● *Kane & Lynch* features several "rail" sequences where gameplay becomes even simpler...and the A.I. becomes even dopier. It's like playing bizarro *Half-Life*.

KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN

If only this were Movieline...

REVIEW

Hate cops? *Kane & Lynch*'s designers sure hope so—butchering pork is a major pastime for the titular "heroes" of this third-person shooter from IO Interactive. Of course, you'll kill plenty of criminals, too. And civilians. And security guards. Hell, kill everybody—that's what this game's all about.

EMPATHY WAS YESTERDAY

Well, it's not *all* about screaming one-eight-seven on a motherf***er: *K&L* sports a surprisingly gripping storyline, imaginative scenarios, and plenty of snappy four-letter dialogue. Nevertheless, the heart of the *K&L* experience is making those shell casings ping-ping-ping off the floor. And whether it's psychotic Lynch offing hostages in a sudden freak-out or brutal Kane gunning down Tokyo clubgoers during a kidnapping, *K&L* offers plenty of opportunities to scratch that itchy trigger finger.

The secret ingredient, though, isn't the raw slaughter, but the game's many sharp set pieces—*K&L*'s missions rely on clever settings to provide that extra kick in the ass. A desperate gunfight following a botched bank robbery (an obvious homage to Michael Mann's *Heat*); rappelling down the face of a skyscraper for a through-the-window assassination; busting through concrete barriers in a balls-to-the-wall prison break—it's almost enough to make you think you're in the middle of a movie.

THE ACTION IS THE JUICE

Thing is, you're *not*. Exciting as cinematic set pieces are, *K&L* is a game, not a film. By that standard, it fails to do what a game should do: provide you with meaningful choices and tests of skill. Instead, for all its flash and flutter, the action poses virtually no challenge. Simply wait for enemies to pop out from cover, put the reticule across their mugs, and press the left mouse button. Lather, rinse, repeat. Because of the essentially unlimited ammo, and because enemy A.I. is about as sharp as G-flat major, all the cinematic dazzle quickly falls by the wayside, and

> IT FAILS TO DO WHAT A GAME SHOULD DO: PROVIDE YOU WITH MEANINGFUL CHOICES AND TESTS OF SKILL.

you find yourself slogging through one point-and-click moronfest after another to advance the story.

The multiplayer (powered by Games for Windows Live) doesn't do much to amend the problem. A co-op/deathmatch hybrid called "Fragile Alliance" is the sole game mode. Matches start with players working together against the A.I. but increasingly encourage them to betray and kill each other for a bigger share of the score. It sounds nifty on paper, but with *K&L*'s simplistic gameplay mechanics, figuring out when to betray whom is child's play...and the whole thing eventually gets monotonous. Multiple roles—or other aspects beyond shooting everyone in sight—would've done wonders here.

YOU ARE GOIN' DOWN

K&L serves as an important lesson in game design: The medium isn't the message. The game's still entertaining, especially if you're looking to play on a casual basis...but with rumors of a film adaptation already in the works, I can't help but wonder if the designers were more focused on another Hollywood vehicle instead of a solid game. ● **Eric Neigher**

VERDICT

➕ Fantastic graphics, nonstop action; great "cinematic" feel.

➖ Repetitive gameplay; limited multiplayer; too simplistic.

5 \10

AVERAGE

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● **Your foes aren't Rhodes Scholar material, so it's pretty easy to flank around and waste 'em.**

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