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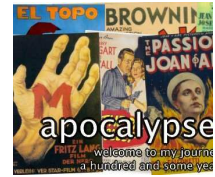
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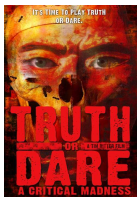
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Review by Jeff Dolniak

### Truth Or Dare?: A Critical Madness (1986)



Directed by: Tim Ritter

As a kid, I never got to partake in the game Truth or Dare but I did view a movie when I was around 10 years old called, Truth Or Dare?: A Critical Madness, from 18 year-old director and writer, Tim Ritter (Killing Spree, Wicked Games, Dirty Cop, No Donut and the upcoming Deadly Dares). I really didn't know what to expect when I picked up the box and scanned the back cover; it just looked like another slasher film, which was certainly fine with me. After coaxing my parents to get out of the house (a practice I mastered through-out my youth), I pulled the VHS from its hiding place and stuck it in the VCR. What my impressionable eyes viewed was something that would etch its way into slasher history. Truth Or Dare, unfolds in sunny Florida where Michael Strauber (John Brace), a very timid but seemingly likable hard-working young man drives home to see his lovely wife, Sharon (Mary Fanaro). To his dismay, he walks in on Sharon, riding his best-friend, Jerry (Bruce Gold) like Secretariat. This doesn't give Mike much hope for furthering his relationship. Mike then starts to become delusional, and gives self-mutilation a shot to dull his emotional pain, while using his favorite child-hood game (Truth Or Dare) as the main focus of his "critical madness".

Strauber's insanity starts off very simply, but quickly delves into an unprecedented rage, fueled by his angst. Like a powder-keg, he goes off; on a ridiculously grisly rampage, that doesn't discriminate (Men, women, children and even a baby in a baby carriage are slaughtered.). Mike grows what I like to call, "Psycho Balls". The murdering of the youngsters, were something I never saw Jason, Michael Myers, Freddy (just in the back-story) and other "slashers" do. My doughy, ten-year old body trembled at the thought of this sick bastard, (I even had a few nightmares after viewing.) could fly to my home in the Chicago suburbs (Or road-trip it in his snazzy wheels.) and cut my fucking head off. Yeah, that was about 24 years ago, and I still remember it vividly. I also, not so fondly recall a \$92 dollar late-fee the rental cost me. Mom paid it...but I really paid, when my Twinkies got cut off for a few weeks... but that's a whole other story.

Brace's portrayal of Michael Strauber is excellent. He brings a level of "every-man" to the role of Michael Strauber, but steadily approaches his pinnacle of mass-murdering lunatic; but also maintains the fluidity of the film. I'm kind of surprised Brace hasn't popped up in any other films, as he is a talented actor. No other actors really stand-out, though Mary Fanaro, is solid as Mike's cheating wife, Sharon. The SFX are all over the place, simpler, than anything. Ritter explains in the commentary on how, initially, the gore FX were to be much more extensive. Most notably in a scene in which a little-leaguer meets his demise via the chainsaw. It's still a revolting scene nonetheless. Ritter, for an 18 year-old, with little film experience (aside from, Twisted Illusions) does a superb job, considering he wore so many hats (Director, Writer, hell, maybe he did craft service.). For a low-budget film (A mere \$200,000.), the cinematography by Christopher Burritt and Ned Miller are respectable. There are car chases, explosions and even a guy being burned alive very realistically. Going into Truth Or Dare, the last thing I expected were stunts.

As someone who has seen Truth Or Dare in both its VHS and initial Subrosa DVD incarnations, one area that could really kill the disc would have been the absence of the wonderful extra features included on the out-of-print Subrosa release. This re-release by M.V.D / Subrosa, thankfully, delivers all of the previously produced extras. We're treated to a treasure trove of supplements including: An informative and fun commentary (Director, Ritter and moderator, Allen Richards command the track) that doesn't shy away from details including the rather amusing particulars of the FX that never happened, as well as other anecdotes about the difficulties of production. Also on the disc, there's a behind-the-scenes (Narrated by Ritter) and a trailer reel for all of the Truth Or Dare films.

Truth Or Dare?: A Critical Madness, even with its flaws, has truly stood the test of time; in contrast to so many slasher films that were released in the 80's. This DVD package (While still virtually identical to the out-of-print release is essential for any horror fan who likes their slasher films unapologetic and bloody...the way they should be.

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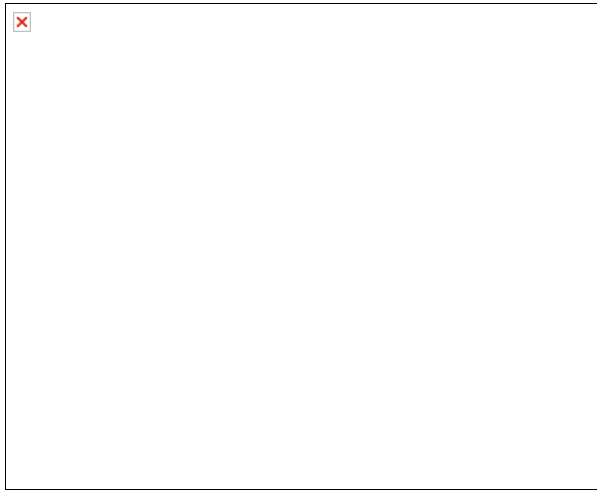


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