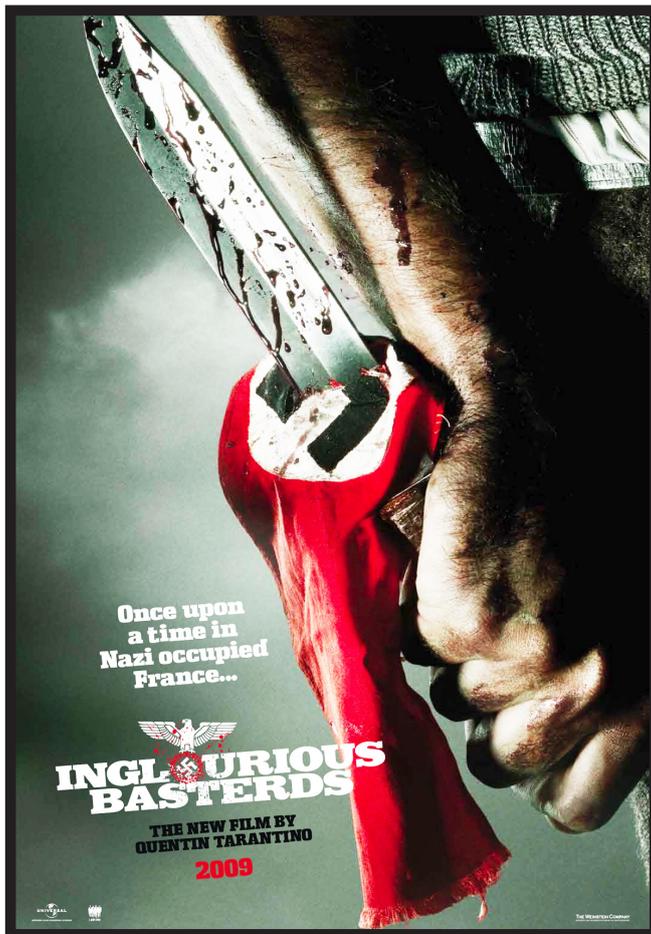


Film Review ...  
**Inglourious Basterds**  
 by Quentin Tarantino

If you have seen a Quentin Tarantino film in the past, you'll already know whether you are going to see *Inglourious Basterds*. His films tend to work on people like audiovisual marmite, inspiring either intense dislike or a compelling desire for the unwholesome. If you haven't seen a Quentin Tarantino film before, you might be confused by the extremities of reactions that hail the film variously as "the best film of the year" (Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times*), or "morally akin to holocaust denial" (Jonathan Rosenbaum, formerly head critic of the *Chicago Reader*).

Now, you know how movie reviews work: a brief but unrevealing précis of the movie is followed by a quasi-insightful analysis of whether the director has achieved his aims. *Inglourious Basterds* renders some of this process superfluous. Tarantino's magpie approach to filmmaking means that any attempt to judge the plot's originality would be to wilfully ignore the fact that it 'borrows' a series of tropes from earlier cinematic sources: for the Basterds themselves, a team of Jewish Americans parachuted into occupied France to murder as many Nazis as possible, see *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), while Shoshana's quest to avenge the death of her family is such a familiar storyline (1974's *Death Wish*, among countless others) that it was parodied as long ago as 1987 in *The Princess Bride*. Some of the dialogue has even been snatched wholesale from 1985's bratpack classic *The Breakfast Club* ("Two hits. Me hitting you, you hitting the floor").

Because Tarantino essentially deals with only one subject: genre films. His filmography so far consists of virtuoso reworkings of the Gangster (*Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*), Blaxploitation (*Jackie Brown*), Martial Arts (*Kill Bill*) and Grindcore



(*Deathproof*) genres. In *Inglourious Basterds*, he constructs the ultimate war-western by reversing the power relationship between that unambiguously moral figure, the World War II Jew, and his unassailably evil nemesis, the World War II Nazi. If you want complex explorations of how the holocaust could have happened in modern Europe, rent *The Reader*: all you'll find in *Inglourious Basterds* are ironic reclamations of American movie heroism and Scooby Doo-style villains, one of whom happens to be Hitler. But the virtue of Tarantino's approach is that he commits everything to creating sensations that are particular to film. Scenes of expertly modulated suspense are filled out in lurid colours and underscored by daringly anachronistic musical choices (Bowie's *Cat People*, from 1982, soundtracks a scene set in 1940s France). Aside from the generous sight of Kate Winslet's nipples, nothing about *The Reader* justifies a cinematic treatment of the source novel; *Inglourious Basterds*, in contrast, could only exist as a film, and as such is a glorious affirmation of the medium.

As to the claim that *Inglourious Basterds* is akin to holocaust denial, that very much depends on what moral accountability you, the viewer, expect from a film. Jonathan Rosenbaum supported his judgment by invoking Roland Barthes' view that anything that makes facism unreal is wrong. A defence of Tarantino's film might argue that it has nothing to do with the actual war, only cinematic representations of it, but it's not a defence to be made lightly. *Inglourious Basterds* is balls-out superhero shit that takes perverse pleasure in its own simplistic moral vision, and which demands the viewer leave all thoughts of the real War at the door.

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by Peter Crowe