggestive pause) **pleasure to meet you.**"

Now, the blonde was me. And that really did happen. It's not actually the imaginary fulfilment of my dearest wish although Diesel obviously thought it was going to be.

Because Diesel is a star. The star of *The Fast and the Furious*, *Pitch Black*, *Boiler Room* and now *XXX*. Even in life he's bigger than life, six-foot something and built. If one of his film characters ever spawn an action figure they wouldn't even have to recalibrate the GI Joe machine. And all women fantasise about being kissed by buff film stars. Or at least ... Diesel fantasises that all women fantasise about film stars. Maybe that's why he so wanted to become one?

Diesel doesn't want to talk too much about "*reality*". It's true, he agrees, that he really, really wanted to be famous. Not for fame's sake, of course. But simply "**to create**", he says, "**to take fantasies, ideas and dreams and make them into films**". And so he worked very hard for a long time to make it into films himself.

He broke into theatre, aged seven, by breaking into a theatre and vandalising props with a group of hooligan mates (at which point they met a woman who gave them \$5 and a script each and told them to come back every day at 4pm). As an adult he spent years working as a bouncer in New York to keep his days free for auditions.

He wrote, directed, starred in and self-funded a short film *Multi-Facial* about an actor struggling with a mixed racial identity. He raised the money for his first feature *Strays* (again written by, directed and starring Diesel) through 15-hour days telephone marketing, giving a friend free rent and board if he'd walk the dog and answer the phone, telling anyone in the industry that Diesel was "*in a meeting*".

"**I didn't want anyone to know I was at the level where I had to do telemarketing,**" Diesel says. "**I didn't even tell my agent.**"

But he doesn't want to talk about things like his real name (he won't say but numerous websites list it as Mark Vincent), his real background (again, according to the internet, he and his twin brother were raised by his astrologist mother and his drama teacher stepfather in an artists' housing project in Greenwich Village) or his real race (the internet claims he had an African American biological father and a white mother but he's played black, white, Cuban and race unspecified roles). Right now he is simply Vin Diesel: movie star. Sure he wants to make my dreams come true, he just doesn't necessarily want to answer my questions.

"**I believe,**" he says, gazing into my eyes, "**that you will better enjoy the movie you are about to see if you know less about me. I want you to walk into the theatre and discover the character, not feel as if you already know the actor too well who is playing the character.**"

Is that because, I suggest, the reality might somewhat disappoint people?

"**No,**" he says consideringly. "**No,**" he says again. "**No, no,**" he adds in case I have misunderstood. "**I don't think they would be disappointed. At all. But what I want to share is just the positive message, the positive idea that anyone can make their dreams a reality.**"

Because Diesel's dreams came true, eventually. Steven Spielberg saw Multi-Facial at a festival screening and was so impressed he created the role of Private Adrian Carparzo, the first soldier killed in Saving Private Ryan, especially for Diesel. From SPR, Diesel provided the voice for the main character in animated feature The Iron Giant. Then he got a lead role in Boiler Room, then Pitch Black. And then of course he starred in the unexpected summer hit The Fast and the Furious. And that catapulted him to a (reportedly) \$20 million salary for XXX in which he plays extreme sports champion and anti-authority Alexander "Xander" Cage, another hero role.

Or rather not just **"another hero"**.

**"A nihilist hero," Diesel says. "A hero who has a disregard for authority. A rebel who is forcibly recruited by the NSA (National Security Agency) to save the world. I'm always fascinated by any kind of spin on the hero. Xander is a reluctant hero. He's not necessarily an anti-hero like Dominic (his character in Fast). Or like Ruddick (Pitch Black). This character is not even aware, not even cognisant of the fact that he could be a hero."**

Diesel uses words like cognisant a lot. He reads Camus, he says with confidence, perhaps confidence that almost no one else does. He's not just a body for the poster. His first films were critically acclaimed for both his writing and his performance. Diesel wants to be the thinking man's brain dead action hero.

**"I don't have to worry about being typecast. In the States I have been acting since I was seven. That's 20 years of experience right there,"** says the 35-year-old.

**"And on top of that my interests are so diverse by the time they start officialising the label of action hero I'll already have done something completely different like starred in a romantic comedy with Nicole Kidman."**

Alas, my 15 minutes with the big star is up. The romantic comedy that has been this interview is over. Roll the credits. But Diesel, ever the professional, doesn't slip out of character for a moment.

**"Goodbye,"** he husks, drawing me towards him again and giving me a kiss on the cheek that strongly suggests it's all he can do to stop himself from settling down with me to raise our children. **"You be good."** It's a beautiful moment. There's so much love in this room. But I tiptoe away, leaving Diesel alone. I hate playing gooseberry.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## **DIESEL GIVES A TRIPLE X**

Film Review

2002/Oct Issue

Following his acclaimed role in the Sci-Fi actioner Pitch Black and the stunt-tastic The Fast and the Furious, Vin Diesel takes on the spy genre – and won't rest until he's the most famous spy in movies!

Vin Diesel's career is firing on all cylinders. XXX is an action-thriller tailor-made to transform Diesel, who earned a \$10,000,000 paycheque for his efforts, into a combination of Sean Connery, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bruce Willis. Directed by Rob Cohen, who put Diesel through his paces in The Fast and the Furious, XXX casts Diesel as Xander Cage, an extreme sports enthusiast with an equally extreme attitude, who likes to pull off his stunts in the very face of the authorities. When a bunch of villainous Eastern Europeans threatens to destroy the world, NSA Agent Gibbons (Samuel L Jackson) turns to Cage, the idea being that conventional spies simply can't get the job done in this day and age. And so Cage blows things up, outraces avalanches, romances the sultry Yelena (Asia Argento), and so on. Film Review caught up with Diesel at a hotel in Los Angeles, where he shed some light on XXX, fame and his future.

**You started off your career with much more serious roles and then took the bad guy/hero route in Pitch Black and then went with something far more commercial and testosterone-driven like XXX. Is that a product of what you're being offered or a product of what you're going after? And is all of that building to you creating more of your own projects?**

Everything has been a product of what I've been offered. Every film I've done is what I've been offered. I have directed films and created things. Have you seen any of that? It's completely different work. But it's always been about taking whatever I've been offered and making it as good as possible.

**What made you interested in the role of Xander Cage?**

The idea of giving birth to a new breed of secret agent was interesting and challenging. What attracts me to projects first is the content, and with XXX I was attracted to the concept of a guy who is solely concerned with his own thrill-seeking endeavours. He couldn't care less about political affairs outside of the ones that directly affect him. I liked the idea that someone like Xander could be called upon to step into the shoes of a

secret agent. Taking a guy who's the least likely to want to save the world, and having him do just that, fascinated me.

### **How did you prepare for the physicality of XXX?**

I went into training three months prior to shooting. I did motocross training, snowboard training, ski climbing. Initially, the character was going to have a father who was in the Navy SEALs, so I did some Navy SEAL training in San Diego, which ended up being valuable for Xander Cage's third act. I basically did the extreme sports version of weightlifting for three months. You have to learn how to use rigs, even – every apparatus that will help you with each stunt. It's such a complicated process.

### **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.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## **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.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## **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.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

**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!

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## **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 Vader'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 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, late star bloomer**

It took the star of "XXX" 20 years to conquer Hollywood

New hero of the hip hop culture, Vin Diesel, alias Mark Vincent, 35 years of age (twenty of which he spent doing theater and lifting iron weights), is the latest rising value of Hollywood, after the colossal commercial success of The Fast and the Furious realized by Rob Cohen. The same Rob Cohen who directs him in XXX today, in which he holds the role of a sort of heavy-metal James Bond, Xander Cage, tattooed from head to foot and extreme sports fanatic. A person to whom, in real life, he corresponds only imperfectly.

Distinguished for his performance in Saving Private Ryan, Vin Diesel also claims a filmmaker status. His first full-length film, Strays, was therefore screened at the Sundance festival in 1997. He is working on a new "very personal" project today, which he should lead to completion after shooting The Chronicles of Riddick, sequel to the science fiction film Pitch Black, and above all, embodying Hannibal the Carthaginian under the leadership of Ridley Scott.

### **According to Rob Cohen," Xander Cage is an impressive, hard, vulnerable, human, nice person, like Vin Diesel ". Are you all that?**

I wouldn't identify with Xander Cage, but there are similarities between us. Just like it was previously the case with the other characters. In Pitch Black, notably, in which I embody somebody presumptively labeled psychopath, from whom we prejudge no good can come out of, and who nevertheless behaves in an unexpected way. I've known this kind of situation well enough. I am less wild now, the stunts are enough for me to let off steam. In fact, I have a rather innocent approach of life. I like it when people smile, are happy. On the other hand, when work comes into play, I become fanatical, obsessed. I am a perfectionist. Every time I begin shooting a movie, I act like it is the last one.

### **You created a new type of hero: the "nice bad guy"...**

The time of the beautiful white knight is over. The spectators do not recognize themselves in a character too Manichean. It became natural to become attached to a hero not devoid of flaws, but capable of surmounting them as the action progresses.

### **Are not you afraid of becoming a hostage of stereotypes?**

I slaved away during years off Broadway, without obtaining the slightest recognition. It's in Cannes, where I came to present my short film, Multi-facial, in 1995, that a first sign appeared. 'Vin Diesel paced the Croisette'.

Up to then, I was nothing. Henceforth I shoot a lot of movies, but I do not confine myself to a single type of character. F. Gary Gray's This Man's Dominion, which should come out soon, has nothing to do with XXX. My role in it is different from those you're evoking. I was collectively "oscarized", thanks to Saving Private Ryan. As a "serious" actor, therefore. However I don't look down on movies like XXX, which are fun to make. Above all, I trust my art. Shooting a film does not mean, for me, escaping reality. On the other hand, nothing prevents me from appreciating the reality of the film in question, whether it's an independent production or a big-budget movie.

### **Do you look for the sufficient financial freedom to achieve your projects in blockbusters?**

This kind of film undoubtedly guarantees a certain financial freedom. But if I gave up theater, which occupied my younger years, it's because I wanted to act for the biggest possible number of people. Only cinema allows you to do that. When Hollywood welcomed me, I was 30 years old and already an actor's life behind me. In the United States, to benefit from the public medical coverage, it is necessary to justify annual earnings of 7 000 dollars. Until Spielberg entrusted the role of Private Caparzo to me, never had I been entitled to it. It means that as actor, at 30 years old, I had still never earned 7 000 dollars in one year. But looking back, I think that these years of misfortune were beneficial. Thanks to them, I became more rigorous, more mature.

### **Haven't you ever known periods of doubt?**

I always trusted myself. It is necessary. Being that there is nobody else there to reassure you. And I fought. Contrary to a sculptor or to a musician who do not need anybody to create, an actor is the victim of outside elements. So, after twenty years of fight, I understood that it was necessary for me to become the director who steers the comedians, the writer who writes stories or still the money person who learns how to earn money to finance a film. Which I did.

### **Which explains your English diploma...**

I chose English as my major in college, hoping to be able to write scripts. I had thought about it since high school, but I was too bad. I didn't even dare to read out loud in front of the class. I believe that a good knowledge of writing allows an actor to surpass himself. Take the examples of Woody Allen, Sylvester Stallone or Matt Damon. Learning to write considerably helped me, if only by allowing me to have a more critical glance in regards to scenarios and, possibly, to work on them again.

### **Are you a sport fan?**

Moderately. I grew up in Manhattan and my father never took us, my brother and I, to football or basketball games, simply because of the lack of fields around or because he couldn't. On the other hand, we were regulars at the movie theaters of the 42nd Street, in double session. After we'd get out, we'd take off for a Chinese fast food restaurant where they served enormous plates of chow mein chicken for \$1.50 . It was a rite. While indulging ourselves, we'd discuss the film. I suppose that is what pushed me to gain interest in the stories.

### **So Hannibal's has to fascinate you...**

I always dreamed to embody Hannibal Barca whom nobody knows anymore. When you think that he was in command of a multiethnic army, that he made elephants cross the Alps, it is effectively fascinating.

### **One can sense that your house of production isn't accidentally called One Race.**

No. There is something harmonious in this title. One race, only one: the human race.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

### **A hero with a heart**

Richard Mowe  
[scotsman.com](http://scotsman.com)  
2002-10-10

The first thing to keep in mind when you meet Hollywood's new action hero, Vin Diesel, is that nothing he says should be taken terribly seriously. Minutes into our chat he has revealed that his parents' name is actually McGillicuddy and that he is known as Diesel because he was born in a filling station. He's also desperate to wear a kilt, he tells me, having seen what it's done for Ewan McGregor, Peter Mullan, Dougray Scott, Mel Gibson and Samuel L Jackson. He says all this nonsense, by the way, in an RSC accent, as if he's on stage in Stratford.

The bit about kilts might be true, the rest isn't. His real name is Mark Vincent; he adopted the Diesel part during his nights as a club bouncer in New York. He was raised in Manhattan by his mother, an astrologer, and his stepfather, a black theatre director who turned to teaching to support the family of two sisters and a twin brother Paul, a film editor. They never knew their biological father. He's proud of his multi-ethnic origins - so who's to say there's not a McGillicuddy lurking somewhere in his background?

There's a serious reason for the fibs - it's a roundabout way of staying low profile. **"I'm just saying that I do a better job if I'm only accepted as the role that I'm playing."** This can make it difficult to find anything out about him. He is very coy about his age (some records suggest a birth date of July, 1967). **"Maybe I should say I am 31, but actually I think I was born 34 years ago. Phew - I feel exhausted just explaining all that. A friend of mine who is 56 (Tommy Lee Jones) has been lying about his age for the last six years, and he says I should start saying I am 31 - which I bought into for half a second."**

He is equally coy on the subject of his girlfriend, the actress Michelle Rodriguez (of *Girl Fight* fame) whom he met while filming *The Fast and the Furious*. **"Some questions are best answered with a smile of delight,"** he beams. **"You can write what you think, and I do not doubt that you would be accurate."**

I tell him I like his British accent. **"I watch British films incessantly,"** he replies. **"I probably could sing and know by heart 80 per cent of the songs in *My Fair Lady*. I could go on stage and be word perfect. And I love Alfie. When I was making *Saving Private Ryan* I spent a couple of months in London, which I grew to adore. But my father also was a fan of British theatre and he imparted that to me. We used to have these long conversations about the different approaches - essentially the English dress themselves up with a character and work from the outside, whereas the Americans were mainly all into Lee Strasberg, the Method and 'externalising'."** The advice gave him the confidence to develop as an actor, harnessing whatever tools he thought would work for him. **"Mind you, I'm still trying to master a lot of it,"** he says.

With his shaven head, tree-trunk arms, and beefy physique, Diesel certainly has a commanding aura - which may have come partly from his time as a bouncer. **"I had to master being the most masculine person in the room. Part of the job description was to command respect, to have this presence that would discourage anybody from breaking the rules. And I did that every single night for eight years in a club with 2,000 people in it. So you learn how to command attention."**

His reputation suggests he's getting very good at it. He is said to have clashed with director John Frankenheimer over the size of his role in the film *Reindeer Games* - eventually leaving the project, even after the part was beefed up - and reportedly refused to appear in a sleeveless T-shirt, saying: **"I only show my guns in Vin Diesel films."** He has had a rather more productive relationship with Rob Cohen, who directed him in *The Fast and the Furious* and his new film, *xXx*. Cohen says the key to getting on with Diesel is **"to be as competent and talented as he is."**

He must mean it - Diesel was paid \$10 million for *xXx*. He worked hard for it though. Before shooting he had to spend months in training, rock-climbing and riding motor cycles. He plays Xander Cage, whose nickname *xXx* is tattooed on the back of his neck. Samuel L Jackson plays his boss. **"The guy is a real rebel who doesn't care about anything,"** Diesel says. **"There is no family, no girlfriend, no upward mobility thing. He's a sort of nihilist who goes on this journey, and then finds there is something to care about."** Shaven-headed and heavily tattooed, Cage displays plenty of charm, has a great line in one-liners and sports the sort of physique that would stop a bull elephant in its tracks. As an action star he could take on all comers.

Vin Diesel is quite happy playing action heroes. He was very influenced, he says, by James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* and Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*. "At the time though they were not considered action heroes," he points out. **"The term came into being when the physique made its presence felt through people such as Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger. I am an actor first and foremost but I love action films, and I felt empowered by them. I loved what the Sylvesters and the Arnolds brought to the table on those films. Anthony Hopkins could never say 'hasta la vista, baby' and make it work. When Arnold says it you go 'Y-e-a-h!' I learned a lot from them and obviously also Morgan Freeman and Marlon Brando. I am flattered by anyone saying I'm the 'next' anything."**

Does he worry about being typecast, though? Diesel bristles with indignation at the thought. **"I have 20 years of theatrical training on the record and all those years of off-on employment and sleeping on friends' couches. It was a rough beginning because I wasn't getting anything."**

**"In any case I didn't start off in Hollywood, I was in the theatre in New York. I started off in cinema as a director and writer with a short film called *Multi-Facial*, about the trials of an aspiring actor, which received praise at Cannes, and then there was a low budget feature, *Strays*, which was recognised at the Sundance Film Festival. It was after he watched *Multi-Facial* that Steven Spielberg gave me the part in *Saving Private Ryan* and also allowed me to shoot some second unit sequences which ended up in the film. I managed to turn unemployment around by being proactive and becoming an independent film-maker."**

He hopes this experience will add to the action movies he makes. **"I hope you can see that what I bring is the same conviction, the same consciousness of choice and the same style that went into *Saving Private Ryan*. Just because there are special effects and action sequences does not mean that I am absolved from having to do anything. *xXx* is a thrill ride, sure, but I am trying to find some gravity and social relevance, and to make the film more important than it might be otherwise. The same thing happened with *Pitch Black* (he was the marooned psycho killer) which became big because of the interesting anti-hero that I played."**

So is he a big softy under the hard exterior? Edward Burns, his *Private Ryan* co-star, thinks so. *"Actually he is a tough guy,"* Burns told me. *"But at the same time he's the nicest, sweetest person; surprisingly sensitive,*

*real tight with his family, and he loves his mom."*

Diesel says that he feels a natural inclination to side with the underdog in his characters rather than seeking out white-washed heroes. He embraces the flaws rather than the heroics and wants his protagonists to undertake some kind of radical transformation - **"otherwise I'm not interested"**.

**"I think I'm a culmination of everything, just like you are. There are probably times when you're more competent than others and times when you feel less confident than others. A good actor is able to draw upon that. I can be different things at different times. I don't know if that's a good or bad thing - it's sometimes confusing even for me - but that's a complexity that's part of me, and I really pull from it to whatever character I've committed to.**

**"One thing that's so therapeutic about acting is that you can define the parameters of a character and be that for a few months. And the parameters are clear, unlike with myself where the parameters are never clear."**

Given his mother's penchant for astrology, is he a confirmed believer as well? **"I'm into it as much as the next person. I know how to do a solar chart - and I am a Cancer with a Scorpio rising in a Sagittarius moon which is a deadly combination."** And with that thought, he lights up and offers me a cigarette. **"You're too healthy,"** he says when I refuse. **"That's disgusting."**

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## Vin Diesel "xXx"

Interviewed by Film 2002 with Jonathan Ross  
15th October 2002

[Video: Watch the interview in full](#)

**Vin, your rise to stardom seems to have happened very, very quickly. You've accelerated with the speed of one of those ridiculous cars you drove in "The Fast and the Furious"...**

It's crazy how it happens. You spend your life working on your craft - I started acting as a seven-year-old - and then, all of a sudden, you're an "overnight success".

**It's an interesting career trajectory you've had, from indie films and then Spielberg and now the big action star stuff. Was this was a deliberate plan on your part?**

No - if it were up to me, I would have just landed roles as a teenager. I got to my mid to late 20s frustrated, and had to become an auteur in order to be a successful actor and that's where the independent filmmaking came from. And then just trying to make the smartest decisions and trying to do the best that I can with every film that I have.

**In "xXx", you play a kind of unwilling spy. He's got his name tattooed on the back of his neck - that means undercover work is going to be a bit tricky for him!**

Well, if it's up to him, he's not going to be a spy. That's the whole idea, he's not trying to be undercover. He is who he is, and that's why he's chosen for the job.

**Your arms are perhaps the most terrifying I've ever seen committed to celluloid. They've gone down a bit since the movie, I'm sure deliberately.**

Well, I like to try to stay as neutral as possible, because you know the next role may call for an obese character or an anorexic character, and what would be the point of working out and being so physical and then having to lose it all? And so my objective when I'm not working isn't to try to be a body builder.

**This movie is great. But this is the nation that gave the world Bond. We're proud of our secret service man. Xander Cage versus Bond? What's the outcome there?**

I think there's easily room for both of us. I think that this is a completely original approach to the spy genre movie. This is the guy that never went to spy school. Xander Cage allows you to feel that heroism and to fantasise about becoming that hero.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## Vin Diesel

Rupert Mellor  
[Times Online](#)  
2002-10-17

Vin Diesel's brawn may have bought him huge box-office success but it's his brains that will keep him there

**"THESE,"** SMIRKS Hollywood's latest Million Dollar Man, looking down at his canteloupe biceps, **"are about respect. Where I grew up in New York City, there was a lot of ingrained machismo. You had to be somewhat formidable, you were either predator or prey."**

Currently adorning billboards all over the planet on the poster for his new movie XXX, Diesel's comic-strip musculature has served him well. As a young buck, he gave it several years of strenuous use as a bouncer at Manhattan's Tunnel club while paying his dues in Off-Off Broadway theatre productions. It has also helped him to land the lead in three action movies to date. And today, even as Diesel's fame becomes such that a night out generally necessitates his own security staff, he's discovering new purposes for his Unique Selling Property.

**"It's still like a suit of armour now, but in a different way. It kind of throws people off because it doesn't let them in on my intellectual side, which can play to my advantage. They don't realise that they can get something more than grunts from me."**

Based on the two films which have made Diesel's name, they can't really be blamed. Last year's dumb but dynamic street-racing thriller *The Fast and the Furious* propelled the big guy's bald pate on to cinema screens worldwide, snaffling a tidy \$150 million in the process. And XXX, which again teams Diesel with the *Fast and Furious* director Rob Cohen, has conferred on him improved status, bringing with it his first seven-figure fee.

A Bond for the attention-span-deficit generation, XXX adds extreme sports and a pounding urban soundtrack to the familiar guns, gadgets and girls cocktail. Diesel plays Xander Cage, an all-snowboarding, all-motorcross riding, all-base-jumping tattooed nihilist rebel who is coerced into the service of his government after his latest trick, **"surfing a shiny new Corvette off a 700ft bridge before parachuting to the ground"**, brings the law calling. Cue daft weapons of mass destruction plot, a splash of feisty Eastern Bloc totty and more stacy explosions than a whole series of *The A-Team*.

In its favour, Diesel is an amiable and charismatic presence. And it's not just the action that is spectacular. XXX has to date grossed \$160 million at the box office. A sequel is already slated to shoot next year, and it is this which will elevate Diesel to the ranks of the \$20 million-a-pop club. But if Diesel's rise seems rocket-powered, it wasn't always thus. Initial acting ambitions struck a seven-year-old Mark Vincent, as he then was, back in 1974, when he and some friends broke into a theatre in Greenwich Village. **"We were discovered suddenly by a woman,"** Diesel recalls. **"She said, 'If you want to play here, you can do it at 4pm every day.' She passed me a script. 'And learn your lines'. I was hooked."**

Eighteen years later, with a fat portfolio of theatre work and a certain degree of local celebrity from working the door at the hottest club in town, Diesel decided that Hollywood was ready for him. **"And I bombed. I borrowed money, went out there \$10,000 in debt, thinking, hey, I'm a New York actor. I'll nail the jobs. A year later, I went back home a failure, the tail between the legs."**

Filling time by enrolling in an English and drama degree course, it was a book bought by his mother which was to catalyse his next big move, in 1994. The book was called *Feature Filmmaking for Used-Car Prices* and it was loaded with tips for success on a shoestring. Saving money by buying a computer, then bashing out the script within the 30 days of the shop's full-refund policy, Diesel wrote, directed and acted in *Multi-Facial*, an autobiographical 20-minute film about the trials of a multiracial actor struggling to find work. And all for \$3,000.

Taking *Multi-Facial* to the following year's Cannes Film Festival, Diesel got a rapturous reception, and a phone call **"some 18 months later"** from Steven Spielberg, with an offer of a part in *Saving Private Ryan*. Since then Diesel has worked steadily.

*Multi-Facial's* subject-matter remains close to its maker's heart. **"My mother is Italian, and the man who raised me and who I consider my father is African-American. I never knew my biological father. I'm multicultural, neither black nor white,"** he has said. His refusal to pin down his racial origins has been his protest against racial stereotyping in the film industry. As *Multi-Facial's* final line has it, *"My father was a black actor, but he wanted me to go one step further and be an actor. Just an actor."*

It looks as if he's cracked it, too. So far Diesel, who has called his production company One Race, has excelled as a dodgy Italian-American stockbroker in *Boiler Room* (2000), played a Jewish would-be gangster in the as-yet unreleased *Knockaround Guys*, and numerous Ethnically Unspecifieds, as well as an intergalactic serial killer in *Pitch Black* (2000), and an animated robot in *The Iron Giant* (1999). The director Joel Schumacher barely talked him out of playing a drag queen.

**"I think that Hollywood has had to acknowledge that this is a multicultural world, we live in a global**

**village, and the fact that they have access to a star who embraces his racial ambiguity is probably very good for them,” Diesel says.**

It's not working out so badly for him either. Despite initial qualms about signing up for XXX, **“because it's a franchise, and for an actor who demands to be taken seriously a franchise movie is a little tricky”**, he has also committed to making a further two Pitch Black movies. His intellectual muscles on the other hand will be getting a workout too, in the forthcoming This Man's Dominion, a study of a cop's breakdown after he loses his wife, and Doormen, a script he wrote five years ago about his days in New York's clubland.

**“But what I'm really excited about,”** purrs Diesel, **“is Hannibal”**, about the Carthaginian general rather than the cannibal killer. It's been a pet project for years. Diesel has commissioned a screenplay from David Franzoni, who wrote Gladiator, although press reports that Ridley Scott will direct are, he says, **“untrue”**. The producer, Joe Roth, is fielding directors now. **“I have a meeting with Ron Howard when I get home. It's going to be amazing. We'll have battles, elephants, Carthage . . . “**

**Sounds ambitious? Dead right. I'm the most ambitious person you ever met.”**

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## **Vin Diesel interview**

Empire Online  
2002 Oct UK

### **EO: When did you start the physical preparation for your role of Xander Cage?**

VD: I started training 10 weeks prior to shooting and I wouldn't have been able to participate in the stunts if I had not been able to take that time out. I mean, the first day I had ever been on a motor cross bike, I was already doing jumps. My instructor blew out his knee doing a simple turn right at the start of the process and the studio found out so that was the beginning of the Xander - Gibbons like relationship with the studio. I was constantly trying to sneak away from the set to practise these jumps and try to do things in the film that the studio would never have let me do. It was imperative for my character to do the training because I go into this film as an extreme sports athlete so I had to understand what that was like and be the best I could be.

### **EO: So did you tell your Mum about the stunts?**

VD: [laughing] No, Mum wasn't allowed on the set. This was one of those sets where Mum would have been better off... [adopting high-pitched voice again and raising arms in mock horror] "Is that my son...?"

### **EO: This is the 40th anniversary of a certain other agent. Were you a fan of Bond's antics and did you re-enact any of Bond's adventures when you were a kid?**

VD: Yeah, I loved James Bond when I was a kid. I only think of this now, but I remember when I was watching James Bond, I still didn't relate to him. I was entertained by him, but I couldn't identify with him. I felt like this guy had been at school for 12 years getting a Masters in spy technology and it didn't feel like I could really fit his shoes. One of the interesting things about xXx and how Rob enrolled me, was the idea to have this whole original take on the spy genre which has been monopolised by James Bond so effectively, and to come up with another kind of spy. And the first thing that attracted me to the character was that he doesn't want to be a spy! There was something about it that felt universal for me. Maybe it was because it was post September 11th, because we all had this feeling of frustration that the idea of taking a guy who would be the least likely to be heroic and in the first act making him understand the point of heroism and then have him trying to achieve this goal throughout the film was interesting.

### **EO: You've signed off for sequels to both xXx and Pitch Black, why did you not agree to the sequel to The Fast and the Furious?**

VD: Going into The Fast and the Furious, me and Rob talked about the introduction of this subculture. So the idea of doing this sequel introducing the same subculture wasn't crystal clear for us. And the reactionary response to sequels - going let's just make another one after it makes so much money - for an actor and filmmaker, that's just not exciting. With xXx, we knew before we even made the first one that this was a character and a world we wanted to revisit and we went into making the prototype to make the first film powerful enough to launch a franchise. It's very tricky because there's a lot of fans who want you to make a sequel to The Fast and the Furious and don't understand that you're turning down lots of money to keep the integrity of your films alive and intact.

### **EO: There is more of Riddick on the cards, though...**

VD: ... The interesting thing about Riddick is that they were writing a sequel to Pitch Black and it was just another planet with more creatures. That wasn't working or exciting, so I went to the studio with the idea of trying to create a mythology, a trilogy. David Twohy is writing three scripts, which he describes as to Pitch Black, what Lord of the Rings is to The Hobbit. So, [smiling] that should prove to be very interesting.

**EO: Do you feel you've filled your ideal niche as an action star?**

VD: I've acted since I've been seven years old and spent twenty years trying to make it. And I had to become an auteur to become an actor - I had to direct my own independent feature film and a short film, which went to Cannes and won a competition at Sundance. I am doing Hannibal the Conqueror next, I'm talking to Nicole Kidman about doing a remake of Guys and Dolls and the one thing I will probably never do is become pigeonholed by anything. So, enjoy this action film!

**EO: Your Mum seems like a good egg... how has she supported you over the years?**

VD: She's magical, my mother. She's given me little tokens that have really helped me. In 1993, I'd just got back from LA after I'd gone off thinking I was gonna be a big movie star and all the doors would open. [laughing] A year later, I come back to New York with my tail between my legs, having to face all the people whom I'd told I was going to be a big movie star and go back to my Mom's house! And she gives me this book 'Feature Films at Used Car Prices - Make a Movie for \$11,000 or less.' And what it lacked in practical, technical advice, it made up for in motivation. It was truly, truly empowering - probably the most important gift I've ever been given. Because after that I knew I could make movies and it was just a matter of money. I may not have a car, I may not be able to buy a flatscreen TV, but I was going to make movies.

**Vin Diesel's Capital Takeover**

Vin Diesel takes to the airwaves to play out his favourite tracks, answer some of your email questions and talk about his new movie 'XXX'.

Yo, this is Vin Diesel and you're listening to my Capital Takeover. I've just taken over the station, and it's completely under my control.

Check out this track. This is one of my favourites **by Styles, featuring Lil' Mo**, it's **'Daddy Get That Cash'**.

**Charlie asks: What's your new film about?**

'XXX' is an adrenaline rush like you've never seen. I could go on for hours about what this film is about, but I will just give you a piece of advice. When you go to see 'XXX', make sure that you go to the bathroom before the previews start. And make sure you've got your popcorn and necessary beverage in hand, because this is going to be one hell of a ride.

Here's another one of my favourite tracks by Eve, the infamous **Eve, featuring Alicia Keys - 'Gangsta Lovin'**.

**Mark asks: How do you build up your body?**

Well Mark, I spent nine years as a bouncer in New York city. The only thing I had to worry about was training to remain formidable. It's all a residual affect of bouncing. The perk of being a bouncer is you end up with a somewhat decent body.

You are partaking in the Takeover, we are here in force, and here's another one of my incredible favourite tracks from **Coldplay**. Check it out. Here's **'Yellow'**.

**Emile says: Is there a lady in your life?**

I knew this question was inevitable! There are many ladies in my life - my mother, my sister, all the women that work with me. If the question is if I am single, then yes, I am single. But hopefully not forever.

You are experiencing a Vin Diesel, New York style Takeover, and here's another one of my favourite tracks by **Nelly and Kelly Rowland**. This is **'Dilemma'**.

This is Vin Diesel. You know I've had fun chilling with you and I've had fun being in London, like I always do. I hope that I'll see you when I come back again. Peace.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

**Vin Diesel to Start Videogame Company**

Hollywood star to form Tigon Games and develop an action-adventure game titled Perrone.  
By By Scott "Scooter" Steinberg | Nov. 10, 2002

Vin Diesel to start Tigon Games. Being a Hollywood hero has its perks. Eight-figure salaries, award shows,

and six-girl-deep bedroom pileups for instance. But for a dedicated Grand Theft Auto III junkie like xXx star Vin Diesel, it also means getting to indulge your every fantasy, no matter how farfetched.

On a recent teleconference to discuss the impending New Year's Day launch of xXx on DVD, the self-avowed geek announced plans to form Tigon Games, his very own videogame company. **"So many people had been approaching me to attach my name to this kind of project lately, I figured the time was right to get out there and do something on my own,"** says the enigmatic entrepreneur. As for what exactly that "something" encompasses, he promises ongoing developments across every genre for all top console platforms will soon be underway.

**"I've been playing videogames forever,"** admits the budding Diesel, **"This project is more of a hobby than a business venture to me. I want to see if I can actually create a game that I personally would enjoy playing."** While a full range of products from Tigon has yet to be confirmed, Diesel cites titles with a cinematic component as his favorite, so it's a safe bet those who enjoy Max Payne and are looking forward to Sony's upcoming The Getaway will find the corporation's upcoming productions a good fit.

Presuming the actor can pull himself off Dynasty Warriors 3, his current favorite, his company -- named for a hybrid creature that's a cross between a tiger and a lioness -- will fire its opening shot in the form of Perrone, a mature action-adventure. According to Diesel, it chronicles the story of a cop from the '70s. In his words, **"the man was simultaneously the most accoladed and excessively aggressive lawman on the force. It's a fascinating tale, how this guy was involved with both the Mafia and police at the same time."** Although he cited the Grand Theft Auto brand as a natural inspiration, Diesel declined to comment further on the game, saying only that audiences could expect to see and hear more on it in the coming year.

Diesel in a movie ad for xXx To critics who scoff at the prospect -- many of whom would be well founded, considering the bomb that was xXx for Game Boy Advance -- Diesel offers reassurances his latest project won't disappoint. **"Yes, Activision's xXx was terrible. But I didn't know any better... I had no idea how important it was to see the entire project through. Forgive me. I'm learning -- and getting better. As someone familiar with writing and directing, trust me, I'll come correct."**

Come 2003, he'll have a chance to prove it. Although no partnership or distribution deals have yet been revealed, such a venture -- boasting the name of an outspoken A-list celebrity attached to it -- will surely attract sharks, once word reaches major players in the gaming industry. Rest assured GameSpy will be keeping a close watch on the situation, and will bring you more news as soon as it breaks.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## Maximum overdrive

[dvdfile.com](http://dvdfile.com)

2002-12-31

**As we talk the new James Bond film (Die Another Day) is just out and seems to be a hit. Did you feel any pressure trying to create a "new Bond" in XXX, and did you intentionally try to pay homage to or avoid any of the elements that has made that series so long-lasting?**

My intentions when I made XXX were not to create a new Bond, but to create an original approach to the secret agent genre, the spy genre. The first and foremost different between XXX and all of its predecessors and contemporaries is that he (Xander Cage) doesn't want to be a secret agent. And that's the first characteristic that makes him fascinating, and makes the story fascinating. That this guy is the quintessential reluctant hero.

I felt like that there was more integrity in that approach, a little bit more tangible about that reality, especially in the wake of September 11th.

**What sorts of things did you try to focus in on with the character to make it more accessible, more tangible?**

I remember when I used to see James Bond movies, the one thing I didn't relate to was that this guy seemed like he probably went to school for 12 years to be a secret agent. I was like, "No, that's not going to be me."

**While the Bond films are still popular with a wide audience, XXX seems like it was designed to appeal more directly to the young adult demographic...**

It was successful in that demographic, but it was I also found is that when the older audience went to see the film they were tapping into something completely different than the modern cultural influences that were incorporated into the character. They were talking about the characters, the relationships and the storyline. They were intrigued by it, which was cool. I feel like this is a film that entertained, that hopefully anybody that went to it came away entertained.

### **Did you allow any influence of Bond the character into your portrayal of Cage?**

Bond is the father of these movies. We were just taking it one step further and making it current. That was Rob Cohen's objective. But, of course, you can't help but to take the Bond films into account. Look at it, analyze it, and see what they've done. It would be shortsighted not to. Especially the techniques they used to be as successful as they've been. When we were doing XXX, we knew that we were creating a prototype, and that if this wasn't good and we didn't knock this out of the park, then there wouldn't be others.

### **You actually have a considerable stage background which few probably know about. How much of that experience proves useful for a role like Xander?**

I can't do a film like XXX and go, "OK, well this is just an action part so I don't need to act at all." Or, "This isn't Saving Private Ryan or Boiler Room, so I don't have to pay that much attention to the character." On the contrary. If anything, I've got to kind of play out how much introspectiveness I can put into the character because with all the fast-paced editing, how much of the character I can get through is the trick. If it were up to me, I would tone some of the action scenes down or take some out, and put more backstory into the film.

### **A project like XXX is obviously a huge physical undertaking. How do you prepare for a role like Xander Cage, both mentally and physically?**

Well, despite what people may think, I try not to get too carried away if I'm not shooting because I want to keep the possibilities open. If I had to play a character that was anorexic or obese, going to the gym every day wouldn't help that. (laughs) It really depends on what film I'm doing. Now that I'm getting closer to doing Chronicles of Riddick (Editor: The sequel to the cult hit Pitch Black) I'll have to set out some time in December with a three-month program to kind of "design" his look. It's always character specific. I have to keep the character in mind and break down what his physical attributes would be. And that's how I come up with whatever training I need to go into.

### **Do you like playing the action hero?**

I like playing cool characters. I like that aspect of it. I don't think in terms of the "action hero," ironically, and it is so new. Clint Eastwood wasn't considered an action hero. James Dean did "Rebel Without a Cause," which is, in many ways, a film similar to "Fast and the Furious" – just 50 years ago – is not considered an action film. "The Wild One" isn't considered an action film, nor Marlon Brando an action hero. But guys like Arnold were the ones that created that new type of character. Years ago, actors weren't considered action heroes; they were acting in movies that had a high action quo.

### **What was it like working with Asia Argento?**

Amazing. She's amazing. Everyone sees the sex appeal, but she's this very intelligent, creative woman who is a director in her own right.

### **Like her father?**

Well, I haven't seen much of her father's work. And she'll kill me for saying that. But I haven't seen enough of those horror films ...

### **You've already signed on to do the sequel to both XXX and Pitch Black, despite having turned down Fast & the Furious 2. Are you generally wary of sequels, or are you excited by them?**

Not a whole lot, which is why I turned down the The Fast and the Furious sequel. But with the Riddick character, the reason why I'm doing Chronicles of Riddick next is because I wanted to try to find a way to create a modern day mythology in a trilogy form, not unlike Lord of the Rings, but something more futuristic and more contemporary.

I am excited about The Two Towers. I'm a huge, huge, huge fan of fantasy, which is why I've taken a fantasy-like approach to Riddick. It would have been so easy just to do a sequel to Pitch Black and go to another planet and fight other creatures. And that's actual the sequel scripts that were written at first. And that wasn't interesting at all to me.

But what was interesting was taking a Tolkien-like mythological approach to the character and actually creating a trilogy

### **How much input do you have in the Pitch Black sequel?**

Well, story wise, I have a lot of input. Because, you know, I was talking about doing a sequel for a long time. A couple of scripts were even written by different writers. But I needed to go back to David Twohy, because he was the one that was most willing to really think outside of the box, and come up with the idea of creating a trilogy out of a character in a film that's really kind of a cult film. It is extremely daring, as you can imagine. But David had the belief in the concept, the belief that this could be a modern-day mythology, and was able to run with it. And I think David brings the Star Trek element, and I bring the Dungeons & Dragons element.

So we're covered.

As far as the story's concerned in general, I don't think there's a film that I've done that I haven't been involved with in terms of the story. And the greater my participation is in the film, the more involved I am involved at the story stage.

I know you probably can't give out any particulars, but I'm interested in where you think the character of Riddick might go. Is he going to become like Snake Plissken, more of the same, or evolve into something else? Is there going to be a journey for this character?

It's going to be a huge journey for the character. You're going to see a world that is so expansive. It's literally taking Pitch Black, taking that character, taking that future world, and applying it to a mythology to it. When you see Chronicles of Riddick, you'll go, "Oh, my God, I didn't know that this character was that relevant in the grand scheme of things. I didn't know that this character actually had a purpose." The fate of our society or our universe is dependent upon a person that, could otherwise be a criminal. He'll always be an anti-hero. He'll never be the guy that says, "Ooh, I want to save the day."

### **What was it about XXX in particular that drove you to choose it over, say, more Fast and the Furious?**

Fast and the Furious didn't seem like a franchise to me. If I would have done that franchise, I would have made tons of money. But I would have been doing a sequel in a reactionary way. I would have been reacting to the fact that it was a blockbuster hit, as opposed to what the story is and where the story would go.

And for me, the script wasn't ready, it wasn't at a place that could really warrant doing it. I'm in a position where I have to think about what films I'm going to do sequels to, or what characters I'm going to revisit or expand on. Fast and the Furious just felt like a sequel that would be introducing cars, you know? And I don't know if you can introduce that subculture again and again.

But to answer your question, Xander is an interesting character in that he goes into different scenarios. You know when you see the first one that you're going to see him again in a different scenario. You know when you go to buy that ticket for Xander Cage, when you buy the DVD, that it's the first of many. It's the prototype.

### **How many more installments do you see yourself doing? Should we expect you in XXX Part 5?**

Oh, I don't know. We've got to see how each one goes. So far, I'm amped up to do the second and the third one. But XXX might be the only film that I do a "legitimate" sequel to. Chronicles of Riddick is creating a brand new trilogy in the same vein as, Lord of the Rings' relationship is to The Hobbit. So Pitch Black is to Chronicles of Riddick. You wouldn't have needed to see Pitch Black to get it. But if you did, you'd have that much more insight on the character.

### **The rumors floating around now is that XXX 2 is supposed to take place in Japan...**

Well, I do love sushi. But I don't know if it's going to take place in Japan. To be 100 percent honest with you, there are two scripts being written simultaneously, XXX Squared and XXX Cubed! And there's a possibility that the latter will take place first. And the first story is being created in Asia somewhere. I'm not sure if it's Japan.

XXX Cubed is a script that takes place in Washington DC, which could be kind of fascinating.

### **There are so many extreme stunts in the film. How are you going to top them in the next one?**

Oh, God, it's going to be tough and scary. I did 10 weeks of pre-production training for XXX. I will probably have to increase that time for the sequel, because the stunts will be that much more demanding ...

### **One interesting aspect of XXX I wanted to discuss was that it seems very influenced by video games and that culture. Do you think that is a fair assessment?**

I think that the line between movies and video games is becoming less and less apparent. I think that these really good video games are incorporating real screenwriters and trying to give you an extended, interactive movie-going experience. Games like Grand Theft Auto and Dynasty Warriors. That's a really exciting thing to me, because I'm so into video games. I can spend like 20 hours playing a video game and just get lost in it. So much so that I'm creating a company called Tygon Games. I don't know if you know what a tygon is?

**No, I don't.**

It's a cross between a tiger and a lioness. It's a hybrid. Most are born stillborn. But the ones that make it are quite formidable. Anyway, we will probably start with a game called Perrone. By the way, you're like, you're the first to hear all this shit...

### **What made you want to get into video gaming?**

I've been playing video games forever. I love them, and now that video games are crossing over into a more cinematic, storytelling approach, it feels like the right time. It feels like something that would be interesting.

It's more of a hobby than anything else. I'd like to create a game that I'd really like to play.

People have been wanting me to sign up and support their video games, and I thought about, that I should create a game that I would really enjoy playing. I came across this one story of this cop from the '70's who was the most violent cop of the era, but also had garnered all these accolades in the Bronx.

**And that's Perrone?**

Yes. Its such a fascinating story that goes in and out of the Mafia and the police department.

**Aside from video games, where do you see career going? I suppose the majority of your success as an actor has been in action films. Would you like to branch out into other genres, other roles?**

Yes. A Man Apart, which comes out in the spring, is not an action film. It's a drama. It's a thriller. It's about the psychoanalytical breakdown of a cop who loses his wife. It's a much darker film than I've done before. It's a much more introspective.

I'm also talking to Nicole Kidman about doing a musical remake of Guys and Dolls. So that would be the antithesis of an action film!

**I bet most people would be surprised to hear that you like musicals....**

That is what's so scary and intriguing at the same time. I've always loved musicals. I've loved all kinds of movies. I grew up with having a father that was heavily into the theater arts. When I was young, I would go to the movies with my father and sometimes it would be a musical. We'd spend the time breaking down the story, the plot, all the different aspects of the film.

**Many of your fans like you because you have this very "tough" image. Do you ever worry that doing, say, a musical might turn off some of your fans? That people will only expect to see your "bad side"?**

No, no, no, no, no. I'm tough, but I'm cool. I think, you know, being cool takes you a long way. I think there's something about being cool that you're either born with or you're not. But then there's another part of it where you could actively participate. You can choose to be cool or not. So my motto is to be as cool as possible. You know, don't act like an asshole.

**Is it true that you first you got into acting after you were caught vandalizing a theater?**

Yes. I was seven years old. I had already been into the idea of acting because my father was taught theater in Brooklyn before I was born. Then when he had to raise a family, he had to get a job that could actually pull some money in. But when I was seven, back in the 70s, a group of kids and I were terrorizing the neighborhood on our banana seat bikes. We went into a theater that appeared to be abandoned, but then a woman came out and was like, "If you guys want to play here, come here every day at 4:00 p.m. Here's a script. Know your lines and you'll get \$20 a week."

So that was the first I was paid to do theater. All an accident.

**You eventually started out in independent film, which many people also don't realize.**

Yes.

**How hard was it to break in that way? Another rumor is that you actually raised \$50,000 on your own via telemarketing...**

That is correct. I started directing and writing out of frustration. I'd been acting for so many years. And I wasn't getting any roles. Out of frustration, I became a writer and a director. I made two films, one short that went to Cannes and a feature that went to Sundance. I was very lucky in the independent world. Then Steven Spielberg saw Multi-Facial and wrote a role for me in Saving Private Ryan. And that led me to Hollywood.

**What was it like to have Steven Spielberg create a role especially for you, an unknown young filmmaker?**

It didn't make sense because, first of all, I was ecstatic that he saw Multi-Facial at all. I was ecstatic as a filmmaker that Spielberg, of all people, was able to see my work. But I was blown away when I heard on the call that he had Frank Darabont write a role for me in Saving Private Ryan. That was surreal. It felt like a Hollywood fairy tale.

**Was it daunting being thrust into Ryan, and being surrounded by major talent at such a young age?**

At first, it was. Then, when I got there, I kind of realized the similarities, the most glaring being that both my little \$45,000 film and this \$67 million film both wanted to make magic. Steven Spielberg has received all the accolades in the world. But all he really wanted to do was make magic again. And it was interesting to see how the budget was irrelevant in that objective.

**Well, our time is coming to a close. So, last question. Do you have any plans to go back to directing or writing?**

Oh, my God. Of course. I want to go back to directing. I write all the time. I write on every film I do.

**Anything planned?**

Well, one of the things I talked about directing is a feature film version of Multi-Facial. We'll see....

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## **'XXX' Star Vin Diesel Fuels Up On Action**

Tuesday, December 31, 2002

By Barbara Vancheri,  
[Post-Gazette](#) Staff Writer

Vin Diesel never intended to create a James Bond for a new generation with "XXX." No, the buff, bald one was after a new approach to the super agent or super spy genre with his movie about Xander Cage, an extreme-sports enthusiast who chooses a gig with the National Security Agency in Prague over prison. "XXX," which earned roughly \$140 million at the U.S. box office, arrives on VHS and DVD today.

**"I remember even when I would see James Bond movies, the one thing I didn't relate to was that I knew this guy probably went to school for 12 years to be a secret agent. Nah, that's not going to be me,"** Vin Diesel says of his reluctant hero character in "XXX," coming out on VHS and DVD today.

**"The first and foremost difference between 'XXX' and all its predecessors and contemporaries is that he doesn't want to be a secret agent. ... This guy is the quintessential reluctant hero,"** Diesel says, his low voice rumbling (barely at times) over a phone line connecting writers from around the globe.

Diesel thought the reluctant hero approach in "XXX" would be a more realistic one, especially in the wake of Sept. 11. **"I remember even when I would see James Bond movies, the one thing I didn't relate to was that I knew this guy probably went to school for 12 years to be a secret agent. Nah, that's not going to be me."**

He is a 35-year-old who made his professional acting debut 28 years ago after an act of Big Apple bravado. **"I had already been into the idea of acting because my father taught theater in Brooklyn before I was born, and then when he had to raise his family, he had to get a job that could actually pull some money in.**

**"But when I was 7 years old, a group of kids and I were terrorizing the neighborhood on our banana-seat bikes,"** hastening to add this was the 1970s, after all. **"We went into a theater that was abandoned and a woman came out and said, 'Look, if you guys want to play here, come here every day at 4 p.m. Here's a script, know your lines and you'll get \$20 a week.' That was the first time I was paid,"** for acting.

As a teenager, he once was part of the ultimate New Year's Eve experience: He held cue cards for Dick Clark. As an older teen, he worked as a nightclub bouncer who happily took the Dec. 31 shift since it meant his \$100 pay would be doubled.

Frustration over a lack of acting roles prompted Diesel to start directing and writing. **"I made two films -- one short film that went to Cannes and a feature film that went to Sundance, so I was actually very lucky in the independent world, and this was all before Steven Spielberg saw 'Multi-Facial' and wrote a role for me in 'Saving Private Ryan,' which kind of invited me into Hollywood."**

Since playing Pvt. Adrian Caparzo in "Private Ryan," Diesel provided the voice of the "Iron Giant," was among the hard-selling boys in the "Boiler Room" and co-starred with Paul Walker (and a fleet of cars) in the surprise hit "The Fast and the Furious." In the spring, Diesel will play a DEA operative whose wife is murdered, and he is talking with Nicole Kidman about doing a musical remake of "Guys and Dolls."

**"I've always loved musicals; I've loved all kinds of movies. ... When I was younger, I'd go to the movies and then spend time breaking down the stories, plot, all the different aspects of the film, and musicals were part of that."**

For the near future, Diesel is reprising his character of Richard B. Riddick for a follow-up to "Pitch Black" called "Chronicles of Riddick." He sees it as an attempt **"to create a modern-day mythology in a trilogy form, not unlike 'Lord of the Rings,' but something more futuristic and more contemporary."**

And still to come are not one but two sequels to "XXX," which will be pronounced as "XXX Squared"

(although the title could be written with the raised 2 in the corner) and "XXX Cubed."

Two scripts are being written simultaneously, with "Squared" set in Asia and "Cubed" in Washington, D.C., and no guarantee that they'll be filmed in that order. However, he says, "The idea of me taking a BMX bike to the Capitol dome is kind of fascinating."

Of course, in the first film, Xander "represents not a country but a generation. ... **I think that's what the world has responded to: I think there's a universal quality about Xander Cage. There are patriotic moments throughout the film, but overall, the character isn't even saving his own country and doesn't even want to work for his own country. He hates his government,**" which forces him into the heart of a group called Anarchy 99 headed by a brutal Russian ex-army commander.

Although Diesel is Hollywood's idea of the next generation of "action hero," he doesn't necessarily embrace that title.

**"I like playing cool characters. I like that aspect of it. I don't think in terms of 'action hero,' ironically. The whole action hero title is so new. Clint Eastwood wasn't considered an action hero," nor was James Dean when he did "Rebel Without a Cause" or "The Wild One" star Marlon Brando.**

**"Guys like Arnold [Schwarzenegger] were the ones that kind of created that title, the action film title, but years ago, actors weren't considered action heroes. They were acting in movies that had a high action quotient."**

A DVD of "Alfie," a movie that's anything but an action film, is the one Diesel has watched more than any other in the past two years. He owns about 200 DVDs and acknowledges that he set up his screening room for two purposes -- to re-create the movie experience and "to really get lost in whatever video game I'm playing."

In fact, Diesel is creating a company called Tigon Games and plans to produce games similar to the popular "Grand Theft Auto" and "Dynasty Warriors 3" that can be played on all the major systems. **"I think really good video games are incorporating real screenwriters and trying to give you an extended, interactive moviegoing experience."**

A "tigon" is the offspring of a male tiger and a female lion. **"It's a hybrid. Most are stillborn, but the ones that make it are quite formidable."**

Not unlike Diesel himself.

[GO BACK TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)

## **Vin Diesel On DVD -- Do I watch DVDs? Religiously."**

*So declared action superstar Vin Diesel,*

Jan 20, 2003 (DVD Report/PBI Media via COMTEX) -- chatting with reporters to promote the DVD of XXX (Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment), which was released earlier this month. DVD Report asked Diesel a few questions about the shiny silver disc.

### **DVD: How has DVD changed your approach to your work?**

VIN: How much do I think about the DVD when creating a film? [pauses] I haven't thought about the DVD. Maybe I should start. I am beginning to think about the DVD a lot more after the record-breaking numbers of The Fast And The Furious. That's an eye-opener.

### **DVD: What separates a good DVD from a bad one?**

VIN: Well, for me, the commentary. But I'm a huge fan of [seeing] how they marketed [the film], because the great thing about DVDs is you're able to go back and see what trailer it was that initially excited you, and compare it to the film. What were they thinking? What were they playing upon? What did they use to attract their audience and did they deliver?

### **DVD: What would you like to see on a DVD in the future?**

VIN: I wish with some of my older DVDs, or DVDs of older films, I could see the effect that the movie had on the public. I'd love to go back to Gone With The Wind and really, really get an idea of how people regarded it then.

### **DVD: A documentary of audiences' perception of the film?**

VIN: Yeah, exactly. Look at a film like [Diesel fave] Alfie and hear what the critics were saying, both good and

bad, and how it was received. Were people relating to it, did it spawn any kind of cultural change? Its impact. That's the best way to put it. Films, especially good ones, always have an impact on society.