

Video Game Reviews: 'SOCOM - U.S. Navy Seals Tactical Strike' allows for great strategy

by *Jeb_Haught*

Game: "SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals Tactical Strike"

Publisher: Sony

System: Sony

Cost: \$40

ESRB rating: T

Review rating: 3 stars

'SOCOM: TACTICAL STRIKE' - In 'SOCOM: Tactical Strike,' commanders must direct the movements and actions of an entire four-man SEAL squad. CNS Photo courtesy of Sony Computer Entertainment.

'THE ORANGE BOX' - In 'The Orange Box,' the player gets to pilot a gunboat through toxic waste while shooting down helicopters, or use a gravity gun to chuck debris at enemies. CNS Photo courtesy of Valve Corp. Sony's highly popular SOCOM series once again infiltrates the PSP, but this time the battleground takes place in Panama. However, gamers expecting "SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals Tactical Strike" to be just like its predecessor will be very surprised to find that it has actually been transformed from a third-person shooter into a strategy game similar to THQ's "Full Spectrum Warrior."

Instead of actually controlling a Navy SEAL, budding commanders must direct the movements and actions of an entire four-man squad. This means that the player controls where they go and who they shoot, but he or she doesn't actually aim or fire weapons. Nevertheless, this unusual style of game play does allow for great strategy, like splitting up the squad and sending them to different areas to create an impenetrable crossfire.

Several additional special forces units are available for missions that range from the United Kingdom's Special Air Service to Germany's Kommander Spezialkrafte. In addition to customizing their weapon loadouts, the player can upgrade each soldier's combat stats at the end of each mission. Additional weapons can be unlocked by completing secondary and bonus objectives.

Taking SOCOM online lets players expand their experience by challenging other special forces units to battle it out in several different mission types. It's just too bad that the A.I. is just as dumb in multiplayer as it is in single player. Don't be surprised to see your soldiers randomly rise from behind cover just to stand in the line of fire or even unload an entire clip into a wall. I guess the military is letting anyone in nowadays.

Despite the frustrating camera control and spotty A.I., "SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals Tactical Strike" still manages to provide enjoyable, portable warfare.

Game: "The Orange Box"

Publisher: EA Games

System: Microsoft Xbox 360 (PC)

Cost: \$60

ESRB rating: T-M

Review rating: 4 stars

If you can't decide which new title to buy for the avid gamer in your life, why not get them five titles in one package?

That's right, "The Orange Box" contains the full versions of the PC hit "Half Life 2" and its expansions, "Episode 1" and "Episode 2." Two completely new games, "Portal" and "Team Fortress 2," round out the offering.

After several years on the market, "Half Life 2" and its expansions are still able to compete with modern games thanks to an awesome selection of weapons, fantastic visuals and a sublime physics engine. Whether you are driving a grimy gunboat through toxic waste while shooting down helicopters or using the ultra-cool gravity gun to chuck debris at enemies, this series offers a plethora of truly unique experiences. I also enjoy that the storyline and visuals ooze with style.

Next on the list is an unusual puzzle game that will surely blow your mind. "Portal" tasks players with simply getting from point A to point B by using a portal gun to fire two-way doorways onto walls, ceilings or the ground. When the player enters one doorway, he emerges from the other doorway, and vice versa. Now traversing a chasm is as effortless as firing a portal on each side and simply walking through. With many curious new possibilities, this game will force players to think in new ways.

"Team Fortress 2" is an online-only, team-based shooter that sports cartoon-inspired visuals and nine-player

classes. In addition to having deadly weapons, this fast-paced game offers specific abilities for each class, like building automatic gun turrets, healing teammates and turning invisible. Teamwork is essential to gain victory in this game, so enlist the help of some friends and take the battle online with "TF2."

Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)

E: Everyone

T: Teen (13 and older)

E10-plus: (Everyone 10 and older)

M: Mature (17 and older) **RATING KEY**

4 stars - Must have

3 stars - Pretty good

2 stars - So-so

1 star - Don't waste your time

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