



# **‘Call to Arms: Silver and Lead’ Campaign Review**

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*Posted December 10, 2034 by Julie Annie (staff writer at Génial Gaming)*



## Answering the Call to Arms (yet again)

*It's almost the end of the year, so readers will know what that means: it's time to review the latest yearly instalment of the 'Call to Arms' franchise. Last month marked the release of 'Silver and Lead,' the franchise's 8th game. As long as Hacktivation keeps making these games, we will keep providing readers with the information they need to know in order to answer one of life's biggest questions: is it worth putting this game on my Christmas Wishlist? A review of the game's multiplayer will be out soon, but in the meantime, we've played and reviewed the campaign of 'Call to Arms: Silver and Lead' for your consideration.*

(spoilers ahead)

## A Story in Three Parts

The game's campaign is split into three separate acts, the first of which introduces you to generic action hero and protagonist Eric Masterson, a character and story structure that should feel familiar to devotees of the 'Call to Arms' franchise. The story of Masterson, then only a police officer, begins in a small town in southern Texas in the mid-1990s. After being exposed to escalating drug-related gang violence which claimed his sister's life, Masterson is inspired to join the DEA, vowing to do his part to keep his community and his country safe. After a quick tutorial mission, the campaign's first act begins against the backdrop of the war on drugs during the mid-2000s. Masterson has just been selected to join a team of DEA agents sent to the state of Michoacan in Mexico to support the government's fight against the drug cartels. After scoring a few victories against some cartel henchmen as part of "Operation Michoacan", enemies begin to appear with better weapons and equipment. The justification for the increasing difficulty is presented in-game as a sort of escalating arms race between the cartels on one side and the increasingly militarized police on the other. **Over the course of the first act, Masterson's team is called in on a couple of occasions to restore "law and order" to communities that have been taken**



**over by vigilante “self-defence groups.”** It is never really made clear exactly what their grievances are with the Mexican government (they’re not the cartels from the previous missions, after all), not that the player is given any real choice one way or the other. Confusingly, in several missions towards the end of the act, the player fights alongside self-described “self-defence groups” *against* local community police forces. The last mission of the first part of the campaign takes place outside a sprawling hacienda near a mining facility that has been ambushed by a local cartel. If you can prevent them from making off with too much plunder from the nearby mines, the player is rewarded with a cutscene of Masterson being personally congratulated by the owner of the hacienda (an almost comically over-the-top stereotype of a member of the Mexican business elite). Masterson then gets shot in the shoulder by a bloodied left-for-dead cartel henchman in a final act of vengeance; the screen fades to black, and act one comes to a close.

Act two of ‘Silver and Lead’ sees Masterson leading a U.S.-Brazilian police exchange in the early 2010s, carrying out missions with the Brazilian UPP in the favelas of Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, and Sao Paulo. After taking time off to recover from his injuries, Masterson steps off onto an airstrip outside of Salvador and is quickly escorted to the local office of the UPP to be briefed on his mission. The powers that be have decided that the rampant insecurity in Brazil’s favelas has gone on long enough and that the time has come for a new approach to the problem. **Gameplay in this act is much more tense and slower-paced with the player moving through densely-packed favelas street by street.** Despite this, Masterson and his team still rack up an impressive body count from mission to mission. The enemies here run the gamut of narcos to street militias. Some missions have optional objectives to capture “high-value targets” alive to be turned over to the UPP. What happens to the targets you capture (or why you need to take them alive) is never explained, but given some of the background historical information on the topic we assume it isn’t pleasant. Completing all of the optional objectives will give the player bonuses moving into the second act’s final mission. Masterson and the UPP must do one final cleaning out of the favelas in Rio de Janeiro ahead of the rapidly-approaching 2014 Olympics. The player’s



perspective switches between UPP officers providing overwatch support in the cable cars and forces on the ground working together to purge one last meddlesome street militia from the area. The cutscene that rounds out act two shows a very smug-looking Masterson enjoying a well-earned vacation at the Rio Olympics.

The campaign's third act takes place in Bolivia in the late 2020s in the early days of the military dictatorship. Gameplay shifts away from the running-and-gunning of the previous parts of the campaign and towards top-down strategic management of security forces across several different theatres from Santa Cruz to the Andes. Masterson has been sent to Bolivia ostensibly to support the new government in its struggles against "anti-establishment radicals and drug traffickers," but it should be pretty clear to the audience that his mission isn't all it seems to be. From the get-go, Masterson is put in contact with local CIA assets who enable him to just barely stay one step ahead of the enemies of the state. The first missions of the third act take place in Chapare where Masterson is called to direct a series of joint U.S.-Bolivian counternarcotics operations. After mopping up some drug traffickers in the outlying areas, attention shifts towards the "criminal elements" operating in the city of Cochabamba, although it should be fairly clear to the audience that security forces are largely just targeting a particularly well-armed segment of the urban poor. It is then revealed to Masterson by figures from the military junta that the city's criminals have been receiving arms from an underground "Evista" militia. The act's final missions centre on the hunt for the militia's radical leadership, culminating in their final stand in the salt flats of Potosi. The campaign goes out with a literal "Bolivian Army Ending" which rather dramatically extinguishes the left-wing insurrection that, besides undermining the junta's political legitimacy, can be inferred to have been highly disruptive to the government's lithium extraction efforts.

## **The Final Verdict**

It's not clear if the developers wrote the campaign as an over-the-top satire of the "War on Drugs" and U.S. attitudes towards Latin America, or if they're pushing



the same decades-old essentializing, jingoistic, “red scare” messages they expect will play well with American audiences. The game comes dangerously close to self-awareness in its concluding cutscenes. After returning from Bolivia and preparing to enter early retirement, Masterson finds himself walking past the presidential portraits hanging in the White House, mumbling to himself about how little things have changed during his career – it’s as close as the game gets to recognizing some of the driving factors of the conflicts it fictionalizes.

This game’s campaign stands out from previous instalments in the franchise in one key area: there is no singular antagonist to tie the campaign together. The haciendas of Mexico, the favelas of Brazil, and the barrios of Bolivia are shown to be run by the same vaguely-defined corporate interests, morally bankrupt politicians, and criminal strongmen. It’s also worth pointing out here that the supermajority of the goons and henchmen that Masterson fights over the course of the campaign appear to be ethnically indigenous or Afro-Latino. Other ‘Call to Arms’ games have featured memorable characters, but Masterson and his teammates largely fall flat or are characters we’ve seen a hundred times before. Many of the officers sprinkled throughout the campaign (and even Masterson himself to some extent, really) follow the same formula: **a young man from the fringes of a community wracked by insecurity becomes a trigger-happy trooper with a hero complex** whose impacts on the community turned out to be questionable at best in the final calculus.

Even though the campaign presents a fictionalized take on militarized urban policing, the campaign reflects a very real cycle of violence, corruption, and exploitation, much in the same way that the game developers at Hacktivation seem stuck in a loop of turning out the same uninspiring shoot-em-ups year after year. We give ‘Call to Arms: Silver and Lead’ a 5.2 out of 10.

*Do you agree with our score? Let us know what you think on social media or in the comment section below the review.*





## ***Explanatory Appendix***

The text above reimagines elements of John Gledhill's book *The New War on the Poor: The Production of Insecurity in Latin America* (London: Zed, 2015) as a Call of Duty-esque video game using an IGN-esque review of its story as the framing device. The first act of the campaign reflects Gledhill's perspective on primitive accumulation and class relations in Mexico: collective lands pass into private and concentrated ownership by force deployed under the pretext of the war on drugs, and said force enables local politicians and foreign businesses to exploit natural resources. The final mission involving the hacendado, his mines, and the cartels was written to underscore this nexus. This act of the campaign was also written to reflect both the 'autodefensas' that are incorporated into the class structures of Michoacan as well as those that refuse to cooperate with state and federal forces, and illustrate the complex linkages between the licit and illicit economies. The Brazilian segment of the campaign review is meant to reflect Gledhill's perspective that despite the intent to take a new approach ("intelligent" militarized policing) the results are still comparable to the "bodycounting anti-crime politics in Mexico" and serve to safeguard commercial interests (Masterson's vacation connects the tourism sector to securitization as a prerequisite stage, for example). The Bolivian part of the campaign applies many of these themes to a region outside Gledhill's experience. **The war on drugs is again brought out as a key element of narratives of securitization**, and references to the CIA, "Evistas," left-wing insurgents, and military dictatorships are meant to echo ideological narratives of securitization floated during the height of Operation Condor. I specifically chose to include Cochabamba here because the city was the site of the "Water War" of 1999 and 2000 - the protests surrounding the privatization of Cochabamba's municipal water supply are meant to connect to the forcible opening of Brazilian favelas to electricity providers as described by Gledhill. The act's ending in Potosi is intended to highlight the use of force to enable primitive accumulation by exploitation of Bolivia's vast lithium deposits. See Elon Musk's 25 July 2020 tweet regarding Bolivia ("We will coup whoever we want! Deal with it.") for the inspiration for this act.



The review of the campaign was also written with nods to themes referred to by Gledhill throughout his book, namely: machismo as a strong current in militarized urban policing (which I attempted to caricature by portraying Masterson in the same vein as the macho protagonists from the actual Call of Duty games), the inability for the Global North to take any responsibility for these problems (see Masterson's concluding remarks), the racialization of securitization (the choice of majority-mestizo Bolivia, for example), and the "structural... but flexible" links between politicians, organized crime, and securitization ("there is no singular antagonist to tie the campaign together"). Finally, Julie "Giuliani" Annie's opinions of the campaign should not necessarily be taken as indicative of my opinions of Gledhill's book, but rather aim to satire Call of Duty's commercialization of securitization.

**Featured photo by [Sam Pak](#) on [Unsplash](#).**

This post is part of our second Academic Fiction thread – see [Dennis Rodger's introductory post](#).