

The Explosion of Information in Strategy Game for New Players

Despite the reputation of Starcraft II and Civilization V, strategy games, in general, display a pattern of despise against new players. As a new player of both Starcraft II and Civilization V, I found no urge to play them again after the class mostly because of the overwhelming information presented to the players in the game that makes those that are always trying to find the optimal strategy unable to perform and thus receive no sense of accomplishment.

The beginning of a Starcraft II game starts with a couple of same-looking units, a base and limited vision that is restrained to those units. Within the vision, the player could see some crystal-like minerals and two gas bumpers. The information presented by merely opening the game is vast already. What do the units do? What does the base do? How do I control the units or the base? Why can't I see the whole map? How do I see more of the map? After clicking on the unit, we get the information panel showed up at the bottom and the skill panel on the right. We could get the information about the unit, including its name and stats, the basic movements it could do, and two special abilities called "build". If we halt here and think about it, this single unit contains as much information as a lot of games' core character does. It not only has attack and defense attribute, but also eight basic commands that control its behaviors. Also, it has two special abilities which if expanded, contains couples more to find. In comparison, Super Mario Brother, a fairly complicated game, only has one controllable unit which only has five basic commands. Later in the game, we could find that the game has hundreds of the units with the same amount of information contained.

The middle of a Starcraft II game contains many meaningful decisions, which is almost impossible to make in the first few times of playing the game. One species have about twenty battle units, each with different production time, required resources, stats, special abilities, and occupation. It's almost impossible for a relatively new player to figure out which units to produce will yield the best result in battle using just the information with his/her units. Not to mention how to effectively counter-play the opponent, who has a high chance of being a different species.

Strategy game such as Starcraft II is hard to grasp. However, if we compare it with other hard games such as the Souls series, it is difficult on a different perspective: the amount of information is too much to absorb. And the resulting steep learning curve will most likely drive a new player away. I did not enjoy the Souls series, however, I stayed in the game for more than two hours before I rage quit and deleted the game because it was easy to grasp and friendly to the new player with less information displayed. I switched with my partner in the first five minutes of playing Starcraft II because of the overwhelming information.

Strategy games, in general, share the same problem. It most likely caused the demise of the real-time-strategy genre. I think it should be an important problem that we must solve if we ever want to design a strategy game in the future.