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AGE of EMPIRES II

THE AGE OF KINGS

Flow - Pacing - Difficulty - Tutorial
Challenge

Game Presentation

Real time strategy game
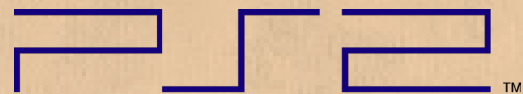
First Windows & Mac release
(1999)

Microsoft Studios

Published by Microsoft Studios

ENSEMBLE STUDIOS

Developped by Ensemble Studios

PS2 release
(2001)

PS2 PlayStation 2

Published by Konami

KONAMI

HIDDEN PATH ENTERTAINMENT

HD release for Windows
(2013)

Developped by Hidden Path
Entertainment

Tutorial analysis

In order to properly explain the mechanics of a complete strategy game, Age of Empire 2 has an entire **campaign** as a **tutorial**.

The player will take control of **William Wallace** in his fights **against England**.

Given the scope of the game, dedicating a full campaign is **nice**. It gives the **time** the player needs to **get familiar** with the many **aspects** of the game, such as the units, buildings, ressources, UI but also the campaign proceedings.
Furthermore, making it a campaign let the player go back to it when needed, by selecting the level that explain the mechanics he the player want to learn.

Tutorial analysis

First mission
Marching & Fighting

In the first mission, the player learns to :
- **Select** one unit or more
- **Move** a unit
- Basically read the **map**
- **Attack** with a unit

The level is plain, short and simple. A real time strategy game veteran will quickly overlook it, as he already knows the mechanics. A real beginner will find it simple but it helps familiarize with the UI, the map, the signs and feedbacks of units.

Tutorial analysis

Second mission
Feeding the army

In the second mission, the player learns to :
- **Recognize** the different **ressources**
- Assign a unit to **collect** it
- **Familiarize** with the gathering **time** of the ressources

Once again, the level is quite simple but it teaches the player the **essentials** of gathering **ressources**. Not only does it teaches the player what the ressources **look** like and how to **gather** them, but also the **importance** of **managing** the *Villagers* in order to **optimize** the time required to do it.
If the player don't understand, the level can be quite lengthy for what it is.

Tutorial analysis

Third mission
Training the troops

In the third mission, the player learns to :
- **Build** basic buildings
- **Create** simple and military **units**

The player is taught how to **build** a set of essential **buildings** necessary to increase the population by **creating** *Villager* and *Men at Arms*. However, the player has all the ressources he needs to complete the tutorial and barely needs to gather them. Player with RTS experience will surely be **frustrated** by the **lack** of basic **challenge** and even beginners will **want** the game to **open up**.

Tutorial analysis

fourth mission
Research & Technology

In the fourth mission, the player learns to :
- Upgrade his units
- Go to the next age
- Manage more efficiently the ressources gathering

The player learns some of the most **important** mechanics : **upgrading** and **progressing** through the **ages**. These mechanics introduce the player to **change** in the game. This is the first time the player will witness the buildings' change of appearance, as instance.

The setup the same easy one, but it is the **last time** the player will be that **constrained** in the tutorial campaign. More changes are coming.

Tutorial analysis

Fifth mission
The battle of Stirling

In the fifth mission, the player learns to :
- **Build** a whole **base**, using ressources and new buildings.
- **Defend** his base against basic attacks
- **Create** a small **army**
- **Defeat** an opponent

This is the point where the tutorial **opens up**.
The player is left in a **bigger environment** with an **objective** and has access to **new** buildings, units and technologies. The **beginner** can stick to what he already knows and **complete** the **mission** nonetheless, but players eager to make use of everything they have **can** expand and **discover** new things. This mission is the **conclusion** of the **base** tutorial : the player knows the basics and can hold himself in a standard game.

Tutorial analysis

Sixth mission
Forge an Alliance

In the fourth mission, the player learns to :
- **Trade** with an ally
- **Capture relics**
- Manage **diplomatic** statuses
- Create more **advanced buildings** and **units**

This is the first of the **advanced tutorial** mission.
The player will be taught how to **cooperate** with an **ally** against a common enemy.
The player is considered **autonomous** when it comes to **ressource** managing as well as **base** and **army** building.

Tutorial analysis

Seventh mission
The battle of falkirk

In the fifth mission, the player learns to :
- Create even more advanced buildings and units
- **Use everything** he knows to **defeat** the **enemy**

This is the **last** of the advanced **tutorial** mission.
The player is taught how to progress even more, even if he **knows enough** to expand on his own.
Then the game **leave** the **player alone** to **complete** the **objctives**, thus making sure the player knows everything he needs to tackle almost every situations the player can possibly encounter in a game.

Tutorial Analysis

Conclusion

The tutorial campaign is composed of **two part**.

The **base tutorial** is the first 5 missions.
They teach the player the **basics**, from moving a units to creating a small milicia.
Once completed, a player can, theoretically, take part in a standard game or another campaign.
These missions are **important** but can really **drag** the player's **patience** in the fourth and fifth mission, even for a beginner. More experienced player would be willing to skip to the more advanced tutorial instead.

The two last missions are **advanced tutorials**, teaching the player **non-essential** (but always **useful**) gameplay elements. They also contribute to **reinforce** the player's **grasp** on the game. These missions **almost** play like a **standard game**, and can be a **relief** for players waiting for the game to open up.

Overall, the tutorial of Age of Empire II is **well paced** but can prove to be **long** toward the end of the basic tutorial. Then it shows what the game has to offer.
By carefully teaching the player, the **control** over the **flow** of the game is **assured**, but any pacing **mistakes** will immediatly become **apparent**.

Difficulty Analysis

Introduction

The difficulty in *Age of Empires II* is managed in **multiple ways**.
First, it has the ever so classic **difficulty choice** before starting a game.
The many **campaigns** the game has include their own difficulty **progression**.
Finally, there is the case of multiplayer games, which involve their own difficulty management.

Difficulty Options

Age of Empires II features a simple **set of difficulty**. They range from **Easy** to **Very Hard**.
They mostly define the **behaviour** of the enemy **AI**.

During a campaign, the player has access to the Standard, Moderate and Hard difficulty.

During a standard game, the player has more options.

What do these difficulties really mean ?

Difficulty Analysis

Difficulty Options
Easiest

Base

> The AI will **slowly** gather close ressources and **abandon** those which are **contested**.
> It will stick to **basic** buildings, never build walls or any advanced buildings.
> It will always **progress** through the ages **after** the **player** does.

Military

> The AI will **never attack first** and always have a **small army**.
> It will **never** use **advanced units** such as monks or its civilisation's special unit.

Diplomacy

> The AI will never change its diplomatic stance.
> It will **never** form **alliances** and never break an already existing one.
> It **doesn't have** any **preferences** between another AI and a player.
> It will **trade easily** with other players.

Other

> The AI decision-making **speed** and **actions** per minutes are quite **low**.

Difficulty Analysis

Difficulty Options
Standard

Base	The AI will **slowly** gather ressources but will **fight** over them. It will seldomly build advanced building. It will progress through the ages slowly like a novice.
Military	The AI will **never attack first** but will maintain an **army**. It will **sometimes** use **advanced units** such as monks or its civilisation's special unit.
Diplomacy	The AI is susceptible to change its diplomatic stance. It will **rarely** form **alliances** and never break an already existing one. It **doesn't have** any **preferences** between another AI and a player.
Other	The AI decision-making **speed** and **actions** per minutes are those of a **beginner**.

Difficulty Analysis

Difficulty Options
Moderate

Base | The AI will **fastly** gather ressources.
It will make use of **every** offensive and defensive **buildings**.
It will always **progress** through the ages quite **fastly** like an experienced player.

Military | The AI will **sometimes attack** first and will have a **good army**.
It will make use of **every unit** it has.

Diplomacy | The AI can **change** its **diplomatic** stance.
It can form **alliances** and break an already existing one.
It might **accept** an alliance with one **player** and might also ally with **AIs against** human **players**.
It will trade with allies.

Other | The AI is quite **fast**.
The AI can use other **way to win** (wonder, relics, …).
It begin to **prefer AIs** over humans.

Difficulty Analysis

Difficulty Options
Hard

Base | The AI will gather ressources and will fight over them.
It will build **advanced buildings**.
It will **progress** through the ages as **fast** as possible

Military | The AI will **attack first** and will have a big army.
It will **use** extensively **advanced** units.
It will efficiently **cooperate** with its **allies**.

Diplomacy | The AI can change its diplomatic stance.
It will form alliances and can break an already existing one.
It may still form an alliance with a human but will always **prefer** an **AI**.
It is higly susceptible to **cooperate** with others **AIs against** human **players**.

Other | The AI is very fast.
It will use every way to win if it can.
It clearly prefers AIs.

Very Hard

The AI will benefits from all of the above. It will always **target human players**, cooperate extensively with AI allies to progress.
It has access to **additional ressources** at the beginning.

Difficulty Analysis

Campaign

Each campaign follow the same **pattern** as the **tutorial** campaign.

Each campaign follow a different civilisation, so the player always have to **learn**.
The **first** missions are **simple** and let the player **explore** and get familiar with the new civilisation.

From an **easy beginning** to a **challenging end**. That's the path the game want the player to follow.
Every mission is **harder** than the previous one to give a **progression** feeling to the player.

Difficulty Analysis

Multiplayer

The **multiplayer** requires little difficulty management as the **difficulty** is partly **defined** by each **players' skill** level.

Reset	
Data Set	Expansions
Game	Random Map
Map Style	Standard
Location	Ghost Lake
Map Size	Medium (4 player)
Difficulty	Standard
Other Players	Easiest
	Standard
Resources	Moderate
Population	Hard
	Hardest
Game Speed	Normal
Reveal Map	Normal
Starting Age	Standard
Ending Age	Standard
Treaty Length	None
Victory	Standard

Team Together ☐   Lock Teams ☐

All Techs ☐   Record Game ☐

Moreover, a whole range of **settings** can make the game easier or harder for everyone.

Results

Tutorial Outcome

The **tutorial** is an entire **campaign**, containing 7 missions and centered around William Wallace.

Advantages

- Complete
- Efficient
- Achieve learning by **repetition**
- Give plenty of **time** and opportunities **to learn** the interface and mechanics
- **Begin** by **teaching** basic mechanics and **then** offers scenarios in which they mix up and form a **complex gameplay**
- Introduces **regularly** new mechanics and **possibilities** for the player to integrate
- **Opens up** and let the player free at the end

Drawbacks

- Quite **lengthy**
- Can **bore** easily experienced player
- **Takes time** to open up

Does it fit the game ?

Age of Empire II is a **complex** game. The **tutorial** makes a **good** job of **teaching** the mechanics and of making the player use all of them **progressively**, in **more complex** missions.
It takes inevitably its **time** which is both its main **strength** and **weakness**, since it **can't adapt** to each player's **pace**.
Albeit having mastered the **basics** the player still has a **lot** to **discover**.

Results

Difficulty Management Outcome

As we saw earlier, the game has several ways of managing difficulty in its various game types.

Advantages

- The game has a **good variety** of difficulties to choose from
- Each **campaign** is shaped **like** the **tutorial** and have a nice **difficulty progression**
- In standard and multiplayer games, there are **plenty** of options to **customize** the game and make it **tougher** or **easier** for everyone.
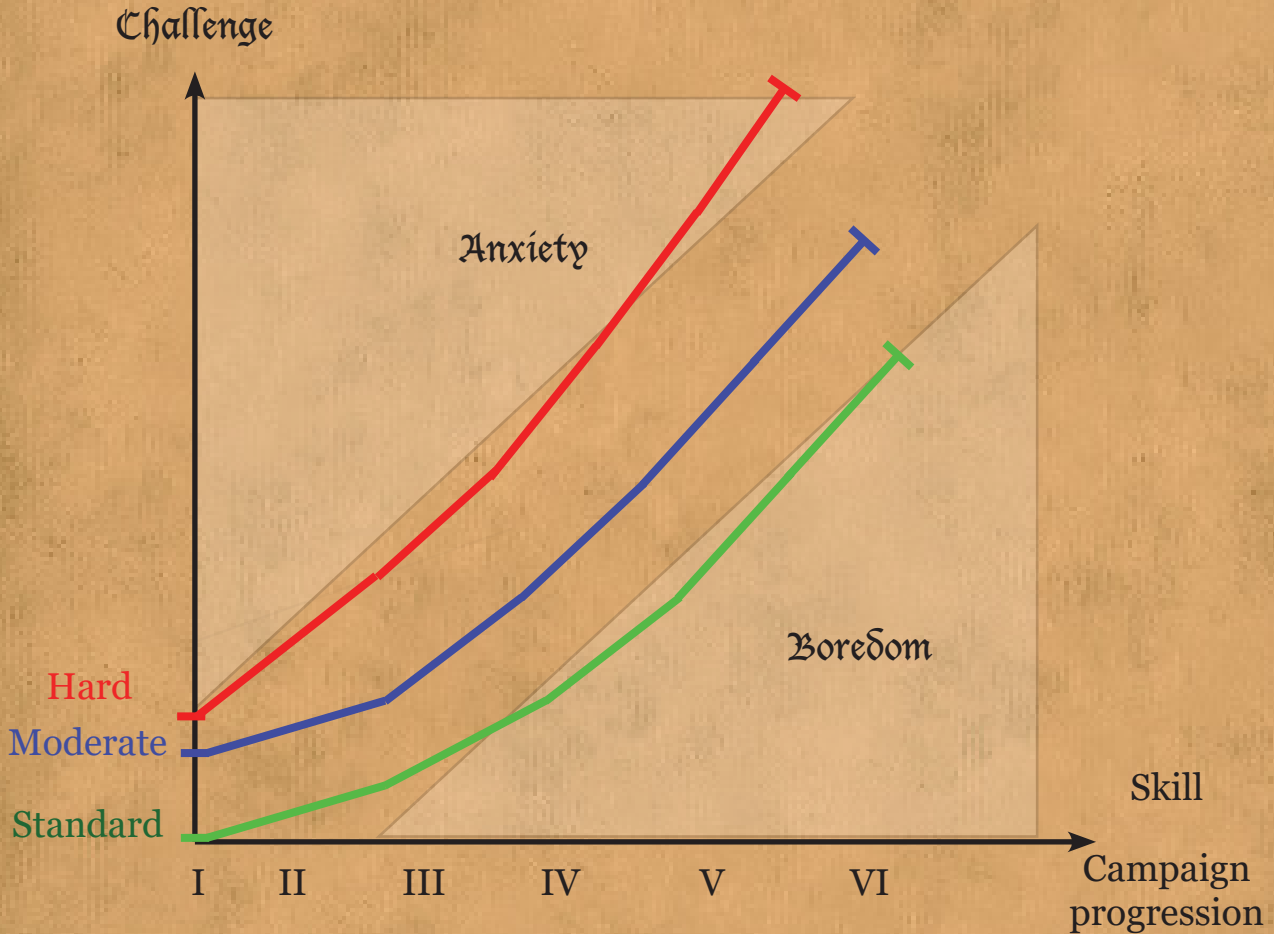
Drawbacks

- The player has access to **only 3** levels of difficulty in a **campaign** against **5** in a **standard** and multiplayer game
- The **gap** between some levels of difficulty can be big and **hard** to overcome
- In the **Very hard** difficulty, the enemy having more resources can be and has been percieved as **unfair**

Does it fit the game ?

Age of Empire II **isn't** a **linear** game. As such, it can't pretend to have fancy levels of difficulties. The classic **choice of difficulty** before a game is **fit** for this game, even if it would sometimes **need** to be **balanced** and extended to the whole game.

Flow

Flow analysis of a campaign

Challenge

Anxiety

Boredom

Hard

Moderate

Standard

Skill

I II III IV V VI

Campaign progression

Help to stay in the flow

Having the **campaign progress** along with the **challenge** and the player's **skill** allow the player to stay in the **comfort** zone if the right difficulty is cho-

Prevent from being in the flow

Choosing the difficulty before a game is a simple way to set the challenge but it may cause **problems** in the fact that a new player will not know **what difficulty** he can handle. If **too easy**, the player will be **bored** after 2 missions. If **too hard**, the player will feel **overwhelmed** by the game.