

One of the best puzzle RPGs gets another chance

The team over at Capy Games has a real knack for inventive takes on seemingly simple puzzle games. I first realized this when playing way back in 2009, and nowadays, I'm reminded of it whenever I squeeze in a few rounds of *Grindstone* on my phone. Tucked away in between those two releases was *Might & Magic: Clash of Heroes* – which originally debuted on the Nintendo DS – an often overlooked game that might just be the most engrossing puzzle RPG I've ever played. Now it has a new lease on life with a rerelease for modern platforms.

Clash of Heroes is a match-three game, but in practice, it's quite different from something like *Candy Crush* or even *Puzzle Quest*. Basically, the things you are matching are soldiers and other combat units, and matching them is how you do battle. The screen is divided into two halves – you on the bottom, your opponent on top – and you're presented with a grid full of different kinds of units that you can move around. Match three of the same type vertically, and they'll get ready to attack; match them up horizontally, and they'll create a defensive wall. The goal (usually) is to deplete your enemy's health by pushing your attacks through the warriors in front of them.

The game is turn-based, so you'll make a few moves before switching over to your opponent, like in a classic *Final Fantasy*-style RPG. The complexity ramps up pretty quickly. There are different types of units, all with unique styles of attacks, some of which take a few turns before they're unleashed. Success becomes a combination of making smart, efficient moves, and paying close attention to the timing of

your (and your opponent's) attacks. There are lots of games that have attempted to wed role-playing with puzzle-solving, but few have done so as seamlessly as *Clash of Heroes*.

It's also a game that constantly surprises you. There are all kinds of unique battles with tricky win conditions; in the first few hours, you'll have to prevent an ancient elven tree from being chopped down and defeat an army while not harming a particular unit. It keeps things fresh and challenging. There are also quests where the goal is to kill all of the enemy units in a single turn. It's like a sudoku puzzle, only in fantasy warfare form.

The new "definitive edition" was put together by Dotemu, the team behind some other recent retro revivals like *Streets of Rage 4* and *TMNT: Shredder's Revenge*, and is largely based on the beautiful console version that came out in 2012. The gameplay feels as good as I remember it, but there are some improved visuals and other quality-of-life tweaks, including a revamped online mode that I haven't tested yet.

All that said, while I love this game, there are some things you should be aware of before jumping in. For starters, the fantasy story is painfully boring. There are some fun bits of dialogue, but I always find myself racing through the cutscenes to get to the good stuff. I've played this game multiple times on multiple platforms, but I could barely tell you the story. Also: *Clash of Heroes* is hard. Some of the battles are very demanding, and it's easy to get in over your head, which often necessitates grinding through some of the "optional" missions. Of course, since the battles are the fun part, this isn't *too* annoying, but you should definitely be aware of the challenge ahead.

I'll admit that I miss how perfectly the game fit on the DS's dual screens (what a surprise), but that aside, this is an ideal port. There are a lot of reasons that *Clash of Heroes* was overlooked in the first place, not least of which is the

generic name and story. But those are easy to look past here: the new version looks incredible and, more importantly, offers the same satisfying mix of swords, sorcery, and puzzle-solving.

Might and Magic: Clash of Heroes *is out now on the Switch, Steam, and PS4.*

<https://www.theverge.com/2023/7/22/23803057/might-and-magic-clash-of-heroes-switch-steam-ps4>