



‘SAY “WHAT” AGAIN!’

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

On Oct. 14, 1994 — 30 years ago — Quentin Tarantino’s “Pulp Fiction,” opened in theaters. The film starred John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson as a pair of mob hit men who find themselves surrounded by even stranger and more violent circumstances than usual.

“Pulp Fiction” would earn seven Academy Award nominations, it would win an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay and, in 2013, would be selected for preservation in the Library of Congress’ National Film Registry.

A SCREENPLAY THAT WAS ‘TOO DEMENTED’

While Quentin Tarantino’s first directorial effort, “Reservoir Dogs,” wasn’t a huge box office hit, it earned him enough respect in Hollywood that he was signed to a deal to develop another film.

Tarantino showed his friends a simple composition notebook and declared: “This is the notebook in which I’m going to

write ‘Pulp Fiction’.” He ended up filling up several notebooks with a script that contained three intertwined storylines, but combined them in a non-linear way.

The head of TriStar Pictures was horrified by the violence and drug use in Tarantino’s result and turned down the script, calling it



Quentin Tarantino

“too demented.” The screenplay eventually found its way to Harvey Weinstein, who made “Pulp Fiction” one of Miramax Pictures’ first purchases after Miramax was bought by the Walt Disney Company.

The film cost only \$8.5 million to make. About \$5 million of that went into actors’ salaries — and a

large chunk of that was due to Tarantino’s bringing in Bruce Willis.

“Pulp Fiction” won the Golden Palm award at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1994 and then easily made back its costs, pulling in \$9.3 million in the first weekend after it was released on Oct. 14, 1994.

BEHIND THE SCENES OF ‘PULP FICTION’

Tarantino originally wanted Michelle Pfeiffer for the role of Mia. He also considered Isabella Rossellini, Meg Ryan, Halle Berry, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Jennifer Aniston and Joan Cusack for the part before finally offering it to Uma Thurman. Thurman wasn’t so sure about the project, so Tarantino read her the script over the phone to convince her to sign on.



Thurman was worried about performing the twist dance contest scene with Travolta, who had danced so memorably in “Saturday Night Fever,” “Grease,” and “Staying Alive.” When she mentioned this to him, Travolta told her to “shut up and twist.” Thurman’s work on the film would earn her an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actress.



The character of Butch the boxer was written for Matt Dillon. Tarantino tweaked the script to make Butch older and offered the role to Mickey Rourke, who also turned it down. Finally, Tarantino offered the part to Bruce Willis — who, in turn, was disappointed he hadn’t been offered the role of Vincent. Willis filmed all his scenes over just 18 days.



Tarantino typically writes roles for specific actors he has in mind. He wanted Michael Madson to play Vincent, but Madson passed up “Pulp Fiction” to work on “Wyatt Earp” instead. John Travolta, who much of Hollywood regarded as a washed-up actor, was hired to replace him. This film turned out to be his second comeback film, after “Look Who’s Talking.”



Tarantino had Samuel L. Jackson in mind for the role of Jules but then found himself impressed by Paul Calderon’s audition. Jackson was called in for a second interview. He spent his interview eating a burger and fries — which he’d be doing in a key scene. Jackson’s character was originally supposed to have a huge afro.



The 1964 Chevelle Malibu convertible Vincent drives in the movie belonged to Tarantino, but it was stolen from him soon after “Pulp Fiction” was released. Nearly two decades later, the car turned up near Oakland, California, in the possession of a man who had bought it 12 years before and had spent \$40,000 restoring the car.



Harvey Keitel played the brief role of “the Wolf,” who specializes in quietly cleaning up messes and who takes care of Vincent and Jules after Vincent accidentally shoots a man in Jules’ car. Keitel helped Tarantino raise funding for the movie, made sure Tarantino was allowed to direct it and even talked Willis into taking a role in the film.



One key scene in the film comes when Mia finds Vincent’s heroin, thinks it’s cocaine and overdoses on it. Vincent seeks aid from his dealer, who gives him adrenaline to inject into Mia’s chest. The jab Travolta gives Thurman is jarring, but it’s fake: They started with the syringe already in Thurman and Travolta then dramatically pulls it out. They then reversed the film.

WORLDWIDE BOX OFFICE GROSSES FOR TARANTINO-DIRECTED MOVIES

