

Video Game Review: ‘Call of Juarez: Gunslinger’ is a Blast

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 17, 2013 - 11:00am

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CHICAGO – There’s nothing quite like exceeding bottom-of-the-barrel-low expectations. Considering “Call of Juarez”’s less than spectacular reputation amongst gamers - the last game in the series was referred to as “the kind of racist one” - it’s kind of neat to see the franchise may have a little something to offer after-all. “Call of Juarez: Gunslinger” has been generating a most curious kind of buzz, the “I hear that’s pretty good, actually” sort of buzz, a phrase typically reserved for bizarre late-night movie and fast food choices. Having never played any of the other games, I decided to dive in.

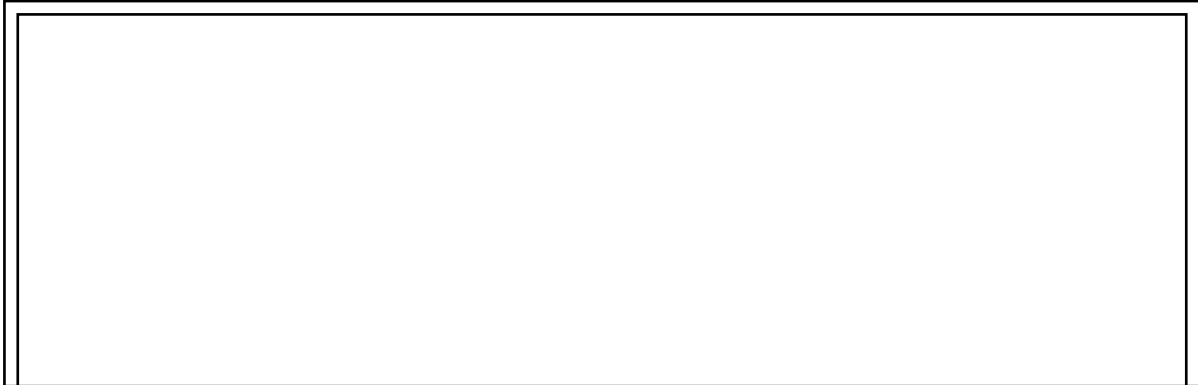


First impressions are mixed, as you’re initially presented with a series of graphic-novel inspired cut-scenes that set up “Call of Juarez: Gunslinger”’s story. The story is told primarily through the narrated flashbacks of its main character Silas Greeves, a tough-as-nails bounty hunter happy to hold court in exchange for free imbibements. At first, the voice works appears a little corny, and it can put off some gamers expecting a deadly serious narrative in vein of “Red Dead Redemption”. But you’ll eventually come to find it’s a relatively creative and ultimately pulpy western adventure, with heroes, villains, bloodshed (lots of that), and more than a few twists and turns.



Call of Juarez Gunslinger
Photo credit: Ubisoft

The gameplay makes a similarly tepid first impression before opening up, as well. If the title didn’t tip you off, “Gunslinger” is a shooter. It makes no apologies for sending wave after wave after wave of enemies after you, giving you a break, then sending a few waves more for kicks. However, you have a couple of tools at your disposal to make dispatching the hordes of bandits, lawmen, and a bit easier.





Call of Juarez Gunslinger
Photo credit: Ubisoft

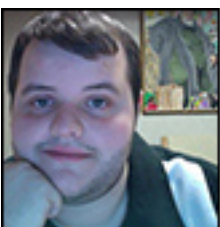
First, you have bullet time, and boy are you gonna need it. "Call of Juarez: Gunslinger" is a tough little s of a b, and there's a great satisfaction (relief?) in being able to pick off several enemies at once and give yourself a breather in the process. While the mechanic isn't nearly as refined as it is in "Max Payne 3", I'm of the mind that ever since the "Matrix" came out, that slowing down time and blasting dudes in a video game is always a good time. On a similar note, you have the ability to dodge bullets with a quick time event that pops up when you're low on health. You slide your thumb stick to the left or right, and if timed right, the bullet will zing by, missing your soft doughy skull by mere inches. You also have, well, guns. Pistols, Rifles, and shotguns all make an appearance in "Gunslinger", and all serve their purposes nobly. Ammo is somewhat scarce, so you'll find yourself using whatever gun you have ammo for, versus tactically choosing the best gun for the job, which is a bummer, but also increases the stress level of a given shootout in a good way.

But in all honesty, the things "Call of Juarez: Gunslinger" does best are of an intangible nature. The sort of design features that elicit a bemused smile and ring the "oh, that's clever," impulse of your brain. For starters, Ole' Silas has a bit of a foggy memory, so you'll sometimes play through a scenario, only to have the entire game rewind once Silas realizes that's not how it went down in the old west, so to speak. The narration does a couple of other neat things, too. In an early mission you have the option to nab a Sheriff's shotgun, and the narration only pops in after you grab said gun. The narration stuff isn't particularly robust, but it's a unique take on storytelling in gaming, and considering just how bad "Alan Wake" was at attempting mostly the same thing, it's nice to see someone get it right. Other neat touches include how Silas's story interacts with real life figures like Billy The Kid, a separate arcade mode that lets you string together combos for a high score, and without giving too much away, the ending is really clever, too.

But, "Call of Juarez: Gunslinger" isn't perfect. Locations sometimes appear samey, checkpoints are a little out of whack occasionally - forcing you to replay long stretches of the game, and some sections of the game grow increasingly frustrating as you're simply outnumbered by the dozens of enemies, and low on ammo. And don't even get me started on the dueling system.

But, that said, for a fifteen dollar downloadable title, "Call Of Juarez: Gunslinger" is a simple game about a simpler time that is simply fun. "Call of Juarez: Gunslinger" isn't a great game, no, but it is enjoyable, and certainly a great little diversion, especially for fans of the woefully underrepresented western genre.

Dare I say I'm excited to see what this studio does next?



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