



Tarantino's 'Kill Bill: Vol. 2' stands well on its own

Tarantino's new film lacks the kung fu punch of 'Vol. 1'

By Steven Neuman
News Reporter

Forget all the film-geek babble about Quentin Tarantino splitting one film into two — "Kill Bill: Volume 2" is essentially a sequel, and sequels as a rule aren't very good. It's too hard to live up to the hype. As a sequel this movie is decent at best, but when taken as an individual work, its stock rises considerably.

Primarily, the movie has an entirely different pace that translates into the overall aesthetic of the film. Everything is slower, and whereas "Vol. 1" was a furiously fast tribute to kung fu films, "Vol. 2" is a methodical study of classic westerns. It feels like clockwork slowly

ticking toward an inevitable end.

The rest of the movie is designed to reinforce this perception. The film picks up with The Bride, played by Uma Thurman, who is off to kill the last members of the now-defunct Deadly Viper Assassination Squad

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(DiVAS). She killed two of the members the first time around, but the action is put on hold as the movie finally begins to flesh out The Bride's past with Bill, played by David Carradine.

A flashback to The Bride's fatal wedding rehearsal, where Bill gunned her down, is perhaps one of the most striking sequences in recent cinematic history. The black-and-white

cinematography has an earthy graininess that alludes to the western genre, but also recalls Dorothea Lange's Depression-era portraits. When the creased face of Bill — essentially a disembodied voice in "Vol. 1" — finally appears, his visage is strikingly worn and weathered, a factor only heightened by the stylized photography.

The whole look of the film is an homage to every possible source of inspiration, with references so deep and obscure that only Tarantino could know them all. However, the cumulative effect is a comforting, albeit discontinuous, atmosphere of pop culture that intentionally tries to evoke strong emotions in the viewer through familiarity. The East-West fusion heightened the stylized gore of "Vol. 1," but when Tarantino tries to stylize the spaghetti-western in "Vol. 2," the whole thing drowns in an echo chamber of self-referential cinema artifice.

Perhaps the most successful element that survives the Cuisinart effect of Tarantino's direction is the music. The RZA reprises his work from "Vol. 1," and his sensitivity to the film is once again well-placed. Robert Rodriguez, who scored his own "El Mariachi" movies, gives this score a sensibility that fits perfectly with the American southwest and Mexican setting in "Vol. 2."

The movie also tells the tale of how The Bride, a.k.a. Black Mamba, became the most talented of Bill's assassins, and why she decided to leave him and the killing business. Thurman's scenes with Gordon Liu, who plays her white-haired martial arts master Pai Mei with an exaggerated



Courtesy

Clockwise, from left: The Bride (Uma Thurman) prepares to breach Bill's (David Carradine) California mansion; Pai Mei (Chia Hui Liu) trains The Bride for her work as an assassin; Bill attacks The Bride off-guard; and The Bride finally gets the upper hand against her kung fu master in Quentin Tarantino's "Kill Bill: Vol. 2."

charm, possess a peculiar chemistry that is lightly tinged with perfect comedic timing. Similarly, a later scene where The Bride dispatches a would-be assassin — almost immediately after learning she is pregnant — is also well-timed and fraught with dark humor.

Daryl Hannah's screentime is limited, but her rendition of the one-eyed assassin Elle Driver is unrelenting. She is cold, calculating and stunningly sharp, but Tarantino fails to utilize her potential. This is perhaps the movie's greatest flaw because, if anything, Hannah leaves you wanting more.

Much has been made of Carradine's turn as Bill, but frankly it's nothing special; he's essentially playing himself.

On the other hand, Michael Madsen, who plays Bill's brother Budd, is masterfully aloof, yet cool.

As far as the action is concerned, "Vol. 2" is a bit of a disappointment. There is no climactic epic battle like in "Vol. 1" and the swordplay is limited, although the catfight between Driver and The Bride in a trashy trailer is spectacularly gruesome. By the end, somehow revenge isn't quite what it's all about.

"Kill Bill: Volume 2" is currently playing at the Gateway Cinemark 17 theater and at Regal Cinema World 8 at Valley River.

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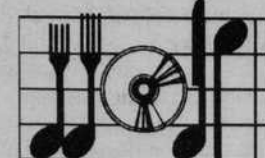
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