

Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines

Format: PC
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Troika Games
Origin: US
Release: 2004

It's the return of the Masquerade. Let's just hope it banishes bad memories of the first videogame outing for White Wolf's seminal ruleset

Activision

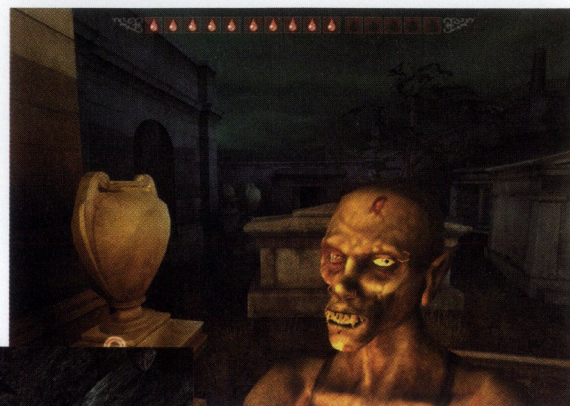
The biggest surprise at Activision's booth was probably *Trinity*, a hitherto unrevealed firstperson shooter, though the decision to restrict *Doom III* to a rather muted appearance was also rather unexpected. Nevertheless, the company's stand had plenty of other highlights, such as *The Movies*, *Rome: Total War*, *Tony Hawk's Underground*, MoH clone *Call of Duty*, and, potentially the most intriguing, *Bloodlines*. All of which offset the licensed tat, such as *Shrek 2* and *Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure* to round out a solid performance.



The original *Vampire* videogame was a pretty poor specimen given the elegance of the pen-and-paper ruleset upon which it was based. But past performance is no reliable indicator of future fortune, and **Edge** is quietly confident that *Bloodlines* will lay the ghost of its predecessor to rest. It's still early in development, and what was on show at E3 was little more than a tech demo, but it gave a good idea of the sorts of environments and activities that will make it into the finished game, as well as offering a glimpse of the *Half-Life 2* engine in action.

The most promising thing about the game is Troika's bid to incorporate a much greater part of White Wolf's original ruleset. A wider variety of skills has been included, for example, and players can now choose from one of the seven core vampire clans and their unique abilities.

The result is a more authentic recreation of the World of Darkness, and one which boasts the sort of emergent design more characteristic of the likes of *Thief* and *Deus Ex*. Therefore, to judge by demonstrations, a Malkavian character might get past a security guard by turning him insane, while a Nosferatu would be able to simply ghost past, and a Brujah by resorting to violence.



The epoch-hopping approach of the original *Vampire* game has been given up for a story set solely in the dark recesses of modern-day LA



1. Sounds fun... Now what do you want me to do?
2. Whatever. Just tell me what you want so I can get the hell out of here.

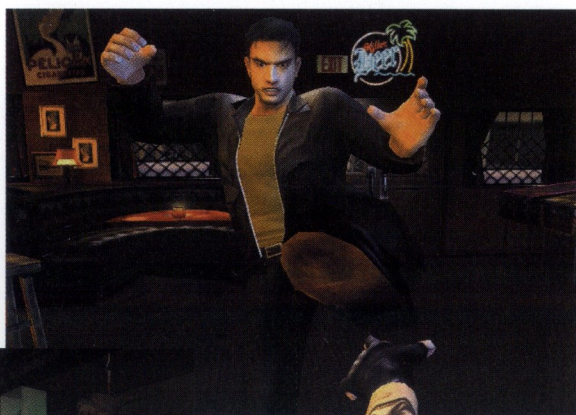
True Crime: Streets of LA

Format: Xbox, PS2, GC
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Luxoflux
Origin: US
Release: Summer

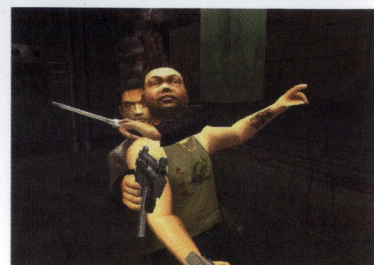
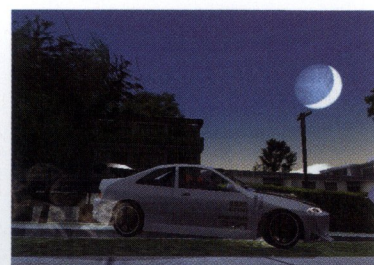
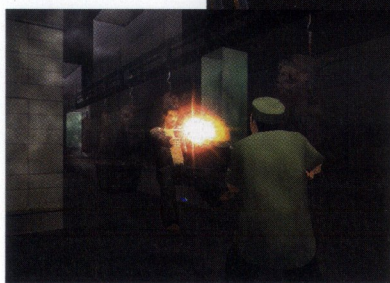
Imagine a game in which you can explore an entire city, stealing cars, with gang violence and various weapons, with a branching storyline and celebrity voice actors. No, not that one

There really shouldn't be any surprise at the decision by a major publisher to ape the most successful franchise of recent years. Even so, *True Crime's* appropriation of the template laid down by Rockstar North is almost shamefacedly unabashed. Action and driving sequences; granting players the ability to "commandeer any vehicle in the game and to target and shoot at perps from a moving car"; a branching story told over the course of 100 missions and supplemented with free-roaming random missions. So far, so *GTA*. The involvement of Chinese Triads and Russian Mafia is hardly a massive departure either – nor the decision to cast players in the role of Nick Kang, a "no-holds-barred badass."

No doubt the biggest selling point is the 250 square miles of LA that's been "accurately recreated", including locations such as Hollywood, Santa Monica, Beverly Hills and Downtown, and landmarks such as the Convention Center (home of E3 no less). Still, the game boasts a more impressive hand-to-hand combat system than Rockstar's, and the engine appears more polished, with none of the camera foibles of *GTAIII* and *Vice City*. Whether it matches Rockstar's humour or design skill is another matter, and not one that will be apparent until it's complete.



It certainly looks sharper than *Grand Theft Auto*, but it's not yet clear whether it will have the wit or, indeed, the soundtrack – though presumably it will, as Xbox owners will be able to rip their own



Nick Kang doesn't play by the rules. He's a maverick, etc. Not much in the way of irony, then