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.

### 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.

### 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 stereoscopically.

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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 hats in Vietnam to leading a massive prison uprising in Siberia. While it doesn’t provide as much of the overwhelmingly chaotic battles that defined Warfare 2, its consistent creativity elevates Ops above the depressing legion of indistin- guishable 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 playing.

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 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-character fans the 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.

Natural, a slew of new items have been added as well, including weapons and weapon attachments (such as a 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. Top on our list is the new character customization system, which lets us record and play back our favorite online moments. Treyarch has added a staggering number of new maps and weapons for the world-class gameplay, along with its rich, darker story, makes Ops well worth playing. 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-character fans the 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 in mistakes are usually short-lived.

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