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[Heroes Of Might And Magic V](#)

A dream come true...

The spirit of the legendary Heroes of Might and Magic has returned. With the bitter faith of the New World Computing (eventually bought by 3DO) team and its last title, I began to have nightmares. And I bet there were many others who shared my excruciating torment knowing that their legendary heroes will not continue their saga, and never see some of their idiotic secondary skills re-thought. When I heard that Ubisoft bought the rights for HoMM and that Nival (Etherlords, Blitzkrieg) was chosen to work on a sequel to the doomed franchise, I was reluctant to believe they would manage to revive that sweet gameplay we all got used to. We may sleep well; we are in good hands. The hallmark of the series has always been its unique turn-based gameplay and the beautiful castle screens, and the fifth installment is no different, managing to innovate and generally improve on the familiar formula while staying true to the spirit of its predecessors; it really is what Heroes 4 should have been. **Features** Graphically, the game is superb. Everything from creatures and heroes to the environments themselves looks great and is wonderfully animated, be it trees swaying with the wind, ships gently rocking with the waves, waves breaking against the shores, or birds soaring high in the sky, little touches that help create the endearing enchanting fantasy atmosphere we've come to expect from the first three games in the series. The transition to 3D means you can rotate the map and zoom in/out at leisure which is very nice, the problem however is you really need to rotate and zoom in order to make out small objects like resource piles and certain monsters, but this could be easily remedied with an option to highlight such objects of interest with the press of a key. How open the developers are to suggestions remains to be seen. The castles are absolutely gorgeous and screenshots don't do them justice, they have to be seen to be believed. As far as artistic direction goes, they are some of the most beautiful castles I've ever seen, equaling if not surpassing those from Heroes 3 and Disciples 2. Being 3D means you can rotate the view at any time and admire them from any angle, and fully upgraded ones are quite a view. My favorite ones are the Necropolis and the Inferno, although I really like them all, and my only complaint is there aren't more of them. Well, I also wished I had more control over the camera in the castle screen, to be able to zoom farther out and view them from afar, but things may yet change until the game is released. The interface uses a spoke-and-wheel design, like Disciples 2, and occupies very little of the screen. In addition, most of the game's panels, the resource bar, the minimap, the chat field and a new panel showing all your heroes and castles can be toggled on/off, and were they also movable the interface would almost be everything one could wish for. Some of the notable additions to the classic formula are the greatly improved skill system and a new initiative system during battles that really help move the series forward. Just like in the previous installments, each faction has access to a number of heroes, each with a unique background and specialization, and all can learn up to six skills, thrice upgradeable. Most of the skills from Heroes 3 have remained (except for Tactics), although some work differently, but there are quite a few new ones to choose from, even some which are faction specific. Another addition is that heroes can now choose from four options when up-leveling, either from upgrading a skill or picking a new one, like in the previous ones, or picking from a huge number of perks linked to their available skills (of which they can have 25 in total). The Necromancy skill for example has three perks tied to it, Raise Archers which allows a Necromancer to raise upgraded Skeletons after battles, No Rest for the Wicked which gives the ability to raise some of the fallen undead creatures after battles, and Death Scream, an ability usable during battles which costs no mana to use and decreases the luck and morale by 1 and the initiative of

living creatures by 10%.The magic system has also been modified for the better. There are a number of schools of magic, such as Destructive Magic, Dark Magic, Light Magic, Summoning Magic and so on, and each school gives access to three perks that improve certain spells belonging to it. For example a hero having the Dark Magic skill can learn the perks Master of Curses which give mass effect to Curse and Disrupting Ray while doubling their mana cost, Master of Mind which does the same for Slow and Forgetfulness, and Master of Sickness which similarly improves the spells Plague and Weakness. Wisdom is no longer required to learn spells, without it heroes still being able to learn spells, but only those belonging to the schools they are skilled in. The battles are superb, just as I hoped they would be. As I said, Tactics is no more and, instead, you can arrange your units before each battle. However, you no longer need to take all units in battles, so if you're fighting ranged units you can leave your archers out to avoid losses for example. There are a lot of small changes besides the ones I mentioned, such as heroes becoming more expensive to purchase the more you have, or the new town building system, but the most notable by far is the new initiative system. Initiative is no longer the same with the creatures' movement allowance, like in Heroes 3, but a distinct characteristic. The order in which the units act is determined by their initiative and that order is actually shown during battles, making more complex strategies accessible to everyone. Morale works differently now, no longer making a unit act twice, but act sooner, and while I haven't got used to the lack of a wait option yet, I can tell you the battles feel as great as ever.**In Conclusion**Remember this is just a beta version of the game. It is hard to foresee how the final product will look like. There still aren't any clues about the behavior of the AI outside the combat screen, nor about the Campaign structure and content. A game isn't just about playing, but also about experience and feeling. And all these are still shrouded in mystery.The game will supposedly be launched this spring. Until then, happy four-week beta testing!**RELATED DOWNLOADS**[Combat Screen Movie](#)[Adventure Map Movie](#)[Castle Screen Movie](#)