

The XCOM mechanics and 40K setting are made for each other.



Warhammer 40,000: Chaos Gate – Daemonhunters

Grey Knights vs. the forces of Chaos in XCOM-alike

THOUGH TECHNICALLY A SEQUEL to *Chaos Gate* from 1998, *Daemonhunters* has little to do with the older title, apart from being a turn-based strategy, its *Warhammer 40,000* setting, and the choice of the hordes of Chaos as the enemy. While the earlier game used the *Soldiers at War* engine to power its grimdark mass murder, *Daemonhunters* is in thrall to a completely different title: *XCOM*.

And this is a good thing. *XCOM 2* is one of the few games from the past five years to get the coveted *Maximum PC* 'Kick-Ass!' award. There are far worse things to be inspired by. And by dressing up *XCOM*'s turn-based tactics in mutated green Nurgle pants and Terminator armor, you're basically guaranteed a good time.

Daemonhunters swaps *Chaos Gate*'s Ultramarines, the by-the-book Space Marines who are as close to 'good guys' as the 40K universe will

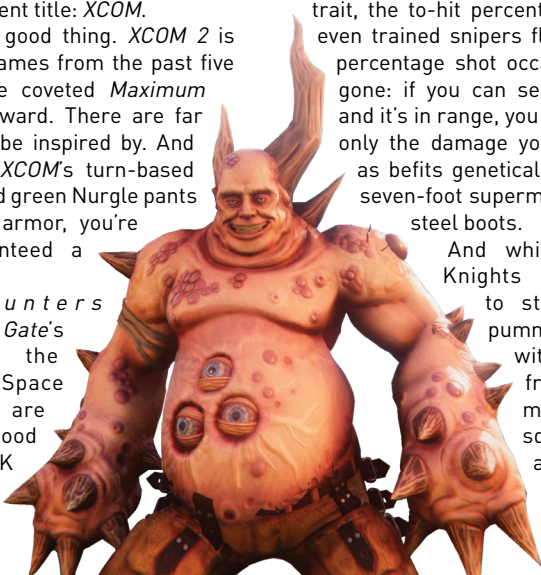
allow, for the Grey Knights, a group of anti-demon troops kitted out with specialist weapons and psychic powers. They also come with some of the best bits of *XCOM*, including overwatch and reaction shots, plus enough armor to stand in the open for a bit and not worry too much about anything less than a direct hit from explosives. *XCOM*'s most annoying trait, the to-hit percentage that saw even trained snipers fluff a 90-plus percentage shot occasionally, has gone: if you can see the enemy, and it's in range, you can hit it with only the damage you do varying, as befits genetically engineered seven-foot supermen in one-ton steel boots.

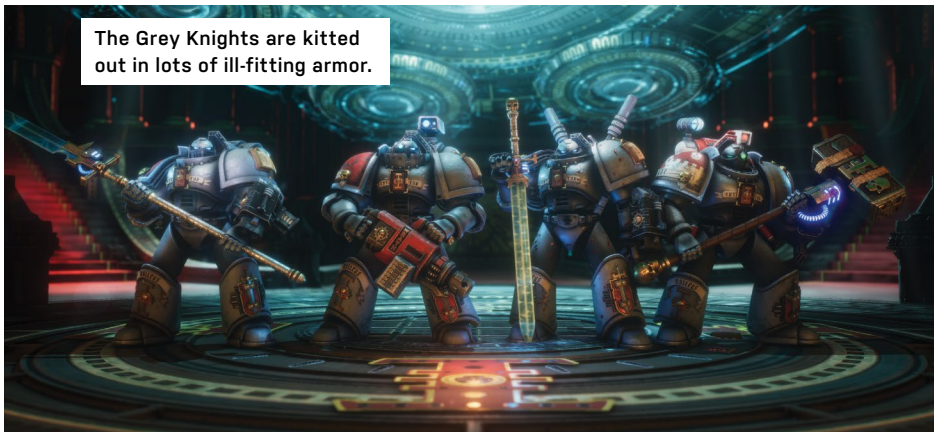
And while the Grey Knights are happy to stand off and pummel the enemy with heavy fire from afar, each member of your squad is also armed with a fearsome

melee weapon they're itching to leap into close combat with. Far from being the boy band they appear in pre-battle cinematics, your Grey Knights squad is absolutely lethal from the moment they touch down, combat experience only making them more dangerous and better-equipped. When even your grenades have 'wrath' emblazoned on them, you know you're a force to be reckoned with.

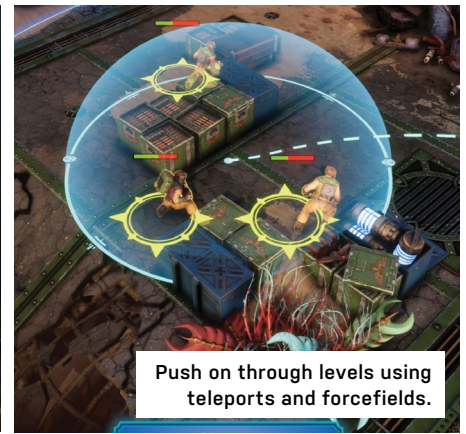
The lack of a stage where your troops are puny recruits armed with rusty weapons means the enemies can go hard right from the start too. While roaming the galaxy in your flying cathedral of a spaceship, you run into an Inquisitor, a polite young lady with a penchant for embossing the letter I into her armor and with the power to requisition your ship and all on it (including a remarkable tech priest, who is more machine than human) to serve her needs.

She drags you into a mystery concerning The Bloom, an innocuous-sounding virus spreading on nearby planets. Not much investigating later, you realize you're fighting a disease released by the forces of Nurgle, one of the 40K setting's four





The Grey Knights are kitted out in lots of ill-fitting armor.



Push on through levels using teleports and forcefields.



Just look at that spaceship—it's like a flying cathedral.



Fight some demons, and then go to some exotic places.

chaos gods and the jolly grandfather of everything rotten, pestilent, and diseased. While this means the cultists you face are just as likely to explode in a shower of their own pus as they are to fire back accurately, it also puts tough Chaos Space Marines and psychics (who might as well be wizards) on the enemy roster.

BLOOMING ENEMIES

As *The Bloom* spreads, you're given multiple targets on the strategic map and a number of days to reach one. In transit, your troops heal and you fix up your ship, which has taken damage in a previous campaign against a greater demon that took out your commander and thrust you into the big chair. You quickly realize there's no way to get to all the missions before the timer runs out and *The Bloom* intensifies, making them harder.

The Bloom is always notching up its local presence, and when the meter is full the bad guys may get a fun mutation, or something nasty added to the forces against you, thanks to a Warp Surge. It's all geared to push you through the level, using teleports, forcefields, and high ground to your advantage instead of lingering in cover taking pot-shots at 60 percent accuracy.

Moves are strung together using the familiar action point system that sees you

attempt to extend your turn for as long as possible by exploiting moves that return AP to your characters. Happily, for at least one class of Grey Knight, this means killing. A tightly grouped band of enemies can be carved through with a sword or halberd while your troopers set overwatch and attempt to annihilate the rest on their own turn. Running into position while using all your AP is a valid tactic in the beginning phase of a fight, though slower-moving heavy-weapons troopers can feel under-used, their ability to set everything on fire often taking second place to a character with a glowing sword bouncing about and teleporting away while another uses his psychic powers to make enemies cower in fear.

Character animation is wonderful, with a sense of heft to the heavily armored Knights that means it's lovely to see them scramble up to rooftop height as if all that clanking metal meant nothing. Video communication between your ship and Grey Knight HQ reveals that they wear their armor all the time, not even slipping into something more comfortable when kicking around at home on Titan, so we guess they've gotten pretty used to it.

The whole game is steeped in the lore and look of *Warhammer 40,000*, and if that's not your thing then you're going to have a serious problem with this game.

Happily, Nurgle is a great choice of faction to pit the Knights against, as it's just as happy 'upgrading' its followers with tentacles as it is teleporting demons to the battlefield. You never quite know what's coming next, especially once the action turns from planet-hopping industrial areas to the realm of chaos itself.

The 40K setting and XCOM mechanics are made for each other, but at least at the beginning, it can feel a little samey. Your spaceship is a thing of beauty and your troops look amazing, but when you teleport down to yet another train yard to fight the guys out of *Borderlands* once again, you start to wonder where this is all going. Thankfully, it goes to some wonderful places, and with solid tactical combat behind it, isn't afraid to let rip with the weirdness. —IAN EVENDEN

VERDICT
9
Warhammer 40,000: Chaos Gate-Daemonhunters
NURGLE Excellent world-building; great combat; superb graphics.
GURGLE Occasionally wonky AI; some samey levels.
RECOMMENDED SPECS CPU, i7-7700/Ryzen 7 2700. RAM, 16GB. GPU, GTX 1060/Radeon RX 580.
 \$45, www.chaosgate.com, M-rated

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