



When Genres Collide

The almost-unbelievable, Goth-and-glitchy, **Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines** mixes and matches its way to glory. BY TIFFANY MARTIN



Genre Goth-y Role-playing **Developer** Troika Games **Publisher** Activision
ESRB Mature **Requirements** 1.2GHz CPU; 256MB RAM

White Wolf Games, creator of the pen-and-paper RPGs that fill that oft'-looked-in niche in your local bookstore, has spawned a pastime for actors and nerds alike to gather together and play with arcane magics, survive the end of the world, and role-play as werewolves and vampires. Who better to translate their World of Darkness crown jewel into a videogame than Troika, maker of some of the finest RPGs to date, including *The Temple of Elemental Evil*, *Arcanum*, and the *Fallout* series?

Troika doesn't miss a beat with *Vampire: the Masquerade—Bloodlines*, a superb example of choice-oriented gameplay. You're in total control, whether you want to attack everyone, save the city from oppression, or ride a tornado of destruction until you reach your Final Death. It's powered

by *Half-Life 2*'s Source engine, and it features a Gothic soundtrack populated by the likes of Ministry, Lacuna Coil, and the Genitorturers. And it fits White Wolf's *Vampire: the Masquerade* pen-and-paper game like a well-worn pair of fangs.

Walk your crazed Malkavian through whacked-out dialogue options, or use Dementation to make others crazed like you. Or just get a bunch of guns and go *Counter-strike* on your enemies. Just don't forget to allocate experience points into appropriate "Feats"—a new innovation to the *Vampire* rule set, simplifying White Wolf's sometimes complicated stats and attributes into a more videogame-friendly reward system—or else you may find that despite your elite sniping tactics you can't hit the broadside of a Brujah.

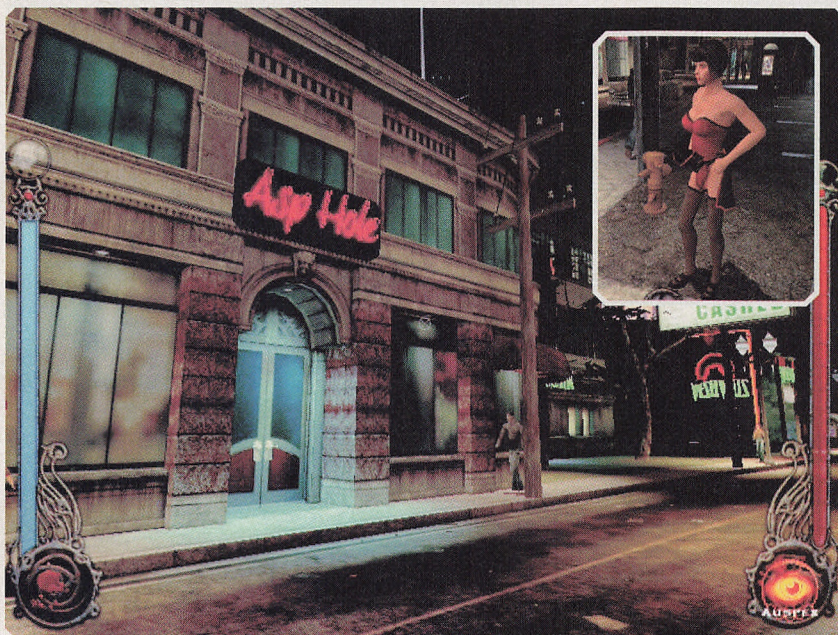
Go ahead and tell Mercurio he's a use-



Skulking through a cemetery at night... I'm sooooo Goth.

less jack off—rest assured, you can say worse than that to him in-game. Sass Prince LaCroix every time he sends you on another mission he's too lazy to do himself. These are some of the most satisfying actions in the game, but the tradeoff is often a loss of their helpful assistance. If you're a min-maxer, you might just want to perfect the fine art of butt-kissing in order to attain every possible advantage. Each mission gives you multiple ways to get the job done, and when you check out new parts of Los Angeles, you meet new people who are willing to send you on side-quests to make up for the experience you lost from bad-mouthing your Camarilla buddies.

The gameplay varies wildly. One mission may have you sneaking in the shadows like Garrett from *Thief*; the next thing



An LA without cars is the scariest sight in the World of Darkness. [inset] It's true that some women have surprises under their skirts.

you know, you could be cleaning out a warehouse of Sabbath thugs in full-on FPS glory. On another, you could be getting your brains eaten by zombies, or rather trying not to get your brains eaten by



Because I'm a Tremere, that's why.

zombies, but hey, you're a Vampire, you can just grow 'em back. *Bloodlines* is a sampler of many of the greatest game genres all in one, wrapped neatly with an RPG bow on top.

You might find *Bloodlines* a little tricky, but not because of difficult puzzles. There are a lot of bugs and glitches, like being unable to complete several side quests when your web cams mysteriously reduce in number, unable to be replaced

anywhere in L.A., and ripping you off of 8XP and \$400. And get used to watching load screens. Often. Expect an occasional reload due to crashes or getting trapped in the level itself. It's hard to ignore the sundry graphical glitches or the slow framerates that detract from gameplay. The importance of costuming—a favorite aspect of Live Action Role Playing—is left to the wayside, forcing you to look kinda lame most of the game.

Bloodlines is no pigeonholed, run-of-the-mill corporate schlock, which makes it such a shame that it's details that drag it down. But after all the effort of putting in laundry rooms in hotels for no other reason than to have laundry rooms, and creating arching plotlines and subplots worthy of a novel, Troika has delivered an immersive gameplay experience that even *Vampire* fanboys wouldn't bite holes in. ■

Upside Superb role-playing; more choices than a Google search result

Downside Some graphic glitches; more bugs than a rotting corpse

RollerCoaster Tycoon 3

Ride the wild snake



★★★★½

Genre Fun Simulation Developer Frontier Developments Publisher Atari

ESRB Everyone Requirements 733MHz CPU; 256MB RAM

Peeps everywhere! Peeps of all sizes! Young peeps, old peeps, peep couples, families of peeps, peeps in different clothes, with different heads, no two alike! Peeps running amok, dashing from ride to ride, giggling madly, screaming with glee, and vomiting on your sidewalks. You've built their playground, but you're no longer relegated to the role of a god hovering overhead, jealously watching the mortals at play beneath you. *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3* isn't just about being the tycoon; it's about letting you be one of the peeps. It's a brilliant use of 3D to breathe life into an old game that never lost its charm, even as it was retread for a few too many expansion packs (including one masquerading as a sequel). At last, *RollerCoaster Tycoon* has gotten the full makeover it deserves.

Just as Microsoft's latest *Zoo Tycoon 2* used 3D to add listless polygonal animals that made the whole thing almost as sad as a real zoo, this game uses 3D to make the whole thing almost as magical as a real theme park. To understand how great your park is, you don't have to rely on the bottom line of the ledger and the sound of laughter bubbling up from the tiny 2D graphics. Now you can get down there and see for yourself. The graphics are enchanting, glowing with color, and buzzing with activity. You can literally watch the expressions on the faces of your peeps. You can see bits of what they've eaten in those disgusting green puddles near the exits of the rides with the highest nausea ratings. You probably didn't need to know that.

The rides and decoration look totally awesomely swell, festooned with detail and allowing all sorts of options for theming and customization. One of the new additions is a fully configurable fireworks show, which is partly a great way to make peeps happy, but also a blatant excuse for the developers at Frontier to show off. *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3* is generous to a fault, offer-