

GDC

March 21-25, 2022
San Francisco, CA

Ahistorical Accuracy

Bringing New Myths and Representation to *Civilization*

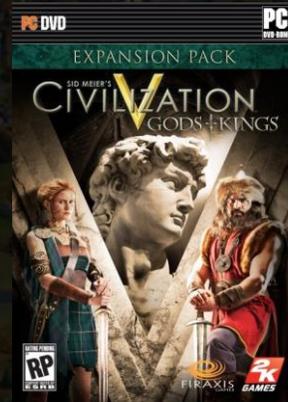
Anton Strenger – Lead Designer

#GDC22



My Story

- Symbolic Systems
 - CS, Linguistics, Psych, Philosophy
- Entertainment Technology
- Lead Designer at Firaxis Games
 - Some part in every Civilization release of the last 10 years
 - “Designer/Programmer”



My Limitations

- I am a white, straight, cisgendered male
- I am one part of a talented team

Design Approach

- Systems that suggest a Story
- Abstract systems need compelling elements to truly sing

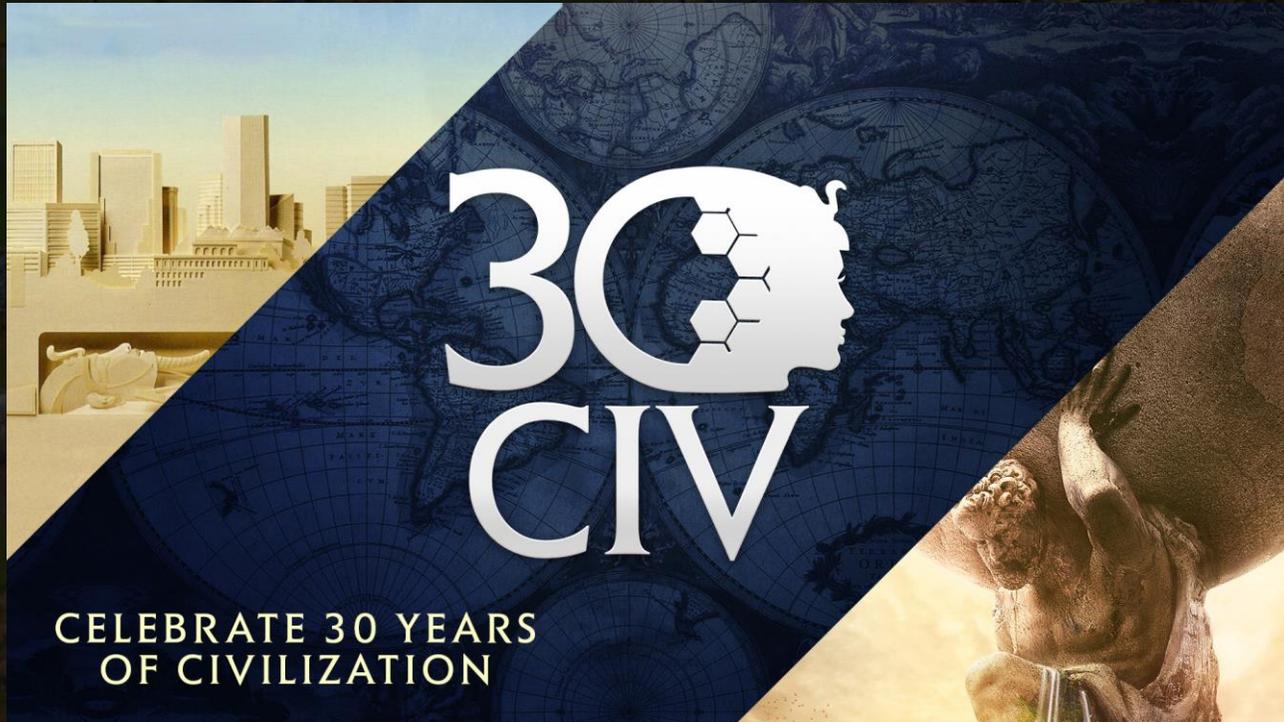
Design Approach



- 
1. Broadening the Story of Civilization
 2. New Frontier Pass
 1. History-Fantasy Line
 2. Representation
 3. Wins
 3. Takeaways

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The Story of Civilization

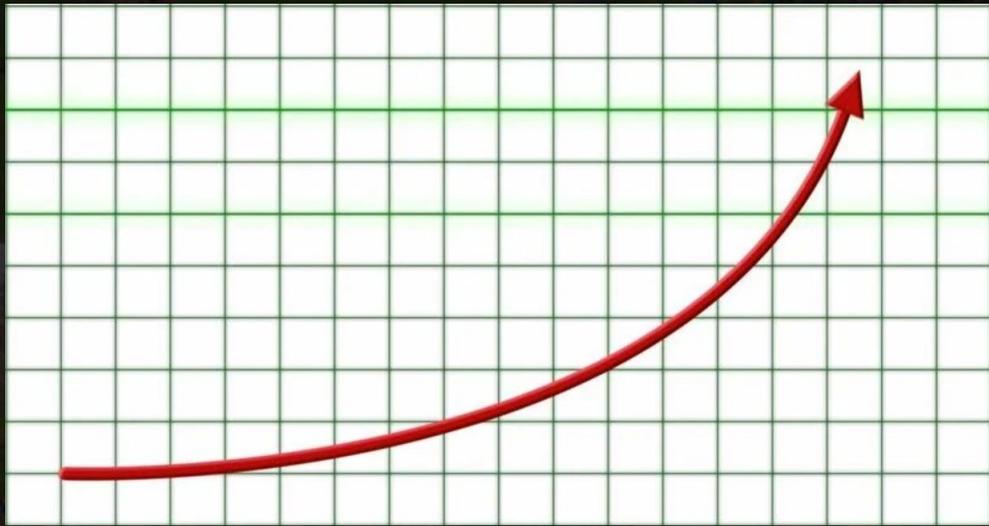


- Historical Turn-based Strategy
- "Stand the test of time"
- "Stone Age to Space Age"

Broadening the Story

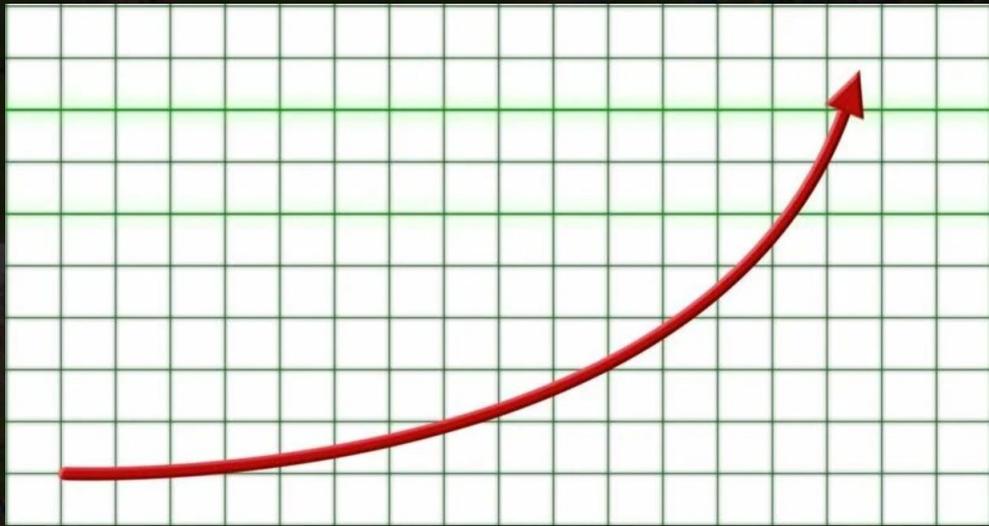
- Civilization is not a 1:1 scale model of history
- Myths can result
 - Stories that we tell and retell about how something came to be
 - Narratively consistent simplifications about how the world works
- We thought deeply about these myths, and used Civilization itself to address, challenge, and broaden them

Myth #1 – Progress is Inevitable



History is a march of upward progress, numbers always go up

Myth #1 – Progress is Inevitable

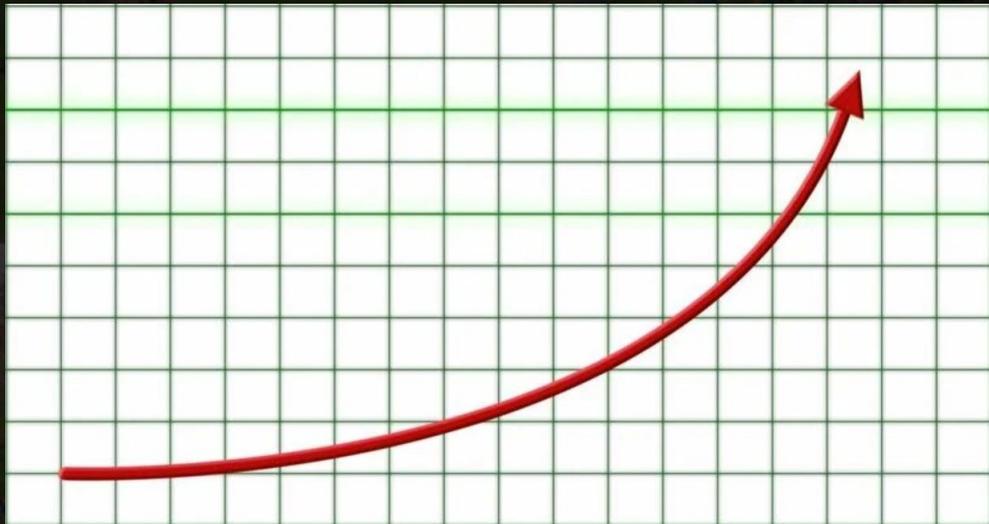


System

Story



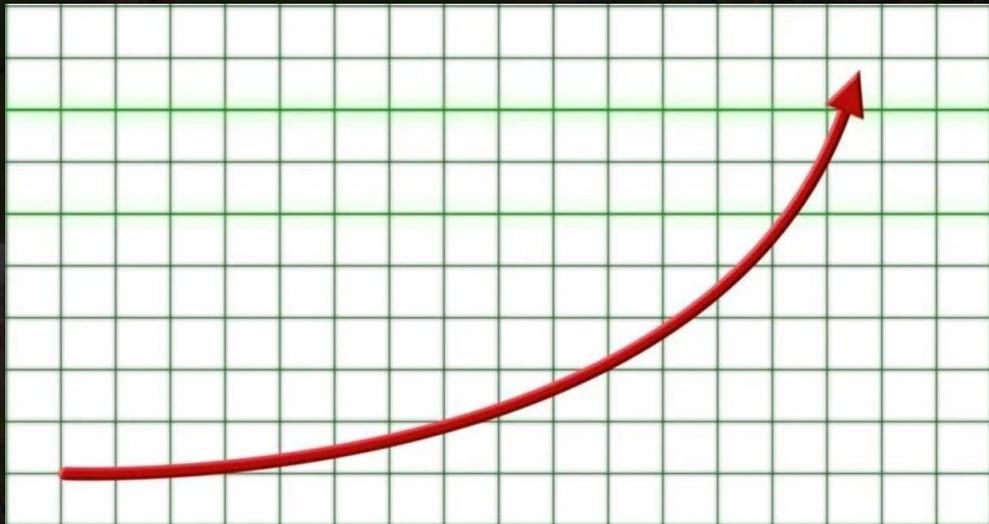
Myth #1 – Progress is Inevitable



Advantages

- Engine building mechanics
- Player progression motivation and systems
- Clear model for player agency and positive feedback

Myth #1 – Progress is Inevitable



Disadvantages

- History has rises and falls
- Setbacks can be “quit the game” moments
- Risks losing tension

Myth #2 – Great Man Theory



Heroic individuals are largely responsible for changing the course of history

Myth #2 – Great Man Theory



System

Story



Myth #2 – Great Man Theory



Advantages

- High drama
- Clear player avatar
- Familiar, worthy antagonists
- “Greatest Hits” historical touchstones

Myth #2 – Great Man Theory



Disadvantages

- Where are the women? Dubious historical accuracy
- These individuals are usually the “winners” who wrote history
- Overlooks historical systems and broader social forces

Myth #3 – “What If?” History



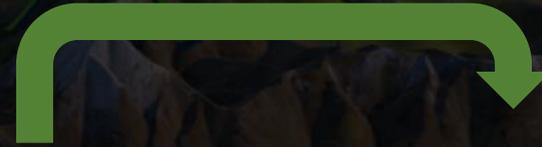
History results from a series of choices and chances, not an inevitable fate

Myth #3 – “What If?” History



System

Story



Myth #3 – “What If?” History



Advantages

- Encourages us to think about how history and the world could have turned out differently
- Ahistorical, but feels accurate!
- Open-ended opportunities for vast representation and player-driven narratives

Myth #3 – “What If?” History



Disadvantages

- Straying too far from familiarity can be risky

- 
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New Frontier Pass – Goals

- May 2020 – April 2021 releases
 - 6 Paid DLC
 - 6 Free Community Updates
- Increase active players
- Community engagement
- Put myths on the witness stand



New Frontier Pass – Process

- Fan Survey to gauge content interest

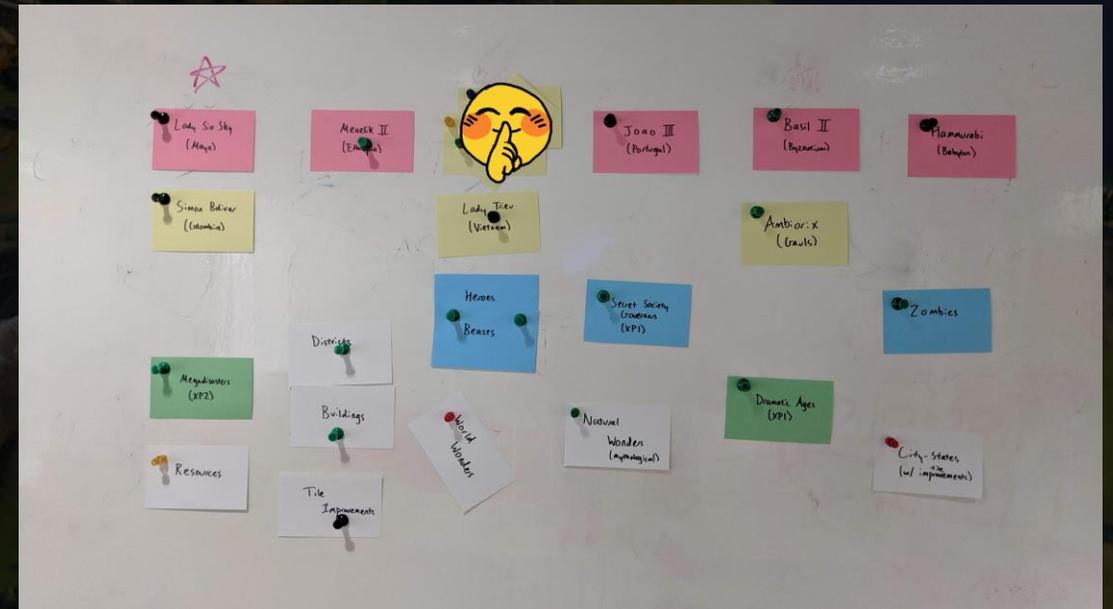
New Frontier Pass – Process

- Fan Survey to gauge content interest
- Modular gameplay systems



New Frontier Pass – Process

- Fan Survey to gauge content interest
- Modular gameplay systems
- Content index cards to mix and match



SID MEIER'S
CIVILIZATION VI
NEW FRONTIER PASS

2020-2021 CONTENT ROADMAP

MAY



**MAYA & GRAN
COLOMBIA PACK**

2 CIVILIZATIONS

2 LEADERS

APOCALYPSE
GAME MODE

NEW CITY-STATES,
RESOURCES & MORE

JULY



**ETHIOPIA
PACK**

1 CIVILIZATION

1 LEADER

SECRET SOCIETIES
GAME MODE

NEW DISTRICT &
INFRASTRUCTURE

SEPTEMBER



**PACK
#3**

2 CIVILIZATIONS

2 LEADERS

NEW
GAME MODE

MORE NEW
CONTENT

NOVEMBER



**PACK
#4**

1 CIVILIZATION

1 LEADER

NEW
GAME MODE

MORE NEW
CONTENT

JANUARY



**PACK
#5**

1 CIVILIZATION

2 LEADERS

NEW
GAME MODE

MORE NEW
CONTENT

MARCH



**PACK
#6**

1 CIVILIZATION

1 LEADER

NEW
GAME MODE

MORE NEW
CONTENT

PLUS FREE UPDATES FOR ALL PLAYERS

(NEW MAPS, SCENARIOS, BALANCE CHANGES AND MORE)

SID MEIER'S
CIVILIZATION VI
NEW FRONTIER PASS

2020-2021 CONTENT ROADMAP

MAY



MAYA & GRAN COLOMBIA PACK

2 CIVILIZATIONS

2 LEADERS

APOCALYPSE
GAME MODE

NEW CITY-STATES,
RESOURCES & MORE

JULY



**ETHIOPIA
PACK**

1 CIVILIZATION

1 LEADER

SECRET SOCIETIES
GAME MODE

NEW DISTRICT &
INFRASTRUCTURE

SEPTEMBER



**BYZANTIUM
& GAUL PACK**

2 CIVILIZATIONS

2 LEADERS

DRAMATIC AGES
GAME MODE

NEW WORLD
WONDERS & MAP TYPE

NOVEMBER



**BABYLON
PACK**

1 CIVILIZATION

1 LEADER

HEROES & LEGENDS
GAME MODE

NEW CITY-STATES
& GREAT PEOPLE

JANUARY



**VIETNAM & KUBLAI
KHAN PACK**

1 CIVILIZATION

2 LEADERS

MONOPOLIES &
CORPORATIONS
GAME MODE

NEW DISTRICT &
INFRASTRUCTURE

MARCH



**PORTUGAL
PACK**

1 CIVILIZATION

1 LEADER

ZOMBIES DEFENSE
GAME MODE

NEW WORLD
WONDER & MAP
TYPE

PLUS FREE UPDATES FOR ALL PLAYERS

(NEW MAPS, SCENARIOS, BALANCE CHANGES AND MORE)

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History-Fantasy Line

The Bermuda Triangle

- One way trip for ocean units to the other side of the world
- Permanent movement bonus

History-Fantasy Line



History-Fantasy Line



History End – Tech and Civic Shuffle

- Plays with “Progress is Inevitable” myth
- Less predictable progression in game’s “backbone”
- Hidden information and randomness



Fantasy End – Secret Societies

- Plays with “Great Man Theory” myth
- Powerful entities outside player’s control
- Hidden information and randomness



The screenshot shows a game interface for the Hermetic Order Secret Society. On the left, there is a portrait of a man's head in profile, with the text "HERMETIC ORDER Secret Society" below it. A small icon of an alchemical flask is centered below the portrait. Below the icon, a paragraph of text reads: "The Hermetic Order is a society of unorthodox scientists and alchemists. Their work focuses on science, great people, and resources." On the right, the "GOVERNOR ABILITIES" section is titled "Spend Governor Titles on Promotions". It contains three ability cards: "INITIATION" (unlocked by discovering a Natural Wonder, reveals Ley Line resource), "RITUAL" (unlocked in Medieval Era, allows construction of the Alchemical Society building), and two cards with "???" (mysteries not yet revealed).

HERMETIC ORDER
Secret Society

The Hermetic Order is a society of unorthodox scientists and alchemists. Their work focuses on science, great people, and resources.

GOVERNOR ABILITIES
Spend Governor Titles on Promotions

INITIATION
Unlocked by discovering a Natural Wonder. Reveals the Ley Line resource on the map. Ley Lines give a standard adjacency bonus to all specialty districts.

RITUAL
Unlocked in Medieval Era. Allows you to construct the Alchemical Society building, a powerful replacement of the University.

???

The deeper mysteries have not yet been revealed. We must first demonstrate our commitment.

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Heroes and Legends

- A twist on “Great Man Theory” myth, with a lot of “What If?”
- Powerful RPG-like characters on the map
- Limited lifespan, but pay to resurrect
- Semi-magical abilities



Heroes Around the World

- Familiar Western characters
 - King Arthur
 - Beowulf
 - Hercules
- Awesome non-Western characters
 - Anansi (Ghana)
 - Oya (Nigeria)
 - Sun Wukong (China)

Hunahpú & Xbalanqué (Maya)

*"Little did the lords of Xibalba know that **the Hero Twins had mastered the art of resurrection**. Despite being burnt into ash, they were reborn in Xibalba, and lived amongst the dwellers there, hidden in plain sight. They pretended to be magicians who could bring back the dead and offered to show their trick to the dark lords by killing them, then bringing them back."*



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TIL you can get unique units from other civs with Hunahpu & Xbalanque



Maui (Maori)

*"When he returns, he is faced with four skeptical brothers, whom he is able to win over by **displays of the magic he learned in the depths. He then goes about helping to create the world** as we know it...Maui remains an important figure across Polynesia as Polynesian societies re-assert themselves in the wake of colonialism."*



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You haven't lived until you've tried Maui's Desert Bananas!



Choosing Leaders and Civilizations

- A twist on “Great Man Theory” myth, with a lot of “What If?”
- Familiarity
 - Series Favorite vs. Fresh Face
 - Victors vs. Resistance
- Gender
- Chronology
- Geography
- Playstyle and Bonuses



Authenticity

- Worked with talent from the cultures we wanted to represent
 - Voice Acting in Native Language
 - Musicians and Instrumentation
- Anthropologist in house
 - Writing
 - Research
 - Art consultation

Simón Bolívar of Gran Colombia

- A “Great Man” with a mixed legacy
- Quintessential “what if?” history
- Underrepresented region
- Comandante Generals throughout all of history



Bà Triệu of Vietnam

- A semi-mythological figure who resisted oppression
- *"I'd like to ride storms, kill the killer whales in the open sea, drive out the foreign aggressors, reconquer the country, undo the ties of serfdom, and never bend my back to be the concubine of whatever man."*



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- An aerial view of a Civilization VI game world, showing a city with various buildings, a river, and a mountain range. The image is darkened to serve as a background for the text.
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Fresh Design Potential

- Engaging with myths allowed us to find new frontiers and stretch what Civilization means

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- Safe grounds for experimentation with tried-and-true mechanics and assumptions
- High autonomy and ownership for designers, though system “slots” are finite

Emergent Player Stories



Player Engagement

PCGames^N

NEWS : REVIEWS : HARDWARE : GUIDES : COMMUNITY ▾ MORE ▾



Civ 6's New Frontier Pass drew more active players than either expansion

Fans Around the World



Fans Around the World



Why you may ask do I put so much effort into this particular city-state, even if it an inconvenience. Well it's cause I am Puerto Rican. And yeah you may think "That makes sense Caguana is in Puerto Rico" but it's more than that. Though I was raised in the United States from a young age and I have been mostly Americanized, but this astounded me. This small island in the center of the Caribbean, my homeland was represented in this major franchise in an interesting way. The civilizations and city-states in the game are at center stage and with the nature of this game means that those cultures are at center stage. Part of my culture (I acknowledge that a large part of my culture is European but the native Taino also influenced it greatly) . And one of the primary reasons why I became so Americanized is that I never saw culture depicted in media in any meaningful way. Always just Puerto Rican characters or quick Puerto Rican locations but never it center stage. Until I played Sid Meier's Civilization VI and that's why Caguana is my favorite city-state.

Fans Around the World



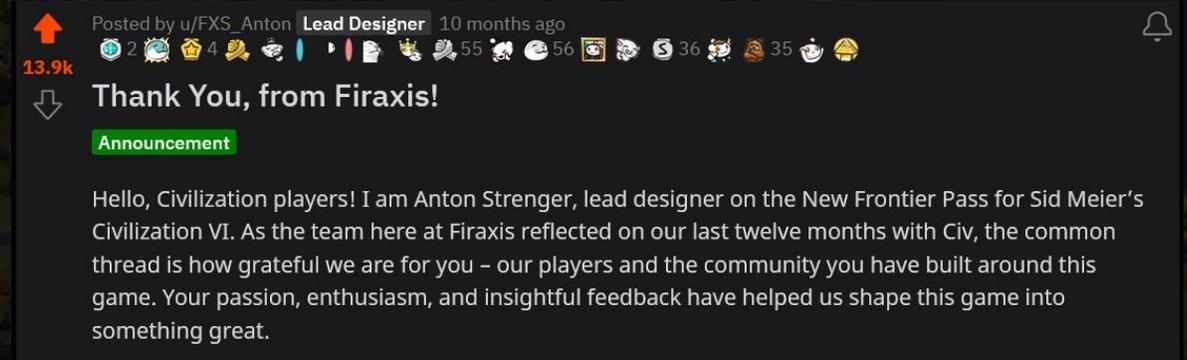
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pflz 103 points · 9 months ago · edited 9 months ago

As a Venezuelan playing as Simon Bolivar was the first time I'd ever seen someone who talks like me and music and people from my culture and history presented in videos games as anything other than a villain. I think the only other time I'd seen Venezuela come up was in [redacted] where we were cookie cutter terrorists for the player to shoot at. I don't think it clicked how much I wanted that kind of representation until I saw it so thank you. I love the dedication you put into the civs and leaders and only hope you can continue to do that for other cultures too. Fingers crossed for some Aboriginal Australian rep!!

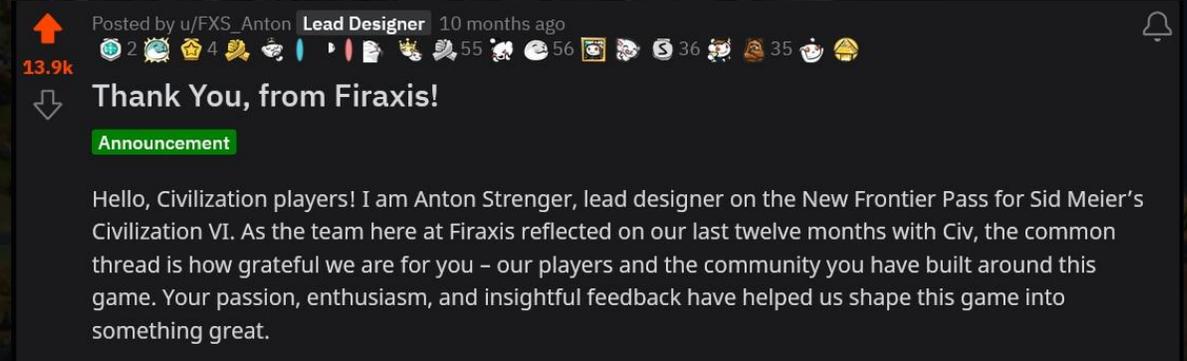
Thanking the Fans

- “Thank you!” posts on Reddit and CivFanatics
 - Personal and vulnerable
 - “Flash mob” of developer comments
 - Heartwarming stories from players going through tough times



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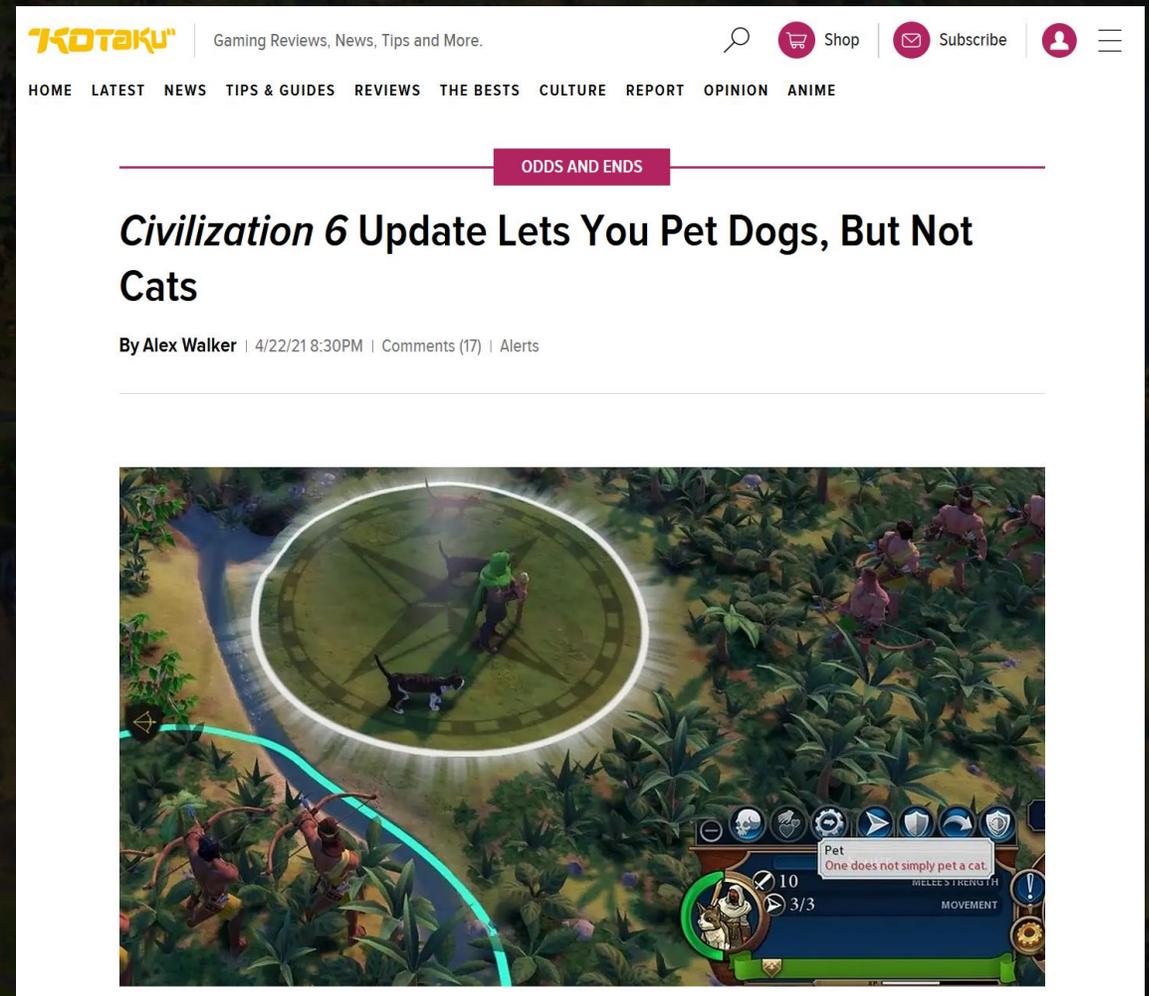


There has been something truly magical about this game, its content, its systems, that has me absolutely infatuated with it. After thousands of hours of playing I still find myself appreciating the little things like how beautiful Joao III looks on the loading screen. Thank you for a truly beautiful work of art that has caused this healthcare IT worker some respite during a terribly stressful time. I appreciate you, I sincerely hope there is more Civ VI content to come. If not, know Civ VI will hold a special place in my game library for as long as compatibility allows. Thank you for allowing me thousands of hours of enjoyment when many other forms of entertainment couldn't. Firaxis is my favorite studio because of Civ VI and another title, and I keep looking for any CyberSecurity job postings.

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- An aerial view of a Civilization VI game world, showing a river, mountains, and various city buildings. The image is darkened to serve as a background for the text.
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Takeaways

A designer's job is not to have the best idea, it is to recognize the best idea



The screenshot shows the top of a Kotaku article. The Kotaku logo is in the top left, followed by the tagline "Gaming Reviews, News, Tips and More." On the right, there are icons for search, shop, subscribe, and a user profile. Below the navigation bar is a horizontal menu with categories: HOME, LATEST, NEWS, TIPS & GUIDES, REVIEWS, THE BESTS, CULTURE, REPORT, OPINION, ANIME. A red pill-shaped button labeled "ODDS AND ENDS" is positioned above the article title. The article title is "Civilization 6 Update Lets You Pet Dogs, But Not Cats" in a large, bold, black font. Below the title, it says "By Alex Walker | 4/22/21 8:30PM | Comments (17) | Alerts". The main image of the article is a screenshot from the game Civilization 6, showing a character in a green robe petting a black dog on a circular platform. A tooltip for the dog says "Pet One does not simply pet a cat." The game's UI is visible at the bottom right, showing a unit's stats and abilities.

Takeaways

*A designer's job is not to have the best idea, it is to **recognize** the best idea*

Abdicate authorship to let players and systems tell their own stories



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To honorably represent a culture, work with people from that culture

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Abdicate authorship to let players and systems tell their own stories

To honorably represent a culture, work with people from that culture

Identify and interrogate myths to broaden creativity and representation

An aerial view of a city in a game, showing a river, a lake, and various buildings and structures. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting dusk or dawn.

Thank You!

www.antonstrenger.com
@antonstrenger