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Turn-Based Strategy

for the Masses

In the oldest days of gaming there were two types of games: those for the strong, quick, and agile of body; and those for the strong, quick, and agile of mind. The turn-based strategy game has long been the haven of the thinking man. Where great minds wished to compete there were such games as **Chess** and **Go**. Over the years, with the advent of computer gaming, the lines between the two worlds of gaming have blurred. No longer must one be physically strong to compete in a game of reflexes and speed, and those who once would have played the thinking games now play instead games where winning depends on your speed and agility with a keyboard and mouse, forcing the games of turns and strategies to find new appeals.

In today's market, games like **Grand Theft Auto 3: Vice City** and **Tony Hawk Pro Skater 4** have risen to the top due to their simple game rules. Both are games of realistic limits (although sometimes exaggerated) that everyone already knows just by being alive. In either game your success depends greatly upon response time and hand-eye coordination, another thing we all innately have. Within seconds of picking up the controller anyone can understand how to play, what makes some people better than others is experience, and this business model succeeds. Any gamer experienced in the style of gaming can pick up a brand new game and feel comfortable playing against any other player or accomplished in beating them. Traditionally, turn-based games have had the opposite effect.

Turn-based games are games of artificial rules, many options, and patience. Games like Stars!, Risk, Chess, and Go have fallen into obscurity among modern gamers due to the effort involved in playing them. To play a turn-based strategy game effectively one must know all of the many rules and invest quite a bit of time into becoming proficient at using them. It is obvious that the most successful turn-based games have been those with the least options and quickest pace, such as Risk and Chess. Both Risk and Chess can have games that last as little as an hour due to the limited options presented at each turn, while Stars! and Go both rarely have games that last under 2 or 3 hours due to their multitude of possibilities for each turn. Modern gamers are rarely willing to put this kind of effort into a game.

So what is the answer, how does a turn-based strategy game capture the attention of today's gamers?

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-by [Andy Smith](#), staff writer for Digital Times® and game designer for Progrum Software.



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Negative Trace: 13313r Than Thou

This week I was lucky enough to get to beta test the newest creation to come from the geniuses over at Radikant Studios. And I assure you, it will r0x0r your b0x0rs.

Imagine, if you will, Earth in 50 years, a planet shattered by revolution at the climax of the digital age. Technology has erected a massive fiber-optic infrastructure allowing for the realization of a completely digitized parallel planet, Metagaia, an outrageous etherification of Earth ruled by mega-corporations and hackers. In a reality where governments are nothing more than crippled companies striving to control the people, Metagaia is the only escape.

Your character, a freelance hacker, is one person, content with survival in this age of digital anarchy, when suddenly they are thrust into the center of a massive conspiracy after trying a new drug called Negative Trace, altering his world forever, and leading him on a quest to destroy the makers of the drug.

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Turn-Based Strategy for the Masses

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Most companies have moved to real-time strategy in hopes of luring gamers away from the fast-paced actions games and in doing so have had to lower the thought involved in the game giving it more general appeal while at the same time diverging from its roots. Real-time strategy games are no longer simply games of thought, and as such lose their appeal to thinkers. Other attempts have involved special effects, trying to lure gamers with eye candy. An example of this is the game Battle Chess, in which the game Chess is played normally, however, whenever a piece is captured an animated battle ensues. This flashiness does its part to gain modern gamers' acceptance, but it is not enough to do it alone.

The future of turn-based strategy, it seems, is yet to be discovered. Perhaps it will come in the form of a game similar to Risk 2's simultaneous play feature where participants need less patience, perhaps it will come in the form of three-dimensionally rendered version of Go, perhaps in the form of a game with ascending modes of play, or perhaps a game like Stars! Supernova Genesis will bring all the right pieces to the market once it is eventually released. The series of cute and comical Worms games and Worms World Party and their eye-candy oriented ballistic turn-based strategy has been gaining popularity, and might be a sign that higher production values will bring turn-based games into mainstream attention. Only the future can tell how it will be re-awakened, but turn-based strategy is not yet dead.

-by [Andy Smith](#), staff writer for Digital Times® and game designer for Progrium Software.

modifications and expansions. New areas, new items, entire new cities and sub-quests complete with new skills can be imported and developed for the game. Character development is, of course, the greatest experience. As your character joins elite circles of hackers, works for mega-corporations, trains for both physical and digital warfare, gathers intelligence for governments, or any of the seemingly limitless courses of action, he develops different areas of expertise and new skills and talents that he will need to succeed on his mission. In a world where knowledge is power, you need knowledge to stay alive.

The entire feeling of the game is dark. Everything has its consequences; you will make enemies. Every day of living is another day you might be attacked by anyone else looking to score what you have, what they need to survive. It truly gives you the feeling of every man for himself, a world of anarchy. This game is what the computer gaming culture has been waiting for. It gives such an accurate depiction of the culture of hackers, crackers, h4x0rs, programmers, and thieves, that those accustomed to those lifestyles will be better at the game. In fact, as a publicity event for the release of the game, the publisher is offering rewards as part of a contest to find or develop cheats for the game.

Now wouldn't that be nice? Unfortunately none of it is true, there is no Radikant Studios, and Negative Trace is just a dream, because no game developer has yet to bring the expertise to the table to create a game for such an audience. An entire untapped market segment is being overlooked by game developers, that of the hacker or digital cultural elite. By ignoring them, they ignore the future of gaming.

-by [Alex Wright](#), Digital Times® staff writer and 3d modeler for Progrium Software.

Negative Trace: 133t3r Than Thou

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That's the story. The game plays as an action-RPG, somewhat akin to games like System Shock 2 or Deus Ex. When the game starts, you are given a variety of options for creating your character and run through a short back-story as you choose some initial skills. From there on, it is the most immersive world ever given to such a game. Your character is given free range as he or she progresses along the story line, with no set path to be seen through cities both of Earth and of Metagaia.

Some of the exciting features are the ability to restart the game at certain points with a new character, allowing for variation in the story-lines, and the customization of your character's models. Also, as your character progresses, he can create and customize his own piece of Metagaia. One of the most interesting features, however, is the ability