THE RIGHTEOUS PATH OF THE VIRTUAL COLONIZER: POSTCOLONIALISM

AND MORALITY IN SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION

AND HUMANKIND

by

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DEDICATION

For Kadin Rowe Stephens, my brother, who always supported my dreams of being a writer. I would not be who I am without you. You are eternally missed.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Game studies, or the study of video games, began in the late 1990s when video game popularity soared due to console creation, technological innovation, and widespread consumer internet use. By 2001, the first game studies academic journals and associations were being created and began publishing work. The scope of this burgeoning academic field ranged widely from the historical "ludology vs. narratology" argument to analyzing video games' socio-economic, psychological, and cultural impacts.

While postcolonial studies was an established field of academic research by the late 1990s, it wasn't until the 2010s that game studies and postcolonial studies began to merge. Postcolonial studies analyze the effects of colonialism in cultures and societies. Specifically, it studies the conquering of other peoples by (mostly) European nations, the systemic issues this created, and its impacts on colonized people's lives, cultures, and societies. In "The Work of Postcolonial Game Studies in the Play of Culture, " Soraya Murray defines each field, describes how they connect, and the results of said merge. Her article analyzes the significant points in postcolonial game studies history and tries to justify its existence. She defines postcolonial studies as the "consideration of the functions and impacts of large-scale domination and subjection, in the form of imperialism and colonization; as well as more fundamentally deconstructing the colonizing impulse and its rationalizations evidenced in culture manifestations" (Murray 5). Deepika Bahri, from Emory University, defines postcolonial studies as "the study of the interactions between European nations and the societies they colonized in the modern period" (Bahri). Yet, these definitions are constantly changing due to the massive field of study, even Bahri states "there is considerable debate over the precise parameters of the field

and the definition of the term "postcolonial" (Bahri)[1]. When combining this study with game studies, Murray defines it as work that analyzes "the nature of the representational practices at play in the game [as] there is often a particular focus on the gameworld's logics regarding the control and exploitation of territories, peoples and resources" (Murray 6). Murray, and many other postcolonial game studies scholars like Dom Ford and Souvik Mukherjee, noticed not only the colonial narrative some video games were creating but also how the new medium shaped that narrative. The convergence of these fields had a specific focus, usually, around games of empire and war like the *Civilization* series, *Empire*, *Europe Universalis*, etc.

To begin, I will briefly overview significant points in the scholarship surrounding 4X games. The 4X (eXpand, eXplore, eXploit, eXterminate) genre of games, with headlining titles like *Empire* and *Civilization*, was a clear area of interest for postcolonial scholars. Most scholarship surrounding these games began as "critiques on the level of form itself - describing the ways in which the very logics and affordances of some games reinforce entrenched values of empire" (Murray 7). Many strategy and management games struggle with this critique as they are based on capitalistic resource management and planned economics that benefit one central being or location, usually whatever the player inhabits (an empire, group of beings, etc.) in said game. Shoshanan Magnets and Souvik Mukherjee analyze gamespace, or notions that landscape creates in 4X games. Magnets coined the term gamescape and discusses how landscapes in video games are "constructed within a particular ideological framework [that]...uses gamescape to interpolate the player into both a colonizing and masculinist ideology" (Murray 7). For example, in the strategy and management video game *Tropico*, gender is not directly addressed. Yet, the

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[1] Please reference Emory University's postcolonial scholarly blogs or *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism* by Gaurav Gajanan Desai and Supriya Nair for further information around the postcolonial studies definitional debate.

game consistently displays and refers to the player as a man, displaying images of a bearded man with a cigar in his mouth in military uniform. Anna Anthropy agrees with Magnets and addresses how 4X games "[force] the player to inhabit a political ideology" (Murray 7). Johan Hoglund studies this game genre from a neo-orientalist perspective, analyzing how military games "contribute to and/or reflect a larger ideology of empire" (Murray 8). Military 4X games like *Age of Empires* provide a great example of these ideas. While the player is constantly exploring and expanding their lands, the player's acts with military units alone. Sybille Lammes states, "playable representation as *Age of Empire* and *Civilization* not only model a colonial perspective, but personalize and make subjective what were once colonial histories" (Murray 8).

   Sid Meier's Civilization series (1991 - 2016) and the newly released *Humankind* (2021) created and are actively changing the 4X genre of video games. These terms define the player's exploration of the surrounding in-game land, expansion into that land, exploitation of its resources, and extermination of any player/peoples remaining on said land. According to marketing from the game developer and player reviews, *Humankind* is a 4X game comparable to *Civilization*, yet it turns away from traditional colonial themes and tools typically used by this genre of game and utilizes a less problematic style of gameplay. Allegedly, this game also utilizes a morality based game mechanic, or moral implications are tied to a players in game decisions which impact game outcomes. The *Civilization* series does not utilize or address the ideas of morality, which is the main divider between the two similar games. My thesis begins by establishing how ancient games evolved through history, then by tracking the historical colonial, capital, and religious themes within American board games from the late 1800s to the 1990s, specifically *The Game of Life*, *Monopoly*, and *Risk*. These board games created the game genres that led to 4X video games, and their roots are visible in the *Civilization* series and *Humankind*.

Following this, I will discuss previous postcolonial game scholarship that surrounds the

Civilization series, further those theories with my own analysis of that game and apply those

theories to *Humankind*. Lastly, I will define and analyze the 'morality' utilized by both games.

Specifically, I will attempt to define morality in relation to each game and analyze the playable

moral issues, the outcomes they produce, and which dilemmas are ignored.

Daniel Dooghan's research focused on mainstream, sandbox games like *Minecraft*. A

sandbox game is an open-concept game set on an environmental plane where players gather and

utilize resources to improve their surroundings. They will chop down trees to build houses and

fuel fires, hunt animals to eat and make clothes, etc. Dooghan suggests that these games are "not

politically neutral" but create "an overall neoliberal worldview in which myths of empire,

capital, and dominance over global resources become normalized" (Murray 9). This game

essentially creates a neoliberal utopia. I argue that the *Civilization* series does something similar.

The theory that some games reinforced the values and ideals of empire, explicitly creating a

western perspective on the development of civilizations and established understanding of history,

was discussed in almost every analysis of the 4X game genre discussed above.

The prominent postcolonial game scholars I utilize in my study of the *Civilization* series

and *Humankind* game are Soraya Murray, Dom Ford, and Souvik Mukherjee. Regarding notable

postcolonial scholars, I will utilize Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Edward Said. Finally,

Marxist scholar Louis Althusser's ideas underlie my analysis of ideology behind these games .

Ford, Mukherjee, and Murray discuss how these games recreated imperial and colonial systems

of power in a recognizable and playable format. Their arguments range from analyzing spatiality,

or the acquisition of geographical space, in empire games to analyzing *Civilization's* specific

western-centric structure and narrative. Murray provides most of my historical postcolonial game

studies information, discussed previously. She also provides a general understanding of where the field of research currently stands within game studies.

Souvik Mukherjee details how "the mechanism of empire is based on … geopolitics through which it lays claim to an established order of spatiality and ironically, further expansion" (Mukherjee 300). His main study focuses on how video games can represent "spatial relations, political systems, ethics, and social values of colonialism" and how these representations can be analyzed to display "insight into the neoliberal, capitalist, and expansionist rhetorics" that created them (Murray 6). He discusses the implications of a postcolonial subject being the player rather than only a figure in the games. He analyzes how the postcolonial player's action within a colonial based video game resembles Spivak's subaltern and voiceless subject. His theories are heavily rooted in how the video game medium impacts and informs his analysis. I will use his research to analyze further how the *Civilization* series and *Humankind* express their ideas of expansion and exploitation.

Dom Ford is criticized by Murray as "stopping short of the assertion that the game serves as a training tool for ruthless imperialism" he notably outlines how the game creates "a particular version of history that images a distinctly Western perspective and…submerges any kind of critique of imperialism" (Murray 10). Ford's goal is to analyze how *Civilization V* can or cannot be used successfully as an educational tool for students, ultimately analyzing the game's narrative implications to the players. Mainly, Ford explores the game's "representation of empire building and the writing of imperial histories and narratives" (Ford 3) and is concerned with "the writing of history and the voices that are heard and silenced in that process of writing" (Ford 3). I will use Ford's work consistently in my analysis of the *Civilization* series and the *Humankind* game mechanic analysis.

Louis Althusser's Marxist approach to ideology, in the 1970 essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", defines it as a system that maintains human relationship with reality through an imaginary set of narratives; "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser). While systems like the government, police, courts, and prisons are "repressive state apparatus…function[ing] by [physical] violence", systems like religion, education, family structure, cultures (literature, art, sports), politics, and healthcare are "ideological state apparatuses… function[ing] by ideology" (Althusser). These apparatuses were created by and exist within the superstructure of capitalism to continue the cycle of exploitation through their material effects. Both repressive and ideological state apparatuses transform a person into a subject of the state. In addition, the apparatuses impact the material. The current goal of ideology, according to Althusser, is to protect capital by integrating the material into values, customs, violence, and control. I will utilize Althusser's concept of ideology to analyze the *Civilization* series' gameplay mechanics and functions that transform everything, from people to land to prayers, into material and capital numerical representations. In addition, the game systems almost perfectly represent the ideas of repressive and ideological state apparatuses.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said explores the impacts of colonialism and western perceptions on colonized countries, analyzing how empires developed and functioned. According to Said, "The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe: it is …one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (Said 71). The Orient, meaning the east or the countries on the Asian or African continent, "helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" and it "is an integral part of European material civilization and culture" (Said 71). Through Orientalism, a phrase coined by Said, the west "[dealt] with [the east] by

making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism [is] a western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (Said 73). The *Civilization* series, among many other video games, consistently produces a western narrative and historical perspective, with the game's imperial functions ignoring or misrepresenting nonwestern peoples and narratives, or those outside the occident. In the game, the representation of all peoples is limited, and at times problematic. The stereotypical representation is used more so as an aesthetic choice and place holder for numerical, material benefit rather than an attempt to represent people properly or accurately.

Lastly, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is the postcolonial scholar I will use in my study of peoples, characters, and the unseen group that provides labor, as portrayed by the *Civilization* series and *Humankind* video game. In a section of her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak states, "the true subaltern group['s] …identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself" (Spivak 27). Spivak theorizes that any truly othered group by imperialistic narrative cannot be seen by "the subject of the West" or "Europe as subject" (Spivak 24). Nor can it speak for itself within any realm or discourse created by these subjects. She analyzes the subject's and subalterns' relations to labor and class. Spivak notes that most postcolonial scholars' "privilege is their loss" (Spivak 28) and, through their privilege, cannot truly see, speak for, represent, or analyze the subaltern. I will take an empathetic approach and attempt to avoid "merely…generalizing and co-opting subaltern peoples into the Western narrative" (Ford 9).

As Murray states, "Spivak's call to embrace alterity and contradiction does not specifically address video games, but as sites of aesthetic expressiveness that suspend us in the stories of others, games can reflect the world as it is, and present tools for imagining what our

place in it may be" (Murray 21). Ford, Murray, and Mukherjee all utilize Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in their analysis of 4X games. I will continue analyzing the *Civilization* series and *Humankind* games through their game mechanics using their scholarship, focusing on characters, non-playable characters, expansion, religion, and technology.

Chapter one will begin by tracking the historical influences that led to the creation of 4X video games, like *Sid Meier's Civilization* and *Humankind*, starting with some of humanity's oldest board games, continuing into United States' board games in the early 1860s, and ending with board games and general video game development in the late 1990s. Mainly, I will historically analyze the *Game of Life*, *Monopoly*, and *Risk*, but I will discuss many other board games in tandem. This historical analysis will display how these games are rooted in materialism, capitalism, colonialism, and protestant ideals and how those ideals transferred into video games like *Empire, Old World, Age of Wonders, Hearts of Iron, Victoria, Europa Universalis, Civilization* and *Humankind*.

Chapter two will focus on the *Civilization* series by discussing previous and relevant scholarship, outlining how it relates to game mechanics, and analyzing the game's created narrative. I will argue that the game series, through imperial mechanics, encapsulates western ideals to the player in a sandbox game space where their narrative is infallible, reaffirmed, and entertaining. I will also analyze how morality is defined by the game series and is inherently rooted in those narratives. The game's structure, narrative, and player actions are based on coloniality and imperialism. The player is restricted to operating under these systems of power.

Chapter three will focus on *Humankind*, the newest addition, and the biggest threat to *Civilization's* reigning control over the 4X genre. *Humankind* attempts to turn away from the traditional themes and gameplay 4X games utilize. While the two games have many similarities,

Humankind differs from *Civilization* in a few key areas. *Humankind* attempts to be a morally conscious 4X game, providing players with the ethical dilemmas that follow war, colonization, and exploitation. These moral dilemmas vary from decisions on how the government will handle the clash of languages to whether the country will accept or deny refugees; from addressing pollution to the country's acceptance or opposition to slave fighting pits. Yet, a morally conscious 4X game is an oxymoron. The fundamental ideas in this game work against each other. This chapter will determine if *Humankind* is achieving its claims or is recreating the same issues all 4X games display, exemplified in the *Civilization* series.

In conclusion, my thesis aims to display how certain board games influenced and created the 4X video game genre, the issues within specific 4X games, and how the genre is growing to combat these issues. Overall, these games have been played for thousands of hours and are immensely popular. They won't be forgotten or ignored. Regardless of their somewhat inability to adapt to academic criticism, these games are intended to represent the development of humanity. Their displayed histories, narratives, and representations of humanity are advertised, sold, and immortalized in these games. Critical analysis that presents the imperial nature and western ideologies behind these games is vital for players, scholars, and the betterment of 4X game genre. Video games are an integral part of modern culture. They allow people to become active participants in narratives, experiencing ideologies and stories in a new way. We ignore their cultural presence and justify their place outside academic criticism at our own peril. Film, pulp fiction novels, graphic novels, and comic books were all, at one point, seen as inconsequential and left outside academic cannon. Yet, each of these art forms eventually found their way into the cannon due to their valuable insight into popular culture and dominate societal values. Just as cinema in the early 20ᵗʰ century created new horizons for popular narrative forms

and ideology, video games will continue to create a new narratives, formats, and experiences for

players.

II. BOARD GAMES TO VIDEO GAMES

Board games have done more than just survive. They have made and ruined fortunes, revealed the secrets of lost civilizations and concealed the work of spies, and tested our morals. They have saved marriages, exposed the inner workings of our minds, decoded geopolitics, tracked societal changes, and organized the killing of millions. And - most of all - they have entertained us.

--- Tristan Donovan, "It's All a Game: The History of Board Games from Monopoly to Settlers of Catan"

Board games, card games, and dice-based games have been played as early as 6000 BC, but evidence points to the even earlier existence of board games; "For thousands of years, games have been one of the most popular forms of entertainment – and for some periods the most popular" (Spanos 3). While the origination of board games is unknown, the earliest board game humanity discovered was found in Egypt and dates to 3000 BC. From 3000 BC onward, humanity created thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of board games varying in shape, genre, and style. Many games were forgotten with the fall of empires and the destruction of peoples. Other board games, very few, followed trade routes to new countries, be adopted, rewritten, and distributed. War, religion, and the dominant culture of any given area ripped a game to pieces, but some games were rebuilt from the leftover parts. For years, people created or copied other homemade versions of their favorite games, handmaking game boards, pieces, and rules. Much like the evolution of a long-surviving species, popular games adapt to survive and become almost unrecognizable versions of themselves.

Once innovation led to manufacturing, plastics, and upgrades in general technologies like the printing press and chromolithography, board games were produced on a massive scale, with

popular games spreading globally. The process of game adaptability started in 3000 BC (though it most likely began when games were created) and continue to 2023, with fans reuploading old video games to websites for public access when the company that owns the game refuses to continue distributing it. Tristan Donovan, an avid researcher, and producer of game history from the first board games to current popular video games, placed board games in four eras in his article "The Four Board Game Eras: Making Sense of Board Gaming's Past": the folk era, the mass-produced era, the plastic era, and the connected era. Like board games in the folk era, with fans creating handmade boards and tokens to play the game, video games are being reuploaded, modified, and given to others for them to enjoy. While there is little connecting board games and video games today, and as Donovan discusses, the current division between the two fields only grows, there was a point where the two medias converged. In the 1970s and 1980s, many board games evolved into video games. In this convergence, the commercial success of board games created a desire for new games and new mediums of play. This desire aided in the creation of the video game industry. Some of the first games to step onto the virtual platform were originally board games.

This chapter will begin by outlining and tracking various points in board game history that influenced the creation of 4X video games, like *Sid Meier's Civilization* and *Humankind.* My historical analysis will begin with some of humanity's oldest recorded board games, displaying how these games adapt to survive and remain for thousands of years. Then, I will jump ahead to the early 1800s in the United States and continue to the release of the video game *Humankind* in 2021. This historical analysis aims to prove how the 4X genre of video games, specifically the *Civilization* series and *Humankind*, have roots in 19th and 20th century America's capitalism, colonialism, and religious dogma which began in American board games. While

these games, like their ancestors, try to adjust to modern culture and societal norms, they cannot escape nor change the foundations of their game as they are inherently bound within these systems. Thus, they cannot claim to abstain from the ideologies these systems create.

Part One: Ancient Games

To begin the historical journey through board game past, we start with ancient board games played for millennia. One of the first board games excavated from ancient peoples was called "the game of thirty squares," or "Senet" (meaning passing in Egyptian), with the earliest copy, found dating back to 3000 BC (Donovan, *It's All A Game* 10). The board game was found in Egypt, specifically in Tutankhamun's tomb, by Lord Howard Carnarvon in 1922. Britain's massive colonization efforts unearthed many of the world's oldest artifacts, including board games. All these games under consideration were "discovered" by British archaeologists and are possibly held in the British museum's colonial treasure trove. Yet, the discovery of *Senet* provided a unique area of study that other previous finds had not. It allowed archaeologists to study the game itself and its placement in Egyptian society and culture. In other areas of the tomb, there were illustrations of people playing the game on wall paintings and papyrus drawings. In other Egyptian archaeological sites, more depictions of the game board were found carved in numerous places. The depictions located on floors, walls, and tables everywhere, from houses to tombs. Inconsistencies arose as the board's layout was constantly depicted differently. These deviations led to years of confusion and argument among researchers about the rules and goals of the game.

As thousands of years passed, *Senet* continued to be played in its various versions. It was still being played when Alexander the Great conquered Egypt. A copy of this game was even included in the *Book of the Dead*, written in 1250 B.C. Over time, academics and archeologists'

most accepted theory about the game morphed from an entertainment-based objective to a faith-based depiction of the Egyptian afterlife. The game's goal was to teach the masses what to expect after death based on moral expectations. On a journey through the underworld, the good spirits would "unite with Ra and live forever", while the "souls of sinners would be punished and destroyed" *(It's All A Game* 12). Despite the Christian verbiage used, the game combined Egyptian religious messaging and entertainment with the goal of education. Would a player face "fiery annihilation," or could they "change their ways" (*It's All A Game* 3)?

Senet continued to be played and evolved through many iterations. It was believed to allow the living to commune with the dead at one point. While its religious foundation was most likely its ruin due to the eventual Christian Roman rule in Egypt, around 60 CE, the themes behind the gameplay were found in many other board games. Specifically, the idea that religious morality could be taught through board games dominantly prevailed in multiple countries until the 1900s.

Sadly, *Senet* does not resemble any modern game, and our only understanding of its meaning is based on researcher theory. A translatable guide or rules to the game was never found. In addition, *Senet* cannot be traced past the Egyptians. Yet, this game flowed seemingly throughout Egyptian society, through different socioeconomic classes, and into religious teachings. It was played for thousands of years by slaves, workers, and royals. It is one of the first examples of a board game lasting through generations of humanity. In the city of Ur, around a thousand years earlier, another game stood on a similar pillar.

In 4000 BC, *The Royal game of Ur* was found in the excavation of the ruins of Ur in what is now southern Iraq. Once a city of great riches and immensely populated, the city fell due to invaders, war, and drought. The first board game of *The Royal Game of Ur* was found in the

Royal Cemetery and the board was inlaid with shells and gemstones. Like *Senet*, the game traversed class and was played on various boards in many homes. It was a racing game meant to entertain and tell the player's fortune. In 1880, a game tablet created by a Babylonian scribe was excavated in the ruins of Babylon by European archaeologists and sold to the British Museum. Here, the game sat forgotten in archives for one hundred years. Eventually, in the 1980s, Irving Finkel of the British museum, translated the game, and research around it continued. *The Royal game of Ur* was historically traced from the city of Ur to the Middle East to Kochi and even to a s mall number of people in Israel after World War II. Finally, people stopped playing *The Royal game of Ur*, yet there is no evidence providing any specific reason. Some theorists believe it evolved into modern backgammon. Others believe backgammon drew players away from *The Royal game of Ur*. Either way, *The Royal game of Ur* stands next to *Senet* as one of the ancient world's most popular games, which is still remembered and studied today. While having not been played for thousands of years, *Senet* and *The Royal game of Ur* still influence board game studies today.

While some ancient board games, like *Senet* and *The Royal game of Ur*, fell out of popular culture, others, such as Mancala and chess, endured through adaptations. As previously stated, Donovan created four eras to study board games, and chess and Mancala fall into the folk era. In the folk era, Donovan describes, "board games had no inventors, no owners, and no fixed rules sets. Everything was liable to change, or adjustment and they spread largely person-to-person" (Donovan, "Four Board Game Eras" 266). These games kept growing, "chang[ing] generation to generation, from nation to nation, or even from community to community" ("Four Board Game Eras" 266). Due to their ever-shifting rules, game boards, and players, their histories are long, tedious, and full of holes. Yet, their weakness of structure is also their strength

of malleability. They saw the rise and fall of empires, the end of eras, and were played well into the modern day.

Mancala has existed since roughly 1000 BC, with alleged starting points in African, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries. It could be played with a board with holes and seeds or rocks, but the board and pieces, like the game, have many different iterations. The origins of this game are vast and unstable due to the fallibility of the board, which was commonly be made from dirt or wood, and the complex, widespread history. Today there are hundreds of game versions, like *Oware* and *Boa*, which change depending on the country and culture the game is found in. Mancala's players have been traced through Ethiopia and Eritrea to Transylvania despite its fuzzy history. Eventually, spreading along slave trade routes from East Africa with French colonists to other areas in Europe. Mancala is "sometimes portrayed as a single game, even though that's like calling playing cards" (*It's All A Game* 16) a single game. Even with hundreds of different games, the game board and pieces remain similar enough to mass produce. Mancala became commercially successful, and game boards were produced around the globe. Another game, as old and evolved as Mancala, also utilized a global standardized board. Chess evolved with nations and eventually have a globally understood standard for its rules, board, and gameplay.

On July 20th, 2022, otherwise known as world chess day, the United Nations released a statistic that 605 million adults play chess regularly (United Nations, "World Chess Day"). These results were polled from adults in the US, UK, Germany, Russia, and India. Chess is typically deemed "the best board game of all time" in many countries. This title, while opinionated and extreme, fits chess quite well as it is probably the most popular of the ancient board games that originated thousands of years ago.

Chess originated in the Gupta empire, located in today's northeastern India, in the fourth century. The Gupta empire was built through a fearsome military and war-based expansion covering most of India, reaching into Afghanistan, touching the Himalayas, and stretching into Mumbai. The game began through an evolution of an already existing game, *Ashtapada*, which had its own lengthy history, but soon became *Chaturanga*. *Chaturanga*, or "four limbs" in Sanskrit, "was a war game…the playing pieces represented the four divisions of the Gupta Empire's military: infantry, horsemen, war elephants, and ships. Each player also had a piece that represented the raja who commanded their forces" (*It's All A Game* 20). This war game looked very different from the strategy game we know today, and it evolved multiple times following the dominant societal culture. Initially, the game involved dice, tokens, figurines, multiple players, multiple armies, and a large playing board. Soon, religious pressure from Hindus and Buddhists encouraged the players to eliminate dice from gameplay, as "Hindu legal text the Laws of Manu opposed playing games with dice" (*It's All A Game* 21). A dominant religion can decimate board games, but chess is the first game to utilize religious criticism to its benefit. *Chaturanga*, or chess, underwent many cosmetic changes and continuously "[evolve] to fit the society it arrived in" (*It's All A Game* 23).

The Silk Road took *Chaturanga* to Persia in 531 AD, where the name was changed to *Shatranj*, and the playing figures were altered to represent Persian war symbols, evolving to fit their society. The Muslim army's invasion of Persia in the early seventeenth century led to the game spreading to Arab and Muslim countries. Again, the game had a cosmetic change, and the rules altered to fit Islamic doctrine. It was banned and unbanned by some Islamic countries starting in the 1980s and remain forbidden on moral grounds in Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Chess "reached Europe at the end of the first millennium, in Byzantium due to the direct

contacts between the Byzantine and the Muslim world and in Western Europe because of the Arab conquests" (Spanos 143). It swept across the continent, but it was not until the late 1300s that the game had a widely understood and agreed-upon set of rules and pieces. By the 18th century, chess clubs opened across Europe, with the first chess competitions between people being held at coffeehouses and cafes. When manufacturing began in London, John Jacques & Son produced the standardized chess set known today, The Staunton set in 1849. The Staunton board of sixty-four squares, the playing pieces (king, queen, bishops, knights, rooks, and pawns), and its set rules are the chess game typically played today. The World Chess Federation declared this version the global standard in 1924, setting the gameplay for all future international competitions. Unlike other board games, chess grew to be played domestically and internationally, leisurely, and competitively, with competitions between countries impacting international relations.

While played and loved globally, chess owes its contemporary look and standardization to the reign of the British empire. The playing pieces seem reminiscent of medieval Europe, and the standardization happened during this empire's peak. Chess fame and standardization were due to Britain's colonial and imperial efforts. On the other hand, Indian chess game variants are still played today, utilizing previous, older, game pieces (like raja [king], mantri [minister], ghora [horse/cavalry], gaja [elephant], nauka [ship/navy] pieces) and rules. These games are different from *Chaturanga* and standard European chess. They will continue to independently develop into other new game versions as time progresses.

Each of these games (Chess, *The Royal Game of Ur*, Mancala, *Senet*) have gameplay that is rooted in a narrative. The games let the player fight a war or determine their future and game's narrative is altered to fit the player. Board games and narrative are always connected and

influencing each other as most games provide a narrative structure or story for the player to follow. A great example of board game and narrative connection is *Parchisi,* originated in India in the 4th century A.D., this game is mentioned in the great Indian epic poem *Mahabharata* as *Pasha* (WhiteHill). *Mahabharata* is an important text in Hinduism and one aspect of this massive poem dictates the story of the Pandava family. The Pandava's are exiled from their kingdom and to return, one of the Pandava brothers, Yudhishthira, bets their home on a game of *Pasha*. His loss results in an additional twelve years of exile for the family. The inclusion of the game *Pasha* as a pinnacle point in narration further solidified the game's popularity and further evolution. Not only did this game also evolve to tie into religion, it ties a board game to a narration outside itself. *Pasha* or *Parchisi*, a previous evolution of *Chaupar*, evolved into many game variations like *Sorry!, Parcheesi, Trouble, Ludo, Twenty-five,* and *Patchesi* (WhiteHill). The narrativity within games only grows as they evolved through time. Eventually, stories created games and games created stories. Narration flows between board games and many differing genres. Popular board games inspired television shows in the 1990s with shows like *Pictionary*, *Monopoly*, and *Trivial Pursuit*. Chess rules are used as narrative devices in literature and film, a popular example being the Netflix show *The Queen's Gambit*, detailing a woman's journey to a world chess champion. The popular television show *Stranger Things* was inspired by the board game *Dungeon and Dragons*. Video games specifically allow players to act as the main character in a story, where their actions and choices altered the narrative.

Games like chess and Mancala survived for over a millennium, "board games … can count its existence not just in human generations but also in whole ages of human civilization" ("Four Board Game Eras" 266). Each of these ancient games, *Senet*, *The Royal Game of Ur*, Mancala, and chess, were touched, impacted, or preserved in some way by the British. This is

most likely a result of their colonial and imperialistic actions from the 1500s to 1900s. This statement highlights how these systems can impact and shape humanity's oldest board games. They shape how players understand board games, how they are played, and impact which games live on through generations. Future board games I will discuss are shaped even more so by these systemic issues.

With that said, I do not want to overshadow the importance of people in this historical analysis. While the British empire's systems of colonization impacted these games, the games owe their adaption and survival to the people who loved to play and study them. The people that settled to play their favorite game with a dirt-drawn board and rocks. The people that drew and redrew their favorite board game on cloth or paper. It is those people who are responsible for these lasting and famous games, as well as their descendants who kept playing the games that lasted until the modern age. Players are the blood that kept pumping in the heart of these ancient folk games. I will continue to display how players, despite the whims and demands of the dominant socioeconomic culture, are the true keepers of humanity's favorite games.

Part Two: Board Games in Early America

The ancient, or folk, board games section established how colonialism impacted games and how games evolve throughout human history. This section will jump to outline the board games that lay the foundations for modern 4X video games. While ancient, or folk, board games dominated most of human history, the nineteenth century led board games into a new era of mass production. As Donovan explains, "The 1700s saw a new era begin, as intellectual property rights and mass production techniques redefined the way people thought of and distributed board games" ("Four Board Game Eras" 267). The United States began manufacturing and producing board games in the mid-nineteenth century, and the industry only grew. There are clear histories,

documentation, and theories that track a board game created in the 19th century to two hundred years later into the modern day. Board games were "mass produced… have identifiable owners whose position as the owner is legally protect[ed] and have official rules" and they were "no longer [be] malleable objects owned by the commons, but products created usually in the pursuit of profit" ("Four Board Game Eras" 267).

In the 1830s, the United States began to change politically, economically, and socially. Urbanization and industrialization pushed families to live in cities, restructuring the family dynamic, and giving children leisure time instead of work. In addition, this new family structure combined "with a burgeoning middle class and advances in …technology…assured a lucrative market for board and table games" (Jensen 4). The nineteenth century began America's turn towards consumerism, and by the end of the century, protestant piety vanished from mainstream culture. Board games mimicked this switch in culture as well, with religiously oriented board games like the protestant's *The Mansion of Happiness* (TMOH) becoming *The Game of Life*, while political games like *The Landlord's Game* were philosophically flipped to become *Monopoly*. Games that "emphasized moral instruction were superseded by ones that centered on subjects such as industry, transportation, and current events" (Jensen 5) in the flip from religious values to consumerist and capitalist values. Yet, despite their extreme changes, these games could not entirely escape their predecessor's narrative that shaped them. The resulting games, having adapted as they aged, still retained some semblance of their original intention.

The Mansion of Happiness was a religious board game published in England in 1800 and brought to the New England area in 1843. Gameplay involved a player "spin[ing] the spinner and mov[ing] along a path on which more than half the spaces are illustrated with virtues and vices" (Jensen 4). The game spaces "took a hard line on sin, imposing harsh punishments" like

"Whoever becomes a Sabbath Breaker must be taken to the Whipping post and whipt" and
"Whoever gets into a Passion must be taken to The Water and have a dunking to cool him" (*It's
All A Game* 53). The game ended at "*The Mansion of Happiness,* or heaven" (Jensen 1). Based
loosely on "the game of goose", a 1480 Italian entertainment-based dice game (Spanos 1),
TMOH "offered a puritanical twist…to enhance the soul" (*It's All A Game* 55). The dice were
left behind from *The Game of Goose*, replaced by a teetotum as dice and gambling were seen as
"tools of the devil". This view "[persisted] well into the nineteenth century, so they were
forbidden in most American homes" (Jensen 5). This game, like most games in America during
the beginning of the nineteenth century, was heavily rooted in Christian religion and had the goal
of morally educating people with Protestant values. Thus, the narrative the game created
reflected the game's goal; if the player lived life as the game instructed, they would go to heaven.

      In the 1840s, New England, or more precisely modern-day Maine, New Hampshire,
Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and parts of New York and lower Canada,
was inhabited mainly by Methodists and Protestants. The popularity of *TMOH* grew while the
"attitudes toward children… changed" (Jensen 4). Adults began to realize "in order to grow into
moral and industrious adults, [children] needed a stimulating environment" (Jensen 4). The goal
was to bring up "literate and moral" children by guiding their "learning, religious piety, and
personal appearance" (Jensen 4). Protestants used board games like *TMOH* for children's
religious and moral education. Generally, "religious New Englanders viewed broad games as
gateway drugs that could lure children into a life of gambling and sin" (*It's All A Game* 55), but
this religion-based game turned the head of popular culture. Instead of all board games being
tossed aside as wholly immoral and sinful, some were allowed to be educational and pious. This
development led New Englanders to play board games openly and in social gatherings. In

addition, board games were slowly becoming a sellable product and commodity that fit into a

capitalistic culture.

TMOH soon inspired another game, *The Checkered Game of Life*, in 1860. The game

took the pious bleakness of its predecessor and replace it with a combination of happier ideals.

Players traversed more positive spaces that represented "going to college and getting married"

and "working hard and getting rich" (Jensen 5). The negative spaces still held some semblance of

the religious discourse in *TMOH,* with players avoiding areas like "idleness, intemperance,

gambling, poverty, ruin" (Jensen 5). Most religious verbiage was removed from the game, aside

from an alter on the marriage space and the clear Protestant values. Yet, the goal of the game had

changed. Instead of reaching heaven, the winner aimed "to live a good life and become the first

player to achieve a happy old age" (*It's All A Game* 54). *The Checkered Game of Life* also

provided a mix of chance and player autonomy, something *TMOH*, which relied on chance

alone, did not have. Players could choose the "right" path instead of hoping the teetotum landed

them there.

Through *The Checkered Game of Life*, gameplay and game narrative started changing.

Game narratives add a story to gameplay and give the game its meaning or create an overall

point of playing. *TMOH* produced a narrative that players can only watch as life throws sinful or

righteous paths upon them. They have no control over their religious path of good or evil. *The

Checkered Game of Life* produced a narrative that players could seek happiness and goodness

through their actions, even after they sinned or mis stepped. As Donovan stated, the "game's

underlying message was clear: everyone is responsible for his or her own actions and

setbacks…[which] can be overcome if you strive for goodness" (*It's All A Game* 54). In addition,

the removal of a central religious doctrine also led to the New England population stepping

further and further away from their religion dictating their board game pastime.

    The Checkered Game of Life, created by Milton Bradley[2], became quite popular for an 1860s American board game, selling over forty thousand copies in New York City (*It's All A Game,* 57). Yet, by the end of the nineteenth century, the game fell out of popular culture, as did Protestant and Methodist piety norms. *The Checkered Game of Life* disappeared for around sixty years, but by the time it resurged, the board game industry in America had changed. The Gilded age created a push towards games centered in capitalistic and consumerist rhetoric, while religious and spiritual games fell out of popularity.

    Yet, some spiritual games began transforming to fit the culture, similar to the adaptation of ancient and folk board games. The morality-based Indian game, *Moksha Patamu*, was rooted in Hindu and Jain beliefs and had players working toward spiritual liberation climbing "virtue" ladders like "knowledge and generosity" and sliding down "vice" snakes like "anger, vanity, lust, and killing" (*It's All A Game* 58). In 1890, the game was released in Victoria Britain as "Snakes & Ladders, the vices and virtues …removed" and when it reached America in 1934 as "Chutes and Ladders", even the snakes were removed (*It's All A Game* 58). While the game evolved to remove all religious diction, the playing board is still left, and the player is left with a question, why do we climb the ladder? Why do we slide down the chute? The altered game intends to provide no answer to these questions, yet the game still creates a message for the player. For example, climbing the ladder is hard, but it gets the player closer to the goal of winning. While sliding down the chute is easy, it prevents the player from winning. A message, despite its vagueness, can be gleaned. Hard efforts lead to good results. Despite the will of Victorian Britain

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[2]Bradley founded The Milton Bradley company, a successful American board manufacturer, in 1860. The company continuously succeed and outlive Bradley. Eventually, it became a division of Hasbro in 1984, a five-billion-dollar holdings company that has famously produced toys, games, and even television shows for children around the world.

and America to turn this game into "a message free-plaything" (*It's All A Game* 58), the game still retains some of its heritage.

Similar to *Moksha Patamu*, the goals of many board games shifted from religious and educational to entertainment alone to sell board games to secure profit. America was "aided by industrial-scale printing technology and the growth of leisure time" to increase the production and consumption of board games. These games stopped "threatening players with trips to the whipping post, board games now" focused on "fun and being modern" (*It's All A Game* 57). While child development was still a concern, board games were proving to be a lucrative business and were becoming widely accepted regardless of the exclusion of moral or religious teachings. Eventually, even "the antipathy toward dice gradually disappear, and by the 1870s, brightly colored dice and dice cups appeared in many manufactured games" (Jensen 5). The industry had drastically changed, and a new generation of board games was being created while others were evolving with the times. Finally, *The Checkered Game of Life* found a resurgence in 1959 by Australian hula hoop creator Reuben Klamer.

Klamer took *The Checkered Game of Life* and transform it into *The Game of Life*. *The Game of Life* released during the surge of plastic use in toys and games. Klamer replaced the teetotum from *The Checkered Game of Life* with a plastic spinning wheel. Despite the major shift in society's view of dice and games like *Monopoly* freely and successfully using them, the producers of the game still viewed dice as evil. So, despite its attempts to lose religious influences, *The Game of Life* had a significant aspect of its gameplay solidified by protestant, Christian morality. Religion also appeared as a "compulsory stop at the church to get married (no bachelors, spinsters, or living in sin allowed)" (*It's All A Game* 60), and the fundamental pillars of a good, protestant life remained in the game.

Despite this religious decision, Klamer aimed to restructure the game to "captur[e] the optimism and consumerism of white America at the dawn of the 1960s" (*It's All A Game* 60), and he succeeded. The gameplay and rules were like today's version of T*he Game of Life*, although there were still a few changes between the 1960's version and today's version. Player's journey around the board, starting college, careers, collecting salaries, getting married, buying houses, having children, and hoping to retire wealthy. This new version of *Game of Life* ended on "the Day of Reckoning, the moment when the value of players' table-top lives would be measured by toting up their money to see who was richest" (*It's All A Game* 60). At this game's end, we see another significant narrative shift. After "one hundred years … from Bradley's Morality lesson, players no longer aspired to a happy old age but dreamed of spending their retirement in the luxurious surrounds of Millionaire Acres" (*It's All A Game* 60). In *The Checkered Game of Life*, the game ended with the player living a happy life. Good deeds and life moments were just as important aspects of the game as making money. *The Game of Life*, while full of life's happiest and saddest moments onboard spaces, in the end, was only concerned with the player's capital gained. The player could have completed good deeds, had a family, and overall had a happy life; But if that were not represented in monetary wealth, the player ended the game at "the poor farm", or in future redesigns of the game, in "destitute and disgraced…reduced to living on social security" (*It's All A Game* 63).

With morality and religious-based rhetoric vanishing at the turn of the century, "good deeds were out, greenbacks were in" (*It's All A Game* 60). *The Game of Life*'s turn toward capital only grew as years passed. The progression of the game past the 1960s and into the modern day led to multiple changes and adaptions. The losing players received a happier retirement at a "country cottage" instead of the "poor farms" (*It's All A Game* 64). This narrative

change led to a happier ending for all players, which mimicked the politics of the 1980s. By the 1990s, following the sociopolitical climate, Hasbro (the new owner of the game) tried to turn away from the "games' wealth obsession" (*It's All A Game* 65). They created life tiles that tried to reinstate good deeds as a pillar of the game. Instead of a sum of money, the player received a lifetime achievement like writing the next great American novel. The company seemed to be drawing from Bradley's original take on the game. Yet, this game version failed, and to save the game's popularity, a sum of money was tied to life tiles. The game resembled an older version with the addition of life tiles, but on the "Day of Reckoning [life tiles] were converted into cold hard cash" (*It's All A Game* 65). The game assigned a monetary value to winning a Nobel peace prize, winning a humanitarian award, or saving an endangered species, "life, it seemed, always came down to money no matter what you did" (*It's All A Game* 65).

From *The Mansion of Happiness* to *The Checkered Game of Life* to *The Game of Life*, throughout its many stages, this game always changed to reflect the values of the dominant social culture. While the game lost many Protestant aspects and gained an extremely capitalist outlook, the narrative outlining how to live a good Protestant life remained. Marriage at a Protestant church and having children are non-negotiable aspects of the game. The message that doing good deeds leads to a good life remained. The only way the game truly changed was by reflecting how the Protestant lifestyle had changed from circling god to circling profit, "the only god in this American life was money" (*It's All A Game* 61). As religious games transformed into capitalist games, new consumption-based games began to emerge.

In 1877, the Gilded age began, creating a huge divide between employees and company owners. American industries like oil, steel, and railroad companies, among many others, were being monopolized. Tycoons, or robber barons, like J. P. Morgan ", used their power and riches

to snuff out competition, exploit workers, and undermine democracy by bribing corrupt politicians" (*It's All A Game* 72) to further their business and amass millions. Morgan created the first billion-dollar corporation, U.S. steel. Yet, "as these industrialists and financiers amassed millions, the cracks in American society split open. People began talking about class struggle and forming trade unions to take power back" (*It's All A Game* 72). Workers' rights, protests, and class-conscious discourse was now becoming household news. In 1879, Henry George wrote a book, *Progress and Poverty*, which "argued undeveloped land was God given and any increase in its value was due to work done by people… [any] money landlords made simply from owning land really belong to everyone" (*It's All A Game* 73). In summary, George wanted to restore value or income to the laborer, not the landlord, and shrink the divide between classes[3]. This bestselling book created a political movement, the single taxers, who unintentionally created a game that was utterly antithetical to their beliefs, *The Landlord's Game* or *Monopoly*.

While the end of the nineteenth century saw an end to the domination of religious board games, the socioeconomic environment the Gilded age created in America helped push the popularity of consumerist and capitalist-valued games. From the 1890s onward, board games begin to take a materialist turn with the development of technology and the rise of department stores. America began perceiving "economic success in regard to accumulating material goods as evidence of God's blessing," (Jensen 5) and the cultural shift to consumerism was unstoppable. Popular games included games like the "Game of playing Department store," which had

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[3] To be clear, the single tax political movement was far from socialistic or communistic. In fact, George was a capitalist and denounced Marx as a "prince of muddle-heads", believing communism led to dictatorship. Marx believed a single tax "work[ed] against communism and in an 1881 letter he described George as "utterly backward" (*It's All A Game* 77). The Red Scare, in 1917, was the ultimate downfall of this movement as it was looped in with the villainization of socialism. Thus, after the death of its founder, the single-tax movement slowly died out of the mainstream political discourse.

"player[s] attempt[ing] to amass the most material goods during a shopping expedition" (Jensen 1), and a game called *Banking* (Orbanes 9), where the winning player becomes the richest first.

In 1903, Elizabeth Magie, a political single taxer, designed the board game *The Landlord's Game* to bring life to the movement and educate others (Orbanes 9). The game had "players [travel] around and around the board using paper money to buy lots, railroad, and utilities… after buying a property players could then charge rent to anyone who landed on it and build houses that increased the amount" (*It's All A Game* 74). The game ended when the players had circled the board a specific number of times and the player with the most money won. In Magie's own words, the game displayed "how the landlord gets his money and keeps it" and she intended to educate others on "the injustice of it all" (*It's All A Game* 75).

Magie had some difficulty getting the game formally published in 1905 as it was seen as too political and complex, despite the local love for the game in Delaware. Magie's game clearly stood at odds with games that were commercially successful; "bold, detailed, and educational, it was far from commercial" (Orbanes 15). It wasn't until students from the University of Pennsylvania were introduced to the game by an economics professor from Delaware, that the game became domestically popular. Like popular folk-era games, these students started recreating their version of the game by hand, adding new rules, and gameplay methods. Soon, *The Landlord's Game* "spread via word of mouth and handcrafted copies while being refined slowly by input of countless, nameless individuals" (*It's All A Game* 77). Eventually, "people would make copies of the Landlord's Game for their friends on sheets of oilcloth," and "they would type or write Chance cards…and property deeds on unlined index card…and turn earrings, coins, and other miscellaneous household items into playing pieces" (*It's All A Game* 78). Soon, versions of *The Landlord's Game* were not only filling the halls of academic institutes

but also filling homes across the northeastern United States. In addition to fame, the students also gave it a new nickname, *Monopoly*.

At this point, the long and complicated history of *Monopoly's* publication begins. It is through this folk-era popularity that *Monopoly* survived the end of the Gilded age and through the Great Depression. In 1927, Daniel Layman solidified a version of *The Landlord's Game* and add community chest cards while updating its cosmetic look, finally commercially publishing the game under the name *Finance*. Even by removing Magie's overt political messaging, the game was still too complicated to sell and failed commercially. Thus, it once again fell into the rings of domestic popularity once again avoiding mass production on an industrial scale. Eventually, another person recreated the game. A Quaker woman, Ruth Hoskins, recreated the game with names and places around her town, Atlantic City. This version of Monopoly spread to Philadelphia, where it was introduced to Charles Todd, who played the game with Charles Darrow. Darrow took the game, including Todd's edited game version and spelling errors from copying Hoskins's version and sold it successfully commercially. This version of the game became the *Monopoly* we know today.

While there is an argument for Darrow stealing the game from Todd, the history of *Monopoly* is long, somewhat confusing, and sordid. So many hands, documented in companies and undocumented in homes, rewrote the rules and recreated the game. There were at one time, multiple different patents for the game. Individuals, companies, and department stores all had a hand in the history of *Monopoly*. While we can credit Magie for the creation of the original game that turned into *Monopoly*, I do not have the time in this paper to find, track, and analyze the creators of the game, thieves or not. It is important to note that Darrow was credited in history as the original creator of the game and made millions from *Monopoly*, while Magie was only paid

$500 for her original idea and patent.

Darrow's game was wildly successful, eventually having his game produced by the Parker Brothers company, and "by the end of 1935, more than 250,000 copies of the game had been sold" (*It's All A Game* 84). By 2016, Monopoly had sold over 250 million copies (*It's All A Game* 86). *Monopoly* seems to be completely at odds with its original self, *The Landlord's Game*. New versions of the game switch from buying land to big-name brands like My Little Pony or Spotify. Players can steal, sabotage, and collude against one another for profit. Donovan argues that "the message of the Landlord's Game lurks in Monopoly. It can still be seen in the way that every game ends with one rich monopolistic landlord and everyone else ruined" (*It's All A Game* 85).

I agree and argue that Magie's message continues in another cultural-based way. In current American board game culture, the playing of *Monopoly* is always tied with angry players and arguments. It has been known to start fights in friendships and families. It has become a waiting game of 'let's see who lands on boardwalk first', as they will most likely be the winner. Monopoly has created a social understanding around itself, with people stereotypically flipping the game board over before the game is complete out of anger. This anger comes from frustration at the gameplay, the lack of player autonomy, and the game's functionality. The game, similar to TMOH, relies solely on a roll of dice or chance. This also helps lay out Magie's message of the renter's relationship to the system of capitalism that benefits landlords. Hopefully, the dice lands the player on a piece of property they can afford that will doubly make them rich; if not the player loses. The game functions under a "dog-eat-dog capitalism" (*It's All A Game* 85) ideal, which does not stay entertaining for long. As soon as one player steps ahead, the economic divide intentionally only grows, with the rich getting richer and others becoming poor. Soon

enough, one player is having fun, while others are upset at the high rent charges and unfair advancement opportunities. While not precisely representing Magie's political argument, the basic anti-landlord sentiment remains in the game despite its years of change. It only takes an hour or so of gameplay for one monopolist to rise above the others. Suddenly, a die-hard capitalist, at the beginning of the game, begins accusing another player of cheating due to the number of houses on a property and complaining of high rent costs. If Magie's message is not maintained, it seems her feelings around Landlords have been.

Like *The Game of Life*, *Monopoly* could not completely leave its ancestors in the past. While it, like all popular board games, adapted to survive, remnants of nineteenth-century America remain in its gameplay and player attitude. Both games were insanely successful and created board game genres where others would try to mimic their gameplay and success. *The Game of Life* led the genre of board games that held onto remnants of the Christian colonial past. *Monopoly* led the board games that focused on materialism by continuing to hold onto the Gilded age's capitalistic values. Each of these game genres have an influence over the video game industry and specifically the 4X genre of games, but the creation and popularity of war board games impacted video games the most.

The development of war-based board games, from their origination to their rise in popularity, was caused by militaries, armies, and soldiers worldwide. For the first time, board games step outside of the domestic world. The games were not played for entertainment but to enhance military planning and strategy. These games started the strategy game genre. In 1941, the Japanese used a war game to plan, practice, and finalize their attack on Pearl Harbor (*It's All A Game* 90). The game results and plan were utilized to launch their attack successfully. This was not the first use of war games as literal battle practice and plan, and it was not the last.

The idea of "using games as military planning tools originated in the Germanic states of Europe" (*It's All A Game* 92), with one of the earliest attempts starting in 1559. Chess was the original start to the war game genre. The war game credited as the successful start of the battle realistic war game genre is *Kriegsspiel* or War Game in German. Created in 1810 by Lieutenant Georg Von Reisswitz, "Kriegsspiel" (*It's All A Game* 93) was a combination of two and three-dimensional to-scale landscapes. The game utilized free-form movement (a step away from chess or dice games), tokens that represented military units, and mathematical rules to dictate gameplay. The game was meant to plan and test real-life military action. The game was popular and efficient, played by the King of Prussia and adopted as a tool by the entire Prussian army. This game proved to be a valuable tool in the Franco-Prussian war. With the Prussian victory in 1871, any country with a military began using it, "the Austrians, the Russians, the British, the Italians, the Americans, the Japanese, and yet, even the French were introducing their commanders to the German war game" (*It's All A Game* 97).

The use and results of this game by various countries led to developments in weaponry, military strategy, and spot-on battle predictions. *Kriegsspiel* was redeveloped by Germany and continue to be used by military personnel until computers took over in the military realm. In 1945, the U.S. army created the world's first programmable computer, weighing in at thirty tons, to "calculate artillery-firing tables" (*It's All A Game* 100). By the 1970s, computers could quickly calculate projections and estimates in war games much faster than people playing tabletop versions. Yet, as the military stepped away from tabletop war games, the domestic sphere picked them up.

Domestic interest in war games started when "military mania for Kriegsspiel began," and people wanted to create an at-home version of the war game with a shifted goal of entertainment

(*It's All A Game* 100). The famous H.G. Wells wrote *Little War* in 1913, a book of rules outlining a domestic war game played with toy soldiers. Other creators wrote similar game books and these games prioritized military action over general strategy, a switch up for this genre. Their games "advocated [for the] creation of imaginative battlefields" (*It's All A Game* 100), where players used a spring-loaded toy cannon to knock down enemy forces. Yet, none of these attempts popularized war board games until 1952, when Charles Roberts created *Tactics*.

Tactics utilized tanks, infantry, and air power figurines to simulate conflict between two fictional nations (*It's All A Game* 101). The figures of different forces set it apart from other war games at the time. A roll of the dice and a glance at a table determined a player's moves and actions over a board of squares which each depicted different terrains. It was published as a board game in 1954 in Avalon, Maryland.[4] The gameplay of *Tactics* was a state of constant conflict and expansion. The players move across the board either defeating enemies in battle and taking their land or defending to maintain their land. The game only ended with one player's total domination of the game board. The game's narrative was a simplified version of war that ended in a simplified expansion into lands. This narrative was created by its roots in *Kriegsspiel* when the goal of military conflict was colonization directly. Yet, *Tactics* was the first commercially successful war board game, aside from chess, and it paved the way for future games.

In the early 1950s, Albert Lamorisse created *La Conquête du Monde* (or the *Conquest of the World*), which had the winning goal of global domination through military strategy and dice rolls. After some revisions, the board game was released in America by the Parker Brothers in 1959 as *Risk* (*It's All A Game* 102). *Risk* became one of the most popular games of war still

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[4] While *Tactics* achieved some popularity, the game was not as popular as Roberts hoped. So, in 1958, Roberts created Avalon Hill, a war and strategy board game publisher that was very successful and shape the game genres history.

played today. Its narrative remains the same as *Tactic's* narrative, war and expansion. Despite the unease growing around war toys for children, especially the closer we get into the 1970s, *Risk* sold more than one hundred thousand copies in the first year.

Yet, similar to the military, by the 1980s, home computers were becoming common and taking the place of board-based war games. The computer allowed for two important improvements to the war game genre. First, the computer provided an eternal computer opponent. The player doesn't need to find a friend to play *Risk* when the computer is always ready to play. Second, it created the well-known "fog of war" (*It's All A Game* 105). The computer version of the game could hide new areas of the map until explored. It could also block asset and troop location from enemy eyes. The "fog of war" solved one of the board game version's biggest problems. In times of real war, the player did not know the location of enemy troops. Thus, the computer war game replicated the "war experience" (*It's All A Game* 105). The fog of war is still used today in most, if not all, virtual war and 4X games.

Aside from the computerized opponent and the fog of war, "in almost every other way the early computer war games were just like their tabletop counterparts" (*It's All A Game* 105). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, video games emerged as a new area for war-based gameplay. Many board game companies began transferring their games to the virtual platform to gain from this burgeoning industry monetarily. These new video games were either direct copies of or loosely based on the popular board games of the past. *Risk* inspired one of the first commercially successful war-based video games, *Empire*, which was developed in 1977. It was a primary point-and-click game where players-built armies and ships to conquer neighboring islands. The war game genre did not turn away from the narrative of its past of confronting, invading, and conquering during its digitization.

It was also not the only board game genre to join the technological game revolution, "just as the landlord's game fascinated college students in the early 1900s, so computers sparked students in the 1960s to think how a computer might be programmed to play games, especially Monopoly" (Orbanes 104). Thanks to the commercial success of *Pong*, the first video game to reach the domestic space in 1972, video game production was increased to satiate demand and increase profits. After *Pong*, a virtual table tennis game, the field was flooded with sport-based video games like *Super Soccer* and *TV Hockey*. This industry grew much faster than the board game industry in the early nineteenth century. Each year more and more arcade games were released. Soon the video game industry was full of games, from action games to war games to science fiction games.

In 1958, the first video game was created. In 1972 the first commercially successful video game was released, *Pong,* and the first commercial home video game console released, Magnavox Odyssey. These releases also aligned with the debut of the personal computer into the domestic market. The 1970s was the first boom in the video game industry. The popularity and massive market for video games created a developing surge in video game technology and game creation in the 1980s and 90s. Strategy video games also began developing in 1972 with *Invasion*. *Invasion* is credited as the first computerized strategy game, bringing the gameplay like *Risk* to console tv games. Yet, it still used a board game base in combination with the onscreen video game. The first strategy video games developed were war games mimicking their tabletop ancestors. This game allowed for multiple players to engage in play, instead of just one against a machine. Strategy games particularly continued to grow in available game titles and popularity. Video game technology, like home computers, cell phones, or consoles, allowed for complex rules and actions to be handled by a computer instead of humans. Strategy games could be

played in less time and with less effort on the behalf of the player against simulated opponents in any conceivable genre from sci-fi to fantasy.

The next major bench march in strategy video games was their increased popularity and success on the computer platform in the 1980s. Important strategy games at the time included games like *Computer Bismarck* (1980), the first historical PC strategy game based on the game *Battleship*, and *Reach for the Stars* (1983), the first 4X strategy video game. At this time, strategy video games began splitting into two genres: real time strategy games and turn based strategy games. *Civilization* is a turn-based strategy game, where the game is divided into a set number of turns each player takes individually. The turns are not dictated by a time limit. Real time strategy games, established by the game *Dune II: The Building of a Dynasty* (1992), have players playing simultaneously in 'real time'. The strategy game genres continued to split off into new areas as it grew and additional elements were added to game play (for example, management-based strategy games). The 1980s also marked the first video game connection to the internet with the game *MUD* (Multiuser dungeon) being connected to ARPANET allowing players to join virtually. This was the first instant of online game play, which became a key aspect of strategy and other genres of video games. Still, these games laid the foundation for the golden age of strategy video games, the 1990s. The 1990s was a golden age for strategy games with major titles like *Civilization*, *Age of Empires*, and *Total Annihilation* being released. These games had the playstyle of their predecessors in the 1980s, but the technology of the 1990s. These games are the foundation of the genre. The early 2000s saw a downturn in popularity as the genre started to merge heavily with management style games and struggled to evolve effectively with technology. 3D modeling in game spaces increased the difficulty of strategy games, where the previous 2D style made movement, planning, and strategy easier. Yet, this lull

only lasted for a few years as the game developers learned to adapt gameplay to the new formats. Video games continued to evolve after the late nineties and become the fastest growing entertainment industry to date with billions of dollars in revenue and hundreds of millions of dedicated fans worldwide. The industry established and supported growing personal technology like home computers, cell phones, and home gaming consoles (and their companies) like Xbox, Nintendo, and PlayStation. Individual video game genres evolved around each technological innovation. Video games started from arcades and grew to be accessible from almost every technological device a person could own. In the late nineties, a new video game could be made by one person in a few months. Currently, a AAA (pronounced triple A) title video game release costs billions of dollars and involves hundreds of employees working on a game for years.

During the early development of video games, hundreds of games were released, all fighting for popularity among players. The competition was steep with original games being released by one company, only to be copied by another, slightly altered, and rereleased. This form of plagiarism was frowned upon but created a system of constantly improving game systems and narratives. It was, and still is, a pillar in the gaming community with many games taking heavy inspiration from other video games. In the mad dash for new video games, board games were also transformation to merge with the surge for virtual gaming. While this was slightly plagiaristic, board games provided an easy, copyable game format that could operate within the computer operating systems. They also already had a dedicated fan base, which provided a steadier revenue than newer video games. Today, most popular board games have an app or video game version in circulation. A video game titled *Tabletop Simulator* gives players to opportunity to play any board game on a virtual table with other players online. While there is still some ongoing merge of these genres, the massive segue of board games and video game

ended in the late nineties. Video games began to evolve with technology and the virtual platform allowed for more complex gameplay than board games. Games created for the virtual format could not easily be transferred to a board game. Board games also began to evolve separately, as they have done for years, still offering educational and social development for children, quality time for families, and nostalgia for parents. Currently, the two entertainment sections are separate and distinct from each other.

Board games did not vanish with the growth of the video game industry. Instead, they turned towards the "connect era" ("Four Board Game Eras" 264) where board games adjusted and adapted, as they always have, to innovations like the internet and the increased, almost global, socio-culture it created. The idea of adaptations that board games utilize transitioned to video games with the slight merging of the two industries in the 1970s and 1980s. Video games, if converted or inspired by a board game, will always carry their history in some way.

Board games survived by evolving. Religious games like *TMOH*s evolved into *The Game of Life* and create lifestyle games. Lifestyle games gave players an opportunity to live fantastic, exciting lives. Yet, their narrative still, in some ways, resemble the Protestant values *TMOH* created. Political games like *The Landlord's Game* evolved into *Monopoly*, a reflection of America's turn into a consumer-based culture and created a genre of games with consumption and capitalist values. The narrative in *The Landlord's Game* held on to players through the feelings the game created. War games like *Kriegsspiel* evolved the least, with its descendant *Risk* only simplifying its narrative before ascending to stardom.

In addition, with war games rising on the virtual platform, the genre did not turn away from the capitalist, materialist, and Protestant influences that other games standardized. The war video game creators embraced these ideologies further, utilizing them as additional mechanisms

in a new branch of strategy games. Similar to how advances in technology, computers, made war games easier to play, they also allowed for the combination and creation of more complex video games. The possibility of combining the genres of the war game, lifestyle game, and capitalist/consumerist game into one video game became possible. This idea led to essentially playable colonization games. After warring and conquering the land (*Risk*), the player needs to economically (*Monopoly*) and culturally succeed (*Life*). These games also used the mechanisms *Risk, Monopoly, and Life* popularized. Finally, a new genre of war-based game was created, the 4X game (eXplore, eXpand, eXploit, eXterminate). Coined by Alan Emrich to "[represent] the four main objectives of exploration, expansion, exploitation, and extermination" (Meier 159). Yet, this genre was not created on its own. To be more precise, a video game created this genre for itself after its monstrous success. *Sid Meier's Civilization* was the first of its kind and become one of the most popular 4X games in existence.

III. THE CIVILIZATION SERIES

Video games are something more than just nondescript vessels that deliver varying

dosages of video pleasure . . . They insert themselves into our lives, weaving within and between

our daily practices, both structuring and disrupting them. They induce feelings and emotions in

us, just as art or music or fiction might do.

Ian Bogost

Coming out at the moment of USA's global ascendancy, *Civilization* is a representation

of Western Imperial ideas. By the 1990s, the Cold War had ended, the Berlin Wall had fallen,

and the Soviet Union collapsed. The United States became the last remaining world superpower

and chose to maintain their NATO alliances. They positioned themselves as a world power that

interceded in other country's affairs through the United Nations. During this time, America aided

Haiti during their civil war and famine, but they also militarily defended Kuwait in their war

with Iraq to protect their oil interests. This was only the first of many conflicts America had with

Iraq and the Middle East. This action would begin the many modern imperial actions the United

States would take to ensure their interests and values were recognized globally. The *Civilization*

series provides a representation of American values, historical beliefs, and biases in 1991.

This chapter focuses on the *Civilization* series by discussing a brief history, previous and

relevant scholarship, outlining how the scholarship relates to game mechanics, and analyzing the

game's created narrative. I will argue that the game series, through imperial mechanics,

encapsulates western ideals to the player in a sandbox game space where their imperial narrative

is infallible, reaffirmed, and entertaining. I will also analyze how morality is defined by the game

series and is inherently rooted in those narratives. The game's structure, narrative, and player

actions are based on coloniality and imperialism. The player is restricted to operating under these

systems of power. In the sections below I will mention both colonial and imperial actions. The gameplay's basic structure is imperial as all resources and action, regardless of number of cities, benefit the player who embodies the empire itself. Colonial actions can also be taken to create or dominate many cities, but the resulting game play still combines all materials into one central location, the player. The game simplifies many real world systems into entertaining game actions, colonial and imperial actions are simplified in a similar way.

Part One: A Brief History of *Sid Meier's Civilization* Series

In 1982, game developer Sid Meier and game producer Bill Stealey created the video game company Microprose. The company was successful and began producing many video games, with their most successful games being *Civilization* (1991), *Civilization II* (1992), *Railroad Tycoon* (1990), *Pirates!* (2004), and *F-15 Strike Eagle* (1984). Microprose lived on for years, being shifted from owner to owner, even being owned by Hasbro Interactive at one point. Other famous employees of Microprose, who helped create the *Civilization* series, created games like *Colonization* (1994) and *Age of Empire* (1997). But Meier and Stealey left in 1996 to form another game company Firaxis. Firaxis is the current owner and producer of the *Civilization* series. Before he found success, which started with *Civilization*, Meier created many games in hopes of striking video game gold. Meier's game development revolved around the U.S.-based war and military genre, although he developed many different games since the early 1980s. In addition to the games he developed at Microprose, some additional games he worked on include *Crusade in Europe* (1985), *Conflict in Vietnam* (2004), and *NATO commander* (1983). Eventually, after creating *Railroad Tycoon* and *Pirates!*, Meier wanted to create a war game that prioritized "military battles and maneuvering" as well as "resource gathering and economic strength" (Meier 123). This idea combined the game genres that the previously discussed board

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games created. *SimCity*, a city builder game released in 1989, was the final inspiration that completed Meier's idea. It was a city builder game that placed the player in a god seat, giving them a high level of control, otherwise creating the god style of video games.

According to S*id Meier's Memoir!: A Life in Computer Games*, *Empire: Wargame of the Century* (1987), the war video game inspired by *Risk* the war board game, was the starting point for developing the original prototype version of *Civilization*. *Empire* was created by Walter Bright and Mark Baldwin. The game featured a fog-blocked map that revealed itself as the player's armies marched across it. The gameplay involved players taking control of cities around the map, with the winner dominating all cities and the entire map. The other largest influence over the game was *The Seven Cities of Gold* video game. This game was written by Dan Bunten in 1984. The game was a "land-and-sea exploration game" where players could choose "to behave honorably or cruelly with the natives [they] encountered" (Meier 189). While these games were rooted in their own histories, they generatively shaped the game *Civilization* and the multiple iterations that followed. Each of these games were also influenced by American sociopolitical climate at in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The United States, being the last remining world superpower, dominated the international political world. They began preforming modern imperial actions like military interventions that reinforced their capital interests abroad. Examples of these actions includes the United States involvement in the Soviet-Afghan War where the U.S. government provided aid to the Mujahedin opposing the Soviet presence and causing long term, massive consequences. Ultimately, the war was "a US provocation that bolstered US Cold War Foreign policy objectives" (Lowenstein 3). In addition, after the Cold War, America desired a democratic capitalist world, militarily aiding those who forwarded their interests and ideologies, while punishing those who did not. Like the board games that secretly

influenced *Civilization*, America struggled to shake its foundation and history. Meier's game development mainly focused on military or colonization-based games with clear western narratives. *Civilization* combined and recreated these themes.

In 1991, *Civilization* was released to the public, stamped with the marketing tagline "it's good to be King" (Meier 139), and the game was a massive success. It created the 4X genre of games and grew to establish the strategy video game industry, selling 1.5 million copies. It "was the first commercially successful strategy game to hit the market" (Meier 154). The *Civilization* series spans twenty-nine years, twelve editions, and numerous expansion packs. The players have, according to the game distribution service *Steam*, played over one billion hours of *Civilization V* from 2010 to 2016 (Meier 1). The game series has marked itself as a mammoth in the industry and in game history. It is known as one of the best video games of all time and continues to release new editions, with *Civilization VII* rumored to be released in 2023.

While the *Civilization* series currently has twelve editions, I will focus on games one through six as they were the most prominent and varying editions. Each addition to the game series employed at least one major change to gameplay. *Civilization II* (1996) introduced a cheating menu list. *Civilization III* (2001) added a new espionage system. *Civilization IV* (2005) added major mechanics for religion and culture, and *Civilization V* (2010) created a new board that utilized a one-unit-per-tile rule (Meier 228). Yet, the basics of the game remained the same. The game begins with the player choosing a tribe/country and managing one small village. This game places the player in a god-like role, where the player is an unbodied, powerful, omnipotent creator that controls a civilization and its many decisions. They must explore outwards, create military units, expand their borders, build infrastructure, build more cities, exploit nearby natural resources for capital gain, build industry sectors, and usually exterminate any other civilizations,

or players, in their way. Meier wanted to create a game with "a hidden map" where the player would be

> a single settler dropped into the wilderness, able to see nothing but the nine squares surrounding them…It allowed the player to imagine a seemingly infinite set of possibilities in the blackness beyond. There might be treasure just one square over, or an enemy lurking perilously nearby, and that uncertainty made the urge to start exploring both intense and immediate. (Meier 121)

The player can win the game through set points in different categories, which change between game editions. The main categories include domination (war), religion, science, culture, diplomacy, or an overall score from each category. Each category utilizes some method of colonization or imperialism as this is a root function of the game. A religious win involves intense conversion rates of other players' people, sometimes ending in a holy war. A scientific victory was depicted as the Cold war space race, ending with a player colonizing another livable planet, *Alpha Centauri*[5]. Cultural victories relied on tourism, artifacts, and successful economic development. A domination victory was total control of the world through militant force. Despite the game's attempts to include other ways of winning aside from domination and war, this game function is a basis for the game. The games of *Risk* and *Empire* are unfunctional without a war mechanic, and *Civilization* mimics this. A player can win through religion, science, or culture, but if they don't have the military to protect themselves, they will be attacked and lose the game.

Part Two: Game Mechanics

As previously stated, The *Civilization* series' basic gameplay begins with the player managing one small village. As a strategy game, it relies on the player's mental abilities to

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[5] *Alpha Centauri* (1999) was another game expansion by the series, placing a science fiction twist on Meier's *Civilization* series.

organize and plan their way to victory: "the player spends most of their time interacting with maps and spreadsheets" (Carpenter 38). To describe the gameplay in newer versions within the series, the player begins by exploring outwards, expanding their field of vision past the fog that clouds the map. They expand their borders by building more cities, expanding their population through food and happiness, and buying land tiles with in-game gold. They will exploit nearby natural resources, such as livestock, vegetation, and mineral mines, to obtain gold. Finally, the player will defend themselves and/or exterminate any other civilizations, or players, that hinder their plans for expansion and domination in a winning category (domination, religion, science, culture, and diplomacy, or by an overall score from each type).

As the previous historical scholarship suggests, the rules and gameplay are based on western and imperial models of success as displayed in the categories. The game series projects an Americanized version of history and a progress-based advancement of civilizations through its game mechanics. Through this, "players normalize the content of the game, assuming (for example) that certain technologies precede other ones, economies function in particular ways, and civilizations have specific cultural traits, based on how the game represents these elements" (Zeller 38). Victories always involve exploiting resources, nearby peoples, or warring units regardless of category. While Sid Meier, *Civilization's* primary developer, constantly denies "the notion of any hidden social commentary" (Meier 167) within the game, this claim is far from the truth, like *Humankind's* (2021) claim that their game is "morally" guided. In the next few sections, I will dissect the game mechanics, from characters to religious systems, and reaffirm the games' Americanized, imperial mechanics.

This game places the player in a god-like role, where the player is an unbodied, powerful, omnipotent creator who controls a civilization and its many decisions. Yet, the player does not

embody a specific character like other video game genres where a main character, or body, is depicted. At the beginning of the original *Civilization* game, the player chooses a tribal leader as their physical representation. In Civilization IV,

> The player is technically represented by a famous national figure (Napoleon, Qin Shi Huang, Montezuma), [yet] the focus of play is entirely at the national rather than individual level—the player spends most of their time interacting with maps and spreadsheets. (Carpenter 38)

While famous national figures have many assigned benefits like faster expansion rates or access to unique military units, their ultimate impact results in numerical benefits to land, economy, or war efforts. They are "ultimately only strategic vessels for the game's action" (Ford 7).

Since the national figure is not truly represented as a person, no physical body is assigned to the player, who instead becomes an empire. The implications of this shift in player representation result in a "focus on nations and nation-level decision-making," which impact "the narratives communicated" (Carpenter 38). In other games, if a player takes a main character to war, they see themselves injured, heal, and see other bodies impacted similarly. In *Civilization*, while human bodies (through labor and action) are the assumed causes of the game mechanics (successful expansion, war, trade, etc.), the absence of the visual body erases all negative discourse that could counter imperial, capitalist narrative. When a city begins starving, there is not a group of dying bodies on the map. Instead, a negative number appears in the production statistics. The loss of a battle does not include dead bodies, only a reduction in the player's controlled lands, population, and a loss in productivity. The visual lack of loss of human bodies reinforces a capitalist setting driven by the game's imperialistic nature.

 The player controls unseen peoples, or the city's population statistic, as the primary labor

force. They are faceless and classless. Usually, the people do not resist or fight against the player's decisions. Yet, newer *Civilization* games include another "crucial element in the experience of empire: protest. Unhappy populations will riot, send letters of demands and finally, rebel" (Mukherjee 308). These riots and protests are created by "unhappy citizens [refusing] to work, limiting the ability of the city to produce new military units, buildings, taxes, or science" (Zeller 45). Enough riots and protests lead to civil disorder, open rebellion, and an eventual collapse into anarchy. The only way to avoid this is to keep citizens content through a proper supply of food, homes, and infrastructure. When religious systems were coded into earlier *Civilization* games, "religious buildings served a distinct function: they calmed the population" (Zeller 45), helping deter anarchy and maintain productivity.

In the *Civilization* series, the idea and action of protest are counter to the mechanisms of empire, yet it still works within the same system. Historically, rebellion and protest can lead to years of social unrest, violence, civil war, or extreme governmental change. *Civilization* extremely simplifies these ideas and no political or social change comes from protest in-game. Protest and rebellion in some game versions can lead to barbarians spawning around the city, sending waves of attacks. According to Spivak's postcolonial discourse, "the 'othered' space of protest always exists simultaneously as a 'thirding' to the spatiality of expansion as understood by empire" (Mukherjee 312). In the game protest exemplifies an action against the expanding empire and takes this action by creating violent others or enemies meant for destruction. It is a fallible shell meant to represent the idea of protest solely as a counter to empire. When protest ultimately fails, it reinforces a narrative that empire is ever prevailing and eternally successful. Additionally, the lack of change or action following the empty protest alludes to the idea that changes in policies or regimes come at the sake of the empire. If the empire is to succeed, protest

should not be allowed to happen or stopped at all costs. This counter is easily deterred and meant to fail. While in-game protest can cause losses of cities and land, it usually leads to a lack of happiness as a means to reduce productivity and capital. The empire must continue expanding and producing to win, so contentment of unseen peoples, managing hollow protests, and destruction of rebels is required. The game narrative weakens or destroys notions of counter-discourse to imperialism, like protest, to structure an environment where it cannot fail. The game narrative purports that a civilization only succeeds through the mechanics of empire. Anything outside the system is unacceptable and fails.

While the populations that fill the civilizations are unseen, their leader is represented as an animated and famous national figure. The leaders can be based on historical facts or fiction, depending on the game version. In *Civilization VI* (2016), national figures include Gandhi, Gilgamesh, Montezuma, Pericles, Victoria, Cleopatra, Caesar, Alexander the Great, and Genghis Khan. Either way, they are not much more than some voice lines and a shell for strategic benefits. Yet, they are also the only representation of people in connection to nations the game provides. Due to this, the leaders are highly criticized for their design, benefits, and programmed actions. While the goal of this section is not to dissect the game's ability to represent a variety of people, the series has struggled with presenting non-Western nations without a western narrative or colonial mechanics. In other words, these games engage in acts of othering in their representational politics.

To begin, in the original *Civilization* game, there were no women leaders aside from Elizabeth I representing England. In *Civilization II*, more women leaders were added, creating an almost equal gender representation, but many were removed in the third edition. According to Shannon Martino, with only 29.9% women leaders, the games' gender ratio is highly skewed.

Following Magnets' research, the game seems to be leaning towards a "masculinist ideology" (Murray 7) with the continuous production of the series and lack of equality in character choice.

In addition to this issue, the representations of cultures and ethnicities have also caused critique and public debates. The first problem arises with civilization inclusion and "which civilizations are chosen for inclusion reflects the audience Firaxis[6] wants to attract as well as the cultural narrative the game creates" (Martino 33). In "early Civilization" games, civilizations "feature mostly Western and Asian polities struggling for world domination" (Carpenter 37). There is a definite "western focus in the choice of …civilizations" (Martino 40), with many European or western countries representing more than half of the available civilizations in the previous games. The developers claim the original game used "research…from more generalized history books, some even aimed at children" (Meier 124) to simplify the building of civilizations and gameplay. Yet, this lack of research, and clearly western version of simplified history, have impacted character representation and historical understanding. Developers of newer editions have claimed they use specialists to research, create, and pixilate cultures in "sensitive areas." This raises the major question of "who defines what a 'sensitive area' is" in this game? (Martino 37). For example, "were members of the modern Assyrian community consulted when it came to representations of Assurbanipal" in *Civilization VI* (Martino 37)?

In *Civilization VI*, Maori peoples and the Cree nation were consulted when creating their respective civilizations. This led to ambiguous results. The Maori nation was given benefits they appreciated, like "good at ocean voyages and gaining cultural power from the natural environment" (Carpenter 40). Yet, the Maori designer Firaxis hired to create "Tā Moko," the in-game Maori leader, "Arekatera "Katz" Maihi, a tattoo artist in New Zealand, [was] not credited

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[6] The game company that currently produces and owns the *Civilization* series.

within the game" (Martino 39). Instead, the creation credit was given to general character designers at the company. These are the same designers that were criticized for using football players as body models for African 'warrior kings' like Shaka, the leader of the Zulus. While other European 'warrior kings', like Alexander the Great, were not modeled after football players, each had differing body models depending on research. This incident was "based on the assumption that a warrior king like the Zulu leader should look and behave like a football player. Such perceptions about the leadership of an African man are likely rooted in orientalist stereotypes rather than studied fact" (Martino 36). In the same game, the Cree civilization was represented as a "nation [that] gains additional benefits from alliances and get special bonuses from trade routes" (Carpenter 40). While Firaxis hired Cree musicians to create a soundtrack for the civilization, they failed to contact any representatives of the Poundmaker Cree Nation. This led to protests after the Cree nation was unhappy with their civilization when it was released. The game mechanics allow the "player [to] use the playable Cree nation in ways that many protestors found ahistorical and objectionable… just as the game allows for a bloodthirsty Gandhi or a peaceful Teddy Roosevelt" (Carpenter 40). While the game "encourages players to think of indigenous nations as sovereign, active, and independent," it is "only via universalized, largely Eurocentric metrics of achievement and notions of nation" (Carpenter 34). The use of the Cree Nation as a playable civilization is now heavily debated in online fan circles[7].

As the games continue to be produced, Firaxis makes efforts to better its representations of women and people of color, but these attempts don't seem genuinely impactful or well

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[7] On Reddit, user 2pacman13 discusses their love of the inclusion of the Cree nation into the game, "It meant the world to me to see representation of my own people in a video game. So often are native people either underrepresented or misrepresented in popular culture. It is because of the inclusion of the Cree that I'm still playing one more turn..." (2pacman13). Yet, in the two hundred and fifty additional comments, players debate their own opinion around the controversy, 2pacman13 stating, "I understand the controversy was that some Cree people didn't like seeing Poundmaker as a conqueror, warring with barbarians, and land grabbing" (2pacman13).

thought out. The representation of people is only developed through postcolonial players demanding diversity and inclusion. The representational issues of peoples in the game reflect the issues raised by Edward Said in the idea of Orientalism, which "is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident" (Said 72). The *Civilization* series creates a historical narrative that clearly favors western culture and perspective. In the first few versions of the game, nonwestern peoples and cultures are left out of the game completely. In later editions, they are utilized as aesthetic shells to provide a sense of diversity to satisfy player demand. The game narrative creates an Occident (or western) and 'other' narrative. While not directly stating it, the Orient seems to be the insinuated other as the game prioritizes and platforms western ideas, histories, etc.

This Occident game space was not created intentionally but follows a "false image of the Orient or the East that has been fabricated by western explorers, poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators since Napoleon's occupation of Egypt in 1798 (Hamadi 40). According to Said, this false image is something created and reinforced by the modern world:

> One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media's resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds. So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization, and cultural stereotyping has intensified the hold of the nineteenth century academic and imaginative demonology of "the mysterious Orient" (Said 91)

The *Civilization* series is only replicating and continuing a problematic narrative that was created in the 1800s and continues in new forms today. Said's "false image" can be seen in some

of the previously discussed board games and is also embedded into the *Civilization* series'

narrative and ideologies, where

> …a powerful colonizer has imposed a language and a culture, whereas cultures, histories,
>
> values, and languages of the Oriental peoples have been ignored and even distorted by
>
> the colonialists in their pursuit to dominate these peoples and exploit their wealth in the
>
> name of enlightening, civilizing, and even humanizing them. (Hamadi 40)

The game ignores most histories that fall too far from western historical influence, only utilizing

some aspects of nonwestern cultures, histories, and ideologies. These people and cultures are

usually anti-colonial and anti-imperial in nature, as these people were violently impacted by

colonialism, and cannot fit inside a game whose primary mechanics revolve around colonial

ideas. The game company cannot change the imperial western narrative rooted in the game.

Thus, the narrative does not include noncolonial bodies that desire to operate under nonimperial

narratives. The second vein of representational issues in the *Civilization* series is their use of

barbarians and tribal villages.

There are two groups of non-playable characters (NPCs), aside from other computer-

controlled civilization leaders: barbarians and tribal villages. These NPCs operate more as

objects to conquer through war or exploit for capital gain instead of a specific group of people.

Barbarians are military units, primarily scout and melee types, that spawn in encampments or

outposts. They were first introduced in *Civilization* and reappeared in *Civilization III, V, and VI*.

Barbarians are placed randomly around the map at the start of the game. The barbarian units are

represented by a basic warrior unit[8], four white warriors with spears and shields (the weaponry

mimics nearby players weaponry). Encampments, or outposts, are the barbarian version of a

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[8] A basic warrior unit has four distinct people with clothing that matches that player's civilization and weaponry that
matches their level on the technology tree. The specific aesthetic details can change depending on the civilization.

town, except they do not expand, build, or produce like other civilizations. The encampment's visual is dramatic with a few straw-roofed huts surrounded by two circles of pointed sticks jutting out of the ground and a large fire in the middle. They will only spawn military units to scout and attack nearby civilizations. Their primary actions are plundering trade routes, capturing settlers, and raiding villages. They do not use the assets they steal, only hold them until another civilization gains control of that asset through warfare. *The Civilopedia*, or the *Civilization* series in game encyclopedia that describes all aspects of the game, ends their description of barbarians with, "Since it was generally a good idea - if one were a barbarian - not to be easily found by the civilized, the outposts over time were located in more inaccessible (and defensible) places… until, of course, there were no such places left" (Civilization). If the barbarian outpost is destroyed, the player receives a bonus of gold or experience. The game was designed and intended for the barbarians to be problematic and erasable.

Another primary issue this game creates for players is rhetoric and discourse rooted in colonial binaries. The word barbarian mimics colonial narrative, creating "a binary in the form of masters and slaves, oppressors and oppressed, users and used, etc." (Murray 21). In this situation, the binary is barbaric and civilized. According to Said, historical representations of these binaries have

> …always shown the Orient as the primitive, uncivilized "other", in an attempt to create it
> as the contrast to the advanced and civilized West…the colonial texts have depicted the
> Indians, the Egyptians, the Palestinians, the Latin Americans, and many others as almost
> the same, the Orient, the "Other", in juxtaposition with "Us", the Occidental. (Hamadi 40)

Barbarians are the game's unlabeled (without an attached country or being identified as specific peoples) version of this colonial othering. While the game does not directly place nonwestern

peoples as the barbaric other, they must have a barbaric other to maintain their imperial narrative. They cannot acquire land, use resources, or trade because they are barbaric, and those actions are civilized. They are the 'uncivilized' compared to the players 'civilized'. In addition, historically the utilization of a colonial binary was "either in preparation [for] military campaigns and colonialism against the Orient, or as a justification for the occupations and horrors that accompany them" (Hamadi 40). The violence the game forces upon the player through the barbarians, as well as the consistent war happening in game, represents this idea perfectly, reinforcing the colonial binary with colonial violence. Barbarians are meant to be eradicated as they are an afront to the civilized, or the player. The real implications and history of the colonial binary are imposed in the game, despite the lack of specific peoples attached to barbarian units.

Spivak's concern with the subaltern being unable to be seen by and yet still spoken for by major systems of colonial power is essential here. The *Civilization* series creates rhetoric using colonial binaries, which will always recognize the subaltern as extreme other or not at all. Barbarians are the only clearly othered enemies in the game without a connection to historical people. Their presence as the othered enemy points to the colonial narrative, which needs an other to fulfill its plot. *Civilizations V'*s "barbarians have no history or identity" (Ford 6). Their representation is irrelevant as they are irrelevant to the narrative aside from their interaction with the empire. The "ethnicity of the barbarians does not matter because they do not matter; the game's interface presents them as a mindless hindrance to the business of empire-building, rather than as a native people with their own history, culture and values" (Ford 7). This rhetoric is most damaging to players where one could "learn the etymology of the term "barbarian," but may receive with it the dehumanizing colonial ideology that surrounds in-game barbarian" (Ford 9). The original term barbarian derived from a Greek word used to describe all foreigners and non-

Grecian peoples. Romans and Greeks created the modern western understanding of nations, defining "populations [as] speaking a common language and sharing a common culture…ethnie (Greek) or gens (Latin)" (Bouchard et al 1). Those inside the nation were 'us' and those outside were 'other' or living in the "Barbaricum" meaning "the barbarian lands beyond" in Roman (Bouchard et al 1). The origins of the term barbarian are directly connected to the idea of nation, "which jettisoned its connotations of barbarian otherness" (Bouchard et al 1). *Civilization* recreates the barbarian image as not just other, but a violent, simplified other that is animalistic. The unit cannot communicate, trade, or build, they only fight. It also somewhat recreates the barbaricum as the lands outside of the player's is roaming with violent peoples. The barbarian unit must be destroyed for the player to advance. They are not just an other, but an other that must be overcome in order to advance. The game constantly reinforces a narrative that totes the success of imperialism for the sake of people.

   The Civilopedia in *Civilization VI* starts describing the tribal villages as, "where the unwashed, uncivilized lived. Out beyond the pale. When explorers from "civilized" places arrived in these villages, the natives often greeted them with open arms, gifts, information, awe, and respect" (Civilization). This quote recalls the white savior trope, or the imperial savior trope in this situation, a white person being seen as liberating or rescuing nonwhite people with assumed superiority due to their race. This trope usually ignores the nonwhite people, focusing on the heroic, civilized white savoir. According to an article from Emory University, "The Philosophy of Colonialism: Civilization, Christianity, and Commerce", the concept of the white savior comes from the "White Man's Burden", a poem by Rudyard Kipling written in 1899 justifying European racist ideology and violent colonization efforts. This game, while it does not specifically visually represent white explorers, seems to place the player, as empire, within this

trope. Since the game totes many western narratives, this trope easily fits within it. Tribal villages, colloquially known as "goodie huts" (Carpenter 37), are like barbarian outposts but provide benefit rather than opposition. Tribal villages are already placed around the map on turn one. They are represented by a small village of huts, with white clay bases and straw roofs. They have a small stone fire, some wooden hanging racks, rocks, and torches. They cannot claim land, advance technology, or produce culture like major civilizations. The discovery of tribal villages provides a one-time bonus to the exploring player before the village disappears forever. This bonus can extend into any winning category of the game, like "money, population, soldiers, [or] a new technology" (Martino 35). Tribal villages change slightly from game iteration to iteration but remain actionably the same. In *Civilization V*, they were renamed ancient ruins but did not change in terms of action.

Once again, a nameless and history less unit with a name based on colonial rhetoric operates as other and as a minor function of the imperial game. The binary of civilized versus uncivilized is created, but this iteration adds descriptors like unwashed and showing "awe, and respect" to colonizers that erase them from play. The tribal village is no village but a place holder for a strategic bonus. Yet, the nickname goodie huts depict how players view the unit in combination with the colonizing game narrative. A tribal village is a 'good' version of the game's depiction of others that provides a capital benefit and disappears. At best, it can be read as the tribal villages assimilation and disappearance into an empire. They cannot be left alone, as another player will take their benefit. This lessens their agency even further as their sole purpose is to provide goods to an empire. The villages accept the colonization and domination of other civilizations without fight or issues. The game narrative is stating that the other cannot join the dominant group, but they can provide capital advantage and leave quietly.

In summation, each agent, playable by the player or not, that moves through the game space is inherently "belonging to empire -- all others are reduced to statistics and sub-humans: (un)happiness, barbarians, production levels" (Ford 10). From NPCs like barbarians and tribal villages to playable characters like national figures, the only subject free from the empire is the player, yet they inhabit the empire itself. The only movement or action on the game map is by imperial agents. Thus, the spatiality of the game is dictated by them.

In addition to the characters being tools of empire, the game map embeds capitalist values into the land strengthening the imperial narrative. The release of *Civilization V* introduced a terrain-based tile map to the game series. The previous games utilized a land plot-based system where the plots were one unit on an eighty-four by fifty-two space plot map. The new map was divided into hexagon tiles with "each tile [being] merely a visual representation of a type of terrain" like hill, forest, marsh, mountain, or grassland (Ford 5). Each of these terrain types also benefit the player, from the visual range and movement speed of military units to a better ability to produce food on farms. More food production means an increase in population, which means an increase in the labor output of the player's city. Exploration, environments, and nature lose all other meaning and become a military or economic benefit solely. As Ford stated, "Exploration is not done for curiosity's sake. Exploration is rewarded…they explore as a means to an end" (Ford 5).

With the slow development of land surrounding a city, "the sprouting of peripheral structures such as ports, storage and supply posts and settlements …create hierarchical and concentric arrangements of the capital and the colonies [where] the peripheral spaces exist to supply the center" (Mukherjee 302). With this intrinsic game map design, the player is subject to "the spatial construction of empire … [which] follows older western imperialist models…[and]

problematize such notions of spatiality" (Mukherjee 300). The game narrative constructs land as only eventual and eternal material and economic benefit reminiscent of the colonial era. The capitalist value embeds the circular imperialist idea that land is a venue for profit; thus, expansion is necessary for profit, and profit is necessary for expansion. The only game advantage the player has to non-expansionist play is the people/city's happiness, which increases city production, gold income, and culture points. Yet, these benefits are minor aspects of other major forms of winning the game. Those winning categories always require expansion. Without constant expansion, the player falls behind and loses the game.

At the start of the game, players will see only a few tiles and their attributes due to the fog of war. On turn one, the player will begin exploring, trying to find other nations, good resources, and map out their land. This game space is "not merely a battle map—it is a map-in-time, a spatiotemporal model, bringing narrative tools to mapmaking" (Krapp 45). Mukherjee, and many other postcolonial scholars, have critiqued "cartography and surveying" as a primary tool in "the imperialist machinery of expansionist geopolitics," which is also a "mechanism of empire" (Mukherjee 300). Essentially, cartography was a primary tool during the colonial era by European nations to rename, create borders for, and occupy/possess lands in other countries. The entire *Civilization* series recreates the colonial tool of cartography with the game map. It allows players to rename areas and the definition of borderlines is an inherent aspect of game design. As soon as a village is built by a player and "a region is occupied, the map is redrawn and carries [the player's] nation's color" (Mukherjee 30). Borders automatically appear, are recognized, and are enforced by the game's rules. This game function is "a western conception of space…geopolitical territories are coded into the game" (Ford 10). If a player expands too closely to another computer player's border, it is automatically perceived as a threat, and the

computer will issue a denouncement on the player. Denouncements lead to war. If a player

crosses a border without an open border agreement, it is an automatic act of war. The player's

movement through the game space, both through land procurement and unit movement, is

dictated by western and imperialist expansion and reinforces the ideals of empire.

Historically speaking, the base, or root, of civilizations is not bordered nation-states. To

have a complete civilization, a bordered nation or set state is not required. Before the nineteenth

century, "a single linear border in the modern sense did not exist" (Diener et al 30). Even early

empires like Rome and Qin dynasty's China possessed "relatively fluid, indeterminate

territories" (Diener et al 37)[9]. Yet, the *Civilization* series relies on the concept that nation-states

and civilizations are codependent systems. One cannot exist without the other. This codependent

system reinforces the idea of empire, or one concentric nation controlled by one all-powerful

force. Any forced "discourse of land ownership…is inescapably imperial" (Ford 10). In addition,

the expansion mechanic begins as a colonial tool at the start of the game, influencing players to

create settler units and expand. Yet, by the end of the game, even if the player has stopped

expanding physically, the game demands constant influential expansion. This game mechanic is

reminiscent of American modern imperialism in the nineties, where the spread of American

ideology, democracy, and capitalism, was done through sphere of influence. The United States,

through the United Nations and NATO, was constantly expanding its ideological influence to

support American interests. It also creates a landscape where the capitalist and imperial

expansionist game functions work without fail and become entertaining. The game's centralized

power structure utilizes capitalism similar to *Monopoly* with each owned space providing

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[9] According to the text *Borders: A Very Short Introduction* by Alexander Diener, before the nineteenth century, early empires did not maintain specific and precise borders as they are known today. The fluid nature of their empire was a result of how far their armies could patrol and their dominance in heavily populated areas. Empty land would not be included in the empire's realm unless the military could actively patrol and monitor it.

benefits to the main controlling power, the player. All issues that might arise with mechanisms like an expansion for profit or intrinsic border creation are absent from the game.

A major mechanic of 4X games is the technology tree (and its lessor, the civic tree), or "a list of skills and types of knowledge possessed by [a] civilization that determines what possible governments it can have, what buildings can be constructed, and what kinds of units can be fielded" (Slocombe 161). This mechanic is used in every *Civilization* game and most 4X games[10]. The system begins with the player or civilization generating science points from the contentedness of peoples, trade routes, universities, and many other areas. The amount of science a civilization generates, which fluctuates with innovations, will dictate how quickly they move through the technology tree. The game also has a civic tree, which operates and acts in the same way the tech tree does and provides government, religious, and cultural innovations. Many of the civic tree's researchable options are tied to the tech tree. In *Civilization VI*, the game starts with five research options: sailing, animal husbandry, pottery, mining, and astrology. These five prerequisites will lead the player to other researchable categories which will then become prerequisites for other advancements.

The technology tree has been critiqued as "[presenting] a linear model of technological development" (Slocombe 162). For example, the player must develop animal husbandry before they can develop horseback riding. This game mechanic creates a narrative that enforces technological determinism meaning "technological innovation [being] synonymous with social progress, [which is] an outgrowth of evolutionist theories" (Martino 34). Essentially, this means the more labor a civilization places on research and science, the more innovations they will

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[10] The original board game created in 1980, *Civilization*, "is often credited as being the first game to incorporate a technology tree" (Slocombe 161). This board game has no connection to the video game series according to developer Sid Meier.

unlock on the technology tree. The more innovations they unlock, the more 'advanced' their civilization becomes. Advancement in technology, according to this game narrative, is direct progress towards a successful civilization (and closer to winning the game). In addition to this, a civilization will not survive if they are not constantly researching and upgrading via the technology tree. These upgrades must happen equally across categories for most of the game, or players risk falling behind in key areas, which will cause the fall of their empire. For example, if a player does not advance their military technology, they cannot defend against enemies that have gunpowder, while they have bows and arrows. The linear nature and progress of the technology tree eliminate any alternative narratives that divert from technological determinism.

The technology tree also shapes a historical narrative by restricting the player's movement in time, as the next era of history can only be reached when they have acquired certain points in the technology tree. The use of historical eras, such as "ancient, classical, medieval, renaissance, industrial, modern, atomic and information…solidify [a] Eurocentric homonarrativization" (Ford 4). This inevitable and predetermined course of progress is tied to time, creating a "Eurocentric imperialist narrative of socio-political and technological development" (Ford 7). The technology tree, through technological determinism, shapes, and drives the Eurocentric timeline to create an imperial narrative.

Eventually, the scientific tree ends with a "western cold war narrative" (Ford 7). The final challenge a player faces in achieving a scientific victory in *Civilization V* is a competition against other civilizations to "colonize [the] nearby star Alpha Centauri. The goal…is to reach the real-world United States' crowning Cold War achievement -- no matter which civilization the player chooses" (Ford 4). Essentially meaning, the player races against other civilizations to build a rocket and launch it to Alpha Centauri. The first rocket to land wins mirroring the space race.

Then colonization begins again, and the circular colonist narrative is complete, a scientific victory is achieved. Similarly, since the first version of *Civilization*, the American space race has been a playable option that led to a victory in every *Civilization* game. While the player may choose which tech they want to evolve first, all paths lead to an American technological future (usually a playable space race model) that is shaped by technological determinism, a reductionist theory developed and utilized by the west.

Religion, similar to and developed by the civic tree, is a major game mechanic that can impact war, economics, happiness, and lead to a religious victory. To obtain a religious victory in *Civilization VI*, the player's religion must be the most dominant in the world, influencing over fifty percent of the population on the game map. Religious points, bonuses, and abilities are earned through faith points. The player does not have access to faith points until they research astrology at the start of the game. By placing the religious system inside the technology tree as a cultural technology, it also becomes immersed in the "progressive schema" (Zeller 42) and "convey[s] an explicit religious hierarchy" (Zeller 44) that favors western Christian religion.

Civilization VI introduced civics to the *Civilization* series. Meant to encompass a civilization's philosophical and ideological progression, the civic 'culture' tree copied the technology tree replacing technology with culture. Similar to how the technology tree utilizes science, the civic tree utilizes culture points. While the tech tree focuses on military and infrastructure development, the civic tree develops social policy, diplomatic actions, forms of government, and religions. On turn one, the player beings by researching the "code of laws" (*Civilization*) which produces the first military and economic policy cards. The cards provide military, economic, or diplomatic advantages. The civic tree unlocks a myriad of social aspects that vary in their relation to each other like trade, guilds, colonialism, mass media, conservation,

the cold war, and professional sports. *Civilization's* civic tree had the same issues its technology tree presented. It is rooted in a "progressive schema" (Zeller 42), conveys religious hierarchy that culminates in western, Christian doctrine, and seems to link together random aspects of culture without connection. For example, the research of the cultural technology "Ideology" will unlock the cultural technologies "Nuclear Program", "Suffrage", "Totalitarianism", "Class Struggle", "Cold War", and "Professional Sports" (Civilization VI). The civic system in Civilization VI is underdeveloped, represented as a poorer version of its technological opposite, and supports the western historical narrative the technology tree creates.

The religious game system fluctuates cosmetically and mechanically with each game iteration as the developers tried to turn religion into a tool that works in an imperial and capital-based system. In the first three games, religion mostly functions to appease the people, ensuring productivity and labor. Historically, Christianity was a major justification for exploitation, conquest, and colonizing other countries, particularly in the colonization of the continent Africa. Conversion became a major tool within colonization. This religion created a preordained justification for the racist, destructive, and violent actions European nations took against Africa, and eventually other nonwhite people in America. The colonial diction seen in the *Civilization* series, like barbarians or heathens, was utilized and justified by Christians to denounce all non-Christian peoples, otherwise all non-European people. A religious victory is not introduced until *Civilization VI*. Yet, these early game versions placed Christian images and rhetoric around religious advancement.

For example, a video plays at the start of the first *Civilization* game, which features "an epic chronicle that invoked a secularized version of the Bible's Genesis account of creation, clearly echoing the language of the King James Version of the Bible" (Zeller 41). The

technology tree connects polytheism to primitivism and Mesoamerican iconography, while Monotheism, although "[referring] to both Judaism and Islam alongside Christianity" (Zeller 44), is connected to advancement and maintaining Christian iconography. In addition, the technology tree presents religion as a linear model ending at Christianity, similar to the progressive nature of the technology tree. The temple, the first religious building available to the player in the ancient era, fluctuates visually from "an Islamic mosque (*Civilization*); a South Asian building with stupas (*Civilization II*); a Roman pagan temple (*Civilization III* and *V*); or a neo-classical Byzantine-style building (*Civilization VI*)" (Zeller 46). Yet, all game versions have a European gothic cathedral as its most 'efficient' and 'advanced' religious structure via the technology tree. The written text that accompanied the structure references "the Christian Church" and "European towns" (Zeller 46). While *Civilization IV* and *V* turn away from the problematic narrative, the newest game, *Civilization VI* "offer[s] the most explicit vision of this progression, with the Reformed Church representing the ultimate end of religion" (Zeller 44).

The implication that Christianity is the ultimate epitome of religion is an inherently western idea that mimics a Eurocentric empire's imperial climb to dominance and perseverance. A massive aspect of the colonial formula was Christianity. The religion was used as a tool by the European empire to aid colonization efforts, assimilation, and 'othering' of peoples. While the utilization of Christian narratives and iconography supports their imperial western narrative, it also ignores major religions that developed within other civilizations that lasted as long if not longer than the European empire. These religions also followed a similar historical path of Christianity, growing and changing with its civilization, obtaining millions of followers, and lasting into the modern day. Hinduism is one of the oldest religions, dating back three thousand years ago, with over a billion followers today. It's origination in India, another large, surviving,

and lasting civilization, and its succession into modern times, similar to Christianity, is inconsequential to game narrative. Buddhism, the dominant religion in China, another massive, long-lasting civilization, originated 2,500 years ago and also has millions of followers today. Yet, both significant religions, their histories, iconographies, and doctrines are left out of the religious game play. While the player can choose to play as either of these religions, they are forced into a pseudo-Christian narrative. *Civilization VI* offers the player a various choice of religions, or even creating their own, which seems to address the issue of a Christian dominated game. While it gives the appearance of religious choice, the game still reinforces a western narrative consistently, nonwestern dominant religions are counter to this narrative and could provide counters to imperial or colonial action. Thus, they are almost entirely erased from the game, aside from a religious name and aesthetic building.

  Civilization VI created the religious victory option through religious domination via evangelization and holy war. New buildings were added to the game like shrines, temples, and religious world wonders. Players could create and deploy religious units like missionaries, apostles, gurus, and inquisitors. Missionaries and apostles "spread religion via evangelization" (Zeller 49). The guru is a "religious healer" (Zeller 49) that heals other units in theological combat. Inquisitors engage in theological combat, fighting other inquisitors and removing other religions from nearby areas. The theological combat religious units partake in echoes the warfare combat military units utilize. In addition to the militarization of religion, these units could be purchased via faith points from religious buildings in cities. Prayers and faith become a currency that can be exchanged for tools that aid the empire's religious expansion. While the developers removed much of the Christian iconography and ties between specific religions and theological claims in *Civilization VI*, "they…retained Protestant normativity. Players …were incentivized to

push towards a "Religious Reformation" that allowed adding "Reformation Beliefs" providing powerful in-game effects" (Zeller 48).

Civilization VI's religious mechanics contains a western Christian bias, which is "seen in the names of the religious units as well as their various abilities such as "indulgence vendor" and "heathen conversion" (Zeller 49). To achieve a religious victory, the game system requires religious conflict and combat, incentivizing mass conversation through combat. The game views different religions as constantly in conflict, which "aligns with broader cultural shifts in the post-9/11 world and the rise of a cultural perspective regarding a perceived clash of Islam and Christianity" (Zeller 50). While the technology tree created a western narrative through technological determinism, religion strengthened the western narrative by utilizing protestant normativity and Christian discourse. Combined with a gamescape and characters that reinforce imperial domination, the religious and technological systems create a simplified version of western history that includes its ideologies, policies, and technologies.

Overall, through the game mechanics, board, and characters, it is clear that the *Civilization* series has a simplified western bias and imperialist narrative. The settler colonial mechanics of the games "envision an empty world waiting to be filled by "civilizations" (Carpenter 34). The game rewards "acts of violence, coercion, theft and subjugation" supporting the ideology of colonialism (Trammell 241). The game series operates using a colonial binary discourse like civilized and barbaric, primitive, and modern, etc. There is no space in gameplay for the alternatives or competing narratives that attempt to counter the empire. While some players try to twist the imperial mechanisms against historically colonial nations in their gameplay, for example, having India colonize Europe, they cannot escape the logic of empire the game inherently employs. Ford argues that the "process of rehearsing this narrative through

gameplay is problematic" (Ford 7) as the players "rehearse the historical narrative coded into the structures of gameplay" (Ford 9). To counter this harsh criticism of the game series, it's important to outline that this is a video game meant to entertain, not replicate, or teach history. The developers of previous editions have prioritized replayability, engagement, and entertainment, not realism. While the game series clearly structures an imperialistic narrative, the game developers don't try to hide the narrative. Yet, they also don't try to change the narrative or game functions in newer editions to alter the western and imperial influence. In addition, there is an aspect of realism in their attempt to create a historical narrative in their game that mirrors real history, which does perpetuate a specific ideological narrative and representation. Meier stated he "wanted to simulate the overall experience of building an empire without getting bogged down in the specifics of how existing empire had done it…You were rewriting history, not reliving it" (Meier 124). Yet, the player can only rewrite history using imperial tools and a western perspective. In addition, the game's ideology is a conscious decision intended to target a specific audience, one that mirrors its developers, a white American man and ignore others.

The western ideology within the game resembles Louis Althusser's theory of ideology, or that ideology is based in institutions and has a material existence. His theory states that the apparatuses that maintain the ideologies that structure society are "the religious ISA [Ideological State Apparatus], the educational ISA, the family ISA, the legal ISA" (Althusser), which "enforce beliefs by means of a series of rituals, habits and customs" (Ryder). Some of the *Civilization* series main gameplay mechanics are the civic tree (dictating judicial laws and religion), the technology tree (dictating societal tools), and maintaining constant population growth (families) for constant material growth. The game's ideologies, as I have previously stated, are heavily represented by, and rooted in their game mechanics. Althusser even

categorizes ideologies into two areas, "repressive state apparatuses" (army, police, and courts, enforces through violence) and "ideological state apparatuses" (maintains class society and identity) (Althusser). While the visual class structure is absent from the game, as the imperial game structure provides all material resources to the player not the people, the repressive state apparatuses is the main bodied and moving pieces within the game. The people are unbodied aside from settlers' units, while the armies and policing forces are always visually present in a variety of differing units and performing actions across the game space. Althusser's theory is reliant on 'state' entities constructing ideology and the game utilizes a simplified version of this idea to support the extreme imperial processes of the game mechanics. The game also operates and relies on the material consistently. Every game mechanic references or aesthetically presents real world actions associated with systems, like religion and prayer or people and labor. Yet, these system actions, like praying, are simplified into numbers on charts that provide material benefit only. Prayers are the currency through which the player can buy a religious warring unit or upgrade their religious buildings, they are not worship alone. All the game's ideological systems are tied to material ends.

I find the ambiguity with which western contemporary game developers view the *Civilization* series' imperialist system alarming. Sid Meier intended the game series, as he stated in his book, to be based on a generalized version of history and be nonpolitical, but the game cannot escape its 4X genre nor its root in the western, imperialism narrative. In addition, there is no representation that is nonpolitical nor is there a generalized history. Succinctly put by Ford, the game is a "celebration of the equal opportunity of all nations to conquer" (Ford 7).

Part Three: Morality in the *Civilization* series

       Civilization does not tout morality as a key aspect or function in their game series. *Civilization* does not pose any moral questions or challenges to the player directly, but the gameplay cannot avoid player-applied morality. The game's morality is still defined and shaped by the game series' structure, narrative, and mechanics. In "grand strategy [video] games, narrative is constructed through the actions of the player at least as much as text" (Carpenter 46). Morality fluctuates in its definition of good and bad depending on the society and values held. While a defined version of morality might fit one civilization, historically, it may not fit another. The morality in the *Civilization* series is created through its western, imperial ideologies.

       In *Civilization VI*, for example, if the player destroys a barbarian outpost that held another civilization's settler unit, the game will pose a question to the player. Do they wish to keep the settler unit for themselves or return the unit to its proper civilization? The game's two outcomes of this decision are: to gain a settler unit or gain some relationship points with another civilization. There is not a morally good or bad decision in the game's rewards, either choice provides a positive benefit for defeating the barbarians. Yet, players can see the settlers as people who provide more than the material benefit of colonizing land. The settlers are virtually represented as a group of people, one leading a donkey loaded with bags and the other's carrying their possessions on their back. Should they send captured people back to their homes, or keep the unit for their civilization? This question creates a moral quandary for the player, be a savior of peoples or be another captor of people like the barbarians. While this brush with morality was unintended by the game, it still frames a narrative that gives shape to the game's perception of morality.

       The imperial mechanisms and western narrative the game owns create and support

capitalist values, which all create the narrative morality experienced in game. The game values, or codifies as good, anything that will benefit the empire as good, and anything counter to the empire as bad. Thus, the game's morality is defined by a thing's ability to provide benefit to the empire alone. Moral good is represented in actions and objects like material benefit, resources, and labor for the empire. Moral bad is represented by anything opposing the actions, systems, and agents of empire like barbarians or protest. Just as there is no space in the game for the subaltern or peoples that cannot be seen or heard by the empire, or how the game cannot be won through any paths outside of imperial or colonial domination, no other redefined morality, aside from the imperial and capitalistic definition, can exist in this space.

Sid Meier briefly mentions ideas of morality by stating, "choices have consequences, … a country's fate can turn on a single act of diplomacy, and that historical figures were not black-and-white paragons of good and evil" (Meier 234). He goes on to state that the game must "offer a moral clarity" to the player to "eliminate the painful quandaries" to save the player's ego (Meier 230). So, Genghis Khan does not beg for his life when he is near military defeat, to ensure the player is not "in the uncomfortable position of questioning whether winning is worth it" (Meier 231). Meier wanted to create a game world that taught the grayness of morality but erased the vehicles that define that middle ground. If a player were to attack Genghis Khan and win, the character disappears from gameplay. In a true space that featured the consequence of choice, the player would see Genghis Khan beg for his life and die at the end of the battle. The game does not allow to the player to "contemplate environmental catastrophe in the race for technological supremacy and does not account for what happens to the losing side; indeed, what "counts" is that a player can achieve a military– scientific–diplomatic victory, regardless of how that win condition is reached" (Krapp 49). For the sake of the player's comfort and

entertainment, moral counters to the narrative are erased. Any ethical issues unintentionally posed to the player are guided by capitalistic values and support player actions based on coloniality and imperialism, as the player is restricted to operate under these systems of power.

In conclusion, this chapter outlined how previous scholarship and my analysis discerned how different aspects and mechanics of the *Civilization* series created an imperial and colonial gamespace that supported a simplified version of western history. The player transforms into a nation; other people are represented as placeholders for strategic benefits or detriments. The populations that fill the civilizations are unseen, and NPCs are hollow vessels. Each aspect of the game's people that could have opposed the ideals of empire is erased or transformed. The game map turns land into endless exploitable resources, where exploitation and expansion are essential tools to winning the game. The game mechanics operate under imperial direction but support a colonized map. The technology tree uses technological determinism to outline a western history intended to encompass all human history. It also summarizes all religions into a monotheistic Christian narrative. The in-depth analysis outlining the game's narrative defined the game's sense of morality. While the *Civilization* series does not directly incorporate morality, the game leverages an imperially guided moral compass.

IV. HUMANKIND

Our Universe contains infinite stories... Most of which are about rocks and ice, at subzero temperatures, in a vacuum. Rather boring. However, on a small, damp rock, there is a story that bears a second look. It's your story... This is the dawn of humankind. Struggle and cooperation—have been rewarded. The Neolithic Era draws to a close: the whole world beckons. This tribe has come far, but the rest of their story is your story. YOU are the one who will build them into a great civilization. How far will you push Humankind?

Humankind, Sega

Part One: A Brief History of Humankind

Humankind is the newest addition and the biggest threat to *Civilization's* reign over the 4X genre. The game was created by Amplitude Studios (a French studio) and published by Sega in November 2021. Originally founded in 2011 by former employees of Ubisoft[11], Amplitude Studios is known for its science fiction and fantasy 4X games like *Endless Legends* (2014) and *Endless Space* (2012). These were not the first games to combine science fiction with the 4X genre. While *Civilization* established the game genre and itself in gaming history, some of the first created 4X games were rooted in science fiction. Many of the plots of these games, like *Reach for the Stars* (1983) or *Stellar Crusade* (1988), had players controlling intergalactic empires with massive warships intended for space battles. While the main mechanics of these games were war and military dominance, they still involved aspects of colonization and imperialism, conquering planets, gathering resources, and dealing with other alien empires. Microprose was the first company to introduce a historically based 4X game that stepped away from fantasy realms. They were the only company, until 1997, that combined human history with

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[11] A famous French video game publisher known for titles like *Far Cry*, *Assassin's Creed*, and *Just Dance*.

the 4X genre as all others utilized sci-fi thematically.

The *Endless* Series is one of the more popular 4X games. According to SteamDB (or Steam Database), a database that records the hours of gameplay each game has on the gaming platform Steam, *Endless Space 2* is in 8th place with 53,435 hours played in one day. Right above that is *Humankind*, in 7th place, with 55,284 hours played in one day. Finally, at the top is *Civilization VI* with 162,657 hours played alone in a single day (SteamDB*)*. Places four and five are also a part of the *Sid Meier Civilization* series. While both alternative games combined cannot seem to rival *Civilization VI*, they are still leagues ahead of other 4X games that cannot gain more than 20,000 hours of play, which is rank twelve and below. Essentially, eleven 4X games make up 806,356 hours of gameplay, of which happened in a single day. Of the billions of hours people spend playing 4X games, these particular games are the most consumed and influential.

While the *Endless* series of games are popular, in 2021, Amplitude Studios took their first dip into a historically based 4X game, *Humankind.* While the game is very similar to *Civilization VI*, it attempts to turn away from the traditional themes and gameplay 4X games utilize. The game begins with players starting on a foggy map as a nomadic tribe in the Neolithic era. As a hunting party, the players roam the world gaining bonuses from 'curiosities', or finding food. As the player finds more food, they gain more population, earn 'era stars', and eventually can establish an outpost. An outpost can eventually be transformed into the player's first city. Era stars are the method with which the game awards fame points and tracks the player's progression through time (or the eras, including neolithic, ancient, classical, medieval, early modern, industrial, and contemporary). Once the player earns seven era stars, they have the option to progress into the next era. With each pass into a new era, the player will have the option to

choose a new culture. With enough stars, gained through a myriad of categories, the player

moves on in time and gains fame. The player with the most fame by the end of the game is the

winner, "leav[ing their] mark on history to win the game" (*Humankind*).

   Humankind differs from *Civilization* in many areas, and each area can be analyzed

compared to *Civilization*. In the time between the development of *Civilization* and *Humankind*

the world became more intertwined with the rise of multiculturalism and awareness of global

cultures. From social media to television shows, widespread use of the internet created more

visibility and communication between peoples around the world. The American public was more

divided about foreign policy and the level of which the United States should interfere with

international relations was heavily debated. Counter to 1990's America, imperialism and

colonialism are being questioned and criticized by people, players, and game developers. In

2019, *Vice* wrote an article about the *Civilization* series asking, "How strategy games have held

on to one of colonialism's most toxic narratives, and how they might finally be letting go"

(Soares). Players debated the articles accuracy and validity on reddit, twitter, and other social

media sites. Bloomberg also released an article in 2016 titles "What 'Civilization VI' Gets

Wrong About Civilization" which critiqued the games lack of representation of modern issues

like climate change (Capps). *Humankind* reflects this progressive moment in video game and

American history. The contextualization of *Humankind* through comparison to *Civilization* is

important as it connects relevant scholarship and displays how this game genre is developing.

The *Civilization* series established and continues to create major trends in the 4X game genre due

to its popularity. In addition, based on game hours, *Humankind* is the only game to come close to

Civilization's title. Their parallelism displays player interest, game trends, and outlines the major

root issues within these games and their game genre.

First, the player does not control a single civilization but manages a "culture" that can evolve and combine with other cultures as time progresses. This game design choice displays a fusion of cultures and communities, which *Civilization* does not offer or encourage. The player is represented by their created character which constantly reflects the culture they are playing. Finally, *Humankind* turns away from winning via categorical domination and utilizes fame. Players earn fame through era stars as they travel through the eras winning battles, building world wonders, and completing narrative events. Yet, each player, or culture, has their own unique set of achievable era stars. If one empire achieves an era star, it does not stop other players from receiving that star in their own culture's progress. The player with the most fame at the end of the game wins. While fame dictates the winner of the game, it does not end the game. The end of the game is triggered when certain conditions are reached like the three hundredth turn, all contemporary era stars are earned, completion of the technology tree, elimination of all other empires, vassalizing all other empires, sending a mission to mars, or rending the world unfit via pollution. The player will still expand their lands, scrounge the world for resources, increase their trade, further their technology, spread their religion, and fight to survive, but these categories alone do not provide a victory in the game.

The most significant change *Humankind* brought to the genre was the introduction of a morality mechanism where a player's choices were reflected in consequences or rewards that impacted gameplay. According to *Humankind*'s website, the game is about "Creat[ing] your own civilization by combining 60 historical cultures from the Ancient to the Modern Age…Every great deed you accomplish, every moral choice you make, every battle won will build your fame…The player with the most fame will win the game" (Sega, *Humankind*). As I have previously stated, the *Civilization* series has no such mechanic, and any moral implication that

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can be gleaned from the game is equated to a strategic bonus that supports actions that improves the empire. *Humankind*'s claim to have morality be a function within their game shakes the game genre to its core. Many 4X games have similar mechanics that support a simplified, if not also Americanized, version of imperialism and colonialism. Morality in these games is typically redefined as a mechanism that supports the empire, so an action is morally good if it supports that empire and morally bad if it opposes it. This definition may clash with most players' understanding of moral quests or issues video games usually impose, wherein peoples' lives are prioritized over money, land, or the needs of the empire. For *Humankind* to create a realistic version of morality, or one that stepped away from previous 4X game definitions, the game developers had to restructure the game to ignore the imperial base game function. Basic game functions and mechanisms had to be reimagined. While the narrative events in *Humankind* that serve as their morality mechanic provide a unique foil to the imperial functions of 4X gameplay, their long-term effects have no impact on game events or end results. The narrative events serve as a fallible foil that, while appeasing modern players, does not impact the imperial processes in game. *Humankind's* introduction of morality into this game genre does create new and exciting modes of gameplay that are at the forefront of the 4X genre currently. The game also creates a new game narrative that counters that of the *Civilization* series, as stated by Rob Zacny, "Civilization is a process, not destiny" (Zacny, VICE). It reinforces the idea that any actions, deeds, and paths can lead to an established, famous civilization. No specific civilization was predestined from its founding to last the test of time. They simply evolved and continued until they couldn't do so any longer.

One of the first major differences between *Civilization* series and *Humankind* is the adaptation of the main playable character. In *Civilization*, playable historical figures and their civilizations are permanently tied together. So, if a player chooses to play as the Dutch, they are represented by Wilhelmina, a former queen of the Netherlands. While some civilizations have a few additional options of historical figures, most have one leader accompanying a given civilization. Wilhelmina, with her umbrella and top hat with a pink bow, becomes the face of the player's selected nation. Yet, the player will rarely see Wilhelmina, aside from her face as their nation's icon, they will mostly interact with spreadsheets and the tiled game map. The player acts as the empire itself, whether that empire is one concentrated nation or a colonialist nation with multiple cities.

In *Humankind*, historical figures are mostly nonplayable characters, and the player has to create their own empire's representative leader. This is unique for most 4X games, regardless of genre, as usually when the player picks the civilization, culture, or group of beings, they wish to play as a leading figure is attached to it. After opening the game, the player will be presented with a various set of twenty pre-generated leaders for the player to choose from, but these animated figures do not represent any nation or culture. Instead, they seem to represent a myriad of people from across different times and locations. After choosing one of these characters, the player can completely customize their avatar or leader, from facial features like nose shape to hairstyle to outfit color. Instead of historical figures, the player is represented by a leader of their own creation. The civilization, or culture in *Humankind*, the player chooses to play is represented by the clothing worn by their character, which changes with each evolution of culture. Even the title the player holds will change depending on the era and their empiric choices (for example,

their title could be absolute monarch, empress, enlightened monarch, etc).

The removal of historical figures and the introduction of player-created leaders erases any issues of representation regarding playable characters. It does not give the developers the opportunities to represent their own bias and beliefs in their created leaders, giving the power of representation back to the player. This mechanic turns away from fundamental 4X games process to appease postcolonial and modern players. It reflects the public demand for diversity, inclusion, and representation. Yet, these created leaders still fill a similar function to the national leaders in the *Civilization* series. They are a face that represents an empire, and they are bodiless. The player is still placed in a god-like role controlling all aspects of their empire. While their created character is the face of that empire, the player still becomes the empire itself, interfacing with the world mainly with spreadsheets and the game map.

In recent updates of *Humankind*, the game introduced events and challenges that unlocked the game's first historical figures as playable characters. All figures are locked until the player defeats a set of challenges, three of which are related to holiday traditions. Wang Zhenyi, a famous astronomer from the feudal Qing dynasty, was released as a playable character in the 2022 Lunar New Year celebration game event. Nayakuralu Nagamma, the first female minister to the king of Nalagama in 12th century Palandu, was released with the Holi Festival event. La Catrina, a Latin woman bearing a skull pattern painted on her face, represented the famous icon from the widely celebrated Day of the Dead holiday and was released by completing the Dia de los Muertos challenges. The final two characters were introduced to the game as general challenges surround that character's history. Leonardo Da Vinic, a famous Italian thinker and artist, was won through science and war challenges like owning a biplane in the early modern era or destroying fortifications on ten tiles during a game. Livia Drusilla, Roman empress, and wife

to Caesar Augustus was added during the last game update when the Roman expansion scenario was released.

After completing each character's in-game challenges, the player can pick them as their avatar. Unlike the *Civilization* series, the avatars can be connected to any culture, and their in-game traits can be altered by the player. While the game utilizes historical figures as playable avatars, they are more so aesthetic rewards for completing challenges than game developers' attempts at inclusion (or representing entire swaths of people) in a eurocentric, imperial narrative. The avatars are meant to represent one person in history, rather than a known figure standing as (a sometimes stereotypical) representation of an entire civilization or culture. *Humankind's* historical figures are still a face representing a playable empire, as all playable characters in this game format are, yet they subtly introduce players to interesting figures of history and their backgrounds. The challenges are still rooted in imperial levels of success like military and religious expansion. For example, the Holi Festival event's chapter one (Holi ka Dahan) included challenges like "Shrewd General": which force an expansionist empire with vassals to surrender, and "Houses of the Holi" (*Humankind*): to have ten Hindu religious sites in the players' empire. Yet, their goal is to include a major holiday in the game and highlight a relevant historical figure for player engagement.

While these five newly introduced historical figures can be avatars, they can also be placed as counter-AI players. The base game provides thirteen nonplayable AI leaders for the player to play against. Additional downloadable content (DLC) has led to a total of eighteen AI characters, five of which are also playable avatars. These AI players, similar to *Civilization*, represent different fictional and realistic historical figures. Please reference the A.I. Player Table.

Table 1. A.I. Player Table

A.I. Name	Historical reference
Ancestor	A representation of an early homo-sapiens
Agamemnon	King of Mycenae in Greek mythology, commanded Greek troops in the Trojan war
Walinong Sari	A Pahang Malay princess, known for martial arts mastery and is the subject of a famous folk song
Beowulf	The hero from the Geatish epic poem, known for slaying the beast Grendel
Elisa	Founder of Carthage
Semiramis	Legendary Lydian-Babylonian queen who ruled Assyria
Mama Ocllo	An Incan fertility goddess who, according to legend, established the city of Cusco in Peru
Mu Guiying	A heroine from Chinese legend who was a steadfast warrior.
Arjuna	A legendary Indian warrior from the epic Mahabharata
Tjilbruke	The ancestor of the Australian Kaurna people of the Adelaide plains
Midas	A king famous in Greek mythology known for his ability to transform things into gold by touching them
Gilgamesh	The Mesopotamian hero of the Akkadian epic poem
Makeda	The Ethiopic name for the Queen of Sheba, who appears in multiple tales, particularly the Ethiopian saga Kebra Nagast

They each have one bias, two strengths, and two archetypes; all of which are parameters that dictate their actions in gameplay. A bias is an effect that determines the minor desires of an AI, which can range from the aggregator (wanting to settle everywhere quickly) to lover (favors an ideological position similar to other players) to stubborn (refuses to change cultures throughout the game). The strengths, similar to the *Civilization* series leader ability, are the strategic bonuses like additional food on farmers' quarters or less industry cost on building specific land tiles. The archetypes define the wide sweeping game actions like how the AI interacts with other players and their culture's choice for victory method. The archetypes are sorted in ten categories (leadership, conflict resolution, planning, temperance, sociability, tolerance, trust, integrity, audacity, and resentment) that are set on a sliding scale. For example, an AI leader's temperance can fall on impulsive, cool-headed, or balanced (somewhere in between). The player can also use these three categories to define their own leader, but they must first unlock each bias, strength, and archetype by completing challenges in the game. If they wish to have a cool-headed temperance, they must win a game without losing a battle. If they wish to have an impulsive temperance, they must be the first player to reach all six era's in a single game. The goal of unlocking and applying attributes is for the player's created character to become an AI of its own that others can play against. While the two strengths chosen will benefit the player's game, the biases and archetypes do not work while the player is operating their character as they have their own biases, etc.

Humankind's AI system is more complex than *Civilization's*, providing three areas of traits that define an AI player's actions and decisions. *Civilization* only utilizes two, a leader ability (strategic bonus or strength) and leader agenda (informs behavior of AI, or combination of bias and archetype). For example, Poundmaker, the representative of the Cree Civilization in

Civilization VI has the leader agenda labeled Iron Confederacy, which means he likes other players that establish many alliances and dislikes those who do not. In *Humankind*, Beowulf is labeled as a risk-taking militarist and rusher, also meaning he will overutilize resources, favor military power to achieve era stars, and will attack other players on sight. While this game mechanic widens the AI's possible actions and decisions, creating more entertaining and complex game play, it also provides labels that outline AI intention and shape a game narrative.

In terms of inclusion and diversity, *Humankind's* introduction of player created leaders takes a step in the right direction and away from any discourse or negative impression of represented peoples like that generated by the *Civilization* series. Yet, their nonplayable AI leaders fall into the same issues as their *Civilization* counter parts. While they have a more complex system of determining AI action and leading to multiple possible actions, the AI are still merely a set of parameters representing strategic bonuses or empire actions. All influences created by biases, strengths, and archetypes impact empire and how that AI manages their empire. Once again, a game rooted in imperial and/or colonial mechanisms of war cannot escape its base game. Everything, AI historical figures included, must be recreated to, on a base function, impact the empire.

In addition to this, the labels *Humankind* attaches to biases, strengths, and archetypes are unchangeable and could lead to player backlash. The labels can have heavy implications with titles like "cruel", "vindictive", "hateful", "traitorous", "master", and "stubborn" (*Humankind*), despite their associated strategic focus or influence on AI action. It creates a narrative steeped in game-created binaries; cruel or benevolent, loyal or traitorous, open or hateful, etc. Similar to the representational issues in *Civilization* VI, if these labels are applied to historical leaders inappropriately, it could result in an upset player base or possibly cause retaliations from the

public. *Humankind* also recreates *Civilization's* leader mechanic issue that "allows for a bloodthirsty Gandhi or a peaceful Teddy Roosevelt" (Carpenter 40), despite leader agenda and coded actions. This is the same issue that led to the Cree nation protests. A player can utilize and represent the five playable historical leaders in *Humankind* under any label in the three trait genres. This issue is seemingly unavoidable in the game genre as players have complete control over their civilizations, cultures, or AI avatars.

Games, like *Humankind* and *Civilization*, are based in vague human history with the intent for the player to rewrite history. *Humankind* offers the player the chance to create their personal leader that faces other famous figures of the past, while the *Civilization* series focuses on players' reimagining histories through repackaging historical figures. *Civilization* chose historical human figures to represent civilizations, creating a shell for strategic benefits but also tying identity and representation to their created character. When *Civilization* chose to represent famous historical figures in connection to their civilizations, they could not avoid the connection to real history; "the game makes an explicit connection by using the names and likenesses of historical leaders and setting up game scenarios based on historical events" (Ford 8). How a national leader was designed, both aesthetically and through their computerized actions, reflected the biases and implications of the game creators. The real human history attached to that leader impacts the gameplay or the gameplay reflected across the leader, both influence the narrative and impact the player. In addition to this, the game's western narrative views non-western countries through a stereotypical lens and tie that representation to a real, historical figure. These figures represent massive amounts of people in their connection to each civilization and are typically analyzed for their ability or inability to properly do so. The game series also simplifies historical figures down to two traits and their associated in game effects. Mainly, the figures are

used as playable strategic tools.

Humankind, while using a slightly more complex three-tiered trait system, does not connect one known person to one civilization or culture, which avoids issues created in attempts to represent mass amounts of people in one leader. Instead, their few historical leaders are simplified and represent one person in accordance with their popularized historical accomplishments. While *Humankind* has seemed to (thus far) avoid representational issues, they still simplify historical figures into labels and strategic benefits with a specific aesthetic appearance. *Humankind's* historical leaders are also strategic tools of gameplay. Yet, *Humankind* currently features a well-balanced set of historical AI players and avatars that do not favor western or Eurocentric cultures, like the *Civilization* series. Additionally, there are ten women and eight men among the potential AI leaders. New DLC focuses on African and Latin American cultures, wonders, peoples, narrative events, and music. *Humankind*, through its playable characters and AI counterparts, is not supporting a specifically western or masculinist narrative like the *Civilization* series does. While their representation of peoples falls short due to the imperial base game, they avoid using a western lens on nonwestern cultures, or label them as other in the process.

Other NPCs in the *Civilization* series, like barbarians and the tribal villages, are transformed in *Humankind*. At the start of the game, instead of roaming bands of barbarians spawning from outposts, the player faces roaming animals spawning from a lair or sanctuary tile. These animal units and tile spaces only spawn during the neolithic period and are destroyed by players 'ransacking' the tile for additional food or gold coins. In *Civilization* IV, the barbarian unit begins the game as roaming violent animals that, as time progresses, become barbarians. The dehumanization of barbarians, or people outside those deemed "Civilized", is not an

uncommon theme in colonial narratives, which *Civilization* maintains to some degree in all their game installments. Sanctuaries are described by *Humankind* as "a rich, diverse habitat with plenty to sack, this is a breeding ground for peaceful wildlife who range from the surrounding area" (*Humankind*). These tile spaces spawn peaceful roaming units like deer or mammoths and mirror the placement of *Civilizaton's* tribal village, or "goodie huts" (Carpenter 37). The ransacking action will provide the player a one-time bonus of food or gold, while also erasing the original sanctuary tile. A lair is described in the game as "the dark and fetid dwellings of dangerous, aggressive wildlife, care should be taken both in its environs and when sacking its riches" (*Humankind*). This tile space spawns aggressive bears that will attack players, mirroring the barbarian mechanic. Lair spaces can also be ransacked for a one-time bonus. These animal units can be hunted by players for additional food, influence, or gold coin, they are intended to be eradicated from the game space. Their existence was created to solely benefit empire and grow a culture into a new era.

Yet, *Humankind* does not have a narrative that creates a group of othered peoples (the barbarians) through colonial binaries. It also erases the game history that 'other' people were in the game space before the players, but their civilizations are lesser, meant to be eradicated by the 'chosen' civilizations. Instead, animals roam an empty world waiting for colonization by the various cultures. In the neolithic era, players can find "curiosities" which are mainly food bonuses aside from the "ancient encampment" curiosity. The game states this space is "the remains of a mysterious settlement [where] some land artifacts from pervious inhabitants" lay (*Humankind*). This space, once ransacked, awards the player with influence[12] and science[13].

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[12] Influence, in *Humankind*, is the numerical representation of a player's given cultural influence and pressure. It is used for creating outposts, cities, and creating civics.

[13] Science is the numerical representation of knowledge a player has and dictates how quickly they move through the technology tree.

While this tile creates a narrative that indigenous people did exist in this space before the players, they have disappeared. *Humankind* once again removes the colonial language, but the player still receives a strategic benefit from ransacking an indigenous settlement which connotes a western narrative. It also creates the myth of the 'blank space', which avoids dehumanization of peoples, but still erases them from the narrative completely. The player, in both games and NPC functions, eliminates a game space tile or unit to gain resources, maintaining an exploitive narrative.

The final characters, or NPC, that operates within the game space are the unseen peoples that build the cities, fight the wars, worship the gods, and live within the empire. In *Humankind*, the labor force remains just as unbodied and classless as in the *Civilization* series aside from a few, small illustrations that accompany a culture's vital moments like the starvation of people in a city. *Humankind* also employs a version of protest. The game codifies city 'stability' as a resource and places in on a numerical scale. Depending on the city's stability number, or location on the scale, they can be mutinous, strained, or settled. Mutiny could lead to rebellion and revolution, which could lead to a reset on player's civic decisions (ideological decision), a slow in the economy, and a population deserting your city/empire completely. The mutiny in *Humankind* mirrors protest in *Civilization*, they are negative actions meant to provide a fallible foil to the imperial base game. They are easily remedied and meant to fail, reinforcing imperialist ideals and modes of success. In *Humankind*, mutiny can be easily avoided by building a public fountain, aqueduct, or city watch guards. Protest and munity are not represented as culture altering and empire destroying mechanisms of change, as history represents. Instead, they are annoyances that must be remedied by the player as quickly as possible for fear of a decrease in industry, loss of population, or slow economic development.

Humankind is a game of empire, with all playable and nonplayable characters moving through the game space as tools for imperial function. Ford's criticism of playable characters in the *Civilization's* series "belonging to empire" while "all others are reduced to statistics and sub-humans: (un)happiness, barbarians, production levels" (Ford 10) can also be applied to *Humankind*. The player and AI counterparts either belong to the empire or act as the empire itself. While *Humankind* still reduces all actions, populations, and characters to statistics, the game removes the 'othering' *Civilization* utilizes with their diction and narrative construction. Yet, it cannot escape the inherent imperial game functions that represent all peoples, cultures, and civilizations as statistics, aesthetics, and stereotypical story lines.

The second major difference between *Humankind* and the *Civilization* series is their use of cultures. While the player controls a self-generated leader, or sometimes historical figure, they mainly control an empire. In *Civilization*, the empire was represented as a civilization, in *Humankind*, the empire is represented and operates through cultures. The player does not control a single civilization but manages a 'culture'. The game starts with each player controlling a nomadic tribe in the neolithic era, but once the player reaches the ancient era (the next progression of time) they can choose one of twelve cultures like Zhou, Omecs, Mycenaeans, or Babylonians (see graph below detailing each eras cultures). Each of these cultures have their own strategic advantages, or 'legacy trait', and affinities. Affinities are the special ability category the legacy trait resides within like builder, agrarian, aesthete, militarist, scientist, merchant, or expansionist. Each of these affinity categories are also areas to win fame stars. Please reference the Era Culture Table.

Table 2. Era Culture Table

Ancient	Classical	Medieval	Early Modern	Industrial	Contemporary
Assyrians	Achaemenid Persians	Aztecs	Dutch	Austro-Hungarians	Americans
Babylonians	Carthaginians	Byzantines	Edo Japanese	British	Australians
Bantu	Aksumites	English	Haudenosaunee	French	Brazilians
Egyptians	Celts	Franks	Joseon	Germans	Chinese
Harappans	Garamantes	Ghanaians	Ming	Italians	Egyptians
Hittites	Goths	Khmer	Mughals	Mexicans	Indians
Mycenaeans	Greeks	Mongols	Ottomans	Persians	Japanese
Nubians	Huns	Norsemen	Poles	Russians	Soviets
Olmecs	Mauryan	Teutons	Spanish	Siamese	Swedes
Phoenicians	Maya	Umayyads	Venetians	Zulu	Turks
Zhou	Romans				

Only one player can utilize one culture at a time. Each progression into a new era introduces new cultures replacing options from older eras. It also gives the player the option to choose a new culture or remain the same. If the player decides to change cultures, they will gain a permanent in game bonus to their civilization from their old culture and new advantages from their new one. If the player decides to stay the same, they will gain a fame bonus, which helps their overall path to victory. For example, the player can begin in the ancient era as Harappans and their "Fertile Inundations" (*Humankind*) or ability to produce more food per tile. They could also begin as the Hittites and their "Lust for war" (*Humankind*), or additional unit strength and bonuses on occupied cities. At the dawn of the classical period, either culture could become the Greeks, gaining an eternal food bonus from their Harappan past or a military bonus from the Hittites, while transforming into a culture that focus on science point production with the "Socratic Methods" bonus (*Humankind)*.

Each of these cultures also provide one unique building and military unit in addition to their strategic bonus. Ancient era Egyptians are builders, who can build pyramids, create a markabata (special chariot military unit), and are known as "Grand Planners", or providing extra industry. The Spanish, from the early modern era, are expansionists that can build gothic cathedrals, conquistador military units, and provide extra combat strength through the trait "Honor and Glory". While the specific culture chosen provides new aesthetic appearances, a few strategic bonuses, and a few stereotypical unique units, it does not represent a culture in any true sense of the word. A culture is the collective beliefs, social norms, and traits of a group of people. It combines details and specifics surrounding groups of peoples histories, which is what *Humankind's* culture lacks. When a player's culture evolves into a new or different culture, the unseen people do not maintain previous religions or social norms. Instead, all that is left behind

is a few outdated (and significantly less powerful) military units and some unique land tiles, like pyramids. In *Humankind*, cultures are essentially three defining aspects and a change of avatar costume. Cultures are essentially a new mechanism for players to strategically control their empire.

This culture game mechanic gives the player a more specific and detailed creation of their empire. Instead of reigning as Egyptian for the entire game (like in the *Civilization* series), and receiving only those strategic benefits (that will become unhelpful over time), the player can shift into new cultures, utilizing their benefits instead. While the game replicates some aspects of the fluid nature of cultures over time, it mostly recreates the idea of culture to fit inside a gamespace where all mechanics have to impact (and ideally benefit) the empire. Instead of being builders the entire game, players can shift from builders to militarists to scientists as they desire. This complicates the gameplay itself, making it more difficult to win, but also gives players multiple in game options, increasing entertainment.

The new culture evolution system does not drastically alter the representation of cultures from its representation of people. It simplifies their existence in the game space using a method similar to the *Civilization* series method of simplifying civilizations. The cultures provide just enough detail to identify differences between peoples, but not near enough to create mimics of real human cultures. *Humankind's* cultures are represented by one affinity trait, one emblematic unit, one emblematic district (land tile), one legacy trait (strategic bonus), and a few aesthetic changes (small buildings on the map, character outfit change). The game simplifies cultures into aesthetic units and stereotypical story lines that color the game of empire. The Egyptians have a themed chariot and build pyramids. The Aztecs have jaguar warriors and build a sacrificial altar. In this game, cultures only function to provide the aesthetic window dressings and stereotypical

popularized narrative story line for each culture. The game does not value detailed cultures or verified histories of peoples as a game mechanic as representation does not fit inside the empirical game of empire, nor can it be recreated as a strategic bonus or disadvantage.

Yet, *Humankind's* introduction of an evolving cultures better describes humanity's pathway through time than a single empire dominating the species with various imperial methods. Popular reviewers, like Rob Zacny from VICE, see *Humankind* as "a welcome antithesis to the battle royale of Civilization, where nations and cultures are fixed throughout all of history and can thrive or die, but not evolve" (Zacny) *Humankind* seems to reinforce the idea that "civilization is a process, [not a] destiny" (Zacny) as the *Civilization* series' western narrative displays it. The *Civilization* series discourages via game mechanics any fusion or cultural exchange between civilizations. If a player's civilization begins utilizing another's' religion, they are losing in the religious category because they have not expanded their religion. The exchange of scientific knowledge is encouraged only until the space race begins as only one player can win the space race via being the first to reach the end of the technology tree and building a rocket. *Civilization's* narrative outlines the 'destiny' of one player to dominate the world, similar to America's manifest destiny. *Humankind's* narrative focuses on one player's culture standing above the rest based on esteem and that player utilizes a fusion of cultures to create their own civilization. Similar to the main playable character, the player's hands on creation allows for a twist in the narrative. The game does not utilize specific categorical domination, but creates a variety of actions and decisions that could end in eternal fame.

The *Humankind* game map looks very similar to most 4X games; "once again, a bright and cheery world awaits your settlement and conquest, and little cartoon squads of ancient soldiers and workers crawl across a hex-grid landscape seeking new battles and new resources"

(Zacny). A randomly generated map is blocked by the fog of war, awaiting player exploration. The land is represented by hexagon, tile spaces with each having a specific biome, climate, and terrain type (forest, lake, woodland, mountain, ocean, wasteland, prairie, etc). Each terrain provides it own resources from extra food to extra industry[14] and impacts elevation, unit movement, and unit line of sight. Land spaces also provide the players with "strategic" and "luxury" (*Humankind*) resources. These resources are necessary for the development of empires and create the need to colonize and hold territories. Strategic resources include horses, copper, iron, saltpeter, coal, oil, aluminum, and uranium. These resources are used to build military units and city infrastructure. Luxury resources range from lead (science bonus) to gold (money bonus) to silk (industry bonus) to salt (food bonus). These resources are more commonly traded for gold, but each provide their own unique bonus to a city's population and additionally provide stability. While *Civilization* has some land tiles that provide only space, each piece of land in *Humankind* has an assigned value to the empire. There are no land tiles without an assigned strategic value.

Even land tiles like Natural Wonders (Lake Natron, Yellowstone etc.) and landmarks (mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, deserts), which cannot be altered by the player, reward the player with fame for discovering them. By owning the territories these tiles are located within, the player receives yield bonuses. Rewarding discovery and ownership of natural wonders with strategic bonuses creates an exploitative narrative. Finding the Great Barrier Reef is important, not because of its environmental uniqueness or impact on surrounding culture, but because it provides material benefit to nearby empires. Exploration for the sake of exploitation is a game

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[14] Industry is the idea of labor or production simplified and converted into numbers that a player utilizes to build units or modify game tiles.

mechanic maintained in *Humankind*, "Exploration is not done for curiosity's sake. Exploration is rewarded…they explore as a means to an end" (Ford 5).

Humankind's game space groups the land tiles into preset territories for the players to claim with outposts, "cities in *Humankind* occupy many squares instead of just one, encouraging a much more complex strategy of conquering or defending them" (G2A). In *Civilization* VI, a player can create a city that will automatically take up seven land tiles and expand outward slowly with population growth and passing eras. The player can also buy a tile outright with gold. As previously stated, this does create a system that follows "older western imperialist models" (Mukherjee 300) and leads to a concentric empire where all outside tiles supply the center. The game also automatically creates and enforces borders, "a western conception of space" (Ford 10). In *Humankind*, when the game begins, land tiles are grouped in borders created by the game. To claim a territory, and expand their empire, the player must create an outpost in a given territory, which will then change to their player color and be claimed as their land. Geopolitical territories and borders are crucial to games of empire and force a zero-sum game. Only one can have value at the loss of the other. Cartography is an embedded tool in the colonization these games attempt to model. Borders impact ownership of land and resources, which in turn impact revenue, production, and empire growth, thus they are the primary determining factor in matters of war in the game. War is the primary mechanic the game is built upon. *Humankind's* use of territories only further supports imperialist ideologies of space as borders are recreated as an aspect of the natural environment. The world is naturally divided into colonizable chunks of land, instead of people creating borders and militarily enforcing them. Imperialist ideologies in 4X game maps are unavoidable and a primary root in the expansionist game mechanics.

Humankind does not require empire expansion to achieve victory, as *Civilization* does, but it does provide benefits and rewards for expansion. The game includes twelve expansionist cultures and three expansionist era stars per era. Expansionist cultures favor expansion era stars as their method to achieving fame and winning the game. This expansion does not have to happen via war, but can also happen through cultural expansion and assimilation. A visible erasing of other leaders and cultures is still an aspect of the expansion, regardless of method. In addition to this, achieving enough fame to win through other era stars is difficult without the productivity, resources, and space expansion provided. If the player wants to achieve fame through scientific era stars, they are encouraged to build more science districts on land tiles as this will lead to more science points. Yet, one territory only has so many undeveloped land tiles and the city will need other districts like farms. Expansion, similar to geopolitical territories, is an inherent gameplay mechanic. It cannot be removed and it will always create a narrative that supports imperial ideals and a capitalistic value of land. *Humankind's* game space recreates imperial ideologies of spaces and notions of land that are embedded in the game function of all 4X games.

In *Humankind*, the technology tree operates using science points to unlock new units, districts, bonuses, and abilities. The technology tree, as previously stated, was created by the 4X board game genre and is used in a similar way by all 4X games. *Humankind's* tree is separated and dictated by the five eras. According to Ford, the dictation of time by these eras, which *Civilization* also utilized, "solidif[ies] [a] Eurocentric homonarrativization" (Ford 4). The technologies connect via lines linking to other techs along the technology tree. The first researchable techs in the ancient era are calendar, domestication, carpentry, and city defense. The tree ends with such technologies as the exosuit, military laser, neural implant, fusion reactor, and

space orbital. Most of these 'techs' have prerequisite techs that must be researched before they are unlocked. *Humankind* presents a "linear model of technological development" (Slocombe 162), which is a crude, limited representation of science and innovation that ends in monetary gain, or strategic benefits. The technology tree is another unavoidable game mechanic that is inherent to game functionality. If a player does not utilize the technology tree to increase their ability to expand, capitalize, systematize, and increase productivity in their city, they will struggle, if not fail, against cultures that do.

In *Civilization* VI, a player's progress within the technology tree dictates their advancement in time. The game narrative also equates technological progression to a civilization's advancement and success. To become civilized and achieve victory, the player must become technologically advanced. *Humankind* does step away from this time metric. In *Humankind*, fame controls the player's movement through time and the technology tree. The player must earn seven era stars to move onto the next section of the technology tree, despite their level of completion within the tree. These stars can come from any of the seven categorical affinities. Instead of letting technological progress itself move the player through time, fame dictates a players movement and their access to technologies. This erases the idea that technological advancement alone drives human progression and dictates eras in time. Instead, the famous, and usually rich, progress faster through time. *Civilization* proposes that without technology, humanity cannot advance and is 'stuck' in an ancient period. It also removes the narrative that differing levels of technological progress equates to different levels of advancement, creating 'civilized' peoples. *Humankind* removes any direct colonial connection to the technology tree by removing colonial binaries that dictate cultures as civilized or not.

Humankind levels technology to an indicator of fame, yet by defining technological eras

a Eurocentric technological narrative cannot be avoided. The game does not use technological advancement as an indicator of progress, but of success, which is a western idea. While the game attempts to avoid reinforcing technological determinism, as progression through each era can happen through any affinity, the technology tree provides increases to strategic benefits in all affinity areas. If a player wants to increase their success as an agrarian culture, developments along the technology tree are a necessity, as without technological advancements, cultures cannot optimize their outputs, maximize their production efficiency, and become truly successful.

While it is not a pathway to direct victory, there is a space race narrative event in *Humankind*. In *Civilization* VI, a scientific victory is won when a player launches a satellite, wins the space race, and colonizes Mars. The game creates an Americanized ending in technological history. *Humankind's* narrative event "To The Moon" (*Humankind*) provides a mimic of the space race for players to compete in and receive benefits. It is one of the final possible narrative events a player can receive in the contemporary era after completing "Rocket Science" in the technology tree. After the space race ends, the player can develop the "Mars Colony National Project" (*Humankind*) which allows the player to launch a colonization mission to mars. If Mars is colonized, a final narrative is triggered, offering the player the option to end the game, stating "Let this moment be a line in the sand, from where a reckoning will be made" (*Humankind*). The completion of the technology tree by a culture also ends the game. This action displays to the player that if there is not another technological era to progress into, the player has reached the end of human development and maxed out imperial benefits.

While the colonization of Mars ends the game, it does not mean automatic victory like it does the *Civilization* series. It only ends the game and provides an amount of fame to the player. Yet, it still leads to the conclusion that, after the space race and further intergalactic colonization,

human history ends. Technological advancement and history are represented, once again, through a western and colonial lens. The ultimate end of human technology is the putting of a man on the moon, an Americanized version of the space race, and restarting the colonizing process on a new planet.

Organized religion is intended to be the third major mechanic in the *Civilization* series that can provide a religious victory, but it tends to shrink in comparison to mechanisms like expansion and the technology tree. *Humankind* structures organized religion differently than its major predecessor. First, religion cannot lead to victory nor does it generate fame. Aside from the construction of religious world wonders, which provide fame because they are world wonders, the game does not contain era stars or cultural affinities that focus on religious expansion or development. Organized religion operates as a cultural influence that impacts the player's ideology axes and geopolitical relations. In *Humankind*, when a culture reaches a population of ten, they can found a religion. The development of a player's religion is split into four tiers displayed on a religion tenets menu.

Second, religion is not connected to the technology tree; this choice removes religion as a subliminal finding within the course of technological progression, giving religion its own space in the game. Instead of co-opting other game mechanics to impact religion, it functions and develops through its own systems. The first religious tier is a choice between polytheism or shamanism, both provide faith or a numerical representation of religious influence and pressure. After this choice, the player can build holy sites to generate more faith. This building is represented as a stone ring, which visually resembles stone circles relating to European pagan traditions. They also choose a tenet, which outlines the strategic benefit that the holy site provides in addition to faith. This benefit can support food, science, industry, stability, gold, or

military. The second tier also unlocks a second tenet, and then, by the end of the fourth tier, the

player will unlock four tenets that provide additional strategic benefits. Once a certain number of

followers is achieved, the religion is upgraded to the second tier which allows the player to

choose to remain as shamanism or polytheism, or choose a specific religion like Buddhism,

Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shintoism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism. While the

player has complete creative control over their religion's title, the appearance of the holy site

changes from stone rings to a building that reflects one of the eight religious choices.

Third, *Humankind* does not include moving units (like inquisitors) that function as

physical bodies of religion, forcing religious expansion through holy warfare. Religion spreads

passively to territories on the map and is dictated by trade routes, treaties, and faith production.

Yet, religions are still viewed as constantly in conflict with one another. The religious tenets

menu also displays percentages over the game map showing how much of any given population

is following a certain religion. There cannot be two religions being worshiped in the same

territory harmoniously. Similar to the *Civilization* series, *Humankind* views different religions as

constantly in conflict.

Some narrative events can be triggered based on the specific religion chosen and

actions/ideological leanings of an empire. For example, the narrative event "A Doctrine of Non-

Violence" outlines a waring empire's interaction with its Buddhist population, prompting players

with:

> The ongoing war has left many Buddhists across the empire despondent and disgusted.
>
> Stories of devastating marches, bloody massacres, and scorched villages reach the
>
> people's ears daily. Buddhism preaches a doctrine of non-violence, and this conflict goes
>
> against the very fabric of Buddhist teachings. The people's discontent could become a

problem. (*Humankind*)

Another narrative event following a warring player's civic choice to be religiously hostile, displays an image of a burning Christian church with a distraught monk while prompting the player with narrative,

> The most holy city, (city name), has suffered attack by the heathens of (empire name).
>
> Inside the city walls, believers cower, afraid for the temples and relics – and their lives.
>
> Now religious leaders are calling for this conflict to be named a holy war against the
>
> infidels. (*Humankind*)

While the iconography and diction within this narrative event is inherently Christian, it can be triggered by any player's choice to be religiously extreme and outwardly hostile towards other culture. *Humankind's* has very little inclusion of western, or Christian, religious iconography or diction. The Christian holy site features a church with a cross. The "Unbelievers" civic can allow the imperial action of inquisition, which is inherently related to Christian religious history. Aside from those two aspects, and the vague euro-pagan stone ring reference, western religious doctrine is absent from the game. It clearly avoids any narrative that dictates a correct progression through religious discovery or a preference of one major religion.

Organized religion in *Humankind* ultimately functions as an ideological axis influencer (which spurs narrative events and civics) and a placement for additional strategic bonuses. The only western notion *Humankind's* religious system holds is the base idea that major religions are inherently opposing each other. In a game genre, where base functions are war and domination, all game systems must work in tandem for one player, while opposing the rest.

The ideology axes and narrative events are the new game systems *Humankind* introduces to the 4X game genre. *Humankind* utilizes four axes to determine a culture, or players,

ideological positions in economics, geopolitics, government, and society. These four axes are represented as sliding scales with two ideologies located on either side of the scale. The scales are divided into 21 boxes with five point-based sections determining ideological placement. These sections will align the player left, middle left, middle, middle right, or right. Please reference the table below to see each axis, its two opposing ideologies, the in-game definitions, and strategic bonuses. Please reference the Ideology Axis Table.

Table 3. Ideology Axis Table

The Economy Axis	Collectivism	Individualism
"Is about the question of economics in society; how goods are distributed, who owns the means of productions, notions of property in general, etc." (*Humankind*)	"The choices taken emphasize socialized measures, regulations on the economy, collectivized decisions, etc." (*Humankind*) - provides extra industry	"The choices taken emphasize deregulation, shifting power to private entities, supporting individual interests instead of collective ones" (*Humankind*) - provides extra money
The Geopolitical Axis	**Homeland**	**World**
"Is about how, as a people, they relate to other people. Do they conceptualize as "Us vs Them?" Do they instead see it as a whole that should be undivided?" (*Humankind*)	"The choices taken emphasize group defense, exceptionalism, militarization for reasons against other groups, etc." (*Humankind*) - gives extra combat strength to units	"The choices taken emphasize cooperation, humanism, universalism, militarization for reasons of unifying groups, etc." (*Humankind*) - gives extra food
The Order Axis	**Liberty**	**Authority**
"Is about how power is distributed throughout the political structure. Is it a top-down structure with very politically powerful individuals, or much more decentralized?" (*Humankind*)	"The choices taken emphasize people taking initiative in organizing their society, in what they express, in what they say to the political structure, etc." (*Humankind*) -gives extra influence	"The choices taken emphasize controlling any dissidence, in policing more or less closely the population, defining what people are allowed to do and not do in a top-down manner, etc." (*Humankind*) - provides extra detection and vision on units
The Society Axis	**Tradition**	**Progress**
"Is about how the people approach cultural questions and new ideas. Do they default to "how it has always been done" or prefer change, sometimes at any cost?" (*Humankind*)	"The choices taken emphasize doing things as they have always been done, repudiating new ways of seeing the world, etc." (*Humankind*) - provides extra faith	"The choices taken emphasize changing how things are done, searching for new ideas, question tradition, etc" (*Humankind*) - provides extra science

Differences in cultural ideologies can impact diplomatic relations, affecting attitudes, treaties, trade, and war support[15]. Spatial proximity to other culture's ideologies is reflected in diplomatic relation status, labeled as distrust, tolerance, and kinship. The player's choices on civics and narrative events can impact their standing on each axis. As the player progresses through time and makes choices for their empire, new civics are unlocked and prompted to the player. A civic is a social choice between two options that will push an ideological axis closer to one side or the other. The first civic choice the player faces is the "founding myths" government civic. The prompt asks the player "By what right do we rule"? One option is "natural right, we claim inherent dominion over the land and beasts", the second is "divine mandate, our supremacy is ordained, for we are the chosen ones" (*Humankind*). This choice will push the player's social axis towards either tradition or progress. The player must spend influence points to enact these social choices as law or societal norm. Civics are broken up into seven categories (economy, army, justice, government, society, culture, and religion) depicting different aspects internal and external to the empire.

Civics, or the civic system in *Humankind*, are prompted by ideological standing and create follow up narrative events and additional civics depending on player choice. In conjunction with the ideological axes, the civic tree system reinforces the player's moral choices made in the narrative events. When completing the "religious tolerance" (*Humankind*) civic, dictating how the player's empire views other religions, if the player chooses the "religious hostility" (*Humankind*) option the "unbelievers" (*Humankind*) civic will unlock. The "religious hostility" (*Humankind*) option moves the player four points closer to homeland on the

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[15] War support is the numerical representation of the player's population that is willing to wage war against another empire. The statistic is used to dictate warfare from justifying warfare or forcing an empire to surrender an unjust war. War support also dictates the surrender terms of the war like financial demands, annexation of land, or vassalization.

geopolitical axis. The "unbelievers" (*Humankind*) civic lets the player decide how they should

deal with the "unfaithful" (*Humankind*). Should they "eliminate unbelievers" (*Humankind*),

which pushes their order axis towards authority and unlocks the inquisition action[16], or should

they "banish unbelievers" (*Humankind*), which pushes their geopolitical axis further towards

homeland and unlocks the banish population action[17]. Either way, the choice of religious

hostility will trigger civics and narrative events that further question and push the player's

current ideological position.

  Humankind clearly does not avoid the darker aspects of human history with its civic

policies. The moral implication within civics and the ideological axes is represented here. A

justice civic titled "punishment" (*Humankind*) asks the player if criminals in their empire should

be physically punished with whips or have their possessions revoked. An economic civic poses

"working conditions" (*Humankind*) questions like should the empire prioritize workers' rights or

business profit? Another social civic asks if children should be educated or employed, titled

"children's rights" (*Humankind*). Finally, a social civic titled "slavery" (*Humankind*) drew the

most public attention, asks the player, "How do we procure slaves?" (*Humankind*) stating,

> The Human Engine: The empire has made impressive strides in becoming a building
>
> powerhouse of the world. Now though, to maintain the momentum, you must ensure you
>
> have a reliable stream of workers who will work tirelessly on your great construction
>
> projects. From where should you find these thralls? (*Humankind*)

One option under this civic is "criminal slaves, those who break our laws will become vassals

for the empire" (*Humankind*) and the other is "war slaves, the sons and daughters of the empires

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[16] Allows the player to sacrifice a population point (or unseen person) to increase stability in a city.

[17] Allows the player to sacrifice one population point (or unseen person) to increase money in a city.

enemies will become our slaves" (*Humankind*). Both choices provide an industry bonus to the empire with additional food or influence bonus. In *Civilization* IV, due to player backlash at the absence of slavery and accusations of misconstruction of history, the developers included slavery as a civic. This civic created the action to finish production by sacrificing a single population point, or person. Due to public criticism and backlash again, the civic was removed completely in *Civilization* VI. In response to possible backlash for the inclusion of slavery in their game, Jeff Spock, a lead writer and designer for *Humankind*, said "It's just something we're going to have to deal with…as responsible games developers" (Batchelor).

In *Humankind*, the game does not force players to enact "The Human Engine" civic, but it does provide a (possibly game-long) industry bonus if the player chooses to do so. Yet, there is not a prompted in-game civic or narrative event to end slavery. Once the civic is enacted, the game spawns a narrative event called "Gladiators, Ready!" (*Humankind*), which prompts the player in the following manner:

> Word has come to you that since slavery has been established, the wealthy citizens of the empire are enjoying a new, brutal, form of entertainment: slaves fighting each other - or wild animals - in clandestine fighting pits. Codes of conduct are strict, and fatalities are rare, but already influential voices in (city name) are calling the bloodsports barbaric. Others see the spectacles as useful tools of popular control. What is your stance on these entertainments? (Humankind)

From slavery as an industry buff to slave fighting pits, the player has to face slavery's position as a function of empire. According to Spock things like "colonization, slavery, authoritarian regimes, mass displacement [cannot be avoided] if you're going to make a game that pretends to be about human history" (Batchelor). Yet, the game provides no negative statistics or outcomes

from the utilization of slavery in both situations. The civic provides two options with positive

benefits, and the narrative event provides three options that have positive benefits. The lack of

negative outcome, or narrative event, is noticeable and somewhat counter to the moral

questioning the narrative events provide. If a culture becomes religiously volatile, regardless of

religion, the empire will lose stability if an outside religion is located near their settlement, or

they could start a holy war. Yet, if an empire utilizes slavery, there are no civil wars, culture

upsets, religious upsets, protests, or riots. While the game creates narrative arches and display

ideological spectrums, the new narration depicts slavery as an industry modifier and "sanitizes

the human cost of such a policy to a disappointing if not irresponsible degree" (Deo).

Part Three: Morality in Humankind

  Humankind claims to be a morally conscious 4X game, providing players with the ethical

dilemmas that follow war, colonization, and exploitation. The "Human Engine" (*Humankind*)

civic and following narrative events are indicative of how the game defines and utilizes morality

as a function. These moral dilemmas vary from decisions on how the government will handle the

clash of languages to whether the country will accept or deny refugees; from addressing

pollution to the country's acceptance or opposition to slave fighting pits.

  Humankind adds a new mechanic to its game that many 4X games don't include--

narrative historical events. The events provide a narrative paragraph outlining the issue at hand,

and then provide one to three solution options for the player to choose from. The solutions will

either positively or negatively impact the ideological axes and yield from one of the yield

categories (gold, industry, food, science, influence, or stability). They can also unlock certain

civics and technologies. Some narrative event solutions will generate follow-up narrative events

that further explore the player's original decision and further influence ideological axes. Each era

has a list of narrative events that may pop up depending on the player's previous decisions and culture's ideological standing. One of the first narrative events a player may face is "Seed of an Idea" in the neolithic era. It states,

> Yesterday, the tribe came across a vast tract of wild grain, the stalks swaying in the breeze like the wind laying over golden waters. The ground-down grain could feed the tribe twice over, but one of the tribal elders had another idea. Instead of pounding the seeds into flour, she suggests planting half of them so the grasses may return next summer. It is a curious idea, at odds with the nomadic life, but perhaps a harbinger of the future. What should you do? (*Humankind*)

This event provides benefits to domestic research, food yield, and provides a great example for the lyrical narration the game includes. While 'lyrical' may seem like a stretch, when compared to many numbers, statistics, and spreadsheets the player interacts with, these narrative interludes provide a storyline that flows with the player. As time continues, the narrative events become visceral, evoking emotions, and some mimic historical events from the past.

In the ancient era, the narrative event "The Last of Their Line" (*Humankind*) tells the player that servants in another city in their empire have been mass castrated and the action has become a city tradition. The player can accept the action (do nothing), punish the city, or adopt the belief in all cities. Unlike the slavery narrative event, two of these solutions provide a negative outcome. Each choice impacts the players location on the economic, order, or social axis. One of the first narrative events in the ancient era presents the player with the moral dilemma of forced castration on a group of specific peoples. As a player, the serious and intense narrative draws attention and creates a dark dichotomy from the colorful map and tiny cities. Suddenly, imperial operations are foiled by, not fallible oppositions of empire, but with realistic,

visceral narrative the player is forced to engage with. In the classical era, expansive cultures are faced with "The Language of Bureaucracy" event (*Humankind*), which tells the player that the multiple cultures and peoples in their empire are fragmented by language barriers. They can choose to enforce the mother tongue, yield to regional dialects, or invent a new, nationwide language. This narrative event provides an example of civil unrest as a result of mass colonization, yet the solutions construe only positive outcomes. In the Medieval era, narrative events allow players to incite or discourage holy war and "The Human Cost" (*Humankind*) event dictates the empire's reaction to refugees. The prompt states:

> Across the border, where war ravages the empire of (name), thousands have abandoned their homes and are now seeking sanctuary in your peaceful lands. Refugees - and no doubt some agitators too - are amassing near the closest city of (city name). They are tired but proud, afraid yet hopeful. It is a delicate matter, and one that may have far-reaching consequences. What is your decree? (*Humankind*)

There are four options, two of which lead to follow up events. If refugees are refused, a sentence pops on screen, "guard patrols are relaying stories of starving, desperate people on the other side of the border. So it goes" (*Humankind*). The narrative event forces players to acknowledge refugees of war and by ignoring them, creates an image of starving, suffering people. The player may have saved gold in the decision, but the narrative creates an uncomfortable image for the player to process as a result of their decision. In the industrial era, the narrative event "The Age of Alienation" (*Humankind*) brings up working class issues and "The Corrosive Nectar" (*Humankind*) allows the player to enact prohibition. The contemporary era produces relevant social issues that the modern population has not 'solved' yet. For example, the game provides events that outline a sever climate crisis, mirroring our own climate change problem with

increasing global temperatures due to pollution and drastic changes in established global weather patterns.

The "Inconvenient truths" (*Humankind*) narrative discusses climate change and if the player chooses to dismiss the narrative, they are prompted with the event, "Extreme weather devastates countless ecosystems and countless lives. The damage is unspeakable" (*Humankind*). It creates the negative effect "panic" (*Humankind*) on cities for ten turns. In the last ten years, the decrease in mental health across the American population has been a major concern, especially regarding how the modern workplace impacts the mental health of the worker. In *Humankind*, the "Twenty - Four Seven" (*Humankind*) event outlines how modern productivity has caused multiple cases of depression due to exploitive work environments. Similar to the Chernobyl meltdown of 1986, the "Unchained reaction" (*Humankind*) event outlines possible issues in a nuclear power plant that, if ignored, can lead to nuclear meltdown and city destruction. Other issues faced in modern society are also reflected in *Humankind,* like accessibility for disabled peoples and clashes of culture. In "A City for Everyone" (*Humankind*), the player must decide if they will make their city accessible to disabled peoples. In "Culinary Trends" (*Humankind*) the player has to decide if their population will uphold the "empire-wide, long held custom of eating roasted guinea pigs" (Humankind). All three solutions to this event have positive benefits, from preserving heritage to enacting animal rights.

Humankind includes hundreds of possible narrative events that attempt to alter the narrative 4X games usually tote. They successfully bring to the forefront of the screen issues caused by colonial, imperial, and capitalistic values like accessibility, climate change, mental health issues, and human rights. The *Civilization* series, and other 4X games, fail to include any issues imperial action or capitalistic value could cause as it is difficult to equate them to

numerical values. Also, they do not benefit the empire nor are they a decent fallible foil to the empire, like protest.

Yet, a morally conscious 4X game is an oxymoron. The fundamental ideas under this game work against each other. Expansion, technological progressivism, religious conflict, and imperial actions are critical game functions and unavoidable in any 4X game, including *Humankind*. The introduction of moral narrative that influences ideologies is a great step in the direction towards a morally conscious 4X game, but the solutions to most of the events are inconsequential to game play. Any true morally conscious 4X game would have such drastically different base mechanics and game functions, it would hardly fit inside the genre. It would no longer be a 4X game. The narratives themselves provide an intense, sometimes dark, story to combat imperial action, but their solutions result in prosperity, celebrating, or patriotic actions on cities for ten turns. These effects don't last long and provide no long-term impacts based on player decision. The most negative effects are loss of gold, loss of population, or actions like panic on a city for ten turns. Once again, these effects are irrelevant in the long run. While the narratives provide some counter to the imperial action within the game, the intended repercussions of a player's moral choice are represented as small strategic benefits and negatives. Ultimately, *Humankind* defines morality just as the *Civilization* series does, anything morally good benefits empire. The only possible action stopping this definition and function is player morality impacted by the narrative events.

Humankind's attempt to add moral consciousness into this game is honorable. Public interest in the game revolved around new mechanisms and the redesigned actions of old systems; "the room for exploration and experimentation made it one of the most exciting 4X games of the last decade" (Zacny). Through these moral "baby steps" (Batchelor), the game is leading the

genre towards a new future. Other areas of art and narrative, like "science fiction novels, for example, have pushed the boundaries of gender, race and other sensitive subjects, [while] games tend to avoid this because of the "very toxic subcultures" around the hobby" (Batchelor). As gaming ages, and more people play, develop, and create video games, the 4X genre has to grow and evolve or risk falling out of popular game play. The addition of moral narrative to this gaming format creates new and interesting interactions with imperial and colonial actions. It is a breath of fresh air that should be further improved and developed.

In conclusion, *Humankind* provides some unique and some antiquated updates to the historically based 4X game genre with a blend of new and traditional features. The game's best aspects reflect the progressive period it was created in. In the late 2010s and early 2020s, the rise of multiculturism, awareness of global cultures, increase in global communication, and massive amounts of international players created change in the gaming industry and the world. With widespread internet use, game developers and companies had to address criticism from players and the public. The western world was confronting its imperial past with players, academics, and the public questioning imperial and colonial action. *Humankind* was an attempt from the 4X gaming genre to turn away from previous issues the game genre held. The characters, NPCs, game mechanics, and morality system are key highlights of the game. By adding player-controlled leader creation, the game places representation in the hands of the player. The organized religion system stood apart by driving culture and informed ideologies. Diction and narrative surrounding religion and roaming parties were altered to reflect a non-colonial binary. Yet, the base functions of imperial mechanics remained within the game, like cultures rooted in aesthetics, progression based technological system, and reinforced expansion mechanisms. The moral narratives and civic systems were redesigned to include realistic problems that arise from

colonialization, war, and imperialism. Yet, this new moral system fails in its attempt because all systems within this imperial game structure muse be transformed into numbers and strategic elements. A moral system that supports human life, comfort, and happiness over material, capital, and the empire cannot exist in such a strictly imperial space. While *Humankind* tried it's best to step out of the 4X game genre mold, ultimately is falls back into the circular imperial system every 4X game utilizes.

V. CONCLUSION

In the late 1800s, some American board games heavily ingrained religious and political ideals of the time. The materialism and consumerism that developed in the 1950s and 60s, due to the economic boom following World War II, altered board games forever, cementing ideologies like capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism in these games. In this transition, religious games like *The Mansion of Happiness*, which focused on Protestant education and spiritual wellness, evolved to become *The Game of Life*. A game that is less about Christian teachings, although their values are still present, and more about connecting lifetime happiness to material and capital gains. Political games, like *The Landlord's Game*, which attempted to teach the political leanings of single taxers (anti landlords) in the 1900s, transformed into *Monopoly*. A game in which the winner becomes the landlord with the most properties who exploited the most money out of other players. *Kriegsspiel*, a war game meant to replicate realistic war strategy, went on to inspire games like *Risk*, in which colonization and war are brought to life with brightly colored, plastic pieces. Each of these board games became the roots of the modern 4X video game genre, wherein the capitalist and imperialist game functions dominate all aspects of the virtual world, even nature. Those board games became the historical roots of modern 4X video games like the *Civilization* series, *Age of Wonders, Victoria, Europa Universalis, Old World, Total War* series*,* and *Humankind*.

The *Civilization* game series established the 4X game genre and other games within the genre recreate its unique play structure. Because of this, the game series' ideological problems are also recreated in other 4X games like the recently released *Crusader Kings, Victoria, Age of Wonders, Empire, and Humankind*. The *Civilization* series struggles with colonial diction, misrepresentation of peoples, technological determinism, a Christianity based religious system,

and an overall western historical narrative that ignores any other historical perspectives. These issues in combination with the capitalistic and imperialistic base functions within the game, create a western imperial machine that encapsulates western ideals to the player in a game space where their narrative is infallible, reaffirmed, and entertaining. The moral code the game narrative provides players reinforces the imperial structure where moral good is anything that benefits the empire.

Humankind has tried to step away from Civilization's issues by creating a 4X game that places representation in the hands of the player, eliminates colonial binaries, and implements a diverse religious system. The game also created a morality civic system that was intended to define morality not as an imperial function but to mirror the player's personal morality. Ideally, the player has to make choices that positively impact people, not capital or resources, to receive positive in game benefits. Yet, the moral system has very few negative impacts and those negative outputs do not impact long term game play. Despite narrating the social and cultural issues that arise with imperial, colonial, and capitalist action, like ongoing war or forced religious conversion, players may still choose a civic option that provides benefit to the empire at the expense of its people. The negative result does not harm their long-term game play or result in a loss of the game. Ultimately, Humankind does not fully step away from the issues the Civilization series created. The moral system still supports imperial progress over all else. Expansion through colonial action is required to win and borders are engrained in nature itself. While their representation of people and cultures is marginally better that the Civilization series, it still simplifies people into stereotypes and aesthetics. Humankind fails to step outside of the 4X game genre mold and creates an imperial gamescape where western ideals, like technological determinism, are once again recreated and enforced.

In conclusion, the distinctions between *Humankind* and the *Civilization* series best describes the predominant issues in the 4X game genre, defines its possible future, and outlines where the 4X postcolonial game studies discourse is headed. This is best represented in a comparisons of each game's victory conditions. The *Civilization* series uses categorical winning conditions in science, culture, domination, religion, and overall score. Aside from overall score, each category has its own challenges that must be completed to end the game and achieve victory with that category. A science victory mimics the space race, players must launch a satellite, land on the moon, and establish a colony on Mars. A culture victory is won by obtaining the most culture and tourism points through artifacts, great works of art, wonders, etc. A domination victory is completed by capturing the capital of every other civilization. A religious victory is won through becoming the predominant religion on the map. An overall score victory is awarded in 2050 AD when no other civilization has achieved victory in the other categories. The player with the overall highest score wins. Each victory, aside from the rare score victory, is dictated by dominance in each category. Players are intended to fight to become, and remain at, the top civilization in one category. There are no benefits attached to completing category challenges after another civilization has completed them. If the Spanish placed a man on the moon after the Dutch, their action is fruitless and unrewarded as they did not win the race. In their game narrative, one empire is all powerful, influencing and controlling other civilizations through their chosen category. Also, their narrative insinuates a predestination, that one country was chosen, since the beginning of time, to rule over the rest. The game has imperial mechanisms that produce an Americanized view of world domination. The game creates a narrative where the world must be dominated in some form by someone, and this domination is inevitable and all encompassing.

Humankind has only one victory condition, fame, "there is also no specific goal in this game, as the title judges victory based on your actions over the centuries. Some efforts earn you points, while others can entirely take you down" (G2A). The most famous culture, even if they were wiped off the map by a warring culture, wins the game. Fame can be rewarded from narrative events, exploration, or battles won, but most fame comes from era stars. The challenges to earn era stars fluctuate depending on the era and affinity of the player's culture, but each era has a base of twenty-one winnable era stars regardless of specific culture. Unlike *Civilization*, these stars are winnable by all players, providing benefits and fame to any who can complete them. The narrative does not outline a dominant, all-powerful empire, yet it still includes many mechanisms of empire. *Humankind's* narrative awards victory to the player that, through a myriad of possible options, left the most notable mark on the world. The main source of fame could be through religion, military, tourism, or technology, but it is mostly likely a combination. Instead of domination, fame is now the ultimate metric for human life.

These games repackage western and imperial narratives throughout their gameplay and poses them to players in a space that reaffirms and supports their ideals. The 4X genre is repurposing and refacing the ideas of coloniality and imperialism for a gaming audience. These games mimic and simplify harmful systemic processes that allow players to ignore the traumatic and violent effects of these systems of power. They display imperial and colonial actions as correct, flawless, successful, and a key to humanity's development. Without utilizing these actions, the player loses the game, the world will not continue, and humanity will fail. This narrative creates the idea that human history is a result of empire, which is false. *Humankind* does narrate the issues that should arise within these game spaces to the player, like mistreatment of peoples and destruction of the environment, but the imperial base structure of the game does

not allow any real counter discourse to imperial action. Yet, the introduction of these moral quandaries is a step in the right direction for the gaming genre.

These games were clearly made with one audience in mind, an imperial, capitalist, and western audience. *Humankind's* inclusion of moral narration reflects the changes the world has seen since the early nineties and release of *Civilization*. It is also a step towards the changes the game genre needs to include. Video games are globally consumed and there is a demand for more diverse and inclusive games. Currently, the 4X game genre was established by an American gaming company attempting to recreate an American, imperial dreamscape. In *Civilization*, the developers were recreating the international sociopolitical climate during the American rise as the sole global power in the nineties. Their game structure reflects their biases, their country's version of history, and American society in the nineties. As Murray stated best,

> The purpose of … of postcolonial game studies…is not for the express purpose of making a better game…It is also not ultimately about making a corrective gesture around the pursuit of 'better' representation…it is not about the formalist value judgment of whether a game is 'good' or 'bad'…[it] is the intervention into public debates as a counter-discourse to the prevailing narrative, which is ethically anemic. And such studies should continue to demonstrate a commitment to apply persistent pressure toward a public good. (Murray 19)

The goal of this thesis, just as Murray stated, is an attempt to pressure the 4X game genre into doing more public good. These games need to change to reflect a postcolonial, global world. Technology and the internet have connected people, cultures, and countries around the world. No longer is the world dominated solely by massive empires. Video games are played globally, not just by Americans. The gaming industry should strive for equality and awareness of other

peoples, cultures, and countries in their games, opening the horizon of the American public and gaming companies. In recent years, gaming companies and their products have shown an awareness and willingness to engage in global culture and their intersections with the United States like *Victoria 3, Civilization VI, Hearts of Iron 4, and Humankind*. While these attempts are small or somewhat problematic, they are a step in the right direction towards more inclusive, diverse, and less problematic games. The *Civilization* series and *Humankind* games are entertaining and popular because they allow people to reenact humanities greatest achievements. A player can watch the wonders of the world be built, found a major religion, develop tools and technology that aid society, generate the world's great pieces of art, and build their own, ideally better, world. Yet, just as *The Game of Life* simplifies life's greatest achievements to monetary gain, these games turn these exciting moments into resources, gold, and capital. In addition, only a western world is reflected in its narrative and people, the foundation of human history, become numbers and resources, if they are not erased from the narrative altogether. The first major change this game genre should undertake is to include a wide sweeping world history as a foundation, allowing players to follow any path through human history. In addition, game systems like cultures, people, war, international relations, government policies, religion, and technology should not be simplified and streamlined, but complex and massive. This could be completed through more complex and lengthy game research and less biased game research and developers. American gaming companies could also create more diverse corporate environments, hiring more non-American employees to develop games. These games aim to replicate human history but simplify and belittle it in the process. Postcolonial players, the fans that began the academic discourses and online fan forums, are responsible for the changes in the many versions of *Civilization*. They are actively changing the 4X game space and will continue to do so, just as

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board game fans actively changed their favorite games.

While my analysis generally analyzed *Humankind* in relation to a major 4X game, future scholars will continue to study *Humankind* as there is little scholarship on it currently. *Humankind*'s addition of the moral system, while small and somewhat ineffective, is the reason for its popularity. They will study how the addition of morality systems impacts the game genre and how this genre will evolve in the modern world. Additionally similar scholarship is needed on fiction or science fiction versions of 4X games, connecting the postcolonial work done with science fiction to game studies. There are very few non-Euro-American game developers that are currently releasing 4X games. There are plenty of non-Euro-American game companies, like Rockstar India based in Bangalore or FromSoftware based in Tokyo. Very few of these companies are creating 4X games. NGD studies, an Argentinian video game company, was the last studio in a nonwestern country to release a 4X genre game. In the last ten years, NGD studios released *Mater of Orion Conquer the Stars* in 2016. The genre is clearly dominated by European and American gaming companies. This creates an opening in the genre left by the clear lack of nonwestern game developers to produce their own version of a 4X game. The players are craving new 4X games that better reflect the world around them. The gaming genre is changing to reflect modern player desires and it will continue to evolve as games always have.

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