

GM Reviews

The Final Verdict!

HOW WE SCORE

- 0-39 Awful** Avoid it as you would a bullet with your name on.
- 40-59 Poor** Major issues here that won't be solved with a hug.
- 60-69 Decent** A mixed bag filled with sweets and sharp stones.
- 70-79 Good** Some flaws, but still a very enjoyable experience.
- 80-89 Excellent** Buy it, love it, thank us when you're done.
- 90-100 Outstanding** A rare and essential piece of brilliance.

The small print: We rate games in comparison to what else is available on the same system, in the same genre, and for the same format at the time of release. So this year's FIFA might score less than a FIFA from three years ago, but still be a better game. Because time, and our expectations, move on. Hey, you're smart, you get it...



Not awarded based simply on score, but rather given to games that possess a special blend of qualities. For instant classics that you won't regret owning.

Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC **Publisher** Activision **Developer** Sledgehammer Games **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-18

CALL OF DUTY: WWII

Activision storms the beach, but only makes it halfway



You might have hoped that this was year Call Of Duty finally changed. Activision's decision to travel back to the 1940s created the opportunity to rebuild some central pillars of the series, which have stood the test of time but have been

showing a few cracks of late. Sadly, WWII does no such thing, largely sticking to the tried-and-tested formula we've become used to. That's no disaster: aside from a shoddy campaign it's a perfectly solid shooter, and the multiplayer modes are a blast. But it delivers fewer surprises than we'd hoped, and leaves us wondering what might've been.

You can think of WWII as three separate games: a single-player campaign that zooms through the later stages of the war, a familiar multiplayer shooter with a few new modes and a zombie murder simulator with undead Nazis. Let's take each in turn, starting with the campaign.

It borrows heavily from the best on-screen portrayals of the Second World War, including Band Of Brothers and Saving Private Ryan. Its six-hour whistle stop tour whisks you through D-Day via the Battle Of The Bulge to the crossing of the Rhine by Allied forces, all told through the eyes of a single American squad. Most of the time you're moving from checkpoint to checkpoint mowing down waves of enemies, but you'll also be driving jeeps, dogfighting among the clouds, sneaking through smoke, and sniping from rooftops.

The story, focused on the bonds the soldiers form, misses the mark, largely because most of them are as bland as trench rations. They poke fun at each other with all the fizz of a bottle of coke left in the sun for half a year, and any

semblance of chemistry is quickly wiped away by a dud piece of dialogue. We find it hard to keep track of who's who sometimes, which is never a good sign. When the emotional music swells and tragedy grips the group, we can't muster up the energy to care. It's telling that the game's most poignant moment doesn't revolve around its the main characters, but a group of terrified German civilians trapped in a basement in Aachen.

D'oh boys

WWII's attempts to take on tough issues like racism in the US Army and the treatment of POWs are clumsy, and make the tepid tale even less appetising. When the platoon passes a brigade of massacred Nazis they should've stayed in sombre silence, allowing the audience to ponder the scene. Instead we get one soldier jeering at the dead "Krauts", while two others protest that the dead soldiers are "somebody's

son" and "they're not all bad", ramming the point so far down our throats that we can feel it settling uncomfortably in our stomachs.

Josh Duhamel provides a silver lining with his portrayal of the tough Sgt. Pierson, whose internal struggles are the most engaging part of the squad's tale, although that isn't saying much.

The hamfisted story isn't even the biggest problem though - the action is. If you've played previous Call Of Duty games then you already know what to expect: a seemingly endless shooting

gallery of soldiers and guns that largely lack punch (see 'Pea shooters', over the page), punctuated with annoying quick time events. It's occasionally fun moment-to-moment but it grows old quickly, especially when 'surprises' get repeated. We've lost count of how many times our character looked certain to die, only for an ally to take out the Nazi leering over us at the very last minute. Get a new trick.

The game throws in stealth segments, on-rails shooting, and even some plane combat to mix up the action, but none of it is particularly polished. It's a shame, because the few times the game tests genuinely new ideas, and abandons the



Knock knock. Who's there? Dr David Tennant. Dr Who? Exactly.



"THE STORY MISSES THE MARK BECAUSE MOST OF THE SOLDIERS ARE AS BLAND AS TRENCH RATIONS"



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The new War multiplayer mode is a highlight. Attackers fight through multi-stage maps, building bridges, and escorting tanks as they go.



main characters, it's really fun. In its best mission you control a French revolutionary infiltrating a Nazi stronghold in Paris. You read a notebook with your cover story, and you have to answer questions accordingly when the Germans check your papers on the way in. You walk around in plain sight searching for your contact, navigating tricky conversations until you find your man, swap briefcases, and try to sneak out. It's nothing special but it's a breath of fresh air rustling through the tedium.

So, there are some good bits here. And we can't deny that some of the sniping segments are enjoyable, some of the set pieces impressive (falling through a crumbling church bell tower is a particular highlight). But the storyline is largely forgettable, and we won't be playing through it again. If this were a complete game on its own we'd be advising you to steer clear of it, and that's as good an indicator as any that the Call

Of Duty campaign formula needs a drastic overhaul.

Hold the (on)line

Thankfully, multiplayer fares better. It's got everything long-time fans love about playing Call of Duty online: quick matches, small maps, and fragile characters whose only defence is your reaction time and aiming skill. And then, when the timer hits zero, you get a flood of unlocks to use for the next outing. The feeling of jumping around a corner and catching an enemy unawares before sprinting forward, dolphin-diving under a hail of bullets and peppering a second enemy remains as satisfying as ever.

WWII's maps are diverse, and that variety gives you a chance to try out the reworked class system. Instead of loadouts you have five 'Divisions' with unique skills that encourage you to play them a certain way, and to try them out on particular maps. In the trenches of

Pointe du Hoc you might pick the Expeditionary and shred enemies with explosive shotgun shells. On the open flats of Gustav Cannon you might pick the Mountain division and your favourite sniper rifle to make use of the Sharpshooter ability, which makes aiming through a scope easier. We like the Divisions system because it encourages you to try out playstyles you might not have previously.

Shedding the jetpacks and wall-running from Infinite Warfare makes WWII feel more focused. It's just you and your enemy, and to the quickest trigger finger the spoils. The new game modes give it more variety than any previous Call Of Duty, too. The star of the new additions is War, in which the attacking team slowly pushes through a larger map, completing objectives to unlock the next area while the other team holds them off. For example, one map sees the attackers push up a beach, dodging machine gun fire from the defenders, who are embedded in bunkers. Once the attackers reach those bunkers they build ladders and place explosive charges to create lines of attack. Then they push onto a second set of bunkers, taking out defensive walls and blowing up



SOCIAL FAUX PAS

There's nobody home in WWII's Headquarters

The game has a social hub where players can mill around between matches. It's called Headquarters, and from there you can sign up to challenges, open loot crates (yup, they're there), practice kill streaks, play on an old arcade machine, and test weapons.

The built-in 1v1 arena mode is fun but having an open space like this feels at odds with COD's DNA, which is built around quick matches and instant gratification. It's also been plagued with connection issues: for the first week after launch Activision made the hub single-player only to avoid problems. It isn't much fun.

“MULTIPLAYER IS JUST YOU AND YOUR ENEMY, AND TO THE QUICKEST TRIGGER FINGER THE SPOILS”



Zombies return, and planting a shovel deep in the neck of an undead Nazi is as satisfying as it sounds.



The campaign's cast is devoid of personality, save for Josh Duhamel (he's famous) as a troubled sergeant.

communications equipment, before finally attempting to destroy two artillery guns.

It feels different to anything else in the series. Defenders have a massive advantage but that doesn't matter: as an attacker your purpose is so clear you can't help but fling yourself tirelessly at the objective until you finally break through. You're judged not on your kill/death ratio but on the objectives you've taken out and the defensive structures you've either built or blown up. It's a refreshing change.

The multiplayer is not perfect, however, and comes with the niggles that we've seen elsewhere in the series. Connectivity problems are widespread and have rendered at least five of our matches unplayable. Hit detection can be iffy: sometimes we'll get hit markers on a player who goes on to kill us, but on the kill camera our bullets miss them. These are the kind of issues that should get ironed out with time, but you should know they're there, at least for now.

But those problems aside, this is the Call Of Duty multiplayer that millions of fans know and love. You know what you're getting, here, and what it lacks in innovation it makes up for in the strength

of its core mechanics. Plus, the new game modes provide some extra variety. If you've enjoyed the multiplayer of any previous games in the series, then you're going to enjoy this.

Eat my brains

That brings us finally, and briefly, to Zombies. You and three friends battle through increasingly tough waves of undead Nazis in the streets and the sewers of a Bavarian town. As the action ramps up you're tasked with completing story-led objectives, from opening new areas to powering generators and defeating bosses. Killing zombies nets you 'jolts', which you spend on new abilities, better guns, and keys for gates. It's more grisly than previous COD zombie modes but, thankfully, it keeps its tongue in its cheek. David Tennant and company provide decent comic relief, and his endless profanity consistently makes us chuckle.

It's suitably tough and tense, and if you gather a good squad it's proper backs-to-the-wall stuff. One minute you're waiting for the next wave, the next you're smacking shambling undead corpses in the face with a spade, popping sprinters in the head, and dodging larger enemies



PEA SHOOTERS

The best (and worst) tools in Call Of Duty: WWII's lovingly-recreated arsenal

When it comes to first-person shooters we generally find weapons with little or no recoil feel flimsy, almost like toy guns. But when you're in the heat of WWII's multiplayer that predictability is exactly what you want, allowing you to flick effortlessly from target to target. The campaign, however, gives you more time to think about your weapon, and you begin to notice just how much the quality of COD's arsenal varies.

Sledgehammer has done a stellar job making some weapons feel powerful, combining beefy sounds with more weighty handling. The satisfying clink of an M1 Garand reload is reason enough to carry it around. The low rumble of the FG 42 stirs up something primal as you cut through waves of Nazis, and the pneumatic thud-thud of the Toggle Action shotgun makes us squeal with delight, especially if we've equipped incendiary rounds. Sniping feels great, too, and we could spend hours slipping in and out of slow motion, popping headshots and watching helmets spiral skywards.

But other guns feel puny. Without a distinctive sound of its own, the semi-automatic M1 Carbine is a boring pea shooter. Massive mounted LMGs have zero recoil, which just feels bizarre: more like firing a laser than a 10-kilo killing machine. We have the same problem with the StG 42, another assault rifle that pops up regularly in the game. In future we'd like to see campaign weapons given a makeover. More recoil and beefier sound effects, please - they both go a long way.

with flamethrowers, all the while trying to make it to your downed teammate in time to revive them.

But we worry that the only people who will stick with the mode are those with a group of friends they can corral and communicate with via headsets. Completing the objectives, sticking together, and watching each other's backs requires a co-ordination that's hard to muster when you're playing with online randoms (even when they're not trash-talking). Without that social side, Zombies remains a welcome distraction from the main multiplayer modes but is unlikely to capture a wide audience. After all, competing against real humans is just more interesting than shooting waves of largely mindless foes.

Overall, we would have liked to see Call Of Duty: WWII try a bit harder to push the series' rigid boundaries. Its new ideas are good but there aren't enough of them, and we can't help but wonder what the campaign would've looked like if Sledgehammer had thrown everything it had at making something fresh. WWII is worth buying, because the multiplayer is the best the series has delivered in a long time. But let's hope that 2018 is the year Call Of Duty finally changes. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✓ The intense multiplayer firefights never get old.
- ✓ Objective-focused War mode is a new way to play COD.

GM HATES...

- ✗ A flat campaign with characters you won't care about.
- ✗ Yet another game that fails to meaningfully improve the series.

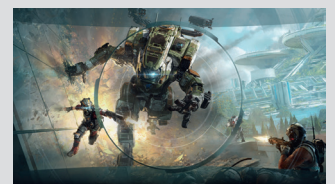
Better than...



Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare

The jetpacks and wall-running didn't sit well with a fanbase that wanted boots on the ground.

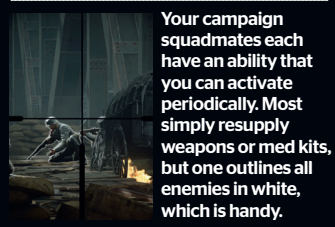
Worse than...



Titanfall 2

The futuristic shooter showed that there's life yet in FPS campaigns, packing a huge array of fantastically creative ideas into six hours.

NEED TO KNOW



Your campaign squadmates each have an ability that you can activate periodically. Most simply resupply weapons or med kits, but one outlines all enemies in white, which is handy.

GM JUDGEMENT

71%



Some of the best multiplayer in the whole series is let down by a mediocre campaign mode. **Samuel Horti**