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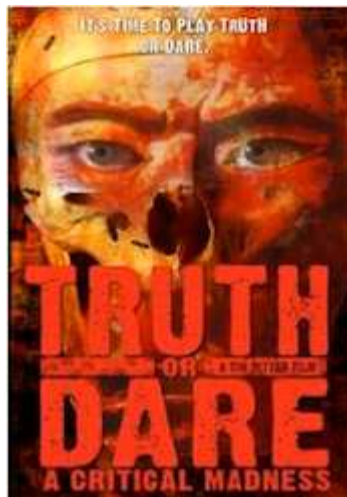
Truth or Dare: A Critical Madness

directed by Tim Ritter

starring John Brace, Mary Fanaro, Bruce Gold

Sub Rosa Studios

You get what you pay for, and this re-release of a 1986 gore fest has a few noteworthy moments, but barely enough to keep your thumb off the fast forward button. Mike Strauber (Brace) finds his wife Sharron (Fanaro) in bed with his best friend Jerry (Gold). He's upset, of course, and nearly shoots himself, but opts for a psychotic break that propels him into either a



murderous rage or a bloody, brutal fantasy. He picks up a sexy hitchhiker (Kerry Ellen Walker) and takes her camping, but his fantasies collapse when she convinces him to cut off a finger and a few other personal accessories in a bloody game of *Truth or Dare*. Certainly this man needs help, and the Sunnyville Mental Institution takes him in, only to release him in the mental health cut backs of the Reagan years. Set loose in a low rent section of South Florida, he knifes, mutilates, and chainsaw whips his way through town, only to run over an occupied baby carriage. The worst is yet to come, and I guarantee nightmares if you keep your eyes open as he illegally parks his car.

I was unimpressed until the director interview where I learned Ritter made this movie when he was 18, and rounded up half a million to put it together. He claims that dissension in the crew over his age led to the plot holes and bizarre editing, and even though this film can be painful to watch there are some positives. Overall, the stunts and effects work: people fall off stairs, cars blow up, a burning man runs around, and there are several very believable low speed car

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Truth Or Dare? A

Critical Madness

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chases in saggy old Cadillacs. The gore is where Ritter really shines, both in its red-dye-and-Karo-syrup extravagance, and the total gruesomeness of someone cutting off a finger, arm, or a leg on a dare. The baby carriage scene is another heart stopper -- you know they took the tyke out before Strauber runs over it, but the cutting is so tight you really want to believe. And for sheer cleverness, the act of cutting a little Leaguer's head in half with a drive by chainsaw is just plain sick.

Not so good are the acting and pacing. The first half of the film is slow, slow, slow and Mr. Strauber writhes like he sat on a fire ant hill as he debates killing himself or the rest of Palm Beach County. His best work comes late in the show when he performs in a copper mask, thus saving us from his facial gymnastics. The medical doctors on his case (Rick Paige and Mona Jones) patiently read each other page after page of medical text as if they were explaining a vasectomy to a nervous man. Hitchhiker Kerry Ellen Walker combines sexy with creepy, but Ritter edits out her "lift your blouse" dare for no good reason. Doofus cop Pournelle (Terrence Andreucci) is incompetent in ways that make Barney Fife look like Colombo, but even after he accidentally burns the town drunk to ashes, he seems unashamed and keeps acting for another 15 minutes. The only redeeming performance comes from Detective Rosenberg (Raymond Carbone). He spews anger and profanity the way Strauber directs death, fuming at Strauber, Pournelle, traffic jams, and an innocent, hard working drawbridge. He's always one step away from stopping the horror, but constantly blocked by the writer and editor, and neither he nor I can figure out where copper-masked Strauber is getting semi-automatic weapons as he drives down US1.

So it's not *Titus Andronicus* (although the body count is similar), but when you're looking for cheap scares and vicarious vengeance, this is acceptable entertainment. Comments on the 'net from various sites place *Truth or Dare* up there with the big guys: Chucky, Jason, and Freddy, but I'm not completely convinced. Take away the gore and what's left is a spotty story with some made-for-TV effects. It's a solid freshman film, but one destined to circulate on the fringes of slasher fandom.

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