

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War -- Soulstorm Announced Free Download

This third standalone expansion for THQ's real-time strategy game adds new playable factions and a brand-new campaign.

[b]The sun may have set on the relic that is Richie Shoemaker. But the Dawn of War juggernaut just keeps on coming.[/b]

[color=#ff0000]Spring 2008 will see the return of the Dawn of War series to PC. Like its predecessors, Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War - Soulstorm will be a standalone expansion, playable with or without previous iterations; and this time containing 2 new playable factions, one of which is the malicious Dark Eldar, bringing the grand total to 9.[/color]

In the life-cycle of interactive electronic entertainment (Sims-branded shop fodder notwithstanding), that's a lengthy span to have to endure to keep a single game alive. Most developers, even the lazy ones, can usually find enough time to squeeze out a proper sequel.

To be fair to Relic though, who've been credited as co-developers on Soulstorm, they have been a bit preoccupied with Company of Heroes, which (apart from being set 38,000 years before the game that first pretty much nailed down the take-and-hold RTS mechanic) was in every respect as good a sequel as we could've hoped for anyway.

The new chapter will feature an entire intergalactic campaign, spanning not just a planet, but an entire star system - building on the revolutionary meta-game from Dark Crusade. Soulstorm will also introduce air units, additional units for the existing 7 races, and multiplayer achievements to boot.

RTS and Warhammer 40,000 fans are in for a treat then, as Relic, in association with Iron Lore Entertainment, continues its tradition of genre leading gameplay and strategic depth. We'll have plenty more on this soon, so stay tuned.

When Relic Entertainment's Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War was first published back in 2004, it was an exceptional title that offered two big features. It pioneered a new style of RTS gameplay, in which resource gathering and base building was minimized in favor of fast action and squad maneuvering. It was also the first game to bring across the spirit of Games Workshop's delightfully violent far-future/fantasy universe. Since then, the title has had a very successful run, spawning two well-received expansion packs (Winter Assault and Dark Crusade) and inspiring Relic's own Company of Heroes, our 2006 PC Game of the Year.

After a run like that, it might be expected that Relic would retire the game in favor of the

Company of Heroes franchise and the all-but-certain Dawn of War 2. Not so. Like the game's own Necron faction (undead robotic beings almost impossible to kill), Dawn of War apparently has one last battle to fight. With recently closed developer Iron Lore at the helm, Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War -- Soulstorm is about to hit store shelves. Two new factions, the Dark Eldar and the Sisters of Battle, are joining the fray. We dragooned three of our GameSpy editors into an exclusive playtest of the game's multiplayer to find out what players can expect and how these new warriors will fare once battle begins on March 4th.

With that in mind, you have to wonder what minds were at work to conceive Soulstorm - when in almost every area the underlying gameplay has been refined (or superseded in the case of the graphics) multiple times over.

The answer to that conundrum lies within a certain magic number. Previous to Soulstorm that figure stood at seven - representing the number of Warhammer 40,000 races that featured after Dark Crusade, Dawn of War's last outing.

Soulstorm brings the total to nine, and whilst the two latest factions might not be fan favourites, the fact that you'll have to try them out against the seven established ones adds a considerable amount of playtime as you throw them into the fray.

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