



Sid Meier

The Godfather of Games

Sid Meier
Co-Founder and Director of Creative Development, Firaxis Games
BS 1975, LSA Cpt&Com Sc.



“Michigan was where I was introduced to computers,” says Sid Meier. “It’s hard to visualize the world of the 1970s now, when we didn’t walk around with computers in our pockets and access to the Internet 24/7. It was a very different world, so when I came to the University I had no idea that I was going to be interested in computers.”

Sid Meier arrived at the University in 1971 with an interest in chemistry, physics, and math. Needing a job, he applied for a workstudy position with physics professor Noah Sherman, who happened to be interested in computer-assisted learning. Since Sid was already taking one programming course, Prof. Sherman hired him with the expectation that he would pick up what was needed in this new area as they progressed. The assignment jump-started Sid’s interest in the potential of computers and computing, and he ultimately selected a CS concentration.

One summer, Prof. Sherman was traveling and had given Sid some assignments to complete. This included an artificial intelligence project that Sid addressed by teaching the computer to play tic-tac-toe. In those days, programs were run on punchcards, and printouts of results were sorted and handed out by computing center personnel. The person sorting the printouts saw Sid’s tic-tac-toe games and confronted him, saying, “You can’t do this. Computers are not for playing games!” She called Prof. Sherman, who fortunately provided assurances that the work was legitimate.

After Sid graduated, personal computers began to emerge and actually lent themselves to making games. Sid’s first home computer was an Atari 800, and he started writing games on it for fun. A colleague at his day job, Bill Stealey, became interested in starting a company around games and Sid was interested in making them, so in 1982 the two formed MicroProse.

At MicroProse, Sid and Bill’s philosophy was to develop games that they would enjoy playing, which led them in the direction of developing strategy and simulation games as opposed to arcade games. As the game industry evolved, a new genre of “building games” developed, which was characterized by the release of

Sim City in 1989 and MicroProse’s release of Railroad Tycoon in 1990. The success of these games inspired Sid’s team to think really big and they came up with the idea of a game based on the history of civilization, which led to the game Civilization in 1991. Civilization leveraged a universal sense of history and introduced familiar elements to create an experience that was fun and empowering. It resonated at the time, and continues to be one of the most recognized game franchises today (Civilization V was released in 2010).

In the early 1990s, MicroProse was acquired by Spectrum Holobyte. Sid left in 1996 to cofound Firaxis, where he is today Director of Creative Development. It has been 30 years since Sid began developing commercial games, and in that time he has developed, co-developed, or produced over 40 titles, an astonishing accomplishment. His name, which precedes the titles of so many of Firaxis’ games, is a household word amongst gamers, and in 2011 the people search company PeekYou claimed that Sid has the largest digital footprint of any game developer.



Civilization V is the most recent of the genre-shaping Civilization game series.

In recent years, Sid has renewed ties with the department and donated his time and energies to activities here. It began when his son Ryan enrolled at Michigan to pursue a CS degree and a career in game development (Ryan graduated in December 2011 and is working at Blizzard Games). Sid has come back to judge game development competitions, speak at classes, and recently ran a 12-day workshop for aspiring game developers. May the games never end! ●

Notable Industry Recognitions:

- 2009:** Number two, IGN’s list of Top Game Creators of All Time.
- 2008:** Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2008 Game Developer’s Conference.
- 1999:** Second person to be inducted into the Academy of Interactive Arts and Science Hall of Fame.
- 1996:** Number one, GameSpot’s Most Influential People in Computer Gaming of All Time.
- 1996:** Number eight, Computer Gaming World’s Most Influential Industry Players of All Time.