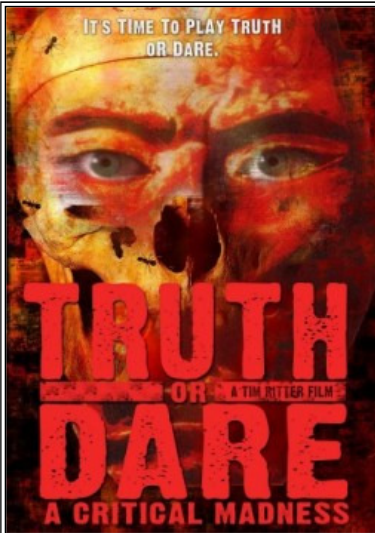




Truth Or Dare?: A Critical Madness (1986)



Director: Tim Ritter
Starring: John Brace, Mary Fanaro, Bruce Gold, A.J. McLean, Christopher Bontempo
Genres: Horror, Psychological Thriller, Slasher Film

As a kid, both me and my neighbor were huge horror junkies. We would both rent at least a couple of movies per week from the local mom-and-pop and then meet up at one another's place to check out each other's finds. I'm not sure which one of us found *Truth or Dare?*, but I do remember watching it and falling in love with the concept and the extreme gore. That's about all that I've retained about the movie since watching it well over twenty years ago: it was a great horror flick, the violence was downright vile, and someone pulled their eye out with a screw. When I told him about picking up a copy of the DVD, his recollections were about the same: great movie, lots of gore, and someone blew their own head off with a grenade. It's amazing how time can change an opinion.



Review by Chad
Added: August 15, 2010

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5.4 / 10

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The storyline begins when Mike Strauber (John Brace), a mild-mannered businessman, comes home from work to find his wife (Mary Fanaro) in bed with his best friend (Bruce Gold). Naturally, seeing his wife having sex with his friend in his bed doesn't go over too well with him, so he storms out of the house, hops in his car, and tears out of the driveway. He eventually comes across a hitchhiker (Kerry Ellen Walker), who he picks up and starts chatting with while driving aimlessly about. He then decides to take her along with him on a camping trip, since - as he helpfully explains - he doesn't need alcohol or drugs to deal with today's world... he only needs nature to get him through his problems.

After setting up camp and building a fire, the two decide to play a friendly game of truth or dare. It starts out innocently enough: "I dare you to throw your wallet into the fire", "I dare you to show me your boobs", that sort of nonsense, but it quickly turns nasty when the lady dares him to rip out his own eyeball. A few more similar dares are exchanged between them, and then we realize that Mike's mind has completely snapped: he's alone in these woods, and he has been "daring" himself to tear his body to pieces. Watch for an appearance by a young Backstreet Boy as "Young Mike" in one of the flashback sequences.

He does manage to survive the night, and he is placed inside a mental institution for reasons that I shouldn't have to point out. What follows for the next hour is his repeated releases and escapes from the establishment, his subsequent killings and mutilations, and yes, his valiant attempts to put an end to his ex-wife's life. What also follows is the rapid downfall of my general opinion of this film.

According to an extra on the DVD, director Tim Ritter put together an anthology film entitled *Twisted Illusions* during his high school years, and found within the tales in that release was a little short entitled *Truth or Dare?*. Now, nobody ever comes right out and says this in said extra, but having not seen the film in question and doing a bit of reading between the lines, I do believe that the short ended after the events found in the first two paragraphs of my synopsis up above: man comes home to find cheating wife, goes into the woods, has a mental breakdown, here's some gore, "he was batshit insane the entire time", end of story. That concept works, and even in this film, that chunk of the running time makes for some classic horror goodness. Unfortunately, it was decided that this nugget of an idea wasn't enough to fill up an entire feature length film, so we wind up with more padding than a junior high dance.

To be fair, I sort of agree with the assessment that this one scene could not have filled a feature length film, and thus, something more needed to be added to the mix. The only way that base idea would have worked would be to produce a nonstop gorefest, and though that sort of release would certainly find an audience, it wouldn't have made for a very memorable movie... and based on the apparent budget, it wouldn't have been very pretty either. So, my problem with the movie wasn't that they decided to expand it and add more of a plot, it's the fact that what was added simply wasn't very good. There's a reason that I only remembered very specific scenes: the rest of the movie is entirely disposable, and it's quite likely that I fast-forwarded through all of it during my childhood years just to get to the good stuff. Unfortunately, I didn't do that this time around.

See, it's readily apparent that the writers had that basic idea and couldn't do much more with it, so they just threw in some random shit that would probably look good on the back of the VHS case, but wouldn't do much for anybody while playing on their television. Mike is released from the mental institution, and alright, I can buy that - the movie wouldn't be much fun if it was confined to one small room. He goes after his wife, is sent back, plays another game of truth or dare, escapes, goes on a laughable killing spree with more plot holes than I care to point out, goes up against some bumbling cops somewhere in there to kill time, and the entire affair just plays out more as a test of the viewer's patience than a fun night in front of the tube.

As for my recollections of the over-the-top gore, I have to give the filmmakers credit: they were able to come up with some nasty sequences that left an impression on my childhood brain, but watching them with adult eyes, I realize that it was the acts that were being performed that left said impression rather than the actual red stuff. This is a low-budget affair that would never be confused for a snuff film, but with that out of the way, I can't say that it's completely horrible in the effects department - it's just not as good as other movies released during that time, even the low-budget ones.

If I were grading the movie based on the opening half hour, I'd easily go with an eight or maybe even a nine out of ten. Anybody who has faint memories of this movie will undoubtedly be remembering bits and pieces from that opening act, and it's really a damned fine example of low-budget horror at its finest. Unfortunately, there's another hour tacked on after that, and that hour really drags the overall product down to just a small step above mediocrity. So, with that factored in, I do believe that a 5/10 is the best that I can do for this release.

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