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## Tarantino's latest takes a more subdued approach

"Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood" is the ninth film by director Quentin Tarantino, who has declared that his 10th film will be his last.

Styled as a fable, the movie is a dreamy reflection on 1960s TV, spaghetti westerns and old Hollywood landmarks and watering holes.

Joan Didion famously wrote that the 1960s ended in Los Angeles on Aug. 9, 1969, with the brutal murder of pregnant actress Sharon Tate, who along with four others was stabbed to death in her home by the followers of cult leader Charles Manson.

In "Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood," Tate (Margot Robbie) and her husband director Roman Polanski (Rafal Zawierucha) rent the Cielo Drive home next door to Rick Dalton (Leonardo DiCaprio), a former TV-western headliner on the downside of his career who looks to reinvent himself by making spaghetti westerns in Italy.

Rick is attended by his loyal longtime stunt double, Cliff Booth (Brad Pitt). As Rick's career has dwindled, the men's relationship has

evolved. Loyal as Jeeves and superior in every measure of manly character, the unflappable Cliff is now Rick's driver, handyman and barstool psychologist.

The real Charles Manson was a music industry hanger-on, lurking in its fringes, desperate to break in. Record producer Terry Melcher (son of Doris Day) and his girlfriend Candice Bergen lived at the Cielo Drive house before Tate and Polanski.

A vengeful Manson, who had been snubbed by Melcher and Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys, instructed his followers — a "family" of young women "hippies" who lived with him on the decrepit Spahn Movie Ranch — to kill everyone in the house.

In the movie, an inebriated Rick drifts in his pool, listening to music blasting through his headphones on the fateful night when the Mansons come calling.

Because we know the terrible fate of the real Sharon Tate, Tarantino can take his time to build tension by meandering through a trivia maze of '60s-era Los Angeles



**REBECCA L. FORD**

REBECCA L. FORD is counsel at Scharf Banks Marmor LLC, and concentrates her practice on complex litigation, compliance, board governance and specialized employment issues. She is the former executive vice president for litigation and intellectual property at MGM. She can be reached at [rford@scharfbanks.com](mailto:rford@scharfbanks.com).

while we wait for the worst to happen.

Robbie's Sharon Tate is presented as a nearly silent goddess ideal. She's unattainable by Rick for sure, but also Steve McQueen (Damian Lewis).

Pitt's Cliff is a nerd's dream friend — the epitome of cool,

yet protective and servile, differential to the Hollywood class hierarchy.

In Tarantino's Thurberish fantasies of power, there must be humiliation and there is resonance of this trope in his casting two of the biggest male stars in Hollywood as a lackey and invertebrate and portraying Bruce Lee (Mike Moh) as a preening buffoon.

But the primary violence and ultimate humiliation in the film is reserved for women, including the shrewish wife Cliff is rumored to have murdered.

"Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood" is not a masterpiece like "Pulp Fiction." Ruminative and musing, it is a look back on the former movie wunderkind, ex-video store clerk and cinematic savant's major influences — the product of a middle-aged director poised to stamp "fin" on his filmic oeuvre, who is taking stock of the popular culture that formed him.

The subdued tone of this penultimate film feels like a setup. One can only imagine that No. 10 will take Tarantino out with a bang.