

Terror Tidbits (Fango #295)—Back Into the “SPLATTERHOUSE”

Written by Doug Norris
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On my way to catch a train from DC to New York at 3 in the morning, I had an unwelcome setback as Johnny Law guided me, the lone car on the bypass, off to the shoulder with his traditional blue-and-reds dancing in my rearview. Upon arrival in the Big Apple, I snagged breakfast at an enticing diner that served freshly brewed Columbian engine oil, two cups of which I desperately chugged to gain some sense of alertness. However shock-inducing or cringeworthy, neither of those events would provide a wake-up call like the bloodsoaked, bone-crunching, brutally violent game play of Namco Bandai’s reboot of the treasured SPLATTERHOUSE franchise, slated for third-quarter 2010 release on the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 platforms.

For those unfamiliar with the history, the original SPLATTERHOUSE is sort of the granddaddy of horror-themed video games (see page 33). The 1988 arcade version was the first such game to bear any sort of “parental advisory” warning. Falling victim to the home-console craze, SPLATTERHOUSE was ported to the 16-bit generation for three different installments between 1990-93, losing some of its more shocking and parent-angering aspects but retaining the overall fright-film theme. Each follows protagonist Rick as he fights hordes of demons and monsters to rescue his beloved Jennifer from the clutches of the evil Dr. West. During his quest, Rick draws power from the Terror Mask (or Hell Mask, depending on the version), an artifact that bonds with Rick after Jennifer’s first disappearance. Resembling a cross between a skull and goalie equipment, the Mask gives Rick a hulking physique, a bloodthirsty sense of combat and a penchant for barbaric weaponry.



Flash-forward 17 years to the present day, and we have a full-on reboot of the franchise, aptly tweaked for today’s blood-crazed audience. In the company of designer Dan Tovar and PR

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honcho Tim Ng, Fango gets the chance to experience an advance version, and the grue is copious: At one point, Rick plunges a chainsaw into a demon's shoulder with blood spewing every which way, painting the floor and collecting in puddles while the creature writhes and convulses. Rick then stomps through the blood pools and swings the saw at three smaller demons, dealing fatal blows and spraying more crimson across the screen, remnants dripping from Rick's Mask and body as well as the blade. Nothing could say “horror-gore gaming” more than this scene alone.

We also get to see Rick break away from the 3-D over-shoulder third-person camera to a side-scrolling sequence. In a great homage to the original, Rick runs a gauntlet of swinging blades, jabbing spears and falling spikes, all while crushing minions' skulls and stomping through a trail of blood. Throughout the game, there are elements of side-scrolling puzzles, reminiscent of the classic systems on which so many bloodthirsty Rick Juniors cut their teeth.

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