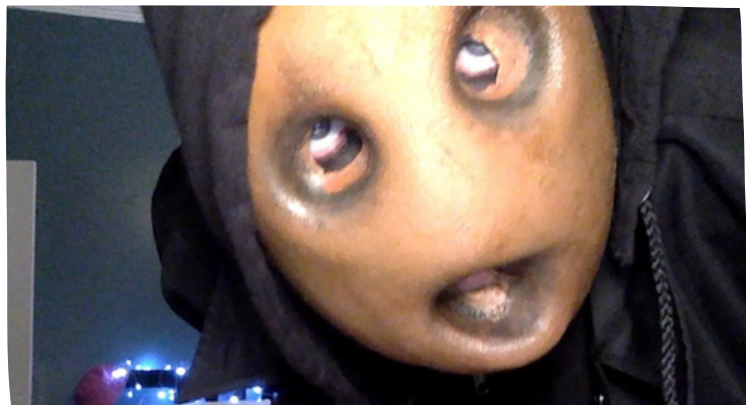


STRANGE HARVEST

Strange Harvest is the newest mockumentary-style horror to hit the big screen (released on August 8, 2025), though in limited theaters. Written and directed by Stuart Ortiz, the story covers the crimes of a serial killer known as "Mr. Shiny." A masked murderer specializing in bladed weapons with touches of Ed Kemper, Zodiac, and a little something that would spoil the mystery if divulged.



The story uses news reports, CCTV clips, and interviews to recount a series of murders that occurred over nearly 30 years. Somber dialogue, mirroring the true crime documentaries that have been so popular in recent years, is intercut with crime scene photos, web streams, and CCTV footage showing actual crimes or the aftermath of such. Those aftermaths, though only snapshots and not full action scenes, work magic in creating a tense atmosphere as you are shown just how violent the attacks must have been. The reality of those attacks, however, is left to your imagination, which, as is almost always the case, is going to create visuals and horrors that could not have been matched on screen with such limited resources. This, in this movie fan's opinion, is the strength of Stuart Ortiz's approach to this material.



While the story isn't groundbreaking, it provides a familiar look at life before the Internet, when information and evidence arrived more slowly. The film, however, goes by in a flash. With its appropriate length of 1 hr. and 30-something minutes, nothing overstays its welcome, and the pacing never falters.

The cast here deserves massive credit as well. Our two lead detectives on the case are believable. Almost to the point that I thought many of the interviews were ad-lib. There are moments where the writing pokes through, but they are few and far between. Reactions, emotions, mannerisms, and body language help to sell this story and push us to suspend our disbelief, and that, my friends, is where every successful mockumentary has made its mark. Lake Mungo and The Poughkeepsie Tapes, standard bearers for me in this subgenre, have set the stage for an amazing film that stayed with me throughout the night, and to do that on the same weekend as a Zac Cregger follow-up is impressive indeed.

While I fully expect this film to fly under the radar due to its low budget and limited release, I truly hope that horror fans find their way to it in any way they can. Perhaps Shudder or a similar streaming service will bring it into homes so that the cast and crew are able to receive the credit and congratulations that they so richly deserve for creating an independent, economically made thriller that punches far above its budget. Enter this film at its level and you will not be disappointed.



CJ's RATING



based on a 5-point scale

Photos courtesy of Roadside Attractions/Saban Films