

'Tango's' formula fails; Cruise triumphs as veteran

NEW YORK (CNS) — An ultraviolent super-cop film, "Tango and Cash" (Warner Bros.), is a vehicle for an unlikely pair of Hollywood muscle men.

The formula buddy plot involves fashion plate Tango (Sylvester Stallone) and bohemian Cash (Kurt Russell), crack Los Angeles police detectives who are complete opposites in their lifestyles but who wind up working together to find the mastermind behind their being framed for the murder of a federal agent.

The only one who seems to be enjoying himself in the sophomoric proceedings is Jack Palance, who mugs his way through the role of an outrageously sinister ganglord bent on eliminating the title characters. His brutal methods, especially in some bloody prison scenes, are equaled — and then some — by the two gun-happy, light-headed cops who survive all manner of mayhem only because Randy Feldman's slack script depends on it.

Perhaps this was intended as a spoof of super-cop movies. There's a "sly" Rambo reference, for instance. But if so, nobody told director Andrei Konchalovsky who plays everything straight — violence, vulgarity, sexual innuendo and insult humor.

The ham-handed result can only appeal to fans of rock 'em-sock 'em special effects macho bravado. The central characters are little more than cardboard and the worth of human life is meaningless here.

Because of excessive violence, demeaning sexual references and rough language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

Born on the Fourth of July

An emotionally wrenching story, "Born on the Fourth of July" (Universal) is a film about an idealistic youth who returns from Vietnam as a crippled war hero, tormented



AP/Wide World Photos
Sylvester Stallone, left, and Kurt Russell play Los Angeles cops who fight each other almost as much as the drug dealers in the Warner Bros. release "Tango and Cash."

by battlefield experiences and a growing awareness that his sacrifice has been in vain.

Paralyzed from the chest down, the disillusioned veteran tries to blot out his anger and bitterness by indulging in a marathon of alcohol and sex that ends when he joins the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and discovers a purpose in life in the anti-war movement.

Adapted from the Ron Kovic book of the same title by Kovic and Oliver Stone, the movie's director, the picture presents a devastating firsthand account of what the Vietnam War meant to one who fought it both there and on the home front.

At the same time, it is the story of a young man who, after losing faith in God, family and country — values instilled in him from birth — struggles to find meaning in his life.

The film succeeds more than it fails on

both levels — personal and political — but taken together, the result is a powerful stimulus for viewers to reassess values and political consciousness.

Kovic (handsomely portrayed by Tom Cruise) had a Catholic upbringing that is dealt with in a knowing, respectful manner by director Stone, also a Vietnam vet with Catholic roots.

Born on July 4 to a small-town, working-class family, Kovic was raised as a true believer in U.S. democracy and a Christian soldier in the war against atheistic communism.

The Vietnam sequences are brief but emphatically violent, depicting the confused nature of guerrilla warfare where civilians are cut down in the cross-fire and a soldier may be killed by "friendly fire," something that weighs heavily on Kovic's conscience. Severely wounded shortly thereafter, Kovic survives the excruciating

conditions of a field hospital in which the depiction may turn strong stomachs.

This, however, is minor compared to his treatment in a rat-infested Veterans Administration hospital where, as a helpless paraplegic, he almost dies in his own excrement. Through it all, he keeps faithful to his patriotic ideals but after coming home from the hospital, gradually goes to pieces, unable to cope with feelings of alienation from family and community.

Thrown out of the house by his mother who refuses to accept his drunken abuse, he holes up in a Mexican town selling liquor and women to a ragtag collection of crippled Vietnam vets. Stone here, as elsewhere, needlessly depicts the degradation in graphic detail, going on long after the point has been made.

The movie ends with Kovic's return to the real world as an anti-war spokesman, seen in a melee inside and outside the 1972 Republican Convention and then addressing the 1976 Democratic Convention.

The movie re-creates well the look and atmosphere of the era. It is especially good in dramatizing the Vietnam War as the overriding issue of the time and the protests against it that polarized the nation.

Central to the film's success is Cruise's convincing performance in a role where Cruise portrays the stages of a man, from winsome, innocent teen-ager, conscientious soldier, stoic hospital patient, embittered wheelchair victim and finally to determined anti-war protester.

Almost as good is the fine supporting cast which includes Willem Dafoe as a cynical casualty of the war, Caroline Kava as Kovic's mother and Kyra Sedgwick as his teenage sweetheart.

Because of its disturbing depiction of violence, a scene with nudity in a sexual context and much rough language laced with sexual references, the U.S.C.C. classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The M.P.A.A. rating is R — restricted.

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