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## ***THE EXPENDABLES 2***

If home viewings of *The Expendables 2* are one day turned into a drinking game, and I pray that they are, one of the rules has to be that you chug every time the film employs a thudding cliché from the '80s, either directly or indirectly. A plot involving stolen weapons-grade plutonium? Drink! A team of he-men astonished that a new female recruit can actually *do* something? Drink! Dolph Lundgren wrestling with a Rubik's Cube? Drink *twice*!

I promise you that the copious consumption of alcohol will make the *Expendables 2* experience a lot more enjoyable, but happily, unlike this sequel's predecessor, you can have fun at the movie without liquor being *mandatory*

. In what turns out to be one of the more pleasant surprises of the summer, 2010's lumbering, overwrought, and deathly boring

*The Expendables*

has inspired a follow-up that's loose, funny, and charming – or, at least, as charming as any follow-up with pummeling machine-gun warfare and endlessly exploding squibs possibly *can*

be. Despite its über-obvious, tongue-in-cheek camp appeal, there was something desperate and rather sad about director/writer/star Sylvester Stallone's original action flick for AARP

## Old Habits Die Hard: "The Expendables 2," "ParaNorman," and "The Odd Life of Timothy Green"

Written by Mike Schulz

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members, a lack of confidence that was apparent in the clumsily staged melees and the aging performers' forced, jokey banter. (The subtext read throughout seemed to be “

*Please*

let us be relevant again.”) But with the first film emerging as a substantial box-office hit, and genre veteran Simon West taking over the directorial reins from Stallone, this homage to Reagan-era crap classics proves to be nothing

*but*

confident – a big, broad blow-'em-up that takes nearly all the guilt out of “guilty pleasure.”

Sure, the narrative is utter doggerel, and Stallone's and Richard Wenk's script shoehorns in its fading stars' familiar catchphrases (“I'll be back!” “Yippee-ki-yay!”) so awkwardly that you occasionally feel the need to laugh merely out of pity. West, though, keeps the nonsensical events moving at a speedy clip, and comes through with utterly sensational fight sequences that make you wince *and* giggle; Jason Statham is granted a particularly outstanding bit in which he kicks his assailants' asses while dressed in a clerical robe, and there are cackle-worthy “Clunk!”s and “Bonk!”s aplenty when Jet Li attacks a heavysset bruiser with a pair of frying pans. (There's also an exquisite violent gag involving an airport x-ray machine that I'm astonished I haven't seen before.) Yet West's movie is even better whenever Stallone, Statham, and the film's cast of supporting monoliths are allowed to just relax and riff, as when the he-men – and, in the form of the appealing Nan Yu, he-woman – discuss their favorite foods, or Bruce Willis and Arnold Schwarzenegger lead a chase in a borrowed compact car and Ah-nold exclaims, “My *shoe* is biggah dan dis!” I silently cheered when Jean-Claude Van Damme dispatched a nemesis with a knife to the heart that he drove in with his *foot*.

But I positively roared when Stallone, greeting a group of Middle Easterners, introduced his team by saying, “We're Americans,” and the British Statham – standing alongside the Swedish Lundgren and the Chinese Yu – retorted, “Since

*when*

?”

*The Expendables 2*

, with its Neolithic single-mindedness and frequently cornball repartee, can really only be taken as a comedy.

Thankfully, it's also kind of a

*great*

comedy.

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