

LETHAL FORCE (2001)

Category : DVD REVIEWS (J-M)

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Directed by Alvin D. Ecarma

Review by Dan Greene



Released by: Unearthed Films

Year of release: 2006

Running time: 70 minutes

Rating: NR

Color Format: Color

Audio / Subtitles: Dolby Digital 2.0, English language, no subtitles

Region Code: Region 1 NTSC

Aspect ratio: 1.33:1

16:9 enhanced: No

Special features: Director's audio commentary, director's shorts, production photos, action figure gallery, art gallery, trailers.

Trailer Online: [Yes](#)



LETHAL FORCE is the brainchild of Alvin D. Ecarma, a filmmaker obsessed—as many of us are—with grindhouse action & kung-fu films from the '70s and '80s. Equal parts parody and homage, this no-budget chop-socky gunslinger gorefest is easily as enjoyable as its influences (namely, the action-packed but cheezy early films of John Woo, in all their slow-motion, doves-flying glory).

Jack—a brutal gangster plus family man—must protect his son from organized crime boss Mal, but his only option to save the boy is by betraying his best friend & partner, Savitch—an equally remorseless, yet strangely honorable, professional killer. Bullets will fly, knives will be wielded, and limbs will definitely come loose.



A sloppy, dirty, ugly bastard of a movie, LETHAL FORCE survives on heart and desperate ingenuity alone. Acting is cut-rate, costumes are atrocious, special effects are dime-store experiments, makeup & hair stylists are M.I.A. But, man, do you want these crazy kids to succeed! The simple, unflinching will to live that LETHAL FORCE exerts makes for one entertaining slugfest—a slugfest that happens to be filmed in English, then largely re-dubbed... in English; one that uses every Baltimore location that the crew doesn't get kicked out of; one that surprises with some classic lines of dialogue ("You bastard! You should've died when I killed you!") and decently choreographed fight sequences. Painfully true to the "shot-in-the-streets" ethos of the genre, LETHAL FORCE is a prime candidate for any gathering of midnight movie maniacs.



The DVD from Unearthed Films benefits from stylish menu design and a few extras worth a peek. The audio commentary with director Ecarma and key crew members moves at a mile-a-minute, constantly spilling the warts-and-all details of making a no-budget feature, from shooting without permission to re-dubbing limp performances to setting off firecrackers in one's own pocket for a special effect... and other questionable acts of guerilla filmmaking. There are three short films by Ecarma—only one of them really worth the time: in THE CONVERSATION, a masked vigilante and his panhandling hippie friend find themselves in a moral and philosophical quandary over the use of violence in the pursuit of justice... and also, they admire one another's footwear. There's a collection of surprisingly snappy production stills, as well as a look at the conceptual artwork behind the final movie poster, and—most intriguing of all—an elaborate gallery of LETHAL FORCE action figures, which some obsessive must have spent weeks creating. My only beef with the action figure slideshow is that the slides cycle through too quickly for you to read the humorous copy on the phony toy packaging. I guess that's why we have the pause button.

At a time in cinematic history when the grindhouse exploitation style is being dug up, polished off and reclaimed by studio filmmakers, it's refreshing to see the honest-to-goodness, down 'n' dirty, strictly independent vision that is LETHAL FORCE. Whether you end up cheering for the film or laughing at

it, either way you're sure to enjoy yourself.