

• If you like chicks with guns, the Sisters of Battle gotcha covered.

WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR—SOULSTORM

You've come a long way, baby

PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: Iron Lore GENRE: Real-Time Strategy AVAILABILITY: Retail ESRB RATING: Mature
MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 2GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 5.1GB hard drive space MULTIPLAYER: 2-8 players VERSION REVIEWED: Near-Final Reviewable

REVIEW

Y The back of the box would have you believe the stand-alone *Soulstorm* expansion for future-fantasy RTS *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War* adds two factions, flying vehicles, and a brand-new strategic campaign. But the more notable addition is dairy farming. That's right: dairy farming. *Soulstorm* demonstrates how to shamelessly milk a franchise.

NUNS WITH GUNS

Not to say the new stuff isn't cool—the new races are full of that *Warhammer* piss and vinegar that makes this such a spirited RTS. The Sisters of Battle constitute the first playable side in *Dawn of War* that isn't a full-fledged *Warhammer* faction. Instead, the Sisters are the religious arm of the Imperial Guard (a faction added in the first expansion pack, *Winter Assault*). So it's no surprise that they play a lot like the Guard, but sexier; they talk with the self-assured fanaticism of the Space Marines, but their units rely on add-on leadership. To power many of their special abilities, the Sisters use a resource called faith that accumulates based on the number of "faithful" units they recruit. You can just call it mana, because that's pretty much how it works.

We also get the Dark Eldar, who play like the non-Dark Eldar (albeit a purple-themed, Chaos Marine version). Their main twist: They power their spells with souls, represented here as purple blobs left lying around after a battle. It's also OK to call this mana, because that's pretty much how it works. As far as tone, the Dark Eldar are even more Clive Barkery than the Chaos Marines, and they're totally bitchin' because of their Green Goblin hoverboards...and a pleasure barge built around a mattress, complete with chained-up slave girls. If this barge is a-rockin'...!

COME HOVER WITH ME

Each of the previous factions gets a new unit, mostly so they have something that flies. Well,



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"flies." It's more of a "hover," bound by the same map rules as most of the other units. It's not much of an airplane if it can't get over a wall. The new campaign is a reskinned version of the *Dark Crusade* expansion's campaign, but with a fussier map and strategic powers anchored in each faction's home territory.

So, it's all about the new races...but when the chain saw hits the bone, neither feels substantially different. They certainly don't bring the same kick that *Dark Crusade* brought with the Tau and the Necrons. The mana gimmicks are a nice try, and the artwork and voiceovers remain as lively as ever. But fans of the series will see far too much overlap with the previous races, and the fact that the Sisters can summon an angel and the Dark Eldar shoot purple beams won't count for much after the initial "cool" factor wears off. At this point, three expansions and three years after the original game, the factions in *Dawn of War* feel like the various menu items at Taco Bell: The order in which you pile on the beans, cheese, or lettuce doesn't make that big a difference. • Tom Chick



• Who let the Warp Beasts out?

VERDICT

- Two new races.
- Same old gameplay.

C+
AVERAGE

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