DECEMBER 21, 2005: SERIES LAUNCH

It is the first Real-Time Strategy machinima series, and the first *Rise of Nations* machinima endeavour. It even blends some 'live-action' footage for good measure.

Age of Nations is an animated episodic adventure series created entirely on the personal computer from **Apolyton Civilization Site**, one of the oldest and premiere online computer strategy gaming fansites on the Internet. **AoN** is set in the *RoN* environment, a Real-Time Strategy (RTS) computer game from developer **Big Huge Games** and publisher **Microsoft Game Studios**. In addition to this series announcement, **ACS** is simultaneously releasing its 9-minute pilot "Dawn of Ages" from the series' official website (http://aon.apolyton.net). Its Creator and Producer is Daniel "DanQ" Quick, **ACS**' Co-Owner/Administrator.

"In August of this year, I started to watch some of the more popular machinima series out there", Quick says. "In terms of genre, most of it was and continues to be focused heavily in the First-Person Shooter (FPS) community. From the research I have conducted so far, I discovered that in the strategy community there have been a few and promising efforts in terms of both number and scope. Then as with now, I want to help machinima settle into the mainstream strategy genre. The RTS variety lends itself well to the nature of this evolving form of storytelling, and I quickly set my sights on *Rise of Nations*".

SERIES BACKGROUND

With the occasional exception for the sake of simplicity or, as Quick phrases it, "creative license", **AoN** adheres to the 'rules and conventions' of *RoN* in its writing and structure. All characters to appear throughout the series will represent a category of the game's land units whose nature is defined in-part by that unit's existing in-game characteristics.
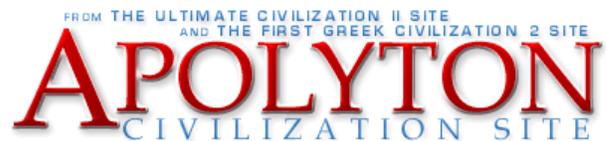
The history of the nations featured will follow from the Ancient to the Information Age over the course of three 13-episode seasons, plus the pilot first mentioned above. One nation will be featured prominently, with others in their relation to the prominent one. Each 'regular' season episode's length will vary, but is expected to fall in the 10-20 minute range. All episodes will be linked together in one or more ways including primary and secondary story arcs and multi-part installments. Due to the inability to zoom close-up on any given unit or other object in *RoN*, 'live' action footage is incorporated within the pilot and has the potential to be present in degrees in future episodes.

"We are making the length and the basic structure details of **AoN**'s anticipated run public upfront for several reasons", Quick explains. "We want to give our prospective audience a general timeline and idea of where we are going and why. Over the course of roughly five weeks beginning in September, the greater plot movements for the first season were proposed, developed, discussed and decided upon by myself and our writing team. As of now, four scripts have been finalized and the fifth is in its early draft stages".

"I've never contributed to anything like this and I look forward to contributing in future", says Co-Executive Producer Gordon "Illuminatus" Smith. "It is certainly an interesting and fun experience. I hope viewers will like it. I can just say that they shouldn't be concerned with plot unraveling slowly in the beginning".

AoN is created using a combination of hardware and software. Personal computers, microphones and digital camcorders are the pieces of hardware in use. Besides *Rise of Nations* itself, the software combination of *HyperCam* and *Video Edit Magic* is used in the technical production of the series. A number of audio editing programs are also being employed, the most prominent of which is *Audacity*. Permission to *RoN* copyrights and trademarks for the purposes of creating and distributing **AoN** was secured by **ACS** from **BHG** prior to the series' development.

The series is voluntarily rated PG-13 on the **Motion Picture Association of America**'s scale by the **AoN** team. The series' first regular season episode, "Differences of Opinion", is scheduled for release on January 19th, 2006.

PILOT AND BEYOND
The nearly 9-minute pilot now available, "Dawn of Ages", sets the stage for many of the events that will unfold during the regular first season.

"You won't believe how far this final version has come from its initial stages in DanQ's mind", says Co-Executive Producer "DarkCloud". "He truly has been the inspiration and the impetus behind this project[.] Stankarp has been his deft hands – working hard to perfect the video from its embryo[nic] phases".

The "Stankarp" that DarkCloud refers to is Stan "stankarp" Karpinksi, **AoN**'s Director and the fourth senior member of the series team. Recruited by Quick, the two ultimately decide on how each episode will look and sound. When reached for comment on his experience with the series so far, he describes it as both "novel" and "interesting". Further:

"Before I started... I had never joined to video clips together, or even tried to attach dialogue. Learned quite a few little tricks, but also learned to appreciate how much effort goes into the production of any public video/film."

Counting "Dawn of Ages" in the episode total, it is more accurate to say that there are fourteen episodes in Season 1; given earlier numbers quoted, there are to be 40 episodes total in **AoN**'s run then. DarkCloud reflects on the pilot that is now a produced reality and future installments in the series.

"When I heard the first sounds that were piped into the picture, *shivers* went down my spine. Then I realized that this was it. It was happening – Episode 101 – and now that it's been shot, even more fun is yet to come".

More fun is indeed in store as the approach and implementation of dialogue from voice actors is changing effective **AoN**'s second episode, and beyond. With the exception of two characters who appear in the pilot, all voices will be different for a simple but important reason. "Thrill in the pilot as DanQ voices all the characters", DarkCloud explains. "Marvel at his vocal range". This was done in the pilot, in Quick's words, for "the sake of simplicity". "For better or worse", adds DarkCloud, "change [is in store] as other Apolytoners get involved in the project and lend their voices to the fun!"

DarkCloud himself is one of those Apolytoners and actors. He is set to voice at least two characters throughout the remainder of the series' run, one of whom audiences will not have met yet by the end of the pilot. "If you like pedantic sniveling, you'll love [my] voicing of Jason in [episode two]".

When reached for further comment on the series, Smith gave fair warning. "No peeking at future storylines!"

TEAM BACKGROUND
The first person to join the **AoN** team after Quick was Smith, **ACS**' *Alpha Centauri* Forum Moderator and *AC* Stories/News Editor. On **AoN**, he soon earned the title of Creative Lead after taking the foundational plot developments envisioned and documented by Quick and expanding, evolving and even advancing beyond them. More prominently now, he is Co-Executive Producer with "DarkCloud" who became **AoN**'s third team member. "DarkCloud" is also **ACS**' *Civilization III* Stories and *Apolytoner's Hall of Fame* Editor. Of the five scripts written in whole or in part to date he and Quick have written, co-written, edited or co-edited them all.

Stan "stankarp" Karpinski is the fourth and final senior member of the **AoN** team. Recruited by Quick, he is perhaps best known for his work in leading the organization and development of the extensive *Call to Power II* modification **Ages of Man** and its sequel **Ages of Man II: Yin's Update**. His most prominent title on **AoN** is Director. He is responsible for and has taken the lead in the 'in-*Rise of Nations*' direction and live action footage of the series' episodes.

"Getting the right scenes for the machinima is an art in itself", Karpinski says. "But I also wanted to have faces for the main characters to give the whole series a bit more".

With Quick, they ultimately decide on how the episodes will look and sound. Quick organizes the recording and mixing of dialogue and provides post-production audiovisual editing where needed. Karpinski executes and shoots all footage within *RoN*, as well as directing the live action footage. He welcomes audience participation in the latter process in particular.

"Any person who would like to appear can send me a couple of 5-10 second AVI clips taken with a camcorder or digital camera. Featuring head and upper torso, one speaking and moving head a little, one just looking around preferably with a neutral back ground (sky, hills, trees) or even... a flat white curtain or blind. [..]

[T]hey may have 5 minutes of fame. I have already taxed friends and relatives quite a bit."

The first junior **AoN** team member, Joe "snoopy369" Matise, has and continues to serve as Writing Consultant on occasion during the writing of series scripts. Matise is also **ACS'** Directory Editor, a News Editor, and the Treasurer for **ApolyCon '06**. Viktor "Gramphos" Griph and Kyle "ixnay" Stradler are voice actors, second and third junior team members respectively. Griph's other **ACS** titles are Database Developer, *Civilization III* Database Manger and a News Editor. Stradler is also **ACS'** *Civilization IV* Assistant Editor and *Rise of Nations* Content Editor.

MACHINIMA BACKGROUND
Machinima is a blend of machine and cinema. It is both a collection of associated production techniques and a film genre, or film created by such production techniques. As a production technique, the term concerns the rendering of Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) using 3D engines found in video games. As a film genre, the term refers to movies created by this technique. Machine refers to a computer and/or video game system, while cinema can refer to a number of elements including genre and production practices.

For more information on this evolving media form, visit **Machinima.com** (http://www.machinima.com) and **Wikipedia**'s entry at http://en.wikipedia.org/Machinima.