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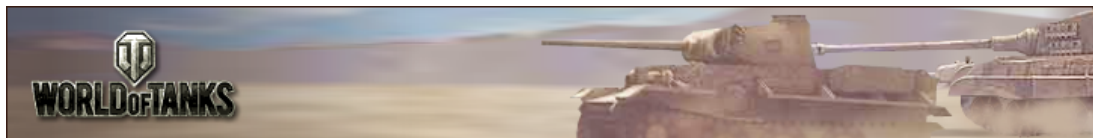
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REVIEW | "Spec Ops: The Line" Offers New Perspective Into War-Based Gaming

By Evan "King Baby Duck" Bourgault
Posted on August 8, 2012 AT 09:01am

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Union general William Tecumseh Sherman once said, "War is Hell." Gamers who have spent countless hours on any *Call of Duty* or *Battlefield*, however, would think that it's all guns and glory. Perhaps it is time that a game came around to slap these gamers out of their bullet-riddled fantasies and into the harsh realities of serving in the military. That time has come, and it has been presented in 2K Games' *Spec Ops: The Line*.

Dubai is in ruins, thanks to a horrible series of sand storms. An evacuation attempt is initiated by General John Konrad and the U.S. Army's 33rd Battalion, but quickly finds that it's too much to handle. A message is sent out from Dubai: "This is Colonel John Konrad, United States Army. Attempted evacuation of Dubai ended in complete failure. Death toll: too many."



Players take control of Delta Operator Walker, who is teamed up with two soldiers named Lugo and Adams. They are sent into Dubai in order to find survivors and what is remaining of the "Damned" 33rd. Trouble quickly ensues when the Delta Force comes across a group of insurgents, who appear to have a vendetta against the 33rd. Soon it becomes clear that Konrad has led his soldiers off the path of common sense and redirected onto the trail of martial law and treason. As the game progresses, the perception of the soldiers (especially Walker) changes, thanks to the horrors they not only witness, but also have to create.

At first glance *Spec Ops: The Line* appears to be your average run-of-the-mill third-person shooter. You are forced into killing waves of soldiers who wish to only cause harm to those in the name of good, sometimes using the environments around you to your advantage. When you first meet the Delta Force they are all jokey with one another, having a good laugh and throwing one snarky comment after another. (Think of the Clooney/Cube/Wahlberg trio in the David O. Russell film *Three Kings*.) Soon they are forced into making decisions that not just affect the goings-on around Dubai, but their mentality as well. Then it happens, and this is as far as this reviewer can go without spoiling anything.



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Spec Ops: The Line is unlike any war-inspired game out there. Taking cues from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* the game creates twists and turns that will have your stomach, well, twisting and turning. Where *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield* reward you for your actions, *The Line* makes you regret what you just did. There has never been a game that was able to guilt you for trying to act heroically, and yet here is a prime example of how to do it without making you throw down your controller afterwards.

Speaking of controls, the combat system in this game is as smooth as can be. You can shoot, melee, switch weapons, and even execute with the finest of ease. If you can't get to a certain enemy soldier, you can call on either Lugo or Adams to take them down for you; the best part being that your friendly AI is actually as competent as you are, which is a very nice change of pace.



The world of *Spec Ops: The Line* is beautiful and scary at the same time. Its sandy landscape seemed to go farther than you'd ever be able to reach, and the buildings you travel through look scarred and ruined, just as a city destroyed by sand storms would look like. The one complaint I have in the graphics department comes in the synching department. I noticed more times than not when a character would be talking, and his mouth wasn't moving at the right moment. It's a nitpicking complaint, but it did distract me a couple of instances.

Voice acting from Nolan North (Walker) and Bruce Boxleitner (Konrad) is top-notch, with them and the others able to change the attitudes and frames of mind as the game progressed into darker territories. Elia Cmiral's score hardens the blows that you bear witness to, creating the proper sort of tension that chills you to the bone. Licensed music from Jimi Hendrix, Mogwai, The Black Angels, and Bjork are merely the icing on the cake, with Hendrix's rendition of "Star Spangled Banner" hauntingly playing behind the opening screen.

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While the game's single-player campaign is short (around 6-7 hours on the easiest of settings) *Spec Ops: The Line* makes up for it with its original story and eye-popping moments. You can always go back into the game and replay some of the missions to see if you can change the outcomes of a couple scenarios, along with getting all the alternate endings. However there is no way to fix the outcome of that incident.

Spec Ops: The Line features an impressive setup when it comes to its multiplayer. There are your average deathmatches and the king-of-the-hill Rally Point, but there is also one unique one called Buried. Here a tower-defense system is put into effect where there are three weak points in a team's area, and it is up to the players to break through them. Your team can try fixing them, but precious time and energy won't be spared by doing so. Add some sand storms and other environmental hazards, and you've got yourself a multiplayer mode that actually has something unique to feature. The only downside is the maps tend to be smaller than what most players are used to.

PROS:

- One of the most amazing stories you'll see in gaming this year
- Worlds are beautiful, great soundtrack and voice acting
- Great combat system

CONS:

- Voice-synching issues
- Single player mode is kinda short
- Multiplayer maps are a tad small

FINAL THOUGHTS:


Spec Ops: The Line will have you thinking twice about any other military game ever played. The story and its plot


twists will have you dumbfounded, with difficult choices being brought to your attention that you cannot avoid. If this game teaches you one thing, it's this: sometimes there is no other way around a bad situation, a lesson that's taught beautifully here. Grab a controller, sit down, and prepare your heart for the harsh truths that'll appear in *Spec Ops: The Line*.

FINAL GRADE: 9.7 (out of ten)

The Xbox 360 version was played for this review.


Evan Bourgault is an accomplished music, anime, and video game critic. His passion for discovering new bands, developers and Japanese pop culture began in his college radio days and continues on today. Evan joined the ElectricSistaHood team in 2008 where he is a contributing editor and co-host of one of the network's weekly podcasts. Follow Evan on Twitter at twitter.com/King_Baby_Duck

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