

Review: 'Star Wars Battlefront' -- amazing multi-player shooter

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The team at Electronic Arts' Digital Illusion Computer Entertainment unit in Stockholm would be working on a legendary franchise, one that shaped their childhoods. But at the same time, they would be creating a game for one of the world's most passionate fan bases. Every move would be scrutinized mercilessly, and abject failure could trigger an Internet meltdown.



This photo provided by Electronic Arts shows a scene from the video game, Star Wars: Battlefront. (Electronic Arts via AP)

For an average studio, that kind of pressure might have been overwhelming, but DICE knows its stuff. That's the reason fans were jubilant when they learned this team was taking charge of "Star Wars Battlefront": It was behind the "Battlefield" series, and it knows just how to build massive multi-player shooters.

In "Star Wars Battlefront," DICE has captured some of the best moments from the original trilogy. Players can live out favorite fantasies as they gear up for fire fights on snowy Hoth or the forested moon of Endor.

But in addition to such highs, the game suffers from lows, too. Three of the game modes -- Supremacy, Fighter Squadron and Walker Assault -- are great, but the rest of the rule sets range from mediocre to downright awful.

"Battlefront" excels when the scale is epic, pitting 20 players against another 20. The two best modes, Supremacy and Walker Assault, have that scale in common.

In Supremacy, the Empire and the Rebellion continuously fight over five control points. Each match feels like a tug-of-war, as one side attempts to mount an assault against the other. This setup often makes skirmishes a numbers game, but there are exceptions.

Scattered throughout each map are power-ups. Some of them give players a proximity mine, while others let them bring vehicles such as X-Wings or AT-STs into the conflict.

The most-powerful pickup is the hero emblem, which lets a player choose a hero from his or her side. That's how Darth Vader enters the fray, and Force chokes hapless Rebel scum. It's how Leia Organa drops in and lends her powers to her squad mates. These heroes can turn the tide of battle, and they often create a shootout's best moments.

Walker Assault matches are similar to Supremacy's, but with more of a narrative element. The Empire is attacking a rebel objective with enormous AT-ATs. The Rebels are fending off the attack, while trying to keep uplinks online so that Y-Wing bombers can target and stun the robotic walkers.

Once the walkers have been stunned, Rebels must concentrate their fire to do as much damage as possible on the AT-ATs. The goal is to bring them down before they can destroy a Rebel transport ship.

The more structured elements make Walker Assault matches the best "Battlefront" mode. The rules funnel players into areas where there are chaotic possibilities for fun. Even the maps suggest various tactics and strategies, as players exploit the terrain for ambushes and cover.

As for the gameplay, DICE has simplified the shooter elements. Players needn't worry about how many bullets or grenades are available, because those are regenerated over time. Customization is based on an accessible card system, in which players choose up to four weapons and power-ups to bring into a match.

The surprise in "Battlefront" is the Fighter Squadron mode, which puts teams of 10 players in the cockpit of an Empire or Rebel ship, for dogfight duels above famous locales.

DICE has nailed the flight controls, making them simple enough for novices but deep enough so experts will be rewarded for outmaneuvering foes and locking onto enemy bogeys. Occasionally, there will be targets such as Imperial or Rebel ships to go after. The two hero ships -- the Millennium Falcon and Slave I -- are ridiculously hard to bring down.

Smaller-scale modes such as Blast, Cargo, Droid Run, Drop Zone and Heroes vs Villains are decent, but don't offer the dazzle of the bigger battles. Their maps are less creative, and their rule sets can be unbalanced. Some of these modes, especially Hero Hunt, feel like efforts wasted.

The one problem with "Battlefront" is that "Star Wars" fans will wish for more maps and modes. Instead of giving players ho-hum maps on Cargo, DICE should have created modes that optimize the game's excellent flight system. Maybe the team was saving those extras for the Season Pass. It costs an additional \$49.99, but could be worth the price.

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'Star Wars Battlefront'

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Platform: Xbox One, PlayStation 4, PC

Rating: Teen