Age of Empires II

Age of Empires II : The Age of Kings is a real @-@ time strategy (RTS) video game developed by Ensemble Studios and published by Microsoft . Released in 1999 for the Microsoft Windows and Macintosh operating systems , it was the second game in the Age of Empires series . An expansion , The Conquerors , was released in 2000 . A PlayStation 2 version was released by Konami in 2001 , and a Nintendo DS spinoff , Age of Empires : The Age of Kings was developed by Backbone Entertainment in 2006 . A Dreamcast port , by Konami , was canceled .

The Age of Kings is set in the Middle Ages and contains thirteen playable civilizations . Players aim to gather resources , which they use to build towns , create armies , and defeat their enemies . There are five historically based campaigns , which constrict the player to specialized and story @-@ backed conditions . There are three additional single @-@ player game modes , and multiplayer is supported . Despite using the same game engine and similar code to its predecessor , development of The Age of Kings took a year longer than expected , forcing Ensemble Studios to release Age of Empires : The Rise of Rome in 1998 instead . The design team focused on resolving significant issues in Age of Empires , but noted on release that some problems remained .

Reception of The Age of Kings was highly positive . The significant number of new features was praised , as were the gameplay improvements . Some reviewers , however , were critical of the presentation of units ? they were seen as bland and uninteresting ? while others considered The Age of Kings to be too similar to its predecessor , Age of Empires . Three months after its release , two million copies of The Age of Kings had been shipped , and it topped sales charts in seven countries . The game won multiple awards and is today considered a classic of its type , having had a significant impact on future games in its genre . Both the original Age of Empires II and the expansion pack were later released as " the Gold Edition " .

In April 2013 , Age of Empires II : HD Edition was released on the Steam digital distribution platform for Windows operating systems . The HD Edition includes both the original game and the expansion The Conquerors , as well as updated graphics for high @-@ resolution displays . It also supports user @-@ generated content through the Steam Workshop and multiplayer games provided through the Steam servers . On August 16 , 2013 , Microsoft announced The Forgotten , the first new expansion in nearly 13 years and exclusive to the HD Edition . On November 5 , 2015 , Microsoft released another new expansion to Age of Empires II : HD Edition , The African Kingdoms .

Gameplay

The Age of Kings focuses on building towns , gathering resources , creating armies and ultimately conquering opponents by destroying their units and buildings . Players conquer rival towns and empires as they advance one of 13 civilizations through four " Ages " : the Dark Age , the Feudal Age , the Castle Age (being the High Middle Ages) , and the Imperial Age , reminiscent of the Renaissance ? a 1000 @-@ year timeframe . Advancing to a new Age unlocks new units , structures , and technologies , but players must first build certain buildings from their current age and then pay a sum of resources (typically food and gold) .

Civilian units , called " villagers " , are used to gather resources ; they are either male or female ? gender does not affect their abilities . Resources can be used to train units , construct buildings , and research technologies , among other things ; for example , players can research better armour for infantry units . The game offers four types of resources : food , wood , gold , and stone . Food is obtained by hunting animals , gathering berries , harvesting livestock , farming , and shore fishing and fishing from boats . Wood is gathered by chopping down trees . Gold is obtained from either gold mines , trade or collecting relics in a monastery , and stone is collected from stone mines . Villagers require checkpoints , typically depository buildings (town center , mining camp , mill , and lumber yard) , where they can store gathered resources . Each civilization can purchase upgrades that increase the rate of gathering these resources . Players can construct a market for trade ; players can trade wood , stone , and food for gold , and use gold to buy other resources . Market prices fluctuate with every transaction . Furthermore , markets and docks can also generate gold by

using trading carts or cogs which are used to visit foreign markets and ports ; once they return to the player 's market / dock , gold is added to the stockpile . The amount of gold a trade unit earns on each trip is related to the distance it had to travel to a foreign market ; more gold is earned on longer trips . It is possible to trade with enemies ' markets or docks , but the player 's trading units may be attacked or destroyed by enemy units in the process . Players do not need to keep trading manually , as once they select the port or market the trading units infinitely continue to trade .

There are five campaigns in The Age of Kings , containing historically based scenarios such as Genghis Khan 's invasion of Eurasia , Barbarossa 's Crusade , or Saladin 's defence of the Holy Land . In the Joan of Arc and William Wallace campaigns , the player can control a unit based on its namesake ; in others , players take orders from guiding spirits representative of the army 's commander .

Additional game modes are available to the player in The Age of Kings . One mode , random map , generates a map from one of several randomly chose map generating scripts , with players starting in the Dark Age with a Town Center , three villagers (or more depending on civilization) , and a scout unit . The game can be won through military conquest , by constructing a special building known as a Wonder and keeping it standing for a certain amount of time , or by obtaining control of all relics on the map for a set amount of time . Deathmatch mode allows players to begin with large amounts of resources , creating a focus on military dominance , while in the regicide mode each player is given a king unit , winning by killing all of the other monarchs .

= = = Units and civilizations = = =

Every player has a limit to the number of units they can create ? a population limit ? but may not immediately use the entire potential population . The population capacity , which can be capped at anywhere between 75 ? 200 in intervals of 25 , is based on the number of houses , Castles , or Town Centers ? the main building in a player 's town ? which have been built . The Age of Kings introduced two significant new features for unit management : the idle villager button , which helps players identify villagers that have not been assigned a task , and the town bell , which sends all a player 's villagers into their Town Center , Castle , or tower for safety ; units garrisoned within these three buildings , especially archers , increase the building 's firepower (towers fire more arrows with units garrisoned inside) including the town center , which can not fire anything at all without someone garrisoned there .

The Age of Kings also includes five types of military units : infantry , archers , cavalry , siege weaponry , and naval units . Certain types of infantry , archers , and cavalry are " counter units " with special defenses against other types of unit . The three human classes of military generally follow a rock @-@ paper @-@ scissors model . For example , infantry are generally powerful against buildings but weak against cavalry , thus the infantry counter units ? spearmen and pikemen ? have attack bonuses against cavalry . Each Civilization in The Age of Kings has one or two special units that are exclusive to that Civilization . For instance , the Britons have access to Longbowmen , an archery unit with increased range . These Civilization @-@ specific units are generally more powerful , but still follow the basic rock @-@ paper @-@ scissors model . The monk is a special kind of military unit that has the ability to convert enemy units to the player 's civilization , and to heal allied units . Monks are also used to collect relics ; relics accumulate gold once held in the player 's monastery ? the more relics are captured , the faster the gold is accumulated . Collecting all relics on the map is one method by which a player can win a random map game , depending on the victory setting . Once a player has all in their monasteries , a timer is shown to all players . If an opposing player does not destroy a monastery holding a relic after the set time , then that player wins .

Players choose to play as one of 13 civilizations split into four architectural styles ? Western European , Eastern European , Middle Eastern , and East Asian ? that determine building appearance in @-@ game . The civilizations have varying strengths and weaknesses with regards to economics , technology , and battle , and each has access to a different , very powerful " Unique Unit " . Additionally , each civilization provides an individual team bonus in team games . To add

variety , each civilization has a set of sound bites in its native language that are uttered by units when selected or instructed to perform a task .

Buildings

The buildings in The Age of Kings are split into the economic and military buildings categories . Buildings can research technologies and upgrades that increase economic , military or unit @-@ based efficiency , as well as provide resources for the player .
The most important economic building is the Town Center , where villagers are created , all types of resources can be stored , some technologies are researched , and the player can advance to the next Age . The Town Center can fire arrows at enemy units within range if villagers or archers are garrisoned while under attack . Other economic buildings available include storage buildings for resources , farms , docks (the dock may also produce several military ships) , and houses to support a higher population .
Military buildings include unit @-@ producing buildings such as barracks , archery ranges , stables , and castles , as well as defensive buildings such as walls and towers . Military buildings can perform research to improve the abilities of military units , increasing their strength , defensive capabilities , or other attributes . The castle is a military building which can build trebuchets , train the civilization 's " unique unit / s " , and fire arrows at enemy units within range , with garrisoned units firing extra arrows . It can only be built after a player has reached the Castle Age , although in some game options , players can begin with an already @-@ built castle as early as the Dark Age .

Multiplayer

The Age of Kings supports multiplayer over the Internet , or via a local area network (LAN) . Up to eight players can take part in one game , with all of the single player game modes available . The MSN Gaming Zone supported the game until the service closed on June 19 , 2006 .

Development

Prior to the completion of Age of Empires , Ensemble Studios had signed a contract with Microsoft for a sequel . The design team chose to set The Age of Kings in the Middle Ages as a logical progression from the ancient era setting of Age of Empires . The design team was conscious of attempting to capture the broad appeal of the first game without making the game 's design too similar . Nonetheless , they attempted to appeal to the vast demographic who played Age of Empires . The Age of Kings 's design team intended to complete the game within a year by using code from the original and reusing the Genie game engine . Several months into the process they found they would not be able to complete a game of the quality they sought in that time . Ensemble Studios informed Microsoft they would need another year and instead created Age of Empires : The Rise of Rome , an easily developed expansion pack of Age of Empires , as a compromise which could be released for Christmas 1998 . To help meet the next year 's deadline , additional programmers , artists , and designers were employed . To overcome another significant objection to Age of Empires ? that of path finding ? the team completely redesigned the game engine 's movement system .
The original Age of Empires had been criticized for its artificial intelligence (AI) . Because the original AI did not " cheat " by attributing itself extra resources or using other techniques the human player could not , it was easier to defeat than in many other real @-@ time strategy games . For The Age of Kings , Ensemble Studios attempted to develop a more powerful AI system that did not compromise by cheating . Industry veteran Mario Grimani led Ensemble Studios in the creation of the new system . The Age of Kings saw the introduction of a triggers system for its scenario editor . The triggers allow messages to be displayed , or actions to take place , based on pre @-@ set criteria or " events " . The scenario editor was also improved by the new AI system . The AI and trigger systems interacted regularly in the single player campaigns .

The team was less successful in resolving other issues ; programmer Matt Pritchard complained following the release of Age of Empires that there was still no process by which patches could be issued . Extensive cheating in multiplayer games of Age of Empires came as a result of several bugs in the game , which resulted in Microsoft promising Ensemble Studios there would be a patch process for The Age of Kings . On release , there were several bugs that needed immediate attention , but the patch process was not yet ready . The first patch was released 11 months later .

Ensemble Studios developed a new terrain system for The Age of Kings , with 3D presentation capabilities that were vastly superior to those of Age of Empires . Pritchard noted an improvement in the team 's artistic abilities following their work on the past two games , and he is noted as saying that " AoK became a showcase for their improved talent " . However , he complained about the lack of an art asset management tool , while other departments gained new tools and automated procedures to assist in design and play testing .

The soundtrack for The Age of Kings was directed by Stephen Rippy , who has since taken that role for all games in the Age of Empires series . Music for the game was split into two categories . For " in game " music , Rippy 's team took musical elements from a variety of cultures and combined them to create a mixed sound . " Pre @-@ game " music was designed to be unique to the civilization in question . Campaigns based on historical figures would include " a theme that will at least be rooted in [the character 's] culture " .

A demo of The Age of Kings was released on October 16 , 1999 . It featured the learning campaign , a sample of a random map game , and the ability to play via the MSN Gaming Zone . Much to Ensemble Studios ' disappointment , numerous incomplete versions of the game were leaked . These were picked up by warez sites , and sold illegally throughout the Pacific Rim ; warez versions of the game were even sold outside Microsoft 's offices in South Korea .

= = = High @-@ definition remake = = =

In 2012 , Hidden Path Entertainment began working on a high @-@ definition remake of Age of Empires II , an effort spearheaded by Matt Pritchard , an original Ensemble lead programmer . On March 7 , 2013 , its release was announced , branded as Age of Empires II : HD Edition . It has improved graphics , widescreen support and new multiplayer options through Steam . It was released on April 9 , 2013 , and there was a pre @-@ order available on April 5 .

= = Reception = =

The Age of Kings received " universal acclaim " , according to video game review aggregator Metacritic .

According to Eurogamer 's Geoff Richards , " the list of new features and improvements over the original game is over a page long " . GamePro 's review similarly focused on " new additions to the genre itself " which it argued made The Age of Kings outstanding . These included the idle unit button and town bell . GameSpy 's Carlos Salgado was appreciative of other features ; he praised the ability to create individual profiles for different players and to customize hotkeys . Meanwhile , IGN appreciated the new abilities given to the villager unit ? the review stated villagers " now play an important role not only in the collection of resources , but also in town defense and even in combat . "

AllGame 's Michael L. House enjoyed the use of sound bites in civilizations ' native languages , which he said was " very influential in developing an era @-@ enhancing atmosphere " . Eurogamer said this feature " gives [villagers] a personality , rather than the standard ' Acknowledged ' grunt of military RTS games " , also stating that the use of female villagers provided a good variety . Game Revolution 's review explained that by being set in a more recent epoch of human history , The Age of Kings was able to " add character to an otherwise impersonal style of gameplay " . Computer and Video Games approved of The Age of Kings ' use of shorter , more focused campaigns , compared to its predecessor , while Game Revolution noted that even in slower sections of the campaign , the historical narrative helped maintain player interest . GameSpot said that with the screen full of units ,

" you can begin to imagine how their historical equivalents once prospered " , while GameSpy said The Age of Kings presents " realism rarely seen in the RTS genre " . IGN staff argued that while the strengths and weaknesses attributed to different civilizations made the game more realistic , the fact that they were still mostly the same prevented The Age of Kings from " delivering the same battlefield impact of StarCraft or Tiberian Sun " .

House also praised the gameplay interface , which he said " couldn 't be simpler " , as well as the advanced grouping and path @-@ finding systems . Nash Werner of GamePro said that the formation tools were wonderful , and complained only that they could not be assigned to naval units . Computer and Video Games generally agreed , stating that " the controls are very user @-@ friendly and well explained " . GameSpot 's Greg Kasavin wrote that despite the game 's improved graphics , " there 's nothing foreign about its appearance " and that most game features will be " immediately recognizable if you 've played a real @-@ time strategy game before " . PC Zone agreed , but in a negative sense ? it argued that The Age of Kings " is essentially an update of a two @-@ year @-@ old game " .

Richards was surprised by the quality of The Age of Kings ' graphics , considering they were all bitmapped . However , AllGame complained that units were sometimes difficult to tell apart , a point numerous reviewers agreed on . It also called the sound of The Age of Kings as a negative , but not something significant enough to draw players away from the game 's overall quality . IGN stated that cutscenes were somewhat bland , but that overall the graphics added " an amazing amount of detail to the actual game " . IGN 's main criticism was for the in @-@ game speech used in campaigns ; it rhetorically asked " why can 't they just find a Frenchman to do a French accent ? " Alex Constantides of Computer and Video Games rated the graphics highly , saying that some in @-@ game buildings are " so grand you 'll even feel guilty about burning them to the ground " . Werner agreed ; " the most noticeable graphical advancements " , he wrote , were " the sheer size and scale of things " . Game Revolution stated " AOE2 is the best looking of the 2D RTS games out there right now " .

In January 2000 , three months after its release , Microsoft announced that they had shipped two million copies of The Age of Kings . The game topped sales charts in the United States , Japan , the United Kingdom , Germany , France , Australia , and South Korea . It would spend the next two and a half years on top 20 sales lists . The Age of Kings was top selling game in October 1999 , and the fourth highest selling game in 1999 .

The Age of Kings won GameSpot 's Strategy Game of the Year in 1999 , and was a nominee for Game of the Year . GamePower also named it Strategy Game of the Year , while PC Gamer and Computer Gaming World gave it Editor 's Choice awards . The Age of Kings won Strategy Game of the Year and Computer Game of the Year at the 2000 Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences awards . It was also nominated for Game of the Year , Outstanding Achievement in Animation , Outstanding Achievement in Game Design , and Outstanding Achievement in Game Play Engineering . IGN ranked The Age of Kings the 53rd best game of all time in 2005 , and the 10th best PC game of all time in 2007 . GameFAQs users placed it 56th in a poll of the best games ever .

The Age of Kings was highly influential on its genre . Star Wars : Galactic Battlegrounds , a 2001 game by LucasArts , shared The Age of Kings ' game engine , and was heavily influenced by its mechanics . Empire Earth 's design was also similar to that of The Age of Kings ; GameSpot said it " borrows most of that game 's controls , interface features , and even some of its keyboard shortcuts " . Rick Goodman , designer of Age of Empires and The Rise of Rome , designed Empire Earth . GameSpot 's Scott Osborne argued that the gameplay of Cossacks : European Wars was heavily based on The Age of Kings .

= = = HD Edition = = =

Age of Empires II : HD Edition received mixed reviews with aggregate review website Metacritic assigning a score of 68 out of 100 based on reviews from 20 critics . Critics agreed that the HD Edition changed very little from the original game . Daniel Starkey of Destructoid added that the

reluctance to change the game features encourages " a much more aggressive , and obsessive style of play " . He highlights the fact that many of the problems of trying to run the original game on a modern computer are gone , and calls its compatibility with Steam 's Workshop " an amazing bonus " .

Paul Dean of Eurogamer was less forgiving ; although he agreed that the Workshop compatibility was a good addition and praised the players in the online community as " remarkably calm and friendly " , he thought that the game should have been updated more , citing its " boring campaign " and poorly @-@ aged gameplay mechanics : " It just doesn 't play very well , and its flaws are more blatant than ever before " . Underscoring his criticisms of the lack of significant changes to the game , he described it as " a mouldy time @-@ capsule that will likely mar your memories of the original " .

= = Sequels = =

An expansion for The Age of Kings , The Conquerors , was released in 2000 . It introduced numerous new game features , including five new civilizations . Two of these , the Aztecs and the Mayans , represent the New World and have new distinctive architectural style . Other new civilizations are the Spanish , Huns , and Koreans . As well as three campaigns similar in concept to those in The Age of Kings , The Conquerors included a " Battles of the Conquerors " campaign which contained several unrelated battles such as those of Agincourt and Hastings . Age of Mythology , released in 2002 , broke away from the historical trend and instead focused on Greek , Egyptian , and Norse mythology . It shared many gameplay elements with The Age of Kings and was considered a spin @-@ off of the main Age of Empires series .

The third historical game in the Age of Empires series , Age of Empires III , was released in 2005 . The game portrayed the European colonization of the Americas . Aside from one significant feature , the home city , the game 's design was similar to that of its predecessor .

In 2012 , a free @-@ to @-@ play title was released in the series , called Age of Empires Online . While the game was freely accessible , it featured premium content which could either be earned through gameplay or purchased , enabling the player to use higher @-@ tier equipment and new game modes . Active development of the game ended on January 1 , 2014 , when executive producer Kevin Perry stated that adding new content was " no longer cost effective , " and announced that the game would be moving from " development phase " to its " support phase " . The game servers were subsequently shut down on July 1 , 2014 .

= = = Age of Empires II HD : The Forgotten = = =

In August 2013 an expansion pack was announced for Age of Empires II HD , entitled The Forgotten . It is based on the fan @-@ made expansion , The Forgotten Empires . The expansion includes five new civilizations , seven new campaigns , two new game modes , twenty @-@ seven new technologies , ludakris map size , Twitch streaming and spectator mode . It was developed by Forgotten Empires and SkyBox Labs and released on November 7 , 2013 .

= = = Age of Empires II HD : The African Kingdoms = = =

A second expansion pack for Age of Empires II HD was announced on April 9 , 2015 , and released later the same year . The focus of the expansion is on African civilizations , thus named The African Kingdoms . On June 23 , 2015 , new details and a tease were released for the The African Kingdoms expansion . The expansion includes four new civilizations , four new fully voice acted campaigns , one new game mode , new generic units and technologies , twenty @-@ three new maps , improved AI , and new scenario editor objects . It was again developed by Forgotten Empires and SkyBox Labs and released on November 5 , 2015 .