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in Speed Starcraft 2 First Demonstration Review! 2D to 3D, No Problem

May 21st, at the Seoul Ap-Gu-Jung the latest build of 'Starcraft 2' was available for direct test play. The time to test was only about 45 minutes, an unfortunately short time, but it was enough to grasp the whole feel of the game. First I will introduce the race I played, Protoss, and explain the general feeling of 'StarCraft 2'.

Somehow today, it feels as though the huge quest of starting and continuing in the footsteps of 'Starcraft' is being tied off. For all things that have a beginning have an end.

2D to 3D, No Problem in Speed?

When you search this nation's celebrated games there is one similarity. That is speed. Of course, the sense I am speaking of includes the actual speed of the gameplay, but the time after logging on till you start playing the game is all considered. StarCraft had this, and 'Sudden Attack' had this. Only after the time taken to log on and connect could you start playing. I don't know about other countries, but the 'hurry, hurry' mindset that our nation is geared towards means that we have this kind of sense of speed that you could call a very fitting code for which a game's successfulness could be measured.

Before I actually experienced the game, the part I most feared was this very thing. If it progressed from 2D to 3D, it seemed obvious that the loading time and gameplay speed would have been that much more influenced.

But 'StarCraft 2' was different. Firstly, the demonstration version allowed multiplayer through the method of IP connection, but like its predecessor 'StarCraft', after the map was selected and the room was made, you could wait until other players came or added computers, and after the conditions were made you could start the game immediately. The amazing truth is that there was no loading time. Like eating rice after putting it in water (***a common way for Koreans to cool down rice instantly while not altering the flavor***) the loading time was over almost instantly, and because of this there was no time to enjoy the starting of the glorious first game, or for stretching, or for straightening your back there was the direct greeting that became a slight abuse. Of course, I was quite glad that there was no loading time, and I found that my frown naturally disappeared.

The gameplay speed was even more surprising. The rampant guesses and opinions that came to be until now were incinerated in one blow, the game being host to a fast sense of speed. From the speed of Probes mining minerals to the movement and attack speeds of the Zealots and Zerglings, and also the rate at which units killed and died in the middle of a battle. The speed was approximately 1.5 times faster than the current 'Star'. Thanks to this, in the small time I was fiddling with the game I found difficulty in using all my accumulated minerals, and found many cases where the battle started and ended with no time to look away.

Of course, I normally like games with fast progression so it doesn't matter to me, but if this gameplay speed was used for the release, then the difficulty would be impacted quite a lot. Perhaps the game was especially set in consideration of national users' wants to be faster, but judging from today I imagine there will be no complaints such as 'StarCraft 2 is slow'.

Improved Graphics. To Be Magnificent, or to Be Comfortable, That is the Question.

The graphics quality probably will not surpass those of the recently released RTS, 'Warhammer 40K, Dawn of War2', but its refined, polished look and the light, warm colors give the whole game a graceful, pristine feel. Each unit's motion and animation was incredibly smooth, and even their movements when they attacked were considerably smooth and there were no problems in control that could be seen.

While StarCraft had a dark and gloomy feeling, the slightly brighter color scheme of 'StarCraft 2' was worth looking at closely. These were not black or graytones, but tones slightly brighter than these were used to change the color scheme. With this there isn't an overwhelming feeling, but instead was successful in creating a lighter feeling. Of course, the essence of StarCraft hasn't been ruined because it became too bright so there is no need for worry.

Unfortunately the impact that is felt in times of battle was a bit lacking. People might have thoughts of the game being too fast, but the rush that was felt in StarCraft when the Zealots stabbed, the Marines fired, and the Hydras spat could not be felt. This is because the times of conflict and unit death animations and the graphical effects when building exploded were almost inconspicuous, and the physics effects were too light. It was disappointing to see that the craters and corpses left after the battle didn't linger for more than a few moments.

Actually this aspect has traces of Blizzard's hard work. About one year ago, in the interview with the development team, the art team said "to make sure it works well on the latest PC specifications, to give each object a unique feel, and to allow 300 units to move on one screen" was their goal. This means that they didn't make it so graphics upgrades were necessary to run the game smoothly.

The point is, if Blizzard decided to create realistic graphics and put it together with refreshing battles, the 'StarCraft 2' shown today could have become another game entirely. But if these graphics effects appear everywhere then instantly the feel in playing might increase, then eyes will be easily hurt and people could easily become sick and tired. Blizzard threw away magnificence and chose comfort. And, in actuality, the playing of the game is definitely geared towards accepting the matches of pro gamers.

And any fan of StarCraft will want that there is no lag when 300 units pop on screen. Leaving aside if lag will affect/not affect control, lag is definitely the most hated guy. If you consider these aspects, then it is understandable why 'StarCraft 2' has graphics that are plenty for recreating the feel of StarCraft and matching it with today's sense and style.

#### The Interface and Functions that Enhanced Convenience

From the interface to the additional functions that were required for control, things have become notably handy. Firstly the AI improvement. In my case, I first played with Protoss, and after selecting the Nexus I clicked the minerals, the Probes that came out automatically mined minerals. It was the same with gas. On top of that, when multiple workers were selected and one mineral was clicked, instead of rushing all to that one mineral they all spread out, going in different directions like the good friends they are.

Next is the ability to hotkey multiple selections and squads. The original selection cap of only 12 multiple selections has increased to 24, and when selecting with hotkeys it was possible to go above the 24 limit. If 25 Zealots were set to hotkey number 1, the space that showed unit details said 24 units were set to hotkey 1 and the leftover one unit was set to hotkey 2. Each number hotkey had an icon on the screen, and when you clicked the icon the corresponding units were selected easily.

This multiple selection worked for not only units but buildings as well. You could select 10 Gateways and set them to hotkey 1. Catch was, when multiple buildings were selected it was necessary to press the unit production button as many times as the number of buildings. It

was because if you pressed the button once, the first of the selected buildings started producing, and if you pressed another time the second building produced and so on. It was the same for unit upgrades, like in the case of 10 hydras. If all ten were selected, you needed to press the Lurker button 10 times to make all ten into Lurkers. It was annoying at first but since I could make just the right amount I wanted, and this allowed for more precise control and seemed much more useful. (it was not confirmed if spells work the same way)

Even the move navigation was something to look at. If you selected a unit and Shift + Right Click multiple times, the unit's move order showed as a green line on the screen. This wasn't the case for only move orders but for attack orders as well, and this allowed me to see and understand units' actions at one look. Other than this, there was worker tracking, resource requests and transactions with members of your team, combat alerts that could be clicked and took your screen to where the alert came from, and other luxuries that were plentiful.

#### The Inheritor of the Strategy and Tactics of 'Starcraft'

New units were added, and the buildings' roles and tech trees were changed a lot, but on the whole the strategy and tactics that needed to be used were quite similar. 'Take a lot of resources', 'produce as much as you take', 'control is essential' were the three conditions required for victory, same as before.

In the case of resources minerals were chunks of 5, and gas was in chunks of 4 per worker. Compared to StarCraft the mining rate has decreased, but that is because the mining speed is faster and the number of workers you start with increased from 4 to 6, and due to this resources could be gathered faster. In the case of gas, several workers still had to enter one at a time, same as before, but usually there were two geysers so there was no problem in gathering gas. Also, in a region near the middle of the map there were yellowish minerals, and these minerals gave out not 5 at once but 7 at once, and could be mined a little bit faster than normal minerals.

As the speed of resource gathering changed I predict that there will be an endless number of creative strategies that fit to the early/mid/late game. In my first game I went one on one with a HARD level computer, and was acquiring resources with ease when a Marine/Marauder squad game and beat me to a pulp. The helper next to me said "the computer's skills went up a bit, haha", much to my embarrassment. Anyways the point is that in 'StarCraft 2' the mid/late game is important, but the early game is considerably important.

In the mid game, the new unit uses and the new skills (upgrades) took great importance. The new units all had characteristics and roles that fit to this, and this allowed people to figure out the opponent's tech trees through observation, and then produce units that can counter the opponent's strategy. In the case of the Terran's new unit, the Thor, it was very strong against melee units and pushed back Zergling/Ultralisk combos, but when attacked by its weaknesses, Hydralisks and Lurkers, the Zerg brought about victory. Same with the older game, understanding the relations with the armor types and the strengths and weaknesses of a unit are vital.

The new quality of 'StarCraft 2' is that the landscape should be utilized well, incorporating it into strategies, unlike the past game. It's because units that can jump over high obstacles, or ignore them and climb up have been added to the game. The Terran's Reaper (Kang-Sup-Byung) (Kang-Sup-Byung is the romanization of the Korean name for the unit, and a literal translation would be 'Raider' or 'Assaultman') doesn't have a special skill that is used to jump over cliffs, but instead it jumps over by itself when given a move order over the cliff. These strategies/tactics that use of terrain are predicted to play a big part of 'StarCraft 2'.

#### If it Can Become Part 2 of the National Game

The achievements that StarCraft has, up to now, built up are impressive. Released in the time when Internet began and became widely used, it developed the PC Baang (Korean cyber café) popularity, and created the culture called e-sports. Along with this Lim Yo Hwan, Hong Jin Ho, Lee Yoon Yeol, and other outstanding stars were born, and with the occupation of progamer came jobs involved with the broadcasts, such as broadcast hosts, announcers and other numerous jobs.

In a national game, the game's quality is important, but it should be enjoyed easily by everyone, and easily understood by everyone. Through 10 years of passed time, StarCraft was able to keep its popularity because these conditions were satisfied.