



DEVELOPMENT DIARY #1 REVAMPING THE M&M UNIVERSE

1. First of all, could you introduce yourself and explain us what is your job on HOMM 5?

Erwan

My name is Erwan Le Breton, Might & Magic Content Director at Ubisoft.

My quest is to build the new world of Might & Magic that will be the setting of all the current and future M&M games produced and / or published by Ubisoft.

And my favourite colour is red (for those with an unhealthy obsession for the airspeed velocity of an unladen swallow.)

Outside of Ubisoft, I'm a published writer, author of a dozen pen & paper RPGs, children's novels, and comic books for various French publishers.

Richard

I'm Richard Dansky, Might & Magic World Designer at Ubisoft

I've worked on numerous games for Ubi, including Far Cry, Ghost Recon: Island Thunder, and Cold Fear, and before that I contributed to roughly 130 roleplaying books for White Wolf. I've published four novels, including the fantasy series The Trilogy of the Second Age, and various other bits of fiction.

Outside of work, I enjoy building large wooden badgers, and running about with silly knees-bent advancing behaviours.

2. Why did Ubisoft decide to revamp the M&M universe?

There are several reasons for this.

1/ The world used as a background for the *Might & Magic* games has often changed from one title to the next (Varn, Cron, Terra, Xeen and then Axeoth with Enroth, Erathia, Jadame, Cheh'dian, etc.)

As a result the consistency between all the M&M games was a little weak and the overall background was vague, if not flat-out confusing at times. We want to have a single, deep world that's consistent across the board and has layers of story and content that players can just dive into.

2/ There was just so much information in the world that it was difficult for new players to really embrace everything that was there. The mass of backstory and continuity was almost intimidating, and we wanted to create a world that new players could enjoy as well.

3/ As much as we enjoyed the original M&M worlds, they had a certain science fiction undertone, while we really wanted to focus on the fantasy aspects – the “might” and “magic”, as it were. Those games were also “lighter” in tone than what we had in mind for the new generation of M&M games.

Again, we really loved what was done in the past, so it simply made sense to respect that and build our world from the ground up, focusing on capturing the core essence of what drew us all back to Axeoth over and over, rather than try to modify things that people really loved and enjoyed.

3. Precisely, what did you keep from the old M&M universe?

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The more obvious aspect is that we are still in “high fantasy” world, ripe with valiant Human knights in shining armor, mysterious Elves lurking in the woods, savage Orc tribes raiding the frontiers, Undead armies gathering in the dark of the night, and all that good stuff.

But of course, in our new implementation, expect to find more than one twist on the canonical representation of these elements. ☺

Then, we decided to keep the Factions that made the *Heroes* line so popular. By “faction”, we mean the city / nation / race coalitions known to *Heroes* fans as Haven, Inferno, Academy, Dungeon, Stronghold, etc. Many of them will be back, some with a familiar aspect and “philosophy”, others with a bunch of surprises up their sleeves!

Soon, we’ll be revealing loads of exciting stuff on the factions, but for now, here’s a quick rundown on the first two: Haven and Inferno.

Haven: The Humans of the Holy Griffin Empire are inspired and guided by angels. It’s a feudal society driven by the rigorous edicts of the Dragon of Light – not any place you’d want to be a heretic. Picture an ironclad alliance of Arthurian Britain and Victorian England and you get a general idea. Oh, and did we mention the Spanish Inquisition? Guess not...

Inferno: Imprisoned between worlds by the legendary wizard known as the Seventh Dragon, the Legions of Chaos want out in the worst way – and we mean that literally. Destructive, hateful, vicious, sadistic – that’s just a warm-up for these guys. Even worse, they’ve got a plan, and that’s where things get really interesting.

We preserved the epic quality of the former M&M titles, which drives the player to experience fantasy on a grand scale and participate in world-shattering events. The actions the player takes impact the whole world.

We were also determined to maintain the ambiguous oppositions and moral choices which made the M&M narratives so compelling.

Indeed, rather than a striking opposition between Good (Light) and Evil (Darkness), there has always been, in the former M&M games, a balance of the opposites, with most characters painted in shades and grey (ie: fully fleshed out personalities, covering the whole spectrum between radiant benevolence and wicked villainy instead of square-jawed caricatures).

Nobody is all good, and nobody is pure evil. Any character (and the heroes above all) could choose to be a villain or a hero at the moment. It’s a lot like life as we know it.

4. What are your objectives with this new world ? What innovations can we expect?

First things first: we want to make it deep, consistent, and exciting!

By “deep and consistent”, we mean giving the world a sense of history and of scope. The universe shouldn’t feel like it was shiny and new and unwrapped just for the game.

You might not see all the background that’s being built in *Heroes 5*, but it’s important that it’s there – that sort of continuity informs everything else, and lets you know that the world doesn’t end at the edge of your mission map.

As for the “exciting” aspect, well, expect to re-discover all of the familiar fantasy places and races, with countless subtle touches that will spark your imagination.

Chief among the races you’ll see will be our Dragons, who are, literally, the base the entire universe is built on. They are a vital part of every aspect of our world – from the cosmology to the nature of magic, to religion and the way people talk day to day.

5. Could you describe us the process of re-creating a universe like this one? What are the key areas you are working on?

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Our first task is to design a common background: a brand new fantasy world complete with history, geography, politics, culture, etc.

Then, we build a common “identity”: a tone, an atmosphere, a style that will permeate all the facets of any future M&M products from the global concepts (dramatic themes, general mood, etc.) to the more specific details (graphic codes and symbols, musical leitmotifs, etc.).

Finally, because we are talking about games, we must also create a common set of “core rules”: What is mana and how do we use it? What are a paladin or a fireball in our world? These things seem pretty basic, but you really need to nail down your definitions early – it’s amazing how many things can cascade off of simple things like this.

6. What are your inspirations for this new universe?

We’ve been heavily inspired by seminal fantasy authors like J.R.R. Tolkien (of course), but also Michael Moorcock, Guy Gavriel Kay, Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, Glen Cook and George R.R. Martin. These are authors whose worlds and stories are both epic and tragic, with the perfect balance of horror and wonder.

7. On the graphical aspect, what orientation can we expect from future M&M games?

Let us say that it’s time for Dorothy to ride the dark whirlwind and leave the gentle light-hearted fantasy of Axeoth behind. Ahead lies a world of blood and shadows, of jagged blades and voracious flames, of sweet lies and bitter poison...

That’s where we’re taking you, and the best part is, you’ll gonna ask for more ☺

8. Why did you decide to work with Olivier Ledroit on this project? Could you introduce him to us?

Olivier Ledroit is a French Comic book artist, very popular in Europe, best known for his first series *Les Chroniques de la Lune Noire* (“The Black Moon Chronicles”, 1989-2005).

He has more recently worked with the British writer Pat Mills (of *Marshal Law* and *Slaine* fame) on several “dark horror” series such as *Sha* or *Requiem*.

Olivier is an extremely talented artist, and his dark baroque fantasy universe was one of our main graphic inspirations for the new M&M world. So the logical step was to ask him to contribute on the project, and you easily imagine our extreme excitement when we he accepted the assignment ☺

For more info on Ledroit, check out his interview and bio.

[HOMM5_IsabelvsDemon_detail.tga](#)

9. Regarding Heroes 5, why was it important to have this new universe?

Simply because Heroes 5 will be the first M&M game published by Ubisoft, and as such, will really lay the bases for the “reborn” brand ☺

So the events of the single player campaign you’ll play in Heroes 5 will have direct repercussions in all the M&M games to be released in the coming years. Here is where the avalanche starts, and it’s going to be a hell of a ride down.

10. What are your plans for the future regarding this new universe?

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In the future M&M games, we will deal with the “apocalyptic” consequences of the main plot featured in Heroes 5.

We will also expand the “known world” to include new Factions (5 are currently planned).

And we are already thinking of a “prequel” saga that would let you delve into some of the more obscure mysteries of our world.

There’s an awful lot of backstory, culture and history in the world we’ve created, and we want to give you a chance to explore it. This is, of course, another way of saying we want to share all of the cool stuff we’ve been coming up with, because, well, it’s cool and we’re just naturally both a couple of show-offs. It’s still cool, though. Honest.

11. Can you tell us more about Isabel, the key character of the game? What does she look like, what will happen to her, how is she? Why is she so important?

Let’s just put it this way – when a child is born in a way that contravenes every known law of the universe, it might be time to start worrying.

And Isabel was that child. She’s a beautiful woman of noble birth, the only child of her parents’ old age. Her upbringing was rather lonely — she had nannies, tutors, and maids rather than siblings, parents, and friends. None of them could have prepared her, however, for what she’s about to go through.

Now that she has come of age, she is promised to Nicolai, the young ruler of the Holy Griffin Empire.

But Isabel is not destined to find happiness. Her fiancé will die, her world will crumble, and, well, you’ll just have to see what happens after that. It’s going to be one hell of a honeymoon.

As for her portrait, well, picture an immaculate apple-blossom frozen in its delicate beauty and purity by an early, unnatural, frost, and set to a sharp, metallic twig... This is what Isabel looks like...

[Isabel_Sketch_01.jpg](#)

12. To conclude why do you think people will enjoy the universe you helped to create?

I think that the best praise we could get for this new universe is that it “feels strong and it feels real”.

All of the different factions have very good reasons to justify their existence and their ongoing struggles with the rival nations.

All of the characters have legitimate motivations and credible mindsets.

The drama is tight, focused on a long chain of major events that covers millennia of spoken myths and written history.

Everything is related. Every action has its consequences, sometimes hundreds of years later.

And the Magic is there, stronger than ever and ready to lead you to places you’ve never seen before.

Thank you for your answers ☺