

SHOCK CINEMA

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UNDER GROUND ODDITIES

LETHAL FORCE (2001). [Divergent Thinking Productions, P.O. Box 60261, Potomac, MD 20859; www.lethalforcethemovie.com] The feature debut by writer-director Alvin Ecarma is an impressively brutal and adrenalized treat that's both a tribute and satire of old-fashioned, kick-ass action films. Within minutes you'll realize that Ecarma has seen far too many B-movies, and now gets to revel in their brand of over-ripe dialogue, hard-hitting fights and inherent absurdity. Frank Prather plays gangster Jack Carter, whose son is kidnapped by a wheelchaired villain named Mal Locke (Andrew Hewitt), with a fortress guarded by masked minions. In order to get his boy back, Carter has to set up his old pal Savitch (Cash Flagg, Jr.), a steely super-assassin. Locke is looking for revenge, and Savitch finds himself besieged by a bizarre array of foes, including the butch Big Bertha, savage strippers and Minnesotan hitmen, and spends most of the film leaping, kicking, bleeding, and slaughtering anyone in his way. When our killing machine hero is eventually tortured within an inch of his life, it only leads to a seriously damaged finale! Although its story won't tax any brain cells, Ecarma's imaginative filmmaking is packed with adrenaline, twisted humor and severe violence — such as a huge fuckin' power drill taken to a human skull. For an indie production, it's also crammed with surprisingly intricate fight-choreography, while cinematographer/action-director Eric Thornett turns up on-screen to battle Savitch, and allows himself be set on fire! At its center, Flagg is a deliriously sadistic bad-ass who makes Jean Claude Van Damme look like a pussy (OK, I admit that's not difficult) and has the resilience of Wile E. Coyote. It adds up to a winning mix of savvy laughs and non-stop excitement on a home-grown budget.