With his rollicking WWII caper film INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS making its cable-TV premiere this Saturday, August 14 on Showtime, we're presenting an extensive interview with its writer/director Quentin Tarantino, originally conducted as a pretaped feature for FANGORIA RADIO. The acclaimed filmmaker behind RESERVOIR DOGS, PULP FICTION, JACKIE BROWN, KILL BILL and GRINDHOUSE's DEATH PROOF talked up his war epic, his thoughts on the genre and even Fango's 30th-anniversary issue from last year.

FANGORIA: Tell us the basic plot of INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS.

QUENTIN TARANTINO: The idea behind it is a WWII movie, a bunch-of-guys-on-a-mission war movie, like THE DIRTY DOZEN or THE DEVIL'S BRIGADE. Brad Pitt leads a group of eight Jewish soldiers, and they go behind enemy lines in Nazi-occupied France. They're basically doing an Apache resistance against the Nazis, a psychological war. They ambush a patrol, not only kill them, [but] collect their scalps, desecrate the bodies and leave them there for other Nazis to find. And the fact that it's Jews doing it actually is supposed to be even more disturbing to the Nazis and get into the German psyche.

FANG: What were the other inspirations for the story? Anything factual?

TARANTINO: My first jumping-off point about it was just the idea of a bunch of Jewish soldiers behind enemy lines doing this. But when I started doing a lot of research, one of the things I found that actually ended up being kind of true was, an American patrol would get a German soldier and question him to get information. They'd say, "Look, if you don't tell us what we want to know, we're gonna give you to our Jew. And if we give you to our Jew, it's all over for you, pal. You want to talk to me, you don't want to talk to our Jew, 'cause they really got a problem with this whole master race thing." And that's kind of what happens in the movie, just times eight.

FANG: One critic I spoke to felt sorry for the Nazis in the movie, because, in consideration of what went on with the Bush administration and waterboarding, he was drawing this parallel between what your characters do to the Nazi POWs and what our government allegedly did to the Iraqi captives and Al Qaeda.

TARANTINO: Personally, if I was in WWII, I'd be very down with what the basterds are doing, especially when it comes to Nazis. Having said that, I didn't want to make it easy. You can just find it distasteful, in which case you're probably not gonna like the movie anyway. But it would've been easy to make it much more "Rah! Rah!" and cheer them, but I actually tried to undercut that and make it a little bit more disturbing. Disturbing is not the right word; complicated. I want your response to be complicated, and what I mean by that is, say in the interrogation scene with the German sergeant that we're kind of referring to toward the beginning of the movie. On one hand, there is this gallows humor to the scene, and it is quite fun, especially in this "Get the Nazis" way. But it's complicated actually, because the German sergeant is very brave. If I made him a cringing coward when he faces Eli Roth, that would've been a whole different experience and you couldn't help but enjoy it a little bit more. This German sergeant passes the test under any criteria of bravery in warfare. Thus, that complicates the issue. And it's not quite so "Rah! Rah!"

FANG: Your film does not stick to any kind of historical accuracy. What made you take that approach?

TARANTINO: Well, you know, it wasn't something I planned from the beginning. You're actually referring to this thing that happens in the third act toward the end. I had planned to completely follow history until I got right up against it. What made me change my mind is this: I was writing the story, and all of a sudden it occurred to me that, wait a minute, my characters don't know that they're a part of history; they're in the present. They don't know that there are things that they can do and things that they can't do. None of my characters have ever been guarded by stuff like that, and now's not the time to start. Where I'm coming from on it is, basically, my

characters change the course of the war. Now that didn't happen because my characters didn't exist. If they had existed, everything that happens is quite plausible.

FANG: Even though the film is largely a fairy tale—you even open it with "Once upon a time in Nazi-occupied France"—I like the fact that all the characters are realistic, and you cast German actors to play the Germans, Jewish actors to play the Jews, French, etc. And they speak their natural tongues, and it's subtitled. Most WWII movies don't do that, like the recent Tom Cruise movie VALKYRIE.

TARANTINO: I'm not playing kick the dog with VALKYRIE, 'cause I actually respect Bryan Singer. But one of the things about it, though, is to me, when you're supposed to be in Nazi Germany and everybody speaks English or even British English half the time, you'd think the Third Reich started at the Old Vic. Or when they do the thing where English is supposed to be German. I think that's what makes those movies quaint, it makes them feel old-fashioned, like a movie from 1967. That was a contrivance we put up with then; I don't know why we did, but that time has passed. I mean, the idea of seeing an Iraqi war movie where the Iraqis speak English to each other is unfathomable. You just wouldn't buy it.

So I actually think it's a situation where younger audiences, it'll be much more relevant to them. It just seems like an old-fashioned movie when they don't speak the normal languages. Not only that, but there's this whole aspect of suspense that can be got out of these different languages if you go with it as opposed to say, WHERE EAGLES DARE, which is a fun movie, but at the same time there's that big sequence where Richard Burton and Clint Eastwood supposedly speak German so beautifully and wonderfully that all they have to do is put on Nazi uniforms and they can mix it up with a bunch of generals. No worry there, and there is no worry because English is supposed to be German in that movie. Where if they actually spoke German, they'd have to pull it off, [plus] there'd be this wonderful level of suspense that these movies have never taken advantage of, and I do.

FANG: Tell us about the offbeat cast you assembled for the movie.

TARANTINO: We've got Brad Pitt in it, and he plays this hillbilly-rooted Lieutenant Aldo Raine. Eli Roth, the director of HOSTEL, plays Donny Donowitz, a.k.a. the Bear Jew. Everybody has these little nicknames. Aldo is a.k.a. Aldo the Apache. The evil guy in the movie, Colonel Landa [Christoph Waltz], is the Jew Hunter. One of the things I got a kick out of is, all the nicknames are given by the enemies. The Germans are the ones that nickname the basterds, the Germans are the ones who call Eli the Bear Jew, the ones who call Brad Aldo the Apache. It's the Jews in France that call Landa the Jew Hunter.

FANG: Speaking of the Jew Hunter, he kind of comes across as a Sherlock Holmes, especially when he pulls out that…

TARANTINO: Calabash pipe.

FANG: That was great.

TARANTINO: Colonel Landa is a brilliant detective. That is one of the qualities of the character. It's f**ked up that he's a Nazi, but he truly is a brilliant detective. One of the things that I hope happens is that when the Mystery Writers Association give out their Edgars, one of the awards they give out is Best New Detective of the year. I'm really hoping Landa wins because I think he deserves it.

FANG: The film also gets away with a lot of violence. You've been pretty lucky with the MPAA over the years. How do you feel about the shake they tend to get from Hollywood, like in the

documentary THIS FILM IS NOT YET RATED?

TARANTINO: I disagree with a lot of the criticism that the MPAA [often gets]. I know that it's easy to kick these guys around or complain about them all the time. They do a hard job as conscientiously as they can. They will tell you that their responsibility is not to filmmakers, their responsibility is informing the parents of America about the idea of content, and that's true enough, but it's also not true. They realize that they don't want to be censors, that they are working with artists in an art form and they understand that, and I've always had a good situation with them. Part of the problem that filmmakers like Brian De Palma or Wes Craven or other people have had with them is because they go, "You damn Nazis, get your f**king mitts off my movie." Well, who the hell is going to respond to that kind of take? I've always worked with them, and we've always found a meeting of the minds.

FANG: So what's next for you? Are you any closer to the *giallo* movie you once told Fango you wanted to do?

TARANTINO: I'm not sure. I would like to do one straight-ahead full-on horror movie. I don't know what it would be, though; I just have to get there. As much as I like the *gialli*, I just think that would be a little too reflexive. Just as much as I like slasher films, it would just be too reflexive to do a slasher movie *per se*. It would probably have elements of it. However, doing wildly big operatic, orchestrated murder scenes, that could definitely be in my future.

FANG: What are your thoughts on the current state of the horror genre?

TARANTINO: One of the best movies hands down last year was DRAG ME TO HELL. It was just absolutely terrific. You know one of the things I liked about DRAG ME TO HELL so much, especially for FANGORIA fans, there is this aspect of, we can't help but be disappointed when Sam Raimi went off to do other kinds of movies; it was almost like he started this visual style with the EVIL DEAD movies and then gave it to everybody else. He didn't follow it up. Whether it be the Coen brothers or Danny DeVito or whatever. DRAG ME TO HELL was like if Sam had actually gone further as a horror filmmaker [and stuck with the genre], as opposed to branching off into other directions. I could almost imagine this being an Avco Embassy release in 1978. If he had just continued making horror films, then this would have been one of the ones he did, one of his classic ones. It was fantastic. And the end is the best part about it, which is usually

the worst part of most horror movies these days. The final moment was the best moment of the whole film.

FANG: And what did you think of Fango's 30th-anniversary issue, as you were saying just before we started?

TARANTINO: The anniversary issue was so special. It actually just reminded me how long I've been reading the magazine and how much it meant to me and I found myself, it made me actually go through my life, from reading the magazine to now. It's always wonderful when you have a little something that actually makes you trip through your life, and this was like tripping through my life via the horror movies and the covers of different FANGORIA issues. I have a whole bunch of back issues of FANGORIA in my magazine collection, and it really made me take them out and start going through them and reading issues again. I reread the Alan Ormsby interview about CAT PEOPLE and picked my favorite covers. I was actually blown away when you put me on the cover of FANGORIA for DEATH PROOF [#262]. There are not that many directors who had their physical face on the cover. Joe Dante did it because he's holding a Gremlin [#38], and there's not many after that.

I've gotta say one thing, though: I was teasing Eli about this. Eli's whole dream was to be on the cover of FANGORIA, and he was really flipped out when my face was on the cover. You guys haven't done this yet, but he was on the cover of *Cahiers du Cinema*! The issue on BASTERDS had him and Brad Pitt. So he made the cover of
Cahiers
before he made the cover of FANGORIA, and that's his only goal, is to be on the cover of FANGORIA.

{jcomments on}