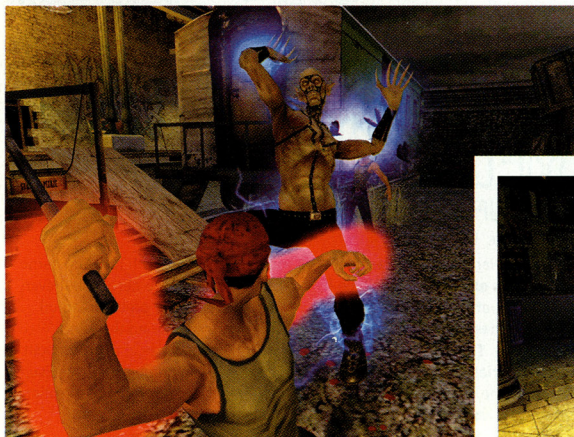




→ We all learned in high school science that fire and vampires don't mix. But vamps and leather bondage? A match made in heaven.



# VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE—BLOODLINES

A POSITIVE USE OF THE WORD "SUCK"

MATURE | PC

PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION  
DEVELOPER: TROIKA  
PRICE: \$49.99  
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW  
PLAYERS: 1  
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

➔ As a species, vampires have gotten a raw deal in videogames. Over the years, they've been staked, whipped, boomeranged, and generally humiliated by an endless procession of cookie-cutter heroes. So it's refreshing to see a game that casts them in a positive light, especially when it's rendered with *Half-Life 2*'s engine.

Strapping players into the boots of a newly minted bloodsucker, *Bloodlines* sets them loose in a detailed (if small) version of Los Angeles filled with Goth nightclubs and no shortage of walking juice boxes to prey on. Combat happens in real time, there are multiple paths to goals, and moral decisions must be made at every turn. It's a lot like *Deus*

*Ex*, actually, only with neck biting.

Conversation plays a huge role: As you meet (and run errands for) other "Kindred," you can decide whether to play it nice or hostile, which affects both story flow and future conversation decisions. You can also pick fights, although this isn't usually the smartest course of action. Personality aside, though, *Bloodlines* feels unpolished. Fighting feels a little awkward even after you've leveled up your skills. The load times are long, and occasional bugs disrupt the flow of play.

But while the action might not be outstanding, the game world itself is. Drawbacks are made tolerable by the game's deep story, memorable

characters, and clever scripting. *Bloodlines* weaves a convincingly dark atmosphere and even throws in a few genuinely creepy sequences (like a haunted hotel straight out of *The Shining*) for players expecting scares. If nothing else, the hybrid RPG-stealth-action gameplay is compelling and replayable enough to keep gamers occupied until the next *Thief* arrives. **B+**

—Mikel Reparaz

**GMR** 7/10

BETTER THAN: DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR  
NOT AS GOOD AS: THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS  
WAIT FOR IT: THE ELDER SCROLLS 4: OBLIVION

## 2ND OPINION

One of the game's biggest highlights for me was the way the role-playing system lets you create an avatar with a real, heady sense of power. As soon as a patch blunts the myriad rough edges of this game, I look forward to playing through the game again in an entirely different way. **B+**

—Robert Coffey  
Reviews editor, *CGW*