

EVERYTHING IS UGLY, AND EVERYTHING HURTS

Vapid violence dominates the empty, overlong spectacle of Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight*

Although the party line these days is that one must have a stridently absolute, carefully outlined position about being pro or con Quentin Tarantino, it is in fact possible to have thought *Inglourious Basterds* was brilliant and also to find *The Hateful Eight* a tiresome, incoherent, overlong slog.

The story isn't the problem; the tale of bounty hunters and double-crossers works out just fine, and *The Hateful Eight* is best when it's a single-room whodunit, carefully uncovering at least some of the lies told by its charming occupants. Jennifer Jason Leigh looks like she could spit a nail and hit you in the eye at 20 paces, and if there's a bit of scenery chewing going on, some of it (Demián Bichir) is quite enjoyable. (Michael Madsen is downright restrained in this company.)

The problem is that this is two movies. On the side of the angels you have the legendary Ennio Morricone's ominous score, which does more to evoke a deadly, lonesome sense of place — and the deadly, lonesome people who wander through it — than anything in the often blandly expository dialogue. Cinematographer



SAMUEL L. JACKSON IN THE HATEFUL EIGHT

Robert Richardson does beautiful things with snow, and with the saloon/outpost, Minnie's Haberdashery, in which much of the action takes place. Production designer Yohei Taneda creates such depth in Minnie's chilly, no-privacy room that the space begs to be recreated as an immersive theater project.

Except you wouldn't want to be in this raggedly violent story, with its paper-thin characters and lazy attempts to shock. *The Hateful Eight* starts about 40 minutes before it needs to, when Kurt Russell's John Ruth reluctantly lets Samuel L. Jackson's Marquis Warren hop aboard his coach. Both men are bounty hunters: Warren stacks a pile of corpses on the roof, while Russell prefers bringing his prey (Leigh's Daisy Domergue) in alive. At Minnie's, they meet a bunch of strangers and all is well enough, in a tense and moderately deadly way, until someone starts vomiting

blood. The projectile blood vomit is fairly delightful in its absurdity, and it offers a nice change of pace from the endless excuses the script finds for Daisy to get hit in the face.

There are a few potentially interesting confrontations about race, notably with Bruce Dern's old general, but they feel like little more than check-boxes, a tip of the hat to theme and America, with nothing new to say. In the end, they mean as little as any of the characters' lives: everything is ugly, and everything hurts.

The Hateful Eight is beautifully filmed, and Morricone's score should have escaped to find a better movie. But it's just a bloody sandbox in which Tarantino plays with his favorite toys until it's time to destroy them. If the moral here is that everyone's an asshole, well, mission accomplished, loud and clear. (Regal Cinemas, Cinemark 17)

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