



Written by [Eric Egan](#) on August 15, 2010

The Expendables: Sly's So-So Effort

The cast of *The Expendables* is a veritable pantheon of action stars — Sylvester Stallone, Bruce Willis, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jason Statham, Micky Rourke, Jet Li, Terry Crews, Eric Roberts, Dolph Lundgren, and the list goes on. The film's cast might not be a complete canon, but it comes pretty darn close.

If *The Expendables* should be guilty of anything, it should be guilty of too much — too much machismo, too many explosions, and too much chemistry between the leads. Unfortunately, the movie inexplicably turns out to be too little. There is not enough chemistry between Statham and Stallone, who have the most screen time by far, and there are not enough tongue-in-cheek, wink-wink moments that self-reference the sheer audacity of what should have been a testosterone-drenched monument to hyper-masculinity. In short, *The Expendables* is an unworthy cinematic Olympus in which to house this cinematic pantheon.

The Expendables, co-written and directed by Stallone, takes its name from the team of mercenaries at the heart of the film's story. Stallone's character, Barney Ross, leads the team on a mission to a small South American island to overthrow a communist-style dictator — an action film staple — at the behest of Willis's character, a man known only as Mr. Church. Church, as Ross soon discovers, is a CIA spook. One of the funniest scenes in the film is the meeting between Church and Ross in which Church hires Ross's team for the job. Willis and Stallone obviously relish every second of their screen time together, and when Schwarzenegger walks through the doors of the church in which the meeting is taking place, it is enough to make any action fan giddy. The biggest nod to just how ridiculously awesome it is to have Stallone, Willis, and Schwarzenegger on the same screen comes at the end of this scene as Schwarzenegger's character walks away. Church asks Ross, "What's his problem?" Ross replies, "He wants to be President."

The three achieve a rapport in the scene that should infect the rest of the film but unfortunately does not. Of course, much of this is due to the fact that, for all the hype about having the three most famous action stars on screen at once, Willis's and Schwarzenegger's characters don't show up again in the film. Their combined screen time may be less than 10 minutes. But even without John McClane and the *Terminator*, there is more than enough combined action experience on screen that the film should have been able to keep up the sort of energy and tongue-in-cheek tit-for-tat achieved in the Mr. Church scene.

This is not to say, however, that the film does not have its moments outside of the Mr. Church scene. Another hilarious scene comes compliments of Jet Li's character, Yin Yang, as he argues that he should





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get a raise because he must work harder than the rest of the team since he is so short. While there are myriad other funny moments in the film, they generally fall just this side of flat, either because of a lack of timing or because of mumbly action stars. Micky Rourke gives the best performance by far as a sort of tortured, hookah-smoking caterpillar, complete with words of wisdom and an elongated pipe.

One very interesting aspect of the film is that, for an action flick, it is comparatively clean viewing. Make no mistake, this one is not for the kiddies and it more than earns its R rating through violence. But sexuality is refreshingly close to nonexistent and it does not take a stretch of the imagination to think that this is probably due to [Sly Stallone's return to the Catholic faith of his childhood](#).

Unfortunately, a responsible use of the cinematic medium is not enough to make a great film; nor is wonderfully over-the-top casting.

And yet, for all of my issues with the film, I would still suggest it to any fans of the action genre. My disappointment really boils down to the film not living up to my expectations and its own potential, suggested by the sheer number of names on the marquee. But, though good ol' Sly and the boys are looking just a little arthritic these days, both in physical and cinematic terms, they are still a blast to watch. I just wish the temple that was built to house this action pantheon wasn't looking so crumbly.



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