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Choosing a Game

Out of the many strategy PC games that populate physical store shelves around the globe and the digital shelves of the internet, the *Civilization* series is considered one of the pioneers of the genre (Bates 57). According to Edwards' "History of Civilization", the first game in the series, *Civilization*, was released in 1991 despite the fact that its publisher, Microprose, had pushed back continually on the project because of the revolutionary nature of the game with respect to other strategy games of its day. Since I didn't happen to have any of the revolutionary series on my personal bookshelf, I decided it was time to go out and grab myself a copy of *Civilization III* and *Civilization IV*. If time allows, I may also try to get a copy of *Civilization* and *Civilization I* so I can compare the entire series, but since each play-session can take quite a few hours, I'm sticking to the most recent two for the time being.

The main reason I will be looking at multiple Civ games and not just one is because I'm interested in seeing the changes, mainly in design, that happen between a series of games that still maintains much of its core material from installment to installment as opposed to some series of games like the *Zelda* series that, although they keep pretty much the same hero and have similar storylines (i.e. save the princess/save the world), changes areas, worlds, temples, etc. In essence, I'm interested in the "substance" of the game design mentioned by Sylvester as a crucial reason for the success of the game year after year and the changes it has undergone. Another reason I was interested in this series was simply because I've heard that it's good. Not only have I

had good reports from friends over the past couple of years, but the series has continually received high reader and press ratings (usually around 9/10) from IGN as well as GameSpot.

I've already found out about a few changes that I should be on the lookout from some friends who are fans of the series as well as from online reviews. The AI in *Civilization IV* has apparently been tweaked to deal with a few inconsistencies that were apparent in *Civilization III* (Rogosic; Tait; Gerbil; GameSpot). One of the funniest things I've been told by my friend John Rogosic to look for is the ability to take advantage of a quirk in *Civ III*'s AI by using tons of units to make, in essence, a living wall between other civilizations. Apparently a certain aspect of the AI in *Civ III*, but not in *Civ IV*, makes it impossible for the units to move around other units under certain conditions, so if you make enough units you can create your own wall (Rogosic). There was a general consensus among the people that I talked to, and among the reviews that I looked at, that the AI was improved from *Civ III* to *Civ IV* (Rogosic; Tait; Video Rev. of *Civilization IV*). Two other examples would be that the traits of individual units have been changed (can now get unit upgrades) and the moods of the leaders of the computer controlled characters is more complex and harder to manipulate (Rogosic; Tait; Video Rev. of *Civilization IV*). Another improved aspect of the game that my friend, Ryan Tait, was particularly excited about was the improvement of the cultural boundary that was first introduced in *Civilization III*. Another set of changes that could be interesting design-wise are the changes to the UI. Demonic Gerbil's review on GameFAQs notes the streamlining of the UI for *Civilization IV* was one of its major advantages.

Obviously the changes noted above are not the only changes that occurred between the two editions so I'm sure I'll find plenty more to amuse myself with. However, I can honestly say I'm going to have fun trying out John's human-wall technique.

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