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## 'Dogs' has fur flying

By GERSH KUNTZMAN

**I**S Quentin Tarantino a plagiarist? Miramax Films — which distributed the oft-praised filmmaker's "Pulp Fiction" and "Reservoir Dogs" — doesn't want you to know.

According to sources close to next week's New York Underground Film Festival, the studio-of-the-moment (it is up for a leading 22 Oscars) used its much-vaunted powers of persuasion to discourage Festival director Todd Phillips from showcasing "Who Do You Think You're Fooling?" a 12-minute film which claims to prove that Tarantino lifted major plot points and action sequences for his 1992 directorial debut from a grade-Z Hong Kong pot-boiler.

Tarantino has been ducking charges of plagiarism for years, so naturally the media started a feeding frenzy when the Underground Film Festival heralded Mike White's documentary short as one of the series' highlights.

In fact, "Who Do You Think You're Fooling?" was going to be one of six Festival offerings to be pre-screened for the press — until the media started asking too many questions about Tarantino's "influences."

That's when Phillips, who has friends at Miramax,

### Tarantino, Miramax, & festival under fire

called the trendy studio to alert them that White's film was getting major advance buzz, sources said. Both Miramax and Phillips have denied that the studio pressured the festival.

Phillips then pulled "Who Do You Think You're Fooling?" from the screening list, saying that he didn't want White's film to overshadow the festival's 70 other offerings.

But other sources say that Phillips only pulled the film has friends at Miramax,



**POSTER BOY:** Mike White, who lensed a documentary ("Who Do You Think You're Fooling?") questioning Quentin Tarantino's sources for "Reservoir Dogs," poses beside an advertisement for "Dogs" in his Riverview, Mich., home.

after Miramax — which has a well-deserved reputation for hounding reporters, even when they're working on puff pieces — pressured him to put a lid on any bashing of "Reservoir Dogs" or its director.

Tarantino is up for seven Oscars for his just-as-violent, just-as-reference-filled "Pulp Fiction," and Academy members have until March 20 to finish voting. The press screening would have been on Tuesday, March 7.

In interviews, Tarantino has admitted that "Reservoir Dogs" was influenced by John Huston's "Asphalt Jungle" and Stanley Kubrick's "The Killing." And by dubbing his criminals "Mr. White," "Mr. Blue," "Mr. Brown," etc., the frenetic filmmaker didn't even try to hide his theft from Joseph Sargent's "The Taking of Pelham One Two Three."



**QUENTIN TARANTINO**

White's documentary, which the 22-year-old film-school grad made for only \$15, asserts that "Reservoir Dogs" steals even more wantonly from Ringo Lam's "less-than-spectacular" 1987 film "City on Fire," a Hong Kong-style action thriller about — surprise, surprise — a jewel heist that goes wrong when one of the bandits turns out to

be an undercover cop. Tarantino, who, like White, fled away scenes from thousands of films while working in a video store, has never denied that he cuts and pastes film styles into a post-modern movie stew.

But on the subject of "City on Fire," Tarantino has been coy, deflecting questions by praising Lam.

"Ringo Lam is probably, like, my second, after Jackie Chan, [or] third favorite of the Hong Kong directors," Tarantino told the Village Voice last year.

"There's homage and then there's theft," White said. "I understand his influences and the statements he's making about film, but what he stole from Lam is blatant."

The New York Underground Film Festival runs from March 22-26 at the Anthology Film Archives (32 Second Ave. at Second Street [212] 627-8098).

Mike  
Thanks  
very  
much for  
your help.  
Sorry the  
Miramax  
contract was  
overshadowed  
you, but that's  
what my  
boss wanted  
Good luck  
in NY  
Gersh



**HE AIMS TO SQUEEZE:** Harvey Keitel blasts away in "Reservoir Dogs," much like in the movie "City on Fire."

## New 'Dogs', old tricks?

**S**O HOW much does Quentin Tarantino's "Reservoir Dogs" steal from Hong Kong director Ringo Lam's 1987 blood-spiller "City on Fire"? Detroit-based filmmaker Mike White's documentary "Who Do You Think You're Fooling?" which will be shown at the New York Underground Film Festival next week, cites these examples:

■ Like "City," the basic plot of "Dogs" centers around a jewel heist that backfires when one of the gang betrays his fellow crooks to the cops.

■ Harvey Keitel's two-fisted shootout with cops is a straight lift from "City on Fire."

■ In "Dogs," Tim Roth hides his identity as a cop by shooting an innocent bystander. In "City on Fire," the mole shoots a fellow cop.

■ In the climax scene of "Reservoir Dogs," Keitel, Lawrence Tierney and Chris Penn aim guns at each other in a triple-barrel standoff over who betrayed whom. The same scene appears for the same reason in "City on Fire."

■ After the three-way shootout, Roth's character weepily admits — just as the police close in — that he did, in fact, betray the group. Ditto "City on Fire."

Despite his film's tone, White says he made "Who Do You Think You're Fooling" to praise Tarantino, not to bury him.

"I love Tarantino's work," White said by phone. "But I'd like him even more if he admitted he took a crappy Hong Kong action movie and made it into something as great as 'Reservoir Dogs.'"

— Gersh Kuntzman