



Written by [Eric Egan](#) on October 17, 2010

Red: Star-studded Cast Feels Crunched

Retirement. The word can conjure visions of sweet oases of rest and relaxation between games of golf and lazy morning bouts with crossword puzzles, a permanent wave good-bye to the daily grind. Or it can conjure nightmares of days with nothing more to do than contemplate the cruelty of impending infirmity and reminisce about youthful revelries over jello and re-runs of *The Price Is Right*.

For the former assassins at the core of *Red*, directed by Robert Schwentke and the latest film based on a DC Comics property, the word definitely conjures the latter. Bruce Willis, Morgan Freeman, John Malkovich, Helen Mirren, and Brian Cox all play former intelligence agents dealing with the comparatively dreary afterlife of a CIA spook. The film takes its name from the CIA acronym, Retired, Extremely Dangerous.



Inherent dramatic irony exists when their former exotic line of work clashes with their failed approximation of normal life, and this provides much of the comedy part of this action-comedy. Schwentke gets this and does a good job of accentuating the irony of the premise for comedic effect by interjecting action sequences with the humdrum trappings of daily living. This is accomplished through either cutting to elevator-music moments amidst fight sequences or by letting everyday problems seep into characters' conversations while they're engaged in dangerous activities such as covering fellow seniors with a sniper rifle.

The film begins with a display of this clash as Willis' character, Frank Moses, has his life turned upside down when a squad of black ops blows his front yard and its elaborate Christmas decorations to smithereens. This sets the tone for the rest of the film. For these crotchety, cloak-and-dagger folk, a regular life is a futile exercise — and they wouldn't have it any other way.

Moses shakes off the rust and dispatches the bad guys with the cool-headed ease one might expect of a former assassin who shuns the wheelchair as much as he revels in danger, and then rounds up his former colleagues to help him find out who is trying to kill him.

In Moses' team, Schwentke certainly has plenty of talent to work with considering that they share a plethora of various golden statues. Freeman plays a convalescent with stage IV liver cancer who, having retained his contacts in the intelligence community, relishes the idea of going out in a hail of gunfire with a wry smile rather than wasting away in hospice care. Mirren plays a deceptively domesticated dame who seems to be taking the whole retirement thing quite swimmingly — but of course she takes "jobs" on the side. Malkovich is by far the most entertaining to watch as a variation on the theme "John Malkovich." That's a fancy way of saying that he plays a crazy character like he usually does with a



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touch of 10-year-old ADHD.

The performances in *Red* are universally solid, if not brilliant. Part of the problem with such a talented ensemble is that it's nigh impossible to give each actor enough screen time to show his or her full potential. Any one of the stars is enough to carry a film — not to mention six of them. Add to the mix Ernest Borgnine as an old records keeper who, it seems, the CIA has kept locked in a vault since the beginning of time, and Richard Dreyfuss as a sleazy, CFR-style defense contractor, and it's easy to understand how the film could feel too crunched casting-wise.

But in spite of the overloaded cast, *Red* is still a hoot. Between Malkovich running after the bad guys with a Looney Toon-style suicide bomb and Freeman donning a ridiculous African dictator's suit along with a French accent, the cast delivers plenty of entertaining moments. It's definitely worth a look-see, especially if any of the cast members tickle your fancy. Rated PG-13 for some double entendres and a crude gesture, *Red* is fairly clean for an action-comedy.



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