



Call of Duty Black Ops

The Cold War gets that much cooler

Our vision is hazy. "What is your name?!" A blinding white light burns our eyes as we try desperately to blink away the blurry images surrounding us. We're covered in blood. It's probably ours. Probably. "Where were you born?!" The distorted voice seems to come at us from all sides—deep, demanding, colored with a strange sense of urgency. We struggle against the coarse leather straps that bind us to an examination chair. Then we notice the wires attached to our chest and arms. "Answer me!"

Just 30 seconds into the campaign and it's already clear: *Call of Duty:*

Black Ops is decidedly different from any of its predecessors.

The Dark Side

In contrast to *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*—a breathless, modern-day terrorist rollercoaster careening toward certain nuclear annihilation with every outlandish twist—*Ops* explores the darker underbelly of the Cold War. By comparison, it's far more psychological. Whereas *Warfare 2* focuses on the events of a few short (and extremely dramatic) days, *Ops* revolves almost entirely around one very broken man: Alex Mason, an accomplished American soldier and former CIA operative.

Through a series of violent flashbacks, the story traces his turbulent military career across the 1960s—from the Bay of Pigs to the Tet Offensive and beyond—as he tracks a rogue Russian militant bent on developing an

insidious new chemical weapon called Nova 6. It's a very personal tale that hits harder emotionally and goes places other *Call of Duty* games never could, leaning on Mason's obsession, paranoia, and deteriorating mental state to create mood and tension.

It's also much grittier than any other game in the series. Imagine interrogating a man by shoving glass in his mouth and punching his face until he talks. That's not even as dark as it gets. But all that unflinching violence pays off: *Ops* is fresh without feeling forced, and maintains the intensity we've come to expect from *Call of Duty* while providing a deeper, more substantial narrative experience.

The plot becomes a little predictable and some of the supporting characters could have been more fully fleshed out, but the story is easily our favorite since the original *Modern Warfare* blew our minds.

Duty 3D

Though we're still not convinced that 3D is the way of the future, *Black Ops* provides deep, well-executed 3D visuals for those with equipment and inclination to enjoy them. Stereoscopic!



Info
 Format PS3 Pub Activision
 Dev Treyarch Price \$59.99
 ESRB Mature It's like our own
 personal Vietnam flashback...in
 the best possible way.

Even multiplayer maps teem with life: Swirling smoke, passing trains, and...guys with guns.



War Is Hell

Despite the Cold War-era narrative, the gameplay feels nearly identical to the modern-day combat of *Warfare 2*. Not that we're complaining. If anything, that's a massive compliment. The gameplay first laid out by the *Warfare* games helped establish *Call of Duty* as the world's most powerful interactive franchise, so for developer Treyarch to produce a game that matches that caliber is no small feat—even if it didn't always feel like we were knee deep in 'Nam or the Cold War.

All of the game's core mechanics are on par with anything superstar developer Infinity Ward ever created: The flawless aiming mechanics, the spot-on camera, the physical impact of every bullet, the consistently intelligent enemies—this is as close to first-person shooter perfection as we're likely to get. Plus, while the difference isn't dramatic, this is the best looking and best sounding *Duty* game to date. Environments explode with life, and the sound effects



Kills earned using kill streak bonuses no longer count toward the next bonus. This should help keep the rich from getting richer.

demonstrate a subtle attention to detail that's truly impressive.

Even more important than the brilliant mechanics, however, are all the exhilarating things *Ops* lets us do with them. From jumping off a cliff to escape an avalanche to legitimately piloting an attack chopper, there's such a wealth of memorable moments that we aren't too concerned about exposing a few of them here. And amazingly, it never felt like overkill—the game's meticulous pacing allows each moment to stand on its own.



The gameplay between those discrete dramatic moments is varied and unique as well, offering a vast array of settings and situations—from stealthily swimming under huts in Vietnam to leading a massive prison uprising in Siberia. While it doesn't provide as many of the overwhelmingly chaotic battles that defined *Warfare 2*, its consistent creativity elevates *Ops* above the depressing legion of indistinguishable corridor shooters.

Unfortunately, *Ops* retains a few of *Warfare 2*'s bad habits, such as infinitely spawning enemies and vague instructions. Other than one specific mission where both factors left us extremely frustrated, however, these issues didn't crop up often enough to bring down the eight-hour solo experience. The campaign's world-class gameplay, along with its richer, darker story, makes *Ops* well worth replaying.

Our Idea of Fun

And then there's the main event: multiplayer. Treyarch follows the classic formula much closer than it does with *Ops*' single-player, and the developer captures the experience perfectly. The addictive progression system that allows players to gain



Find an ideology and promote it, one bullet and one corpse at a time.



experience for everything from basic kills to ultra-specific ambient challenges remains firmly intact. The fast-paced, hyper-competitive action can still be frustrating for newcomers who lack the gear and the skill to avoid being shot in the back repeatedly, but it's also easy to see how this series set the bar for player-vs.-player action. Taking out two vehicles and four opponents with a single grenade during a demolition match may have been the high point for us. And that was just one round of many.

There are a few key updates both longtime fans and series newcomers will appreciate. Treyarch has implemented a currency system allowing players to select their upgrades rather than simply take whatever the game gives them. Most items are locked until players reach a certain experience level, but this system gives create-a-class greater depth and players greater freedom to create a specific role for themselves on the battlefield. We wish we could preview items before we purchase them, but hey, cash comes easily enough so mistakes are usually short-lived.

Naturally, a slew of new items have been added as well, including weapons and weapon attachments (such as a

Cast List

THE BROKEN HERO



Mason
The unfortunate soldier whose memories we relive.

THE SUSPECT MENTOR



Resnov
Mason's seasoned but mysterious Russian ally.

THE GOOD COP



Woods
Mason's reliable partner on his trip to hell and back.



"Black Ops is the complete package."



Whether the targets are commies or zombies, *Black Ops* delivers shooting fun.

crossbow and an under-barrel flamethrower) and new kill streak rewards—the runaway favorite being the RC-XD remote-controlled bomb on wheels. More importantly, the game contains 14 brand-new maps, all of which manage to be intricate but not overly complicated, offering a healthy mix of wide-open and close-quarters environments with no obvious bottlenecks. Top notch.

Full Metal Jacket

In addition to this robust foundation, Treyarch has added a staggering amount of additional (and completely worthwhile) content. Tops on our list is wager matches: These six-man free-for-alls come in four unique flavors and, much to our delight, eliminate character customization in favor of pure, accessible action. Everyone enters on a level playing field and competes under a very unique set of rules, and the results are the most

addictive arcade-style fun we've had in years. Then there's Treyarch's patented co-op Zombie mode, which pits up to four players against an endless zombie horde but allows them to purchase weapons and upgrades as they progress through the level. We would buy *Ops* just to play this mode—it's that fun. And topping everything off, there's also the experience-and-upgrade-free Bare Bones mode; the offline, bot-based combat training; the optional risk/reward contracts adding ambient objectives to multiplayer; and a seriously impressive theater mode that lets us record and play back our favorite online moments.

Black Ops is the complete package. With an impressive balance of new ideas, smart changes to the existing formula, and nearly flawless gameplay execution, it's arguably the best game in the *Call of Duty* series to date.



SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

5 Deaths Black Ops' most creative online killings

- 1 You're Toast**
The "Launch" multiplayer map features a working rocket that totally barbecued us upon take off as we stood beneath it.
- 2 Stupid Cupid**
The all-new crossbow features exploding arrows that let us kamikaze our attackers once they stuck us. Hilarious!
- 3 It's a Gas**
The Nova 6 gas grenades not only blur vision and slow movement, they gradually chip away at health as well.
- 4 Car Bomb**
Remember: derelict vehicles are more than just scenery. Damage them enough and they'll explode, taking out anyone nearby.
- 5 Eaten By a Grue**
Black Ops is full of Easter Eggs. Really, really amazing Easter Eggs. Study the Trophy list carefully for a few hints.