

The rage of Rambo

AS the most popular adults-only US film ever screened, *Rambo* grossed over \$100 million in a few weeks, and was cheered in 2,165 cinemas. *Time* magazine said, "It seems to have perfectly articulated the nation's mood over Vietnam."

Articulate? Hardly. Stallone, co-writer of the film, substitutes oafish muttering for dialogue, making that other hero of the genre, Clint Eastwood, seem almost garrulous. Other than the mass murder of foreigners who don't agree with him, Stallone's only preoccupation in the film is exposing his preposterous body. His enormous breasts loom over the screen like Jane Russell in *The Outlaw*. The acting is performed mostly by his biceps.

The several hundred killings are perpetrated almost entirely by Rambo alone, although early on he is assisted by a female Vietnamese agent for the US called Co (who is not even played by an Oriental, but Julia Nickson speaking in broken English).

Rambo stabs, clubs, shoots, strangles, burns, bombs, drowns, and garottes his victims, using enough knives to equip a meat market, mostly carried in his boots. As well as a high-tech bow with exploding arrows, he also manages to produce three assorted machine guns, all with inexhaustible ammunition clips.

He has no need of a helmet or flak jacket - let alone a shirt - because none of the enemy fire ever hits him,

whereas he never misses. Rambo was obviously what the Americans needed before being chased out of Saigon in 1975.

The B-52s might even have remained in Guam, for Rambo is "a human war machine", as his old colonel observes. He becomes Bombo and blows up two dozen bamboo huts, an entire village, a bridge, several vehicles, a monster Russian bomber helicopter, two boats, a rice paddy and about half a battalion.

As an ex-Green Beret, Rambo's task is to find a jungle camp for American MIAs, Missing in Action, photograph any if there, and return "without engaging the enemy". (As this is supposed to be 1985, the incursion is illegal and Vietnam is not an enemy.)

Ignoring his brief from the start, he tells Co that "orders don't matter". His first act is to shoot an arrow through a guard's head, impaling him to a tree. This caused a fellow behind me in a T-shirt marked "USA" in red, white and blue, to shout gleefully "good arrow" as if at a Sunday darts match.

Zombo's final words are the nearest he comes to a full sentence. All he wants, he grunts, is "for our country to love us as much as we love it". Howls of approval from audiences, most of whom, like Mr Stallone, did not actually serve in the real Vietnam either.

The idea that the US did not lose has obvious attractions for an imperial power beaten by a nation of peasants.

Chris Reed

A Highlight these words in the article (the ¶ symbol shows the paragraph they are in). Work out their meanings from the context. When you've decided, look them up in a dictionary to check if you were right.

¶ 1 articulated	confused contradicted expressed
¶ 2 articulate	athletic interesting speaking clearly violent
¶ 2 oafish	idiotic inaudible noisy
¶ 2 garrulous	peace-loving very quiet very talkative violent
¶ 2 preposterous	enormous muscular ridiculous-looking
¶ 3 perpetrated	committed enjoyed witnessed
¶ 4 inexhaustible	incredible never-ending tiring
¶ 8 brief	instructions report request short
¶ 8 gleefully	at the top of his voice in dismay joyfully loudly

B Answer these questions about the article, and find EXAMPLES or QUOTES as evidence for your answers. (Note that the writer uses irony to make some of his points.)

- 1 What does the writer dislike about the film?
- 2 What does the writer like about the film?
- 3 What does the writer dislike about Sylvester Stallone?
- 4 Which is the most horrifying scene described in the article?
- 5 What were the reactions of the audience, according to the writer?
- 6 What kind of people enjoy films like *Rambo*?
- 7 Why has *Rambo* been such a popular film?
- 8 Why does the writer misspell Rambo as 'Bombo' and 'Zombo'?