

Teamxbox.com Battlefield: Bad Company Review

Tom Price, Tuesday 24 June 2008 - 00:00:00

[newpage=Page 1]Developer DICE should be commended for hitting the nail on the head. Like the best games, I want to overlook its flaws for the sheer awesomeness of the rest of it. Battlefield games are historically purely multiplayer affairs, setting teams of gamers playing specific roles in objective-based team-oriented games. That's not really a new concept, but one that the series overall has been honing and perfecting for years. Bad Company is the culmination of that, with a pretty compelling single player game thrown in for good measure.

On the single player side, the game offers up a decent enough storyline about a rag tag bunch of misfits tearing across the countryside fighting bad guys and capturing lost gold. Nothing you haven't seen before, especially in movies like Kelly's Heroes or Three Kings, but it compels you to have a good time, something too many games have forgotten how to do. More importantly, the action of the single player sets up the multiplayer very nicely without feeling like a string of loosely hooked together arenas interspersed with cut scenes. It also saves you the high drama. I was fully expecting one of the characters to die during the storyline in a cheap attempt to make me feel some emotion. But DICE never took that cheap shot. I don't think they want you to necessarily develop some deep emotional connection to the characters. I think they want you to have a good time. If so, mission accomplished.

The characters, especially Haggard and Sweetwater, the two â€” comic relief â€” characters were really chafing me early on. I really wanted them to shut up and cut the shtick. It's just a little too much in the early going. But looking back now after playing the entire game, I think the chatter heavy early levels of the game are that way to set up the story. And the game's designers smartly get it out of the way. After you get down to what your real business is â€” stealing gold â€” the game starts telling the story through the action. The army cuts you off, forcing you to go rogue. Not a problem, considering you were already a bunch of loser soldiers they didn't know what to do with in the first place, that's why they put you in Bad Company.

By keeping the story simple and light, DICE doesn't bog you down with trying to figure out what's going on. It's simple: you're gonna get rich or die trying. This is the kind of story I was hoping for out of Army of Two, a game that I think tried to take a similar tack, but got bogged down in weird conspiracy B.S. and lame, uninteresting characters. Good job on getting it right this time, EA.

More importantly about single player, it let's you try everything out. It's a good set up for the multiplayer matches where you'll be driving vehicles and using cool equipment like laser guided bombs and mortar strikes. Honestly, playing through the single player is a great warm up for the multiplayer, and finishing the game will actually make you better when you go online. I promise you.

[newpage=Page 2]The overall design of Bad Company â€” and indeed, the entire Battlefield series â€” is based on flexibility. While hardly an open-world sandbox type of game, the levels are definitely not just corridors. Well, at some parts they are. But most of the time you have a lot of options on how to tackle an objective. You can tear through a town with a tank blasting every last building to rubble, finding all of the collectible guns (collectibles, another sign Bad Company knows it's a video game and not some kind of complex interactive fiction) and blowing up every last exploding barrel you see. Or you can grab a boat and jam up river, grenade launchers popping heat along the banks as you go. Or you can sneak through the woods all stealthy and snipe as you go.

There's a ton of ways you can do things, and that only makes the experience more satisfying.

The hunt for lost gold sets up the multiplayer. Like I said, there's only one multiplayer mode, which is a two-team objective based game where one team defends the gold and the other captures it by blowing it up. Maybe they're just setting the gold free. In multiplayer is when you get into character classes, five in all, and they feel extremely well balanced. Every class has a special weapon or piece of equipment, but you'll have to unlock those. The nice thing is, you unlock stuff in the order you want to. You earn credits which can be spent however you want. I highly recommend the support class' mortar strike for one of your first purchases.

Like any team based multiplayer game though, your experience playing it is going to be highly dependent on who you play it with. All of the vehicles seat more than one person, and in most cases there are two stations that control a weapon. If you take off in a chopper or a tank without a compadre, you're basically cutting your effectiveness in half. It's also a really good idea if at least one person on board has a support kit too, since they can repair vehicles.

Another cardinal rule that must be followed in this game is talking. You have got to hook up your headset and talk to your team. Bad Company does not reward teams full of lone wolves. Get on there and talk, make a buddy and work together. No one's saying you have to be BFF or hold hands; that's up to you. But this game is zero fun with people that don't want to play it the way they should.

At this point, I've probably played less than ten online matches, first with other media types and the devs, and one or two with the regular civilians. The only time I had a good time was when people worked together. But those times were really awesome. Bad Company's single multiplayer mode actually offers a lot in the way of variety. Sure, you're always attacking or defending the gold, but when you factor in all the weapons, vehicles and equipment, you'll realize just how many ways there are to do the things you want to do. From a design point of view, DICE really nailed it. The classes and weapons seem perfectly balanced. Who's to say what exploits people will discover as the game matures, but hey, welcome to online gaming. That's what downloadable updates are for. If my mortar attack gets nerfed though, I'm gonna be mad pissed.

Battlefield: Bad Company knows what it wants to do and does it. The gameplay is simple and easy to wrap your mind around, but opens up to a lot of different strategies. The explosions are visceral and fun, and the game looks great too. Yeah, I bitched about the color palette, but there are moments when you realize they're going for that smoky, hazy look that a battle-ravaged landscape would have and it's O.K. It may not be a magnum opus like GTA IV, but Battlefield: Bad Company is a great piece of mindless fun to waste away some hours with this summer.

Courtesy of TeamXbox.com