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Entertainment Weekly

The Mad Genius Of **KILL BILL 2's** Quentin Tarantino

PLUS

- His Top 5 Movie Moments
- His Favorite Make-out Soundtrack
- Why He Wants to Work With Johnny Depp, Tom Hanks, And... Madonna

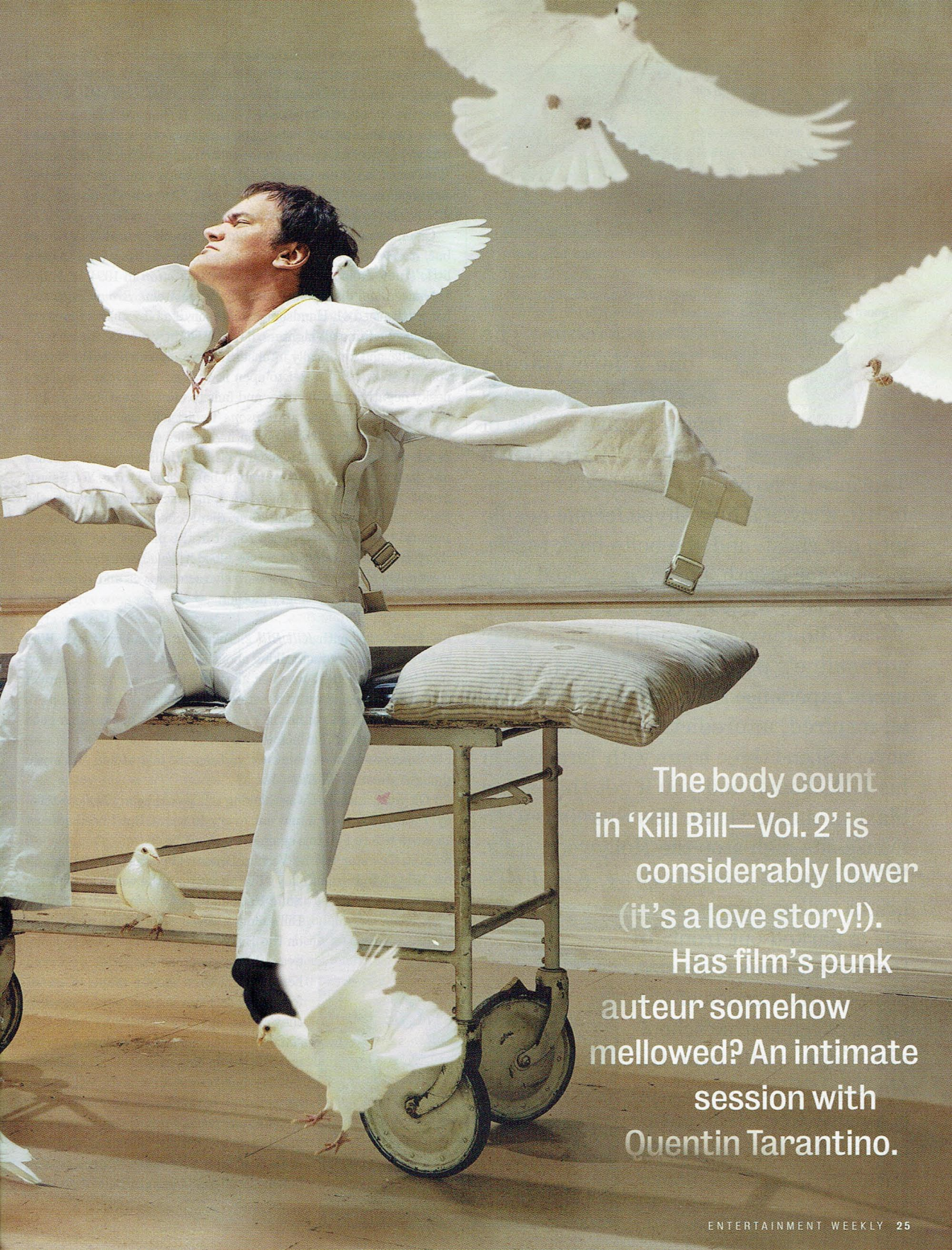
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the second coming

by Mary Kaye Schilling

photograph by Martin Schoeller



The body count in 'Kill Bill—Vol. 2' is considerably lower (it's a love story!).

Has film's punk auteur somehow mellowed? An intimate session with Quentin Tarantino.

THERE'S A SCENE IN *Pulp Fiction*. The one where Vincent Vega (John Travolta) is trying to save the life of his boss' wife (Uma Thurman), who has just overdosed on heroin. He shoves a huge hypodermic needle into her chest, and she bolts back to life, gasping for breath, her eyes shocked wide open. That's what it feels like to watch a Tarantino movie. Seconds into it, your adrenaline's pumping. *This* is what the movie experience is supposed to be: visceral, inspired, unpredictable, exuberantly alive. • Spend three hours with Tarantino in his L.A. home, and you'll get that same blast of movie thrill. His Spanish-style manse sits high atop the Hollywood Hills. When you hit the driveway, *Kill Bill*'s bright yellow "Pussy Wag-on" is parked out front. In the foyer, there's a life-size, dead-on wax version of *Kill Bill*'s psychopathic school-girl, Gogo, a gift from the film's special-effects-makeup company, KNB. The entire house—filled to the rafters with movie posters, books,

CDs, DVDs, videos, comic books, and memorabilia (including a shelf packed with Barbie and Midge lunch boxes and thermoses)—is a geek paradise. The home movie theater's as real-world as you'd expect; the bar is actually part of *Kill Bill*'s Beijing set, complete with a Ms. Pac-Man, a CD jukebox, and a photo booth. A second jukebox upstairs is stocked with his music collection, including albums by the Wu-Tang Clan, June Carter Cash, Fleetwood Mac, Dion, and, yes, Britney Spears ("I'm a huge fan," he says. "Anyone who doesn't give it to her is too stuck in their too-cool-for-schoolness").

Cinema's punk auteur—who ignited the film world with his debut, *Reservoir Dogs*, in 1992, changed movie history (and saved a little studio called Miramax) with *Pulp Fiction* in 1994, and then entranced and disappointed equally with *Jackie Brown* in 1997—has just turned 41. Handsomer in person, if a bit rounder thanks to months of editing all-nighters, he's still slightly gawky, insanely encyclopedic, and kinetically intense. Tarantino's on a high; the second volume of *Kill Bill* is set to open in a week, and so far there's no pesky negativity from critics and fans to taint his enthusiasm. But as Tarantino—sporting a *Simpsons* T-shirt with his own Itchy and Scratchy-directing character on it—settles onto his dining room bench with a vodka and a sugar-free Red Bull, there's also a sense of—dare we say it—the papa auteur he's destined to be. You'll see it in *Vol. 2*—a quieter film than *Vol. 1*, in which Uma Thurman, the Bride who was shot at the altar, dispatched dozens of unlucky samurai types who happened to get in the path of her lightning-sharp sword. Oh, she's still out for blood in *Vol. 2*, but this film's the most unlikely of revenge movies: a character-driven and visually sophisticated ode to one angry mother.

EW Let's start with *Kill Bill 2*. Turns out it's a love story. Who knew? And I'm not just talking about Bill and the Bride.

QT I love the Bride. I *love* her, all right? I want her to be happy. I don't want to come up with screwed-up scenarios that she has to fight the whole rest of her life. I killed myself to put her in a good place at the end of this long journey.

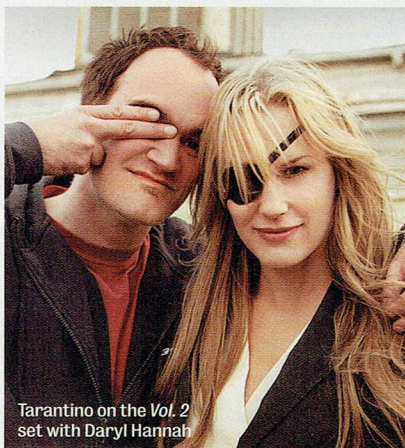
EW Somehow I don't think we've seen the last of her. Have you thought about a *Kill Bill*—*Vol. 3*?

QT Oh yeah, initially I was thinking this would be my *Dollars* trilogy. I was going to do a new one every 10 years. But I need at least 15 years before I do this again. Uma won't be the star, though she'll be in it. The star will be Vernita Green's [Vivica A. Fox's] daughter, Nikki [Ambrosia Kelley]. I've already got the whole mythology:

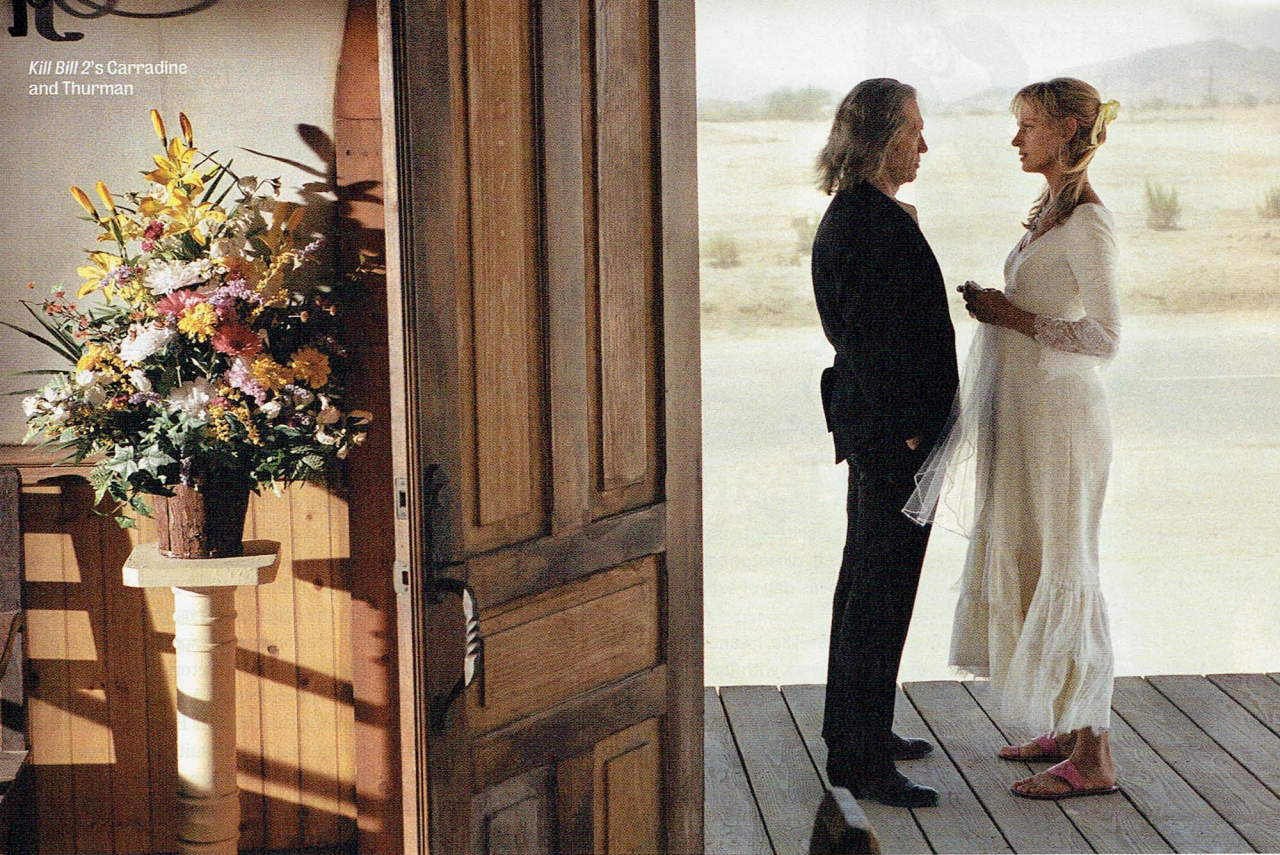
Sofie Fatale [Julie Dreyfus] will get all of Bill's money. She'll raise Nikki, who'll take on the Bride. Nikki deserves her revenge every bit as much as the Bride deserved hers. I might even shoot a couple of scenes for it now so I can get the actresses while they're this age. It's exciting to know that somewhere there's a little girl who'll grow up to be my leading lady.

EW It's hard to imagine *Kill Bill* as one movie, given how different they feel.

QT It actually does work as one, because we didn't have to move any scenes around, create something that wasn't there, spin a bunch of bull that wasn't organic to the sto-



Tarantino on the *Vol. 2* set with Daryl Hannah



“I love the Bride, all right?” says Tarantino of Thurman’s character. “I killed myself to put her in a good place.”

ry. Where the tone changes at the beginning of the second movie? It happens exactly right there [in the script]. I decided to split it up because for the audience to get what I spent a year and a half writing, you have to see everything that’s in *1* and *2*. And there’s something very pretentious about a four-hour exploitation movie.

EW Some critics bemoaned your return to violence with *Vol. 1*, especially after the quieter, more character-driven *Jackie Brown*. In *Vol. 2*, the carnage is pretty minimal, which may bug some fans. If you’re happy with a film, do you ultimately care what anyone else thinks?

QT Critics don’t want to see directors they like make too much of a left turn. That’s good for criticism. I understand that. But one thing that was semi-annoying to me in reading reviews for *Vol. 1* was, Oh, this is very wild and stylish, but it’s a clear retreat from *Jackie Brown* and the growing maturity in there. “Clear retreat” says I’m running away from what I did in *Jackie Brown*. But I’ve done that. I don’t have to prove I can do it, all right? And after *Vol. 1*, I don’t have to prove that I can do a good action scene. My filmography is important to me; I want every one of my movies to count. Stephen King took a dig at me [in EW] for starting off *Kill Bill* with “Quentin Tarantino’s Fourth Film”—you know, la-di-da! I can imagine someone taking a cynical view like that. But to me, I mean it, and not in some airy-fairy way. This is my fourth movie and I

haven’t done anything in a long time. It’s telling you who I am today, and the fifth will tell you something else. They’re all different places. I hope you invite [King] back to review *Vol. 2*. Even if he doesn’t like it, I’m interested in what he thinks.

EW *Pulp Fiction* included biblical references and *Kill Bill* includes references to God. What are your religious beliefs? Do you believe in God?

QT I’m not going to tell you how I believe, but I do believe in God.

EW When you see movies, are you watching as a fan or as a filmmaker? Do you fix sloppy editing or rewrite scenes in your head?

QT My goal is to be a film fan. If I see mistakes in tone or rhythm, I might start thinking, Okay, I would do this. But I can still enjoy the film. If I were teaching a class or having a serious conversation with somebody about it, I could point out deficiencies I wouldn’t allow in my own work, but I forgive it if I like it. A movie doesn’t have to do everything. A movie just has to do a couple of things. If it does those things well and gives you a cool night at the movies, an emotion, that’s good enough, man. Movies that get it all right are few and far between.

EW If you were teaching a class on your own films, what deficiencies would you point out?

QT The answer is none. I’m sure somebody else might find weak-



QT's Dream Team

A look at the director's all-time would-be favorite actress to work with, monster to center a movie around, director to promote, and imported cut of meat to savor on his day of execution.

ACTRESS "As much as I want to live a long time—like, I want to live to 100—I would give up five years of my life to work with Tura Satana [circa her starring role in 1965's *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*]. She is Japanese, Cheyenne, and something else—awesome."

OBSCURE DIRECTOR "I'm a big fan of Brian Trenchard-Smith. He did a Vietnam movie called *The Siege of Firebase Gloria* [1989], starring Wings Hauser. He also did a really terrific movie, *Dead End Drive-In* [1986], based on a Peter Carey short story."

DESERT-ISLAND DATE "Pauline Kael [the late *New Yorker* film critic]—if we'd have enough movies to watch and talk about."



LAST SUPPER, GUESTS "Of creative people I know who like me and get me: [left to right] Paul Thomas Anderson, Robert Rodriguez, Sofia Coppola, [producer] Stacey Sher—those in particular."

LAST SUPPER, FOOD "Kobe beef."

MONSTER "I have an idea for a Godzilla movie that I've always wanted to do. The whole idea of Godzilla's role in Tokyo, where he's always battling these other monsters, saving humanity time and again—wouldn't Godzilla become God? It would be called *Living Under the Rule of Godzilla*. This is what society is like when a big f---ing green lizard rules your world."



nesses, but I can't. If there's a weakness, I don't do it—you'll never see the scene.

EW So what recent movies have you enjoyed?

QT I can't believe it, but I really liked the remake of *Dawn of the Dead*. It was terrific. I don't really expect to see much better filmmaking in any set piece this year than that. I was almost offended when [they announced] a remake—I mean, the idea of remaking a George Romero film without George Romero! And there are things about the new *Dead* that don't compare favorably at all. [In the original], Romero used [mostly] amateur actors from Pittsburgh, and they're giving their all, and you just completely buy into their characters in this world gone wrong. They become your friends. It wasn't like a character in a movie just got killed, it was like, Oh, this is horrible. It had the most intense character study of almost any pure genre movie. Even the zombies had personalities.

EW You have gotten either the best or one of the best performances out of every actor you've worked with. Do you think it has to do with writing your characters with actors in mind?

QT I do write characters for certain actors, like, say, Honey Bunny [Amanda Plummer] and Pumpkin [Tim Roth] in *Pulp Fiction*, but I'm also trying to find out who the actor is so I can add that to the character. The most I ever wrote for one person is *Kill Bill*, for Uma. And sometimes I write characters for actors who don't play them, and then have to reinvent the character.

EW You mean like Warren Beatty, the original Bill, versus David Carradine? [Beatty felt Carradine was better suited to the role.]

QT Exactly. With Warren, Bill would have been much more of the sexy old lion, a James Bond character—James Bond as a villain. David has a mystical quality and that became more important at the end [of the movie].... People always ask me, Who are actors you'd like to work with? Well, there's a lot of actors I'd love to work with, but I don't think that way. I want to come up with the right combination of character and movie and actor. Usually the opposite happens. They get the actor, and then, okay, f--- it if it's right or not, make it right, all right? I think that's one of the reasons why my casting is so good, and why the actors are so good.

EW Well, why should we be any different? Who would you like to work with?

QT Tom Hanks. He's got kind of a snide side in real life that I really like. It's a biting sense of humor that hasn't 100 percent been capitalized on. He's a wonderful comedic actor—he was even terrific in *Turner & Hooch*, a little f---ing Rin Tin Tin story; his acting elevates it. But I've also wanted to work with Johnny Depp forever, and he's wanted to work with me, but it has to be special. The same thing with Daniel Day-Lewis.

EW Madonna has been a conversation point in a few of your films. Are you interested in working with her?

QT I've always said that Madonna has gotten a bad rap. She was the only actor who knew what she was doing in *Dick Tracy*. She was my favorite in *A League of Their Own*. If I had something right for her, I would totally cast her.

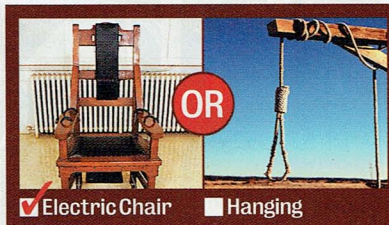
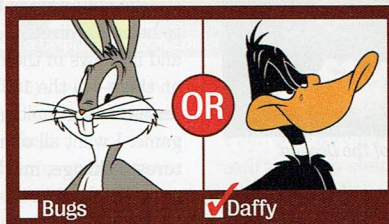
EW After seeing *Reservoir Dogs*, I never would have pegged you for a feminist. But *Jackie Brown* and *Kill Bill* are female-empowerment fests. Jackie and the Bride are two of the most multi-dimensional women ever to be seen in genre films.

QT I almost feel weird categorizing it as *feminist*. It's more of a femininity, an appreciation for women rather than a label. But it's not

Tarantino: Testing His Tastes

On the *Pulp Fiction* DVD (Collector's Edition), one of the special features is a deleted scene in which Mia conducts a Barbara Walters-style interview of Vincent—camcorder in tow—before their date. The line of questioning centers on his preference

for certain pop-culture staples: *The Partridge Family* or *The Brady Bunch*? Betty or Veronica? Her goal: To get him “to reveal things you normally wouldn’t.” Just like we do here with Tarantino himself. (Thanks for the insider tip, Mia!)



hard to figure it out. I was raised by a single mom who came from white-trash beginnings. She created a very nice career for herself as an executive—a legend in her own time in the HMO field. From the very beginning I never considered that there were boundaries, things a woman can and can't do. I had my mom as an example of someone who came from nothing, who paid her own way, had nice s---, drove a Cadillac Seville. She was living the life.

EW One recurring theme in your films is loneliness—not in the American sense, as in a bad thing. It's a loneliness of choice. A spaghetti Western kind of loner. Is that a reflection of you?

QT Good question. I've got lots of friends, and I like hanging out with individuals and cliques of people—like I was hanging out with Sofia Coppola and her friends recently, while all this *Lost in Translation* stuff was going on. It was a nice distraction, so I wasn't so self-obsessed about [*Kill Bill*]. It's always fun to be in love with someone else's movie. But as much as I like that, I'm a loner. If you're an only child, you get comfortable with your own company. I can have a great time reading or watching movies by myself.

EW What kinds of books do you read?

QT All kinds of stuff. I'm attracted to genre-oriented stuff, like crime stories or mysteries. But if somebody turns me on to a writer I like, then it's not about story or genre. Then it's just about the writer's point of view. One of my favorite books of all time is Larry McMurtry's *All My Friends Are Going to Be Strangers*. I use Mc-

Murtry as an example of what I'm trying to do in one way or another. I've always liked the way he moves characters from book to book. When I sell my movies, I retain the rights to characters so I can follow them. I can follow Pumpkin and Honey Bunny or anybody and it's not *Pulp Fiction II*.

EW Motherhood is a big part of *Kill Bill 2*. Since you've been quoted as saying the Bride is you, does that mean you're thinking about having kids?

QT Oh yeah, totally. I can honestly say that all that baby stuff would not have been in *Kill Bill* if I hadn't written the part for Uma. We are best friends, and when I was writing the script it was a good excuse to hang out with her. And if you hang out with Uma, you're going to hang out with her kids. I had a wonderful connection with her daughter, Maya. Actually, the truthful answer is that Maya made me want to have kids. [She] showed me I'd be a good father.

EW One critic suggested that no one with a child could have written the scene where the Bride kills Vernita in front of her child.

QT I completely and utterly disagree. When you're dealing in the genres of Hong Kong kung fu films and spaghetti Westerns, or even American Westerns, that is an absolute staple of those movies—the child on the prairie sees his parents slaughtered and spends the rest of his life avenging the deaths. At that moment the child is dead and the warrior is born—that's the symbolism.

5.5 Killer Movie Moments

Tarantino's off-the-top-of-his-head best-of list: bullets, baseball bats, a bitchin' score, and the bodaciously batty



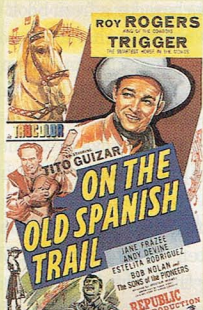
1 The last shoot-out in Michael Cimino's *Year of the Dragon* "You forget to breathe during it!"



2 Joe Don Baker in the bar with the baseball bat in the original *Walking Tall*.



4 Sonny Corleone getting it in *The Godfather*.



3 "All the early stuff by William Witney [On the Old Spanish Trail; Adventures of Red Ryder], who, for all intents and purposes, created the modernized, choreographed Western fight scene we see today. He came up with the cinematic language by watching Busby Berkeley musicals."



5 Dean Stockwell and Dennis Hopper singing "In Dreams" in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*. "You're like, Is this even happening? Am I watching this?"



5.5 "There's a Japanese movie, *All About Lily Chou-Chou*, by a really terrific director, Shunji Iwai. He has my career in Japan—he did a movie called *Swallowtail Butterfly* that was to Japan what *Pulp Fiction* was to America. The *Lily Chou-Chou* soundtrack is really cool to make out to."

EW Was turning 40 hard?

QT No. I couldn't be doing better than I'm doing. I could not be doing more than I want to do. The privileges I have are vast. I've got all the money I could ever need. I mean, I'm not talking grandiose, but just to live like Elvis Presley on crack, all right? Also, I hate working, so I'll never have to work for a living again.

EW You hate working except for making movies...

QT Exactly. But I never want to have to *work* at movies. I never have to make a movie to pay for my pool or to reposition myself in Hollywood. I can make a movie when I mean it. I have a really fortunate position in this industry. I am able to truly, in this town, live the life of an artist.

EW You've been quoted as saying that you've created an infallible career; that you don't fear anything. There's got to be something that scares you.

QT I'm not afraid of this, but I am taking precautions: I don't want to be an old director. A lot of the ['70s] movie brats have gotten old and it shows in their work, and I don't want that. I'm not picking on them—in the 100 years of cinema, directors just don't get better as they get older. I really do think directing is a young man's game. I want all of my films to be good. Look, as you age your interests change, maybe not everything has to be so visceral or kinetic. If I say Martin Scorsese's movies are getting kind of geriatric, he can say, F--- you, man! I'm doing what I want to do, I'm following my muse, and he's 100 percent right. I'm in my church praying to my god and he's in his church praying to his. There was a time we were in the same church, and I miss that. I don't want to go to that church. If I was headed to that church, I would write novels.

EW So how do you imagine Quentin Tarantino, boy wonder, at 60?

QT I won't be making movies, that's for sure. I want to get some movie theaters—I'm kind of a frustrated theater owner anyway. And I want to have a good life and let the filmography stand on its own. I don't want to be some old guy pitching f---ing scripts.

EW What's next? Will it be the much-discussed *Inglorious Bastards*—what you've described as your *Dirty Dozen*?

QT I'm going to take a little break—not as long as the last time—but I'll probably do something small, something modest, in between, and then do the war movie.

EW What about reports of working on Robert Rodriguez's next film, *Sin City*?

QT I totally want to do it—it's based on one of Frank Miller's graphic novels. I'd be a special guest director. He wrote the score for *Kill Bill—Vol. 2* and charged me a dollar to do it, so I'll charge him a buck for directing.

EW Do you ever worry that your moment has passed? As popular as *Kill Bill* was, it didn't have the watercooler buzz of *Reservoir Dogs* or *Pulp Fiction*.

QT It's not something I think about. *Pulp Fiction* was a phenomenon. You can't count on making a phenomenon every time out of the gate or you'll be one sorry bastard. And when you make a movie as violent as *Kill Bill*, you can't be surprised when people don't want to see it. Harvey Weinstein always says, "We could make \$100 million if people weren't *drowning in blood!*" [Laughs.] ■

For the complete three-hour interview with Quentin Tarantino, go to ew.com/tarantino