The Middle Ages in Modern Games: An Adolescent Field

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The study of the Middle Ages in modern games is no longer a new field.

This is undoubtedly and deliberately a contestable statement, but it remains the case that this body of scholarship has become vast and diverse over the course of the last decade. In the introduction to his pivotal 2014 collection *Digital Gaming Re-imagines the Middle Ages*, Kline could reasonably claim that "Investigation into gaming and medievalism […] is still nascent"[1] (at least with regards to computer games) while Webber's note in the same volume that "A relatively small amount of existing literature considers video games as a locus of medievalism"[2] was equally justified. Kline's book was one of the earliest concerted attempts to address medievalist computer games – in 2008 volume 16 of the long running *Studies in Medievalism* was subtitled *Medievalism in Technologies Old and New*[3] and included a series of articles addressing medievalism in computer games;[4] in the same year, Corneliusun and Rettberg published their edited collection *Digital culture, play, and identity: a World of Warcraft Reader*[5] which formed a key part of a cluster of early work around the game;[6] in 2012 Heinze's *Mittelalter Computer Spiele: Zur Darstellung und Modellierung von Geschichte im*

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[1] Daniel T. Kline, 'Introduction "All Your History Are Belong to Us"': Digital Gaming Re-Imagines the Middle Ages', in *Digital Gaming Re-Imagines the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel T. Kline, Routledge Studies in New Media and Cyberculture 15 (New York: Routledge, 2014), 6.

[2] Nick Webber, 'Technophilia and Technophobia in Online Medieval Fantasy Games', in *Digital Gaming Re-Imagines the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel T. Kline, Routledge Studies in New Media and Cyberculture 15 (New York: Routledge, 2014), 215.

[3] Karl Fugelso and Carol L. Robinson, eds., *Medievalism in Technology Old and New*, Studies in Medievalism 16 (Cambridge ; Rocheter, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2008).

[4] Oliver M. Traxel, 'Medieval and Pseudo-Medieval Elements in Computer Role-Playing Games: Use and Interactivity', in *Medievalism in Technology Old and New*, ed. Karl Fugelso and Carol L. Robinson, Studies in Medievalism 16 (Cambridge ; Rocheter, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 125–42; Amy S. Kaufman, 'Romancing the Game: Magic, Writing, and the Feminine in Neverwinter Nights', in *Medievalism in Technology Old and New*, ed. Karl Fugelso and Carol L. Robinson, Studies in Medievalism 16 (Cambridge ; Rocheter, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 143–58; Brent Moberly and Kevin Moberly, 'Revising the Future: The Medieval Self and the Sovereign Ethics of Empire in Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic', in *Medievalism in Technology Old and New*, ed. Karl Fugelso and Carol L. Robinson, Studies in Medievalism 16 (Cambridge ; Rocheter, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 159–83; Lauryn S. Mayer, 'Promises of Monsters: The Rethinking of Gender in MMORPGs', in *Medievalism in Technology Old and New*, ed. Karl Fugelso and Carol L. Robinson, Studies in Medievalism 16 (Cambridge ; Rocheter, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 184–204.

[5] Hilde Corneliussen and Jill Walker Rettberg, eds., *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

[6] Leigh Schwartz, 'Fantasy, Realism, and the Other in Recent Video Games', *Space and Culture* 9, no. 3 (August 2006): 313–25, https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331206289019; T. Higgin, 'Blackless Fantasy: The Disappearance of Race in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games', *Games and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2008): 3–26, https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412008325477; Lisa Nakamura, 'Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft', *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26, no. 2 (June 2009): 128–44, https://doi.org/10.1080/15295030902860252; Nathaniel Poor, 'Digital Elves as a Racial Other in Video Games: Acknowledgment and Avoidance', *Games and Culture* 7, no. 5 (September 2012): 375–96, https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412012454224.

populären Computerspiel[7] became the first, and remains the only, monograph to focus exclusively on these games; and in 2013 Kapell and Elliott's chronologically broader, but equally important, collection *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*[8] presented a series of chapters pertinent to the medievalist subfield of historical game studies.[9] These earlier works remain of massive significance but, as Kline and Webber rightly observed, they were relatively few in number. In 2014 medievalist computer games studies was new.

However, this is no longer the case in 2022. In the years since Kline's volume there has been a veritable explosion of scholarly work addressing medievalist computer games. A particularly deep tranche of publications have been produced around the medievalism present within the massively commercially successful *Assassin's Creed* series of free running action-adventure games – most notably within the original *Assassin's Creed* (set during the Crusades),[10] *Assassin's Creed II* (the Italian Renaissance),[11] and *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* (Viking Age Scandinavia and Britain).[12] Likewise, the

[7] Carl Heinze, *Mittelalter Computer Spiele: Zur Darstellung und Modellierung von Geschichte im populären Computerspiel*, Historische Lebenswelten in populären Wissenskulturen 8 (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verl, 2012).

[8] Matthew Kapell and Andrew B. R. Elliott, eds., *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

[9] Rolfe Daus Peterson, Andrew Justin Miller, and Sean Joseph Fedorko, 'The Same River Twice: Exploring Historical Representation and the Value of Simulation in the Total War, Civilization and Patrician Franchises', in *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, ed. Matthew Kapell and Andrew B. R. Elliott (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 33–48; Joshua D. Holdenried and Nicholas Trépanier, 'Dominance and the Aztec Empire: Representations in *Age of Empires II* and *Medieval II: Total War*', in *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, ed. Matthew Kapell and Andrew B. R. Elliott (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 107–19; Hyuk-Chan Kwon, 'Historical Novel Revived: The Heyday of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* Role-Playing Games', in *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, ed. Matthew Kapell and Andrew B. R. Elliott (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 122–34; Douglas N. Dow, 'Historical Veneers: Anachronism, Simulation, and Art History in Assassin's Creed II', in *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, ed. Matthew Kapell and Andrew B. R. Elliott (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

[10] Mirt Komel, 'Orientalism in Assassin's Creed: Self-Orientalizing the Assassins from Forerunners of Modern Terrorism into Occidentalized Heroes', *Teorija in Praska* 51 (2014): 72–90; Frank G. Bosman, '"Nothing Is True, Everything Is Permitted" - The Portrayal of the Nizari Isma'ilis in the Assassin's Creed Game Series', *Online - Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 10 (2016): 6–26, https://doi.org/10.17885/HEIUP.REL.23546; Lisa Gilbert, '"*Assassin's Creed* Reminds Us That History Is Human Experience": Students' Senses of Empathy While Playing a Narrative Video Game', *Theory & Research in Social Education* 47, no. 1 (2 January 2019): 108–37, https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2018.1560713; Oana-Alexandra Chirilă, '"Show This Fool Knight What It Is to Have No Fear": Freedom and Oppression in Assassin's Creed (2007)', in *Playing the Crusades*, ed. Robert Houghton, Engaging the Crusades : The Memory and Legacy of the Crusades, Volume Five (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 53–70; Mike Horswell, 'Historicising *Assassin's Creed*: Crusader Medievalism, Historiography and Digital Games', in *Teaching the Middle Ages through Modern Games: Using, Modding and Creating Games for Education and Impact*, ed. Robert Houghton (Amsterdam: ARC Humanities Press, Forthcoming).

[11] Amanda G. Madden, 'Blending a First-Year Composition Course Using Assassin's Creed II', in *Blended Learning in Practice: A Guide for Practitioners and Researchers*, ed. Amanda G. Madden et al. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019), 249–68; Amanda G. Madden, 'Requiescat in Pace: The Afterlife of the Borgia in Assassin's Creed II and Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood', in *The Borgia Family: Rumor and Representation*, ed. Jennifer Mara De Silva (London ; New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 276–95; Simone Bregni, '"Unarmed Prophets Have Always Been Destroyed, Whereas Armed Prophets Have Succeeded:" Machiavelli's Portrayal in the Assassin's Creed Series', in *Machiavelli in Contemporary Media*, ed. Andrea Polegato and Fabio Benincasa (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 29–52, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73823-5_3.

[12] Marco Accordi Rickards and Manuel Maximilian Riolo, 'L'oltrepassamento della soglia', *AOQU (Achilles Orlando Quixote Ulysses). Rivista di epica* 2, no. 1 (2021): 155–80, https://doi.org/10.13130/2724-3346/16049;

market dominating massively multiplayer online roleplaying game *World of Warcraft* continues to form the focus of many articles and books.[13] However, a plentiful range of studies address the approaches taken by strategy games such as the *Total War*[14] and *Crusader Kings*;[15] roleplaying games from the notionally realist *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*[16] to the more typical fantasy approach embodied by *Dragon Age*,[17] *The Elder Scrolls,*[18] and *The Witcher*;[19] and games which take innovative

Tobias Enseleit and Tobias Schade, 'Das Mittelalter im Videospiel: "Assassin's Creed: Valhalla"', *Mittelalter Digital* 1, no. 2 (14 March 2021): 174–211, https://doi.org/10.17879/MITTELALTERDIGI-2020-3292.

[13] Stef Aupers, 'Spiritual Play: Encountering the Sacred in *World of Warcraft*', in *Playful Identities: The Ludification of Digital Media Cultures*, ed. Valerie Frissen, MediaMatters (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 75–92; Sonja C. Sapach, 'The WoW Factor: A Virtual Ethnographic Study of Sacred Things and Rituals in World of Warcraft', *Gamevironments* 2 (2015): 1–24; Verónica Valdivia Medina, 'National Cultures and Digital Space: Interpersonal Communication in World of Warcraft, from Latin to North America', in *Video Games and the Global South*, ed. Phillip Penix-Tadsen (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University, 2019), 129–41; Steven Reale, 'Barriers to Listening in World of Warcraft', in *Music in the Role-Playing Game: Heroes & Harmonies*, ed. William Gibbons and Steven Reale, Routledge Music and Screen Media Series (New York ; London: Routledge, 2020), 197–218.

[14] Sergio Pérez Lajarín and Gerardo Fabián Rodríguez, 'Temporalidades históricas y temporalidades jugadas. El tiempo en los videojuegos de estrategia *Age of Empires II* y *Medieval Total War II*', in *Videojuegos e historia: entre el ocio y la cultura*, ed. Juan Francisco Jiménez Alcázar and Gerardo Fabián Rodríguez, 2018, 73–86, https://www.historiayvideojuegos.com/libro-colectivo-videojuegos-e-historia-entre-el-ocio-y-la-cultura/; Ben Redder, 'Playing in a Virtual Medieval World: Video Game Adaptations of England through Role-Play', in *From Medievalism to Early-Modernism: Adapting the English Past*, ed. Marina Gerzic and Aidan Norrie, Routledge Studies in Medieval Literature and Culture 11 (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 137–53; Robert Houghton, 'Crusader Kings Too? (Mis)Representations of the Crusades in Grand Strategy Games', in *Playing The Crusades*, ed. Robert Houghton, Engaging the Crusades 7 (London: Routledge, 2021), 71–92.

[15] Bertrand Lucat and Mads Haahr, 'What Makes a Successful Emergent Narrative: The Case of Crusader Kings II', in *Interactive Storytelling*, ed. Henrik Schoenau-Fog et al., vol. 9445 (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 259–66, http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-27036-4_25; Clément Dussarps, 'Le Jeu Vidéo Médiateur de Savoirs En Histoire : L'exemple de Crusader King 2 et Europa Universalis 4', *Sciences Du Jeu*, no. 13 (14 July 2020), https://doi.org/10.4000/sdj.2696; Felipe Augusto Ribeiro, 'Uma teoria digital do feudalismo: dinastia, poder, vassalagem e Estado no game Crusader Kings (2012-2020)', *Medievalia* 53, no. 1 (19 May 2021): 191–219, https://doi.org/10.19130/medievalia.2021.53.1.25628; Robert Houghton, 'If You're Going to Be the King, You'd Better Damn Well Act like the King: Setting Objectives to Encourage Realistic Play in Grand Strategy Computer Games', in *The Middle Ages in Modern Culture: History and Authenticity in Contemporary Medievalism*, ed. Karl Alvestad and Robert Houghton (IBTauris, 2021), 186–210.

[16] Helen Young, 'Whiteness and Time: The Once, Present and Future Race', in *Studies in Medievalism XXIV*, ed. Karl Fugelso, Vincent Ferré, and Alicia C. Montoya, NED-New edition, Medievalism on the Margins (Boydell and Brewer, 2015), 39–50, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt12879b0.9; Eugen Pfister, '*Kingdom Come Deliverance*: A Bohemian Forest Simulator', *Gamevironments* 11 (2019): 142–48.

[17] Kristin M.S. Bezio, 'Maker's Breath - Religion, Magic, and the "Godless" World of BioWare's Dragon Age II (2011)', *Online - Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 5 (2014): 134–61, https://doi.org/10.11588/REL.2014.0.12156; Mohamed S. Hassan, 'You Can Be Anyone; but There Are Limits. A Gendered Reading of Sexuality and Player Avatar Identification in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*', *Gamevironments* 6 (2017): 34–67; Alicia McKenzie, 'A Patchwork World: Medieval History and World-Building in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*', *The Year's Work in Medievalism* 33 (2018): 49–61.

[18] Victoria Cooper, 'Fantasies of the North: Medievalism and Identity in *Skyrim*' (PhD, Leeds, University of Leeds, 2016); Jakub Majewski, 'The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim and Its Audience as a World Building Benchmark for Indigenous Virtual Cultural Heritage' (PhD, Bond University, 2018), https://www.academia.edu/37594478/The_Elder_Scrolls_V_Skyrim_and_its_Audience_as_a_World-Building_Benchmark_for_Indigenous_Virtual_Cultural_Heritage; Victoria Cooper, 'Modding and Authentic, Gritty Medievalism in *Skyrim*', in *The Middle Ages in Modern Culture: History and Authenticity in Contemporary Medievalism*, ed. Karl Alvestad and Robert Houghton (IBTauris, 2021), 161–73.

[19] Derek Fewster, '*The Witcher 3*: A Wild and Modern Hunt to Medievalise Eastern and Northern Europe', *Gamevironments* 2 (2015): 159–80; Vinicius Marino Carvalho, 'History and Human Agency in *The Witcher 3*:

approaches such as *Senua's Sacrifice*[20] and *Plague Tale: Innocence*.[21] More obscure games from *Massive Chalice*[22] to *Dante's Inferno*[23] have also been the subject of occasional but important study. Much of this scholarship has focused on the use of use of these games for teaching purposes,[24] and a significant portion of this work remains focused on the accuracy (or lack thereof) of these games. But new aspects of experimental scholarship have emerged to consider the potential of these games in interesting and innovative fashion.

Whether directly or indirectly, this research into medievalist computer games builds in no small part on the legacy of and ongoing work into medievalist board games – including card, dice, tabletop, and roleplaying games and indeed any non-digital format. The long running and widespread roleplaying game *Dungeons and Dragons* is without question the core of much of this research and presents many immediate – and unsurprisingly given their heritage – parallels with research into digital roleplaying games.[25] Research into medievalist wargames forms a part of an extensive field.[26] Beyond this, studies into other genres are more sporadic, but nevertheless essays such as Black's

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Wild Hunt', *Gamevironments* 5 (2016): 104–31; Tea de Rougemont, 'Temeria as a Virtual Past: When Medieval Influences and Contemporary Outlook Merge in The Witcher' (PhD, Université de Strasbourg, 2018), https://www.academia.edu/37213345/Temeria_as_a_Virtual_Past_When_medieval_influences_and_contemporary_outlook_merge_in_The_Witcher; Tomasz Z. Majkowski, 'Geralt of Poland: The Witcher 3 Between Epistemic Disobedience and Imperial Nostalgia', *Open Library of Humanities* 4, no. 1 (30 January 2018): 6, https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.216; Aurelia Brandenburg, '"If It's a Fantasy World, Why Bother Trying to Make It Realistic?" Constructing and Debating the Middle Ages of *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt'*, in *History in Games: Contingencies of an Authentic Past*, ed. Martin Lorber and Felix Zimmermann, Studies of Digital Media Culture 12 (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verl, 2020), 201–20.

[20] Eoghain Meakin, Brian Vaughan, and Charlie Cullen, '"Understanding" Narrative; Applying Poetics to Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice', *Game Studies* 21, no. 2 (July 2021), http://gamestudies.org/2102/articles/meakin_vaughan_cullen.

[21] Juan Cruz Oliva Pippia, 'Temer, rezar, partir: El miedo a la Peste Negra en el videojuego A plague tale: Innocence', *e-tramas* 8 (2021): 15–30.

[22] Serina Patterson, 'Women, Queerness, and Massive Chalice: Medievalism in Participatory Culture', in *Studies in Medievalism XXIV*, ed. Karl Fugelso, Vincent Ferré, and Alicia C. Montoya, NED-New edition, Medievalism on the Margins (Boydell and Brewer, 2015), 63–74, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt12879b0.11.

[23] Katherine J. Lewis, '"I'm Not Responsible for the Man You Are!": Crusading and Masculinities in *Dante's Inferno'*, in *Playing the Crusades*, ed. Robert Houghton, Engaging the Crusades : The Memory and Legacy of the Crusades, Volume Five (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 30–52.

[24] Robert Houghton, ed., *Teaching the Middle Ages through Modern Games: Using, Modding and Creating Games for Education and Impact* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022).

[25] Matthew Chrulew, '"The Only Limitation Is Your Imagination": Quantifying the Medieval and Other Fantasies in Dungeons and Dragons', in *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, ed. Stephanie Trigg, Making the Middle Ages, v. 8 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2005), 223–40; David W. Marshall, 'A World unto Itself: Autopoetic Systems and Secondary Worlds in *Dungeons and Dragons'*, in *Mass Market Medieval: Essays on the Middle Ages in Popular Culture*, ed. David W. Marshall (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co, 2007), 171–85; Greg Gillespie and Darren Crouse, 'There and Back Again: Nostalgia, Art, and Ideology in Old-School Dungeons and Dragons', *Games and Culture* 7, no. 6 (November 2012): 441–70, https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412012465004; Sarah Stang and Aaron Trammell, 'The Ludic Bestiary: Misogynistic Tropes of Female Monstrosity in *Dungeons & Dragons'*, *Games and Culture* 15, no. 6 (September 2020): 730–47, https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412019850059.

[26] Leonardo Andrade et al., 'Transmedia's Implications of the Use of RPG and Wargame as Tools to Support Vast Narratives of Medieval Fantasy', *Revista GEMInIS* 2, no. 2 (2011): 135–66; Ian Williams and Samuel Tobin, 'The Practice of Oldhammer: Re-Membering a Past Through Craft and Play', *Games and Culture*, 11 October 2021, 155541202110495, https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120211049577.

work on the card games *Dominion* and *Love Letter*,[27] have produced important analysis and insights. This work into medievalist board games is less visible and widespread than that addressing medievalist digital games – in no small part because of the relative accessibility of complex games within the two media – but it is just as significant.

These publications have been accompanied by the emergence of various scholarly organisations, networks, and events addressing the subject of medievalist games in any format. The annual *Middle Ages in Modern Games* Twitter conference with its accompanying in person events – most notably the extensive strands at the *International Medieval Congress* in Leeds – and conference proceedings is perhaps the most visible of these currently,[28] but works alongside several other prominent organisations including *The Public Medievalist*, *Mittelalter Digital*, and *Coding Medieval Worlds*. Organisations addressing history in games more generally – such as *Arqueologia Interativa e Simulações Eletrônicas*, *Boardgame Historian*, *History and Games Lab* and *Videogames and Archaeology at Leiden University* – alongside those which consider medievalism in a broader range of media formats – including the *International Society for the Study of Medievalism*, *The Middle Ages in the Modern World,* and *Medievalisms on the Screen*. Various conferences and publications have provided a platform for those studying medievalist games since the late 1990s.

The field is therefore no longer new. There are frequent (if not necessarily regular) publications; dedicated blogs, conferences, workshops, and seminars; sizeable presence at key medievalist and gaming events; numerous scholars from across fields and around the world; not to mention an emergent programme of study at postgraduate and undergraduate level. The field also has a lengthy heritage through the study of medievalist board games. Medievalist games studies is vibrant, exciting, and full of potential: but it can no longer be fairly called a nascent or embryonic field. To do so now disregards the work of these earlier scholars and stymies further research.

But while the field is no longer new, it is by no means mature. While the scholarship has grown and diversified there remains a tendency for scholars to talk past each other. The wheel has been reinvented by multiple authors and bibliographies remain very sparse in many outputs. The subfield has fallen into the same trap as medievalist film scholarship identified in the last decade by Bildhauer where outputs and theory are produced "mostly in parallel rather than building on each other".[29] There are several reasons for this. Perhaps most fundamentally, the field is vast and varied. Scholars within departments of history, literary studies, media studies, game studies, archaeology, anthropology, international relations and (more occasionally) game design have made vital contributions to the field and in doing so have supported its vibrance and relevance. However, as is the case with the study of medievalism more generally, these approaches often remain siloed within their own mother fields. As a corollary of this issue of interdisciplinarity, the substantial majority of scholars who address medievalist games do so as an appendage or extension of their core work. This is not a problem in and of itself – indeed, it facilitates the introduction of ideas from a broader

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[27] Daisy Black, 'Malevolent and Marginal: The Feminized "Dark Ages" in Modern Card Game Cultures', in *The Middle Ages in Modern Culture: History and Authenticity in Contemporary Medievalism*, ed. Karl Alvestad and Robert Houghton (IBTauris, 2021), 105–18.

[28] Robert Houghton, ed., *The Middle Ages in Modern Games (30 June - 3 July 2020): Twitter Conference Proceedings* (Winchester: The Public Medievalist / University of Winchester, 2020), https://issuu.com/theuniversityofwinchester/docs/final_mamg20_threads; Robert Houghton, ed., *The Middle Ages in Modern Games 2 (25 May - 28 May 2021): Twitter Conference Proceedings* (Winchester: The Public Medievalist / University of Winchester, 2021).

[29] Bettina Bildhauer, 'Medievalism and Cinema', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, ed. Louise D'Arcens, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 45, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781316091708.004.

scholarly range – and it should be noted that most of the authors within this volume straddle distinct fields in their work. But it does mean that we have a tendency to come to the field with limited knowledge of its breadth and historiographical trends. Beyond this, language barriers have contributed to the emergence of distinct national schools; the relevance of medievalism in other media is often overlooked; and approaches within the broader field of historical games studies are occasionally side-lined. The rapid evolution of the field in the past decade has exacerbated these issues: so much is being written so fast that it is increasingly difficult to engage with the body of literature.

Addressing this issue and maturing the field is not simply a matter of engaging more widely with existing literature and theory – although this is certainly an important step. Rather, it is increasingly important that the field develop its own identity and coherence. This is an issue with which the broader fields of game studies and historical game studies continue to struggle and has also had a marked impact on the emergence of medievalist studies and media studies. Medievalist game studies is unequivocally connected to a multitude of other fields and subfields, but its subject matter and concerns are substantively distinct. Elements of medievalist studies are undoubtedly present, but the mechanical requirements and audience expectations of games as a medium create a unique set of trends within medievalist games. Likewise, there are important similarities between the portrayal of the Middle Ages and history in general within games, but there are certain inimitable tendencies which emerge. Ultimately, we need to look at medievalist games in the context of neighbouring fields, but also as part of a distinct media which forms a field in its own right. We need historiographical and methodological surveys. We need more attempts to cross linguistic boundaries.[30] We need more attempts at 'big picture' theory identifying trends, commonalities and distinctions across medievalist games in general rather than focusing on individual games and genres. This 'big picture' approach will by necessity lack the nuance of the – typically excellent – case studies, but is essential for the development and recognition of the field.

Themes in Medievalism and Historical Games

As highlighted above, the scholarly outputs around medievalist games is vast and varied and traverses the fields of medievalism and historical game studies and they must be understood within this context. Different traditions have emerged around different genres of game, discipline of study, and national or linguistic divisions and, as noted above, many of these traditions have emerged in parallel and in isolation: there has been a repeated invention of fundamentally similar ideas by different scholars in different fields using different examples to create substantively similar arguments, frameworks and methodologies. Cataloguing the divergent and scattered trends within either historical game studies or medievalism is a vast undertaking, and has formed the subject of a series of volumes. Addressing the intersection between these two fields, and hence the trends around medievalist game studies as a whole, approaches an impossible task but it is nevertheless important to highlight some particular tendencies.

Historical accuracy remains a common theme around historical game studies and medievalism, even as the approaches taken to this issue have become more nuanced and critical in recent years. Both fields have largely moved beyond the identification of historical inaccuracies for their own sake or as evidence of the shortcomings of a particular game or piece of media. This tendency was apparent within many works on historical game studies in the first half of the 2010s, and is still visible within

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[30] Martin Lorber and Felix Zimmermann, eds., *History in Games: Contingencies of an Authentic Past*, Studies of Digital Media Culture 12 (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verl, 2020).

some more recent academic publications, in interviews and articles by scholars of the Middle Ages for a popular audience, in audience commentary, and in the advertising materials for many games.[31] Accuracy was – and remains – important to scholars, developers and gamers alike for its immersive, commercial and social impact.[32] This approach mirrored a similar trend within studies around medievalist literature,[33] film,[34] and medievalism more generally,[35] where media was critiqued and criticised primarily for its adherence to a 'historical truth'. This quest for veracity has been deconstructed within both medievalist and historical game studies circles: identified as an impossibility even in academic works,[36] as a necessity due to the inherent qualities and limitations of a given media,[37] and an obstacle to the artistic or commercial success of a game or other media.[38] There remains a substantial concern around the issue of accuracy in games within medievalist and historical game scholarly circles, but this has shifted to a more nuanced discussion around issues including the ways in which claims to accuracy are constructed;[39] the processes behind the creation

[31] Esther Wright, 'On the Promotional Context of Historical Video Games', *Rethinking History* 22, no. 4 (2 October 2018): 598–608, https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2018.1507910.

[32] Erik Champion, *Critical Gaming: Interactive History and Virtual Heritage*, Digital Research in the Arts and Humanities (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015); Nicolas de Zamaróczy, 'Are We What We Play? Global Politics in Historical Strategy Computer Games', *International Studies Perspectives*, 4 February 2016, ekv010, https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/ekv010; Tara Jane Copplestone, 'But That's Not Accurate: The Differing Perceptions of Accuracy in Cultural-Heritage Videogames between Creators, Consumers and Critics', *Rethinking History* 21, no. 3 (3 July 2017): 415–38, https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2017.1256615.

[33] Veronica Ortenberg West-Harling, 'Medievalism as Fun and Games', in *Studies in Medievalism XVIII: Defining Medievalism(s) II*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4, http://universitypublishingonline.org/boydell/ebook.jsf?bid=CBO9781846157646.

[34] Andrew B. R. Elliott, *Remaking the Middle Ages: The Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2011), 11–13; Bildhauer, 'Medievalism and Cinema', 49–52.

[35] Nickolas Haydock, 'Medievalism and Excluded Middles', in *Studies in Medievalism XVIII: Defining Medievalism(s) II*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 19–20, http://universitypublishingonline.org/boydell/ebook.jsf?bid=CBO9781846157646.

[36] Elliott, *Remaking the Middle Ages*, 13; Adam Chapman, 'Privileging Form Over Content: Analysing Historical Videogames', *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2012): 43–44; Andrew B. R. Elliott and Matthew Kapell, 'Introduction: To Build a Past That Will "Stand the Test of Time"- Discovering Historical Facts, Assembling Historical Narratives', in *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, ed. Matthew Kapell and Andrew B. R. Elliott (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 9.

[37] Adam Chapman, 'Is Sid Meier's Civilization History?', *Rethinking History* 17, no. 3 (September 2013): 321–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2013.774719; Sian Beavers, 'The Informal Learning of History with Digital Games' (Open University, 2019), 180–82; Jeremiah McCall, 'Playing with the Past: History and Video Games (and Why It Might Matter)', *Journal of Geek Studies* 6, no. 1 (2019): 37.

[38] Beavers, 'The Informal Learning of History with Digital Games', 93–94; Scott Alan Metzger and Richard J. Paxton, 'Gaming History: A Framework for What Video Games Teach About the Past', *Theory & Research in Social Education* 44, no. 4 (October 2016): 553–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2016.1208596; Andrew B. R. Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media: Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-First Century*, Medievalism, volume X (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2017), 38–54.

[39] Heinze, *Mittelalter Computer Spiele*, 180–83; Jerome De Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*, Second edition (London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 153–54; Metzger and Paxton, 'Gaming History', 548–53; Jeremiah McCall, 'Video Games as Participatory Public History', in *A Companion to Public History*, ed. D. M. Dean, 1 edition (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2018), 406.

of a world which feels authentic to players;[40] mechanical and social factors behind inaccuracies;[41] the impact of these representations in the modern world;[42] and the utility of games as counterfactual histories –[43] most typically for educational purposes,[44] but occasionally and increasingly as a facet of scholarly research.[45] An emergent splinter of this theme considers the possibilities posed by roleplay as a new and more immersive engagement with the medieval and other historical periods.[46]

A recent development within this field concerns the use of audio within medievalist games. Visual representations have formed a long standing and prominent element of medievalist game studies (and historical game studies more generally), and research into this sphere has often leant heavily on work conducted around medievalist film and has highlighted the cinematic heritage of visual environments.[47] The connection between medievalist architecture and these ludic visuals has likewise been considered[48] and the impact of the practical requirements of games as an interactive medium on the visual environments the present has been highlighted.[49] Looking medieval is just as

[40] Dow, 'Historical Veneers', 218–19; Tim Raupach, 'Towards an Analysis of Strategies of Authenticity Production in World War II First-Person Shooter Games', in *Early Modernity and Video Games*, ed. Tobias Winnerling and Florian Kerschbaumer (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 132–35; Julian Wolterink, 'Authentic Historical Imagery: A Suggested Approach for Medieval Videogame', *Gamevironments* 6 (2017): 104–31.

[41] Andrew J. Salvati and Jonathan M. Bullinger, 'Selective Authenticity and the Playable Past', in *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, ed. Matthew Kapell and Andrew B. R. Elliott (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 152; Tetsuya Nakamura, 'The Fundamental Gap between Tabletop Simulation Games and the Truth', in *Zones of Control: Perspectives on Wargaming*, ed. Pat Harrigan and Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, Game Histories (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 43.

[42] S.-h. Hong, 'When Life Mattered: The Politics of the Real in Video Games' Reappropriation of History, Myth, and Ritual', *Games and Culture* 10, no. 1 (1 January 2015): 35–56, https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412014557542.

[43] Rolf Nohr, 'The Game Is a Medium: The Game Is a Message', in *Early Modernity and Video Games*, ed. Tobias Winnerling and Florian Kerschbaumer (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 20–21.

[44] Kevin Kee, ed., *Pastplay: Teaching and Learning History with Technology* (University of Michigan Press, 2014), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv65swr0; Joanna Wojdon, ed., *E-Teaching History* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016); Houghton, *Teaching the Middle Ages through Modern Games*.

[45] Jerremie Clyde, Howard Hopkins, and Glenn Wilkinson, 'Beyond the "Historical" Simulation: Using Theories of History to Inform Scholarly Game Design', *Loading... The Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association* 6, no. 9 (2012), http://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/viewArticle/105; Jeremy Antley, 'Going Beyond the Textual in History', *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2012), http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-2/going-beyond-the-textual-in-history-by-jeremy-antley/; Vinicius Marino Carvalho, 'Videogames as Tools for Social Science History', *Historian* 79, no. 4 (December 2017): 794–819, https://doi.org/10.1111/hisn.12674; Robert Houghton, 'World, Structure and Play: A Framework for Games as Historical Research Outputs, Tools, and Processes', *Práticas Da História* 7 (2018): 11–43.

[46] Daniel T. Kline, 'Participatory Medievalism, Role-Playing, and Digital Gaming', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, ed. Louise D'Arcens, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 75–88, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781316091708.006.

[47] Robson Scarassati Bello, 'História e Memória Em Assassin's Creed (2007-2015)', *Revista Tempo e Argumento* 11, no. 27 (2 August 2019): 304–39, https://doi.org/10.5965/2175180311272019304; Enseleit and Schade, 'Das Mittelalter im Videospiel'.

[48] Dow, 'Historical Veneers'.

[49] Laura Zucconi et al., 'Pox and the City: Challenges in Writing a Digital History Game', in *Writing History in the Digital Age*, ed. Kristen Nawrotzki (University of Michigan Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.3998/dh.12230987.0001.001; David J. Staley, *Computers, Visualization, and History: How New Technology Will Transform Our Understanding of the Past*, Second Edition, History, the Humanities, and the New Technology (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2014); Adam Chapman, *Digital Games as History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice*, Routledge Advances in Game Studies 7

important within medievalist games as it in any other media.[50] More recently though, a range of scholarship has emerged which addresses the use of sound effects,[51] ambient music,[52] and voice acting[53] to create a seemingly authentic medieval environment, to deepen immersion, and to allow the exploration of pseudo-medieval worlds. This work primarily addresses computer games, but a range of research has been conducted considering audio-visual issues around analogue games from the depiction of miniatures in the tabletop game *Warhammer: Fantasy Battle*[54] to the use of accents to augment roleplay in pen and paper *Dungeons and Dragons*.[55]

The ways in which the narrative and rules of medievalist games engage with medievalist and gaming tropes is a further frequent subject for research, with branches of work addressing the reasons behind these tendencies, their impact on player experiences, and the possibility of developing and nuancing these representations for commercial and educational purposes. Representations of endemic warfare as the defining characteristic of medieval society within games has been highlighted and dissected by numerous authors,[56] alongside the casual everyday violence present within medievalist games.[57] The propensity of games to follow the stereotypical vision of the 'Dark Ages' common to medievalist media has been noted,[58] although several authors have highlighted games which take a more romantic approach to situate the Industrial era as the 'Dark Ages',[59] or

(New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 61–69; Matthew Nicholls, 'Digital Visualisation in Classics Teaching and Beyond', *Journal of Classics Teaching* 17, no. 33 (2016): 27–30, https://doi.org/10.1017/S2058631016000076.

[50] John M. Ganim, 'Medievalism and Architecture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, ed. Louise D'Arcens, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 43, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781316091708.003.

[51] Ailbhe Warde-Brown, 'Waltzing on Rooftops and Cobblestones: Sonic Immersion through Spatiotemporal Involvement in the *Assassin's Creed* Series', *Journal of Sound and Music in Games* 2, no. 3 (1 July 2021): 34–55, https://doi.org/10.1525/jsmg.2021.2.3.34.

[52] Karen M. Cook, 'Music, History, and Progress in Sid Meier's Civilization IV', in *Music in Video Games: Studying Play*, ed. K. J. Donnelly, William Gibbons, and Neil William Lerner, Routledge Music and Screen Media Series (New York ; London: Routledge, 2014), 180–96; Stephanie Lind, 'Music as Temporal Disruption in *Assassin's Creed*', *The Soundtrack* 11, no. 1 (1 August 2020): 57–73, https://doi.org/10.1386/ts_00005_1; Reale, 'Barriers to Listening in World of Warcraft'.

[53] Magy Seif El Nasr et al., 'Assassin's Creed: A Multi-Cultural Read', *Loading... The Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association* 2, no. 3 (2008): 1–32; James Cook, 'Sonic Medievalism, World Building, and Cultural Identity in Fantasy Video Games', in *Studies in Medievalism XXIX: Politics and Medievalism (Studies)*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Boydell & Brewer, 2020), 217–38, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvxhrjqn.

[54] Mikko Meriläinen, Jaakko Stenros, and Katriina Heljakka, 'More Than Wargaming: Exploring the Miniaturing Pastime', *Simulation & Gaming*, 26 June 2020, 104687812092905, https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878120929052.

[55] Mary Bucholtz, 'Play, Identity, and Linguistic Representation in the Performance of Accent', *Texas Linguistic Forum* 44, no. 2 (2002): 227–51.

[56] Heinze, *Mittelalter Computer Spiele*, 273–96; Gregory Fedorenko, 'The Portrayal of Medieval Warfare in *Medieval Total War* and *Medieval 2: Total War*', in *Digital Gaming Re-Imagines the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel T. Kline, Routledge Studies in New Media and Cyberculture 15 (New York: Routledge, 2014), 53–66.

[57] Oliver Chadwick, 'Courtly Violence, Digital Play: Adapting Medieval Courtly Masculinities in Dante's Inferno', in *Digital Gaming Re-Imagines the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel T. Kline, Routledge Studies in New Media and Cyberculture 15 (New York: Routledge, 2014), 148–61; Kristin Noone and Jennifer Kavetsky, 'Sir Thomas Malory and the Death Knights of New Avalon: Imagining Medieval Identities in World of Warcraft', in *Digital Gaming Re-Imagines the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel T. Kline, Routledge Studies in New Media and Cyberculture 15 (New York: Routledge, 2014), 93–106.

[58] Wolterink, 'Authentic Historical Imagery'; Dom Ford, 'Lost Futures: In the Presence of Long-Lost Civilisations in The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild', in *Unpublished*, 2018, https://doi.org/10.13140/rg.2.2.32490.57286; Black, 'Malevolent and Marginal'.

[59] Esther MacCallum-Stewart, '"Never Such Innocence Again": War and Histories in World of Warcraft', in *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader*, ed. Hilde Corneliussen and Jill Walker Rettberg

which eschew the 'Dark Age' concept entirely.[60] The use of Christian – and to a lesser extent, Islamic – religious paraphernalia, ritual and architecture as signposts for the 'otherness' and 'medievalness' of games' worlds has been highlighted, even as scholars underline the failure of most games to engage with religion and morality in any meaningful manner.[61] Much of this work addresses the interaction of medievalist and gaming influences on these trends within medievalist games, although this remains an issue which requires deeper and more comprehensive study.

Finally, and as a subset of this concern around medievalist and gaming tropes, the preponderance of white, male, cis-hetero focus within medievalist games and gaming communities, and the impact of this trend has produced a rich and vital vein of research. The Eurocentric focus of historical games is well established[62] and parallels medievalist tendencies to centre stories around western Europe – and most particularly the British Isles.[63] The use of games and medievalism to cement racial and national identities and rhetoric have been underlined alongside the use of claims to accuracy to

(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 39–62; Webber, 'Technophilia and Technophobia in Online Medieval Fantasy Games'; Kevin Moberly and Brent Moberly, 'Swords, Sorcery, and Steam: The Industrial Dark Ages in Contemporary Medievalism', in *Studies in Medievalism XXIV*, ed. Karl Fugelso, Vincent Ferré, and Alicia C. Montoya, NED-New edition, Medievalism on the Margins (Boydell and Brewer, 2015), 193–216, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt12879b0.19.

[60] Jason Pitruzzello, 'Systematizing Culture in Medievalism: Geography, Dynasty, Culture, and Imperialism in *Crusader Kings: Deus Vult*', in *Digital Gaming Re-Imagines the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel T. Kline, Routledge Studies in New Media and Cyberculture 15 (New York: Routledge, 2014), 43–52; McKenzie, 'A Patchwork World'.

[61] Mark Cameron Love, 'Not-So-Sacred Quests: Religion, Intertextuality and Ethics in Videogames', *Religious Studies and Theology* 29, no. 2 (20 April 2011): 191–213, https://doi.org/10.1558/rsth.v29i2.191; Heinze, *Mittelalter Computer Spiele*, 170–72, 238–43; Simone Heidbrink, Tobias Knoll, and Jan Wysocki, 'Theorizing Religion in Digital Games. Perspectives and Approaches', *Online - Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 5 (2014): 5–50, https://doi.org/10.11588/REL.2014.0.12156; Elke Hemminger, 'Game Cultures as Sub-Creations - Case Studies on Religion & Digital Play', *Online - Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 5 (2014): 108–33, https://doi.org/10.11588/REL.2014.0.12156.

[62] Berrin Beasley and Tracy Collins Standley, 'Shirts vs. Skins: Clothing as an Indicator of Gender Role Stereotyping in Video Games', *Mass Communication and Society* 5, no. 3 (August 2002): 279–93, https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0503_3; M.D Griffiths, Mark N.O Davies, and Darren Chappell, 'Online Computer Gaming: A Comparison of Adolescent and Adult Gamers', *Journal of Adolescence* 27, no. 1 (February 2004): 87–96, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2003.10.007; D. Williams et al., 'The Virtual Census: Representations of Gender, Race and Age in Video Games', *New Media & Society* 11, no. 5 (1 August 2009): 815–34, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809105354.

[63] Maria Eugênia Bertarelli and Clinio Oliveira Amaral, 'Long Middle Ages or Appropriations of the Medieval?: A Reflection on How to Decolonize the Middle Ages through the Theory of Medievalism', *História Da Historiografia: International Journal of Theory and History of Historiography* 13, no. 33 (7 August 2020): 97–130, https://doi.org/10.15848/hh.v13i33.1555; Amy S. Kaufman and Paul B. Sturtevant, *The Devil's Historians: How Modern Extremists Abuse the Medieval Past* (Toronto ; Buffalo ; London: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 25–27.

cement racist and nationalist rhetoric.[64] Likewise women[65] and queer communities[66] are marginalised within medievalist games. The vocal presence of racist and misogynist groups and values within medievalist and gaming communities has been well documented and the impact of this rhetoric within and around games and play is a topic of an increasing volume of scholarship.[67] Other work has highlighted the factors behind these tendencies – highlighting in particular the dominance of the games industry by white men and the perception or intention of a primarily white male audience for historical games -[68] and ways in which the hegemonic world view prevalent within many medievalist media and historical games may be averted or critiqued through more diverse and progressive development studios,[69] user modification of games,[70] or through counterplay.[71]

This Volume

This volume compiles work from a range of disciplines and from industry around several key emergent areas of study. While it does not resolve the issues raised above, it highlights the sheer

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[64] Tom Shippey, 'Medievalisms and Why They Matter', in *Studies in Medievalism XVIII: Defining Medievalism(s) II*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17–30, http://universitypublishingonline.org/boydell/ebook.jsf?bid=CBO9781846157646; Stefan Donecker, 'Pharaoh Mao Zedong and the Musketeers of Babylon: The Civilization Series between Primordialist Nationalism and Subversive Parody', in *Early Modernity and Video Games*, ed. Tobias Winnerling and Florian Kerschbaumer (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 105–22; Young, 'Whiteness and Time'; Jonathan Hsy, *Antiracist Medievalisms: From 'Yellow Peril' to Black Lives Matter*, Arc Medievalist (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2021).

[65] Monica K. Miller and Alicia Summers, 'Gender Differences in Video Game Characters' Roles, Appearances, and Attire as Portrayed in Video Game Magazines', *Sex Roles* 57, no. 9–10 (20 October 2007): 733–42, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-007-9307-0; Rachel Kowert, Johannes Breuer, and Thorsten Quandt, 'Women Are from FarmVille, Men Are from ViceCity: The Cycle of Exclusion and Sexism in Video Game Content and Culture', in *New Perspectives on the Social Aspects of Digital Gaming: Multiplayer 2*, ed. Rachel Kowert and Thorsten Quandt, Routledge Advances in Game Studies 8 (New York London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).

[66] Edmond Y. Chang, 'Love Is in the Air: Queer (Im)Possibility and Straightwashing in FrontierVille and World of Warcraft', *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* 2, no. 2 (2015): 6, https://doi.org/10.14321/qed.2.2.0006; Hassan, 'You Can Be Anyone'.

[67] Jessie Daniels and Nick Lalone, 'Racism in Video Gaming: Connecting Extremist and Mainstream Expressions of White Supremacy', in *Social Exclusion, Power, and Video Game Play: New Research in Digital Media and Technology*, ed. David G. Embrick, J. Talmadge Wright, and András Lukács (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 85–100; Tanner Higgin, 'Gamic Race: The Logics of Difference in Videogame Culture' (PhD, Riverside, University of California, 2012); Jules Skotnes-Brown, 'Colonized Play: Racism, Sexism and Colonial Legacies in the DOTA 2 South Africa Gaming Community', in *Video Games and the Global South*, ed. Phillip Penix-Tadsen (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University, 2019), 143–53.

[68] Lisa Nakamura, 'Queer Female of Color: The Highest Difficulty Setting There Is? Gaming Rhetoric as Gender Capital', *ADA* 1 (2012), https://doi.org/10.7264/N37P8W9V; Emil Lundedal Hammar, 'Producing & Playing Hegemonic Pasts: Historical Digital Games as Memory-Making Media' (PhD, Arctic University of Norway, 2020), https://munin.uit.no/handle/10037/17717.

[69] Higgin, 'Gamic Race', 230–34.

[70] Rhett Loban and Tom Apperley, 'Eurocentric Values at Play: Modding the Colonial from the Indigenous Perspective', in *Video Games and the Global South*, ed. Phillip Penix-Tadsen (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University, 2019), 87–99.

[71] Tom Apperley, *Gaming Rhythms: Play and Counterplay from the Situated to the Global* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2009); Souvik Mukherjee, 'Playing Subaltern: Video Games and Postcolonialism', *Games and Culture* 13, no. 5 (July 2018): 504–20, https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015627258; Angenitus Arie Andries Mol, 'Toying with History: Counterplay, Counterfactuals, and the Control of the Past', in *History in Games: Contingencies of an Authentic Past*, ed. Martin Lorber and Felix Zimmermann, Studies of Digital Media Culture 12 (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verl, 2020), 237–57.

breadth of approaches to the study of the Middle Ages in modern games and, the divergence in representation and construction of the medieval period within and around games. In doing so, these chapters engage with several of the key scholarly trends identified above and inform future study.

The volume opens with an of essay by Grufstedt which addresses the ways in which medievalist games construct their history and historical worlds. This chapter considers the intersection of counterfactuals and historiographical trends in *Medieval Dynasty* (2020), *Crusader Kings III* (2020) and *Mount & Blade: Bannerlord* (2020). It outlines the different roles of historical reference and periodisation to decipher larger counterfactual themes. It also discusses the specific configuration of counterfactuals in the games by critically analysing them in terms of causality and outcomes in the context of historical culture.

The next pair of chapters address the use of audio within medievalist games. Lopez makes use of emergent studies into the soundscapes of past cultures within Archaeacoustics, Music Archaeology, Auditory Archaeology, and Sensory History more broadly to address what it means to create past soundscapes in the context of gaming. Using examples drawn from *The Witcher*, *Age of Empires*, *Assassin's Creed* and *Skyrim*, it proposes and explores a taxonomy that refers to the creation of historically-set soundscapes as acts of evocation, recreation and artistic reflection.

In their chapter, Cook provides a deep exploration of the use of stereotypically Christian and choral audio cues as a means of player immersion within a substantial range of games from *Civilization IV* to *Baldur's Gate*. They highlight the effectiveness of this technique within medievalist world building and underline its near ubiquitous presence. Ultimately though, this chapter highlights the xenophobic and misogynistic limitations and implications of the close association of this particular genre of music with the Middle Ages, particularly when musical themes from other cultures are almost invariably coded as 'other' or 'exotic' rather than 'medieval'.

The third cluster of chapters consider the interaction of popular impressions of the Middle Ages with the unique mechanics and cultures of games and the ways in which these elements combine to create new images of the period. Smith's chapter considers the subset of board-games which have attempted to deal with crusading related scenarios, and provides a close analysis of the range and evolution of topics incorporated within these games. It considers how these games can reveal both the limitations and the potential for development of ludic handling of historical sources, concepts and secondary debates. The chapter presents a case study of this subgenre to highlight where the limitations of the board-game format might yet be able to be transformed to expand the scope and reach of scholarly games.

McLeod's piece explores the *Legacy of Kain* games as objects of medieval reception. It argues that the franchise can be understood as a teaching narrative, which time and again peals back conventional good-evil paradigms and encourages players to be wary of otherwise familiar tropes. In an industry often seen to reinforce harmful political dynamics, the game offers up new experiences to modern audiences familiar with the appropriation of crusader imagery by extremist factions. For players, the games provide a thrilling narrative experience filled with uncertainty and the mystique of a gothic-fantasy setting; for scholars, they are a window into challenging the appropriation of the Middle Ages by radicals.

Bierstadt's piece addresses the Eurogame *A Feast for Odin* and its unusual engagement with the Viking Age. They consider the abstraction and distortion of geography and society as the consequence of the necessities of game design and balance. They note the continued presence of harmful misconceptions around the game's period and theme, but also highlight a shift away from

the traditional view of Vikings as bloodthirsty raiders and typical focus on violence within games addressing this theme.

Houghton's chapter addresses the limitations of the games within the hugely popular and influential *Civilization* series in their representations of medieval societies. It argues that the genre conventions, mechanical restrictions and player expectations placed on the designers of these games restrict their ability to represent the period and lead to a lack of distinction between the Middle Ages and other historical periods. Ultimately, it suggests that mechanics may be constructively drawn from games of other genres including *Reigns* and *Mount and Blade* to provide a more nuanced and useful depiction of the Middle Ages.

The final group of chapters address key issues within medievalist games and their communities pertaining to nationalism, colonialism, race, gender, and sexuality. In his chapter, Bloch addresses the establishment of Joan of Arc as a French patriotic idol during the 19th century and the evolution of this theme through various authors and media until its transposition into *Age of Empires II*. It considers the construction of Joan of Arc within the game, noting that it leans on fictitious and ideological renditions of history rather than historical studies and addresses the impact that this representation has within the game and within the playerbase. The chapter concludes by addressing ways in which scholars of the Middle Ages may engage with the game and those like it in a constructive manner.

Nagwekar's contribution considers the representation of Indians within *Age of Empires II* through a postcolonial lens. This chapter highlights the limitations and difficulties of the portrayal created within the game and places a particular emphasis on the extreme degree of abstraction necessary to condense a vast, complex, and diverse region into a single playable faction. In doing so, the chapter engages with and informs key issues around colonialism and postcolonialism in medievalist games and othermedievalist media.

Quijano's chapter explores the disconnect between current knowledge regarding colonialism and racial identity in the Middle Ages, their depictions and representations in video games, and the mainstream discourse around these concepts. It focuses on *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, *Innocence: A Plague Tale*, *The Elder Scrolls*, and *Black Desert Online* to address the erasure of rich racial diversity of the Middle Ages within medievalist video games and the ways in which this erasure excused and promoted within gamer communities. The chapter considers the media which inform the perception of the Middle Ages in the public imagination and how these perceptions become self-perpetuating despite being historically anachronistic. It also considers the influence of contemporary colonialist thinking on the depiction and rationalisation of race and racial identity in the Middle Ages in video games and popular discourse.

In their piece, Mindrebo examines the role of medieval gender representations in the modern pseudo-medieval fantasy genre through games such as *The Witcher*, *World of Warcraft*, *Guild Wars 2* and *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. In particular, it presents the view that gender roles in these games are strongly comparable to a binary inspired by the literary and historiographical narratives of Medieval Scandinavia. This comparison presents a new approach to contemporary cultural phenomena and their inspiration from the Medieval past, and Mindrebo argues that a significant amount of our thinking about gender still follows along the same lines.

Butler's chapter explores the three games of the *Dark Souls* series in conjunction with medieval romance antecedents, giving attention to the chivalric character archetypes in each game and core gameplay mechanics iconic to the series. He argues that examining the chivalric characters

throughout the series offers the clearest window into how From Software disrupts contemporary notions of knights as invincible warriors and instead channels medieval romances' anxieties about the fragility of the knighthood. Approaching the game play mechanics of the Dark Souls series as a complementary to the narrative world expands how this game series challenges its players to not only leave themselves open to failure but confront their own vulnerability.

In the final chapter, Apgar considers the representation of Matilda of Canossa within *Crusader Kings II*, in the context of the evolution of Matilda's popular image was shaped between the seventeenth and the twenty-first century. She argues that the game has retained the image of Matilda as a papal warrior dating back to Pope Urban VIII's seventeenth-century revival of the veneration of the countess. The chapter contends that Matilda's appearance in popular media and thus her modern legacy outside of academia has been expressly shaped by the needs of a seventeenth-century papacy in need of a strong figure of papal victory and might, but though these aspects make for a more exciting game, they are entrenched in post-Tridentine propaganda, and offer a reductive take on the otherwise rich history of Matilda and the Canossan legacy.

These chapters embrace a broad range of disciplines and approaches. In doing so they highlight and embrace the vibrancy and variety present within the field of medievalist game studies. These chapters note the influence of established medievalist trends and tropes alongside that of gaming expectations and limitations. They consider the ways in which these divergent factors create a distinct variety of medievalism and a particular form of history through games. In several cases, they highlight innovative and constructive uses, variations, or rejections of these tendencies and the potential these games possess to overcome or mitigate typical pitfalls around common representations of the Middle Ages.

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