Playing in the Middle Ages
Margaret May and Lynn Jones
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Background and Introduction
The purpose of this project is to conduct an in-depth study of the presence of the medieval in gaming, RPG, or role-playing games, in particular. To study various aspects of the medieval, we played multiple games that were marketed as medieval RPGs including Long Live the Queen, Knights and Merchants, and most notably the latest installment of Crusader Kings, Crusader Kings II. All of the games were played on a Mac OS platform over the course of several months. Answers were sought to questions such as which aspects of medieval culture were being appropriated and how they were being edited and recontextualized for consumer demands and expectations. Are groups, such as women and people of color, represented and what do these portrayals say about the willingness of game developers and companies such as Paradox Interactive to bend historical accuracy in order to reinforce medieval stereotypes? Once answers to these questions are understood, these games might be used in a classroom setting to provide a more interactive and superior conduit for understanding and learning about the modern medieval, or the lens through which the “medieval” is sold to consumers.

Goals and Methodology
All games were played in the Art History Lab with the Mac OS platforms. Each game was played through carefully and notes were taken on the appearance of the game, such as the presence of various markers that could be measured and compared. This included the way the medieval was represented within each game such as race, gender, dress, geography, and languages, as well as any notable aspects that were missing from the games, or omissions.

Timeline of Crusader Kings II Downloadable Content Release Dates

![Timeline of Crusader Kings II Downloadable Content Release Dates](image)

The Games

**Long Live the Queen** (2012) Developer: Hanako Games
The product description from the Steam store promises that the game will “Rule the world or die trying! Being a Princess is not an easy job. Being a Queen is even harder. Especially when the product description from Steam promises that the player will “Rule the world or die more interactive and superior conduit for understanding and learning about the modern medieval, or the lens through which the “medieval” is sold to consumers.”

**Knights and Merchants**

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**Crusader Kings II** (2012) Developer: Paradox Development Studio
Crusader Kings II includes multiple DLCs which allow you to begin gameplay at several points throughout history, including the High Middle Ages to the Age of Mongols. You are immersed in geography and climate and history drawn from history to begin shaping it to your will. The game now covers Western Europe, Northern Africa, the middle east, and the Indian subcontinent.

**Rajas of India**
This unlocks the subcontinent of India and its regions and allows to play as rulers in this region.

**Sunset Invasion**
This extra feature includes an invasion of the Aztecs around the mid-13th century. Although they are not playable, it is possible to interact with them as regular characters. You may form alliances or declare war as usual.

**Portrait and Song Packs**
Portrait packs allow for variation in the physical appearance of characters according to race and/or region. Song packs are additions to the soundtrack of the game, and each pack is tailored to reflect the musical style of the particular culture.

“Medievalisms”

**Gender**

**Long Live the Queen**: Your character has several suits during the game, some older and some in your age bracket. As you play through the game, you may get different offers, and you choose whether or not to accept them but your suitor is always male. The first one received was from a young Prince about the Princess’ age, although later on there is a place where you are given the chance to dance with an older unmarried man, and this could lead to a proposal. The choice of your character is discussed when the suitor is introduced, such as his title or possible inheritance.

**Knights and Merchants**: Although men and women, as well as children are both present on the cover of the game and its advertisements, neither women nor children are present in the game. The map covers most of Europe, the Middle East, and Asia and parts of Northern and Northeastern African coast. It also extends east as far as Burma.

**Long Live the Queen**: There is a backstory to the game, and the history of your land of Nova involves the interactions of other powers, including the kingdom of Ixox.

**Knights and Merchants**: Your enemies can only be talked apart by you and your suitors from the color of their uniforms or dress. In the Shattered Kingdom Campaign, your enemies are named after the German townships of Lausenburg and Walheim.

**Crusader Kings II**: Divisions are over religion and territory, and seem as historically authentic as can be. Except for the Aztec DLC, in which the Aztecs sail over and begin pillaging towns and sacrificing citizens.

**Dress**

**Long Live the Queen**: The Princess starts out in an outfit that is hardly medieval, aboarding school uniform. You can unlock other outfits for her as the game progresses, however, including a ball gown. The rest of the characters appear in the same outfits throughout your play. Your father the King is dressed in a kingly manner, with a golden crown and red velvet cape.

**Knights and Merchants**: The dress of your men varies slightly by profession, but all of the colors are similar and color seems to be the only way to differentiate your men from your enemy or invading forces.

**Crusader Kings II**: Vary by culture, although rank is shown the same way across the territory covered by the game: different ranks of crowns over the character’s house or insignia.

**Races/Ethnicity**

**Long Live the Queen**: Everyone is Caucasian and drawn in exaggerated anime style, with wide eyes and unnatural hair colors (your main character has light pink hair). The characters’ appearances seem to be set. As you learn courtly manners and attend more classes you can unlock other outfits for the princess but the physical appearances of the characters remain the same. Peasants are not even allowed to dress. However, when a peasant comes to you with a request there is a blank spot where the character usually appears as they speak.

**Knights and Merchants**: Every character and profession are of the same white skin color; there appear to be no differences and people can be told apart only from each other by the pre-set color of their outfits. You can tell your men apart from your enemies upon meeting, you may be wearing red and your enemies yellow, but the outfits themselves are all similar in color and only differ obviously by profession. A fisherman, for example, wears a hat, and the blacksmith has an apron.

**Crusader Kings II**: Race and ethnicity vary by region and seem authentic in this sense.

**Geography**

**Long Live the Queen**: You are princess of the land of Nova, and although some other lands and nearby kingdoms are mentioned periodically, there are never any maps available to see and when you go on trips you simply receive notifications. If one were to play through again and focus on the classes in the History of Nova and Economics and Trade they may be able to find out through gameplay but this comes at the sacrifice of classes in the name of lore, which keep the player alive when attempts are made on the Princess’ life.

**Knights and Merchants**: You can start out on different “maps” but there is little evidence of the complex ecologies promised in the games description in order to sell it. You have to mine stones from the quarry and then build a smithy and then train a blacksmith in order to get weapons but there seems to be no trade with other kingdoms as was suggested by the advertisements. The game claimed that the geography was entirely fictional, although the rest of the situations were based on the Anglo-Saxon period. This statement was made in the game’s description, but beyond this assumption the player that has gone into the game and some “markers” such as knights and towers there doesn’t seem to be much obvious support for it.

**Crusader Kings II**: The map covers most of Europe, the Middle East, and Asia and parts of Northern and Northeastern African coast. It also extends east as far as Burma.

**Languages**

**Long Live the Queen**: Most of the language in the game sounds exactly as you would expect from someone today as far as grammar and word choice. There are a few words that would indicate a limited level of technological superiority of the peddlers, “bwahaha”. The peasants who may come to you with requests or complaints speak more slowly, and use phrases such as “themselves”.

**Knights and Merchants**: Your knights/men do not speak. However, you may get a description of your campaign or mission in the beginning of gameplay which employs a clichéd sort of “ye old” tongue”english, with phrases such as “your enemy doth not…” and “will thou prevail?”

**Crusader Kings II**: The talk is always formal and court appropriate, with phrases such as “many blessings upon your house” when another ruler or ally is pleased with you. This could have to do with the medieval appeal of the game or is perhaps a side effect of the fact that they never talk to any peasants, only other rulers and noble men and women.

Acknowledgements
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References