The X-Files – I Want to Believe

Talent: David Duchovny, Gillian Anderson, Mitch Pileggi, Amanda Peet, Billy Connolly.

Director: Chris Carter
Duration: 104 minutes
Classification: M
We rate it: Two and a half stars.

The X-Files was of course a twentieth-century television phenomenon. From its beginnings in the early 1990s it became a true pop-culture goliath, with fan-sites all over the internet, an overwhelmingly vocal fan-base that helped to research and generate storylines, multiple adaptations into computer games, comic-books, fan literature and finally the inevitable big-screen, big-budget adaptation in 1998.

I can’t believe it was ten years ago that the first film was released (it seems like about six or seven, but there you go); the director of that first film, The X-Files – Fight the Future, was Rob Bowman, who was one of the show’s regular directors, and he made a good fist of the first big-screen adaptation.

Sadly, this time around, with the show’s creator Chris Carter taking co-writing and directing duties, The X-Files – I Want to Believe is a lacklustre effort, which ultimately comes off as a somewhat forgettable 104-minute episode that one might have watched once and then promptly forgotten about. For a fan of the show like me, this is very sad.

The plot has Mulder and Scully retired from the FBI, but called back into the fold to investigate a series of kidnappings of young women. A defrocked Catholic priest, played by (of all people) Billy Connolly, claims to have some kind of psychic connection with the victims, and seems to have been able to lead some of the FBI investigators to the sites of the kidnappings. Mulder (Duchovny), with his background in all things paranormal, is brought in to manage the more unconventional aspects of the case, while his old partner and now lover Scully (Anderson) is drafted in to handle the forensics.

With fans expecting a lot of the return pairing of these two fine actors, and of the film itself, the movie disappoints fairly quickly, as it enters tawdry and rather humdrum X-Files territory early on, with very little of the wise-cracking charisma of Mulder evident, and certainly no Little Green Men, Alien conspiracies, or high-level Government cover-ups.

These were the fundamental elements of the show that made it so enjoyable and addictive to its legions of fans, and without them being fore-grounded in this big-screen version, what we’re left with is a fairly routine (not to mention notably gory)
police-procedural thriller with some vaguely paranormal elements. The locations are suitable snowy and evocative, the FBI trappings are often reasonably suspenseful, and, as one would expect, the production values are superb. What makes it all so disappointing is that even with all of these elements at his disposal, Carter has managed to squander the opportunity to re-invigorate a television phenomenon by trailing the story off into murky and not-terribly-exciting horror/thriller territory. We remember the North by Northwest-style helicopter chase scene from the first movie; here we have nothing as exciting, with one routine chase scene executed in by-the-numbers fashion. We remember the superbly suspenseful bomb-blast opening from the first movie; here we get nasty kidnappings and people being held in rusty cages. We remember the star rapport from the first film, and here we see both actors more-or-less going through the motions, inhabiting their familiar characters without making their interactions zing with the enjoyable frisson we are all used to. It’s true that Chris Carter set a fairly high benchmark for himself by creating this show, but it is indeed sad to see that even he can’t step up to it anymore. With the underwhelming event that The X-Files – I Want to Believe has turned out to be, I doubt we’ll ever see a third X-Files movie, and that, in my opinion, is a real shame.

Nick Prescott