

ULTIMATE DEATH MATCH

Weirdly, this film's opening titles end with the credit "Special Guest Star: Shawn Cain". By the time that appears on screen, we've already seen him listed as the writer, director and star of ULTIMATE DEATH MATCH.

Anyhow, he portrays Jake here, a promoter of professional wrestling who loses his licence when one of his fighters - Johnny - dies in the ring. He's not best pleased (as we witness in a foul-mouthed interview to camera) and nor are the fans: we observe as two meatheads set upon him in a bar and, hilariously, a fight erupts which incorporates wrestling moves into a non-wrestling environment. Weird.

Ignoring his business partner's subsequent advice that "you gotta have a moral compass", Jake insists that "the show must go on" and pitches the idea of the 'ultimate death match'. As he later barks to a rabid crowd over the speakers, "Here in this ring tonight, someone will die".

And so, the wheels are set in motion for the staging of the first UDM. After a brief spell witnessing characters sign up for the event, it's suddenly upon us: a 'round robin event' with eight contestants ... and an audience of bloodthirsty spectators.

Then it's time for the host (Frostie?) to introduce us to the contestants. The first two are Beast and Larkin, and they won't disappoint fans of WWE: it's all camp posturing and bravado for the camera.

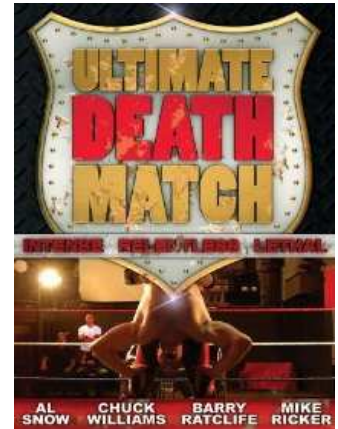
Moments later, the fight begins. Beast and Larkin fight in the ring for an audience of, I don't know, perhaps 20? "Anything goes", the commentators say, and this seems to only include severe wedgies to begin with. Pretty soon though, the match has degenerated into eye-gouging and bone-breaking.

The first match ends messily but, behind the scenes, the promoters are still not content. They need more from the ensuing contestants ...

Cue Azul versus Jimmy Flame. A particularly authentic-looking wrestling match. Now, when I say 'authentic' ... I apologise to anyone that this may offend, but the wrestling you get on Sky TV or whatever - it's not real. It's cleverly choreographed by amazing professional stuntmen, and looks very good. It's even entertaining. Nothing more. And that's what we get here (I'm not suggesting for one moment that Jimmy and Azul's scrapping is the real deal ... it isn't, thank God!).

Anyway, this is how Cain's film progresses from here on in. A match here and there, interspersed with a little backstage argy-bargy about money etc: the story unfortunately never blossoms fully and, ultimately, with no characters to root for or even warm to, ULTIMATE DEATH MATCH is sure to test the patience of all but the more concerted pro-wrestling fan.

For fans, the big draw here is that has-been Al Snow plays a significant role in the latter half of the film. But, even then, it's a shame that Cain couldn't have dimmed the lights a little and given the impression that these fighters were performing to a packed-out auditorium: the fact that the brightly-lit room reveals an audience of perhaps 20 people (one table is repeatedly shown, with the



obligatory Texan money man in a Stetson and surrounded by girlies) cheapens the handheld rawness of the wrestling footage.

Cain doesn't do a bad job of holding the attention overall - there is humour, there is horror - but he's not Darren Aronofsky.

Shot in a pseudo-documentary manner, ULTIMATE DEATH MATCH is decently acted and driven by the verve of its cast. Cain, as mentioned above, directs competently enough and his script is accurate in terms of what you get from wrestling commentators (which accounts for much of the dialogue, once the battles commence - roughly 10 minutes into the film). But, unless you absolutely need the fake gore of this film (minor, to be fair), any fans of the sport will be better off keeping to the latest televised spectacles.

ULTIMATE DEATH MATCH is presented in 1.78:1 anamorphic widescreen and looks okay. Colours hold up well but images are somewhat soft and occasional ghosting makes you wonder what the back cover's claims that the transfer was "originated from High Definition" actually mean. English 2.0 audio is good throughout.

The only extras on the disc are trailers for the surprisingly decent I AM VIRGIN and Jake Kennedy's mean-spirited PENANCE.

Independent Media Distribution's disc opens with a static main menu page. From there, a static scene-selection menu allows access to the main feature via 10 chapters.

Worth a punt if you're into pro-wrestling. Everyone else will wonder what the fuck this is all about. I don't watch wrestling but my brother, bless him, has educated me in why and how it can be taken as guiltless entertainment. Hi bro.

A very low-budget, rather specialised film, on a so-so disc.

Review by Stuart Willis

Released by IMDFILMS

Region 1 - NTSC

Not Rated

Extras :

see main review

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