

# Review: 'Hearthstone' card game is the real deal

April 24 2014, by Lou Kesten

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This video game image released by Blizzard Entertainment shows a scene from "Hearthstone: Heroes of Warcraft." (AP Photo/Blizzard Entertainment)

Video game publishers don't take many risks with their most popular franchises. You know exactly what you are going to get from a new "Call of Duty" or "Madden NFL" game—it will probably be pretty good, but won't offer any surprises.

That's part of what makes "Hearthstone: Heroes of Warcraft" (Blizzard Entertainment, for iPad, PC, Mac, free) such a delight. It couldn't be any

less like its parent, the massively multiplayer online role-playing behemoth "World of Warcraft." While "WoW" is sprawling, time-consuming and somewhat intimidating, "Hearthstone" is tightly focused, fast-paced and accessible to just about anyone.

Essentially, it's a one-on-one card duel. Each player is represented by a "hero," who has 30 health points and 30 cards. Most cards generate "minions," who can attack your opponent or defend your hero. Other cards allow you to directly attack enemies, make minions more powerful or recover lost health points. If you can whittle down the competition's health points to zero, you win.

It's a virtual version of a collectible card game like "Magic: The Gathering" or "Pokemon." Win a few games and you're rewarded with more powerful cards to add to your deck. The basic decks provided with the game are good enough for a few practice games, but you'll want to start building your own after you get crushed by online competitors.

And that's where "Hearthstone" leaps from a 15-minute diversion to an obsession. There are more than 450 cards available, some of which you have to create using a clever crafting system. There are nine different heroes—mages, warriors, rogues and so on—each of whom has cards only he or she can use. You'll want to spend time playing as each character and then, once you've picked a favorite, build the optimal 30-card deck.

If you're worried that your deck will never match up to that of a "Hearthstone" veteran, try visiting the Arena. There, each player is forced to assemble a fresh deck from randomly selected cards, adding a bit more luck to the equation.

"Hearthstone" has been available for a few months on PC and Mac, but the just-released iPad version shines particularly bright. The illustrations

on the cards are gorgeous, and the animations and sound effects are elegant and effective. It's a beautifully executed labor of love from a company that usually works on a much bigger canvas.

And it's free. Yes, you'll need to spend some money if you expect to track down some of the more rare [cards](#), but you can expect dozens of hours of enjoyment from "Hearthstone" without investing one cent. Three-and-a-half stars out of four.

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"Hitman Go" (Square Enix, for iPad, \$4.99) takes another AAA series in an unexpected direction, transforming the violent assassination thriller into a battle of wits.

Agent 47, the cold-blooded killer from the "Hitman" franchise, has been transformed into a board-game token, and each of his missions is now a series of a dozen or so logic mazes. If any of the guards stationed around the maze sees 47, he gets knocked off the board—though if you approach a guard from behind or from either side, you can knock him off.

Whenever 47 moves, the guards move, too, so you need to figure out their patterns to escape each level. As the puzzles get more complex, new tools are introduced: You can hide behind bushes, throw rocks to distract guards or hide in secret passages.

It's a satisfying package of deviously designed brainteasers that will even appeal to players who can't stomach the gore in a regular "Hitman" game. Three stars out of four.

**More information:** [us.battle.net/hearthstone/en/hitman.com/launching-hitman-go/](http://us.battle.net/hearthstone/en/hitman.com/launching-hitman-go/)

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