

The Trouble with Quentin

On the eve of the release of legendary director Quentin Tarantino's latest opus *Django Unchained*, [Jordan Allwood](#) wonders whether, considering the bagginess of some of his recent output, his new film is deserving of the levels of excitement it is receiving

Friday 18 January 2013



In *The Guardian's* list of this year's top directors, Quentin Tarantino unsurprisingly pitched up, taking the number twelve spot ahead of both David Fincher and Christopher Nolan. For many years, Tarantino has found himself as Hollywood's (occasionally self-proclaimed) 'king of cool', but is he really all that good?

All of my problem's with Tarantino's movies could come under a single heading: self-indulgence. At his best, he is a stunning filmmaker, and it would be foolish to argue that *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction* are anything but incredible. There is a reason, though, that those films are the best of his back catalogue, a reason that we go back to them repeatedly - he was constrained. Constrained by budget and by time, he produced a remarkably intelligent heist movie, followed by a time-bending, ice-cool gangster flick. The trouble is, increasing success brings with it higher budgets, more time, and the general loosening of producers' reins.

Let's start with *Kill Bill*. There is a film (and it is one film) that has, at its heart, a decent story. A shame, then, that Quentin takes four-and-a-half hours to tell it, storming into a series of tangents that become increasingly frustrating when all we really want is to see Bill. Don't get me wrong, there are some outstanding moments - the opening fight is brilliant, the half-way twist is genuinely shocking - but it feels as though there's very little with which to hang them together.



One virtue *Kill Bill* enjoys is not featuring one of Tarantino's much loved (ahem) cameos. Cameo is really too kind a word. Quentin the actor is painful to witness, yet another instance in which someone needed to assert a bit of authority over him. In *Reservoir Dogs* his appearance as Mr Brown is forgivable (he gets shot in the face, off-screen, fairly early on). However, his effect on *Pulp Fiction* is grimace-worthy. Wincing, gurning and squinting like an agitated squirrel, his character appears to be from a different planet. A horrible planet. Where people say things like "do you see a sign (wincing) above my house (squints) that says dead n****r storage?". Clint Eastwood he is not.

A shorter cameo features in *Death Proof*, although it isn't that bothersome there because *Death Proof* is dreadful for a whole host of other, self-indulging reasons. I've been told that "I don't get it", that "it's supposed to be like that". No. You cannot defend a boring film by saying that it's supposed to be boring. And boring it is: badly paced, slow, even the cut-down version is too long. Essentially two (admittedly impressive) car chases, strung together with an avalanche of tediously bland conversations between equally bland characters (who, might I add, ALL talk exactly like Quentin Tarantino), *Death Proof* also stinks of the sense that, having been told his dialogue was good, Quentin decided to stick to that, rather than actually making a decent film. I don't care that it's supposed to be retro, that isn't an excuse. Scratchy film stock, obscure soundtrack, old-school credits, they're all great, but they were also great fifteen years earlier in *Reservoir Dogs*. Please, for pity's sake, give us something more.

The trouble with Quentin is that, for every piece of fantastic work, there's always something to spoil the soup. Obviously, the level of disappointment varies with the film; I can stand Eli Roth spoiling five minutes of *Inglorious Basterds*, but I can't tolerate ten minutes of a leering, gratuitous striptease in *Death Proof* (not that I'm comparing Eli Roth to a striptease...or am I?). Watching his films is frustrating because, just as you think he's finally learned some self-control, something always slaps you back out of the film, reminding you that the director, for better or worse, is making these films for himself.



2 comments

Nail on head

18 Jan '13 at 9:19 pm

This is all very true in my mind. I can still remember the excitement and awe I felt watching RD and PF. Found the films afterwards very disappointing, always being about 20 minutes too long. Even *Inglourious Basterds* was a bit of a mess, though it was my favourite of the post PF stuff.

Having said that, I saw *Django* recently and it is comfortably his best since PF. I know that's what people kept always seem to say with his films but it really is. It has the best pacing and he seems to have been reined in a little. Still perhaps a little too long but you should check it out. Only bad point is when QT tries to 'act' and I say that loosely.

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Constantin Stanislavski

22 Jan '13 at 10:44 am

Couldn't agree more about the cameos. Absolutely terrible. DU might be the worst yet.

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