

EMPIRE REUNION:
LETHAL WEAPON

MAGIC *the* IS BACK!

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EMPIRE brings Mel Gibson, Danny Glover and Richard

Donner together to celebrate 25 years of buddy-cop carnage



D ID WE TRASH THIS ONE? I'M CERTAIN WE TRASHED THIS ONE." RICHARD DONNER, DIRECTOR OF ALL FOUR LETHAL WEAPON FILMS, IS STANDING IN A HOLLYWOOD

parking lot, appraising a sleek, black Oldsmobile Delta 88 — an exact replica of the hero car from the first movie, tracked down by *Empire* for our 25th anniversary photo shoot. But before Donner can recall the fate of the original sedan, a tiny white Smart car zips into the lot. At the wheel, astonishingly, is Mel Gibson. As he emerges, clutching a bundle of clothes he's brought for the occasion — including Riggs' leather jacket from *Lethal Weapon 4* — the ever-sardonic Donner remarks, "Mel, you've really got to get an apartment."

There's no sign of Danny Glover, prompting fears he might be too old for this shoot. Fortunately, though, a limo soon arrives bearing the star, who has made the trip from his San Francisco home, bringing along his brother, Martin, and San Francisco 49ers linebacker Patrick Willis. Within seconds, Glover and Gibson are making each other howl with laughter — there's ribald joking, mockery, even a bit of barking from the latter. Actual barking. Like a dog. "God, I've missed this," beams Donner, the man responsible for pairing them up in the first place.

The *Lethal Weapons* are the definitive buddy-

Weapon reboot recently announced by Warner Bros., the timing's perfect for a sit-down with the trio who made it all happen. That is, if we can get Gibson to give a straight answer.

Twenty-five years on, why are people still talking about *Lethal Weapon*?

GIBSON: 'Cause you asked us to?

DONNER: Wise-ass! Twenty-five years? Boy, that's amazing.

GLOVER: I was a young man...

DONNER: Really, it's the relationship between these two crazies. You don't find it in real life very often, much less on the screen. But it works. People care about them.

GIBSON: And it's been emulated so much and referred to so often. Who's that English guy with red hair? He did this thing — *Hot Fuzz*.

Simon Pegg?

GIBSON: Yeah. (*To the others*) Did you ever see *Hot Fuzz*? It's like a homage to '80s buddy-cop movies, and it's really funny.

DONNER: What's it called? (*To Empire*) Write it down for me.

GIBSON: My kids went nuts for that film. But *Lethal Weapon* started this whole thing. Action films during the '70s and early '80s, they were all a little two-dimensional. The heroes would grunt; they wouldn't express themselves much. But Riggs and

or whatever you had.

GIBSON: Roofalo. It's what happens when your roof caves in.

DONNER: This guy's jokes! I haven't heard that one for a while.

Richard, *Lethal Weapon* was your first action movie. Why pick that story to tell?

DONNER: Because of the characters. They evolved. They had depth. It wasn't just gratuitous violence.

GIBSON: Although there was plenty of that.

DONNER: But it was made for a reason. The other action scripts I was sent were all car crashes and shrapnel. This one was different. As a matter of fact, we were going to kill him (*points at Gibson*) in the third act. But we slowly realised that maybe there was a series in this.

GLOVER: Wow, I didn't know that.

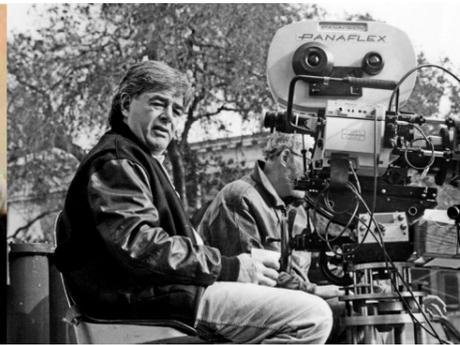
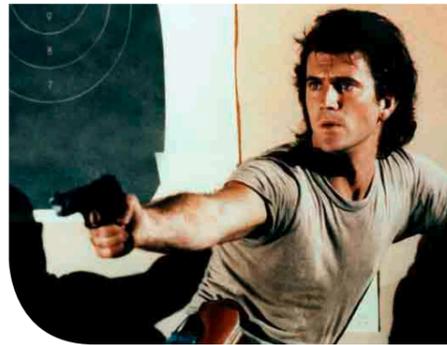
GIBSON: We were always teetering on the brink of bumping Riggs off. We came very close to doing it in the second one.

DONNER: You're so good in that scene where you get shot on the boat. With Eric Clapton singing *Knockin' On Heaven's Door*.

GIBSON: I love that song.

In 1986, Shane Black's script was one of the hottest in Hollywood. How many other directors were after it, and is it true Leonard Nimoy was in the running?

DONNER: Mark Canton at Warners gave it to me.



cop movies, lavishly stuffed with wild action and big laughs. Together, homicide detectives Riggs (Gibson) and Murtaugh (Glover) have survived exploding toilets, killer surfboards, nefarious South Africans and a front-lawn jujitsu duel with Gary Busey, not to mention hours of action jazz. But the real reason for the franchise's near billion-dollar success is chemistry. A screen friendship that turned into a real one, Gibson and Glover made two potentially silly characters — a Three Stooges-loving, black-belted loon; a buttoned-up, prissy family man — not only lovable but iconic. And Donner kept the series on course, even as it transformed from dark thriller to wacky comedy, picking up Joe Pesci along the way.

Since its birth in 1987, the series has become a cultural touchstone. There's been a *Sesame Street* skit, a feature-length spoof (*National Lampoon's Loaded Weapon 1*), a dedicated episode of *How I Met Your Mother* ("I'm too old for this stuff!"). On the downside, it's also responsible for *Cop Out*. So, with a *Lethal*

Murtaugh were real characters. Even though the pitch was: "Put the two unlikeliest guys together — they don't like each other, but by the end of the movie they're friends!"

GLOVER: It's the humour, mixed with the action and the special effects. All that came together at that particular time. And the chemistry between the two of us was undeniable.

DONNER: I deserve the credit for that. It was really great editing.

You've known each other so long, do you feel like family now?

DONNER: Hell no!

GIBSON: Which *is* family. "Get the fuck away from me!" Isn't that most families? We're a dysfunctional one, I guess you could say.

DONNER: We've gone through four of Danny's marriages. Five of *his*...

GIBSON: And he cut all my cattle in half.

DONNER: (*To Glover*) Remember when we went down to his ranch?

GLOVER: I remember all the beefalo, or buffalo,

I know nothing about its previous history.

GIBSON: I did glimpse a guy walking around the studio lot with the script and sharp ears. I actually saw him put the Vulcan death squeeze on Joel Silver.

DONNER: You know, William Shatner's doing a one-man show at the moment. I've got to go see him — he's just an amazing guy.

And Shatner played the villain in the *Lethal Weapon* spoof, *Loaded Weapon 1*...

GIBSON: With Samuel L. Jackson, right?

GLOVER: Oh yeah!

DONNER: What is it?

GIBSON: You haven't seen *Loaded Weapon*? The whole thing is a spoof of our movies.

DONNER: No, no. Why do I miss these things? (*To Empire*) Add it to the list.

GIBSON: If something works and people are sending it up and knocking it off, you've got to be flattered.



Facing page (l-r): Mel Gibson in *Lethal Weapon*; Richard Donner behind his own (ahem) '*lethal weapon*', making the second film; Larks aplenty in *Lethal Weapon 4*.

Bruce Willis, who also pops up in *Loaded Weapon*, was discussed for the role of Riggs. How did you end up finding these guys?

DONNER: I looked under a rock.

GIBSON: You looked under Iraq? Did you find oil?

DONNER: We went down to the unemployment agency and there they were. No, here's what happened: Marion Dougherty, in our first casting session, mentioned Gibson. I said, "Can we get

him?" And I think you were still in Australia.

GIBSON: Yeah, I was down there.

DONNER: Because I called you on the phone and one of your wives said, "He's out mucking the cattle."

GLOVER: Mucking!

DONNER: "Hold still, Bessy! Hold still!"

GIBSON: I tell you, they talk funny down there. So I sent him the script. As for Danny, he made me

realise how intolerant I was. Because the script didn't say Murtaugh was black. It just said, "Roger Murtaugh — going on 50." Marion said to me, "Did you see *Color Purple*? What about Danny Glover?" And my first reaction was, "But he's black!" And then I thought, "Whoa, fuck, here's Mr. Liberal. What a brilliant idea..." I felt stupid. It changed my way of thinking. Anyway, >>

Danny was in a play in Chicago...

GLOVER: I flew out Monday night, got here about midnight. We read together and then we had bangers at your house at 3.30 in the morning.

DONNER: Right.

GIBSON: Dick's bangers are legendary.

Bangers?

GIBSON: Sausages. We should have made that clearer. I guess you were thinking, "Whoa, he really turns it on for the guys!"

GLOVER: And then Mark Canton, after we read the script for him, said, "Let's go make the movie."

DONNER: Yeah. We didn't need any rehearsal. We just went out and made it.

Mel and Danny, did you hit it off straight away?

GIBSON: It's funny. We'd actually already met, at Lido (the location of the Venice Film Festival).

GLOVER: And even before that, I'd heard about Mel. We had worked with the same dialect coach and when I was on Color Purple she talked about him. I'd seen Gallipoli and all this great stuff he'd done, and I said, "Boy, I'd sure like to work with him." And then we met at Lido in '85 — I was there with Silverado and you were there with the last Mad Max — and said, "It would be nice to work together." Like

The crew had broken already, but we got everybody back and did it. The camera operator was sitting on the dolly, crying his eyes out. The camera's shaking and I'm crying too. And then Mel started hitting himself on the head with the gun. I was worried about him, but I let him go.

GIBSON: It really helps to wait until just after post-testicular surgery to do a scene like that. Standing up is agony.

GLOVER: Every time I drive down Santa Monica Boulevard, past that building that Mel jumps off, I remember shooting that and our big argument. The confrontation where Riggs puts the gun in his mouth and I say, "You are crazy..."

DONNER: That building was the headquarters of a rug company. Still is.

Do either of you enjoy doing stunts?

GIBSON: I hate it.

GLOVER: Me too. Count me out of that stuff.

GIBSON: I'll always remember the day when I had to jump with the handcuffs guy. It was a 50-foot drop onto the airbag. From the ground it looked okay. They said, "Can you do that?" And I went, "Sure." Then I went up there and was like, "Shit, that's higher than I thought." But when everyone's watching, you have to jump. I didn't do many stunts, in truth. It was all Mickey (Rodgers), my double. He

"Where did I find these guys? I looked under a rock!"

RICHARD DONNER

actors say all the time, man! And who'd have thought that the next year — boom.

Was it a tough shoot?

DONNER: No. If everyone's happy, it's easy. Tough shoots are when you have personality problems. Otherwise it's just mechanical problems that you're finding solutions to.

GIBSON: I remember it as being pure fun.

DONNER: There was uncontrolled laughter at times. And there was uncontrolled emotion. When they first meet at the station house and Mel throws Danny on the ground, I was off camera by about ten feet and I was shaking. I wanted to laugh out loud, but they kept it going so long. And then there's the scene where Mel attempts suicide. We tried it once...

GIBSON: Twice.

DONNER: But Mel wasn't happy with it. And so we just carried the set with us for weeks. You've got to wait. You can't force those moments. Every night I'd say, "Are you up to it?" And he'd say, "No." And then one day he said, "Hey, can we do that scene?"

was taking the lumps.

DONNER: He says that, but Mel's done some stupid things.

GIBSON: (Shrugs) A few little dumb things. Stuff where you need to get your neck fixed after.

DONNER: On the third show he was on a motorcycle for a freeway chase. We did a safe shot with him on a carryall. And then we had to do a free run where the motorcycle emerges from a cloud of steam. It's supposed to be Mickey, his stunt guy. But out of the steam comes Mel. I'm ready to kill him. Not that I care about his safety, but he's going to fuck up my picture if he gets killed.

GIBSON: I wasn't travelling very fast.

DONNER: Bullshit!

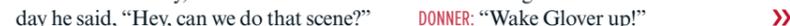
Danny, did you have to do anything scary in the name of Lethal Weapon?

GLOVER: Not really, no.

DONNER: Wake up.

GLOVER: He's always joking about that! I knew he'd go there!

DONNER: "Wake Glover up!"



Coffee and donuts, anyone? Glover and Gibson, photographed at 5th and Sunset, Los Angeles, February 22, 2012.



Three amigos: Richard, Danny and Mel, reunited.



VIEWING GUIDE: LETHAL WEAPON (1987)*

* Director's Cut

CHAPTER 3, 00:05:09

SAX! First time ever.

CHAPTER 4, 00:12:55

RIGGS KILLS A sniper.



CHAPTER 8, 00:26:06

TOO OLD FOR THIS SHIT! Murtaugh meets Riggs for the first time, on the floor, at gunpoint.

CHAPTER 10, 00:29:33

BAD-GUY MOMENT Mr. Joshua (Gary Busey) watches impassively as his arm is burned.

CHAPTER 12, 00:36:57

RIGGS CRAZINESS Riggs jumps off a building, handcuffed to a suicidal office worker. "I controlled the jump! You wanted him down — he's down!"

CHAPTER 13, 00:40:34

TOO OLD FOR THIS SHIT! Murtaugh on the phone to the police psychologist.

CHAPTER 15, 00:45:16

RIGGS KILLS The pool guy.



CHAPTER 21, 01:03:05

PROPERTY DESTROYED House goes kaffloey.

CHAPTER 29, 01:31:55

RIGGS KILLS Seven mercenaries in 90 seconds.

CHAPTER 30, 01:35:59

VEHICULAR MAYHEM Riggs explodes Joshua's car with a machine gun.

CHAPTER 31, 01:37:46

MURTAUGH MOMENT "No way you live."

CHAPTER 31, 01:38:12

VEHICULAR MAYHEM Bus smashes into car, followed by grenade-enhanced explosion.

CHAPTER 32, 01:41:34

PROPERTY DESTROYED Murtaugh's living room.

CHAPTER 34, 01:46:22

RIGGS KILLS Joshua. Total Riggs body count: 17, more than five times as many as Joshua.

CHAPTER 36, 01:49:24

TOO OLD FOR THIS SHIT! Minus the "shit".

VIEWING GUIDE: LETHAL WEAPON 2 (1989)*

* Director's Cut

CHAPTER 1, 00:00:01

VEHICULAR MAYHEM Car-vs.-caravan explosion.

CHAPTER 1, 00:03:22

SAX! First appearance in LW2. We hear it about every five minutes during the first half-hour.

CHAPTER 2, 00:08:29

RIGGS CRAZINESS Escaping a straitjacket by dislocating his shoulder. For a bet.

CHAPTER 5, 00:13:37

BIG ISSUE The plight of dolphins caught in nets.



CHAPTER 10, 00:26:52

NEW TO THE GANG Joe Pesci's Leo Getz.

CHAPTER 13, 00:40:56

VEHICULAR MAYHEM Car + pickup + transporter truck = surfboard-in-face. "Wipe-out!"

CHAPTER 16, 00:46:52

TOO OLD FOR THIS SHIT! Riggs teases Murtaugh.

CHAPTER 18, 00:49:32

THEY FUCK YOU... At the drive-thru.



CHAPTER 22, 01:00:36

PROPERTY DESTROYED Murtaugh's bathroom.

CHAPTER 23, 01:01:13

BIG ISSUE Apartheid!

CHAPTER 28, 01:22:36

RIGGS KILLS Finally! Six gunmen.

CHAPTER 30, 01:26:55

BAD-GUY MOMENT Vorstedt (Derrick O'Connor) reveals that he killed Riggs' wife four years ago.

CHAPTER 33, 01:34:15

PROPERTY DESTROYED Stilt house toppled.

CHAPTER 35, 01:41:08

TOO OLD FOR THIS SHIT! Murtaugh won't jump.

CHAPTER 36, 01:44:25

RIGGS KILLS Vorstedt, bringing the total up to 14.

CHAPTER 37, 01:45:13

MURTAUGH MOMENT Murtaugh revokes Rudd's (Joss Ackland) diplomatic immunity.

GLOVER: Twenty minutes before my scene, man, I'll hear him yelling that. I have this uncanny way of just falling asleep. I'll just have myself a little sleep before the scene.

GIBSON: He can do it standing up.
GLOVER: Whenever we'd travel to location in the show car, being towed, I'd pass out. When I get in a car, I fall asleep.

DONNER: Even when you're driving.
GLOVER: I knew you were going to say that, Donner! I'm talking about the passenger seat. If I'm riding shotgun, don't count on me to give you directions, baby.

As the series goes on, the mayhem gets bigger. Was it fun devising the set-pieces?

DONNER: Oh yeah. Sometimes things would just come along. When we were prepping the third movie, we got a letter from the film department of Orlando, Florida, saying they were going to blow up their old city hall.

GIBSON: This huge, seven-storey building.
DONNER: They said, "Can you use it?" Well, shit, we already had a script, but we weren't going to turn that down.

GIBSON: How long did it take the team to wire that? It was like a month or six weeks.

DONNER: We did the explosion in pieces. When you guys ran out of the building, we blew all the glass. And you were really there when the big detonation happened. I'm sure you felt that blast.

GIBSON: We were jumpy as hell. We knew the building was coming down and we were ready to sprint. When we took off, I thought, "I'd better slow down for him" — but he actually ran right past me.

GLOVER: Yeah!
GIBSON: I'd never seen the guy move like that. I was like, "What the...?" I thought I had him beat.
GLOVER: You sure didn't!

You've had a lot of colourful villains, from Gary Busey's psychopathic Mr. Joshua to Jet Li's deadly Wah Sing Ku. Any favourites?

GIBSON: Busey was the best. No question.
GLOVER: He *became* that character.
DONNER: Gary, for sure. He was unstoppable. And the guy who played the South African [in *Lethal Weapon 2*], Joss Ackland, he was creepy as hell. In real life, he was the sweetest guy in the world.

GIBSON: The nicest man on Earth. Really funny and charming. But he could be *really* creepy when the camera was rolling.

DONNER: I got death threats on that movie. Lots of them. Even on the first *Lethal Weapon*, the studio got threatening messages because of the sticker on the fridge in Murtaugh's house...
GLOVER: "Stop apartheid."

DONNER: And then on the sequel there were literally death threats. Anyway, Joss Ackland — he was great. (*To Glover*) And you won't believe it, but I recently ran into that guy who interviews you in the movie and goes, "But you're black!"

GLOVER: Serious?
DONNER: Yeah. He came up to me and said, "Do you remember me? I'm the 'But you're black' guy." (*Laughs*) We would throw all kinds of stuff into those movies. Anti-NRA posters...



"The chemistry between the two of us was undeniable."
DANNY GLOVER



Far left: The original buddy cops take aim in *Lethal Weapon*. Left: Events heat up for Riggs in *Lethal Weapon 3*.

GLOVER: The stuff about tuna.
GIBSON: Animal testing.
DONNER: If you can make a good entertainment and sneak a message in, super. Sometimes people do it ass-backwards: make message films and then sneak the entertainment in.

Were there any sequel ideas that didn't come to pass?
DONNER: Lots. There was a fifth one that I would have loved to have made. Shane Black wrote another treatment, which I never saw...
GIBSON: I saw it. I saw everything.
DONNER: Oh. But we had a totally different story. The two crazies decide to cool their lives, but it's impossible for them to stay out of situations. It starts with Riggs and Murtaugh out in the country in a motorhome. They're on a trip and they stop

to get gas, but Roger forgets to put the brake on. So the motorhome rolls through a village, annihilating everything, and they get in serious trouble. It had a lot of heart, a lot of family. Rene (*Russo*), Darlene (*Love, who played Trish Murtaugh*), they would all have come back.

Do you have a favourite moment from the series?
DONNER: Whenever they said, "Cut. Go home."
GIBSON: The final shot! "Here's the martini."
DONNER: I don't know. There are so many.
GIBSON: Put it like this. I've done six films with Dick, so it's almost like one big experience. There's no one favourite moment, but there are lots of highs and lows.
DONNER: I loved it in *Maverick* when Danny turns up in a scene (*Glover plays a bank robber sporting*

a bandana) and he and Mel look at each other and do a double-take. I mean, where else can you get away with that?

GLOVER: And I got to say, "I'm too old for this shit!" again.
GIBSON: That was so stupid. It was perfectly stupid.

Finally, how often do you see each other these days?
DONNER: We saw each other ten years ago, when we started this interview...

GIBSON: (*To Glover*) I wished you happy birthday.
GLOVER: Yeah, Mel rang me in July and sang Happy Birthday down the phone.

DONNER: Aww. I would've called you, but I wouldn't know where you are. I see Mel now and then.
GIBSON: Once in a blue moon, we have a lunch.

DONNER: Danny is harder to find.
GLOVER: You're going to see me soon!
DONNER: I'll be there waiting. I've stood on corners with flowers for years and he never shows up.

GIBSON: (*Mimes phone call*) "Hey, Danny, I'm at the wharf like we agreed..."
DONNER: I want to meet his wife.

GLOVER: Yeah, you've got to meet my wife, man.
GIBSON: I've met your wife.

GLOVER: (*Puzzled*) No, you haven't... When did... (*Catching on*) You son of a bitch!
GIBSON: I got you! I got you!

DONNER: He's evil. Twenty-five years, and they're like this every day.
GLOVER: That motherfucker! He got me with that one! I love that guy!

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VIEWING GUIDE: LETHAL WEAPON 3 (1992)*

* Director's Cut

CHAPTER 2, 00:05:27
SAX! The beginning of the real horror — this is where the sax starts to be endlessly recycled.

CHAPTER 2, 00:06:03
PROPERTY DESTRUCTION Office-building bomb.

CHAPTER 4, 00:10:10
VEHICULAR MAYHEM Armoured-car chase.

CHAPTER 4, 00:13:43
TOO OLD FOR THIS SHIT! Murtaugh car-chase shells shock.

CHAPTER 6, 00:21:17
BAD GUY MOMENT Travis (Stuart Wilson) drowns a lackey in cement.



CHAPTER 9, 00:28:58 ⚡
NEW TO THE GANG Rene Russo as Internal Affairs sergeant Lorna Cole.

CHAPTER 11, 00:47:07
BIG ISSUE Ebonie Smith sports a pro-choice T-shirt.

CHAPTER 13, 00:53:38
RIGGS CRAZINESS Demonstrating an unconventional dog-taming technique.

CHAPTER 22, 01:23:09
THEY FUCK YOU... In the hospital! "First they drug you, then they fuck you!"



CHAPTER 25, 01:21:36 ⚡
VEHICULAR MAYHEM Train and freeway chase that ends with Riggs driving a bike into thin air.

CHAPTER 27, 01:41:01
PROPERTY DESTROYED Riggs explodes a truck, burning down a construction site in the process.

CHAPTER 28, 01:41:32
MURTAUGH MOMENT Roundhouse-kicking a goon. "Sonuvabitch — it works!"

CHAPTER 28, 01:44:18
RIGGS KILLS Travis. Only four this movie...

CHAPTER 32, 01:55:37
PROPERTY DESTROYED An entire hotel.

CHAPTER 32, 01:55:55
TOO OLD FOR THIS SHIT! Post-demolition stress.

VIEWING GUIDE: LETHAL WEAPON 4 (1998)*

* Uncut Version

CHAPTER 3, 00:04:50
RIGGS KILLS The armoured flamethrower loon.



CHAPTER 3, 00:05:04 ⚡
PROPERTY DESTROYED Gas station goes kaboom.

CHAPTER 3, 00:05:27
SAX! After this, we hear it every fucking ten minutes or so throughout the whole film.

CHAPTER 5, 00:12:47
PROPERTY DESTROYED! Murtaugh's boat.

CHAPTER 7, 00:16:22
VEHICULAR MAYHEM Car vs. train.

CHAPTER 8, 00:16:53
BIG ISSUE People-trafficking.

CHAPTER 8, 00:18:12
NEW TO THE GANG Chris Rock as Detective Lee Butters, Murtaugh's secret son-in-law. Gets his own harmonica theme, as if Murtaugh's sax and Riggs' guitar weren't enough.

CHAPTER 22, 00:55:06
TOO OLD FOR THIS SHIT! This time it's Riggs.

CHAPTER 23, 00:58:00
THEY FUCK YOU... With the cellphones!

CHAPTER 24, 01:02:05
BAD-GUY MOMENT Jet Li unconcernedly mimes brushing Riggs' laser-sight from his chest.

CHAPTER 25, 01:04:27
PROPERTY DESTROYED Murtaugh's house.



CHAPTER 29, 01:13:00 ⚡
VEHICULAR MAYHEM Car jumps from highway, drives through office, and back onto freeway.

CHAPTER 37, 01:36:09
VEHICULAR MAYHEM Exploding car into water.

CHAPTER 40, 01:42:42
RIGGS KILLS Wah Sing Ku, making the final chapter's total six, and the series total 41.

CHAPTER 41, 01:44:16
MURTAUGH MOMENT Saves Riggs from drowning.
OWEN WILLIAMS