



• *Hammers of Fate* is more polished, but still has bad design choices like transparency effects in skills and abilities screens that make them difficult to read.

PUBLISHER: **Ubisoft** DEVELOPER: **Nival Interactive** GENRE: **Turn-Based Strategy** AVAILABILITY: **Retail Box, E-tail (www.direct2drive.com)** ESRB RATING: **Teen**
 MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: **1.5GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 2GB hard drive space, Heroes of Might and Magic V** MULTIPLAYER: **2-8 players** VERSION REVIEWED: **Retail Box**

REVIEW

Y What *Heroes of Might and Magic V* needed in order to rate first-class (instead of merely mediocre) was a serious delousing. Six months later, we've received four megapatches that cumulatively fixed zingers like random freeze-ups, multiplayer fritzing, bad math, loopy camera antics, and a hundred other nits that altogether spelled "hold on to your wallets." Props where props are due: Patched, *HOMMS* is—as we predicted—a much better game that holds up favorably against series favorite *HOMM3*. So how about a great expansion pack to reintroduce things?

Or maybe not. Instead, how about that freely downloadable überpatch, plus three protracted, disorderly campaigns, one humdrum new faction, and a few desirable (if overdue) features like a random map generator and caravans. Yep, sad to say...but *Hammers of Fate* turns out to be *Might and Magic* middlesville, part two.

FATEFULLY FLAT

The design team gets a nod for trying, at least. Those three campaigns altogether add up to 15 marathon operations with considerably fewer flinch-inducing cut-scenes. And yet, hotfooting heroes down narrow terrain corridors and mopping up loot never seemed duller. You don't touch the new Dwarf faction until the second campaign and instead have to futz with Haven for five soporific missions that deal with civil war in the Griffin Empire. Those missions are a breeze, but they feel practically purgatorial as you inch for hours toward possible salvation in the second act.

But when you get there, the Dwarves and their new town type (the Fortress) end up all wet, a



• While it's smarter on the whole, the A.I. can still be ridiculously indecisive, retracing paths it already took and sidling into resource-sapped areas it already visited.

seventh unit hodgepodge that's more an overpowered spin on the Academy. You get your low-end pawns like defenders and spear-wielders for rote hack-n-shoot tactics, your midgrade fielders like bear riders and brawlers for cavalry charges or casual slugging, and the obligatory high-level tanks like thanes and dragons with hip lightning- and fire-based attacks—in other words, "been there, yawned that."

The story and objectives never step up to compensate, and while the Fortress visuals are eye-catching, that's really all you can say about the Dwarves in terms of novelty. The only notable additive is rune magic (i.e., the Dwarf way of casting spells), which allows your hero to gradually improve abilities that use resources in lieu of mana points. It's not enough to redeem the faction...but makes it an early-game magic force to reckon with.

CREATURE FEATURE

It's not all yawns and ho-hums, though. Caravans aren't new to the series, but they're certainly welcome, and they allow you to set up automatic creature delivery trains and—since caravans can be destroyed midpassage—simultaneously add a provocative multiplayer logistic. You also get a random-map generator, which frankly should've been released for free alongside the editor (which was free). Too bad it occasionally mislabels power-ups... and drops bases right next to each other. Whoops.

Hammers of Fate could be a great expansion with smarter, tougher solo missions. As it stands, it's an overpriced box of carrots that belonged in the game the first time around. • **Matt Peckham**

YEP, SAD TO SAY...BUT HAMMERS OF FATE TURNS OUT TO BE MIGHT AND MAGIC MIDDLESVILLE, PART TWO.

VERDICT	6/10 AVERAGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Random-map generator; creature caravans; Dwarf faction's rune magic. Three generic campaigns; new faction barely stands out; too many bugs. 	

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