



*Scully and Mulder are back on the case in a dark supernatural thriller that will please hard-core fans but may not convert viewers unfamiliar with the television series*

I wanted to believe. But with his big-screen blowup of his great and weird television series *The X-Files*, Chris Carter has turned me into a reluctant skeptic. Baggy, draggy, oddly timed and strangely off the mark, *The X-Files: I Want to Believe* is the generally bad-news follow-up to the show's first feature-film incarnation, *The X-Files*. Released in 1998 and directed by Rob Bowman, one of the show's regular frontmen, that earlier film was a seamless translation of the series's paranoid vibe and trademark geek cool. The series supersized nicely, filling the larger spatial dimensions by staying true to its conceptual parameters.

Not that it isn't swell to see Mulder and Scully, the Nick and Nora of paranormal freakouts — aka David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson — once again trading dark, searching looks under the cover of the long night, or even by bright eerie day. Mulder may be wearing a bushy beard (Carter builds up the character's entrance so dramatically I expected something rather more lepreux), and Scully looks thinner, more angled, a touch weary. But it's still them, the sexy renegade agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation who, for almost a decade, poked into strange goings-on, partly driven by Mulder's belief that his sister had been kidnapped by extraterrestrials and partly by a work relationship that became something more.

That relationship still simmers, though at a reduced temperature. There's nothing stirring the air between Mulder and Scully, who, having left the bureau, come across as unmoored and unfocused, even when they're working on the outlandish criminal case that drags them back into the twilight zone. A similar lack of urgency characterizes the movie, which despite its yowling dogs, barking Russians, screaming women, swelling choral voices and moody cinematography by Bill Roe — which turns even dark blue a deeper shade of black — never finds a sustainable pulse. Carter knows how to grab your attention visually, but the amalgam of trashy thriller clichés that he has compiled with Frank



Just when they thought they were out...

BY MANOHLA DARGIS  
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK



Fox Mulder and Dana Scully's relationship still simmers in *The X-Files: I Want to Believe*. PHOTOS COURTESY OF FOX MOVIES

Spotnitz, another series regular, creates its own deadening effect. It's no wonder Mulder and Scully seem so diffident.

The first *X-Files* movie, released before the show ended, added nothing substantive. It came off like a contract clause writ large, a shot at a potential franchise. The new film, Carter's debut as a feature director, adds even less, but it won't hurt the show's legacy, at least among die-hard fans who appreciated it as a wittily sustained pop take on what the historian Richard Hofstadter has called "the paranoid style in American politics." In the years since the show's demise, US politics has grown all the more paranoid, an observation that Carter — who throws out an easy laugh about US President George W. Bush to no real purpose — might have run with instead of stumbling in less interesting directions.

Film Notes

THE X-FILES:  
I WANT TO BELIEVE

DIRECTED BY: CHRIS CARTER

STARRING: DAVID DUCHOVNY (FOX MULDER), GILLIAN ANDERSON (DANA SCULLY), AMANDA PEET (DAKOTA WHITNEY), BILLY CONNOLLY (FATHER JOSEPH CRISSMAN), ALVIN (XZIBIT) JOINER (AGENT MOSLEY DRUMMY)

RUNNING TIME: 104 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

Crime does pay, for movie stars

*Is wealth, ill-gotten or not, the answer to everything? Yes, yes, yes! proclaims 'Mad Money'*

BY STEPHEN HOLDEN  
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK  
In the breezy, amoral heist comedy *Mad Money*, *Fun With Dick and Jane* meets *9 to 5* on the way to recession. If this uncomfortably timely movie lacks the political bite of the first and the cozy star chemistry of the second, it sputters to fitful life in the crooked grin of Diane Keaton, whose character, Bridget Cardigan, an upper-middle-class homemaker in suburban Kansas City, Missouri, develops an insatiable lust for larceny.

As in *Fun With Dick and Jane*, financial crisis inspires serious theft. No sooner has Don (Ted Danson), Bridget's husband, sprung the alarming news that he has been downsized from his cushy corporate job and is US\$286,000 in debt, than she springs into action.

Is there a place in the workforce for an upper-middle-class woman of a certain age with a degree in comparative literature and no job experience? Yes, if she accepts humiliating work as a janitor in the local Federal Reserve Bank. Surrounded by money in a high-security environment of surveillance cameras, checkpoints and employees subject to random searches, Bridget, while pushing a mop, becomes obsessed with getting her hands on some of the dough.

The lucre she craves is literally filthy. Every day carts of old bills are transported under lock and key to shredding machines. Since the money is going out of circulation, diverting some wouldn't really be theft, would it? That's how Bridget rationalizes her scheme, in which she enlists two handpicked co-conspirators to change the locks on the carts so they can grab some moola during its transit to the shredders. She airily calls it recycling.

Bridget initially decides to steal just enough to allow her family to get out of debt and not have to sell its fancy house. But just enough soon becomes more than enough, as she amasses a basement's worth of dirty money.

Bridget and her partners — Nina Brewster (Queen Latifah), a single mother raising two children, and Jackie Truman (Katie Holmes), a flibbertigibbet who lives in a trailer with her husband, Bob (Adam Rothenberg) — are a demographically oddball threesome calculated to appeal equally to the Woody Allen,

Oprah Winfrey and Jerry Springer crowds.

Having grabbed some loot without being caught, and deliriously toss it into the air. As the movie invites you to share their delight, you may feel a tad unclean. Is wealth, ill-gotten or not, the answer to everything? Yes, yes, yes! proclaims the movie, directed by Callie Khouri from a screenplay adapted by Glenn Gers from the British television film *Hot Money*.

The attachment to the project of Khouri, whose screenwriting debut, *Thelma and Louise*,

made her Hollywood's go-to gal for stories of empowered sisterhood, lends it a feminist credential. And because two of the film's women become their family's breadwinners, *Mad Money* is another fable of sisters doing it for themselves. Danson's stay-at-home husband becomes a reluctant collaborator who agrees to run a sham consulting business from the house as a cover story for their affluence.

The movie's weakest link is Holmes' underwritten Jackie, a one-note character who dances around the bank wearing headphones. While Bridget and Nina bond amiably (Nina is one of Latifah's meatier recent screen roles, which isn't saying much), Jackie registers as a ditsy afterthought. Nina is given a love interest in Barry (Roger Cross), a soft-hearted security guard who, spotting the signs of money stuffed under her shirt, remarks, "Unless you have very hard, rectangular breasts, we need to talk."

The film's other feminist predecessor is *9 to 5*, another movie in which three smart women defy the system. But in *Mad Money*, Glover (Stephen Root), the stubbornly doltish bank manager who thwarts investigators by insisting his security is unbreachable, isn't half as pungent a villain as the evil sexist boss in *9 to 5*.

This movie is awkwardly structured. Beginning with a scene of the thieves frantically disposing of their stolen cash by fire and flushed toilet as the feds close in, it jumps back three years, then periodically leaps ahead to show snippets of the women under police interrogation. The confusion is a sign that *Mad Money* doesn't trust its audience to stay seated until the caper is underway.

Film Notes

MAD MONEY

DIRECTED BY: CALLIE KHOURI

STARRING: DIANE KEATON (BRIDGET CARDIGAN), QUEEN LATIFAH (NINA BREWSTER), KATIE HOLMES (JACKIE TRUMAN), TED DANSON (DON CARDIGAN), ADAM ROTHENBERG (BOB TRUMAN), ROGER CROSS (BARRY), STEPHEN ROOT (GLOVER), CHRISTOPHER MCDONALD (BRYCE ARBOGAST), FINESSE MITCHELL (SHAUN)

RUNNING TIME: 104 MINUTES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY



PHOTO COURTESY OF GROUP POWER



Assembly features unfamiliar actors, all of whom turn in able performances.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DEEPLY PICTURE

Film Notes

ASSEMBLY (集結號)

DIRECTED BY: FENG XIAOGANG (馮小剛)

STARRING: ZHANG HANYU (張涵予) AS GU ZIDI, LIAO FAN (廖凡) AS JIAO DAPENG, WANG BAOQIANG (王寶強) AS JIANG MAOCAI, DENG CHAO (鄧超) AS ER DOU, YUAN WENKANG (袁文康) AS WANG JINCUN

RUNNING TIME: 124 MINUTES

LANGUAGE: IN MANDARIN WITH CHINESE AND ENGLISH SUBTITLES

TAIWAN RELEASE: TODAY

Whose historical truth is this?

BY HO YI  
STAFF REPORTER  
Noted for his popular comedies that satirize the enormous social changes China has undergone in the past decade, director Feng Xiaogang (馮小剛) tested his talents in the martial arts historical genre with the less-than-successful *Banquet* (夜宴) in 2006.

The director returns with *Assembly* (集結號), his first attempt at a wartime movie, which received rave reviews and became a blockbuster last year in China; an unexpected achievement as the film features an unfamiliar cast, except for Hu Jun (胡軍), who plays a small role.

A story about a People's Liberation Army veteran who survives the Japanese invasion, Chinese Civil War and Korean War, *Assembly* is likely to crack open the international market for the Chinese director with its masterful camera work, well-developed and moving story and appealing moral message.

The film's title refers to the bugle call used to order a retreat, which captain Gu Zidi (played by Zhang Hanyu (張涵予)) and his 47 men listen out for as

their PLA unit, ill-equipped and outnumbered, is sent to the front to delay the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) forces, in 1948.

The call never comes and Gu finds himself the sole survivor of the battle, who is unable to prove what happened. Wracked with guilt, the veteran carries on fighting through the Korean War. Against all odds, he survives.

When hostilities end, Gu returns to the battle site, now a coal mine, and tries to uncover evidence of the battle and the fate of his fallen comrades.

*Assembly* tackles universal themes rather than historical specifics, with PLA and KMT forces that resemble nothing like those taught in history lessons.

Stylistically similar to Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, the film eloquently shows the absurdity and follies of war through brutal realism and gory violence. For the first hour of the film, the terror on the battlefield creeps through the relentless camera work.

Audiences are pulled into the madness by witnessing mutilated arms and legs flying across the screen and torsos being dragged through pools of

blood and piles of corpses. There's nothing noble in the war depicted, nor is there patriotic fervor or triumphalism. The soldiers are not heroes but ordinary people gripped by fear and are blindly obedient. Love for their compatriots produces acts of bravery.

The film takes a more contemplative tone in its latter half when the action gives way to a human drama about the veteran Gu's fight for to have his dead comrades' sacrifice recognized by the authorities. To some viewers, the movie's true strength may be the examination of humanity the trauma and injustice of war.

The sugarcoted ending, however, is a letdown. The Communist authorities emerge as a benevolent, paternalistic force that grieves for and honors the country's fallen sons. Given China's strict control of the country's movie industry, that Feng stuck to the safe path comes as no surprise.

With *Assembly*, Feng not only sets a new benchmark for Chinese war movies, but has proven himself to be a talented blockbuster maker who excels in different genres.