

Gameplanet Battlefield: Bad Company Review

Joel Lauterbach, Sunday 22 June 2008 - 00:00:00

[newpage=Page 1]**THE BATTLEFIELD SERIES HAS** been around for quite a while, and in recent years it seemed to have taken a turn for the worse.

It was with some scepticism that I received Battlefield: Bad Company. I wasn't expecting much, but after having played through the game I feel I could have been expecting a whole lot and it still would have blown me away. This game breaks new ground for the FPS genre, but also for the warfare genre, and has learnt a lot from its predecessors as well as from other games in the genre.

Battlefield: Bad Company puts you in the shoes of Preston Marlowe, a young guy with a chequered past. You've been dropped into the middle of a war zone with B-Company, which is filled with the misfits of the U.S. Army and nicknamed Bad Company.

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Your squad is made up of Sarge, a big black guy with a cool head and a smooth voice; Haggard, who carries a rocket launcher and is essentially the brawn of the outfit, always getting himself into trouble; and Sweetwater, who is the brains, but lacks the bravado that Haggard seems to have in spades.

Bad Company is set in the near future and the weapons and vehicles reflect this nicely. The U.S. is in the middle of a war with Russia and you have been stationed in the middle of it. Moments after arriving bets are being made as to how long you'll live, and you sink into the role of being the newbie in a hardened unit. The jokes and one liners are to large extent quite funny, and the dialogue is entertaining. One of the fun parts of the game is the interaction between Haggard and Sweetwater, who at any chance (in cut scenes) will break into a game of rock-paper-scissors or hassle each other. All of this brings the characters to life and gives a level of personality which doesn't happen often enough in games like this.

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On one of the earlier missions, you and your squad encounter some mercenaries carrying a bunch of gold bars. Sweetwater recites a rumour about where the gold comes from, and that there might well be a lot more of it. The squad, already receiving tough treatment from the rest of the U.S. military, with the whiff of riches in the air, decide to chase the gold - despite not having clearance to do so. From this point on the squad is acting mostly illegally, and receives little support from the rest of the Army. The story, clearly inspired by the 1999 movie Three Kings (starring George Clooney), is really golden. It is fun, and amusing, and involves a small scale invasion of a country you've never heard of (by small scale, I mean four guys - but they sure pack a lot of heat).

For what has traditionally been a multiplayer franchise, this foray into single-player territory has gone very well indeed. The squad-based combat is there, you can crouch and run, and the missions are exciting. The open world also works very well to give the feeling of freedom.

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The environments provide a wide variety of settings, from mountains to lakes and rivers, forests to golf courses (yes, golf courses - along with golf carts to drive, or blow up with your tank). The maps are big, reminiscent of Operation Flashpoint. They're certainly not endless, but your view distance is superb and you can drive all over the place. You are constrained to remaining within your mission area however, the worst part of which is barrelling down the road in a jeep when you stray outside the specified zone and have only five seconds to return to the mission area, which is near on impossible to achieve. But if this occurs you are merely reset at your spawn point (which moves as you hit certain checkpoints).

All in all you are given eight distinct missions which are divided up into a load of objectives. Each mission takes at least one to two hours giving the game quite a solid single-player experience. The shooting and manoeuvring feels good, however the option to go prone is missing. You have a range of weapons and war-machines at your disposal - or rather, as you commandeer them.

[newpage=Page2]Basically "if its in the game, you can use it" is a good rule of thumb for vehicles in Bad Company.

There are jeeps, tanks, trucks, helicopters, armoured vehicles, boats, and as mentioned earlier golf carts; all of which have a varying range of usefulness. The tank also has the option to blow out smoke therefore creating a smoke shield, which will become mighty useful in the online multiplayer. All the vehicles are very straightforward to drive (or pilot) and getting into each will come almost naturally to most players. This is great for new players, but also somewhat sad as the challenge in piloting planes, jets and helicopters in previous Battlefield titles was part of the great attraction and longevity of the franchise.

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The squad combat in the single-player works quite well. To begin with it feels as though the rest of your squad is pretty useless, unless in a vehicle where they can man the guns for you while you drive. It's not until you are left without them that you realise the difference they make. They follow you well, and if they fall behind they will be re-spawned closer. For the record however, they can't be killed and will always be there to back you up, which is probably why they aren't the crack shots you might at times wish them to be, as this would have made the game too easy.

You also can't command the squad around (which might have something to do with the fact that you're not Sarge), but they will take cover and on occasion even take out a vehicle for you. Very useful is the audio feedback they give you on eliminating enemies and such, or when Haggard sings "Sdown down down" after eliminating an enemy, and you think of Johnny Cash and chuckle.

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One of the most irritating aspects of the single-player is the enemies. There are a good number of them, and they are ace shots. The irritating bit is that they will in most cases see you before you see them. Shrubs and trees don't matter, they'll see you and they'll shoot you. Its a shame because this means there is rarely an opportunity for any real sniping or sneaking tactics. But I guess that's what you get when you implement one of the most amazing deformation engines ever, into a game. This game is meant to be played in a way that maximises the number of buildings that are destroyed and carnage created.

From the word go to the end I found myself blown away by the manner in which building walls and roofs are, well, blown away - often leaving the enemy inside somewhat stunned and open to attack (if the initial barrage hasn't finished him off yet). Virtually every

building and surface in the game is in some way damageable or deformable. You can't completely level buildings, as the corner walls usually remain, but you can come pretty close. It's awe inspiring to see the war affecting the environment around you.

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The particle and smoke effects do a lot to help realise the destructible environment. When you blow open a building it often takes some time before the dust is swept away by the wind. The graphics overall are very impressive. It gives the game a realistically gritty feel; partly due to the grainy filter they have put in, which won't appeal to everyone, but which gives a unique feel that I felt worked well. The draw distance is immense and you can often see miles off into the distance. The trees sway realistically (and as with the houses are fully destroyable), and the texture detail is superb. The ground, buildings, uniforms, everything looks great. A nice touch, adding to the immersion, is that most of the vehicles have a range of moving parts that bounce around, all rendered beautifully with excellent shadowing.

For the most part the game is in first-person, but when you are in a vehicle you have the option of third-person or first-person. I personally found the first-person view much more satisfying, and occasionally in third-person the camera would swing to an annoying angle where your tank/vehicle would block your sight. Aiming the tank was also substantially easier from within the driver's cabin. [newpage=Page 3]While on your missions you will come across a range of weapons, from various machine guns to sniper rifles to shotguns.

Each can be picked up and used, and also 'collected' for the multiplayer. You also have rocket launchers, the ability to call mortar strikes, and laser guided missiles. It's all super cool and spices up the game as there is no one way to complete a mission, and no one weapon for the job. You can also pick up tools with which you can fix vehicles up, which really helps if you want to keep your tank on the road. You can also patch yourself up as often as you like, but the healing kit has a cool-down period, but it doesn't take too long. This may seem silly to those hardened shooter veterans, but the game would be impossible without it as your health drops too fast, and the enemy is too great of a shot. Thankfully, dying simply results in you re-spawning further back, much like in the online multiplayer.

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In multiplayer the aim is for the attackers to capture or destroy the gold crates of the defenders. These battles will take some time as the defenders are slowly forced back across the vast maps. Games easily take 20 to 30 minutes depending on how quickly the attackers are able to capture all of the points, or the defenders are able to whittle down the attackers. Here the defenders have the advantage, as they have unlimited respawns, while the attackers respawns will drop with each death and when it drops to zero it's game over. Another mode called Conquest Mode is due to come out sometime after the launch of the game, diversifying the multiplayer.

As Bad Company is yet to be released, we had trouble finding a good online match, as any game we joined would have been on the other side of the world. But despite this, games were smooth and a lot of fun from start to finish.

Now all this might sound like any other online game, but the deformable environments are where it's at. Each game will be unique as the environment is constantly changing and in flux. That means that fantastic sniping spot you had moments earlier might now be only

the edge of a room with the rest of the house blown open by a tank or other powerful artillery.

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The different classes come into great use here, with teams having to arrange themselves into a useful task force of Assault, Demolitions, Recon, Specialist, and Support. Be it sharing out medkits or using rocket launchers to take out tanks, the classes all play vital roles as without their abilities being utilised it will be difficult to wrest victory from the enemy. This has the potential to become a fantastic game as people become specialised in certain roles and teams start playing as teams, rather than individuals. I found the support unit one of the most satisfying roles, for his ability to repair vehicles and also to call in mortar strikes on enemy positions. Not all maps will have all vehicles, and it won't always be an even fight - different spawn points have different weapons so as the enemy is pushed back they may be able to access more weaponry (or less).

To help with the multiplayer the devs have included a range of movies with hints/guides to each map which will come in useful for anyone wanting to master the online mode. There are eight maps in total and they are made up of a nice range of urban close combat areas and wide open spaces. Again though, I feel the lack of a prone option in the multiplayer (as in the single-player) is frustrating. When what limited cover you have gets blown away by a pesky tank, it's unfortunate that you can't lie prone in a building, however it does help remove the frustration linked with snipers continually camping with no real way of finding them. So its a trade-off, but one that I am willing to live with considering how fun the multiplayer is.

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Add into this 24 players per game, and you have one hell of a fight on your hands. You'll also have a host of medals to collect for completing certain tasks in multiplayer, for example taking out two guys at once with a mortar strike. This doesn't do much except give you something to brag about, which isn't a bad thing.

Battlefield: Bad Company is an exceptional game. Its deformable environments will do for battlefields what Codemaster's DiRT and GRID have done for the racing genre. Having the larger part of your environment being deformable to the extent that it is in Battlefield: Bad Company is no small feat. It may lack the finesse in the single-player that some similar titles have, but it does a great job of making you feel the part as you roll into combat with guns blazing, your squad hooting and bellowing behind you. Add to this the multiplayer which is well rounded and realistic, yet big on the fun, and you have a great experience which could ultimately have you playing for months and months.

Needless to say, the Battlefield series is well on track again.

Courtesy of [Gameplanet](#)