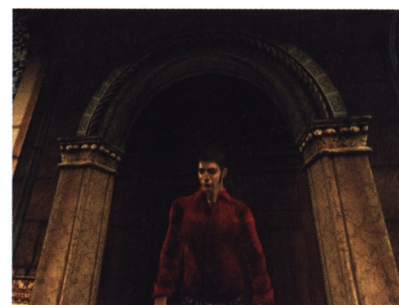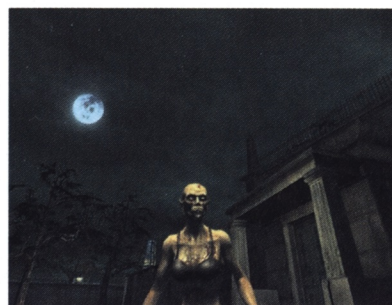# Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines

In both respects, the first *Vampire* game sucked. With a whole new team and an entirely new approach, can the promise of the night be fulfilled?

■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **Troika Games** ■ Release: **TBC**

While abstractly a roleplaying game, *Vampire* does absorb some of the more obvious tropes of firstperson games, including the perennial large end-of-level monster – in this case, a fleshy experiment of a vampire clan

As in the original 'gothic-punk' worlds of the pen-and-paper games, an oppressive atmosphere dominates throughout

Vampire: The Masquerade revolutionised pen-and-paper RPGs in the '90s, through both subject matter and its strongly held emphasis on the narrative and character-interaction elements of play instead of the traditional Dungeons & Dragons fare of gold-collection and monster elimination. When it arrived on the PC, via Nihilistic Software, it became little more than a lacklustre *Diablo* clone with bloodsuckers. In other words, it completely missed the point. While the online mode could be seen as a forefather of *Neverwinter Nights*' dungeon-master-led multiplayer, it was nowhere near as developed as BioWare's game.

Bloodlines operates in a very different way. Developed by Troika Games, an experienced RPG-making team best known for the steampunk oddity *Arcanum: Of Steamworks & Majick Obscura* and whose core members created *Fallout*, it's aiming to be something considerably truer to the subject material. Rather than a party, you play a single vampire chosen from one of the clans of the mother game. Each of these have wildly varying powers, leading to a *Deus Ex*-like variety of approaches to every problem – and since you're playing a single character, it's of paramount importance that a solution is available for every bloodline, no matter where they find themselves. Different bloodlines can roughly approximate differing character archetypes, from the stealth-led characters to the more brutish, warrior-like Brujah. However, it's possible to define your character strongly within each, with your character's statistics and abilities altering the game in many small ways. Maximise your charisma, for example, to play a totally charming diplomat, and have a variety of conversation options open up.

However, what's immediately going to attract attention is that it's the first game outside of Valve's walls to use the *Half-life 2* Source engine. While not as polished as Valve's game, *Bloodlines* looks spectacularly attractive for a roleplaying game. Especially useful will be Source mainstays like intricate facial animation, allowing characters to express the subtlety of emotions required for a more narrative-based game.