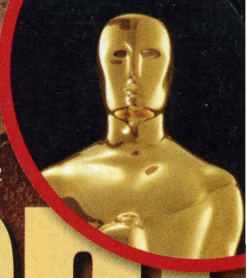


25 MOVIES TO SEE BEFORE OSCAR NIGHT

#1238 • DECEMBER 21, 2012



Entertainment WEEKLY

Jamie Foxx
as Django

★ DJANGO UNCHAINED ★

Tarantino's Wild, Wild Western

Revenge Fantasy, Slave Drama, Bloody Thriller—Inside the Year's Most Shocking Movie

PLUS

LATE GREATS 2012

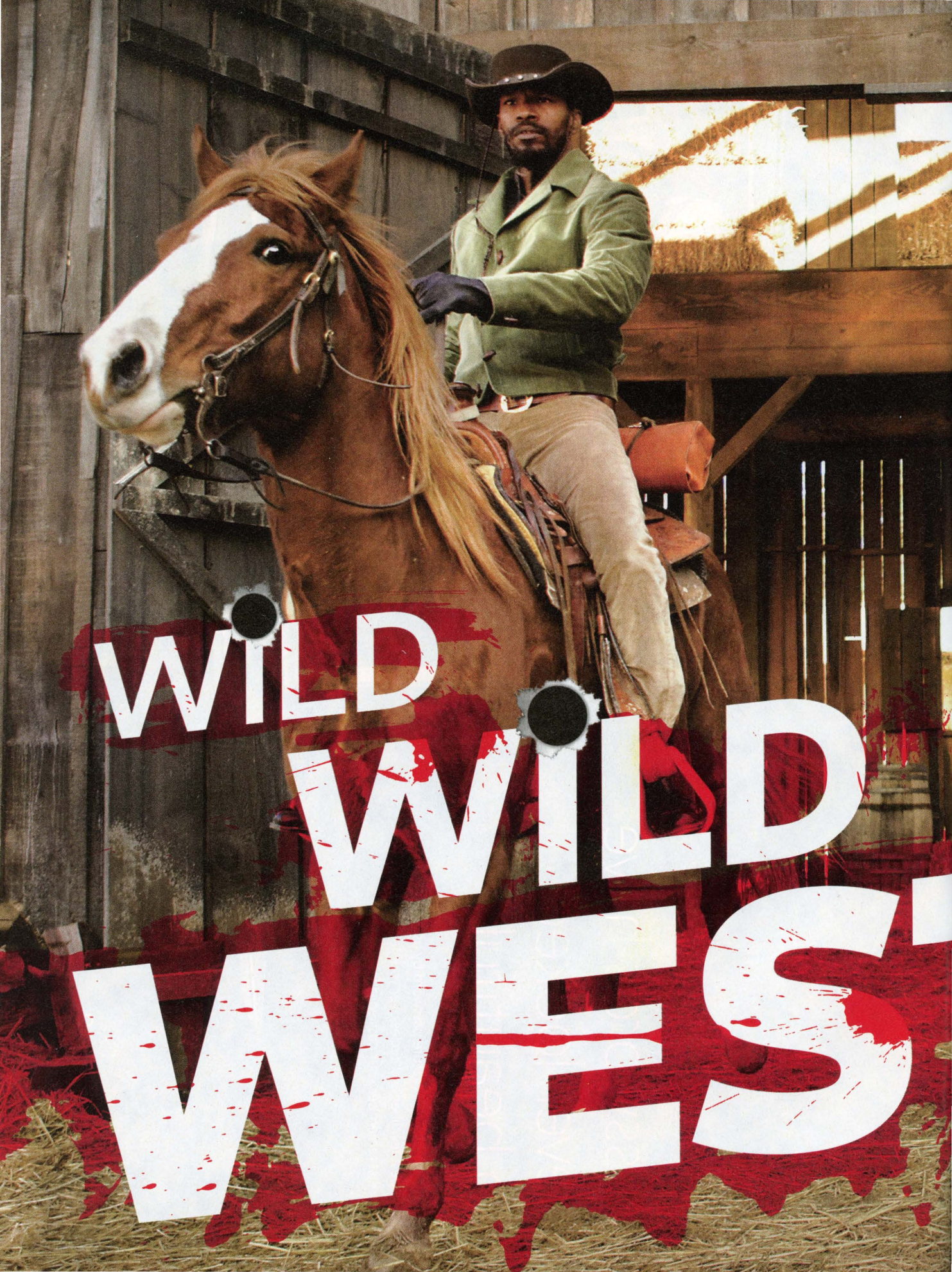
Stevie Nicks on WHITNEY HOUSTON

Tom Cruise on TONY SCOTT

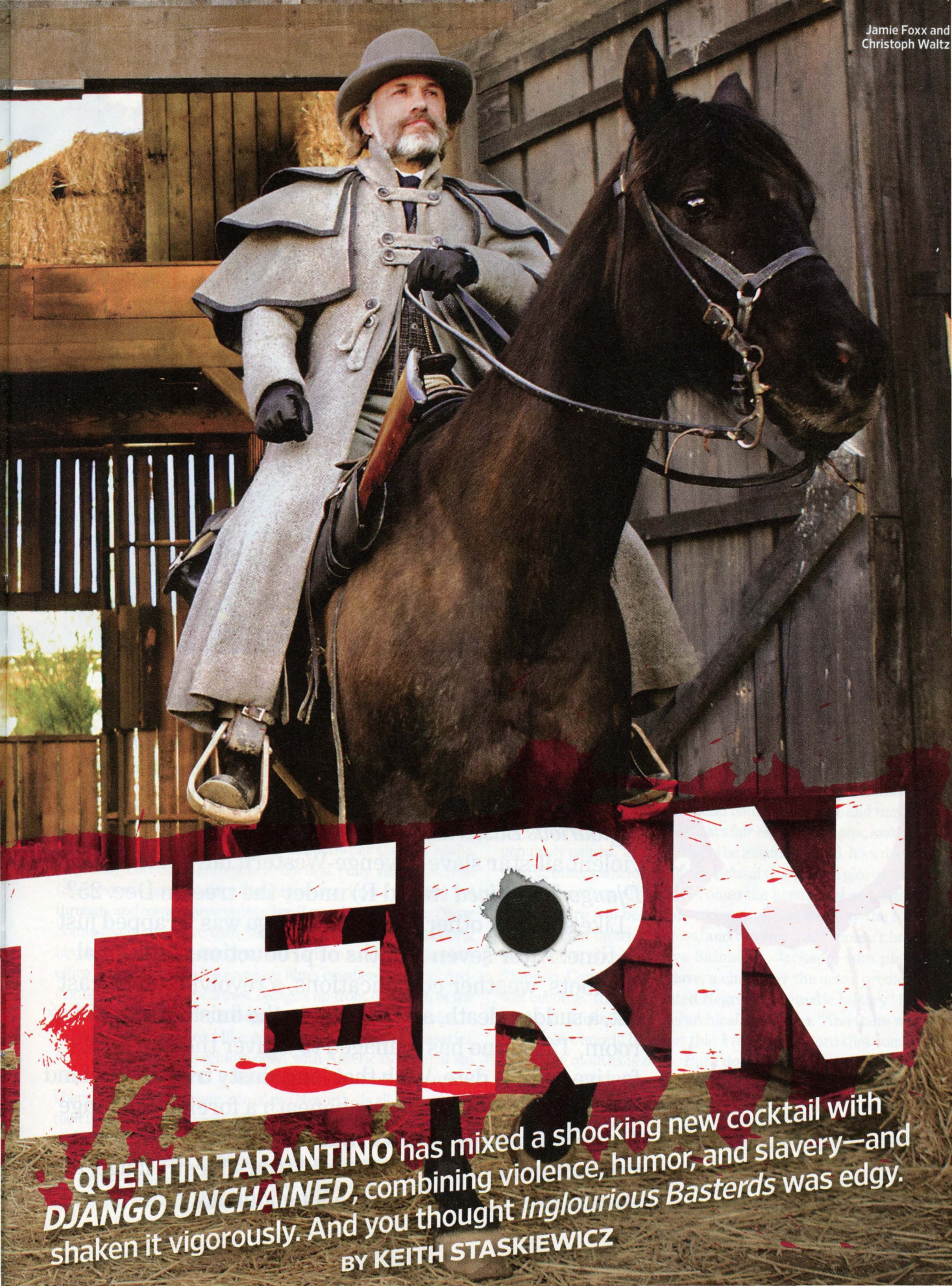
Prince on DICK CLARK

and More





**WILD
WILD
WES!**



TERMIN

QUENTIN TARANTINO has mixed a shocking new cocktail with **DJANGO UNCHAINED**, combining violence, humor, and slavery—and shaken it vigorously. And you thought *Inglourious Basterds* was edgy.
BY KEITH STASKIEWICZ



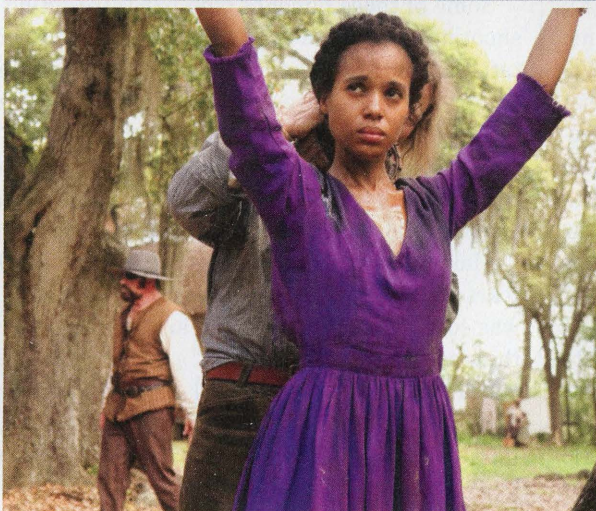
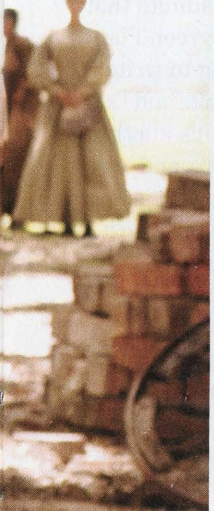
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QUENTIN TARANTINO knows the secret of yuletide gift giving: Get them something they wouldn't get themselves. After all, who but Tarantino, the man who machine-gunned Hitler's face off in his WWII remix *Inglourious Basterds*, would think of laying a hyper-violent all-star slave-revenge-Western fairy tale like *Django Unchained* (rated R) under the tree on Dec. 25?

Like so many other presents, *Django* was wrapped just in time. After seven months of production, additional reshoots, weather complications, a revolving-door cast list, a sudden death, and a sprint to the finish in the editing room, Tarantino has managed to deliver the film for its festive release date. With that long, dusty trail now behind him, the filmmaker slumps beneath a foreign-language *Pulp Fiction* poster in a corner of Do Hwa, the Korean restaurant he co-owns in Manhattan's West Village, and admits he's tired. "It's been a long journey, man."



(Clockwise from far left) Foxx; Foxx, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Waltz; Kerry Washington and Samuel L. Jackson; Washington



Keep in mind: An exhausted Quentin Tarantino, even at 49 and a long way from his wunderkind years, is still as energetic as a regular person would be after two strong coffees. And he's characteristically enthusiastic about his new film: a spaghetti Western transposed to the antebellum South that follows a slave (Jamie Foxx) who teams up with German bounty hunter King Schultz (Christoph Waltz) to rescue Django's wife (Kerry Washington) from the clutches of noxious plantation owner Calvin Candie, played by Leonardo DiCaprio in his first truly villainous role. (See review, page 50.) It's a Tarantino experiment through and through, and comes three years after *Basterds* earned eight Oscar nominations and more than \$320 million worldwide, cementing his place as one of the few filmmakers whose name alone is a box office draw. But while his previous film's cavalier historical revisionism lifted a few eyebrows, *Django's* up-front depiction of the brutal horrors of slavery is likely to raise some serious hackles.

With rare exceptions like ABC's landmark 1977 miniseries *Roots*, Hollywood has seldom dealt with America's original sin head-on. So Tarantino knows that his film—which features liberal, if era-appropriate, use of the N-word—is all but guaranteed to spark controversy. After one of *Django's* first screenings in New York City earlier this month, an African-American woman stood up and, visibly distraught, told Tarantino she was horrified by what she had just seen. A few others voiced their agreement with her, although most in the audience remained

silent. To a degree, Tarantino understands the response. "There is no setup for *Django*, for what we're trying to do. Truthfully, some people are going to respond badly to the film, and maybe they'll blame me, and I guess that's fair enough," he says, looking genuinely pained. "No one likes to be misunderstood. It's a drag."

Still, others will love it for its refusal to wear kid gloves, and for the way Foxx's Django becomes the hero of his own story. "Look, there will be people who are glad at the way the film shines a light on what it does, and the fact that it doesn't hold back about slavery," says Samuel L. Jackson, who plays Stephen, Candie's head slave, a character the actor predicts will become "the most hated Negro in cinematic history" for his rabid defense of the hierarchical status quo. "And there will be people who will be upset that every other word that comes out of our mouths is n-----. But I don't see that as a bad thing. Isn't the problem that we *haven't* been talking about this stuff?"

D JANGO IS Tarantino's first Western, but only technically. His love of the genre has infused his previous films with Mexican standoffs, Sergio Leone-style close-ups, and climactic showdowns. The idea to do a "Southern" came to him post-*Basterds*, while he

(PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS SPREAD) ANDREW COOPER (5)

was writing a book on Sergio Corbucci, the Italian filmmaker who directed the original 1966 Western *Django*. Tarantino started churning out a script and soon was inviting Waltz—who won an Oscar for his slithery turn as SS officer Hans Landa in *Basterds*—to his home to read it as he finished, 20 pages at a time. “I’d sit down at his kitchen table, he’d pour me a drink, and then put the still-warm, just-printed pages in front of me,” recalls Waltz, who grew a thick salt-and-pepper beard for the role. “And I’d sit there reading while he was eyeing me.”

While Tarantino wrote Schultz expressly for Waltz, he had no one actor in mind for his unshackled protagonist. “*Django* was Django,” he says. “That’s always a pretty exciting place to be as a writer. You’re not gilding it towards this actor’s strength or that actor’s strength, it’s just the character. Then it’s ‘Let me find somebody to fill this role.’” At one point he met with Will Smith, news of which spread like a prairie brushfire, but that collaboration ultimately failed to come to fruition. Other prominent actors also vied for the role. “Terrence Howard is a fantastic actor, and he had some really interesting insight into the character,” he says. “And Chris Tucker really got the movie. But when Jamie came over to my house and we talked, he was just *the guy*. His voice, the fact that he’s from Texas, the fact that he could already ride, that he has a horse...he was the cowboy.”

As *Django*, Foxx charts a full arc from chain-gang slave to fearless gunslinger. He’s taciturn—a rare trait for a Tarantino character but not for the genre, where Clint Eastwood could communicate monologues with merely a grimace and a chomp on his cheroot. Foxx fell for the role immediately. The actor has a history of reaching into his own past for his work, whether it’s his time as a high school quarterback for *Any Given Sunday* or his classical-piano training for *Ray*. *Django* was no different. The horse Foxx rides in the film is his own, Cheetah, whom he bought about five years ago. Growing up in small-town Texas, the star says he used to spin little plastic revolvers and dream of playing the cowboy. “All that heroic cowboy stuff that you get to watch as a kid, I got to do that,” he says. Not everyone on Foxx’s team was so confident about the role. Jackson says he received a call from

the actor’s reps early in the process. “Jamie’s people called me one day to see what I thought about the script,” he says. “They said they were worried about his brand, and I said, ‘In what way? Because he’s playing a slave? He’s the hero of the movie!’”

Like Tarantino’s last film, *Django* isn’t entirely historically accurate (see sidebar, page 30). “There’s historical with a capital H, this almost arm’s-length, dusty record of things,” says Tarantino. “But I wanted it to be vital. I wanted it to work as a Western, and I wanted it to work as an adventure film that would be thrilling and exciting—where you’re not being exploitative, but you’re also not pulling any punches about the sexuality and the brutality that was happening at that time.”

Some of those punches land hard. Tarantino admits that shooting on location at Louisiana’s historic Evergreen Plantation raised the emotional stakes. “It’s one thing to write a cotton field full of slaves in the background as Schultz and Don Johnson’s character have lemonade,” he says. “It’s another thing to plant the cotton where it didn’t exist before, and then put 100 black people in the hot sun dressed as slaves picking it, and putting white people on horses yelling at them to do it.”

Making the film on land anointed by the blood, sweat, and tears of actual slaves had an effect on the actors as well. “There was something very haunting and profound about shooting those scenes on sacred ground,” says Kerry Washington, whose character, Broomhilda, is bullwhipped and imprisoned in a metal hotbox. Despite her Valkyrian namesake, she’s much more of a damsel in distress than Tarantino’s earlier heroines—Uma Thurman’s The Bride in *Kill Bill*, say—but Washington believes Broomhilda isn’t a passive victim. “It was special to me to be part of a story that allowed for the black female character in the context of slavery to be the princess, because that just wasn’t a fairy tale that black women were afforded.”

The dragon in this tale is DiCaprio’s evil, petulant plantation owner, who rules over a cotton kingdom and finds diversion in “Mandingo fighting,” a blood sport that pits slave against slave in gladiatorial combat to the death. “He was one of the most deplorable, indulgent, horrendous characters I’ve ever

THE FILMS BEHIND THE FILM



1. DJANGO
One of *Django Unchained*'s biggest inspirations was the 1966 original, *Django*. Star Franco Nero has an extended cameo, and a scene with a proto-KKK gang echoes one of the earlier film's plot threads.

2. TAXI DRIVER
Martin Scorsese's 1976 classic is one of Tarantino's favorite films, and Christoph Waltz's Schultz has an apparatus up his sleeve that pops a gun into his hand much like the one used by Travis Bickle. "Yeah, that's in *Taxi Driver*," says Tarantino.

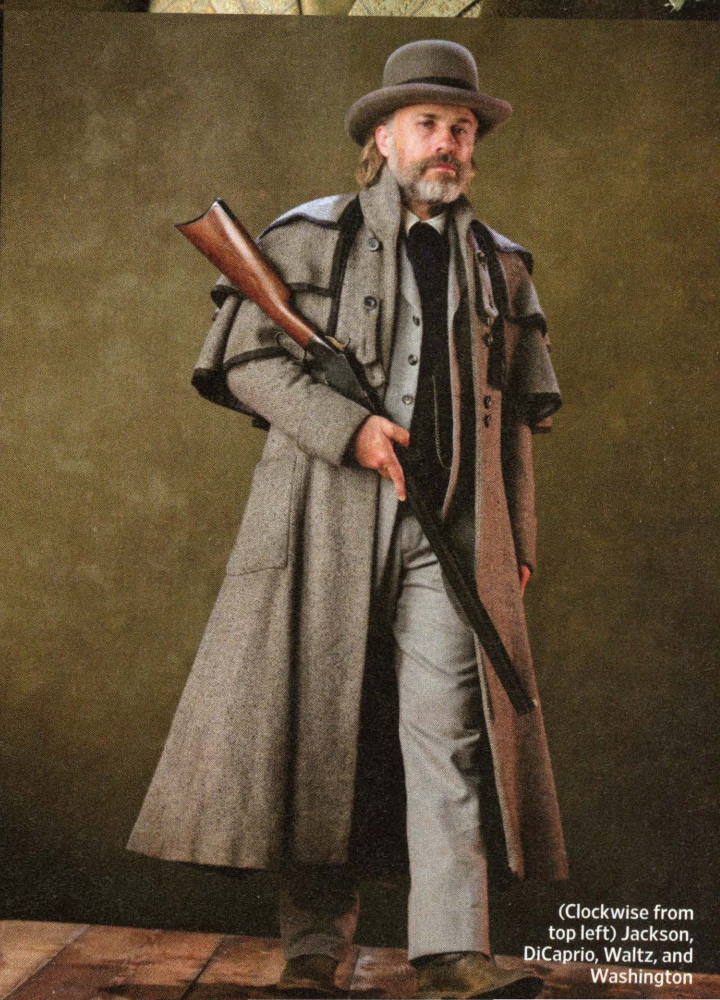
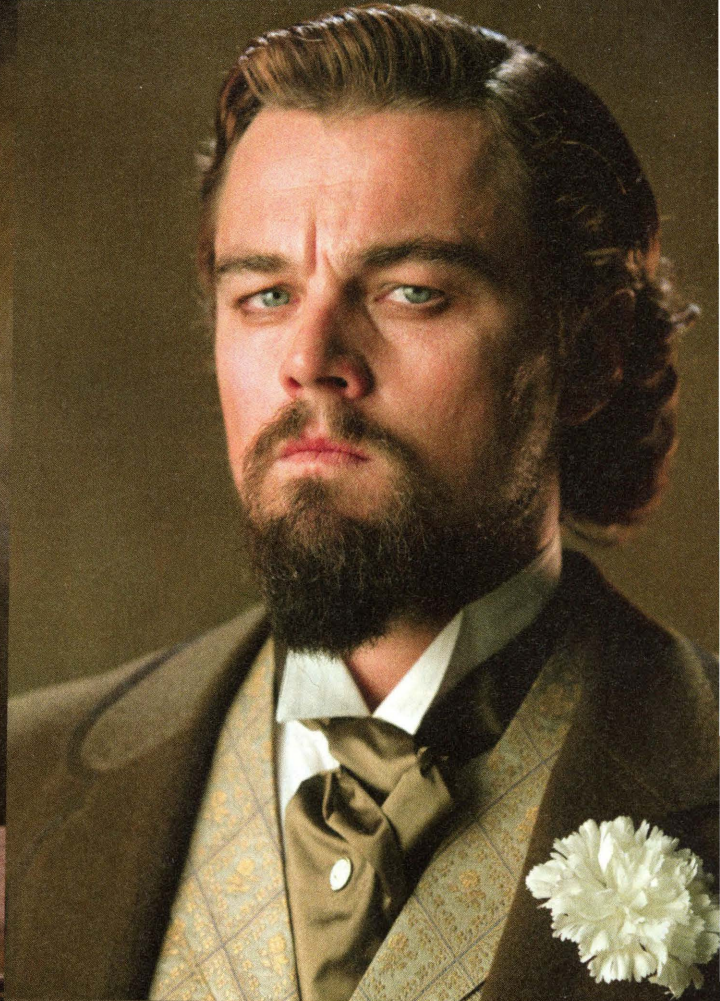
"But it's also in this Lee Van Cleef Western called *Sabata*."

3. BONANZA
Michael Landon's character on the 1959–73 TV Western *Bonanza* inspired one of *Django*'s costumes. "That 'Little Joe' green jacket is a cool, sexy, all-purpose jacket," Tarantino says. "So we took the idea of it and fitted it to Jamie [Foxx]. And it looked pretty cool."

4. SON OF A GUNFIGHTER
As a clever one-off joke, Tarantino cast Russ Tamblyn as "Son of a Gunfighter"

because he starred in a 1966 Western of the same name. Then he cast the actor's real-life daughter Amber Tamblyn (*127 Hours*) as "Daughter of a Son of a Gunfighter."

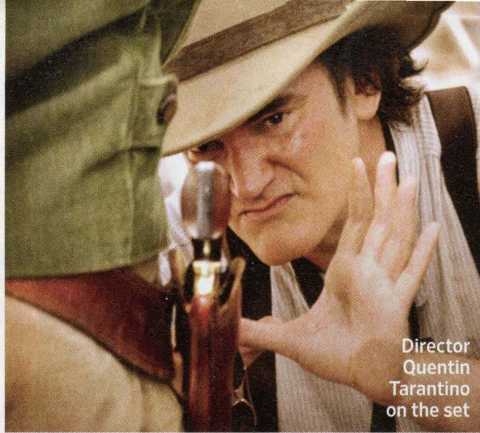
5. THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
Tarantino drew on many sources for the dynamic between his protagonists. "Schultz is a bit like Yoda to *Django*'s Luke," he says. "But I was also looking at [1966's] *Nevada Smith* and the relationship between Steve McQueen and Brian Keith." —Keith Staskiewicz



(Clockwise from top left) Jackson, DiCaprio, Waltz, and Washington

read in my life,” says DiCaprio, who had been wanting to work with Tarantino for ages. This is the star’s first nonleading role in nearly 15 years (although he was originally in the mix to play *Basterds*’ Landa before the role went to Waltz), and he’s now generating awards buzz for his performance, as are castmates Foxx and Waltz. “Once I stepped on set, it was a different me. I had to have a different relationship with everybody,” DiCaprio says.

Django’s road to completion appeared bumpy. Names continued to attach themselves to the project before detaching again. Kevin Costner and Kurt Russell were both in talks for a part that would eventually be folded into Billy Crash, one of Candie’s stooges played by *Justified*’s Walton Goggins. Jonah Hill and Sacha Baron Cohen were each slated to appear in the film, before dropping out; in the end, Hill has a small bit as a member of an early, bumbling version of the Ku Klux Klan. (Tarantino even cast himself in a key small role after Anthony LaPaglia bowed out because of a scheduling conflict.) The filmmaker was rewriting the script during production, including major changes to its third act. Shooting in snowy Wyoming and rainy Louisiana added some weather headaches—a rite of



Director
Quentin
Tarantino
on the set

passage for any Western. Then, with one month left on the shoot, Oscar-nominated production designer J. Michael Riva suddenly died of a stroke.

Riva’s wasn’t the only death that cast a pall over the project. *Django* marks Tarantino’s first major feature without Sally Menke, his editor and collaborator of nearly two decades, who died on a hiking trip in 2010, before Tarantino had

even finished the script. (Menke’s duties were taken over by Fred Raskin, an assistant editor on *Kill Bill*.) “When I went into the process of editing it, yeah, it was sad,” says Tarantino, pausing and turning unusually serious. “I missed her terribly.”

During the editing process, Tarantino and executive producer Harvey Weinstein also pondered splitting the film into two parts, as they had done with their last collaboration, *Kill Bill*. “That always comes up, especially when you’re running out of time,” says Weinstein, noting that they would have made the cut at the point where DiCaprio enters. “Trust me, we could have. But you really need both halves of the whole for it to work.” In the end they managed to trim the story to two hours and 45 minutes, finishing the final cut only two days before the first screening.

BACK AT DO HWA, the rollicking kick start of *Stealers Wheel*’s “Stuck in the Middle With You” rumbles over the speakers. Even Tarantino laughs, acknowledging the song that scored the gruesome ear-ectomy in *Reservoir Dogs*. This year marks the 20th anniversary of Tarantino’s debut film, a Sundance phenom that launched his career. (If you want to get circular about it, you might note that *Reservoir Dogs*’ iconic amateur-surgery scene was inspired by a similarly brutal ear slicing in Corbucci’s original *Django*.)

With his eighth film in the can, the director claims he wants to retire before his consistency suffers. “I don’t want to be doing a *Topaz* or a *Buddy Buddy*,” he says, referring to the subpar later output of Alfred Hitchcock and Billy Wilder, respectively. Tarantino is fiercely protective of his legacy. He says he makes movies not for the black-tie audiences at gala premieres but for “the kid 10, 20 years from now who watches the TNT version of *Django Unchained* on TV”—a kid not unlike the young Tarantino, who famously worked at a video-rental store. Weinstein, on the other hand, is more focused on the here and now, particularly *Django*’s release on Christmas, which may seem an odd day to launch such a violent, genre-busting film. But the pinch between awards-season eligibility and the film’s long production schedule narrowed his options. “What date could we have?” Weinstein asks.

Regardless of the reception for *Django* this year, Tarantino believes that films shed their contemporary context over time. For him, the true test of a movie’s worth comes decades later, when some boy or girl stumbles upon *Django* and utters what Tarantino believes to be the greatest thing any filmgoer can say after a movie is over: “Wow, who the hell did that?” ■

WOULD DJANGO PASS A HISTORY TEST?

MANDINGO FIGHTING

FACT In the film, DiCaprio’s plantation owner trains slaves to fight each other until one is left standing—and so-called battles royal really did occur. Ralph Ellison famously documents one in his 1952 novel *Invisible Man*.

FICTION The term *Mandingo fighting* is a Tarantino invention, a nod to the 1975 exploitation film *Mandingo*, which depicts a similar gladiatorial system.

DJANGO’S SUNGLASSES

FACT The sunglasses that Jamie Foxx sports may look ultra-modern, but their round spectacles and hooked temple arms are close to the earliest versions of tinted eyewear designed in the mid-1700s by James Ayscough.

FICTION Of course, sunglasses were originally meant to correct bad eyesight, not protect against the sun’s glare. And definitely not just to look badass.

BOUNTY HUNTERS

FACT Christoph Waltz’s Schultz is modeled on men who helped tame the Wild West by hunting down criminals across jurisdictions.

FICTION Schultz calls himself a servant of the court, but that didn’t become official until an 1872 Supreme Court ruling. And there were certainly no black bounty hunters in the region then. —Keith Staskiewicz



Django Unchained



Jamie Foxx;
(inset) Kerry
Washington

STARRING

Jamie Foxx

DIRECTED BY

Quentin Tarantino

R, 2 HRS., 45 MINS.

By Owen Gleiberman

Django Unchained

It would now be a surprise if a new Quentin Tarantino movie *didn't* dip into the well of '70s grind-house cinema. *Django Unchained*, Tarantino's deliriously kinky and shameless (and also overly long and scattershot) racial-exploitation epic, is set in the slave days, and among other things, it's a low-down orgy of flamboyant cruelty and violence: whippings, a scene in which a man gets torn apart by dogs, plus the most promiscuous use of the N-word ever heard in a mainstream movie. Is *Django* attacking the cruelty or reveling in it? Maybe both, and that's what gives the film's best parts their danger—the way that Tarantino, with lip-smacking down-and-dirty subversive gusto, rubs our noses in the forbidden spectacle of America's racist ugliness.

What's fun about *Django*—at least, when it *is* fun—is that it's also a liberal-hearted revenge Western, with a stoically commanding Jamie Foxx in the part of Django, a slave who is bought and freed by Dr. King Schultz (Christoph Waltz), an abolitionist bounty hunter. He wants Django to help him locate and hunt down a handful of the slave's former overseers. Waltz, speaking in his German-from-Neptune accent, and in cadences so

literate they're a little loopy, plays Schultz as a charismatic benevolent oddball, and he and Foxx, with that smoky and knowing killer gaze, make an irresistible buddy team.

Yet the film's first hour is a little... basic. There's a funny, farcical scene with an early version of the Klan (the joke is they can't see out of their hoods), but *Django* doesn't spike to full Tarantino fever until it gets inside the big house of Calvin Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio), a wily plantation owner. One of his slaves, Broomhilda (a luminous Kerry Washington), is Django's wife, and Schultz and Django now pretend to be slave traders to fool Candie into selling her.

DiCaprio, having a blast, makes Candie the equivalent of Waltz's Nazi in *Inglourious Basterds*: a racist

villain who mesmerizes us by elevating his ideology into a puckishly thought-out vision of the world. Yet *Django* isn't nearly the film that *Inglourious* was. It's less clever, and it doesn't have enough major characters—or enough of Tarantino's trademark structural ingenuity—to earn its two-hour-and-45-minute running time. What it does have is Samuel L. Jackson in a pinpoint performance as an unctuous old house slave who's more layered than he appears, and when Django, Schultz, and Candie are sitting around the parlor trying to outwit each other, the film achieves that QT hypnotic mood. But only for a while. In the gaudy-bloody last 30 minutes (think over-the-top and beyond), the mood vanishes. And *Django Unchained* becomes an almost sadistically literal example of exploitation at its most unironic. **B-**

★ PRIZE FIGHTER ★

ANTHONY BREZNICAN ON DJANGO UNCHAINED'S OSCAR CHANCES

NEAR CERTAINTIES

Original Screenplay, Quentin Tarantino; Supporting Actor, Leonardo DiCaprio

POSSIBLES

Picture; Director, Tarantino; Lead Actor, Jamie Foxx; Lead Actor, Christoph Waltz; Cinematography, Robert Richardson

