

Film Close-Up: Sylvester Stallone

by Joey_Berlin

Six years after Sylvester Stallone earned two Oscar nominations for writing and starring in "Rocky," he created another American icon with his screenplay for "First Blood."

SYLVESTER STALLONE - Sylvester Stallone returns to the big screen as John Rambo in the action movie 'Rambo.' CNS Photo courtesy of Karen Ballard. Now, two decades since the last film in the franchise, Stallone is resurrecting the army-of-one for "Rambo," the fourth macho movie about the beefed-up, disgruntled Vietnam vet. As John Rambo, Stallone is living quietly out of the action in Thailand when missionary aid workers ask to rent his boat to get up river. When they disappear, Rambo goes on a rescue mission armed with his survival knife and grenade-tipped arrows for more guts-and-glory heroics.

Stallone not only wrote and starred in the new "Rambo," it is also his first time directing a film in this series. After the solid success of his return to the ring for "Rocky Balboa" in 2006, Stallone is hopeful that "Rambo" will continue the long-delayed revival of his two macho icons of the '80s.

Q: Did you do any of your own stunts in "Rambo?" How hard was the stunt work this time around?

A: Pretty hard indeed. I did everything but one stunt, the one where I'm supposed to jump off the hill during the explosion when the big bomb goes off. I really thought the stunt guy was going to die. I felt bad. And we had to do it twice, it was very slippery. You will have to look at the "making of" when the DVD comes out because there were so many injuries during the shooting, like snake bites, cuts and so on. But it made this movie such a great adventure because of all of these incidents. Everyone was scared at first. I said, "I know, but this is like a war and you're all going to be sad to go home. You're going to go home and look at your husband or your wife and kids and tell them, 'You have it so easy, you don't know. So don't even complain to me again!'"

Q: What was the most challenging aspect of making this movie?

A: For sure it was the ongoing threat of the Burmese while we were shooting in Thailand. There were a lot of secret police over there and they knew exactly what was going on, and especially all these people - and I won't mention names - doing drug dealing between the Burmese general and people on the other side of the river. It's really a bad and sad situation. So when you step into their territory, life is very cheap over there. You get shot and nobody will ever find you. At first, I didn't worry about me but I really felt bad for the crew because I thought that's how it would start, with the intimidation of the crew. And they did intimidate them.

Q: Was it difficult to get local actors to appear in the movie?

A: For a while we could not get any Burmese to work for us at all until one man stepped up and it opened the floodgate. All you see in the movie is authentic. It's real cannons, real amputees who had lost their legs in land mine accidents. The man who started to show the other Burmese they had to be in the movie was the one playing the villain in the movie, and actually in real life he is a rebel fighter. But for doing this film his family was arrested and put in jail in Burma.

Q: What has happened to Rambo over the last 20 years?

A: Well, last time we saw him he was in Afghanistan and he was disenchanted about America. He felt America was like a parent that had no use for him, who just threw him away. America used him and told him, "We don't need you anymore." He is this angry and disillusioned soul that believed in a cause and realizes it's all been a waste of time. I had a big speech in the movie and I cut it. He was speaking about how war is natural and peace is not. He says, "It's old men starting the war, young men doing the war and nobody wins, everybody in the middle dies. And you think that God is going to make all that go away? Just go home." But Rambo can't talk like that. I can talk like that, but not Rambo. So in the end I went from that long speech to: "Go Home! Just go home!"

Q: Where do you see your old buddy Arnold Schwarzenegger going after the election? Will he end up in the White House?

A: If we change the Constitution, for sure! In any case, he has the talent and the taste. I see him every Saturday at Cafe Roma in Beverly Hills for a cigar. Well, actually, smoking is now banned all over so we have to hide in the back, in the alley, in a small cigar shop. For the last few years he was teasing me about wanting to see a new "Rambo." And I was teasing him back, saying he is jealous and that he is missing the business. It's funny because we used to be so competitive with each other in the '80s and now we are the best buddies in the world. Arnold is amazing, he's already had three superstar careers and he is not over at all yet. Sometimes I tell him to stop, just relax and go fly a kite or something! Arnold is amazing. I love him.

Q: What is your next movie?

A: Well, I'd love to do a remake from an old action movie, like one of the Charles Bronson movies. I have a script for "Death Wish," for example. We'd make it more contemporary. Also, I optioned this book called "The Lion's Game" by Nelson DeMille, and it's about al-Qaida. It's a Jason Bourne-type movie about the tracking of a terrorist across the country, and it's a brilliant book.

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