

## Stallone Assembles Cast of Fight Icons for Mother of All Buddy Flicks

Written by Film Review by Kam Williams

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### The Expendables

As kids, my friends and I periodically engaged in debates about which of our favorite comic book superheroes was the mightiest. Could Batman beat Superman? Who would prevail in a battle between Spiderman and Wolverine? Or between Flash and the Hulk? And how would a clash of the Fantastic Four and the X-Men turn out? The possible permutations were endless, but the winners were always a matter of pure speculation, since no issue was ever published portraying all of these characters.

The Expendables is the closest cinema has come to staging such a fantasy showdown, though featuring famous Hollywood icons instead of beloved comic book characters. To his credit, writer/director Sylvester Stallone somehow signed a cast containing many of the greatest legends of the action genre. Consequently, this high-impact adventure is worth the investment just to see that assemblage of matinee idols sharing the same screen.

For starters, there are matinee idols Stallone, Schwarzenegger and Bruce Willis. Then we have bona fide box-office draws in Mickey Rourke, Jason Statham and Jet Li, with tough guys Dolph Lundgren, Terry Crews, "Stone Cold" Steve Austin and three-time UFC Heavyweight Champion Randy Couture rounding out the ensemble.

The stock storyline revolves around a band of mercenaries recruited by a mysterious figure (Willis) for a dangerous assignment, namely, to overthrow General Garza (David Zayas), the cocaine-dealing dictator of a Banana Republic. Mastermind Barney Ross' (Stallone) subsequently handpicks a team comprised of knife-wielding Lee Christmas (Statham), martial arts master Yin Yang (Li), crack sniper Gunner Jensen (Lundgren), heavy weapons specialist Hale Caesar (Crews) and demolitions expert Toll Road (Couture). The men are outfitted with

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weapons by a black market arms dealer (Rourke), although they happen to be pretty good with their fists in a pinch.

The plot thickens once these killing machines for hire arrive on the fictional South American island of Vilena, surreptitiously entering the country under the imprimatur of the "Global Wildlife Conservancy." However, with the help of Garza's estranged daughter, Sandra (Gisele Itie), they soon realize that they've been setup by James Munroe (Eric Roberts), a rogue CIA Agent with designs on political power in order to wrest control of the lucrative drug trade in the wake of the imminent coup d'etat.

Despite the fact that the diabolical Munroe also plans to use the army to eliminate his unit of "Expendables," Ross nonetheless opts to follow through with what now looks like a suicide mission, in part because his heartstrings have been touched by the perilous plight of the suddenly-compromised Sandra. What ensues is an old-fashioned, pyrotechnics and stunt-driven spectacular, harking back to the best summer blockbusters from the Seventies and the Eighties.

Yeah, the special effects may be old school, and Stallone and company may look a little long in the tooth, especially when squaring-off, mano-a-mano, against Munroe's relatively-youthful henchmen led by Dan Paine (Austin). The movie magic feels fresh, as you suspend your disbelief to root for some fading screen heroes of yesteryear who've been taken out of mothballs to kick butt together in the mother of all buddy flicks. Never underestimate the nostalgia factor.

Vintage Stallone!

Excellent (4 stars)

Rated R for profanity and graphic violence.

In English and Spanish with subtitles.

Running time: 103 Minutes

Distributor: Lionsgate Films

To see a trailer for The Expendables, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWWFnQoR5fc>