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PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: QUENTIN TARANTINO

A candid conversation with Hollywood's punk auteur about doing drugs, getting laid, the secrets of Pulp Fiction and how Kill Bill ended up as a two-parter

At first Quentin Tarantino wanted *Kill Bill* to be a small homage to samurai films, a modest vehicle for his *Pulp Fiction* star Uma Thurman. She would play the Bride, a sword-wielding assassin who rises from her deathbed to carve up hundreds of villains standing between her and the mysterious Bill.

Just as in a Tarantino movie, though, strange twists were in store. Somewhere between original concept and final production, *Kill Bill*, Tarantino's first feature in more than five years, became an epic. After nine months of shooting, a budget that surpassed \$50 million (compared with the \$8 million he spent on *Pulp Fiction*) and three hours of final footage, the decision was made to slice *Bill* into two freestanding movies that will hit theaters in quick succession. It's a risky, groundbreaking, in-your-face move, and that's exactly how the boy wonder of art-house violence likes it.

Tarantino forever will be known for *Pulp Fiction*. That gloriously bloody follow-up to *Reservoir Dogs* had far-reaching impact, way beyond winning Tarantino the *Palme d'Or* at Cannes and an Oscar for best screenplay and beyond making Tarantino the indie-film equivalent of a rock star who spawns a legion of imitators.

Pulp Fiction instantly turned John Travolta from a has-been into a \$20 million-a-picture superstar. More significantly, it transformed

Miramax from an art-house haven into a major studio. Tarantino's impact on Miramax has been so profound that studio chief Harvey Weinstein has likened it to Mickey Mouse's on Disney. Weinstein gives Tarantino more artistic freedom than just about any other Hollywood director. Who else but Tarantino could have gotten the notoriously tough Weinstein to say yes to casting the long-forgotten David Carradine as Bill in *Kill Bill*?

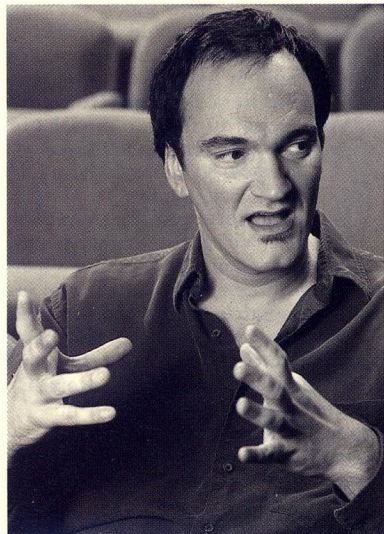
Born in Tennessee and raised in Torrance, California, Tarantino dropped out of school in the ninth grade. After jobs that included working as an usher in a porn theater, he got the equivalent of a film degree working behind the counter of a video-rental store in Manhattan Beach, California. He watched thousands of movies belonging to every imaginable genre before finding his own voice writing the films *True Romance*, *From Dusk Till Dawn* and *Natural Born Killers* and directing *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*.

Still, it has been six years since Tarantino followed *Pulp Fiction* with his critically and commercially disappointing *Elmore Leonard* novel adaptation, *Jackie Brown*. In the interim he's annoyed critics by starring in numerous films and a Broadway play, and he has become renowned for a series of high-profile celebrity brawls. It was clearly time to get back to work.

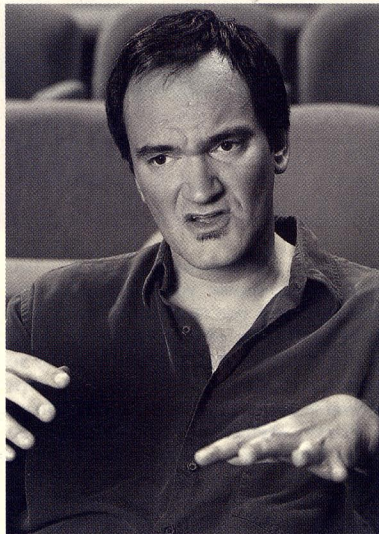
Kill Bill is based on Tarantino's first original screenplay since *Pulp Fiction*. He met with *Variety* columnist **Michael Fleming** on several nights in Hollywood, once coming from a screening of his favorite film, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, another time from the editing room where he was putting the finishing touches on a *Kill Bill* fight scene so huge it cost nearly as much as the entire budget for *Pulp Fiction*. Despite a bad-boy image, Tarantino was charming and disarming, no matter who interrupted him. He was even polite to a woman who tried to engage him in a long-winded discussion of numerology.

PLAYBOY: It has been six years since *Jackie Brown*. Why so long? The rumors were that you had writer's block and anxiety because you were doing your first original work since *Pulp Fiction*.

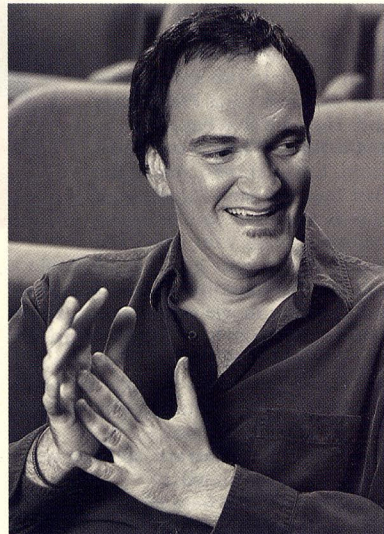
TARANTINO: I didn't have writer's block at all. I did so much writing in those six years, I'm hooked up for a while now. I wrote a big war film, and it was like a gigantic novel. I ended up writing about three war films in the course of writing one, *Inglorious Bastards*. I had no anxiety about writing *Kill Bill*, but I was precious about it. It wasn't like I was afraid to let the world see it. I just wanted it to be really good. It took me a year to write one big fight sequence in *Kill Bill*.



"The first time I went to the Great Wall of China it was like an all-night rave. They had rock bands, fireworks. We were smoking pot and doing E. It's a great way to see the wall for the first time."



"How much do I want to whip this guy's ass? He was a big black guy, and they're used to white guys backing down. I don't back down, especially to big black guys. That gives me a psychological advantage."



"When I started going on the film festival circuit, I was getting laid all the time. I went crazy for a little bit. There was a lot of making up for lost time. What handsome guys did in their 20s, I did in my 30s."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID ROSE

PLAYBOY: Orson Welles and Peter Bogdanovich also made groundbreaking films early on. They failed to measure up afterward and seemed shackled by people's expectations. Is that perilous?

TARANTINO: I love being shackled with expectations. I've never had a problem with that. I'm not trying to re-create the phenomenon of *Pulp Fiction*, but I intend to keep breaking ground. There is nothing about the success and recognition *Pulp Fiction* got that is bad or negative in any way. *Blade Runner* didn't get appreciated until 10 years later. That's how I thought my life was going to go. I didn't think I'd get such cause and effect—*bam!*—during the theatrical release of the movie.

PLAYBOY: What ground are you breaking with *Kill Bill*?

TARANTINO: I don't think that way. People will view it and filter it back to me. I've been having this conversation for some time, because as far as some people were concerned, *Reservoir Dogs* was as good as it was going to get. This poor, silly boy is trying to follow up *Reservoir Dogs*? If somebody had asked what ground was being broken in *Pulp Fiction*, I'd have said none. It's just what I wanted to see in a movie, what I thought would be cool. I'm not surprised when people are surprised. They haven't seen all the movies I have, and they're not prepared for all the jerking around of the senses. They're not as bored with movies as I am. I need to do those things to make the experience worthwhile.

PLAYBOY: This film was supposed to be a small movie before your big World War II film. Now *Kill Bill* is so big it has been split into two movies that cost six times what *Pulp Fiction* did. How did that happen?

TARANTINO: When Uma's husband, Ethan Hawke, read it the first time, he said, "Quentin, if this is the epic you're doing before you do your epic, I'm afraid to see your epic." It's become a full-on epic exploitation movie. Hopefully, it's the movie that every exploitation-movie lover has always wished for. It doesn't have the pretentiousness of a big movie epic. This is made for black theaters, for exploitation cinema that covers the entire globe.

PLAYBOY: Isn't it awkward, splitting a single movie into two parts?

TARANTINO: There were no obstacles. I've always designed movies to be malleable. For instance, I've always designed different versions for Asia and for America and Europe. I don't make movies for America; I make movies for the world.

In the last month of shooting, when Harvey Weinstein came to the set and

brought up the idea of splitting the movie into two parts, within an hour I had figured out how it would work. We shot two opening sequences, all kinds of stuff. This is my tribute to grind-house cinema, and something was bothering me about releasing a three-hour grind-house movie. It seemed pretentious, like an art film meditation on a grind-house movie. Two 90-minute movies coming out fairly rapidly, one after another—that's not pretentious, that's ambitious.

PLAYBOY: Will the abundance of blood in *Kill Bill* limit your audience?

TARANTINO: I like that it's violent as hell, but it's also fun as hell. It doesn't take place in this universe but in the movie universe these movies take place in. This

When I was a kid, I used to go into theaters when they didn't have the name of the movies on the ticket. I'm a theater-sneaker-inner from way back.

PLAYBOY: You conceived *Kill Bill* with Uma Thurman on the set of *Pulp Fiction*. Then she and Ethan Hawke conceived a child. You had to decide whether to wait or to replace her. Your long layoff must have left you tempted to find someone else.

TARANTINO: I definitely thought about it for two to three weeks. It was a decision I had to make.

PLAYBOY: Did she talk you out of it? This is her meatiest role since *Pulp Fiction*.

TARANTINO: Uma was so invested, so in love with this movie, it would have broken her heart if I'd gone with anybody else. At the same time, she didn't want to ruin my life. She was having her baby, and this was mine. She was going to let me decide. And I decided. It needed to be her. If you're Sergio Leone and you've got Eastwood in *A Fistful of Dollars* and he gets sick, you wait for him. If you're Josef von Sternberg doing *Morocco* and Marlene Dietrich breaks her leg, you wait.

PLAYBOY: Warren Beatty signed on to play Bill. He was replaced by David Carradine, which keeps alive your tradition of recycling forgotten actors such as John Travolta, Pam Grier and Robert Forster. Why didn't Warren make the film?

TARANTINO: He wanted to. Then, as it got a little closer, things changed. He thought it was a bit more of a commitment than I'd let on. Bill doesn't show up until almost the end, but Warren would have had to go through the three months of kung fu training that everyone else went through. He wasn't prepared for two months in L.A. and a month in China.

PLAYBOY: So he would have had to leave his family.

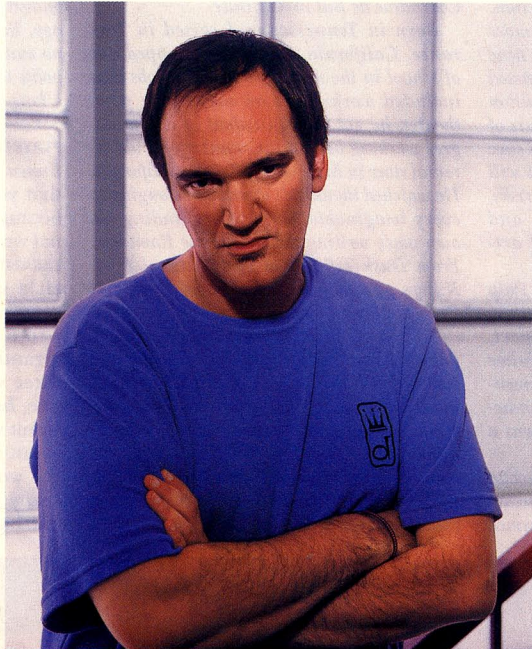
TARANTINO: Just like everybody else. Vivica Fox left her family, and she worked only a week and a half. She spent three months in training, including a month in Beijing, and her scene was shot here six months later. She didn't like it, but when that week and a half came, she kicked ass like you wouldn't believe. I needed that commitment.

PLAYBOY: Who thought of Carradine?

TARANTINO: Warren did. I'd thought of Carradine after reading his autobiography but never told anybody. Warren suggested him out of the blue, and I laughed. The minute he said that, that kind of became the deal.

PLAYBOY: David Carradine has a reputation for being somewhat eccentric.

TARANTINO: I'm a huge fan of his. Along with a few actors such as Jack Nicholson



You'll read about someone taking a swipe at you, making fun of your looks. Who needs that shit?

is a movie that knows it's a movie. You may like the movie, you may not like the movie. But if you're a movie lover and have good knowledge, you can't help but smile at this thing, because it's just so movie-mad obsessed. It makes its own universe out of all these different genres.

Harvey Weinstein was worried at one point that women would be turned off by the violence. I said, "Don't worry. They're going to love the movie. They'll be very empowered by it." I think 13-year-old girls will love *Kill Bill*. I want young girls to be able to see it. They're going to love Uma's character, the Bride. They have my permission to buy a ticket for another movie and sneak into *Kill Bill*. That's money I'm okay not making.

QUENTIN'S MAGIC TOUCH

Sometimes Tarantino saves a career, sometimes he doesn't

and Christopher Walken, David is one of the great mad geniuses of the acting community. There is also the aspect of having Gordon Liu, representing Hong Kong, Sonny Chiba, representing Japan, and David Carradine, star of *Kung Fu*, representing America—a literal round-up of the three countries that made martial arts the genre that it is.

PLAYBOY: What is it like for a young guy to be transformed overnight from a film geek into a rock star, as you were when *Pulp Fiction* came out?

TARANTINO: Let's make it clear that we're using the rock star thing because you brought it up.

PLAYBOY: Did your sudden fame change the way women regard you? Do rock star directors have groupies?

TARANTINO: Even before *Pulp Fiction* I started discovering how cool it is to be a director. When I started going on the film festival circuit, I was getting laid all the time. I'd never been out of the country before, and not only was I getting laid, I was getting laid by foreign chicks. When I wasn't getting laid I'd find myself making out with some Italian girl who was the spitting image of Michelle Pfeiffer.

PLAYBOY: Were these women you would dream about when you were a minimum-wage guy?

TARANTINO: No, it wasn't quite *Revenge of the Nerds*. I always really liked beautiful women and interesting women. I never walked around thinking I was this geek who could never get anybody. I never felt any girl was unattainable, as long as she got to know me. But when you spend most of your time renting videos at the Video Archives, it's hard to meet girls unless you're in a situation where they're around. The entire time I was at the video store, my only dates were with customers. Other than that, I'd hang out with my dateless friends and go to movies.

The minute I started working at places where I had more natural contact with women, it became a whole different story. I felt like Elvis when I was meeting girls on the festival circuit. I went crazy for a little bit—a lot of making out. I love kissing. I'm a good kisser.

PLAYBOY: What about foot massages, the kind you popularized in *Pulp Fiction*?

TARANTINO: I've been known to give a good foot massage. But with *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* it just went off the hook. There was a lot of making up for lost time. What handsome guys did in their 20s, I did in my 30s. When you become famous, it's cool. I can go by myself into a bar I've never been in before, and in no time I'll have a couple girls around me, if not more. I usually go home with a couple phone numbers, and I'm not asking for them. If I go into a strip club now and play my cards right, I can take one of the strippers home. If I go to get a lap dance when it's close to the end of the night, when they're getting ready to close up, and the girl knows who I am, she'll



HOT

JOHN TRAVOLTA/*Pulp Fiction*

Before QT: The ultimate fallen idol couldn't get arrested in early-1990s Hollywood—even though those talking-baby flicks were a capital offense. **After QT:** In one masterstroke, Tarantino gave Vinnie B. an Oscar-nominated, \$20 million comeback. But now he's fading again. Is more QT help on the way?



SAMUEL L. JACKSON/*Pulp Fiction*

Before QT: Jackson spent years doing bits in everything from *The Exorcist III* to *Goodfellas*. **After QT:** As a deadly cool, Bible-spouting hit man he won an Oscar nomination and instant stardom. Now he's rich and famous enough to waste his brilliance on crap like *XXX* and turgid *Star Wars* sequels.



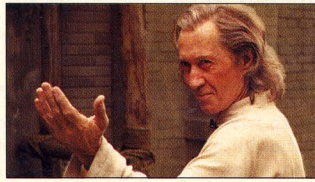
UMA THURMAN/*Pulp Fiction*

Before QT: When Quentin met Uma, she was best known for artsy dud's like *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*. **Pulp's** hype to the heart sent her to the A-list. **After QT:** Tarantino wrote *Kill Bill* for Uma, then stuck with her during baby delays. Will it karate-kick her into high gear or send her back to Cultville?



BRIDGET FONDA/*Jackie Brown*

Before QT: Fonda had made more than 30 movies without a real hit. Tarantino shrewdly cast her as a drugged-out, TV-addicted surfer bunny. Fonda scored, but the movie didn't. **After QT:** She was even better as the scary wife in *A Simple Plan*, which flopped, as did *Monkeybone*. Curse, anyone?



DAVID CARRADINE/*Kill Bill*

Before QT: Some count Tarantino's casting of the spooky dude from the old *Kung Fu* TV show as his biggest gamble yet, especially since he seemed to have disappeared for years. **After QT:** Sure, Tarantino's faith in Carradine could blow up in his face like a trick cigar, but our dough's on the thin man.



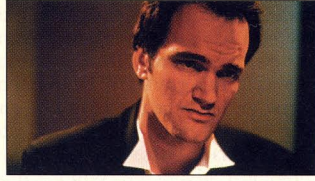
CHRIS PENN/*Reservoir Dogs*

Before QT: Sean's little brother worked with such big-timers as Coppola (*Rumble Fish*) and Eastwood (*Pale Rider*) but never caught fire. Tarantino exploited his mopey surliness as a mob boss's son. **After QT:** *Beethoven's 2nd*? *Corky Romano*? Clearly, Tarantino's magic doesn't always work.



PAM GRIER/*Jackie Brown*

Before QT: Blaxploitation's gunslinger goddess scorched the psyche of 1970s fan Tarantino. But director worship of a 40-something cult star doth not a hit make. **After QT:** She's been stuck trifling with Snoop Dogg in *Bones* and Eddie Murphy in *Pluto Nash* when she ought to be making those fools her bitches.



QUENTIN TARANTINO/*Kill Bill*

Before QT: No one's worked harder to turn Quentin Tarantino into a movie star than Quentin Tarantino. He's stuck himself in everything he's directed thus far and has even managed to get a few of his director buddies to follow suit. **After QT:** As an actor he's a great director. —STEPHEN REBELLO

WARM

COLD

probably ask if I want to go out for coffee. **PLAYBOY:** What was the biggest surprise about the women?

TARRANTINO: One thing I wasn't expecting—I really got a kick out of it—was getting really sexy fan mail.

PLAYBOY: Do you mean nude pictures?

TARRANTINO: I never really got nude pictures. I would get girls who have really big crushes on me writing about that, whether they're 12 or 13 or 25. I also got sex letters, and those were pretty cool. The girls had done some thinking about my sexuality. Some of the pictures and letters were brilliant.

PLAYBOY: Highlights, please.

TARRANTINO: One girl sent me a can of tennis balls, with a picture and a note that said, "Now you've got the balls, give me a call."

PLAYBOY: Did you call?

TARRANTINO: I did, but she was in St. Louis, and I wasn't going to travel. I followed up on a few of the letters. One girl, I'll never forget her. I don't think I called her; I was afraid she was a little too young. In her picture, she could have been 20, or she could have been 15. She was a young black girl. I was doing *From Dusk Till Dawn* with George Clooney. After I read the letter, I went banging on his trailer. I went in and read it to him, and he was like, "Whoa!"

PLAYBOY: He gets good letters too.

TARRANTINO: We had a good time reading each other our sex mail. This one was so imaginative. First she's telling me what movies she'd like to watch with me, talking like a cool film-geek kind of girl, and then she starts getting into dirty stuff. She mentions kissing for hours. Then she writes, "I want to dress you in a French maid outfit, and while I sit in a chair in a garter belt and panties, smoking a cigarette, I'll make you pick up every piece of lint off the carpet. And I'm not going to be easy about it! You're going to have to get right down on your hands and knees, and I want that carpet completely clean as I smoke cigarettes."

PLAYBOY: You spent four months in China shooting *Kill Bill*. How does a guy entertain himself in a communist country?

TARRANTINO: The nightlife in China is off the hook. If you've ever seen Sixth Street in Austin, Texas, that street with all the bars, well, they've got five streets like that in Beijing, and the bars are open all night. We worked six-day weeks in China and did a lot of partying on our day off. When we finished shooting, we would go out. We were up all night on Saturdays, and we would sleep all day on Sunday. China is the ecstasy capital of the world right now. They have E there that's beyond acid. It's wild. We had a good goddamn time in China.

PLAYBOY: You did ecstasy?

TARRANTINO: Yes. The first time I went to the Great Wall of China it was like an all-night rave. They had rock bands, fireworks. We were smoking pot and doing

E. It was great. Me and a bunch of the crew partied like rock stars all night. It's a great way to see the wall the first time.

PLAYBOY: You write about bad guys who navigate through the worst trouble imaginable. What's the worst situation you've had to get out of? Was it the time you spent in jail?

TARRANTINO: I went to the county jail three different times, all for traffic stuff. I was in my 20s and broke, barely making \$8,000 a year. If I got caught for traffic stuff, I had to do the days because I couldn't pay. When your car's outlawed and you have no insurance, if you get a ticket you can't fix it. You just do the days and try not to get caught again for a while.

PLAYBOY: You pummeled a producer of *Natural Born Killers* at a Hollywood restaurant and scrapped in a New York City bar with a guy who objected to the way you refer to blacks in your movies. Do you have too quick a temper?

TARRANTINO: I don't think I have a quick temper. I can get into a discussion, and that argument can get heated. I'm not going to take it to a violent place, because I know there is no limit to where I

"Boom! I punched him. The bouncers grabbed me, and then the guy tried to bite me in my breast. He took a big bite out of me, right by my nipple. What an asshole."

could go with that. Depending on how thick the shit gets, I'll go all the way if I need to. I don't want to. Life will be a lot easier if I don't. I can get really mad at somebody, but I'm never afraid that I'll hit them or step over that line. But the minute they do, I'm all there.

PLAYBOY: When was the last time you got into a physical altercation?

TARRANTINO: Well, for a while it was happening a lot. There was a third incident that nobody knew about, with a cabdriver. I was with a girl, and he was really rude. I got into an argument with him. We were yelling at each other, and he said something about her. I went around the side of the cab and beat him up. Bouncers from a club pulled me off him, and he drove away. Those two other things had just happened, and I remember thinking, Is this worth \$30,000, the amount I'll have to pay when this guy figures out who I am? How much do I want to whip this guy's ass? He was a big black guy, and they're used to white guys backing down. I don't back down, especially to big black guys. That gives me a psychological advantage. When I don't back down, they have to stop and think,

Why didn't he back down? He came out of the car and said, "Come on, mother-fucker!" Right then the \$30,000 went out of my head, and all I was thinking was, I'm going to get my money's worth.

PLAYBOY: Did you?

TARRANTINO: I did. *Boom!* I punched him. The bouncers grabbed me, and then the guy tried to bite me in my breast. He took a big bite out of me, right by my nipple. What a fucking asshole!

PLAYBOY: Talk about a plot twist. You probably never expected to get milked.

TARRANTINO: The only reason he didn't really fuck me up was he was too greedy. He took too big a bite. Had he taken a small bite, I might not have a nipple now. He barely broke the skin because he had too much flesh in his mouth.

PLAYBOY: Did it cost you \$30,000?

TARRANTINO: No, I did something smart. I said to myself, I'm not going to call my publicist; I'm not telling anybody. I didn't want to release it into the atmosphere, figuring I had about five days before he figured out who I was. It wasn't till two months later that I told friends I'd gotten into this fight.

PLAYBOY: Fighting lends to your mystique. Why are people so intrigued by you?

TARRANTINO: Two things. They are digging on my movies. Maybe I turned them on to movies they'd never seen before. Then there's my personal American-dream story that maybe they saw me tell on *The Tonight Show* or read in interviews. I'm open, and what you see is what you get. That is something that made me sick of the media for a bit, because it seemed like they were making fun of me for being me. That sounds like some poor-baby thing, but once you're an adult, people don't make fun of you anymore—not to your face.

PLAYBOY: You become a caricature.

TARRANTINO: You'll read about someone taking a swipe, making fun of your looks—my hair, my jaw or the way I talk. I've gotten over it, but it hurt my feelings. I wasn't expecting that. Who needs that shit? I didn't want to go through that shit in high school; that's why I dropped out. You think, They're always complaining about everybody being so guarded. I'm not guarded, and I'm paying for it. I'm over it now, though.

PLAYBOY: For both *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* you were accused of borrowing elements from obscure Hong Kong films. Tell us the influences that went into *Pulp Fiction*. The scene in which Bruce Willis and Ving Rhames are brawling, fall into a pawnshop and end up captured by redneck homosexual rapists, where did that come from?

TARRANTINO: I don't know exactly how those things happen. I'm about not getting too analytical beforehand and just letting stories take the turns they take.

PLAYBOY: You could compare that pawnshop scene to John Boorman's *Deliverance*,
(continued on page 140)

TARANTINO

(continued from page 62)

if only for the homosexual rape.

TARANTINO: Roger Avary came up with the idea. He'd written a whole script for a movie. I didn't want to do the whole thing, only one section that fit into *Pulp Fiction*. I bought that script the way you'd buy a book to make into a movie, just to adapt the part that I liked. That was the scene when the boxer throws the fight and gets chased down by the other guy and they end up in a pawnshop with two guys who are serial killers.

PLAYBOY: Did the "Wake the gimp" sequence come from Avary?

TARANTINO: The gimp and the whole anal-rape torture sequence were his ideas. I wanted to do it because it was a flip reworking of something that was a big deal in *Deliverance*. This crazy, anal-sex rape was so out of nowhere that I thought it was funny. I thought, Wow, he's made anal rape really funny.

PLAYBOY: Finally.

TARANTINO: We were worried about getting an X rating. Right around that time, *American Me* came out, and it had three anal rapes. It helped our cause.

PLAYBOY: Ned Beatty has been permanently linked with being raped in *Deliverance*. Was it tough to get Rhames to play the mob boss who gets sodomized by rednecks?

TARANTINO: It was a stumbling point for almost all the black male actors I talked to. It's very hard to talk a black man into doing anything where he's being raped. It wasn't even a matter of how much to show but rather, if the audience sees that, will they ever not see that? But I'd

written it with Ving in mind. I'd always heard his voice saying that dialogue. The words trickle off Ving's tongue because I wrote it for his cadence. He came in, did his audition, and he was just magnificent. Then came the time to have the conversation. I was thinking, Please, let him not have as much of a problem as everybody else, because he's just so good. Ving sensed this and said, "Let me ask you, how explicit is this shit gonna get?" I said, "It's not going to be that bad, but you're going to know what's going on. Do you have a problem with that?" He says, "Not only do I not have a problem, you have to understand that because of the way I am, I don't get offered many vulnerable characters. This man might end up being the most vulnerable motherfucker I will ever play."

PLAYBOY: So he was game.

TARANTINO: Ving was a man of his word, but there was one sequence with Duane Whitaker, who plays Maynard, one of the guys who's fucking him in the movie. I wanted this wild, "yee haw!" kind of anal-rape thing. Ving says, "Okay, so we're going to see his butt, right? Well, what's going to be down there to protect that?" I say, "You won't see anything." And he says, "I'm not talking about what you're going to show. I don't care if it's on camera, in focus or not. I don't want dick touching anus. What are you going to put down there?" It's Duane, Ving and me, and this prop guy brings in this turquoise velvet bag that you put diamonds in. We burst out laughing, and Ving says, "Duane, you just put your dick in this little bag and I'll be okay."

PLAYBOY: You've said of *Jackie Brown* that you most identified with Sam Jackson's

badass gun-runner character, Ordell Robbie. Is there a bit of badass in you?

TARANTINO: People misunderstood what I said about Ordell. I'm a method writer. I become one or two characters when I'm writing. When I was doing *Kill Bill*, I was the Bride. People noticed that when I was writing, I was getting much more feminine in my outlook. All of a sudden I was buying things for my apartment or house. I'd see something cool in a shop in Greenwich Village, and I'd buy it. An item could jump off a shelf at me, through a window. I'd have to buy it, take it home and try it out. I'd buy flowers for the house and start arranging them. I don't normally wear jewelry, and suddenly I'm wearing jewelry. My friends said, "You're getting in touch with your feminine side. You're nesting, adorning yourself."

In the case of *Jackie Brown*, the character I assimilated was Ordell. I walked around like Ordell that whole year. I'd leave the house as Ordell. When I stopped writing, I had to let go and let Sam Jackson take over.

PLAYBOY: You clashed with Oliver Stone at his peak when he vastly changed your script for *Natural Born Killers*. Why did you hate the film so much?

TARANTINO: I'd never really seen the movie from beginning to end. I watched it only in bits and pieces, out of defiance at first. Then I actually went to the movies to see it.

PLAYBOY: And you walked out?

TARANTINO: Yes. I just hated that whole Rodney Dangerfield sequence so much. It was so unfunny, so disgusting. It did the number one thing I would never do: It came up with a little peanut psychological origin for why these people were the way they were. I rejected that in every way, and then that awful scene gives you a little pop psychology analysis.

PLAYBOY: It was modeled like a sitcom, with a laugh track, and it made clear that Dangerfield's character had molested his daughter.

TARANTINO: I had my name taken off the script just so people wouldn't think I had written that.

PLAYBOY: You sparred with Spike Lee over your liberal use of the word *nigger* in your films. Did that feud also go by the wayside?

TARANTINO: It didn't go by the wayside per se. Spike and I bumped into each other once after all that crap was over, and I was all set to kick his ass.

PLAYBOY: Why?

TARANTINO: Because he'd been talking all this shit instead of talking to me about it. My biggest problem with Spike was the completely self-serving aspect of his argument. He attacked me to keep his "Jesse Jackson of cinema" status. Basically, for a little bit of time before I came along, you had to get Spike Lee's benediction and approval if you were white and dealing with black stuff in a movie. Fuck that. This destroyed that, and he's



"Yes. They're darling together, but it'll never last. She's a confirmed comparison shopper."

never had that position again. I wasn't looking for his approval, and so he was taking me on to keep his status. I hated it, because a celebrity feud is one of the most tasteless, trite, trivial things somebody in my position can engage in, to be drawn into something so beneath you.

PLAYBOY: Do you think some of his arguments had merit?

TARRANTINO: It's funny, because he talks in these grandiose terms, but as much of a loudmouth as he can be, the press doesn't really listen to what he says. They print his tone. If you boiled down what he was saying, it wasn't that I didn't have the right to say "nigger" as many times as I did. It was why do I have the right to say "nigger" 37 times, but he doesn't have the right to say "kike" 37 times? That is really what he was saying.

PLAYBOY: He did get flack for using two stereotypical Jewish characters in *Mo' Better Blues*.

TARRANTINO: The words *nigger* and *kike* are not the same word. *Kike* is not common parlance among Jews. The other word has maybe 12 different meanings, depending on the context it's spoken in, who is saying it and the way he's saying it. So to equate *nigger* with *kike* does not take into account the way the English language works today. And I am working with the English language.

I am not just a film director who shoots movies. I'm an artist, and good, bad or indifferent, I'm coming from that place. All my choices, the way I live my life, are about that. He came back with, "Quentin isn't any more of an artist than Michael Jackson is, and when Michael said 'Jew me' in a song, they made him change it." It was almost worth the whole damn thing to hear him say that.

PLAYBOY: Rate yourself from one to 10 on your level of skill as a writer, as a director and as an actor.

TARRANTINO: Wow, you're nailing me down here. Look, I don't want to rate myself with numbers. If I say 10, I'm being a jerk, and if I don't say 10, I'm being a liar [laughs]. I'll answer the question, just not by your scale. As far as acting is concerned, I think I could be a great actor. If I got a chance to do more characters and get more time into it, I could be a really good character actor. People have been really tough on me.

PLAYBOY: Why?

TARRANTINO: Probably because they didn't realize how serious I was about it, and film critics didn't want it. One critic told me exactly as much. I was this great white hope, a young auteur, and they didn't want me to divide my focus. They wanted me sitting in a room, coming up with the next thing they can watch. "Why aren't you saving cinema from itself?"

PLAYBOY: George Clooney and your *Reservoir Dogs* cast mates Tim Roth and Steve Buscemi directed films and were roundly applauded for stretching. Double standard?

TARRANTINO: Thank you for noticing, because it hasn't been lost on me. I actually confronted Roger Ebert after he named this movie I did years ago, *Somebody to Love*, as some kind of booby prize on his show. It was released way after the fact, and I'm in it for two seconds. Buscemi directs *Trees Lounge* and gets the door prize for directing and stretching his talents. The booby prize went to me for daring to act in a movie. Why is it okay for him to stretch his talent and not me?

PLAYBOY: You started acting as an Elvis impersonator on *The Golden Girls*. What was it like, being near Bea Arthur with stars in your eyes?

TARRANTINO: The job lasted two days, and what was fantastic was how much money I made. That was when I had no money whatsoever. All of a sudden I made \$700 in a lump sum. You get it again when it's repeated. They liked that bit so much they put it in a "Best of the Golden Girls" episode. I got paid \$700 for that. And then the show was in tremendous repeat mode, on NBC and in syndication. I had two episodes in repeat rotation and ended up making \$2,500. Just when I was flat broke, a check would come in for \$150, then \$75, then \$95. I got a check the other day for 85 cents.

PLAYBOY: How was your Elvis?

TARRANTINO: I was the best of the bunch. The others were all the Vegas Elvis. I was the Sun Records Elvis, the hillbilly cat.

PLAYBOY: This was your first big acting job after quitting school. How did you negotiate that exit?

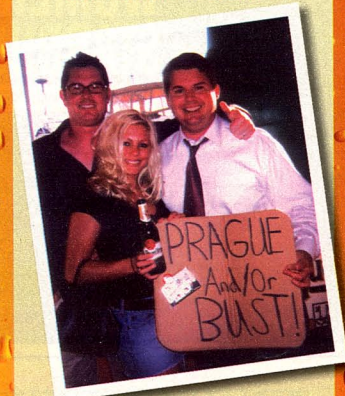
TARRANTINO: My mom and I have different recollections. I had ditched school for about three weeks, so I was in this weird phase when I couldn't go back because I'd get busted. I went back, and I got busted. Me and my mom were arguing, and in the heat of it I said, "Well, I want to quit anyway." She said, "You're not going to quit." I thought that was that. A week later, she was putting on makeup in the bathroom, getting ready for work. She said, "About your quitting school, I've thought about it, and I'm going to let you quit. But you have to go out and get a job." I was gob-smacked. I thought, Doesn't she realize I was bluffing? So I quit.

PLAYBOY: You dated Mira Sorvino, a Harvard grad, and you didn't go near college. Do you ever regret dropping out?

TARRANTINO: No, there's a slight pride in quitting junior high and achieving what I have. It makes me look a little bit smarter. When I tell somebody that, they're genuinely impressed. I'm not very enamored with the American public school system. I hated school so much, I dropped out in ninth grade. I never went to high school. There's a cool cachet about it now. My only regret—and it's not even a big regret—is that I hated school so much I thought that's what it was going to be like forever. I didn't realize college would be



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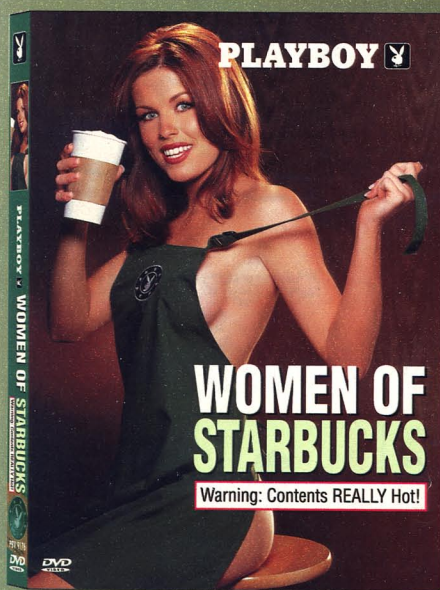
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different. So if I had to do it all over I probably would stay in school so I could have my college experience. I'm sure I would have had a ball.

PLAYBOY: Your mom raised you without your biological father. *Premiere* magazine trotted him out after you became famous. Was that unfair?

TARRANTINO: That really bothered me for a long time. It was one of those crappy by-products of fame. I've never met him and don't have any desire to. He's not my father. Just because you fucked my mom doesn't make you my father. The only thing I've got to say to him is "Thanks for the fucking sperm." He had 30 years to look me up, and he tries after I'm famous? It was sad. For a while, when I was going by that name and he didn't look me up, I thought, Well, that's cool of him. He's showing some class. Stay the fuck out of the picture. But that limelight is a little hard for people to turn down.

PLAYBOY: We can't leave without asking the one question you always refuse to answer. What's glowing inside that briefcase in *Pulp Fiction*? And for that matter, what happens when Mr. Pink runs off after the shootout in *Reservoir Dogs*?

TARRANTINO: I'll never explain what was in that briefcase—not to be a prick but because people come up with their own explanations, and that is the explanation. Same with Mr. Pink.

I once said this as a dig to Oliver Stone, but I don't really mean it as a dig anymore. When Oliver Stone does his movies, he has a big idea he wants to get across, and he wants everyone to leave the theater with that idea. They can reject the idea, but they'd better get it or he'll think he didn't do his job. I want to do a whole lot of work for you, but I want to leave 10, maybe even 20 percent for you to imagine so the movie is really yours. You have a version. Stuff that's open for interpretation, I want your interpretation. The minute I tell you what I think, you'll throw away whatever you've come up with in your head. You can't help it. I would too. You'd feel like a fool.

So you tell me what's in the briefcase. If you think it's Marsellus's soul and he's bought it back from the devil, which is one guess I've heard, well, you are right: It's his soul. That I actually did a movie that can inspire such wildly imaginative readings makes me proud.

It's funny where a throwaway line can lead you. You know what my favorite line is in the pawnshop scene in *Pulp Fiction*? Holly Hunter noticed it. It comes when they're deciding who they're going to fuck first. They choose Marsellus, and it's "You want to do it here?" The other guy says, "No, let's take him into Russell's old room." You're left thinking, Who the fuck is Russell and how did it become his old room? I'll leave you guessing on that one, too.

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