

Review by Mark Martucci - 3/19/2012 11:34 AM - Exclusive for CHFB

ACADEMY OF DOOM

Directed: Chip Gubera

Written by: Jeffrey Uhlmann

Run Time: 1:23:17

Filmed on the heels of the extremely enjoyable MIL MASCARAS VS THE AZTEC MUMMY, this is not quite up to the quality of that film, but don't let that be a deterrent because this one is almost as enjoyable.

As in the earlier film (Nominated for a Rondo this year), this one is not a cheesy parody of the Mexican Lucha films of the '50s-late '70s, but actually it is a new film to add to that weird and wonderful canon.

The plot is about as wacky as anything that came out of Mexico during the masked wrestler era and that's a good thing. The only difference is that these look like new films shot in high def and widescreen even though they were shot at the University of Missouri of all places!

By the way, these films are not in Spanish, but are completely in English. One of my few gripes is that there are no Spanish subs. I know how frustrated I get when I have to watch a non-English friendly Mexican film.

The new film reminds me quite a bit of CAPTAIN CELLULOID AND THE FILM PIRATES (1966) serial which can be viewed as an example of a genuine chapter play. Like that film, you feel the creators here have a deep understanding and respect for the genre. Look for lots of in-references throughout such as the spooky old Huerta Mansion where the battle royal at the end of the film takes place. The film also reminds me of John Carpenter's DARK STAR which was made with available college locations, props and sets found on campus.

ACADEMY OF DOOM takes place in a Bizarro-like universe where just about everyone wears a mask of some sort. People in masks are just taken for granted and there are no double takes when they are walking about town. I found this to be a world that I would not mind living in even though there are some evil and brain thirsty creatures lurking about. It's nice to know that Mil Mascaras and the wrestling women are there to protect us from all that. It's a world where good prevails and I'll bet THEY have a good economy!! Perhaps their gas sells for under a dollar a gallon, too.

The academy of the title, THE WRESTLING WOMEN ACADEMY (what else would you call it?), is a training ground for future wrestling women who will go on to provide protection for all nations and genders in case the world should again be menaced by

an Aztec mummy or some other nasty creature created in the heat and chili gas south of the border. I'll bet Lorena Velasquez and Elizabeth Campbell are alumni.

A nice touch is that at the academy there seems to be some kind of pecking order, as the underclasswomen either has no mask or only skimpy ones that merely cover the eyes.

Jeff Uhlmann, the "brains" behind these films plays a masked villain whose headgear is very mean-looking and is covered with spikes. It's certainly not the kind of thing you would want to put a headlock on!

I asked Uhlmann how he had found so many different masks and how they were created.

Uhlmann: "I designed all the main luchador masks, e.g., for Luctor and La Torcha, but the costumes for the women at the academy were done by Chip (the director) and the film's wardrobe team."

The story concerns world famous wrestling star, La Torcha and her companions who remind me of a coed version of the Champions of Justice from the '70s. La Torcha seems to have some kind of past with Mil and he is contacted whilst busy fighting ninjas in Asia. What else would he be doing, anyway?

Luckily he is still on schedule to speak at the college and to hopefully lend a hand with a local situation. It seems that there is a very nasty being which is sucking the brains out of people around the academy. Mil Mascaras: "It's a new kind of Undead". With its animated tongue and cerebral diet, it will remind you of "The Brainiac". There's even an homage to that film in the form of a comet that is linked to the creatures.

One scene in particular had me laughing out loud. These are young ladies who just happen to be wrestling women and who are afraid of nothing. The one exception being the brain goo on their hands! One of the girls has to stop the action for a minute so that she can wash the slimy stuff off. (How do you spell "eeyooowww"?) Even with the amateur acting, this scene is well done and effective.

There is a bit of a mystery plot here that also works quite well. What are those cow brains doing there anyway?

A nice addition to the plot is a mini hit man running amuck with a machine gun as they so often did back in the '70s.

Mil Mascaras, who still looks great, plays a lesser role in this film. I was struck by the

fact that even as outlandish as the whole thing is, when he is on screen, he brings a very professional air to the film.

His voice is dubbed so I asked Uhlmann, who is a friend of Mil and Santo (The Son of the original Santo) and their families, if Mr. Mascaras was at all fluent in English and why his screen time was so limited.

Uhlmann: "Mil is fluent in English, but his body language seems to be more expressive when he delivers his lines in Spanish. In some scenes he did his lines in English. As for screen time, he doesn't appear much in the first 20 minutes which makes it seem like he's in there less than what he really is."

La Torcha, who is actually the lead character in the film is quite a cutie. Her mask sports two openings at the top to allow a couple of ponytails to deliciously bob around as she chases down the bad guys. She gives a professional performance compared to the bulk of the cast who seem to have taken acting lessons from William Shatner. I asked Uhlmann to give us the low down on the actress, Sabrina Braden, who is behind that mask.

Uhlmann: "Sabrina is multi-talented and not too different from the character of La Torcha. She's intelligent, athletic, and can hold her own kicking ass alongside Mil. Her performance was great, as was that of Jaxon Stanford as the Baron."

The grand finale, featuring flame throwing wrestling women and tongue stinging monsters, is mucho gusto. The creatures (like vampires, once stung and brain sucked you come back as an undead being) look pretty good with their tongues dangerously darting here and there.

I would also note that this is a family film with no R-rated love scenes or cruel violence. Even though the masks come off at La Torcha's pad in the closing shot, I am sure there were only naked faces off screen!

Again, I really must stress that the film is not poking fun at the genre, but is actually adding to it. If you are a fan of the classic Mexican Horror genre, you really need to get this when it comes out. You will be supporting a worthy venture, and it might actually be the first step toward bringing back the wonderful masked wrestling genre to today's screens where it belongs.

For more info on Uhlmann and the Mil Mascaras films, pick up a copy of SCREAM # 23 and new 2012 issue of Filmfax. There you will find further information on these films being made south of the border - the border of Iowa that is!