The widely known phrase, “knowledge is power” encapsulates a wide range of insights on what can give someone an upper hand. From applying to the business world, in terms of arguing that getting a higher education is necessary for grand success, to war, where knowing where the enemy lies can play a more important role than fighting with brute strength. One of the most important applications of knowledge, however, is how you apply it to specific decisions. In Civilization, we see that a lack of knowledge leads to seemingly good decisions in the short term, yet the long-term consequences become apparent as a player’s knowledgebase grows.

Civilization V is rooted in decisions, every small choice made plays a role in the larger outcome. The topics you choose to research change what units you’ll be able to create, and which lands you explore will result in which ‘players’ you meet first. If you choose to play such that you can expand efficiently and get very large, focusing on workers and settlers is (seemingly) the best way to go. Once multiple cities are developed, you can focus on creating workers to create farms, pastures, mines, etc. and bring in some scouts such that you can explore the massive expanse of the world around you. This feels productive, because you are making physical things build up and making more gold. However, as the game progressed having made these decisions, I realized that taking this approach left me incredibly vulnerable. My original spearman unit was killed by barbarians, and I had two warrior units- both in one city. This left nothing but a team of archers in the way of two barbarian groups advancing from both directions toward another defenseless settlement. I may have had mines and pastures in both cities, and a road nearly connecting two of them, but I had so little in the way of defenses since no walls had been built. Alongside being fairly defenseless, the net gain of gold started becoming negative. Paying one gold for a road tile seemed like nothing, but once you have a lot and suddenly lose the payments you get from neighboring players, such as building an embassy, those roads become more expensive than they’re worth.

Out of experimentation, I decided to take an abrupt approach and, starting up a new game, declared war if I ended up meeting anyone. I decided to take a conservative approach and build up warrior groups and then archers, without anything to specifically scout. This choice was a more obvious choice, in that I would be able to predict the outcome, but my lack of knowledge about Civilization V led to a an unexpected journey to said outcome. I was not invaded by the two people I met in the time I played on this file, there was no direct intention to invade. I failed to fully realize they had their own cities to build up and fortify, and when I did attack any groups I saw, I was quickly overwhelmed since they had support in a nearby surrounding area.

We see that knowing where different decisions in Civilization V can take you helps educate future decisions, and not knowing how specific units work or how interactions with City States are strengthened have consequences over time. Expanding your knowledge of not only the map but reading the game hints and using what you have learned from previous sessions is incredibly important when making decisions; this difference in foresight changes the way in which you win, or how far you make it.