

THE BEST COMMERCIALS OF THE YEAR

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Entertainment

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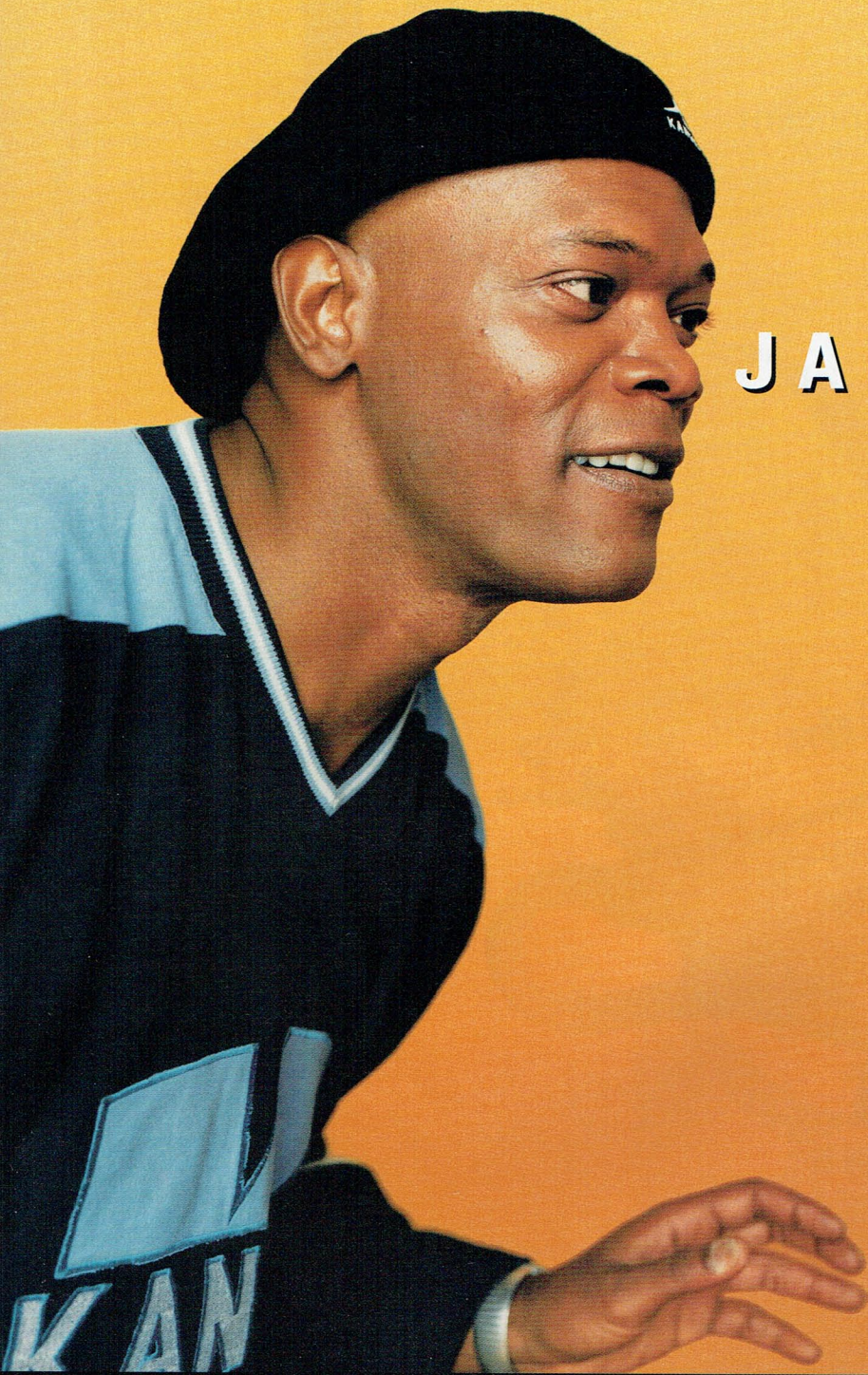
SAMUEL L.
JACKSON AND
PAM GRIER
WITH DIRECTOR
TARANTINO

QUENTIN TARANTINO IS BACK
IN TOWN WITH JACKIE BROWN

PLUS:

ROBERT DOWNEY JR.
GOES DIRECTLY TO JAIL

INSIDE POP-UP VIDEO



JACKIE, O



— Leaving the ‘Pulp’
faction behind, director
QUENTIN TARANTINO
taps his own reservoir
of ‘70s nostalgia for
the crime caper —

JACKIE BROWN

► Quentin Tarantino jumps up from the table, throws his whiskey in my face, slams me against a wall...

◆ Well, no, not exactly. He didn't *literally* jump up from the table, throw whiskey in my face, or slam me against a wall—but he did accidentally spill a bottle of fizzy water in my lap. So I'm suing him for \$5 million.

◆ Other than that, lunch with the battling auteur turns out to be a decidedly docile affair. Despite his recent penchant for punching out producers in L.A. restaurants (for which he really *is* being sued for \$5 million), the 34-year-old bad boy of independent cinema seems to have mellowed recently. Even his new movie, the twisty caper comedy *Jackie Brown*, which Miramax is opening Christmas Day, sounds like it's been decaf-

feinated, at least compared with the so-hip-it-hurt mayhem Tarantino unleashed in 1992's *Reservoir Dogs* and 1994's *Pulp Fiction*.

"It's a love story," the director says of the long-awaited *Pulp* follow-up. "A love story with older people and an older sensibility."

It's also the first film Tarantino has adapted entirely from someone else's material—*Rum Punch*, the 1992 best-seller by *Get Shorty* author Elmore Leonard. And while it does bear certain unmistakable Tarantinoisms—dialogue peppered with pop-culture references, corkscrew twists in the chronology, a killer '70s soundtrack—some hardcore fans may be alarmed by its shocking lack of violence (only four murders in the entire movie) and its kinder, gentler story line. Even Tarantino calls it

Robert Forster, yet another acting refugee from the 1970s (*Avalanche*, *The Black Hole*), playing a fiftysomething bail bondsman who helps the heroine scam her way out of her jam.

"It's definitely not *Pulp Fiction II*," Tarantino says during lunch in West Hollywood earlier this month, where he's been editing *Jackie* all fall. Suffering from the sniffles and exhausted from the last-minute push to finish the film, he seems more subdued than his usual speed-talking, hyper-gesticulating self—at least for the moment. "We screened it in Seattle, and people were like, 'This is *not* what we thought it would be.' But I felt I'd gone about as far as I could with my signature shooting style, so this one is at a lower volume than *Pulp*. It's not an epic, it's not an opera. It's a character study. I knew I didn't want to go bigger than *Pulp*, so I went *underneath* it."

► BIGGER THAN *PULP* IS SOMETHING OF AN OXYMORON. No independent film this decade has had more impact, spawned more imitations, or raked in more cash (\$210 million worldwide). *Pulp*'s box office break-

SAMUEL L. JACKSON

TARANTINO "has an affinity for black culture," Jackson says. "He likes to write black characters. He's like my daughters' little white hip-hop friends. They're basically black kids with white skin."

through, which helped trigger the '90s indie phenom, turned Miramax into a major player, saved John Travolta from talking-dog movies, and even managed to give Bruce Willis a touch of art-house class. And, of course, it elevated Tarantino into geek god-dom, making him the idol of thousands of goateed film students and video-store clerks around the globe.

In short, it turned Tarantino into his own tough act to follow—which may be why it's taken him three years to get behind the camera again. A number of potential projects have crossed his path. At one point he talked to Warner Bros. about a big-screen version of *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, "with George Clooney as Napoleon Solo and me as Ilya Kuryakin," he says. But mostly he has spent the après-*Pulp* period concentrating on other matters. Like acting in a film made from one of his earlier screenplays (1996's vampire comedy-thriller *From Dusk Till Dawn*, in which he really *did* get to costar with Clooney), script-doctoring on *Crimson Tide*, goofing off with Dave and Jay on late-night TV, and turning up in the tabloids with girlfriend Mira Sorvino ("The actress of her generation," he calls her). In fact, the only actual directing he's done over these last three years was an episode of *ER* and a segment in Miramax's famously dreadful *Four Rooms*.

For a time, it looked like Tarantino was in danger of becoming



CON FILM FESTIVAL:
Criminal elements De Niro and Jackson (above); Fonda puts on a beach-blanket-bimbo guise for 'Jackie'

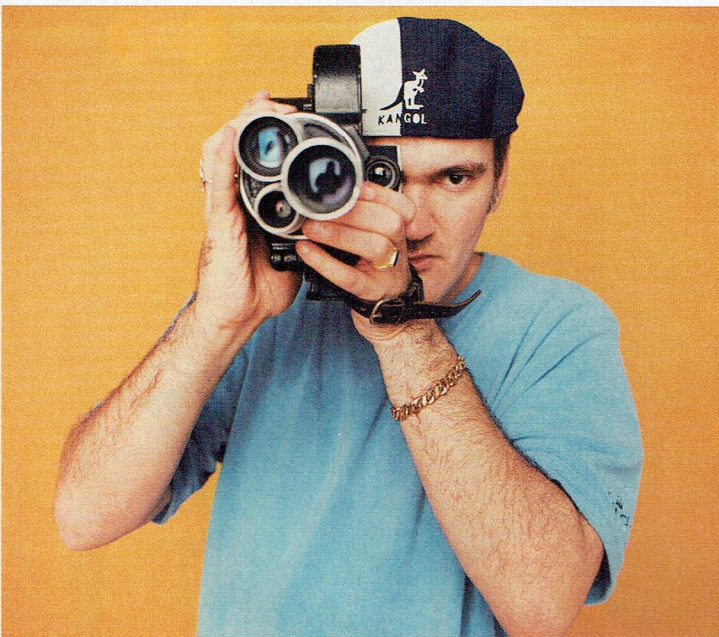
the least Tarantino-esque film he's made so far.

Pam Grier, the director's latest '70s career restoration project (see story on page 32), stars as the title character, a 44-year-old flight attendant who gets caught smuggling drugs and gun money for a sleazy, rinky-dink arms dealer, played by *Pulp*'s Samuel L. Jackson. Robert De Niro has a small role as Jackson's none-too-bright ex-con sidekick, Bridget Fonda plays Jackson's beach-bunny girlfriend, and Michael Keaton is an ATF agent trying to squeeze Jackie into ratting for the government. As Jackie's love interest, there's



a professional celebrity, a sort of skinnier, nerdier Orson Welles, more famous for his talk-show patter than for his groundbreaking filmmaking. The overexposure helped spark an anti-Tarantino backlash in the press. "That's one of the reasons I didn't do TV for a year and a half," he says, still a bit touchy on the subject. "I wanted the celebrity thing to go away. Critics couldn't see the work because I was in the f---ing way, so I gave up my membership in the celebrity club. I'll renew it when I need to sell a picture again."

Actually, it was renewed for him last fall, with the publication of a juicy little volume titled *Killer Instinct*—the book that made Tarantino go medieval in that restaurant in L.A. A dis-and-tell



account of the filming of *Natural Born Killers*—which Tarantino wrote (and Oliver Stone rewrote)—by one of the film's producers, Jane Hamsher, it portrays Tarantino as obnoxious, duplicitous, and arrogant, as well as a bad speller. Hamsher even quotes her producing partner, Don Murphy, as saying that he would "openly celebrate Quentin Tarantino's death."

What happened next, on Oct. 22, when Tarantino bumped into Murphy in an Italian eatery in West Hollywood, is a matter for the judiciary to decide. Murphy claims that Tarantino slammed him against a wall and began hitting him so hard his watch flew off his wrist. Tarantino has admitted hitting Murphy—in fact, he gleefully pantomimed the entire incident on *The Keenen Ivory Wayans Show* last month—but claims he merely "bitch-slapped" the producer three times ("A little bitch slap don't hurt nobody," he told Wayans). Police were called to the restaurant; Tarantino was ushered into a cop car (where, Murphy says, he mockingly blew kisses at him) and was nearly carted off to jail—

until Miramax cohead Harvey Weinstein, who was dining with Tarantino, managed to persuade Murphy to drop the charges.

Tarantino is no longer very talkative about the fight "because of the lawsuit," he says. But Murphy—who's described in Hamsher's book as 6 foot 2 and 220 pounds—is a regular chatterbox on the subject. "I didn't say I *wished* Quentin Tarantino was dead," he explains. "I didn't say I *wanted* him dead. I just said I'd *celebrate* his death." In other words, he meant it in a *nice* way.

▶ WHILE MURPHY'S LAWYERS GOT BUSY PREPARING THE \$5 million suit, Tarantino returned to the relative comforts of *Jackie Brown*, a project that's long occupied his mind. In fact, he first contemplated making it before *Pulp*. "I read [*Rum Punch*] in galleys," he recalls, "and it just kind of presented itself to me as a low-budget anti-Hollywood action picture." But film history beckoned, and *Jackie* went into turnaround while Tarantino taught the world what they call Quarter Pounders in France. Then, last year, he picked up *Punch* again and got that old familiar feeling. "That

QUENTIN TARANTINO

"I FELT I'D GONE about as far as I could with my signature shooting style," says Tarantino, "so this one is at a lower volume than 'Pulp.' It's not an epic, it's not an opera. It's a character study."

same movie I saw years before came back in my head."

Of course, the director has tinkered a tad with Leonard's original text. For starters, he changed Jackie's race from white to black—mostly, he says, because he's always wanted to work with Grier and wrote the screenplay with her in mind. Sam Jackson, though, offers another insight that could explain the switch: "Quentin wants to be black," says the actor. "He watched a lot of black exploitation flicks growing up. He has a lot of black friends. He has an affinity for black culture. And he likes to write black characters. He's like my daughters' little white hip-hop friends. They're basically black kids with white skin."

In any case, the rest of the casting required no further race changes. De Niro and Keaton took salary cuts for the chance to work with Tarantino, who made *Jackie* for a mere \$12 million, while Fonda was chosen partly because she looks the age of her character ("You know, around 33, living off guys her whole life, starting to get kinda old," elaborates Tarantino). Forster, meanwhile, *still* can't believe he got the part. "If I can just get 10 percent of what Travolta got out of *Pulp Fiction*..." he prays.

Filming started last summer around L.A. (another change from the book, which is set in Florida). The shoot was intense (Tarantino sometimes gets so excited during a scene, he can't help shouting out verbal high fives in the middle of a shot) but exceptionally

social. Many cast parties were thrown, many Mira sightings reported. "He was more confident in what he was doing than he was during *Pulp*," says Jackson. "But it was basically the same old Quentin."

QUESTION IS, WILL QUENTIN GENERATE THE same old box office? Frankly, probably not. Although Miramax has been running trailers for *Jackie* before *Scream 2*—and plastering New York and L.A. with cool black-and-white billboards of each of its cast members—there's been surprisingly little buzz over the film. Part of the problem is that so few people were allowed to see it before Tarantino finished editing on Dec. 4; for a while, there was even some doubt whether it would be ready in time for the New York Film Critics Circle Awards this month. "We felt like, if we can get it done in time for the critics, great," he says of the last-minute crunch (he ultimately met the critics' deadline). "But if we can't, they can have their little contest without us."

Of course, nobody really expects the film to do anywhere near *Pulp*-size business. Even Tarantino's

PAM GRIER

A YEAR AFTER she auditioned (unsuccessfully) for 'Pulp Fiction,' Grier ran into Tarantino: "He said, 'Pam, I got an idea for you.' I said, 'Really? Before my teeth fall out and my breasts sag?'"

longtime producing partner, Lawrence Bender, is low-keying his expectations: "There are only so many times you can make a movie that changes the world," he points out. Still, a lot is on the line here—namely Tarantino's reputation as the most innovative, ingenious, and envied director in all of indie-hood. Surely some performance anxiety is to be expected. Isn't Tarantino sweating at least a little?

"You know, there's an insult in that question," he says quickly, starting to wave that bottle of fizzy water around ominously. "It presumes that I care what audiences think about my movies, when my whole career has proven that I don't care, all right? I mean, if I was scared, I wouldn't have done *Pulp Fiction* the way I did, okay? I would have cast Daniel Day-Lewis instead of John Travolta.

"I've built a career in which fear doesn't exist," he says, talking faster and faster, sounding more and more like the old Tarantino. "If nothing else, I think I've proven that. All right? Okay?"

Whatever you say, Quentin—just don't hit me. ■

With her 50th movie—and her first starring role in 20 years—blaxploitation bombshell PAM GRIER is alive and well and still kicking butt in 'Jackie Brown'

ROSY GRIER

► PAM GRIER HAS A SECRET: "BABY'S PEE."

◆ Huh? "Baby's pee," she says. "That's why I don't have wrinkles. It was some juju stuff my grandmother and aunt did when I was a baby. They would wipe my face with my diaper and chant." ◆ The actress must still have juju on her side: At age 48, Grier is experiencing a miraculous career resurgence. It's been more than 20 years since she reigned as queen of the blaxploitation films, delivering karate chops to the head without batting a false eyelash. Impressive, yes, but nothing compared with surviving such subsequent roles as a robotic chemistry teacher (1990's *Class of 1999*) and a transsexual gang leader (1996's *John Carpenter's Escape From L.A.*), then emerging as Quentin Tarantino's latest cinematic darling. With the lead role in the eponymous *Jackie Brown*, the actress may follow the steps of another '70s who-knew? Tarantino makeover, *Pulp Fiction*'s John Travolta.

As Grier extends her manicured hand in greeting, she seems to shine: sparkling white teeth ("All mine," she says, clacking her pale nail against her incisors), long glossy locks, and a figure swathed in clothes tight enough to show that the assets that helped make her famous are holding up fine.

Grier perches regally on a couch, still retaining the bearing of the beauty queen she was before she fled Denver at 18, her heart broken by a boyfriend who'd dumped her because she "wouldn't give him any." The daughter of an Air Force mechanic, Grier headed for L.A., where she enrolled in film-school classes, interned for the raffish B-movie director Roger Corman, and answered telephones for American International Pictures, the now-defunct production company that spearheaded the blaxploitation movement. "I'd walk in and say 'Who's that gorgeous person?'" recalls director Larry Cohen, who worked with Grier years later in the 1996 blaxploiter's reunion, *Original Gangstas*.

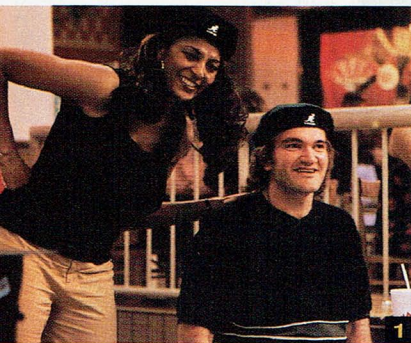
Cohen wasn't the only one to take note: By 1971, Grier was working for AIP as an actress. Whether it was in 1972's *Hit Man*, 1973's *Coffy* and *Black Mama, White Mama*, or 1974's *Foxy Brown*, Grier became not only the first African-American action heroine but the hyperbolic symbol of the women's liberation movement and the sexual revolution, able to bed a man or shoot him with equal flair.

At first, Grier says, "I didn't know how to be an actress. I didn't want to. They said, 'Pam, you're an actress now.' I thought, 'I am? I don't think I'm a very good one, because I don't think the movies are good.'"

It wasn't until 1977's *Greased Lightning* that Grier, who had been taking acting classes, realized she might have the knack for playing serious dramatic roles. By then, however, audiences had tired of the blaxploitation genre, and filmmakers weren't knock-



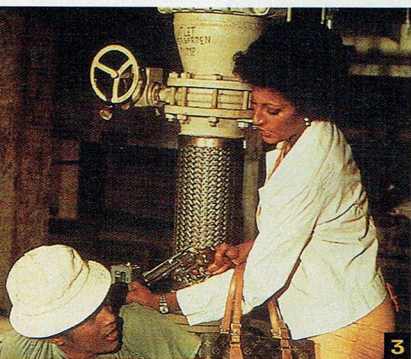
ing down the doors of African-American acting with a penchant for punishing bad guys. “You can be on top of everything,” Grier says with a shrug, “and the next minute, you’re going to be on the bottom.” Of her graceful adjustment from star to civilian, Mario Van Peebles—who cast Grier in a small part in 1993’s black Western *Posse*—says, “After [Hollywood] shut the doors economically, Pam triumphed because she didn’t get bitter.”



Grier, who never married (though she had been linked with comedian Richard Pryor in the late '70s), moved back to Colorado and earned a living doing regional theater and occasional films. Some were good, like 1981’s *Fort Apache, the Bronx*; others simply paid her



COOKING WITH PAM: (1) Grier and Tarantino on the 'Jackie' set; (2) a poster for the blaxploitation classic 'Foxy Brown'; (3) a classier Grier (note Louis Vuitton handbag) sticks it to one of the boys in 1975's 'Sheba Baby'



mortgage. But her focus had shifted, and she was more interested in nesting than acting. She initially passed on the role as the mother in Tim Burton’s 1996 space spoof *Mars Attacks!* because her dog was terminally ill (she later took the role; the dog died). And her idol of the time, she says, wasn’t any movie star but Bob Vila,

the host of PBS’ *This Old House*, because “he taught a lot of women how to be able to take care of their homes.” “She doesn’t like the Hollywood rat race,” says Cohen. “And she hasn’t gone out of her way to look for jobs. When we had the premiere of *Original Gangstas*, she didn’t come. She’s not interested in promoting herself.”

As far as Quentin Tarantino was concerned, she didn’t have to. A year after Grier auditioned for—and didn’t get—the part of Jody (played by Rosanna Arquette) in 1994’s *Pulp Fiction*, the actress ran into Tarantino. “He said, ‘Pam, I got an idea for you.’ I said, ‘Really? Before my teeth fall out and my breasts sag?’”

Tarantino, a fan since childhood, was only four months away from completing the script of *Jackie Brown*, and Grier had the exact beauty-cum-wisdom quality he was looking for. “One thing you get with someone like Pam,” Tarantino says, “is they’ve been up and down and sideways and out. And it’s all there, in their body and in their face, ready to be drawn upon.” At the time, however, Tarantino played coy. “She’s saying ‘Yeah, things are going well, I just got cast in *Mars Attacks!*’ and when she finished, I said, ‘F--- all that. Wait till you see what I’ve got.’ But I didn’t tell her anything about how big or small the part was.” When he was ready to send the script to her, “I just told her to take a look at the part of Jackie Brown,” Tarantino says, laughing, “and the script arrives, and it’s called *Jackie Brown*.” Within months, Grier began rehearsals for what would be her 50th movie and first starring role in more than 20 years.

Grier had no anxiety about holding her own with Robert De Niro and Samuel L. Jackson. “I have enough confidence as a person,” Grier says, “and as a human being who survived, you know, hardship, physical hardships, and death a couple of times, and...”

Wait. What?

“Death,” she repeats. “The first time, I had a disease from doing a movie for Roger Corman in the tropics. I had, like, a 105 temperature, and I was in bed for four weeks. I lost my hair, I couldn’t see, I couldn’t walk. I was dying. The doctor actually kind of froze me to kill the cell that was in my brain, and I started getting better.”

The second illness was even more serious, and Grier hasn’t spoken of it publicly until now. She says that in 1988 she was diagnosed with cancer. “My doctor gave me 18 months to live,” Grier says, though she refuses to specify where the cancer was located. “My whole life changed. I became a different person at that point.” For two years, Grier underwent treatment. “Dr. Kevorkian wasn’t around then,” she says. “There were days where I thought, Take bottles of pills. I would be looking at the ceiling, saying ‘Should I live? Should I die?’ I had to take it one step at a time. And then, after two years, I realized I was okay.”

Grier is so okay that she plans to have a baby—her first—with her boyfriend, 35-year-old record producer Kevin Evans. But the memory of her illness, she says, was all the preparation she needed to play Jackie Brown. Like herself, she says, “Jackie solves her problems one step at a time. She’s going to survive all these people trying to destroy her life and making decisions for her. She’s making decisions on her own, which is what I had to do. It was like a building hit me, and I was able to crawl out from underneath and walk away.” ■