



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



Jason Clarke

ON THE RISE

Zero Dark Thirty Star Jason Clarke

A bold turn as a bin Laden-hunting CIA agent in *Zero Dark Thirty* has made Clarke one of Hollywood's most wanted. —SARA VILKOMERSON

When Kathryn Bigelow (*The Hurt Locker*) told Jason Clarke she wanted him to play a part in *Zero Dark Thirty*, he surprised both the Oscar-winning director and himself with his reaction. "I just grabbed the woman and hugged her," says the actor, 43, still sounding somewhat incredulous. His enthusiasm is understandable. *Zero Dark Thirty* (rated R, in theaters Dec. 19), which tracks the man-hunt for Osama bin Laden, has

been topping critics' lists and is already considered a Best Picture favorite. And Clarke's portrayal of a CIA operative charged with breaking accused terrorists is mesmerizing, a potent mix of intelligence, tenderness, and ferocity. "I always thought that [my character] was the type of interrogator who's like a boxer," he says. "You've got to give a bit of skin. You've got to open yourself up if you want to get in there and hit." The role is generating Oscar chatter for the Australian-born actor, who's been working for almost two decades, most recently alongside Shia LaBeouf and Tom Hardy in *Lawless* and on Fox's *The Chicago Code*. And he's not slowing down: In 2013 Clarke will be seen in Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby*; the action thriller *White House Down* (from which Clarke is currently nursing two ribs cracked in a fight scene with Channing Tatum—"At least they were broken by the Sexiest Man Alive," he jokes); Terrence Malick's star-studded *Knight of Cups*; and William Monahan's *Mojave*. But for now Clarke seems content to enjoy the success of *Zero Dark Thirty*. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime film," he says. "You can feel that it's special."



With Kyle Chandler in *Zero Dark Thirty*