

What is the importance of StarCraft II in RTS Genre?

In gaming media, the term Real Time Strategy (RTS) has not appeared until Byte Magazine's December 1982 issue had been published. The genre became more and more popular after the release of one of the first games of the genre, Cytron Masters. Until today, lots of popular RTS games have been released such as StarCraft, Rise of Nations, Age of Empires, Command & Conquer et cetera. Some game studios still continue to develop and release the successors of these games. Although belonging to the same genre; there occurs some differences between their game mechanics, game designs and rules. Because of these variables; their popularity, playability and target player audience in the market also show difference. When these elements are examined for each game, it can be said that StarCraft II - successor of StarCraft- is one step ahead from other significant examples of the RTS genre. In this paper, it is going to be argued what makes StarCraft II considered as one of the most important RTS games and its place in eSports community. The games that are going to be used in comparisons may be released in different times, but they are the most popular ones and considered as timeless classics (Gamingbolt).

Firstly, StarCraft II has a more basic game design compared to the others. Similar to some of the other games in genre, player's goal is to win the game by destroying all structures of the enemy, or making the enemy concede. Player selects a unit set he desires at the beginning of the game, or sometimes he may have the option to select it randomly. Unit sets may have different definitions, such as "Races" in StarCraft II, "Nations" in Rise of Nations, "Civilizations" in Age of Empires II. When the quantity of these unit sets are compared, StarCraft II has only 3 races; whereas Rise of Nations has 24 different nations and Age of Empires has 27 different nations (Wikia). More unit sets mean more complexity, since it directly increases the number of combinations of unit set compositions in a game.

Considering Rise of Nations, for instance, each nation has unique attributes and nation-specific units that mostly leads to unique strategies for each nation. In StarCraft II, there are only 3 races that players can choose. Comparing Rise of Nations and StarCraft II, in 1vs1 games, the number of possible unit set compositions in StarCraft 2 is 6, whereas it is 552 in Rise of Nations. Since the unit sets have unique attributes, each of these compositions would consist of different strategies. Design pattern of RTS games are also affected by resources in the map. Resources is one of the typical elements of RTS games that are gathered from game map by players, and establishes the economy in the game (Abbadi et al, 2). StarCraft II has only 2 different resource types, while Rise of Nations has 6 and Age of Empires II has 4. Number of resource types increases the complexity of game design since as the number increases, the player would have to deal with more resources to develop his economy. Moreover, optimizing the division of workers in each gathering site would be harder in this case. To be more specific, in StarCraft II, optimal number of workers that can work in gathering sites are displayed in the game, which is 16 workers for each mineral site and 3 workers for each vespene gas site (Battle.net). In Age of Empires and Rise of Nations, however, there is no indicator that shows the optimal worker count for gathering sites, which naturally makes the economic optimization process for the players harder. For these reasons, StarCraft II is more basic in terms of its game design compared to other two significant examples from the genre.

Other than its game design, StarCraft II's game mechanics are also can be considered to be more enhanced. To explain more, StarCraft II has pretty much micromanagement and macromanagement in its gameplay. In order to achieve a victory in StarCraft II, player should establish a strategy by making high-level decisions about his expansion bases, unit composition and attack-defend timing (Rogers et al, 67). Then player should implement his strategy by the use of macromanagement and micromanagement. He should carefully do the

coordination of his units while in the combat -which is micromanagement-, and continue to develop his base, get new expansions and train new units and research new upgrades for units -which is macromanagement-. StarCraft II's gameplay is more suitable for micromanagement since the game flows faster compared to Age of Empires and Rise of Nations. Besides, most of the units in StarCraft II have active abilities that can be used to gain advantage in various ways, which is the most important element of micromanagement during combats. This is not the same for Rise of Nations and Age of Empires II, as most of the units don't have active abilities, except the healing ability of priests and imams, which means combats in these games require less micromanagement compared to StarCraft II. Furthermore, when these active abilities are examined, it can be seen that some units can make significant temporary changes on the game-map. For instance, "Sentry" can create temporary obstacles with its active ability called "Force Field", which is pretty effective against rush strategies and base-defense situations. Moreover, "Overlord" can generate creep on the terrain, which is essential for Zerg buildings and gives movement speed advantage to Zerg units and creep does not let other races place their buildings on it. With the support of these examples, it can be said that StarCraft II's game mechanics are more developed compared to Rise of Nations and Age of Empires II.

StarCraft II is not only a RTS game, but also a competitive arena; in other words, an eSports. Its basic game design and enhanced game mechanics allow developers to exercise the game balance much better. They continuously get feedbacks from the players and release new patches accordingly, to establish the game balance in a better way. When the races in the game become balanced, the players can purely show their skills in the multiplayer gameplay against each other. To enhance the competitive atmosphere of the game, StarCraft II has a ladder system to divide the players into divisions according to their skill level. Because of the continuous updates, the strategies that players apply do not last forever; a solid, strong

strategy may become a very weak one after a patch so that the player should always develop new strategies to progress in the ladder. In StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty, total of 25 patches were released for a single expansion of the game, whereas in Rise of Nations, this number is only 2 and in Age of Empires II, it is 3 (patches-scrolls.com). Also, it is very hard to maintain macromanagement and micromanagement at the same time because of the game flow. These factors made the distinction between StarCraft II and other games and let StarCraft considered as an eSports and lead to worldwide tournaments of the game.

As a result, StarCraft II is one of the most important examples of RTS genres because of its game design, game mechanics and competitive arena. Game design of StarCraft II is relatively basic that developers can balance the game more effectively. Furthermore, it has advanced game mechanics that put the player's skills into foreground during gameplay with macromanagement and micromanagement. Moreover, with the support of these properties, it became an eSports with its competitive arena. StarCraft II is still one step-ahead of the other example, and will continue to be one of the best games in RTS genre.

RESOURCES

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