Don’t Blow It!
The Civilization Series: How to Maintain a Successful Franchise

Q: Who am I?
- Programmer/Designer, Firaxis Games
- Academic background in user interface design and artificial intelligence
- Franchise experience
  - Civilization III: Co-Designer, Lead Game/Al Programmer
  - Civilization IV: Project Lead, Lead Designer
Franchises: Who needs ‘em?

- Regular profits
- Minimal risk
- Loyal fan-base
- Free marketing
- Publisher support

Don’t believe me?

2003 Top 10 Console
1. Madden NFL
2. Pokemon Ruby
3. Pokemon Sapphire
4. Need for Speed: Underground
5. Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker
6. Grand Theft Auto: Vice City
7. Mario Kart: Double Dash
8. Tony Hawk’s Underground
9. Enter the Matrix
10. Medal Honor Rising

2003 Top 10 PC
1. Sims Superstar
2. Sims Deluxe
3. C&C: Generals
4. Warcraft III
5. Sims Makin’ Magic
6. Sims Unleashed
7. Sim City 4
8. Call of Duty
9. Age of Mythology
10. Battlefield 1942
Different Challenges

Creating…
- Convince your publisher
- Find fresh design space
- Build an audience
- Fight for marketing

Why should I take a risk on Potential Franchise?

Maintaining…
- Handle publisher pressure
- Keep veterans happy
- Add killer improvements
- Fight cynicism/fatigue

Why should I buy the new version of Established Franchise?

Not all franchises the same
Release frequency

Innovation focus
The Franchise Universe

Technical

MADDEN 2004

DOOM

Short

Long

Gameplay

The Franchise Universe

Technical

MADDEN 2004

DOOM

Short

Long

Gameplay

FINAL FANTASY
Short-cycle updates

- Episodic content
  - Updated rosters
  - Continued storyline
  - Level tread-milling

Technology-based updates

- Same game but new experience
  - Next-generation consoles
  - 3D graphics
  - Integrated multiplayer
  - Fan content

However...
Maintain your gameplay regardless of technology

Still jumping…

Still exploring…

The Civilization Franchise

- Long-cycle updates (3-4 years)
- Focus on gameplay innovation
- Continued commercial and critical success
  - 1+ million units per iteration
- Enormous, rabid fan base
  - 200,000-word “official” suggestion list from our fans for Civilization III
A History of *Civilization*

- **Civilization I** (1991)
  - Classic “god game”
  - Simple, turn-based game mechanics
- **Civilization II** (1996)
  - More units, buildings, technologies, etc.
  - Isometric view
  - More complexity (hit points, trade system)
  - Multiplayer
  - Map/events editor

A History of *Civilization*

- **Alpha Centauri** (1999)
  - Sci-fi setting allowed short-cycle update
  - Even more complexity (unit workshop, faction traits, social engineering)
- **Civilization III** (2001)
  - New design vectors (culture, resources)
  - Simplified mechanics
  - Flexible diplomacy (bargaining table)
  - Rules editor
  - Unit animations
The Franchise Universe

Lessons from Civilization

- Find fresh blood
  - Rotating design responsibilities
  - Fight team fatigue
  - New eyes substitute for new fans
- Kill “unfun” elements
- Simplify, simplify, simplify
- Design orthogonally
- Choose a focus
- “Borrow” from your competition
- Go back to the beginning
Lessons from *Civilization*

- Find fresh blood
- Kill “unfun” elements
  - Zones-of-control trapping units
  - Senate overriding user decisions
  - Spending limits
- Simplify, simplify, simplify
- Design orthogonally
- Choose a focus
- “Borrow” from your competition
- Go back to the beginning

Lessons from *Civilization*

- Find fresh blood
- Kill “unfun” elements
- Simplify, simplify, simplify
  - “Countable” hit points
  - Automatic trade routes
  - Global unit support
- Design orthogonally
- Choose a focus
- “Borrow” from your competition
- Go back to the beginning
Lessons from *Civilization*

- Find fresh blood
- Kill “unfun” elements
- Simplify, simplify, simplify
- Design orthogonally
  - Culture determines borders
  - Strategic resources (i.e. Chariots requires Horses)
  - Luxuries provide happiness
- Choose a focus
- “Borrow” from your competition
- Go back to the beginning

Lessons from *Civilization*

- Find fresh blood
- Kill “unfun” elements
- Simplify, simplify, simplify
- Design orthogonally
  - Improved the single-player, random-map experience by focusing on the world generator and artificial intelligence
- “Borrow” from your competition
- Go back to the beginning
Lessons from Civilization

- Find fresh blood
- Kill “unfun” elements
- Simplify, simplify, simplify
- Design orthogonally
- Choose a focus
- “Borrow” from your competition
  - Distinct civilizations (unique units and abilities)
  - Multi-unit forces (armies)
- Go back to the beginning

Lessons from Civilization

- Find fresh blood
- Kill “unfun” elements
- Simplify, simplify, simplify
- Design orthogonally
- Choose a focus
- “Borrow” from your competition
- Go back to the beginning
  - Humor and light-heartedness of Civ I
  - Replay system
Civilization I Fanbase

Civilization II Fanbase
**Alpha Centauri Fanbase**

Civ II

SMAC

**Wishful thinking??**

Civ II

Civ III
Civilization III Fanbase

Why the Ven diagram?

- To keep a franchise alive, adjust the target audience
- Hard-core fans usually want more complexity and options
  - Shrinking flight simulator market
  - Manuals got bigger and sales got smaller
More is not always better

Civilization and its discontents

Our mistakes...
- Not starting engine from scratch
- Too much design simplification
- Ignoring user interface legacy
- Trying to improve everything
Case Study

- Make old fans comfortable
  - Camera controls
  - Isometric view
  - Interface continuity

- When do graphics dictate gameplay?
  - *Age of Mythology*: adapt 3D to classic gameplay, graphical effects spawn god powers
  - *Warcraft III*: focus on “small” game (heroes, severe unit limits, special items)

Transitioning to 3D
Unit Counts

- Age of Kings - 38
- Age of Myth – 108
- Starcraft – 36
- Warcraft III - 60

- Age of Kings
  - 24 Generic
  - 14 Unique

- Age of Myth
  - 47 Greek
  - 32 Egyptian
  - 29 Norse

- Starcraft
  - 12 Terran
  - 13 Zerg
  - 11 Protoss

- Warcraft III
  - 15 Human
  - 15 Orc
  - 15 Elves
  - 15 Undead
Unit Counts

- **Age of Kings** - 38
  - 24 Generic
  - 14 Unique
- **Age of Myth** – 108
  - 47 Greek
    - 21 Human
    - 13 Heroes
    - 13 Myth
  - 32 Egyptian
  - 29 Norse
- **Starcraft** – 36
  - 12 Terran
  - 13 Zerg
  - 11 Protoss
- **Warcraft III** - 60
  - 15 Human
    - 12 Regular
    - 3 Heroes
  - 15 Orc
  - 15 Elves
  - 15 Undead

Age of Kings Unit Relationships
Rock-Paper-Scissors

<Designer RANT>

It’s a TERRIBLE game!!!
Rock-Paper-Scissors 2.0

- Victory with...
  - Rock = 2 points
  - Paper = 5 points
  - Scissors = 10 points
- Winner has most points after 10 rounds

Asymmetrical Rewards

- *Age of Kings*
  - Knights are strong and fast
  - Pikemen are cheap
  - Archers can garrison
Age of Kings Unit Relationships

Age of Mythology: Greek Human Relationships
**Age of Mythology:**
Greek Unit Relationships

**Age of Mythology:**
Greek God Relationships
Age of Mythology

- Greeks
- Egyptians
- Norse

Case Study

- **Age of Mythology**
  - Runaway design complexity
  - Aggressively maintain traditions (same font)
  - New fighting with old
  - Killer feature: god powers

- **Warcraft III**
  - Sustain complexity level
  - Changed player’s focus
  - Embraces per-unit tactics
  - Killer feature: heroes
Jumping Genres? (Good)

- Role-playing to turn-based strategy
- Mixes hero leveling with *Civilization*-style mechanics
- Similar fan-bases
- Genuinely new gameplay!

Jumping Genres? (Bad)

- Turn-based tactics to first-person shooter
- Seems appropriate for subject matter
- Genres at odds with each other
- Genuinely old cynicism!
**Civilization IV**

- Drop unfun legacy (pollution, rioting, maintenance, corruption/waste)
- Modern interface/help conventions
- Continuous, immersive 3D world (what-you-see-is-what-you-get)
- New design vectors (religion, civics)
- RPG elements (unit upgrades/experience)
- Coding from scratch (multiplayer, mod-friendly)
- Can still take over the world!

**The Point**

If you put something in, take something out!
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Questions?

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