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**TRUTH OR DARE: A CRITICAL MADNESS (1986)**

Published by [David Carter](#) on 2010/10/3 (52 reads)

Directed by Tim Ritter  
 Review by David Carter



Released by Sub Rosa Studios  
 Running Time: 87 minutes  
 Rating: Not Rated  
 Color format: Color  
 Audio/Subtitles: 2.0 Stereo English  
 Region Code: 1, NTSC  
 Aspect Ratio: Full Screen  
 16:9 Enhanced: No  
 Special Features: Commentary tracks, behind-the-scenes, film facts  
 Trailer Online: [Yes](#)



*Short Version*: 80s direct-to-video classic

With the recent demise of Blockbuster Video, it appears that the video rental store is fast going the way of the drive-in theatre and the full-service gas station. It had a particularly good run of things, playing as big of a part in revolutionizing the way films are made and distributed as the VCR itself. Nowhere is this truer than in the case of independent horror cinema. No longer would-be horror filmmakers need to find someone to bankroll the massive amounts of special effects needed to compete at the box office. They simply needed a camera and they too could find their work on the video store shelves next to the FRIDAY THE 13THs of the world. One of the true classics of the direct-to-video horror market was Tim Ritter's TRUTH OR DARE: A CRITICAL MADNESS, now available on DVD courtesy of Sub Rosa Studios.

Mike Strauber has a pretty nice life. He has a good job, a new car, and a beautiful wife, Sharon. These things are all ripped away from him simultaneously when he returns home early to find Sharon in bed with his best friend. Distraught, Mike drives around reviewing everything leading up to the horrible moment and curses the fact that he didn't realize what was going on sooner. Not thinking clearly, Mike picks up a sexy hitchhiker and heads into the woods for an impromptu camping session. When the hitchhiker innocently suggests that they play the game "Truth or Dare," she accidentally triggers a psychotic reaction in Mike, who had taken the game to self-mutilating extremes as a child. Mike cuts off a finger and rips out his tongue at the woman's request - or what he believed to be her request, since she was just a figment of his damaged imagination.



After a time in an asylum, Mike is granted an early release for making good progress. His psychosis hasn't gone away, however, and he immediately heads to his ex-wife's home to exact his revenge. He manages to kill her new husband quickly, but Sharon proves capable of defending herself and a seriously injured Mike finds himself back in the institution. Once inside, another round of Mike's disturbing version of truth or dare leaves him permanently disfigured. Wearing a copper mask to hide his face, Mike languishes in the institution until he sees a chance to escape. He racks up a huge body count on his way out of the asylum and goes on a bloody rampage throughout the city before going after the one he still blames for everything: Sharon.

TRUTH OR DARE became so well-liked because it is surprisingly well-made. The first twenty or so minutes of the film feature overlapping flashbacks that are done in an artistic manner that seems well beyond the capabilities of first-time filmmaker Tim Ritter. For a good chunk of its first act, TRUTH OR DARE feels more like a drama than a horror film, which helps viewers stay engaged throughout. You'll actually care about Mike's situation and feel sympathy towards him. By making the character more than simply the means by which victims are killed, viewers are given a greater reason to watch the non-killing scenes. Furthermore, the film is helped infinitely by the excellent performance by star John Brace, which puts the acting in most mainstream horror to shame.

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Everything is well-done, but the violence and gore is still the main draw to TRUTH OR DARE. This film goes farther into the realm of the transgressive than even most modern horror as no one is safe from Mike's wrath, not even an infant or small child. Some scenes are played for laughs rather than scares - Mike backs up over the infant after he's run over him - but scenes like this come closer to the end of the film and TRUTH OR DARE slowly builds towards its final delirium. One of the more interesting facets of the film is the fact that it is so bleak. There are no heroes or sympathetic victims; the cops chasing Mike murder innocent people too and Sharon seems remorseless for what role she played in Mike's insanity.

TRUTH OR DARE is one of those almost-forgotten gems that resurfaces on DVD from time to time and reminds you of how good the days of perusing video store racks truly were. Sure, you'd end up watching a lot of crap most weekends, but every now and then you'd see something like TRUTH OR DARE and it would make up for it. A good print of the film and some bonus features make this one a definite pick up for anyone who saw it originally, or a much-needed addition to the collection of a horror fan looking to learn about the direct-to-video days.



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