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KILL BILL

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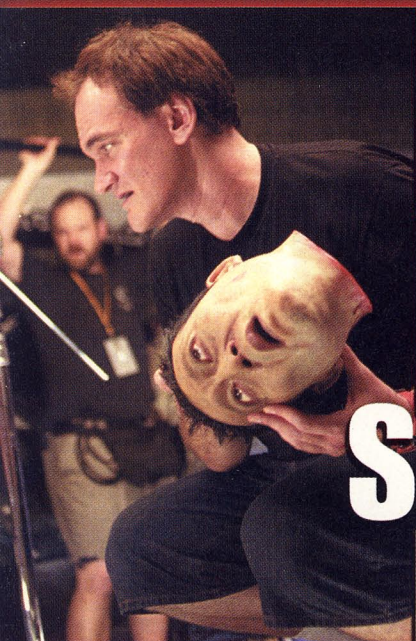
Once Tarantino gets an idea in his head, he doesn't rest until he realizes it perfectly on screen.

Quentin Tarantino

Asian action leaps out of the films within Quentin Tarantino films and into the foreground of *Kill Bill*.

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KILL BILL Samurai Fiction

creates the ultimate paean to grindhouse cinema.

By ANTHONY TIMPONE

Sure, he may have starlets on his arms, hang with the Hollywood elite and take home the Oscar, but Quentin Tarantino will always be a big fanboy at heart. How else would you explain his casting of drive-in and B-movie heroes Pam Grier, Robert Forster, Fred Williamson, Michael Parks and Dick Miller in his previous films? Or rereleasing cult staples such as *The Beyond* and *Mighty Peking Man* via his Rolling Thunder label?

With *Kill Bill*, the writer/director has fashioned what may be the crowning achievement in retro-'70s schlock cinema, combining elements of kung fu, samurai swordplay, Sergio Leone-style Westerns, Japanese anime and even Italian gialli into a package unlike anything ever seen before. It's a package so huge that he's dividing it up into separate films, Volume One (due October 3) and Volume Two (set for release three to six months later).

Tarantino specifically sought out Fango to promote his bloody, multimillion-dollar epic, preferring to rap with the genre crowd rather than some highbrow critic. That's because he remains a horror geek at heart, and he made



Uma goodness!
This time, the actress overdoses on mayhem in her latest collaboration with the director.

Bill Photos: Andrew Cooper/Copyright ©2003 Miramax

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So, does this effect add one or two to *Kill Bill's* epic body count?

Kill Bill for those just like him. The day after he delivered his picture, Tarantino spoke with Fango. As he describes *Kill Bill* in frenzied tones, he frequently has to gulp for air. His excited descriptions remind one of the old huckster voiceover guys, like Adolph Caesar, narrating the trailer for *Dawn of the Dead* or *Master of the Flying Guillotine*. His grueling, globe-spanning production has not worn Tarantino down a bit, and he's ready for *Kill Bill* to be discovered at a flea pit near you.

FANGORIA: I was surprised that Miramax called me asking if we'd want to interview you for *Kill Bill*. They don't even come to us with their horror films. Was this your idea?

QUENTIN TARANTINO: I totally mentioned it to them. I said, "This is a genre movie extraordinaire, so we have to hit the genre mags." Other filmmakers were reading *American Cinematographer* and *American Film* growing up, I was reading FANGORIA [laughs]. I was reading Fango and *Film Comment* because that has always been my thing—art films, horror movies and genre flicks.

FANG: Tell me about the story.

TARANTINO: The Bride, Uma Thurman, works for Bill, played by David Carradine. Bill is the world's greatest assassin, this Fu Manchu character, a great evil corrupter with all the money and power. He has a team made up of six, the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad. The Bride splits, gets pregnant and is getting married.

But they track her down on her wedding day, kill everyone in the chapel and shoot the Bride in the head, putting her in a coma for four years. Then she wakes up and she makes those bastards wish they never did what they did. She goes down the list killing them all.

FANG: How will *Kill Bill* appeal to Fango readers?

TARANTINO: Well, it's kinda cool. Let me give you an example:

When I did *Reservoir Dogs*, they sent me to all the horror film festivals, like Sitges, and I said, "I'm happy to go, but why are they inviting me?" They said, "Well, because the movie is pretty horrible and it drives people crazy in the same way that a horror film does." [Laughs] People were watching Peter Jackson's *Dead Alive* and not leaving, just laughing and having a good time. Then we showed *Reservoir Dogs* and 30 people left [laughs] because they can't handle it. So I guess that's considered the same audience base.

FANG: Is *Kill Bill* the ultimate Quentin Tarantino fanboy project?

TARANTINO: Oh, very much so! This is my full-on, all-out tribute to grindhouse cinema! The New York 42nd Street stuff. Fans on the Internet say, "I've only seen grindhouse movies on DVD and on video. I've never had the theatrical grindhouse experience. I can't wait for *Kill Bill* to come out to actually see one on the big screen." And I'm reading and I go, "You're not gonna quite get that; you need to be in a theater that smells like cat piss, be a little scared for your life, there should be a few rats in there, graffiti on the screen and

three of the four speakers should be blown out [laughs]. That's the grindhouse experience."

But, yeah, *Kill Bill* is totally that in every way, with all the different genres we're blending together and the different styles we're working with. And then, to top it off, with all the cool actors I grew up with, to have them in a Hollywood movie! It's the three kings of '70s martial arts from all three different countries. Gordon Liu from Hong Kong, David Carradine from America and Sonny Chiba from Japan. And it just doesn't get better than that! Sonny is fantastic in *Kill Bill*. Just

directing him, it's like, "My God, I'm directing Sonny Chiba!" And this is in my movie. I'm directing Gordon Liu in his *Pai Mei* get-up, the evil white-haired priest, and I'm like, "Oh my God, that's the man, and he's in my movie!" We've got a scene where David Carradine is playing the flute, and I'm like, "Oh my God, that's my movie!"

FANG: So the film combines your passion for both the Shaw Brothers Hong Kong flicks and Japanese samurai films?

TARANTINO: Well, it's even more than that; it's a total mix between the two movies, *Volumes One* and *Two*. My joke is: Uma is out for revenge and she has this list, called the deathlist five, and it's the five people she's gonna kill, working her way down to Bill.

And every name on that list represents a different subgenre of grindhouse movies. So she's fighting her way through 42nd Street's grindhouse cinemas to get to everybody. So



Since he's already used "Stuck in the Middle With You," look for Tarantino to back this scene with different vintage music.

this just hits all my passions. You've got Shaw Brothers kung-fu films, Japanese samurai movies, anime, a spaghetti Western aspect and there's even Italian giallo in there. FANG: Tell me about the giallo scene.

TARANTINO: There's this cool sequence that takes place in the hospital when Uma's in a coma. The Daryl Hannah character dresses up as a nurse and comes in to kill her by giving her a fatal injection. Later, Uma's character is buried alive, and I was totally thinking of Lucio Fulci the entire time we were doing that. She gets put in a coffin and buried alive. I thought of *The Psychic* when Jennifer O'Neill is bricked up in that wall or when Catriona MacColl is in the grave in *Gates of Hell*. Even the script reads, "Graveyard straight out of a Lucio Fulci horror film."

Also, I'm using RZA of Wu-Tang Clan to help me come up with a soundtrack that will include a few new pieces of music, but mostly a lot of bits of old soundtrack albums. I'm just taking cuts from different albums and movies that I like and using their pieces of music in *Kill Bill*. So it's this Greatest Hits of all these fantastic composers. You've got

phers, most of them sit in chairs by the monitor while these guys are directing stuff. I was directing the movie, shooting it. I don't watch monitors. Yuen Woo-Ping and I choreographed all the fight scenes together. It was great. One of the things that people are gonna see different in this movie as opposed to a normal action film [is that there's] no 2nd-unit director. I'm directing it. If it's in the movie, I directed it. I said "action" and "cut," I set up the shot. It's like when you go to these James Bond movies and they have three directors. I never understood this [notion of] doing an action movie and letting someone else do the action scenes, while you're directing the exposition. That's like having sex and letting somebody else have the orgasm.

FANG: Once you got past initial setbacks, Thurman's pregnancy and Warren Beatty turning down Bill, was it smooth sailing?

TARANTINO: It was smooth sailing as far as, you know, we all had a good time making it, but it was hands down the most difficult thing I've ever done in my life. This movie was climbing Mt. Everest and I'm still climbing it; it's not like I'm up on the top or going

while we were shooting, in the last month, [Miramax boss] Harvey Weinstein came on the set and said, "You know, Quentin, I don't want you to have to cut anything out of this movie. What about releasing it as two parts?" And within an hour, I figured it all out.

One of my favorite epics of all time is Richard Lester's *The Three and Four Musketeers*. That's a great movie. And that's exactly what they did on that. When I saw *The Three Musketeers*, I didn't even know there was gonna be a *Four Musketeers*, but at the end of that movie you saw some scenes from *The Four Musketeers*, and I thought, "Oh my God! There's more? Great!" And when they came out on video, I took both tapes and I cut off the closing credits of the first one and the opening credits of the second and put them together. So for *Kill Bill*, fans will be doing the same thing for the next 20 years.

Plus, there was something about doing a three-hour grindhouse film that seemed pretentious. It smacks of some art-film meditation on a grindhouse movie, whereas coming out with two kick-ass 90-minute movies, well, that's not pretentious, that's ambitious.

That works, that's right, that's how it should be. And after we got through the first one, I decided we needed to split it up, because it's almost too intense to watch them both together. The first movie ends with this big one [person]-against-100 fight as Uma's character goes up against Lucy Liu's character. She's the queen of the Tokyo underworld and has a whole army of guys called the Crazy 88. After that big fight, you wanna go home! You can't handle a whole other movie.



Beyond the swordplay and bloodshed, *Kill Bill* also pays homage to the widescreen days of Shawscope.

Bernard Herrmann next to Quincy Jones, next to Isaac Hayes, next to Ennio Morricone, next to Riz Ortolani, all the way down the line. And, for instance, my Italian giallo scene has Herrmann's theme from *Twisted Nerve* in there right alongside that tune that they play all throughout *The Psychic*.

We also have about eight or so minutes of Japanese anime in *Volume One*. It's the whole origin of Lucy Liu's character, O-Ren Ishi, when she was a little girl. We did it with Production IG, the company that did *Ghost in the Shell* and *Blood: The Last Vampire*. It wasn't like I just turned it over to them, either. I wrote out a detailed script, shot for shot, and then I walked them all through it, acted it all out. There is anime in *Volume Two* as well.

FANG: You were one of the first people to champion Asian action cinema. Now Hollywood has co-opted the HK aesthetic, from choreography to hiring the top Asian actors and directors. Was it difficult to make *Kill Bill* fresh and exciting?

TARANTINO: Oh no, my take is that I'm not doing it the way anyone else is doing it. My take is always my own thing, and no one's done my thing before. Also, when these American directors hire Asian choreogra-

back down. No, we're still on the mountain, climbing. But it was very difficult! We shot for 155 days, about 30 weeks! As a director, I've never shot out of Los Angeles before, and we shot *Kill Bill* all over the world, in Beijing, Tokyo, California, Mexico... And all my other movies up until this were 10 weeks long, including *Pulp Fiction*. The big fight scene at the House of Blue Leaves, which is the climax of *Volume One*, took eight weeks alone.

FANG: Going in, did you realize *Kill Bill* would take that long to shoot and eventually be divided into two parts?

TARANTINO: I didn't know 100 percent that it was going to be divided into two parts, but the thing about it is the movie was always very malleable to me for different versions, because the one thing you have to keep in mind with me is, as opposed to a lot of American filmmakers, I'm not making movies for America *per se*. My films have done well in countries all over the world. I've spent 10 years going around the world getting to know those audiences and my fans, so America is just another country. It's not the county, it's a country. So I knew going into *Kill Bill* that I was gonna make a version for America, a version for Asia. So what happened was that

FANG: After cutting the film into two parts, is the next challenge winning an R rating?

TARANTINO: It's going to be challenging, but not a challenge. See, I have a really great relationship with the MPAA. I've always worked really well with them and they've worked well with me. I've never understood directors like Wes Craven or Brian De Palma who are like, "F**k you, assholes, you guys are f**king Nazis. Screw you!" Well, what the f**k do you think their response is gonna be when you treat them like that? And when you bitch about them to the press all the time, how the hell do you think you're gonna get what you want? I have always been very understanding of [the MPAA] as far as, they have a tough job to do and they could do it a lot worse than they do. Everyone bitches at them when they're wrong, but no one ever gives them credit when they're right. I don't see the horror fans applauding them when they give *Cabin Fever* an R. "Hey! Good job, MPAA!" I don't see FANGORIA applauding them when they give *From Dusk Till Dawn* an R. "Green blood and vampires, it's funny, we get it."

See, they've got a line to walk; they've got to both represent, more or less, the parents of

America, whose kid might unsuspectingly see a movie, but they also, even though they don't say it, they know they have a responsibility to filmmakers and to the art form. They don't say that they do, but they do. When I work with them, they understand. Some filmmakers bitch because they don't have a set of rules and they change it for each movie. But that's what you want! You want it to be flowing. You don't want a set of rules, you want them judging each film as its own case. But also, between the MPAA and every jerkwater county in America having their own obscenity laws, you want the MPAA!

FANG: At any point, as the blood was flying, did anyone stop you and say, "Quentin, are you sure you want to shoot that?"

TARANTINO: No, not really. From time to time people at Miramax were like, "Quentin, are you sure we'll be OK [with the MPAA]?" [Laughs] And I'm like, "Guys, don't worry about it, it'll be just fine." Because one of the things with the film is, as violent as it is, when you watch it it's so much fun. This is not real life. This is a movie-movie. There is not even an attempt to make a scene real; it exists [only] in a movie world. I'm using all this filmic language from all these different movies, so it's not real. It exists completely on celluloid. For instance, when Uma flies into Japan, I wanted to do it *Godzilla*-style—models, all models. Model airplane, get the crazy orange backdrop, model of Tokyo... So we went to Toho and rented their Tokyo set that they used in the last *Godzilla* movie. And they said, "Well, you know, the way we do it now is we use a lot of CGI," and I said, "No, no, no. No CGI. I want models and strings. I wanna do it the way that [director] Ishiro Honda did it, old-school." So in *Kill Bill* you'll see that crane that you always see silhouetted against the skyline of Tokyo Bay.

FANG: Did the KNB boys offer any creative input on the carnage?

TARANTINO: Howard Berger was the lead guy. We had them there working their asses off. Also, I'm into genre cinema from all different countries, so we literally had three different types of blood on the film. We had American, Japanese and Chinese blood, and at different times we used all three. They all have different qualities. Normally you hire these prop guys and they show up with blood and it's just the same shit. But in *Shogun Assassin* or the *Baby Cart* movies, they have a special blood that you put on a sword and it stands out. If you go with whatever blood the special effects guy brings, you could be putting raspberry pancake syrup on it. I wanted different styles, colors and consistencies. Yuen Woo-Ping and the Hong Kong fight team taught us another way of doing a blood gag, the old '70s kung-fu way, and I loved it.

I really applaud ingenuity on the set. If anyone came up with a good idea that helped something be accomplished that didn't necessarily fall into their category, I gave them \$5. And people started wanting to win that \$5. The bigger filmmaking becomes, the

Actors around the world are kicking and screaming to work with the celebrated director.



less people start thinking with their heads and more about technology. We have to solve some of these problems as if we are making an amateur movie in our backyard. The [Chinese] don't have technology to rely on. They figured out, "Hey, if we take flour and we use this, we can do this and that will work!" We need to come up with solutions like that every once in a while, because all these tubes, hydraulics, pressure gauges and everything, that's gonna get in my way at a certain point. We gotta figure out a smart way to do this. It was getting to be a drag having to hook up tubes to everyone's leg every time they wanted a blood squirt.

One of my favorite directors, and he's one of the people I'm dedicating the movie to, is the old kung-fu director Chang Cheh. He is to old-school Shaw Brothers kung-fu movies what John Ford was to Westerns. He invented the modern martial arts movie. And what Cheh used to do, people would be fighting and the actors would be holding in one of their hands a Chinese condom filled with blood. And when they would get sliced, *Poof!*, they'd squeeze the condom and the blood would *Pshhhhhh!*, squirt out! It has to be a Chinese condom, because an American one you can squeeze all day and it won't crack [laughs].

FANG: You shot forever on *Kill Bill*, as if the Weinsteins gave you a blank check.

TARANTINO: To one degree or another, there was a little aspect of knowing what we were getting into. First, once I start shooting the action scenes, I'm not gonna leave until they're right. We went down to China and built this gigantic, gorgeous set for the House of Blue Leaves, and we didn't just build a set, we built the House of Blue Leaves. We proceeded to destroy it over eight

weeks. Little by little, we started getting more and more behind schedule. And we just didn't really know what we were doing. We didn't have the proper time and budget. But once Harvey saw the footage, he said, "Quentin, this looks so great, you just keep going making your movie." And as it is, we have this giant epic that can go head-to-head with *The Matrix* and *Charlie's Angels* and all these other big giant action films that are our competition, and they all cost \$100-175 million. Ours cost \$55 million, which is \$100 million for me. No one in the industry can believe we made this, and shot as long as we did, for that price.

FANG: Was the House of Blue Leaves sequence the toughest one to shoot?

TARANTINO: At the time, I thought it was until we started getting into other stuff. We have a huge fight between Uma Thurman and Daryl Hannah in *Volume Two*, where they have this massive knock-down, drag-out bitch fight inside this white trash trailer. And they're both these big, tall, leggy blondes who go diagonally from one end of the trailer to the next, and they're just bouncing off the walls. That was very difficult [laughs]. That scene went on forever, too.

FANG: You've been called the career revitalizer. Who's it going to be this time?

TARANTINO: Uma's gonna get a whole lot of the press, because this is the first movie I've done where [only] one person is the lead. Even [in] *Jackie Brown*, it was still pretty well divided between Pam Grier, Robert Forster and Sam Jackson. So this is the first time I've done a movie where there is just one protagonist and everybody is supporting her. But it's gonna be a combination of David Carradine as Bill and also Michael Madsen as Bud, Bill's brother in the movie. Michael is just amazing in it. It's some of the best work I've ever seen him do. He's just really amazing!

FANG: And you got Bo Svenson too.

TARANTINO: Yeah! We got a bunch of cool guys! Bo Svenson, Michael Parks... As a matter of fact, both Michael Parks and his son Jim recreate their roles from other movies. Michael is playing the same character, Earl McGraw, he did in *From Dusk Till Dawn*, and Jim is playing the same part he had in *From Dusk Till Dawn 2*.

FANG: Did you have to rewrite Bill for Carradine?

Considering how extreme his genre-blending from *Dusk Till Dawn* was, we'd love to see Tarantino tackle a straight horror movie.

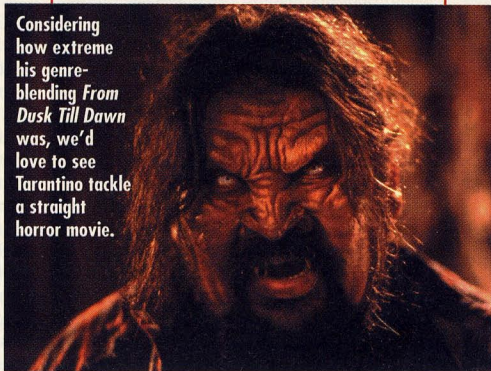


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TARANTINO: Not necessarily, but I started changing it a little. It's not like I went back to the drawing board. David was really coming into my mind as a possible Bill even as I was talking to Warren Beatty. I ended up reading his autobiography, *Endless Highway*, and it was so fantastic that I felt he would be a really good Bill.

FANG: *Kill Bill* has been described as flowing like a book—the opposite of the kung-fu flicks that inspired you. Is this an attempt to turn exploitation into art?

TARANTINO: Well, I guess that is what I'm always trying to do, but I just believe that if I'm doing it, I'm coming to it from an artistic place. I've always liked exploitation movies when they came from an artistic place. Those are two great tastes that taste great together! But yeah, you're right, it is different from the way most drive-in films are done, but that's me, that's what I have to offer to it. It is broken down into 10 chapters, and each chapter kinda takes you to a different place.

FANG: Are you concerned about the expectations surrounding the new Quentin Tarantino film?

TARANTINO: No, I'm counting on it [laughs]. That's why I took so long to make it, 'cause I wanted it to surpass those expectations. I know people have been waiting a long time, and I appreciate them waiting a long time, so I really wanted to give them one that was worth the wait. My whole thing is that I make [the film] for me, and everyone else is invited. But if you go see *Kill Bill*, you will have a night at the movies! You won't just be going out and having a bunch of images glaze over you and forgetting what you saw by the time you walk to the car. You have been to the movies!

FANG: Will you ever make a true horror film someday?

TARANTINO: Yeah, I would really like to, actually. In particular, I'd like to do a low-budget one. I feel like I missed something by not having to do an exploitation movie first before I could just do exactly what I wanted [with *Reservoir Dogs*]. I always shed a tear for those exploitation movies I could've made if I had come up in the '70s, and in a way, I can do those now and not have to listen to people jerk me around and tell me how to do it. So I would totally love to do a real Italian *giallo* or a slasher film, or some wild crazy *Body Melt* kind of movie, or a Philippine *Blood Island* movie. I would just be so into that!

FANG: Is the war film next?

TARANTINO: Well, I have that written. That will either be the next one or maybe the one after that. I don't know if I wanna dive into another epic right now.

FANG: Then do the *giallo*!

TARANTINO: I'm thinking about it, something a little smaller, a little less of a big canvas after *Kill Bill*. So I'm watching *gialli*, maybe I can do one of those, maybe my crime film, a horror film, whatever. I just want to take a short break and chill for a while. ☠️

reporter to an upper floor to see the Phantom Footprint. The actress explains that nuns use the mansion to teach classes during the day, so the *Flesh* team has to completely clean up after themselves after every round of shooting. One of the nuns found a bare footprint on the wood floor, and Siegel says, "They thought it was a crew guy's. They cleaned it and cleaned it and it kept coming back and coming back. It's still there," he says, and Fango can attest to its presence.

After returning to the main shooting area, Fango finds most of the crew missing. A trail of extension cords leads down into the labyrinthine basement. There is a boiler room section where some zombie footage has been shot, but the scene West is working on (in which Jones, as Stoker, emerges on the other side of the destroyed portrait) takes place in the library area. That's right, there is an entire library down here, complete with a card catalog along one wall. There are rows of shelves covered in books, although many have either fallen over or been knocked down. It all looks very innocent until closer inspection reveals, instead of maybe History or Classics, sections entitled "Trans-Cyber-Gnostics," "Urban Tactical" and "Alternate Yesterday." Another shelf holds large boxes of old reel-to-reel tapes labeled "Psychedelics," "Stimulants" and "LSD." Taped to the wall above the hallway leading to the boiler room is a piece of paper reading "Heresy." La Rocca says it was all like this when they got here; none of it was designed for the movie.

After heading into a far, dark corner of the library to examine part of a wall that has fallen down, this reporter's head starts to swim and the floor seems suddenly off-kilter. Could it be the result of some sort of fumes emanating from the thick, dark mold or mushrooms that cover so much down here? Or is there some atmospheric miasma tied to the location itself? Not caring to find out, Fango heads back up to the main foyer to get some air.

As things wrap and the crew begins packing up, Hicks confides that he and a group of seven classmates from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh have an ongoing conversation, wondering which of them would get into FANGORIA first. It appears we have a winner. And if Morano and Media Blasters have their way, there will be more for Hicks and co. to work on.

"No one is consistently making genre films in New York, so that's our goal; there are definitely talent and resources that nobody's using," he says. "Next on the table will be a full-blown hardcore zombie film [being scripted by Fango's Michael Gingold], and then we'd like to do something different with a women-in-prison film, maybe mix some genres. This is our first movie, so it's an experiment, but we'd like to consistently put out features that are successful." ☠️