

= Skin Trade (film) =

Skin Trade is a 2014 action thriller film directed by Ekachai Uekrongtham , and starring Dolph Lundgren , Tony Jaa , Michael Jai White , and Ron Perlman . Lundgren wrote the film with Gabriel Dowrick and Steven Elder , while John Hyams performed uncredited script revisions . The film centers around New Jersey police detective Nick Cassidy , as he travels to Asia intent on killing the man who murdered his family , mobster Viktor Dragovic . He is also set on destroying Dragovic 's human trafficking network .

Development started in 2007 after Lundgren read a news report about a group of girls being smuggled into the United States from Mexico . The girls were left in a vehicle along the border , and trapped inside , they all died of heat stroke and suffocation . Skin Trade had a \$ 9 million production budget , and was shot over 50 days in Canada and Thailand . It was the first film to be shot in English by an organization based in Asia (outside of Hong Kong) for an international theatrical release .

The film premiered at the American Film Market on November 7 , 2014 . This was followed by a limited theatrical release , starting on April 9 , 2015 in the United Arab Emirates , and succeeded by Thailand (on April 23) , Malaysia (on April 30) , and the United States (on May 8) . The film grossed \$ 384 thousand at the worldwide box office , but it received mostly negative reviews . Particular criticism was aimed at Jaa 's fluency in English , as well as at the film 's scant focus on human trafficking .

= = Plot = =

A Cambodian girl leaves her village for Bangkok . Upon arriving , she is kidnapped , drugged , and sold in the skin trade .

In Newark , New Jersey , detective Nick Cassidy discovers that mobster Viktor Dragovic is in town . Meanwhile , in Bangkok , detective Tony Vitayakul attempts to buy a Thai girl from a group of human traffickers . When his cover is blown , he kills the traffickers and frees the girl from captivity .

Captain Costello and Cassidy brief the police department on Dragovic ; revealing he runs the largest human trafficking network in the world . As a cargo ship owned by Dragovic approaches America , Cassidy and the department prepare to intercept it at the docks . When the ship arrives , Dragovic discovers the trafficked women have died during transport . The ship 's captain is held responsible and shot in the head . A shootout erupts as the police move in for an arrest . Cassidy chases Dragovic and his son , Andre , as they flee . He fatally shoots Andre in self @-@ defense and Dragovic is arrested . While in custody , Dragovic arranges to have Cassidy and his entire family murdered ; having his house blown up the same night . Cassidy 's wife and daughter are killed instantly , while Cassidy survives after being shot in the back .

Costello and Reed , an FBI agent , visit Cassidy in hospital . They tell him Dragovic fled the US after being bailed . As soon as they leave , Cassidy staggers out of the hospital unnoticed . He gathers a few weapons and travels to the restaurant of Dragovic 's attorney . After forcing the attorney to reveal Dragovic 's whereabouts , Cassidy kills the attorney and blows up the restaurant .

In Cambodia , Senator Khat warns Dragovic that unless he leaves the country immediately , he will be arrested and extradited to the United States . Dragovic blackmails the Senator into giving him two weeks to put his affairs in order and flee .

Cassidy travels to Thailand in pursuit of Dragovic . Believing that Cassidy has experienced a nervous breakdown , the US authorities have ordered Reed to detain him as soon as he arrives . Tony and his partner , Nung , are told to assist with the arrest . At Suvarnabhumi airport , Cassidy flees as the police try to arrest him . Reed , who has been bought off by Dragovic , kills Nung and frames Cassidy for the murder . Tony pursues Cassidy through the streets , but Cassidy escapes ; he travels to a nightclub in Poipet , where - after torturing one of Dragovic 's men - he discovers the location of Dragovic 's current operations . Tony and Reed arrive at the nightclub and attempt to arrest Cassidy . After fighting with Tony , Cassidy escapes injured . Reed then uses Tony 's cell phone to uncover an informant , who happens to be Tony 's girlfriend , Min . While attempting to

sabotage Dragovic 's operations , a shootout erupts between Cassidy and Dragovic 's men . Ivan and Goran shoot their half @-@ brother , Janko , on behalf of their father . Tony arrives and attempts to kill Cassidy , but after learning the truth about his partner 's death , he kills Reed instead . Before dying , Janko reveals his father 's location .

The next day , Cassidy and Tony storm Dragovic 's compound . While there , Cassidy learns that his daughter , Sofia , was not killed , but placed in the human trafficking trade . Ivan tries to kill Min , but Tony shoots him in the head . Cassidy destroys a vehicle with a rocket @-@ launcher , and as a result , Dragovic 's helicopter leaves without him . During a shootout between Cassidy and Dragovic 's men , Goran is killed in a hand @-@ to @-@ hand fight with Tony . After the shootout , Cassidy fights with Dragovic ; ultimately stabbing him in the chest . He attempts to retrieve the whereabouts of his daughter from the dying Dragovic , but fails .

In the aftermath , Cassidy says goodbye to Tony and Min . Before leaving , he gives them a picture of Sofia and tells them to hold onto it until he has found her . He then sets out in search of his daughter .

= = Cast = =

Dolph Lundgren as Nick Cassidy , a New Jersey police detective seeking to avenge the murder of his family .

Tony Jaa as Tony Vitayakul , a Thailand police detective tasked with arresting Cassidy .

Michael Jai White as Reed , an FBI agent .

Ron Perlman as Viktor Dragovic , a Serbian mobster running an international human trafficking ring .

Mike Dopud as Goran Dragovic , Viktor 's eldest son , who oversees his father 's operations in the Middle @-@ East .

David Westerman as Ivan Dragovic , Viktor 's other son , who oversees his father 's operations in South @-@ East Asia .

Leo Rano as Janko Dragovic , Viktor 's son from another relationship , who manages a chain of nightclubs in Thailand .

Michael G. Selby as Andre Dragovic , Viktor 's youngest son .

Celina Jade as Min , Tony 's girlfriend .

Peter Weller as Costello , the captain of Cassidy 's police department in Newark , New Jersey .

Tasya Teles as Rosa Cassidy , Nick 's wife .

Chloe Babcook as Sofia Cassidy , Nick 's teenage daughter .

The film also stars Cary @-@ Hiroyuki Tagawa as Khat , the Senator of Cambodia ; Maethi Thapthimthong as Nung , Tony 's partner on the Thai police force ; and Bryce Hodgson as Dex , a petty criminal from New Jersey . The film 's co @-@ writer , Steven Elder , appears in a minor role as Dragovic 's attorney .

= = Production = =

= = = Development = = =

Lundgren started researching human trafficking in 2005 . He claimed there were " 20 million slaves in the world " , and that human trafficking was a " \$ 20 billion industry " ; the world 's " second largest " illegal trafficking enterprise (as of 2015) . He started developing Skin Trade in 2007 ; after reading a news report about a group of girls being smuggled into the United States from Mexico . The girls were left in a vehicle along the border ; trapped inside and with no means of escape , they all died of heat stroke and suffocation . Lundgren , who had " two young daughters " at the time , felt the story of human trafficking " had to be told " . He related with each of the victims , saying : " these people are physically humiliated [and] psychologically abused to have no self worth , sort of like [how] I used to feel " .

= = = Screenplay = = =

Lundgren wrote the screenplay with Gabriel Dowrick and Steven Elder , while John Hyams performed uncredited script revisions ; seven in total , frequently regarding the setting as Lundgren sought financing . The original script was set in Russia . Lundgren even went as far as to scout for locations and actors ; and to seek financing in Moscow , but it " didn 't work out " . He changed the setting to Southeast Asia after meeting " someone " interested in financing the film .

= = = Casting = = =

Originally , Lundgren planned on playing a supporting role , with a more famous actor in the lead . He also considered directing the film , but decided against it , as he desired to learn more about producing . In 2013 , Lundgren announced the casting of Tony Jaa , in the role of Tony Vitayakul ; and Ekachai Uekrongtham as the director . Lundgren chose Uekrongtham after being impressed with his film , Beautiful Boxer . He contacted him through a mutual friend in Los Angeles , and in mid @-@ 2013 , they arranged to meet in the city . While he had previously turned down scripts offered to him for international markets , Uekrongtham found Skin Trade " riveting " . He said the script " [had] the potential to work as a character @-@ driven piece while saying something about how we deal with scars , literal and otherwise " . Jaa , on the other hand , met with Lundgren through his manager and film agent . He couldn 't speak any English when cast , but claimed to have taken " intensive " lessons in preparation for his role ; stating he is now " reasonably fluent " in " conversational " English .

Tasya Teles was cast as Rosa Cassidy on Christmas Day , 2013 . She was heading to Thailand for a holiday " after a year of hard work " , and her agent phoned to tell her about the " perfect role " ; even insisting on her having a " quick look " at the script . Once Teles realized Skin Trade was about human trafficking , she was " instantly hooked " .

On February 7 , 2014 , SC Films announced the casting of Michael Jai White , Ron Perlman , Peter Weller , Celina Jade , and Cary @-@ Hiroyuki Tagawa . The film 's co @-@ producer , Craig Baumgarten , was White and Weller 's manager ; he secured them both roles in the film . Weller was the original choice to play Viktor Dragovic , but due to scheduling issues , the role went to Perlman instead . Furthermore , Lundgren considered having White to co @-@ star ; White only accepted the role of FBI agent Reed after finding the script " appealing " .

= = = Principal photography = = =

Filming began on February 2 , 2014 in Thailand . Skin Trade was shot over 50 days : 43 filming in Thailand , and four filming in Vancouver , Canada . In Thailand , filming locations included : Suvarnabhumi Airport , the Min Buri District , the Siam Kempinski Hotel , a rice mill , a leather @-@ bleaching factory , and a century @-@ old mansion . Filming was briefly disrupted by public protests relating to the Thai political crisis . To avoid any further interference , the cast and crew had to travel early to get through the traffic and to the set on time . Most of the film was shot on location , but some scenes were filmed at Baanrig Studios . Skin Trade was the first film to be shot in English by an organization based in Asia (outside of Hong Kong) for an international theatrical release .

Uekrongtham arranged a " few lunches and dinners " between Lundgren and his on @-@ screen family (Tasya Teles and Chloe Babcook) , so they could bond " on a personal level " before filming scenes together . Babcook spent a week and a half filming her scenes in Bangkok , followed by a few days of filming in Vancouver .

The " heavily choreographed " fight scene between Lundgren and Jaa was planned over " [one] or two " months . It was rehearsed for two weeks and took a further week to film . Due to Lundgren 's role as co @-@ producer , the cast had a lot of freedom to improvise their scenes . Jaa filmed his fight scenes without using wirework or CGI . He felt this would give his character " more depth " and allow him to better display his acting abilities . Jaa also performed all of his own stunts . Lundgren

claimed he was " very impressed " by Jaa 's acting and fighting abilities . In his opinion , the majority of people wouldn 't be able to perform Jaa 's stunts without using wirework .

According to White , his fight scenes with Jaa were " largely " choreographed ten minutes before filming . On the contrary , Jaa insisted it was something they were practicing " right up until the shoot " . He recalled that while they were rehearsing the sequences and moves together " quite extensively " for a " number of days " , they didn 't rehearse them on the film set . The fight was filmed in three takes .

== Effects ==

Explosions were shot at Baanrig Studios ; by the special effects team that had worked on The Expendables .

== Editing ==

According to Lundgren , the " large " number of editors resulted in him having less " [creative] control " over the final product . As co -@ producer of the film , Lundgren assumed he would have been more involved in the editing process .

== Release ==

The worldwide premiere was held at California 's American Film Market on November 7 , 2014 , while the Thailand premiere was held in Bangkok ; at the Siam Paragon on April 23 , 2015 . This was followed by theatrical releases in the United Arab Emirates (on April 9 , 2015) , Malaysia (on April 30) , and the United States (on May 8) .

On May 21 , 2015 , the film was screened at a fundraising event for CAST (The Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking) , a charitable organization based in Los Angeles that helps to rescue and reintegrate victims of human trafficking back into society . Lundgren , who was looking for ways to " help out " , started volunteering for CAST during the film 's development stage .

== Marketing ==

A teaser poster was released in 2013 , followed by a teaser trailer on March 26 , 2014 . On April 7 of the same year , Lundgren promoted Skin Trade on CNN . He appeared live in the studio and discussed the film with news anchor Richard Quest . At the 2014 Cannes Film Festival , Hyde Park International presented potential buyers with nine minutes of footage . Magnolia Pictures acquired the U.S. distribution rights on February 20 , 2015 , and announced they were releasing the film through their subsidiary label , Magnet Releasing . The film 's official trailer was released on March 12 , 2015 .

== Critical reception ==

Skin Trade received mostly negative reviews . Rotten Tomatoes reports that 25 percent of critics gave a positive review ; the " average " rating being 4 @. @ 8 out of 10 . On Metacritic , the film has a score of 39 out of 100 , also indicating " generally unfavorable " reviews .

Martin Tsai , of the LA Times , described the film as a " movie where cops self @-@ righteously act as judge , jury and executioner " , without considering any protocols or procedures . He also said the film barely touches upon human trafficking . Nick Schager , of Variety , came to a similar conclusion , calling the issue of human trafficking (within the film) a " window dressing " for standard " revenge @-@ driven " action . Schager also criticized Jaa 's lack of fluency in English . Other critics have had similar feelings ; Ignatiy Vishnevetsky , of A.V. Club , called it one of the film 's " biggest drawbacks " .

Chuck Bowen , of Slant Magazine , heavily criticized the film ; he awarded zero out of four stars .

He said *Skin Trade* " fails " to satisfy even the " qualified expectations " that someone brings to a " low @-@ rent Dolph Lundgren ass @-@ kicker " . Bowen went on to say there is " no beauty to this film , little rhythm " , and none of the " physical grace " that action @-@ film fans " crave " .

Frank Scheck , of *The Hollywood Reporter* , rated the film as poor , saying the film is " more suitable for late night cable viewing " than a theatrical release . He went on to criticize Uekrongtham 's directing , saying that " [Uekrongtham] clearly paid more attention to the casting than the onscreen mechanics . And for a film so seemingly interested in educating audiences about the evils of sex trafficking " , Uekrongtham has no problem with " including [a] copious [amount] of female nudity " .

Scott Tobias , of *The Dissolve* , rated the film two and a half out of five . Calling the film a " throwback to the one @-@ man @-@ army [action films] " of the 1980s , he said " if the film happens to raise awareness [of human trafficking] " , then it 's more of a " bonus than an objective " . Tobias took a disliking to the film 's " needlessly complicated setup " , which - according to him - " posits *Skin Trade* as the splashy global production that it [clearly] is not " .

Simon Abrams , of *Rogerebert.com* , gave the film a positive review ; he awarded three out of four stars , and praised the film 's choreography and fight scenes . He said that " while time hasn 't been kind to the best ass @-@ kicking knuckle @-@ draggers , *Skin Trade* is energetic and winsome " . In his opinion , the movie " hails " from a " decadent period of action cinema " ; " when every renegade cop had a private vendetta , a pet charity / social concern , and a few lousy quips in his back pocket " . He summed his review saying : " you can teach a new dog old tricks , though why you would want to is anyone 's guess " . The *Action Elite* 's Eoin Friel also enjoyed the film ; he awarded four out of five stars , and praised the choreography , stunts and fight scenes . Unlike Schager or Vishnevetsky , Friel had no issues with Jaa 's fluency in English , and even felt he " handled " the language " pretty well " .

== = Box office performance == =

The film debuted in the United Arab Emirates on April 9 , 2015 . It peaked in fifth place at the box office , and made \$ 79 @,@ 286 from 19 screenings (\$ 4 @,@ 173 per theater) . No information is available for the film 's Thailand debut , but it peaked in fifth place during the second week , and grossed \$ 137 @,@ 643 from 40 screenings (\$ 3 @,@ 441 per theater) . By the end of the third week , the film dropped to eleventh place at the Thai box office , making a further \$ 3 @,@ 686 (bringing the entire gross to \$ 141 @,@ 329 in Thailand) . For its debut in Malaysia , *Skin Trade* came in sixth place , and made \$ 98 @,@ 559 from 42 screenings (\$ 3 @,@ 861 per theater) . By the end of the second week , it dropped two places at the box office , making a further \$ 32 @,@ 917 from 39 screenings (bringing the entire gross to \$ 162 @,@ 163 in Malaysia) . *Skin Trade* grossed a total of \$ 382 @,@ 784 at the foreign box office .

The film debuted in the United States on May 8 , 2015 , making \$ 162 (from one theater showing) during its opening weekend . It remained in the one theater for a second week , grossing a further \$ 510 . By the end of its third and final week of release in the US , *Skin Trade* grossed a total of \$ 1 @,@ 242 at the domestic box office , bringing the film 's entire theatrical gross to \$ 384 @,@ 026 .

== = Home media == =

Skin Trade was released through Video @-@ on @-@ Demand on April 23 , 2015 , On August 25 , Magnet Releasing distributed the film on Blu @-@ ray and DVD . In the United States , the film was given an R rating by the Motion Picture Association of America , while in the United Kingdom , it was issued a 15 rating by the British Board of Film Classification . As of January 1 , 2016 , *Skin Trade* has grossed \$ 959 thousand in domestic home video sales .

== = Soundtrack == =

All of the music was written and composed by Jacob Groth . The song " Unzip Me " by Belle Rev

was played in the film , but not included in the soundtrack .

= = Potential sequel = =

Teles said she would be open to returning for a sequel ; she feels the film was " nicely set up " for one , and claims " [the cast and crew are] wondering " if there will be a follow @-@ up . On the possibility of a sequel , Lundgren said : " I didn ' t consider [Skin Trade] as a franchise , but when I was over there [in Thailand] , I started thinking , ' How would I do this different ? How would I stay close to the subject matter ? ' Organ trafficking is quite big as well , so I thought that could be interesting . We could follow up with some kind of other trade " .