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<u>History Has Never Been So Addictive</u>:

The Legacy of Sid Meier and the Civilization Series

"In the beginning, the earth was without form, and void. But the sun shone upon the sleeping Earth, and deep inside the brittle crust, massive forces waited to be unleashed. The seas parted and great continents were formed. The continents shifted, mountains arose. Earthquakes spawned massive tidal waves. Volcanoes erupted and spewed forth fiery lava, and charged the atmosphere with strange gases. Into this swirling maelstrom of Fire and Air and Water, the first stirrings of life appeared: tiny organisms, cells, and amoeba, clinging to tiny sheltered habitats. But the seeds of life grew, and strengthened, and spread, and diversified, and prospered, and soon every continent and climate teemed with Life. And with life came instinct, and specialization, natural selection, Reptiles, Dinosaurs, and Mammals, and finally there evolved a species known as Man. And there appeared the first faint glimmers of Intelligence. The fruits of intelligence were many: fire, tools, and weapons; the hunt, farming, and sharing of food; the family, the village, and the tribe. Now it required but one more ingredient: a great Leader, to unite the quarreling tribes, to harness the power of the land, to build a legacy

that would stand the test of time: a Civilization."[1] This man, this leader, this God of sorts

is Sid Meier, and his legacy is Civilization, the computer game series.

Sid Meier's Civilization series of computer games has left a mark on the

computer gaming world that will surely never die. Record-setting sales, coupled with a

growing cult of avid Civilization fans throughout the world, this series of games has

transcended the norms of the computer game business, technology, and culture. The

October 2001 release of the latest installment in the Civilization series was highly

anticipated by a generation of Civ[2] loyalists, but to Sid Meier, and the few who have been

involved with this series since the beginning, the release was just another chapter in the

storied history of this computer game. To fully understand the background and the

history of these games, one must undoubtedly begin with the history and background of

Sid Meier, whose name is synonymous with the title Civilization.

Sid Meier Prior to Civilization:

In the early 1980's, Sid Meier teamed up with Bill Stealey, a colleague of his at the

General Instrument Corporation,[3] and the two "scrapped up $1500 in start-up cash and

formed Microprose."[4] As a former jet fighter pilot, Bill was somewhat amazed and

jealous at how well Sid performed in Fighter arcade games. According to Sid, the secret

to his success was the relatively primitive quality of the AI[5] of the enemies in the games,

therefore allowing him to easily figure out how these enemies would act. Sid was

convinced that he could create a more challenging game, with better enemy AI. He

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[1] Introduction video to Civilization I
[2] This paper will occasionally refer to the Civilization series as Civ for simplicity.
[3] http://www.civfanatics.com/sidlegacy/index.shtml.
[4] http://www.joabj.com/stories/meier.html.
[5] AI = artificial intelligence

subsequently convinced Bill to join him in his computer gaming endeavor. Sid would handle the design aspect of the games, and Bill would take care of the business side.

In 1984, Sid completed the design of Microprose's first game: Solo Flight. Although primitive in design, Sid accomplished what he had set out to do, and that was to create a flight game, with improved enemy AI. Bill's Air Force background, along with the personal success of Solo Flight, prompted Sid to follow up the game, with another flight simulation game. Later in the same year, Microprose released Hellcat Ace, and in 1988, they released F-19 Stealth Fighter. These fighter jet games were the beginning of an evident trend for Microprose towards the flight war simulation and strategy war game market of the gaming industry. The early years of Microprose were marked almost entirely by war games. Their first big hit was a World War II submarine simulation game released in 1985 entitled Silent Service. This was followed by an Avalon hill inspired war game called NATO Division Commander, and subsequent Microprose titles included: Conflict in Vietnam (1985), Crusade in Europe and Decision in the Desert (1985), Pirates (1987), and Red Storm Rising (1987). In approximately three years, Microprose had built itself into a respectable computer gaming company, and by 1990 they had racked up several hit games. 1990 marked a transition period for Microprose, as Sid and his design and programming team decided to stray a bit from their trademark war simulations, to enter the real-time and turn-based strategy market. This transition was to become the birthplace of the gaming industry legacy of Civilization.

The Dawn of Civilization:

At the University of Michigan, Sid Meier majored in History and Computer Science, and his younger days, he had been a avid fan of board games. In his own words he stated that "when [he] was young, [he] played all sorts of family games such as Monopoly and Candyland [but] when [he] got a little older, [he] got involved in the military board games from Avalon Hill."[6] One of these Avalon Hill games was a game entitled Civilization. It was a multi-player board game, set upon a map of the Mediterranean Sea and its surrounding land. The objective of the game was as follows:

> "Each player starts with a single population token on the board and, over the course of the game, will add and expand to make, wishfully, the greatest civilization. As each nation grows, adding more and more population to the board, players can build cities in regions they control, and embark on trade with other players for any of 11 commodities such as iron, grain and bronze. Along with trade come eight calamities as well, such as volcanoes, famine and civil war, which destroy population and cities. With their acquired wealth, empires can buy civilization advances for themselves. There are 16 of these ranging from lowly pottery and mysticism up to the lofty democracy and philosophy. These advances allow one to move up the archaeological succession table to, ultimately, victory."[7]

Those familiar with the Civilization games can undeniably notice similarities between the Avalon Hill board game and the computer games, and from the game-play and design characteristics of the board game, the transition from a tabletop setting to a computer one

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[6] http://www.joabj.com/stories/meier.html.
[7] http://www.lilback.com/civilization/

was inevitable. Sid Meier conceptualized the game for a PC platform, and in 1991, the original version was released.

Designing Civilization:

With the inspiration set, Sid Meier and the Microprose team (which included Avalon Hill game designer Bruce Shelley) turned to the computer gaming world for models and inspirations for the upcoming Civilization computer game. In 1989, Maxis had released to great success the first installment in its Sim series, SimCity. As a big fan of this game, Sid, envisioned Civilization as a similar Strategy/Managerial genre of game. SimCity however, in his mind, was more of a time-passing tool or hobby than a real game. Sid "thought that for him to feel comfortable doing something similar, the end product would have to be more of a game and less of a "software toy" that had no real ending."[8] In 1990, using the Will Wright's SimCity model, Sid and Bruce Shelley released Railroad Tycoon, and the following year, having used this latest release as a sort of tune-up or practice, they released Civilization. The end product was a conglomerate of all that had inspired him. In his own words, Sid said:

> "SimCity inspired Civilization in a way. The first prototype of Civilization that I did was a real-time game like SimCity, in that you placed cities and moved things around, but cities grew without you. You basically seeded the world in a kind of SimCity-esque way. Instead of zoning, you seeded things, and you said I want a city over there, and why don't you do some farming over here. What I didn't like in that version of Civilization is that you did a lot more watching than you did playing. So

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[8] http://www.civfanatics.com/sidlegacy/index2.shtml

SimCity, Empire, Railroad Tycoon, and the Civilization board game were the different ingredients that we stirred together to get to Civilization."[9]

The design team for Civilization consisted of Sid Meier and Bruce Shelley, while Sid did the majority of the programming. The original game was designed for the PC on the DOS platform, but would later expand to include Macs. Either way, the game had tremendous success and mass appeal as it sold close to one million copies in record time. This was remarkable considering the concept of the game drew from a pre-existing board game and the design aspects were borrowed as well. It was the bringing together of these aspects and the release of it in PC form that propelled it to greatness. As with SimCity, the graphics were relatively simple, using a square grid map, and block units. The layout of the game itself, as well as the game-play felt almost like a board game, as you would move your units, space by space on the gridded map, in a turn-based format.

A. (Screenshot from of map view from Original Civ)[10]

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[9] http://www.civfanatics.com/sidlegacy/index2.shtml

[10] http://apolyton.net/civ1/images/screenshots/show.shtml?athrivingciv.jpg.

B. (Screenshot of City Status Window from Original Civ)[11]

In what would became the trademark design for Sid Meier, what the original civilization brought forth was an emphasis on playability, human involvement in the game, and human thinking, as opposed to strictly aesthetically pleasing graphics and quick-finger controls. Sid Meier's main focus in creating this game was the human player. In order to appeal to a mass audience, the game needed to have a multitude of settings options, and well as game-play options so that anyone of any age or skill level could enjoy the game.   Civilization fit this mold. Among the array of options were different skill levels and randomized maps that could be customized to different sizes and different climate and terrain settings. The diplomacy aspect of the game was also an intriguing element for it showcased Sid's knack for advanced computer AI. As a player, you were responsible for all aspects of running an empire, from financial management to

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[11] http://apolyton.net/civ1/images/screenshots/show.shtml?cityscreen.jpg

military actions, and from long-range planning to diplomacy and social management in case of civil disorders.

The concept of the game was simple. At the beginning, you pick which civilization you want to be, or you can customize your own. You then select either a randomized map or Earth as the setting of the game. The game commences in the year 4000 BC, with one settler. The map is yet to be revealed, and thus, with your one unit, you move around space by space until you reveal more of the map and eventually find a suitable location for you first city. Once your city is built, you can start managing the production in that city. By clicking on the city icon in the map view (screenshot A), you reveal the City Status Window (screenshot B). This window allows you to control what the city produces, whether it be a structural improvement such as a temple or marketplace, a great wonder such as the Pyramids, or a domestic or military unit such as more settlers or a warrior. Structural additions to cities improve the quality of life for your empire by making citizens happy or increasing government revenue, and military and domestic units allow you to explore the world, expand you empire, and conquer your opponents. What appealed to gamers was this God-like stature of the player. You controlled everything from city dynamics to world wars. It was SimCity on a world scale. Players could create and recreate history in any way they wanted, and this historical realism and easy playability made the game highly addictive.

The Sequels Begin:

What the original civilization lacked, if anything was a mutli-player element. Microprose answered consumer cries with the 1995 release of CivNet. While maintaining the same graphical primitivism as civilization, CivNet allowed its players to play networked multi-player games. The problem however, was that by 1995, the simple EGA look of Civilization had been far-outdated by new strategy games such as Operation Crusader and Panzer General. These games "led the way to SVGA graphics for strategy games"[12] The release of CivNet was criticized by many also as a shameless business tool aimed at maximizing the profits of the original Civ, as Civ II was in production. This does appear to have been the case, since CivNet was released "a mere four months before Sid Meier's Civilization II, without letting anyone know of the latter game's impending release until after the sales curve of CivNet had flattened."[13] This event seemed to mark the beginning of Civilization: the moneymaking business machine, rather than Civilization: the loyal fan's game.

Drawing from graphical advances in strategy games and player feedback, Microprose officially released Civilization II in 1997. Commenting on the new game, Sid Meier said:

> "It had never, even initially, been a technological marvel. The feeling was
> that we could do a significantly better job with presentation. We also had
> gotten so much play out of Civ. People had come up with new ideas. We
> had come up with ideas. So between better graphics and adding some of
> these game-play things that people had come up with and we had come up
> with, there was really a need for a new game."[14]

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[12] http://www.civfanatics.com/sidlegacy/index2.shtml.
[13] http://www.civfanatics.com/sidlegacy/index2.shtml.
[14] http://www.civfanatics.com/sidlegacy/index2.shtml.

Although Sid had been involved in almost every aspect of the creation of the original civilization, his involvement in the production of Civ II was limited. The Design team was led by Jeffrey Briggs, Douglas Kaufman, and Brian Reynolds. Briggs had prior civilization experience as the sound man for the original Civ, and Reynolds was also somewhat of a Microprose veteran having programmed some of the companies less notable titles such as "Rex Nebular and the Cosmic Gender Bender" and "Return of the Phantom."[15]

As far as the game-play itself, Microprose would have been foolish to change much of what had made the original Civ a great success. Sid Meier's greatest contribution to the gaming industry is his emphasis on playability rather than technological impressiveness. Given an interesting storyline, sleek control interface and playability are enough to keep satisfy customers. Adhering to this philosophy, Civ II maintained a similar content, interface, and playability to that of its predecessor. Although the greatest change was in terms of graphics and aesthetics, the content, including elements such diplomacy, trade, and AI were also improved, and these remained the core of the game. According to Sid Meier, "Civ II was a chance to go back to Civ and polish and finish up a lot of things."[16] Civilization II was in essence Civilization with better graphics and music. It went from the simple square-grid format of the original to the more isometric view of Civilization II. This gave the game a more updated modern look, as a well as a more realistic map to play on.

[15] Brian Reynolds interview: http://pc.ign.com/articles/075/075111p1.html.
[16] http://www.civfanatics.com/sidlegacy/index2.shtml.

C. (Screenshot of map view from Civ II)[17]

D. (Screenshot of City Screen from Civ II)[18]

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[17] http://www.civfanatics.com/cgi-bin/autoimage.cgi?/images/front20.gif.
[18] http://www.civfanatics.com/cgi-bin/autoimage.cgi?/images/city.gif.

The latest installment in the Civilization series is Civ III, which was released in late 2001. With Microprose no longer in existence, Civ III marked the continuation of the Civ series as part of Sid Meier's new company Firaxis. Firaxis was created by Sid along with Civ II and Civ III lead designer Jeffrey Briggs. The change of company name however did not entail a change of expectations for the newest Civ game. With Civ III the basics once again remained the same. However, an array of improvements was made to both the content and the interface of the game. Diplomacy and trade interactions with computer opponents were vastly improved, as work was once again done on the AI of the game, and a cultural element to the game was also added, allowing players to win the game by having the most dominant culture. In the true style of Sid Meier, the main focuses of improvement were in terms of content and playability. The map view of the game is more advanced, clearly showing a player what all their options are, and the game as a whole was made to be easy to play.
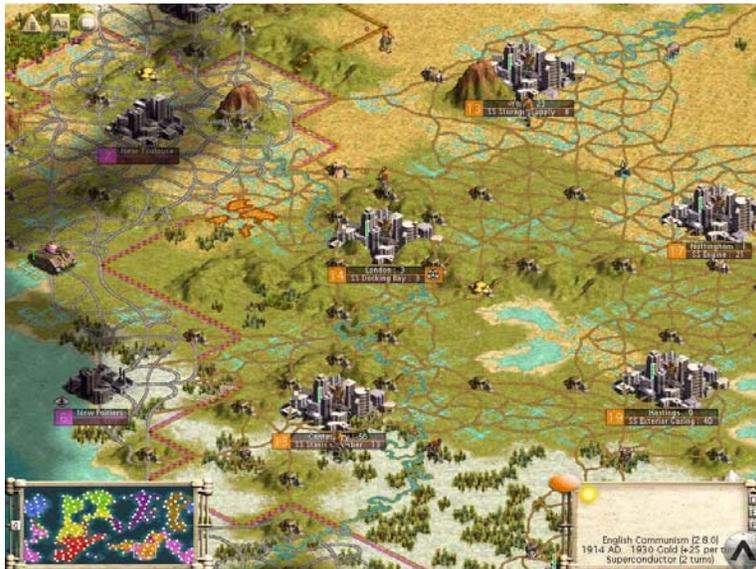
E. (Screenshot of map view from Civ III)[19]

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[19] http://www.civfanatics.com/civ3images/gallery1/screenshot37.shtml.

F. (Screenshot of City Screen from Civ III)[20]

The Impact of Civilization on the Gaming World:

The legacy that Sid Meier created with the original civilization, is truly, as the introduction video to the original Civ game states, one that "will stand the test of time."[21] The civilization series has had a tremendous impact on the computer gaming world. Selling millions of units of its games, it turned Microprose from a two-man basement company, to a multi-million dollar enterprise. Civilization started as a game, but grew into a business on the production side and a cult on the playing side. With the success of the original Civ, other companies quickly entered the Civ market trying to get a piece of the action. The most notable of these confrontations came in 1998, when Microprose, Avalon Hill, and Activision got into a legal battle over naming rights of the Civilization trademark. Sid Meier's Civilization had been inspired by Avalon Hill's board game and

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[20] http://www.civfanatics.com/civ3images/gallery1/screenshot20.shtml.
[21] Introduction video to Civilization I

Microprose was first to market the computer game. However, after the release of Civ II, "Microprose learned that Activision had reportedly received a license from Avalon Hill to produce games under the original Civilization name. In response, Microprose bought Hartland Trefoil, Ltd., the original creator of Avalon Hill's board game in the United Kingdom."[22]

The lawsuit ended with Microprose winning all the rights to the Civilization name and series. Microprose subsequently granted Activision a license to produce its own Civilization game, meaning that the end result was that both could create their games, but Microprose would get more money. Activision, however, was not completely at loss. They released Civilization: Call to Power in 1999 and Call to Power II in 2000 and both games were extremely well received by the gaming world. Activision had created its own profitable Civ legacy, although not as lucrative as Microprose's. Civilization spawned imitations and sequels galore and to date is impacted the computer gaming business like few others. With a cult following amongst its loyal fans the Civilization series is eternally destined for continued success. It is without doubt that Firaxis will eventually release more sequels to Civ, and furthermore it without doubt that more companies will try to imitate what succeeded in Civ. Although today's gaming market is flooded with high-tech graphic, quick-finger control, first-person shooter games, Sid Meier proved that game-play is what matters most, and until sales show otherwise his success will continue.

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[22] Stephenson, Scott, "Civilization: Sid Meier's Legacy," p.6

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