



# Don't Blow It!

The *Civilization* Series: How to Maintain a Successful Franchise

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## Q: Who am I?

- Programmer/Designer, Firaxis Games
- Academic background in user interface design and artificial intelligence
- Franchise experience
  - *Knockout Kings 2000, 2001* (PSX): Programmer
  - *Civilization III*: Co-Designer, Lead Game/AI Programmer
  - *Civilization IV*: Project Lead, Lead Designer

A: Soren Johnson



## 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

### Maintaining...

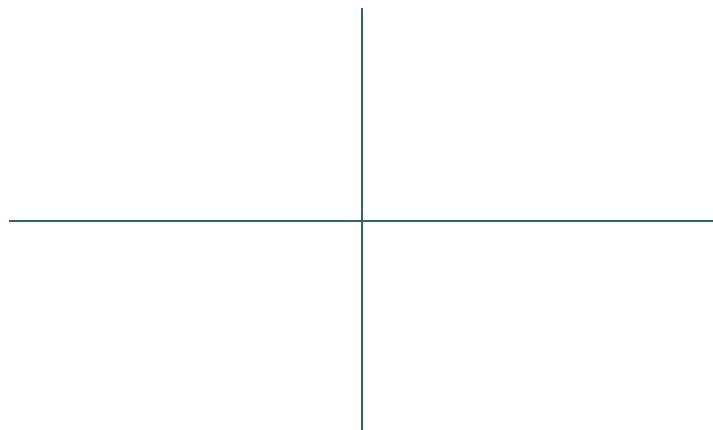
- Handle publisher pressure
- Keep veterans happy
- Add killer improvements
- Fight cynicism/fatigue

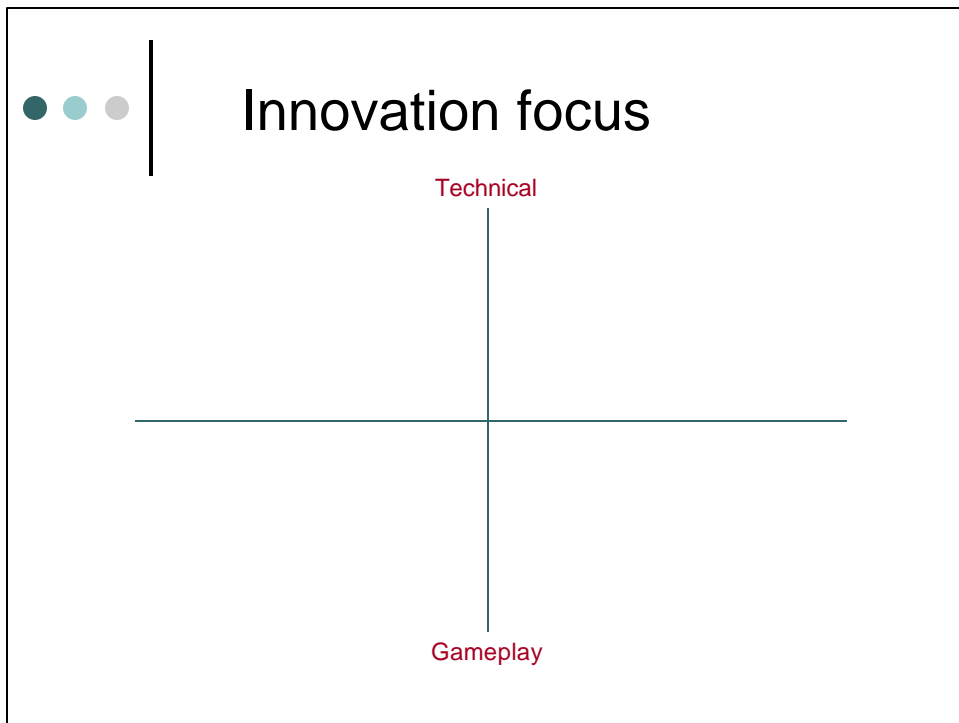
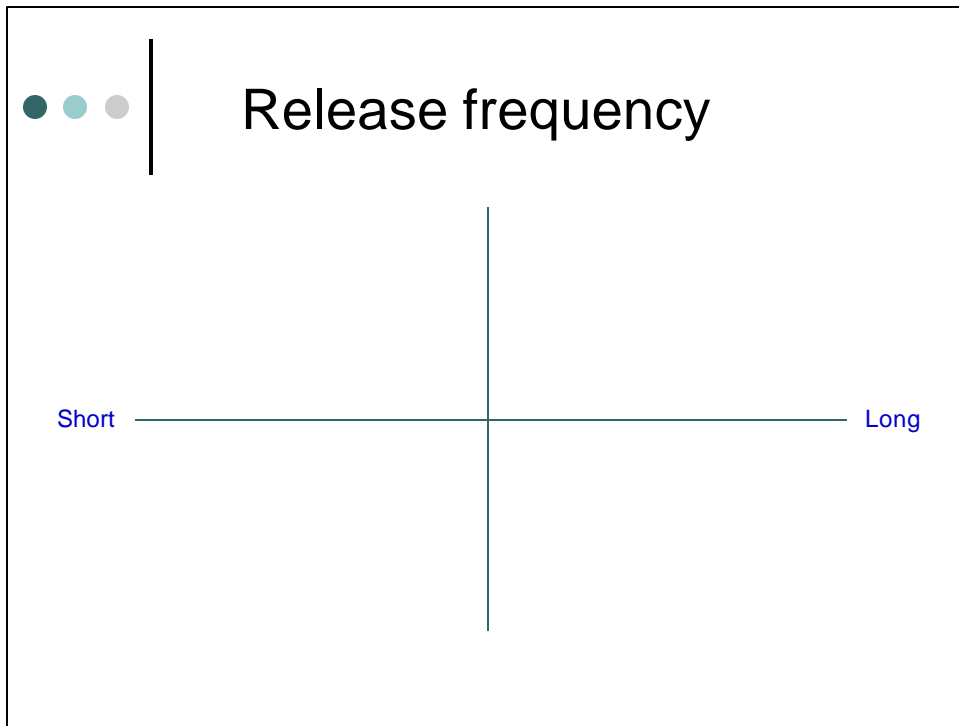
*Why should I take a risk on  
**Potential Franchise?***

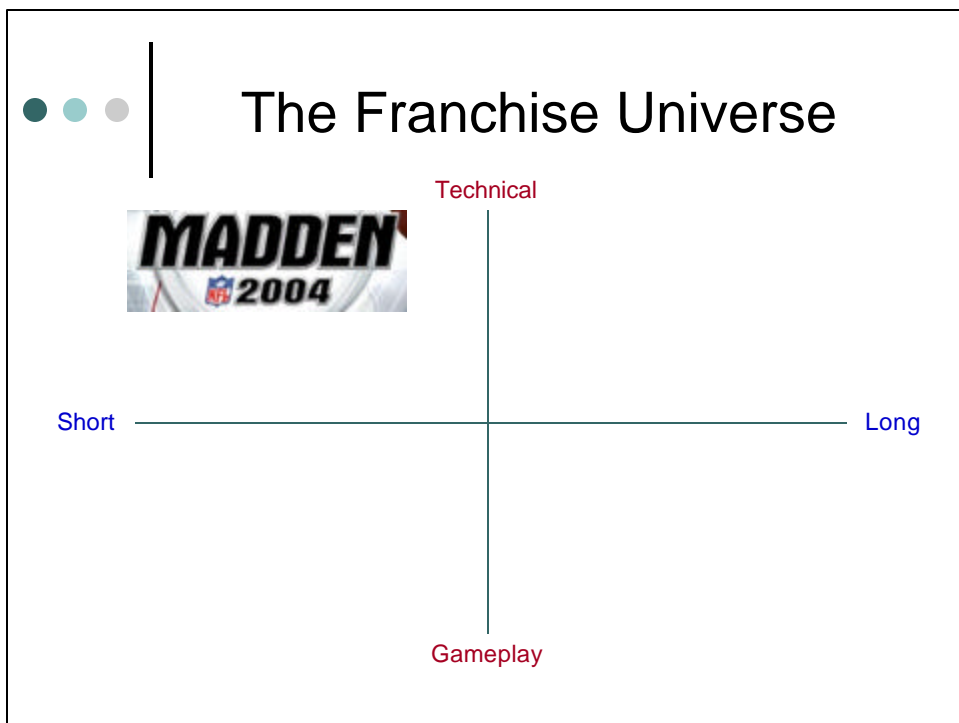
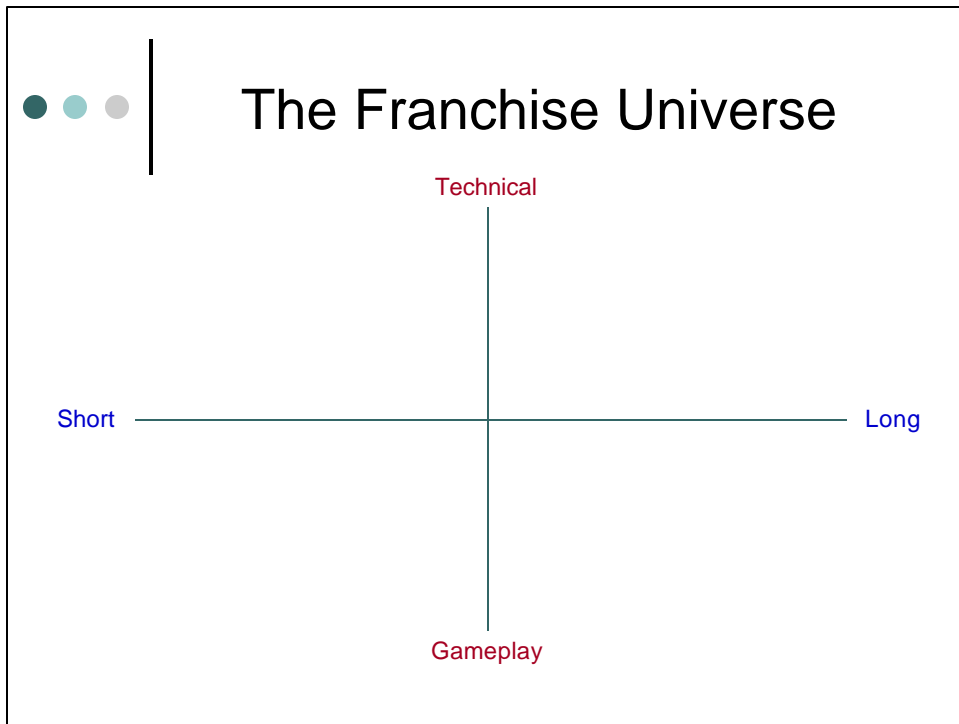
*Why should I buy the new  
version of **Established Franchise?***



## Not all franchises the same









## The Franchise Universe



Technical



Short

Long

Gameplay



## The Franchise Universe



Technical



Short

Long



Gameplay



## The Franchise Universe



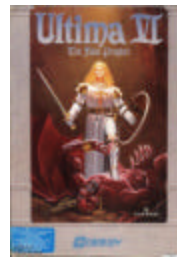
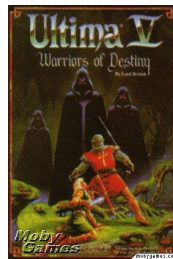
## The Franchise Universe





## 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



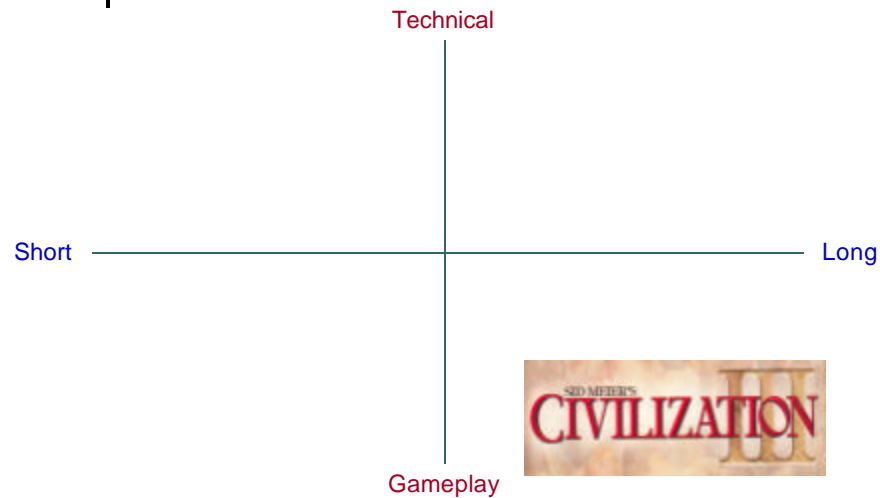
## A History of *Civilization*

- *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
- Choose a focus
  - 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

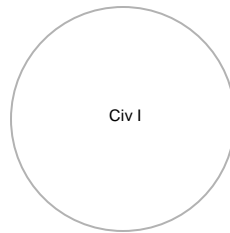


## Lessons from *Civilization*

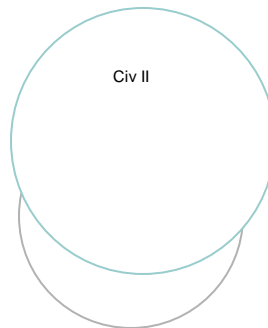
- Find fresh blood
- Kill “unfun” elements
- Simplify, simplify, simplify
- Design orthogonally
- Choose a focus
- “Borrow” from your competition
- Go back to the beginning
  - Humor and light-heartedness of *Civ I*
  - Replay system



## *Civilization I* Fanbase

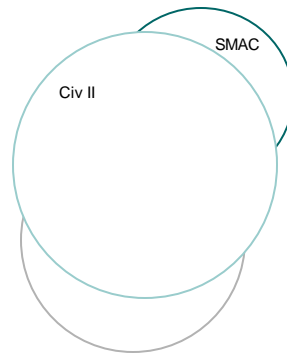


## *Civilization II* Fanbase

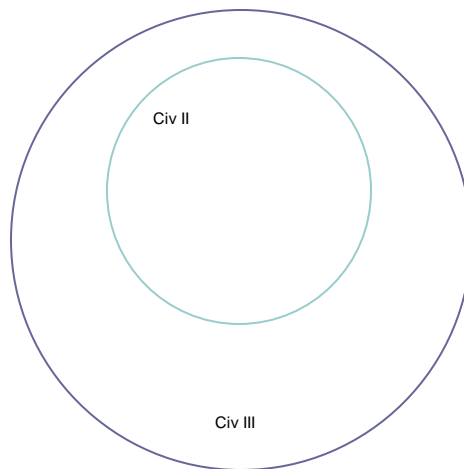




## *Alpha Centauri* Fanbase



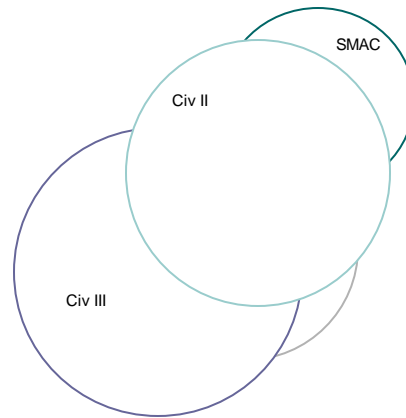
## Wishful thinking???







## *Civilization III* Fanbase



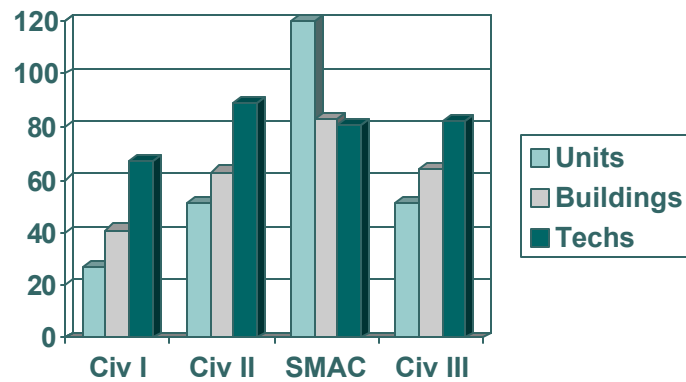
## Why the Ven diagram?

- 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



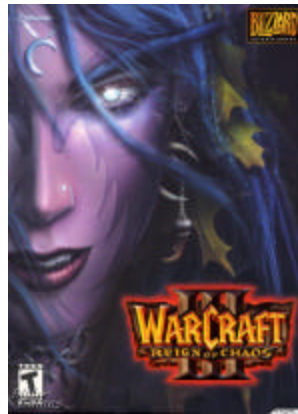
## *Civilization* and its discontents

Our mistakes...

- Not starting engine from scratch
- Too much design simplification
- Ignoring user interface legacy
- Trying to improve everything



## Case Study



## Transitioning to 3D

- 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)







## Unit Counts

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



## Unit Counts

- *Age of Kings* - 38
  - 24 Generic
  - 14 Unique
- *Age of Myth* – 108
  - 47 Greek
  - 32 Egyptian
  - 29 Norse
- *Starcraft* – 36
  - 12 Terran
  - 13 Zerg
  - 11 Protoss
- *Warcraft III* - 60
  - 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

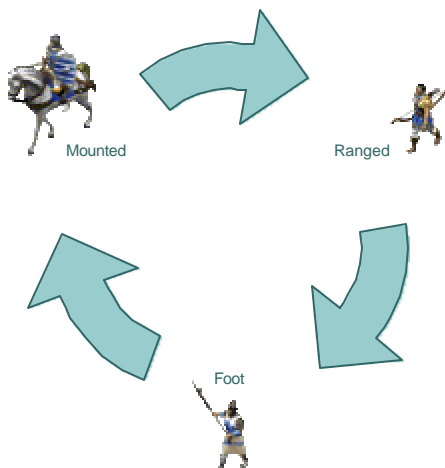
- 12 Terran
- 13 Zerg
- 11 Protoss

- *Warcraft III* - 60

- 15 Human
  - 12 Regular
  - 3 Heroes
- 15 Orc
- 15 Elves
- 15 Undead

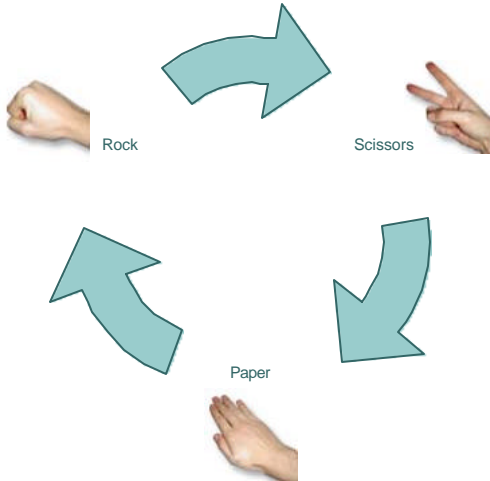


## *Age of Kings* Unit Relationships





## Rock-Paper-Scissors



## <Designer RANT>







## Rock-Paper-Scissors 2.0

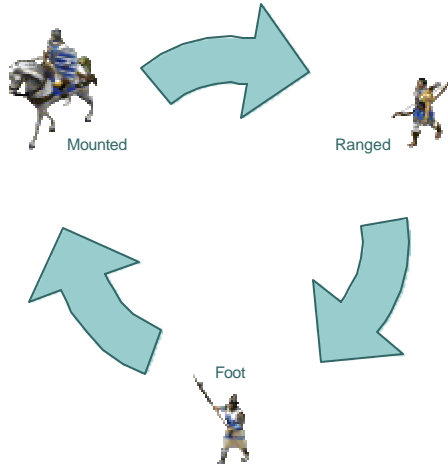
- Victory with...
  - Rock = 2 points
  - Paper = 5 points
  - Scissors = 10 points
- Winner has most points after 10 rounds



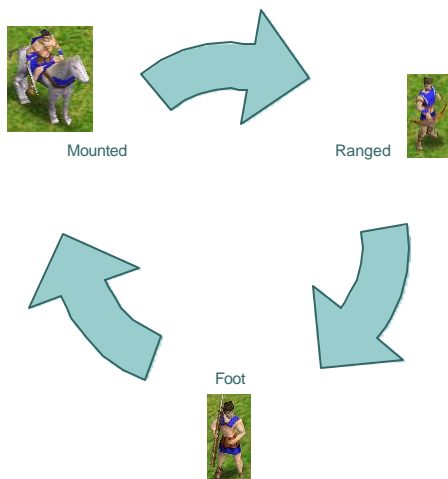
## Asymmetrical Rewards

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

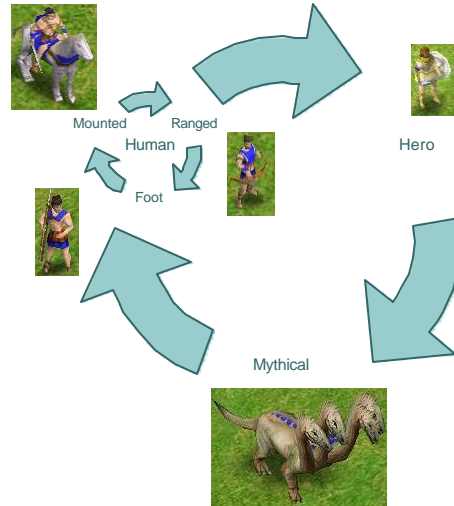
● ● ● | *Age of Kings* Unit  
Relationships



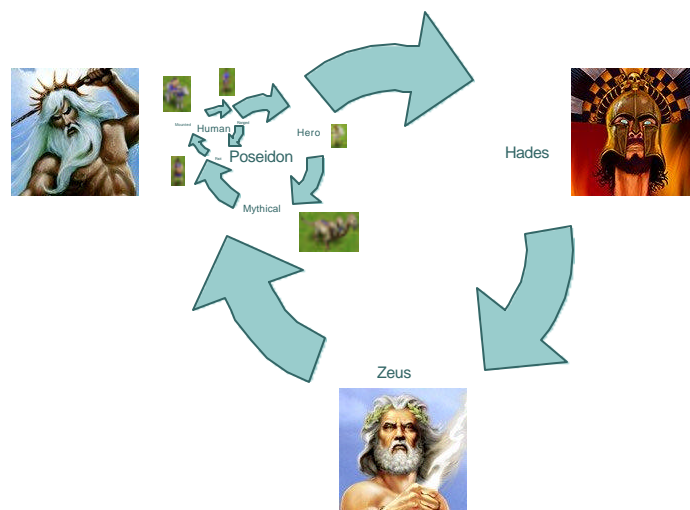
● ● ● | *Age of Mythology*:  
Greek Human Relationships



## Age of Mythology: Greek Unit Relationships

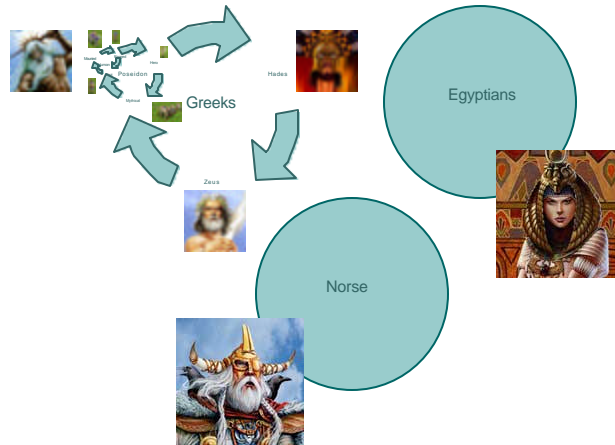


## Age of Mythology: Greek God Relationships





## Age of Mythology



## 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!

*Might & Magic*



*Heroes of Might & Magic*



## Jumping Genres? (Bad)

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

*X-Com: UFO Defense*



*X-Com: Apocalypse*



## *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!



## Don't Blow It!

The *Civilization* Series: How to Maintain a Successful Franchise

# Questions?

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