



DEVELOPMENT DIARY #2 DEV TEAM'S AMBITIONS

{Note: the dev diary is not a Q&A. The answers can be longer and be illustrated with screenshots, WIP models etc...}

1. First of all, could you introduce yourself?

Hi, my name is Alexander Mishulin. I am Creative Director of Nival Interactive and one of the game-designers for Heroes of Might and Magic V.

2. Why did you want to develop the next Heroes of Might and Magic game? Was it important for you?

Of course, we are very excited about developing the next Heroes of Might and Magic game. We have many fans of the series among our team (actually, most of them are ☺). But besides this desire we also had a great experience in game developing, including games in TBS genres and/or fantasy universe. We really felt that we COULD do the next Heroes of Might and Magic game, and that we could do it good. And now we are trying very hard to make it as great as any fan of Heroes series would dream of.

3. What is your ambition for this title? From what we heard so far there will be few innovations regarding the core of the game. So where is the challenge for you and what can we expect?

Our ambition is the “Best PC Game” of the year – the “Best Strategy” at least. ☺ Heroes of Might and Magic V is not just transferring the old gameplay into 3D. The game has enough innovations in it to keep several game-designers occupied for a couple of years. We tried to make the gameplay more mature, with even more strategic and tactic choices, with more complex yet still clear schemes and structures. On the other hand, we wanted the fans of the previous games feel themselves at home in the new game with all these innovations. This is our biggest challenge, and although the game has not been played by outside gamers yet we can already see that we succeeded with that.

4. Etherlords, Silent Storm, and now Heroes... Your teams seem to enjoy turn-based gameplay a lot. Could you explain us why you appreciate this way of playing? What are - according to you - the advantages/disadvantages of it vs real time?

Turn-based genre gives you time to think the situation over and to implement the best solution possible. So I would call it the most thoughtful gameplay among all genres. Of course, real-time strategies also make you think but because you are tied with the time factor you have to do it fast – and usually you really can't afford wasting the precious time on tactics, you think more global, building your strategy. Yet because it TBS so time-consuming it is not as dynamic as RTS, and this is its main disadvantage in our present era of speed. It is especially a disadvantage in a multiplayer mode, when you wait not for the computer, but for another human brain, that is thinking over all combos possible. That's why we are focusing on making the multiplayer in Heroes of Might and Magic V dynamic, smoothing the waiting time with various means.

5. What is your vision of the Might and magic universe? How will you translate it into the game?

I would describe it in two words: dark and epic. By “dark” I mean that the world of Might and Magic is more mature, with more complex relations between “good” and “evil”. If you remember the first Heroes of Might and Magic games they had very cute and cartoon-like



graphics. In the 3rd game the graphics became more “grown up”, yet the general atmosphere was kept fairy-tale like. In Heroes 5 we want its universe to be not a fairy-tale but a world as complex as our real world is. And here we come to another word describing the new Might and Magic universe – “epic”. We are making the Might and Magic universe more large-scale, deeper and more global. Even the plot of the game is more epic and more serious.

6. Have you been influenced by other movies/books/games? How will that translate into the game?

Our artists have made a great job on studying different cultures and different periods of history. In creating new images of towns and creatures they took them as a base – say, human race reflects the period of Medieval Europe, and everything, from the look of the warriors to the architecture of the towns is more or less kept in these frames. You’ll meet such references to various cultural heritages in the game, starting with ancient myths and up to the Decadence of the beginning of the 20th century. Talking on influence by some fiction, I should mention Lord of the Rings we surely had been thinking of. Not like we tried to follow it in some way - although you’ll find a couple of references to it in the game (since these universes have some cross points up to some creatures, such as elves or orcs). It’s rather some sort of a standard we were trying to meet. We were greatly impressed how epic, mature, and “dark” this universe is, and consider it to be one of the absolute examples of the fantasy universe.

7. What in your opinion are the features that make the Heroes series that unique and addictive for players?

I will tell you my point of that, although I’m sure that everybody will be able to name his own reason for his love for Heroes of Might and Magic. ☺ I would say that the main reason why the series has been so popular is the freedom in strategic and tactical solutions of the player its gameplay suggests. You can fully concentrate on tactics and take a deep analyse of the battlefield options, or you can play only on the strategic level, leading your heroes to victory - or you can keep in mind both in any proportion you like. Because of its depth on both tactical and strategic levels, the gameplay of Heroes is very flexible providing each player with the opportunity to play “his own Heroes” the way he likes. Yet despite this complex structure the gameplay is also simple enough for anyone to understand it intuitively and to dive into this world. It really is the best strategy set in a fantasy world of all times! And we are keeping these best features of the series – even with all the innovations the game will be as comprehensible and addictive as the previous games of the series.

8. Could you explain us the process of designing the creatures in Heroes 5? What did you keep from the previous titles, how did you translate that into 3D, what was your objective when you created/adapted the new designs?

We wanted to populate new universe with some new creatures as well as keep there the creatures that made this world real due to their vivid personalities ☺ . We studied different forums to identify the creatures that gamers loved the most. These creatures are kept in the game. Some of the creatures from the previous games are kept in the new game but they have been “moved” to other towns (factions). And surely some new creatures have been added, kept in the traditions of each particular faction. All the creatures were redesigned from the very beginning in all the aspects. Since the graphic standards of Heroes of Might and Magic V are much higher than in the previous games, we drew new sketches even of the creatures that had been in the previous games of the series. Creating their new image we definitely kept in mind the way they had look before, plus the general style of the faction they belong to – plus the inner vision and inspiration of the artist, of course. We also developed new animations, new sounding and new effects for them. Many creatures have also got some new abilities, so there was some work for game designers too.

9. How do you tune the gameplay on a game of this scale (over 100 creatures, 200 skills, 40 spells...)?

Well, we have already had an experience of balancing some large scale games – Etherlords, despite its numerous creatures and spells and their rather complicated relations, has a very strong balance. Coming back to Heroes, I would say that we use standard mechanism of balancing – mathematics at first, then we implement it to the game, when we try everything over and over, when we use playtests and beta-tests to make sure we didn't miss anything. Plus there already are some balance schemes from the previous games of the series that can be a good base sometimes, too.

10. How will you handle the AI in the game?

I won't be able to give you the programming details, so I'll tell about handling the AI from the game designer's point of view. ☺ We studied thoroughly the AI of the previous games in the series, especially in the third and the fourth parts and took the best features from there. We also took as a base expert opinions, especially as one of our game designers had been a pro gamer of Heroes of Might and Magic having a huge experience of multiplayer gaming, so could give us very much valuable expert estimations.

Because of more tactical varieties the AI has to do much more analysis now. Say, you can point your griffins a cell they should aim at after some time, and should they meet an enemy's unit there when the time passes, they will make a big damage to it. However, if there's no enemy's unit there, it will be count as a miss and you'll waist your turn and effort. So you should really think deep to use this option to the fullest. The same goes for the AI as it has to analyse the present situation on the battlefield and possible ways of its farther development. Then it points the future aim to the griffins based on this analysis. This is just one of the examples of how analytical the new AI needs to be.