

WALKING into the posh pent-house suite of the Dorchester

Hotel in London, I have a serious case of butterflies in my stomach. I'm about to interview one of the most iconic action heroes of our time – I'm meeting Rocky and Rambo rolled into one. I'm meeting screen legend Sylvester Stallone.

I'm guided to a plush silk couch by Mr Stallone's personal assistant, but my heart sinks as I spot the movie star pacing the room in a thunderous mood, barely acknowledging my presence. His last interview must have gone badly.

Sitting across from me with a stern face and huge biceps bulging through a black t-shirt, I have to admit that I am nervous of how the interview will go.

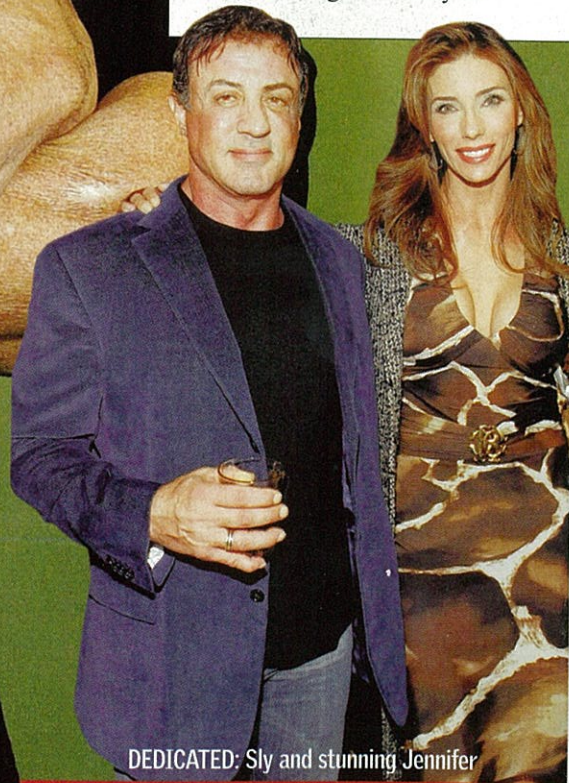
But as soon as he hears the Irish accent the clouds lift and he opens up, speaking candidly about family, politics, getting older, trying to save the world and his love of Guinness.

Underneath those mean looks Stallone is just a big teddy bear.

It turns out that the Rambo actor has a soft spot in his heart for Ireland after marrying Irish-American actress Jeniffer Flavin.

"I love Ireland, I honeymooned there, that must be about 10 years ago now, at the KClub, we were guests of Smurfit," he smiles reclining awkwardly on

'DON'T BRING A MAN TO A GOLF CLUB IF YOU DON'T WANT HIM TO PLAY GOLF'



DEDICATED: Sly and stunning Jennifer

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Hard man Sylvester Stallone softens when he hears NIAMH BYRNE'S Irish accent, chats openly about family, getting older and Guinness



the couch (it's hard to be agile when your muscles are so big).

"I loved the trip, but my wife thought I ignored her, she wanted me to be more attentive. But I was like, 'don't bring a man to a golf course if you don't want him to play golf'. Bad choice.

"I had a great time. I drank tons of Guinness, I

stronger. We got into a squeezing contest, he was trying to break my arm and I was trying to break his.

"I've been more careful since then because people just try and grab your hand and if you're not aware, break it."

Sly (he hates being called Sylvester) and third wife

Jennifer have three children, Sophia (11) Sistine (9) and six-year-old Scarlet.

"I live for my children,

and I dote on them," he says.

"They are the first thing that I see in the morning, and the last thing I see at night.

"It hurts for me to be away for more than a few hours. They are little girls, so they know how to push daddy's buttons."

And they know their fashion too — Sly tells me that after the interview he is heading to Topshop to pick up the latest looks for his little ladies.

His relationship with his two sons Seargeoth (Seth) and Sage, 18 and 20 respectively, from his first marriage to Sasha Czack is not as perfect though.



RETURN: Rambo is back in form

He admits one of the few regrets in his life is "not being around enough for my older kids when I was a lot younger, and they needed a dad to be there.

"Now, well, I don't know if a bridge between me and them will ever be connected, there will always be a kind of friction.

"So this time around, with a new family, I am blessed to be given a second chance."

At 61, Stallone is incredibly fit and toned, but thankfully he is not one of those muscle heads who rants on about working out

being a way of life, and how their body is a temple. Asked if he ever thinks about just 'letting himself go', he instantly replies "Everyday."

The muscle man put down the dumbbells before to play an out-of-shape sheriff in the 1997 thriller Copland, but it was a box office flop:

"Copland was such a vacation for me and I thought 'I'm going to move into this world' but it didn't happen. Rocky and Rambo are so ingrained in people's minds now that that's it, the die is cast."

Stallone did, however, work out for the latest Rambo film, but decided to keep his top on.

"I wanted it to be age appropriate, Rambo is much heavier now, more brutal looking, more ponderous. There wasn't the pressure to be sleek because he doesn't take his shirt off, it wasn't about being chiselled," he says.

The Italian stallion may think he is too old to strip off in movies, but he still manages to perform his own death-defying stunts.

"I didn't want to," he laughs "the first day the stuntman severely tore his leg muscle and there was no double so I had to do them. →

'One on my fondest memory was a big thick Irish guy grabbing my arm to see who was stronger'

love its big thick foam, its like drinking bull's blood.

"I visited Dublin a few years later for the opening of Planet Hollywood. One of my fondest memories was walking down the line shaking hands with people and some big thick Irish guy grabbing my arm to see who was

I LOVE IRELAND, BUT MY WIFE THOUGHT I IGNORED HER ON OUR K CLUB HONEYMOON

from page 15 “The stunts in Rambo were pretty hard but I still did all of them myself. I feel like I am 20 again – but with arthritis.”

The actor seems to have mellowed with age, even befriending his long-term box office rival Arnold Schwarzenegger.

“At one time, Arnold and I were like Sodom and Gomorrah, Cane and Abel, very competitive,” he says.

“After he became governor, we started to build a relationship. We’d go to this place called, Cafe Rome, and smoke cigars. Then they banned smoking, so the governor and I were in an alley stealing puffs talking about how to balance the budget.”

‘Arnold and I were like Sodom and Gomorrah, very competitive. Now I’d love to do a film with him’

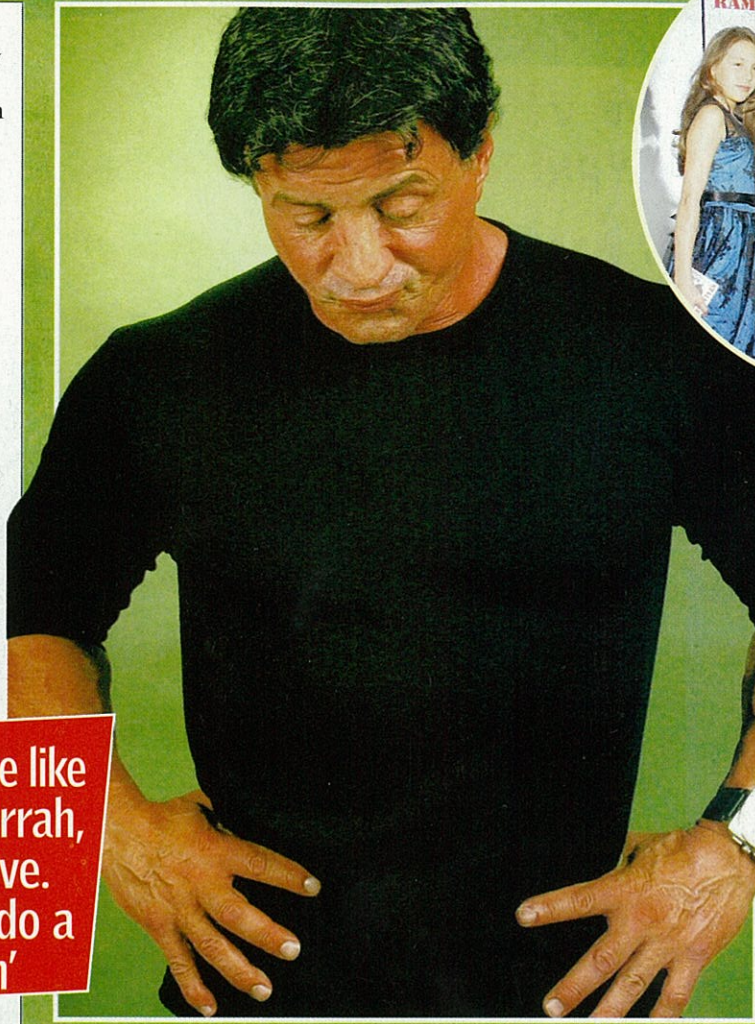
Stallone won’t be following his muscular friend into politics, but would like to join him in a movie.

“Arnold’s a political animal, I don’t have the patience to go into politics, I don’t censor myself enough,” he says. “I asked Arnold why don’t politicians answer yes or no, it’s like an unwritten rule. I’m just too straight, I cut straight to the chase.

“I’d love to do a film with Arnold though, what would we call it? The Dinosaurs?”

During the filming of the fourth installment of the Rambo series, Stallone braved death threats in a bit to highlight the plight of the Karen people who are being tortured and murdered by the Burmese army. He spent

MUSCLE MATES: Arnie and Sly are now pals



FAMILY MAN: With his wife Jennifer and three daughters

three months filming in the jungle of Northern Thailand, learning of the horrific genocide that is currently ongoing.

“I talked to the Karen people and each story was more horrific than the next,” he says. “I witnessed the aftermath – survivors with legs cut off, land mine injuries, maggot-infested wounds. “People might say that the violence in this film is gratuitous, but this is what’s happening.

“The Burmese don’t just believe in killing someone – they believe in psychologically damaging someone forever, like cutting their child’s head off and making them keep it outside their house until it rots.”

For the cast and crew, shooting the new Rambo movie in the politically unstable region was as daring as any daredevil mission Rambo has undertaken.

The Burmese army tried to intimidate Stallone so he would abandon the project.

“They called every night for weeks saying they were going to kill me, but they were very polite. They’d say ‘you are making a Burma film, you cannot do this, this could be you to die, thank you’ and hang up,” he says.

The hostile jungle environment also caused problems. He says: “There were lots of scorpion and snake bites, a lot of rashes and dysentery, so many of the cast were in hospital on drips.”

But, he admits, it was worth it to uncover the atrocities that are currently ongoing in the country

“There is a story that needs to be told,” he says. ●

SYLVESTER'S FACT FILE

★ His signature slurred speech and drooping lower lip are actually caused by birth complications.

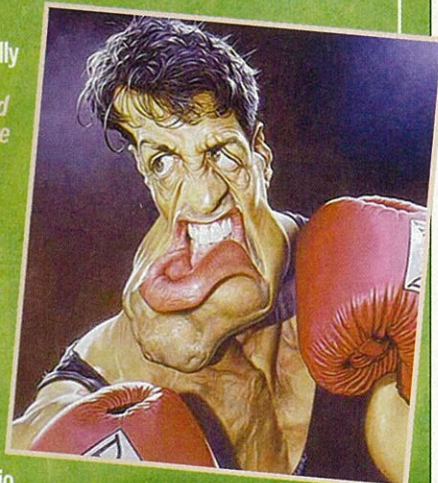
★ Stallone's mother Jackie used to work as a trapeze artist in the circus.

★ The Italian Stallion got his first movie acting role in a 1970's porn movie, called Party at Kitty and Stud's.

★ He may appear like a looming giant in his films but the actor is an average 5 ft 8".

★ His middle name is Gardenzio.

★ All five of his children's names begin with S – Sage, Seargeoh, Sophia, Sistine and Scarlet.



★ Sly is a bit of an artiste– he oil paints in his spare time and considers Leonardo Da Vinci his personal hero.

★ To mark their 10th wedding anniversary, Stallone had his upper arm tattooed with a picture of his wife surrounded by three roses representing his daughters who all have Rose as their middle name.