



FORMAT REVIEWED

PlayStation 3

OTHER FORMATS

360, PC, Wii, PS2, DS

PUBLISHER

Activision

DEVELOPER

Treyarch

REVIEWED BY

Zoheir Beig

IN THE LINE OF FIRE

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR

When Treyarch were confirmed as developers of *Call of Duty: World at War*, the instant reaction from videogamers online – the forum-obsessed vocal majority – was so overwhelmingly negative that Activision would have been forgiven for announcing that the whole thing was a joke, and that the next entry in the series would simply be titled *Modern Warfare 08*. This almost unanimous backlash was initially surprising, though with the benefit of nearly ten months of hindsight a few obvious explanations for such anger do emerge, all stemming from the fact that *Modern Warfare* proved to be such a remarkable game.

Not only was the return to World War II scenarios an apparent step backward after Infinity Ward's deliciously simple idea of dragging the series into the current day, but Treyarch were also the team responsible for the much-maligned *Call of Duty 3* (the series entry that appeared to undo most of the good work of the second game, though it remains an enjoyably flawed experience). Then there's the sense that, as stunning as *Modern Warfare* was, playing the same game every twelve months runs the risk of blunting the occasion, of turning *Call of Duty* into just another franchise. We already know that Infinity Ward is hard at work on 2009's "true" sequel; does this mean that *World at War* is merely a Christmas-friendly stop-gap?

It is certainly the case that *World at War* trades on gamers' affection for last year's title, and nowhere is this more apparent than in multiplayer. Everything from lobby interface to the involving system of experience points and perks has been lifted across wholesale; it's little more than an expansion pack with the

new maps, weapons and unlockables this entails. Frankly there's little wrong with this in principle. After all, *CoD4*'s multiplayer is one of the few online experiences that expertly balances casual play with rewards for the hardcore, and Treyarch has sensibly left the bulk of Infinity Ward's design intact. The new levels will perhaps take time to sink into the collective psyche but already we've had countless memorably exciting and edgy games.

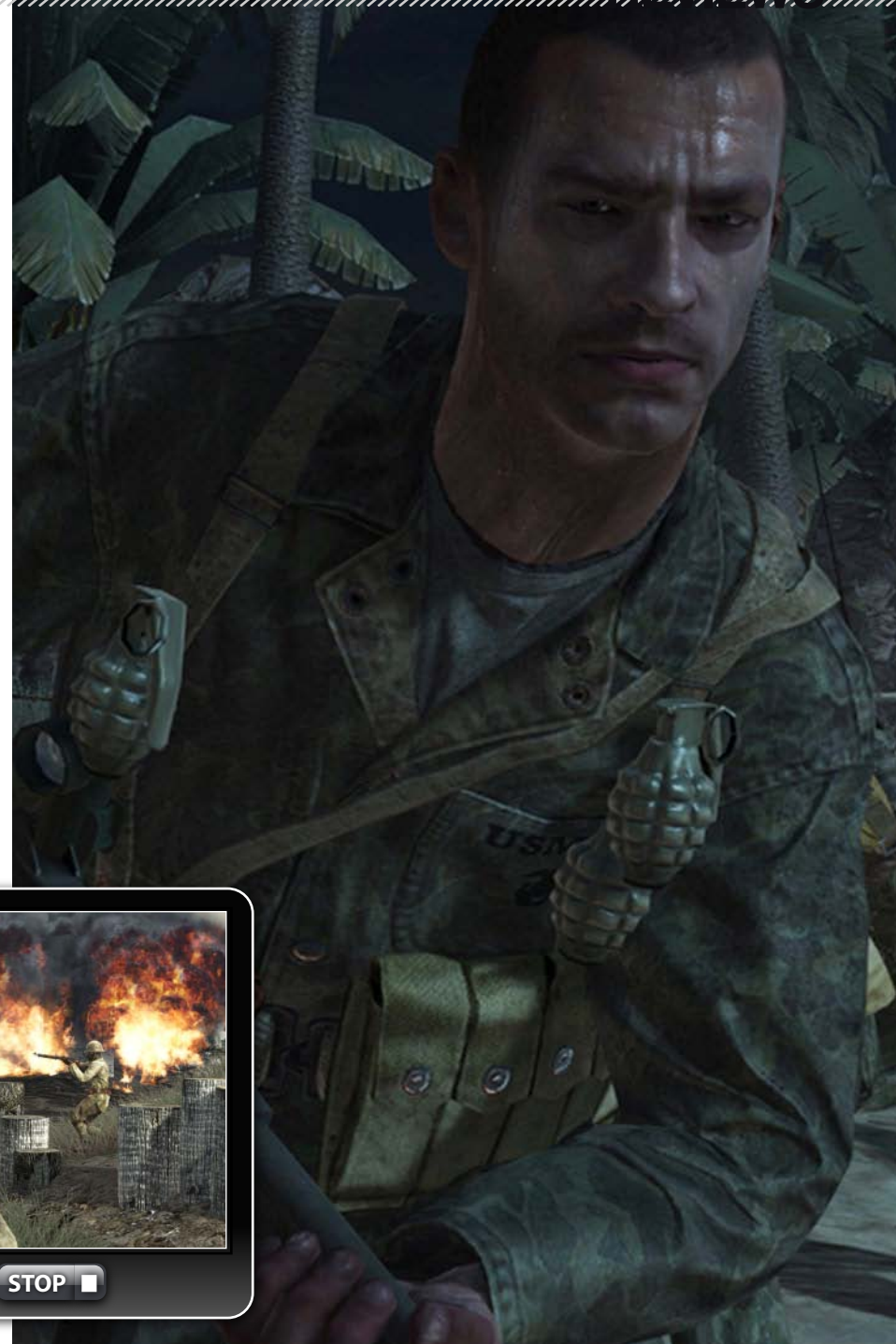
In this context the success of *World at War*'s single-player mode is even more significant – otherwise the game might as well be the aforementioned expansion pack (albeit an expansion that includes Nazi Zombies, which may be the greatest combination of two words in videogame history). Somewhat predictably it's a campaign that treads carefully, meeting the expectations of gamers head-on (arguably only *Gears of War* and its sequel have demonstrated as memorable a flair for the set-piece in recent years as the *Call of Duty* series) whilst



PLAY ▶

PAUSE ||

STOP ■



“FRUSTRATINGLY SHORT OF CLASSIC STATUS DESPITE EXCELLING IN AREAS THAT ENSURE IT’S A GAME WORTH PLAYING”



recalling flaws that dogged Treyarch's previous entry in the series. In fairness the faults are those that could also be aimed at first-person games in general.

Incorporating both the Soviet and American armies, *World at War* immediately tries to separate itself from its predecessor by utilising some fascinating (and quite graphic) newsreel footage in the pre-mission briefings, placing the ensuing carnage in a firm historical context. The presentation is stunning, the effect being to say that whilst *Modern Warfare* only alluded to contemporary events, *World at War* is the real thing. Any lesson in mid-20th century global politics is of course lost the moment you actually enter battle, but the intention is laudable (as is the voicework of Kiefer Sutherland; anyone still doubting the gravity of the situation should be consoled by the presence of Jack Bauer himself).

The first few missions are suitably grinding, the sense of chaos and incidental details (such as fellow squad members walking into traps or engaging the terrifying kamikaze soldiers in hand-to-hand combat) creating a sensory impact that thrills as much as it reassures: moments like the ambush in the opener 'Semper Fi' and the first appearance of the flamethrower will be enough to satisfy many previous fans of the series, who'll walk away from the completed game satisfied that they've

played one of the finest World War II campaigns there has been (they'd be right). However there are also far too many similar objectives, a problem compounded by levels that are often extremely linear and environments that lack much variation. Taken separately each mission would be more successful, but the cumulative effect is of a developer's imagination wearing thin and as a result failing to hide the duck/cover/destroy mechanic.

Perhaps the problem is in the pacing. The superb Stalingrad ordeal arrives too early, and is the only section that shows real flair (though the Berlin-set scenarios score high on atmosphere), with the game finishing on several identikit exercises in attrition when the James Bond-esque feel of *Modern Warfare's* climatic escape/vehicle chase would have been more welcome. The AI also sporadically suffers, with flanked enemy soldiers failing to react even on the harder difficulties. Even judged on its own merits *World at War* is frustratingly short of classic status, despite excelling in the areas that ensure it's a game worth playing and to which countless hours will certainly be lost. If all that sounds deeply contradictory then the likes of *Haze* and *Medal of Honor Airborne* have shown just how hard it is to engineer a memorable first-person shooter these days, the latter even proving more innovative in its treatment of WWII despite being a far lesser game than *World at War*.

Unfortunately a large shadow in the shape of last year's game hangs heavy over everything here. Admittedly the feel of *World at War* is excellent, the visuals and audio work strong, but any overt enthusiasm is tempered by the knowledge that in twelve months time we'll perhaps be thinking the same thing about part six: that we've seen it all before, that in itself each *Call of Duty* is still one of the best rollercoaster rides outside of Hollywood's summer season, that *Modern Warfare* did it all better. In this case maybe time will be the best judge.



VERDICT ★★★★★