
CULTCUTS

LETHAL FORCE

Directed by Alvin D. Ecarma
2001 ❖ 71 minutes ❖ fullscreen
Divergent Think Productions

An army of faceless killers. A wheel-chaired villain. An afro that is out of control. Scummy pimps with bad teeth. A pedophile, kung-fu strippers, an evil cackling fez wearing crony with a curling iron and drill bit fetish and blood spurting like a hose. Wait, that's not all. More 70's Saturday Morning Cartoon sound effects than you can shake a stick at. More bullets than a baseball game in the Bronx. Sean Connery as the Man Who Would Be King and the close friendship between two professional killers? Sounds like a number of great action films? Well it is. And it's all rolled up into one big homage/spoof inspired by everything from **DIRTY HARRY** to **KUNG FU** with a splash of John Woo and **THE MATRIX**.

Jack, a professional killer, has just watched his wife murdered and his son taken captive by MAL, a powerful crime lord bent on revenge. If he wants to see his son, Patrick, alive again, Jack needs to sell out his best friend, Savitch, to MAL. It seems MAL was left for dead by Savitch awhile back and now, wheel-chair bound, wants Savitch to pay. Now it is up to Jack, with the use of MAL's faceless army, Rita (MAL's love interest and Pam Grier stereotype) and a whole group of pimps and hoodlums, to work together and bring Savitch in for a day of reckoning, torture and revenge. Unfortunately for Jack, Savitch isn't that easy to deal with. Feeling betrayed, Savitch takes it upon himself to take down everyone in his path leading to a final showdown that delivers a tirade of kung-fu, shootouts and the most blood-squirting this side of the Baby Cart series!

Before one can mention the word cliché, director Alvin Ecarma has written a screenplay that really works to bring together everything we grew up watching in the seventies and makes it his own hysterical film. One major plus is that our leads are played straight. Sure, Savitch (played by Cash Flagg, Jr. with a Dirty Harry accent) gets run over four times and thrown out of a building at least six floors up to land face down in a parking lot. It's not enough to stop him from getting up, even more bloody than before, getting pissed and kicking some ass! Rita's character (played by Patricia Williams)

really hones in the tough femme fatale with the soft side. She has no problem shooting someone in the balls or biting tongues of cohorts that cop a feel but when it comes to loyalty and children she's on our side. Then there is Jack, played with emotional betrayal by Frank Prather, whose sense of family safety outweighs his loyalty towards his old friend even after John Woo's loyalty theme song from **THE KILLER** haunts his memory on our screen. Altogether, these three characters drive the film into success with the aid of some of the best use of sound effects to highlight the insanity that ensues.

Overall, Ecarma makes the best of a small budget and transcends the usual pratfalls of independent filmmaking into ways that work most of the time. A few moments don't quite work, especially a certain drilling scene, but this is a minor quibble considering the same set piece turns into one of the best fight sequences of the entire film. Ecarma knows the action genre well and seems to have a feel for when to go for broke and when to restrain. Divergent Thinking Productions are currently working on the follow up to **LETHAL FORCE** with **CERTAIN DEATH**. I personally can't wait. Until then, I'm off to play with my *Lethal Force Action Figure Set* personally certified by Cash Flagg, Jr. and equipped with actual loaded mini guns and over 2,000 possible fighting poses or articulations!

~Mark Engle~