



• You can lean around corners in *Denied Ops*. And how—apparently the main characters have dislocated vertebrae!

CONFLICT: DENIED OPS

Gonna be Conflict: Denied Promotion for these developers

PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive DEVELOPER: Pivotal Games GENRE: First-Person Shooter AVAILABILITY: Retail ESRB RATING: Mature
 MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 2GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 7GB hard drive space, 128MB videocard MULTIPLAYER: 2-16 players VERSION REVIEWED: Near-Final Reviewable

REVIEW

Y *Denied Ops*, the latest in Eidos' *Conflict* series, starts off with a promising concept: You continuously switch between controlling two complementary characters to achieve a tactical advantage you couldn't get in a solo FPS. If only the story weren't as tired as Rip Van Winkle, and the dialogue as poor as a pauper, and the missions as boring as crap....

I WANNA HOLD YOUR HAND

Yep, *Denied Ops* features a setup so lame you'll expect the characters to walk with a limp. Which, in a way, they do—only the limp is in their artificial brains. Baddies routinely sit around in the open, staring deerlike into the "ooooo, shiny!" of your rifle scope. Meanwhile, your A.I. partner, whether it's machine-gunner Lang or sniper Graves, requires constant babysitting to keep from becoming a float in the 35th Annual Tournament of Bullets parade.

"Partner management" could've been a total disaster, but because *Denied Ops* is designed to be console-friendly (the load screens incongruously display the Xbox 360 controls, even if you're using a mouse and keyboard), the necessarily limited options make things simpler. Your choices for ordering your buddy around are basically: follow, move to a spot, and cap a fool. Of course, the console-centric design will piss you off plenty, too. Example: *Denied Ops* features a frustrating checkpoint-save system instead of the PC-friendly save-anywhere model...which basically means you'll repeat the same areas more often than Jeff Gordon turns left on race day.

WE CAN WORK IT OUT

Some of this nonsense is ameliorated by *Denied Ops*' primary saving grace: co-op mode. Grab a friend over a LAN or the Internet and the two of you can do your best *Tango & Cash* impersonation on the bad guys. In a firefight, one suppresses while the other flanks and finishes, or, if you hop into



DENIED OPS FEATURES A SETUP SO LAME, YOU'LL EXPECT THE CHARACTERS TO WALK WITH A LIMP.

a tank, one of you drives while the other handles blowing crap up. And *Denied Ops*' crap blows up real nice: Destructible environments are all over the place and have a real effect on combat. If foes cower like girlie men behind a wooden fence, just put your favorite 7.62 mm round right through it. If you want to collapse a tower or a piece of concrete wall, that tank cannon will do the job.

Even when *Denied Ops* is at its best, though, it still suffers from a critical lack of inspiration. Apart from the hackneyed story, the maps are mostly conventional room-to-room affairs with the predictable "tough," wide-open battle coming at the climaxes.

OLD BROWN SHOE

In the final analysis, while the "buddy system" approach *Denied Ops* takes with the genre is novel (and certainly well-suited to co-op mode), the statue it builds on that skeleton is ugly enough to be a modern-art masterpiece. Between this game and *Kane & Lynch*, Eidos has caused more damage to a promising idea than anyone since Joel Schumacher. •Eric Neigher

VERDICT

Co-op mode; destructible environments.

Bland gameplay; horrible A.I.; hackneyed story; generally feels unpolished.

C-

AVERAGE



• The maps are littered with tactically placed combustibles. Why this monastery is filled with loose propane tanks and oil drums is unexplained.

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