

17 March 2008

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[Warhammer 40,000: Soulstorm](#)

Get to know the Adepta Sororitas and the Dark Eldar

There's war and there's total war. There are places where the life of one individual is worth something and places where the same life is worth nothing at all. There are universes filled with violence and there are universes where violence is so much part of everyday life that you don't see it anymore. The universe of Warhammer 40,000, the space translation of the Warhammer fantasy universe, always falls into the latter categories. And the game series created by Relic and published by THQ manages to retain that feeling of darkness and violence perfectly. You'd be hard pressed to find a darker RTS on the market. And yet it's engaging, deep, interesting and very true to the intellectual properties on which it is based. Warhammer 40,000: Soulstorm is the last of the standalone expansions that followed the original Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War. There are rumors that THQ is planning to announce a brand-new Warhammer game, based on the Company of Heroes game engine. Until then, you have Soulstorm to tie you over. Oh, and let's not forget that this is the last game Iron Lore will ever produce, as the studio that produced Titan Quest is now officially closed. So, while playing the last installment of Warhammer, slay someone in their honor. They did a real fine job of expanding the scope of the Warhammer series, the main attraction being the introduction of the Sisters of Battle and Dark Eldar as playable sides.

Adepta Sororitas
Dark Eldar
Story

The Milky Way is a restless place in the Warhammer universe. After the tough fight for Kronus that resulted in the destruction of the Necron threat, a new cataclysmic event shook the Empire of Man. The Kaurava system has been sealed off from the rest of space with a violent Warp storm. No communication is possible and all space travel has stopped. Nothing but ancient Warp gates built on the 4 planets and 3 moons within the system make interplanetary movement possible. And nine factions from the Warhammer universe are in the system, ready to take each other on and fight until only one faction remains. Apart from the introduction video, there's no real linear story in Soulstorm. Depending on which faction you choose, you get relevant story bits when you capture certain territories and defeat an enemy race. And there are back story elements woven in the archive descriptions of every territory on the meta-map. There are some reviewers who criticized the rather open-ended structure of the story in Soulstorm. I for one thoroughly like it as it offers each and every player the possibility to make up his own narrative, without being constrained by the developers. Also up for critique is the way all out war plays in the game. Some say that forces which belong to the Imperium of Man, like the Adepta Sororitas, Imperial Guard and Space Marines, would never battle each other into extinction. As the game progresses, the story elements offered when races are defeated provide sufficient motive for all the human-on-human fighting that goes on. In such a treacherous fictional universe, fighting your fellow man is as usual as fighting chaos or alien powers. The main story-related innovation of Soulstorm is the introduction of two new factions. First up, we have the Sisters of Battle, or Adepta Sororitas for the pseudo-Latin inclined in the audience. The Sisters are an all female military wing of the Ecclesiarchy, the religious arm of the Empire of Man. They have a clear mission to root out heresy and mutation everywhere they go and also harbor a deep hatred for everything that isn't human. Their success is based around the Faith resource, which allows the Sisters to call upon the power of the Emperor in some really spectacular ways which complement nicely their fire and melta-based attacks. The second playable race introduced in Soulstorm is the Dark Eldar, the twisted brother of the regular Eldar, now driven extremely bloodthirsty by their devotion to Slaanesh. They now occupy just one city, Commorragh, and raid the galaxy in search of slaves and new ways to quench their twisted hedonism. They harvest souls from

the dead bodies on the battlefield to power their global spells which can quickly turn any battle in their favor. *Immolator tank*

Battle Sisters charging

Gameplay The game retains the main gameplay mechanics of the entire series. There's no real resource gathering in Warhammer. Instead, players must focus on capturing and then holding on to critical locations that provide requisition. The earned requisition, together with energy from generators, is used to purchase units, buildings and upgrades. An enemy player is defeated when his worker units and his troops producing buildings are destroyed. The pace of the game is pretty fast, with many initial attacks that can throw a player off balance. The tactical AI is no better than it was in Dark Crusade, but on the higher difficulty setting, it can give a good account of itself. First introduced in 2006 in Dark Crusade, the strategic map is now bigger, spanning 4 planets and 3 moons. While the map is indeed larger in scope the number of regions one can conquer is not much greater than the number of regions in Dark Crusade. Each region has a bonus that it confers to the player once it is conquered, from units that carry over from scenario to scenario to bigger planetary requisition. This strategic map resource is important as it allows a player to buy units and buildings in his territories so as to fortify them against possible enemy attacks. On the strategic level, the AI is more competent. Because the races start pretty much paired up and because the AI on AI battles are autoresolved using an in-game calculation, it's a usual sight to see the AI attacking the same region it failed to conquer previously and getting repulsed again. The result of this incompetence is that no computer-managed faction gains enough regions to have a strong strategic presence, as opposed to the player that can develop a remarkable strike force on the strategic map. With these forces in place, it is usually pretty easy to win against the computer in the late stages of the game. The coolest fights in the game are those in the faction capitals. Here, each side has a pre-programmed defense system, usually of a strength that the attacking player cannot match unit for unit. There are also some scripted objectives you have to reach before you can take on the enemy base directly. So, whether you're shutting down the Chaos magical barriers, liberating the Dark Eldar slaves or taking out the Space Marines drop pods, these capital fights are a lot of fun. The racial powers that each faction has, from the Necron ability to salvage destructed units to the Sisters ability to establish forward bases, are making a comeback. And the war gear pieces that a commander can gain after each successful tactical engagement are still present.

Strategic Map

Taking a control point

Visuals and sound The visuals are good for an RTS, especially considering that the engine was first used in 2004. But there's real room for improvement. The low perspective, that's real great for small infantry skirmishes where you really need to micromanage your units, doesn't work that good when large tanks are factored in. The artwork is detailed and coherent with the universe the game is set in, but zoomed in at maximum details, you still get the nagging feeling that it could look better. There's also the issue of the air units. While an interesting addition to the game, and while opening up some new tactical opportunities, that are more really high hover crafts than air units and the perspective makes controlling them a chore rather than fun. The voice acting is a bit over the top at times, but hey, the entire Warhammer 40,000 is way over the top, so that's not a huge issue. The weapons' noises and the various chit chatter are also nicely integrated with a soundtrack that lends itself nicely to the noir atmosphere of the game.

Dark Eldar commander screen

Chaos Defiler in action

Multiplayer Usually, the multiplayer component of the Warhammer games is pretty good, with just the balancing of various races under discussion on the forums. But the latest installment in the series seems to be suffering from much darker problems of the multiplayer soul. There are at least two game-stopping bugs that have been reported and sadly they affect the new races. There's a bug where the Sisters of Battle can lose all of their faith points, which makes them pretty much useless in battle, and another one that lets multiplayer observers use the battlefield powers of the Dark Eldar, making them also very vulnerable. THQ have stepped in and assured gamers that a team is working on those issues right now and that multiplayer will be fixed in short order.

Conclusion Air units are a bit rubbish. The new races, the Adepta Sororitas and the Dark

Eldar, are extremely fun and rewarding, bar multiplayer. Even if there's no story per se, the campaign offers enough content, as archive text and in-the-battle intros, to keep the player supplied with incentives to fight on. Each of the nine races in the game is unique in its tactical approach and in its handling, so there's a ton of re-playability in the game. THQ has already hinted that a new Warhammer 40,000 game is in the works, based on the Company of Heroes engine, with a wider scope than the current one. But it is remarkable to see how innovation regarding the settings and the factions, coupled with retaining solid gameplay principles, can help a series create a standalone sequel, the third, some 4 years after the game was initially launched. Some would call it "cash cow milking." I call it sold game production. So, go out there and fight in the Kaurava system under the watchful eye of the Soulstorm!