GAME DESIGNERS VERSUS DESIGNERS OF GAMES

- "WHY DO YOU WANT TO BE A GAME DESIGNER?"
- WHEN I ASK **STUDENTS** THIS QUESTION, 9 OUT OF 10 GIVE THE **SAME** RESPONSE
  - "EVER SINCE I WAS A **SMALL CHILD**, I'VE **LOVED** PLAYING COMPUTER GAMES"
- EVER SINCE YOU WERE A SMALL CHILD, YOU'VE LOVED **LIVING** IN A **HOUSE** BUT YOU DON'T WANT TO BE AN **ARCHITECT**
- "I WANT TO **MAKE** GAMES"
  - SO, LIKE A **CONSTRUCTION WORKER** RATHER THAN AN ARCHITECT?

- AT THIS POINT, I **MAY** GET SOMETHING RESEMBLING AN ACTUAL **ANSWER**
- GAME DESIGN IS AN **ART** FORM
- GAME DESIGNERS ARE **CREATIVE** PEOPLE
- THEY **COULD** AND OFTEN **DO** CHOOSE TO BE CREATIVE IN **OTHER** MEDIA
  - THEY WRITE **STORIES**, COMPOSE **MUSIC**, PAINT **PAINTINGS**, WRITE **SCREENPLAYS**, ...
- SO WHY DO THEY PRIMARILY DESIGN **GAMES**?
- BECAUSE **GAMES** ARE THEIR PREFERRED **MEDIUM** OF **EXPRESSION**

- ARTISTS ARE TRYING TO **SAY** SOMETHING THROUGH THEIR WORK
  - TO THEMSELVES, OTHER PEOPLE OR **SOCIETY**
- GAMES ALLOW DESIGNERS TO **SAY** THINGS THEY **CAN'T** SAY ANY **OTHER** WAY
- THIS IS BECAUSE **GAMES** HAVE SOMETHING **NO OTHER** MEDIUM HAS
- THAT SOMETHING IS **GAMEPLAY**
  - DECISION PROCESSES IN CONTEXT

VICTORIA

Greetings. We are by the Grace of God, Victoria, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. And soon, dare I say, the empire.

- IT **CAN** BE ARGUED THAT GAME DESIGN IS NOT AN *ART* BUT A CRAFT

- DESIGNERS OF GAMES **CONSTRUCT** GAMEPLAY FROM **MECHANICS**

- IN **THIS** VIEW, DESIGNERS ARE NOT ARTISTS BUT **ENGINEERS** SOLVING **CONSTRAINT** PUZZLES
  - CREATE GAMEPLAY THAT'S **FUN**
  - DO SO WITHIN TIME, BUDGET, IP AND OTHER LIMITATIONS

- GAMES, THEN, ARE DESIGNED BY **TWO** KINDS OF PEOPLE

- **GAME DESIGNERS** DESIGN GAMES TO **SAY** SOMETHING THROUGH GAMEPLAY

- **DESIGNERS OF GAMES** DESIGN GAMES TO **SOLVE** THE PUZZLE OF CREATING GAMEPLAY

- **IDEALLY**, YOU WANT A GAME DESIGNER WHO IS **ALSO** A DESIGNER OF GAMES

- A GAME DESIGNER WHO **ISN'T** A GOOD DESIGNER OF GAMES WILL CREATE GAMES THAT:
  - HAVE SOME ARTISTIC **SPINE** TO THEM
  - ARE INCOMPLETE, INCOHERENT, INCONSISTENT AND GENERALLY **INARTICULATE**
- A DESIGNER OF GAMES WHO **ISN'T** A GOOD GAME DESIGN WILL CREATE GAMES THAT:
  - ARE **PLAYABLE**
  - ARE **SOULLESS**
    - SELF-CONSCIOUS **ART** GAMES FIT HERE
- FOR SOMEONE WHO IS **BOTH**, WHICH IS BEST?

- WELL, YOUR GAME-DESIGNER SELF SHOULD **RULE** OVER YOUR DESIGNER-OF-GAMES SELF
  - THE *ART* CAN BE DESTROYED BY THE CRAFT
  - THE CRAFT CAN'T BE DESTROYED BY THE *ART*
- TO **ILLUSTRATE** THIS, LET'S LOOK AT THE *CIVILIZATION* SERIES OF STRATEGY GAMES
- THE VIDEO GAME WAS DESIGNED BY **SID MEIER**
- IT WAS PARTIALLY INSPIRED BY A **BOARD** GAME DESIGNED BY **FRANCIS TRESHAM**
  - WHO DIED LAST MONTH, SADLY
- WHAT WERE THESE GAMES **ABOUT**?

- THIS WAS A GAME ABOUT **RISE** AND **FALL**
- EVEN THE MIGHTY ARE ONLY **FLEETINGLY** SO
  - VERY OZYMANDIAS
- IT DID THIS VERY **WELL**
- EVERY MAIN MECHANIC IMPLEMENTED TRANSIENT **POWER**

- THIS WAS ABOUT **REAPING** WHAT YOU **SOW**
- ACTIONS HAVE **LONG-TERM** CONSEQUENCES
  - "MIGHTY OAKS FROM LITTLE ACORNS GROW"
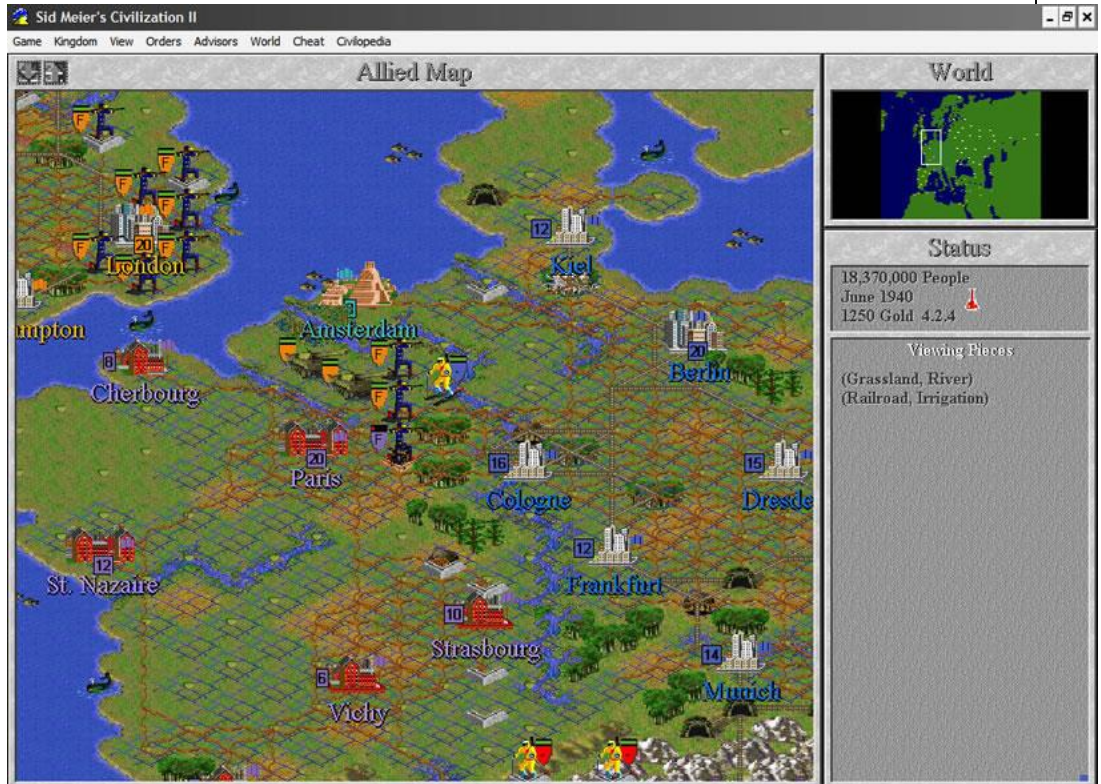
- THE GAME **DID** DEVELOP THIS MESSAGE **WELL** THROUGH ITS **CITY**-PLACEMENT MECHANIC

- HOWEVER, ITS **ACCOMPANYING** SYSTEMS INTERACTED WITH CITY PLACEMENT MESSILY TO INTRODUCE **DIFFERENT** GAMEPLAY

  – IT BECAME MORE ABOUT MOMENT-TO-**MOMENT** CHOICES RATHER THAN LONG-TERM **STRUGGLE**

- *CIVILIZATION* WAS FOLLOWED BY *COLONIZATION* IN 1994, BY SID MEIER AND BRIAN REYNOLDS

  – DYNAMIC DIFFICULTY ADJUSTMENT MADE ALL MAJOR CHOICES **POINTLESS**...

- REYNOLDS DESIGNED *CIV2* – **BETTER** THAN *CIVI*
- ITS CENTRAL MESSAGE WAS THE **SAME** AS *CIVI'S* BUT IT WAS CLEANED UP AND **AUGMENTED**
- PLAYERS WERE TEMPTED WITH SHORT-TERM **ACTIONS** HAVING LONG-TERM **EFFECTS**

Sid Meier's Civilization II

Game Kingdom View Orders Advisors World Cheat Civilopedia

Allied Map

World

Status

18,370,000 People
June 1940
1250 Gold 4.2.4

Viewing Pieces

(Grassland, River)
(Railroad, Irrigation)

London
Kiel
mpton
Amsterdam
Berlin
Cherbourg
Paris
Cologne
Dresde
St. Nazaire
Frankfurt
Strasbourg
Vichy
Munich

- CIV3 WENT **BACKWARDS**, WITH TOO MUCH **MICRO-MANAGEMENT** CAUSED BY A **CHANGE** TO THE MESSAGE

- CIV3 DID **RETAIN** THE REAP-WHAT-YOU-SOW ARTISTIC **BACKBONE**, BUT **INTERPRETED** IT **POLITICALLY**

- **POLLUTION** HIT HARD IN THE END GAME
  - AS DID OTHER NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

- YES, POLLUTION AND OVER-POPULATION **DID** HAPPEN BECAUSE OF **EARLIER** DECISIONS

- THE PROBLEM WAS, THESE DECISIONS WERE **UNAVOIDABLE**

- THE **POLITICS** DELIBERATELY BUILT INTO THE GAME'S SYSTEMS **REMOVED** PLAYER CHOICE

- CIV4 BOUNCED **BACK** BUT CONFLICTED ITS MESSAGE BY HAVING TOO MANY WAYS TO **WIN**

- THE **MAIN** DECISION WITH A **LASTING** CONSEQUENCE WAS WHOM TO HAVE AS YOUR **OPPONENTS**

  – AND WHICH **VICTORY** CONDITIONS TO TURN OFF...

  – AND **MAP**

- CIV5 WENT WITH **NEW** MECHANICS THAT ADDED **COMPLEXITY** BUT MUDDLED THE **MESSAGE**
- THE GAME BECAME MORE ABOUT **UNIT** PLACEMENT THAN **CITY** PLACEMENT
- IT **ALSO** HAD ISSUES TO DO WITH TOO MANY **ROUTES** TO VICTORY
- **SCALE** WAS COMPROMISED TOO

  – SEE MAP ->

- CIV6 DOUBLED **DOWN** ON CIV5'S GAMEPLAY
- COMPLEX INTERACTIONS BETWEEN MEANINGLESS, **SUPERFICIAL** SYSTEMS **REMOVED** ITS ARTISTIC SPINE
- TOO MUCH VARIANCE IN VICTORY CONDITIONS
- TOO FEW CITY TILE OPTIONS

- IN TERMS OF **DESIGN**, *CIV2* IS PROBABLY THE **BEST** VERSION, FOLLOWED BY *CIV4*

- *CIV5* AND *CIV6* FEEL LIKE THEY WERE MADE BY DESIGNERS **OF** GAMES, RATHER THAN BY GAME DESIGNERS

- THEY HAVE GOOD/DECENT GAMEPLAY, BUT THE GAMEPLAY HAS NO **SUBSTANCE** TO IT

- IF THE GAMES HAD **STUCK** TO THE MESSAGE OF **REAPING** WHAT YOU **SOW**, THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN **BETTER** GAMES

  – UNLESS THEY **OVERPLAYED** IT, LIKE *CIV3*

- GAME DESIGNERS HAVE SOMETHING TO **SAY**
- EVERY MAJOR DECISION IN THE GAME **FLOWS** FROM THIS
- BONUS: IT MAKES SOME DECISIONS **EASIER**
  - WHEN YOU'RE **STUCK**, YOU ASK YOURSELF "WHAT AM I **TRYING** TO SAY HERE?"
  - THE ANSWER WILL USUALLY **DROP** OUT OF THIS
- "I JUST WANT MY PLAYERS TO HAVE A **BLAST!**"
  - **WHY?**
  - IF YOU **KNOW** WHY, YOU CAN BETTER FOLLOW IT **THROUGH**

- THE **BEST** DESIGNERS **OF** GAMES ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST GAME **DESIGNERS**

- **WHY**, THEN, ARE SO MANY **MODERN** GAMES DESIGNED BY DESIGNERS **OF** GAMES WHO **AREN'T** GAME **DESIGNERS**?

- **TWO** REASONS...

- REASON 1: **MARKETING**
  - A GAME DOESN'T HAVE TO BE **GOOD** TO SUCCEED, JUST NOT SO **BAD** THAT IT'S EMBARRASSING
  - **DISCOVERABILITY** BEATS GAME DESIGN WHEN IT COMES TO PROFITABILITY

- REASON 2: **EXPENSE**
  - GAME DESIGNERS OFTEN WANT TO SAY SOMETHING **ORIGINAL**
  - **ORIGINAL** MEANS **RISKY**
  - **RISKY** MEANS **COULD-LOSE-ENTIRE-INVESTMENT**
  - THOSE COMPANIES THAT **HAVE** GIVEN BIG-NAME DESIGNERS ARTISTIC **FREEDOM** OFTEN REGRET IT
  - IT'S SAFER TO GO WITH KNOWN GAMEPLAY THAT YOU CAN **TRUST**

- GUILTY **SECRET**: MOST GAME DESIGNERS AND DESIGNERS OF GAMES AREN'T VERY **GOOD** AT IT
  - THEY'RE JUST FAR, **FAR** BETTER THAN NON-DESIGNERS
- **EVERY** GAME WILL BENEFIT FROM HAVING AN ARTISTIC **SPINE**
- FIGURE OUT WHAT THE GAME IS **ABOUT** AND **STICK** WITH IT
  - USE IT TO **INFORM** YOUR DECISIONS
- ARE **YOU** A GAME DESIGNER OR A DESIGNER OF GAMES OR **BOTH**?
- **WHY**?