

y Bill Jahnel

find myself in a most awkward position as I sit down to write a review of Terror TRAX: Tracks of the Vampire. It is not a sense of trepidation because the game was terrible; in fact, the game was enjoyable. It is not a worry that the game will be too complex to describe; in actuality, the game and its interface are simplicity itself. Rather, I have this horrible, impending fear -- one that clutches my heart and snags at my very breath -- that the review will take longer to read than the game took to play.

Bloodlines

All games have a lineage. Terror TRAX, while form-fitting into the quicktime full-action video game mold, actually has a pedigree that extends back into print: that of the venerable "Choose Your Own Adventure" books. If you don't remember them, let me refresh your memory. They would have titles like "Journey to the Haunted House" or "Off to the Bermuda Triangle." At the bottom of each page or two you were given a decision to make: to enter the haunted house, turn to page 34, to examine the root cellar, turn to page 36, and to wait for a bit to see if the hearse coming contains anything spooky, turn to page 666. Terror TRAX has both the tone and implementations of these books, in that you run two investigators, and your main interaction is the occasional option to make them choose path A or path B.

B-Grades

This does not actually mean the production values of Terror TRAX are poor. The video production, while sometimes a little over-dark, is very smooth (they apparently use the same technique a number of live-action video games use, which is to take a smaller Quicktime movie and force it onto a larger screen, which makes the gameplay smoother for slower machines). You follow the paths of two "TRAX" operatives -- agents investigating paranormal activity, and through these two agents, you, as their controller, attempt to wipe out the bad guy paranormals before they drain your blood, electrify your spine, or steal your vital organs. In issuing these commands you are guided by what the game refers to as a holographic ghost -- actually a wonderfully and fully-rendered feminine face mask, which reports on various activities and offers you the ability to make the choices. Normally, making a simple choice between A or B doesn't sound very exciting; but to this game's credit, since there is a time limit until the agent you are guiding makes their own (usually disastrous) choice, there is a real sense of urgency in making a decision. Also to its credit, the game switches between two storylines, a much more interesting narrative structure than if they had chosen "do mission A, then do mission B."

[oing for the Jugular](#)

However, while the game had much going for it -- again, you have to be a fan of the B-rated horror genre to appreciate high chintz (I personally revel in it) -- there is much here that is left to be desired. The main complaint, as I mentioned, is that the game simply is much too short to really be worth the money you are likely to spend on it. My little brother and I were able to go through the game and apparently all of its various endings in a little over 90 minutes. Most people will probably not feel the urge to take all the wrong pathways available just to see their hero substitutes bite the big one (or, as more appropriate in a vampire chase, have a big one bite them).

I also cannot help but wonder to whom the designers planned this game's target audience to be. Terror TRAX really is not a complex enough game to engage the attention span of a mature gamer for too long. It might have been more suitable to the attention spans of teens and pre-teens, but certain choice moments -- especially one sequence where a woman is displayed with bleeding eye sockets as her eyes have been stolen from her -- seem extremely graphic for younger players (take the Teen: 13+ rating seriously on this package. The violence is not realistic to adults, but smaller children require less to disturb them). This makes Terror TRAX really neither fish nor fowl, in that it seems too graphic (and has a few too mature themes) for younger players but is not sophisticated nor complex enough for older players.

Small Bites

Underlying these complaints is the basis for a very good game. As I mentioned, the speed of choice required to survive does lend a sense of urgency. It would have been better if once a player made a choice, the computer showed some recognition of the choice the player made (the choices go from white to yellow to red with increasing urgency for you to make a choice, but even if you make a choice the sequence continues, so you have no idea if the computer registered your keystroke). The other controls that existed were nice -- it was very good that the game allows you to fast forward through sequences you have already seen with the touch of a button. Also, you can have one saved game position by hitting S, and you can return to that point in the plotline. However, since the computer does not show recognition that it has registered your request to save, it sometimes leaves the player feeling somewhat nebulous as to whether they really did save the game or not.

In Summary

Terror TRAX is not a bad game. It is a short game. And at \$19.95 on sale at Micro Center (the cheapest place I could find it), Terror TRAX was a somewhat expensive venture but not unentertaining for the time that I played it. However, most catalogs are asking around double that price, and Terror TRAX is simply not worth an investment of over \$20. 3 Prong Plug has some good technology and ideas underlying this title, but if they really wish to gain a market for horror titles, they'll need to give more playtime for the asking price.

Pros

- Video Action is smooth
- Easy Controls to learn and master
- Ability to fast forward through sequences you've been through before
- Occasional bright gems of schlock dialogue (Reviewer's favorite: In response to seeing the outside of a suburban house, one agent chides, "How special, a topiary tragedy.")
- Sense of urgency to make decisions

Cons

- Game is way too short for the cost
- Some scenes too gory for younger children
- Very limited interactivity (Choose path A or path B)
- Game does not highlight the choice you make when you choose a path

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