

## It Coulda Been Worse: "Rambo" and "Meet the Spartans"

Written by Mike Schulz

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### **RAMBO and MEET THE SPARTANS**

In recent articles, I've mentioned how thoroughly I'd been looking forward to *There Will Be Blood*, and some might wonder whether my anticipation had me *predestined* to love the film, regardless of what was actually on-screen. I'd like to think not, but it's hard to deny that expectations do play an enormous part in one's enjoyment - or lack thereof - of *any* movie.

For instance, I walk into every new David Fincher or Coen brothers picture with excitement, and it dissipates irrationally quickly when confronted with a *Panic Room* or an *Intolerable Cruelty*; expecting excellence only to be confronted with mediocrity, my high hopes probably make me dislike these movies more than I should. Yet occasionally, I'll attend a movie *expecting* a dismal time, only to have more fun than I would've though possible.

Take *Rambo*, Sylvester Stallone's cinematic resuscitation of his monosyllabic '80s ass-kicker.

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As a viewer for whom 2006's *Rocky Balboa* was both shameless and humiliating, this new venture sounded almost ineffably misguided - another chance for the screen icon to be grimly determined about not fading into obscurity. The notion of a 60-year-old, one-man militia swooping in to systematically annihilate the evildoers of Burma - two decades after performing similar services in Vietnam and Afghanistan - seemed ridiculous and beyond offensive; I entered *Rambo's* auditorium, hunkered down, and prepared for the worst.

Incredibly, it never comes. The script, which finds our humorless he-man rescuing imprisoned American missionaries, is almost shockingly primitive, but the movie is briskly edited and suffused with an admirable sense of moral indignation, and the routine bursts of ultra-violence are so cartoonishly over-scaled that they're actually pretty damned entertaining; heads are lopped off and entrails are spilled with a demented fervor that's surprisingly tough to resist. I entered *Rambo* anticipating the most insufferable movie I'd see in 2008. It's only January, and I've already seen at least three that were *far* inferior.



One of them is the *300* goof *Meet the Spartans*, which - based on writer/directors Jason Friedberg's and Aaron Seltzer's previous, achingly obvious parodies

*Date Movie*

and

*Epic Movie*

- I was dreading nearly as much as Stallone's offering. And Lord knows it's bad; the unfunny skits, such as the extended

*Stomp the Yard*

satire, go on for-freaking-ever, and its one "insight," revealing

*300*

to be an unintentionally hilarious, homoerotic camp classic, was (for many of us) already old news back in March.

Having said that, I'll admit to smiling at the witty (though still overlong) *Grand Theft Auto* parody and at the legion of soldiers heading off to battle while holding hands, skipping, and singing along to Gloria Gaynor, and I even

*laughed*

once, at the sight of a newborn baby's six-pack abs. That's more enjoyment than I had at

*Date Movie*

and

*Epic Movie*

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combined. Lowered expectations frequently  
*do*  
help.