

Civilization V is the latest entry in the turn-based strategy franchise that began over 20 years ago. Now comes the expansion, Sid Meier's *Civilization V: Gods & Kings*. *Civ V* had some sharp critics when it was released due to several major changes over the previous edition. However, it was still a good game. The Gods & Kings expansion, however, makes it an incredibly solid one.

Several marquee features of the game include nine new civilizations (including the ancient Celts, Carthage, the Maya, and Sweden), new Wonders, new units, three new scenarios, an overhauled diplomacy system (including new espionage mechanics), and a longtime fan request, religion. Truth is, both religion and espionage were featured as part of Civilization IV but these two systems were not as developed as in Gods & Kings. Graphics are the same as *Civ V*, but the new introduction is beautifully created.

Gameplay in single player mode consists of choosing from the now 30+ civilizations available, each with its own pros and cons. It's then your job to explore, establish your cities, grow them, research new technology, and ultimately, expand. Of course, others have the same goal, so you'll need to stay on your toes!

Your Friendly Neighborhood Spy Network

Given that you'll interact with your neighbors and other civs at one point or another, the diplomacy system is important. The way the developers at Firaxis have improved the system has increased its depth dramatically. There are more choices under the diplomacy offerings when talking to other nations. Before, you were mostly limited to trade, open borders, and of course, declaring war. Now, you can begin with embassies, use the expanded trade menu, make public declarations of friendship, those open borders pacts, war, and more. Plus, once any civilization enters the Renaissance period, you start earning spies. Spies are assigned in three different ways. Infiltration missions let you try to steal technology from other civs, as well as learn their plans. Counterintelligence lets you place a spy to one of your own cities to prevent your own technology from being stolen. Buildings such as the new Police Station boost your city's protection from enemy agents. The third option is to insert your spies into the governments of city-states to potentially rig elections and win you allies.

City-States Are Important This Time Around

In Civilization V, city-states were independent cities you could gain influence over, conquer, or use as allies in war. They were easy to ignore and were easily bought off by a wealthy player. Now, city-states offer quests that encourage civs to compete to win influence over them, while offering them gold doesn't go as far. Two new city-state types further integrate them into the game. Mercantile types are the only source of new luxury resources porcelain and jewelry. Religious city-states offer the game's newest Yield: Faith.

Your God or Mine?

The game's Religion system is a highlight. Civilizations may build a pantheon early, selecting a benefit to their civ. Later, civs may found their own religions, choosing from a list including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Shinto, and Buddhism. But be quick about it – the number of religions that may be

founded is always lower than the number of civs per game. All of these decisions, as well as the religious buildings and units like missionaries or inquisitors cost Faith. It's up to you how much impact religion will have on your civilization – to a point. Other civs can exert pressure or even force conversion upon your citizens! As in real-life, religion can be a thorny issue.

Of the new scenarios, the Steampunk-inspired Empire of the Smoky Skies stands out.

As a whole, the Gods & Kings expansion for *Sid Meier's Civilization V* really enriches the gameplay. While the original game was good, everything from the combat improvements, new Great Person rules, major systems like Religion, and expanded diplomacy just make it that much better. If you are a strategy or Civilization fan, even one of the skeptics that were a little disappointed in Civilization V's original release, this is a must buy.