

01.05

GENRE: ACTION/RPG



The roof, the roof, the roof is on fire...



A Nosferatu in a thong — that's all kinds of wrong!



A Malkavian can influence the minds of lesser humans with its demetation discipline.

But sometimes the story behind a mission is far more interesting than the mission itself. And more importantly, why does a vampire — especially one with his strength maxed out — need a keycard to open a door? Dracula never needed a keycard.

OUT-SOURCED

➔ Much has been made of the fact that *Bloodlines* is the first game besides *Half-Life 2* to be powered by the Source graphics engine. But that's where any similarity between the two games ends. In fact, *Bloodlines* is far more similar to *Deus Ex: Invisible War* in appearance and design — unfortunately sharing many of that game's issues: terrible implementation of physics, weak AI, and long load times between levels.

Despite rumors that *Bloodlines* has been finished for months in anticipation of *Half-Life 2*'s release, the final product lacks polish. There are numerous graphical glitches (like disappearing textures) and annoying audio flubs (such as the sound of your footsteps continuing even after you've stopped moving), most of which will surely be patched soon. But what can explain the horrendous animations, flashing textures, and ugly graphics in the opening cut-scene?

Bloodlines does benefit from Source in some good ways — the water effects are amazing, and each character's facial expressions and eye movements hint at the power of the engine — but the engine's most impressive features have been wasted. For example, non-activated characters either walk pre-set paths or stand like mannequins. Never has L.A. seemed more lifeless than it does here.

Similarly, the use of physics is inconsistent, and worse, baffling. Some objects can be nudged or picked up, while others of the same size and shape cannot. Sometimes, these opposing objects will be in the same room together. And then there are those times when the collision-detection system is so sensitive that a dropped piece of plywood simply can't be walked over, becoming a roadblock.

Propped up by a fascinating story, excellent voice acting, and a diverse range of playable character types and interactions, *Bloodlines* succeeds in spite of its teething pains. What it lacks in polish, it makes up for in bite. Just don't come in expecting *Half-Life 2*: Part 2.

■ CHUCK OSBORN

more attributes or abilities. Want to become better at Lockpicking? Better put points into Dexterity and Security. Or, you can use the game's Auto-level feature to automatically distribute experience points if you'd rather not do it manually.

In addition to your clan's unique powers, like the ability to grow claws or see enemies through walls, you can buy weapons or steal them off the bodies of your kills. These implements range from the macabre (a severed arm) to the conventionally lethal (an Uzi). Unlike in some RPGs, combat is a necessary evil at times, and the judicious implementation of disciplines and firepower may be the only way to win a boss battle.

DEAD LIKE ME

➔ As it turns out, the Masquerade isn't without controversy. In defiance of the Camarilla, members of the Sabbat sect revel

in being vampires and treating humans like cattle. And the Anarchs, who ran L.A. before the Camarilla moved back into town, agree with most of the tenets of the Masquerade, but despise the royal hierarchy of the Camarilla itself. Each sect will try to seduce you to its side over the course of the game.

Bloodlines' mandatory story missions will take you on a fly-by-night tour of L.A.'s seedier side, sleazing through Santa Monica, Hollywood, and Chinatown. In addition, asking the right questions will usually open up side-quests whereby you can earn extra XP and cash. Some characters may even reward you in unexpected ways: Do someone a good deed, and they may pop up later in the game to help you out. Kill them, and they're gone for good.

Mission types run the gamut from the stealthy infiltration of a museum to an all-out assault on a crackhouse overrun by brain-eating zombies. (Just say no to crack, kids!)

PC GAMER

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Immense, immersive storyline filled with rich characters and interactions.

LOWS Lacks polish; fails to fully use Source engine; faulty physics; long load times.

BOTTOM LINE An engrossing story of urban vampirism, but with a touch of glitchy anemia.

77%

GOOD