

CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW 2

There will be blood...

• Words: Nick Pino

The banquet room door shudders. Outside, an army of soldiers is waiting to rush into the castle and kill what's left of the once-Knight of the Brotherhood of Light, Gabriel Belmont. Now, engulfed in darkness he is Dracul, the sole Lord of Shadow. As the door gives way, covering the hallway with its splintered remains, he empties the last drop of blood from the sanguine goblet he'd been holding. "Good," he says. "I was getting thirsty."

This was my first demo of the anticipated *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 2*, and what I saw was both frighteningly impressive and horrifically satisfying. If my chat with MercurySteam co-founder Enric Alvarez is any indication, getting to this point wasn't all sunshine and rainbows. But in a series so steeped in blood, combat, and family feuds, I would hardly think there was any other way. Still, Alvarez didn't have me fly nearly 6,000 miles from San Francisco to the team's headquarters outside of Madrid, Spain, to tell me that Drac's story was going to be good. He told me how it's going to be the best. "Of course," he says, "this is a matter of opinion."

I'll admit, in the 20 minutes of gameplay that took me from Drac's inner sanctum to the castle precipices, even up past the walking, battle arena-sized Siege Titan, I never saw *Castlevania*

completely shake the all-too-easy *God of War* comparison that haunted the first *Lords of Shadow* game. What I did see, though, was an improvement in every single way over the original. A 360-degree camera replaces the staunch fixed-camera perspective, making it easier than ever to appreciate the game's unearthly ambience. More impressive, however, was the platforming that took place through the game's gothic environments—moves that will put the *Uncharted* and *Assassin's Creed* series to shame. It's the combat that series producer Dave Cox wanted to be the primary focus when making *Lords of Shadow 2*.

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"We want people to feel the depth of the combat. We want them to feel the strategy by using the tools that we give them," Cox explained. "We're going to give you lots of toys to play with in combat, so please use them."

"It's blood, though, that is basically what will fuel your abilities." The original never gave me a reason to believe otherwise, but it was this line from Cox that made me realize that *Lords of Shadow 2* wasn't going to be a light-hearted follow-up to the first game. It's understandable, though, because LoS2 looks to be the team's last entry in the trilogy. "I've said this in a few interviews now, but this is going to be the last story that we tell in this universe." ☐