

Review

Vampire The Masquerade: Bloodlines

Great RPG soul trapped in mediocre action body

Recommended system specs

OS: Win 2K/XP	Video: Dx 9.0c 128 MB
CPU: 1.8 GHz	Sound: Dx 9.0
Mem: 512 MB	Internet: N/A

Vampire the Masquerade: Bloodlines isn't quite cooked. It certainly looks tantalizing, but some edges are still raw and unsavory. Had Troika's RPG spent another couple of months in production, we might be enjoying one of 2004's best adventure efforts. The core RPG elements are deep, fleshed-out and loaded with several viable abilities to navigate the labyrinthine game of politics and brutality in LA's undead scene. Among many roles, you might become the seductress, weaving hypnotic wordplay to coerce others, a rude brawler with enormous constitution to back-up your arrogant swagger, or an ace hacker and security expert skulking in shadows, dismantling objectives

from the inside out. The writing and spoken dialogue are top notch and often wickedly humorous, and the tale of rising armageddon interwoven with each clan's place in Kindred history and society is well crafted. The Source engine captures all of this nocturnal intrigue with a strong presentation of rich urban details and excellent, expressive character models boasting pretty good lip sync and plenty of fine female bounce. Ironically, however, the developers had issues here manipulating some of Source's stronger elements, as we witness bizarre cloth simulation glitches and occasionally spastic NPC pathing. The wounds are further compounded by bits of nasty

collision and sloppy physics: You'll get stuck on doors, corpses, planks of wood and other seemingly innocuous objects—and it happens way too often. Superficially, the Half-Life 2 engine looks good in VTMB, but the execution is pretty half-baked.

A fine RPG core and ostensibly solid

presentation are nearly drawn lifeless by the clunky, uninspiring action system. Clearly it was difficult to merge dozens of stats with twitch melee and gunplay, but that doesn't justify the lapse of design resolve with regards to the game's limited move selection, dubious hit detection and lacking AI.

Despite the encumbrance of a number of rough spots, Vampire the Masquerade: Bloodlines still rises to the occasion as an atmospheric, mature and engaging story-driven adventure. It pulls you along with unwavering RPG depth through the mire of unfortunate execution blunders and it succeeds, despite itself. Mike Griffin



Vampire The Masquerade: Bloodlines

- + Excellent story and character depth coupled with superb voice work.
- Underwhelming combat and some problematic collision and physics.

Developer: Activision
Publisher: Troika Games
Online: None
Available: November

play Rating ★★★★★

Review

Sonic Heroes

Better graphics sweeten the deal

Recommended system specs

OS: Win 98SE/ME/2K/XP	Video: Dx compatible, 64 MB
CPU: 1.4GHz+	Sound: Dx compatible
Mem: 256 MB	Internet: N/A

The PC version of Sonic Heroes is essentially an Xbox port with improved graphics. The tutorial even mentions the controller. Thankfully, configuring your favorite PC pad couldn't be simpler in the options. We actually played through the game using an official Sony DualShock 2 controller with a third-party adapter that supports vibration options. It worked like a charm. Incidentally, you need one of these; it makes all the difference in games like Sonic and Prince of Persia. The additional graphics options allow you to crank up anisotropic filtering (that's better than trilinear), play at very high resolutions and enable a toggle to lock the frame rate. To re-cap: fully compatible PS2 pad in hand, 1024 x 768 resolution and unshakeable 60fps graphics. Toss in fast loading, and you have a great Sonic Heroes experience. The dynamic speed/power/flight team play remains fun, and though minor collision

and camera issues still pop up and some voice work and textures are of dubious quality, the excellent Team Sonic, Dark and Chaotix campaigns provide ample reason to own this version. It's great to see further PC support from Sega. Bring on PSO: Blue Burst! Mike Griffin

Sonic Heroes

- + Team gameplay is still great and the new graphics options are a fine addition.
- Minor areas of flaky collision and camera. Some textures are too low-res.

Developer: Sonic Team
Publisher: Sega
Online: None
Available: November

play Rating ★★★★★

