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History in Multimodal Gameplay: A New Language and Model for Constructing, Experiencing, and Studying the Past

A thesis

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Abstract:

This doctoral study examines how historical gameplay constructs and provides ways of experiencing history within (historical) video games. Historical gameplay is examined and defined as an expression of history within historical games as it is the primary medium of representing or experiencing the past based on the interactions between the player and the various intricacies and components of the historical game. This thesis identifies, interprets, and illustrates several modalities of histories that emerge from and are characterised by particular modes and sequences of gameplay, with the aim of discerning and demonstrating what kind of experiences and knowledge of history are being conveyed. The undertaking of gameplay research in this thesis produced case studies of two contemporary Medieval games: *A Plague Tale: Innocence* (Asobo Studio, 2019) and *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (Warhorse Studios, 2018). These texts were analysed via recorded footage of the author's gameplay activity, while in-person interviews with several members of the game studios responsible for developing both these historical games provided insights into the research and game development processes required to produce historical games. In spite of the growing recognition of, and scholarship on historical video games, there are no current works from the discipline of history that thoroughly explore gameplay as a different yet innovative medium for disseminating and understanding history. This thesis fills that gap. Studying gameplay from the development and release of recent Medieval historical games has the potential to provide historians with new insights and opportunities regarding gameplay as catalysts for studying, discussing, and critiquing history.

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Glossary of Key Terms:

Gameplay: The principal medium of representing and interacting with history in historical video games, as well as a type of digital source or record of historical scholarship, via its multimodal communication and meaning-making processes.

Historical Fantasy: A gameplay immersion containing fantasy elements authentically representative of or characteristic to beliefs, ideas and fantasies from past imaginative works (e.g. folktales and legends, visual art, dramatic novels).

Historical Modality: A systematic assemblage of and language for describing different modes or typologies of history contained in and experienced through multimodal gameplay via three core functions (representation, procedural, orientational).

Imaginative History: A type of historical gameplay representation that engages in and conveys different systems of imaginative historical poetics.

Lore History: A type of historical gameplay representation involving discovery, dissemination, and experience of different typologies of historical knowledge, research, and insights in relation to the game's chosen history(ies).

Multimodality: The composition and interaction between multiple literacies and modes of communication and the meaning-making generated by those elements when combined and experienced as a whole text (e.g. verbal discourse, book, film). It is essentially the study of different communicative languages or acts in all of its multiple modalities of semiotic expression, content, and meaning process.

Realist-fiction: A gameplay immersion combining the qualities and elements of ‘fiction’ and ‘realism’ into one integrated mode when experiencing history, be they stories and events, settings, characters, objects, and other constituents. Constructions in this type of representation are in totality fictional creations but plausible or authentic to accepted historical evidence and chronology.

Video Game Footage (Gameplay Recording): The primary source for recording, editing, and documenting gameplay activity via a game capture device (e.g. Elgato). The main resource unit for interpreting or analysing, corroborating, and disseminating scholarship from historical gameplay experiences.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Historical Gameplay

1.1 Introduction:

Imagine an historian at a conference recounting their time when they fought at the battle of Hastings in 1066 on either the side of William the Conqueror or King Harold Godwinson, or an historian who joined the liberation of Spain from the Napoleonic French occupiers as a female Spanish guerilla fighter during the Peninsular wars in the early nineteenth century. Envisage an academic's recitation of their recent return to our world after being on a mythological Chinese adventure encountering and befriending or fighting dragons, monsters, and strange humanoid beings reminiscent of the famous novel *Journey to the West* as the iconic Monkey King Sun Wukong with his iconic staff polearm. How can these experiences be possible one would ask? What kind of evidence or perhaps foul sorceries could these potential historians conjure up to make such a claim on these accounts? The answer, gameplay – the medium of historical video games.

Through the power of gameplay, my passion for history in video games started. The age of ten was the year that my interest in history began when I played *Dynasty Warriors 4* on the PlayStation 2 console, a game set during the tumultuous Three Kingdoms era between the second and third century China (180 – 280 A.D).¹ While this was an action-based game with a focus on player freedom and military history, many of the battles, events, and warfare were based on real history, with most of the characters based on their “real” historical counterparts. As soon as I finished playing, I spent immense time researching

¹ Tomohiko Sho, *Dynasty Warriors 4* (Console video game) (Ashikaga: Omega Force, 2003).

everything about this history. I read and memorised the dates of births and deaths of the Chinese historical figures, what happened during the battles, names of cities and different factions, reasons for the historical events to have surfaced, and even read some primary sources. Essentially, the significance of playing and researching this historical game was engaging in and learning a complex history while enjoying the experience of what the game had to offer about Chinese history. Other historical games would follow during my life, but the same element always resonated with me – that these games were transporting us into the past by allowing us to experience the stories of real people, events, beliefs, and conflicts.

The allure of experiencing, researching, and disseminating histories through video games is the driving force behind my research into representations of history and historical knowledge.² The number of historical games produced and consumed in the digital game market since the late twentieth century has demonstrated the growing commercial success and popularity of integrating and communicating history in a wide variety of historical periods, settings, and cultures for generations of players around the world, as well as a popular resource for creativity, storytelling, and traversable settings for video game developers.³ For instance, *Total War: Three Kingdoms* released in 2019 sold over one million copies in less than a week since its initial release alone.⁴ The widely acclaimed

² For this thesis, the terms “digital games”, “video games”, and “games” will be used interchangeably, and will refer to all games in digital or virtual simulated formats.

³ A video game designer or game developer works as part of a wider comprehensive team to create a video game, but works in a range of roles, including the design of characters, constructing puzzles or obstacles, using e-computer programming, and designing game environments in each level. Since digital game projects are a collaboration between different departments in the game studio, video game designer also refers to the various members within each department of the game studio, including audio designers, script designers, visual graphic artists, and creative directors.

⁴ Janos Gaspar, *Total War: Three Kingdoms* (Computer game) (Horsham: Creative Assembly, 2019);

Fraser Brown, 'Total War: Three Kingdoms Sold a Million Copies in a Week', *PCGamer* <<https://www.pcgamer.com/au/total-war-three-kingdoms-sold-a-million-copies-in-a-week/>> [accessed 15 October 2021].

Assassin's Creed game series has currently in total sold about 155 million copies over its entire franchise as of October 2020.⁵ Take-Two Annual Report in 2016 reported that *Sid Meier's Civilization VI* (2016) sold thirty-four million copies in total, and single released games like *L.A. Noire* (2011) has sold seven and a half million copies as of 2017 in Take-Two 2018 Earnings Results report.⁶ Information from these reports demonstrate that historical games, even those long after their release, are still widely played.

This thesis examines two subtle yet often overlooked questions by academic and public historians studying historical games: What is it about the gameplay medium that enables games to communicate history? How is history experienced by active participants with this medium? These questions might seem to have straightforward answers, but upon closer examination one comes face-to-face with complex terms and discourses that alter our engagement with history and gaming (beyond an entertainment medium), which make it impossible to answer these questions with simple statements. The relationship between gameplay and its subject(s) can vary considerably based on the type and form of gameplay and its activities, altering how historical representation through gameplay is expressed and experienced. The breadth and variety of gameplay modes result in many different kinds of historical experiences of subjects, periods, and elements of history. It is precisely because of these challenges that I contend that exploring history through gameplay deserves to be given serious attention as a topic in both the disciplines of digital

⁵ Ubisoft, *Assassin's Creed* (Game series) (Montreal: Ubisoft, 2007-); World Today News, 'Assassin's Creed: Ubisoft's Million Dollar Franchise', *World Today News* <<https://www.world-today-news.com/assassins-creed-ubisofts-million-dollar-franchise/>> [accessed 17 September 2021].

⁶ Brendan McNamara, *L.A. Noire* (Console video game) (New York: Rockstar Games, 2011); Ed Beach, *Civilization VI* (Computer game) (Sparks, M.D: Firaxis Games, 2016); Take Two Interactive, *Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc. Annual Report* (New York: Take-Two Interactive, 2016), p. 4; Take-Two Interactive, 'Take-Two Interactive Software (TTWO) Q2 2018 Results - Earnings Call Transcript', *Seeking Alpha* <<https://seekingalpha.com/article/4122006-take-two-interactive-software-ttwo-q2-2018-results-earnings-call-transcript?part=single>> [accessed 19 October 2018], para. 29.

game studies and history. Gameplay, as a multi-communicative mode of expression and engagement, may challenge the way we think about the construction, dissemination, and representation of the past. Yet before we can begin to define and examine historical gameplay, as well as outline the aims and arguments of this thesis, it is first necessary to discuss what an historical game is.

1.2 What are Historical Games:

On a basic level, a video game is simply playing a digital game via a screen interface, or in using Gonzalo Frasca's definition "any forms of computer-based entertainment software, either textual or image-based, using any electronic platform such as personal computers or consoles and involving one or multiple players in a physical or networked environment."⁷ Another notable scholar Jesper Juul provides a more specific layout of a video game's innerworkings, where he defines a video game as both "rules and fiction", that is containing narrative stories within specific ludic frameworks.⁸ From the earliest releases of *Pong* and *Pac Man*, digital games have become a global phenomenon in the entertainment industry and media culture.⁹ Moreover, they have rapidly evolved since its inception due to technology advances like improved game engines (e.g. Unreal Engine, Unity) which enable better or higher levels of processing power and visual graphics, increasing player engagement, and diversity of game genres. Today, video game content and activity ranges from sports and military strategy to those set in highly fictional worlds, including science-fiction, Medieval fantasy, and horror.

⁷ Gonzalo Frasca, 'Simulation Versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology', in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, ed. by Mark J. P. Wolf & Bernard Perron (London: Routledge, 2003), 221-235, p. 4.

⁸ Jesper Juul, *Half-real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge, M.A: MIT Press, 2005), p. 121.

⁹ Allan Alcorn, *Pong* (Arcade video game) (Sunnyvale, C.A: Atari, 1972); Toru Iwatami, *Pac Man* (Arcade video game) (Tokyo: Namco, 1980).

However, historical video games are a distinct brand of digital games that focus on being set in and provide experiences of history and/or engage in discourses and meanings about the past. The ongoing development and consumption of historical games is evident by the vast range of histories that have been produced and experienced by players. You can partake in macro or global histories that involve global strategy, resource management, and developing your chosen civilization through different historical eras and cultural phases in either peaceful co-operation with or in active wars instigated by your own or other human and/or computer-controlled civilizations, as portrayed in games like the *Age of Empires* series and *Humankind*.¹⁰ There are recent historical games with extensive character role-play and expansive worlds conveying historical engagements and experiences not only of well-known but also localized histories documented in historical academia, such as *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* and the forthcoming *Titanic: Honor and Glory*.¹¹ For those far more adventurous and with desire to be taken away into whimsical or fantastical histories, one can journey to a post-World War Two era in *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus*. In this game, the current rules and conventions governing history are absent in favor of giant mecha Nazi robots, laser weapons, and an alternate timeline in which Germany during the Nazi regime has won WW2 and have claimed nearly the entire world (including America).¹²

Historical games were initially closely reliant on stylistic conventions, tropes, and research practices from other popular forms of history in order to claim historical

¹⁰ Bruce Shelley, *Age of Empires* (Game series) (Dallas, T.X, and Vancouver, Canada: Ensemble Studios and Relic Entertainment, 1997-);

Romain De Waubert De Genlis, *Humankind* (Computer game) (Paris: Amplitude Studios, 2021).

¹¹ Dan Vávra, *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (Computer and console video game) (Prague: Warhorse Studios, 2018); James Penca, *Titanic: Honor and Glory* (Computer game) (Columbus, O.H: Vintage Digital Revival, 2021).

¹² Jens Matthies, *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus* (Computer and console video game) (Upsala: MachineGames, 2017).

authenticity, such as novels, films and television series, and live re-enactment activities collectively known as 'living history'. To explain, historical games are in one sense like films, as they are audio-visual texts that present a world conveying closely detailed depictions of life and society from the past in many of its intricacies (e.g. utensils, places, buildings, clothing, and inhabitants) while incorporating certain filmic devices. These devices commonly used in games include introductory movies, cinematic cutscenes, and camera angles (first and third-person perspective) for orientation of the player's actions and motives. Historical games also share features similar to a written or literary historical text in that it must have a narrative to tell its history, and can incorporate facts, descriptions of actual events, and written evidence or sources (e.g. chronicles and diary accounts). Also, in line with historical novels, games employ devices such as fictional characters and plotlines, and embed elements of drama (also evident in films).

Despite incorporating qualities possessed by other mediums, historical video games are neither films nor literary works. While many contain stories or narratives, this common feature alone does not fully reflect the entirety of a digital game text or the experiences it offers. Games must be appreciated for their distinctive qualities. Specifically, formal or procedural (game) systems that "subjectively represents a subset of reality [by] a collection of parts which interact with each other, often in complex ways."¹³ This collection of parts or elements comprise the various formalist or procedural game structures that make up the game system and enable activities of (ludic) play. Some of these include fixed rules and game mechanics which in the basic sense determine the boundaries, affordances, and limitations of both the game and the player's activities, and difficult puzzles and obstacles or challenges. Another integral game structure is

¹³ Chris Crawford, *The Art of Computer Game Design* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 1984), p. 3.

contemporary design technologies that construct and remediate the various intricacies of the game's 2D or 3D world, including its visual aesthetics, environments, characters, and in-game assets to interact with and utilise. Most importantly, historical games are initiated by and operated symbiotically through the innumerable actions performed by both the game's AI or artificial intelligence and those undertaken and performed by us as the player, otherwise known as player agency.¹⁴ Therefore, video games are highly interactive, which enables its in-game content, activities, and other experiences to be read, seen, conversed with, and performed and lived out within its world. Yet this interactive quality is still mediated by the boundaries of the game itself, in that the technological capacity, mechanisms, and aims of the game influences or limits a player's agency in their capacity for meaning-making.

Video games then function as representational texts and simultaneously a digital form of structured play, creating an occasion and platform for a variety of histories to be expressed within historical gaming. Giving full coverage to the 'history of' historical games is a time-consuming project that would constitute a separate study. Instead, this chapter provides an overview on some of the more popular video game genres that have commonly represented history to showcase the popularisation and diversification of histories within gaming.¹⁵ The evolution of historical gaming has emerged within several main game genres, which are: Turn-based (TBS) and Real-time Strategy (RTS) games; First and Third-person Shooter games; and Action-adventure games.¹⁶

¹⁴ Alexander Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis, M.N: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. 2.

¹⁵ I would also like to refer to articles such as 'Video Games Set in the Middle Ages: Time Spans, Plots, and Genres' as works that provide an effective material/archival timeline of the release, genre, and type of historical game.

¹⁶ Another notable genre of mention that frequently engages in historical representation are 'hack-and-slash' games. This is a fighting style action genre which pits players into combat with one or many opponents, and with either or both firearm and melee-based weapon systems. While hack and slash action games were originally designed with a focus on combat and campaigns of violence with little to no narrative plot, elements of history are used as settings and

1.2.1 Turn-based and Real-time Strategy:

Turn-based strategy (TBS) is a video game style similar to traditional boardgames where each player has a turn to choose and perform a set of actions in a game environment (usually in the form of a map). In contrast, real-time strategy (RTS) allows players to make decisions and perform actions without taking turns. However, these styles of strategy video games also share a number of similarities, such as incorporating audio-visual elements as board game pieces that traverse maps of varying sizes.¹⁷ The output of similarities in both turn-based and real-time games also extends to their systematic functions. Namely, players are placed as extra-diegetic figures in creating both their story and the story of the game in a large-scale or global context, and the overall goal of eliminating or beating other human-controlled or AI factions within limited or unlimited time.

TBS and RTS games were the first wave of video games to construct and represent history, and they remain popular to this day. While Sid Meier's *Civilization* series and Bruce Shelley's *Age of Empires* series are examples that helped to establish history as a lucrative source for video game content since the 1990's, it was the *Total War* series that instigated the possibility of historical games becoming a genre in their own right.¹⁸ Game studio Creative Assembly has expanded their *Total War* series to cover diverse historical periods and settings, such as Europe during the Napoleonic period, Medieval Japan, and most recently a re-telling of the Trojan War. Combining both turn-based and real-time

characters in these games whilst still retaining their degree of highly intensive or hyperviolent action and combat activity. Popular examples, albeit with their own unique stylistic conventions in both game aesthetics and combat, are the *Dynasty Warriors* series, *Samurai Warriors* series, *For Honor*, and *Spartan: Total Warrior*.

¹⁷ Adam Chapman, *Digital Games as History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice* (Abingdon, and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 73-74.

¹⁸ Sid Meier, *Sid Meier's Civilization* (Game series) (Computer Game) (Hunt Valley, M.D: Firaxis Games, 1991-); Creative Assembly, *Total War* (Game series) (Horsham: Creative Assembly, 1999-); Shelley, *Age of Empires* (Game Series).

game systems, games of the *Total War* franchise contain a map of a particular continent(s), from which players conduct their decisions and activities in a series of turns between the human and AI players regarding the placement of battles, the movement of their armies and agents, management of income, and construction of period-related buildings. Concurrently, these games also contain a real-time battlefield system in which players engage in visually authentic and interactive battles where they tactically control one or several armies (each controlled army can comprise of up to twenty units), with their goal being to defeat the opponent's army(ies). Describing historical strategy games like the *Total War* series infers that these games allow players to experience history from a top-down view of the game world in a macro or global context, while demonstrating not only simulations but also discourses about the past.¹⁹

1.2.2 First-Person and Third-Person Shooter:

Another significant wave of historical games is found in first-person and third-person shooter games such as the *Call of Duty* and *Medal of Honor* game series, a type of action game which primarily uses firearm combat.²⁰ The periods of history covered in these types of games are typically major conflicts of the twentieth century, with a popular theme being World War Two. Contemporary artistic and cultural media works, particularly Steven Spielberg's film *Saving Private Ryan*, led WW2 shooter games to advance from being solely gamic activities of competitive play within a WW2 background to spaces for representing key historical events requiring new levels of authenticity.²¹ Indeed, after the release of *Saving Private Ryan*, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* was the first game to recreate the Omaha beach landing, depicting the Allied invasion of German-occupied France on

¹⁹ Chapman, p. 75.

²⁰ Infinity Ward, *Call of Duty* (Game series) (Woodland Hills, C.A: Infinity Ward, 2003-); Electronic Arts, *Medal of Honor* (Game series) (Redwood City, C.A: Electronic Arts, 1999-).

²¹ *Saving Private Ryan*, dir. by Steven Spielberg (Universal City, C.A: DreamWorks Pictures, 1998).

June 6th, 1944.²² The shift by game studios toward narrative-based historical shooter games coincided with game developers' capacity to produce more realism and visual authenticity. Visual fidelity led to more detail, for example, accurate army uniforms of Allied and Axis soldiers, authentic environments such as the different types of war-scarred battlefields, highly detailed weapons and weapon functions, and the wide array of tanks, artillery, planes, and military equipment that were active during the different stages of the war.

WW2 games in the first-person shooter genre laid the groundwork for contemplating how historical attributes and research methods, such as integrating specific historic events and visual details, could improve and increase players' experiences and understanding of the past on a visual, material, and performative level. Thus, the compatibility of systems and level design in shooting games to offer historical knowledge and detail on both firearm and explosion-based combat and battlefields in twentieth century wars enabled games to provide significant simulative historical experiences.

1.2.3 Action-Adventure:

Action-adventure video games are currently the broadest and most popular type of game genre representing history. Originating from the once separate genres of 'action games' and 'adventure games', action-adventure games combine these two forms of gaming to provide action and movement with challenges, puzzles, and other various tasks. As defined more explicitly by digital games scholar Clara Fernández-Vara, the core components of an action-adventure game are:

²² Vince Zampella and Jason West, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* (Computer game) (Tulsa, O.K: 2015 Inc., 2002).

story-driven ... [and] encourage exploration and puzzle solving and always have at least one player character ... [with interactive] object manipulation and spatial navigation. Their challenges usually appear in the form of concatenated puzzles, which are integrated in the fictional world.²³

This definition reinforces some of the core components of this genre, such as in-game actions and game challenges, but also highlights the player character's investment in and growth through storytelling. Having a complete story fulfils the narrative pre-requisite via means of communicating both macro and micro events in the game, events of which take place in the story as the player character interacts with the world.²⁴ In other words "story-driven games provide a narrative framing to the actions of the player, making him or her a participant in the events, or turn the discovery of the events the main aspect of gameplay."²⁵ However, both the unfolding story and the participant to initiate the unfolding requires not only a number of game obstacles and puzzles, but also the capacity to explore and interact with the intricacies of the game world usually based on some form of genre fiction(s) (e.g. horror, history, and science-fiction).²⁶ This open dynamism in exploring a vast world is supplemented with highly visualised graphics that create aesthetically pleasing and life-like portrayals of environments and landscapes, various inhabitants and their routines, objects, clothing, and buildings. This type of game also permits players to partake in a variety of activities to further supplement the player's immersive absorption into its game world. Activities can include, but are not limited to,

²³ Clara Fernández-Vara, 'The Tribulations of Adventure Games: Intergrating Story into Simulation through Performance' (unpublished Doctoral thesis, Georgia Institute of Technology, 2009), p. 13.

²⁴ Clara Fernández-Vara, 'Adventure', in *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies*, ed. by Bernard Perron & Mark J.P. Wolf (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 232-240, p. 233.

²⁵ Fernández-Vara, 'The Tribulations of Adventure Games: Intergrating Story into Simulation through Performance', pp. 46, 233.

²⁶ Fernández-Vara, 'Adventure', p. 234.

random encounters and straightforward battles, spending and/or selling at particular shops, and participating in fully encompassed narrative storylines.

This video game genre has been increasingly popular for historical game development in the last decade. Particularly, action-adventure historical games have expanded from linear and static game worlds (e.g. *Way of the Samurai*) to large open-worlds with both linear and non-linear gameplay (e.g. *Assassin's Creed* game series, *Red Dead Redemption*, and *Red Dead Redemption 2*), though linear action-adventure games continue to be produced.²⁷ Games with an open-world format are usually non-linear by allowing players to discover, explore, and roam freely or extensively for endless hours in a vast open-world and revel in its minutiae.²⁸ Meanwhile, players encounter and complete objectives, tasks, or storylines in multiple ways, although the variance of these different pathways mostly lead to a satisfying form of closure in regards to concluding the game's overarching story and conflict. To elaborate, certain game developers may design open-world games where its framed narratives and events are usually guided along a pre-determined plot through extensive scripting of the game world (including non-player character actions) toward single or multiple end points.²⁹ Concurrently, players can play open-endedly before, during, or after the conclusion of those plots.³⁰

²⁷ Kenji Nakanishi, *Way of the Samurai* (Console video game) (Tokyo: Spike, and Meguro, 2002); Rockstar San Diego, *Red Dead Redemption* (Console video game) (San Diego, C.A: Rockstar San Diego, 2010); Rockstar Studio, *Red Dead Redemption 2* (Console video game) (New York: Rockstar Studio, 2018); Ubisoft, *Assassin's Creed* (Game series).

²⁸ Andy Bossom and Ben Dunning, *Video Games: An Introduction to the Industry* (London, and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), p. 42.

²⁹ Sebastian Deterding and José Zagal, 'Definitions of "Role-Playing Games" ', in *Role-Playing Game Studies: Transmedia Foundations*, ed. by Sebastian Deterding & José Zagal (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 19-51, p. 39.

³⁰ Deterding and Zagal, p. 39.

1.3 Gameplay and Key Incentives:

Having established what a historical video game is allows me to introduce and explicate here, in my own words, what I mean by the term 'gameplay' and how it will be expressed or used throughout this thesis. My interest in historical gameplay had arisen out of several key incentives. One of these incentives was simply having a passion for immersing myself in and researching historical games that align with my deep interest and specialisation in the late Medieval and Early Modern periods in both Europe and Asia, particularly Central Europe and Japan. Another and more important incentive was my interest in the way players capture and disseminate their gameplay to audiences, leading to professionalisation of game playing. In the everyday online world, one of the most common forms of accessing video game releases, besides obtaining and playing the product, is viewing extensive recordings of a player's experiential gameplay activity. Thanks to advancements in digital game capture technology, gameplay can now exist outside of the original video game device by being digitally preserved, uploaded onto, and watched (even repeatedly) on online platforms, such as Youtube and Twitch, as recorded footage.

While gameplay is usually recorded and uploaded as a means to simply share one's favorite pastime, there are increasing number of players that have become online content creators using their own recorded gameplay footage. Some casual gamers have referenced and/or used footage of their gameplay for telling their stories and escapades. One such game reviewer Christopher Livingston gave his entire review on the Medieval game *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* solely on his personal revenge quest to find and reclaim

his missing boots when they mysteriously vanished while his character was asleep.³¹ As Livingston exclaimed “Story quests, knowledge, and relationships can all wait. I just want my boots back.”³² Others have developed videos that not only recount stories from these games, but also use their own recorded gameplay as supporting evidence to both inform and raise questions for their online viewers about the world, inhabitants, themes or mysteries, and many other facets of in-game knowledge regarding the games themselves. Content creator Vaatividya, for example, has a YouTube channel containing lore videos on the various subjects, topics, themes, and philosophies in video games developed by game studio FromSoftware. Most popular among them are the Medieval dark fantasy game series *Souls*, the Japanese historical fantasy game *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*, and of recent *Elden Ring*.³³

Various uses and approaches to gameplay prompted an interest in exploring the degree to which the mechanics and communicative styles of gameplay, and what they enable (in terms of action or interactivity), constitute a key mode for representing and experiencing history. My use of the term ‘gameplay’ then is inspired by digital game scholar Grant Tavinor’s insights into how we can explore and adopt a more in-depth examination of gameplay as an all-encompassing term for describing and understanding the multiple and simultaneous ways video games engage with their audiences.³⁴ Tavinor proposes that gameplay encompasses a lot more than just simply how one plays the game from A to B. As he elaborates:

³¹ Christopher Livingstone, 'Kingdom Come: Deliverance Stole my Boots, and I'm on a Violent Mission to get them back', *PCGamer* <<https://www.pcgamer.com/au/kingdom-come-deliverance-stole-my-boots-and-im-on-a-violent-mission-to-get-them-back/>> [accessed 13 September 2021].

³² Livingstone, para. 1.

³³ Hidetaka Miyazaki, *Souls* (Game series) (Tokyo: FromSoftware, 2011-2016);
Hidetaka Miyazaki, *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice* (Game series) (Tokyo: FromSoftware, 2019).

³⁴ Grant Tavinor, 'Definition of Videogames', *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 6 (2008)
<<https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/journal.php?search=true>>, para. 56.

What is gameplay? How are games played? ... if gameplay signifies how videogames are interacted with, then it includes the following of narratives, empathizing with characters, an aesthetic appreciation of graphical depictions, and a great deal else that does not seem typical of traditional forms of gaming, but derives from the partial nature of videogames as narratives, fictions, and graphical artifacts.³⁵

This definition of gameplay by Tavinor provided the overarching basis for constructing my own definition tailored toward historical gameplay, and the development of a conceptual and analytical multimodal framework dedicated to the research, analysis, and articulation of gameplay as representations of the past. I have appropriated Tavinor's definition because it is one of the first (and perhaps one of the only few) accounts that recognises possibilities of looking at gameplay as a medium that comprises both action (ludic) and communication (representation). His definition also acknowledges how action (play) constitutes one of the principal components of the medium alongside aesthetics, narrative, creativity, emotional and intellectual experiences, and fictional spaces. Together, they function to offer diverse experiences and challenge a single, fixed notion of "playing the game."³⁶ However, Tavinor's examination of gameplay is part of a wider philosophical study of the potential of video games as a distinct form of art through their "active exploratory aesthetics" within fictional game worlds.³⁷ In this frame, Tavinor engages with the ludic and representational intersections of gameplay by situating gameplay as "interactive fiction", which he describes as the player's interactions with the game in constructed fantasy or fictional worlds.³⁸ My research, by contrast, diverges from

³⁵ Grant Tavinor, *The Art of Videogames* (Hoboken, N.J: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), pp. 86-87.

³⁶ Tavinor, p. 87.

³⁷ Tavinor, p. 26.

³⁸ Tavinor, p. 26.

this direction of expressing gameplay as interactive fiction on several bases. It is too reductionist and does not account for the myriad of different modes and nuances of fiction taking place within a game world, especially in dealing with the nature of fiction in history (including historical games). In both historical games and other forms of history, historical fiction occupies a niche yet contentious space between its own rules of fictionality and as a close representation of a past reality of our own world rather than presenting a made-up fictional universe.

Expanding upon Tavinor's definition, I define gameplay then as encompassing the entirety of the animative game experience, including in simultaneity its ludic and procedural elements (e.g. rules and game mechanics, player agency, level design, obstacles) and the visual, performative, material, narrative, verbal, aural, and many other communicative modes and styles. The term 'experience' is defined here as the various ways a history and its meanings can be conveyed and experienced. This definition also affirms that gameplay, and not the game itself, is the actual medium by operating as both a semiotic form of communication, and concurrently as a rule-based or ludic system of recurring actions. Thus, historical gameplay representation is a multimodal form of communication, which is the simultaneous integration and interaction between its multiple literacies, content, and modes of communication and meaning-making processes of history. The status of an historical video game is not diminished, but rather its role or position is shifted from being the overarching medium to that of the object or vessel that contains multiple opportunities for engagement (through gameplay). Additionally, a gameplay sequence as a record of experiences with a game can be of any duration or length when used or recounted, ranging from as a single immediate moment, as sequences of several continuous events occurring one after the other, to entailing the entire playthrough of the game and its main story from beginning to end.

Figure 1.1 – Gameplay Medium (Exemplar)

An exemplar of the innerworkings of a gameplay experience within an individual moment.

Recorded in 'Eight Princes – Sima Ai ii'.³⁹



To outline an example of gameplay shown in Figure 1.1, the image shows a duel between the player's commander Sima Ai and a rival general Wan Buyi while their armies battle in the distance. Consider the many different communicative modes of this gameplay representation that converge within this single moment. The overarching narrative frame of this function is that this duel occurred during my first battle playing as one of the faction leaders and princes Sima Ai (c. 277 – 304) in the campaign *Eight Princes*, a DLC

³⁹ Ben Redder, 'Eight Princes – Siam Ai ii', in *Total War: Three Kingdoms – Eight Princes* (16 March 2020), min 4:29.

(downloadable content) expansion to the main historical game *Total War: Three Kingdoms*, which is set in a historical re-telling of the real-life civil war between rival princes known as ‘The War of the Eight princes’ (291 – 306).⁴⁰ Examples of visual elements displayed are the battle’s environment as a grassy plain mixed with woodland forests and a nearby river reflecting the climate of one of China’s southern commanderies Changsha, while Sima Ai and his opponent are dressed in authentic yet stylised armour reflecting the military fashion of third century China. Imagine the various sounds and dialogue accompanying this fight, such as the clanging spears when pressed together, the chanting shouts and battle cries of the soldiers engaged in prolonged fighting, and background battle music.

These modes are also interlayered with a number of ludic features. To name some, several usages of colour within the game are shown, such as visual markers or signs highlighted either with green or red representing the forces belonging to the player and the opponent respectively. Green and red is also used as some of the colours (others being blue, gold-yellow, and purple) to mark the different character classes of generals and their officers, strategists, and faction leaders, such as Sima Ai’s apparel displayed in green to designate his class as ‘champion’. Champions are individuals who are highly specialised in one-on-one duels, but are naturally vulnerable when stuck in prolonged fights with multiple soldiers. Finally, different forces are given monochromatic colours to represent the faction they fight for, with each faction given its own particular colour (this is separated from the colour of the faction leader, commander, and officers’ apparel due to their character class system). Another core mechanic displayed is the duel system, an interactive feature afforded to players when two or more generals on opposing sides desire to duel one another. If accepted, these opposing generals are automatically locked

⁴⁰ Janos Gaspar, *Total War: Three Kingdoms – Eight Princes* (Computer game) (Horsham: Creative Assembly, 2019).

into engagement, can be watched for amusement, and cannot be harmed by other generals and soldiers while dueling. If either the player or the opponent's general are defeated in the duel by being wounded or if the option 'Run Away' is selected, the player or the opponent's army receives a massive morale debuff which can turn the tide of battle by the soldiers losing the will to fight. These are just some of the many modes and their features of a gameplay representation occurring within a continuous stream of numerous gameplay moments and sequences occurring before, during, and after the duel and the immediate battle. In other words, a gameplay representation encompasses both this battle alone, and the many hours of this playthrough of the entire campaign.

This definition of gameplay I have developed aims to offer a more applicable account for digital game and historical game research. Given that this thesis deals with gameplay representing the past, a more extended historical version of this definition will be given later in Chapter 3. Despite my excitement in discovering what gameplay experiences can bring to historical game study, only a limited handful of works within academia (e.g. Tavinor) has explored, let alone considered, gameplay as a representational medium and the possibilities of this engagement. The majority of work available on gameplay by game developers, scholars, and the wider player community usually employ care-free or vacuous definitions of the term as simply a procedural component of the game system regarding how you play, interact, and progress through the game from start to finish. Examples of this current trend include gameplay being defined as the "interactive involvement typically associated with videogames, that is, the activities that occur when one plays a videogame", gameplay as the "formalized interaction that occurs when players follow the rules of a game and experience its system through play", and "the plot

and the way the game is played, as distinct from the graphics and sound effects.”⁴¹ Digital game scholars Lasse J. Larsen and Bo K. Walther also explicate this sentiment, highlighting that “gameplay is likely one of the most widely used terms in the computer games industry and the study of games ... [but] Rarely, though, is the term defined.”⁴² They frequently cite as evidence various scholars (e.g. Jesse Schell, Scott Rogers, and Tracey Fullerton), as well as game designers like Rob Pardo from Blizzard Entertainment, who have expressed the term in ambiguous or non-specific gestures such as gameplay being simply “fun” and “hooks them [players]”, and a means of “playing the game.”⁴³ This recurring coverage and usage of gameplay as a ludic constituent of the game system is addressed further in Chapter 2 and its literature review.

1.4 Contextual Fields and Key Contributions:

Before outlining the aims and arguments of this thesis and the possible contributions to knowledge that gameplay can bring to the study of history and historical games, it is first important to provide an introductory overview of the scholarly fields that study video games and where this thesis is situated in relation to existing work. Key disciplines and relevant fields of research related to this study are ‘digital game studies’, ‘historical game studies’, and ‘history’. Providing a broad introduction to these respective fields aims to signal the interdisciplinary nature of this history thesis which combines knowledge, research, and methods from each of the disciplinary areas listed. Although this research into gameplay primarily works with and contributes to the fields of history and historical

⁴¹ Eric Zimmerman and Katie Salen, *Rules of Play - Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge, M.A: MIT Press, 2004), p. 3;

Concise Oxford English Dictionary: Luxury Edition, 12th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 584; Tavinor, p. 86.

⁴² Lasse J. Larsen and Bo Kampmann Walther, 'The Ontology of Gameplay: Toward a New Theory', *Games and Culture*, 15.6 (2020), 609-631, p. 612.

⁴³ Larsen and Walther, pp. 612.

game studies, it is still necessary to highlight the relevance of digital game studies which has, in part, enabled historical game studies to both establish and flourish as a discipline, particularly as some of the first works on historical games originated in digital game studies. Examples of these works within digital game studies include 'Controversies: Historicising the Computer Game' by Esther MacCallum-Stewart and Justine Parsler, Manuel Martínez's 'Playing with History's Otherness. A Framework for Exploring Historical Games', and Tara J. Coplestone's 'But that's not Accurate: The Differing Perceptions of Accuracy in Cultural-heritage Videogames between Creators, Consumers and Critics'.⁴⁴

1.4.1 Digital Game Studies:

Digital game studies is one of the relevant fields applied in this thesis, but is also an important branch from the older and wider 'game studies' comprising the "academic ... interdisciplinary field of learning, which focuses on games, playing, and related phenomena", with subjects covering digital, board, and table-top games as well as LARP (Live Action Role-Play) and games culture.⁴⁵ As a continuation of game studies (which has largely concerned with games as a new field of inquiry, particularly in non-digital and/or traditional games), digital game studies continues to explore some of the larger and ongoing questions and issues explored by game studies. One of the wider concerns explored within this field is the 'narratology vs ludology' debate.⁴⁶ This debate divided

⁴⁴ Esther MacCallum-Stewart and Justin Parsler, 'Controversies: Historicising the Computer Game', in *DiGRA '07 - Proceedings of the 2007 DiGRA* (Tokyo: DiGRA, 2007);

Manuel Martínez, 'Playing with History's Otherness: A Framework for Exploring Historical Games', in *DiGRA/FDG '16 – Proceedings of the 2016 Playing With History Workshop* (Dundee, Scotland: DiGRA, 2016);

Tara J. Coplestone, 'But that's not Accurate: The Differing Perceptions of Accuracy in Cultural-heritage Videogames between Creators, Consumers and Critics', *Rethinking History*, 21.3 (2017), 415-438.

⁴⁵ Frans Mäyra, *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture* (London, and Thousand Oaks, C.A: SAGE Publications, 2008), p. 11.

⁴⁶ Chris Bateman, *Imaginary Games* (Winchester: John Hunt Publishing, 2011), p. 13.

opinions as to whether video games should be understood and studied as another form of narrative text (digital games are the recent trend or form of storytelling and thus share narratological characteristics with films, books, and role-play) via the use of various narrative theories (narratology), or should games be studied as to what they primarily are – games, including its formal systems and structured interactive play (ludology).⁴⁷ Under this framework, the main discipline of history would be considered as representative of the narratology group. Another widely engaged discourse has been the relationship of games to play, with one of several foundational texts for digital game study being French philosopher Roger Caillois' book *Man, Play, and Games*. Caillois' book went beyond an analysis of play in its abstract or formal context by looking at the existence of games within a materialism context. Caillois argued that games can consist of some or many elements of play by separating games into four main categories: Agôn (competition of a certain skill with set rules like volleyball and soccer), Alea (a game of chance or luck without control over outcome such as gambling), Mimicry (a game of role-play or make-believe), and Ilinx (a game of temporary disorientation of perception in pursuit of vertigo).⁴⁸

However, digital game studies is a relatively young yet distinct interdisciplinary field (established in the year 2000) containing an extensive array of theoretical paradigms and topics that explore the different interrelated layers of a video game text, from its ludic and narrative mechanisms and engagements to its cultural impact in popular culture and

⁴⁷ Bateman, p. 13. Narratology is concerned with understanding digital games as stories or narrative texts, and more broadly game experiences conveyed within the game's audio-visual and narrative structures. Ludology in contrast argues for and examines the idea that it is game systems and its mechanisms, such as rules, level design, and afforded actions within the game, that generate meaning because to these scholars games are not simply watched but played. While narratives are still part of the game, they are seen by ludologists as incidental to the formal system and mechanisms of the game structure.

⁴⁸ Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. by Meyer Barash (New York: Free Press, 1961), p. 54. Examples of Ilinx games are horseback riding, riding on a roller-coaster or stomping on a sandcastle.

the wider player community.⁴⁹ The success of this field's development was partly attributed by the immediate establishment of the online journal *Game Studies* launched in 2001, and the establishment of one of the main international conference organizations DiGRA (Digital Games Research Association) in 2003.⁵⁰ One of this field's core areas of research has been centered on defining what a video game is while providing overarching principles or characteristics that video games universally share (e.g. Jesper Juul, and Johansen Quijano).⁵¹ Jesper Juul's article 'The Game, the Player, the World: Looking for a Heart of Gameness' for instance explored the relationship of video games in general to that of computers (as a recent form of gamic activity) by highlighting that video games and the act of playing consist of six main features. These main features Juul identified include video games containing rules, require player effort, and have variable quantifiable outcomes with positive and negative values.⁵² This ludological approach also extended to, and has been supplemented by, studies on the nature of player agency, namely how "players [through their agency] engage with the text at different levels: how players understand the rules, and follow or break them, how players create goals for themselves, [and] how they communicate with each other."⁵³ The topic of player agency has been fervently explored in texts by digital game scholars such as Janet Murray and Espen Aarseth.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Johannes Fromme and Alexander Unger, 'Computer Games and Digital Games Culture: An Introduction', in *Computer Games and New Media Cultures: A Handbook of Digital Games Studies*, ed. by Johannes Fromme & Alexander Unger (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2012), 1-30, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Fromme and Unger, p. 2.

⁵¹ Jesper Juul, 'The Game, the Player, the World: Looking for a Heart of Gameness', in *DiGRA '03 - Proceedings of the 2003 DiGRA International Conference: Level Up*, ed. by Marinka Copier and Joost Raessens (Utrecht: DiGRA, 2003), pp. 30-45;

Johansen Quijano, *The Composition of Video Games: Narrative, Aesthetics, Rhetoric and Play* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland Inc. Publishers, 2019).

⁵² Juul, p. 34.

⁵³ Clara Fernández-Vara, *Introduction to Game Analysis* (Abingdon, and New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 7.

⁵⁴ Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore, M.D: John Hopkins University Press, 1997);

Janet H. Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, 2nd edn (London, and Cambridge, M.A: MIT Press, 2017). The term ergodic is based on Aarseth's conjugation of the Greek words *ergon*

Other digital game scholars have undertaken a more specific focus within their research into a video game's audio-visual and narrative potential integrated with its core ludic properties, as encountered in a variety of game areas covering genre, environmental storytelling, and game aesthetics. Notable scholars in this domain include Kevin Schut, Clara Fernández-Vara, and Jan-Noël Thon.⁵⁵ The interrelationship between game systems, rules, and play has also been increasingly examined in their role as communicators of socio-cultural, historical, and contemporary ideas, events, and issues. Ian Bogost is a notable scholar in this area of digital media, and his widely regarded text *Persuasive Games* proposes the theory of the rhetorical function of video games, commonly known as 'procedural rhetoric'.⁵⁶ Procedural rhetoric contemplates how games as a mode convey arguments effectively via computational processes, particularly that of rule-based or game mechanic representations and interactions.⁵⁷ Bogost asserts that video games that successfully utilise modes of procedural rhetoric have the capacity to disrupt and change players' attitudes and beliefs about the world.⁵⁸

1.4.2 Historical Game Studies:

The increasing number of historical game releases alongside the growing recognition and scholarship on historical games inspired a number of historians to establish historical video games as a new yet currently emergent field of history. In the last several years,

meaning work and *hodos* meaning path, with cybertext in this book being a sub-category of his concept of ergodic literature.

⁵⁵ Kevin Schut, 'Technology tells a Tale: Digital Games and Narrative', in *DiGRA '03 - Proceedings of the 2003 DiGRA International Conference: Level Up* (Utrecht: DiGRA, 2003);

Clara Fernández-Vara, 'Game Spaces Speak Volumes: Indexical Storytelling', in *Proceedings of DiGRA 2011 Conference: Think Design Play* (Hilversum: DiGRA, 2011);

Jan-Noël Thon, *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture* (Lincoln, N.E: University of Nebraska Press, 2016).

⁵⁶ Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (Cambridge, M.A: The MIT Press, 2007).

⁵⁷ Bogost, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁸ Bogost, p. ix. Rhetoric is procedural in digital media texts because the code(s) written by a programmer creates rules that generate a type of representation.

this field has been defined formally as ‘historical game studies’ by video game historians Anna Foka, Adam Chapman, and Johnathan Westin in their article ‘Introduction: What is Historical Game Studies’.⁵⁹ Some of the early and groundbreaking works that helped to develop this field are *Digital Games As History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice* and the edited collection *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*.⁶⁰ Interestingly, historical game studies appears to currently occupy an intersection between being a sub-field of both the larger disciplines history and digital game studies, and simultaneously operating as a main field in its own right. Comprising a range of disciplines, including history, digital games, cultural-heritage, archaeology, and education, historical game studies aims to examine and understand the different ways history has been represented through video games, and on a broader level the various discourses of historical gaming.⁶¹ In a more extensive fashion, Foka, Chapman, and Westin consider historical game studies as the study of games that:

represent the past or relate to discourses about it, the potential applications of such games to different domains of activity and knowledge, and the practices, motivations, and interpretations of players of these games and other stakeholders involved in their production or consumption.⁶²

⁵⁹ Adam Chapman, Anna Foka, and Johnathan Westin, ‘Introduction: What is Historical Game Studies’, *Rethinking History*, 21.3 (2016), 358-371, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Matthew W. Kapell and Andrew B.R. Elliott, eds., *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013);

Chapman, *Digital Games as History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice*.

⁶¹ Historical game studies concerning with the role of history represented in games also contains certain intersections or comparisons with its older sister field ‘game history’ which concerns instead with the history of games. That is looking at areas such as the history of game hardware and operative devices like consoles and arcade machines, and the history of game making or development.

⁶² Chapman, Foka and Westin, p. 5.

This quote addresses the foundational basis of how historical game studies brings together or is concerned with the way history is represented and played in gaming. Despite this foundation, it is also quite clear that being a nascent field historical game studies is also a divergent and expanding practice, in part due to comprising of a series of “distinct but overlapping areas of interest and strands of investigation.”⁶³ To name a few of these strands, a number of works have examined the various formal constituents or structures and limitations of video games that represent history, or in simpler terms how historical games work (e.g. Adam Chapman, Andrew Elliott, and William Urrichio). Another domain of historical game study that looks at the representations and discourses in individual historical games have received critique, particularly with a specific focus on “questions regarding the historical ‘accuracy’ and/or ‘authenticity’ of these games.”⁶⁴ For example, Adrienne Shaw’s analysis of *Assassin’s Creed III*’s depiction of the American War of Independence (1775 – 1783) has criticised how this game continues to adhere to the same formula applied in older media works. Specifically, presenting a nationalistic and epic yet linear re-telling of the war as that of the heroic and good colonial American patriots versus the military forces of the royal and authoritarian British empire.⁶⁵ This narrative of the American Revolution “told in much of American popular culture” overshadows certain moments in *Assassin’s Creed III* that depict the existence of slavery, as well as the life and struggles of the Mohawk Native American tribe situated on a Mohawk Valley region (in the modern day state of New York) and their conflicting relationships with both the patriots and British forces during the war.⁶⁶ Occasionally,

⁶³ Chapman, Foka and Westin, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Christian Rollinger, 'Playing with the Ancient World: An Introduction to Classical Antiquity in Video Games', in *Classical Antiquity in Video Games: Playing with the Ancient World*, ed. by Christian Rollinger (London, and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 1-18, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Adrienne Shaw, 'The Tyranny of Realism: Historical Accuracy and Politics of Representation in *Assassin’s Creed III*', *Loading*, 9.14 (2015), 4-24.

⁶⁶ Alex Hutchinson, *Assassin’s Creed III* (Computer and console video game) (Montreal: Ubisoft Montreal, 2012); Shaw, p. 19. This issue emerged despite game studio Ubisoft Montreal working hard to construct an authentic representation of Native American history by having on their team several Native American consultants, such as

edited collections have been published that examine and contribute discussions on a series of historical games pertaining to a particular period of history and culture(s), such as the recent collection *Classical Antiquity in Video Games: Playing with the Ancient World*.⁶⁷ Others like Kevin Kee, Jeremiah McCall, and Karen Schrier have explored the didactic applications and limitations of historical games used in school education.⁶⁸ Some of these aspects include the inherent problems of treating historical games in school education as supplementary tools or aids instead of as critical historical texts for analysis and discursive debate, and implementing strategies to encourage and develop student participation in and learning through interaction and inquiry with historical games.

1.4.2.1 Medievalism Studies:

While historical games have become a major area of study in both digital and historical game studies, Medieval video games by extension have also become a growing area of study within Medievalism studies.⁶⁹ Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl outline Medievalism as the “art, literature, scholarship, avocational pastimes, and sundry forms of entertainment and culture that turn to the Middle Ages for their subject matter or inspiration.”⁷⁰ As a field, Medievalism studies examine scholarly or popular cultural forms that produce or re-imagine the Middle Ages in the post-Medieval era by drawing

cultural liaison of Mohawk/Kahnawake language and those proficient in Kanien’kehá:ka culture, to ensure sensitivity to indigenous perspectives of this history.

⁶⁷ Rollinger, ed., *Classical Antiquity in Video Games: Playing with the Ancient World*.

⁶⁸ Kevin Kee, ed., *Pastplay: Teaching and Learning History with Technology* (Ann Arbor, M.C: University of Michigan Press, 2014);

Jeremiah McCall, *Gaming the Past: Using Video Games to Teach Secondary Schools* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011);

Karen Schrier, 'Designing Digital Games to Teach History', in *Learning, Education, and Games: Volume 1: Curricular and Design Considerations* ed. by Karen Schrier, 3 vols (Pittsburgh, P.A: ETC Press, 2014), I, 73-91.

⁶⁹ ‘Medievalism studies’ should not be confused with ‘Medieval studies’, which is the field dedicated to analysing the actual history of the Middle Ages, including the gathering, interpreting, and archiving of Medieval artefacts, art, and literary works.

⁷⁰ Tison Pugh and Angela J. Weisl, *Medievalisms: Making the Past in the Present* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 1. For more information about Medievalism in other fields, see Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl’s *Medievalisms*, David Matthews’ *Medievalism: A Critical History*, and Louise D’Arcen’s *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*.

from, adapting, or re-contextualising anything pertaining to the Medieval in a contemporary context. The study of digital games in Medievalism studies has produced insightful works exploring the relationship between gaming and representations of the Medieval, covering Medieval games in a range of contexts or genres such as history, high-fantasy, and Arthurian legends. Major studies that have emerged in this area of research are the edited collections *Digital Gaming Re-imagines the Middle Ages* by Daniel T. Kline (2014) and *Neomedievalism in the Media: Essays on Film, Television, and Electronic Games* by Carol L. Robinson and Pamela Clements (2012), volume 16 of the collection *Medievalism in Technology Old and New* (2008), and Ben Redder's chapter 'Playing in a Virtual Medieval World: Video Game Adaptations of England through Role-Play'.⁷¹

1.4.3 History (Representation):

This doctoral study on historical gameplay is situated under one of this discipline's most significant areas – the historiography of representation (the theoretical discourse and writing on the nature of history through representation). Historians Edward Carr, Hayden White, Alun Munslow, Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, and Robert A. Rosenstone are some of the many scholars that have contributed extensively to this area.⁷²

⁷¹ Daniel T. Kline, ed., *Digital Gaming Re-imagines the Middle Ages* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014);

Carol L. Robinson and Pamela Clements, eds., *Neomedievalism in the Media: Essays on Film, Television, and Electronic Games* (Lewiston, N.Y: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2012);

Karl Fulgelso and Carol Robinson, eds., *Studies in Medievalism XVI: Medievalism in Technology Old and New*, 30 vols (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), XVI.

Ben Redder, 'Playing in a Virtual Medieval World: Video Game Adaptations of England through role-play', in *From Medievalism to Early Modernism to Early Modernism: Adapting the English Past*, ed. by Marina Gerzić & Aidan Norrie (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 137-153.

⁷² Edward Carr, *What is History?* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1961);

Hayden White, *MetaHistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore, M.D: Johns Hopkins University, 1973);

Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative, Discourse, and Historical Representation* (London, and Baltimore, M.D: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987);

Alun Munslow, *Narrative and History* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007);

Alun Munslow, *A History of History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012);

Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History*, 10th edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015);

In history, the term ‘representation’ refers to the ways in which the past can be represented or conveyed to us through various modes of construction, communication, and now in the case of video games experience by composing of two fundamental components – ‘form’ and ‘content’. Form designates the “structural design of the historical text in question” (e.g. novel, film, video game) by its formal stylistic conventions and narrative structures, while content is the “exterior real-world events, people, actions, processes, and other entities to which references are made” – essentially the subject matter of a history or histories.⁷³ The combination of these two components enables a representation to contain and express a historical narrative presented by its author, and more broadly an account set in the past. Concurrently, epistemological practices or methods of history are still fervently applied in constructing a representation, including the “finding ... or location of the empirical traces [historical evidence] of the past” and “the historian’s inference as to the most likely explanation of the meaning of [that historical evidence].”⁷⁴ In considering these components, the ways historians engage with the “past-as-history” as opposed to “history-as-the-past” is revealed as the principal function.⁷⁵ Therefore, historical representations, including those in historical games, are not mirror images or exact duplications of the past, but are closely approximated constructions based on information or evidence determined and shaped via particular form(s) of expression, whether be it in words, moving imagery, and/or performances.⁷⁶ In other words, representation is not the “‘the thing in itself’ but a ‘stand-in’ for it.”⁷⁷

Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 3rd edn (Abingdon, and New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁷³ Alun Munslow, *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies* (London, and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 100.

⁷⁴ Alun Munslow, 'Fiction, Imagination and the Fictive: The Literary Aesthetics of Historiography', in *The Fiction of History*, ed. by Alexander Lyon Macfie (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 31-40, p. 32.

⁷⁵ Munslow, p. 135.

⁷⁶ Chris Lorenz, 'History: Forms of Presentation, Discourses, and Functions', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. by Neil J. Smelser & Paul B. Baltes, 26 vols, (Amsterdam: Elsevier Ltd., 2001), X, p. 6835.

⁷⁷ Munslow, *Narrative and History*, p. 143.

As historical games are not written histories or history constructed in written form, their relationship to historiography does not relate to, in historian Hayden White's terms, the "representation of history through verbal images and written discourse."⁷⁸ Chapman within historical games studies has labelled historical games belonging to what he calls "historioludicity", which is the representation of history and our thought about it not only through visual images and written texts but more importantly through "rules and opportunities for action, and thus ludic discourse."⁷⁹ However, this label too is insufficient by heavily subscribing the representation of the past in historical games as leaning toward a ludology-centric discourse. For the moment, I place instead 'multimodal historiography' as an alternative to both embody and encompass the complexity of historical games, and more importantly their gameplay medium, as a composition of multiple communicative modes, engagements, and knowledge expressions supported by digital and non-digital methods in research and game design. This theme will gain prominence over the course of this thesis.

1.5 Aims and Arguments:

This thesis aims to examine and illustrate how gameplay, as the primary medium of interaction and expression within a game world, constructs and provides ways to experience history within historical video games as opposed to the current approach of examining history through the video game form itself, and what kind of histories and their discourses are being represented or experienced through gameplay. The main focus of this study is to examine and discern if, how, and at what level historical representations are being communicated and understood as histories by their historicization of the

⁷⁸ Hayden White, 'Historiography and Historiophoty', *The American Historical Review*, 93.5 (1988), 1193-1199, p. 1193.

⁷⁹ Chapman, p. 22.

game's rules and mechanics, level design, challenges, and many other procedural constituents. The framework of this entire examination then consists of four key arguments which this thesis aims to address and demonstrate in exploring historical gameplay. Firstly, gameplay is a viable and critical historical medium of and method for representing and experiencing the past because it is an advanced and multimodal language of history. Secondly, because of its multimodal nature and capacity to converge both traditional and digital historical sources and methods, gameplay can contribute new, critical, and scholarly-like ways of expressing and disseminating either or both new and existing historical knowledge that are constructed, animated, and experienced within the historical game text. More broadly, this contribution coincides with and extends to the recent phenomena of gameplay providing their own historiographies in the form of 'gameplay histories' contributing scholarship specifically on the historical period and topics represented in the game. Thirdly, multimodal gameplay is the prime output that both consists of and encourages the development of an interplay between different modalities of histories within gameplay. Each of these modalities contain their own extensive engagements to and styles of history, ranging from micro, regional and/or macro histories to those centering on gameplay remediations of mythology, folklore, and past societal beliefs. Lastly, different responses and game design approaches to history by game developer studios elicit different types of gameplay experiences.

Establishing the study of gameplay in alignment with these arguments signifies and explores how different types of historical gameplay representation allows better understanding as to how these games' respective histories are vaguely or deeply represented and experienced, as well as their intersections with the different domains or traditions of history. The overall arc that my research findings hope to achieve is the commencement of advancing historical gameplay as a form of multimodal

historiography in signaling a new and recent phase of researching, representing, and documenting the past. The outline of the aims and arguments described above then can be summarised as the goals of this thesis for developing and refining my research questions which are given at the end of Chapter 2.

1.5.1 Brief Introduction to Research Methodologies:

This research into historical gameplay is distinct in two ways. One, conducting empirical research centered on accumulating and using actual recorded gameplay cross-examined with written historical sources, undertaking interviews with game developers, and travelling to historical sites for fieldwork as key sources of historical evidence. And two, its contextual focus on scholars being a particular type of player.

The empirical undertaking of this doctoral research consisted of an employment of several historical methodologies in gathering and cross-examining a variety of historical data or sources of evidence from analysis of two historical games based in the late Medieval period. The games explored in this thesis as case studies are *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (2018) and *A Plague Tale: Innocence* (2019).⁸⁰ Both these historical games represent the earliest stages of games expanding from representational to historiographical engagements, in this case eliciting contributions to certain areas of scholarship on the late Medieval period. The methodologies entailed extensive sources of written historical literature, interviews with a total of four developers working in one of the game studios responsible for producing the games, fieldwork in about a dozen historical sites, and the production and subsequent analysis of 85 hours of my own

⁸⁰ Dan Vávra, *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (Computer and console video game) (Prague: Warhorse Studios, 2018); David Dedeine and Kevin Choteau, *A Plague Tale: Innocence* (Console video game) (Bordeaux, Asobo Studio, 2019).

recorded gameplay footage. The incorporation of in-person interviews and fieldwork were both exciting ventures, and played an instrumental role by both enhancing my analysis, articulation, and corroboration of the gameplay historical data from *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* and *A Plague Tale: Innocence*, and tracking the development of these historical games through several stages rather than focusing solely on their gameplay. A more extensive outline of the research framework for this study is covered in Chapter 4.

Although this thesis primarily investigates historical gameplay as a medium of representation and source of multimodal historiography, approaching this study as a historian highlights my secondary research interest into how critical historical play can be used by scholars as a primary source of evidence for the production and dissemination of academic scholarship. From the early stages of this research, there was a genuine desire to combine and corroborate recorded gameplay with older or traditional historical sources in order to illustrate gameplay as an effective, reliable, and contributory source of evidence in supporting historical research. However, there is a limited amount of empirical work researching, critiquing, and/or discovering new historical knowledge and findings from historical games by scholars of history operating as principal players, and including recorded gameplay as one of their main methods and sources of historical evidence. Empirical practices from a scholar-player context have started to appear in a couple of works within the last few years, such as video game historian Ylva Grufstedt's thesis (2020) which interviewed game developers and beta testers working for Paradox Development Studio in exploring two of the studio's historical games produced (*Europa Universalis IV* and *Hearts of Iron IV*), but this kind of undertaking is still a rare engagement.⁸¹

⁸¹ Ylva Grufstedt, 'Counterfactual History and Game Design Practice in Digital Strategy Games' (unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of Helsinki, 2020).

1.6 Key Contributions and Potential Interests:

This thesis hopes to make a contribution to knowledge in the area of ‘representation’ (History and Historical Game Studies), while also contributing to future historical ‘game design’ practices, and its impact in terms of the potential application of such games in educational contexts.

1.6.1 Representation Scholarship (History):

In addition to establishing how gameplay constitutes a primary representational device in video games, this doctoral research into gameplay as the medium of history primarily focuses on and contributes findings to the historiography of representation. The subject of representation constitutes the main body of my literature review on gameplay (see Chapter 2). The aim is to demonstrate the scholarly contributions made by particular game titles that present Medieval historiographies (periods, events, and/or discourses represented or referenced in these games). Section 4.2, in part, presents a preliminary outline of historiographical contributions to Medieval history in gaming.

Ongoing debates around the nature of history and historical representation (historiography) have been developed across several influential ways of thinking and scholarship. Since the early nineteenth century, a number of historians explored and forwarded the idea that to write the past and claim that what one wrote about the past is a truthful objective representation was defined on its correspondence to the author’s explanation of the facts contained in surviving historical records from archives and artefacts.⁸² This area of study was engaged and advanced by historians from the empirical

⁸² Green and Troup, pp. 4-6.

tradition, such as Leopold von Ranke and Geoffrey Elton, who based their arguments on a number of principles. Notably, making epistemological claims to truth, the gathering and analysis of evidence or the historical sources, and engaging in objective or factual interpretations that are free from subjective bias, all of which are assembled and conveyed by the given or corresponding narrative based on the content presented.⁸³ Simply put, these historians claim that history and the past are identical, as described by Von Ranke's famous phrase "wie es eigentlich gewesen [German]" (to show what actually happened), through their engagement with history as an empirical discipline.⁸⁴

This earliest area of scholarship on historiography paved the way to the constructionist trends of historical study which began around the mid-twentieth century, with historians Edward Carr, Fernand Braudel, and Edward P. Thompson being some of the earliest forerunners of this trend. In this branch of historical thought, historians argue that data and facts alone from empirical methodologies is not enough to constitute a history. It must also require extensive analysis, employment of a particular conceptual or social theory, and an historian's inferences and judgments from these sources in order to explain the most likely true meaning or account of that past.⁸⁵ This form of history implies that evidence itself is not the same as fact, as facts only become evidence based upon its relationship to the specified historical question(s). This trend of history also encouraged historians to construct their accounts structured by general patterns and causal effects based on the wider economic, sociological, political, anthropological, and other trends and movements that broadly shaped the societies, nations, conflicts, and social systems

⁸³ Green and Troup, pp. 3-5.

⁸⁴ Cited in Green and Troup, p. 2. In the former, epistemology concerns with the process of "knowledge acquisition ... a more or less complex process of the discovery of 'the evidence' that refer to the content of past events" (Munslow, 2015, p. 32). In the latter, ontology denotes the nature of history as "produced by the historian and which is an act of authorship through which historians represent their knowledge of the past" (Munslow, p. 32).

⁸⁵ John P. E. Harper-Scott, *The Event of Music History* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2021), pp. 47-48.

throughout history, rather than solely fixating their studies on an individual or minute element of history (e.g. person or figure, event, and written document or source).⁸⁶ The establishment of the Marxist and Annales schools of history are some of the major outcomes and contributors in this area of history scholarship.⁸⁷ History under this view can be thought of here as a form of social science, but still concerned with providing a closely verified version of and causal relationship between historical events in the past.

In recent decades, important developments and circulation of ideas on history and representation within post-empirical movements of history, such as post-modernism, post-structuralism, deconstructionism, narrativism, and cultural studies, were developed by historians such as Hayden White, Alun Munslow, Keith Jenkins, and Robert A. Rosenstone. These historians challenged the essentialist views of both their predecessors and contemporaries from the empirical and constructionist traditions that history is a form of science that can closely, if not wholly, discover, re-construct, and explain the past accurately, starting with the simple premise that history is a product of the present and not the past.⁸⁸ While still acknowledging the role and importance history has in its epistemological and ontological functions, they argued that this common-sense understanding of the past fails to recognise the distinction between 'history' and the 'past'. Because the actual past (whatever it may have been) no longer exists, only through history can the past be substituted, history that is as the narrative authored by the historian.⁸⁹ The consensus among these like-minded scholars then is that all

⁸⁶ Eugen Zelenák, 'Modifying Alun Munslow's Classification of Approaches to History', *Rethinking History*, 15.4 (2011), 523-537, p. 526.

⁸⁷ Mark Donnelly and Claire Norton, *Doing History*, 2nd edn (Abingdon, and New York: Routledge, 2021), p. 43.

⁸⁸ Keith Jenkins, "Once Upon a Time": On History', in *At the Limits of History: Essays on Theory and Practice*, ed. by Keith Jenkins (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 208-229, p. 207; Munslow, p. 137.

⁸⁹ Munslow, 'Fiction, Imagination and the Fictive: The Literary Aesthetics of Historizing', pp. 32-33; Munslow, *Narrative and History*, pp. 6, 108.

epistemologies and its claims to historical truth and objectivity within an historian's production of history is essentially circumscribed by language (understood in their broad sense of the term as including formal structures, morality, aesthetics, power, imagination, and narrative).⁹⁰ By extension, because of the historian's contemporary background, world-view or ideology, and their authorial narrative choices, historical representation also attains "an inescapable ethical and political and personal dimension[s]."⁹¹

The purpose of covering some of these influential forms of history is not for their use as a framework for this study into historical gameplay. Instead, it is to demonstrate the history of the field and its influential scholars, and to highlight this thesis' gameplay study, and more generally historical game studies, as more-or-less a continuation of this wider ongoing discussion. Moreover, while these different ways of historical thinking were separated in this discussion for the sake of clarifying their principles and approaches to history, in actuality they interlap with one another rather than being mutually exclusive or fixed, with most historians occupying a combination of these approaches. Nonetheless, in summary, these discourses on the representation of history by historians past and present can be broken down broadly into several key arguments or concerns. Is history a science or a form of (communicative) art? Is history the realm of the materially real or an imaginative narrative? And is history a true real account of the past or a work of fiction? This research into historical gameplay, however, seeks to broadly engage in and contribute to these spectrums in a different and less restrictively binary way by looking more at what are the intersections between these different ways of approaches that make up a representation of a history. For instance, a gameplay

⁹⁰ Amir Skodo, 'Hayden White: The Historical Imagination', *European Review of History: Revue Europeenne d'histoire*, 19.3 (2012), 485-487, p. 485.

⁹¹ Skodo, p. 486.

discourse would not inquire as to whether ‘history is fiction or not’, but could instead ask ‘to what extent or degree is fiction in history being employed’. A possible finding within gameplay study could be the discovery of certain kinds of historical fictions or imaginations that are not merely employed as formalist conventions or techniques of an historian in imagining and narrating their history, but also operate as another empirical practice or a form of epistemology by enhancing historical research and scholarship. Likewise, a gameplay lens could uncover possible extensions of empirical reconstructions of history to that of game studios’ extensive research into and accurate reconstructions of folkloric, mythological, and religious entities, creatures, beliefs, and/or worlds imagined or remediated by past individuals and societies.

Potential contributions to these kinds of questions and discoveries within a gameplay medium frame could likely unveil or suggest an important theory – that the nature of history and historical representation is and has always been, and should be engaged more as, a multimodal enterprise. The term ‘multimodal’ will be unpacked later in this thesis. For now, I refer to it here as being that history is an interconnected hybridity and assemblage or a combination of multiple traditions (e.g. empiricism, structuralism, Marxism, biography, indigenous history, post-modernism) with their associated methodologies, concepts, and meaning-making incentives, modes of expression (e.g. visual, narrative, performative), and of historical sources (for example written records and archaeological and heritage sites) both digital and traditional. I am aware that the amount of research and scale of complexity required to untangle the nature and disciplinary enterprise of history as multimodal is impossible for this thesis alone to fully address. Nevertheless, what this thesis and its contribution to historical gameplay research provides is the first step in acknowledging the validity of gamic representations of the past. Notably, it also seeks to establish how historical gameplay functions and

operates as multimodal texts. Texts that communicate in new and distinct ways to exhibit and allow players to experience historical scholarship. To unearth gameplay modes of historical scholarship also required methods of recording, analysing, and discussing gameplay experiences as a mode of researching and examining historical knowledge, as well as supplementing and cross-examining these findings with traditional historical sources.

This endeavor constitutes one of the key aims of this thesis – the construction of a multimodal historiography via gameplay (as a mode of representation). However, it can be argued that the presence and development of multimodal historiography in video games, without being directly labelled, is already observed by a small number of historians. For instance, historian Dawn Spring is the earliest scholar known to tease out the possibilities of game studios adopting a “Gamic Mode of History” in the manner in which they develop digital games that “present original historical scholarship and ... original research ... transforming readers, learners, and viewers into players interacting with history.”⁹² To clarify, Spring does not suggest that historical games should be scholarly monographs, but rather presenting scholarship through combining and complementing the strengths and skills of the history discipline with the conventions of game systems, allowing for “the relevant historical narrative [to be conveyed] while putting gameplay at the center of the design process.”⁹³ The focus is on how game developers might be integrating historical primary sources and its information with game design methods while assessing how the “relevant primary source material ...[can] be most enjoyable [for players].”⁹⁴ In this way “the primary sources of the given research

⁹² Dawn Spring, 'Gaming History: Computer and Video Games as Historical Scholarship', *Rethinking History*, 19.2 (2014), 207-221, p. 207.

⁹³ Spring, p. 215.

⁹⁴ Spring, p. 216.

topic combined with the thesis and historical argument set the parameters for developing the rules.”⁹⁵

Arguably, this gamic mode of history can be prominently evident in the ‘Epoch: History Games Initiative’ at the University of Austin, Texas, founded and managed by historian and Associate Professor Adam Clulow. This programme is currently tasked with the design of historical games catered to potential secondary schools and their history classrooms and teaching programmes by utilising history students as game developers combining their skills in historical research and game design. Their first game released in 2020 *Ako: A Tale of Loyalty* is a digital graphic novel style adaptation of an Early Modern Japanese history called the ‘47-Ronin’, otherwise known as the ‘Akō Incident’ (1702 – 1703). This game was developed by a group of history major students (under the direction and guidance of Clulow himself) with an educational framework in mind alongside a series of historical goals and restrictions that the students had to work under. Clulow himself stated that the student game team used a number of research methodologies for their game process, such as writing over 30,000 words of dialogue derived from and alongside extensive research in topics like agriculture, diet, currency, dress style, architecture, and funeral ceremonies.⁹⁶ While this engagement with historiography is still at an early stage, these historians highlight interesting engagements with history outside the three conventional strands of historical discussion or debates covered in this section earlier.

⁹⁵ Spring, p. 217.

⁹⁶ Adam Clulow, ‘How Student-designed Video Games made me Rethink how I Teach History’, *The Conversation* <<https://theconversation.com/how-student-designed-video-games-made-me-rethink-how-i-teach-history-159310>> [accessed 30 May 2021], para. 16.

1.6.1.1 Representation Scholarship (Historical Game Studies):

These contributions to the discourse of representation outlined in the previous section also apply to and closely overlap with studies on representation within historical game studies. Currently, discussions within this field are still raised into ascertaining to what extent can historical games impart or transmit and produce historical scholarship, and if so what kinds of scholarship can games offer. A current consensus among video game historians (e.g. Andrew Elliott, Rolfe D. Peterson, Sean Fedorko, Jeremiah McCall, and Adam Chapman) is that while historical video games provide a number of different representational styles or engagements, they cannot “function as a medium for true historical representation” in respect to their positioning of the term representation as mainly the “historical accuracy of games” via variables such as “the use of empirical evidence ... and the requirement of a truth attribute.”⁹⁷ Instead, historical games are classed at their best capacity for potential scholarship when promoting and teaching “invaluable tools for acquiring and producing historical knowledge [and discourse]” within the context of “history as a process”, a system which “encourages questions about contingency and what material, economic, social or political conditions led events to unfold as they did.”⁹⁸ Namely, experimentation with simulating historical concepts and theories such as lessons on historical contingency, causality, teleology, and epistemology practices, with the turn-based and/or real-time strategy games that I discussed earlier being the best genre exemplifications of this form of scholarship (see Section 1.2.1).⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Rolfe D. 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. by Matthew W. Kapell & Andrew B.R. Elliott (London, and New York, N.Y: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 33-48, pp. 35, 37;

Andrew B.R. Elliott, 'Simulations and Simulacra: History in Video Games', *Práticas da História*, 5 (2017), 11-41, pp. 20-23, 26-30, 34-35, 37;

McCall, pp. 12-13, 22-23, 27-30;

Chapman, pp. 74-75, 76-78, 83, 232, 235.

⁹⁸ Peterson, Andrew Justin Miller and Fedorko, p. 35.

⁹⁹ Andrew B.R. Elliott and Matthew W. 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*

This current consensus on scholarship still has some merit and will be further unpacked in the following chapter's literature review. However, my contribution via gameplay research to historical game studies challenges this current view by seeking to demonstrate gameplay's ability or affordance to construct and present "[multimodal] historiographies ... on the historical period and topics represented in the game."¹⁰⁰ I base this endeavor on the proposal that a number of recent historical games are not only becoming fully-fledged histories themselves, but can in fact provide genuine and fruitful historical scholarship on par with those found in historical academia via their gameplay mediums' particular type(s) of engagement to history. This is achieved, within the thesis, by the uncovering and analysis of numerous scholarly findings and contributions in both *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* and *A Plague Tale: Innocence*. The thesis reveals then the wider historiography of representation addressed by these games and their distinct employment of particular modes of gameplay experience eliciting new contributions to Medieval historiographies on the specific histories, events, and/or discourses represented or referenced in these games.

The undertaking of this thesis' study into historical gameplay mediums then could help raise or contribute a wide range of new and exciting possibilities, as well as questions, to explore by shifting the study of representation from its current state of examining how video games engage in or represent history to how history is specifically represented or experienced through gameplay within the historical game text. To highlight the most relevant of these contributions, a gameplay focus can provide a more rigorous and in-

Simulation of History, ed. by Matthew W. Kapell and Andrew B.R. Elliott (London, and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 1-30, p. 13;

Elliott, pp. 23-24, 30, 35;

Chapman, pp. 141, 144, 148, 206, 249-251.

¹⁰⁰ Ben Redder, 'History in Multimodal Gameplay: A New Language and Model for Constructing, Experiencing, and Studying the Past' (unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of Waikato, 2023), p. 31.

depth articulation of historical representation as a wide plethora of different and intersecting modalities or expressions within historical games, rather than representation being traditionally perceived as assembling “facts into a ... causal narrative.”¹⁰¹ Under this refined meaning, rule-based simulations of historical concepts and theories is placed as one of many (but not classed as the best) styles or engagements of gameplay representation. Another and more specific contribution is the one discussed earlier in the preceding section encompassing “historical gameplay as a new and distinct historical source or work of historical scholarship for academia, with a key data resource being the recording, analysis, and dissemination of one’s own gameplay footage.”¹⁰² Examining gameplay experiences and its articulations of history could discover that different modalities of gameplay constitute a range of particular histories formally collated and classed as ‘gameplay histories’. With the support of digital game capture technology that can extract and preserve gameplay footage, there is an untapped opportunity for exploring animative gameplay histories and its evidence as a new repository of primary and/or secondary historical sources.

This particular opportunity then is paramount to extending certain historical games as more than simply research tools and ludic apparatuses but fully-fledged and multi-communicative historical texts. The possibility for this contribution to occur within gameplay studies would require that we look at historical scholarship more deeply. Specifically, as an all-encompassing term to describe the various constructions of and contributions to knowledge gameplay mediums can entail or express via the interplay of its combined procedural or ludic and representational functions. However, a gameplay discourse still encourages that historical games be studied in a range of interconnected

¹⁰¹ Peterson, Andrew Justin Miller and Fedorko, p. 36.

¹⁰² Redder, p. 33.

contexts and layers of meaning, in that, for instance, historical games can be scholarly texts whilst still having their mainstream effects in the popularisation of history within gaming entertainment and consumption.

By shifting the term 'historical scholarship' and its practices within historical game study to a more all-inclusive term, this could likely help further progress historical games as a bridge to connect wider public audiences (including players) to academic historians. Notably, by providing a particular opportunity for video and non-video game historians to gather, engage with, and share their knowledge and resources of history to their audiences. This opportunity principally centres on the utilisation of gameplay scholarship as a catalyst for historians using online media platforms, such as YouTube, Twitch, and Spotify, to create episodic lore videos or podcasts. These videos and podcasts would be dedicated directly to and accessed by numerous online viewers about the different histories, including their in-game lore and storylines, represented in these historical games via the author's own and/or other players' recorded gameplay footage with their accompanying narration or analytical commentary. This audience would include not only fellow academics, researchers, and students of history, but also game designers and the pre-dominant player community who collectively share a passion for history and/or historical games. These lore videos would center the historian or scholar not only as a content creator, but also an authorial expert, storyteller, and intermediary of the game's respective period(s) and subjects of history to academic and gaming communities alike who consume these lore videos.

Developing lore video channels with gameplay as a prime source of narrative may appear to be a new and original activity. This venture is in fact, as stated earlier, a popular and

increasingly growing online activity or hobby with a relatively large following, with lore channels and podcasts covering constructed historical and/or non-historical universes or worlds not only derived in video games, but also in table-top and pen-and-paper games. As of recent, content creator Vaatividya's total subscribers for his videos on games such as the *Souls* series are 2.44 million, with each of his videos currently ranging between 500,000 and several million views in total. Other creators like Luetin09 (a lore expert on the dark science-fiction universe of Warhammer 40k) and Fudgemuppet (dedicated to lore videos on *The Elder Scrolls* series) have currently amassed about 703,000 and 1.05 million subscribers respectively, with the same range of viewers numbering from tens to hundreds of thousands.

1.6.2 Historical Game Education/Teaching (Historical Game Studies and Digital Game Studies):

A growing amount of work has also been dedicated to studying and providing resources and strategies for using historical games in pedagogical teaching of history in secondary high schools and universities. Historical gameplay research can serve as another entry point for history scholars and teachers wanting to further develop this major area of study. Notable works include Karen Schrier's 'Designing Digital Games to Teach History', in *Learning, Education, and Games: Volume 1: Curricular and Design Considerations*, Jeremiah McCall's *Gaming the Past: Using Video Games to Teach Secondary History*, and Scott A. Metzger and Richard J. Paxton's 'Gaming History: A Framework for What Video Games Teach About the Past'.¹⁰³ To reference McCall's seminal text as a prime example of this field, his book is distinct not only for providing an extensive discussion on the

¹⁰³ Scott A. Metzger and Richard J. Paxton, 'Gaming History: A Framework for What Video Games Teach About the Past', *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 44.4 (2016), 532-564;

Schrier, 'Designing Digital Games to Teach History';

McCall, *Gaming the Past: Using Video Games to Teach Secondary Schools*.

types of learning historical games can facilitate. It also includes his own sample unit and lesson plans or templates and assessments for classroom activity, and instructional strategies for teachers when incorporating historical games alongside suggestions on how to identify and avoid common pitfalls (e.g. Game Blog Journal, Diagramming Game Systems, and Writing Narratives of Simulation Play Sessions).¹⁰⁴ Another key area McCall highlights is that historical games can provide lessons for facilitating multiple and open or alternative interpretations of the past as opposed to taking what they read or view history at face value.¹⁰⁵ This is because historical games, as McCall states, are interpretations subject to their own strengths and weaknesses as a form of history rather than just simply a fixed historical record.¹⁰⁶

Much of the work and practical application of historical game education and pedagogical teaching from texts (such as those aforementioned) has been largely confined to two sectors. One sector entails the development of lessons and assessments using historical games in the real-time and/or turn-based game genre as potential tools for teaching students in the practices of and critical thinking skills in history, as well as exploring, assessing, and critiquing wider trends and concepts or ideas of historical process (e.g. causality and teleology) rather than memorisation of historical facts and figures. The other sector is based in the edutainment genre, where certain historical games designed as education texts by either game studios or university departments have been contracted by a number of schools for history classroom use, such as *Ako: A Tale of Loyalty* developed by Clulow's history students and *ARTé: Mecenas*.¹⁰⁷ While this doctoral research and its

¹⁰⁴ McCall, pp. 60-133.

¹⁰⁵ McCall, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ McCall, p. 9.

¹⁰⁷ Adam Clulow, *Ako: A Tale of Loyalty* (Computer game) (Austin, T.X: Epoch: History Games Initiative (University of Texas), 2020);

Triseum, *ARTé: Mecenas* (Computer game) (Byran, T.X: Triseum, 2016).

findings provides no direct contribution to historical game education, there is potential opportunity for scholars and teachers to utilise gameplay experiences as learning and analytical texts or sources for both pedagogical teaching and immersive student learning. Including knowledge acquisition, research, and critique, of specialised historical periods and subjects, whether in literal histories with limited documented evidence and research coverage or those pertaining to imaginative and/or fantasy contexts.

1.6.3 Game Design (Digital Game Studies):

Lastly, while also not a key contribution of this thesis, historical gameplay research raises potential future interest for scholars and game designers wanting to expand studies on and/or create certain kinds of game design practices as a form or method of historical research with conventional support from traditional historical methods and sources. Although this (evidenced and researched) method of game design is still in its infancy, projects of this nature have already begun to surface involving collaborations across sectors, such as the earlier mentioned Epoch: History Games Initiative directed by Clulow and Jessica Tompkins' historiographic game model developed in her Master thesis' project.¹⁰⁸ Historical game design and research practices or applications has also begun to appear in the commercial sector as the driving force for one such developer Warhorse Studios in their development of *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, one of the main case studies explored in this thesis. Discussion on some of Warhorse Studios' historical game design conventions as methods of historical research themselves are detailed later in the thesis (see Chapter 5).

¹⁰⁸ Jessica E. Tompkins, 'Playing at History: Resurrection Man and Historiographic Game Design' (unpublished Masters thesis, University of South Carolina, 2014).

1.7 Thesis Outline:

The thesis is outlined as follows: Chapter 2 provides a literature review on how gameplay has been either foregrounded or currently referenced and/or defined by the other disciplines primarily within the context of 'form', one of the major areas of study on representation. As a follow-up to the insights and critiques covered in the literature review, Chapter 3 unveils an original working conceptual model (historical modality) founded on multimodality theory as the principal approach for obtaining the key findings of the thesis via conducting research, analysis, and discussion of the different types or modalities of history within gameplay representation. Both the literature review and the multimodal conceptual framework provides a clear transition into the direction and layout of my entire methodology framework into historical gameplay outlined in Chapter 4. Key areas or stages of this methodology discussed include the selected historical research methods used to collect relevant sources of data and the forms of analysis.

The outline of the methodology framework is followed with analytical discussions on gameplay and its historical findings from the Medieval game case studies *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* and *A Plague: Tale Innocence* (Chapters 5 – 8). Chapter 5 begins the analytical segment of the thesis by giving an extensive introduction to the Medieval historical games, as well as their primary mode of historical gameplay, selected for analysis through examination of their game development structures. An account is provided of each games' plotline, a summary on the histories covered by these Medieval games, and an account of the game studios' intentions or goals and their historical research and game design processes. Chapter 6 examines 'lore history', a particular modality of historical gameplay representation and one of the key findings, using several examples of gameplay sequences from my entire recorded footage of *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* as

evidence. Chapter 7 repeats this analytical format but examines a different modality of historical gameplay representation called 'imaginative history' in *A Plague Tale: Innocence*. Chapter 8 serves as an extended supplementation to the previous analytical chapters by exploring some of the interplays between different modes of historical gameplay identified in Chapters 6 and 7. Finally, Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by providing a summation of the main research results and identifies key contributions.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction:

The previous chapter highlighted that little research currently places, let alone considers, gameplay as the primary subject for examination and discussion of historical games.¹⁰⁹ More specifically, there are no works that identify gameplay as the core medium for historical game representation. Despite the challenge in presenting gameplay as a representational medium with limited prior research to draw upon, this chapter provides a range of literature pertaining to the representational and/or ludic discourses in both history and video game study. This body of literature brings together the disciplines of history, digital game studies, and historical game studies in their discussion of ‘form’, an integral structural component of a history’s representation. However, in alignment with historical game studies, this chapter also provides separate supporting sections on content (2.4.2) and authorship (2.4.3) which are also key components of a gameplay experience.

Discussion on the current understandings or information of gameplay is situated in the context of form because it is the area where gameplay has been mostly referenced. A summary of how form has been expressed within the disciplinary field of history is given first. This review then shifts to a more straightforward discussion into the discourse of the video game form within digital game studies. Thus, historical game studies constitutes the main segment of this chapter’s literature review on gameplay via its

¹⁰⁹ Redder, p. 19.

combined representational and ludic frameworks on historical game form, content, and authorship. Finally, a concluding section synthesises the key points, patterns, and gaps in knowledge in relation to these respective fields followed by a refined set of research questions that form the basis of the doctoral research and its aims.

As was already made clear in Section 1.3, my understanding and usage of gameplay follows the underlying principles of Grant Tavinor's term which incorporates but extends beyond gameplay's pre-dominantly ludic and formalist roles. The purpose of this literature review then is not to provide or use frameworks from the scholars' definitions or references to gameplay within the literature presented. The main purpose of this chapter's literature review in addressing gameplay in its relationship to form is: (i) to review how past and present scholars define or reference the dominant treatment of gameplay as action (the main driving force behind the interactions between rule-based formal systems and play); (ii) to highlight variables or features of a gameplay's ludic form relevant to studying gameplay as a representational medium; (iii) and identify gaps or limitations on gameplay existing in these studies as an integral prelude to and an area of focus for my investigation into historical gameplay representation.

2.2 Form (History):

While the main overarching discipline of history has no existing works that have explored gameplay as a communicative historical medium based within a video game system, certain representational engagements in several older forms of history continue to be present within or are a part of gameplay representation.

Studies on representation within history have ranged across areas such as literary or written history, history through film, and live re-enactment. To discuss the first two as

examples, the tradition of written or literary history since the nineteenth century were originally preoccupied with objectivity, specifically in finding and validating a past that was objectively true and could be explained in a faithfully accurate account. This practice finds its roots in empiricism, a philosophy of science applied in history as a “theory of knowledge, an epistemology, and a method of historical enquiry.”¹¹⁰ Major works such as historian Geoffrey Elton’s *The Practice of History*, Richard Evans *In Defence of History*, and Edward Carr’s *What is History* extensively undertake this objective-based writing approach to history by following a number of its key principles and methods.¹¹¹ Some of these include formulating particular questions and hypotheses that can be answered and argued with evidence and facts within an arranged narrative, and accumulation, verification, and cross-examination of historical data derived from a range of historical primary sources (e.g. surviving written documents or records, heritage sites, photographs, and artefacts) in order to draw inferences.¹¹²

Practices from the empirical tradition of history continue to be employed today, albeit with a better awareness of its technical limitations. However, historians like Hayden White, Frank Ankersmit, and Alun Munslow argue that in order to critically understand the way the past is constructed and represented to us in the present, an awareness and analysis of the processes and stylistic conventions within the respective “form” of history are required, for “while meaning and explanation are important it is much more important to understand the processes that go *into* creating *a* history.”¹¹³ These historians identified and explored the formal structures of the written historical text which significantly influence and determine the way in which the text form shapes the

¹¹⁰ Green and Troup, p. 1.

¹¹¹ Geoffrey Elton, *The Practice of History*, 2nd edn (Hoboken, N.J: Wiley, 2002);
Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997);
Carr, *What is History?*.

¹¹² Green and Troup, pp. 4-6.

¹¹³ Munslow, *A History of History*, pp. 189, 190.

presentation of the content of and narrative(s) about the past.¹¹⁴ Formal structures that appear commonly in historical texts are the employment of ‘emplotment’, which is the assemblage of historical events into a plot as part of recounting the past in a certain chronological order in a range of modes (e.g. romanticism, tragedy, and satire).¹¹⁵ Anachrony is also commonly used in written history which places discrepancies between the order of events within a plot, or in other words “taking events out of chronology.”¹¹⁶ Another major formal structure is the insertion or implementation of stylistic fictive devices, such as the use of tropes (e.g. metaphor, metonymy, and irony), modes of argument, and fictional characters and stories that fill in the gaps within the historical narrative, especially when there is a strong absence or scarcity of evidence.¹¹⁷ These areas of development when writing history reveal that the process of interpreting and narrating the past, as well as the social and intellectual background of the respective historian, largely determines how a history and its content are selected, configured, and ascribed meaning with facts.¹¹⁸

Historical studies in film representation provide another example of how history and narratives about the past can be composed and conveyed through a visual media form. Seminal works such as *History on Film/ Film on History* and *Reframing the Past: History, Film, and Television* have been paramount to discussions in this area of representing history.¹¹⁹ Film historians such as Robert A. Rosenstone have argued that films primarily

¹¹⁴ Prominent works in this trend of literary history are Hayden White’s *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* and *The Content of the Form*, Alun Munslow’s *Narrative and History*, and Frank Ankersmit’s *Historical Representation*.

¹¹⁵ White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* and *The Content of the Form*, pp. 7-8, 10-11, 29.

¹¹⁶ Alun Munslow, 'Rethinking Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe', *Rethinking History*, 19.3 (2015), 324-336, p. 334.

¹¹⁷ White, pp. 29, 31-38.

¹¹⁸ Robert Doran, 'Editor's Introduction', in *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory 1957-2007*, ed. by Robert Doran (Baltimore, M.D: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), pp. xiii-xxxii, xx; White, pp. 22-26.

¹¹⁹ Mia E.M. Treacey, *Reframing the Past: History, Film, and Television* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2016);

rely not on the power of the word to construct and depict its history but largely through the use of moving imagery, close and long camera shots, diegetic music and sound effects, dialogue, colour, editing via ellipsis, and other frames of filmic tropes. These conventions of the visual mode in films often enable an historical period and its society to be projected through *mise-en-scène*, which showcases the minutiae and context of everyday life from that period such as clothing, utensils, buildings, social customs, landscapes, and contexts (e.g. economics, politics, gender, race). Concurrently, because of structural factors such as film length, number of frames per second, and choice of historical topics and settings, certain narrative techniques and conventions are also applied by historical filmmakers to condense or manipulate a film's capture of historical time (usually presented as linear time dissected into historical periods) and space (the terrain for consistent human action) for narrative continuity and flow.¹²⁰ A number of these techniques identified by Rosenstone include "compression" such as condensing or substituting the vast multitude of historical events, people, communities, and places into a few significant substitutes.¹²¹ Another common technique employed by historical filmmakers is "invention of a truth", where an invented or fictional incident, event, and/or person is created but which either represents "something [in that past] that [actually occurred or] could well have happened", or raises cues or signals to actual historical experiences and facets that existed in that time.¹²² These variables together within a filmic medium create a series of "proximate or possible realities rather than a reality that is literally true."¹²³ Films then seek to provide

Rosenstone, *History on Film/ Film on History and Reframing the Past: History*.

¹²⁰ Eleftheria Thanouli, *History and Film: A Tale of Two Disciplines* (London, and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), p. 117.

¹²¹ Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to our Idea of History* (Cambridge, M.A: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 74.

¹²² Rosenstone, p. 74.

¹²³ Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History and Reframing the Past: History*, p. 49.

an overall “portrait or vision [that] has something important or meaningful to say about the past.”¹²⁴

Increasing studies on the historical form also sparked other interesting areas which re-examine the ideas, purposes, and roles of history by exploring its more imaginative and poetic qualities. Hayden White’s works for instance argue that because historians, in reference to written histories, must utilise figurative language and poetic processes such as “tropological strategies ... [and] modalities of representing relationships in words that the poet or novelist [similarly] uses” when “presenting its facts as objects of narrative representation”, historical narratives function more as literary artefacts by their close similarities to literature (such as fiction) rather than operating as scientific accounts.¹²⁵ Another integral development has been the view that history is and should be largely understood as a discourse by entailing the process of thought described as historical imagination. Historical imagination is a distinct type of thought only employed by historians in “imagining ... [a past] event or occurrence ... in the absence of direct experience”, but this imaginary picture of the past is still “always a construction based on the inferences made from [reading available historical] evidence.”¹²⁶ As historian Munslow clarifies “the past can only be engaged with in terms of the historian first ‘imagining’ the most likely meaning/explanation for a set of events, and then (hopefully) ‘fictively’ construing the most likely meaning of ‘the story’ that the historian assumes exists in that set of events.”¹²⁷ In other words, the presence of historical imagination in

¹²⁴ Rosenstone, p. 49.

¹²⁵ Hayden White, *The Tropics of Discourse: Essay in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, M.D: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 97;

Herman Paul, *Hayden White* (Hoboken, N.J: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), p. 90.

¹²⁶ David J. Stanley, *Historical Imagination* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), p. 5;

Jan van der Dussen, 'The Case for Historical Imagination: Defending the Human Factor and Narrative', in *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory*, ed. by Nancy Partner & Sarah Foot (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2013), p. 61.

¹²⁷ Munslow, 'Fiction, Imagination and the Fictive: The Literary Aesthetics of Historizing', p. 33.

construing a history neither conforms it to being another type of fiction nor a completely true objective reality, but rather an “act of imagination which recasts the past in narrative form”, and thus contains a differentiation between its “facts of the past (which are actual [and true]) and the narrative of those facts (which is fictive).”¹²⁸

Outlining some of the main elements of a history form establishes certain structural innerworkings a gameplay medium shares with these earlier forms of history. Principally, an historical gameplay medium foundationally comprises of both content and form, and entails the telling of stories about the past from its chosen narrative(s) and visual imagery. Telling stories through historical gameplay signals again the common pre-supposition by historians that narrative or narration (in any style or form) as the “communication ... of a sequence of happenings or events by establishing a meaningful connection between them” is the imperative foundation that enables any history and their form of expression to emerge, compose, and recount events in the past.¹²⁹ Gameplay can also continually follow these earlier forms’ prime engagement to the ‘past-as-history’. Specifically, by gameplay being built upon and communicating selected historical evidence and facts assembled into the game’s historical world and narrative(s), as well as utilising stylistic narrative conventions or devices such as fictional characters, metaphors, and emplotment.

However, historical video games are multimodal devices which not only represent but also allow us to *experience* its histories through its multiple intertwined literacies and modes of communication, all of which are manifested, constantly sustained, and presented to the player by its medium output (gameplay). The term ‘experience’ was outlined in Section 1.3 briefly. In this outlook, experience means the way histories, and

¹²⁸ Harper-Scott, pp. 41, 42.

¹²⁹ Munslow, *Narrative and History*, pp. 131-132.

its past events, are often presented or played out as immediate, animative, and spatially diverse occurrences, as opposed to being solely described in either written or visual forms. Experience in historical games not only grants audiences intimate interactions with its setting and content via player agency, but these interactive engagements also take place in highly detailed game worlds constructed to appear as closely accurate or fantastical settings of the past. Additionally, since the experientiality of historical game representation is spontaneous and distinctly personalised to the player's own immersion, it has methodological potential in being captured and preserved as recorded video footage in measuring both gameplay activity and its player author's own experientiality of the past.

Because of gameplay's immersive experientiality then, three suggestions can be raised. First, the lines between the real and the imaginary within historical games are far less defined and instead more varied in these games' constructions of the past. This is because the notion of historical imagination discussed by historians (such as White and Munslow) as the figurative employment of an historian's mental images or ideas is not required as a player, since the game's entire history has already been *imagined* for us by the game itself to inhabit and interact. In fact, historical imagination within historical games is where we as players are living the imagined and imagining the lived by the game's fusion of the factual and fictive, invention and discovery, and mimesis (representationalist) with creativity (formalist).¹³⁰ This gameplay manifestation of historical imagination then elicits a wider variety of historical realities and experiences to be communicated or exhibited.

¹³⁰ Stanley, pp. 10-11. Historian David Stanley extends that an historian's process of imagination, in mediation with accumulated historical evidence, should combine in a continuum two distinct spectrums of imagination, the mimetic and creative forms. Imagination entailing mimesis refers to the "ability to visualize something that is not currently present to our senses but that has been present at one time ... [or] that are not currently present to be directly experienced" (Stanley, pp. 3-4). Creative imagination, Stanley describes, is the picturing of unreal or intangible entities or objects when inquiring into the past, such as developing and using historical theories and abstract concepts (Stanley, pp. 6, 10-11).

Second, because historical games are largely interactive animation, historical content and its expression or containment of historical knowledge occupies a far different and more varied presence and role(s) in historical games rather than re-iterating its typical function in written history as “content of the past explained as a story.”¹³¹ In other words, content in historical games is not just descriptions of events from assembled material and written historical evidence. It is rather a highly diversified and multi-communicative form of historical experience and meaning-making semantics, which can entail detailed animations ranging from actual or real subject matter and referents found commonly in scholarly history to in-game folklore and mythology. These two suggestions vitally foreground the third and final suggestion. That is, gameplay representation has significant potential to open new pathways into revitalising and expanding the methods and theoretical engagements of historical disciplines (e.g. empiricism, post-modernism) by combining and applying them into new gamic areas that were previously not thought possible or conceived within the literary realm of historical academia.

To tie together these prior historical works on form with these three main suggestions, I outline four overarching core traditions that together constitute, and are embedded within experiential gameplay representation as, a work of history. The first three traditions are those found in all other forms of history besides gameplay, which are ‘story and narrative’, ‘content’, and ‘form’. These three traditions still support this thesis’ gameplay analysis and discussion (with form being the main theme of this chapter). However, the main context of this thesis’ body of research and evidence on historical gameplay primarily focuses on, and contributes to an extended fourth tradition that I distinguish as ‘lore’ and its intersections or interplays with content and story/narrative articulated in a gameplay context. The term lore is one of the key concepts of my

¹³¹ Alun Munslow, *The Future of History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 155.

gameplay research framework and vital for analysis of one of the game case studies, and thus is defined and established further on (see Sections 3.3.1 and 6.2). For now, I express the term lore here as not simply synonymous to knowledge itself. It is more accurately a tradition encompassing referential, evidential, constructive, and transmissive modes or practices of knowledge-building and knowledge expression. The reason for establishing lore as a distinct co-existing counterpart to the other three traditions is of a firm view that both historical knowledge (lore) and content are in need of extensive revision within the discipline of history, which this thesis' research into historical gameplay and its findings will alleviate and provide new and insightful extensions or contributions. Their current meanings and usages within written historiography are not substantial enough to account for and articulate gameplay expressions of multimodal content and knowledge expression.

2.3 Video Game Form (Digital Game Studies):

As outlined in the preceding chapter, existing research into a standardised all-inclusive definition of gameplay and its role as a representational medium within digital game studies is minimal.¹³² In other cases where gameplay is given some emphasis, the term is assigned a reductionist role. Espen Aarseth, for instance, recognises gameplay as an umbrella term consisting of “players’ action, strategies and motives” while “navigating a virtual environment.”¹³³ This is an important foundational characteristic of gameplay by signifying the term as a primary means for the player to interact with the game and its systems. Simple examples include determining the best strategy to overcome an

¹³² Redder, p. 19.

¹³³ Espen Aarseth, 'Playing Research: Methodological Approaches to Game Analysis', in *5th International Digital Arts and Culture Conference* (RMIT University, Melbourne: RMIT School of Applied Communication, 2003), p. 2; Jeannie Novak, *Game Development Essentials: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (Clifton Park, N.Y: Thomson Delmar Learning, 2008), p. 182.

obstacle or opponent, and choosing items or abilities to augment a player character's combat skills.

More broadly, in another segment Aarseth also lists gameplay as one of the three core components of a video game, the other two being game structure and game world.¹³⁴ Game structure is the rules, mechanics, and other systematic processes that enable a game to function and determine what the player can and cannot do, as well as dictating the outcome of their actions.¹³⁵ The game world component shares very similarly with traditional literary and audio-visual media forms as an “artificial universe, an imaginary place in which the events of the game occur” by comprising of visual graphics, audio music and sounds, storylines, settings, and subject matter of the game that the player can see, hear, and/or interact with.¹³⁶ However, a game's interactivity allows the player to explore its world in different ways that cannot be done by consumers in other textual and media forms. This exploration of a game world is varied by its correspondence to the video game genre (e.g. adventure, strategy, shooter). More importantly, a game world encompasses “much more than the sum of the pictures and sounds that portray them. A game world can have a culture, an aesthetic, [and] a set of moral values.”¹³⁷

Another important definition by digital game scholars George S. Elias, Richard Garfield, and K. R. Gutschera formally emphasise gameplay by its “length of play, dividing it into “atoms” (smallest units of play), game (start to end), “campaign” (series of games), and

¹³⁴ Aarseth, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Robert Houghton, 'World, Structure and Play: A Framework for Games as Historical Research Outputs, Tools, and Processes', *Práticas da História*, 7 (2018), 11-43, p. 19;
Aarseth, p. 2.

¹³⁶ Ernest Adams and Andrew Rollings, *Fundamentals of Game Design*, 2nd edn (Upper Saddle River, N.J: Prentice Hall, 2010), p. 84.

¹³⁷ Adams and Rollings, p. 85.

“match” (series of individual games agreed on for a victory).”¹³⁸ This eloquent expression encompasses a gameplay’s varying lengths or durations of playtime ranging from small moments to entire game sessions. Finally and most prominently, digital game scholar Frans Mäyra highlights that a game consists of two key layers, which are the “core” and the “shell.”¹³⁹ Mäyra signifies representation as the ‘shell’ entailing “all the semiotic richness modifying, containing and adding significance to that basic interaction.”¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, he confines gameplay as the ‘core’ by concerning with “everything a player can do while playing the game, and also game rules that govern these actions” but it is not “the interface ... the graphics and ... the story.”¹⁴¹ In this context, gameplay is conceptually positioned as a co-existing but purely procedural construct separate from representation.

Definitions of gameplay that highlight its ludic or procedural functions emphasise the structured nature of play and the parameters for how the player can interact with the game. Three key variables – rules, mechanics, and player agency – account for player activity that comprises gameplay permitted by the wider game system. Game scholars Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman define rules as closed “formal systems” that limit “player action, [that] are explicit and unambiguous, are shared by all players, are fixed, are binding, and are repeatable.”¹⁴² Common examples of rules then are goals for the player to complete with winning and losing outcomes, how a game may be played in a series of turns between each player involved, and how the resources the player uses are only in limited number unless the player can find more. The second characteristic, game

¹³⁸ George S. Elias, Richard Garfield and K.R Gutschera, *Characteristics of Games* (Cambridge, M.A: MIT Press, 2012), pp. 11-20.

¹³⁹ Mäyra, p. 17.

¹⁴⁰ Mäyra, p. 17.

¹⁴¹ Mäyra, pp. 15, 17.

¹⁴² Zimmerman and Salen, pp. 120, 122-25.

mechanics, constitute the “actions afforded by the system to the players so that they can interact with the game state and with other players.”¹⁴³ Common examples of game mechanics are the ability to climb, run, ride a horse, fire a weapon, and manage resources such as health and firearm ammunition.¹⁴⁴

While rules and mechanics are interrelated and have been used synonymously, they are subtly different components. Digital game scholar Miguel Sicart differentiates these terms very well. He specifies game rules as specifically particular properties of the game system and its agents by providing “the possibility space where that interaction is possible, regulating as well the transition between states.”¹⁴⁵ In contrast, game mechanics are mainly “concerned with the actual interaction with the game state” by operating as the “methods ... [by which] agents can use to interact with the game.”¹⁴⁶ Sicart also emphasises that “[game] mechanics not only describe the actions available to players ... [they] can be invoked by any agent, be that human or part of the computer system ... [when interacting] with the gameworld.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, game mechanics tend to be at times synonymous with gameplay by being formalised as the “verbs of the game”, with the game rules influencing “how those verbs [mechanics] act in the game.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Miguel Sicart, *Beyond Choices: The Design of Ethical Gameplay* (Cambridge, M.A: MIT Press, 2013), pp. 26-27.

¹⁴⁴ Zimmerman and Salen, p. 316.

¹⁴⁵ Miguel Sicart, 'Defining Game Mechanics', *Game Studies*, 8.2 (2008), <<http://gamestudies.org/0802/articles/sicart>>, para. 33.

¹⁴⁶ Sicart, para. 33.

¹⁴⁷ Teun Dubbelman, 'Narrative Game Mechanics', in *Interactive Storytelling: 9th International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling, ICIDS 2016, Los Angeles, CA, USA, November 15–18, 2016, Proceedings*, ed. by Frank Nack & Andrew S. Gordon (Berlin, and Heidelberg: Springer, 2016), 39-50, p. 42;

Sicart, para. 28.

¹⁴⁸ Fernández-Vara, p. 108;

Sicart, para. 27.

If rules and game mechanics influence, afford, and constrain the player's progression, player agency drives the experience of playing the game by applying mechanics to explore spaces and interactivity within the world and controlling time and space, leading players "to feel they have exerted power or control over events."¹⁴⁹ Player agency is commonly defined as "the process through which gamers make decisions and intervene within digital gamespaces ... [and] is often represented within a digital game through an avatar."¹⁵⁰ It is intrinsic for interactivity with games because "as opposed to the audience of film, the player cannot merely observe the spectacle, but has to actively participate in it to realise the game."¹⁵¹ Janet Murray, one of the earliest and still notable scholars on player agency, also provides an important overarching framework of player agency as not merely the same as activity, but the "satisfying power to make meaningful action and to see the results of our decisions and choices."¹⁵² Thus, an author in the context of games and gaming not only refers to game designers who script and construct games, but also to an extent the players in the guise of arbitrators, shapers, and co-narrators or meaning-makers. This dramatic frame of agency then is a useful starting platform to understand the requirements of a player and their actions for a game to both operate and activate new spaces, activities, and interactions.

Aarseth critically engages with player agency in the context of distinguishing games as ergodic literature that stand in contrast to literary texts. Within a cybertext framework (such as a video game), he states that instead of passively receiving meaning, the reader

¹⁴⁹ Gareth Schott, 'Agency in and around Play', in *Computer Games: Text, Narrative and Play*, ed. by Diane Carr, David Buckingham, Andrew Burn & Gareth Schott (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p. 134.

¹⁵⁰ Theo Plothe, "'You Can't Mess with the Program Ralph": Intertextuality of Player-Agency in Filmic Virtual Worlds', in *Contemporary Research on Intertextuality in Video Games*, ed. by Christian-Marie Pons & Christophe Duret (Hershey, P.A: IGI Global, 2016), 129-142, p. 132.

¹⁵¹ Casper S. Boonen and Daniel Mieritz, 'Paralysing Fear: Player Agency, Parameters in Horror Games', in *DiGRA Nordic '18: Proceedings of 2018 International DiGRA Nordic Conference* (Turin: DiGRA, 2018), pp. 1-13, p. 1.

¹⁵² Murray, p. 159.

or user plays a more active and shared authorial role in the meaning-making process which Aarseth characterises as the “struggle not merely for interpretative insight but also for narrative control.”¹⁵³ This process, he argues, requires non-trivial effort for the player to traverse the digital text, such as performing numerous and various in-game actions and interactions, in contrast to a book where trivial effort is required (e.g. turning pages over a book).¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, the player attains responsibility within the game by being given freedom of choice, but also the consequences attached to it within their performative activity.¹⁵⁵ Finally, the “materiality” of the digital text is a co-construction between the player’s agency (that confers significance and progression onto the game) and the content in the game that enables experiences to emerge by the player.¹⁵⁶ While the game is pre-determined and designed by the game developers, it will never be accessed unless activated by the player through play.¹⁵⁷ Players become narrators as they author their own emergent ludonarratives during the interactions with and responses to the various intricacies, storylines, and challenges of the game.

The various definitions of gameplay presented earlier and discussions of integral features that make up a gameplay’s procedural output (systematic rules, mechanics, and agency) provide an important knowledge base for the way gameplay is academically expressed and defined as (ludic) action or play. Moreover, in a historical game context, these discussions are relevant to understanding how representation partly operates on a ludic

¹⁵³ Aarseth, p. 4.

¹⁵⁴ Aarseth, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ Espen Aarseth, 'I Fought the Law: Transgressive Play and The Implied Player', in *Situated Play, Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Conference* (Tokyo: DiGRA, 2007), pp. 130-133, p. 132.

¹⁵⁶ Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, pp. 4-5;

Aarseth, 'I Fought the Law: Transgressive Play and The Implied Player', p. 130. This even includes experiences that are unexpected or unintended by the game system.

¹⁵⁷ Certain games may offer, for example, multiple endings or outcomes at the end due to major choices and/or pathways the players have made during the game which give players a sense of personal authorship of their own story or journey, but this process is already pre-determined beforehand by the game system in that these outcomes are the only options available for the player to inevitably choose and follow.

level in respect to the core mechanisms and features of the video game object. However, digital game scholars' usages of gameplay as action reduces the term to its ludic function within a player-centric context, in that gameplay is often tied to the player's mastery and engagement with the rules, challenges, and affordances of the game.¹⁵⁸ Interestingly, digital game scholar Johansen Quijano states, and I concur, that while scholars within this dominant body of literature on video games claim to engage or address video games as a medium, they mainly approach analysis and discussion of video games on its form rather than in actuality as a medium.¹⁵⁹ Namely, their prevalent focus to either the technical and/or ludology aspects when researching both video games and game design practices function to relegate "all other criteria of the gameplay experience – visual composition, storytelling, narrative, language use, aural composition etc., as [merely] aesthetics."¹⁶⁰ This formalist treatment of games then has consequently inhibited an expansion of studies into a gameplay's representational potential.

Despite this principal treatment of gameplay in its relationship to the video game form, certain works, while not directly indicating gameplay as the medium, have begun to explore the role of gameplay as a primary representational mode. Grant Tavinor, Jason Hawreliak, Andrew Burn, Gareth Schott, and Johansen Quijano comprise the small handful of scholars that directly hold concern with, or have contributed some of their works to, the exploration of video games as a multimodal form of communication.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Affordance is a common term in game studies that denotes, from a game design context, an action a player perceives as possible, or more specifically the player must be made aware that they can interact with something in some way (often by game designers implementing cues that indicate to players that interaction is possible).

¹⁵⁹ Quijano, pp. 3-4, 209.

¹⁶⁰ Quijano, p. 209.

¹⁶¹ Jason Hawreliak, *Multimodal Semiotics and Rhetoric in Videogames* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019);

Andrew Burn and Gareth Schott, 'Heavy Hero or Digital Dummy? Multimodal Player-avatar Relations in *Final Fantasy 7*', *Visual Communication*, 3.2 (2004), 213-233;

Andrew Burn, 'Games, Films and Media Literacy: Frameworks for Multimodal Analysis', in *Researching New Literacies: Design, Theory, and Data in Sociocultural Investigation*, ed. by Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear, *New Literacies and Digital Epistemologies*, 83 vols (New York: Peter Lang, 2017), LXXVI, 169-194;

Tavinor, *The Art of Videogames*.

Principally, they undertake a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach (e.g. ludology, musicology, psychology, education, and literary and film studies) to examining video games and their game design production by “describing multi-modal interactions or configurations in videogames ... [and also] demonstrating how particular multimodal ensembles inform the player experience ... as videogames communicate in their own ways and employ medium-specific modes and modal configurations.”¹⁶² In collating these latter works together (e.g. Quijano, Tavinor, and Burn) on the exploration of the relationship of video game, representation, and multimodality, my doctoral history research underpins that the multimodality of a video game text is its gameplay medium rather than the video game object. My research into gameplay representation then proposes ‘multimodal gameplay’ as a more succinct phrase or expression to account for the entire medium of the video game to be that of gameplay by its materialisation of the game’s various and intertwined communicative and meaning-making modes.¹⁶³

Aarseth’s notions of game world and game structure closely resemble to and can be identified as the content (game world) and form (game structure) of a historical text. Inversely, both the game world and game structure components are also a part of the medium of gameplay because only through gameplay can these two components manifest and operate within the game. Therefore, gameplay is both made up of but also merges and communicates content and form. Subsequently, in contrary to Märya’s view, gameplay is not separate from but holistically encompasses both representational and procedural functions. To understand further the relevance gameplay has in historical game representation however, I turn to historical game studies which has also made valuable contributions to representation within historical gaming.

¹⁶² Hawreliak, p. 7.

¹⁶³ Multimodal gameplay is similarly related to Quijano’s multimodal model “Audiovisual Ludonarrativity” (pp. 6, 181) in place of the limited frame ‘ludonarrative’, but his model situates the digital game, and not gameplay, as the medium.

2.4 Historical Game Studies (Gameplay):

The majority of works within historical game studies continue to re-iterate or use the same ludology-specific meanings and definitions of gameplay as action from digital game studies. To highlight some common examples, Medieval and video game historian Robert Houghton adopts Aarseth's definition of gameplay in one of his articles as "how the player interacts with the game. This play can be based on game rules ... or on game world ... or a combination of the two."¹⁶⁴ In a historical game context, Houghton applies the term gameplay not as the central medium but as a procedural method or tool for the player to test, validate, and/or critique the game's data or information, its representational engagements, and historical theories and arguments facilitated by its rule system and world background.¹⁶⁵

Other historians and scholars apply this iteration of gameplay, particularly in similar vein to Frans Märya as a co-joined yet procedurally distinguished construct from history and its accompanying representational features (e.g. accuracy, content, narrative). Evidence can be found in comments and findings such as Andrew Elliott's expression, in reference to *Assassin's Creed II*, the "delicate balance between verisimilitude, on the one hand and gameplay, on the other."¹⁶⁶ Articles and projects by Eve Stirling and Jamie Wood, Tara J. Coplestone, and Sian M. Beavers, reporting on interviews and/or surveys with players of historical games, both referenced players' descriptions or expressions of gameplay as an intersecting yet distinguished counterpart to history within the context of historical accuracy.¹⁶⁷ Player interviews revealed "historical accuracy is subordinated to gameplay

¹⁶⁴ Houghton, pp. 19-20.

¹⁶⁵ Houghton, pp. 27-31.

¹⁶⁶ Patrice Désilets, *Assassin's Creed II* (Computer and console video game) (Montreal: Ubisoft Montreal, 2009); Elliott, p. 31.

¹⁶⁷ Sian Beavers, 'The Informal Learning of History with Digital Games' (unpublished Masters thesis, The Open University, 2019);

... the importance of accuracy lies in its ability to enhance the gaming experience and the potential of the two to operate in tension with one another” (Stirling and Wood), and “authenticity and gameplay are perceived as the opposite sides of a continuum” (Beavers).¹⁶⁸ Video game historian Adam Chapman also frequently makes similar distinctions between “gameplay and history”, such as “some historical games do forgo some of the typical demands of gameplay in favor of historical representation and their use as systems for historying.”¹⁶⁹

Despite these continuing ludic re-iterations of gameplay within historical game studies, Chapman is still one of the few historians to posit gameplay’s potential as a representational, and not solely procedural, mode of historical expression and production. One of Chapman’s core arguments concerning historical video games is that they possess a dual function. They are both “historical representations for *reading* and systems for *doing* history (historying).”¹⁷⁰ In his terms, reading (or analysing) history in historical games entails the act of reception and consumption of histories in a similar way that we receive and interpret representations in films and books. However, because games involve constant action and grant audiences (players) a larger degree of agency, he also argues that players are also given opportunities to produce history through creating their own narratives and interactions within the game’s historical world and its rules.¹⁷¹ Chapman identifies this latter engagement as “historying”, or the active process of providing players historical practices of interacting with and configuring history

Eve Stirling and Jamie Wood, 'Actual history doesn't Take Place: Digital Gaming, Accuracy and Authenticity', *Game Studies*, 21.1 (2021), <http://gamestudies.org/2101/articles/stirling_wood>;

Copplestone, 'But that’s not Accurate: The Differing Perceptions of Accuracy in Cultural-heritage Videogames between Creators, Consumers and Critics'.

¹⁶⁸ Stirling and Wood, para. 18;

Beavers, p. 186.

¹⁶⁹ Chapman, pp. 160, 272.

¹⁷⁰ Chapman, p. 32.

¹⁷¹ Chapman, p. 22.

through 'doing'.¹⁷² This act of doing history or historying through play more-or-less shapes or determines a player's sense of reading history by affecting, configuring, and manipulating the representations and narratives that emerge within the game, and vice versa reading inversely can also affect doing.¹⁷³ Thus, Chapman concludes "historical gameplay involves both reading [analysis] and doing [ludonarrative authoring]."¹⁷⁴

This salient quality of gameplay described by Chapman provides an integral overarching foundation to understand or articulate historical gameplay as a historical game medium. Yet this establishment of the gameplay medium as the simultaneous involvement of both reading and doing can be enlightened further by looking into the wider principal discourses, studies, and gaps in the three key elements comprising an historical game that were first introduced in Section 2.1. These elements are 'historical game form' (2.4.1), 'content' (2.4.2), and 'authorship' (2.4.3) which both structure and reside within gameplay representation.

2.4.1 Historical Game Form:

The historical game form is often addressed by video game historians as the "rules of engagement", or formal analyses comprising:

the properties of the historical game form ... examining its structures of representation, processes of narration, possibilities, predispositions and limitations and often also aim to search for an analytical metalanguage to describe these formal properties.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Chapman, p. 22. Chapman further clarifies history and historying; he distinguishes history as a closed and shaped product from historying as a process of creating history that is ever-changing, unclosed, dialogic, and dialectical.

¹⁷³ Chapman, p. 32.

¹⁷⁴ Chapman, p. 32.

¹⁷⁵ Chapman, Anna Foka, and Westin, pp. 4.

This quote reveals two principal elements of the historical game form. One, historical gaming is constructed or determined not only by what a game conveys, but more importantly how it is conveyed – that is through both the narrative structures *and* the game’s ludic system (e.g. game mechanics, rules, and level design). The other principal element is how players drive the experience of the game via their input or agency, crafting their own narratives (ludonarrative), and mastery of the rules. William Uricchio’s chapter ‘Simulation, History and Computer Games’, Matthew Kapell and Andrew Elliott’s edited collection *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, Robert Houghton’s article ‘World, Structure and Play: A Framework for Games as Historical Research Outputs, Tools, and Processes’, and Jeremiah McCall’s recently designed framework ‘historical problem space’ represent some of the notable works that introduce and develop this area of study.¹⁷⁶ However, it is Chapman’s work that explores the formal structures of historical games extensively in his book *Digital Games as History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice* which is the main focus here.¹⁷⁷

Chapman claims that historical games should be studied not for what they convey about the past but for how and in what language they communicate history.¹⁷⁸ His work offers a diverse outline and explanation of the different structural forms of historical games with their own strengths and affordances, which Chapman defines as the “ludic

¹⁷⁶ William Uricchio, 'Simulation, History, and Computer Games', in *Handbook of Computer Games Studies*, ed. by Joost Raessens & Jeffrey Goldstein (Cambridge, M.A: MIT Press, 2005), 327-338;

Jeremiah McCall, 'The Historical Problem Space Framework: Games as a Historical Medium', *Game Studies*, 20.3 (2020), <<http://gamestudies.org/2003/articles/mccall>>;

Kapell and Elliott, eds., *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*;

Houghton, 'World, Structure and Play: A Framework for Games as Historical Research Outputs, Tools, and Processes'. The importance of ‘form’ was first mentioned in William Uricchio’s chapter ‘Simulation, History and Computer Games’.

¹⁷⁷ Chapman, *Digital Games as History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice*.

¹⁷⁸ Chapman, p. 19.

aesthetics of historical description.”¹⁷⁹ In explicating this description, Chapman covers a number of formal structures of representation in detail, such as notably realist and conceptual style simulations, the configurations of time and space within historical game activity, and the practices available to players for doing history or ‘historying’ within play. To explain a couple of these elements in detail, regarding realist and conceptual style simulations, Chapman acknowledges that these simulation styles are not intended to be distinct categories of historical games. Rather, they both exemplify the “opposite ends of a spectrum of representation in historical games.”¹⁸⁰ Historical games then are usually a mixture of both these styles with a pre-dominance in either realist or conceptual simulation, although certain historical games can combine these styles equally (such as those in the *Total War* series).

Chapman defines realist simulations as games not predisposed toward historical accuracy and content, but still exhibit highly authentic audio-visual representations of history in “aiming and/or claiming to show the past ‘how it was’, i.e. as it appeared to historical agents of the time.”¹⁸¹ These audio-visual elements encompass things such as period-accurate environments, historical events, real historical figures, weapons and armour, and utensils. Essentially, this stylistic approach concerns with producing histories of the past that imitates direct human experience while aligning the logics within the game world to our everyday world.¹⁸² Games such as *Medal of Honor: Frontline*, *L.A. Noire*, *Assassin’s Creed*, and *Call of Duty* are prime examples in this trend, although Chapman does acknowledge that games using realist simulations can also include those containing fantasy elements.¹⁸³ Additionally, realist simulation games, which usually tell

¹⁷⁹ Chapman, p. 18.

¹⁸⁰ Chapman, p. 80.

¹⁸¹ Chapman, pp. 59-89.

¹⁸² Chapman, p. 61.

¹⁸³ Brett Close, *Medal of Honor: Frontline* (Console video game) (Los Angeles, C.A: EA Los Angeles).

stories of individuals or small groups, typically use either ‘deterministic story structures’ that privilege fixed or framed narratives with linear story progression and narrative discovery, or ‘open-story structures’ that use a combination of fixed narratives and narrative discovery with ludonarrative and player agency.¹⁸⁴ In the open-story structure particularly, this combination influences the order, emplotment, and content through the player’s game choices and actions.¹⁸⁵

Historical games as conceptual simulations, by contrast, usually incorporate large-scale or macro structures and trends that reflect global-based histories of the past (such as global politics, empire-building, and overseas maritime trade) rather than relying on visually accurate historical detail to events, characters, and environments.¹⁸⁶ These situations include implementations of abstract audio-visual representations like symbols, iconography, and 3D board-game pieces, as well as complex rulesets to represent the past procedurally such as maps, tables, graphs, and menus.¹⁸⁷ Essentially, these conceptual-simulation games focus more on simulating and critiquing the discourses about the past or “history as a process” by containing rule-based, game action, and game challenge systems designed to represent player-situated decisions and actions from a sequence of possible decisions and outcomes.¹⁸⁸ Forms of teleology (e.g. the systematic process of cause and effect), discourses of contingency and change, and simulating and critiquing historical models, theories, and abstract concepts are some of the common examples of this historical engagement offered in re-telling past events not simply by “historical competence” but through learning to play the game and absorbing the rules.¹⁸⁹ Game

¹⁸⁴ Chapman, pp. 129-132.

¹⁸⁵ Chapman, pp. 129-132.

¹⁸⁶ Chapman, p. 70.

¹⁸⁷ Chapman, p. 70.

¹⁸⁸ Elliott, p. 23.

¹⁸⁹ Elliott, p. 23-24, 30, 35.

series like *Civilization*, *Crusader Kings*, and *Europa Universalis* are fitting examples. The particularity of conceptual simulation games is identified by Chapman as privileging ‘open-ontological story structures’. This type of story structure extends the ludonarrative element to an even larger scale than its capacity in open-story structure by placing narrative agency and meaning-making primarily on the player while containing little, if any, set or framed historical narratives.¹⁹⁰ This narrative engagement is usually manifested within historical games as counterfactual storytelling. Counterfactualism or counterfactual history mainly centres on providing experiences that aims to “understand what did happen by theorizing about what did not” by affording human and AI players the freedom to strategise, create, and examine ‘what if’ scenarios different to those events in the past as we understand it.”¹⁹¹ This narrative style is one of the most common types of historical experiences gained from historical strategy games and in massively multiplayer online historical games based either in the action-adventure or first-person shooter genre.

Regarding the practices of historying, Chapman outlines some of the key opportunities historical games can bring to potential historical learning and interactivity, such as ‘digital-ludic reenactment’, writing or constructing counterfactual history, and offering heritage-based experiences, with the first practice discussed here as an example. Chapman examines digital-ludic re-enactment within gaming as closely related to (live) actualised re-enactment by focusing on the affordance of actions and movements to the player(s) and AI characters within the game’s environmental spaces akin to the

¹⁹⁰ Chapman, pp. 129-132.

¹⁹¹ Chapman, p. 233.

perceivable or tangible characteristics of actions that were known to have been performed in the past.¹⁹² As he elaborates:

in digital-ludic and traditional reenactment we generally don't reenact the unique actions of a specific historical agent, but instead reenact as a historically generic character performing actions that were oft-repeated and thus shared some common characteristics.¹⁹³

Chapman establishes then that re-enactment within digital games is mostly based on player's perceptual differentiation (determining which actions and movement can be afforded), with player agency seen as largely connected to exploratory actions or challenges (what possibilities for action you can perceive).¹⁹⁴ In the context of historical games, this term is specified by Chapman as "*exploratory* historical challenges."¹⁹⁵ In his discussion of first-person shooter games set in WW2, Chapman lists a number of examples. Exploratory historical challenges can include the player differentiating between who their allies and enemies are, knowing the best tactics or orders to give from available options in the immediate moment or situation when dealing with an enemy unit, and to perceive affordances of terrain such as finding the best areas for cover or flanking an enemy position.¹⁹⁶ However, Chapman accepts that some elements of empathy can also be valuable for engaging in digital-ludic reenactment, such as

¹⁹² Chapman, pp. 201-204. Actualised re-enactment looks at the re-enactment of tangible actions and challenges within a particular environment(s) that share with or "that have some perceivably common characteristics with those typically performed in the past" (Chapman, p. 201). However, this form of re-enactment within historical games is contextualised to digital-ludic re-enactment, in part, because these afforded actions are implemented by the player's piece of game equipment rather than actual physical exertion.

¹⁹³ Chapman, pp. 201-202.

¹⁹⁴ Chapman, p. 181.

¹⁹⁵ Chapman, p. 181.

¹⁹⁶ Chapman, p. 184.

understanding “What did an historical actor know at the time, what were factors that shaped his/her decision, what decisions could have been made and ... the consequences of those decisions?”¹⁹⁷

In summary, the mechanisms, limitations, and other qualities of the historical game form, as examined in works such as Chapman’s formative text, provides the canvas for historical gameplay experiences and its content to emerge. Hence, it is essential that upcoming scholars and students learn this area first before conducting gameplay study. However, similar to Quijano’s insight described earlier (Section 2.3), this prevalence for analysing historical games as a form rather than as multimodal texts within this area of scholarship (e.g. Adam Chapman, Andrew Elliott, Douglas Dow, William Uricchio, and Jeremiah McCall) emphasises the historical game, and not gameplay, as the medium on the basis of its formal properties. This prevalence for a formalist approach to historical games has meant it has dominated historical game studies to date, creating more focus on historical games and their scholarship capacity perceived as best suited to maximising engagement with history as those operating either or mostly in four areas. Namely, historical games highly suited or favoured by these scholars for historical study are those operating as formal and/or hyperreal simulative models (McCall, Elliott, Uricchio), offering counterfactual practices and heritage affordances (Elliott, Chapman, Dow), and supporting cultural and research tools (Chapman, Houghton). In contrast to the formalist position, this doctoral research adopts a different stance to complement and address some of the prominent gaps found in this area of literature on representation within historical game studies, while not discrediting the valuable contributions from these aforementioned formalist areas of historical game study.

¹⁹⁷ Chapman, p. 194. Empathic re-enactment focuses on the re-enactment of the thought or affect of an historical agent in the past (in conjunction with access to and examination of historical sources or evidence) in order to uncover the motivations for action of rational (or inversely irrational) historical agents.

A salient gap within this field is that a more specified system for identifying, categorising, and articulating the different languages or modes of history and their representational particularities is vitally needed as a framework nesting within the wider categories of realist and conceptual simulation styles. Chapman himself provides this important acknowledgement that “the realist and conceptual analytical categories ... only map out the boundaries of the [representational] spectrum ... There is clearly room for the development of further hybridised sub-categories in between.”¹⁹⁸ I would further add that these simulation styles, due to their overgeneralised formalist frame, neither provide precise identifications nor substantial evidence as to if and what the game’s modes of history, and subsequently its particular elicitation of experiences, specifically are that is actively shaping and communicating the game’s historical representations during player activity. These simulation styles’ prevalence for focusing more on the form of the game and not its functions also overlook how formal structures and narrative styles of games may exist merely as systematic conventions of the video game genre (e.g. turn-based strategy, first-person shooter) and not necessarily for deepening representations and facilitations of player interactivity with history. This is because a digital game’s level of engagement to and application of history, in alignment to the intentions of the game studio’s developers, determines whether or not the formal characteristics of games are contextualised to become modes of historical expression.

My research offers historical gameplay as the answer to providing a system for qualifying, articulating, and distinguishing the different modalities of historical experiences existing within these overarching simulation categories (realist and conceptual). Including clearer distinctions between games using history as a spectacle (aesthetic history) from those engaging in more varied yet deeper engagements and

¹⁹⁸ Chapman, p. 81.

productions of history. Historical games communicating simulation models and critiques of 'history as process' would be classed then as only one of many viable modes of experiential history gameplay representation offers.

A second important gap is the hesitancy to position, approach, and disseminate research from historical games as fully-fledged critical historical works or historiographies. A current consensus among a number of major video game historians (e.g. Chapman, Houghton, Kapell and Elliott, McCall, Peterson, Fedorko, and Miller, and Uricchio) is their continual acknowledgment that while historical games provide a number of representational styles and engagements due to their "composite form", they cannot provide or impart the same level of historical scholarship commonly found in current academic history, that is specifically the product of scholarship.¹⁹⁹ Instead, they surmise that the only scholarship historical games are likely to contribute to and are best suited for are teaching the tools of scholarship and research; that is, forwarding practices and engagements within 'history as a process' (see earlier examples, p. 75) rather than critical analysis of a text's historical representation.²⁰⁰ For instance, Houghton states that historical games would typically present historical epistemologies or theories that expresses arguments and trends by creating "system based explanations rather than simple narrative accounts" as part of using historical games as history research tools.²⁰¹ Chapman highlights that certain historical games are more ideally cultural tools by allowing players, for instance, practices in "writing counterfactual historical narratives

¹⁹⁹ Peterson, Miller, and Fedorko, 'The Same River Twice: Exploring Historical Representation and the Value of Simulation in the *Total War*, *Civilization*, and *Patrician Franchises*', p. 35;

Chapman, p. 60.

²⁰⁰ Peterson, Miller, and Fedorko, p. 35;

Elliott and Kapell, p. 14;

Uricchio, pp. 328, 330-336;

Chapman, pp. 15, 52, 150, 235-236, 239-240, 256;

Houghton, pp. 13-17, 21, 41.

²⁰¹ Houghton, pp. 13, 25.

... without players having to go through the training and practice to become knowledgeable in historical content and theory and skilled in methods."²⁰² Historian Elliott similarly writes "video games are not acting like historians in their analytical and speculative mode and their engagement with primary sources, but they are in some cases replicating their process-based, epistemological mode ... allowing us to understand difficult concepts like contingency, teleology etc."²⁰³

I do not wholly disagree with this consensus on historical games, and they highlight some of the main engagements and practices that historical games can offer. Yet despite this consensus on historical game scholarship, currently there has been no actual attempts of undertaking empirical research to test and prove whether historical games can or cannot provide the kind of scholarship or historiography found in academic history. For instance, there has been no critical inquiry into the possibility of practicing or trialing integrations of recent historical games as complementary scholarly sources for academic research and historiography, and critiquing and being critiqued by other sources of history (e.g. written historical evidence and heritage sites) when combined together in more productive ways beyond reductionist comparisons of these sources' fidelity to historical accuracy. Another notable example is Christian Rollinger's comment on the near absence of extensive research into the "applicability or potential benefits of employing video games in classrooms and lecturing theatres – in part, because there is no empirical research to prove or disprove its advantages."²⁰⁴ One of the key factors behind the absence of these attempts is that "despite ... those keen to take games seriously, many [scholars] have still never relinquished the assumption that written academic history is the standard by which all [histories] should be judged in

²⁰² Chapman, p. 191.

²⁰³ Elliott, p. 26.

²⁰⁴ Rollinger, p. 16.

perpetuity.”²⁰⁵ As recent as late 2022, video game historian Esther Wright underlines that this supposition still inhibits historical game studies’ potential of trialing and ascertaining historical games’ capacity to exhibit or produce gameplay scholarship.²⁰⁶ Consequently, Wright then asks “if written-in-books, “capital H” history must always remain the standard by which all representations are judged, then will new forms of digital history always be assumed subordinate and subservient to traditional modes of writing about the past?”²⁰⁷

In response to this gap in knowledge, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that historical games can engage in and contribute a wide range of academic scholarship on its own merits and standards. This undertaking does not displace written historical scholarship and methods which were still a vital component in supporting the analysis of gameplay experiences in each of the historical game case studies. Instead, illustrating the relationship of multimodal gameplay histories to “scholarly [practices and] knowledge formations” within this thesis advances a decentering of the notion that research and production of scholarly histories or academic scholarship principally exists in, and must always be judged by the conventional practices and standards of written or literary history.²⁰⁸

2.4.2 Content:

Expanding studies on gameplay representation must also require expansions in terminology and discourse on the usages and expressions of content in historical games under the conditions described earlier (see Section 2.2), rather than re-iterating their

²⁰⁵ Esther Wright, 'Still Playing with the Past: History, Historians, and Digital Games', *History and Theory* (2022), 1-12, p. 4.

²⁰⁶ Wright, pp. 4-6.

²⁰⁷ Wright, p. 5.

²⁰⁸ Wright, p. 5.

current capacity dictated in their literary guise. Yet an undertaking of this opportunity in expanding historical content has not yet been fully exploited despite several available works that apply content analysis.

Currently, content within historical game studies and in other disciplinary fields (e.g. Medievalism studies) has been mainly explored and contributed in works such as Daniel T. Kline's edited collection introduced previously (Section 1.4.2.1), Chris Kempshall's *The First World War in Computer Games*, and of recent Christian Rollinger's edited collection *Classical Antiquity in Video Games: Playing with the Ancient World*.²⁰⁹ Rollinger's collection particularly is one of the first works where its contributors have made some important progress in approaching historical game research and analysis by coalescing both content and form together in respect to their Classical period context (noteworthy examples being Jeremiah McCall, Sian Beavers, and David Serrano Lozano). However, their engagement with content within this collection still leans toward an "approach that privileges understanding the video game form (and the varying structures this entails)", wherein historical form has a more "integral role in the production and reception of historical meaning, rather than solely, or even primarily, the content of specific products as historical narratives."²¹⁰ In this frame, content is reduced to a "distinct thematic category of representation" in historical game analysis.²¹¹ Namely, an audio-visual replication or construct of its typical expression in written history as a passively descriptive series of factual details or evidence within a narrative used in measuring a text's proximity to

²⁰⁹ Chris Kempshall, *The First World War in Computer Games* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Kline, ed., *Digital Gaming Re-imagines the Middle Ages*;

Rollinger, 'Playing with the Ancient World: An Introduction to Classical Antiquity in Video Games'.

²¹⁰ Adam Chapman, 'Privileging Form Over Content: Analysing Historical Videogames', *Journal of Digital Humanities*, 1.2 (2012), <<http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-2/privileging-formover-content-by-adam-chapman/>>, para. 1.

²¹¹ Adam Chapman, 'Quo Vadis Historical Game Studies and Classical Receptions? Moving Two Fields Forward Together', in *Classical Antiquity in Video Games: Playing with the Ancient World*, ed. by Christian Rollinger (London, and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 233-252, p. 236.

factual and/or affective historical authenticity or accuracy.²¹² This usage of the term is evidently accounted for in written history practice, such as historian Munslow's description of content as the "locus for the organization of any set of events, and the decisions and actions of historical agents ... on the principle of a followable story about such past events."²¹³

In contrast, examination of historical gameplay instigates a more nuanced approach to current frameworks that account for and elevate historical content in relation to its counterpart 'form' within historical game representation. Principally, to define content in games as not simply the regurgitation of facts and the means of chronicling events, but also include the animative substance by which the respective elements and conventions from the game's modal engagements, such as its ludic, narrative, and visual forms, become interconnected in generating experiential animations of that past. It is hoped that a gameplay lens will enable deeper consideration of content's various typologies and their experiential innerworkings, including the possibility of discovering new historical knowledge while expanding existing or known historical sources (as argued with reference to *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*).

2.4.3 Authorship/Agency:

The concept of agency has also been heavily relevant to the gradual development of studies on the paramount relationship of historical games to both game developers and players within historical game studies (see discussion on agency, Section 2.2). Video

²¹² Chapman, 'Privileging Form Over Content: Analysing Historical Videogames', para. 4; Rollinger, p. 5.

²¹³ Munslow, *Narrative and History*, p. 122.

game historians like Chapman have argued that historical video games function as systems for “historying”, which reflects a significant shift from the telling and interpretations of the past being a privilege exclusive to academic historians to a freer and more inclusive practice open to both game designers and then players who have access to what Chapman terms “configurative production within the story space.”²¹⁴ Chapman defines game designer(s) and players then as developer-historian and player-historian respectively as they both occupy “history-play-space.”²¹⁵ The developer-historian is the author(s) of the game that constructs meanings about the past by determining the “nature and components of the story space”, as well as setting up the game world, rules, and ludic parameters for this historical game to operate.”²¹⁶ Meanwhile, player-historians are both “narrator and audience.”²¹⁷ Primarily, in Chapman’s view, player-historians create histories within the game that determine “which narratives are eventually told” by their development of immediate ludonarratives (narratives that are constructed through the player’s own activity of interactive play) and its mediation with the narrative and/or ludic mechanisms and structures of the game itself.²¹⁸ These mechanisms include framing narratives which set the scene and objectives of the player such as the main plotline, pre-scripted events, and quests; and lexia – a term used to describe any object in the game that has a narrative function and control, such as firearms, an opening door, and a moving vehicle.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ Chapman, *Digital Games as History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice*, p. 33.

²¹⁵ Chapman, p. 51.

²¹⁶ Chapman, p. 37.

²¹⁷ Chapman, p. 34.

²¹⁸ Chapman, p. 34.

²¹⁹ Chapman, pp. 119, 121-125.

A full examination into this shared authorship process between developer and player within historical games is not the main focus of the thesis but undertaking any research into historical gameplay has to consider these factors beforehand. For instance, understanding and/or collecting data on the game design fundamentals of a historical game is a vital method for further extending and subsequently corroborating one's gameplay findings, as they determine and shape not only the type of gameplay medium but the entire historical game object. However, while 'developer-historian' and 'player-historian' remain valuable terms, as it currently stands, they have yet to be explicitly proven with robust empirical evidence via accumulation of data from player and/or game developers' receptions toward historical games. Thus, there still exists uncertainty concerning the practicality of these labels in their current iteration. Chapman has addressed the underdevelopment of this area and its absence of empirical data back in his 2016 seminal text. This view was repeated in recent years by Nico Nolden, stating: "Game Developers have not yet been screened for their conceptions of history ... [and there is also an] almost complete lack of ... empirical study of audience/player responses to and engagement with historical video games."²²⁰

Currently, a handful of works within this area of historical game studies have instigated and made early significant contributions to how game developers and players react to, engage with, and understand history. Notable works include Nick Webber's article 'Public History, Game Communities and Historical Knowledge' (player), the earlier discussed thesis and article by Beaver and Stirling and Wood respectively (player), and Grufstedt's thesis 'Counterfactual History and Game Design Practice in Digital Strategy

²²⁰ Nico Nolden, 'Gaming Public History: Academics and Digital Games', in *Making Histories*, ed. by Paul Ashton, Tanya Evans & Paula Hamilton (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020), 151-162, p. 153; Chapman, pp. 32, 34, 45.

Games' (game developer and player) described in Section 1.5.1.²²¹ To elaborate one of the prominent examples, Tara J. Coplestone's 2017 article investigated the differing perceptions of accuracy in historical games between players, game designers, and cultural heritage experts (e.g. historians).²²² In respect to players and video game designers concerned, one of the main findings she found was that between half to two thirds of these groups both perceived history and historical accuracy from an introductory or traditional approach.²²³ Specifically, reciting or replicating facts from visual and material history found in school textbooks, internet sites like Wikipedia, and physical sites such as surviving historical buildings.²²⁴ Without making full generalisations, this article particularly shows that the majority of members within these latter two groups have not fulfilled Chapman's potential of the emergence of developer-historian and player-historian.

Coplestone's findings highlight that more empirical research is needed to corroborate the relationships of authorship to the different kinds of players and game developers involved in historical gaming. Yet, I argue that the current lack of data to fully validate these two particular roles also coincides with a number of technical and conceptual limitations or gaps which problematise their current meanings and functions or usages. While this topic is not the main focus for this thesis, it is imperative to address or resolve some of these concerns as they have important bearing regarding my own position

²²¹ Nick Webber, 'Public History, Game Communities and Historical Knowledge', in *DiGRA/FDG '16 – Proceedings of the 2016 Playing With History Workshop* (Dundee: DiGRA, 2016);

Beavers, 'The Informal Learning of History with Digital Games';

Stirling and Woods, 'Actual history doesn't Take Place: Digital Gaming, Accuracy and Authenticity';

Grufstedt, 'Counterfactual History and Game Design Practice in Digital Strategy Games'.

²²² Coplestone, 'But that's not Accurate: The Differing Perceptions of Accuracy in Cultural-heritage Videogames between Creators, Consumers and Critics'.

²²³ Coplestone, pp. 423-424.

²²⁴ Coplestone, pp. 423-424.

expressed in this doctoral research. Until new substantial evidence surfaces, the current problem with these terms in relation to gameplay discourse is how they are seemingly used as loosely all-encompassing terms to qualify or label the totality of game developers and players as potential historians by minimising their conjugate 'historian' to simply an authorship and productive status that anyone can simply occupy. These authorship roles are addressed further in the following supplementary sections.

2.4.3.1 Developer-historian:

The term 'developer-historian' needs re-working as a specified role to address certain (but not all) types of game developers. Chapman clarifies that he does not argue that there are no differences present between developer-historians and professional academic historians due to still sharing different interests, aims, and engagements.²²⁵ However, his seminal text that originally introduced the term makes no extensive descriptions or clear boundaries as to what specifically are the expectations, roles, and standards of measuring and evaluating game developers as developer-historians, aside from the general ambiguous statement of them being "those that make meaning about the past through the form of digital games."²²⁶ Chapman's formalist position attends more to the productive (historying) and authoring components of an historian and subsequently minimises the role to simply an authorship status (i.e. developing the game). However, an historian is not merely a particular authorship role. It is a highly specialised and meticulous craft, one that must extensively involve *both* and not *either* the production (authoring) and concurrently the analysis of a history, as well as combining many other critical skills and expertise in history while strictly adhering to regulations and standards

²²⁵ Chapman, p. 15.

²²⁶ Chapman, p. 15.

of the discipline. As historian Alessandro Testa further added, not only is doing history (historians) and developing videogames (game developers) conceived as two different tasks (both in procedure and purpose), but the majority of historians and video game developers do not necessarily (although they can choose to do so) work with the same basic source materials, epistemological and methodological choices, and objectives, for:

it can be easily ascertained that no game developer has ever declared his or her sources or critically theorized and discussed with historians – in historical terms of course – about his or her way of interpreting primary sources in the process of developing a videogame. Nor historical videogames themselves (Civilization as well as others) cite any primary or secondary sources.²²⁷

This critique is not to indicate that game developers are not extensively engaging in history or involving themselves in examining and interpreting historical sources. What I argue is that a developer-historian would be someone who is both an expert and extensively versatile in combining both history and game design occupations.

For this thesis, I propose not a dismissal of the term (as it is still possible for someone to qualify that role) but instead forward ‘historical game developer’ as another role complementary to developer-historian. I term historical game developer as a developer who still authors and extensively engages in researching and designing history but operate first and foremost in their respective game designer role with extensive or limited collaboration with historians and/or historical experts. This term then is ideally suited to address the wide plethora of game developer teams who exhibit a range of different aims

²²⁷ Alessandro Testa, 'Religion(s) in Videogames - Historical and Anthropological Observations', *Heidelberg Journal for Religions on the Internet*, 5 (2014), 249-278, p. 264.

or intentions, as well as varying levels of engagement, to the respective history represented in their historical game project. Historical game developer also provides an important placeholder in reference to most of my game designer interviewees of the game case studies, who engaged with their history and its various subject(s) in distinctly different yet insightful and interactive ways (see Section 4.3.2 for discussion on the interview method).

2.4.3.2 *Player-historian:*

The current placement of player-historian by Chapman's term of phrase is also contentious. Namely, simplifying the historian conjugate to mainly an authorial mode afforded to players that are *doing* history (historying) by being able to partake in some of the same opportunities as historians. Including, for example, some of the methodological and/or epistemological practices in historiography (on a barely verified assumption that players are going to somehow know beforehand what historical epistemologies are without guidance or instruction). While I agree that players are given some of the same opportunities as historians in the practices of meaning-making through historying (narrating history), this feature alone cannot denote the entirety of the historian role within historical games (including player-historian). An historian occupation in any field or discipline is more than just taking on an authorial position through narration. It requires years of continual practice and mastery, let alone continuing engagement in the interplay between both production (doing) and analysis (reading).

This limited frame of the player-historian and the few works within historical game studies that examine player immersion and ludonarrative agency in historical games (e.g. Copplestone, Beavers, Stirling and Woods) is further compounded by certain gaps. One

of the significant gaps that problematise Chapman's current aspiration and usage of player-historian is the ambiguity or lack of discussion on distinguishing the different modes or vehicles of a player's "ludic subject."²²⁸ That is, the lack of discussion by historians on a player's ludic subject either as a player avatar or as a (player) character persona when entering and inhabiting the game world. Digital game scholar Gareth Schott explores this dynamic by specifying these two major participatory modes of character immersion adopted by players. The player avatar is simply the "vehicle through which the player is given some sort of embodied agency and presence into the game world", which enables the player to become the avatar itself (essentially the avatar role is more-or-less a virtual-based extension of the player from the real world manifesting within the game world).²²⁹ In this context, avatars are original creations of the player by having a unique appearance, class or role, and abilities based on the player's preferences. This extensive player investment in avatar creation is afforded by using the character design menu prior to commencing the game. The character persona by contrast as a pre-determined figure with their own personality, appearance, and voice shifts the role from being "completely controlled by the player into being an individual and autonomous being with a will of its own."²³⁰ Essentially, the player in this context is mainly the vehicle for enabling the input of the character's interactions.

Historical games have utilised either player avatar or character persona as its primary mode of participation, but the characteristic distinctions of these participatory modes

²²⁸ Daniel Vella, 'The Ludic Subject and the Ludic Self: Analyzing the 'I-in-the-Gameworld'' (unpublished Doctoral thesis, IT University of Copenhagen, 2015), p. 14.

²²⁹ Gareth Schott, *Violent Games: Rules, Realism, and Effect* (London, and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p. 115;

Rune Klevjer, 'Enter the Avatar: The Phenomenology of Prosthetic Telepresence in Computer Games', in *The Philosophy of Computer Games*, ed. by John Richard Sageng, Hallvard Fossheim & Tarjei Mandt Larsen (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2012), 17-38, p. 17.

²³⁰ Kirstine Jørgensen, *A Comprehensive Study of Sound in Computer Games: How Audio Affects Player Action* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), p. 3;

Schott, p. 115.

have an important basis in determining how a game's history is communicated and experienced through gameplay. Since an avatar is essentially a puppet fully controlled by and embedded with the player's personality and sensibilities, participating as a player avatar for historical game research or inquiry is generally controversial from a temporal and spatial perspective. Specifically, complications in having to assess and assign value to our actions in the game as our own present-day selves projected onto a past setting as having significance in correspondence to any historical events, individuals, settings, and other constituents represented in the game. Complications, that is, because these same constituents in their actual past within the real world were never caused by our presence and involvement. As avatars have little prior backstory and are often blank-slate individuals uniquely designed by the player, they are not strictly bound or connected to the historical background and events, conditions or conflicts, and minutiae that typically affected past individuals or societies. This is not to say that we should cease examining historical games using player avatar immersion, but a great deal of care in understanding our engagement to this vehicle of participatory immersion is warranted when exploring historical game representation.²³¹

Arguably then, character persona is the more viable and less problematic role when experiencing and studying history in games. Because it elicits an appropriate degree of distance between the player and the character, it allows us to observe and empathise the character's body, views, and actions, even simple or mundane tasks, in a more meaningfully historical frame by placing the character as a distinct historical entity from the player within the environment and particularities of the game's respective historical period. Character persona then is, in my opinion, more common in historical games,

²³¹ Player avatar is highly popular and suitable in historical games such as *Mordhau* (2019) and *Battlefield 1* (2016) that primarily focus on competitive multiplayer online gaming through intensely violent combative engagements or battles situated in historically themed settings with little to no storyline or narrative framing.

where players take on a particular character archetype who is a unique (albeit artificially constructed) individual belonging to that period and setting of history. Thus, a more nuanced and complex relationship emerges then between two distinct entities with interrelated identity frames – the player-controller and the pre-designed character subject. Since this relationship is further complicated by the player being able to often “switch frames of reference ... [in moving] deftly between the ‘real’ world and the game world or role-play”, an analytical process is required to address and mediate this self-other relationship.²³² This process would entail the player first immersing as the character within the game world and then analysing their character or agent’s actions and experiences within the game with a certain degree of distance and empathy.

Yet this added integral factor of an interactive player-character duality within many historical games undermines or raises issues to Chapman’s rendition of player-historian, because the distinctive presence and personality of the character agent shifts most of the authorial power from the player to the character persona. Since a historical character persona (whether fictional or a real historical figure) is an embodiment of the game’s historical period and locality, the actions and contributions made within the game are usually carried out as and simultaneously affect the character persona rather than the player directly. For professional historians themselves in both history and historical game studies, this is not an inherent problem but a highly engaging and fruitful endeavour, as this process of character immersion and analysis bears close similarities to how historians engage in their immersion and analysis of other historical texts (written, films, re-enactment) and sources/evidence. Particularly, historians are enveloped in the reading and imagining of the historical world and/or agents described in the record, and still concurrently maintain a level of objective distance and inquiry when addressing their

²³² Daniel T. Kline, 'Participatory Medievalism, Role-Playing, and Digital Gaming', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, ed. by Louise D'Arcens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 75-88, p. 77.

historical agents and subject matter. However, Chapman makes no clear indications or provides evidence as to how this would entail non-academic players fulfilling the conditions of an historian if most may only fulfil one of these conditions (the ludonarrative production of history) and not the other (examining their experiences and subjects from a relative distance), especially when the historical character persona is taken into account.

The second significant gap overlooked is that historians (including video game historians), and more broadly scholars in general, constitute as another major type of player group. One may then ask would not this player group fulfil the status of a player-historian by converging both the role of player (author) and scholar (analyst) together, and subsequently establish an entirely different relationship to playing, examining, and disseminating historical games. Such a insight, however, has not yet received extensive research coverage that posits and demonstrates both video game and non-video game historians directly undertaking their historical game research. Namely, by first involving themselves as the main player-analyst, and recording and using actual game footage from the historical game text as one its prime sources of historical evidence and narration. This admission of historians and scholars as another type of active player then presents a conceptual dilemma or challenge to Chapman's application of the term. Further problematic is Chapman's regard that "players might make to a game if cued by historical resonance ... Yet, the majority of players ... probably primarily attend to the ludic aspect (i.e. strategy)", and "Whenever we play a historical game we are simultaneously creating a historical narrative. Importantly, this doesn't mean that we necessarily read this historical narrative. Nonetheless, playing historical games always involves the production of historical narrative by players in some way."²³³ Unfortunately, Chapman

²³³ Chapman, pp. 34, 44-45.

provides no further comments at length on the consequences these statements have in inhibiting non-academic players' ability to occupy or fulfill his player-historian credentials if their primary concern is to the ludic elements of the video game system.

This concurs with the third and final gap, which is that there has been no discussion or consideration into the possibility that there are also many other players comprising not only those with no interest in history (i.e. playing historical games simply for their ludic value). Also more importantly, the players who do have a personal interest in history and may desire to learn it in historical games, but do not want to practice and learn about histories represented in video games by themselves from their authorial play, whether they are aware or not aware that they are 'doing' history through some of their own historying processes. In the latter group, these players prefer to be informed and learn about the world, inhabitants, and the various experiences and lore they had within the historical game by an expert authority and narrator of the game's respective history. As part of informing players, this expert would use recorded gameplay from their own experiences of playing the game as a lead player-historian. As stated in one of my key contributions, there is already a large reception of player audiences who watch and/or subscribe to online lore channels on digital and non-digital game series which have helped these viewers to learn more about the game they have played while answering questions or clarifying confusions.²³⁴ To use Vaatividya for example, a number of his most popular videos on the *Souls* series are a collection of tales narrated by Vaatividya that detail the background and tragic downfall of a particular enemy boss or allied companion that you eventually encounter and/or fight against. These videos have helped to add depth and substance to these inhabitants as implicitly complex entities with their own

²³⁴ Redder, pp. 44-45.

histories, personalities, and inner conflicts or flaws. Meanwhile, they also give certain players a new sense of perspective and clarity to their own experiences when they interacted with these same beings. As one of many viewers Sakuya Amano commented when watching the video 'Prepare to Cry – The Children of Chaos' which explored a gradually declining race of chaos beings under the former leadership of the witches of Izalith:

The Fair Lady [an NPC character] is the reason I find Quelaag [an enemy boss and sister to the Fair Lady] to be one of the saddest fights in the game. Once you realize that she was trying to kill you so she could get your humanity to save her sister.²³⁵

In seeing how these kinds of emotional effects an imaginary dark fantasy game can elicit from players, similar endeavors could be tapped into by academic historians (as dictated in Section 1.6.1.1).

The current notion of player-historian forwarded by Chapman is highly problematic because it seemingly presumes that one who creates or authors histories has to some or large extent an historically guided incentive or mindset. That is, a purpose connected to either the discipline or dissemination of history beyond enthusiasm for consuming history and/or configuring representations in historical video games. In highlighting these problems surrounding the term 'player-historian', a gap exists in defining this term with respect to examining gameplay experiences in contrast to that of other players (besides the general acknowledgement that all players will take something out of history in historical games). A strategy effectively useful for initialising this process of identifying

²³⁵ Sakuya Amano, Re: *Prepare to Cry – The Children of Chaos* (YouTube video) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrUIPNMncz8>> [accessed 30 September 2020].

and describing the different player groups in historical gaming is applying Espen Aarseth's concept of the 'implied player' in contrast to 'transgressive player'.²³⁶ The implied player, Aarseth describes, is someone seen as a "role made for the player by the game, a set of expectations that the player must fulfill for the game to "exercise its effect"."²³⁷ What this means is that the term denotes a boundary imposed on the player-subject (the person playing) by the game, specifically their freedom of movement and choice.²³⁸

Using Aarseth's concept of implied player as a foundation, I expand and forward several more particular categories or roles that discern some of the player's relationships, incentives, and aims when playing and/or examining their gameplay experiences within historical games, and more importantly clarifies my role within this thesis' research on historical gaming. In this nuanced player outline, a player-historian would accurately be a particular type of player occupied by a video game or non-video game historian, historical expert, and student of history. Besides having historical agency and combining multiple critical skills in research, source analysis, and theoretical discourse, a player-historian must have a sound expertise not only in their specialisation of their historical period(s). They must also have extensive expertise in the presentation of that history in both its representational and procedural functions within the historical game, which are critically examined and evaluated via recording and analysis of gameplay sequences as well as corroborative support from other historical sources and/or insights from other

²³⁶ Transgressive players is the counterpart to implied player, where players interact within the game that for a number of reasons curtails or goes against the intentions of the game designers, or create scenarios that were not predicted by the game designers during development of the game, such as cheating or manipulating the mechanisms and systems of the game to produce bizarre or unexpected situations.

²³⁷ Aarseth, 'I Fought the Law: Transgressive Play and The Implied Player', p. 132. His idea of the implied player has similarities with Hermeneutics philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer's discussion on the unfree player-subject. Gadamer argues that it is the game and not the player that is the real subject of play, in the sense that players willingly accept the rules, conventions, and objectives of the game despite games offering the illusion of unlimited or uncontrolled freedom for players.

²³⁸ Aarseth, p. 133.

player groups. This frame of player-historian then subtly shifts the notion of player as an author in totality to that of an analytical agent who primarily authors their own multimodal gameplay experiences which interact with and activate or materialise the game's represented histories. During this process, a player-historian would seek to follow, as closely as possible, with the game's typical parameters, rules, opportunities, and storylines in their avatar/character protagonist role. These experiences would then be analysed and disseminated once they finish the game or suspend it at a certain point and is no longer inhabiting the character agent. Therefore, I define player-historian as one of many types of 'player-analyst', a wider branching term I have developed which is discussed in later detail in Chapter 4's methodology framework as it is one of my key forms of analysis.

This variation of player-historian is contrasted to 'players of history', which are participants who may be historical enthusiasts or chose to play historical games due to an interest in history, and can (consciously or unconsciously) engage in a number of the same practices of configuring historical representations. However, they cannot qualify the historian status because of other activities, practices, and scholarly discourses that historians can apply to researching and discussing historical games which are not afforded to them, as well as typically not conducting any scholarly inquiry or critical analysis of their game's representations as histories. Players of history then are more related to the broader spectrum of 'player-as-participant', another category I have established. This latter term encompasses the many general or regular players that primarily interact with the game for strategy (ludic) reasons, while having more-or-less an interest in interacting with the game's plotline, setting, and content insofar as they impact on the player's progression. This reframing of 'player-historian' in contrast to 'players of history' however is neither intended to establish historians as the chief authoritarian figures and sole custodians in the ownership of history and historical

authoring within games, nor is it to suggest in any way whatsoever that player-historians are a superior or a more ideal player to use for historical game study.

2.4.3.3 Developer-historian and Player-historian – Summary:

The significance of re-defining developer-historian and player-historian, alongside the addition of other roles such as historical game developer and players of history, is to confirm that my thesis' research into historical gameplay is in the role of a player-historian. Re-working and performing this role aligns to a supporting area of interest I discussed earlier regarding historians' implementation of gameplay scholarship as contributions to their area of historiography.²³⁹ Conversely, re-working developer-historian as a specialised role better contextualises the majority of game designers and their various interests and insights into history (including those that I interviewed as part of my doctoral research) as performing the historical game developer role. Meanwhile, it provides a space for future dialogue and research into the potentiality for certain game designers, as well as historians who are either the head of the project or hired for collaboration, to develop into and operate as a developer-historian. Moreover, the re-workings of these definitions put scholars and students of historical game studies more actively at the forefront as intermediaries between the public and academic domains of history and historical gaming by constituting their research, scholarship, and involvement in historical games as embodying and demonstrating the player-historian occupation.

However, these roles outlined are not intended as entirely hard or fixed boundaries, and hence a level of overlap or leeway between these roles exist. For instance, certain players of history may become interested and transition into history as a career, and subsequently

²³⁹ Redder, p. 33.

specialised as a player-historian in their historical game research. Some player-historians may be inspired to learn and take up game design as another key skillset, and in combination with their critical skills and research methods in history can work independently or in collaboration with game studios as a developer-historian versed in researching and developing historical game projects. Moreover, these roles outlined are still themselves highly broad and diverse, such as players of history encompassing a whole range of players with different types and levels of interest, knowledge, and engagement to learning history. Classifying and unpacking the entire typology for each of these roles is beyond the aims and scope of this thesis but is still a vital area of importance for continuing the improvement of research into gameplay representation.

2.5 Literature Review Summary and Research Questions (Refined):

This literature review provides an important foundation as to how gameplay is usually defined or applied in both digital game and historical game studies, as well as how its current meanings relate to the wider discourse of representation studied by scholars from the respective fields concerned. Consequently, outlining this current literature on gameplay provides vital groundwork for the research framework employed in this study (see Chapters 3 and 4) and meet the key aims and arguments (Section 1.5) of the thesis. The grounding provided by this literature is to establish key patterns of known features or facets of gameplay, while also revealing gaps and limitations in terms of the application of game studies knowledge and understanding of gameplay to historical gaming.

The patterns and gaps unveiled within this entire review can be summarised into five key areas:

- Gameplay as a medium structurally entails, and concurrently communicates, content and form in both the contexts of history and digital games (game world and game structure).
- Discussions on historical imagination and lore (2.2) were identified as some of the major pre-existing forms of a history already existent in the historical gameplay medium. They are both vital components for this research into historical gameplay as they represent some of gameplay's semiotic resources in its gamic communication of history.
- This literature review outlined gaps at the end of each of this chapter's preceding sections. To recap one example, current information in the majority of works on gameplay and/or historical representation mainly express and subscribe to gameplay as action (play). Meanwhile, information on gameplay as a form of communication is largely limited, and by extension absent in historical game studies. It was discussed that a main reason behind this absence of historical studies on gameplay as a representational medium is that these works heavily center historical games and their scholarship capacity on a formalist framework (the form of history), including its narratology and ludology aesthetics. This formalist framework on historical games, while still valuable, reinforces gameplay's currently limited status as a purely ludic constituent of the historical game form and method for player interaction. Elias, Garfield, and Gutschera's account of gameplay being of various lengths, and recent explorations into gameplay as the primary mode of representation by scholars like Quijano, Burn, and Hawreliak, are some of the noteworthy exceptions due to their attempts of diverging from this mainstream consensus.

- The lack of studies on gameplay as the primary medium of historical games coincides with limited attention, particularly in historical game studies, to the role of other major historical terms or aspects comprising historical representation. Including content, scholarship, and knowledge (lore) in an animative game context.
- This literature review's coverage on authorship/agency showed that research into the representation of history through gameplay cannot progress without first addressing my position or engagement to recording and examining gameplay experiences within historical games as a scholarly historian. As part of situating my historical gameplay research framework (detailed later in Chapters 3 and 4), this required an evaluation and re-definition of player-historian and developer-historian (originally coined by Chapman).

Using these five key areas as a starting base for the framework of my doctoral research, this thesis aims to establish and forward the study of historical gameplay as the medium of historical games in representing the past, a medium consisting of both action and communication. My entire undertaking of this research is carried out as a player-historian under the conditions described earlier (see also Section 4.4.1 detailing the application of this role). This undertaking also entails some extensions to historical gameplay analysis in the form of introducing the chosen historical game case studies via deconstruction of their initial game design and historical research frameworks (see Chapter 5). Most importantly, this doctoral study will explore, validate, and contribute empirical findings on the different modes or typologies of gameplay as histories containing new and exciting forms of scholarship via its multimodal configuration, and the efficacy of its potential value in assisting and enhancing other sources of historical scholarship and evidence. As highlighted in Chapter 1, scholarship potential in gameplay representation, especially in

recent historical game releases, must be treated as an all-encompassing term to uncover and articulate the various and intersecting animative expressions of historical knowledge, content, and discourse.²⁴⁰ However, the discovery of different types of historical scholarship via gameplay still requires and must incorporate critical research and discussions of the procedural or ludic functions of gameplay as they enable historical representation to emerge within gaming. Ignoring either the procedural or representational functions of a gameplay medium risks undermining my argument of the representation of history through gameplay as multimodal.

The aims and arguments of this thesis outlined in Section 1.5, alongside the major engagements and gaps of gameplay discourse covered in this chapter's literature review, can be synthesised into a list of research questions for examining and achieving this doctoral study's key aims and arguments:

- i.) How is history experienced through multimodal gameplay representation?
- ii.) What historical knowledge (lore) as well as new expressions of existing knowledge are experienced through historical gameplay?
- iii.) What modalities of history and their stylistic engagements within experiential gaming are identified or discovered and illustrated by the PhD through sequences of historical gameplay?

²⁴⁰ Redder, p. 43.

- iv.) How is gameplay imbued with history through the different responses/aims of their game developer studio and their combined methods of historical research and game design?

- v.) What were the historical and game design limitations and compromises or solutions in developing and representing history?

To briefly outline where these questions are addressed within the thesis, Chapter 5 addresses the five research questions, but primarily contributes to research questions iv and v due its focus on the game development production of my chosen game case studies. Meanwhile, Chapters 6 – 8 solely dedicate to the main research questions i, ii, and iii. Yet to carry out and achieve these research questions, the framework best suitable to address, articulate, and optimise knowledge on the innerworkings of historical gameplay representation is multimodality. Multimodality served as the basis for developing my own working conceptual model to uncover, conceptualise, and analyse different modalities of the historical gameplay medium, which is addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Historical Modality

3.1 Historical Modality – Developing a Framework for Historical Gameplay Research:

In line with the key aims (1.5) and research questions (2.5) of this thesis, I wish to explore and validate different modes of historical gameplay both as historical representations and fully-fledged multimodal histories. The study of gameplay ideally examines historical games from a position inverse to formalist accounts by looking primarily at how “history informs environments, narratives, game play, mechanics, and strategies ... [as well as] how original primary [and secondary] source research can become those elements.”²⁴¹ The challenge is that it embarks into new uncharted territory for historical game studies. Referring to analysis of gaps in the literature review (see Section 2.4.1), one of the few frameworks currently used to analyse or express historical games is Chapman’s wider formalist categories – the realist and conceptual simulation categories. However, this research demanded the development of an extended analytical framework that place focus on the medium (gameplay) and its capacity to rigorously identify, conceptualise, and articulate the “different languages or modes [and literacies] of history and their representational particularities.”²⁴² Thus, for this research investigation to proceed, a new conceptual framework was required to determine and provide a focus for analysis of the experiential modes of historical expression.

²⁴¹ Spring, p. 208.

²⁴² Redder, p. 76.

At the end of Chapter 2, it was proposed that incorporating a multimodal approach into gameplay research would begin to offer a particular system for identifying, analysing, and describing the multiple communication modes and literacies of historical gameplay. Therefore, in response to the current lack of frameworks within historical game studies that deconstruct historical gameplay, I provide a working framework founded on the principles of multimodality which I labelled 'historical modality'. This framework serves as a conceptual guideline to discover, identify, and navigate the analysis and articulation of different modalities of historical gameplay. Whether newly emergent or longstanding, most historical modalities included in this framework remain, for the moment, underdeveloped or require further explanation and definition. The purpose of this chapter then is to outline a historical modality framework and how it intends to work in analysis. Before historical modality can be outlined, it is first necessary to introduce the basis for the framework that is drawn from the field of social semiotics – multimodality.

3.2 Multimodality:

Multimodality is fundamentally the composition and simultaneously the application of multiple interconnected literacies and modes of communication and experience to make meaning. Multimodality focuses on meaning-making processes and how distinct (often unrelated) communicative elements “come together to make meaning in a single semiotic event”, and consequently “what meanings are produced by these cultural productions.”²⁴³ Multimodality was established by its founders, semiotician scholars Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, in their study of visual mediums of photography

²⁴³ Burn, p. 169;
Hawreliak, p. 4.

and film.²⁴⁴ However, it is not confined to these mediums. It is presented as a “field of research rather than [strictly] a theory or a discipline [per se] ... [and hence] can be approached from different theoretical perspectives.”²⁴⁵

A number of scholars have contributed applications of multimodal frameworks, including Jay Lemke (science) and Andrew Burn (video games). Nonetheless, most of these works share the basic foundations of multimodal analysis and discourse. Principally, in multimodality all communicative acts contain three integral ‘metafunctions’ or principles, which are representational, orientational, and organizational meanings.²⁴⁶ Representational meaning “are those which present some state of affairs” or more simply to “represent some aspect of the world”, whether the knowledge or meanings of that representation is large, grand, and/or small and domestic.²⁴⁷ Orientational function is how those aspects from that representation are communicated back-and-forth to the other person or group (e.g. audience, viewer, or player).²⁴⁸ Finally, the organizational function simply merges the other two functions together to form a structurally coherent and cohesive communicative event, genre, or text as a whole.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ See *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996) and *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication* (2001) by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen for a full coverage of the multimodality field as one form rooted in social semiotics.

²⁴⁵ Thomas H. Andersen, Morten Boeriis, Eva Maagerø and Elise S. Tønnessen, *Social Semiotics: Key Figures, New Directions* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 157.

²⁴⁶ Andrew Burn and David Parker, *Analysing Media Texts* (London, and New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 6.

²⁴⁷ Jay L. Lemke, 'Travels in Hypermodality', *Sage Publications*, 1.3 (2002), 299-325, p. 304;

Burn and Parker, p. 6. These aspects described regarding representational meaning can be about anything such as processes, figural and abstract imagery, relationships, people, places, and events.

²⁴⁸ Lemke, p. 304.

²⁴⁹ Burn and Parker, p. 6.

For this thesis, the engagement with this theory is primarily confined to representation when combining different modes of communication within and via gameplay, and its meaning-making potential, within the contexts of history and historical games. Multimodality offers a means of deconstructing the various ways games communicate history by bringing a different approach toward the study of representation in the historical game studies field that takes full account of the formal properties of games. Understanding multimodal communication as a “process in which a semiotic product or event is both articulated or produced *and* interpreted or used” shares a close relationship with Chapman’s discussions of how players have the capacity to engage in both the activities of ‘doing’ and ‘reading’ history within games (covered in Section 2.4.1).²⁵⁰ Yet multimodality takes this interplay a step further. Multimodality reveals and deeply illuminates that our doing or authoring of history within play is not, in fact, the authoring of history itself. Rather, we as agents are authoring our multimodal experiences taking place within immersive interaction with the history(ies) being activated and represented in the game, the entirety of which is manifested and subsequently read or interpreted by a medium intermediary (gameplay). This is because the game’s various histories encountered by the player has already been produced and pre-prepared in advance by the game developers (and by extension any historians and/or historical experts who collaborated with the game studio). Acknowledging the multimodal nature of this interrelationship then also shows that, beside game developers, the authorship of history (historying) is not solely the privilege of and partaken by “interactive participants” (players).²⁵¹ It also extends to “[interactive] represented participants” comprising of the

²⁵⁰ Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication* (London: Arnold, 2001), p. 20.

²⁵¹ Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 48.

numerous non-playable AI characters that interact with the player while inhabiting the historical game world.²⁵²

Due to its applicability, I argue that the multimodal nature of the gameplay medium offers a particular innovative system within historical game research for developing and examining “meaning ... through the use of multiple modes of communication as opposed to just language ... [and] our meaning making of the elements (and modes) within the text as a whole.”²⁵³ The word ‘mode’ in this statement is broadly defined as a particular material and/or semiotic resource used to organise and signal or communicate meaning(s) (be it simple or complex) within a medium, whether in referring to its generalisations (e.g. imagery, writing, speech, object manipulation, music, digital and non-digital play) or in its signs, units, and acts (e.g. word, gesture, sound, image), with each mode’s potential and limitations described as ‘affordances’.²⁵⁴ Modes are not always universal and fixed as they are often shaped or situated under particular social, historical, technological, and cultural contexts.²⁵⁵ When two or more modes are combined together, they become a multimodal assemblage presenting new or novel ideas. Thus, multimodality serves to illuminate the multi-communicative nature and meaning-making intricacies of gameplay within historical games. Fundamentally, there is a recognition that communication in all forms (including video games) is rarely limited to

²⁵² Kress and Van Leeuwen, p. 48.

²⁵³ Weimin Toh, *A Multimodal Approach to Video Games and the Player Experience* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p. 21.

²⁵⁴ Gunther Kress, *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication* (Abingdon, and New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 79;

Gunter Kress, ‘What is a Mode?’, in *The Routledge Hand Book of Multimodal Analysis*, ed. by Carey Jewitt, 2nd edn (Abingdon, and New York: Routledge, 2014), 60-75, p. 64.

²⁵⁵ Eva Maagerø and Elise S. Tønnessen, ‘Multimodal Literacy in English as an Additional Language’, in *Multimodality in English Language Learning*, ed. by Sigrid Ørevik & Sophia Diamantopoulou (Abingdon, and New York: Routledge, 2022), 27-38, p. 33;

Andersen, Boeriis, Maagerø, and Tønnessen, p. 77.

a single communicative mode.²⁵⁶ As a result, multimodality encourages scholars to incorporate the relationship between a range of media and non-media sources. When it comes to gameplay histories, this would include historical evidence from different sources and how static and animative representation elicits a multiplicity of historical meanings, perspectives, and information.

Based on existing applications of multimodality, it is argued that there is value in exploring its capacity to reveal how historical scholarship is applied and converted into a system of multiple integrated literacies in the contexts of games.²⁵⁷ Scholars such as Christopher Klimmt have explored the potential capacity for multimodality to diversify and increase the likelihood of knowledge acquisition and application when combined with immersive modern digital game technology.²⁵⁸ Aside from increasing the game's entertainment value, this process can effectively develop and incorporate "multimodal content presentation ... [for active] instructional communication ... to learners' working memory structure."²⁵⁹ Finally, as one of the primary methods for conducting analysis of both the Medieval historical games (see Section 4.4.3), multimodality provides opportunities to identify and interpret or articulate different kinds of historical experiences afforded in gameplay.

For these reasons as to how multimodality addresses the research aims and questions, I developed a history paradigm of a multimodality taxonomy framework to focus analysis around the multimodality of historical games, which I term 'historical modality' (see

²⁵⁶ Ian Roderick, *Critical Discourse Studies and Technology: A Multimodal Approach to Analysing Technoculture* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), p. 52.

²⁵⁷ Burn and Parker, pp. 80-82.

²⁵⁸ Christopher Klimmt, 'Serious Games and Social Change: Why They (Should) Work', in *Serious Games: Mechanisms and Effects*, ed. by Ute Ritterfeld, Michael J. Cody & Peter Vorderer (New York: Routledge, 2009), 248-270, p. 259.

²⁵⁹ Klimmt, p. 259.

Section 3.3). I have chosen this term as it refers to the variety of multimodal systems or ensembles of historical gameplay that engage in and construct or contain different styles of representation, experience, and literacy of history as the principal modality of historical games. Hence, the words 'historical modality' and 'modality' are used within its parent term 'historical gameplay' throughout this thesis to signal these particular modes of historical gameplay representation. The historical modality system is also intended as a working framework for historians and scholars to use in their study of historical video games.

The foundation of this conceptual framework is inspired by and is a structural merging of two of Andrew Burn's multimodal analytical models. These models are 'modality in games' used for video game analysis and 'metamodel kineikonic' for film. The former model addresses how video games are made up of a hybrid of modalities, with each one addressing a particular characteristic or function of a video game in its relation to the immersion of and interactivity with the player.²⁶⁰ Multiple modalities within video games have been identified for use in digital game media, including naturalistic, technology, and narrative modalities.²⁶¹ Meanwhile, the latter model is effective for deconstructing the way larger meta modes are both within a mode and are simultaneously made up of a number of specific conjoined modes. Thus, this model is designed for studying the "nesting of modes within modes."²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Burn, p. 178.

²⁶¹ Burn, p. 178. Naturalistic modality looks at how the "text's truth claim[s] and the audience's judgment of it are based on representational similarity to the natural world or aspects of it" (Burn and Parker, p. 47). Technological modality signifies how the interface of the game contains for access and/or presents varying utilities such as health bar and map. Finally, narrative modality relates to how the story of the game is presented in two forms of moving image, which are the non-interactive kineikonic (e.g. cutscenes) and more prominently interactive kineikonic which is generated from the player's constant interaction with the game and receiving and responding to the feedback response from the game, and likewise the inverse.

²⁶² Burn, p. 173. To reference one of Burn's examples, a modal "contributal" structure he highlights that make up the process of filming alongside its counterpart editing (which he labels together as 'orchestrating modes') is "dramatic modes", which he then breaks down into individual modes such as "action, speech, set, and costume", and then breaks dramatic action down into "gesture ... facial expression, [and] proxemics" (Burn, p. 174).

3.3 Conceptual Model – Historical Modality:

To describe historical modality as the primary framework for investigating the historical gameplay mediums in each of my game case studies, it is first requisite to recap gameplay here. In Section 1.3, I provided my own definition of gameplay:

gameplay ... [encompasses] the entirety of the animative game experience, including in simultaneity its ludic and procedural elements ... and the visual, performative, material, narrative, verbal, aural, and many other communicative modes and styles ... [gameplay is also] the actual medium by being both a semiotic form of communication and as a rule-based or ludic system of recurring actions.²⁶³

This account underlines gameplay as a form of multimodality based on the combined disciplinary dimensions of history, digital game studies, and social semiotics. It also underlines my usage of the term ‘medium’ in gameplay as fundamentally comprising of the constituents ‘gameplay as communication’ (i.e. how it communicates as a game) and ‘gameplay as action’ (i.e. as play). It is clearly obvious that these two constituents are also equally synonymous since action is just one of many modes or forms of communication. Likewise, any form of communication requires, and is the result of, the innumerable series of actions by players facilitated within the game’s configured play-space. Hence historical gameplay medium refers to both these constituents as one and the same.

In proposing a more formalised historical definition extending Tavinor’s wider definition of gameplay, I add that historical gameplay is a multimodal communicative medium and

²⁶³ Redder, p. 16.

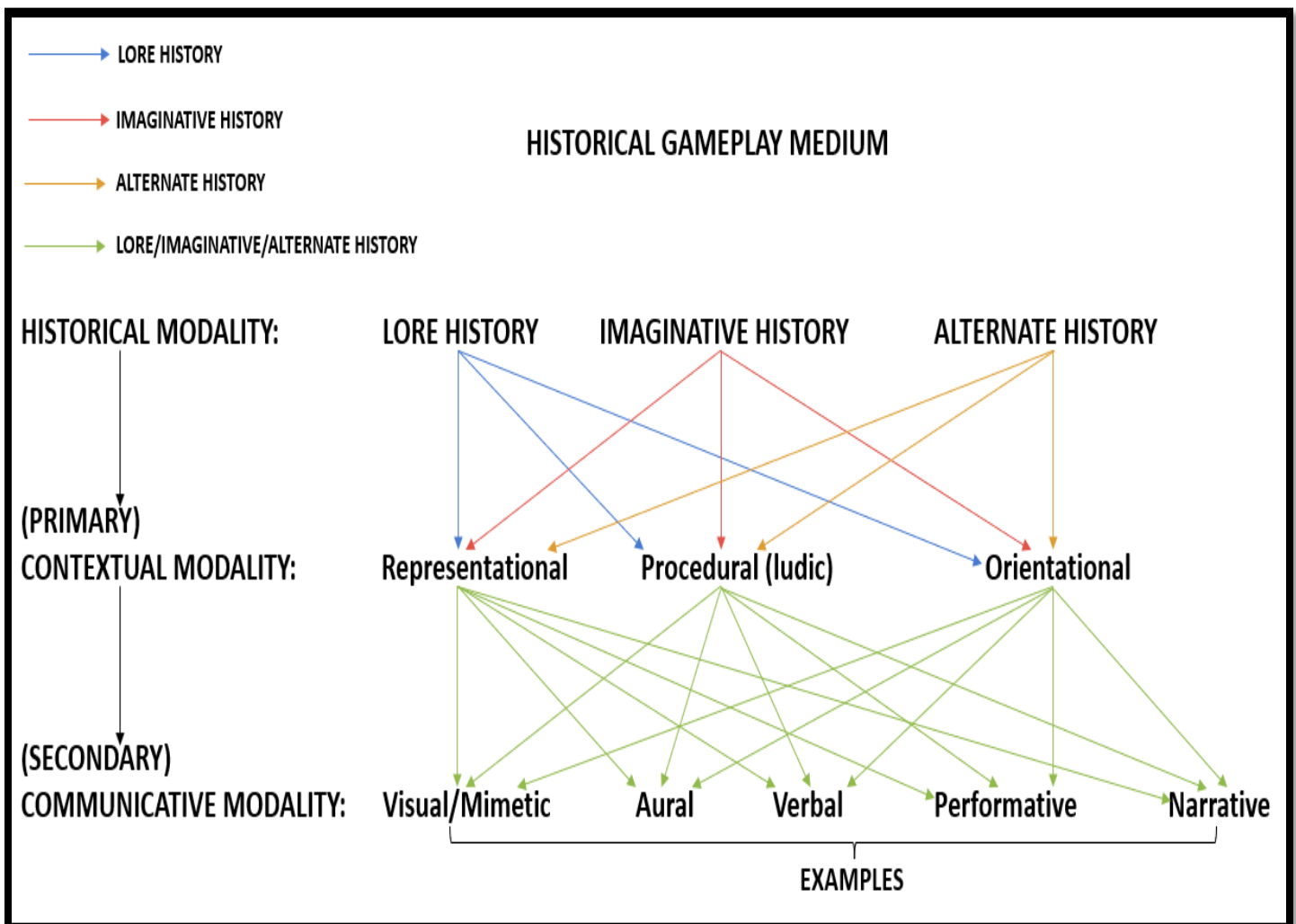
form of historiography consisting of an integrative assemblage of different literacies and modes of expression and experience. Each type or style of gameplay representation constitutes a particular historical modality operating in its own multimodal ensemble, content and its meaning-making processes, and historical literacies. A brief example of historical literacies might be how players visit and interact with historical sites and buildings with its past functions configured to its particular state as it was in the past, or acquiring proficiency with historical objects, tools, and weapons in line with their material properties, technique(s), and function. A game's historical modality is supported and characterised by both its particularity and connection to historical research and evidence. Historical modalities have the potential to become digital records when featured in games as a result of valid and robust game development research. Furthermore, in this study experiential gameplay histories were captured and preserved (as both videos and screenshots), and intently used as sources of evidence that could be verified or further explored with traditional sources of evidence. The definitions presented above account for the use of historical gameplay (the medium of historical games) and its various modalities throughout this thesis.

Historical modality then is a multimodal conceptual framework that identifies, examines, and discusses an assemblage of different modalities or typologies of history contained in and experienced through gameplay. This framework encompasses gameplay not merely as a representation set in history, but more importantly communicates and allows *an experience of that history* (in relation to the historical game's chosen period and subject matter). Historical modality then has two key purposes suitably fitted to addressing this thesis' aims and research questions. First, to identify, describe, and illustrate what modality or modalities of history are being expressed in historical gameplay representation. Second, to examine what kinds of engagements with and literacies of

history are made possible through gameplay and its different modalities of history. An aim of this research is to discern what scholarship or historiographies games disseminate from their communication of the game's history and its various minutiae.

Figure 3.1 – Historical Modality Framework

A diagram showing several main types and the compositions of historical modality.



As displayed in Figure 3.1, each particular historical modality within the medium of historical gameplay comprises of and are arranged by two integrated layers of sub-modalities. That is, an historical modality is made up of a synthesis of three primary 'contextual modalities' known as the representational, procedural, and orientational functions comprising the first layer. Each of these contextual modalities, in turn, are constructed by the assemblage of many interconnected and co-dependent secondary 'communicative modalities' (e.g. visual, narrative, material, performative, written, aural, spatial, ludic) comprising the second layer of a historical modality. Each communicative modality is made up of technical elements and semantic content or features, and these elements can also exist in more than one communicative modality. In the visual/mimetic modality for example, its technical elements include colour texture, lighting, cutscenes, moving imagery, first (FPV) and third-person view (TPV), and level design. Meanwhile, its semantic content would include constituents like settings, buildings and infrastructure, clothing, utensils and objects, weapons, different inhabitants/people and their livelihoods, and topographies with diverse flora and fauna. Some content, such as inhabitants and weapons, are also present in other communicative modalities like performance and aural sound. In summary, a historical modality is the primary multimodal ensemble of a gameplay history arranged by the sum of its interlayered parts (contextual and communicative modalities), with these parts presented to, enacted, and experienced by players not in isolation but in their amalgamated multimodal configuration as sequential gameplay events. Further detail on the contextual (primary) and communicative (secondary) modalities are covered later in this section.

Historical modality addresses historical game studies' lack of specific taxonomy frameworks that nest within and complement the formalist frame of Chapman's wider analytical categories (realist and conceptual simulations). Namely, by providing a

template to analyse and articulate the medium (gameplay) and its various styles of multimodal engagements to history. While still a working model continually refined throughout this doctoral study, the historical modality system has been well demonstrated in its application of examining the Medieval game case studies by the support of key research methods employed. Concurrently, it was also used to support the analysis of data from these methods. A significant outcome of this process was the discovery, exploration into, and discussion of two major historical modalities of gameplay representation, which are 'lore history' and 'imaginative history'. As they constitute the primary key findings of this research and the main themes or subjects of this thesis' analytical discussion, they are introduced again at the end of Chapter 5 as a prelude to their later extensive coverage and illustration throughout the other analytical chapters (6–8). For the moment, I state that lore history and imaginative history are terms I have developed for this research to account for distinct modes of history within gameplay representation. Lore and imaginative histories provide a language to classify, study, and articulate some of the different types of gameplay representation and their multimodal ensembles, as well as their relationship to evidence from other historical sources. Additionally, I hope to establish that they represent a process of translation of scholarship or historiographies into multimodal accounts.

Contextual Modality (Primary):

In discussing each of the three core functions of contextual modality here, the term 'representation' was previously established in both Chapters 1 and 2. In relation to historical gaming, representation is the composition and multimodal communication of gameplay sequences as animated and authenticated or re-imagined representations of

history, and thus deals with the communicative aspect of a gameplay medium.²⁶⁴ The procedural or ludic function identifies and describes the fundamental game mechanics and conventions inherent within gameplay (e.g. in-game rules and objectives, player agency, obstacles and challenges, character class systems, level design, and dialogue options).²⁶⁵ These elements are all tied to the action or play component of a gameplay medium. Any video game historian undertaking research into representations of history through video games must always embed discussions around the ludic modes of historical gameplay into their analysis. Since historical games are partly formalised game systems, the ludic function not only enables representation (including history) to exist within the game. More importantly, it also distinguishes how representation structurally operates in a gamic mode in contrast to representation in other media forms. These distinctions are many, but several can be discerned.

For instance, being grounded under a procedural game system, representational modality is partially organised and codified by game design conventions, rules, and player affordances common to the video game form but absent in other forms like film. Common examples are the accompaniment and completion of game objectives or tasks which usually manifest as pop-up texts, and the presence of tutorial stages usually found in the game's prologue. Depending on the particularity of the game system, the temporal and 3D spatial configurations of video games also allow players a greater degree of experiencing its physics through explorative interactivity. Unlike audience viewers of

²⁶⁴ Composition in this context here comprises of things such as the game world, storyline and events, and characters. Multimodal communication as I have discussed in this chapter encompasses various modes of communication, including the visual, narrative, socio-cultural, ludic, and performative modes.

²⁶⁵ While I have configured the procedural function within an historical modality as a contextual mode, it also concurrently exists as another particular mode of expression within the secondary layer 'communicative modality' due to its inherent communicative capacity. Nonetheless, historical games are, in part, formal game systems, which requires the ludic or procedural role to be elevated to a higher status as a contextual modality.

films and online videos, players can spend relatively unlimited time exploring and examining the vast minutiae, sights, and events of the game's represented world down to its smallest detail, all without having to compromise the progression of the game's main storyline. It is in this way that representations within gameplay mediums are directed and shaped not only by the game system, but also the immersive agency of its players. In a historical game context, the particular commencement and activity of a game's representational mode is often measured by the interplay between play time, fictive time, and past time.²⁶⁶ This process overall offers a flexible balance for historical game events to somewhat parallel with actual events in the past in telling its story or representation while still affording player freedom.²⁶⁷

Finally, the orientational function concerns with how gameplay sequences, in their respective mode(s) of historical representation, orientate the player's immersion in that game's history. Notably, by having an effect of invoking tropes, signs, motifs, archetypes, and other orientational resources which resonate to a player or viewer's impressions or recognitions of that history circulated from current mainstream society and media entertainment. These orientational resources embedded into historical gaming in conveying or reinforcing mainstream perceptions of history usually originate from past iterations, representations, and attitudes that have been continually recycled in various works and adaptations. For a Medieval-period game, orientational resources would include its buildings and dwellings (e.g. castles, villages, churches), social classes (e.g. rural peasants, knights replete with arms and armour), and landscapes (e.g. deep

²⁶⁶ Chapman, pp. 91-93, 112-113. Chapman provides a good breakdown of these three timeframes. Play time is time spent by the player in structural segments or in a continuous flow until they pause or turn off the game. Fictive time is the narrative time of the game represented for its characters. Lastly, past time represents how the game's claims to show meaning and events of the past via the represented actions of the game characters also relate to actions taken by actual historical agents in the past as understood to have occurred from evidence.

²⁶⁷ Chapman, pp. 92-93.

woodland forests) recognised by mainstream society as popular signifiers, tropes, or characteristics of the 'Medieval'. In summary, the orientational modality can be seen not only as an initial form of immersion for the player by the congruence of the game's items or referents, buildings, and experiences to the representative time period or setting. It also reinforces these games' value in providing history as entertainment through their implementation in a game studio's marketing strategies, such as advertisement cover posters and demo trailers. However, what defines or shapes the orientational resources employed are its intersections with the game's representational modes encountered by players. Depending on the game's manner of approaching historical representation, orientational modes can operate within either productions of historical worlds closely corresponding to and built upon diverse scholarship of that respective history, or in those which use history merely as a background spectacle to fill the game's procedural system, visual aesthetics, and storylines with a vibrant background setting. Therefore, orientational correspondences to player impressions of history are generally not a primary indicator of a game's claims to historicity and/or having scholarly-informed agendas or interests.

Figure 3.2 – Contextual Modality (Example)

A display of the unit exchange tab menu between some of the player's controlled armies.

Recorded in 'Total War: Thrones of Britannia – Wessex session Part XI.'²⁶⁸



To illustrate the multimodal analysis of an historical modality's contextual layer, I highlight one example for each of the contextual modalities taking place within an individual gameplay moment from the game *Total War Saga: Thrones of Britannia* (2018). This scene (Figure 3.2) depicts a unit exchange taking place between two armies belonging to the Wessex faction. From a procedural modality lens, the unit exchange tab

²⁶⁸ Ben Redder, 'Total War: Thrones of Britannia – Wessex session Part XI', in *Total War Saga: Thrones of Britannia* (10 February 2019), min 18:05.

is an affordance given to players who want to switch different units with those from another (and player-controlled) army, with up to a maximum of twenty units per army. A stats menu display is also shown on the left side of the screen, which displays the current level of each stat (e.g. armour, morale, melee damage) of a unit when highlighted by the arrow cursor, such as the type of stats of the 'royal huscarls' unit shown. Representationally, this display is an extensive showcase of some of the actual types of units that existed and belonged to Anglo-Saxon factions like the Kingdom of Wessex within the British Isles between the ninth to the eleventh centuries. To name one, the royal huscarl unit were historically the elite armored bodyguard unit of Kings in both Anglo-Saxon England and Scandinavia recognised by their signature double-handed axe. Acquired as a late addition (by unlocking the relevant technology) and the high level for most of their stats historically reflects their renowned status as elite professional warriors.

These representational and procedural features (among others) coalesce to form an overarching system of army management and combative battles, where the player's chosen faction employ armies for a number of military endeavors. Including defeating their opponents' armies in real-time (pitched) land battles, expanding their kingdom by sacking and/or besieging and occupying villages and fortified settlements, and to quell any unrest that occur within the player's kingdom. Yet the majority of land and siege battles experienced in *Thrones of Britannia* (as well as in most *Total War* games) contain an underlying orientational trope, which is their gravitations toward anachronisms of nineteenth century ideologies or practices of warfare rather than actual Medieval warfare.²⁶⁹ Some of these are the game's ludic goals of the player's faction conquering the entire British Isles as its sole ruler through 'total warfare' and nation-building strategies,

²⁶⁹ 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. by Daniel T. Kline (London: Routledge, 2013), 53-66, pp. 61-62.

and unit formations throughout the battle "appear[ing] in compact and relatively ordered blocks of ranks, with players able to order changes in the formation and facing their troops with ease."²⁷⁰ Academic Medieval consensus highlights that the plundering and pillaging of the towns and countryside, as well as siege battles, in the Middle Ages were not only more frequent but preferred methods of Medieval warfare.²⁷¹ However, as some of the defining trademarks of the *Total War* strategy series, the inclusion of massive and immersive real-time battles is an enticing feature enjoyed by many fans of the series. Nonetheless, this implement elicits an orientational effect on the player community's perception that massive, Medieval pitched battles (which were still notable historical engagements) were a more frequent occurrence in Medieval warfare despite historical consensus.²⁷²

This example is a general basic exercise or guide of a more extensive and in-depth process of conducting historical modality analysis in gameplay study. In practice, describing an individual gameplay moment is certainly useful, but the historical modality framework is more effective when used to examine and describe a multiplicity of instances, events, or experiences over several or multiple gameplay sequences. More importantly, applying this multimodal framework addresses and communicates a gameplay's contextual and communicative layers through the principles and particularities of its chosen historical modality in its representation of history, such as imaginative history and lore history. A more thorough application of this process then is demonstrated with extended illustrative examples in most of this thesis' upcoming analytical chapters (6 – 8) dedicated to either lore history or imaginative history through their game case study. Due to spatial

²⁷⁰ Fedorenko, p. 56.

²⁷¹ Fedorenko, p. 55.

²⁷² Fedorenko, pp. 54-55.

constraints however, analytical discussions of gameplay in these upcoming chapters focuses on the representational and procedural contextual functions of a historical modality. The orientational function is referred again at the end of Chapter 8 as one of the immediate areas of further developing the historical modality framework for conducting future studies into historical gameplay (see Section 8.6).

Communicative Modality (Secondary):

The purpose of adding communicative modalities is to acknowledge what is taking place within the entire playthrough of the game, and how they come together in configuring the gameplay's contextual frames or modalities to its particular engagement or language of historical expression. When examining gameplay activity within recorded video game footage, the communicative modalities are self-evidently a conflation of the entire gameplay experience due to its multimodal ensemble. In certain applications then, one's entire recounting of events and experiences within gameplay can be attached with descriptions capturing particular moments or scenes by focusing on an individual communicative mode or lens (e.g. visual, performance, narrative). This is a useful convention to signal or draw salient attention to a particular sound, subject, piece of dialogue, or building detail which played a key role in that moment. Otherwise, for the majority of cases, writing gameplay sequences or events only needs to be described in its contextual frames or functions, as the particularity of its procedural, representational, and orientational functions in determining that gameplay's entire meaning or expression of history is the main focus. Using a dissection of different communicative terms or categories (e.g. visual, narrative, performance) as the overarching approach to describing gameplay sequences is a strenuous and time-consuming endeavour (See Section 4.4.3 for more detail).

3.4 Key Concepts:

To conclude this chapter, four key concepts are provided here as supplementary referential guides for reading and understanding the wider medium of historical gameplay, the historical modalities of gameplay representation, and the analytical discussions on recorded gameplay examples derived from *KCD* and *APTI* covered throughout Chapters 5 – 8. These concepts are ‘lore’, ‘fantasy’, ‘re-construction’, and ‘authenticity/accuracy’. The first two concepts outlined closely relate to the historical modality framework by constituting as some of the major semiotic modes or resources exhibited in particular historical gameplay mediums. These particular terms then are important contextual guides to better understanding the innerworkings of lore history and imaginative history that are examined later in this thesis. The last two are historical terms operating as some of the many important historical components of the contextual ‘representational’ function within a historical modality. Discussion of these four key concepts then is to only select a few definitions and meanings of each term that are clear, concise, and relevant to the context of this thesis’ main topic and research.

3.4.1 Lore:

My definition and usage of the term ‘lore’ for historical gameplay research is relevant to addressing the first three research questions (i – iii) regarding the gameplay modalities of historical knowledge expression and learning within each of the game case studies and their dissemination of Medieval history. One of the main integral meanings of lore is a “body of knowledge” commonly applied in regard to the accumulation of “traditional facts, anecdotes, or beliefs [and practices] relating to some particular subject.”²⁷³ In a

²⁷³ ‘Lore, n.1’, *Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/view/Entry/110333>> [accessed 3 April 2020].

history disciplinary context, lore is practically the knowledge of, and the process of transmitting and configuring knowledge about, the past. More precisely, exchanging the term 'knowledge' with 'lore' provides a more active conceptual structure of studying and describing knowledge within history as a compendium of all the known, and newly constructed, information about events, people, geographies, social classes, traditions, and trends that took place or existed in the past via a body of various content and modes of knowledge-building and expression. Examples include empiricism and factualism, archaeology, experience, folklore, oral history, heritage, and poetics. As the primary epistemology of history, lore is also importantly a method for acquiring, cross-examining, and re-constructing knowledge, be it knowledge found in primary and secondary evidence and/or knowledge constructed through activities in research and interpretation.²⁷⁴ This infers that knowledge is as much a performance as it is a referential repository.

In digital games however, this meaning of lore is extended further into the realm of world-building as a "collection of facts, belief[s], and knowledge crafted to provide context to the [principal] narrative", details which add a "depth and richness to the universe of a video game, expanding its history outside the main plot."²⁷⁵ Elaborating further, lore within digital game world-building develops and represents all of the "details of the [game] world where a story takes place, including its history/geography, people/races, governments, science/technology, religions, and languages."²⁷⁶ Content of lore can range from the current locality and types of inhabitants in a certain region or

²⁷⁴ Ralph B. Smith, 'R.G. Collingwood's Definition of Historical Knowledge', *History of European Ideas*, 33 (2007), 350-371, p. 352.

²⁷⁵ Pablo Seara, 'Telling Stories: The Importance of Lore in Video Games', *Game Skinny* <<https://www.gameskinny.com/ow6z1/telling-stories-the-importance-of-lore-in-video-games>> [accessed 16 November 2019], para. 3.

²⁷⁶ Eddie Paterson, Timothy Williams and Will Cordner, *Once Upon a Pixel: Storytelling and Worldbuilding in Video Games* (Boca Raton, F.L: CRC Press, 2019), p. xviii.

settlement, to small aspects conveyed as exposition such as dialogue between characters, cutscenes, and written background descriptions of obtained items and objects.²⁷⁷ It can also entail large accounts, such as reading or encountering evidence and traces of past major events and conflicts occurring years or centuries ago, and which have or continue to shape events the player takes part in.²⁷⁸

These definitions of lore are immensely important and reveal interesting similarities between historians writing lore on their subject(s) and game developers writing or producing lore as a form of world-building in digital game design. To highlight one example, both engagements signify the 'performativity' of knowledge as a skill or craft cultivated through various engagements. Some of these are immersive research activities, imposition of conceptual or taxonomic structures to break-down and articulate information, the scholar or developer's disciplined imagination or creativity in constructing and communicating lore, and raising new questions or gaps when disseminating knowledge. However, they exclude a couple of other integral definitions of lore also explicitly present within video games. Principally, lore is not only a body of knowledge, but also knowledge actively experienced and similarly gained or learned through experience.²⁷⁹ To elaborate, the tradition of lore as inherently an experience is a form of inquiry with pedagogical value by producing and contributing 'new' knowledge through the process of learning, scholarship, and/or erudition.²⁸⁰ The inclusion of this

²⁷⁷ Xavier Rubio-Campillo, 'Gameplay as Learning: The Use of Game Design to Explain Human Evolution', in *Communicating the Past in the Digital Age: Proceedings of the International Conference on Digital Methods in Teaching (12th-13th October 2018)*, ed. by Sebastian Hageneuer (London: Ubiquity Press, 2020), 45-58, p. 52.

²⁷⁸ This practice, while popular, is not exclusive to digital games. It has been originally rooted in the development of worlds or universes in literary and filmic works, such as notably J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth and the universe of *Star Wars*.

²⁷⁹ Stephen M. North, *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook, Heinemann, 1987), p. 22.

²⁸⁰ North, p. 33;

'Lore, n.1'.

other definition both revises and expands lore as a fully-fledged modal style or resource of gameplay activity that manifests in or permeates through many things, including “environmental storytelling, audio-visual design; game mechanics, such as combat or movement; camera point-of-view (POV); and interactions with player avatars, AI, and NPCs.”²⁸¹

In combining these definitions and characteristics of lore, including its world-building and experiential functions, we can formulate a version of lore as a multimodal form of knowledge within historical games. Notably, lore as a substantial semiotic mode of historical expression and performance entailing all kinds of histories with their own typologies of and methods for establishing and producing historical knowledge and content (e.g. empirical, experiential, and folklore) of that past, as well as composing the player’s gameplay engagements as part of the game’s respective history. One of its main types or bodies uncovered is ‘historical lore’ for establishing and elucidating what I term for certain historical games as comprising of and containing lore histories, histories of which are found in, composed, and experienced through gameplay sequences. The term ‘historical lore’ is also categorically distinguished from both ‘lore’ in non-historical video games (e.g. *The Elder Scrolls* game series, *Souls* game series) and ‘folklore’ (another body of historical knowledge) in historical fantasy games.²⁸² The term lore history and its unit historical lore is explored later in Chapters 6 and 8 through *KCD*.

²⁸¹ Paterson, Williams and Cordner, p. xviii.

²⁸² In the latter group, these historical games’ worlds are derived from a past reality and time period in our own world, but contain supernatural or fantastical environments, atmospheres, and entities taken from or influenced by a certain culture(s). See Section 7.2.1 for discussion on the historical fantasy style.

3.4.2 Fantasy:

Fantasy, like lore, is another key semiotic resource in historical gameplay relevant to addressing the first three research questions from a different angle by signifying one of several distinct modalities of historical imagination. Situating fantasy within the context of history for this thesis' study into gameplay references to and is foundationally based on several of Chapman's key definitions outlined in his recent article 'Playing the Historical Fantastic: Zombies, Mecha-Nazis and Making Meaning about the Past through Metaphor'. Specifically, fantasy operating as an expression of history within an historical game ideally performs four fundamental conditions. These conditions are (i) fantasy in a history setting "purposely combines the real (widely accepted) past with [for example] myth, folklore, [and/or] the Gothic etc."²⁸³ Fantasy (ii) concerns, as one of its primary functions, with representing the "*mentalités* of past cultures ... [such as] the fusion of history and myth into one diegetic world."²⁸⁴ Fantasy (iii) in history exhibits metaphorical, metonymic, and re-constructive utilities that embody poetic meanings about the past.²⁸⁵ Finally, fantasy (iv) within gameplay can provide spaces to explore and discuss both "anxieties about the real world" and "issues that are not, or are, less commonly, explicitly addressed elsewhere."²⁸⁶

These fundamental conditions as core definitions of fantasy within an historical game context provides significant foundation for discerning what kind of roles historical fantasy is likely to entail when representing the past. Historical game scholarship has also

²⁸³ Adam Chapman, 'Playing the Historical Fantastic: Zombies, Mecha-Nazis and Making Meaning about the Past through Metaphor', in *War Games: Memory, Militarism and the Subject of Play*, ed. by Holger Pötzsch (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 91-111, p. 94.

²⁸⁴ Chapman, p. 92.

²⁸⁵ Chapman, p. 96.

²⁸⁶ Chapman, p. 97.

produced a handful of valuable works that explore historical fantasy within gaming in distinct yet interrelated ways.²⁸⁷ However, encountering different understandings and usages of this term within these respective works hints that this term has not been expressed or applied in equal fashion. Consequently, an ambiguity on the consensus as to what is classed as historical fantasy from other (yet still valuable) types of fantasy has arisen within the field of historical game studies, and thus this term remains currently in a relatively loose or incohesive state.

To illustrate this point, Chapman's recent article is among the most robust and up-to-date work in unpacking the concept of fantasy within historical gaming, including his outline of the four key conditions that are incorporated in my usage of the term 'historical fantasy'. Yet Chapman's perception of and approach to historical fantasy as a combination of the constituents of 'history' and 'fantasy', and the case studies he uses to demonstrate this application (such as MachineGames' *Wolfenstein* game series), are in my opinion misappropriations of the term itself. In Chapman's "venn diagram" approach which treats 'history' and 'fantasy' as overlapping yet binary frames, fantasy "unrestrained by the demands of realism" is positioned as a complementary yet oppositional entity to history, specifically history set in the real material past.²⁸⁸ However, this model of historical fantasy he forwards, and its supposed disruption or inversion of 'real' history, relies too heavily on the rigid idea that the *real* and its relationship to fiction are firmly fixed in the temporal, material, and spatial boundaries of our own natural

²⁸⁷ Some of these notable works that center on historical fantasy within gaming are chapters regarding *Dante's Inferno* in Daniel T. Kline's edited collection *Digital Gaming Re-imagines the Middle Ages* such as Angela Jane Weisl and Kevin J. Stevens' 'The Middle Ages in the Depths of Hell: Pedagogical Possibility and the Past in Dante's Inferno', and Timonthy J. Welsh and John T. Sebastien's 'Shades of Dante: Virtual Bodies in Dante's Inferno'. Other integral examples are Maciej Paprocki's article 'Mortal Immortals; Deicide of Greek Gods in Apotheon and its Role in the Greek Mythic Storyworld', and Johannes Koski's 'Reflections of History: Representations of the Second World War in Valkyria Chronicles'.

²⁸⁸ Chapman, pp. 94, 104.

world within a present or past reality. Rather than a modern contemporary device, fantasy has existed in longevity as an old yet significant language of expression in storytelling and world-building traditions, which would mean that Chapman's account of "real history" is too narrow.²⁸⁹ This is because Chapman neglects to account that the folkloric, mythological, and any other imagined realities of the past, which may appear to its audiences and readers as constructs separated from history due to their fantastical nature, constitute as another kind of 'real' history. These imagined or poetic histories are classed as *real* histories by representing not the actual material past itself, but instead imagined realities and worlds created and renewed under new guises in the past by the artistry of individuals and cultures in order to espouse, express, or respond to worldviews and major events, cultural beliefs and traditions, or conflicts and issues.

In response to this issue outlined, a refined definition of what historical fantasy is within historical games is provided and illustrated in Chapter 7 via the game *A Plague Tale: Innocence*. Meanwhile, the kind of fantasy Chapman identifies in his article as 'historical fantasy' is arguably what I would term as 'freestyle fantasy'. Freestyle fantasy is prominently found in alternate history games, such as the case studies Chapman used to explore the Nazi (*Wolfenstein* series) and zombie (*Call of Duty* series providing 'zombie mode') tropes.²⁹⁰ Freestyle fantasy shares a number of the same conditions as historical fantasy, can engage in and generate meanings and discourses about the past, and can also be set in a past historical setting with any of the respective (although usually highly stylised) visual and material referents. However, the manner of the engagements in freestyle fantasy is not to directly represent the past itself, but relies instead on "inversion,

²⁸⁹ Chapman, p. 105.

²⁹⁰ I also consider this kind of fantasy to be similarly found and expressed in Johannes Koski's article that examines the *Valkyria Chronicles* game series.

disruption and recombination of existing elements in new arrangements.”²⁹¹ A notable example of this style is the construction of histories with completely different and alternate realities or timelines that do not have a strict reliance to historical fantasy referents derived from past imaginations.

3.4.3 Re-construction/Re-enactment:

In the context of history, re-construction is generally understood by historians as a means to descriptively and/or visually re-construct the past as accurately as possible via the use and cross-examination of evidence from various sources.²⁹² However, in a multimodal gameplay medium, re-construction acquires a more interactive and investigative role in historical gaming. Gameplay re-construction not only maintains proximity to known or accepted facts, events, and visual accuracy within the respective period of history, but also becomes an interpretive practice for revising, questioning, and/or spurring new knowledge about the game’s chosen history. Thus, the use of the term re-construction for analysis and discussion of gameplay refers to the varying types of re-constructive practices and conventions taking place within multimodal gameplay representation, including factual and experiential re-construction, re-enactment, and reproduction. This usage of the term is foundationally based on some of the chapters within the edited collection *Reconstruction, Replication and Re-enactment in the Humanities and Social Sciences*.²⁹³ Taking an interdisciplinary approach by combining the RRR (re-construction, re-enactment, and replication) practices from varying disciplines (art, history, science,

²⁹¹ Chapman, p. 94. See summary on ‘Alternate History’ modality (Section 3.2.2).

²⁹² Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (Hove: Psychology Press, 1997), p. 36; Munslow, p. 70.

²⁹³ These chapters within this collection described are: Sven Dupré, Anna Harris, Julia Kursell, Patricia Lulof, and Maartje Stols-Witlox’s ‘Introduction’; Jill Hilditch’s ‘Bringing the Past to Life: Material Culture Productions and Archaeological Practice’; Jo Vergunst’s ‘A Walk as Act / Enact / Re-enactment: Performing Psychogeography and Anthropology’; and Patricia S. Lulof’s ‘Recreating Reconstructions: Archaeology, Architecture and 3D Technologies’.

archaeology, computer design, music), this collection re-examines and re-defines these practices as more than just concepts but complex multi-purpose and self-reflexive systems that are “accessible, changeable, and correctible at any time”, supported by a diversity of both traditional and digital tools and devices as well as their epistemological incentives.²⁹⁴

On certain occasions however, particularly in the discussion of late Medieval combat in Chapter 6 (see Sections 6.5 – 6.5.1.1), the term ‘re-enactment’ is used in place of the all-inclusive term ‘re-construction’ to examine a specific type of re-constructive mode via gameplay – the re-construction or re-animation of bodily movement and performance through a particularised set of bodily actions. Historian Jerome de Groot states that “reperformance” is a co-constructed knowledge whereby historical performance establishes its claim to authenticity not only through access to material or objects but more importantly through personal experience, in that re-enactment blends the experience of the historical artefact with individual revelation.²⁹⁵ This process encompasses several key forms of co-constructed knowledge. One is the embodied or the ‘bodily’ experience through particular sequences of actions, such as using musical instruments from different eras and inhabiting and carrying out the roles, mannerisms, and routines of historical occupations such as a Medieval blacksmith or a WW2 general.²⁹⁶ Animation of historical artefacts from its practical functions (such as weapons and tools)

²⁹⁴ Patricia S. Lulof, 'Recreating Reconstructions: Archaeology, Architecture and 3D Technologies', in *Reconstruction, Replication and Re-enactment in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, ed. by Sven Dupré, Anna Harris, Julia Kursell, Patricia Lulof & Maartje Stols-Witlox (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 253-274, p. 254. Scholars of this collection do acknowledge that re-construction practices should not mean and be used to “fully recreate the past” but are open-ended engagements for opportunities to “create the conditions that allow them to raise interesting questions about past processes or objects of study” (Sven, Dupré, Anna Harris, Julia Kursell, Patricia Lulof, and Maartje Stols-Witlox, ‘Introduction’, *Reconstruction, Replication and Re-enactment in the Humanities and Social Sciences*, pp. 22, 23).

²⁹⁵ De Groot, p. 106.

²⁹⁶ Jerome De Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 105.

and using reimagination constitute as other key forms of knowledge as they test their own viability as representational yet interpretive constructions of the past by the partnering and articulation of truth and fiction together.²⁹⁷ In a historical game context then, my use of the word re-enactment within analytical discussion follows these aforementioned key points alongside Chapman's discussion of 'digital ludic re-enactment' defined in Chapter 2's literature review (2.4.1).

3.4.4 Authenticity/Accuracy:

Discussing reconstruction must also account for an explanation on its overlap with the subtly distinguished yet interrelated constructs 'historical accuracy' and 'historical authenticity'. For this thesis and historical game research in general, I implicitly refer to many representations via a particular mode of historical gameplay as having either or both referents historically *accurate* and others historically *authentic*, as I found they do not always exist separately. Nevertheless, historian Laura Saxton's article 'A True Story: Defining Accuracy and Authenticity in Historical Fiction' provides a reliable foundation and guide for my analysis of these concepts within historical games that I encountered. Historical accuracy in representation she explains "denotes the extent to which a text's representation is consistent with available evidence. It is concerned with historical veracity and whether specific aspects ... can be considered factual."²⁹⁸ Historical authenticity is an "*impression* of accuracy and the extent to which readers [and also in digital games, players] believe that a representation captures the past. Appraisals ... [of which] are shaped by the prior representations of the past ... Such perceptions might be informed by historical research ... [but overall authenticity] is a far more complex,

²⁹⁷ De Groot, pp. 105-06.

²⁹⁸ Laura Saxton, 'A True Story: Defining Accuracy and Authenticity in Historical Fiction', *Rethinking History*, 24.2 (2020), 127-144, p. 127.

variable, and subjective concept.”²⁹⁹ Saxton’s statement regarding authenticity hearkens similarly to Diana C. Răzman’s definition that authenticity in historical games mainly concentrate on the “socio-cultural aspects of history and present historical accounts as negotiable rather than unequivocal, allowing for the inclusion of marginal narratives that have been previously ignored from traditional historical accounts.”³⁰⁰

I also like to add two additional components in my reference to accuracy and authenticity. One, historian David Dean’s definition of historical authenticity was also applied during gameplay analysis as a compatible definition with Saxton’s version in understanding my Medieval games’ relationship to authenticity, which is that “[authenticity] is the extent to which a text is truthful to our contexts ... [and] incorporates sincerity, credibility, and trustworthiness.”³⁰¹ Second, there is a desire to extend historical accuracy beyond referents to a real material past (such as actual historical figures, buildings, and events). Particularly, historical accuracy of the appearance, characteristics or behaviors, and roles of entities, places, objects, and other constituents based on historical fantasies found in past imaginative works and historical beliefs (e.g. folklore or folktales and mythology). Overall, expanding studies and discourses on both accuracy and authenticity by exploring them together as co-dependent (rather than oppositional) entities within historical gameplay representation can help to unveil their own nuanced intersecting engagements around the “complex relations between fiction, evidence, truth, and culture.”³⁰²

²⁹⁹ Saxton, p. 127, 128.

³⁰⁰ Diana C. Răzman, 'Replaying History: Accuracy and Authenticity in Historical Video Game Narratives' (unpublished Masters thesis, University of Skövde, 2020), p. 1.

³⁰¹ David Dean, 'Negotiating Accuracy and Authenticity in an Aboriginal King Lear', *Rethinking History*, 21 (2017), 255-273, p. 257;

Saxton, p. 129.

³⁰² Saxton, p. 127. This differentiation between authenticity and accuracy however is not to advocate for historical games to be empirical texts that offer or provide histories that recover and present completely objective truths about the past.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Methodology – Researching and Examining Historical Gameplay:

This chapter details the empirical methodology framework developed alongside the working model ‘historical modality’ and its adjoining key concepts to address the key aims (Section 1.5) and research questions (Section 2.5) of this thesis. In order, a summarised rationale for game selection divulges three key reasons for choosing the respective historical games used as case studies (Section 4.2). Addressing this aspect foregrounds the following section’s coverage of the historical research methods employed to gathering various sources of data or evidence (Section 4.3). Specifically, extensively detailing the key research methods that were used, as well as the reasons for their use, to obtain, examine, and corroborate the multitude of historical findings and information during gameplay research. The final section is narrowed to an explication of three supporting analytical frameworks or forms of analysis that were applied in examining a particular source of historical evidence from one of the key research methods – the researcher’s recorded gameplay footage (4.4). These latter two sections then comprise the main portion of this chapter, and were vitally integral to featuring and demonstrating the practicality of the historical modality framework and its multimodal approach to articulating and disseminating historical gameplay scholarship.

4.2 Historical Games – Rationale for Case Examples:

The games selected for analysis in this thesis are *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (KCD) released in 2018 and *A Plague Tale: Innocence* (APTII) in 2019. The rationale for the selection

of these historical games is three-fold. One reason was a desire to examine a newly released game. At the early stages of this research, neither games had been released. Aside from the general anticipation created ahead of release, examining a new game was an exciting opportunity to investigate and evaluate the claims made by the developers of these respective historical games. Claims that include their respective games offering any new or nuanced engagements, scholarly knowledge in animative or experiential form, and/or deeper relationships or allusions to historical research extended by game developers. This choice indeed brought potential risks in that I had to wait for each game to be released before I could fully carry out the investigation, and could have been further compounded by delay of the game's release date or at worst an unexpected cancellation due to certain factors. In spite of these risks, both of the Medieval games were released on time.

Despite its potential value, utilising games that are newly released when commencing historical game research is still currently an emergent and unused practice until recent years.³⁰³ The majority of works within historical game studies (including those discussed in the literature review) usually rely on older historical games (a lifespan of three years or more) as their case studies. Particularly, games released well before these works' commencement of research and dissemination of analytical findings or evidence are chosen for study. Insights from earlier historical games are definitely useful and should still be studied. However, as game developers in recent years are increasingly changing the way they prepare, research, and design their historical games, they are producing

³⁰³ To clarify this point further, discussions on new or recent historical games are being engaged by video game and non-video game historians, with the podcast series *History Respawned* being one example that has episodes dedicated to recent or newly released video games. However, this is mainly engaged on a conversational level without drawing extensively on and critiquing recorded gameplay, and despite relevant ideas and insights does not cover the full breadth that recent historical games and their gameplay mediums have to offer. When gameplay footage is used, it is mainly an aesthetic or visual prop in reinforcing a core theme or topic of discussion.

games that reflect historical research in a more direct way, in doing so altering how historical games should be evaluated academically. Therefore, some of the initial academic reflections and views on historical games and their representations are specific to a different generation of games. I am fully aware that in the time this thesis will be published, *KCD* and *APTI* would be at least several years old in its product's lifespan, still relatively recent but eventually will be overtaken by newer historical games. Nonetheless, the importance of shifting future research towards upcoming and immediately released historical games is needed if we are to continue expanding and maintaining historical game studies as a fresh, diverse, and self-reflexive field. This undertaking then can both unveil and may help to change or revise some of the earlier approaches, arguments, and perspectives on historical games forwarded by video game historians.

A second major reason was a relative lack of attention given to Medieval historical games and the discourses of Medieval history within gaming, Medieval studies (the historical discipline of studying the Middle Ages), and also Medievalism studies. Scholars like César San Nicolás Romera, Miguel Ángel Nicolás Ojeda, and Josefa Ros Velasco noted that the Medieval genre was the most commonly chosen 'setting' for historical games, recording in their database that out of the 700 Medieval historical game titles (both in pure history and historical fantasy contexts) released between 1980 – 2015, 492 of those pertained to the latter decade alone—from 2003 to 2013.³⁰⁴ While this trend continues to grow in popularity among player communities, with recent notable game releases like *Crusader Kings III*, *Chivalry II*, *Nioh 2*, and *Ghosts of Tsushima*, Medievalism studies have yet to classify Medieval historical games as a complementary yet separate category from

³⁰⁴ César San Nicolás Romera, Miguel Ángel Nicolás Ojeda, and Josefa Ros Velasco, 'Video Games Set in the Middle Ages: Time Spans, Plots, and Genres', *Games and Culture*, 13.5 (2018), 521-542, p. 522.

Medieval games set in non-historical contexts such as high-fantasy.³⁰⁵ Medieval historical games have generally been grouped together with other types or genres of Medieval games as either Neo-Medievalism, pseudo-Medieval, or Medievalist texts by scholars such as Daniel T. Kline, Carol Robinson, and Pamela Clements. In contrast to Medievalism (please see 'Medievalism studies' section, 1.4.2.1), Neo-Medievalism is a term describing works that in Richard Utz's words:

no longer strive for the authenticity of original manuscripts, castles, or cathedrals, but create pseudo-medieval worlds that playfully obliterate history and historical accuracy and replace ... narratives with simulacra of the medieval, employing images that are neither an original nor the copy of an original, but altogether Neo [sic].³⁰⁶

Taking 'simulacra' here to mean representations or imitations of the Medieval, representations of Neo-Medieval worlds then are those far removed from the actual Medieval reality, or as Amy Kaufman argued "Neomedievalism is thus not a dream of the Middle Ages, but a dream of someone else's medievalism."³⁰⁷ These scholars, particularly Kline, denoting Medieval games as Neo-Medieval texts conflates Medieval high-fantasy games and Medieval historical games together. Yet it is unusual that this term should be

³⁰⁵ Johan Andersson, *Crusader Kings III* (Computer game) (Stockholm: Paradox Development Studio, 2020); Steve Piggott, *Chivalry 2* (Computer and console video game) (Toronto: Torn Banner Studios, 2021); Fumihiko Yasuda, *Nioh 2* (Console video game) (Tokyo: Team Ninja and Kou Shibusawa, 2020); Nate Fox and Jason Connell, *Ghosts of Tsushima* (Console video game) (Bellevue, W.A: Sucker Punch Productions, 2020).

³⁰⁶ Richard Utz, 'Preface: A Moveable Feast: Repositionings of 'The Medieval' in Medieval Studies, Medievalism, and Neomedievalism', in *Neomedievalism in the Media: Essays on Film, Television, and Electronic Games*, ed. by Carol L. Robinson, Pamela Clements, and Pamela Clements (Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012), i-v, p. v; Howard, Todd, *The Elder Scrolls* (Game series) (Rockville, M.D: Bethesda Game Studios, 1994-); Miyazaki, *Souls* (Game series).

³⁰⁷ Amy Kaufman, 'Medieval Unmoored', *Studies in Medievalism*, 19 (2010), 1-11, p. 4.

applied to Medieval games situating in history because these games are by all accounts not Neo-Medieval since they are set in and represent the “historical” Middle Ages.³⁰⁸ Thus, categorising Medieval games as Neo-Medieval is effective for identifying and examining games containing their own constructed fantasy or pseudo-Medieval worlds, such as Bethesda Studio’s *The Elder Scrolls* series, FromSoftware’s *Soul* series, and Blizzard’s massive multiplayer online game *World of Warcraft*.

Third and finally, *KCD* and *APTI* were selected not only for signaling new multimodal advancements in the wider historiography of representation. They were also selected for containing and demonstrating gameplay contributions to Medieval historiographies pertaining to these games’ respective historical period, events, subject matter, and themes. Uncovering and examining these historiographic contributions to Medieval history provided the inspiration for the historical modality framework to emerge and take shape, and were also valuable in fulfilling some of the key aims and questions of this research. Most prominently, the capacity for historical gameplay to provide “[its] own historiographies in the form of ‘gameplay histories’ contributing scholarship specifically on the historical period and topics represented in the game.”³⁰⁹ The gameplay histories within *KCD* and *APTI* used as examples for the thesis’ analytical chapters exhibit scholarly contributions to some of the many Medieval historiographies, which are identified and elucidated in Chapters 6 – 8 of this thesis.

³⁰⁸ One could presume that historical fantasy games set in the Medieval period are Neo-Medieval texts. I argue to the contrary that they still belong to Medieval history because their imaginative fantasy elements continue to be set in, inspired by, and re-mediate things from the historical Middle Ages rather than being entirely original or artistic constructions of a different or pseudo-Medieval world (Neo-Medieval).

³⁰⁹ Redder, p. 31.

For these reasons, it is important to understand how Medieval historical games and their gameplay mediums intersects with both Medieval history and fiction by using David Matthews' insight. Matthews argues that even academic Medieval studies—ostensibly about the historical Middle Ages—is a form or branch of Medievalism, insofar as “the scholars’ [Medieval historians] historical representations or reconstructions are post-medieval attempts at re-imagining the Middle Ages.”³¹⁰ This is because their methods or practices of the history discipline constitute themselves as post-Medieval attempts of reconstructing, re-telling, or (re)imagining the Middle Ages, albeit one for the purpose of providing scholarship on Medieval history and its discourses.³¹¹

In considering Matthews' point, I argue and explore in this thesis that Medieval historical games (including my case studies) offer and are themselves histories of the Middle Ages constructed and experienced through sequential gameplay representations. Simultaneously, these games are also more-or-less, as I coin them, ‘*historical Medievalism*’ texts. As opposed to games engaging in other genres of the ‘Medieval’, historical Medievalism is essentially both a particular theoretical discourse and field of research for describing and studying historical games set in or representing the Middle Ages through gameplay that contains, exhibits, and renews or subverts Medieval history in any style or manner. Aside from being a creative form of entertainment, these games’ utilisation of Medievalism, however scholarly, fictional and/or figurative, is to enlighten or communicate Medieval history in a digital game format for modern audiences. More importantly, they broadly contribute to perceptions and discourses toward ideas or concepts, societies, topics, and phenomena from Medieval times since its inception, and how they have historically remained tangential or have changed in various works and attitudes in the centuries

³¹⁰ David Matthews, *Medievalism: A Critical History* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2015), p. 172.

³¹¹ Matthews, p. 172.

following the chronological end of the Middle Ages. Therefore, the various ways fiction, within the tradition of Medievalism, can be used to either reinforce and enhance scholarship of or re-imagine the intricacies and discourses of Medieval history signifies the medium of gameplay within Medieval historical games as an ideal context for this doctoral study.

4.3 Research Design:

In undertaking examination of historical gameplay in *KCD* and *APTI*, a qualitative empirical-based methodological approach was adopted via the employment of four historical research methods that elicited particular types of data. These empirical methods respectively are observation and analysis (recorded game footage), interviews (with developers), fieldwork (visitation to historical sites), and archival research. The first method was primarily relevant to addressing research questions i, ii, and iii, while the other 'supporting' methods covered all the five research questions (see Section 2.5 for the full outline of the research questions).

4.3.1 Recorded Gameplay or Game Footage:

The most prominent empirical method employed was capturing or recording footage of all my game sessions with *KCD* and *APTI* for frequent continuous use in analysing the game texts and performativity. Recordings (owned entirely by this researcher) constituted the primary source of data by containing a wide diversity of gameplay historical evidence captured within both game (engagement with rules and challenges) and play. This evidence ranges from explorations and experiential immersions of actual historical buildings, events, and phenomena contributing new pieces of historical knowledge to their limited or absent treatment in traditional written histories, to

remediations and/or re-constructions of fantasies derived from past historical imaginations. Overall, in total about 70 hours of footage was obtained for *KCD* and about 14 ½ hours for *APTI*.³¹²

Video game historians utilising their own gameplay evidence in published historical game scholarship has not been fully engaged. Most historians reference or recount several specific scenes from certain historical games in demonstrating their points or discussions on the formal conventions and discourses of historical games. This approach works well in examining the conventions and discourses of the historical game form, but insufficient when studying the complex particularities of and experiential representations conveyed through the gameplay medium. Thus, gameplay evidence derived from my own recorded footage was required to not only prove that there are different modalities or types of historical gameplay representation but are also the main output operating the interactions between the player and the various particularities of the game's historical world. Using evidence from recorded game footage by regular players would only provide limited data because these experiences reflect primarily the ludic interests and engagements of that player rather than the background and research incentives of an historian.

A video game capture device (Elgato Game Capture HD60S) was used to record game sessions with *KCD* from April – June 2018 and *APTI* from June – July 2019.³¹³ In order to fully engage in the game worlds of each historical game, it was necessary to commit 2 –

³¹² The lesser amount of total recorded footage in *APTI* should not indicate a lack of quality of footage data or information, but the game being a linear text was completed in a shorter timespan.

³¹³ A video game capture device captures the visual imagery and audio sound of the game projected by a television or computer as a recording, and then saved or stored into the device. These saved recordings can be watched as a video on a TV screen or a computer.

4 hours per gaming session. The game capture device was on for the duration of each recorded game session. In *KCD* and *APTI*, apart from autosaves (a function whereby the current state or progress in the game is automatically saved at certain points), I only manually saved (a file of) the game at the end of each gaming session. Then, when the game was loaded or restarted, I began the next gaming session and continued where I left off. Both historical games were also completed from beginning to end.

Because of the principal video game genre attached to these respective Medieval historical games, both the total number of recordings and the process of arranging or inscribing the file names for each recording between these games varied. In *APTI*, the progression of this game in a linear format allowed an easier process of labelling each recorded game session with the game title and its number in Roman numeral, such as 'A Plague Tale Innocence IV'.³¹⁴ In *KCD* however, having a vast open-world and multiple storylines and missions mostly arranged in a non-linear approach meant that the process of labelling each game session with numbers designating its parts would be extremely difficult. Therefore, I instead labelled the multiple recorded game sessions in one of two ways, either by the name of the current narrative quest or occasionally the relevant theme, such as 'Return to Skalitz' and 'The King's Silver'.³¹⁵

This approach of scheduling, recording, and authoring my gameplay activity in these Medieval games allowed a smoother process of documenting and organising the entirety

³¹⁴ The title of the first recorded game session was also attached with 'pilot' to indicate the first session.

³¹⁵ This process was maintained for the majority of the game sessions, but there was difficulty in titling all of the recorded sessions under a quest or theme name as some contained multiple quests and activities that I was simultaneously involved in. A compromise was to choose the name of the quest or activity I was working on first. Additionally, an exception to the main approach was titling the first recorded session 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue', in order to highlight this recording as a pilot episode.

of raw data obtained from these games that would be revisited for later analysis. This stage of the method can be classed as the authoring of history within play in line with Chapman's discussions on historying (Sections 2.4 and 2.4.1) and the nature of authorship within gaming (Sections 2.4.3). Once the recording process for each game case study was completed, the recordings were reviewed and analysed in tandem with verification and comparison with other key sources of data obtained from the other three methods (see Section 4.4 for outline of the forms of analysis and their implementation). Analysis of the entire footage of both games occurred post-play once they were completed. This was to ensure that the state of player immersion and the game's narrative progression was continuously maintained, as taking notes and conducting analysis while still playing these games would have disrupted the entire gameplay experience. This analytical process comprises the reading or interpreting of history.

4.3.2 Interviews:

Interviews were conducted with several game studio members on the game development process and their chosen history. Chiefly, information was obtained on various matters, such as the game studio's motivations for wanting to engage in Medieval history, what kind of historical topics and approaches to historical research were incorporated, and how they worked with the challenges of representing history within a game world characterised by gameplay. The entire purpose of visiting the game studios and conducting these interviews then was not simply fact-checking, but to delve deep into the developers' engagements to historical research and game design of their respective Medieval history. Consequently, the data from these interviews were instrumental to document and elicit information on the particularities of the game studios' game design and historical approaches. It was also instrumental in evaluating their level of similarity and/or contrast to the historical research methodologies and content provision in

academic history. Principally, as an early foundation, the interviews helped to determine and validate or contribute on a preliminary level what kind of gameplay historical modality and its affordances of historical experiences in communicating the game's respective history were likely going to emerge.

Interviews were conducted in-person at the game studios. I travelled first to Bordeaux for Asobo Studio and later Prague for Warhorse Studios between July – August 2018. Ethical approval was received from the University of Waikato in August 2017 for conducting the interviews with key participants in the video game industry (acceptance number – FS2017-26). Once approval had been gained, I formally approached the respective community manager/coordinator from both game studios to inform them of my PhD research and request permission to interview several participants working in their studio. Prior to the interview, the participants chosen were provided with an information sheet and a consent form with accompanying rights and conditions via a checklist, such as the right to remain anonymous by pseudonyms. All of the participants' signatures for consent were obtained and gave permission to use their full names. The role and status of the participants differed for each of the game studios. With Asobo Studio, I was only able to interview their lead narrative designer (Sébastien Renard), and with Warhorse Studios their historian (Joanna Nowak), concept artist (Tomas Duchek), and game designer (Ondřej Bittner).³¹⁶ The range of their respective roles provided insights into processes connected with researching and application of sources of historical content, the game design process, and perspectives on history and its role within gaming.

³¹⁶ In the case of *A Plague Tale: Innocence*, the second interview with Renard occurred about a week after my first interview with him.

Each of the recorded interviews lasted between approximately 60 – 70 min. Recordings were transcribed and sent to the participant for clarification, verification, and approval.³¹⁷

Interviews were semi-structured, consisting of set written questions, but with each question usually leading to a free, open-ended discussion. Semi-structured is a qualitative-based interview approach similar to a structured interview by having pre-prepared list of detailed questions but allow “an open response in the participants’ own words rather than a ‘yes or no’ type answer.”³¹⁸ By using this format, I had more fluid and flexible back-and-forth conversations on the respective topics given while providing the interviewees more agency to open their opinion on these subjects. Additionally, the open-ended discussion of an original pre-prepared question given meant that improvised follow-up queries and/or ideas via probing techniques also emerged to expand or illuminate the discussion further.³¹⁹

The types of questions I had prepared for each interview ranged in a number of areas to address the historical (representational) and ludic or procedural elements within these studios’ historical research and game design processes that were integrated, complemented, and generated limitations or obstacles (See Appendices 1 and 2 for a list of interview questions, pp. 551 – 556). To summarise, there were a number of history focused questions, ranging from questions regarding the specific historical events

³¹⁷ The participants were also granted the right to request any edits, additions, or omissions from reading their interview transcript for up to one month starting from the time when they first received the transcript.

³¹⁸ Robyn Longhurst, 'Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Groups', in *Key Methods in Geography*, ed. by Nicholas Clifford, Meghan Cope, Thomas Gillespie & Shaun French, 3rd edn (New York: SAGE, 2016), 143-156, p. 145.

³¹⁹ Louise K. Barriball and Alison While, 'Collecting Data Using a Semi-structured Interview: A Discussion Paper', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 19 (1994), 328-335, p. 331.

directly represented in the game to those regarding the access to and application of primary and/or secondary historical sources uncovered from research. Another area were questions regarding what game design approaches (based on the chosen video game genre) were used by game developers to integrate and facilitate the respective history, and how they concurrently inform the gameplay medium when authenticated with historical research methods and content. There was also a set of questions related to the main roles and responsibilities of the interviewees' respective position in developing the game, their engagement with history, and their collaboration experiences with other game designers and/or historians.

Both studios were at different stages in the production that, together with the limited time interviewees had to participate, determined the number and type of questions posed in the interviews. In Warhorse Studios, because the interviews took place after I completed the entire recording of *KCD*, certain questions based on some of my gameplay experiences of the histories represented within *KCD* were devised. These particular questions were useful to find out why they re-constructed these histories and its intended effects, and by extension the main primary historical sources they used to both obtain historical verification and subsequently for re-constructing these respective representations. Having access to three participants also acquired a relatively extensive picture on their distinct engagements to history within their respective role during game development, what history meant to them and its compatibility or influence in game design, and their struggles and compromises they faced in trying to achieve accurate historical representation. Yet because I only had one interview with each of them, I was unable to ask all of the questions from the list. As a result, I had to ask some questions more relevant to the interviewees' expertise or position while leaving out others,

although alternations between these game design and history question types for the participants were maintained as much as possible during their interview.

With Asobo Studio, only one interviewee (Sébastien Renard) was available, but this interview was distinctly valuable as Renard was one of the studio's leading developers for their project. More importantly, the opportunity to conduct two interviews with Sébastien Renard meant that all of my pre-prepared questions were answered fully, producing some surprising and unexpected insights. At the time of the interviews, *APTI* was still in development and was not released until mid-2019. Without having full access to the game for recording until the following year, I could not formulate questions that correlated some of my gameplay experiences of specific historical representations portrayed within *APTI* as examples to Asobo Studios' process and level of information obtained from historical research. To compensate this matter, I developed certain questions that relied on presentations of the game's chosen history and context derived from its early game trailers and demos, such as the unveil of the plague rat swarm.

4.3.3 Fieldwork:

The third supplementary method was fieldwork in visiting, notetaking, and photographing towns and cities, including their Medieval historical sites and/or institutions, either connected to or used for the games *APTI* and *KCD* respectively. In total, just over thirteen-hundred photos were accumulated together from all the sites visited during my stay in both Bordeaux and Prague. Because these sites and institutions were visited by certain development teams (e.g. Joanna Nowak and Tomas Duchek from Warhorse Studios), it was important to gain at least some insights into how each of these game studios' approached the historical sites as important foundations for their re-

construction and/or visual inspiration. The main contribution to this method then was acquiring a relatively extensive database primarily in the form of photographs depicting segments of the settlement and physical evidence of the remains of some of its Medieval historical sites existing today. The most salient photos were then selected for comparison and corroboration with their (approximately) re-constructed or remediated digital counterparts encountered in the respective Medieval games. Meanwhile, certain institutions, such as museums, visited by the game studios (particularly Warhorse Studios) allowed valuable access to physical material that were housed and on display, such as formal letters of address, utensils, weapons and armour, and Medieval art. Moreover, the atmosphere of a couple of institutions also instilled a sense of familiarity to certain events and situations I experienced during moments of the game. Prominently for instance, the visit to a surviving Medieval underground mining tunnel at the Czech Museum of Silver in Kutná Hora had an uncanny feeling to the time I went through a similar underground network of dark mines in one of the settlements within *KCD*.

This fieldwork was conducted during the interview stage with members of the game studios. In Bordeaux, visiting Asobo Studio first during their development of *APTI* meant that I had to uncover several of the major sites and buildings they already used for their game. This included a couple of sites that their communication manager and liaison coordinator Aurélie Belzanne informed me as locations that members of Asobo Studio had visited or were planning to visit for fieldwork, namely the village of St. Emilion. Taking advantage of this opportunity was highly fruitful in the long term. When recording *APTI* in the following year, I accurately identified and corroborated the visual layout of the settlements and/or structures in *APTI* directly taken from these places visited, such as again St. Emilion remediated to a plague infested Medieval village and a visual re-construction of the Porte Cailhau gate located in Bordeaux. However, due to the

limited time frame and long travelling distances to other settlements in southern France visited by members of Asobo Studio, fieldwork was mainly confined to the sites in Bordeaux and the vicinity of St. Emilion (the latter via train).

In Prague, having a few extra days allowed more time to access sites within Prague, and more importantly visiting several more settlements with their historical sites, as well as a couple of the many institutions, visited by Warhorse Studios that were located outside Prague. The outside locations visited in order were Rattay, the former site of the Rovna village commune, Silver Skalitz, and Sasau, with historical sites and institutions visited within or outside Prague in tandem including Prague castle and the Czech Museum of Silver in Kutná Hora. However, several factors compounded the extent of data I could obtain from this entire fieldwork undertaking within Czech Republic. To summarise a couple of these obstacles, I was unable to access all of the towns and its historical sites used in *KCD* as they were directly inaccessible by train and were too far to travel at walking distance, such as the villages of Talmberg and Uzhitz. Additionally, other institutions visited by Warhorse Studios were too long to travel via train. Another integral factor was that a few known historical sites or buildings re-constructed in *KCD* no longer physically exist today. As a result, I could only photograph the rough location of where they once stood, such as the former castle of Silver Skalitz. Conversely, historical sites that have survived today relatively intact still have features or components absent from its original founding, such as the disappearance of the Medieval frescoes that once covered the walls and ceilings of the Sasau monastery that I visited as a museum. Despite these limitations, this was overall a positive outcome. Significantly, the amount and detail of fieldwork data further signified the relevance of the historical findings from the game footage obtained by exploring these same sites within *KCD* as closely accurate and fully operative Medieval institutions, instead of their current status as fragmented heritage sites (with some operating as museums for tourism).

4.3.4 Written Historical Literature (Archival Research):

Lastly, primary and secondary written historical sources relating to the histories that the games represented and/or were set in, were located, accessed, and employed as the earliest and ongoing method throughout most of this entire doctoral study. This method produced an extensive database of written historical evidence used primarily in two areas. Principally, acquiring detailed contextual background information that developed my expertise to address these numerous gameplay representations or experiences in their specific historical context, subject matter, and relevant circumstances, rather than analysing them in a broadly non-specified Medieval context. More importantly, the written sources were also used, in combination with the photographs of historical sites obtained from fieldwork, to corroborate and cross-examine with the numerous gameplay representations and their findings present in my recorded game footage to the content and scholarly information found in these written texts. This cross-examination extended to highlighting prominent gaps or limitations within the major written sources as a result of uncovering and illuminating new scholarly evidence and insights from the recorded gameplay footage, or in the case of *APTI* how these representations remediated and/or subverted these details. Overall, this process significantly confirmed and illustrated the validity and practicality of experiential historical gameplay as a new and innovative form of scholarship capable of working well in combination with traditional historical sources and literary practices of history.

This method was utilised over several key stages. At the very beginning of the thesis, I accumulated and read numerous histories of late Medieval Bohemia and France within the timespan 1300 – 1450, as well as more broadly histories surrounding wider trends in Medieval Europe such as the Black Death. This extensive reading was imperative to further expand my expertise in late Medieval European history and become acquainted

with and absorb the necessary background and contextual historical information in preparation for conducting later the other research methods. During and after conducting gameplay recordings of *KCD* and later *APTI*, fieldwork and interviews, and refinement of the historical modality framework for gameplay analysis, the accumulation and reading of historical literature shifted more specifically toward written sources closely related to or containing histories represented or remediated in the games themselves. In *KCD*, these were the primary and secondary sources of the events and daily life in the Rattay-Sasau region prior to and during the Bohemian Civil War, and broadly histories surrounding either or both late Medieval Bohemia and Europe authentically contextualised to this local region. For instance, copies of archival written letters by King Sigismund in two Hungarian edited collections, and online links to official documents detailing the purchase or transference of land or property residence to certain individuals living in or near the settlements portrayed in *KCD* in that relevant timeframe, were some of over thirty primary and secondary historical sources sent to me by Nowak from their extensive research database. These collection of sources were sent via several email contacts since our interview. For *APTI*, this process was primarily situated from focusing on the Black Death in France to the wider histories documented in secondary written literature on pre-modern expressions of subjects like plague and children storytelling in folkloric, artistic, and cultural forms. This entire stage was an ongoing duration until the last year of my thesis.

4.4 Analytical Frameworks:

Three forms of analysis were also adopted for viewing and examining recorded gameplay data from the video game capture device (see Section 4.3.1). In order of occurrence, player-analyst, Adam Chapman's framework on historical game form, and multimodality (historical modality) comprise the main forms of analysis.

4.4.1 From Player as *Participant* to Player as *Analyst* (Player-Historian):

The entire process of authoring, recording, and analysing historical gameplay from the recorded game footage was carried out in the role of a 'player-analyst'. This approach is catered to scholars interacting with and employing historical gameplay activity for academic research and disseminating scholarship. Foundationally inspired by Espen Aarseth's concept of the 'implied player', a player-analyst is someone who has an interest in video games and continues to interact with and analyse the digital game from a gamic or ludic lens (analysts must always take this element into account of their scholarly analysis).³²⁰ However, what distinguishes a player-analyst from general player participants is how they engage in other different lenses of the video game, lenses that relate to their respective field(s), such as film, anthropology, history, and cultural studies. That is, they not only interact with the game, including its content and setting, and complete its primary objectives or narrative storylines. They also have a specific focus to analyse and interpret their various gameplay experiences, stylistic conventions, and semantics of the game's content in that respective analytical lens. A player-analyst can be seen then as a step further from player-as-participant. Groups identified with this role ideally entail scholars and researchers, secondary school and university students, and certain non-academic players. Regarding the last group, these players may not be qualified as academics, but unlike general player participants rigorously engage in and apply scholarly-like practices in interpreting and disseminating the knowledge and themes of the game's constructed world to their audiences, as well as eliciting any new insights, questions, and/or perspectives.

³²⁰ See definition of 'implied player' in Chapter 2's 'literature review' section (2.4.3).

Being a history thesis, I positioned myself as a player-historian, a type of player-analyst for examining historical games and their particular gameplay historical modalities through ludic (procedural) and history (representational) lenses.³²¹ Considering these key lenses then means understanding how they conjugate together into a holistic form, rather than interpreting one's experiences of a historical game through these expressions in isolation. Adopting a player-historian frame also cautiously distinguished my approach to analysing historical games as an academic, specifically the representations constructed and experienced through gameplay, from players who create representations through their ludonarratives in historical games for various reasons, but of which are not interpreting them as histories from a scholarly frame(s) of analysis. This group concerned were identified earlier as 'players of history' who are themselves closely related to 'player-as-participant' (see Section 2.4.3.2 for an explication on both these terms). Groups identified with player-historian are similar to those comprising player-analyst listed earlier (including both video game and non-video game historians and heritage experts), with the addition of dedicated amateur or non-professional historians included.

To summarise the key stages of this form of analysis, as a player-historian this role entailed the extensive identification, analysis, and articulation of the numerous recorded game footage from each game case study by implementing the historical modality framework. Under this conceptual framework, I discerned in each recorded footage its gameplay sequences' primary mode(s) of historical representation and its engagements, and subsequently uncovered and examined what its key findings were on the game's histories experienced. This extensive analytical process also incorporated in tandem the cross-examination and verification of these gameplay findings with other historical

³²¹ See my variation of the term player-historian in Section 2.4.3.2 as a partial deviation from Chapman's usage or expression of the term.

sources and data obtained. Including principally primary and secondary written historical sources, and the extensive background knowledge gained from reading literature about the relevant historical period and events these games were set under (see Section 4.3.4). This cross-examination process extended to identifying gaps and/or limitations of the evidence and perspectives provided in these traditional historical sources when compared to (but not devalued by) the findings from my gameplay evidence. The entirety of these processes was continually repeated through several series of analysis and cross-examination until the last several months of my doctoral programme. Each repetition arose from either or a combination of factors. Namely, refinement of my historical modality framework, access to and accumulation of evidence from new written sources, or revisiting some of the material from earlier written sources that I previously overlooked in light of new findings or perspectives unveiled from re-examining an individual or several recorded gameplay sequences.

Finally, in operating as a player-historian I mostly maintained a relative distance from the respective character protagonist(s) I was inhabiting. This allowed me to value and examine them not only as designed individuals with unique personalities, but also embodiments or extensions of the game's history. In this context, my position as both character persona (authoring) and scholar-analyst occupied one end of the player-historian spectrum, with one end taking precedence over the other at certain phases of my doctoral research. Particularly, during the authoring and recording phase of my entire gameplay activity within each of the Medieval games, my scholarly historian background was not diminished or displaced when inhabiting the game, but I mostly participated in accordance with these games' respective characters. Once the games were finished entirely and I stopped inhabiting these character personas, I shifted to the analytical historian role to conduct the analysis of those recordings post-play. However, in several

instances the character persona mode was temporarily subsided for the scholar-analyst role in order to examine areas and features of interest within the game world that would be of important historical value for later examination as an analytical historian. These moments of interchange closely resemble an earlier point in Section 2.4.3.2 on the complex innerworkings around switching between different frames or identities of reference between the player-controller and the character persona.³²²

As there are no pre-existing frameworks or models of player-historian outlined by Chapman, I am aware that re-working player-historian into a player-analyst role represents only one specific approach. While future research may result in the development of other approaches, an aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the validity of a player-historian approach for historical game study. It is hoped that what is achieved in this thesis can be adopted and refined by other scholars within historical game studies in the future.

4.4.2 Adam Chapman's 'Game Form':

I continued to use several of Chapman's concepts from his framework on historical game form during the initial stages of analysing the recorded game footage. These concepts utilised for analysis particularly were his description of the narrative structures (e.g. deterministic and open-story structures) with their various sets of lexia, realist and conceptual simulation styles, and digital ludic re-enactment (see Section 2.4.1 for an explanation of these terms). However, examination of the data obtained from my recorded gameplay sessions revealed limitations in exclusively using Chapman's

³²² Redder, pp. 89-90.

concepts and its prevalence for analysing gameplay from a formalist and ecological perspective. Being limited within the confines of Chapman's analytical approach was partly the basis for devising and articulating historical modality as an alternative for historical gameplay analysis and discourse.

4.4.3 Multimodality (Historical Modality):

To resolve an issue affecting the transmissions and elaborations of my findings for the thesis' analytical Chapters 5 – 8, multimodality was also applied as another primary form of analysis, specifically via the working conceptual model 'historical modality' and its key elements (see Sections 3.2 and 3.3 for discussions on multimodality and the historical modality system). I began to implement this framework as a form of analysis after completing the recording of game sessions taken from my first case study (*Kingdom Come: Deliverance*). Multimodality analysis of historical games requires attention given to the communicative modalities present in the gameplay sequences and how they create meanings via a range of contextual layers (e.g. representational, procedural, orientational).

A multimodal analysis of my recorded gameplay sequences originally addressed narrative, setting, and performance. Each of these areas were, in turn, examined through several modal frames, namely mimetic (visual), narrative, performative, and socio-cultural frames, which are classed as some of the interconnected communicative modalities within a historical modality. This approach was initially useful to identify and detail the different ways history and its content were being incorporated and conveyed in each of these areas within gameplay, as well as discerning any nuances due to the particularity of the Medieval game's historical modality. However, when it came to

writing the analytical body chapters, difficulties occurred in articulating and connecting the analytical findings to each of the Medieval game's primary historical modality. This issue arose because separating the different areas of gameplay (narrative, setting, and performance) into separate chapters posed problems due to the nature of gameplay being multimodal. These different areas (among many others) that make up a gameplay representation(s) and its mode of history are experienced not in isolation but in constant relation to one another, since players always experience them in its simultaneity during play. This led to discussing and check-listing every facet, action, and mode during my experiences with the different settings, narratives, and performances in each of the Medieval games, a time-consuming and counter-productive effort.³²³

To resolve this issue, I decided to articulate and connect my gameplay experiences and their findings in *KCD* and *APTI* more closely to the historical modality framework by adopting a broader approach. This involved confining the examination of my recorded gameplay experiences to their overarching representational, procedural, and orientational functions (contextual modalities), which constitute the historical modality and its integrated multimodal assemblage of communicative modes to be present within each historical game. Opting to situate analysis of my historical experiences in gameplay to these terms meant organising and articulating each of my gameplay sequences as a whole more efficiently. Subsequently, it was also possible to uncover and interpret the key engagements to or applications of history within these sequences. Selection was then undertaken of the most salient, vivid, and/or relevant experiences as evidence for

³²³ This issue I encountered is similarly recounted by digital game scholar Jason Hawreliak, correctly highlighting that “individual modes have their own affordances ... [but] when conducting a multimodal analysis it is not enough to simply catalog all of the modes in a semiotic event and leave it at that; rather, multimodal analysis emphasises an examination of how individual modes are ‘configured’ ... in relation to one another” (*Multimodal Semiotics and Rhetoric in Videogames*, pp. 4-5).

illustrating each of these Medieval games' historical modality paradigm within their gameplay medium.

4.5 Research Design – Summary of Limitations:

This chapter offered a detailed outline of my doctoral research framework as a qualitative empirical methodology (four research methods and three forms of analysis) used alongside the conceptual framework 'historical modality' described in Chapter 3. It may seem counterproductive then to conclude this chapter with a summary on some of the limits of this study in its methodology. This study's limits must be broadly acknowledged to further signify why I opted for certain approaches to historical game research over others, and to present them as areas that this current work on historical gameplay can explore in future research.

To highlight a couple, one prevalent limitation is that the use of multiple player participants as another research method was not incorporated. The historical modality system is primarily designed to conceptualise and examine the modalities of gameplay representation within the interest of historians, scholars, and students using historical gameplay sources. It remains to be seen whether this conceptual framework can be applied effectively via the use of general player participants of history, and hence is considered worth pursuing. While player participants were considered on several occasions, this method was not implemented in this doctoral study for a few reasons. Dedicating time and effort to organising and assessing these player participants' responses to and their level of understanding these games' Medieval histories would have been ineffective if I had not played these games myself, and concurrently lacked the expertise of these games' respective Medieval histories. Player participants' engagements with historical games is also a major study itself, but the focus of this thesis' historical

research into gameplay must be undertaken before it can extend to examinations of participants interactions.

Another limit is that the historical modality framework has only been used in one other work outside this thesis, a co-authored video journal article titled 'Rats, Plagues, and Children, Oh My! Multimodal Representations of the Past in Historical Games'.³²⁴ Its proof of efficacy is mainly trialed and expressed here by two Medieval historical games, which constitute a small sample of historical game case studies compared to the wider range of historical games utilised in earlier historical game studies. Development of the historical modality system in future research will require a larger sample of case studies to fully show the entire depth and diversity of historical modalities. However, conducting research with only two case studies was to instigate and practice a more qualitative approach. Specifically, gathering and contributing data capturing the depth and substance of the Medieval games as gameplay histories, rather than simply documenting the formalist 'game form' properties of multiple historical games commonly adopted in previous studies. While this latter quantitative approach still has important use, it only touches the surface of what recent historical games are currently achieving due its lack of a multimodal lens.

³²⁴ Ben Redder and Gareth Schott, 'Rats, Plagues, and Children, Oh My! Multimodal Representations of the Past in Historical Games', *Video Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 6.1 (2022), 1-21.

Chapter 5

Outline of the Medieval Historical Games (Game Development)

5.1 Introduction:

This chapter introduces *KCD* and *APTI* by examining how the multimodality of experiential gameplay, and more broadly the entire historical game text, is conditioned and contextualised by the fundamentals of game design and historical research, with my interviews being a key source in providing wider understanding of this context. When starting to play a new video game, players commence with and consume an end product (gameplay) co-constructed by multiple departments (e.g. visual design or graphic artists, script designers, concept artists), commitments to historical treatment by the Creative Director, and assistance from either or both historians and expert historical practitioners if incorporated. The argument presented then is that there is a spectrum of ways in which games, through their multimodality, can respond to history, with each approach signaling different possibilities and engagements (offering interactivity, function, experience etc.). Therefore, acquiring a sound understanding on the particularity of the approaches to historical research and source evidence that game studio used with their supporting game design methods is integral to determine or reinforce on a preliminary level what kind of gameplay modality(ies) and its engagements are present.

This chapter instigates the analytical segment of this thesis by first introducing and explicating the two Medieval historical games (*A Plague Tale: Innocence* (Asobo Studio)

and *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* by (Warhorse Studios)) as case studies.³²⁵ A synopsis of these games' plotline is presented together with the background of the Medieval histories each of them situate under or represent, as well as a brief outline of their main video game genre and simulation style category. An explanation is then given of each of the historical game development frameworks of both *KCD* and *APTI* adopted by their game studio, as well as the developers' aims and intentions for representing history beyond producing a commercially successful entertainment product. This area is supported using insights from my interviews with some of the studios' developers and examples of these game studios' historical research and game design methods. At the end of these sections, I establish what historical modality constitutes their primary mode of gameplay representation which feeds into analysis of gameplay footage.

Being the first of the four analytical chapters, the outline of this section of the thesis largely addresses research questions iv and v. These questions ask how historical gameplay is informed or grounded by the historical research and game design methods, and what historical and game design challenges or limitations were faced by these game developer studios as well as any measures undertaken to address them. Addressing questions iv and v also provides partial contribution to research questions i, ii, and iii (see Section 2.5 for the entire list of the research questions) by forwarding and illustrating this chapter's main overarching argument as a base for these three questions to be substantially explored in the later analytical chapters (6 – 8).

³²⁵ Except on certain occasions, the names of both these games will be given an abbreviation, which are *KCD* and *APTI* respectively.

5.2 **A Plague Tale: Innocence:**

A Plague Tale: Innocence is set in the south-western region of France during the height of the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century but retold as a dark fantasy children's fairytale. The game centres around the lives of two orphan children, a teenage girl named Amicia and her younger five-year old brother named Hugo. Both are journeying throughout France in search of a cure for her brother's illness while trying to survive from a supernatural pestilence embodying the spread and devastation of the Black Death – rats. The rats are swarming and devastating the lands of France, decimating populations either through spreading sickness and decay or consuming survivors. In trying to survive, Amicia and Hugo's relationship is put to the test, forcing Amicia to undertake drastic measures in order to protect her brother, including taking the lives of other people. Their journey becomes more perilous as they are hunted by the Inquisition, a branch of the Catholic Church that hold jurisdiction in dispensing with heresy, including those afflicted with the plague. Agents of this organization and their forces are currently seeking her brother Hugo as he holds a dark and terrible curse within his family bloodline that is primarily the root cause of the rats' emergence. However, Amicia and Hugo are not alone. Throughout their adventure they come across other orphan children who are also trying to survive and have stories of their own ordeal, as well as accompanying and helping both Amicia and Hugo through their talents.

Figure 5.1 – Amicia and Hugo (Protagonists)

APTI's player protagonists Amicia and her little brother Hugo. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot'.³²⁶



5.2.1 A History of Fourteenth Century Europe during the Black Death:

The events of *APTI* take place between 1348 – 1349, during the first wave of the plague widely known as the Black Death.³²⁷ The first wave of the Black Death, which lasted from 1347 – 1351, claimed lives somewhere between thirty to fifty percent of the total

³²⁶ Ben Redder, 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot', in *A Plague Tale: Innocence* (29 June 2019), min 3:46:54.

³²⁷ Robert S. Gottfried, *Black Death* (New York: Free Press, 2010), p. xiii.

population in Europe.³²⁸ The dominant view held by both modern medical science and historians is that the plague was closely related to a type of bacterium germ (identified by scientists as *Yersina Pestis*) found in certain species of fleas.³²⁹ Fleas initially attached themselves to certain species of grain and rodents, and are then transmitted back-and-forth with humans via sneezing, coughing, physical contact, or exchanging blood (fleas biting into the host and giving blood).³³⁰ Originating from Asia sometime in the early 1330's, the disease was believed to have spread through Central Asia, Middle East, North Africa, and eventually Europe (sometime in 1347) via horses, caravans, infected moving armies and civilians, ships, and rodents.³³¹ The plague then intensified. At its peak from 1348 – 1350, the pandemic affected the entire continent of Europe.³³² France, the setting of *APTI*, was one of the areas worst affected. For example, the city of Marseilles had fifty-six thousand dead when the plague arrived in 1348. The chronicler of St Denis recorded that the death toll in Paris for 1348 – 1349 was fifty thousand out of a total population of more than two hundred thousand.³³³ While the apex of the Black Death ended in the 1350's, outbreaks occurred throughout subsequent decades, each time having less intensity than the first outbreak.³³⁴

Despite ongoing debates as to what the true pathogen of the Black Death was, historians generally agree that the scale of deaths from the first wave shared two common patterns:

³²⁸ Cindy Wood, *Studying Late Medieval History: A Thematic Approach* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 200.

³²⁹ Joseph P. Byrne, *Encyclopedia of the Black Death* (Santa Barbara, C.A: ABC-CLIO, 2012), p. 67.

³³⁰ Byrne, p. 67.

³³¹ John Aberth, *The Black Death - The Great Mortality of 1348-1350: A Brief History with Documents*, 2nd edn (Boston, M.A: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2017), p. vii.

³³² Aberth, p. vii.

³³³ Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (London: Collins, 1969), pp. 64, 78;

Guillaume de Nangis and Richard Lescot, *Les Grandes Chroniques de France (to 1350)*, trans. and ed. by Jules Viard (Paris: H. Champion, 1937), p. 314.

³³⁴ Mark Bailey, 'Introduction: England in the Age of the Black Death', in *Town and Countryside in the Age of the Black Death: Essays in Honour of John Hatcher*, ed. by Mark Bailey & Stephen Rigby (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2012), xix-xxxvii, p. xx.

in terms of how people contracted, exhibited, and died from the plague and the significantly higher rates of mortality in cities and villages. Symptoms and characteristics of the plague recorded by both Medieval chroniclers and medical practitioners, such as Spanish Muslim Abū Jafar Ahmad Ibn Khātima and Louis Sanctus, described how victims were covered with black buboes or lymphatic swellings over various parts of the body alongside severe fever, headaches, vomiting, blood sputum, loss of motor functions, delirium, and stupor.³³⁵ Within seven to ten days, the victim would die after first contracting the disease.³³⁶

The Black Death also had immense psychological effects as populations responded to this horrific and apparently incurable phenomenon. The plague broke down key facets of Medieval society, including family life, the priesthood, farming, trade, civil authority, and public order. One of the few recourses was to simply abandon daily life and hide away with loved ones within the home, in the hope that the disease would eventually pass. As historian Pat Byrne described, daily life was “daily death”, and:

In cities, schools let out, churches closed, shops were abandoned, neighbours moved, construction halted, and the streets were emptied of crowds and theaters of paying audiences. It was like some long, ghastly holiday.³³⁷

³³⁵ Aberth, p. 24. Nearly all accounts from Medieval chroniclers, usually based on either secondhand expert testimony or firsthand observation from autopsy, were consistent with each other. Moreover, the symptoms described appear to be derived from a combination of bubonic, septicemic, and pneumonic diseases.

³³⁶ Joseph P. Byrne, *Daily Life During the Black Death* (Westport, C.T: Greenwood Press, 2006), p. 8.

³³⁷ Byrne, p. 3.

Limited knowledge of the disease meant that a number of medical theories were put forward to try and understand the phenomena.³³⁸ A popular theory was that the plague took the form of miasma. Scholars and physicians argued that “ “corrupted air” caused plague deaths ... [and] needed to be purified while objects exposed to that air ... [should] be cleansed or destroyed.”³³⁹ Medieval physicians and apothecaries, both professional and charlatans, also made numerous attempts to find and develop ways of treating the disease, such as advising people to avoid baths, offering remedies, wearing amulets or talismans, bleeding patients, and following dietary advice.³⁴⁰ However, most attempts to prevent or cure the Black Death had little, if any, success. Instead, the solutions were to quarantine the sick and their families within their homes, developed health boards and pest houses, and blockade or seal ports and poorer neighbourhoods. In the long term, these policies provided a measure of success in isolating the disease until it dissipated, regardless of the victims’ survival or death.³⁴¹

The Black Death was also viewed by many commoners, physicians, philosophers, rulers, and clergyman as the pinnacle of “[God’s] wrath provoked by humanity’s sinfulness.”³⁴² As the plague returned in the years following the first outbreak, these groups came to realise that “God’s scourging was not a one-time matter, but a recurring punishment for sinful human behaviour.”³⁴³ Bryne adds “Plague and its victims were increasingly associated with poverty, filth, moral corruption, and social disorder. Societies accepted

³³⁸ Byrne, p. 67.

³³⁹ Byrne, p. 120.

³⁴⁰ John Kelly, *The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, The Most Devastating Plague of All Time* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), p. 173. Remedies Medieval physicians used for their patients included garlic, ginger, herbs, gold water (drinking barley water that had gold soaked into it), and poison remedies like mithridate and bol armeniac.

³⁴¹ Byrne, p. 7.

³⁴² Byrne, p. 7.

³⁴³ Byrne, p. 216.

harsh actions against such vile creatures in order to protect society.”³⁴⁴ These statements on Medieval religious and moral viewpoints were at times taken to their extremity by certain groups, creating atrocities viewed by those today with a feeling of horror, such as the intensification of the Jewish pogroms and its brutality, the brief yet immense terror of the flagellant movement, and cases of families abandoning their children. Conversely, the Black Death also inspired new and reignited previous works and artistic representations or manifestations of plague, such as the ‘Plague Maiden’, *Danse Macabre* (Dance of Death), and *The Decameron* by poet and writer Giovanni Boccaccio. Therefore, the religious, artistic, socio-cultural, and poetic underpinnings of the Black Death are what I found to primarily foreground *APTI*’s plague adaptation by transforming the Black Death from a scientific model of micro bacteria diseases carried by parasitic fleas attached onto rodents into a dark and menacing supernatural animal plague.³⁴⁵

5.2.2 Primary Game Genre System:

APTI belongs to the action-adventure game genre in its classical linear format (see Section 1.2.3 for the action-adventure genre) while situating primarily under the realist-simulation style (see Section 2.4.1). It also adopts the character persona mode of participation by usually playing as Amicia and Hugo as a pair or occasionally as separate individuals. Lead Narrative designer Sébastien Renard described how Asobo Studio aimed to set *APTI* in fourteenth century France during the Black Death while offering a “strong [game] experience ... that is story driven.”³⁴⁶ The studio’s focus on storytelling overlapped with their other tasks of designing and integrating core procedural components used in contemporary action-adventure games such as *The Last of Us*. In

³⁴⁴ Byrne, p. 90.

³⁴⁵ Aberth, p. 4.

³⁴⁶ Sébastien Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', ed. by Ben Redder (Bordeaux, 2 August 2018), p. 3.

APTI, these are primarily combining stealth, combat, physical puzzle-solving, and survival game mechanics with a certain level of world exploration and resource foraging, like finding and combining ingredients to enhance Amicia's sling.³⁴⁷

Figure 5.2 – Chapter 2: The Strangers

The crafting menu with a display of the ingredients and their specific amount for improving either her sling or equipment when accessing a workshop bench. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot'.³⁴⁸



³⁴⁷ Renard, p. 1.

³⁴⁸ Redder, min 1:09:53.

The distinctiveness of this action-adventure game that centers around children protagonists is that the player controls both of these characters at the same time, reinforcing the sibling's reliance on each other's different skills and strengths to survive their many perilous dangers and hardships. An example of the game mechanics when controlling duo characters is Amicia giving a command for her brother Hugo to crawl through tight or small holes or gaps in order to unlock doors, one of Hugo's several particular skills. Even the simple act of Amicia holding Hugo's hand while traversing a rat-infested environment reinforces the player's journey within the game as being grounded on the close physical and emotional bond between the siblings. These character-based mechanics generate emotional attachment and occasionally strife between these siblings, which were elaborated on by Renard as being inspired by prominent video games involving duo character protagonists, such as notably Ico and Yorda in *ICO* and Naiee and Naia in *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons*, because they "talk ... [and] care about the other [companion], it's about ... human relationships."³⁴⁹ For Renard particularly, both these games influenced his narrative style and ability to craft and shape emotion into *APTl*, as they "taught players that you can care for a virtual character ... [via] non-verbal [language] ... [and] emotion [based] on game design."³⁵⁰ A concept of emotion based on character relationship dynamics, co-operation, and support from these other games greatly assisted Asobo Studio connecting the game's main story, themes, and historical settings to the recurring emotional resonance and relationships between Amicia and Hugo within the player's gameplay experiences.

³⁴⁹ Sébastien Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', ed. by Ben Redder (Bordeaux, 8 August 2018), p. 12.

Fumito Ueda, *ICO* (Console video game) (Tokyo: SCE Japan Studio and Team Ico, 2001);

Fumito Ueda, *Shadow of the Colossus* (Console video game) (Tokyo: SCE Japan Studio and Team Ico, 2005);

Bruce Straley and Neil Druckmann, *The Last of Us* (Console video game) (Santa Monica, C.A: Naughty Dog, 2013);

Josef Fares, *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons* (Computer, console, and mobile video game) (Stockholm: Starbreeze Studios, 2013).

³⁵⁰ Renard, p. 11.

Figure 5.2A – Chapter 1: The De Rune Legacy

Hugo crawling to open a locked door from the other side. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot',³⁵¹



5.2.3 Asobo Studio – Applying History in Game Development: Aims/Intentions:

While providing players with a historically atmospheric and plague-ridden Medieval France, Renard clarified that *APT I* was neither an attempt to objectively explain and provide new historical insights about the real Black Death, nor was it attempting to offer an accurate historical game as “the core thing of the project.”³⁵² One of their main reasons given for using the Black Death and its historical themes was the ideal historical background it provided Asobo Studio to develop a supernatural survival-based game,

³⁵¹ Redder, min 56:14.

³⁵² Renard, p. 15.

with the Medieval period carrying “the children, the emotions, the setting ... the story ... [basically] everything.”³⁵³ Despite this admission however, Renard during our interview also stated “I really prefer ... a kind of [open] fantasised reality, a kind of iterative reality which we do in the game.”³⁵⁴ This notion of fantasy underlies one of the core modal resources of *APTI*'s intended multimodal engagement to history, with fantasy outlined by Renard as that of their players being transported into and inhabiting an imaginative world set in “French history.”³⁵⁵

The meaning of fantasy described by Renard is also contextualised as a principal ingredient for mediating *APTI*'s adaptation of its history between “modernity and Medieval times” by having basis in and channelling the wider socio-cultural, artistic, and poetic themes or metanarratives of both Black Death history and more broadly pre-modern plague expressions.³⁵⁶ Asobo Studio's intention of remediating elements of plague history as fantasy can be discerned from a number of Renard's statements in our interview. To highlight a few, one prominent example was Renard informing me of the studio's attempt to represent the plague as playful manifestations of popular past expressions or emblems of the Black Death.³⁵⁷ Another example was Renard's particular interest in researching the power the Black Death had in generating paranoia, fear, violence, and decay which he could reframe and narrativize in their game's fantastical contexts.³⁵⁸ Finally, fantasy was also expressed as a convenient counterbalance to *APTI*'s engagement with historical realism (another useful but limited feature of their game development) by reducing the amount and complexity of their chosen history's subject

³⁵³ Renard, p. 12.

³⁵⁴ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 14.

³⁵⁵ Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 9.

³⁵⁶ Renard, p. 8.

³⁵⁷ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 1.

³⁵⁸ Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 1.

matter that were either too academic or beyond Asobo Studio's financial and time affordances to re-construct.³⁵⁹

Each of these facets stated above are further detailed throughout the following section as some of the features that helped to generate a fantasy mode in *APTI*'s contemporary revitalisation of the Black Death. Meanwhile, these same facets still maintained enough historical authenticity to both the plague and fourteenth century France that felt or "sound genuine."³⁶⁰ Evidence of this intended history is found in Asobo Studio's selection of historical sources, and the type of information they acquired, for their game design as part of creating Medieval France and its playful re-imagination of the Black Death.

5.2.3.1 Historical Methods – Research and Game Design:

Asobo Studio's game design and research methods were primarily focused on accumulating historical evidence to enable three major areas. Those areas are the creation of an authentic Medieval setting and society emblematic of fourteenth century southern Medieval France within a plague-ridden atmosphere, their manifestation of the plague (rat swarm), and how the game could carry the story and emotional journey of the two main protagonists (Amicia and Hugo). A combination of publication deadlines, shifting directions in writing the story, and alterations to game mechanics and level design limited time spent on historical research for members like Renard as well as the type and amount of information they could obtain.³⁶¹ Therefore, Renard's historical research in his

³⁵⁹ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 14.

³⁶⁰ Renard, p. 8.

³⁶¹ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', pp. 9, 10, 12, 13;

Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', pp. 3, 5.

area of work was uncovering and assimilating historical material and visual illustrations of creative value for game design input, while closely following the studio's mediation between history and game design affordances by their careful attempt to adhere to things that commonly existed in or stayed "true to the period as possible."³⁶² As he explained, on the whole:

it's a lot about restrictions ... due to the [Medieval] technology at this time so we did a lot of research about basically everything ... we tried to reduce as much as possible ... the liberties, the freedom[s] we could take ... [with] history.³⁶³

Several examples of Asobo Studio's historical research and its application to game design to achieve 'Medieval' authenticity were provided in conversation. These examples will show that the direction of Asobo Studio's methods aligns to their intentions of finding various historical referents on both plague history and Medieval Europe from research that would be "historically striking" to both players and studio members like Renard by providing visual, narrative, and ludic stimulation for designing their rendition of Medieval fantasy and its "depiction of this world [France in Medieval times]."³⁶⁴

³⁶² Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', pp. 11-12, 15;

Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', pp. 3, 10-11; Focus Home Interactive, 'A Plague Tale : Innocence - Webseries - Episode 2 - Dark Ages', *Youtube* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ns2jdBuLFyw>> [accessed 5 March 2019], min 0:46-0:50.

³⁶³ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 2.

³⁶⁴ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 9; Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 3.

Historical Sites and Written Sources, Game Setting and Narrative – Research and Game Design:

Two of Asobo Studio's primary methods used were conducting fieldwork of historical sites and written historical sources. Both these methods overall provided creative historical inspirations and a foundational knowledge base for Asobo Studio to design their own Medieval historical settings, and embed experiences alluding to or renewing actual historical events or occurrences, motifs, and themes of pre-modern plague life.

To describe each of these methods, Asobo Studio's fieldwork consisted of visiting and photographing a number of towns and cities with surviving historical buildings and structures within southern France for use as historical influences for constructing and authenticating a number of *APTI*'s "realistic Medieval setting[s]."³⁶⁵ Usage of these historical sites as design influences extended to how their visual and spatial dimensions in their present-day state were reconfigured into or inspired the development of lived spaces within the game's Medieval buildings that facilitated experiences of plague representation within gameplay. Bordeaux, where Asobo Studio is located, was one of their sources because the city contains a wide assortment of surviving historical buildings and structures dating to either the early and late Roman or Medieval periods, including the former Roman amphitheatre entrance of the Palais Gallien, the Porte Cailhau gate, and the Gross Cloche Tower. The Roman historical sites were incorporated as the game made narrative references to Justinian's Plague (541 – 549) as the previous global plague epidemic caused by the mysterious rat swarm (in *APTI*'s story), and some of the locations visited by the children protagonists contained fragmented remnants and buildings of Roman architecture. Other notable Medieval locations visited by Asobo Studio include

³⁶⁵ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 15.

St. Emilion and the fortified city Carcassonne.³⁶⁶ In contrast, Renard and the Asobo Studio team had no time to visit universities, museums, and libraries to obtain further information due to the publication deadline they had with their publisher Focus.³⁶⁷

Figure 5.3 (A – B): Bordeaux – Historical Sites

Remains of Palais Gallien (Figure 5.3A) and Porte Cailhau Gate (Figure 5.3B) as some of the historical influences for Asobo Studio's visual design of APTI's game world.

Figure 5.3A – Palais Gallien



Figure 5.3B – Porte Cailhau Gate



³⁶⁶ Renard, p. 4.

³⁶⁷ Renard, p. 12.

Some of the actual historical structures and buildings the team visited were also visually re-constructed to their approximate detail. This is seen prominently in their Medieval city level containing some of these re-constructions, such as Carcassonne’s layer of fortified walls and its bridge and Bordeaux’s Gross Cloche Tower (see Figures 5.3C – 5.3F), to give *APTI*’s Medieval city a more aesthetically detailed atmosphere as an imposing settlement.

Figure 5.3C – Carcassonne Walls (*APTI*’s Medieval City)

*A segment of the fortified Medieval walls (5.3C) as a visual re-construction of its counterpart in real-life Carcassonne. Recorded in ‘A Plague Tale Innocence III’.*³⁶⁸



³⁶⁸ Ben Redder, ‘A Plague Tale Innocence III’, in *A Plague Tale: Innocence* (4 July 2019), min 1:42:19.

Figure 5.3D – Bridge of Pont Vieux (APTI’s Medieval City)

*The Bridge of Pont Vieux (5.3D) shown in front of Amicia as a visual re-construction of its counterpart in real-life Carcassonne. Recorded in ‘A Plague Tale Innocence III’.*³⁶⁹



³⁶⁹ Redder, min 1:42:30.

Figure 5.3 (E – F): Gross Cloche Tower

A couple of image comparisons of Bordeaux's Gross Cloche Tower (right) re-constructed and inputted into APTI's Medieval city layout (left). Figure 5.3E recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence IV'.³⁷⁰

Figure 5.3E – APTI (Medieval City)

APTI's Gross Cloche Tower.



Figure 5.3F – Bordeaux

Real-life Gross Cloche Tower.



³⁷⁰ Ben Redder, 'A Plague Tale Innocence IV', in *A Plague Tale: Innocence* (4 July 2019), min 7:17.

Aside from visiting surviving historical sites and buildings, their research methods were primarily secondary sources. With Renard needing to spend more time on writing script and dialogue, majority of historical research was conducted at the “beginning [stages] of the project”, but their accumulation of secondary sources focused less on academic research and scientific areas and more on the socio-cultural, poetic, artistic, and religious aspects of their subject matter.³⁷¹ These secondary sources accumulated were namely films set in the Medieval period (e.g. *Black Death* (2010), and *Flesh and Blood* (1985)), acquiring information from the internet, and a handful of illustrated historical books and novels in French (including historical texts about the Black Death).

To focus specifically on written historical texts as another key method for research and game design, the specific titles of the written texts Renard and his studio used were not obtained or verified as most (but not all) of them were not academic or research-based and published entirely in French. More importantly, the interview revealed that these sources were consulted by Renard for their wider ideas, themes, and content that inspired his narrative design rather than the scholarly specificity or veracity of the historical information present within the texts. As Renard stated, his approach to selecting and reading written texts during game development was usually of a more “general approach ... not to ... find some very specific ... scientific or ... like research books ... because the [narrative design] team didn’t have time.”³⁷² Thus, he mainly relied on written histories and novels about the plague, the history of France in the fourteenth century such as the Hundred Years War, and the psychological effects of plague in societies committing violence and atrocities. Among these texts, a prominent source of written material was a

³⁷¹ Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 3.

³⁷² Renard, p. 3.

series of twenty contemporary illustrated children or teenager's books about the Medieval times as they:

were full of pictures which was really interesting for us, even for the artists ... on my side [narrative design team] we had a book about fear and fantastic in Medieval times ... we had another one about ... jobs and crafts in the Medieval times.³⁷³

This particular selection of these texts, particularly relying on Medieval children books, is important not by illustrating that Asobo Studio's historical research framework conforms to the standards of academic research on the Black Death (which was already clarified by Renard as not his studio's main concern).³⁷⁴ The significance of this particular written source was its close stylistic connection to a number of themes in their game and its adaptation of the Black Death experienced and perceived from the perspective of children. When I queried Renard as to this interesting correlation between his use of the collected series of Medieval children books and his studio's emphasis and incorporation of children as the main protagonists (Amicia and Hugo), he surprisingly stated with amusement "well it's interesting because I never thought about that [correlation] ... but yes [its true] [Ben and Sébastien laugh]."³⁷⁵ This matter did not go any further and I was unable to access or view some of the illustrated books he described. Nevertheless, I surmised that this approach of illustrated textual reading would have likely played an implicit role in influencing Renard's writing of the story around Amicia and Hugo's plague adventure. Specifically, the particularity of its Medieval illustrations catered to a

³⁷³ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 10.

³⁷⁴ Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 3.

³⁷⁵ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 11.

child or young adult reader could have implanted influences onto Renard's intuition in writing children and their relationship to the plague "as seen through the[ir] eyes" within the backdrop of the Black Death, such as writing scenes on Hugo where:

he can see the brutality of the world and like a few minutes after he could [then] see a butterfly and ... run after it ... he has this ability to snap which Amicia ... [cannot] because she is confronted to the violence of the world and she has to protect Hugo.³⁷⁶

The studio's incorporation of children protagonists (Amicia and Hugo) brings important historical awareness to a marginally represented and researched group in most adaptations and studies of Black Death history. However, *APTI*'s portrayal and Renard's writing of these characters is not intended to provide new scholarly insights or perspectives on this particular group's existence during this terrible pestilence. The difficulty in such an attempt would be compounded by the near absence of any surviving Medieval sources that detail what children or young adults imagined or thought about the plague and its impact on their lives and relationships to society.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁶ Renard, p. 8.

³⁷⁷ Evidence entailing manorial court rolls and documents on the guardianship and inheritance of children orphaned during the Black Death, surviving statistics on high child mortality rates in fourteenth century Europe, and letters by priests recounting cases of family abandonment of their children during the Black Death comprise some of the handful of fragmented records on this area. Yet despite limitations on the study of Medieval children during the Black Death, studies of children within the larger sphere of Medieval and Early Modern Europe is a gradually growing and highly productive area of research and discourse for both historians and Medieval scholars. Recent works like Miriam Müller's *Childhood, Orphans, and Underage Heirs in Medieval Rural England* (2018) and the edited collection *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: The Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality* (2005) are only some of the valuable contributions to this increasingly rich corpus of literature on children's lives in pre-modern Europe.

The process and efficacy of both these methods (Historical heritage structures and written sources) were not designed to claim historical specificity by replicating real Medieval French settings (e.g. Bordeaux, Carcassonne) and their localized histories. They were instead a means to add both visual and narrative substance to *APTI*'s imaginary Medieval environments which carry the main story as remediated plague-ravaged landscapes. Meanwhile, the written sources provided influences for Renard to write up and later edit or amend a number of scenes and events that were eventually inputted into these settings as authentically Medieval yet contemporary re-imaginings by serving as notable occurrences encountered by the player's protagonists and/or their allies.

To give one example for demonstration, this particular direction of applying real historical sites and written sources undertaken by Asobo Studio can be evidently found in *APTI*'s village game level as the first settlement encountered by the player. The village is heavily influenced and authenticated to the layout and building design of the St. Emilion village (albeit with a few stylistic variations). As seen in a series of comparative images (Figures 5.3G – 5.3J), the village projects a number of key similarities with St. Emilion regarding how the Medieval buildings in this village are constructed and spatially organised. These similarities include the beige colored low-rise two-storied buildings largely made from local limestone that most of the original village was built from, the location of the village monastery being placed exactly on the top of the rocky slope that overlooks the rest of the village as seen in the real St. Emilion, and clay-tiled or timber shingle roofs.

Figure 5.3 (G – J): APTI's Medieval Village and St. Emilion Village

A comparison between the visual layout of APTI's Medieval village with that of Saint Emilion that inspired the village design (Figures 5.3G – 5.3J).



Figure 5.3G – APTI's Medieval Village (I)

The visual layout of APTI's Medieval houses inspired by those in St. Emilion. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot'.³⁷⁸



Figure 5.3H – St. Emilion (I)

The Medieval houses in present-day St. Emilion.

³⁷⁸ Redder, min 49:52.



Figure 5.3I – APTI's Medieval Village (II)

Amicia overlooking the village layout designed in the style of real-life St. Emilion. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot'.³⁷⁹



Figure 5.3J – St. Emilion (II)

Architectural layout of St. Emilion as the basis for APTI's village level.

³⁷⁹ Redder, min 1:13:26.

This village setting is also added with further details or features by the visual graphic artists visually resonant to the settlement conditions and circumstances in the Medieval period, including a lot more ramshackle or run-down features like cracked stonewall edges, cobble streets covered in thick dirt or mud, overgrown plant vines covering the buildings, and a town stone wall.

Figure 5.3K – APTI's Medieval Village

A display of the stone wall and its gate entrance, an example of an original added architectural feature to the Medieval village not found in St. Emilion. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot'.³⁸⁰



³⁸⁰ Redder, min 47:26.

While *APTI*'s Medieval village shares architectural similarities, it is not a replicated copy of St. Emilion. The village is instead an authentic yet unnamed Medieval settlement to orientate the player's recognitions of this dwelling within the game as characteristically 'Medieval' in its look. The significance of this unnamed location (much like its Medieval city counterpart) is its focus on "what happens in this place ... the rats are changing the world as they spread ... and they corrupt, kind of corrupt ... [this] world."³⁸¹ In this case, the design of the village layout extends from its visual historical resonance to St. Emilion by turning into a settlement recently infested with and physically devastated by a plague, invoking an atmosphere similar to some of the current conditions of pre-modern settlements during a plague crisis. When Amicia and Hugo arrived, the entire village was found to be similarly in historian Bryne's words referenced earlier nearly "emptied of crowds", a disturbingly quiet place with no life save that of a few voices heard in shut houses who strangely refuse to come out, food stalls with rotten produce, and markers of white Xs' (or crosses) on the doors of a number of houses. This last feature is the plague cross, an anachronistic early modern symbol only found in England used to signal that the occupant of the building had the plague and no one was allowed to enter. It is likely that Asobo Studio added this feature because of the aforementioned time constraints in the amount of research they had to collect, and it was one of the effective initial foreshadows to the sibling's later introduction to the plague.

³⁸¹ Renard, p. 4.

Figure 5.3L – Chapter 2: The Strangers (II)

The white cross painted over a door, one of many found in the village. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot'.³⁸²



This atmospheric set-up of the village setting as a large barren settlement provided an important foreshadow to the siblings' later discovery of the mysterious plague as the cause behind the settlement's current state and the death of its residents, with most of the remaining survivors isolating themselves in their homes. The near emptiness state of the village also provided a subtly scary foreshadowing to its immediate main narrative revolving around the children's witness of an atrocity. This narrative design approach was utilised in the village setting when Amicia and Hugo entered the settlement as they

³⁸² Redder, min 53:39.

saw smoke at the centre of the village, and believed there was a gathering of people who could help them. Just before reaching the site of the smoke, they started to inhale what smelled to be burnt meat when Hugo said “I can smell something cooking. Is it a fair?”. Upon arriving, they found an angry mob in front of two stakes with each one having a tied villager victim, one already in charred remains and the other being put to the torch. When the leader of the mob Conrad Malfort spotted Amicia and Hugo, he then, in an apparently delusional state, accused the children of bringing the plague to the town on the bizzare grounds of “It’s your dammed music that brought them out.” A chase soon ensued where Amicia and Hugo had to find a way to escape and hide from the paranoid mob who were out to kill them.

Figure 5.3M – Chapter 2: The Strangers (III)

*Amicia and Hugo encounter a violent mob at a village burning. Recorded in ‘A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot’.*³⁸³



³⁸³ Redder, min 55:34.

The encounter with the paranoid and violent mob in the village is one of a few scenes that broadly allude to historical atrocities during the Black Death that Renard incorporated from examining written sources about the Black Death's psychological impact. In our interview, he commented on how the Black Death's ability to provoke fear brought "people to commit ... [catastrophic] crimes [or atrocities], especially in these times when they were ... really superstitious", and gave references to certain events such as the Jewish pogroms as examples.³⁸⁴ Due to the targeted age of their audiences (16 – 18 years and over), Renard commented that this social response to the Black Death was made less horrific as actual events of that nature were "too much [of a] delicate subject for video games ... even if it's ... historically accurate" and the "game is already very dark and so I don't necessarily aim at ... [having] other layers of darkness ... it's all about [historical] imagination."³⁸⁵ Because this age-restriction consequently impacted the realism of this portrayal, he and the studio kept "paranoia" and forms of violent brutality to a general background role by switching, for instance, to "common foes ... [basically general] people from a random village got driven mad ... [and] started to massacre some people", as shown in the village mob encounter described earlier.³⁸⁶

In summary, the village setting's combination of its Medieval architectural layout with historically contextualised events provides clear insight into how Asobo Studio combines historical sites and written sources during their stages of research and game design by exemplifying not a replicated history of St. Emilion. Rather, a re-imagined Medieval plague environment containing immediate events or stories experienced by the player's children protagonists that remediates historical connections to certain socio-cultural

³⁸⁴ Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', pp. 1-2.

³⁸⁵ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 7;
Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 1.

³⁸⁶ Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 9.

plague themes and occurrences. In other words, the village setting facilitates the current incident taking place, which was the children's survival from the paranoid mob after being wrongly accused of spreading the plague.

Internet Database – Research and Game Design:

Renard's engagement to secondary sources also extended to drawing from and examining historical data from the internet. Renard acknowledged that while some of the sources from websites would not be completely accurate, the internet still provided a "giant database" of easily accessible information which he and his colleagues could use to select and integrate the most interesting or relevant facts for their game world, character development, and story.³⁸⁷ This method was extremely helpful to him on several particular sectors such as researching alchemy, including its imagery and symbols.³⁸⁸ Renard wanted to incorporate alchemy due its fantastical-like quality as the "chemistry of this time", but which could be reformatted to work for designing a system of "crafting [certain items] in the game", with examples provided later in Chapter 7.³⁸⁹ Nonetheless, his research into alchemy can also be attested in other areas of their game design process. For instance, there were times where I discovered alchemical imagery in frescoes or in picture frames in different parts of the game. The alchemical image of the "Green Lion [consuming the sun]" was one of a couple of references he stated in our interview that I unexpectedly found later as a miscellaneous item on a blocked staircase at a ruined fortress serving as a hideout for Amicia and Hugo.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 9.

³⁸⁸ Renard, p. 10.

³⁸⁹ Renard, p. 10.

³⁹⁰ Renard, p. 10.

Figure 5.3N – Chapter 8: Our Home

Discovery of a miscellaneous item, which is a portrait of the 'Green Lion Consuming the Sun' found in the game. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence III'.³⁹¹



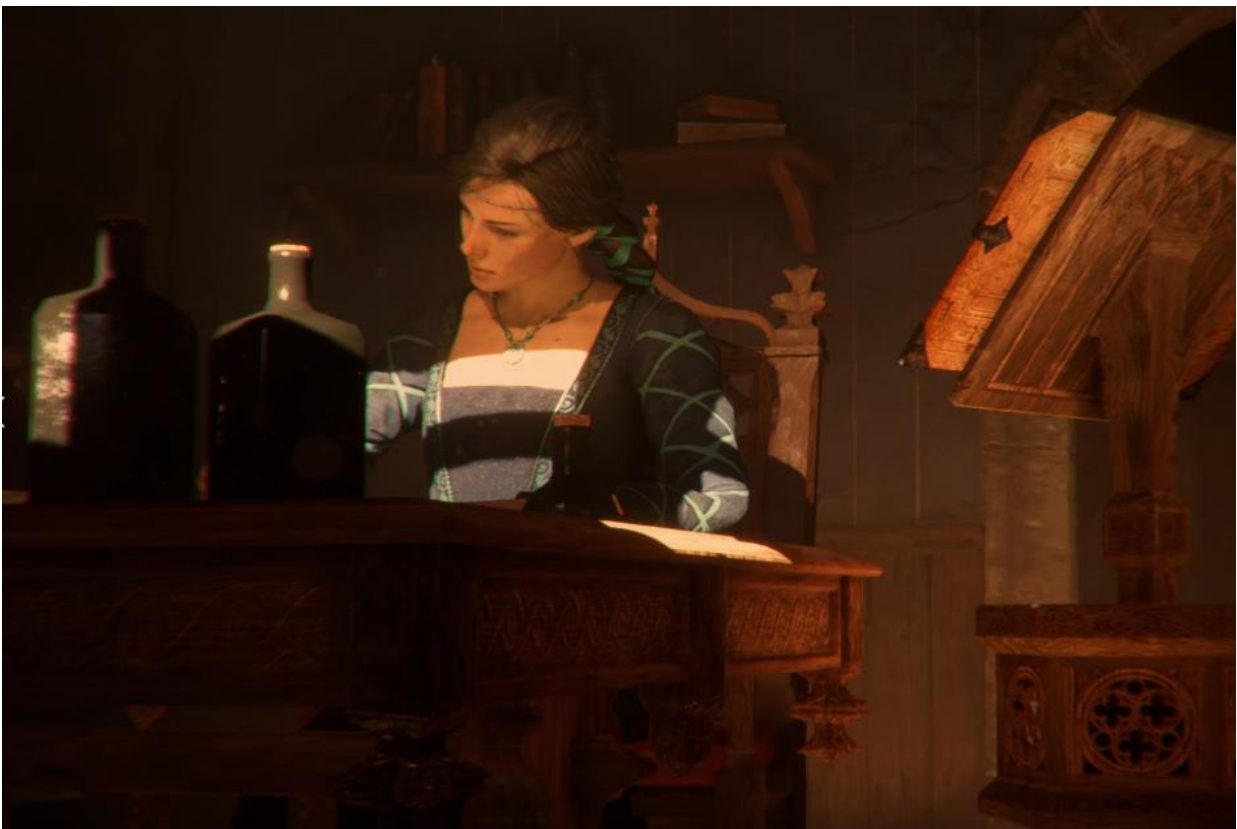
From a narrative frame, the role of alchemy became important as one of the main arcs of *APT*'s storyline by the children's search for a mysterious forbidden text called the 'Sanguinis Itinera'. This text contained knowledge on a recipe for an elixir that could cure or minimise Hugo's disease that is slowly killing him. Moreover, Doctor Laurentius and the sibling's mother Béatrice de Rune represented as alchemists situate the alchemist

³⁹¹ Redder, 'A Plague Tale Innocence III', min 1:34:25.

group as a force for good who desire to find a cure to end or prevent the plague in stark opposition to the religious fanaticism of the Inquisition order.

Figure 5.30 – Chapter 1: The De Rune Legacy (II)

Béatrice de Rune, a female alchemist and Hugo and Amicia's mother. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot'.³⁹²



³⁹² Redder, 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot', min 25:27.

Designing Antagonists – Game Design:

Besides designing and conveying their story of the plague through Medieval children protagonists, the most exciting and notable feature of Asobo Studio's historical game development is its design of antagonists. Several antagonists are humans, such as the mad or paranoid villagers described earlier, and more prominently the Grand Inquisitor Vitalis Bénévent with his second in command Lord Nicholas and Captain of the Purple Guard who control the Inquisition forces. However, the most striking aspect of this historical antagonist game design was how Asobo Studio re-imagined the Black Death by choosing a couple of past imaginative forms or manifestations of this pestilence. Subsequently, the studio then reformatted one of these imaginative forms of the pestilence into one of *APTI*'s main physical obstacles and hostile entities, as well as a major narrative plot device, by being the main source of the infection. Originally, Renard discussed that Asobo Studio wanted to approach the design of their system of infection based on the popular Medieval miasma theory (described earlier in Section 4.2.1) in a format similar to his reference to the horror game *Silent Hill 2* by entailing the "fog as the miasmas ... a form of threads ... that would hide settings."³⁹³ Elaborating further:

peoples in these [Medieval] times ... thought that if the air was stinking it ... was poisoned ... so we could have imagined ... [a system like] don't go too close to this character ... because he looks sick and create this kind of paranoia.³⁹⁴

While Renard implied that this miasma concept thematically conformed to the historical nature of the Black Death as an invisible and unseen force, this idea became difficult to achieve in game design as it was too abstract. As a result, this idea was replaced with the

³⁹³ Renard, p. 1.

³⁹⁴ Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 16.

plague rat swarm as another version of the Black Death.³⁹⁵ The rat swarm and its characteristics is a prime gameplay example of *APTI* in Chapter 7, so this discussion focuses on its game design context illustrating the interplay between Medieval historicity and its immersion in historical fantasy.

Aside from its popular infamy as the main carrier of plague epidemics like the Black Death, the plague rats were an effective choice by Asobo Studio to develop their plague rendition. This choice not only provided them with a more “physical, visual representation [emblematic] of [the Black Death]”, but the physical particularities of the rats as inhabitants “living with us ... in our houses, in the sewers and [everywhere else]” was also ideal for their portrayal of *APTI*'s mystical concepts.³⁹⁶ The mystical concepts Renard described is likely related to his reference to bringing the rats out in the open within their game by turning them from their typical nature as shy creatures living in the shadows to a “force of nature ... flooding the world to change things [destruction]”, and operating as an interesting game mechanic.³⁹⁷ Principally, rats performing as physical puzzles or challenges for the player to overcome using “light [sources] against the rats ... [and occasionally using] the rats against your enemies.”³⁹⁸ Overall, Renard emphasised that the rats were chosen to be the “stars of the show” where “we don't call it the Black Plague ... because the disease in the game is secondary ... our plague is the rats! ... [with] the background and the fantasy to ... fit with [the rats].”³⁹⁹

³⁹⁵ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 1.

³⁹⁶ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', pp. 1-2; Renard, 'Interview 2 with Sébastien Renard at Asobo Studio, Bordeaux', p. 15.

³⁹⁷ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', pp. 1-2.

³⁹⁸ Renard, p. 1. This mystical relationship between rats and light will also be explored further in Chapter 7.

³⁹⁹ Renard, pp. 14-15.

This statement in re-appropriating or substituting the Black Death and its focus on disease with a supernatural form of pestilence may seem to be an ahistorical poetic license. However, I argue that this substitution of the phrase Black Death provides an important initial hint into Asobo Studio's choice and approaches of designing their supernatural antagonist, first as a miasma fog and later the plague rats, as closely tied to the socio-cultural and poetic discourses of pre-modern plague expressions. Particularly, plague expressions relating to the way past societies were affected by and/or imagined or personified plagues like the Black Death. The term Black Death commonly used today is an anachronistic post-medieval expression from about the mid-eighteenth century (when it was fully established in the English language) to refer to the fourteenth century plague. In Medieval times, the Black Death was more commonly known in other names such as 'atra mors' (Latin – Terrible Death), 'the foul death', and 'the first death', while appearing as different manifestations or guises such as the aforementioned miasma and plague maiden.⁴⁰⁰ Therefore, Asobo Studio's gamic manifestation of the Black Death can be perceived as a recent modern addition to the longstanding tradition of plague storytelling by substituting the actual Black Death with a supernatural form of pestilence, an insight explored further in Chapter 7. This tradition Asobo Studio follows via their design of *APTI* is using the plague itself and its past usages or motifs either as a social or fantastical backdrop to inform on, sympathise, or satirise the current breakdown of social, religious, and cultural structures, morals, and interclass relationships severely impacted by plague disasters (e.g. *The Decameron*). Or in rhetorical or figurative terms (e.g. theological, folkloric, artistic) a genuine attempt to rationalise or provide a physical form and purpose to an entity that was until the late nineteenth century literally invisible to mankind (except in the various horrific ways it left its victims to become sick and die).

⁴⁰⁰ Edwin M. Stieve, 'Medical and Moral Interpretations of Plague and Pestilence in Late Middle English Texts' (published Doctoral thesis, Michigan State University, 1988), pp. 26-27, 30.

Consultation with Historian, Imagination Versus Historicity – Research:

The correlation of Asobo Studio's research and game design frameworks to its use of the Medieval in a historical fantasy context also overlaps with how Renard's discussions on combining imagination and historical authenticity differed with the approaches and incentives of the historian they invited as a part-time consultant. I class this collaboration as another historical method the studio implemented, but Renard highlighted that unfortunately there was an early abrupt end to consultation with this historian after two meetings.⁴⁰¹ The two meetings Renard had with the historian were helpful, in that he checked and confirmed that the visual look of the game and the historical research conducted by Renard and the rest of the team were authentically faithful to that period of Medieval France.⁴⁰² However:

then we asked him to check the whole story and give us as much feedback as possible and then he just disappeared at some point ... I think he had several bigger things to do with stuff happening in Bordeaux.⁴⁰³

Renard did not fully know why the historian suddenly left and ended further contact. Yet Renard interestingly noted that the collaboration during their meetings was difficult because the historian's approach was based on a solely research or text-based mindset, in that specific questions on history given by Renard were usually answered with "I need to check ... my books."⁴⁰⁴ This breakdown of collaboration between Renard and the historian should not attribute that either side was at fault. However, what it does show is that these kind of responses from the historian conflicted with the intentions of what

⁴⁰¹ Renard, p. 11.

⁴⁰² Renard, p. 11.

⁴⁰³ Renard, p. 11.

⁴⁰⁴ Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 10.

Renard and his studio wanted to achieve in developing their Medieval historical game. That is, the studio's engagement to a more imaginative side of history as a popular form of storytelling and world-building conflicted with the academic and research background of the historian and his specialisation. By extension, Renard's type of research and the questions he asked the historian reflected, as I have argued, the socio-cultural, artistic, and poetic facets of Medieval life and plague history, facets contrary to the historian's engagement to historical research. This insight is further supported by Renard's comments that the historian was not only "not used to working in game development", but that his specialisation of plagues in France was "more in the seventeenth century ... [specifically] in pandemic."⁴⁰⁵ This latter point subtly indicates that the historian's engagement to and knowledge of plagues was largely situated in the scientific realm regarding academic histories researching the effects of plague outbreaks on a mainly epidemic disease level, rather than the narrative, cultural, and artistic histories of plague representation.

Despite these differences, Renard still acknowledged that having an historian entirely involved in the project would still be useful as "I could ... [ask] him a lot of questions ... and not rely on [the] internet ... it would have brought some new ideas", provided that they were "interactive who didn't just rely ... on books ... [someone] who is creative too."⁴⁰⁶ Thus, collaboration with historians could still be an important method in this avenue of historical representation, provided that an historian can align their expertise to the particularities and intentions of game design approaches around historical games grounded principally in remediated imagination.

⁴⁰⁵ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 11.

⁴⁰⁶ Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 10.

5.2.4 Conclusion – Historical Modality Identified:

These previous sections' coverage on both Asobo Studio's intentions of using history and their historical research and game design processes demonstrate that a more imaginative (but not distant or detached) construct of history is present. Principally, the use of fantasy not only as a device for inhabiting another world (Medieval history), but also as a materialisation of certain past imaginative and socio-cultural facets of pre-modern plagues (such as the Black Death) in generating condensed historical contexts for facilitating *APTI's* storytelling, visual aesthetics, and its multiple settings and characters. Some of these listed are the remediation of visually authentic Medieval settlements into fantastical plague abodes, and the design of the plague rat swarm as a sinisterly visual, narrative, and ludic entity after trialling a previous plague imagination (miasma). Therefore, Asobo Studio's historical game development framework as an interplay between a fantastical and historical plague reality establishes on a preliminary level that *APTI's* gameplay medium primarily follows with the historical modality 'imaginative history'. This modality will be fully explored later in Chapter 7.

5.3 Kingdom Come: Deliverance:

The second game examined in this thesis is *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, an historical game set in early fifteenth century Bohemia (modern day Czech Republic), specifically in the region and its vicinities between the towns of Sasau (Czech – Sázava) and Rattay (Czech – Rataje nad Sázavou) near the capital city of Prague.⁴⁰⁷ The story takes place in the year 1403 during the Fraternal Civil War (1402 – 1403) between King Wenceslas IV of Bohemia

⁴⁰⁷ With a couple of exceptions, most of the names pertaining to Czech villages, towns, regions, and characters in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* will be given in German as this was the language used by Warhorse Studios for their player audiences as they believed the majority of the names in Czech would be difficult for them. However, when first introduced, I provide the proper written Czech form of these respective names.

(c. 1361 – 1419) and his younger brother King Sigismund of Hungary and Croatia (c. 1368 – 1437), and centres around a young man called Henry. Henry, son of the town's blacksmith Martin, is born and raised in the castle-town Silver Skalitz (Czech – Stříbrná Skalice), which is currently under the control of Sir Radzig Kobyla (Czech – Racek Kobyla, d. 1416), a servant and favourite of Wenceslas. Desiring to leave his village life in search of adventure, Henry's wish comes true in the worst of situations, as he and the rest of the townsfolk are besieged in a surprise attack by an army of Czech and mercenary Cuman soldiers under the command of Sigismund. Losing both his parents, Henry escapes and heads to the nearby castle-town Talmberg (Czech – Talmberk) to warn them of the attack. Recovering for several weeks at the city of Rattay (Czech – Rataje nad Sázavou) after almost dying at the hands of one of Sigismund's men following his return to the now ruined Silver Skalitz, Henry meets with Rattay's governor Sir Hanush of Leipa (Czech – Hanuš of Lipá, d. 1415) and the other lords (including Radzig). Henry offers his services and eventually becomes a knight in Radzig's service.

The rest of *KCD*'s main story frequently involves Henry in a series of investigations and attacks in the surrounding villages connected to the massacre at Silver Skalitz and the growing chaos that has erupted throughout Bohemia since the wake of the civil war. Eventually, Henry finds out that these attacks are all connected to a Hungarian nobleman and mastermind of the operation Istvan Toth. Toth, an ally and subordinate of Sigismund, is currently supporting Sigismund's invasion by building an army comprising of Czech soldiers and Cumans to take advantage of the political instability and take over the Rattay-Sasau region. Through several battles, Henry and a coalition of local lords and nobles, including Hanush and Radzig, ultimately defeat Toth's army, though Toth escapes the region with a few remaining men as well as carrying the sword made by Henry's adopted father Martin. Amidst this journey, Henry also discovers his

true parentage as the illegitimate son of Radzig who left him in the care of the blacksmith Martin. The game concludes with Henry vowing to find Toth to reclaim his sword, but not before being sent with his friend and heir of Rattay Sir Hans Capon (Czech - Jan Ptáček, c. 1388? - 1419) as emissaries by Hanush to Lord Otto III of Bergau (c. 1377 – 1414) at Trosky castle (Czech - Hrad Trosky) to negotiate and inquire as to their allegiance with either Sigismund or Wenceslas.⁴⁰⁸

Figure 5.4 – Henry (Protagonist)

KCD's player protagonist Henry. Recorded in 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue'.⁴⁰⁹



⁴⁰⁸ This journey of vengeance also extends to finding, with the intention of killing, the German nobleman and Hetman (civic governor) of Prague Sir Markvart von Aulitz (c. 1360/1370 – 1402/1403) who killed Henry's adopted father and mother in the story during the attack of Silver Skalitz. However, this antagonist is absent for the rest of the game shortly after the Silver Skalitz siege and is likely the next villain in Warhorse Studios' forthcoming sequel.

⁴⁰⁹ Ben Redder, 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (3 April 2018), min 1:23:37.

5.3.1 The History of Bohemia during the Late Middle Ages:

The year 1403 in Bohemia marks as an important intermediary point of late Medieval Czech history between the peaceful reign of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV (c. 1316 – 1378) and the country's subsequent experience of religious and military conflicts known as the Hussite Wars (1419 – 1434). The kingdom of Bohemia was at this time one of the states belonging to the Holy Roman Empire, with Prague elected as the imperial capital and residence of the Emperor. Under Emperor Charles Luxembour's rule, the country had undergone a period of cultural, secular, artistic, religious, and economic expansion known as the 'Golden Age of Bohemia.'⁴¹⁰ After Charles succumbed to his death in 1378, his first son and successor King Wenceslas IV inherited Bohemia (r. 1378 – 1419) and the other German provinces in the Holy Roman Empire as King of the Romans and Emperor-Elect (r. 1378 – 1400).⁴¹¹ If Charles was the exemplar of the ideal and just ruler, then his son, despite all his father's hopes, symbolised the contrast to his father's reign.⁴¹² Most, if not all, writers of that time such as conciliar theologian Ludolf of Sagan are consistent with depicting Wenceslas as an incompetent and idle king who failed to govern both Bohemia and the rest of the Holy Roman Empire.⁴¹³ A man with an increasingly volatile personality in bad temper and melancholy, Wenceslas neglected his royal duties and responsibilities as king, instead spending his days being a "drunkard interested only in hunting and women."⁴¹⁴ Wenceslas' mismanagement and negligence was so severe that

⁴¹⁰ Robert Antonín, *The Ideal Ruler in Medieval Bohemia*, ed. by Florin Curta, East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450-1450, 81 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2017), XLIV, p. 336;

Thomas A. Fudge, *The Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1998), p. 8.

⁴¹¹ Until his deposition in 1400, Wenceslas remained as King of the Romans and Emperor-Elect (a precursor state prior to being crowned as Holy Roman Emperor in Rome by the Pope at the Vatican).

⁴¹² Antonín, p. 308.

⁴¹³ Fudge, pp. 10-11.

⁴¹⁴ Antonín, p. 310;

Fudge, pp. 10-11.

it created a deteriorating relationship with his German subjects.⁴¹⁵ This, coupled with his absence of attending the coronation to be crowned as Holy Roman Emperor and of refusing to attend an imperial court hearing by several German lords and archbishops in answering to charges of negligence, led to his deposition in 1400 by the league of prince-electors on the basis of “futility, idleness, negligence and ignobility.”⁴¹⁶

These behaviours of Wenceslas and his poor reputation also caused distrust and friction with the higher Bohemian nobility and clergyman. Wenceslas made several attempts to increase both the power of the monarch while diminishing the regional authority and autonomy exercised by the higher nobility. For instance, many of his father’s advisors, artists, and architects who came from foreign European countries had left by the time of Wenceslas’ reign, which consequently brought greater uncertainty for the stability of Bohemia. This influenced the king to seek aid and advice from the lower echelons of Bohemian society who were heavily reliant on the king for material aid.⁴¹⁷ Specifically, Wenceslas supported the lower nobility and the towns by appointing lower gentry, courtiers, and townsman into his high council, several of whom he had as his favourites, a privilege previously exclusive to those from the older and higher status aristocracy.⁴¹⁸

These political and social manoeuvres to diminish aristocratic power led to a series of conflicts between Wenceslas and most of the higher nobility in the years 1394 – 1405.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁵ Len Scales, *The Shaping of German Identity: Authority and Crisis, 1245-1414* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 86.

⁴¹⁶ Tom Scott, 'Germany and the Empire', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History VII: c.1415-c.1500*, ed. by Christopher Allmand, 7 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), VII, 337-366, p. 348.

⁴¹⁷ Jaroslav Pánek and Oldřich Tůma, *A History of the Czech Lands* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2009), p. 143.

⁴¹⁸ John Klassen, 'Hus, the Hussites, and Bohemia', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History VII: c.1415-c.1500*, ed. by Christopher Allmand, 7 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), VII, 367-391, p. 372.

⁴¹⁹ Jan Janišová and Dalibor Janiš, 'King, Estates and the Czech Crown: The Legal Sources of the Ideas of Freedom in the Medieval and Early Modern Czech Lands', in *Magna Carta: A Central European Perspective of our Common*

However, it was the Fraternal Civil War of 1402 – 1403 that would instigate the beginning of the end of Bohemia’s prosperity. It began when the higher nobility invited his younger half-brother Sigismund, at that time King of Hungary and Croatia (r. 1386 – 1437), to take the crown and replace his older brother as King of Bohemia.⁴²⁰ His invitation to Bohemia came under the pretense of protecting his brother from the nobility as well as restoring order, but then immediately set-up a kidnapping of the king.⁴²¹ However, his invitation soon turned into invasion when his initial attempt of controlling Bohemia via kidnapping failed after his brother refused to cede the crown.⁴²² Sigismund, with an army comprised mainly of mercenary nomadic Cuman soldiers with several contingents of Czech soldiers (and likely a few German and Hungarian soldiers and lords) instigated the civil war by invading Bohemia in late 1402. Despite initial success in his military invasion, Sigismund’s activities in ravaging Bohemian cities and the countryside would sever his chances of claiming the country as well as cementing his infamous reputation as a detested figure by the Bohemians.⁴²³ Eventually, he was driven out by most of the Bohemian nobility who either opposed him or were formerly allies.⁴²⁴ Meanwhile, Wenceslas was rescued from captivity in Vienna in late 1403 by a group of knights loyal to his supporters.⁴²⁵ Escorted back to Prague by John II of Lichtenstein (c. 1386 – 1412), Wenceslas regained his rule as king, though not before making further concessions to the

Heritage of Freedom, ed. by Przemyslaw Żurawski vel Grajewski Zbigniew Rau & Marek Tracz-Tryniecki (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 79-111, pp. 88-89;

František Šmahel, 'The Hussite Movement: An Anomaly of European History', in *Bohemia in History*, ed. by Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 79-87, p. 95.

⁴²⁰ Jeanne E. Grant, *For the Common Good: The Bohemian Land Law and the Beginning of the Hussite Revolution*, 81 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2014), XXVIII, pp. 22, 55. Sigismund later became both Holy Roman Emperor (r. 1411 - 1437) and of Bohemia (r. 1419 - 1437) upon the death of his brother Wenceslas in 1419.

⁴²¹ Fudge, p. 10.

⁴²² Fudge, p. 10.

⁴²³ Sigismund eventually became King of Bohemia in 1419 after his brother Wenceslas’ death, but his position was mostly titular until he was finally recognised as sovereign by the Czech noble estates in 1436 after the end of the Hussite Wars. Sigismund during the Hussite Wars led several of a number of crusades against the newly established Hussite government in order to claim his control over Bohemia, but these crusades ended in failure.

⁴²⁴ Joseph Aschbach, *History of Emperor Sigismund Vol. 1*, 4 vols (Hamburg: Friedrich Press, 1838), I, pp. 186-188.

⁴²⁵ Aschbach, pp. 191-193;

Grant, p. 55.

higher Bohemian nobility for greater autonomy, which was mostly a re-iteration of the twenty-one demands drafted by the lords to Wenceslas about a decade prior to the civil war.⁴²⁶ While the end of the civil war (taking place several months after the end of *KCD*) would not be the last major conflict in Bohemia, it served as a prelude to later events, with one event particularly being another and far larger internal conflict known as the Hussite Wars.⁴²⁷

This entire background described provides important historical contexts to the history(ies) portrayed and/or referenced in *KCD*, and was also an area extensively researched by Warhorse Studios during development of their game. However, the Bohemian Civil War (1402 – 1403) is where *KCD* and its setting takes place while containing new scholarly insights or knowledge to this minimally documented event.

5.3.2 Primary Game Genre System:

Like *APTI*, *KCD* follows the formal conventions of the realist simulation style while sharing most of the fundamental game structures pertaining to the action-adventure genre. The game also incorporates character persona by the player taking on the principal protagonist Henry from Silver Skalitz. However, due to the non-linearity of the game and the level design comprising of the entire Rattay-Sasau region, it is insufficient to label this

⁴²⁶ Aschbach, pp. 191-93.

⁴²⁷ The Hussite Wars was a major conflict with the Catholic Church by an early proto-protestant Czech movement comprising of followers known as the Hussites, which began under their leader and founder Jan Hus (c. 1369 - 1415), a former university lecturer and later head preacher of this form of Christianity. Jan Hus' execution in 1415 after being arrested led to a nation-wide revolt and civil war by many following Hus' teachings. For more information on Jan Hus, the Hussite Movement, and the Hussite Wars, see Thomas Fudge's *The Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia*, Jeanne E. Grant's *For the Common Good: The Bohemian Land Law and the Beginning of the Hussite Revolution*, and John Klassen's chapter 'Hus, the Hussites, and Bohemia' in *The New Cambridge Medieval History VII: c.1415-c.1500*.

Medieval game as simply 'action-adventure'. Instead, *KCD* is specifically an action-based RPG in an open-world format (see Section 1.2.3 for explanation on open-world design). Role-playing games or RPG is one of a number of variations derived from the broader genre of action-adventure games that can be designed in a linear and/or open-world format, but one that also heavily draws from and remediates features and engagements of older RPG styles such as Pen-and-paper games (e.g. *Dungeons and Dragons*). A number of notable characteristics of the RPG genre include players creating and governing the "actions of one or more characters in a fictional [or historical] game world", extensive rules for combat resolution, and an inventory system within the game menu that lists the weapons and armour, food, clothing, medical gear, and other items currently owned or carried by the player's character(s).⁴²⁸ The containment of intricate or branching story-worlds with multiple activities and engaging dialogue in the form of narrative quests is also another signature feature distinctive to RPG games. Quests are tasks with narrative storylines, cutscenes, game challenges, and sequential mission objectives, which if completed successfully provide material rewards and/or experience points for players.

The game is also marked as an RPG by its inclusion of character class selection (e.g. knight, thief) and level progression, conventions also used in popular traditional and digital RPG games like *The Elder Scrolls*. Level progression is where players improve over time in an aptitude of skills, such as combat, speech, reading, and athleticism, and their stats (e.g. increasing stamina and health points, increasing their maximum level of dexterity, charisma, and strength). This progression system is usually operated by obtaining experience or skill points from either completing quests and conversations or

⁴²⁸ Redder, 'Playing in a Virtual Medieval World: Video Game Adaptations of England through Role-play', p. 144. These characteristics are inexhaustive, with a number of them also found in or intersect with other action-adventure genres.

defeating enemies. The higher the current level number of stats and skills, the more powerful and tougher to subdue or kill the player's character. However, as *KCD* is an RPG set in a real historical period and setting, this character progression is condensed to a system of levelling up by frequent practical application or usage of Henry's skills. The more that Henry's skills are levelled up by accumulating experience points, the more experience points are contributed to Henry's overall main level which determines the current level of his stats.

This genre format of *KCD* was marketed prior to its release as a realistic Medieval game containing not only an expansive open-world but also an engaging combat system and heavy Medieval RPG elements.⁴²⁹ More broadly, this game's employment of its Medieval RPG system is also distinguished by its omission of tropes or features based in Medieval high-fantasy, such as magic, dragons, and elves.⁴³⁰ Even phrases found from Warhorse Studios' comments like "Dungeons and no Dragons" and "We don't have dragons but we got chickens" adds a playful parody of Medieval video games' association with fantasy.⁴³¹ However, *KCD*'s storyline and its various quests and activities akin to the RPG format are not experiences merely set in its respective history, but were actively a part of that history as intricately detailed representations. Thus, a more extensive analytical discussion in the following sections is provided to address Warhorse Studios' particular research and game design engagements to its Medieval histories concerned.

⁴²⁹ Warhorse Studios, 'Kingdom Come Deliverance', *Kickstarter*

<<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1294225970/kingdom-come-deliverance>> [accessed 8 July 2017].

⁴³⁰ Joanna Nowak, 'Interview with Warhorse Studios. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Joanna.', ed. by Ben Redder (Prague, 10 August 2018), p. 2;

Ondřej Bittner, 'Interview with Warhorse Studios. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Ondřej.', in *Warhorse Studios*, ed. by Ben Redder (Prague, 10 August 2018), p. 12.

⁴³¹ Craig Pearson, 'Thought Bubbles: Inside Kingdom Come: Deliverance's AI', *Rock Paper Shotgun*

<<https://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2014/02/17/thought-bubbles-kingdom-come-deliverances-ai/>> [accessed 31st March 2017], para. 1;

Warhorse Studios, 'Kingdom Come Deliverance', *Kickstarter*.

Figure 5.5 – RPG Stat System

An example of an RPG feature found in KCD, which is the character stats system that measures Henry's attributes, such as strength and vitality, which can be increased to develop Henry by accumulating points when Henry's skills increase in experience by frequent practical usage.

Recorded in 'Perk System'.⁴³²



⁴³² Ben Redder, 'Perk System', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (6 April 2018), min 1:38.

5.3.3 Warhorse Studios – Applying History in Game Development: Aims/Intentions:

Warhorse Studios' intentions to set *KCD* in late Medieval Bohemia was overall an historically informed and investigative scholarly direction, as opposed to a purely entertainment avenue. Warhorse Studios' Creative Director Dan Vávra chose to represent a detailed localized or regional history of the civil war between the brothers Wenceslas and Sigismund (1402 – 1403) by centering its impact on a small region in Bohemia, namely the Rattay-Sasau region. Warhorse Studios' historian Joanna Nowak indicated that Vávra's engagement to this history and the choice of locality was instigated by and heavily driven on a more serious scholarly direction. Specifically, she described how Vávra was determined to uncover, document, and represent this history by spending a lot of time finding out what happened between the events during the civil war.⁴³³ As she recounted:

He actually found ... a wide spot ... in [this] history ... [then] he started to finally find the pieces of information ... [and then picked] one or few facts that is like already stated somewhere in history ... [the] burning of the Silver Skalitz, and he was trying to find out the missing elements between that moment and ... [releasing] Wenceslas IV from his capture from Vienna.⁴³⁴

She later affirmed Vávra's desire for a scholarly approach or treatment of this history by "asking around if someone is into this topic and ... [he met] Petr Čornej [historian] who is a specialist in this ... period of time and again he [Čornej] encouraged him [Vávra] ...

⁴³³ Nowak, p. 1.

⁴³⁴ Nowak, p. 1.

[and] found this idea super cool for a video game.”⁴³⁵ These foundational incentives and research impetus described encouraged Vávra and his studio at the start of their game development to create a historically accurate Medieval game as one of their primary aims or goals, including the civil war’s impact on the Rattay-Sasau region, by dedicating to and closely constructing “accurate facts [and content] ... as it is possible to gather and of course made [and incorporated] into the game.”⁴³⁶

Warhorse Studios’ choice to conduct a serious scholarly-driven representation of this local history lasting about 8 – 9 months also made it highly compatible to game design practicalities. This compatibility was outlined in Vávra’s earlier attestations during an interview back in 2015:

What we ultimately chose ... has several advantages ... it is a prelude to the Hussite wars, so we can possibly make a sequel ... it is not really well known, yet ... contains a good narrative: the fraternal conflict and relatively clear discord ... [finally] it does not drag for like twenty years ... It all happened within half a year.⁴³⁷

Game designer Ondřej Bittner also added during our interview that the themes of the Fraternal Civil War revolving around war, chaos, and violence provided a compelling and convenient historical background for him and other game designers to have some liberties to create storylines or quests with unexpected “[plot] twists and turns” that

⁴³⁵ Nowak, p. 1.

⁴³⁶ Nowak, p. 2.

⁴³⁷ Ladislav Loukota, 'Dan Vávra: The Facts and Research behind Kingdom Come RPG', *Games.cz* <<https://games.tiscali.cz/rozhovor/dan-vavra-o-historickem-a-vyzkumnem-aspektu-rpg-kingdom-come-237665#form-search>> [accessed 25 May 2017], para. 14.

would fill in the gaps of this history within *KCD*'s historical world, while still maintaining adherence to Warhorse Studios' goal for "maximum accuracy."⁴³⁸

These statements from Vávra, Nowak, and Bittner provides an initial underline to the historical framework of *KCD* and its minutiae as a substantially contributive body of scholarly history. Notably, by outlining Warhorse Studios' aims to provide a detailed and interactive historical account on a relatively unknown and minimally researched history. Despite the significance of Sigismund's capture of Wenceslas and the subsequent Bohemian Civil War as one of the inherent catalysts to the later Hussite Wars, there is a scarcity of historical evidence (mainly chronicles) that document the civil war (see examples in Chapter 6).⁴³⁹ Nonetheless, the challenge of this undertaking and the limited information on this history provides an early signification of *KCD*'s relevance to late Medieval Czech scholarship. Namely, Warhorse Studios' discovery and multimodal animations of new and innovative historiographical contributions to both this civil war via its impact on the Rattay-Sasau region, and the various facets and phenomena of Medieval history that existed in Bohemia before and during the civil war represented in their game.

The scholarly potential of *KCD* has already been attested by historian and early (part-time) consultant Petr Čornej in a behind the scenes documentary after *KCD*'s release. Čornej briefly highlighted that Warhorse Studios had undertaken and elicited findings on this historical topic from their research, including "topographical [details], [and] the

⁴³⁸ Bittner, p. 1.

⁴³⁹ Examples of this lack of information in this area of Medieval Czech history within historical sources include Thomas Fudge's *The Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia*, Jeanne Grant's *For the Common Good: The Bohemian Land Law and the Beginning of the Hussite Revolution*, and Mikuláš Teich's *Bohemia in History*.

places where the events took place”, that he himself had not originally examined or “would have missed” when researching this same historical period.⁴⁴⁰ I argue then that the prime scholarly contribution of their historical game is neither to create a complete re-telling of what the causes and events of the civil war were, nor is it centering on the brothers Wenceslas and Sigismund who are either absent or minimally depicted within *KCD*, but are still important background figures to the current circumstances and conflicts of this region depicted in the game. Warhorse Studios’ representation of this Medieval history is instead an interactive scholarly history of how the Fraternal Civil War may likely have impacted on the Rattay-Sasau region, while still documenting and depicting some of the actual events and real people as well as the everyday life and socio-cultural minutiae for the residents living in the region at this time. Yet to provide further evidence that the development of *KCD* characterises Warhorse Studios’ scholarly endeavor and contribution described, the particularity of this studio’s historical methods in research and game design are covered in the following sections.

5.3.3.1 *Historical Methods – Research and Game Design:*

Warhorse Studios’ game development framework in designing *KCD* and its Medieval history was found to have been both grounded on and contributes extensive original research to, and innovative methods of, re-constructing this minimally documented history (this discovery will also be primarily explored in Chapters 6 and 8). In contrast to Asobo Studio, Warhorse Studios’ historical research and game design methods were found to be a distinctly scholarly framework aligning to their main goals and intentions recounted in the previous section. Specifically, a framework committed to research and

⁴⁴⁰ *Deliverance: The Making of Kingdom Come*, dir. by Ondřej Bojo, Jiří Bigas and Zdeněk Prine (Warhorse Studios, 2018).

re-construction of localized regional history, as well as the facets and constituents of everyday life in Medieval Bohemia, via gathering and cross-examining a wider repertoire of primary and secondary historical sources from a range of contexts. Part of Warhorse Studios' success in accumulating and utilising a wide range of historical sources was their employment of a full-time historian Joanna Nowak working in multiple roles. Her roles within the studio include consultation, extensive historical research and source analysis, contacting and obtaining data from various departments and institutions, and navigating game developers in their re-construction of the history portrayed in *KCD*.⁴⁴¹ Warhorse Studios' choice of hiring a full-time historian is rarely seen in game studios developing historical games, as historians are usually employed as part-time consultants.⁴⁴²

This scholarly framework can be broken down into (but not entirely comprising of) three key intersecting layers derived from members of the Warhorse Studios team's differing views that negotiated on how history and historical research should be used, including what roles they should play during game design.⁴⁴³ As highlighted by Bittner, Nowak followed an empirical or "purist approach", while Vávra looked to "authors from the nineteenth century which were the first to document Bohemian history" during the "wake of nationalism" regarding the development of a history centered on the Bohemian people with their distinct culture and language.⁴⁴⁴ Bittner's approach to history was two-fold. His consisted of deductive skepticism about traditional Czech history, such as the argument that during the Hussite period Bohemia was the first nation-state (in the

⁴⁴¹ Nowak, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁴² As Warhorse Studios was financially limited, they were only able to afford one historian for their team. Being the only historian, Joanna was involved in a lot of tasks that would typically require more than one expert, including engaging in areas of history that were beyond her level of knowledge and expertise such as landscape topology and translating certain foreign languages. In the long term these areas gave her relevant and useful historical experience and insight but at the same time had problematic effects on how she could engage in historical realism.

⁴⁴³ Bittner, p. 4.

⁴⁴⁴ Bittner, pp. 4-5.

modern sense).⁴⁴⁵ This skepticism was combined with his mediation between sensitivity to historical evidence and applying appropriate game design liberties for selecting and utilising historical topics and content in order to add “a lot of weight or ... a lot more meat into the game” as well as to show “something [about history] to the player.”⁴⁴⁶

Nowak, Bittner, and Vávra’s views and approaches also incorporated either or both the first (empirical/historical realism) and third (skepticism) key layers within their respective roles throughout *KCD*’s development. To provide one example, the notion of historical skepticism regarding the complete veracity of the historical sources was also fervently engaged by Nowak in her research activity.⁴⁴⁷ For instance, Nowak recounted her constant skepticism of the author or artist’s intentions and their accounts within the respective historical source or text, the lack of sources on certain topics, and encountering sources with multiple and contesting viewpoints.⁴⁴⁸ As a result of these challenges, she decided to face these situations by still being motivated to “finding more information but I’m no longer approaching it as oh there must be an answer because ... sometimes [there is an answer and sometimes there is not] or ... even contradictory [answers].”⁴⁴⁹ Therefore, I perceive Bittner’s remark of Nowak’s purist approach as not that of her examining and inferring the historical sources at face value, but rather of her initially not wanting to allow activities, events, and narratives that veered too much from the historical sources.⁴⁵⁰ Nowak herself mentioned on a couple of occasions her acceptance that certain game design liberties were a useful component to Warhorse Studios’

⁴⁴⁵ Bittner, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁴⁶ Bittner, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁴⁷ Nowak, p. 4.

⁴⁴⁸ Nowak, pp. 5-6, 10.

⁴⁴⁹ Nowak, p. 14.

⁴⁵⁰ Bittner, pp. 4-5.

engagement to history, such as our discussion on one of the game's quests 'Mysterious Ways'.⁴⁵¹

These three interwoven layers were co-dependently present in and shaped the entirety of my experiences of *KCD*'s gameplay histories by forming the backbone of Warhorse Studios' historical research and game design methodologies. A discussion of this studio's entire research, collected evidence, and game design processes would be innumerable. Therefore, only a handful of methods are provided here as examples to demonstrate how Warhorse Studios' amalgamation of their historical research and game design applications achieved their scholarly approach to developing *KCD* and its history.⁴⁵²

Medieval Historical Sites, Buildings/Structures, and Institutions – Research and Game Design:

One of Warhorse Studios' historical methods was their visitation, documentation, and photograph of Medieval sites and its known and/or surviving buildings and structures (in both exterior and interior workings) through private tours with a local guide or staff member. Members involved in this area included concept artists like Tomas Duchek, visual artists, and the historian Nowak. These Medieval sites include the upper castle of Rattay and its lower castle or more formally castle Pirkstein (Czech – Hrad Pirkštejn), the remnants of the castle in Talmberg, and the chapel in the village of Uzhitz (Czech - Úžice).⁴⁵³ These towns and their known Medieval buildings or structures (including those

⁴⁵¹ Nowak, p. 8.

⁴⁵² Most of these examples will also include collaborations with historians, historical experts, and institutions, with all of these groups constituting as another key method by Warhorse Studios.

⁴⁵³ This fieldwork they conducted also extended to researching historically known buildings within settlements that were formerly present but no longer physically exist, such as the former castle in the town of Silver Skalitz.

surviving today) provided a significant base for their 3D design of *KCD*'s game world as they are real places within the Rattay-Sasau locality established prior to and existed during and/or after the Bohemian Civil War. These locations and their structures then were used to help accurately re-construct their digitally Medieval counterparts within *KCD*. This fieldwork also overlapped with contacting and arranging visits to a number of departments, museums, and institutions both within and outside the Czech Republic relevant to Medieval Bohemian history.⁴⁵⁴ Overall, these collaborations provided the team access to various historical referents that they later re-constructed into the game as either or both visual and performative assets, such as the “[Medieval] weapons ... [the utensils] used in the field or in the village[s] ... [basically] everything [that existed within Medieval Bohemia] is researched.”⁴⁵⁵ For instance, members of Warhorse Studios visited and collaborated with the Hussite Museum at Tábor and the Museum of Silver at Kutná Hora. To elaborate on the latter institution, this museum specialised in the various intricacies and features of silver mines and mining culture in Medieval Bohemia which became valuable for designing the mines near one of the game's settlements Silver Skalitz.

To demonstrate the importance and usefulness of researching actual historical sites and buildings for game design application, one extensive example is the monastery located in Sasau originally founded in the mid-eleventh century, and one of the real historical sites visited by studio members. Alongside supporting written records documenting the history of the building and the names of the individual monks who lived in the building within that timeframe, such as the Abbot Peter of Zbýšov, the entirety of the monastery

⁴⁵⁴ Nowak, p. 12.

⁴⁵⁵ Tomas Duchek, 'Interview with Warhorse Studios. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Tomas.', in *Warhorse Studios*, ed. by Ben Redder (Prague, 10 August 2018), pp. 1-2.

complex was re-constructed in *KCD* to strikingly minute detail from its height and thickness to the age, quality, and different gradations of its stone blocks (see Figures 5.6A – 5.6F for examples, pp. 215 – 217).⁴⁵⁶ Some examples provided are a comparison between past and present sites of some of the areas of the Sasau monastery, with the present sites of these areas photographed in my fieldwork.

⁴⁵⁶ Nowak, pp. 10-11.

Figure 5.6 (A – B): Medieval and Modern Sasau Monastery – Gothic Bell Tower

Comparative images of the Sasau monastery’s bell tower showing its digital portrayal in KCD (Figure 5.6A) and the real tower that still survives today (Figure 5.6B). Figure 5.6A recorded in ‘The House of God’.⁴⁵⁷

Figure 5.6A – Bell Tower (KCD)



Figure 5.6B – Bell Tower (Present)



⁴⁵⁷ Ben Redder, ‘House of God’, in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, min 4:00.

Figure 5.6 (C – D): Medieval and Modern Sasau Monastery – Basilica Church

Comparative images of the Sasau monastery’s Basilica Church showing its digital portrayal in KCD (Figure 5.6C) and the real church that still survives today (Figure 5.6D). Figure 5.6C recorded in ‘House of God’.⁴⁵⁸

Figure 5.6C – Basilica Church (KCD)



Figure 5.6D – Basilica Church (Present)



⁴⁵⁸ Redder, min 9:26.

Figure 5.6 (E – F): Medieval and Modern Sasau Monastery – Courtyard



**Figure 5.6E –
Courtyard (KCD)**

*The monastery
courtyard containing
an Elysium garden.*

*Recorded in ‘A
Needle in a Haystack*

*II’.*⁴⁵⁹



**Figure 5.6F –
Courtyard
(Present)**

*The courtyard today
where the elysium
garden formally
stood.*

⁴⁵⁹ Ben Redder, ‘A Needle in a Haystack II’, in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (26 May 2018), min 1:00:21.

This re-construction also extends to other original exterior and interior Medieval parts of the monastery that either no longer exist today in its modern heritage state or are in fragmented ruins, such as the monastery's former library and overseer's office, the northern garden, and the main stone entrance (see Figures 5.6G – 5.6I for examples).

Figure 5.6G – Sasau Monastery: Stone Entrance

The monastery's former stone entrance accurately re-constructed in KCD. Recorded in 'House of God'.⁴⁶⁰



⁴⁶⁰ Redder, 'House of God', min 1:48.



Figure 5.6H – Sasau Monastery: Northern Garden Vicinity

The former adjoining garden in the northern sector of the monastery.

Recorded in 'Siege III'.⁴⁶¹



Figure 5.6I – Sasau Monastery: Infirmary

The monastery's former original infirmary during Medieval times.

Recorded in 'House of God'.⁴⁶²

However, this game design application entailing the accurate re-construction of the Sasau monastery to its closely original state in 1403 from heritage and written data was not simply intended to replicate or provide heritage functions for in-game sightseeing. Instead, this building design was that of a prime location to facilitate the player's

⁴⁶¹ Ben Redder, 'Siege III', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (11 June 2018), min 6:18.

⁴⁶² Redder, 'House of God', min 9:33.

progression of the main story. Simultaneously, the monastery was visually and socially configured in its re-constructed local context or function in the early fifteenth century based on the studio's available scholarship of this building's history. This was mainly evident by two integral devices incorporated by script designers like Bittner and character artists. One was the incorporation of particular historical inhabitants that can interact and converse with the player. One of these occupants encountered is the presence and daily minutiae of stonemasons working on certain major sectors of the monastery, such as the scaffolding attached to the almost nearly built Gothic bell tower.

Figure 5.6J – Stonemason's Work Site

A snapshot of the stonemason's camp within the monastery vicinity. Recorded in 'House of God'.⁴⁶³



⁴⁶³ Redder, 'House of God', min 10:34.

Figure 5.6K – Stonemason’s Work Site (II)

Another shot of the stonemason’s camp. Recorded in ‘House of God’.⁴⁶⁴



The presence of stonemasons working at the monastery as the other major group of inhabitants besides the monks is, in fact, a closely accurate re-construction of the Sasau monastery’s current state in 1403. Specifically, this exterior display of the monastery captures a snapshot in time when the building was historically going under extensive expansion by adding new features to the original building (e.g. Gothic Bell Tower) as well as renovation. This project began since the fourteenth century, but operations ceased in 1421 when the monastery was sacked by Hussite soldiers during the Hussite Wars. Thus,

⁴⁶⁴ Redder, min 10:55.

the building standing today is an imperfect construction of what the building was originally meant to look.

Figure 5.6L – Sasau Monastery (Museum)

The originally intended state of the Monastery's Basilica Church before the project's discontinuity during the Hussite Wars.



The second device was the design and incorporation of about a dozen narrative quests and activities taking place at the monastery but contextualised to represent some of the actual social and religious minutiae of that monastery's history. For instance, there were a series of six quests starting at the end of 'Poverty, Chastity and Obedience' to 'A Needle in a Haystack', where I experienced the Sasau monastery sanctum when it was inhabited by the Benedictine monks of the order of St. Procopius by going undercover as a novice monk. The developers' input of the main game objective involving the locating of an individual monk disguised as a member of the brethren allowed a window into the historical discovery and immersion of this monastery's daily life via routines and rituals based on the monastic practices of the longstanding 'Rule of Saint Benedict'.⁴⁶⁵ These rituals and routines that I experienced include taking my vow as a member of the monastery, attending morning and evening mass with all the brethren at the Basilica church, listening to a morning reading by the brother librarian during communal meal at the refectory, and transcribing and translating old Latin texts into copies at the monastery's library.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁵ Bernard Hamilton, *Religion in the Medieval West* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), p. 27. The 'Rule of Saint Benedict' was a book of precepts established by its founder of the Benedictine order Saint Benedict of Nursia (c. 480 – 550) as a guide for monks living communally under their head abbot, including religious instruction, manual labour, and the duties of the Abbott.

⁴⁶⁶ Hamilton, pp. 29-30.

Figure 5.6M – A Needle in a Haystack

Morning prayer at the Three-Nave Basilica Church. Recorded in 'A Needle in a Haystack'.⁴⁶⁷



⁴⁶⁷ Ben Redder, 'A Needle in a Haystack', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (26 May 2018), min 4:12.

Figure 5.6N – A Needle in a Haystack (II)

About to perform transcribing work at the monastery library. Recorded in 'A Needle in a Haystack II'.⁴⁶⁸



⁴⁶⁸ Redder, 'A Needle in a Haystack II', min 3:40.

Figure 5.6O – A Needle in a Haystack II (II)

About to join the brethren for an early evening communal meal at the refectory. Recorded in 'A Needle in a Haystack II'.⁴⁶⁹



The implementation of these devices alleviated one of several tensions between the studio's pursuit of historical accuracy and game design standards in regard to backtracking (a term describing a player returning to previously encountered or visited locations in order to continue advancing the game). Bittner highlighted that Warhorse Studios mostly followed strict adherence to the historicity of these historical buildings and their features (making a few, and only slight, visual and spatial alterations). This

⁴⁶⁹ Redder, min 42:30.

adherence however meant they had to create narratives, obstacles, room interiors, and a diversity of NPCs and their routines that would encourage or foster players returning to and interacting with that location multiple times.⁴⁷⁰ These features were used in order to avoid the building's loss of interest and purpose as a game destination once the player had fully explored the complex.⁴⁷¹

Map Depictions of the Rattay-Sasau Region, Game World – Research and Game Design:

The re-construction of these Medieval buildings and locations from extensive fieldwork and collaboration with institutions overlapped in the broader area of developing *KCD*'s level design as an accurate 3D generated replication of the Rattay-Sasau region and its settlements from a combination of historical and technological methods. Initially, the studio team and their historian Nowak gathered late nineteenth century military campaign maps of the formerly Austrian-Hungarian empire. As Warhorse Studios were unable to find any Medieval maps of the region dating to the early fifteenth century, these military maps not only confirmed and validated that the actual layout of the towns and villages remained mostly the same since late Medieval times. They were also effective in re-constructing the entirety of the Rattay-Sasau region as a working 2D map template for the studio to use in designing the game's historical world.

Creating a working 2D map from military map data enabled Warhorse Studios to begin development of both their in-game player map and the 3D generated game world of *KCD*. Configuring this map as a historical construction of a particular region in Medieval Bohemia also served a narrative purpose by integrating history into the game world

⁴⁷⁰ Bittner, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁷¹ Bittner, pp. 2-3.

through limiting “the space we can use ... [and] also for limiting the history, not only the plot but also the events we could have put in there.”⁴⁷² However, inputting the layout of these areas from their 2D map template into the game’s open-world in 3D was further supported by the studio drawing from satellite and aerial photography in order to reconstruct the entire topography and geomorphology of the region within *KCD*.⁴⁷³ Adding to this repository of photographic material was Warhorse Studios implementing their own in-ground photography team to take precise photographs of the physical environments and their flora and fauna, amounting to in total “more than sixty-thousand pictures.”⁴⁷⁴ From the collected photographic material, the studio were then able to configure the game’s historical world as a close replication of the Rattay-Sasau region during the early fifteenth century. As Duchek summarised:

We started with ... establish[ing] the environment with the vegetation ... then we knew about the cities and the places of interest ... then we started to roughly dock out the villages ... to see how it would work in engine and how many houses there would basically be ... and then ... start to build up ... the objects.⁴⁷⁵

In consequence, Duchek confirmed that the Warhorse Studios team were then able to reconstruct to precise detail a lot of the villages and towns and their assets located in surrounding landscapes with their particular environmental features, slopes, roads and dirt pathways, thick and soft grass, the layout of forests and rivers, and the weather

⁴⁷² Nowak, p. 3.

⁴⁷³ James Billcliffe, 'Kingdom Come: Deliverance Interview – The Bohemian Kingdom, Realistic Medieval Combat & More', *OnlySP* <<https://www.onlysp.com/kingdom-come-deliverance-onlysp-spotlight/>> [accessed 31st March 2017], para. 55, 57.

⁴⁷⁴ Duchek, p. 15.

⁴⁷⁵ Duchek, p. 1.

system that accurately reflected the region's early hot summer climate.⁴⁷⁶ More broadly, this example also shows Warhorse Studios' implementation of game design as a particular form of research by accessing and implementing older historical sources (e.g. real historical settlements and/or buildings, military maps) as the basis for *KCD*'s world-building. Subsequently, this world-building design through these sources presents a scholarly historical re-construction of what the Rattay-Sasau region and its society would likely have looked in the early fifteenth century.

Written Sources – Research and Game Design:

Another method Warhorse Studios' employed in obtaining historical data and subsequently incorporated into game design were the written sources. Namely, written sources covering, to name a few, Bohemia during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the reign of Charles IV and his successor Wenceslas IV, and numerous late Medieval facets and subjects accurately re-constructed to the locality, culture, and minutiae of Central Europe, such as combat and warfare, religion, and occupations. Secondary sources mainly came from digital and hard copy academic journal articles, online databases, and scholarly books from both Czech and other European historians, including József Bánlaky's *A magyar nemzet hadtörténelme*, August Sedláček's *Hrady, zámky a tvrže Království českého, díl 12, Čáslavsko*, Eva Doležalová's *Liber Ordination Clergy 1395 – 1416*, and Internet Medieval Sourcebook.⁴⁷⁷ Warhorse Studios also used a relatively

⁴⁷⁶ Duchek, pp. 1, 3, 8-9.

⁴⁷⁷ József Bánlaky, *9. I. Mária, II. (Kis) Károly és Zsigmond kora (1382–1437)*, 24 vols (Budapest: Grill Károly Publishing Company, 1939), IX;

August Sedláček, *Castles, Chateaux, and Fortresses of the Kingdom of Bohemia, Part 12* (Prague: František Šimáček, 1900);

Eva Doležalová, *Liber Ordination Clergy 1395-1416* (Prague: Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, 2010).

Paul Halsall, 'Internet Medieval Sourcebook', *Fordham University* <<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/sbook.asp>> [accessed 15 September 2018];

large number of written primary sources such as letters, illuminated manuscripts, chronicles, articles, and diary excerpts from online archives in various libraries, museums, and other institutions, such as Regesta Imperii, Czech Medieval Sources online (e.g. *Codex Diplomaticus et Epistolaris Moraviae*), and Monasterium archives (e.g. Charter: Certificates 2755 and 2775).⁴⁷⁸ To explicate one in further detail for example, discovering several accounts in an edited chronicle compilation from Hungary called *Sigismund's Diploma Archive II (1400 – 1410): First Part (1400-1406)* helped studio members like Nowak to identify and corroborate the precise date of the Silver Skalitz siege on 23rd March 1403, and confirmed Sigismund's participation in the siege.⁴⁷⁹ This is depicted by a copy of a couple of letters written by Sigismund with his seal, as well as these letters containing the date and place (Silver Skalitz) where they were written. This document is critiqued further in Chapter 6, but I like to highlight here that the accounts in this Hungarian chronicle also dispelled Nowak's initial skepticism about Sigismund's presence in Bohemia during the civil war due to lack of records found in the main Czech chronicles she was reading.⁴⁸⁰

This text was one of many written sources that not only helped Warhorse Studios to build their historical rendition of the Rattay-Sasau region during the civil war. These sources

⁴⁷⁸ Academy of Sciences and Literature, 'Regesta Imperii', *Academy of Sciences and Literature* <http://opac.regesta-imperii.de/lang_en/> [accessed 20 October 2018];

Robert Novotný, Jakub Jauernig, and Jiří Perášek, 'Czech Medieval Sources Online', *cms* <<http://147.231.53.91/src/index.php>> [accessed 11 September 2018];

Monasterium, 'möm', *monasterium.net* <<https://www.monasterium.net/mom/fonds>> [accessed 15 March 2019]. While most of them, either in their original form or translated copy editions, could not be physically accessed, Nowak stated that this problem was mostly solved by the fact that many of these sources were available in digitized form.

⁴⁷⁹ Elemér Mályusz, *Sigismund's Diploma Archive II (1400-1410): First Part (1400-1406)* (Budapest: Hungarian National Archives, 1956), pp. 276-277. The original Hungarian title of this source is *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár II. (1400–1410): Első rész (1400–1406)*. This source is a compilation of various letters, legal documents, chronicles, and other data pertaining to Hungarian politics, all of which gathered by various historians from foreign archives over the decades. For clarification then, Elemér Mályusz is the author and translator of the edited book containing the chronicle collection, but not the original author of the collected documents themselves.

⁴⁸⁰ Nowak, p. 4.

also guided the script designers' development of several narrative quests with their accompanying storylines, tasks, and game objectives contextualised to this current conflict while addressing gaps present within the written sources. One example was portraying the real-life historical figures and local lords of the region (Radzig Koblya, Hanush of Leipa, and Divish of Talmberg) as a band of allies working together with Henry in his investigation while fighting on Wenceslas' side against contingents of Sigismund's forces. While this ally set-up was a fictional choice, it does historically suggest that a similar local banding by the men could have likely occurred in response to Sigismund's razing of Silver Skalitz near their dominions (see discussion of siege of Silver Skalitz in Sections 6.3 – 6.3.1.1).

Figure 5.6P – An Oath is an Oath

Some of the real historical figures who lived in the Rattay-Sasau region and portrayed as allies, Hans Capon (left), his guardian and Rattay's governor Lord Hanush (Middle), and Lord Divish (right). Recorded in 'An Oath is an Oath'.⁴⁸¹



⁴⁸¹ Ben Redder, 'An Oath is an Oath', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (11 June 2018), min 54:35.

Medieval Fight Texts and the Combat System – Research and Game Design:

Another repository of written primary sources was Warhorse Studios' research and examination of fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth century fighting manuscripts or treatises regarding weapon and armour combat. Including one of Hans Talhoffer's fight books in 1467 and the Starhemberg or Von Danzig (1452) and Paulus Kal (ca. 1470) codices. The reason for Warhorse Studios' study of these texts was their role of designing *KCD*'s main combat system as a digital re-construction based on the German tradition of Medieval fighting. Specifically, the gathering and examination of late Medieval combat manuscripts enabled game designers to craft a combat system that used real historical fighting techniques of the weapons themselves, including how they fared against armored or unarmored opponents, and certain insights into the physics and fluidity of human movement in performing these techniques.

In addition, Warhorse Studios worked with professional Medieval fencers and practitioners of H.E.M.A (Historical European Martial Arts) like Petr Nůsek and Robert Waschka. These experts translated and analysed the historical combat manuscripts, and tested and critiqued the practicality of the techniques these manuals described. Nůsek and Waschka (and others) also supervised and participated as stunt actors in the digital animation of the game's Medieval combat sequences via body motion-capture technology. These collaborations led to shared awareness of the limitations of combat treatises on fighting. In particular "[Medieval] fighting books were mostly painted, illustrations of people fighting with no written text because most people couldn't

write.”⁴⁸² Another limitation of these sources was explained by swordmaster and choreographer Petr Nůsek:

In the case of people involved in Medieval manuscripts, they have all the techniques, very precise as far the manuscript allows although it doesn't take into account that a farmer would fight differently than an aristocrat who could afford to have the manuscript.⁴⁸³

Accordingly, game designers and the fencers both used physical and digital re-enactment, such as testing out combat techniques and moves for the game's combat system, in order to understand the specificities of the fighting styles themselves and the effects of variables, including fatigue, spontaneity, type of combatant and their level of skill, and fighting multiple opponents.⁴⁸⁴ Concurrently, game designers used mocap for capturing the choreography and stunt actors' co-ordinations of the fights in order to simulate, as much as possible, the fluidity and technicality of human movement during a fight, particularly as it might have been expressed by experienced Medieval soldiers. And the team worked to match their ideal of achieving combative historical realism with the restrictions of budget, game design, technology, entertainment value, and the conventions of the player's visual perception.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸² Billcliffe, para. 45.

⁴⁸³ Warhorse Studios, 'Kingdom Come: Deliverance Video Update #13: Introducing Combat Specialists', *Youtube* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4xgxaQqulU>> [accessed 10 March 2019], min 8:15 - 8:30.

⁴⁸⁴ Warhorse Studios, min 8:53 - 9:08.

⁴⁸⁵ Billcliffe, para. 45.

Designing *KCD*'s combat system was also supported by the visual artists of Warhorse Studios' accurate historical design not only of the military fashion in late Medieval Bohemia, but also the appearances and simulations of the practical functions of certain Medieval weapons and armour. The array of Medieval weapons and armour encountered within *KCD* are some of the common features of the Middle Ages localized to Bohemia, its neighboring states such as the Holy Roman Empire and Italy, and the nomadic Cumans. Regarding Medieval weapons, I encountered both plain and ornamented weapons ranging from swords (e.g. shortswords, sabres, and longswords), bows, axes, maces, warhammers, spears, and polearms (see Figures 5.6Q – 5.6S for examples), with each of these weapon classes diversified based on its type, stat levels (e.g. blunt, cut, and thrust damage), and level of quality by the weapon's listed name.

Figure 5.6Q – Longswords



*A display of
Medieval
longswords at
Rattay's
weaponsmith
store. Recorded in
'KCD Rattay
Town'.⁴⁸⁶*

Figure 5.6R – Axes



*A display of
military Medieval
axes at Rattay's
weaponsmith
store. Recorded in
'KCD Rattay
Town'.⁴⁸⁷*

⁴⁸⁶ Ben Redder, 'KCD Rattay Town', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (5 April 2018), min 49:36.

⁴⁸⁷ Redder, min 9:29.

Figure 5.6S – Spears and Polearms

A display of a bundle of different types of spears and polearms at a Medieval military camp.

Recorded in 'My Friend Timmy II'.⁴⁸⁸



Armour is also diverse, and consisting of the three major areas (leg, head, and body armour) broadly cover light (e.g. leather, gambeson, and tunic), medium (e.g. mail and lamellar), and heavy (e.g. plate and brigandine) armour types. Each armour type can be worn either separately as a single layer or as multiple layers (an actual late Medieval combative practice adopted by rulers, nobleman, knights, and later foot soldiers or infantryman) via the game's clothing system.⁴⁸⁹ Wearing multiple layers of armour consist of an inner or under layer of light armour covered with a second layer of medium

⁴⁸⁸ Ben Redder, 'My Friend Timmy II', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (23 April 2018), min 20:01.

⁴⁸⁹ The clothing system provides the opportunity to equip, wear, and/or swap civilian clothing and/or military attire depending on the player's preferences, such as peasant clothing, military gear, or the attire of the nobility class.

armour, and in turn both layers are further covered with heavy armour as the third and final layer in order to improve maximum armour protection.⁴⁹⁰

Figure 5.6T – Inventory and Clothing System

KCD's inventory (left) and clothing (right) systems that is accessed in the player's menu. The inventory shows a list of some of the armour I currently own, while the clothing system displays the current weapon, armour, and accessory gear I am currently equipped via the slots. Recorded in 'Siege III'.⁴⁹¹



⁴⁹⁰ Some armor or clothing items can act as a fourth and final layer over the heavier plate armor, such as a waffenrock (mainly a decorative or aesthetic piece for soldiers to represent the colour of their liege lord or town heraldry, and an ornamental quilted combat jacket (usually a pourpoint or jupon).

⁴⁹¹ Redder, 'Siege III', min 31:14.

Like weapons, different armours of the late Medieval period are authenticated within *KCD* to their quality during the Medieval period, ranging from “low-quality “munitions” armour produced in bulk, and armour of superior quality and craftsmanship.”⁴⁹² Players can find and wear armour that were common to most Medieval countries (including Bohemia), such as kettle helmets, gambeson, mail chausses, and brigandine pauldrons. However, one can also obtain and wear other sets of armour from specific neighboring countries or regions surrounding Bohemia that would have also been commonly accessible to Bohemian lords, knights, and soldiers (see Figures 5.6U – 5.6V for examples).⁴⁹³ Most notably, Holy Roman Empire (Germany) and Italian armour segments incorporated into *KCD*, including the Italian and German bascinet helmets, the Milanese brigandine armour, and the Nuremberg plate armour set. Meanwhile, the implementation of Cuman armour is another branch of military gear I encountered quite frequently (via observing and/or fighting against enemy Cuman soldiers). Unlike the Italian and German styles, Cuman armour follows a more nomadic Asiatic custom albeit with several distinct Hungarian features adopted by the Cumans. Prominent items worn by Cuman soldiers in the game are the Shishak or chichak helmets, lamellar armour, caftan overcoats, Cuman metal shields and sabres, and Hungarian hauberk (a type of mail).

⁴⁹² Ralph Moffat, 'Battle and Bloodshed: The Medieval World at War', ed. by Lorna Bleach & Keira Borrill (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 5-24, p. 8.

⁴⁹³ Eduard Wagner, Zoroslava Drobná and Jan Durdík, *Medieval Costume, Armour and Weapons*, 2nd edn (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2000), pp. 35-37.

Figure 5.6U – Armour Sets

A display of several armour sets. Recorded in 'Interloper Part 2'.⁴⁹⁴



⁴⁹⁴ Ben Redder, 'Interloper Part 2', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (22 April 2018), min 5:55.

Figure 5.6V – Armour Sets II

A variety of soldiers ranging from light to heavy armour gear. Recorded in 'Payback'.⁴⁹⁵



KCD's combat system is one of the first detailed combative re-constructions within historical games to interpret and integrate individualized Medieval combat in military battles. Yet a completely accurate representation of all the disciplines of Medieval combat, as well as the appearance and functionality of weapons and armour, within the game was limited by gaps in the combat manuals and technological constraints. To list a couple examples, Warhorse Studios' combat system also incorporated mounted combat. Due to the technological difficulties faced in accurately simulating the human physicality and fluidity of movement, skills, and techniques of Medieval mounted combat, this type of combat was reduced to simple basic attack and defence moves when fighting against

⁴⁹⁵ Ben Redder, 'Payback', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (29 May 2018), min 17:34.

enemy soldiers. The current technological limitations of re-constructing the particular mechanisms of certain Medieval weapons and combative styles also extended to the studio's omission of the crossbow in spite of being a commonly used ranged weapon of the Holy Roman Empire and Bohemia in siege, and more prominently land battles.

Limitations/Compromises:

Aside from gathering and using historical sources as inspirations for game aesthetics or as supplementary historical references, these types of research and game design methods with their various sources or texts comprise as some of the main approaches reflecting Warhorse Studios' drive and commitment to historical realism by exhibiting and maintaining an extensive and multi-variant framework. That is, a framework consisting of various methods undertaken by the team in Warhorse Studios that compiled and analysed types of historical data, and then selected and applied these same data for historicizing the game design components of and modes of communication in their Medieval game on both a representational and procedural level. However, certain challenges and limitations emerged in Warhorse Studios' close reliance on ensuring historical accuracy from their extensive historical research and game design methods. This resulted in Warhorse Studios' level of engagement to historical realism gradually shifting from originally "one hundred percent ... accuracy" to maintaining a balance of historicity and scholarship between Rattay-Sasau's history in the late Medieval period and the many facets or referents pertaining to the wider world of Medieval Europe.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁶ Nowak, p. 3.

Besides increasing financial, technical, and production time constraints, information from the sources available or found that were either limited or strictly specific due to their selected content, background, and authorial aims was a major factor during game development. This limitation included lack of basic information about common rural Czech architecture of that period (besides the surviving Medieval structures), and the available historical information regarding the events and effects of Sigismund's invasion was confined to only a "few facts ... being written down ...in the history books and researches."⁴⁹⁷ Nowak's reference to minimal documentation on the involvement of the Cumans in Sigismund's invasion except for "chronicles that [briefly] stated they were here" is one such example of the latter instance.⁴⁹⁸ Consequently:

The width of our research had to [eventually] be ... a wide[r] approach to cover everything so we couldn't go [completely] in-depth ... we could do each and every [specific detail] with research but we have one historian and we have limited time and money.⁴⁹⁹

To achieve this direction, Warhorse Studios gave more attention to researching and designing other historical content that generally existed in Medieval societies and were necessary for further building *KCD's* game world, including the representations of occupations, combat, food, and clothing.⁵⁰⁰ This approach worked in tandem with the studio applying certain fictional devices while maintaining sensitivity to their collated Medieval research evidence.

⁴⁹⁷ Nowak, p. 1;
Duchek, pp. 4, 6-7.

⁴⁹⁸ Nowak, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁹⁹ Bittner, p. 8

⁵⁰⁰ Bittner, p. 8.

For instance, both Nowak and Bittner confirmed Warhorse Studios' interest in incorporating and corroborating a number of social and religious-based Medieval histories (besides their game's marketing of real-life Medieval combat, castles, and arms and armour).⁵⁰¹ Aside from time and financial constraints, Bittner followed that a full scope of re-constructing Bohemia's religious and socio-cultural histories was difficult to achieve during game development because "there were no social scientists in fifteenth century, [and] we don't have [many] records of how these people talked."⁵⁰² Thus, he confirmed that certain fictional license, usually via a quest format, was implemented as a compromise in their game design of these respective histories within *KCD* combined with the limited historical knowledge and referents they obtained about them from primary and secondary sources conveying similar historical descriptions or documentations. In one example, Bittner commented that Catholic clergyman hunted and executed Waldensian Christians on charges of heresy in Bohemia sometime after 1410, but used these events for one of the game's fictional quests called 'Waldensians' set in 1403 as part of adding more substance to *KCD*'s open game world.⁵⁰³ Another liberty or compromise they afforded was the implementation of Medieval fictive artwork found in the real castles, churches, monasteries, and other elaborate buildings within *KCD*. Warhorse Studios designed and/or incorporated a lot of Medieval artworks that were either historically real yet transposed into *KCD*'s game world of the Rattay-Sasau region, or were originally designed and authenticated from research into past Medieval artwork styles and material (mostly accessed in digital form) by the studio's visual graphic artists. This approach was implemented to fill in the interiors of certain Medieval structures

⁵⁰¹ Nowak, pp. 6-8;
Bittner, pp. 5-6, 15.

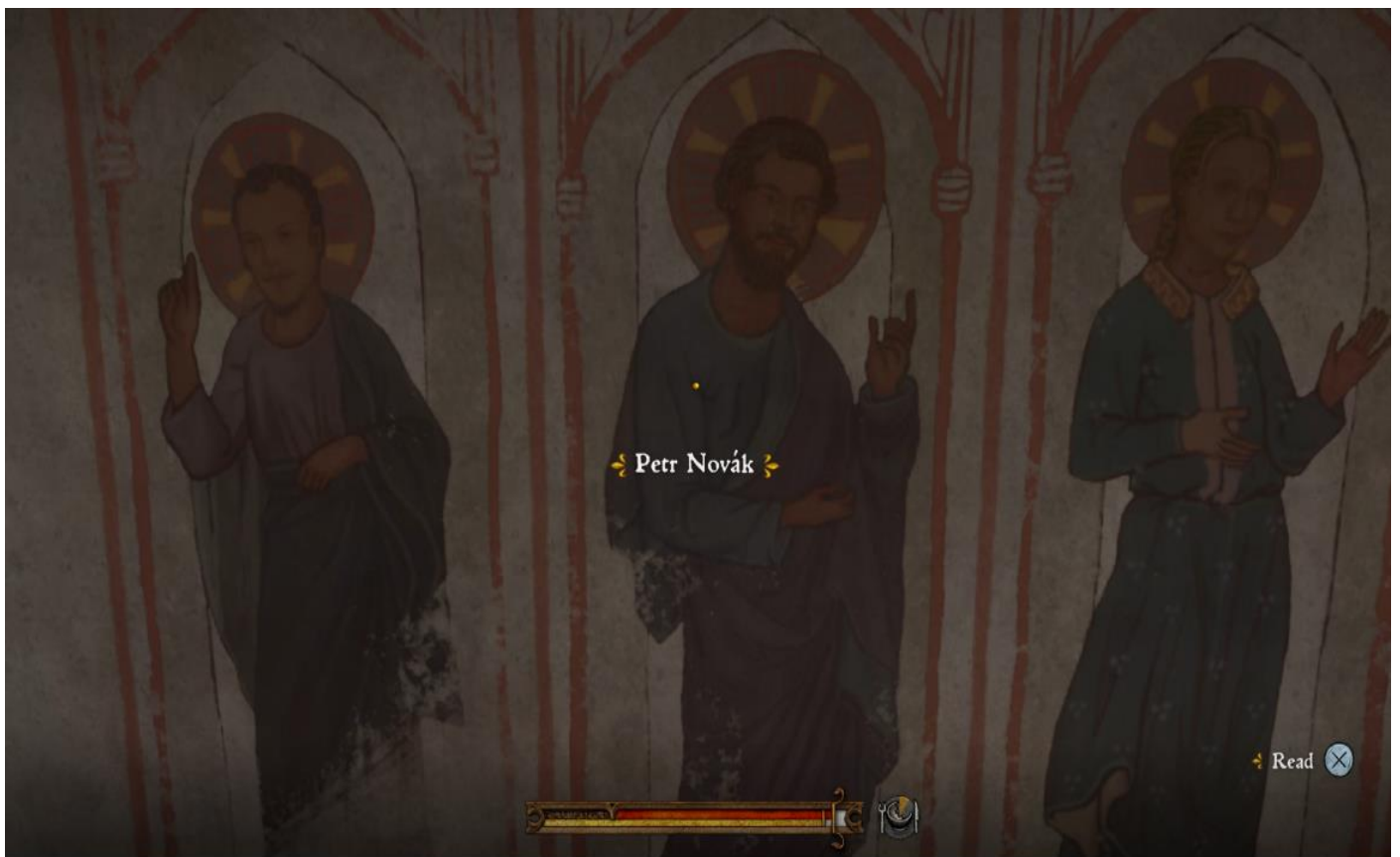
⁵⁰² Bittner, p. 3.

⁵⁰³ Bittner, pp. 4-5.

whose original artworks no longer exist or cannot be recovered (see Figures 5.6W – 5.6X for examples).

Figure 5.6W – St. Nicholas Church (Fresco)

A mural painting at Rattay's St. Nicholas Church, depicting several religious figures showing the artistically rendered faces of several real people from present day Czech Republic (some of the original crowdfunding backers to KCD via Kickstarter). This approach was to provide a substitute to aesthetically fill the walls in the interior complex of St. Nicholas as both the building and its original artwork no longer exist today. Recorded in 'KCD Rattay Town'.⁵⁰⁴



⁵⁰⁴ Redder, 'KCD Rattay Town', min 39:36.

Figure 5.6X – St Matthews Church (Madonna Altar)

A designed Madonna altar at Rattay’s St. Matthews Church closely based on Czech paintings between 1350 – 1410, such as Madonna Svatovitska (1395 – 1415) and Madonna Svojsinska (c. 1410), both made in Prague. Recorded in ‘KCD Rattay Town’.⁵⁰⁵



In spite of these historical and game design limitations and compromises, I identify them as a positive aspect of Warhorse Studios’ scholarly historical practices. Notably, by signifying historian Stephen Anderson’s key point that the “proliferation of data may complicate, rather than clarify, any established knowledge of an event ... as the

⁵⁰⁵ Redder, min 19:57.

combination of more information and increasingly powerful tools ... and their associated historical data make it possible to imagine a vast range of histories” when game designers accumulate an extensive amount of historical content while using diverse historical practices.⁵⁰⁶ More importantly, as indicated by Duchek, Bittner, and Nowak’s discussions, not only was Warhorse Studios aware of these limitations but made several (but not all) attempts to address them, such as the aforementioned compromises. This attempt of alleviating these issues further reinforces this studio’s commitment to and self-reflexivity of their aims and applications between historical realism and Medieval scholarship with game design affordances, while acknowledging improvements for future historical game development.

5.3.4 Conclusion – Historical Modality Identified:

Deconstructing Warhorse Studios’ principal aims of developing *KCD* and its respective history, as well as their approaches to and challenges of applying their collected historical evidence into the various representational and procedural components of *KCD* via game design practices, infers that their historical game development framework corresponds to and facilitates the historical modality ‘lore history’. Lore history and its multimodal ensemble is explained and illustrated as the prime focus in the following chapter. For now, I like to summarise how *KCD* foregrounds and exemplifies this modality in a game development context based on the previous sections’ discussions.

⁵⁰⁶ Tompkins, p. 14.

Stephen F. Anderson, *Technologies of History: Visual Media and the Eccentricity of the Past* (Lebanon, N.H: Dartmouth College Press, 2011), p. 134.

First, Warhorse Studios' co-constructive and self-reflexive practices of multimodal historical research and game design application resulted in the inclusion of a wider range and breadth of histories and their embedded knowledge or lore re-constructed as and communicated through historical gameplay. Including a number of these histories contributing new historical knowledge or evidence to the Bohemian Civil War within the Rattay-Sasau region. This process was partly enabled and characterised by Warhorse Studios' recurring use of its game design format as a form of research via integrating and configuring multiple sources of historical information into a multimodal representation. This process overall then bears strikingly similar resemblance to the majority of elements and functions of history informing and historicizing game design and gameplay highlighted in historian Dawn Spring's discussions of potential historical games offering gamic modes of history. Namely, by engaging in "research questions, incorporate primary and secondary source evidence, explore historical themes ... [and] make historical arguments", and more broadly provide a working model for how "historical research methodologies can inform [and historicize] the iterative design process ... [including the construction] of virtual environments, mechanics, and narrative from historical material."⁵⁰⁷

Second, in situations when their sources provided only partial or specific information or alternatively when there was an absence of specific information, a different set of strategies or approaches were also utilised by the Warhorse Studios team. Particularly, using historical information or references outside or within Medieval Bohemia, guesswork, and creating certain fictionalized yet accurately or authentically sound narratives and visual referents on historical subjects, events, artwork, and other

⁵⁰⁷ Spring, p. 208.

constituents. The examples described earlier (pp. 241 – 245) are some of the illustrations that show *KCD*'s adaptability to utilising fiction while still maintaining historicity to and enhancing scholarship in late Medieval Czech history. Third and lastly, the historical research and game design examples from Warhorse Studios discussed (5.3.3.1) provide an initial glimpse into historical content and its knowledge potential having a larger active role in informing game design, gameplay animations, and player interactivity via an even wider inclusion of historical and archaeological sources. These features then can be classified as some of the principal resources of a lore history modality (see also discussions on content and lore or historical knowledge in Sections 2.2, 2.4.2, and 3.4.1). Including historical content illustrating “not only how history informs environments, narratives, game play, mechanics, and strategies, but how original primary source research can become those elements.”⁵⁰⁸ These three key insights together continue to be echoed in the following lore histories discussed in Chapters 6 and 8.

5.4 Chapter Evaluation:

This chapter introduced the Medieval historical games *APTI* and *KCD* by covering their historical background and game development processes that both inform and shape their principal gameplay medium. Demonstrating Asobo Studio and Warhorse Studios' distinct responses to history via a series of examples of their interconnected applications of, and at times tensions between, historical game design and research methods signifies on a preliminary game development level these Medieval games' historical modality. Discussions throughout previous sections indicate that *APTI* and its multimodality operates in imaginative history, as its Medieval history operates as a vital source of creative inspiration in re-telling historical themes and topics continually renewed in past

⁵⁰⁸ Spring, p. 208

remediations. Meanwhile, *KCD* and its multimodality can be argued as establishing a new trend of historical gaming known as lore history by entailing a deeply scholarly sphere from the support of historical research methods encompassing both traditional (e.g. written sources, surviving historical sites) and game design approaches (e.g. combat system, historical world-building and level design).

Lore history and imaginative history were first introduced in Section 3.3 as some of the major historical modalities within the gameplay medium. Additionally, the historical modality framework identifies ‘alternate history’ as a third major historical modality. These historical modalities are defined as follows:

Table – Historical Modalities:

Lore History	Imaginative History	Alternate History
A historical modality involving the discovery, dissemination, and experience of historical knowledge, research, and insights in relation to the game’s chosen history	A historical modality that engages in historical poetics – the figurative or poetic and fictional imaginations of history	A historical modality that reverses the rules of and narratives in both history and historical fiction as a means to express the past via grandiose inversion, disruption, and recombination of existing elements into new arrangements

Lore history and imaginative history are the two modalities of historical gameplay examined in this thesis as the key research findings of focus for the remaining analytical chapters (6 – 8). They were analysed and articulated via recorded gameplay footage as the primary data and the conceptual terminologies and resources of my implemented historical modality framework. The Alternate history modality is not examined as it has already received valuable coverage by scholars (e.g. Johannes Koski, Gareth Schott, and Adam Chapman). Alternate history games are those where the typical rules governing history are subverted or displaced in favour of players inhabiting and interacting with events based in a highly alternate historical timeline.⁵⁰⁹ Games such as the *Fallout* series, *Wolfenstein* series, and *We Happy Few* are popular examples in this trend of engaging with the past.⁵¹⁰

A final point of discussion to conclude this chapter is highlighting one of the few interesting commonalities shared by most of my interview participants that constitute as another influential layer when examining the relationship of gameplay to its game development fundamentals. Excluding Nowak, Renard, Duchek, and Bittner all confirmed that their primary role was game developers when asked if there were moments where they thought themselves as or utilising approaches of an historian. While later analysis of discussions from the transcripts of their interview indicated their immersion in the history and historical sources while demonstrating some engagements to the practices and meaning-making processes similar to that of historians (such as the

⁵⁰⁹ These alternate historical timelines can range from different outcomes of historical world events to wide-ranging occurrences resulting in a different kind of history, such as being either apocalyptic, futurist, or a return to a time that parallels with or is familiar to a particular period of history such as the Middle Ages.

⁵¹⁰ Todd Howard, *Fallout* (Game series) (Orange County, C.A, and Rockville, M.D: Black Isle Studios, and Bethesda Game Studios, 1997-);

Muse Software and MachineGames, *Wolfenstein* (Game series) (Baltimore, M.D, and Uppsala, Sweden: Muse Software, and MachineGames, 1981-);

Guillaume Provost, *We Happy Few* (Computer and console video game) (Montreal: Compulsion Games, 2018).

discussions presented in this chapter), they all affirmed that they did not consider themselves thinking or operating as historians.⁵¹¹ For Renard, this was based on his acknowledgement of a lack of ability to completely incorporate the research undertakings of historians due to the complexity of its demands, but re-iterated that he was still driven to put a “lot of effort in trying to work [with] ... [and respect] as seriously as possible ... the [historical] context and everything [else].”⁵¹² For Bittner and Duchek, their affirmation was largely due to their reliance on the historian Nowak for support.⁵¹³

These answers are not indications of a lack of interest or engagement to and relevance of history, or that their work was only concerned with the ludic aspects of the history represented. The significance of these answers is their unveiling of some crucial evidence confirming the presence of ‘historical game developer’, a term I advocate for as the more common expression to describe game developers that still “authors and extensively engages in researching and designing history but ... [primarily operate] in their respective game designer role.”⁵¹⁴ This evidence then counters Chapman’s approach of labelling game developers researching and representing history in video games as broadly ‘developer-historian’. As addressed in Chapter 2, a developer-historian in my view would ideally be someone who is not merely engaging in some of the practices of history and historical thinking, but more importantly has critical specialisation in both the professions of history and game design.⁵¹⁵ Having stated this, it is possible to

⁵¹¹ Renard, p. 14;
Bittner, p. 7;
Duchek, p. 6.

⁵¹² Renard, pp. 12, 14.

⁵¹³ Bittner, pp. 7-8;
Duchek, p. 5.

⁵¹⁴ Redder, 'History in Multimodal Gameplay: A New Language and Model for Constructing, Experiencing, and Studying the Past', p. 86.

⁵¹⁵ Redder, p. 86.

designate the head of Warhorse Studios Dan Vávra as representing an early example of this role. This is evident due to his extensive involvement in a number of sectors within the game as Creative Director. Including research and development with the game's main storyline and setting and extensive collaboration with the HEMA experts in developing *KCD*'s Medieval combat system, as well as Nowak's accounts given earlier in this chapter regarding Vávra undertaking preliminary historical research and consultation with experts (e.g. Petr Čornej) during the early years of *KCD*'s development.⁵¹⁶ However, as he was unavailable when I originally requested him for an interview several months before my visit to Prague, this claim cannot be fully proven without further evidence.

This area is not the main focus of the thesis, and more qualitative data from research is still needed in analysing interviews with other historical game studios and indie game developers to extensively validate this insight. Nonetheless, this finding is imperative for both addressing the development of historical gameplay and re-examining the roles of and relationships between game developers and players within historical game studies. Using the term historical game developer then provides a better platform to understand the different incentives, and extent of historical immersion, game developers are willing to engage in when developing their historical game. For developers like Renard, an historical game developer could entail someone who utilises the creativity of contextual imagination via fantasy for re-imagining certain histories of the past. In Warhorse Studios by contrast, a historical game developer would entail someone involved in the scholarly domain of historical representation by working with more diverse and evidence-intensive sources relevant to the respective history, as well as more frequent and closer collaborations with historians, historical experts, and/or institutions. Additionally, this

⁵¹⁶ Nowak, pp. 1-2.

shift extends more openly to historians and historical experts, including video game historians, as part of the game development process through their skills whilst immersing in the fundamentals of game design, such as the studio's historian Joanna Nowak.

Chapter 6

Lore History – Kingdom Come: Deliverance

6.1 Introduction:

The preceding chapter introduced and instigated analysis of the Medieval historical games *A Plague Tale: Innocence* and *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* by first outlining the types of historical research and game design methods used by their game studios (Asobo Studio and Warhorse Studios). These studios' aims or intentions toward the historical modality of each of their respective Medieval game were then briefly unveiled at the end of the sections dedicated to discussing each of the two games. This chapter then focuses on the Medieval game *KCD* (*Kingdom Come: Deliverance*) and its gameplay medium as an exemplar of 'lore history' in addressing the first three research questions (i – iii) within the contribution of its findings.

In contrast to many games representing histories or events already portrayed in earlier media and novel adaptations, *KCD* is the first adaptation of this historical civil war between Wenceslas and Sigismund outside of academic history. *KCD* is ideal for examining how lore history works because the core representational modality of its gameplay exhibits scholarly histories of the Rattay-Sasau region during the Fraternal Civil War within late Medieval Bohemia by inviting players to explore and experience the research incorporated into *KCD*'s expansive game world. Thus, Chapter 6 argues and demonstrates *KCD*'s lore history modality as a new and valuable form of engagement by directing attention to the possibilities this Medieval game can offer to video game and non-video game historians. Namely, opportunities in the construction or use of historical

gameplay developed from and for the purposes of representing historical research and scholarship.

This chapter presents and extensively discusses three historical examples for illustrating the presence and expression of lore histories and their contributions to Medieval historiography within *KCD*. The following vignette shows one of the many acts of atrocities committed by the invading forces under King Sigismund (see Figure 6.1):

*Our protagonist Henry makes his way to his former hometown but discovers, to his dismay, a desecrated body of an unfortunate town resident hung to an upright carriage wheel in a darkly sadistic manner. This gravely solemn sight transcends itself into a simple yet powerful gesture to what likely befell the town, as the shrouding of this deceased victim's identity symbolises the many unnamed and uncounted number of victims brutally killed and/or defiled in a real horrific siege during the Bohemian Civil War. This event is relived in *KCD*.*

Figure 6.1 – Homecoming

An unknown victim hung by a rope tied to a carriage wheel at the outskirts of a ruined castle-town shown in the distant background. Recorded in 'Return to Skalitz'.⁵¹⁷



This scene is both a part of and contributes toward *KCD*'s multimodal engagement to lore history by giving a glimpse into an actual historical event that occurred in the Rattay-Sasau region during Bohemia's civil war called the 'Siege of Silver Skalitz', one of the three examples from *KCD* discussed later in Section 6.3. Therefore, examining *KCD*'s construction and communication of its various historical lore on late Medieval Bohemia via experiential gameplay addresses the emergence and stylistic conventions of lore

⁵¹⁷ Ben Redder, 'Return to Skalitz', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (4 April 2018), min 33:39.

history as a new and innovative form of uncovering and using scholarship composed in multimodal historical gameplay.

6.2 Lore History:

Lore history is a “historical modality involving the discovery, dissemination, and experience of historical knowledge, research, and insights in relation to the game’s chosen history.”⁵¹⁸ This multimodal form of historical gameplay is founded on and synthesises the principles and conventions of ‘lore’ outlined in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.4.1). For re-iteration, they are: (i) lore as knowledge of and about (as well as the method for documenting) the past, (ii) lore as world-building, (iii) and lore as experience. In that earlier section, the term lore was defined in video games as an extensive body of knowledge about the game’s world or universe in its various minutiae, as well as providing or creating a backstory to the game’s settings, characters, and its main narrative. However, attaching ‘history’ to lore when examining historical games qualifies gameplay sequences containing different typologies of historical lore or knowledge as both an interactive form of multimodal representation in which a player can become immersed in and experience a period of history, and as contributive sources containing historiographies pertaining to the game’s respective histories developed from research. To elaborate, lore history is not merely the historical content or substance, but also the generative process of encountering, acquiring, and analysing a compendium of new and/or extended interpretations of existing historical knowledge presented, performed, and experienced through historical gameplay.

⁵¹⁸ Redder, p. 249.

Because lore history is integrative, historical lore covers and communicates through its multimodal ensemble a wide horizon of histories interwoven together as re-constructed and interrelated occurrences or experiences that are magnified and personalised to the player's interactions within the game's historical world. These histories integrated in simultaneity can encompass the traditional realms dominant in academic history, such as politics and war, but are then incorporated into and inform other less examined or minimally researched histories, and vice versa. For example, histories that reflect the minutiae of social life, occupations, and conflicts or struggles of the everyday people as well as the environments in which these individuals once inhabited, histories regarding the experience of gender identity and expression, and representations of the agencies of indigenous cultures. Thus, lore history functions to go beyond factual proximity to known or accepted evidence documented in older primary and secondary sources by using the power of the activity and engagement of the player as an analyst to investigate, educate, and revise or raise new questions about the past.⁵¹⁹ Yet for gameplay sequences to qualify as lore history, they must commonly either or in combination (i) utilise both factual and experiential historical re-constructions and re-enactments (see 'reconstruction/re-enactment' in Section 3.4.3 for an outline of gameplay reconstruction).⁵²⁰ (ii) Provide environmental spaces to discover and analyse actual sites and buildings with its inhabitants via exploration. (iii) Historicize the mechanics, rules, and other features of the respective game system. And (iv) transmit or renew histories from academic texts into quests. These four engagements are only some of the many accounted for in this thesis. An additional engagement of lore history is exposition, which entails a variety of activities. Common examples are dialogue conversations with historical characters, in-game codex or database containing entries for different historical

⁵¹⁹ Munslow, p. 70.

Munslow, p. 36.

⁵²⁰ See also historian Alun Munslow's works *Deconstructing History* (1997) and *A History of History* (2012) for more information on this term.

subjects depicted and/or referenced in the game, and reading written texts within the game's historical world containing accounts on histories that have occurred prior to the game's timeframe.

A nascent concept, the lore history modality has only come into full fruition in the last few years, and hence suited for examining recent historical games as early as 2018 and yet-to-be released games.⁵²¹ Ideally at present, recent historical games situating under the open-world or linear-based RPG and first-person shooter (FPS) game genres which primarily follow the realist-simulation style, with *KCD*, *War of Rights* (2018), and the forthcoming *Titanic: Honor and Glory* (TBC) being notable examples. Nonetheless, as one of the major modes of gameplay representation, lore history is a term I have developed for several major purposes and incentives.

First, it assists historians (including video game historians) and digital game scholars classifying and describing new constructions or expressions of scholarly historical knowledge in gameplay sequences. Second, lore history's affinity to recently released and forthcoming games like *KCD* proposes or elicits potential advances in studying this type of historical gameplay within potential scholarly games that exhibit and expand from the engagements similar to Dawn Spring's 'gamic mode of history' and Jessica Tompkins'

⁵²¹ Mads Larsen and Emil Hansen, *War of Rights* (Computer game) (Copenhagen: Campfire Games, 2018). Two additions attached to this statement must be outlined. One is an acknowledgement that some earlier historical games contain limited traces or elements that I would class as 'proto lore history', with the WW2 first-person shooter game *Brothers in Arms: The Road to Hill 30* (2005) as one possible case. Second, the 'historiographic game' model coined and developed by Jessica Tompkins in her thesis 'Playing at History: Resurrection Man and Historiographic Game Design' can be considered another different style of lore history by its specific focus on a micro-history or biographical structure in contrast to *KCD* situated in a localized or regional history. Unfortunately, as Tompkins' *Resurrection Man* game that she developed as part of her Masters thesis is the only known example of this style (it appears she has not expanded this project further), the historiographic game genre remains unused for historical game development.

'historiographic game'.⁵²² Including, for instance, critical analysis of and opportunities for new historical games to integrate and communicate gameplay historiographies of scholarly history which go beyond (but still adhere to) the current "historical record/historical evidence" while still embracing "multiple interpretations based on player-based decisions and outcomes."⁵²³ By extension, using lore history as a framework offers deeper insights into and applications with refined analysis of historical content.⁵²⁴ This elevation of the role of historical content to a similar level of critical discourse alongside game form helps to counter its typical treatment as namely a "passively descriptive series of factual details or evidence within a narrative" as part of measuring a text's proximity to historical authenticity or accuracy.⁵²⁵

Third, studying historical lore acquired from interactive experiential play also fulfills the potential for in-game lore to constitute as history's digital variant of the ontic and epistemic constructs of historical knowledge. This has significant ramifications for academic history when examining the nature of knowledge in both digital games and written texts. Notably, lore history personifies and offers a gameplay manifestation of the 'performative turn' of historical scholarship constituting as another distinct "practice of reading, thinking, discussing, and writing [history]", where gameplay modalities of knowledge are not only representations and explanations of history but are also interactive historical performances of "scholarship in action."⁵²⁶

⁵²² Tompkins, 'Playing at History: Resurrection Man and Historiographic Game Design'.
Spring, 'Gaming History: Computer and Video Games as Historical Scholarship'.

⁵²³ McCall, 'The Historical Problem Space Framework: Games as a Historical Medium', para. 28;
Tompkins, p. 27.

⁵²⁴ Another integral framework for examining the expression of historical content is historical fantasy, one of the main styles of imaginative history, which is addressed near the end of Section 7.2.1.

⁵²⁵ Redder, p. 72.

⁵²⁶ Herman Paul, 'Performing History: How Historical Scholarship is Shaped by Epistemic Virtues', *History and Theory*, 50 (2011), 1-19, pp. 1, 4, 19.

Lastly, lore history fulfils the conditions to establish, outline, and build lore as the fourth tradition of history (raised earlier in Section 2.2) in order to offer a more extensive framework of knowledge, content, and epistemology within history in contrast to how these terms are currently treated by historians such as Munslow and White. To symbolise this endeavor, Munslow wrote that history “is *always an imposition* on the past dictated by the narrative understanding of the historian.”⁵²⁷ However, while all histories are shaped by, and are indeed narratives of the past, not all histories are just narratives or stories privy to the historian’s modes of authorial production. The inclusion of lore expands Munslow’s original statement by forwarding the imposition on the past as the *co-production of and co-dependency between the myriad of knowledge bases accessed for both research and constructive or creative utilisation and the narrative understanding of the historian*. Discovering and validating lore history as a legitimate form of gameplay representation also expands on Chapman’s concept of the realist simulation style. Principally, by extending realist simulation to certain games like *KCD* that not only aims and/or claims to show the past “‘how it was’ i.e. as it appeared to historical agents of the time”, but also actively builds or generates new historical knowledge and insights about the past as gameplay scholarship.⁵²⁸

6.2.1 Lore Histories in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*:

In Chapter 5, I argued that *KCD*’s overarching Medieval history provides a scholarly gameplay historiography of “how the Fraternal Civil War may likely have impacted on the Rattay-Sasau region ... [as well as representing] the actual events and real people as well as the everyday life and socio-cultural minutiae ... [of the] region.”⁵²⁹ The following

⁵²⁷ Munslow, *A History of History*, p. 99.

⁵²⁸ Chapman, p. 61.

⁵²⁹ Redder, p. 209

sections then draw on a select handful of recorded gameplay sequences of this game's Medieval histories in order to demonstrate how the multimodality of *KCD*'s gameplay invokes scholarly lore history. Selected gameplay sequences will be used to illustrate the particular modalities of lore history by their integration with and advancement of scholarship about either the Rattay-Sasau region during the civil war or phenomena, trends, and activities prevalent in late Medieval Bohemia before and during the civil war.

Findings of *KCD*'s gameplay sequences containing localized historical lore on fifteenth century Bohemia are evident in three such histories experienced within this game. These lore histories respectively are the siege of Silver Skalitz (6.3), the town of Rattay (6.4), and late Medieval combat (6.5). Each of these multimodal lore histories contribute sources of gameplay scholarship to either or most of three areas of Medieval historiography. These historiographies are the Bohemian Civil War (1402 – 1403) via its effects on Bohemia's regional communities, the urban landscape and society of Rattay during the early fifteenth century, and Medieval warfare and combat within Central Europe. All three of these Medieval historiographies (among others existent within *KCD*) situate under the wider late Medieval Czech historiography regarding the period of crisis and conflicts from the late fourteenth until the mid-fifteenth centuries, of which *KCD* is a part of through its gameplay sources.

For the duration of this chapter, when recounting and subsequently providing analytical discussions on the respective gameplay sequences in *KCD*, a number of sentences will be labelled with the contextual modality terms 'procedural' and/or 'representational' within brackets. This is to indicate and distinguish the interconnected ludic (procedural) and historical (representational) functions or properties that make-up and operate both *KCD*'s

respective historical modality (lore history) in communicating its particular Medieval history and the player's activity. In addition, discussion of each gameplay sequence uses both first (I as myself) and third-person (I as Henry) voices interchangeably to distinguish between the game-player and the player-character (with pre-defined backstory, character traits, and motivations).

6.3 The Siege of Silver Skalitz:

A major source of Medieval lore history in *KCD* is the siege of Silver Skalitz, one of the few known documented events about the Fraternal Civil War that occurred in the Rattay-Sasau region. This event was integrated into *KCD* as a prologue to the main storyline, a starting point from where the rest of the events in the game would fill in some of the “missing elements between that moment [siege of Silver Skalitz] ... [and] releasing Wenceslas IV from his capture from Vienna.”⁵³⁰ From the few known written sources available, the siege of Silver Skalitz began on March 23rd, 1403 where King Sigismund's army besieged and razed the entire castle-town of Silver Skalitz.⁵³¹ At the time, the town was governed by Sir Radzig Koblya, a major ally of Sigismund's rival and older brother King Wenceslas. After Sigismund's forces breached and occupied the settlement's main town center, they immediately surrounded and laid siege to the castle in the hopes of capturing and possibly executing Radzig. However, during the night Radzig (and possibly survivors who made it safely to the castle) miraculously escaped unnoticed and fled.⁵³²

⁵³⁰ Nowak, p. 1.

⁵³¹ Mályusz, pp. 276-278.

⁵³² Sedláček, p. 14.

Radzig's escape from the castle and Sigismund's actual response when he discovered the castle empty remains largely unknown to this day.⁵³³ Regardless, two events followed this discovery. First, Silver Skalitz was completely razed to the ground, a testament to the complete absence of any remains of Medieval structures when I visited Silver Skalitz for fieldwork in August 2018.⁵³⁴ Second, it was recorded that shortly after Radzig's escape he travelled to the settlement of Rattay.⁵³⁵ There, Radzig was accepted refuge under his host Lord and governor of Rattay Sir Hanush of Leipa, and stayed temporarily for some time at Pirkstein castle, one of Rattay's two castles.

Despite the siege and its outcome being a real event, it continues to appear in these written sources as a footnote with minimal or vague details. To illustrate, in Czech historian August Sedláček's book *Castles, Chateaux, and Fortresses of the Kingdom of Bohemia*, one of the few references about the Silver Skalitz siege gives a brief explanation:

Racek [Radzig] Koblya ... secluded in nearby Skalici [Silver Skalitz] ... rebelled against the Hungarian king Sigismund during his visit to Czechia [Bohemia]. He

⁵³³ Warhorse Studios incorporated a local legend from the town into *KCD*'s codex entry 'Sacking of Silver Skalitz' which provides some detail as to what possibly transpired during Sigismund's siege of the castle, although the veracity of this legend may not be entirely true or reliable. It states "According to legend, [Radzig] Kobyla and his people, who were hiding from the attackers in the castle, were able to escape because of a great storm that blew up and forced the besieging army to wait until morning to take the castle. The castle defenders took advantage of the opportunity and under the cover of darkness fled to nearby Rattay. In the morning, the only thing Sigismund's men found in the empty castle was a goat ... Sigismund then razed the town and the castle to the ground and the castle was never rebuilt."

⁵³⁴ The codex entry discussed in the previous footnote stated that only the foundations of the castle remain within Silver Skalitz today. Unfortunately, I was unable to find it when I visited the rough location of where the castle formally stood.

⁵³⁵ Sedláček, p. 54.

knew he couldn't fight off the king and so, in the middle of the night, he descended and escaped with his company to the Rataje [Rattay] castle.⁵³⁶

Another example is from the Hungarian chronicle *Sigismund's Diploma Archive II (1400-1410): First Part (1400-1406)*. One of the half a dozen accounts mentioning Silver Skalitz states:

March 23rd (announced in rural Bohemia near the castle Skalicz [Skalitz] ... **Zs.** [Initials for Sigismund] Miklósnak, son of Leukus Kalto received Madaras royal estate in the Bács county with all its appurtenances, customs, and incomes for his completed service in the "military campaign in the Kingdom of Bohemia", and is authorized to hold onto this estate until he receives another from him [Sigismund].⁵³⁷

These written statements from a secondary and primary historical source respectively provide certain details. The former highlights Radzig's escape to Rattay from the castle at Silver Skalitz during the night after being besieged by Sigismund's army. The latter chronicles Sigismund bequeathing a land estate to one of his subjects Miklósnak Leukus for his services, which was signed by Sigismund in his camp on March 23rd 1403, the day Silver Skalitz's castle was besieged after the initial assault.⁵³⁸ However, these written

⁵³⁶ Sedláček, p. 54. This statement is a close translation from its original Czech language with the help of Dechypher, a translator organization based in Hamilton, New Zealand. The names 'Racek Kobyla' and 'Rataje' are the written Czech forms of their German pronunciations 'Radzig Kobyla' and 'Rattay' respectively.

⁵³⁷ Mályusz, pp. 276-277. This statement is a close translation from its original Latin and Hungarian languages, mostly due to the help of the Dechypher team, with the inclusion of two minor amendments after reading the translation. These amendments pertain to a couple of Latin words within Decypher's translation that were either not translated or were grammatically correct but incoherent due to having a meaning different to its original context within this account.

⁵³⁸ Mályusz, pp. 276-77.

accounts neither mention nor explicate as to how many people died, the manner and extent of violence and destruction inflicted upon the town and its populace, and what were Sigismund's reasons for attacking and razing Silver Skalitz. Furthermore, both these statements are among those that I was able to access about the siege which exclusively center on either or both Radzig and Sigismund.

In contrast to the limited documentation on this event from older written sources, I argue that *KCD's* gameplay rendition of the siege of Silver Skalitz is the closest historical account of the siege. This is because its gameplay sequences that represent and/or refer to this event communicate one of several lore histories which re-examine or expand the significance of this event itself and its impacts. The experiential knowledge obtained and examined from these lore histories is founded on but goes beyond those contained within the few written sources. Two of the largest gameplay sources of lore history that I examined about this historical event are the siege of Silver Skalitz as a military massacre or genocide, and the refugee crisis in the neighboring settlements directly caused by the siege. Together, these lore-based sources constitute some of *KCD's* Medieval historiographies of the Siege of Skalitz event and its socio-political impacts on the Rattay-Sasau region. For this thesis, I focus on the gameplay sequences contributing historical lore on the siege as a site of a military genocide.

6.3.1 Siege of Silver Skalitz – Lore History:

Re-living the horrific siege of Silver Skalitz as a massacre was the first and one of the most vivid gameplay experiences of Medieval history in *KCD*. This gameplay sequence is one of several to constitute the lore history of the siege as a massacre because it was primarily an experiential re-construction encased in a quest format, where I relived this historical

event not from the perspective of Radzig Kobyla or Sigismund but as a victim of the siege. Specifically, reliving the siege through the protagonist Henry who emblematically embodies one of the many townsfolk living their last day in Medieval Silver Skalitz before it was attacked by Sigismund's army. The following discussion and analysis of this gameplay re-construction of the siege through Henry's perspective took place in the span of three quests, with each quest representing the different stages or phases of the siege (6.3.1.1). The first quest 'Unexpected Visit' captures the events of Silver Skalitz shortly before Sigismund's attack, while the second and third quests 'Run!' and 'Homecoming' represent the early climax and aftermath of the siege respectively. Despite this gameplay sequence being the main source of evidence on this particular lore history, I also include in my analytical discussion a supplementary gameplay moment from a sequence covering the 'Epilogue' quest (pp. 286 – 288). This small yet significant moment is a minor source of lore history supporting *KCD*'s gameplay historiography of the siege as a massacre by addressing its causes as a topic of conversation during a council meeting.

6.3.1.1 *Medieval Massacre:*

Commencing in the quest 'Unexpected Visit', as Henry I carried out errands for my (adoptive) father and town blacksmith Martin as it was the first game objective to complete, such as picking up a crossguard for a sword and collecting an unpaid debt from a villager named Kunesh [procedural/representational]. While undertaking these errands, I took time traversing and documenting as much of the town as possible (see Figures 6.2 – 6.2B for examples) while mastering most of *KCD*'s immediate game mechanics and rules characteristic to its open-world RPG system. For instance, many of the town's buildings and structures were explored, such as Henry's home, the town's emporium, and the local tavern [representational]. Mundanities of the townsfolk's daily life were also observed, such as traders and storeowners selling wares at their market

stalls or shops, and several commoners playing a gambling game called 'Farkle' for wager using dice on a wooden board [representational]. Concurrently, some of the fundamental game mechanics familiarised include orientation with the immediate surroundings by manipulating the controller device, learning how to run and jump, and equipping and using various objects from late Medieval Europe when obtained [procedural].

Figure 6.2 – Unexpected Visit

Henry's home in Silver Skalitz. Recorded in 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue'.⁵³⁹



Figure 6.2A – Unexpected Visit (II)

Silver Skalitz's main town centre. Recorded in 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue'.⁵⁴⁰



⁵³⁹ Redder, 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue', min 8:04.

Figure 6.2B – Unexpected Visit (III)

One of Silver Skalitz's traders at the main town centre. Recorded in 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue'.⁵⁴¹



When Henry completed the errands, he returned to help Martin finish the final touches to a new sword for the town's Lord and overseer Sir Radzig Kobyla [representational]. When Radzig inspected the new sword and returned to his castle, an army in the distance arrives unexpectedly outside Silver Skalitz. This arrival is soon revealed to be a hostile army under the command of King Sigismund, comprising of mercenary Cuman soldiers as the vanguard with numerous ranks of Czech (and possibly Hungarian) soldiers in the rear [representational].

⁵⁴⁰ Redder, min 17:41.

⁵⁴¹ Redder, min 22:20.

In 'Run!', within moments of the arrival of Sigismund and his army, flaming arrows are fired upon the villagers and buildings, setting the town ablaze with the Cuman vanguard breaking through the town's front wooden gate [representational]. Through cinematic cutscenes, a chaotic array of violence is shown, depicting the slaughter not only of garrison soldiers but also the terrified and unarmed residents trying to flee the town or seeking safety in the castle before the drawbridge closed [representational]. Among those brutally killed were Henry's parents when his father Martin tried to rescue his wife in the town center. Henry, psychologically traumatised after witnessing his own parents killed in front of him by a group of Cumans, rushes to the castle only to find the drawbridge closed [representational]. One of the guards tells Henry to escape and head to nearby Talmberg (another castle-town) and warn its lord of the attack [cutscene ended].

Figure 6.2C – Run!

Several moments from cutscenes showing the initial assault at Silver Skalitz (Figure 6.2C – 6.2E). Figure 6.2C recorded in 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue'.⁵⁴²



⁵⁴² Redder, min 1:21:10.

Figure 6.2D – Run! (II)

The initial pillaging and killings at the town centre by Sigismund's Cuman vanguard. Recorded in 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue'.⁵⁴³



⁵⁴³ Redder, min 1:21:54.

Figure 6.2E – Run! (III)

Henry's father Martin fighting the Cumans to protect his wife. Recorded in 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue'.⁵⁴⁴



Having no other option but to survive and with a new game objective being simply to escape to Talmberg, Henry ran from the settlement's back entranceway and found the nearest horse in order to escape Silver Skalitz [procedural/representational]. Before escaping on horseback, I prevented what would have been an attempted rape of a village women (later revealed in the game to be Theresa, Henry's friend and another survivor) by several Cuman soldiers at her home [representational]. I originally wanted to dispatch the soldiers with the sword previously made for Radzig by the blacksmith Martin.

⁵⁴⁴ Redder, min 1:22:39.

However, still being new to the game, I had not uncovered all of the basics of the game system, particularly finding the button from the controller device that would initiate Henry to draw his weapon once selected and equipped [procedural]. Unknown to me at the time, the button for initiating this action was unusually located on the far-left arrow on the controller device, which was eventually discovered later after trial-and-error [procedural]. As a result, this initial lack of knowledge on how to draw a melee weapon as a game mechanic cued a different spontaneous response through other known mechanics. Particularly, I opted instead to attack this group of Cuman soldiers unarmed by punching them and afterwards creating noise through whistling (calling the horse), with the soldiers' attention immediately directed toward Henry instead [procedural/representational].

While being chased with missile fire from several Cuman horse archers in the outskirts of Silver Skalitz, I witnessed more scenes of pillaging and violence committed by the Cumans at the village of Rovna. Some of those who escaped Silver Skalitz ran along the road or fields while others tried to fight back or seek safety in Rovna's small church, but most were butchered mercilessly by Cumans while they set the entire village ablaze [representational].⁵⁴⁵ Having escaped successfully, I then rode to Talmberg and warned Lord Divish of the attack and to muster defences. In spite of Divish closing castle Talmberg to prevent anyone leaving while Sigismund's army was still at large in the countryside, I returned to Silver Skalitz the following day in order to find and bury my parents by escaping the castle disguised as a soldier [procedural/representational].

⁵⁴⁵ The actual church still stands today and was visited for fieldwork, but its entrance was locked so I was unable to examine the interior of the building.

Figure 6.2F – Run! (IV)

One the scenes of the residents fleeing or being killed by Cuman war parties both in and near Rovna, located outside Silver Skalitz. Recorded in 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue'.⁵⁴⁶



⁵⁴⁶ Redder, min 1:28:05.

Figure 6.2G – Run! (V)

Another scene of residents fleeing Silver Skalitz and Rovna. Recorded in 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue'.⁵⁴⁷



Arriving at the village of Rovna en route to Silver Skalitz during the quest 'Homecoming', what I found through Henry's perspective brought me to complete shock and horror. I discovered not only the burnt remains of the Rovna village and its church, but also an array of mutilated and burnt bodies, both human and animal, either scattered or gathered in large piles around the Rovna village and its church [representational]. These scenes were a recurring phenomenon the further I journeyed back to Silver Skalitz, with the addition of vagrant looters sifting through dead bodies, and corpses hanging from damaged cartwheels along the road [representational]. When I finally arrived at Silver Skalitz, these scenes of extreme violence inflicted by Sigismund's army culminated into

⁵⁴⁷ Redder, min 1:29:13.

an image of a hellish landscape. Both the town and its castle were completely razed to the ground while filled with an abundance of human and animal bodies [representational].

Figure 6.2H – Homecoming (II)

Some of many sites containing evidence of genocide around Rovna and Silver Skalitz (Figures 6.2H – 6.2J). Figure 6.2H recorded in 'Return to Skalitz'.⁵⁴⁸



⁵⁴⁸ Redder, 'Return to Skalitz', min 17:26.

Figure 6.2I – Homecoming (III)



*A massive pile
mostly of
burnt corpses.
Recorded in
'Return to
Skalitz'.⁵⁴⁹*

Figure 6.2J – Homecoming (IV)



*One of many
areas within
Silver Skalitz
littered with
bodies.
Recorded in
'Return to
Skalitz'.⁵⁵⁰*

⁵⁴⁹ Redder, min 18:47.

⁵⁵⁰ Redder, min 51:09.

Establishing the Silver Skalitz siege as a prelude in *KCD* is an effective ludic platform by providing an introductory tutorial to experiencing the world as Henry, as well as to learn and master the fundamental basics of the game [procedural]. These base game mechanics include those described in my gameplay sequence earlier but also, among others, the ability to call and ride a horse during my escape from Silver Skalitz and learning a few basics in armed combat given by a travelling swordsman at the town before the siege [procedural]. Learning the basics was supported by simple game objectives designed to help ease players into their immersion of *KCD*. For instance, the very first game objective in Silver Skalitz was to fulfil or complete the errands for the blacksmith Martin [procedural]. Since this objective required spatial navigation of the town and its surroundings, it allowed me as Henry to engage in a number of ludic opportunities as part of learning to play *KCD*. Taking the time to converse with some of the settlement's inhabitants through the dialogue system, and familiarisation with the inventory and clothing systems within the game's menu were some of these opportunities [procedural].

Despite the ludic importance in establishing the siege as a prologue, the siege of Silver Skalitz was a real historical event. From historical modality analysis, these quests provide integral historical lore of the settlement before, during, and after it was besieged. A number of recorded details or referents about the siege from written sources were identified as factual re-constructions through the cinematic cutscenes, visual observations of the town, and Warhorse Studios' codex entries [representational]. For example, in the entry 'Sacking of Silver Skalitz', the date 23rd March 1403 is given as an implicit historical reference to the day the castle-town was besieged during the summer

months of Sigismund's campaign [representational].⁵⁵¹ Another notable detail found in some of the cinematic cutscenes was the depiction of the historical figures King Sigismund and Sir Radzig Kobyła who were known to have been present at the siege as the respective opposing commanders (see Figures 6.2K – 6.2L) [representational]. Finally, the visual presence of the Silver Skalitz castle before and after its destruction by Sigismund's forces are closely accurate portrayals of one of the few buildings known to have existed in the town (see Figures 6.2M – 6.2N) [representational]. However, visiting and exploring this building was inaccessible beyond looking at its locked front entrance and thick rectangular curtain walls.

⁵⁵¹ Mályusz, pp. 276-278. This small yet important fact was likely first uncovered from Elemér Mályusz's edited chronicle collection *Sigismund's Diploma Archive II (1400-1410): First Part (1400-1406)* during research by Warhorse Studios' historian Joanna Nowak (this source is also mentioned in Sections 5.3.3.1 and 6.3).

Figure 6.2K – Radzig Kobyla

The historical figure Sir Radzig Kobyla. Recorded in 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue'.⁵⁵²



Figure 6.2L – Sigismund Luxembourg

The historical figure King Sigismund. Recorded in 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue'.⁵⁵³



Figure 6.2M – Silver Skalitz Castle

Silver Skalitz in the moments before the siege. Recorded in 'KCD Pilot Video – Prologue'.⁵⁵⁴



Figure 6.2N – Silver Skalitz Castle (II)

Silver Skalitz in ruins after its razing by Sigismund's army. Recorded in 'Return to Skalitz'.⁵⁵⁵



⁵⁵⁴ Redder, min 1:09:24.

⁵⁵⁵ Redder, 'Return to Skalitz', min 46:23.

Incorporating these details highlights *KCD*'s continued adherence to the factual proximity of this event. However, my experiences in this gameplay sequence were not only factual but primarily experiential re-constructions which provided the most substantial body of gameplay historical lore on this event. In my gameplay re-telling of the quest 'Unexpected Visit' for instance, the benefit of familiarising with *KCD*'s ludic elements during the completion of Martin's errands were conversely an avenue for exploring and experiencing the main town center adjacent to the castle. This approach elicited a preliminary source of historical lore regarding how the town center likely existed in Medieval times as well as the daily life of its residents in their idyllic state prior to the attack [representational]. Visually, the settlement's layout was likely organised in a concentric design as marked by several rings of wooden palisade walls and watchtowers (see Figure 6.2O) [representational].⁵⁵⁶ This experience of the town as a quaint yet bustling community, in spite of its people's relative unawareness of themselves being Sigismund's target, is perhaps a subtle historical interpretation that the Silver Skalitz siege was probably a surprise attack unexpected by most of the townsfolk (except perhaps Radzig himself) [representational]. Hence the quest's title 'Unexpected Visit'.

⁵⁵⁶ Oliver H. Creighton, *Medieval Europe; Castles of Medieval Europe*, ed. by Alexander A. Bauer & Neil Asher Silberman, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), I, para. 5. The concentric design of both castle strongholds or fortresses and castle-towns fundamentally comprised of two or more curtain walls (essentially a wall within a wall), the advantage being that the inner wall was higher and could protect defenders occupying the outer wall(s) against besieging attackers.

Figure 6.2O – Map of Silver Skalitz

One of KCD's game maps showing an artistic illustration of the entire Silver Skalitz settlement in the concentric design. Recorded in 'KCD Pilot – Prologue'.⁵⁵⁷



Another prominent source of experiential historical lore was having encounters with and witnessing evidence of genocidal violence and pillaging upon the residents of Silver Skalitz both within and outside the town [representational]. This critical gameplay source about the siege was not found in any of the written sources that I accessed on this event. In 'Run!', this evidence was derived from seeing some of the acts of brutality committed by the mercenary Cuman soldiers as described in the gameplay sequence earlier (pp. 270

⁵⁵⁷ Redder, 'KCD Pilot – Prologue', min 37:17.

– 278, see also Figures 6.2C – 6.2G) [representational]. Likewise, ‘Homecoming’ also provided abundant evidence of a Medieval genocide such as the display of either burnt or mutilated bodies of people and animals in both Silver Skalitz and Rovna (pp. 275 – 278, 282, see also Figures 6.2H – 6.2J and 6.2N) [representational]. From Henry’s perspective, there was no doubt that seeing up-close the severity of the settlement’s destruction and the candid manner in which the townsfolk were killed was on a personal level a graphic and frightening experience. Nonetheless, the amount and degree of violence and suffering shown, albeit with restrictions as to how much could be depicted, largely emulates the characterisations of a particular Medieval siege described by Medieval historian Sean McGlynn, namely:

[the] immediate and localized event of a siege; [with] the large proportion of non-combatants commonly involved, [and] the magnitude of the dreadful consequences for the defeated when a castle’s or town’s defences were breached by storm.⁵⁵⁸

Other key historical lore examined was the inclusion of the Rovna village, another settlement that was massacred and destroyed by Sigismund’s army (see also Figures 6.2F – 6.2G), and facing Cuman soldiers as the combatants leading the initial assault on and killings at Silver Skalitz. Similar to the presence of massacre violence, these types of historical lore are also likely historical re-constructions of the siege as they are not found in the older written historical sources, except for a couple of brief details affirming the latter. One is given by historian and expert of this period of Bohemian history Petr Čornej

⁵⁵⁸ Sean McGlynn, *By Sword and Fire: Cruelty and Atrocity in Medieval Warfare* (London: Orion Books, 2009), p. 141.

in his work *Great History of the Czech Crown V, 1402-1437*. Čornej details Sigismund's invasion of Bohemia by gathering an "army of several thousand warriors in Hungary, mostly Cumans", as well as a small reference to some of the Cuman troops' warlike nature during the invasion when they "were uncontrollably plundering the wide surrounding area."⁵⁵⁹

Recognising and examining *KCD*'s establishment of the siege of Silver Skalitz as a scene of plunder and genocide under Sigismund's direction via, in part, his Cuman mercenaries was further supported in a small key moment during a gameplay sequence taking place in the 'Epilogue' quest. In this quest, the siege of Silver Skalitz is mentioned as a minor topic during a meeting taking place at Rattay's upper castle. This meeting was attended by all the regional lords (e.g. Divish, Hanush of Leipa, Hans Capon), Henry (at this time a newly inducted nobleman), and the meeting's organiser Margrave Jobst Luxembourg accompanied by his ally John II of Liechtenstein (as with the regional lords, these men are real historical figures). Although the meeting itself and the presence of Jobst and John in Rattay are fictional, this event was key for specifying some dialogue-based lore on the probable historical causes or factors behind Sigismund's attack and razing of Silver Skalitz.

The story carried in the 'Epilogue' quest largely functions as a history lesson by using both Jobst and John as intermediary voices that recount key factors which caused both

⁵⁵⁹ Petr Čornej, *Great History of the Czech Crown V, 1402-1437*, 2nd edn, 19 vols (Prague: Paseka, 2000), V, p. 76. These two statements from Čornej are close translations from its original Czech language with the help of Dechypher team. The original Czech title of Čornej's work is *Velké Dějiny Zemí Koruny České V., 1402-1437*. Interestingly, Čornej's reference to the Cumans' military involvement and atrocities in Bohemia under their service to Sigismund was not a one-time affair during 1402-1403, but repeated again when the Cumans accompanied Sigismund in one of his many other attempted invasions of Bohemia taking place later during 1421, the third year of the prolonged Hussite Wars (Čornej, p. 309).

the Bohemian Civil War and the subsequent turmoil across the kingdom. These factors discussed include why Sigismund kidnapped his brother Wenceslas, his goals in conquering Bohemia, and who Wenceslas and Sigismund truly were as multifaceted people [representational]. At some point during the meeting, John and Jobst deduced that a key motivation behind Sigismund's attack and sacking of Silver Skalitz was because:

[John speaks] He [Sigismund] didn't have enough coin for a regular army so he recruited the Cumans. What he does not pay them they make up for in plunder.
[Jobst speaks] But in the end he didn't have enough to satisfy the Cumans. That's why he raided Kutteneberg and Skalitz. He wanted the silver.

Figure 6.2P – Epilogue

The meeting at Rattay's upper castle, with Margrave Jobst (left) and John II (right) shown.

Recorded in 'Epilogue'.⁵⁶⁰



⁵⁶⁰ Ben Redder, 'Epilogue', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (11 June 2018), min 36:08.

John and Jobst's statements implicitly disclose a key economic reason as to why this settlement was Sigismund's primary target [representational]. The town was known during the Middle Ages for mining and exporting silver.⁵⁶¹ Being under King Wenceslas' jurisdiction meant a large portion of that silver would go directly to his royal treasury. Therefore, Silver Skalitz was an ideal site for abundant spoils that Sigismund could use to pay for his large army (particularly the mercenary Cumans), prevent desertion, and to deprive his brother Wenceslas and his allies a major source of income. This dual convention in securing and depriving sources of immediate income through ravaging was a tactic commonly used by commanders in Medieval campaigns, an:

economically efficient way of waging war, while imposing onerous expenses on the enemy. The raider could hope to reimburse the costs of his campaign through plunder, protection money and ransom; to the defender fell the heavy cost of lost productivity and lost taxes.⁵⁶²

The strategic value of Silver Skalitz containing silver reserves is also an argument forwarded by Warhorse Studios in highlighting one of Sigismund's motivations to besiege the settlement. *KCD's* codex entry 'Sacking of Silver Skalitz' states:

⁵⁶¹ The vast network of silver mines is another known structure that once existed in Silver Skalitz, which was plundered and left abandoned after Sigismund's siege. In *KCD*, these abandoned mines are re-constructed and can be explored at a later point in the quest 'The King's Silver' or whenever the player returns to the ruins of Silver Skalitz.

⁵⁶² McGlynn, p. 242.

Sigismund undoubtedly chose Skalitz because silver was mined here and the town was administered by the Royal Hetman, Racek Kobyla, a supporter of the king. Sigismund apparently wanted to disrupt the flow of money going to ... Wenceslas.

Because Sigismund's siege of Silver Skalitz was not just an act of plundering but a decimation of lives under the protection of King Wenceslas' ally and member of his close circle of 'favourites' (Radzig), Sigismund's decision to plunder and ravage the town can also be viewed as a pursuit of a political gain [representational]. In this context, Medieval armies ravaging an enemy settlement could likely intend to show "the subjects of an enemy ruler how unprotected they were, and how much better they would be under a lord who could wield real power."⁵⁶³ Similarly, Medieval historian Clifford Rogers explains that "Devastation ... demoralized and impoverished their enemies, and gave the people of the raided country ... an immediate and direct reason to desire peace."⁵⁶⁴ In a likely view then, Sigismund's attack on Silver Skalitz was one of many attempts to politically weaken and diminish Wenceslas' legitimacy and authority to rule as king, while hoping to strengthen his own claim by conquest and force the Bohemian populace to sue for peace.

The multimodal integration of known key facts with experiential re-constructions from these recorded gameplay sequences demonstrate integral sources of lore history containing new, expanded, and refreshed accounts about the Silver Skalitz siege. This lore history that I experienced through Henry presents this historical event not as a typical siege battle involving intensive and prolonged combative engagements between

⁵⁶³ McGlynn, p. 242.

⁵⁶⁴ Clifford J. Rogers, 'The Age of the Hundred Years War', in *Medieval Warfare: A History*, ed. by Maurice H. Keen, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 136-160, p. 151.

two equally trained armies. Instead, it forwards the argument that the siege was likely a horrific localized Medieval massacre spurred by political and economic incentives. This entire gameplay representation about the siege as a massacre then has significance as a scholarly Medieval historiography by extending the role of the Silver Skalitz siege as a major consequential event in the Bohemian Civil War, which is evident in several aspects. For one, it establishes that the sacking and massacre at Silver Skalitz was perhaps a frequently common ploy by Sigismund during the Fraternal Civil War. Specifically, a reflection of Sigismund's attempts to swiftly end the war via brutal attrition and besieging and sacking settlements. This historical perspective can be collaborated in *The Magnificent Ride* by Medieval Czech historian Thomas Fudge, one of several historians to document Sigismund's earlier siege of the more larger city Kutna Hora (1402) that took place at the start of the civil war (well before the events of *KCD*).⁵⁶⁵ Like Silver Skalitz, the settlement of Kutna Hora was highly renowned for its operation of mining and exporting silver as well as being a main supporter of King Wenceslas, and for these reasons was sacked and ravaged by Sigismund's army. The damage from sacking Kutna Hora was noted by Fudge to have been an estimated one million Hungarian florins.⁵⁶⁶

Moreover, as *KCD*'s gameplay rendition of this historical event illustrates a localized form of Medieval massacre, it also offers gameplay contributions to the wider historiography on Medieval genocide by eliciting valuable perspectives different or alternative to (but by no means a displacement of) those discussed by Medieval historians. To highlight one of them, Medieval historian Laurence Marvin argued that the "potential for massacre and atrocity increased under certain conditions, especially on the

⁵⁶⁵ Fudge, p. 10.

⁵⁶⁶ Fudge, p. 10. This event is also mentioned by Warhorse Studios in *KCD*'s codex entry 'The Conquest of Kuttenberg', Kuttenberg being the German name for Kutna Hora. They also provide an alternative estimated amount of the damage cost as one million gold ducats.

'frontiers' of the Medieval world ... political frontiers such as the English border with Scotland and Wales, or the Middle East."⁵⁶⁷ Similarly, Medieval historian Christopher Allmand writes "Border and frontier societies were particularly vulnerable, the raid being the characteristic form of war waged by and on those who lived on them."⁵⁶⁸ These quotes highlight the ethnocentricity surrounding the nature of directing massacres, implying that primarily foreign armies present along the border were more likely the instigators and agents for conducting massacres during raids or sieges. This aspect of Medieval genocide is definitely an important area of Medieval study, but this approach seemingly examines war atrocities as usually engagements between Medieval societies strongly distinct or exotic to one another in either or mostly cultural, religious, and ethnic contexts.⁵⁶⁹ The settlements of Silver Skalitz and Kutna Hora are a contrast to these historians' views. Both are located not on a political frontier or border but rather on a political centre, literally at the heart of the country since they are relatively close to the capital city of Prague. The location of these places when Sigismund's army conducted these attacks historically implies that in places such as Bohemia, Medieval towns or cities located within interior domains were as vulnerable to plundering and genocide as those situated along the frontier. The nature of this massacre as a politically localized Bohemian affair is further supplemented in *KCD* with a seemingly overlooked yet important depiction of Sigismund's army comprising not only of foreign Cumans (and possibly some Hungarians), but also native Czechs in service to Sigismund's allies who originally supported Sigismund's campaign (e.g. Otto III of Bergau and Markvart von Aulitz). Allied Czech soldiers under Sigismund's command are only shown briefly in a cinematic

⁵⁶⁷ Laurence W. Marvin, 'Atrocity and Massacre in the High and Late Middle Ages', in *Theatres of Violence: Massacre, Mass Killing, and Atrocity Throughout History*, ed. by Philip G. Dwyer & Lyndall Ryan (New York, and Oxford: Berghan Books, 2012), 50-62, p. 58.

⁵⁶⁸ Marvin, p. 58.

⁵⁶⁹ For further readings on this area of Medieval genocide studies, see works such as *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies: Central and Late Medieval Europe* (2010), Sarah Rees Jones and Ethina Watson's *Christians and Jews in Angevin England: The York Massacre of 1190, Narratives and Contexts* (2013), and Sean McGlynn's *By Sword and Fire: Cruelty and Atrocity in Medieval Warfare* (2009).

cutscene prior to the siege (Figure 6.2Q). Yet this minor detail reveals that Medieval massacres were as much a military activity frequently partaken by local lords and soldiers native to their home country as by those in foreign armies.

Figure 6.2Q – Run! (VI)

A depiction of Sigismund's army before attacking Silver Skalitz, showing the Cuman vanguard accompanied by Czech and Hungarian soldiers placed in the rear. Recorded in 'KCD Pilot – Prologue'.⁵⁷⁰



Finally, *KCD's* establishment of Medieval massacres also provides a gameplay historiography on military atrocities being major incidents for creating forced

⁵⁷⁰ Redder, 'KCD Pilot – Prologue', min 1:20:57.

displacement and migration of local refugees to nearby settlements or regions. *KCD* presents a localized form of this trend as part of expanding the history of the civil war between Sigismund and Wenceslas by situating around the displacement of local or regional populations from internecine warfare. Throughout parts of *KCD*'s historical world, Henry encountered and interacted with refugees who survived the Silver Skalitz siege and lived in settlements that became (albeit reluctantly) temporary havens or asylums, namely the towns of Sasau, Rattay, and Talmberg. As briefly mentioned in Section 6.3, because the refugee crisis constitutes as another different gameplay lore history and adjoining Medieval historiography on the Silver Skalitz siege by representing one of the sieges' socio-political impacts, this particular lore history cannot be addressed in this chapter due to spatial constraints.

6.4 Rattay:

The presence of urban towns and rural villages within *KCD* constitutes about half of the game's historical world, and as a prominent type of in-game setting are a popular feature of level design in RPG games based on a Medieval theme. The *Elder Scrolls*, *Witcher*, and *World of Warcraft* game series are a few among this trend. However, most of the settlements I visited within *KCD*'s historical world are in fact real places that existed in the Rattay-Sasau locality during the Middle Ages, and many still exist to this day with some, if any, of their surviving Medieval structures [representational]. These settlements include the earlier discussed castle-town of Silver Skalitz and the village of Rovna, but also the towns of Rattay, Sasau, and Talmberg.⁵⁷¹ For this discussion, I focus on the city or large town of Rattay as a particular case study.

⁵⁷¹ As stated in Chapter 4 (Section 4.4.3), excluding Talmberg, the other four historical sites were places re-visited in 2018 when I went to Czech Republic for interviews and fieldwork.

Rattay, originally founded sometime between the tenth – eleventh centuries, is the largest settlement in *KCD*, and was first visited after Henry’s survival in the siege of Silver Skalitz. The settlement of Rattay constitutes the second gameplay source of lore history in *KCD* for discussion, which is experiential scholarly knowledge on historical sites and their buildings contextualised to a past period and setting. A gameplay recording that captured my visit and exploration of Rattay as Henry was a historical tour that documented the entire settlement, including its buildings and structures as well as the mundanities of daily life of its inhabitants in their respective occupation [representational]. This tour also involved conversations with the majority of the townsfolk regarding their current circumstances during this ongoing civil war, and their views or relations as hosts with the Silver Skalitz refugees who have currently taken asylum in Rattay [representational].

On a ludic level, doing a tour of Rattay allowed me to identify a number of procedural game mechanics typical of rural and urban settlement design in Medieval RPG games.⁵⁷² To highlight a few mechanics, Rattay acted as a haven or temporary residence for my character Henry where I would rest and recuperate in a lodging I owned or at a tavern [procedural]. Another core game mechanic is Rattay’s role as a resource center for supplying my provisions, such as food and medicine, and as a place to buy new or sell either old or redundant items and trinkets with money (Bohemian groschen) via its stores, market stalls, and travelling merchants (see Figures 6.2A and 6.2B for examples) [procedural]. Stores in Rattay include a tailor workshop for (civilian) tailored clothing, weaponsmith and armoursmith stores, and an emporium [representational]. A final core game mechanic is that Rattay operated as a place for finding and accepting new quests

⁵⁷² These urban settlement game mechanics were also commonly present in most, if not all, of *KCD*’s settlements.

given by individuals with their own monetary rewards, and simultaneously as a go-to location for seeking information or answers from residents during a quest, such as the whereabouts of a certain individual [procedural].

Figure 6.3 (A – B): Rattay Stores

Images of the armoursmith and tailor workshop (Figures 6.3A – 6.3B), two of Rattay’s handful of stores that the player can visit and initiate a transaction with the storeowner.



**Figure 6.3A –
Rattay Store:
Armoursmith**

*The front view of the
armoursmith store.
Recorded in ‘KCD
Rattay Town’.⁵⁷³*



**Figure 6.3B –
Rattay Store:
Tailor Workshop**

*The back view of the
tailor workshop.
Recorded in ‘KCD
Rattay Town’.⁵⁷⁴*

⁵⁷³ Redder, ‘KCD Rattay Town’, min 49:36.

⁵⁷⁴ Redder, min 58:04.

On a historical level more importantly, exploring the entire settlement of Rattay was beneficial for accumulating a number of gameplay experiences and observations. Through extensive analysis, they were found to be sources of historical lore by containing informative snapshots of Medieval Rattay and its communal life in the ongoing civil war, and hence constitute as a particular Medieval historiography on the configuration and status of Rattay's urban environment and society during the early fifteenth century. Similar to written documentation on the Silver Skalitz siege, there is almost no information on the history of the town during the Bohemian Civil War. A handful of town records and charter documents that briefly described Rattay's status, land transactions, and changes of ownership, as well as corroboration with its surviving or once-existing Medieval structures and buildings that were around during the civil war, currently exist. Yet the only account uncovered regarding Rattay's history during the civil war was the earlier mention of Radzig's escape and temporary refuge in Rattay's castle Pirkstein as a guest lord.⁵⁷⁵

6.4.1 Medieval Rattay – Lore History:

An overarching lore history I acquired from exploring Rattay is *KCD*'s re-construction of the settlement as an imposing yet affluent Medieval burg (English – borough town) by identifying and validating the former sites and/or heritage fragments of Rattay's unique Medieval buildings when I visited the town in 2018 [representational]. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this type of settlement was characterised by being both a market and/or administrative town with one or several churches and a fortified stronghold via strong defensive walls, and in certain cases an adjoining castle(s). Gradually over time a

⁵⁷⁵ A number of these primary documents mostly date to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with one going as far back as the late thirteenth century, and were all available in the online archive database 'Manuscriptorium'. However, none of them were dated specifically to the years 1402-1403, specifically events in Rattay during the civil war between Sigismund and Wenceslas and their allies.

middle 'burgher' class was created with a distinct identity from villagers or commonfolk in rural villages and towns.⁵⁷⁶

Figure 6.4 – Game Map of Rattay Town

Part of a game map showing the entire settlement of Rattay. Recorded in 'KCD Rattay Town'.⁵⁷⁷



⁵⁷⁶ Charles W. Hollister, *Medieval Europe: A Short History*, 8th edn (Columbus, O.H: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 1997), p. 161.

⁵⁷⁷ Redder, min 0.00.

As seen with a few examples below (Figures 6.4A – 6.4F), I was able to identify and corroborate actual prominent structures and buildings that once existed or are still present as heritage sites in modern-day Rattay by cross-examining their known locations and/or fragmented ruins to their counterparts in *KCD's* Rattay. These buildings particularly historicize and validate Rattay's former Medieval status as a burg by signifying some of the structural features historically adherent or characteristic to this type of Medieval settlement. These principal structures and buildings include: the settlement's remains of the thick defensive stone walls on top of its rocky promontory and its western gate entrance; the church of St. Nicholas; and the remains of the two main castles on either side of the town known respectively as the upper Rattay castle and the lower castle or Pirkstein castle [representational].⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁸ David Nicholas, *The Later Medieval City: 1300-1500* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 75, 77. In regard to Rattay's upper castle, only the layout of the castle's courtyard and part of the stone foundation or base of its eastern gate entrance survives today.

Figures 6.4 (A – F): Medieval and Modern Rattay

A comparison between the past and present sites of some of Rattay's former or currently fragmented historical buildings and structures.

**Figure 6.4A – Western Gate Entrance
(Present)**

*Fragments of Rattay's Medieval
Western gate entrance.*



**Figure 6.4B – Western Gate Entrance
(KCD)**

*Rattay's Medieval western gate entrance re-constructed
in KCD. Recorded in 'KCD Rattay Town'.⁵⁷⁹*



⁵⁷⁹ Redder, min 4:48.



Figure 6.4C – Upper Rattay Castle, East Side (Present)

Site of the former upper Rattay castle taken from the east side.



Figure 6.4D – Upper Rattay Castle, East Side (KCD)

Upper Rattay castle and its vicinity closely re-constructed in KCD. Recorded in 'KCD Rattay Town'.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁸⁰ Redder, min 36:53.



Figure 6.4E – Upper Rattay Castle, West Side (Present)

Site of the former Rattay castle taken from the west side.



Figure 6.4F – Upper Rattay Castle, West Side (KCD)

Rattay castle and its vicinity closely reconstructed in KCD. Recorded in 'KCD Rattay Town'.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁸¹ Redder, min 37:31. The comparative photographs (Figures 6.4A, 6.4C, and 6.4E) were taken by myself during fieldwork in Rattay, with the photographs of Rattay's upper castle containing the approximate layout of the former building and its courtyard.

Even the location of the Rattay town today on a rocky promontory (except for a handful of homes surrounding its base) is exactly on the same site when it was first founded due to the site providing natural defence (via the rocky formations) [representational].⁵⁸² These natural defensive capabilities (enhanced by its former stone walls) give further credence to Rattay's former status as a fortified Medieval burg. Rattay in *KCD* does contain a Rathaus (English – town hall), tavern, a bathhouse, and shops or stores that are not based on actual or known referents. Nonetheless, these buildings are still authentic to Rattay's early origins as a market town by maintaining general historicity to the design and building methods of the economic and social buildings that may have once comprised the status of and productivity in Rattay, as well as being roughly on the same sites where the current modern buildings stand in place.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸² Bittner, p. 2.

⁵⁸³ These conventions displayed include minute differences between each of the houses and shops within Rattay such as their roofs being made out of either wooden shingles, timber planks, or thatched (sheafs of rye or reed straw), and how the majority of the houses and stores in Rattay were two storied within the city's vicinity in referencing to the gradual but growing emergence of multi-storied buildings from about the beginning of the fifteenth century.

Figures 6.4G – 6.4J: Medieval and Modern Rattay

A couple of image comparisons showing the heart of the settlement on the rocky promontory and the main town centre (Figures 6.4G – 6.4J) located on the west side of Rattay.



Figure 6.4G – Town Centre (Present)

The town centre with its layout and buildings closely standing on the site of where former Medieval buildings and homes once stood.



Figure 6.4H – Town Centre (KCD)

Rattay's town centre and buildings closely reconstructed to their state in the early fifteenth century. Recorded in 'KCD Rattay Town'.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸⁴ Redder, min 59:46.



Figure 6.4I – Rattay on Rocky Promontory (Present)

A wide shot of the town proper standing on a rocky promontory – the founding site of the town in Medieval times.



Figure 6.4J – Rattay Town on Rocky Promontory

Rattay's rocky promontory site with its former fully intact Medieval walls. Recorded in 'Bandit Camp I'.⁵⁸⁵

Due to spatial constraints, a discussion of the entire recorded tour of Medieval Rattay and all of the lore histories relating to the life and circumstances of this town during the civil war is beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, this gameplay tour of Medieval Rattay as an historiography of the settlement's history during the civil war is narrowed down to

⁵⁸⁵ Ben Redder, 'Bandit Camp I', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (6 March 2018), min 0:01. The two photographs in Figures 6.4G and 6.4I were taken during fieldwork in Rattay.

a specific gameplay sequence concerning one of Rattay's real historical buildings. Namely castle Pirkstein (lower Rattay castle), originally built sometime before the mid-fourteenth century by Henry of Leipa (Czech – Jindřich of Lipý).⁵⁸⁶ I have chosen to discuss this particular sequence of castle Pirkstein to demonstrate how gameplay interaction with historical buildings can also be considered as an important source of lore history by allowing players (including player-analysts) to traverse them as settings re-constructed to their past appearances, functions, and circumstances. To constitute and illustrate castle Pirkstein's scholarly value in the extension of Rattay's history during the Bohemian Civil War, a detailed summary of key findings obtained from my visit to and exploration of the heritage remnants of castle Pirkstein today is first given. These findings are then compared to the in-game historical data accumulated from my gameplay exploration of castle Pirkstein as a specific historiography of its late Medieval state within *KCD*.

6.4.2 Castle Pirkstein – Fieldwork:

When I visited Rattay for fieldwork, I entered the town on the western side through the fragmented Medieval gate entrance, and then shortly arrived at the remains of the castle. Standing before me was the front gate entrance in a curved arc shape and its rampart of the former castle standing about five metres tall, and most notably its tower standing about twenty-one metres in height with a front inner wall (mostly covered in ivy vines) protecting the tower like the one I saw in *KCD*'s version.⁵⁸⁷ Photographing these remaining structures of this castle was important as it corroborated some of the main external defensive features of castle Pirkstein displayed in *KCD*, as well as validating the

⁵⁸⁶ Sedláček, p. 54. In Sedláček's *Castles, Chateaux, and Fortresses of the Kingdom of Bohemia, Part 12*, both castle Pirkstein and the upper Rattay castle are first documented in 1346 when Rattay was owned by the sons of Henry of Leipa, indicating that these buildings had to have been originally built sometime in the early fourteenth century when Rattay expanded into a heavily fortified town.

⁵⁸⁷ Sedláček, p. 53.

layout of the sites' main castle gate entrance as being the only way of entering and exiting the inner castle confines. These remaining structures of the tower and the front rampart entrance alongside the town's western gate entrance were also valuable in establishing the surrounding outer walls once connected to both the entire town and, more specifically, the castle's tower and former residential building.

Figure 6.5 (A – B): Pirkstein Castle

Remains of castle Pirkstein today (Figures 6.5A – 6.5B), principally the tower with the front rampart wall (bottom left) connected to the arch gate entrance (bottom right).⁵⁸⁸

Figure 6.5A – Pirkstein Castle (I)



Figure 6.5B – Pirkstein Castle (II)



⁵⁸⁸ These photographs were taken during fieldwork in Rattay.

Despite the value of researching the physical remains of castle Pirkstein, I met several challenges in documenting the rest of the castle. The metal door of the gate's archway entrance that leads into the former castle courtyard and residential building was locked, and hence I was unable to enter it. This area of the former castle may have been a tourist site or museum with certain visiting days and opening hours. Likewise, a smaller wooden door and staircase connected to the castle's tower proper was also locked, which meant that I could not enter and explore the tower's interior spaces. In order to capture the rest of the confines, I ended up having to take photos from a certain distance by going around to the back part of the castle on opposite sides (a large segment of the walls that once covered the back of the castle is no longer intact), with one taken on a slope and the other at the base of the town. Another challenge was that the physical structure of castle Pirkstein's residential building (known as a palas) that once comprised the living and dining quarters for Rattay's lords and guests no longer exists. Instead, a presbytery home built by Octavian Kinský in the early eighteenth century occupies the exact former spot of where the palas once stood.⁵⁸⁹ These physical restrictions meant that I could only obtain a vivid yet limited picture as to what castle Pirkstein may likely have been when it was fully intact and operational in the early fifteenth century. Accessing the present state of castle Pirkstein as a heritage building with a few partial fragments can be largely attributed to a great fire in Rattay in 1447.⁵⁹⁰ This fire engulfed most of the town and severely damaged castle Pirkstein, most likely perishing its interior décor, items, and furniture.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁹ Sedláček, p. 58.

⁵⁹⁰ Sedláček, p. 55.

⁵⁹¹ Sedláček, p. 55. The occurrence of this destructive fire in Rattay is further evident by a sealed charter (no. 600) I found written on March 28th, 1463, which confirmed the scribe Matyáš of Brtnice receiving a tenure house and land properties in Rattay by Jan Čabelický of Soutic who is noted as having been present "during the Rataj fire." An online copy of this document is found in the online Czech archive database 'Manuscriptorium'.

Figure 6.5 (C – E): Pirkstein Castle Part 2

Several shots of the site where Pirkstein's palas and its attached rear outer walls once stood.⁵⁹²

Figures 6.5C and 6.5D show the backside of these former structures taken on different sides.

Figure 6.5C – Pirkstein Castle (III)



Figure 6.5D – Pirkstein Castle (IV)



Figure 6.5E – Pirkstein Castle (V)

A distant shot of the backside of the site of the former palas and the outer walls shown as it was on part of the town's rocky promontory.

⁵⁹² These photos were taken during fieldwork in Rattay.

6.4.3 Castle Pirkstein in KCD:

Nearing the end of the tour, as Henry I headed back to castle Pirkstein near the town's western gate entrance to explore the entire complex. Looking directly in the distance was the recognisable castle tower attached to its front inner walls and the castle gate with the front rampart [representational]. These structures were all built from a combination of stone and mortar with supporting timber structures, similar to the ones I saw in my fieldwork of castle Pirkstein [representational]. When I entered the inner courtyard through the castle gate, I initially recorded up close from several angles more of the castle's exterior features, all built with the same combination of stone and mortar with supplementary timber structures. Some of the characteristic features of this castle include: the castle's palas consisting of three floors; the base and upper components of the castle tower accessible by reaching a series of stairs connected to the middle and upper levels of the palas; and extra outer ramparts (some attached with hoarding) adjacent to both the castle tower and the palas [representational]. In addition, the immediate base of the castle's courtyard was comprised of several common lodging rooms as living quarters for Henry and a number of servants and staff that attended to the management of the castle and its guests (Sir Radzig and Sir Hans Capon), as well as a small stable for the horses [representational].

Figure 6.6 (A – C): Pirkstein Castle Part 3

Figure 6.6A – KCD's Pirkstein Castle



The front entrance and tower of castle Pirkstein.

Recorded in 'KCD Rattay Town'.⁵⁹³

Figure 6.6B – KCD's Pirkstein Castle (II)



The inner courtyard and palas (exterior) of Pirkstein castle. Recorded in 'Rattay Town'.⁵⁹⁴

Figure 6.6C – KCD's Pirkstein Castle (III)



View of the inner courtyard and front entrance from the balcony of the palas. Recorded in 'KCD Rattay Town'.⁵⁹⁵

Thinking that the interior of the castle's palas would generally be minimalistic in appearance as the castle's exterior components, I decided to confirm this guess by going inside the palas. To my surprise however, the interiors presented not a barren militaristic atmosphere with its rooms and corridors filled only with stone walls and timber floors, but rather a commodious and ornately elaborate dwelling for permanent or guest lords and staff that once inhabited these spaces. On the third and upper floor of the palas, for

⁵⁹³ Redder, 'KCD Rattay Town', min 1:01:02.

⁵⁹⁴ Redder, min 1:01:45.

⁵⁹⁵ Redder, min 1:10:57.

instance, I found several rooms down its small corridor containing separate and private yet lavish and comfortable bedrooms [representational]. Another room contained a small yet aesthetically decorated castle chapel where the lord would pray in privacy to an altar (Figure 6.6D) [representational]. There was also an adorned and spacious dining room at the end of the corridor with large shutter windows and a fireplace, which was where Radzig would likely invite and dine with his ally and host Lord Hanush as well as his accompanying retinue (Figure 6.6E) [representational]. What attracted me most to this floor of the palas was seeing all manner of simple and elaborate decorative artwork covering the rooms and corridors. Namely, a variety of wall and mural paintings and tapestries, such as the one found in Hans' living quarters depicting a festive scene of a noblemen party hunting stags [representational]. Additionally, this floor of the palas housed high-quality furniture (e.g. canopy beds, well-crafted dining tables and chairs), ornate household objects (e.g. silver dishes and goblets, a candelabra on the dining table), and finally on the dining table rich dishes of food such as a roast pig (Figure 6.6E) [representational].

Figure 6.6 (D – F): Pirkstein Castle Part 4

Some major examples of comparative historical interpretations of castle Pirkstein's interiors within the palas.

Figure 6.6D – KCD's Pirkstein Castle (IV)

Castle Pirkstein's chapel room. Recorded in 'KCD Rattay Town'.⁵⁹⁶



⁵⁹⁶ Redder, min 1:03:00.

Figure 6.6E – KCD’s Pirkstein Castle (V)

*Castle Pirkstein’s dining room. Recorded in ‘KCD Rattay Town’.*⁵⁹⁷



⁵⁹⁷ Redder, min 1:05:41.

Figure 6.6F – KCD's Pirkstein Castle (VI)

One of castle Pirkstein's wall paintings depicting a part of the nobility hunting scene. Recorded in 'KCD Rattay Town'.⁵⁹⁸



Touring the vicinity of castle Pirkstein in a gameplay medium is one of a number of locations within Rattay to offer a lore history-based Medieval historiography on the contextual state and function or role of actual historical buildings in the Rattay-Sasau region during the Bohemian Civil War [representational]. Castle Pirkstein constitutes this lore history in two ways. Firstly, using gameplay for historical immersion of the building allowed me to explore or traverse the place as a closely accurate architectural reconstruction of the fully intact original, a snapshot in time to its Medieval past. Second,

⁵⁹⁸ Redder, min 1:08:04.

exploring the building allowed me to inhabit its physical and social spaces situated in its late Medieval context which were unattainable or absent when I examined the same building in its current heritage state during fieldwork. In other words, the castle Pirkstein that I as Henry observed and interacted with was not the one that I experienced as a present-day heritage site visitor because its functions and boundaries relate to its current state as a fragmented relic from a bygone Medieval past. Although there was no gamific outcome or benefit from exploring the vicinity of the castle, it elicited scholarly historical lore not only in terms of its visual appearance [representational]. More importantly, how its appearance, and the types of inhabitants within the castle, conveyed historical indications to the castle's multiple roles in Rattay society during the Fraternal Civil War [representational].

One source of extensive historical lore on castle Pirkstein uncovered is the distinctly detailed castle structures found from touring Pirkstein that denote its continuing operation as a military fortification belonging to the bergfried class [representational]. As evident by the notable structures described earlier within the recorded gameplay sequence regarding the outside of castle Pirkstein (see also Figures 6.6A – 6.6C), this class was a type of castle popular in development from the late twelfth century until the end of the fourteenth century, and is recognisable by its dominating tall fighting-tower (bergfried). Usually built in a square or round formation, the bergfried tower combined with strong walls and the main palas was an effective defensive measure, such as sheltering ranged units when firing at the enemy soldiers and as a last refuge for the remaining soldiers.⁵⁹⁹ Tight spaces also provided an advantage for its occupiers against incoming enemy soldiers who only had one access point to enter the tower.⁶⁰⁰ Eventually,

⁵⁹⁹ M.W. Thompson, *The Rise of the Castle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 22-23.

⁶⁰⁰ Thompson, p. 23.

the bergfried tower would later become a status symbol for the lord's domain and overtake its original military function when castles gradually lost their effectiveness due, in part, to the advent of siege and gunpowder technology.⁶⁰¹

While the surviving remnants of castle Pirkstein today provide some of the main structures illustrative of this castle type, *KCD*'s re-construction gives us a more visually completed account of the practicalities of the castle's exterior features being designed in accordance with the bergfried style. For instance, in reference to my earlier gameplay discussion on exploring the exterior military components of castle Pirkstein (Figures 6.6A and 6.6C), I saw that Pirkstein's bergfried tower was placed not only against the wall attached to the gate rampart but also to one of the outer curtain walls surrounding the palas [representational]. The advantage of this approach was to protect both the tower and palas' vulnerable sides (rather than placing the tower at the centre).⁶⁰² Another notable observation (as seen in Figure 6.6A) is that accessibility to the castle's front gate can only be reached by a large wooden bridge on top of a dried-up moat that leads directly to the inner grounds of castle Pirkstein itself [representational].

Seeing up-close the re-construction of castle Pirkstein's military structures adherent to the bergfried class, I noted the contrast to the interior décor in the castle's palas, such as the artistic decorations, furniture, and objects found in the upper floor (see Figures 6.6D – 6.6F earlier for examples) [representational]. These features are fictional as they are not based on any actual surviving referents that formerly existed in Pirkstein's residential building. However, they are still vitally important as scholarly visual interpretations by

⁶⁰¹ Thompson, p. 23.

⁶⁰² Armin Tuulse, *Castles of the Western World*, 2nd edn (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 2002), p. 38.

showing how castle Pirkstein's palas may likely have looked as a lively and prestigious home for its various lords since its inception until the fire in 1447 [representational]. Observing the palas' evocation of social comforts and beautiful Medieval artwork bears credence to the probability that *KCD*'s visual and spatial interpretations of Pirkstein's interior design and atmosphere is closely accurate to the original intended construction of this building. Namely, its construction is likely symbolic of the early stage of transition in castle-building, where many Medieval castles during the Late Middle Ages transitioned from being solely military structures to centres of comfortability, luxury, reputation, and political power.⁶⁰³ As elaborated by historian Marilyn Stokstad:

In the later years of the fourteenth century the desire for spacious, comfortable living arrangements surpassed the need for defensive outer walls ... Aristocrats and royals spent enormous sums on tapestries, the woven wall hangings that turned the bare walls and drafty rooms into rich and colorful displays.⁶⁰⁴

Exploring the military and social confines of castle Pirkstein, I noticed it was not solely composed of the building's visual and spatial components. It also elicited historical interpretations on the types of inhabitants who once filled castle Pirkstein with bustling life and activity during its current circumstances within the Bohemian Civil War. To highlight a few, when exploring the castle's military features, I noticed how its areas, such as the ramparts, tower, and the front staircase leading to the middle and upper floors of the palas, were not empty spots but inhabited by the surviving soldiers of Radzig Kobyla [representational]. This presence indicates some of the other non-Rattay residents beside

⁶⁰³ Marilyn Stokstad, *Medieval Castles* (Westport, C.T: Greenwood Press, 2005), pp. 63, 68-69; Hollister, p. 176.

⁶⁰⁴ Stokstad, p. 69.

Radzig who would likely have taken up post to garrison and protect one of Rattay's castles. Another event is depicted in a cinematic cutscene when Henry reunites with Radzig and is introduced to a number of prominent figures during a private feast, including Rattay's governor Hanush alongside his heir and distant cousin Hans Capon [representational]. Here we see how Pirkstein's dining room becomes an active facility to host and dine its fellow noblemen in all its pageantry and dining cuisine, an occasion perhaps for welcoming Radzig as their newfound guest after his escape from Sigismund's forces (Figure 6.6G).

Figure 6.6G – Dining Room Feast

A cinematic cutscene where Henry meets Radzig again while being introduced to Radzig's other guests, including Lord Hanush and Sir Hans Capon. Recorded in 'Meeting with Radzig'.⁶⁰⁵



⁶⁰⁵ Ben Redder, 'Meeting with Radzig', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (7 March 2018), min 24:27.

Finally, those occupying the living areas of castle Pirkstein exhibits its own source of historical discourse on the preferential treatment given to the inhabitants of the castle based on their role or rank within the Medieval social hierarchy. In castle Pirkstein proper, my earlier gameplay description of the upper floor and its exquisite décor indicates the area reserved for noblemen like Radzig and Rattay's heir Hans Capon (Figure 6.6H). The middle floor contains living quarters for the cook and his assistants who run the palas' kitchen as well as Radzig's master engineer Tobias Feyfar due to being a member of the upper burgher class [representational]. In stark contrast, the townsfolk survivors of Silver Skalitz who accompanied Radzig to Rattay are given no lodging, and instead have taken residence in the castle by living in crude makeshift shelters either near the castle's bridge or at the bottom of its moat (see Figure 6.6I) [representational]. The poor living conditions in which these refugees are living under emblematises their status as destitute vagabonds and outsiders, as most of the resources and lodgings are given to the political refugee Radzig (despite being a lower nobleman) and his closest attendants.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰⁶ The refugee crisis was mentioned intermittently as a major lore history in Sections 6.3.1, and 6.3.1.1.

Figure 6.6H – Pirkstein Castle’s Nobleman Living Quarters

Images showing the relative affluence of Hans Capon’s (and also later Henry’s) living quarters and bedding compared to the squalor living conditions for the majority of the refugees from Silver Skalitz (Figures 6.6H – 6.6I). Figure 6.6H depicts a comfortable and affluent bedroom used by Hans and later Henry as well. Recorded in ‘KCD Rattay Town’.⁶⁰⁷



⁶⁰⁷ Redder, ‘KCD Rattay Town’, min 1:07:49.

Figure 6.6I – Living Quarters for Silver Skalitz Refugees Outside Pirkstein Castle

A snapshot of the crude makeshift shelters occupied by the Silver Skalitz refugees that laid out in castle Pirkstein's dried-up moat under its bridge. Recorded in 'KCD Rattay Town'.⁶⁰⁸



These main sources of historical lore on castle Pirkstein uncovered from historical modality analysis together represent a gameplay historiography of castle Pirkstein's Medieval history. It can be discerned that the castle continued to be a multi-functional complex prior to and during the midst of the Bohemian Civil War. Specifically, it functioned as a military stronghold, an administrative centre for occasional meetings, and a socio-political symbol of the wealth and prestige of its current ruling lord (Hanush) and more broadly the entire settlement and its burgher community. The fact that we know

⁶⁰⁸ Redder, min 4:59.

that Radzig once occupied the castle as its temporary tenant after his escape from Silver Skalitz historically implies that castle Pirkstein needed to have been at least socially befitting for such a lord to inhabit [representational]. Meanwhile, the castle would still have maintained an active role in protecting its residents and soldiers against potential besieging armies who could try to take the settlement [representational]. However, being connected physically and symbolically to the rest of the Rattay settlement, Pirkstein was not exempted from experiencing the devastating effects of the Silver Skalitz siege as its confines were shared between the nobility, the castle's servants and soldiers, and poignantly the destitute refugees.

6.5 Late Medieval Combat:

Representation of late Medieval combat is the final gameplay source of lore history within *KCD* for discussion. Historical lore uncovered from my recorded gameplay sequences of late Medieval combat did not identify and disseminate actual past combative engagements during the Bohemian Civil War and the complete typology of soldiers involved. However, *KCD's* historical period and setting still played a necessary role by contextualising and eliciting multimodal contributions via the numerous combative performances I had as Henry to a handful of Medieval military developments and activities or trends comprising the vast body of historiography of Medieval warfare and combat within Central Europe.

One of these military trends and developments in the game is types and usages of arms and armour likely existent in late Medieval Central and East Europe. Chapter 5 discussed how Warhorse Studios incorporated a variety of weapons and armour closely accurate on a visual level to the military fashion in late Medieval Bohemia, including the time

when the civil war between Wenceslas and Sigismund occurred.⁶⁰⁹ This same chapter also extended the representation of Medieval arms and armour to their practical strengths and weaknesses against other weapons or armour. Another important trend integrated is the use of real environments within the Rattay-Sasau region as locations for conducting fictional yet authentic re-constructions of Medieval combative duels and battles. Discussion about late Medieval combat within *KCD* is focused mostly on gameplay sequences, and their particular contributions to Medieval warfare historiography, that communicate a lore history pertaining to one of the few types of combat known as the Medieval 'art of individualized fighting' (German – Kunst des Fechtens). Medieval individualized fighting is close-quarter melee combat through individual competence in engagements such as one-on-one duels, tournaments, small group fights, and battles.⁶¹⁰ The history of Medieval individualized combat and the revival of Medieval martial arts today is largely founded on, concerns with, and has survived in the Medieval fight books (German – Fechtbuch).

As discussed in Chapter 5, *KCD*'s intricate combat system was developed not only by Warhorse Studios' collaboration with Medieval expert fencers such as Petr Nůsek and Robert Waschka, but also their assistance in examining old Medieval fight books.⁶¹¹ The majority of the known fight books depict the art of fighting in the German tradition as was taught principally in the Holy Roman Empire, a number of which bear more-or-less close lineage to one of the only known identified schools of Medieval fighting founded

⁶⁰⁹ Redder, p. 234.

⁶¹⁰ Karin Verelst, Timonhy Dawson and Daniel Jaquet, 'Introduction', in *Late Medieval and Early Modern Fight Books: Transmission and Tradition of Martial Arts in Europe (14th-17th Centuries)*, ed. by Daniel Jaquet, Karin Verelst & Timonhy Dawson (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 7-27, pp. 9, 10.

⁶¹¹ Please see Chapter 5 (pp. 232 – 241) on the research and design of *KCD*'s combat system. Some of these fight books were listed in the previous chapter but are referenced again here in this chapter.

by grandmaster Johannes Liechtenauer sometime in the late fourteenth century.⁶¹² Yet a handful of other surviving individual fight books and manuscripts belonging to unnamed local martial art traditions also exist, each with their own distinctive philosophies and techniques not dependent on the Liechtenauer tradition.⁶¹³ Fight books are composed in one of two formats. Most are presented as a collection of old treatises and manuscripts usually produced by several different (and at times anonymous) master fencers alongside visual artists but were later compiled together as a codex.⁶¹⁴ Occasionally, they can also be an extensive standalone manual or printed book attributed to the author himself. Finally, content within a fight book could be dedicated to a single discipline but usually encompass multiple disciplines, including swords and daggers, polearms and spears, wrestling, and mounted combat.⁶¹⁵

The longstanding significance these primary sources have for recovering and reconstructing the history of Medieval European fighting is their extensive visual data. Namely, a series of detailed hand-drawn sketches of combatants (with or without armour) performing a variety of intricate and distinct techniques or moves in a range of melee weapons (see Figures 6.7A – 6.7C below for examples). These numerous sketches were generally (but not always) accompanied with written commentaries. Information within these commentaries include the name of the techniques with brief yet vague

⁶¹² Rachel E. Kelleet, "...Vnnd schüß im vnder dem schwert den ort land ein zû der brust" - The Placement and Consequences of Sword-blows in Sigmund Ringeck's Fifteenth-Century Fencing Manual', in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, ed. by Larissa Tracey & Kelly Devries (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 128-152, p. 128. There are a few fragmentary manuscripts based on a system of Medieval combat in England, but those pertaining to the German school of fighting, such as Liechtenauer's system, remain the largest and most intact repository of surviving fight books. Therefore, discussions on and use of the term 'fight book' refers to the German tradition.

⁶¹³ Some of these unidentified German fighting traditions include codices containing collated manuscripts belonging to one or several anonymous schools titled collectively as the 'Nuremberg group' such as *Codex Wallerstein*, and visual depictions of unique styles of Medieval fighting in the *Gladiatoria* manuscript belonging to an unknown German school.

⁶¹⁴ Verelst, Dawson and Jaquet, 'Introduction', pp. 7-9.

⁶¹⁵ Christian H. Tobler, *In Saint George's Name: An Anthology of Medieval German Fighting Arts* (Wheaton, IL: Freelance Academy Press, 2010), pp. 6-7.

statements as to how they were to be executed, and a series of tenets and instructions which combatants were to follow in both practice and in real-life combat.⁶¹⁶ One given here from the Von Danzig fight book provides an instruction as to what primary weapons of the knightly class a combatant initiate must learn to master “Be a good grappler in wrestling; lance, spear, sword, and messer handle manfully, and foil them in your opponent’s hands.”⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁶ These tenets were written originally in cryptic poetic verses, largely an effort to prevent non-combatants or rival fencers from acquiring grandmaster Liechtenauer’s combative secrets. However, a number of later manuscripts and treatises by disciples or contemporaries of the Liechtenauer school did not follow this secrecy, and instead translated them into direct literal statements.

⁶¹⁷ Tobler, p. 19. The latter half of Tobler’s book contains a translation of the entire Von Danzig fight book.

Figure 6.7A – Codex Wallerstein (Cod.I.6.4°.2)

Folio 81r in the German Codex Wallerstein (Compiled by Paulus Hector Mair) depicting the Mordhau Stroke technique (English – Murder-stroke) directed at the head of the opponent laying on the ground by using the pommel of the longsword as a blunt weapon in the manner of a hammer.⁶¹⁸



⁶¹⁸ Codex Wallerstein, 'Codex Wallerstein (Cod.I.6.4°.2), Folio - 81r (ca. 1420s/1470s)', *Wikitenauer* <[https://wikitenauer.com/wiki/Codex_Wallerstein_\(Cod.I.6.4%C2%BA.2\)](https://wikitenauer.com/wiki/Codex_Wallerstein_(Cod.I.6.4%C2%BA.2))> [accessed 8 July 2021].

Figure 6.7B – Talhoffer Fechtbuch von 1467 (Cod.icon. 394a)

Folio 43r in the German Talhoffer fencing manual of 1467 (author Hans Talhoffer) depicting a move with polearm weapons where the opponent on the right sets aside the opponent's strike and then wrenches his opponent behind his knee.⁶¹⁹



⁶¹⁹ Hans Talhoffer, 'Talhoffer Fechtbuch (Cod.icon. 394a), Folio - 43r (1467)', Wikitenauer <[https://www.wikitenauer.com/wiki/Talhoffer_Fechtbuch_\(Cod.icon._394a\)](https://www.wikitenauer.com/wiki/Talhoffer_Fechtbuch_(Cod.icon._394a))> [accessed 8 July 2021].

Figure 6.7C – Gladitoria (MS KK5013)

Folio 28r in the German Gladitoria manuscript (author unknown) containing a depiction of the half-swording technique with a longsword against an opponent wearing full plate-armour.⁶²⁰



The diverse array of surviving Medieval German fight books is a significant foundation and impetus for understanding how past combatants in Medieval Central Europe developed, performed, and taught their combat. The written and pictorial content displayed from these texts dismantles a popular yet crude view from public audiences' consumption of films and video games that Medieval European combat was "unmethodical and merely based on strength."⁶²¹ Principally in modern representations

⁶²⁰ Gladitoria, 'MSKK5013 Gladitoria, Folio - 28r (1430-1439)', *Manuscript Miniatures* <<http://manuscriptminiatures.com>> [accessed 31 August 2020].

⁶²¹ Kellet, p. 148.

of Medieval combat in films and television series (e.g. *Braveheart*, *Vikings*) and Medieval video games (e.g. *For Honor*) showing stylish yet highly inaccurate displays of fighting, such as “indiscriminate hacking and slashing” and “edge-on-edge parrying.”⁶²² The study of Medieval individualized fighting by academic scholars and HEMA practitioners’ access to and interpretation of these sources then foregrounds *KCD*’s approach for serious and authentic late Medieval combat as a recent and digital addition to this longstanding engagement.⁶²³ However, the experiences I had in both learning and applying the art of fighting for injuring and killing various enemy soldiers through gameplay provides an alternative yet in-depth way of re-enacting how the “human body performed in close combat ... [including] its capacity to continue fighting while injured.”⁶²⁴ Rather than merely imitating fight books, identifying and examining Henry’s combative performances uncovered experiential historical lore that expanded the study of and addressed prominent limitations on Medieval German fighting presented in the fight books.

To demonstrate *KCD* containing sources of lore history on the particularities and practicalities of individualized fighting, a series of key moments or situations are chosen from several gameplay sequences as examples. Half of them are organised together as a summary of the one-on-one training sessions I had with captain Bernard in Rattay (6.5.1 and 6.5.1.1). The second half are taken from moments during actual combative

⁶²² Grzegorz Żabiński and Bartłomiej Walczak, *Codex Wallerstein: A Medieval Fighting Book from the Fifteenth Century on the Longsword, Falchion, Dagger, and Wrestling* (Boulder, C.O: Paladin Press, 2002), p. x; Kellet, p. 148.

⁶²³ As highlighted in Chapter 5’s discussion of *KCD*’s combat system, the re-construction of combat experiences mostly pertains to archery and close-quarter melee combat on foot. This chapter also highlighted mounted combat as another combative feature incorporated into the game. However, I seldom engaged in mounted combat due to the technical constraints for the team at Warhorse Studios to detail and capture the entire human fluidity and movements of fighting on horseback. Thus, I could only perform a few basic attack moves.

⁶²⁴ John Clements, 'Problems of Interpretation and Application in Fight Book Studies', in *Late Medieval and Early Modern Fight Books: Transmission and Tradition of Martial Arts in Europe (14th-17th Centuries)*, ed. by Daniel Jaquet, Karin Verelst & Timonhony Dawson (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 189-215, p. 193.

engagements involving physical violence and death which are supplementary to the combative lore I uncovered in the training sessions (6.5.1.1).

6.5.1 Individualized Fighting – Lore History:

In *KCD*, a series of gameplay sequences were recorded at different points throughout the game that captured the combat tutorial and sparring sessions I had with Bernard in a training square just outside Rattay. The first series of training sessions started in a recorded gameplay sequence taking place in the quest ‘Train Hard, Fight Easy’. As Henry, after briefly reuniting with Radzig and being introduced to Lord Hanush and other noblemen, I was sent to the training ground as a newly made squire in Radzig’s service. There I received my first lessons on basic training under captain Bernard in both the sword and bow (the latter occurring at the town’s archery range), but this session would be the first of many. For illustration, the gameplay sequences that I recorded from these sessions are summarised into key moments that demonstrate my introductions to and mastery of the lessons and techniques of Medieval German fighting. On several instances however, a description of particular combat moments from several life-and-death duels in other gameplay sequences will also be used as supplementary comparisons to my analytical discussion on the combative lore elicited from the training sessions.

6.5.1.1 Training with Bernard:

Under Bernard’s tutelage, as Henry and Radzig’s new squire I learned and practiced through instruction, imitation, and sparring (with supporting textual information) the basic yet fundamental lessons on how to fight via the game’s main combat interface, which is represented by a star-shaped symbol (this interface is explained later on pp. 341

– 343) [procedural]. As a knight in later sessions, I then learned and practiced via the same interface how to implement effectively advanced techniques that I unlocked through sparring and actual engagements in real combat. In my very first session, I familiarised and practiced the four core guards. These guards are the basic defensive positions or stances in wielding one’s weapon and for directing the launching of attacks via striking, thrusting or stabbing, and cutting as well as blocking at different angles.

Figure 6.8 (A – D): The Four Stances

The four major stances or positions of Medieval combat for directing attacks and/or parries.

Figure 6.8A

Recorded in ‘Meeting with Radzig’.⁶²⁵



Figure 6.8B

Recorded in ‘Meeting with Radzig’.⁶²⁶



⁶²⁵ Redder, ‘Meeting with Radzig’, min 37:59.

⁶²⁶ Redder, min 39:13.

Figure 6.8C

Recorded in 'Meeting with Radzig'.⁶²⁷



Figure 6.8D

Recorded in 'Meeting with Radzig'.⁶²⁸



As shown by Bernard in Figures 6.8A – 6.8D, these positions are the four main stances of holding the weapon in preparation for an attack or block [representational].⁶²⁹ The first two images show the holding of the weapon between the waist and upper body (6.8A) and at head level in a pointed direction (6.8B), while the last two images show the weapon being raised above the head (6.8C) and lowered under the waist (6.8D). To discuss one in further detail, the guard for raising the weapon (Figure 6.8C) is enacted by placing the weapon above the shoulder and head, visually signifying a stance used for attacking an

⁶²⁷ Redder, min 41:08.

⁶²⁸ Redder, min 37:14.

⁶²⁹ Technically there are six stances to direct and block attacks, but two of the guards (Figures 6.8A and 6.8D) can be used on either side of the combatant's head or waist.

opponent with a heavy blow by swinging the weapon in a downward vertical direction when the opponent charges forward [representational]. Learning these guards and their different types of attack and block moves as Henry also required practice in chaining them into a combo sequence. This is where I consecutively executed attacks and/or counterattacks after blocking at different directions, with each new attack being landed as soon as the previous one ended, in order to catch the opponent(s) off guard and to find and hit an open or vulnerable area of their body [procedural/representational].

Another significant moment was learning to use several advanced combative techniques from Bernard such as the 'Master Strike'. This technique was extremely difficult to perform. Rather than performing a perfect block, another advanced fencing move that directly blocks or parries the opponent's weapon in order to make a quick counterattack (riposte), I would have to counter Bernard's move just when he drew his shoulder back in preparation for a swing or strike with his longsword [procedural/representational]. Learning this technique was an arduous process of trial and error because I had to procedurally master the right timing, speed, and precision within a second by closely watching the movement of Bernard's shoulders [procedural]. When successfully performed, it initiated an animation adherent to a particular 'Master Strike' move. An unavoidable riposte, the master strike can be executed either with a quick sharp thrust to the opponent's stomach by turning the sword into a makeshift spear or by hitting the opponent multiple times in the face or head with the sword's pommel [representational].

Since wooden or occasionally real swords were used for most of the training sessions, my skill in using this class of weapon had increased exponentially. Mastering the art of swordplay through sparring was a major incentive for unlocking and trialing new

techniques specialised to sword fighting for both armoured and unarmoured combat.⁶³⁰ Unlocking and practicing these sword techniques through simulated sparring constitutes the final and the most engaging moments on these combat training sessions for discussion. Some of the notable sword techniques that I learnt and used frequently were 'False Edge', 'Fehler: Scarmaker', 'Zornort (Wrath Strike)', 'Durchlaufen: Run Through', and 'Half-swording' [procedural/representational].⁶³¹ To elaborate a couple of them as examples, the fehler: scarmaker technique (more commonly known in German fencing as 'Zwerchau') for longswords is described in *KCD*'s sword techniques list within the combat skills menu:

By means of rapid attacks, put the opponent on the defensive, then feint a stab, but instead of carrying it through, execute a Mittlehau around the opponent's blade straight to the face.

As seen during a sparring session with Bernard (Figures 6.8E – 6.8F), when real swords were used on one occasion for practice, the advantage of this technique was that I could easily put Bernard on the defensive by quickly making a few feint strikes. This would follow with an immediate deflection to Bernard's sword in order to deal a final horizontal cut across his face [procedural/representational].

⁶³⁰ In the latter half of the game, I also trained with other types of weapons, namely maces and axes, which are other main options offered for sparring, and as with swords can be practiced with or without shields. Techniques for the mace and axe can be attained from frequent use but are fewer in number than those pertaining to swords.

⁶³¹ In *KCD*'s combat skills menu, the word zornort is spelt as two words 'zorn ort' but this may be a slight spelling error as most secondary written sources write it as one word. I have kept the proper format in order to avoid confusion.

Figure 6.8 (E – F): Fehler Scarmaker

Figure 6.8E – Fehler: Scarmaker



Performing a final feint strike to deflect Bernard's sword to the left before turning the blade into a horizontal cut. Recorded in 'Combat Practice VI'.⁶³²

Figure 6.8F – Fehler: Scarmaker (II)



Performing the signature fehler: scarmaker technique across Bernard's face. Recorded in 'Comat Practice VI'.⁶³³

⁶³² Ben Redder, 'Combat Practice VI', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (16 April 2018), min 3:38.

⁶³³ Redder, min 3:42.

The zornort (wrath strike) is another distinct technique characterised by dealing a powerful thrust to the chest with the front tip of the longsword, a move fatal even when wearing heavier armour if the longsword was of good quality [representational]. This technique is described in the sword technique list:

With a rapid Zornhau from the Ox stance, parry the opponent's strike to the side from your left shoulder and thrust the point straight to his chest.

As displayed in a particular moment with Bernard (see Figures 6.8G – 6.8K), after I dealt a series of feint strikes directed above Bernard diagonally (this type of strike is called the zornhau), the final strike from the longsword pushed his blade to the left side while simulated a thrust into his upper chest with the front tip [procedural/representational]. This thrust represents the signature 'zornort' attack.

Figure 6.8 (G – K): Zornort – Wrath Strike

Figure 6.8G – Wrath Strike



*Performing the first
feint strike blocked
by Bernard.*

*Recorded in 'Combat
Sparring VI'.⁶³⁴*

Figure 6.8H – Wrath Strike (II)



*Performing a
second feint strike.*

*Recorded in
'Combat Sparring
VI'.⁶³⁵*

⁶³⁴ Redder, min 2:42.

⁶³⁵ Redder, min 2:43.

Figure 6.8I – Wrath Strike (III)



*A third feint strike
with the backhand.
Recorded in 'Combat
Sparring VI'.⁶³⁶*

Figure 6.8J – Wrath Strike (IV)



*The feint strike
deflects his sword to
the left as an opening
for the wrath strike.
Recorded in 'Combat
Sparring VI'.⁶³⁷*

Figure 6.8K – Wrath Strike (V)



*Performing the
zornort technique.
Recorded in 'Combat
Sparring VI'.⁶³⁸*

⁶³⁶ Redder, min 2:44.

From a ludic angle, the instructional and sparring sessions with Bernard were an effective procedural platform for orientation and mastery of *KCD*'s combat system for the first time. As *KCD* is played in a first-person perspective, the process of learning and utilising the different facets and conventions of the combat system was enabled by several prominent procedural or ludic mechanics. These game mechanics were designed to encourage and instill (but not force) the player to approach combat in a more strategic manner rather than solely relying on brute strength [procedural]. To discuss one as an example, a subtle yet integral game mechanic is the presence of a star-shape symbol with a dot that appears in the centre of the screen whenever I enter a fight [procedural]. This star-symbol combat interface is a convention akin to Adam Chapman's conceptual simulation style due to being a ludic referent of and a substitution for a Medieval combatant's sensory perceptions and bodily actions in the real world [procedural/representational]. Therefore, the placement of this conceptual element represents possible actions, moves, and rules of conduct a player can initiate during combat in accordance with those likely performed by actual Medieval soldiers within Central Europe.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁷ Redder, min 2:45.

⁶³⁸ Redder, min 2:46.

⁶³⁹ Some of the many other supporting game mechanics within *KCD*'s combat system include controlling or recovering Henry's level of stamina (identified onscreen by a yellow bar on the bottom of the player's screen) from physical exertion during combat in order to avoid temporal fatigue, and the occasional yet real-life risk of unintentionally hitting and injuring or killing a friendly allied soldier within the chaos of a battle or skirmish engagement due to varying factors. These kind of supporting mechanics further solidified and nuanced the authenticity of my Medieval combat experiences by closely simulating or replicating actual combative conditions when fighting in duels and battles.

Figure 6.8L – Star Symbol Interface

This image displays the star-symbol interface when Henry is locked into combat with an opponent. Recorded in 'Combat Training I'.⁶⁴⁰



As seen in a particular sparring moment with Bernard (Figure 6.8L), this star symbol acts as a visual aid for the player while simulating the complexity of human motion and natural spontaneity of fighting either with melee weapons or unarmed. Each of the star's corners represents the different guard stances when holding the weapon and subsequently the different angles for striking or cutting attacks and blocks, while the presence of the dot inside the star signifies the thrusting attack [procedural/representational]. Changing between stances for directing different attacks and blocks is indicated when the colour of the corner or dot of the star symbol turns from gold yellow into red [procedural]. Performing a sequence of these stances and attacks by repeating the same and/or changing between the different areas of the star symbol results

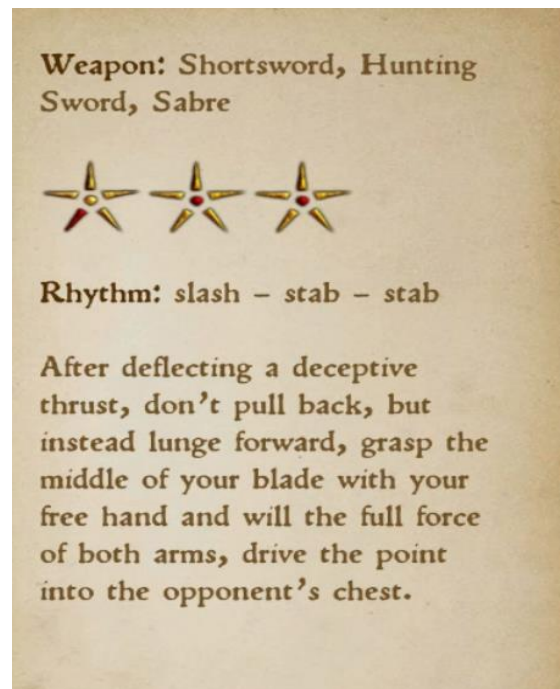
⁶⁴⁰ Ben Redder, 'Combat Training I', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (7 March 2018), min 2:56.

in a chain of attacks and/or blocks [procedural]. These chain of attacks include those that imitate the steps for performing both advanced combative techniques (e.g. master strike) and specialised weapon techniques (e.g. zornort: wrath strike, half-swording).

Figure 6.8M – Ludic Instructions for ‘Half-Swording’

This is a written template outlining how to sequence a chain of attacks that deal the half-swording technique, with visual directions shown via the ludic star symbol interface diagram.

Recorded in ‘Combat Techniques List’.⁶⁴¹



Discussion on the procedural familiarisation of the combat system by choosing to extensively train and spar with Bernard demonstrates the presence and practicality of Chapman's ecological framework of exploratory historical challenges discussed in Section 2.4.1. Under this framework, players re-enact through exploratory agency certain

⁶⁴¹ Ben Redder, 'Combat Techniques List', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (20 April 2018), min 1:00.

perceivable actions approximate to those performed by individuals in past historical periods and settings [procedural].⁶⁴² In *KCD*'s case, exploring perceivable actions of Medieval German combat is afforded through interaction with and inputting a sequence of actions derived from the combat system [procedural]. Effectively, the combat system allowed me in the persona of Henry to be perceptually trained as a battle-ready Medieval combatant by "learning to differentiate some similar (mainly visual) information to that which the historical agent had to learn to differentiate."⁶⁴³

However, the multiple sessions with Bernard were not merely a means of exploring and applying a ludic series of "tangible skill, action and challenge" by interacting with and mastering the procedural elements of *KCD*'s combat system.⁶⁴⁴ These training and sparring sessions with Bernard are situated as digital-ludic re-enactments historicized to a particular combative activity known in the German art of fighting as "schimpfe" (English – mock fighting) [representational]. A consensus amongst Medieval scholars is that mock fights were often used as training modules either for sparring, tournaments or competitions such as jousting, or more importantly as a pre-requisite means for doing "fighting in *ernste* ... [or] serious fighting ... for matters of life or death", such as judicial duels and military battles.⁶⁴⁵ From this description, training with Bernard through sparring was an animative manifestation of the latter usage. Specifically, the intended purpose of using mock fights as simulations designed to help combatants develop an awareness of and approach combat "not in a purely mechanical way ... [but rather] from the perspective of their violent motionality for either causing or preventing immediate

⁶⁴² Chapman, p. 183.

⁶⁴³ Chapman, p. 186.

⁶⁴⁴ Chapman, p. 184.

⁶⁴⁵ Clements, p. 190;

Verelst, Dawson and Jaquet, 'Introduction', pp. 10-11.

harm.”⁶⁴⁶ Therefore, the aforementioned combat lesson sequences described earlier (pp. 332 – 340) comprise as some of the first and earliest sources of lore history on the particularities of Medieval individualized fighting. Chiefly, by being experiential combative re-enactments of, and subsequently eliciting historical lore on, the stances, attack and block styles, and fighting technique moves of melee combat in the German tradition. Being multiple and spontaneous re-constructions in either scripted quests or random engagements, applying and performing these various combative elements revealed how they likely worked in its proper fluidity of human motion and reflex, level of distance and precision, and degree of lethality.

To use the earlier discussed combative lessons again as gameplay evidence of this particular body of historical lore, being taught by Bernard the different guard stances are actual re-enactments of the four core guards or the “vier leger” [representational].⁶⁴⁷ In fight books such as the *Starhemberg* or *Von Danzig* (1452), *Ringeck* (ca. 1504 – 1519), and *Paulus Kal* (ca. 1470) codices, these four guards are depicted commonly as the ox or oxen (ochs), plow (pflug), roof (vom tag), and fool’s (alber) guards respectively.⁶⁴⁸ As presented below in the *Solothurner* codex (ca. 1506 – 1514) for example (Figures 6.8N – 6.8Q), the oxen guard places the weapon at head level in a ‘horn’ stance while the plow guard holds the weapon around the waist on either the left or right sides (see also Figures 6.8A – 6.8B) [representational].⁶⁴⁹ The roof and fool’s guards either raises (roof) or lowers (fool’s) the weapon (see also Figures 6.8C – 6.8D) [representational].⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁶ Clements, p. 207.

⁶⁴⁷ Tobler, p. 59.

⁶⁴⁸ Tobler, p. 59.

⁶⁴⁹ Hans Talhoffer, *Fechtbuch von 1467*. trans. by Mark Rector, 2nd edn (London: Grenhill Books, 2006), pp. 13-14.

⁶⁵⁰ Talhoffer, pp. 13-14. While there are many other guard stances as outlined in sources such as *Starhemberg* and *Ringeck* codices, the four guards are emphasised in the majority of the Medieval fight books and treatises as the foundational moves for all students and practitioners of Medieval fencing.

Figure 6.8 (N – Q): Four Guards or ‘Vier Leger’

The notable four guards depicted in the Solothurner fight book. Each of the figures are depicted using one of the four stances. The stances presented are the fool’s, roof, oxen, and plow guards.⁶⁵¹

**Figure 6.8N – Solothurner Fechtbuch
(Cod.S.554): Fool’s Guard (Image 75)**



**Figure 6.8O – Solothurner Fechtbuch
(Cod.S.554): Roof Guard (Image 76)**



⁶⁵¹ Paulus Kal, 'Solothurner Fechtbuch (Cod.S.554), 073 (ca. 1506 - 1514)', *Wikitenauer* <[https://www.wikitenauer.com/wiki/Solothurner_Fechtbuch_\(Cod.S.554\)](https://www.wikitenauer.com/wiki/Solothurner_Fechtbuch_(Cod.S.554))> [accessed 8 July 2021]; Paulus Kal, 'Solothurner Fechtbuch (Cod.S.554), 074 (ca. 1506 - 1514)', *Wikitenauer* <[https://www.wikitenauer.com/wiki/Solothurner_Fechtbuch_\(Cod.S.554\)](https://www.wikitenauer.com/wiki/Solothurner_Fechtbuch_(Cod.S.554))> [accessed 8 July 2021]; Paulus Kal, 'Solothurner Fechtbuch (Cod.S.554), 075 (ca. 1506 - 1514)', *Wikitenauer* <[https://www.wikitenauer.com/wiki/Solothurner_Fechtbuch_\(Cod.S.554\)](https://www.wikitenauer.com/wiki/Solothurner_Fechtbuch_(Cod.S.554))> [accessed 8 July 2021]; Paulus Kal, 'Solothurner Fechtbuch (Cod.S.554), 076 (ca. 1506 - 1514)', *Wikitenauer* <[https://www.wikitenauer.com/wiki/Solothurner_Fechtbuch_\(Cod.S.554\)](https://www.wikitenauer.com/wiki/Solothurner_Fechtbuch_(Cod.S.554))> [accessed 8 July 2021].

**Figure 6.8P – Solothurner Fechtbuch
(Cod.S.554): Oxen Guard (Image 73)**



**Figure 6.8Q – Solothurner Fechtbuch
(Cod.S.554): Plow Guard (Image 74)**



Originating (but not likely invented) from the teachings of Johannes Liechtenauer, the four guards are the foundational moves that all practitioners of the German style of fighting were required to learn in their training. As emphasised in a verse attributed to Liechtenauer in the Starhemberg codex “Four guards along hold; and disdain the common. Ox, Plow, Fool, From the Roof should not be unknown to you.”⁶⁵² Referring to Figure 6.8C for illustration (pp. 334 – 335), captain Bernard’s raising of the sword above his head for an attempted downward strike is called the roof guard [representational]. The name of this guard is derived from the combatant raising his weapon above his

⁶⁵² Tobler, p. 99. This statement is a translation derived from the primary source Johannes Liechtenauer’s Verse Epitome (zettel) in *Starhemberg Fechtbuch* (Cod.44.A.8).

shoulder and poised to make a quick and powerful downward strike against a charging opponent.⁶⁵³ The nature of this attack acts as a defence-offense mechanism not by intercepting the opponent's blade, but by cutting or striking down an opponent who blindly charges towards you. Unlike the fight books however, I saw these stances come into full effect by their manner of directing and carrying out a rhythmic sequence of attacks in quick succession via a repetition of and/or a combination of striking or hewing (Hauen), thrusting (Stechen), and cutting or slicing (Abschneiden) moves [representational].⁶⁵⁴ As with the guards, these three types of attacks are also animative re-enactments of the three basic yet fundamental offensive moves when "injuring an opponent with a longsword", known in the German tradition as "Drei Wunder" or the 'Three Wonders'.⁶⁵⁵ As seen in Figures 6.8R – 6.8T, the attacks shown by Henry and Bernard with a longsword offer different advantages for hitting an opponent. Strategising and simulating through the star-symbol interface an effective sequence of attacks that target an opponent's vulnerable body area is partially dependent on whether the opponent is wearing full or partial armour protection [procedural/representational].

⁶⁵³ Tobler, p. 59.

⁶⁵⁴ The 'hauen' or strikes are broken down further into three types, which are the 'oberhau' (over hew) that strikes from above the attacker, the 'mittelhau' (middle hew) that strikes at mid-length from either the left or right side, and finally 'unterhau' (under hew) that strikes below the attacker.

⁶⁵⁵ Christian H. Tobler, *Secrets of German Medieval Swordsmanship: Sigmund Ringeck's Commentaries on Johannes Liechtenauer's Verse* (Dallas, T.X: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2001), p. 381.

Figure 6.8 (R – T): Drei Wunder

Examples of some of the basic sequence of attacks pertaining to the ‘Three Wonder method’ when executed (Figures 6.8R – 6.8T).

Figure 6.8R – Drei Wunder



Performing a thrusting (stechen) attack. Recorded in ‘Meeting with Radzig’.⁶⁵⁶

Figure 6.8S – Drei Wunder (II)



An exchange of middle hew (mittelhau) strikes between Henry and Bernard. Recorded in ‘Meeting with Radzig’.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁶ Redder, ‘Meeting with Radzig’, min 38:02.

⁶⁵⁷ Redder, min 43:05.

Figure 6.8T – Drei Wunder (III)

Bernard countering again Henry's middle hew (mittelhau) strike with an under hew (unterhau) strike. Recorded in 'Meeting with Radzig'.⁶⁵⁸



Obtaining historical lore on the movement and physicality of these 'Drei Wunder' attack moves, as well as their deflection of them, also encompassed the re-enactment of real specialised weapon techniques [representational]. Using the star-symbol interface to correctly perceive and input a sequence of moves corresponding to different fighting techniques as combative gameplay actions provided ludic yet life-like comparisons to these same techniques. Principally, comparisons that show how these respective techniques were intended to be performed for dealing lethal injuries at precise angles,

⁶⁵⁸ Redder, 'Meeting with Radzig', min 42:51.

especially those derived from sharp and pointed weapons “striking at target areas (often very small targets) with considerable precision.”⁶⁵⁹

For instance, the earlier discussion on fehler: scarmaker technique as displayed in Figures 6.8E – 6.8F was a closely accurate re-enactment of the zwerchhau’s practical design or application for dealing injuries on the enemy’s face, neck, or head [representational]. In *KCD*, while the opponent is usually still alive and can continue fighting, their head and facial injuries results in them fighting at lower capacity by taking longer to recover their stamina and tiring easily after making fewer consecutive attacks [procedural/representational]. As seen similarly in a life-or-death duel with an enemy boss called Runt at the top of a ruined church in Pribyslavitz (Figures 6.8U – 6.8W), finding the right moment to execute this technique due to his lack of head protection was decisively effective in incapacitating him. After performing a few rapid feint strikes, the final cut visually showed the lethality of its injury by slicing his face and eyesight with blood being spilled [representational].

⁶⁵⁹ Kellet, p. 148.

Figure 6.8U – Fehler: Scarmaker (III)



The final feint strike that deflects Runt's blade to the left to create an opening for the fehler: scarmaker move.

Recorded in 'Baptism of Fire'.⁶⁶⁰

Figure 6.8V – Fehler: Scarmaker (IV)



Performing the signature fehler: scarmaker strike. Recorded in 'Baptism of Fire'.⁶⁶¹

Figure 6.8W – Fehler: Scarmaker (V)



The after effect of slicing Runt's face. Recorded in 'Baptism of Fire'.⁶⁶²

In the case of the zornort: wrath strike technique, perceiving and initiating the movements and actions leading to the final thrust is another example of *KCD's* authentication of the imitative performance of the mechanisms needed to maneuver and deal the correct sequence of the technique. Referring to Figures 6.8G – 6.8K again, these series of images during a sparring moment with Bernard showed several shots capturing the critical points of the complex actions needed to manipulate the opponent and his weapon in order to direct the final fatal strike to his upper chest [representational]. In another example depicting a duel with a wayward knight (Figures 6.8X – 6.8Y), the actual effect of the zornort technique from the sword's thrust is shown when I identified his brigandine chest armour as being the weakest area of protection. As with Bernard earlier (Figures 6.8G – 6.8K), I successfully manipulated an opening by performing feint strikes and then dealt a final thrust that punctured through the knight's body armour with the front tip of the longsword, severely injuring his upper chest in spite of a lack of blood being shown [representational].

⁶⁶⁰ Ben Redder, 'Baptism of Fire', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (26 April 2018), min 15:18.

⁶⁶¹ Redder, min 15:19.

⁶⁶² Redder, min 15:20.

Figure 6.8 (X – Y): Zornort – Wrath Strike Part 2

A couple of shots taken during a second duel with the wayward knight while wearing a helmet.

Figure 6.8X – Wrath Strike (VI)



*Initiating the zornort
move. Recorded in 'Duel
II'.⁶⁶³*

Figure 6.8Y – Wrath Strike (VII)



*The tip of the blade
puncturing the cuirass.
Recorded in 'Duel II'.⁶⁶⁴*

Providing a closely accurate re-enactment of these different conventions and techniques of Medieval German fighting, as well as their effects of injury, allowed me to better understand what weapons were effective in damaging armour directly or as a means of targeting gaps in an opponent's armour [representational]. Inversely, as historical challenges they subsequently influenced how I understood the imperfections of relying on a single method or strategy of doing combat. Namely, the over-reliance on the longsword and its range of specialised weapon techniques for dealing what I hoped to be one or two hit kills or knockouts [representational]. This historical insight became prominent as tough lessons learnt through my participation in several life-or-death duels and battles.

To give one example, during a quest I was unexpectedly ambushed by two outlaw knights. Both these knights looked highly trained and lethal by wearing a complete set of intricate plate armour and wielded weapons designed for dealing against plate armour. One carried what appeared to be a heavy war hammer with an emblematic bouche shield, while the other knight carried a well-designed Lucerne hammer (a type of polearm) [representational]. Using a high tier ornated dueling longsword called 'Herod's Sword', I struck first with a quick succession of attacks combined with specialised sword techniques, particularly zornort: wrath strike and durchlaufen: run through, in the hopes of killing or incapacitating the soldiers quickly [representational]. This horribly failed, for my sword attacks did little to penetrate or pierce through their high-quality plate armour. Attempts where I implemented the techniques successfully likely dealt some grievous injury but were practically ineffective due to the opponents' effectiveness in countering or blocking them with either their shield or weapon, while simultaneously making

⁶⁶³ Ben Redder, 'Duel II', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (23 April 2018), min 3:46.

⁶⁶⁴ Redder, min 3:49.

successful counter attacks [representational]. Despite wearing one of the best armour sets in the game (Nuremberg plate armour), my worst fears that I would lose this battle came to fruition. The knight wielding the Lucerne hammer managed to hit and pierce my cuirass, helmet, and gauntlet in only three to four consecutive slashes and thrusts while puncturing my right hand, head, and upper chest [representational]. The rest of this duel was hopeless, for having received these severe injuries I was losing health incrementally from blood loss and completely exhausted from losing stamina. The screen in front of me turned red, indicating that I was covered in blood and on the verge of death [representational]. After making one last attempt at fighting back, I was knocked down with a final blow from the knight's polearm behind me and died.

Figure 6.8Z – Outlaw or Robber Knights Duel

An altercation with two brigand knights (Figures 6.8Z – 6.9). Figure 6.8Z recorded in 'Interloper Side Quest II'.⁶⁶⁵



⁶⁶⁵ Ben Redder, 'Interloper Side Quest II', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (3 May 2018), min 7:43.

Figure 6.9 – Outlaw or Robber Knights Duel (II)

Nearly on the cusp of death before the fatal strike with a polearm that killed Henry. Recorded in 'Interloper Side Quest II'.⁶⁶⁶



These animative examples discussed throughout this section (pp. 332 – 340, 349 – 357) both illustrate and contributed a collected gameplay historiography of this subtle yet significant lore history on individualized Medieval fighting. Each example demonstrates how I engaged in combat by constructing simulative interpretations on the physical actuality and movement of the various combative elements of melee combat. Moreover, experiencing approximate manifestations of combative violence from inflicting and receiving injury with Medieval weapons and their distinctive techniques also constitutes as experiential historical lore by expanding knowledge on the “transmission ... of

⁶⁶⁶ Redder, min 9:49.

[combative] movement for dealing with violence.”⁶⁶⁷ Together, these contributions of historical combative lore within *KCD* fervently address certain issues or limitations found within fight books in their depictions of Medieval German fighting. One of the issues is the fight books’ minimal documentation on the parameters and challenges in articulating the physical and spatial dynamics needed to capture the realism of these Medieval fighting movements and techniques, as they are depicted in these sources as static and singular actions (see Figures 6.7A – 6.7C again for examples). As Medieval scholar and expert fencer John Clements elaborates:

Fight books ... do not tell us, for example, at what speed they practiced attacks and counter-attacks, or what level of force and degree of contact was commonly used when doing so. They also cannot easily convey the understanding of timing or shifting leverage and balance required in executing movements.⁶⁶⁸

To clearly illuminate this point, the series of images depicting the entire animation of the *zornort*: wrath strike (Figures 6.8G – 6.8K and 6.8X – 6.8Y) via Henry’s physicality and intricate bodily movement with his longsword provide interesting yet extended gameplay counterparts to the sketched image of the warrior on the left in third-person (shown in Figure 6.9A). In this scenario shown, he and his opponent are static or immovable figures, with the former trying to successfully initiate the final thrust move. This image (labelled folio 3r) was drawn by an unknown artist in Hans Talhoffer’s *fechtbuch* in 1467 with a small written caption “The swordsman on the left menaces his

⁶⁶⁷ Clements, p. 207.

⁶⁶⁸ Clements, p. 191.

opponent with the thrust of wrath [wrath strike]. The swordsman on the right counters the thrust with a cut from above” (translated by Mark Rector).⁶⁶⁹

Figure 6.9A – Zornort: Wrath Strike (Talhoffer’s Fechtbuch)

*Folio 3r in the German Talhoffer fencing manual of 1467 (author Hans Talhoffer) depicting the Zornort: Wrath Strike technique as shown by the warrior on the left.*⁶⁷⁰



Likewise, the earlier discussion on the realism of Medieval combative movements and techniques to inflict and/or hinder different types of lethal injury when accurately hitting a specific opening target with a weapon is also an aspect of Medieval fighting heavily

⁶⁶⁹ Talhoffer, p. 25.

⁶⁷⁰ Hans Talhoffer, 'Talhoffer Fechtbuch (Cod.icon. 394a), Folio - 3r (1467)', Wikitenauer <[https://www.wikitenauer.com/wiki/Talhoffer_Fechtbuch_\(Cod.icon._394a\)](https://www.wikitenauer.com/wiki/Talhoffer_Fechtbuch_(Cod.icon._394a))> [accessed 8 July 2021].

restricted in combat manuscripts but present as a gameplay source. Absence of any artistic rendering of external and internal wounds to the body, as well as evidence of blood loss in the fight books' pictorial imagery, is highlighted by Medieval scholars such as Rachel Kellet.⁶⁷¹ She states that because fight books do not "explain the context in which ... [the] instructions are to be used in any detail, any discussion of the purpose ... and the kinds of wounds likely to result from the use of it ... [are] speculative."⁶⁷² The restriction these books have in trying to show the realities of combative violence and injury through their imagery is also present in modern HEMA practices and demonstrations. Because modern practitioners are not using Medieval combat "for real" by intending to and actively injuring and killing their opponent, nor have they seen these techniques being performed "for real" either, live performances of Medieval combat remain as subjective, partial interpretations and not completely "true reconstitution[s]."⁶⁷³

These fight books' limitations, such as those aforementioned, are attributed in part to the restricted format of these sources' pictorial form. Clements again explains that since the artwork was limited in its "visual vocabulary" to display physical action, content within fight books were usually designed as mnemonic aids containing only "samples of particular techniques as isolated "snapshots" ", usually showing the final move only.⁶⁷⁴ The restrictive capacity for these sources' artwork to depict combat overlaps with how master fencers wanted to design their fight books as only referential aid texts.⁶⁷⁵ In doing so, the imagery of these texts only afford ideal, rather than a totality of real-life, combative scenarios to students and adepts of that time who were already taught to and likely had

⁶⁷¹ Kellet, p. 130.

⁶⁷² Kellet, p. 130.

⁶⁷³ Clements, p. 205.

⁶⁷⁴ Clements, pp. 207-208.

⁶⁷⁵ Clements, p. 191.

some experience in performing these combative moves and techniques as a “violent athletic application[s] of combative action.”⁶⁷⁶ Summarised succinctly by Mark Ryan Geldof “These texts [fight books] were never designed to teach the reader, only to aid the reader in remembering what he had already learned through other means.”⁶⁷⁷

These limitations are further compounded by the fact that representations of combat in Medieval fight books are always portrayed in judicial duels or tournaments, and do not thoroughly show or discuss how individualized melee fighting are applied in a military context. Namely, Medieval pitched and siege battles. In contrast, this issue is alleviated in *KCD* as I participated in a handful of major skirmish and siege battles, such as the battle of Pribyslavitz and the siege of Talmberg castle [representational]. Medieval battles and warfare, another type of combat experienced in conjunction with individualized fighting, constitute as another major source of lore history on the historiography of late Medieval combat that I uncovered and analysed within *KCD*. Due to spatial constraints, this topic is beyond the scope of this chapter, but two images are provided (Figures 6.9B and 6.9C) to illustrate a small insight into this historical gameplay experience.

⁶⁷⁶ Clements, p. 212.

⁶⁷⁷ Mark R. Geldof, "'Pe herte þe fote þe eye to accorde:" Procedural Writing and Three Middle English Manuscripts of Martial Instruction' (unpublished Masters thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2011), p. 75.

Figure 6.9B – Battle Moments

A couple of shots pertaining to some of the major Medieval battles within the Rattay-Sasau region, namely the battle of Pribyslavitz (Figure 6.9B) and the first and failed assault at castle Talmberg (Figure 6.9C). Figure 6.9B recorded in 'Baptism of Fire'.⁶⁷⁸



⁶⁷⁸ Redder, 'Baptism of Fire', min 8:15.

Figure 6.9C – Battle Moments (II)

The first attempt of re-taking castle Talmberg from Istvan Toth's army before the drawbridge closes. Recorded in 'Out of the Frying Pan'.⁶⁷⁹



In summary, *KCD*'s gameplay provision of this particular historiography on Medieval warfare via entailing gameplay experiences that allow mastery and performance of a range of conventions and strategies for doing Medieval combat offers a nuanced yet relevant source of historical scholarship on Medieval fighting. This kind of scholarship in historical gaming has valuable potential for Medieval scholars, modern re-enactors, and martial artists by operating in closer alignment to what practitioners and master fencers within Medieval Central Europe were trying to teach and instill. Particularly, conveying

⁶⁷⁹ Ben Redder, 'Out of the Frying Pan', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (31 May 2018), min 1:37.

the realities of and development of solutions for overcoming life-threatening combat within the “chaos of combat situations” by constructing combative scenarios that models fighting as a means of addressing not the “actual unpredictability of combat or to explain every conceivable possibility, but only to aid the combatant in successfully getting through it.”⁶⁸⁰

6.6 Chapter Evaluation:

In addressing the first three research questions, I have shown that *KCD* demonstrates a type of multimodality representation focused on lore history and its respective conventions (e.g. experiential and factual re-construction, and quest storytelling). It was discussed that *KCD*'s historical gameplay qualifies as lore history as it incorporates and communicates both new and existing historical knowledge pertaining to the histories encountered and experienced within the game. I illustrated how *KCD*'s gameplay contains and exhibits scholarly expressions of early fifteenth century Bohemia gripped in a civil war through a sample of lore histories integrated with primary and secondary historical sources. This included the Silver Skalitz siege and a segment of my tour of Rattay focused on the town's castle Pirkstein. Finally, I also determined that these respective histories' multimodal expressions of historical lore contribute gameplay sources of Medieval historiography by highlighting a number of their findings as adding new and extensive information or challenging previous consensuses.

KCD is, to date, the most prominent example of this nascent type of historical gameplay activity by providing player-analysts opportunities to critically examine the experience

⁶⁸⁰ Żabiński and Walczak, p. x;
Clements, p. 207.

of their own sequential activities of play as scholarly lore of that history. On a broader level, applying lore as a multimodal (and not merely a literary) construct in my classifying and study of *KCD*'s gameplay medium and its many gameplay histories prompted and illustrated elicitations of new extensions or refinements of older terms (e.g. historical content, knowledge as lore, fiction, and re-construction) that further assisted in developing and articulating this historical modality. However, as lore history is still a relatively new mode of historical gameplay representation, there is some uncertainty as to whether future studies can emerge and develop this modality further if it does not expand by other game studios. A few possible candidates exist as promising areas to extend historical game research into upcoming or recently released historical games that represent their respective histories in a lore history framework. Including the previously mentioned *War of Rights* and *Titanic: Honor and Glory* developed by Campfire Games and Vintage Digital Revival respectively. Like *KCD*, these two historical games initially began development and were supported by their respective online crowdfunding sites Kickstarter and Indiegogo, as well as grounded on extensive historical research and their game developers' collaborations with several or multiple historians and/or historical experts. This interesting correlation suggests that, for the moment, lore history and its aspirations within emerging historical games is currently tied to and driven by indie developers and small game studios.

Yet *KCD* still remains the most substantial illustration of lore history because Warhorse Studios' option to design *KCD* as an open-world RPG allowed them to access, integrate, and communicate a more abundant variety of Medieval histories. In contrast, the other two historical games are strictly confined to a couple of specific historical events.⁶⁸¹ *War*

⁶⁸¹ Moreover, aside from their game studios facing typical financial and time constraints during development, the release of *War of Rights* and *Titanic: Honor and Glory* as early access games means that, while still playable, not all

of Rights is an online multiplayer first-person shooter set in the Maryland campaign of 1862 during the American Civil War (1861 – 1865). This game depicts highly detailed real battles and environments of that campaign between the northern Union and southern Confederate forces, with players encouraged to closely re-enact the types of actual warfare (e.g. rank and file formation). Yet the presence of a lore history framework within this game would be heavily limited to purely battlefields in this single military campaign, as well as leaving out other discourses of military violence (e.g. violence against civilians or non-combatants). In *Titanic: Honor and Glory*, despite having the closest similarity to *KCD* in both its historical research and game design processes as was originally analysed in Redder and Schott's 2018 article, a recent series of events (e.g. their original director Thomas Lynskey left the project in April 2021) led to a change in direction by Vintage Digital Revival studio.⁶⁸² As a result, the game is currently released as a demo in late 2021 (a date for the full game has not yet been announced) as a museum-like simulation likely devoid of or condensing its representation of the Titanic ocean-liner containing a "microcosm of society ... a spatial-temporal experience of how movement, barriers, privilege and degrees of freedom are structured and contained."⁶⁸³

These observations given should not detract our interest and investigation into these games, but it can be argued that future expansion of lore history rests more-or-less on the

of the historical content and features are available to players until they are added after months or even years later when these historical games are updated.

⁶⁸² Ben Redder and Gareth Schott, 'Presence at History: Toward an Expression of Authentic Historical Content as Game Rules and Play', in *Proceedings of DiGRA 2018: The Game is the Message* (Turin: DiGRA, 2018), p. 7. See the co-authored DiGRA article by Ben Redder and Gareth Shott 'Presence at History: Toward an Expression of Authentic Historical Content as Game Rules and Play' (2018) that discusses some of the original key aims, developments, and anticipated historical content of this game before its recent change in direction of development.

⁶⁸³ *Titanic: Honor and Glory* still has most of the core fundamentals that were promised to its players, such as being the latest and most prominent work of depicting the closest historical re-construction of the entire Titanic ocean-liner to date with fully explorable interior and exterior spaces. Nonetheless, it appears that large chunks of the game originally intended to be included are now omitted or reduced in scale, such as removing the player's fictional protagonist Owen Robert Morgan and his storyline, and actual historical figures as interactive NPCs.

RPG genre in further developing the viability and practicalities of this modality. Nonetheless, I remain hopeful that Warhorse Studios' success of *KCD* and its approaches to historical research, game design, and gameplay may instill or inspire upcoming game studios to undertake a similar attempt in future historical game projects. This outlook is further encouraged by Warhorse Studios' current development and eventual release of a sequel to *KCD*. Thus, to continue future historical game research into lore history, I would like to discover and examine new historical game releases that engage in and exhibit a multiplicity of detailed immersive histories interwoven together within the game's respective historical world and time period.

KCD's distinct rendition of lore history in an open-world RPG format offers an early and promising template to carry out and support this potential area of research, while still acknowledging its current technological, game design, and historical research limitations or gaps that Warhorse Studios faced.⁶⁸⁴ The three illustrated examples discussed, and their accompanying contributions to late Medieval historiography covered in this chapter, only comprise a small sample of the many recorded gameplay sequences of lore history I experienced in *KCD*. Like the examples, these other sequences constitute as multimodal lore histories containing their own gameplay sources of Medieval historiography suited either to or an overlap between the Fraternal Civil War and the facets of life and society in late Medieval Rattay-Sasau region, and more broadly Bohemia, during crisis and conflict. Besides those already mentioned in this chapter (e.g. the refugee crisis following the Silver Skalitz siege), a few of these other sources are mentioned here as examples.

⁶⁸⁴ See examples of some of the limitations and challenges I discussed regarding Warhorse Studios' development of *KCD* in the preceding Chapter 5.

For instance, there were a number of recorded lore histories more socio-cultural based and without violence and combat. One source was an assortment of recorded experiential interactions with and insights into the daily life and/or struggles of Medieval women in either conventional or occasionally marginalised roles and occupations within the current hierarchical and social norms of late Medieval society. One of these experiences was assisting the nurse Johanka (a survivor of the Silver Skalitz siege) who is looking after severely injured Skalitz refugees at the Sasau monastery with a diminishing supply of food, medicine, and bandages. Another centered on the current predicaments facing Zora in the male-dominated profession of running a large stud farm in Neuhof as a sole female business proprietor shortly after her husband and former co-owner Smil was brutally killed in a raid. Another integral lore history was observing and actively immersing in the authentic religious minutiae, current politics, and habitual routines of the secluded Benedictine order of St. Procopious at the Sasau monastery while undercover as a novice monk. In certain instances of accessing temporal immersion in historical roles such as a novice monk, only a bending (but not complete breakage) of the social boundaries and limited mobilities between the various late Medieval social groups and occupations inherent in that time were afforded. Finally, on a number of occasions there were histories revolving around the amicable and/or tense or even hostile relations between different social classes (e.g. Rattay's burgher community and Skalitz refugees) and ethnic groups, with Henry himself being either an intermediary between these groups or one of its active participants. These gameplay recordings would by themselves be great case studies for writing future articles and book chapters.

While this chapter explored *KCD* and its multimodal conventions as engaging primarily in the lore history modality, a level of fiction is still present, to some or large degree, within both *KCD* and its gameplay medium. This matter particularly is a core theme

clarified in Chapter 8 regarding how *KCD* also incorporates and reframes certain elements derived from a particular style of the imaginative history modality as interesting supplementations to enhance and illuminate this Medieval game's principal engagement to lore history in representing late Medieval Bohemia. To examine how two or more historical modalities can exist in unison, we must first define and illustrate imaginative history as another major type of multimodal gameplay representation. The Medieval game best suited to illustrate this modality is *A Plague Tale: Innocence*, and is covered in the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Imaginative History – A Plague Tale: Innocence

7.1 Introduction:

The previous chapter addressed *KCD* and its engagement to Medieval history through lore history. This chapter addresses research questions i – iii by analysing the second Medieval game *A Plague Tale: Innocence* (*APTII*) and its historical modality ‘imaginative history’. *APTII* and its adaptation of the Black Death as a dark fantasy children’s fairytale is a viable case study for examining the multimodality of imaginative history in gameplay representation. This is because the game’s fantastical constructions of Medieval history actively re-imagines or re-tells, rather than diminishes or linearizes, the Black Death under new guises or perspectives. Chapter 7, thus, seeks to demonstrate the historical possibilities, nature of the engagements, and insights that imaginative history can offer. Principally, by offering a particular exemplary engagement to discerning and distinguishing gameplay mediums using poetic remediations, socio-cultural responses to, and occasionally subversions of the past through their multimodal ensembles.

This chapter explores and discusses rats here (as the embodiment and carriers of the plague) as an illustration of imaginative history and the primary mode of conveying the threat and spread of the plague in a Medieval context within *APTII*. The following vignette provides an illustration of the first rat vermin encounter experienced by the game characters Amicia and Hugo (see Figure 7.1):

At the crypt of a village church, a dark, menacing, and ravenous animal plague consisting of rats is first seen by the siblings Amica and Hugo as well as their guide and monk Father Thomas. Amica and Hugo are transfixed yet terrified by this incoming rat swarm who have flooded the entire area of the crypt entrance en masse. The appearance of these rats up-close from Amicia's perspective were creatures looking black as darkness itself save that of having big and glaring yellow eyes, creepy tails, and projecting terrifying high shrieking sounds. Only the light from Thomas' fire torch could discern these ghastly vermin who were now approaching from all directions in the manner of an uninhibited devourer.

Figure 7.1 – Chapter 3: Retribution

The first ever encounter with the rats. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot'.⁶⁸⁵



This particular scene of the rats described unveils historical fantasy (introduced briefly at the end of Section 5.2.4) as both *APTII*'s primary mode of historical gameplay representation and this chapter's core subject or theme of discussion by representing one type of imaginative history. This chapter then seeks to define and argue the validity of imaginative history as another useful framework for illuminating and learning about the past. Notably, by using *APTII*'s multimodal engagement to historical fantasy as a platform

⁶⁸⁵ Redder, 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot', min 1:34:48.

to document, study, and disseminate new insights from gameplay experiences containing loose and/or closely authentic animations, as well as subversions, of actual past imaginative fantasies.

7.2 Imaginative History:

Imaginative History is a “historical modality that engages in historical poetics – the figurative or poetic and fictional imaginations of history.”⁶⁸⁶ To unpack this definition, imaginative history entails experiences that engage in history mainly through figurative and poetic conventions and/or genres or modes of historical fiction that are derived from or express, and occasionally subvert, imaginative remediations of things pertaining to the past. Elements of period-accurate visual and material history can still appear, such as the presence of real or authentic historical settings and buildings, actual historical figures and events, and clothing. However, what makes these games strikingly recognisable to players is their highly fantastical or fictional gameplay constructions of history closely situated under the “fidelity ... [of] imagination.”⁶⁸⁷

Because historical poetic systems have been incorporated by many historical games in one form or another since the release of the first *Oregon Trail* game in 1971, this historical modality has a far longer lifespan and is more diverse in its styles than the recently emergent lore history. Therefore, imaginative history is a concept I have adopted for several reasons. First, it is an umbrella term to collate, categorise, and provide a relatively stable framework for distinguishing the different gameplay styles of historical poetics that currently exist, each with their own unique engagement or correspondence to the

⁶⁸⁶ Redder, p. 249.

⁶⁸⁷ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 29.

'imaginative'. Second, developing imaginative history can assist historians and digital game scholars in the discovery and articulation of new advancements in representing imaginative histories within recent and forthcoming historical games. Examination of recent historical games aim to reveal how they elicit gameplay historiographies of speculative history, past imaginations, and/or poetic re-tellings that are derived from and renew or subvert specifics of the game's respective historical period, content, and/or folklore.

Three historical poetic styles among the handful of those within imaginative history are commonly found in historical games. They are accordingly 'counterfactualism or counterfactual history' (e.g. *Crusader Kings* game series and *Total War* game series), 'realist-fiction' (e.g. *Red Dead: Redemption*), and 'historical fantasy' (e.g. *Nioh* and *Dante's Inferno*).⁶⁸⁸ Each of these styles represents a distinctive branch or type of historical fiction due to their particular engagement with or manifestation of historical imagination. All three are equally worthy for discussion in this thesis, but this chapter concentrates on the historical fantasy style only. Counterfactual history, described earlier in Chapter 2's 'historical game form' section (2.4.1), is not elucidated further as it is already a well-studied (but not exhaustive) subject within historical game studies.⁶⁸⁹ Realist-fiction is an important feature in the following chapter regarding *KCD*'s implementation of realist-fiction and its contextualisation to the lore history modality as a supporting secondary

⁶⁸⁸ Fumihiko Yasuda and Yosuke Hayashi, *Nioh* (Console video game) (Tokyo: Team Ninja and Kou Shibusawa, 2017);

Jonathan Knight and Stephen Barry, *Dante's Inferno* (Console video game) (Redwood City, C.A: Visceral Games, 2010).

⁶⁸⁹ Some of the major works on counterfactualism that I referenced in Chapter 2 are *Digital Games As History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice* and the chapter 'Modding the Historians' Code: Historical Verisimilitude and the Counterfactual Imagination' in the edited collection *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*.

mode of history. Therefore, an extensive definition of this imaginative style and its main applications are covered in Chapter 8.

7.2.1 Historical Fantasy:

Several definitions on fantasy were earlier addressed in Chapter 3's 'key concepts' section (3.4.2) via contextualisation of this term within historical games as fundamentally performing four potentials. These potentials include fantasy providing gameplay commentary on the "mentalités of past cultures ... [such as] the fusion of history and myth into one diegetic world", and exhibit "metaphorical, metonymic, and reconstructive utilities that embody poetic meanings about the past."⁶⁹⁰ Using these overarching potentials as foundations, I deem imaginative histories grounded in the historical fantasy style as those which utilise detailed gameplay animations of vivid and/or subtle fantasy elements that are authentically representative of or characteristic to past fantasies.

Historical fantasies in past imaginations primarily entail the various worlds, stories, subject matter, and aesthetics from old folktales and legends, mythology, religion, visual art, and literary and dramatic works (including their adaptations) that were created and renewed in the minds and artistry of individuals and/or cultures. Depending on the game's chosen period of history and its settings, examples include physically gamic animations of supernatural beings, monsters, and creatures derived from past mythologies and folklore, as well as the animation of magical rituals and objects, that are

⁶⁹⁰ Chapman, 'Playing the Historical Fantastic: Zombies, Mecha-Nazis and Making Meaning about the Past through Metaphor', p. 92;
Redder, p. 125.

closely re-constructed not only to their appearances but also their known roles or functions, personalities, and symbolism(s). They can also entail either a past reality and time period in our world but filled with wondrous or strange and supernatural events and phenomena, or inhabiting an exotic, horrifying, or mythical world inspired by their original counterparts from mythologies and religions in past cultural works and beliefs. Thus, the kinds of imaginative history exhibited in gameplay through historical fantasy constitute traces or remnants of socio-cultural, folkloric, and poetic literacies about the past. These respective literacies have shaped, and continue to shape, future generations through transmedial storytelling.

Examining historical fantasy in *APTI* attempts to raise further awareness to the production of gameplay mediums containing imaginative histories in recent historical games that draw from and renew historical fantasies originally conceived or pre-eminent in past eras and societies. In the last several years, a number of recent historical games have been instrumental to preserving or renewing, as well as bringing new life and purpose into, these various representations of historical fantasy that are otherwise left lingering in the past or remain strictly confined to academia. These games include this chapter's case study *A Plague Tale: Innocence (APTI)*, but also *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*, *Nioh* and its sequel *Nioh 2*, *God of War Ragnarök*, and the forthcoming game *Black Myth: Wukong*. These developments signal historical fantasy's potential as another viable and legitimate form of doing history and disseminating academic historical research and scholarship via knowledge-building and expression of folklore and oral traditions. This potential includes its provision of gameplay historiographies that not only preserve and renew but also re-constitute the poetic, fantastical, and folkloric referents, literacies, and meanings of the past relating to the game's chosen historical period, mythology world, or culture. Yet in providing my own extensive description earlier as to what I class as

historical fantasy within gameplay representation, exploring this style of imaginative history through *APTII* also attempts to review, formulate, and demonstrate a refined or updated definition of historical fantasy for future historical game research and discourse on transmedial adaptations of fantasy. These avenues then are a response to the main critique I raised earlier on fantasy in Section 3.4.2 regarding the multiple but incohesive usages of the term historical fantasy, including its differentiation from other valuable “types of fantasy” by scholars such as Adam Chapman.⁶⁹¹

7.2.2 Imaginative Histories in *A Plague Tale: Innocence*:

As established in the previous chapter, *APTII*'s principal engagement to Medieval history is a playful multimodal remediation of and a source of gameplay scholarship on past “socio-cultural, artistic, and poetic themes or metanarratives of both Black Death history and ... pre-modern plague expressions.”⁶⁹² This particular remediation and dissemination of scholarship is achieved via *APTII*'s historical fantasy mode based on original game design endeavours adapting or invoking past usages or motifs and imaginative manifestations of pre-modern plagues generating “paranoia, fear, violence, and decay.”⁶⁹³ To demonstrate the usefulness of the imaginative history modality for studying poetic and figurative expressions of the past through gaming, the following sections provide a select handful of recorded gameplay sequences representative of *APTII*'s re-telling of the Black Death in the historical fantasy style. To illustrate the findings obtained on *APTII*'s historical imaginations of the Black Death, the respective gameplay sequences are situated around the different experiences I had with one of the game's

⁶⁹¹ Redder, pp. 125-127.

⁶⁹² Redder, p. 169.

⁶⁹³ Redder, p. 169.

fantasy-based histories, which is the disease-infested and flesh-eating rat swarm pestilence.

The choice to focus on the imaginative histories and their body of Medieval historiography relating to *APTI*'s plague rats provides an exciting and engaging theme to explore historical fantasy within gameplay as another bridge for entering into and learning about the past. This is because *APTI*'s portrayal of rats taps into, manifests, and plays on our anticipated fear toward rats, as well as their infamous reputation as carrier of plagues, as a gameric experience within a fantasized Medieval setting. More importantly, the transference of our modern impressions of rats into a particular historical plague (Black Death) provides an ideal opportunity to unpack and illustrate the multimodal representation of *APTI*'s rat swarm fantasy as an animative conduit for representing historical traces of societies' past attitudes, imaginations, and phobias toward things prevalent or commonly expressed in their time. Including principally the rats themselves, plague phenomena, and universal beliefs around light and darkness.

As with Chapter 6, discussion of each of the chosen gameplay sequences from *APTI* uses both first-person (I as myself) and third-person (I as Amicia and/or Hugo) voices interchangeably. Subsequently, both the recounting of these sequences themselves, and the following analytical discussion on these respective sequences, also have a number of sentences ending with 'procedural' and/or 'representational' within brackets. A final point to add. Because the interview with Renard at Asobo Studio was conducted before the game's release (as stated earlier in Chapters 4 and 5), it was not possible to ask questions pertaining to some of the major encounters and experiences within (the then unreleased) *APTI*. This does not diminish the interpretation of imaginative histories

uncovered from my analysis. *APTI*'s gameplay revealed distinct correspondences to past plague fantasies, tropes, and adaptations in its engagement to historical fantasy. Analytical interpretations of the rat swarm, as an imaginative conduit for past historical traces and themes, were completed as a player-analyst well after the interviews. Therefore, it was not possible to explore whether Asobo Studio's treatment of the Black Death was driven by, and involved research into, past Medieval and Early Modern viewpoints, folklore, and literary adaptations. Nonetheless, certain topics within conversations with Renard, such as the studio's initial idea to use the miasma theory (see Section 5.3.2.1) as *APTI*'s plague, provides some important evidence to indicate Asobo Studio's use of folklore and past imaginative or fantastical beliefs.

7.3 Medieval Rat Pestilence:

Asobo Studio's adaptation of southern France during the Black Death transforms the plague from its "scientific model of micro bacteria diseases carried by parasitic fleas attached onto rodents into a dark and menacing supernatural animal plague" consisting entirely of rats.⁶⁹⁴ Yet before we explore rats within *APTI* as a core design feature and gameplay re-imagination of the Black Death, a concise yet inexhaustive discussion on past understandings and representations of rats by European societies must be addressed first. A dominant view within academic scholarship on pre-modern plagues is that rats, in contrast to other theories of the time such as miasma and divine punishment, were not directly identified as a plausible cause for or as the main culprit behind plague outbreaks. As historian Norman Cantor explicates:

⁶⁹⁴ Redder, p. 165.

Over the years explanations of the Black death have varied greatly and passed in and out of style ... [but the] rats and fleas ... did not figure strongly in medieval imagination ... The absence of references to rats as a necessary prelude to a human epidemic may arise from contemporaries' failures to notice or attach any significance to the rat plague.⁶⁹⁵

This statement holds some historical merit by the near absence or lack of correlation of documented rat die-offs known to accompany global plague pandemics within many Ancient and Medieval written sources.⁶⁹⁶ A notable example is historian Nikephoros Gregoras' (c. 1295 – 1360) description of the Black Death in Constantinople in 1347. Gregoras mentions rats in passing but lists them as one of many species alongside other animals, such as dogs and horses, as deaths possibly attributed to the plague.⁶⁹⁷ Cantor's perspective suggests then that the association of rats to plague outbreaks is a relatively modern perspective held widely by today's scientific and medical consensus. Yet this argument is valid only if the evidence or absence of evidence of rats as the direct cause of plague outbreaks within these pre-modern sources are measured narrowly under modern plague terminology.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁵ Norman F. Cantor, *In the Wake of the Plague: The Black Death and the World it Made*, 2nd edn (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), pp. 171-172.

⁶⁹⁶ Cantor, p. 172. One of the few rare exceptions is the reports by Islamic polymath scholar and physician Avicenna (c. 980 – 1037), who directly mentioned accounts of rat die-offs and tied them to plague phenomena as harbingers (but not vectors) of plague.

⁶⁹⁷ Werner Köhler and Michael Köhler, 'Plague and Rats, the "Plague of the Philistines", and: What did our Ancestors know about the Role of Rats in Plague', *Indian Journal of Medical Microbiology*, 293 (2003), 333-340, p. 338.

Christos S. Bartsocas, "'Two Fourteenth-Century Greek Descriptions of the 'Black Death' '", *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 21 (1966), 394-400, p. 395. Nikephoros Gregoras' account on the Black Death is originally given in his historical work *Byzantine History*, covering the years 1204 – 1359.

⁶⁹⁸ Scholar Michael McCormick also provides a contrasting yet convincing argument to this subject in his article 'Rats, Communications, and Plague: Toward an Ecological History'. He argues that while the absence or silence within Ancient and Medieval texts of rat die-offs from plague were possibly due to literary disinterest in pests (as Cantor argues), he claims that the principal reason was more likely of a conceptual nature. Both he and other scholars like Lucinda Cole and even earlier Raymond Crawford (1914) mentioned that both Biblical and Classical Latin and Greek texts lacked a word to name and distinguish a rat from a mouse, with the Latin 'mus' (pl. mures) and Greek 'mys' (pl. myes) referring possibly to either rats or mice. Until the later establishment of Linnaean classifications or apparatuses

Contrary to today's usage of plague as strictly a set of life-threatening symptoms from micro-bacterial epidemical outbreaks, Medieval and Early Modern European societies used plague or pestilence as a complex all-encompassing term for describing a number of sequential or simultaneous yet inexplicable or unforeseen disasters that disrupted the "workings of an orderly universe."⁶⁹⁹ Some of the multiple definitions of plague or pestilence used in pre-modern Europe are plague as a "blow, stroke, wound" in the context of inflicting a particular calamity or disaster, a "sporadic disease or disorder", and "morally or socially pernicious; [an] evil conduct, wickedness, [and] sin."⁷⁰⁰ Essentially, disease outbreaks were considered as one of many symptoms or events existing alongside and instigating or being caused by other symptoms classified as plague, such as natural calamities (e.g. earthquakes), poor climate and weather conditions, spiritual and moral degradation alongside religious laxity, famines, and wars.⁷⁰¹

In re-situating plague and pestilence under these aforementioned pre-modern classifications, some substantial evidence on the relation of rats to imaginative

in the eighteenth century when the word 'rat' became fully classified, McCormick writes that only in rare instances within Ancient sources were distinctions made regarding the context in which the respective rodent (such as either mus or mys) was in fact a rat.

⁶⁹⁹ Stieve, p. 35.

⁷⁰⁰ 'Plaga, n.', *Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/view/Entry/144931>> [accessed 18 February 2021];

'Plague, n.', *Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/view/Entry/144957>> [accessed 18 February 2021];

'Pestilence, n. and adv', *Oxford English Dictionary* <<https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz/view/Entry/141763>> [accessed 18 February 2021].

⁷⁰¹ Lucinda Cole, *Imperfect Creatures: Vermin, Literature, and the Sciences of Life, 1600-1740* (Ann Arbor, M.I: University of Michigan Press, 2016), pp. 26-27;

Jennifer Cooke, *Legacies of Plague in Literature, Theory and Film* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. 7;

Raymond H.P. Crawford, *Plague and Pestilence in Literature and Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1914), p. 21;

Stieve, p. 25. The Black Death was also a global catastrophe preceded by and containing most if not all of these 'plague' events, including not only the massive population decrease from the disease itself but also prior crop failures, military conflicts (e.g. The Hundred Years War), and the breakdown or disestablishment of social and economic systems operating in that time.

expressions of plague throughout the Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern periods, with or without a disease aspect, can be found, such as “culturally, [rats] as mirrors of lustful, soulless, gluttonous, forever-multiplying human beings; [and] naturally, as agents of famine, as symptoms of putrefied air, or as warm-blooded disease vectors.”⁷⁰² This particular evidence then offers a useful contextual background for framing this chapter’s discussion of the rat plague as an exemplar of historical fantasy within *APTI*, as it elicits critical insight for understanding not as to whether “rats were (or were not) perceived as disease vectors ... as hosts for the plague, bacillus”, but instead:

[rats] as actants, as mediating agents ... [of] beliefs [that] express essentially the same process of infection ... but in an idiom to which we are unaccustomed.⁷⁰³

Due to spatial constraints, examples selected from this evidence for discussion are two of the dozen of folktales and beliefs within Medieval German folklore that demonstrate the most prominent sources of pre-modern rat imaginations in folkloric plague storytelling. These tales are ‘The Mouse Tower’ (German – Mäuseturm) and ‘The Pied Piper of Hamelin’.⁷⁰⁴

The Mouse Tower tells the story about the corrupt and cruel German Archbishop of Mainz Hatto II who was eaten alive by a swarm of rats when they breached through his

⁷⁰² Lucinda Cole, ‘Of Mice and Moisture: Rats, Witches, Miasma, and Early Modern Theories of Contagion’, *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 10.2 (2010), 65-84, p. 79.

⁷⁰³ Edward Green, *Indigenous Theories of Contagious Disease* (London: AltaMira, 1999), p. 18; Cole, *Imperfect Creatures: Vermin, Literature, and the Sciences of Life, 1600-1740*, p. 29.

⁷⁰⁴ Other notable sources of this evidence were uncovered from research in lining with this framework on the relation of rats to pre-modern expression of plague. They include: the ‘Rat King’ phenomena; literary studies on the infliction of the plague of ‘mice/rats’ as divine punishment upon the Philistines after their capture of the Israelites’ Ark of the Covenant as recounted in the Book of Samuel within the Bible; and English scholar Lucinda Cole’s chapter ‘Rats, Witches, Miasma, and Early Modern Theories of Contagion’.

stone tower refuge.⁷⁰⁵ Set in the late tenth century, the tale begins with the provinces in Germany (known in that time as the Holy Roman Empire) suffering from a terrible famine. The starving populace living in Archbishop Hatto's domain requested food from him as his granaries were full, but Hatto instead used this request as an opportunity to sell them at prices unaffordable to his subjects. When the peasants became angry and threatened open revolt, the dishonest bishop secretly devised a plan. He first enticed the peasants into a large barn and were to wait for him under the pretext of promising to bring food. When Archbishop Hatto arrived with his servants, he ordered them to shut and lock the barn's doors and then set the building on fire, burning its hungry occupants alive while exclaiming 'hear the mice squeak!'. However, shortly after the terrible incident when Hatto returned to his residence:

As a judgment for his cruel and wicked act he was plagued by mice and rats in swarms, and he fled for safety in a boat to a tower, which stood in mid-stream, to escape his doom. The vermin, however, swam after him and devoured him.⁷⁰⁶

This tale reinforces a popular Medieval attitude toward rats as a major threat to the consumption and contamination of food in respect to the Medieval power figures of authority had in the ownership of and misuse in distributing food supplies.⁷⁰⁷ Yet the occurrence of a pestilence via famine and subsequently mass starvation imbues the rats

⁷⁰⁵ Jan Bondeson, *The Two-headed Boy, and Other Medical Marvels* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 89-91. While the villain in this Medieval tale references to an actual historical figure (Hatto II), scholar Warren Dawson warns that the tale should not be seen as an authentic presentation of this figure, and that the villainous Archbishop is likely a conflation of Hatto II and an earlier predecessor Hatto I (c. 850 – 913), the latter recorded to have been a power hungry and cruel individual. Furthermore, the popularity and cultural significance of this tale and its overarching themes were not simply confined to Germany but were re-told in other European countries under different versions. One of these variations is the popular Polish tale *Popiel* involving the corrupt proto-Polish prince Popiel and his power-hungry German wife, exhibiting the same plot-structure of a swarm of rats that consume this royal couple as punishment for their evil deeds.

⁷⁰⁶ Warren R. Dawson, 'The Mouse in Fable and Folklore', *Folklore*, 36.3 (1925), 227-248, p. 245.

⁷⁰⁷ Cantor, p. 172.

with a ghastlier role as a supernatural pestilential agent of consumption by devouring the Archbishop alive due to his wicked deeds, selfishness, and lack of care toward his subjects. Moreover, the Archbishop's affliction of rats is also interpreted by Egyptologist and antiquarian scholar Warren Dawson as likely a Medieval narrative remediation of plagues sent by God as divine retribution or punishment against excessive sinfulness, idolatry, or wrongdoing via expression of the "spontaneous creation of swarms of mice from the bodies of innocent victims, who appear ... and avenge the dead by destroying their murderer."⁷⁰⁸ If this interpretation holds validity, it is likely that the Archbishop victims' metamorphoses into rats also loosely pays tribute to another popular Medieval German belief that rats and mice were a vehicle for the souls of those who departed during their journey to the afterlife, or that the "soul could assume the form of a mouse."⁷⁰⁹

In the 'Pied Piper of Hamelin', the commonly recognised version tells the story about an enigmatic figure called the Pied Piper who originally saves the town of Hamelin (located in the province of Saxony) from a massive rat infestation. The piper used his magical flute to draw the swarm of rats away from the closely packed streets and buildings, and then lead the rats to the Wesser river where they drowned.⁷¹⁰ However, the Piper later uses the same flute to play music that draws the young children away from their homes after the townsfolk refused to pay him for his services, or offered a sum lower than what was originally agreed to because he had dispatched the rats with little difficulty.⁷¹¹ Save that

⁷⁰⁸ 'Plague, n.:',
Dawson, p. 245;
Stieve, p. 139.

⁷⁰⁹ Dawson, p. 243.

⁷¹⁰ Wolfgang Mieder, *Tradition and Innovation in Folk Literature*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 51.

⁷¹¹ Mieder, pp. 51, 56-57.

of three children who returned, each of whom were either blind, deaf, or lame, all of the town's children that followed the Pied Piper were never to be seen again.⁷¹²

This story has had multiple re-tellings since its original inception, but all of them correspond to a real yet mysterious historical event in Hamelin on June 26th, 1284 involving the unexplainable disappearance of about 130 children.⁷¹³ Distinctive interpretations or theories have been given by various scholars in addressing what the tale is fundamentally about. One of the dominant views posits that the tale is a poetic re-telling of a terrible animal pestilence that afflicted the town in 1284, and thus was the likely cause behind the 'disappearance' of over a hundred children among the untold number of adult deaths.⁷¹⁴ Although the story neither explicitly displays a disease nor describes the rats as being a plague carrier, there is no doubt that the rats and their infestation of Hamelin are clearly established as the instigator for the town's misfortunes by likely being an artistic forewarning, harbinger, or symptom of a plague event. More importantly, the rats are also conveyed as a symbolic catalyst or prelude to the later calamity surrounding the children of Hamelin's unexpected departure for they, like the rats, are also entranced with music and follow the Pied Piper.

Yet the difficulty in establishing this interpretation with complete certainty, as German folklorist Wolfgang Mieder assents, is that both the inclusion of rats and the attachment

⁷¹² Mieder, pp. 56-57.

⁷¹³ Mieder, p. 49. Folklorist Wolfgang Mieder writes that the earliest record to date of this strange event is the now lost stained-glass inscription in the Market Church in Hamelin dated originally from about 1300 (underwent a restoration at one point in 1572). The inscription was reported to have had an image showing a man in coloured clothes surrounded by children with the attached description (translated from German) "On the day of John and Paul 130 [children] in Hamelin went to Calvary and were brought through all kinds of danger to the Koppen mountain and lost" (Mieder, p. 46).

⁷¹⁴ Mieder, pp. 49-50.

of an additional role to the enigmatic musician as a “piping rat catcher” were not incorporated into the legend until the sixteenth century.⁷¹⁵ Nevertheless, Mieder still argues convincingly that this Early Modern version of the Pied Piper story is likely the first known attempt of amalgamating both the original historical account of the mysterious disappearance in Hamelin with a much earlier series of rat-and-mouse catcher legends.⁷¹⁶ These earlier legends originated from and were already popular as a folktale genre in late Medieval Europe, tales which exhibited the same plot-structure found in the later Pied Piper story.⁷¹⁷ Namely, the occurrence of an animal plague and a figure who frees the town from this plague by playing a magical instrument (such as a pipe or horn).⁷¹⁸ Therefore, the rat swarm and rat catcher motifs within the Pied Piper tale are probably later integrations yet still, by their origins, chiefly Medieval entities re-fitted to serve a dual focus. Specifically, these motifs were likely a means to re-arrange the original Pied Piper tale into an artistic Early Modern response to the ongoing plague outbreaks among local communities owing, in part, to the devastating lingering effects originating from the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century. They would have also concurrently provided an initial platform that associated rat clusters as suspicious precursors (but by no means confirming them as causal vectors) to the occurrence and transmission of plague diseases.

These pre-modern examples of rat plague representation illustrate a small sample of the historical kernels of personal knowledge relating to past societies’ understanding of rats

⁷¹⁵ Mieder, p. 50. The unpublished chronicle in 1565 by Count Froben Christof von Zimmer of Swabia and his secretary Johannes Muller, and the 1592 chronicle by Augustin von Morsperg are cited as the earliest records to date that implemented these inclusions for the Pied Piper story.

⁷¹⁶ Mieder, p. 52. This amalgamated version would later become finalised and popularised as a unified text under the first volume of the collected fairytale series *Deutsche Sagen* (German Legends) by the brothers Jacob (c. 1785 – 1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (c. 1786 – 1859).

⁷¹⁷ Mieder, p. 52.

⁷¹⁸ Mieder, p. 52.

not as the direct source or origin of the plague, but as one of its primary vessels for rationalising a deadly yet invisible entity. It also provides further foundation to *APTI* as a recent modern addition to the longstanding tradition of plague storytelling by re-appropriating or substituting the actual Black Death with a supernatural form of pestilence. Therefore, analysing the various encounters and interactions I had with the rats in my recorded gameplay sequences of *APTI* exhibited a group of overlapping imaginative histories operating within Asobo Studio's negotiated space between "modernity and Medieval times."⁷¹⁹ In the modernity sphere, these sources of imaginative history contextualise the conflation of the Black Death and the rat swarm contagion as a backdrop to the game's overarching story themes that exude universal resonance to both our present contemporary society and the Middle Ages regarding global disasters. These themes surmised include the struggles of survival and family bonds, circumstantial forms of extreme violence and paranoia, and the loss of or the fear of losing one's innocence during a crisis. In the Medieval sphere, these same group of imaginative histories contained sequences of rat plague imaginations. These particular imaginations combined historical fantasy constructions of past plague symbologies, motifs, and expressions with playful interplays and/or subversions of various Classical, Medieval, and Early Modern subjects and storytelling traditions re-contextualised under new guises in *APTI*'s Black Death setting.

To demonstrate that these gameplay experiences with plague rats illustrate *APTI*'s multimodal representation of the past through historical fantasy, the selected gameplay sequences throughout the following sections will explore and illustrate one of two major imaginative histories. The first gameplay source of imaginative history examined

⁷¹⁹ Renard, 'Interview 2 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 8.

encompasses the infested rat swarm as a historical fantasy embodiment of past creations or manifestations of pestilence and decay (7.4). The second imaginative history unveils *APTII*'s utilisation of the plague rats as a folkloric intermediary for invoking and re-mediating under-represented historical groups existing during the Black Death (7.5). Both of these multimodal imaginative histories within *APTII* constitute as gameplay execution of Medieval historiography.

7.4 Plague Rats: A Supernatural Medieval Pestilence – Imaginative History:

Confronting and interacting with the rat swarm as a fantastical embodiment of pestilence and decay was a constantly recurring gameplay experience throughout most of my recorded sessions within *APTII*. These numerous experiences together constitute as an imaginative history by encompassing some of the various pre-modern usages and folkloric creations of plague but are re-imagined in *APTII* as artistically and/or procedurally generated gameplay performances directed by the rat swarm. To explore the two most significant animations of the rat swarm fantasy, the gameplay sequences used in the following section (7.4.1) are the first encounter with the plague rats at a village church in Chapter 3, and the game's representation of deceased plague victims in a fantasized plague-ridden Medieval city during Chapter 9. After the analytical discussion segment of these recorded sequences, several additional gameplay moments are also incorporated as extended illustrations to another integral embodiment of *APTII*'s rat swarm adaptation and its pestilential performances.

7.4.1 The Bite – A Pestilence of Disease, Hunger, and Landscapes:

The first introduction to the rat swarm in its terrifying power occurred at an early segment during Chapter 3 entitled 'Retribution'. As both Amicia and her little brother

Hugo, we managed to enter the village church after being chased by the violent and paranoid village townsfolk, with the first game objective of this chapter being to simply explore the confines of the church and find any surviving occupants [procedural/representational]. After some time had passed, we managed to find a lone and non-hostile surviving monk named Father Thomas, but when Amicia called out to him from a distance and asked for help, he shouted “leave. It’s dangerous. You have no business being here” [representational]. Despite the warning, Amicia and Hugo still needed his help and decided to catch up to him.

Once the children finally approached him the second time, a cinematic cutscene was initiated [procedural]. At first, he again told the children to go away. However, once he recognised Amicia’s necklace bearing the sigil of the De Rune family and being told that she and Hugo are the children of their deceased father Robert De Rune, Amicia then asked Thomas the whereabouts of their mother’s colleague and friend the alchemist Doctor Laurentius [representational]. Amicia believes Laurentius may have answers or knowledge to cure Hugo’s unusual yet life-threatening illness that is slowly killing him [representational]. Father Thomas replied that while he knew of Laurentius and how he used to look after the De Rune family, Thomas told the children that they needed to leave the church immediately because the place itself contained a far more “imminent threat.” Once Father Thomas realised that Amicia and Hugo could not return home as they would be caught by the Inquisition soldiers who earlier raided and massacred most of their family and servants, Thomas finally relented to help the children. Although Father Thomas could not leave the vicinity, he offered to take them to the church’s underground crypt called the ‘Crypt of the Three Saints’ which would lead to a back exit that would bring the children outside the crypt. This exit would lead them to another path that was in the direction of Laurentius’ farmstead [cutscene ended].

Figure 7.2 – Chapter 3: Retribution (II)

Amicia and Hugo talking to Father Thomas about their predicament. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot'.⁷²⁰



Once the group arrived at the crypt after walking a short distance, another cutscene appeared depicting Father Thomas giving the torch to Amicia that he obtained earlier, and then began to look for the other surviving monk and comrade Brother Morel (not knowing the terrible fate of Morel which I would later discover when escaping the crypt) [representational]. While Father Thomas was searching for Morel, Amicia noticed that Hugo felt frightened while clutching onto her as he could sense something terrible coming toward them. When Amicia called out to Father Thomas, suddenly a heavy thundering noise erupted followed by a strong howling sound that blew out the candles surrounding the downward staircase of the main crypt entrance, turning the entire vicinity dark save that of Amicia's torch [representational]. Within a split moment, a large

⁷²⁰ Redder, min 1:31:36.

swarm of rats unexpectedly erupted at a frightening pace in all directions, from the staircase to the cracked holes in the walls [representational], eventually flooding the entire place until it was completely covered with the black vermin. As recounted in my opening vignette, these plague rats looked “black as darkness itself save that of having big and glaring yellow eyes, creepy tails, and projecting terrifying high shrieking sounds.”⁷²¹

Figure 7.2A – Chapter 3: Retribution (III)

*Father Thomas trying to reach Amicia and the torch she is carrying before the rats overwhelm him. Recorded in ‘A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot’.*⁷²²



⁷²¹ Redder, p. 371.

⁷²² Redder, min 1:34:53.

Amicia and Hugo then hopelessly watched as a panicked Father Thomas hurried back to the children while calling out to Amicia for “the light! [torch]” [representational]. Due to having a severe limp in his leg, Thomas was running at a slow pace and could not reach to them in time. Then in a vivid display of horror and gruesomeness, dozens of rats crept and swarmed over Father Thomas’ body until he was completely covered, with Amicia and Hugo watching the rats eating him alive by gnawing him in a carnivorous fashion as he was screaming to his death [representational, cutscene ended].

Figure 7.2B – Chapter 3: Retribution (IV)

*Father Thomas being consumed alive by rats. Recorded in ‘A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot’.*⁷²³



⁷²³ Redder, min 1:35:03.

Returning to the game, after witnessing Amicia's terrifying shock at what she had just seen, as Amicia I held Hugo in close embrace as the rats had now surrounded them from all sides as more continued to appear and envelop the area [representational]. Another game objective appeared, stating that our goal was to escape the rats (and indirectly the crypt), but the rats were now extremely close to the siblings [procedural]. I knew at this point that the game system was implicitly signaling the rat swarm itself as one of the principal game mechanics in the form of a massive and moving physical obstacle [procedural]. This was evident by the vast number of rats that physically blocked all directions of escape and seemingly prevented me from initiating any kind of movement for fear of meeting the same fate as Father Thomas [procedural].

Figure 7.2C – Chapter 3: Retribution (V)

The rat swarm covering the entire vicinity. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot'.⁷²⁴



Strangely however, I noticed that the flaming torch was somehow protecting both her and Hugo by keeping the rats at bay [procedural/representational]. When I began to move, the rats immediately moved away from both us and the light while still keeping the children surrounded [procedural/representational]. I realised immediately that the rats were for an unknown reason somehow adverse to light, and that the torch was a reliable source that could allow Amicia and Hugo to escape the area and subsequently the entire crypt [procedural]. I did not receive any direct queue from the game, such as in-game text pop ups, indicating that the torch (and generally light sources) was an

⁷²⁴ Redder, min 1:35:16.

effective gameric object or asset designed for my characters to overcome this immediate rat swarm obstacle [procedural]. Nonetheless, through the game's visual and performative cues (e.g. holding the torch), I surmised shortly later that using light would be one of the primary rules to follow as part of progressing through this entire game by being the main device for encouraging myself as Amicia to evade, fight, or inhibit the plague rats [procedural].

Figure 7.2D – Chapter 3: Retribution (VI)

Amicia using the light from the torch, a core game mechanic to both illuminate the room and more importantly repel the rats. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot'.⁷²⁵



⁷²⁵ Redder, min 1:35:29.

Having our light source as a means to escape, I then proceeded with Hugo down the stairway and continued exploring the rest of the crypt in order to find the back exit. Shortly before we went down the staircase, when I cleared away a group of rats from a body temporarily, I saw to my shock the remains of Father Thomas as a bloodied skeletal corpse stripped of clothing and most of his flesh [representational].

Figure 7.2E – Chapter 3: Retribution (VII)

The Remains of Father Thomas after being consumed by the rat swarm. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot'.⁷²⁶



⁷²⁶ Redder, min 1:35:24.

The rat pestilence consuming humans like Father Thomas was not the only behaviour the rats exuded. In another segment during a gameplay sequence within Chapter 9 entitled 'In the Shadow of Ramparts', as only Amicia herself (without Hugo) I visited and explored a large Medieval city.⁷²⁷ The first game objective in this chapter was to find and enter the city's university which contained a forbidden book called 'Sanguinis Itinera' (Voyages of the Blood), with secret knowledge pertaining to an elixir that could cure or stop the progression of Hugo's illness [procedural]. At certain points of this journey when I took the time to explore parts of the city without rats and/or Inquisition soldiers nearby, I came across large piles of covered or exposed dead bodies. These corpses were scattered everywhere and left abandoned in places such as the streets, public cisterns, the town square, and on certain occasions large dug up pits near a public cemetery but left deserted and unburied [representational]. These particular displays took on a more tragic tone when I traversed through the upper floor of a house and saw the covered bodies laid on a bed of a parent and its child holding its doll [representational].

⁷²⁷ This Medieval city is discussed earlier in Section 5.2.3.1 as reminiscent or a conflation of several real cities within the south-western region of France, including Bordeaux and Carcassonne.

Figure 7.2F – Chapter 9: In the Shadow of Ramparts

Amicia finding the bodies of an unknown parent and child who have died from the plague (Bite).

Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence IV'.⁷²⁸

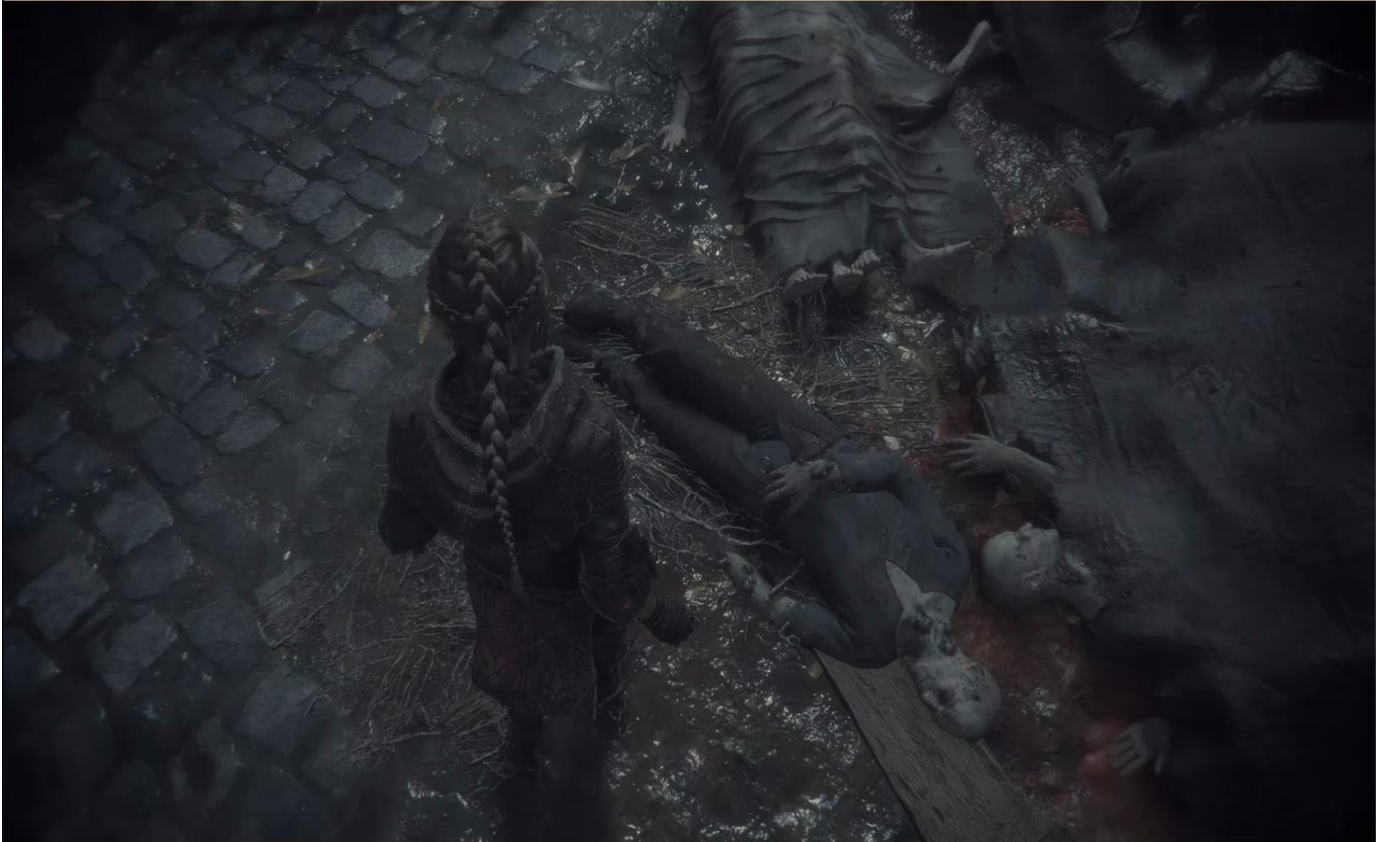


In cross-examining these observations, I deduced that these city residents died not by being consumed as food for the rats but through their diffusion of a particular plague disease. This was indicated by visually identifying most of the piles of exposed bodies displaying sickly pale skin, displays of a large discharge of blood (likely a pneumonic symptom via haemoptysis), large black buboes and/or sores, and a single instance of watching an individual coughing profusely before his immediate death [representational].

⁷²⁸ Redder, min 20:56.

Figure 7.2G – Chapter 9: In the Shadow of Ramparts (II)

One example of exposed plague bodies displaying some of the core symptoms. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence V'.⁷²⁹



⁷²⁹ Ben Redder, 'A Plague Tale Innocence V', in *A Plague Tale: Innocence* (5 July 2019), min 2:22.

Figure 7.2H – Chapter 9: In the Shadows of Ramparts (III)

Another example of plague bodies in an open, unburied pit near the city's cemetery. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence V'.⁷³⁰



In another particular instance, I came across a barely alive yet extremely weak and sick townsman heading to a small cistern while calling out for “water” that was contaminated with an embellished yet aesthetically horrific array of floating dead bodies [representational]. Despite Amicia’s warning not to drink the contaminated water, the townsman gave into his thirst but died shortly afterwards, revealing firsthand that the

⁷³⁰ Redder, min 12:24.

disease also gave its victims of the city hemorrhagic symptoms before dying [representational].

Figure 7.2I – Chapter 9: In the Shadow of Ramparts (IV)

Amicia watching helplessly as the plague-stricken individual drinks the contaminated water.

Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence V'.⁷³¹



By taking the time to examine these incidents, such as those aforementioned, I interpreted the nature of these deaths as bearing some of the visual characteristics likely pertaining

⁷³¹ Redder, min 35:31.

to the real Black Death, but poetically re-used in *APTI* as disease symptoms attributed to the rat swarm via the bite of individual rats.

In unpacking *APTI*'s rat swarm as an interactive imaginative history of Medieval pestilence, we can establish from a procedural angle that the recorded gameplay segment from Chapter 3 regarding the rats and their behaviour described earlier (see also Figures 7.2A – 7.2E) demonstrates the primary game mechanic of the rat swarm entity [procedural]. Concurrently, it also broadly introduced the rat swarm as one of two main types of enemies encountered throughout most of the entire game [procedural]. In progressing through each of *APTI*'s levels involving the rats, their ability to consume its victims, and how the success of their ability relies not on the total strength of the individual rat but in their numerical superiority, offers one of the common types of obstacles for my character protagonists Amicia and Hugo. Namely, the rats' ability to devour serve as one of several 'game over' scenarios if the player unfortunately comes into close contact with the rats [procedural]. If overtaken by a large cluster of rats, the player is instantly swarmed and then horribly eaten alive by the rats before a 'game over' screen appears [procedural]. Subsequently, the game's inclusion of countless rats spreading nearly all over the entire respective game map magnifies the chances of risking a game over scenario by encountering rat hordes as physical obstacles that block pathways and key destinations that the player must traverse to progress [procedural].

Figure 7.2J – Chapter 12: All that Remains

One of many examples depicting a core procedural function of the rat swarm as an integral obstacle for the player's characters to overcome. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence V'.⁷³²



To illuminate further this procedural component of the rats' consumption as shown in Figures 7.2K and 7.2L, one of the earliest occasions where I was consumed by rats occurred near Laurentius' farm in Chapter 4 entitled 'The Apprentice'. As Amicia and Hugo, we were close to reaching the farm, but our movements and pathways were impeded by the vast swathes of rats that burst forth from holes in the ground alongside large overlapping piles of rotting dead pigs [procedural]. Using a makeshift torch from a bundle nearby (one of the game's resource stockpiles that Amicia can access) and then

⁷³² Redder, min 2:41:33.

lighting the torch from a burning lamp, I tried to traverse through a path blocked by rats [procedural/representational]. While the flaming torch detracted the oncoming rats from the siblings, I noticed that the torch flame was starting to fade and would eventually die out, which I shortly discovered later was a subtle gamic rule or mechanic for objects that can only cast light temporarily [representational/procedural]. Not encountering this mistake beforehand, I tried to retreat and head to the closest lamp for protection, but it was too late. A large group of rats swarmed over Amicia and was in the early process of being devoured before it faded to a game over screen, and thus I had to restart the game from the last checkpoint [procedural/representational].

Figure 7.2K – Chapter 4: The Apprentice

The light of the torch fading. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot'.⁷³³



⁷³³ Redder, 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot', min 2:43:52.

Figure 7.2L – Chapter 4: The Apprentice (II)

Amicia being swarmed and devoured by rats before cutting to the game over screen. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I Pilot'.⁷³⁴



As I discovered through immediate environmental observation as well as trial and error, several key gamic affordances are given to players to avoid or overcome this prominent obstacle. The most notable affordances are the utilisation of temporary or permanent sources of light as rats can only move around and occupy places during the night or when inhabiting dark spaces bereft of daylight, and in certain instances turning the rats' consumption ability into a useful weapon or tool for my characters by direct or indirect manipulation [procedural]. One example of this manipulation is using Amicia's sling to hit hanging dead human or animal bodies that provide both a food source and temporary

⁷³⁴ Redder, min 2:43:56.

distraction for the rats, while creating an open gap for the player to traverse [procedural]. As these affordances are important aspects for the second imaginative history on the rat swarm, they will be discussed in further detail in Section 7.5.1.

In the gameplay sequence during Chapter 9 regarding Amicia's exploration of the Medieval city game level (7.2F – 7.2I), visually experiencing the depictions of disease, such as those encountered within the Medieval city, were found to have no known procedural game mechanics or functions. Instead, these depictions were primarily historical aesthetic conventions used to both add substance to and enhance *APTII*'s fantastically dark and plague-ridden Medieval environments [representational]. Thus, this aspect of the rats transmitting diseases was mostly representational, but it continued to play an important narrative role within the game's main story which is expanded in this section later.

These animated horrors of the plague performed by the rats within *APTII*, as shown in the respective sequences of Chapters 3, 4, and 9, were effective aesthetic and/or procedural devices by creating and facilitating a dark and nightmarish Medieval horror atmosphere for survival-based interactivity [procedural/representational]. However, these ghastly fictional depictions of death by rats via disease and consumption are not whimsically ahistorical constructions or representations. From historical modality analysis, they exemplify historical imaginations that allude to and concurrently renew certain characteristics, connotations, and folkloric constructions of Medieval and Early Modern pestilence derived from past documentations, folktales, and poetic compositions by conflating and re-constituting them together as attributes or powers of *APTII*'s supernatural rat plague. This supernatural plague is named by both the game *APTII* and

Sébastien Renard during our interview as “The Bite” [representational].⁷³⁵ The ‘bite’ in Renard’s terms is their game’s re-envisioning and idiom of the Black Death, where:

we don’t call [it] the Black Plague, we call it the bite ... because the disease in the game is secondary to the rats, our plague is the rats ... [with] the background and the fantasy to fit ... this [the rats].⁷³⁶

Throughout Amicia and Hugo’s journey within *APTII*’s Medieval France, the player encounters the pestilential powers of the bite as imaginative multimodal manifestations of the Medieval plague as both hunger from famine and disease. The most prominent of these powers of the bite then are the rat swarm as the deadly and ravenous devourer of both human and animal lives (famine), and as individual rats by extension the primary transmitter of diseases through biting their victims (disease) [representational]. Therefore, this remediation of plague rats as a symbol of famine and disease is arguably significant in preserving and constructing new and complementary sources of Medieval historiography for studying and disseminating scholarship about some of the historical interrelationships between pre-modern plagues and rats as a mode of expressing or imagining plague through folklore.

In reference again to the gameplay sequences from Chapters 3 and 9, these powers of the rat bite described constitute as two different yet correlated historical fantasies of the plague within *APTII*. In Chapter 9 for instance, the numerous visual observations of plague victims, and the nature of their deaths by contracting and suffering the terrifying

⁷³⁵ Renard, 'Interview 1 with Asobo Studio. Ben Redder (Interviewer and Researcher) with Sébastien.', p. 14.

⁷³⁶ Renard, pp. 14-15.

effects of the disease, corresponds to one of the rats' abilities within the game as a fantastical plague of disease [representational]. On a historical level, the various representations of the disease symptoms from the game's dying or deceased city residents are one of the few historical authentications of actual Medieval plague history (although slightly embellished in *APTI* for enhancing its visual horror). Specifically, authentic referents to several similar symptoms pertaining to the combination of bubonic and pneumonic trends exhibited by victims of the real Black Death as witnessed and documented by Medieval writers living in the time of that plague, such as Louis Sanctus, Giovanni Boccaccio, and Michele de Piazza [representational]. These symptoms recorded by Medieval contemporary writers that were compared to those I identified in *APTI*'s fantasy rendition of the plague include victims that "violently spat out blood [bloody sputum]", and how "some people broke out with black spots [buboes] all over their bodies, [where] in some they were few and very manifest, in others they were obscure and dense."⁷³⁷

However, being a historical fantasy, and not purely historical, construct within a visual-narrative format, these diseases were conveyed as afflictions created by the supernatural rat contagion by biting their unsuspecting victims (usually in the night). These victims would then exacerbate the disease by spreading it to others before succumbing to their own excruciating death. The nature of this connection between the rats and disease as I documented during my playthrough of the city was established early on in Chapter 3 as subtle yet important background information for Amicia. During a conversation with Father Thomas while heading to the crypt, Amicia asked him if the plague has already hit the region [representational]. Thomas himself gave subtle clues without directly

⁷³⁷ Michele da Piazza, *Cronaca*, ed. by Antonio Giuffrida (Palermo: ILA Palma, 1980), p. 82; Bartsocas, p. 396.

naming the culprit to the children (the rats), stating that it “started with bites during the night and then the sickness spread. First in families then to everyone. Fever, boils, people started dying and when we finally found out where it came from it was already too late.” Moreover, this fantastical disease aspect of the bite also signifies the rat pestilence as the primary catalyst for the main antagonist Grand Inquisitor Vitalis Bénévent’s search for the cure that resides within Hugo’s blood, due to Vitalis having at some point been bitten by a rat and is succumbing to his illness [representational]. In the game’s storyline, the plague of the bite is found to originate from Amicia and Hugo’s family as a mysterious ancestral curse known as the Prima Macula (A Latin expression of the phrase ‘first spot’) [representational]. Hugo unknowingly is patient zero and the cause of origin behind the main plague outbreak, while Amicia and her their parents are only dormant carriers [representational].⁷³⁸

⁷³⁸ From an implicitly technical perspective, both Amicia and Hugo are immune to the disease effects of the plague itself, with Amicia being vulnerable to only the physical consumption by the rats. Additionally, this plotline illustrates the only known yet indirect procedural function of the rat disease component by serving, in part, as one of *APT*’s overarching meta game objectives or goals, where Amicia and her allies are trying to find a possible cure that would save Hugo’s life before he succumbs to the curse.

Figure 7.2M – Chapter 12: All that Remains (II)

Hugo at an advanced stage of the Prima Macula Curse. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence

*V'*⁷³⁹



The earlier account given by Father Thomas on the origins of how the plague arrived and infected the populace in France as the silent deadly vermin, and the visual effects of the disease notably found in Amicia’s traversal of the Medieval city, are both clearly fictional due to the supernatural rat conduit [representational]. Nonetheless, in reference to the poignant scene of the eerie silence I felt toward the lifeless child and parent laying on the bed (see Figure 7.2F) as occupying an historically intermediate space between past real and unreal configurations of plague expression, I consider these visual fantasy representations of plague disease as likely subtle yet powerful historical remediations. That is, remediations of disease and infection that use fiction (rats) to present players a contemporary-based folkloric conflation or stand-in not only for the “trauma of

⁷³⁹ Redder, ‘A Plague Tale Innocence V’, min 3:27:46.

enormous death counts” that plagues like the real Black Death inflicted, but also how it came to its victims rapidly, unseen and silent, and usually unexpected.⁷⁴⁰

As briefly implied earlier, the gameplay sequence in Chapter 3 regarding the painfully violent end of Father Thomas by rat consumption is the second historical fantasy of the rat pestilence or bite by poetically corresponding to the plague of famine [representational]. Encountering this highly vivid fantastical aspect of the plague rats was not an isolated incident. It was a consistently prevalent and terrifying experience throughout most of my recorded sessions within *APTI* by encompassing the climax of the plague at its most aggressive and violent stage due to the presence of fewer human survivors [representational]. Yet this supernatural attribute of *APTI*'s rat pestilence as a carnivorous monster can be seen, in part, as a multimodal historical fantasy representation of Medieval plague as it alludes or plays homage to the earlier discussed revenge folktale *Mouse Tower* and its adaptation of the plague of famine and starvation [representational]. Particularly, the devouring of Archbishop Hatto II by numerous rats for his crimes. Despite this significant correlation, *Mouse Tower*'s portrayal of rats eating the bishop is used to symbolise divine punishment or retribution against a single individual (albeit corrupted). By contrast, *APTI*'s version of rat consumption of humans, and more broadly its incarnation of hunger, takes on a more darkly visage. From Papal Inquisition guards and English soldiers to priests and even Amicia's former dog companion called Lion, these collated gameplay representations of witnessing and physically experiencing the rats' power of eating their victims' bodies elevates *APTI*'s fantasized rat swarm pestilence to a far grander diabolic stage than its Medieval predecessors like *Mouse Tower* [representational]. Principally, in both physical and

⁷⁴⁰ Cooke, p. 17.

folkloric terms, as an apocalyptic, unrelenting, and seemingly unstoppable force of nature through its insatiable appetite for blood and flesh that leaves suffering, death, and devastation in its wake.

Figure 7.2N – Chapter 9: In the Shadow of Ramparts (V)

A further illustration of the rats' power of consumption encountered at the Medieval city.

Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence V'.⁷⁴¹



⁷⁴¹ Redder, min 26:27.

Figure 7.20 – Chapter 16: Coronation

Another illustration but in a grandiose display of horror involving parishioners. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence VI'.⁷⁴²



Moreover, seeing how some of the victims' bodies became grotesquely deformed and unnatural after physical devourment also historically engages on a poetic level to a couple of literary Medieval attitudes or significations regarding the association of flesh-eating to both imagined monsters and monstrosity [representational]. As Medieval scholar David Williams states in his exploration of imagined monsters within the discourse of Medieval thought and physical deformities "Not only does the act of cannibalism in and of itself establish monstrosity, it is also a common characteristic

⁷⁴² Ben Redder, 'A Plague Tale Innocence VI', in *A Plague Tale: Innocence* (5 July 2019), min 52:26.

among many kinds of monsters.”⁷⁴³ Similarly, German language and Medieval scholar Bettina Bildhauer, in exploring the depiction of monsters in several Medieval world maps, concurs that “cannibalism constitutes an extreme ‘deformation’ of the victim’s body, a mutilation.”⁷⁴⁴ It must be clarified that *APTI*’s association of famine pestilence to rat’s flesh-eating of humans is deprived of the anti-Semitic sentiments that came attached to these certain imaginative Medieval works on monsters, and rats by themselves are real and not elaborate mythical monsters adapted in these works such as the giant, strigae, and dogheads.⁷⁴⁵ Yet *APTI*’s careful mediation between tapping into the rat as a widely used object of phobia for generating horror into its game world, and the longstanding intensification of negative attitudes towards rats by pre-modern literary and even scientific communities, enables its rats to be a flexible conduit involving both real and fantastical, or even bizarre, manifestations of plague in respect to both storytelling and player interactivity.

The transmission and display of disease and the physical consumption of both humans and animals by the rat swarm were the most prominent historical fantasy animations, and concurrently metaphors, of some of the different material and folkloric or poetic expressions of pestilence. However, a notably third type of pestilence was also found and identified as another attribute of the rat swarm as well as another major source of Medieval (and Early Modern) historiography. This attribute is the rats’ putrefaction and corruption of Medieval landscapes, particularly plague corruptions of urban settlements. In contrast to certain other environments within *APTI* containing idyllic and peaceful

⁷⁴³ David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), pp. 145-148.

⁷⁴⁴ Bettina Bildhauer, 'Blood, Jews, and Monsters in Medieval Culture', in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. by Bettina Bildhauer & Robert Mills (Toronto, and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 75-96, p. 81.

⁷⁴⁵ Bildhauer, 'Blood, Jews, and Monsters in Medieval Culture', pp. 76, 80-81; Williams, p. 148.

moments during daylight by their beautiful forests, rivers, and flora and fauna covered with shades of bright, gentle colours, the pestilential corruption of Medieval urban environments by the rat swarm were not merely aesthetically dark and gloomy expressions of *APTI*'s game world. From analysis of my recorded footage, most of these pestilential urban landscapes exhibited graphical subversions of several past Medieval connotations or personifications of cities as symbols of Medieval urban society by depicting these places afflicted with strange putrefactions excreted by the rat invaders. As Medieval scholars Deborah Youngs and Simon Harris highlight, in the late Middle Ages:

Urban authorities often aspired to see their towns and cities emulate heaven in their good governance, order, harmony, and quality of life. City leaders hoped that the city walls would act as a civilizing barrier, shutting out the disruptive, wild, natural world outside.⁷⁴⁶

APTI however plays a twisted inversion of this universal Medieval thought with a gameplay variation of body metaphor. Prominently, by changing these similar urban structures and buildings representative of Medieval towns and cities into plague bodies diminished or despoiled of light, civilization, order, and security due to the destruction and infestation by the rats. To demonstrate these visual insights of *APTI*'s pestilential landscape, the images from Figures 7.2P – 7.2R relate to Amicia and her allies' return to the Medieval city in Chapter 16 entitled 'Coronation', with the main game objectives involving the rescue of Amicia and Hugo's mother Béatrice de Rune and the final fight

⁷⁴⁶ Deborah Youngs and Simon Harris, 'Demonizing the Night in Medieval Europe: A Temporal Monstrosity?', in *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. by Bettina Bildhauer & Robert Mills (Toronto, and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 134-154, p. 142.

against Grand Inquisitor Vitalis Bénévent [procedural]. Beginning with Figure 7.2P depicting a segment of the Medieval city, the state of the settlement since Chapter 9 has worsened. This settlement has been transformed from a powerful stronghold that once held a bustling and vibrant community to a mutated abode for the numerous rat nests that inhabit its impassable chasms, ruined buildings, and streets while bereft of human life save that of the Papal Inquisition soldiers [representational]. As we progress further into the heart of the city, we begin to see the city at its pinnacle of pestilential corruption or pollution, evident by the city's cathedral (Figure 7.2Q) and the last stronghold of the Inquisition. The cathedral is covered with a strange yet vile and disgusting black substance likely created by the rats and has also seeped through the entire city, covering streets, houses, and walls, with the air itself being a sickly and polluted yellow-green fog [representational].

Figure 7.2P – Chapter 16: Coronation (II)

A snapshot of the Medieval city, depicting one of the first and least polluted layers of its rat-infested environment, with the chasm in front of the children containing a large rat nest.

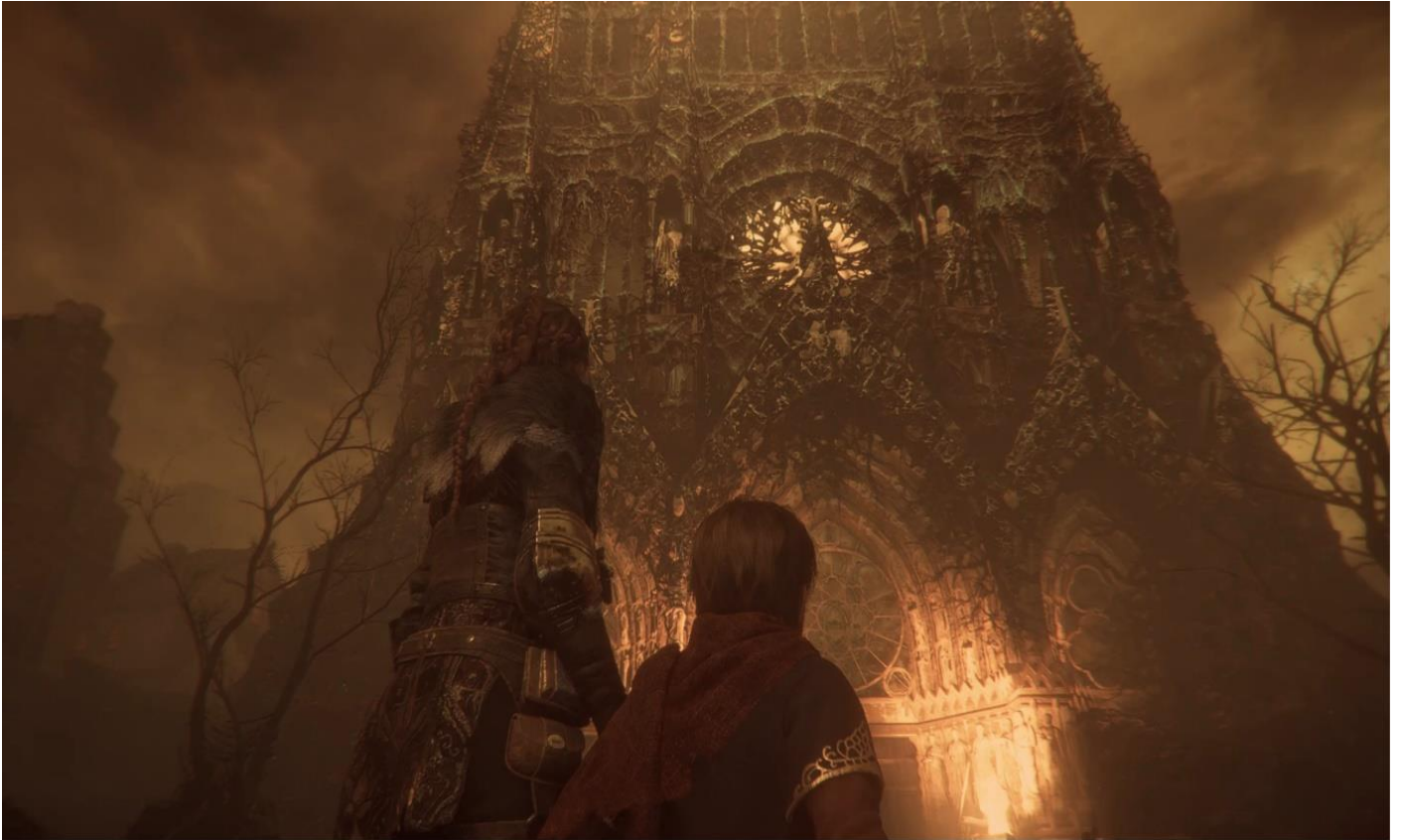
Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence VI'.⁷⁴⁷



⁷⁴⁷ Redder, min 8:53.

Figure 7.2Q – Chapter 16: Coronation (III)

The cathedral representing the heart of the city's pestilential corruption. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence VI'.⁷⁴⁸



⁷⁴⁸ Redder, min 48:53.

Figure 7.2R – Chapter 16: Coronation (IV)

A residential area covered with the same black substance. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence

VI'.⁷⁴⁹



Likewise, the crypt of the church from Chapter 3 was also a putrefied nesting home and breeding ground for the rats, who seem by some unknown means to multiply by covering the vicinity completely with the same gooey black substance (see Figure 7.2S) [representational]. This uncomfortable feeling of having to traverse through this bizarre yet disgusting environment occurred near the end of escaping the church's crypt. Amicia and Hugo encountered and were forced to go through a large hive created by this

⁷⁴⁹ Redder, min 30:51.

unusual black substance, as well as the hive decorated with blood-covered skeletal remains of its victims (likely the former monks) [representational].

Figure 7.2S – Chapter 3: Retribution (VIII)

An earlier encounter with the black substance as the main rat hive nest at the church's 'Crypt of the Three Saints'. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I (Pilot)'.⁷⁵⁰



These several visual examples shown exemplifies another key mode of *APT*'s multimodal engagement to pestilence via the utilisation of setting. These designs of fantastical plague-ridden settings through mass rat infestation and corruption may

⁷⁵⁰ Redder, 'A Plague Tale Innocence I (Pilot)', min 1:55:17.

appear ahistorical. I argue, however, that these fantasy expressions are another contribution to historiography on plagues by containing gameplay historical imaginations that interplay with or allude to some of the principles and styles of body metaphor used in Early Modern plague writing when describing urban environments. More specifically, these imaginations also play on Early Modern fears that transplanted perceived anxieties around the reproductive and eating habits or characteristics of rats as having destructive potential.

To explicate these gameplay imaginations, *APTI*'s remediation of the village church (Chapter 3) and city (Chapter 9) into hellish plague-ridden landscapes broadly resonate to the way Early Modern writers and poets used body metaphor for making analogies between people infected with disease to the fetid and unsanitary conditions within certain large urban centres like London. Examples like English playwright Ben Jonson's poem *On the Famous Voyage* using phrases to describe London as a "muddy ... womb ... its sewers as ... [its] entrails", and as a "concealed gut clotted with "stench, diseases, and old filth" " demonstrates how this style of language turned cities themselves into diseased or "corrupt pestilential body[ies]."⁷⁵¹ *APTI*'s implicit association of landscapes corrupted by pestilential forces to the unknown manner of the rat swarm's incessant copulation and proliferation also physically brings to life the inner fears and anxieties by members of Early Modern society toward the "unnatural or uncanny modes of reproduction ... [which] in turn, mimic the mysterious process of contagion, thereby reinforcing associations between rats and disease."⁷⁵² This longstanding disdain for the rats "sexual lawlessness and cannibalism" was even carried right until the early 1800's by natural historians and scientists, who examined the rat under their relatively

⁷⁵¹ Ernest B. Gilman, *Plague Writing in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 47.

⁷⁵² Cole, p. 66.

unconscious intersections between the “rat as a phobic object and as the object of natural history.”⁷⁵³ For example, natural historian and wood engraver Thomas Bewick wrote “their [rat] numbers would soon increase beyond all power of restraint, were it not for an insatiable appetite, that impels them to destroy and devour each other.”⁷⁵⁴ And Charles Fothergill in 1813 conveyed in one of his essays an apocalyptic vision of the unchecked proliferation of rats (one coincidentally manifested in *APTI*'s rendition of its rat plague apocalypse), stating:

if rats were suffered to multiply without ... restraint ... not only would fertile plains and rich cities be undermined and destroyed, but the whole surface of the earth in a very few years would be rendered a barren and hideous waste, covered with myriads of famished grey rats.⁷⁵⁵

In exposing and examining these particular contexts, *APTI*'s infinite tide of rats and their pestilential powers, specifically environmental decay through ongoing proliferation and the bite through disease transmission and physical consumption, bears similar overarching themes to the adaptations of plague in the modern era. Notably, Edgar Allan Poe's novel *The Red Masque of Death*. Like the enigmatic Red Masque of Death who leaves death, pain, and hardship to all of those that it meets regardless of their social status and wealth, *APTI*'s fantasy representations of death by the rats spares neither the rich nor the poor, young or old, and most notably the good and innocent from the evil and wicked. In a broader sphere, *APTI*'s engagement to a fantastical plague apocalypse and survival

⁷⁵³ Johnathan Burt, *Rat* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p. 47.

⁷⁵⁴ Thomas Bewick, *A General History of Quadrupeds: The Figures Engraved on Wood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 422. The book was originally published in 1790, but I could not find the name of the editor for the 2009 re-print, only the author of the foreword (Yann Martel).

⁷⁵⁵ Charles Fothergill, *An Essay on the Philosophy, Study, and Use of Natural History* (London: J. Moyes, 1813), p. 139.

is morbid, depressing, and dark, an apocalypse in Medieval guise but subversive to the traditionally epic and celestial apocalypses conveyed in Biblical and Medieval tales such as the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*.

7.5 Plague Rats: Invoking Folkloric Gameplay Re-tellings on Marginal Groups within Medieval Plague Discourse – Imaginative History:

APTI's implementation of the rat swarm fantasy as a playful facilitator for exposing and re-telling certain historical groups marginalised or seldom expressed in Black Death history constitute as the second and last imaginative history for discussion. Three of these groups re-imagined in *APTI* that I class as marginal histories of the Black Death are the orphan children, the Inquisition, and alchemists (each of these groups are also gameplay sources of imaginative history within *APTI*). Due to spatial constraints, the selected multimodal gameplay sequences for this imaginative history are mainly confined to the agency of Medieval orphan children as illustrated principally through the player's protagonists Amicia and Hugo. Since *APTI* is a historical fantasy adaptation, approaching this game's inclusion of Medieval orphan children as having new academic scholarship on the lives and experiences of this marginalised group in Black Death history would be an unproductive endeavor as well as an unfavorable standard. *APTI*'s incorporation of children protagonists is more closely resonant to the usages of children or adolescents in Medieval and Early Modern European folktales (e.g. *Pied Piper of Hamelin* and *Hansel and Gretel*) as the principal protagonists in folkloric confluences of past historical events entailing dangers, disasters, and/or traumas.

This type of imaginative history regarding the role rats play in *APTI*'s re-telling of Medieval plague disasters via a contemporary children-based folktale style is that of the

rats themselves interacting with, embodying, and/or subverting certain pre-modern genres, beliefs, concepts, and historical events. This is evident by my uncovering and analysis of two key gameplay sources of this imaginative history. The first source identified entails the rats as one of the conduits for the character Amicia to partake in folkloric-stylised combative violence by personifying the entity of darkness and its opposition to entities and institutions representing light. The second source places the rats as a framing narrative device for the player (as either or both Amicia and Hugo) to encounter situations embodying condensed folkloric adaptations of certain actual historical events and dangers pertaining to plague history, such as the Hundred Years War between England and France which occurred before and during the Black Death. Both of these key sources constitute as historical fantasies of this particular gameplay imaginative history on the rat swarm, but the following section solely focuses on the interplays of light and darkness characterising the children's survival from the rat pestilence for illustration. The primary gameplay sequence used is one of many instances involving Amicia's use of fire as light for combat against the rats, which is accordingly the capture of the fictional castle called Château d'Ombrage. Afterwards, several recorded contrastive gameplay moments are then provided near the end of that section, which contain experiences of the siblings' control or use of the rats as an intrinsic source of power.

7.5.1 Children and Rats – A Medieval Battleground between Light and Darkness:

One of *APTII*'s many fantasized displays of light against the plague rats as darkness incarnate was the capture of Château d'Ombrage by Amicia, Hugo, and two other allied children (Laurentius' apprentice Lucas and the thief Mélie) in order to turn the castle into a new home and main hideout from the Inquisition. This event occurred in the last segment of Chapter 7 entitled 'The Path Before Us'.

Figure 7.3 – Chapter 7: The Path Before Us

A view of Château d'Ombrage from a distance. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence III'.⁷⁵⁶



When the group finally arrived at the fortress after traversing through a treacherous rat-infested pathway, they immediately discovered to their distress that the castle grounds was also occupied with countless rats [representational]. As it was night-time amid a thunderstorm, the rats occupying the castle would not disappear until daylight, but the children were very cold and needed to reach the castle's main tower for shelter and warmth which was obstructed by the rat swarm. Moreover, between the children at the castle's entrance and the main castle grounds was a strange large pit filled with rats, and seemingly blocked the only route of entering the castle proper [representational].

⁷⁵⁶ Redder, 'A Plague Tale Innocence III', min 1:00:39.

Fortunately, the thief Mélie in our group was an expert in lockpicking, so as Amicia I tasked her with opening a nearby locked door via the game's simple command menu [procedural/representational]. Unlocking this door allowed us to reach to a partial segment of the second floor of the castle grounds to gain a better overlook of the entire vicinity [representational]. From viewing the vicinity, three stone platforms at the centre of the castle grounds were identified (with the one closest to us containing a ladder), and were all surrounded by a number of old braziers filled with embers as well as a couple of bundles of unlit makeshift torches [representational]. The braziers at the outer layer of the castle grounds were attached to supporting primitive cranes, while those closest to the centre platforms in the inner layer were attached to wheels for movement [procedural/representational]. Having encountered braziers and unlit torch bundles in previous chapters of this game as some of the gamic resources or tools used for creating fire, I already knew that these potential sources of light scattered around the castle grounds were our only means of fighting back against the rats [procedural/representational].

Figure 7.3A – Chapter 7: The Path Before Us (II)

The large pit in front of the children at Château d'Ombrage's entrance. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence III'.⁷⁵⁷

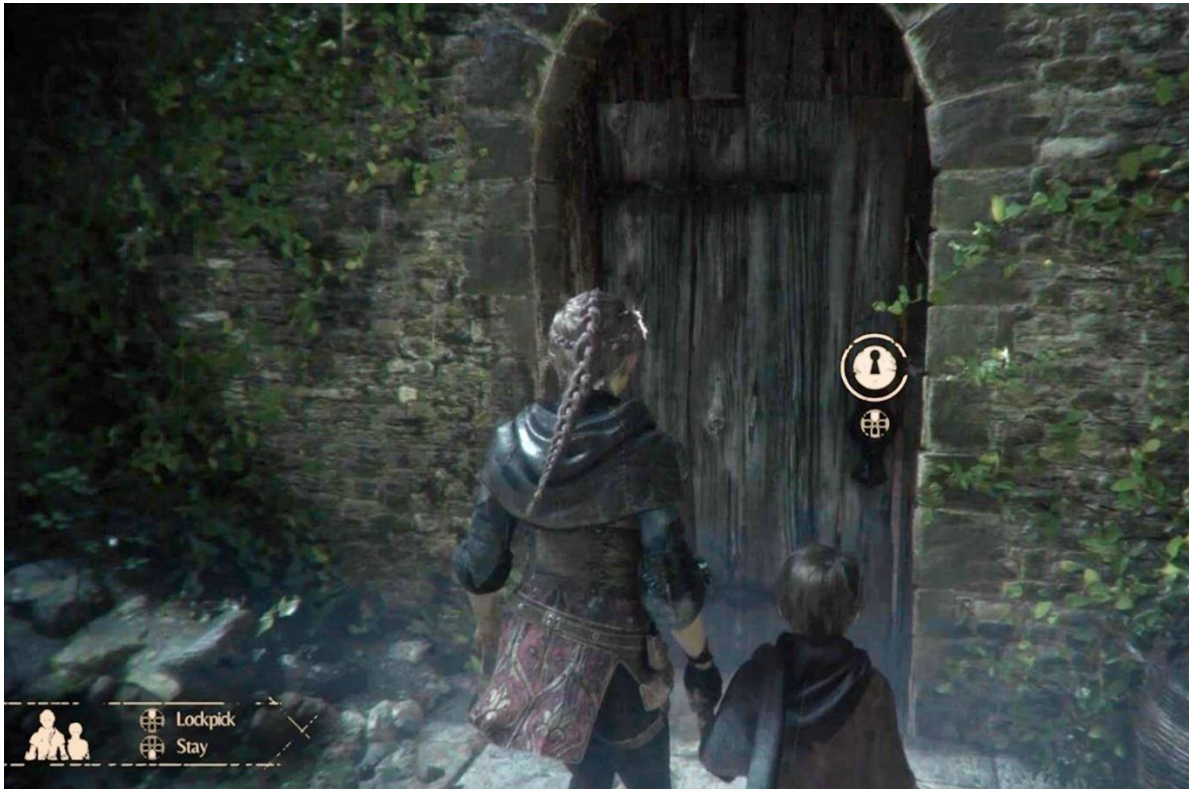


⁷⁵⁷ Redder, min 1:05:19.

Figure 7.3B – Chapter 7: The Path Before Us (III)

A simple command menu display, with the option 'lockpick' used for the group's thief Mélie.

Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence III'.⁷⁵⁸



With Lucas looking after Hugo until the rats were cleared, as Amicia I, accompanied by the thief Mélie for assistance, would work together in battling the rats while securing the castle grounds. With Amicia calling this battle in a playful tone the “siege of Château d'Ombrage, two girls versus thousands of rats”, I lighted the first nearby brazier by firing a projectile from my sling called an ignifier, a fantastical alchemy-based flammable mixture that when thrown lights the targeted object on fire [procedural/representational]. I then used the lever attached to the crane from the wall operating the enflamed brazier and moved it from one side to the other, which forced the first and nearest group of rats

⁷⁵⁸ Redder, min 1:05:50.

below the wall to the inner sector of the castle grounds while clearing a certain area of ground for Amicia to safely land [procedural].

Figure 7.3C – Chapter 7: The Path Before Us (IV)

Amicia using the crane device with the first lighted brazier to clear the nearby area of rats.

Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence III'.⁷⁵⁹



This approach also allowed access to one of the castle's bundle of unlit torches, and lighting one of them for use I proceeded to traverse through the next cluster of rats and then lighted the first inner brazier [procedural].

⁷⁵⁹ Redder, min 1:06:59.

Figure 7.3D – Chapter 7: The Path Before Us (V)

A snapshot of Amicia about to light the first inner brazier with her temporary makeshift torch.

Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence III'.⁷⁶⁰



After climbing onto the first centre stone platform via its ladder, I forgot to command Mélie to follow me as her assistance was needed in pushing the small drawbridge which connected the first and second stone platforms together in order to continue the mission [procedural]. However, the gap between the first and second braziers that I lighted earlier was already reclaimed by the rats [procedural]. To return and fetch Mélie, I threw a different alchemical projectile called a 'luminosa', a makeshift hand grenade that would explode and kill many rats when it landed in order to clear a path, but this approach failed as the remaining rat cluster would immediately occupy the area again

⁷⁶⁰ Redder, min 1:07:55.

[procedural/representational]. However, the platform I was on had a primitive steering device operating the wheels under the first inner brazier that I lighted earlier. Steering the contraption, the brazier went all the way until reaching the edge of the pit while its light was repelling the rats, who eventually retreated and fell into the pit [procedural/representational]. As soon as I let go of the steering contraption, the wheeled brazier immediately reversed and went straight back to its original position [procedural].

Figure 7.3E – Chapter 7: The Path Before Us (VI)

A display of Amicia using the inner brazier to repel and force the rats toward the large pit.

Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence III'.⁷⁶¹



⁷⁶¹ Redder, min 1:10:46.

Using this steering contraption revealed initial insight of a pattern forming, where the outer and inner braziers throughout the castle that I would have to light were not single, isolated instruments like those in previous chapters. These fire sources were instead organised as interconnected mechanisms of the castle's defensive system designed by its former occupants (likely the alchemists) as a means for repelling and driving the rats toward the large pit by the entrance, thereby keeping them at bay by the braziers' light until daybreak [procedural/representational]. This process of lighting all the braziers around the castle through using its crane and steering contraptions continued throughout the children's reclaimant of the castle grounds, which gradually turned the fortress from a dark and rat-infested plague abode into a bastion of light [representational]. Essentially, the task of re-establishing the castle's defence system was entirely a practical-based type of puzzle. That is, I somehow had to light the remaining braziers without being devoured by the rats, and then place them at precise positions that would gather and maneuver the different clusters of rats toward the pit for containment [procedural]. Teamwork with Mélie was the main solution to this puzzle. This was mainly enacted by using the command menu to delegate her as the main driver of the steering contraptions when a steering icon appeared near the device in order to move the enflamed inner braziers that would protect Amicia from the open blanket of darkness occupied by the rats [procedural].

Figure 7.3F – Chapter 7: The Path Before Us (VII)

An example of using Mélie's assistance with operating the steering devices controlling the inner braziers from the stone platforms by initiating the command menu whenever the steering icon appears. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence III'.⁷⁶²

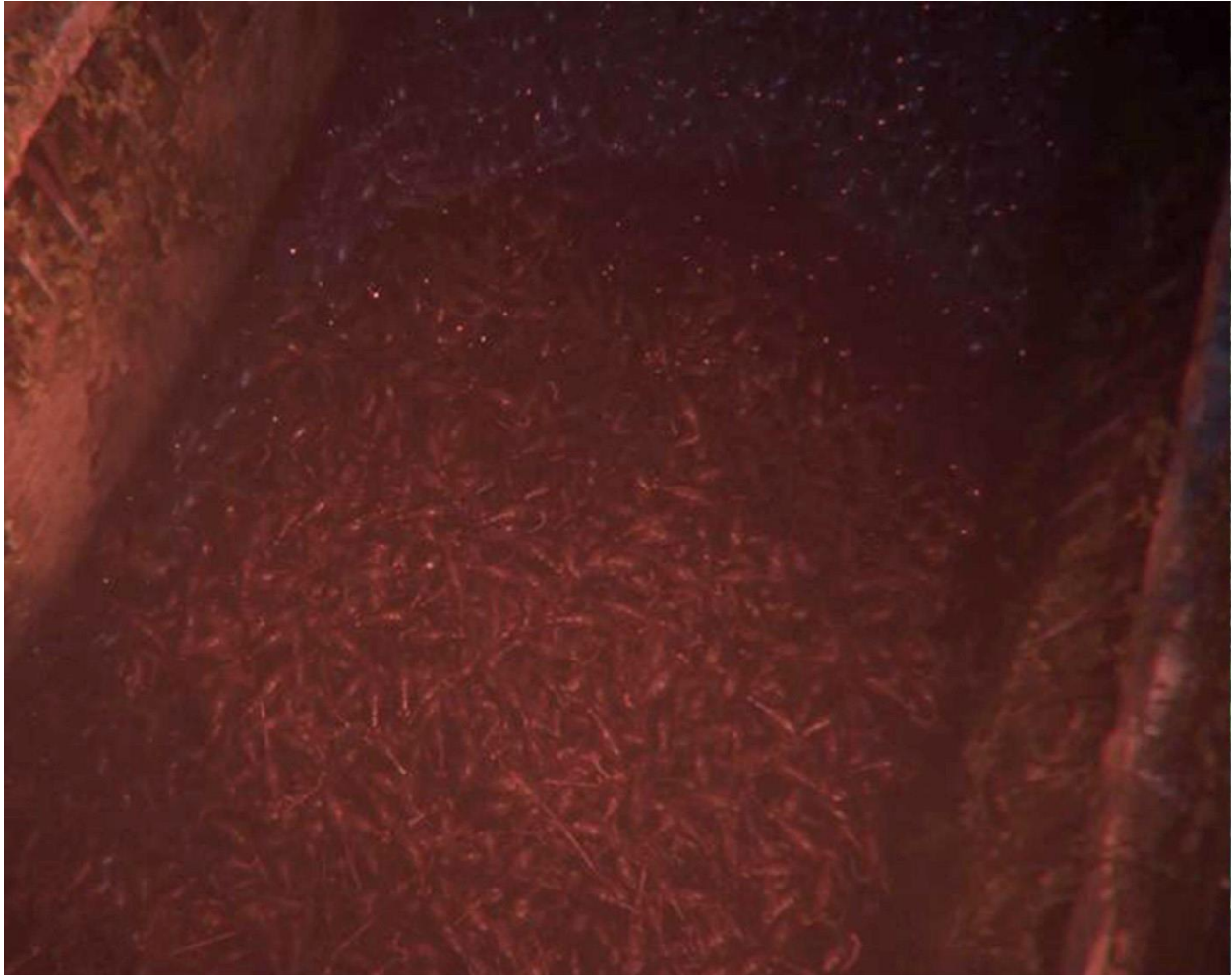


Meanwhile, as Amicia I would be tasked with lighting the remaining braziers, usually by firing ignifier projectiles, and then using its light to repel and force as many rats toward the pit while creating a path safe enough for Mélie to traverse with Amicia [procedural]. After clearing all of the rats from the castle grounds, Amicia and the other children regrouped, celebrated their victory, and headed to the main castle tower in order to recuperate after their long travel, which ended Chapter 7 [representational].

⁷⁶² Redder, min 1:12:36.

Figure 7.3G – Chapter 7: The Path Before Us (VIII)

A snapshot displaying all the rats permanently contained in the castle's pit. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence III'.⁷⁶³



On an overarching narrative level, recounting my gameplay experiences of the children's battle with the rats within the mystical ancient fortress is one of the many sequences representative of *APT* as an overarching work of gameplay historiography. Foundationally, by containing striking similarities to some of the wider conventions or principles of storytelling in the Medieval children folkgenre 'Wonder Tales', as well as its

⁷⁶³ Redder, min 1:22:10.

later Early Modern German variation 'Märchen' (Little Story). The main storytelling conventions from these respective folkgenres echoed in *APTI* are the incorporation of episodic adventures partaken by children in a variety of locales or environments, and the inclusion of children (Amicia and Hugo) as the principal narrators and heroes of the main story [representational]. Most importantly, the children protagonists facing and overcoming through some mystical or fantastical means a hostile or troublesome supernatural creature(s) containing recurring trials and tribulations is another integral convention shared [representational].⁷⁶⁴ Despite these similarities however, these respective adjoining narrative structures in *APTI* are distinctly reframed in a manner characteristic to a contemporary folkloric-based rendition of a pre-modern children's adventure by animating its nuanced plague story, villains, and the children's heroism under a dualistic framework comprising of light and darkness.

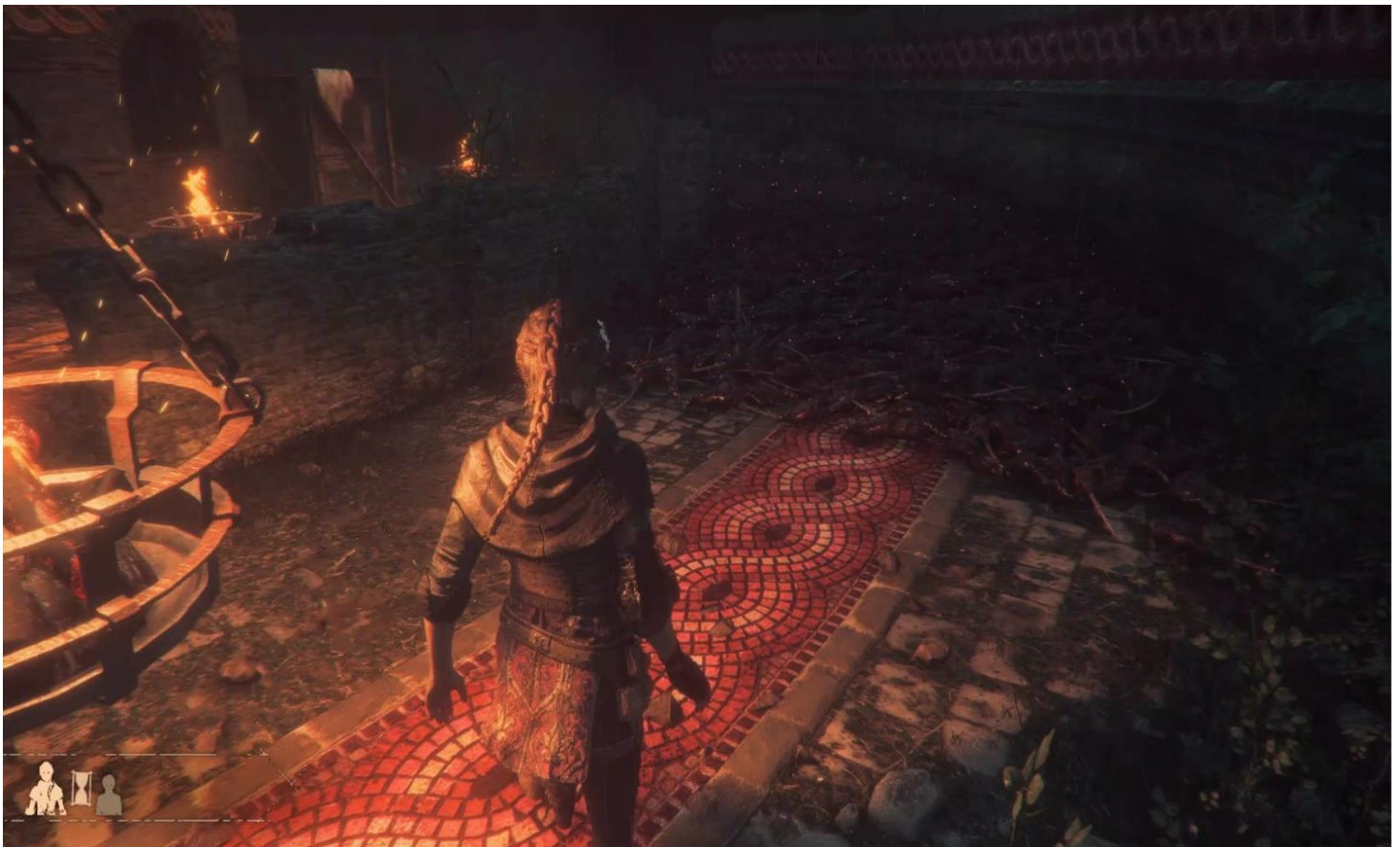
This interplay of light and darkness is largely played out as both physical and emblematic gameplay manifestations. Manifestations that is of the numerous fantastical yet dangerous encounters and combative engagements between the Medieval children protagonists Amicia and Hugo (usually in accompaniment with other allied children) via their use of fire sources for protection and the rat swarm as the personification of the Black Death [representational]. During Amicia and Mélie's activity in securing and purging the rat infestation within the castle for instance, gameplay evidence of this interplay is directly exhibited through the repetitive nature or behaviour of the rats as a literal force of darkness. To specify, the nature of the rats as an entity of darkness encompasses not only its diabolical pestilential powers (e.g. fantasized consumption of humans) but also its fear of fire when it quickly evades the blazing light emanating from

⁷⁶⁴ Carl Lindahl, 'Folktale', in *Medieval Folklore: A Guide to Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs*, ed. by Carl Lindahl, John McNamara & John Lindow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 142-147, p. 145.

the flame carried by Amicia [representational]. This latter characteristic particularly confirms without doubt the rat swarms' existence as supernatural creatures that actively thrive only in the dark. Specifically, living in places absent of both fire sources and direct sunlight during daytime, and more prominently in the open evening when the rats themselves rule the night [representational].

Figure 7.3H – Chapter 7: The Path Before Us (IX)

A snapshot showing the rats occupying the only dark space near them as they are temporarily ensnared by the light of the enflamed braziers. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence III'.⁷⁶⁵



⁷⁶⁵ Redder, min 1:14:04.

Thus, Amicia's varying usages of fire to practically dispel and/or destroy the infinite rat horde (certain rat clusters can be trapped and killed if cornered by literally combusting from the light of the flame until nothing of them remains) embodying the unrelenting darkness afflicting Medieval Europe can be inferred definitively as one of *APTI*'s manifestations of light [representational].

Figure 7.3I – Chapter 3: Retribution (X)

An example of an incident showing a group of rats undergoing the process of combusting into flames as they are cornered by the light of Amicia's torch with no chance of escape, as visually indicated by a number of scattered sparks with a faint black residue representing the former individual rats. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence I (Pilot)'.⁷⁶⁶



⁷⁶⁶ Redder, 'A Plague Tale Innocence I (Pilot)', min 1:45:36.

From a procedural perspective, the symbolism of the fire sources and rats as remediated gameplay fantasies of light and dark works as an effective multi-purpose game mechanic.⁷⁶⁷ In sequences such as the children's victory in securing and purging the rat infestation within the castle, fire resources within *APTI* depicted and/or available for the player to create and use as light sources mainly comprise of natural and alchemical types [representational]. Both types of fire resources throughout the game operate under three core procedural functions. The functions of these fire resources are to offer a fantasized type of Medieval combat specific to fighting the plague rats, and serve as practical tools or instruments to solve some of the game's physically intricate puzzles [procedural]. Finally, they also act as simple emergent ludonarrative devices by visually illuminating the dark for the siblings Amicia and Hugo when they are forced to traverse through hostile rat-infested environments during night-time [representational/procedural].

Natural fire sources comprise of unlit and already lit primitive objects, which include lamps, lanterns, smoldering haybales, and those used in the castle siege such as braziers and torches [representational]. Alchemical fire sources can also be obtained through crafting and firing certain types of flashy alchemical projectiles at certain targets via Amicia's sling [procedural]. These different types of alchemical projectiles can be produced by Amicia at any point during the game by opening the in-game crafting menu once the recipe or knowledge of them are first acquired, and subsequently if the player has the correct type and amount of ingredients or items required for crafting the specific projectile(s) [procedural]. As seen in Figure 7.3], the product called 'devorantis' is currently the option selected within the crafting menu, showing the exact types of ingredients required, as well as their exact amounts, for initiating the 'craft' action

⁷⁶⁷ This Medieval game's remediated association of fire to light was previously introduced in some detail during discussion of the first imaginative history in this chapter (see Section 7.4.1).

[procedural/representational]. Craft items can be found by exploring the immediate surroundings throughout the varying linear environments in each of the game's chapters, ranging from rocks and fabric material to alcohol, saltpeter, and sulfur [representational].⁷⁶⁸ Because these ingredients found by the player in each chapter for crafting are usually in limited number, alchemical projectiles should not be used too frequently [procedural].

Figure 7.3J – Chapter 7: The Path Before Us (XI)

A snapshot of the projectile crafting menu, displaying the current types of projectiles available, including the selected projectile 'devorantis'. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence III'.⁷⁶⁹



⁷⁶⁸ The last three ingredients listed (alcohol, saltpeter, and sulfur) required for crafting these alchemical missiles bear a level of historicity to the same ingredients and components that actual Medieval alchemists used in their profession, such as conducting experiments and brewing medicinal cures.

⁷⁶⁹ Redder, 'A Plague Tale Innocence III', min 23:46.

The flammable product 'ignifier' described earlier during my recounting of the castle siege is one of six types of alchemy projectiles available, but this projectile specifically is one of two missiles designated for creating fire. The other fire-based projectile is 'luminosa', a byproduct of ignifer first obtained in Chapter 7. While ignifier is a tool for illumination by simply emitting unlit objects with light when thrown from a distance (e.g. smoldering haybales and braziers), luminosa is purely an offensive hand-thrown makeshift grenade [procedural/representational].

Figure 7.3K – Chapter 7: The Path Before Us (XII)

A before shot displaying Amicia about to fire the alchemical projectile 'ignifier' at an unlit outer brazier crowded with rats, with the ammunition marker indicated by a flame symbol at the bottom right-hand corner. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence III'.⁷⁷⁰



⁷⁷⁰ Redder, min 1:18:41.

Figure 7.3L – Chapter 7: The Path Before Us (XIII)

An after shot showing the brazier enflamed by Amicia's ignifier projectile. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence III'.⁷⁷¹



The luminosa was used on many occasions against the rats, including the re-taking of Château d'Ombrage recounted earlier. To elucidate, on several instances it was difficult to reach an unlit brazier with a torch or set it alight with an ignifier projectile, so as Amicia I would resort to throwing a luminosa projectile at some of the rat swarm clusters. This flammable mixture when thrown at a particular spot near or covered by rats ignites into a powerful explosion, killing a large group of rats directly hit while temporarily dispersing those near the immediate blast [procedural/representational]. Thus, enough

⁷⁷¹ Redder, min 1:18:43.

time was allowed for Amicia to run across and reach the targeted brazier before the flames from the blast disappeared [representational].

Figure 7.3M – Chapter 7: The Path Before Us (XIV)

A snapshot of the explosion created from throwing the luminosa projectile during my initial attempt of clearing a safe path to reunite with Mélie. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence

III'.⁷⁷²



From a representational standpoint however, the children's usages of the power of fire (light) against the plague rats (darkness) within *APT I* are historical fantasy animations of

⁷⁷² Redder, min 1:08:48.

and subsequently provide several playful gameplay historiographies contributive to the Medieval allusions to and attitudes of light and darkness as the oppositional Manichean-based forces of 'good versus evil' respectively.⁷⁷³ Recounting the characterisations of the rats as the monstrous denizens of the night in the siege of Château d'Ombrage gameplay sequence earlier (see also Figures 7.3 – 7.3H, and 7.3K – 7.3M) confirms a popular literary Medieval association of the night as the metaphor for darkness and evil [representational].⁷⁷⁴ In Medieval times, many inhabitants in both cities and villages were afraid of venturing out of their homes or social venues after curfew in the late evening, as they believed the night contained all kinds of dangers, horrors, and monsters lurking somewhere in the “quintessential terror of the dark and its unknowns.”⁷⁷⁵ The correlation of *APTT*'s rat swarm appearing under complete darkness as the plague via its pestilential powers to the collective imagined horrors of the Medieval night can be suggested as playfully invoking a modern re-imagined spin on Medieval society's fear and demonization of night-time as an evil entity. Chiefly, by signifying either “the time for monstrosity, or ... [the night] anthropomorphized into a temporal monstrosity” [representational].⁷⁷⁶

Likewise, the recurring practical effects of both natural (e.g. brazier, torches) and alchemical (ignifier and luminosa) forms of fire when usually used by Amicia exhibits characteristics widely emblematic to several Medieval connotations of fire.⁷⁷⁷ Namely, fire as a metaphor for light by representing both the “purifying, and renewing ... power of

⁷⁷³ Madeleine Pelter Cosman and Linda Gale Jones, *Handbook to Life in the Medieval World* (New York: Facts on File, 2008), p. 362.

⁷⁷⁴ Youngs and Harris, p. 134.

⁷⁷⁵ Youngs and Harris, p. 135.

⁷⁷⁶ Youngs and Harris, p. 135.

⁷⁷⁷ On a visual level, the enemy English and Papal Inquisition guards and soldiers are other users of fire sources besides Amicia, mainly through carrying lanterns, torches, and lamps.

destruction”, and when expressed as a flame contained in a vessel, such as a lamp or brazier, the preservation of the individual’s “life force” [representational].⁷⁷⁸ Amicia’s usages of fire symbolising light can be suggested then as a force of good not only by preserving the lives of herself, her brother Hugo, and the other children from the clutches of death by the rats [representational]. It also conveys a figurative preservation of the children’s remaining fragments of innocence and humanity within this extremely violent and paranoid world of plague-ridden France, for Amicia’s use of fire is neither to harm nor claim human lives but a noble means to combat the evil rats [representational].

By interpreting the children’s varying usages of fire against the plague rats as interactive gameplay remediations of the Medieval pillars of light and darkness, a particular narrative theme can be ascertained. This narrative theme is one derived from *APTI* re-fitting the Medieval figurative connotations of fire, the rat swarm, and the night as moralistic signifiers of good and evil into its nuanced plague storytelling. The conveyed narrative concerned is that of fire as the force of destruction that purges or cleanses the evil of plague by dispelling and burning the rats with an overpowering radiant light from its flames [representational]. While seemingly original to *APTI*, this fantastical narrative thematisation of light-dark imaginations is arguably a loose gameplay incarnation of older re-tellings of climatic conflicts between good and evil within Medieval and Classical accounts and stories by sharing correspondences to past religious and folkloric renditions of this narrative structure. Including a vision by Benedictine abbess and writer Saint Hildegard von Bingen (c. 1098 – 1179) of the Trinity as the fiery light banishing the eternal darkness depicted in her illuminated manuscript *Scivias*, and the banishment of plague

⁷⁷⁸ Udo Becker, 'Fire', in *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols*, trans. by Lance W. Garmer (New York: Continuum, 1994), p. 112;

Udo Becker, 'Lamp', in *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols*, trans. by Lance W. Garmer (New York: Continuum 1994), p. 172.

depicted in the Ancient Greek texts *Illiad* by the poet Homer (c. 800–c. 701 B.C) and *Oedipus Rex* by tragedy playwright Sophocles (c. 497/6 – 406/5 B.C).⁷⁷⁹

To elaborate on *Illiad* and *Oedipus Rex* as examples, both its respective authors Homer and Sophocles apply the Greek God Apollo as the main figure who both incites and ceases and subsequently wards off certain evils such as plague due to his control of light.⁷⁸⁰ Homer’s Apollo is endowed with a “special [supernatural] power ... the bright light ... [which] dispels the darkness of pestilence”, and uses his divine power to end a plague taking place during the Trojan War after being placated by the Greeks rectifying their crime (returning Chryses’ daughter Chryseis to him).⁷⁸¹ Sophocles’ Apollo, by contrast, is simply endowed with “special knowledge ... [knowledge as] the light that illuminates the dark places of mind” by giving information to Oedipus through several obscure puzzles and riddles that when solved provide answers that help end the city of Thebes’ plague crisis.⁷⁸² *APTI*’s rendition of fire as light banishing the dark plague can be deduced as a more mundane and less mythical version of the light-dark expressions within these Classical Greek texts by conveying Amicia as an implicitly figurative representation of Apollo. Specifically, Amicia and her combative agency in utilising fire for battling the rats subtly exudes or channels both the Homeric and Sophoclean notions of light. These

⁷⁷⁹ Elizabeth Dreyer, *Holy Power, Holy Presence: Rediscovering Medieval Metaphors for the Holy Spirit* (Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press, 2007), p. 78. Hildegard von Bingen’s illustration of the Trinity is one of her 26 visions that she claimed were communicated to her by God himself at different points throughout her life prior to recounting them in *Sivicas*.

⁷⁸⁰ Theresa Bane, 'Bow of Apollo', in *Encyclopedia of Mythological Objects* (Dallas, T.X: McFarland Inc., 2020), 34, p. 34. Specifically, the God Apollo is widely known within Greek mythology in various roles, such as the God of knowledge, medicine, plague outbreaks, and light. In reference to the last role, Apollo as the God of light should not be confused with Helios the God of the sun. Apollo is usually understood as the God controlling light (including sunlight) as well as bringing it as illumination to people living in darkness (illumination through prophecy), whereas Helios is the God symbolising the physical sun itself and its various operations throughout its constant movement between day and night.

⁷⁸¹ Crawford, p. 22;

Graf, p. 16.

⁷⁸² Crawford, p. 22;

Lawrence, p. 4.

Apollo-like significations of light are manifested as Amicia's discovery of the knowledge that light from fire and direct sunlight can repel, and even kill, the plague rats as they can only be sustained by living in perpetual darkness (Sophocles) [representational]. Concurrently, the light from Amicia's usages of fire sources in both natural and alchemical forms exhibit mystical-like sources of great power by being used as fantastical weapons to dispel and destroy the plague rats when travelling in dark places or in the open night (Homer) [representational].

However, this projection of the rats manifesting darkness as the purely archetypal force of evil and fear was not always resonant throughout my entire playthrough of *APTI*. On certain occasions, the power of the plague rat swarm called 'imperium' through their consumption ability was used as a violent but highly lucrative offensive weapon primarily against the hostile human forces of the Inquisition.⁷⁸³ Due to spatial constraints of this chapter, a succinct yet limited coverage of this source of imaginative history can only be given here. The ability to directly control and master the rats is first obtained by the young Hugo in Chapter 14 entitled 'Blood Ties' after giving himself into the Inquisition with the hopes of reuniting with his mother Béatrice, who is found to still be alive but currently a hostage [representational]. Hugo's ability to control rats plays a loose homage to the *Pied Piper of Hamelin*, but instead of an adult rat catcher who controls the rats as a means to bring them to their death, Hugo's power over the rats is described by his mother as a "gift" from his inheritance of the Prima Macula curse. Yet the player's reliance on the dark power of the dangerous rats provides its own set of procedural and representational contradictions to the status and role of fire within *APTI* as being the children's principal means of progressing through the game by shifting emphasis toward

⁷⁸³ By extension, the English soldiers encountered in Chapter 4 within *APTI* was also another engagement where rat swarms were used indirectly by Amicia against them.

Hugo's control of the rats as the primary means of completing the game's last few chapters.

Figure 7.3N – Chapter 14: Blood Ties

Hugo's first orientation with controlling rat swarms as a Pied Piper-like figure to protect his mother from incoming Inquisition soldiers. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence V'.⁷⁸⁴



As a unique combative game mechanic acquired much later in the game, imperium can be accessed by opening the same in-game menu containing the alchemical projectiles [procedural]. When used, Amicia directs her younger brother Hugo to control a large cluster(s) of rats as a single merged body, and use the weight of the rat body from their

⁷⁸⁴ Redder, 'A Plague Tale Innocence V', min 4:23:52.

numbers to overwhelm and devour the targeted soldiers, ranging from lightly protected and nimble archers to heavily armed plate-armoured foot soldiers [procedural/representational]. This ability can only be used after any immediate sources of fire are extinguished, which is usually achieved by Amicia crafting and firing an alchemical projectile called 'extinguis' to suppress enflamed objects or firing stones with her sling to knock out lit lanterns carried by soldiers [procedural/representational].

Figure 7.20 – Chapter 16: Coronation (V)

A before shot of Amicia firing extinguis projectiles to smother the armoured knights' enflamed maces that are preventing the rats to attack them. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence VI'.⁷⁸⁵



⁷⁸⁵ Redder, A Plague Tale Innocence VI', min 51:20.

Figure 7.3P – Chapter 16: Coronation (VI)

An after shot showing the effect of Hugo's power of controlling the rats' consumption ability when used against the same Inquisition knights. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence VI'.⁷⁸⁶



From a representational view, this contradictory theme unveils subversions to *APTI's* grand Medieval characterisation of fire embodying light and rats embodying darkness as good and evil respectively, as the player's children protagonists either reluctantly or willingly partake in a folkloric yet gruesome form of human violence. This is enacted by Amicia relying on Hugo's mastery of the rats to kill various members of the Inquisition through rat devourment [representational]. The Inquisition members embody a perverted manifestation of light through their many activities of extreme violence and/or

⁷⁸⁶ Redder, min 51:24.

torture against innocent people, as well as their desire to obtain, rather than destroy, control of the rat swarm [representational]. An epic example of this subversion in which darkness, through the children's usages of the rats, symbolically triumphs over the evil of light was one of the main boss battles involving Amicia and Hugo's fight with Vitalis Bénévent's protégé Lord Nicholas [representational]. This boss battle took place when Nicholas breached the Château d'Ombrage in his attempt to exterminate all of the children during the climactic end of Chapter 15 entitled 'Remembrance'. To defeat Nicholas, the immediate makeshift fire pits located around the main castle grounds needed to be extinguished first by using the projectile extinguishers before using the rats to attack and consume Nicholas [procedural/ representational].

Figure 7.3Q – Chapter 15: Remembrance

A poetic display of dark against light. One of the successful instances in which Amicia and Hugo were able to inflict the dark rats against Nicholas as the warrior of light after several nearby fire sources were first extinguished. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence V'.⁷⁸⁷



At some point after the first and second successive occasions where I used the rat swarm to overwhelm and severely injure Nicholas, through some strange unknown means he ignited himself on fire [representational]. This display of Nicholas is poetically reminiscent of a holy warrior monk, but in this context is contrastive to the paragons of virtue, justice, and honour associated to this popular Medieval trope due to Nicholas'

⁷⁸⁷ Redder, 'A Plague Tale Innocence V', min 5:09:59.

sinister desire to kill, rather than defend, Amicia and Hugo with his flaming sword [representational]. Nicholas' engulfment into flames as a last resort of protection dispelled temporarily my access to using the rats [procedural]. Thus, with difficulty, I had to take out both the fire consuming Nicholas and the surrounding light sources relighted by Nicholas' flaming sword in order to utilise the rats before Nicholas would relight himself [procedural].

Figure 7.3R – Chapter 15: Remembrance (II)

A snapshot showing Nicholas beginning to turn into a twisted manifestation of a holy warrior and paragon of light by defeating Hugo's rats that previously enveloped him in darkness by setting himself completely ablaze as a last stand. Recorded in 'A Plague Tale Innocence V'.⁷⁸⁸



⁷⁸⁸ Redder, min 5:10:08.

These morally dubious experiences within *APTI*'s folkloric storytelling of Amicia and Hugo engaging in children violence is highly sensitive and seemingly disturbing from an uninformed modern lens. However, this kind of representation is not solely original to this game but a relatively common phenomena in a number of pre-modern children folktales. This opens the possibility then of supporting a Medieval and/or Early Modern historiography dedicated to pre-modern and contemporary (gameplay) remediations of folktales centering on children and child protagonists. A notable example is *Hansel and Gretel*, where Gretel the older sibling kills the witch by pushing and shutting her into the blazing hot fire in the oven to save her younger brother Hansel from being eaten alive by the witch, and then escape the witch's house where they were formerly held as slave prisoners. The manner of children committing violence in self-defence is similarly invoked here in *APTI*, as the young adolescent Amicia is compelled to inflict violent means via manipulation of the rats, usually to protect both herself, and more importantly her brother Hugo, from the Inquisition and its leader Grand Inquisitor Vitalis. Occasionally, this kind of violence is also used when encountering severely wounded Inquisition soldiers as symbolic retribution for the collective injustices to various innocent lives committed by members of the Inquisition. This retribution includes the massacre of most of Amicia's family and servants of their household when a contingent of Inquisition soldiers led by Nicholas occurred at their home during Chapter 1 entitled 'The De Rune Legacy'.

7.6 Chapter Evaluation:

Research questions i to iii have been addressed in this chapter. Through analysis of the text supported by comments in my (pre-release) interviews, *APTI*'s language of multimodality representation based in imaginative history has been demonstrated. That is, a modality that engages in imagination through an historical fantasy mode. To validate

this historical modality as grounded in folklore scholarship, *APTII*'s gameplay was examined for the way it contains and renews long held intersections between past poetic and socio-cultural imaginations and literacies of plague responses, beliefs, and folklore. Through focusing on one of *APTII*'s core constructions of fantasy, the rat plague or 'the bite', it was possible to illustrate how these same intersections are brought to life through multimodal gameplay and contribute toward the game's dark and terrifying Medieval atmosphere. Using the plague rat swarm entity as an exemplar of historical fantasy within *APTII* allowed how the modality of imaginative history functions as a contemporary assemblage that incorporates folkloric modal engagements with the past. It signifies that *APTII* contributes to the body of Medieval (and in certain areas overlapping Early Modern and Classical) historiography via gameplay remediations of pre-modern motifs, folklore, and imaginative expressions.

It is likely this kind of historical fantasy engagement implemented and refined by developers from Asobo Studio will continue to be their trademark style, as evident by the studio's release of a sequel called *A Plague Tale: Requiem* in October 2022. The significance of this research on historical fantasy proves that a consolidation of our usages of this term for historical game discourse is needed, and that historical fantasy within gaming is not devoid of or separate from its historical context and more broadly its ties to history. Fantasy, whether in historical games, films, books, and oral storytelling, is as much a part of history and the different languages or mediums of expressing our past as has history itself continues to shape and carry fantasy into posterity. Yet the rat swarm is only one of the facets of historical fantasy, and more broadly one of the imaginative histories, in *APTII*. Thus, it does not represent all the findings I obtained on the game's fantastical adaptation of Medieval France during the Black Death. Although this chapter incorporated discussions on a few other groups as part of explicating my gameplay experiences of the

rat swarm fantasy, such as the orphan children and the Inquisition forces, focusing analysis on the rats as the main exemplar could have been applied instead to any of *APTI*'s other imaginative histories. Analysis of this Medieval historical game indeed unveiled other important discoveries, some of which raised further questions that would be valuable for myself and other potential scholars conducting further investigation into *APTI* and its gameplay medium.

To discuss some of them briefly, one question surrounds the deeper relationships of *APTI*'s engagement to children storytelling and agency by incorporating similar approaches from other video games to past compilations and renewals of pre-modern European traditions involving or concerning the lives or struggles around children. Another question from a narrative standpoint would be addressing the reasons behind *APTI*'s positioning of the Medieval alchemists as the more morally good and benign figures in contrast to its placement of a certain religious authority (the Inquisition) as the villain of the story. From the discipline of women's history, *APTI* would also be an interesting case study for historians exploring some of the different representations and discourses of Medieval women within the game. Its representations were mostly confined to three characters, namely Amicia de Rune, her mother and alchemist Béatrice, and the thief Mélie. However, the negotiated powers of their distinctive agencies in which these women exhibited that opposes or threatens against the male-dominated institution (Inquisition) provides an interesting avenue for future historical and folklore research. Furthermore, the fact that in analysing these recorded gameplay sequences allowed me to discern different yet interwoven layers and tangents of the rat swarm fantasy, such as interpreting the game's depiction of using light sources against rats as symbolic manifestations and subversions of light dispelling darkness (pestilence), raises another important question. Namely, the question surrounding as to whether game designers

engaging in imaginative history are always consciously aware that what they produce, borrow, or adapt bears loose and/or close traces and correspondences to constructions already found or conveyed in past imaginative works and adaptations in non-digital formats.

Finally, the gameplay findings on the rats used for examining both *APTI* and its multimodal engagement to imaginative history is limited to exploring one of the styles of imaginative history (historical fantasy), with the other two outlined earlier in this chapter being counterfactualism and realist-fiction.⁷⁸⁹ With Chapter 6 addressing lore history and this chapter covering imaginative history, the theme of Chapter 8 then addresses the realist-fiction style. Returning to the game *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* for illustration, discussion on the realist-fiction style serves as a model for establishing and unpacking the way historical games can, and quite often, comprise of and interplay with several historical gameplay modalities, commonly a combination of the modalities of both imaginative and lore history.

⁷⁸⁹ Redder, pp. 374-375.

Chapter 8

Realist-Fiction

8.1 Introduction:

Chapter 8 serves as a supplementary extension to the preceding analytical chapters' discussions of and findings made on lore history and imaginative history (Chapters 5 – 7) by forwarding and addressing how gameplay mediums usually emerge and perform together as a combination of several interconnected historical modalities. The argument then is to identify and explicate some of the main intersections or interplays between different modalities and how they, despite the contrary, work together in better enhancing both the history(ies) represented in the game and the process of learning and conducting scholarly research around that history. Using *KCD* again for illustration, some of the main intersections between the modalities of lore history and imaginative history are explored as part of addressing research questions i – iii, prominently the realist-fiction mode as the main context for discussion. This chapter then will show how realist-fiction works not as a detractor, but a complementary and reliable modal feature to lore history by discerning and articulating what qualities or roles realist-fiction plays when reframed under the primacy of lore history.

8.1.1 Historical Gameplay – A Medium in the Realms of Lore and Imagination:

Since historical games are a multimodal device, it is imperative that gameplay mediums are treated and studied with this same appreciation as a particular multimodal system. Therefore, we can propose that historical gameplay mediums and their representations can encompass or operate in either one of two formats. Principally, either as a single

historical modality or an interwoven assemblage of and interplay between several modalities, with each modality still operated by its multiple frames of communication (e.g. visual, performative, verbal, and game mechanics and rules) and their intended meaning-making processes and literacies of history. *KCD* and *APTI* are examples of the latter format. In *KCD*, its gameplay medium primarily falls under lore history, but its chosen historical period and various gameplay lore histories are still, in part, imaginative (yet closely approximated) constructions of the Rattay-Sasau region during the Bohemian Civil War. This is because we as players experience *KCD*'s Medieval history not by physically reliving the actual past itself but only through a gameplay substitute. Likewise, *APTI* engages in imaginative history but both its game world (Medieval southern France) and depicted society still adheres to at least some segments of actual Black Death history during the fourteenth century. Therefore, a few minor sources of historical lore on this remediated Medieval plague (excluding the game's abundant expressions of plague folklore) can be found within *APTI*.⁷⁹⁰

Identifying the overlapping occurrences of lore history and imaginative history in both *KCD* and *APTI* reveals that interplays between different modalities consist of a primary historical modality as the dominant form of experiencing history through gameplay, and a secondary historical modality(ies) that supplements the primary modality. In other words, when a gameplay medium is composed of several different historical modalities, one has primacy as the main mode of experiential gameplay supported by the other co-existing modalities. Yet to further prove this interrelationship within multimodal

⁷⁹⁰ One example is a game feature involving the discovery of hidden miscellaneous items or objects within different environments in each chapter, which are permanently kept as collectibles once found by the player, and can be accessed at any time for perusal by visiting the main menu when pausing the game. Each of these items, accompanied with written descriptions about them and their history, are generally historical artefacts emblematic of different facets of and major events in Black Death history.

gameplay, realist-fiction is chosen as the main subject of focus for discussion. Realist-fiction is a viable choice to address this chapter's core argument due to its flexible nature as an intermediary semiotic resource shared between lore history and imaginative history by its synthesis of historical realism and a particular fiction mode (imagination). More importantly, engaging and applying realist-fiction via lore history offers a recent and nuanced form of the realist-fiction genre by operating as a supporting frame for better understanding and communicating gameplay scholarship of the histories experienced.

8.2 Realist-Fiction:

Realist-fiction is another type or style of the imaginative history modality, but the term itself originates in the genre of literary realism. Literary realism is a mode of fiction writing based on the "impression of recording or 'reflecting' faithfully an actual way of life ... [via] detailed accuracy of description."⁷⁹¹ The most characteristic trademarks prevalent in this genre is the depiction of "characters, settings, and events in accordance with [its respective] reality ... [and] fictional narratives that presents a plausible world ... [containing] a variety of concrete details ... [grounded] in human experience."⁷⁹² This account of realism described should not be confused as intending to bring about a "direct or simple reproduction of reality (a 'slice of life')", but is instead more appropriately a "system of conventions producing a lifelike illusion of some 'real' world outside the text by processes of selection, exclusion, description, and manners of addressing the reader."⁷⁹³ Becoming the dominant literary trend during the nineteenth century (and later

⁷⁹¹ Chris Baldick, 'Realism', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 4th edn (Oxford University Press, 2015), <<https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz>>, para. 1.

⁷⁹² Ross C. Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, 4th edn (New York: Macmillan Learning, 2018), p. 399.

⁷⁹³ Baldick, para. 1. In other words, literary realism is not and should not be viewed as providing a purely objective metaphysical reality. Instead, its different strands or styles and techniques signify the effects of realism and its impacts

in cinema filmmaking), notable works either belonging to or containing core elements of literary realism include Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Honoré de Balzac's *Illusions Perdues*, and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*. These works and their subject matter exemplify this trend by being set in and chiefly concern with depicting the complexities of the everyday lives, social routines and practices, and individual and/or collective struggles of the middle and lower classes.⁷⁹⁴ These elements are concurrently rendered within literary conventions and cues used by the author in coding their text as a "reflection of everyday reality", such as employing characterisation.⁷⁹⁵

A good ideal model or expression of realist-fiction in historical games is one founded on these statements above by being a particular style of historical imagination that combines or interweaves, through its multimodal assemblage, the qualities or elements of 'fiction' and 'realism' into one integrated mode. Historical gameplay through realist-fiction then represents stories and events, settings, characters, objects, and other constituents that are fictional creations by the game developers. Concurrently, these same constituents are still plausible or authentic to actual historical referents within current historical evidence and the respective timeframe, and thus having to varying degree a quality or an effect of historical realism. Naming this particular modality as 'realist-fiction' rather than simply 'historical fiction' situates realist-fiction more accurately as one of several types or variations of historical fiction alongside other forms such as speculative fiction (e.g.

in representing "life and the social world as it seems to the common reader [and in the case of historical games the player]" (Meyer H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, p. 174).

⁷⁹⁴ Baldick, para. 1.

⁷⁹⁵ Meyer H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th edn (Fort Worth, T.X: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), p. 174. Characterisation is the presentation of "well-developed, round characters whose experiences and interactions with other characters could occur in real life ... in a specific cultural group, locale, and historical era ... [as well as] establish convincing motivation for the thoughts, emotions, and actions of the characters" (Murfin and Ray, p. 399).

historical fantasy, alternate history, counterfactualism). This is because technically realist-fiction texts created by authors as a constructed contemporary reflection of their own present-day society would inadvertently become historical fiction, and more broadly an artefact of the past, after a certain degree of time has passed since their original publication.⁷⁹⁶

Examining the realist-fiction style in *KCD* seeks to illustrate that realist-fiction can be classed as another effective convention or engagement of the lore history modality in experiencing and qualifying gameplay's historical lore. Unpacking this multimodal variation of realist-fiction in *KCD* establishes a new area of studying this genre with its degree of fiction directed to a more scholarly focus, in contrast to the more common and longstanding usage of realist-fiction within historical gaming. Similar to older forms of history (novels and films), most historical games utilising realist-fiction as its sole historical modality mainly conform to and accentuate its fictional and dramatic aspects in order to generate compelling and/or emotionally-driven entertainment for its players. Meanwhile, the realism aspects are often heavily eschewed or minimised in its capacity to merely the look and theme of the respective history the game and its main story are set in.⁷⁹⁷ Consequently, players become immersed in multimodal representations or experiences that conform to either conventional hegemonic narratives and discourses about the past, or popular media misconceptions and/or contemporary exaggerations of

⁷⁹⁶ In addition, realist-fiction practically shares nearly all of the same representational functions and conventions as historical fiction, such as realistic settings and the presence of credible multi-dimensional characters. Therefore, it can be argued that the current academic view of realist-fiction texts as a distinct and separate category from historical fiction is trivial. The term 'contemporary fiction' should be used in place of 'realist-fiction' to cover works of fiction with lifespans lasting up to ten or fifteen years at most.

⁷⁹⁷ This dominant approach to the realist-fiction modality within historical gaming can still entail the incorporation of real historical places, events, and historical figures from scholarly research. Yet more often it is rooted in the absence of these elements, as seen in games like *Red Dead Redemption*, by consisting entirely of fictional historical characters and thematically authentic or believable yet otherwise invented or made-up locations and events.

and sensibilities toward that history. *Red Dead Redemption*, *L.A. Noire*, and *Mafia* are notable examples of this dominant form of realist-fiction by their reliance on and remediations of stylistic conventions, including popular historical tropes or stereotypes, from literary and filmic genres via older mediums in their claims to historicity, such as epic 'Spaghetti Western' films, Medieval chivalric romance, and noir crime drama.

In contrast, *KCD* contains a new multimodal paradigm of the realist-fiction style within its gameplay medium, one that does not merely amalgamate but proactively plays on the strengths of both its conjugations (historical realism and fiction). In this model, realist-fiction is reframed by and implemented as an important secondary mechanism or component to extend *KCD*'s primary modality (lore history) and its respective functions and conventions (e.g. experiential re-construction, and direct transmissions of histories into a game world via quest storytelling). The reliance on and use of drama, tropes, and other fictional devices in realist-fiction are still at play and necessary in driving both the story and player immersion. Yet under lore history, these devices are also contextualised to generate a more strategic immersion of historical realism as part of assisting or solidifying *KCD*'s provision of scholarly historical knowledge and learning composed and experienced as multimodal lore histories. In this manner, historical imagination is controlled or channelled (but not suppressed or diminished) by sensitivity to historical authority and evidence toward knowledge acquisition of and learning about the game's respective histories, while at times raising new questions and areas of historical inquiry.

This model was observed on many occasions during historical modality analysis of my recorded sequences in *KCD*, with lore-based manifestations or constructs of realist-fiction interwoven together including characters, settings, narrative quests, and artwork (in

tandem with actual historical referents). Excluding characters, each of the other three constructs serve as the overarching contexts of the lore histories chosen as gameplay examples in the following sections (8.3 – 8.5).

8.2.1 Kingdom Come: Deliverance – Realist-fiction in the Modality of Lore History:

The innerworkings around some of the multimodal interplays between lore history and imaginative history are examined principally in the context of realist-fiction via *KCD*. Most examples of the Medieval lore histories discussed in Chapter 6, such as the reconstructed siege of Silver Skalitz and exploration of the Rattay settlement, are counted as scholarly gameplay representations and Medieval historiographies composed and re-told, in part, through a realist-fiction mode. In this chapter, a number of key moments or events with their historiographical findings from several more recorded gameplay sequences are selected as examples to further illustrate the diversification of realist-fiction and its functions when embedded into lore history. The first example situates around one of the illuminated game maps and addresses realist-fiction in the context of visual artwork (8.3). The second example engages in realist-fiction through setting by exhibiting experiences representing both the romantic and historical meanings and functions of the Medieval forest when venturing into *KCD*'s woodland environment (8.4). The third and final example addresses realist-fiction in the context of narrative quests, using 'Mysterious Ways' as an example (8.5). While each of these examples addresses a different mode or constituent of realist-fiction, in actuality they all contain an amalgamation of several realist-fiction modes.

As in Chapter 6, discussion of each of these chosen gameplay examples from *KCD* uses both first-person (I as myself) and third-person (I as Henry) voices interchangeably, with

the recounting and subsequent analytical discussions on these sequences having a number of sentences ending with ‘procedural’ and/or ‘representational’ within brackets. However, as this is a supplementary chapter, a notable difference in its format is the absence of scholarly background sections that accompany each of the gameplay examples beforehand. Additionally, opting to discuss several gameplay examples, instead of a single extensive example, is to separate and highlight within this chapter some of the many different lore-based constructions of realist-fiction (existing alongside actual or known historical referents) shaping gameplay representation. Thus, each example is scaled down to a series of short or summarised key gameplay moments and events from their respective sequences. Despite these differences, scholarly contributions and findings within the analytical discussion segments for each of these gameplay examples are still present to illuminate *KCD*’s application of realist-fiction as another important component to the aims and functions of lore history.

8.3 Game Maps (Artwork):

The first example of realist-fiction within *KCD* are the 2D illuminated in-game maps, one of many types of Medieval fictive artwork.⁷⁹⁸ From historical modality analysis, I found that most of *KCD*’s illuminated maps used iconography in the Medieval art tradition of telling stories, events, and subjects to encode or emblematised both *KCD*’s historical game world and the player’s experiences to the particular period, locality, and themes of the Rattay-Sasau region. This section then is to demonstrate that implementing realist-fiction as a versatile art form can enhance lore history via codifying varying representations of historical lore into corroborative iconographic sources. To illustrate *KCD*’s maps’

⁷⁹⁸ *KCD*’s illuminated in-game maps should not be confused with Warhorse Studios’ working 2D map template discussed in Chapter 5, which helped with the development of *KCD*’s 3D game world and the sketched in-game maps.

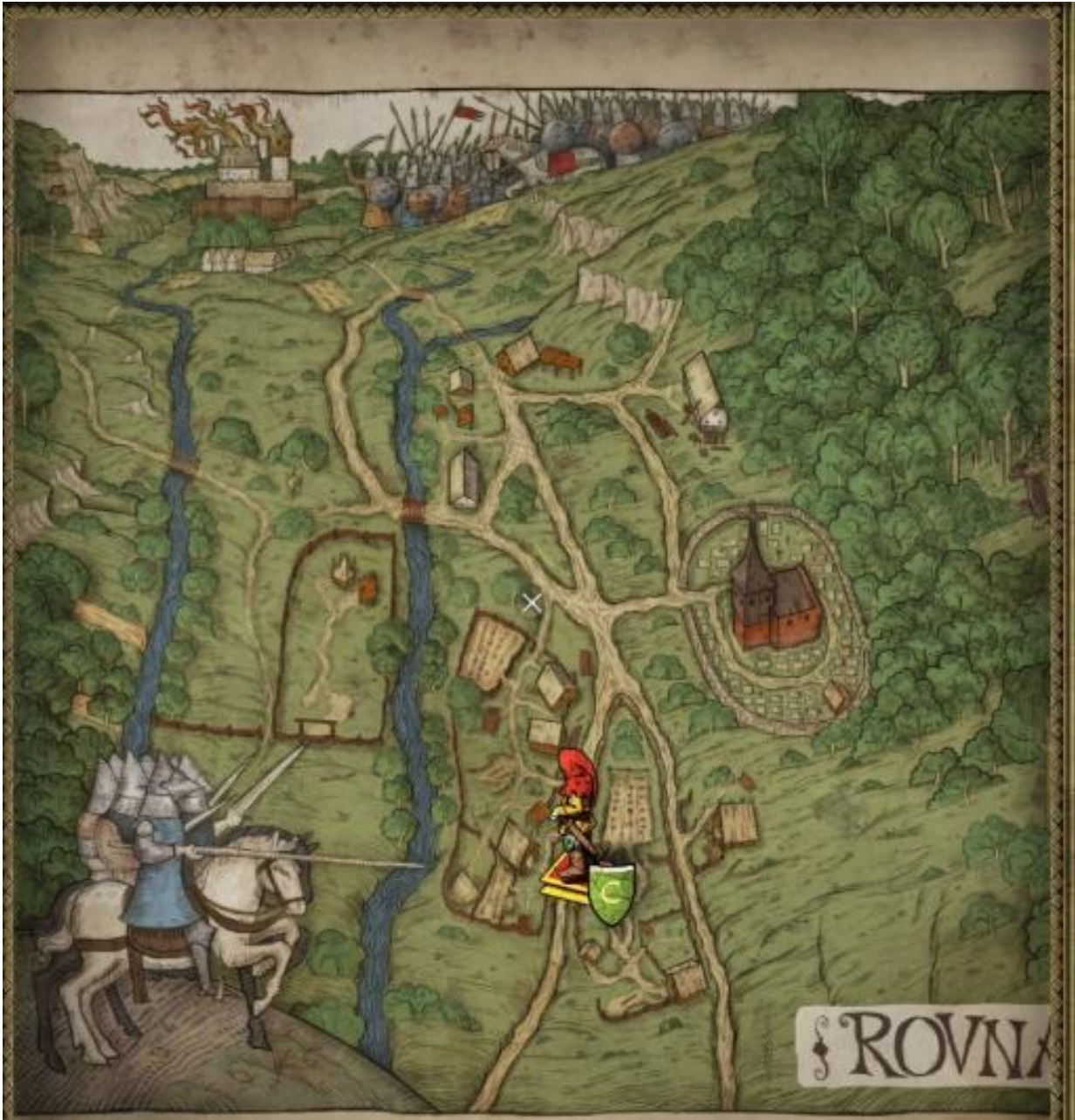
interplay between fiction and historical realism formatted to the provision of historical lore on the Rattay-Sasau region during the early fifteenth century, the presentation of the Rovna village map is used as a prime example.

8.3.1 The Illuminated Map of Rovna:

During the quest 'In God's Hands', as Henry I returned to the village of Rovna for the first time since its terrible destruction and accessed the map of the village in order to find my current objective quest marker [procedural]. As shown in Figure 8.1, the map displays the entire Rovna village from a top-down isometric view and drawn up as an old yet vibrant Medieval landscape filled with aesthetic iconography emblematic to this local region [representational]. To elaborate, this map shows the entire village complex surrounded by several stretches of forest, interconnecting dirt roads and streams, and a nearby cluster of small, thatched houses and huts representing the primitive homes of the village commune, with the Rovna church being the prominent historical building and symbol of the community [representational]. However, two interesting iconographic features give this map a more striking portrayal by depicting scenes of impending doom. One of them is a burning castle attended by a large crowd of soldier figures wearing cone-shaped helmets, and the other feature is a group of horsemen wearing full plate armour, with one standing out by wearing what appears to be a hounskull bascinet helmet [representational].

Figure 8.1 – The Rovna Map

The micro map of the Rovna settlement. Recorded in 'In God's Hands II'.⁷⁹⁹



⁷⁹⁹ Ben Redder, 'In God's Hands II', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (14 April 2018), min 2:07.

From this gameplay description, the Rovna map in its procedural function follows with other in-game maps as one of *KCD*'s conceptual resources or tools to support the player's activity, a common feature in many RPG video games. As a cartographic conceptual resource, the Rovna map displays the current location of the player's character Henry (represented as a red hooded figure), and reveals the targeted quest location as a colour-coded marker or sign (labelled in green with the letter 'C') [procedural]. The Rovna map is also classed as a micro map, one of two types of maps in *KCD* by representing only the entire location and boundary of a particular settlement.⁸⁰⁰ More importantly, the representational function of the Rovna map corresponds to a visual-narrative construct of realist-fiction. As an invented fictional construct, the entire Rovna map is an original work of digital art created by a visual graphic artist rather than a reproduction of any actual referents, as well as perhaps being the first post-Medieval artwork to show former Rovna during the Late Middle Ages in a pictorial rendition [representational]. While this particular map configuration of Rovna is contemporary in its production, it simultaneously attends to the enhancement, rather than the disruption, of the historical realism of *KCD*'s representation of late Medieval Bohemia on an iconographic level.

The Rovna map's engagement to historical realism is largely evident by being one of many maps within *KCD* digitally re-constructive of and designed in strict accordance with the core patterns, techniques, and principles of past Medieval illuminated manuscripts, cartographic maps, and woodcuts. These conventions and principles include: the composition of scenes; character gestures as initiation for visualised action;

⁸⁰⁰ In-game maps in *KCD* consist of two types, which are an overarching macro map representing the entire Rattay-Sasau region as *KCD*'s game world (including its settlements and landmarks), and a number of micro settlement maps representing each of the game's cities and villages whenever Henry visits these places, including Sasau, Rattay, and Uzhitz. One of the distinct functions of this game's macro map is to allow the player to observe new locations or areas revealed on the game map which were previously unknown or undiscovered as represented by a 'fog of war'.

an array of lush, bright colours; and the use of time to configure the state of a place, environment, person, object, or any other entity in a particular moment of temporality or transformation [representational].⁸⁰¹ The most important and foundational convention identified in *KCD*'s Medieval maps is their telling of stories or topics such as religion, myths and legends, history, and facets of everyday life in Medieval society not only through words but also illuminated decorations, specifically iconographic or pictorial miniature illustrations [representational].⁸⁰² Moreover, *KCD*'s integration of these elements together for its own Medieval map art design is not merely an aesthetic homage to the Middle Ages. It also closely resonates to and manifests Medieval historian Anne Harris' explanation on the effects of Medieval society encoding symbolism, mentality or thought, and history into iconographic narrative art as:

[Inviting] a consideration of bodies, voice, and performance into the operations of medieval narrative ... Medieval visual narratives were often more a process of *re-* cognition than of cognition, of recognising characters in new visual guises rather than learning about them through images.⁸⁰³

This framework of *KCD*'s Medieval iconography conveyed in maps like *Rovna* also intersects similarly with and can offer nuanced multimodal comparisons to certain scholarly discussions like those from geographers Awadh Narayan Choubey and Taruna Bansal. Notably, their discussion on how most maps in the Middle Ages performed more

⁸⁰¹ Anne F. Harris, 'The Iconography of Narrative', in *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Iconography*, ed. by Colum Hourihane (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 282-294, pp. 283, 287, 290.

⁸⁰² Harris, pp. 282-283. While most illustration formats or 'image writing' in these art forms were usually, though not always, supplemented with written text that matched with its picture(s), the imagery themselves were still packed with their own semantic or emblematic meanings in expressing the respective subject matter.

⁸⁰³ Harris, p. 283.

as a form of storytelling or a visualised description of its particular subject(s) rather than being geographically precise maps of Medieval Europe.⁸⁰⁴ As they elaborate:

Maps ... produced in the medieval period contain more information than modern maps; they are authentic sources of history, legend, the wonders of nature, stories from the Bible ... [essentially] an encyclopedic study of the world ... present[ing] a mesh of information not only of the geographical landscape of that particular period but also the theological, anthropological, historical and political milieu.⁸⁰⁵

In highlighting these points, we can infer that the core realism functions of *KCD*'s in-game maps explicated earlier, combined with its fictionality as a post-medieval product, are framed as Medieval iconographic documentations of lore history through codifying major historical events, locales, and experiences into a mimetic art form. This interplay can be applied then to interpreting the earlier gameplay recounting of the Rovna map and its choice of Medieval symbols and subjects as containing an iconographic (and not merely a geographic) lore history of past Rovna during late Medieval times. Specifically, the Rovna map and its iconography artwork is representationally a supplementary text used to re-tell (as well as to remind) the player as Henry both of the events and Henry's traumatic experiences of the actual horrific siege and massacre of Silver Skalitz and Rovna by Sigismund's army [representational]. For instance, the pictorial feature of the castle in flames in the distant background can be interpreted as signaling the razing of the castle of Silver Skalitz located near Rovna [representational]. Meanwhile, the cone-shaped figures are clearly the mercenary Cumans who were one of the known main

⁸⁰⁴ Awadh N. Choubey and Taruna Bansal, 'Maps and Mapmaking in Medieval Times: A Retrospect', *Indian Cartographer*, 37 (2017), 41-47, p. 41.

⁸⁰⁵ Choubey and Bansal, p. 41.

groups in Sigismund's army during his invasion of Bohemia [representational]. Discerning the iconographic lore from these two features helps to draw a better conclusion to identifying the group of horsemen on the bottom left section of the map as likely the brigand Czech knights or elite soldiers in service to Sigismund [representational]. This is evident by how the horsemen are seen heavily armed and protected in Medieval European gear (plate armour) with their lances drawn, indicating a military attack by heading straight into Rovna to instigate pillaging and killing [representational]. This particular feature raises an interesting cue, and subsequently further information, into the nature of the Rovna attack by presenting one of the contingents of Sigismund's Czech forces as having participated at a later point in the massacre and razing of Rovna with their Cuman allies, perhaps sometime after Henry escaped Silver Skalitz during the siege [representational].

8.4 Medieval Forests (Setting):

The forest setting is one of *KCD*'s main types of environments and a prime location for visiting and achieving a number of narrative quest storylines, as well as often facing enemy soldiers, taking place outside the populated urban locales. My gameplay experiences in traversing through *KCD*'s forest setting unveiled a number of multimodal lore histories, all of which representative of the Medieval forest as a "complex combination of realism, symbolism, and fantasy."⁸⁰⁶ Therefore, the wide swathes of forests are not merely a passive visual replication of Rattay-Sasau's Medieval landscape. They are another notable construct of realist-fiction due to integrating and assigning opportunities that allow spatial exploration and interaction with a number of past

⁸⁰⁶ Marilyn Sandige, 'The Forest, the River, the Mountain, the Field, and the Meadow', in *Handbook of Medieval Culture. Volume 1: Handbook of Medieval Culture*, ed. by Albrecht Classen, 3 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter, Inc., 2015), I, 537-564, p. 538.

meanings and roles of the Medieval forest pertaining to and overlapping its romantic function (an aesthetically picturesque landscape) and historical functions. This section then identifies the main conjugations of this realist-fiction construct (setting) that achieve this interplay and illuminate on its relevance to lore history by cementing potential gameplay experiences within *KCD*'s forest setting with historical lore representative of Medieval forest history. To further unpack the fictional (romantic forest) and realism (historical forest) dimensions of *KCD*'s Medieval forests as a setting-based source of lore history, evidence from key moments in a gameplay sequence recounting my hunting trip with Hans Capon during the quest 'The Prey' is chosen for illustration.

8.4.1 Forest as a Place for Hunting:

On a particular occasion, as Henry I participated in the activity of hunting wild animals as it was part of a main quest called 'The Prey'. This quest began with meeting Hans Capon (a nobleman and heir to the city of Rattay) for a hunting trip as his page, which was a punishment for them both by Rattay's governor and Hans' guardian Hanush due to an altercation the night before where Hans' insults to Henry about his status as a common serf embroiled them into a brawl [representational].⁸⁰⁷ In this Medieval hunting experience as Henry with Hans and a couple of hunting hounds, we travelled by horse to our destination and then made camp at an area in the eastern woods [representational].

⁸⁰⁷ A page in Medieval times was a type of servant or attendant to either a nobleman, knight, or governor, and often became a precursor for one to become a squire and eventually a knight.

Figure 8.2 – The Prey

Hunting camp within the eastern forest abode for members of the nobility from Rattay such as Hans Capon and Hanush of Leipa. Recorded in 'The Prey'.⁸⁰⁸



The following day, we head deep into the forest and the first main objective of the quest was to either win or lose on a money wager with Hans by seeing who would hunt and kill the most hares with their bow [procedural]. Upon returning to camp midday, it was declared that I won the wager by hunting the most hares (four in total) [procedural/representational]. However, during the hunt I was enraptured again with that familiar sense of both awe and amazement in the splendor of the forest expanse by

⁸⁰⁸ Ben Redder, 'The Prey', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (11 April 2018), min 14:51.

its beautiful yet wild unexploited scenery, the flora and fauna common to the climate of Bohemia during the hot summer season, and the bright penetrating rays of the glaring sunset that pierced through the multitude of thick tall trees [representational]. These displays together gave the feeling of safety and assurance that I was the only occupant in this mystical, surreal otherworld.

Figure 8.2A – The Prey (II)

Clumsily attempting to fire the arrow at the running hare deep within the pristine wild forest.

Recorded in 'The Prey'.⁸⁰⁹



⁸⁰⁹ Redder, min 26:29.

Figure 8.2B – The Prey (III)

Another snapshot of a small section of the vast idyllic forest during the summer season. Recorded in 'The Prey'.⁸¹⁰



Later, we then headed to a site where a nearby wild boar was found, with Hans mistakenly using his bow in trying to kill the boar (instead of using a spear). The animal, although wounded, fled in haste with a frustrated Hans immediately giving chase, but quickly separated himself from Henry in the dense forest [representational, cutscene ended].

⁸¹⁰ Redder, min 35:47.

Figure 8.2C – The Prey (IV)

Hans preparing to take down the boar with an improper method (bow and arrow). Recorded in 'The Prey'.⁸¹¹



⁸¹¹ Redder, min 48:57.

Figure 8.2D – The Prey (V)

Hans chasing after the boar. Recorded in 'The Prey'.⁸¹²



After a while, Henry deduced that Hans was in some danger and the game objective changed from chasing the boar to finding Hans [procedural/representational]. After initial difficulty, I finally discovered Hans' location, but to my shock he was captured and held hostage at a Cuman camp and was gravely injured [procedural/representational]. Shortly afterwards, I immediately rescued Hans from this group of Cuman soldiers at their camp, killing them in quick succession with my combative skills [procedural/representational]. Once Hans was untied by Henry, a cinematic cutscene appeared depicting Henry taking Hans immediately back to Rattay for medical aid as

⁸¹² Redder, min 49:33.

well as to warn Lord Hanush of the Cuman presence and their torture of Hans [representational, cutscene ended].

Figure 8.2E – The Prey (VI)

Hans as a hostage at the Cuman camp deep within the forest in the eastern domain of Hanush's controlled dominion. Recorded in 'The Prey'.⁸¹³



⁸¹³ Redder, min 55:08.

In examining the experiences of these key events from this sequence described, on a procedural level the act of hunting is one of a number of activities afforded by *KCD*'s woodland forests.⁸¹⁴ Specifically, going out to hunt game animals within forests such as hare, deer, and boar allows you to obtain and store game meat and their fur in your inventory for several usages, such as cooking the meat for alleviating Henry's hunger and selling the meat and fur to either the town's local butcher or tavern owner for money [procedural].⁸¹⁵ In its representational function more importantly, this particular forest immersion in 'The Prey' quest is one of many gameplay sequences where I inhabited and experienced the minutiae of *KCD*'s forests as a multimodal gamic rendition of both the romantic and historical Medieval landscape [representational]. To elaborate on this Medieval forest interplay as a core mode of realist-fiction, experiencing the fictionality of *KCD*'s woodland forests as the idyllic, boundless, and untouched place secluded from the confines of human civilization and lush with thick dense woodland, wildlife, and overgrown flora and fauna was a relatively recurring phenomena [representational]. The fictionality of having realistic yet exaggerated numbers of idyllic natural woodland environments within *KCD* was partly based on certain aesthetic liberties by adding a more vibrant and diverse game world for players to inhabit as opposed to a singular static environment [procedural/representational].⁸¹⁶ As stated in an early interview with Creative Director Dan Vávra by Polygon back in 2015:

⁸¹⁴ Other notable procedural affordances engaged via the forest setting are foraging plant ingredients and finding hidden treasures (e.g. weapons, armour, and/or money) with the support of an obtained crude treasure map.

⁸¹⁵ At times obtaining meat is a requirement to fulfill the conditions of a quest, such as hunting meat as supplies to give later to the player's employer or quest-giver in exchange for a reward.

⁸¹⁶ As recounted earlier in Chapter 5, Warhorse Studios' methods of re-constructing Rattay-Sasau's natural topography and landscapes were given the same level of extensive treatment in research and visual detail as the city and village settlements, such as using on-site photographs and written notes and sketches of the region's flora and fauna during the summer season.

partly ... [forests] is our medieval idyll, a construct of the post-Industrial Age. It's not entirely wrong, but it's not wholly right, either ... [Medieval Bohemia] was [historically] famed for its silver mines, which demanded enormous volumes of wood. Such a landscape would have been stripped of forests.⁸¹⁷

This particularity of the forest invoked in *KCD* as a trope or motif of both the 'Medieval' and a nostalgia for a by-gone, pre-industrial world barely touched by human interference is also a figurative convention stemming from Medieval literary origins. As a convention, it provides not only a visually distinct atmosphere in contrast to places with dense human habitation (e.g. castles and cities), but more importantly is often a crucial narrative device for instigating or accentuating the main plot or conflict and adventure within the story. Many adaptations during and after the Middle Ages have used this convention frequently, from older works such as Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'arthur* and Chrétien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* to modern media such as Director John Boorman's film *Excalibur* and Bethesda Studio's *The Elder Scrolls* series.

⁸¹⁷ Colin Campbell, 'Giving Life to 15th-Century Bohemia in Kingdom Come: Deliverance', *Polygon* <<https://www.polygon.com/features/2015/4/24/8445617/kingdom-come-deliverance-interview-preview>> [accessed March 15 2017], para. 25-26. Vávra went onto say that the few forests that remained in early fifteenth century Bohemia served as either grazing for livestock, gathering timber, or indeed those uncultivated "dark woods" existing in that time (Campbell, para. 26, 36, 38).

Figure 8.2F – Idyllic Forest

A snapshot of a large swathe of idyllic woodland forests around the western outskirts of the Rattay settlement taken from a distance. Recorded in ‘KCD – Exploring Forest’.⁸¹⁸



However, this romanticisation of the natural beauty of *KCD*'s Bohemian forests encountered in incidents such as Hans' hunting trip is not grounded in fantasy like its Medieval literary predecessors, but a forest embedded with real historical functions and meanings constituting the realism of actual Medieval forests. These past functions and meanings re-constructed in and experienced through multimodal gameplay within *KCD*'s Medieval woodland were obtained and analysed as overlapping lore histories

⁸¹⁸ Ben Redder, 'KCD – Exploring Forest', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (5 April 2018), min 18:00.

localized to the interpretive everyday reality and known circumstances of the Rattay-Sasau region during the Bohemian Civil War. Some of these lore histories experienced in *KCD*'s forest setting are the Medieval forest as a place of productivity via observation and interaction with groups such as Medieval charcoal burners and woodcutters, and the Medieval forest as a place of danger and military conflicts during times of prolonged war and hardship such as the fictional battle of Pribyslavitz during the quest 'Baptism of Fire' [representational]. Together, this collection of lore histories constitutes an extensive body of gameplay historiography on Medieval forests. Therefore, the level of historical realism within 'The Prey' quest surrounding the rituals of partaking in the hunt itself as one of the nobility's modes of interactivity in forests constitutes as another lore history. Principally, by exhibiting experiential gameplay re-constructions of several common historical relationships between Medieval forests and the socio-cultural practices around the pastime of hunting studied succinctly in academic Medieval studies.

For instance, hunting in this section of the Medieval forest under the domain of Lord Hanush elicited certain historical lore that spatially alludes to and interplays with a particular function of forests as an administrative extension of royal or aristocratic authority [representational]. Medieval scholar and historian of language Corinne Saunders describes how the word forest, aside from being simply an extensive tract of woodland, was more closely associated in Medieval times to being "Legally ... the lands on which the king enjoyed the right of hunting", as well as an enclosed reserve to which "special laws are applicable ... under the jurisdiction of the king."⁸¹⁹ Historian Marilyn Sandidge also provides a detailed explanation of this connection of forests as an exclusive space for hunting game to aristocratic power by highlighting that the majority of

⁸¹⁹ Corinne J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), pp. 5, 9.

woodland areas in Medieval Europe were, at least in principle, designated as the 'royal forest', where:

royal rulers seized large tracts of land and imposed forest laws controlling the use of this land, particularly the hunting of animals such as deer and boar, but also the cutting of trees and grazing of animals.⁸²⁰

However, as historian David W. Rollason notes "Forests did not remain exclusively royal, for they were granted away to followers of kings, and at certain times created by non-royal persons, although with the sanction of kings", implying that primarily nobles or lords (and occasionally secondary groups such as monks) also owned forests within their territorial boundaries as well as the privilege of hunting.⁸²¹ In *KCD*, this view is demonstrated when the forest that both Henry and Hans visit is briefly mentioned as the eastern extreme of the domain of Rattay under Lord Hanush, and thus an ideal remote sanctuary for protecting woodland animals and consequently hunting [representational].

⁸²⁰ Sandige, p. 540.

⁸²¹ David W. Rollason, *The Power of Place: Rulers and their Palaces, Landscapes, Cities, and Holy Places* (Oxford, and Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 137; Saunders, p. 6.

Figure 8.2G – The Prey (VII)

Hanush and Radzig contemplating on the growing presence of Cumans entering and infiltrating within the woodland outskirts of Hanush's dominion in close proximity to Rattay, and the time-consuming effort and extensive cost in manpower of trying to apprehend them by venturing into the forest. Recorded in 'The Prey' quest.⁸²²



More importantly, the historical nuances of personal delight and relaxation of both hunting and its social customs or practices within the presence of nature were also experienced, a topic more commonly found in discussions by various writers and poets throughout the Middle Ages [representational].⁸²³ One text particularly, for example, is *Dialogus de Scaccario* by the Bishop of London and Royal Treasurer Richard Fitz Nigel (c.

⁸²² Redder, min 58:52.

⁸²³ Saunders, p. 10;
Sandige, pp. 539-540.

1130 - 1198) who describes several kinds of delights of the forest. One of these delights he described emphasises the alignment of hunting and forest to relaxation and privacy:

It is in the forests too that ... [are] their chief delights. For they come there, laying aside their cares now and then, to hunt, as a rest and recreation. It is there that they can put from them the anxious turmoil native to a court, and take a little breath in the free air of nature.⁸²⁴

Warhorse Studios also included brief information about the nobility's pastime of hunting in *KCD's* codex database, highlighting that "hunting was always a source of meat and furs, mainly for the lesser nobility. For the aristocracy, courtly hunting was more for enjoyment, being much cheaper entertainment than tournaments, while providing similar thrills."

The content of these historical descriptions obtained regarding the social pleasures of visiting forests for hunting, such as those from Fitz Nigel and Warhorse Studios, are evidently found as expanded pieces of experiential scholarly lore played out through subtle interactive gameplay animations during the 'The Prey' quest. First, my partaking of the hunt as Henry with Hans was a private affair and mainly appeared to be light-hearted entertainment since it was a competition in the form of a wager [representational]. Second, the hunt contained several social rituals and cues that

⁸²⁴ Richard Fitz Nigel, *Dialogus de Scaccario: The Course of the Exchequer and Constitutio Domus Regis: The Establishment of the Royal Household*. trans. by Charles Johnson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), pp. 59-60. Another notable Medieval text on this subject about the techniques, equipment, and social pleasures in hunting is *Livre de Chasse* written between 1387 and 1389 by Gaston Fébus (formally known as Gaston III, Count of Foix, c. 1331 – 1391).

implicitly signified the hierarchal nature of aristocratic power [representational]. Notably, using hunting hounds as the main device reserved for kings and later the aristocracy to chase and corner a wild animal, performing certain tasks or game objectives imitating the role of a Medieval page like bringing Hans his wine and bacon from his saddlebag, and the emphasis by Hans of killing and claiming the wild boar as a higher prize to attain than hares [procedural/representational].⁸²⁵

Figure 8.2H – The Prey (VIII)

Hans accompanied by hunting hounds befitting the nobility class. Recorded in 'The Prey'.⁸²⁶



⁸²⁵ Rollason, p. 161.

⁸²⁶ Redder, min 45:55.

Figure 8.2I – The Prey (IX)

Hans requesting his page (Henry) to bring him wine while staying at camp. Recorded in 'The Prey'.⁸²⁷



Third, going to forests for hunting as a form of relaxation was significantly expressed from the conversations between Henry and Hans during their stay at camp the night before the hunt. During conversation, my character Henry said that he is enjoying the hunt so far but they had not hunted anything yet [representational]. Hans admitted that the reason why he wanted to go hunting, aside from finding game, was mainly a “diversion. The main thing is to get out of Rattay for a while. Listening to Hanush’s lectures all day long would drive anyone mad” [representational].

⁸²⁷ Redder, min 8:36.

Figure 8.2J – The Prey (X)

Hans confiding in Henry his main reason to go out hunting within the privacy of the forest setting. Recorded in 'The Prey'.⁸²⁸



Both these social cues and Hans' comments, although fictional in their originality, provides historical lore entailing critical socio-cultural insights. Specifically, insights into one of the likely known kinds of emotional empathy or behaviour expressed by certain nobleman when venturing into forests for hunting, where finding a prized animal and escaping from life at court went hand-in-hand together for members of the nobility seeking temporary respite from their daily duties. These insights are illuminated by

⁸²⁸ Redder, min 9:44.

Henry's opportunity to understand from Hans' point of view some of the stresses and burdens he faces as a lord in training. These problems include tedious complaints from his subjects, and how despite being technically an adult cannot claim his birthright since he has neither yet been assessed by nobles (due to the time-consuming effort of travelling to Rattay) nor King Wenceslas who is currently Sigismund's hostage [representational].

Figure 8.2K – The Prey (XI)

Hans explaining to Henry some of his duties as a nobleman. Recorded in 'The Prey'.⁸²⁹



⁸²⁹ Redder, min 10:59.

Furthermore, the authenticated nature of this conversation, taking place in a remote forest expanse without the social mores, tensions, and formal hierarchical relationships and protocols between the varying classes in urbanized settings, conveyed to an extent a preliminary dissolution of Hans' social prejudice and disdain towards Henry due to his low-born status as a serf [representational]. Yet this interaction also historically re-enacts in a subtle tone historian Rollason's point that going to forests for hunting in Medieval times often provided a "rich opportunity for bonding between the ruler and certain of his subjects, as well as for the assertion and representation of hierarchal relationships" [representational].⁸³⁰

However, because *KCD*'s Bohemian forests are historically authenticated to the military activities of the Wenceslas-Sigismund Civil War, its representation of past forest activity via facilitating realist-fiction spaces and engagements also incorporates several historical moments illustrating the disruption of the typical social routines of hunting in forests. Particularly, the presence of Cumans Henry encountered in his attempt to save Hans within the territorial confines of Hanush's domain of Rattay invades the privacy and tranquility that forests provided for nobleman hunting game, and more broadly subverts or dismantles the illusion of the forest as the idyllic and serene place for escapism [representational].⁸³¹ Moreover, the Cumans living within an enemy lord's territory challenges or undermines the reputation of forests as lands subject to the authority, jurisdiction, and property of a lord, as symbolised by the Cuman party's capture and torture of a high-ranking nobleman from Rattay who would have died from his injuries or direct execution had Henry not intervened [representational].

⁸³⁰ Rollason, p. 166.

⁸³¹ The growing presence of Cuman war parties or scavengers as mercenary invaders historically affiliated to and participated in Sigismund's attempted conquest of Bohemia are one such segment of experiential historical lore on the historiography of military dangers within forests of late Medieval Bohemia briefly mentioned earlier (p. 481).

Figure 8.2L – The Northern Forest, Cuman Raid

One example of an authentic military danger in Bohemia's forests, where the secluded pristine woodlands are occupied by a hostile Cuman war party belonging to Sigismund's invading forces, as seen through Henry's helmet visor. Recorded in 'Cuman Raid II'.⁸³²



⁸³² Ben Redder, 'Cuman Raid II', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (16 April 2018), min 1:46.

8.5 Historical Medieval Quests (Narrative):

KCD's narrative quests is the final construction of realist-fiction for discussion.⁸³³ *KCD*'s lore history framework establishes and advances a distinctly new and innovative multimodal form of RPG quests by conveying its historical quests as not narratives set in history, but histories themselves tailored to presenting reality as it were a story. Here realist-fiction was either minimally or extensively present for a number (but not all) of these main and side quests within *KCD* by exhibiting stories and events with tasks and challenges that are completely fictional, but concurrently authenticated to and subsequently contribute scholarly entries into these quests' respective histories. Thus, this section shows how realist-fiction manifested in certain historical quests can be one of the key ways for telling past realities as stories in generating lore histories by reframing the multimodality of its imaginative fiction as a scholarly device for inputting new and expanded gameplay scholarship.

The innerworkings of realist-fiction is illustrated through one of many recorded quests called 'Mysterious Ways', a tale involving drinking and conversing with a wayward village priest. This quest particularly was initially perceived as a media experience by involving salacious and ahistorical debacles with a Catholic village priest rather than an affluent and powerful cardinal as commonly portrayed in historical television series (e.g. Neil Jordan's *The Borgias*). However, it was later found to be one of the most substantial gameplay sources of lore history relating to a relatively popular area of study by academic Medieval Czech historians. Namely, historiographies on clerical impropriety and abuses during late Medieval Bohemia. Awareness of this topic began immediately

⁸³³ See definition of 'quest' in Chapter 5 (5.3.2). Additionally, transmissions and subsequently renewals of histories found in academic historical texts via quest storytelling was classed in Chapter 6 as one of the key overlapping engagements of lore history.

after completing 'Mysterious Ways' when a codex icon appeared indicating the heading of an entry titled 'Priest' that became unlocked. A main segment of this entry's written transcript within the codex database was given:

Village priests were less educated than those of the larger parishes ... They were none too well-off ... They were not celibate, enjoyed folk entertainment and games, dancing and going to the tavern. As time went on, looser morals and educational decline spread to the towns and monasteries.⁸³⁴

This codex entry encouraged re-examination of both the gameplay representations in this quest and some of the material from my written historical sources that I originally (though not intentionally) overlooked. To demonstrate what this discovery unveiled, several key gameplay moments and their scholarly lore are explicated in the following section.

8.5.1 Mysterious Ways:

Father Godwin, a priest in charge of the parish in Uzhitz, was the last person who had contact with Limpy Lubosh, a Czech local connected to my investigation into the raid and burning of a stud farm in the nearby village of Neuhof [representational]. Lubosh was originally a member of a Czech gang on the night of the raid, but when the gang torched the stud farm while committing violence, Lubosh with a few others quickly deserted. Godwin wishes to relay Lubosh's involvement to Henry, but cannot divulge this information as it was given to him when Lubosh visited Godwin for confession

⁸³⁴ This entry also highlights that priests stationed in poor or affluent parishes, including those engaging in illicit activity, still performed a number of the typical duties and routines of their occupation, such as preparation and serving of mass, hearing confessions, visiting the poor and sick, and conducting baptisms.

before being later murdered and mutilated in his own home by members of his former gang [representational]. Nonetheless, he reassured Henry that they should discuss it further with a drink at the inn in Uzhitz and potentially find a compromise or solution.

Figure 8.3 – Mysterious Ways

Godwin refusing to disclose Lubosh's confession to Henry. Recorded in 'Mysterious Ways'.⁸³⁵



As soon as Henry and Godwin sat at a table, I was unexpectedly surprised when his cook and mistress arrived and joined for company with Godwin out in public [representational].

⁸³⁵ Ben Redder, 'Mysterious Ways', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (16 April 2018), min 15:52.

Figure 8.3A – Mysterious Ways (II)

Witnessing from Henry's perspective Godwin's cook and mistress for the first time who just joined them at the Uzhitz inn. Recorded in 'Mysterious Ways II'.⁸³⁶



We then entered conversation and via the dialogue system conversed with Father Godwin on various subjects or topics [procedural]. One raised was Godwin's discussion with a journeyman who recently visited Prague and attended one of the sermons given by the widely popular master theologian and preacher Jan Hus (c. 1372 – 1415) in front of a large crowd [representational]. Another vivid subject discussed was Henry's inquiry into some of Godwin's moral transgressions as a priest, such as breaking his vow of celibacy by fornication and indulgence in excessive drinking [procedural/representational].

⁸³⁶ Ben Redder, 'Mysterious Ways II', in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (16 April 2018), min 1:57.

Figure 8.3B – Mysterious Ways (III)

A prominent example of the dialogue system seen from Henry's first-person perspective, showing a list of conversational options to select. Recorded in 'Mysterious Ways II'.⁸³⁷



Near the end of the conversation, I accepted Father Godwin's offer of staying longer in order to not compromise my chances of obtaining Lubosh's confession, but I had no idea of the consequences that were to follow. As conveyed in a few cinematic cutscenes, both myself as Henry and Father Godwin feasted and got intoxicated from excessive drinking, did arm wrestling and gambled in a game of dice, and danced with some of the locals [representational, cutscene ended]. We even got into a drunken fight with the town's bailiff and his men who were trying to arrest Godwin for breaking curfew

⁸³⁷ Redder, 'Mysterious Ways II', min 7:25.

[representational]. Their wild antics continued through the entire night, including Henry sleeping with a local barmaid and Godwin likewise with his mistress [representational].

Figure 8.3C – Mysterious Ways (IV)

Henry and Godwin having another of their many drinks after a round of gambling with dice (farkle) late in the night. Recorded in 'Mysterious Ways II'.⁸³⁸



⁸³⁸ Redder, min 9:51.

Figure 8.3D – Mysterious Ways (V)

The Bailiff and his men arrive to find a completely drunken Henry and Godwin well past the town's curfew. Recorded in 'Mysterious Ways II'.⁸³⁹



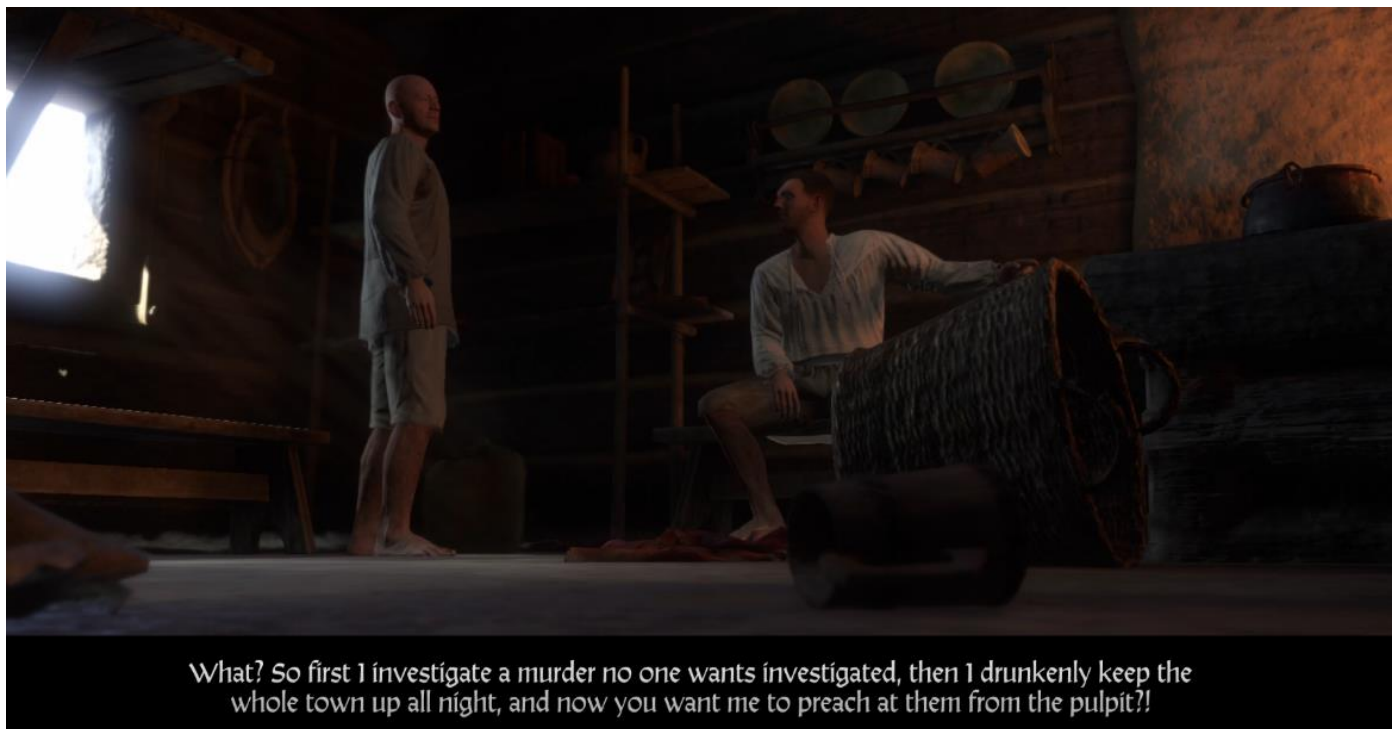
The following morning at Father Godwin's presbytery residence, both Godwin and Henry are woken frantically by Godwin's mistress, with Godwin having only a few moments to get ready and give morning mass to the entire village [representational]. Godwin realises, to his dismay, that he completely forgot but cannot give mass with a terrible hangover, and in conjunction with last night's drunken altercation will likely convince the bailiff to contact the bishop for Godwin's excommunication if he gives a terribly humiliating service [representational]. Accepting Godwin's request to give a successful sermon in exchange for disclosing Lubosh's confession, Henry and Godwin

⁸³⁹ Redder, min 10:12.

decided that the sermon should be based on Jan Hus' teachings, using their conversations at the inn last night and supporting material from Godwin's book containing copies of Hus' recent sermons placed on his table nearby as aids [representational].

Figure 8.3E – Mysterious Ways (VI)

Henry still coming to terms with Godwin's proposal in disbelief. Recorded in 'Mysterious Ways'.⁸⁴⁰



At the Uzhitz church, Henry and Godwin arrived much to the disdain from the entire townsfolk for last night's revelry. After Godwin gave the liturgy, as Henry I gave the sermon by standing at the pulpit in front of the congregation, and had to choose the correct statement or phrase from a series of conversational choices via the dialogue

⁸⁴⁰ Redder, min 17:18.

system at each stage (within a certain time limit) [procedural]. Choosing a lot of wrong options would deter the audience and risk Godwin's career and subsequent refusal to assist with the investigation [procedural].⁸⁴¹ Despite this challenge, I selected nearly all of the correct dialogue options as their phrases were closely familiar to the type of language, rhetoric, and content found in both the written sermons by and in the conversations about Jan Hus, such as one presented in Figure 8.3F [representational].

Figure 8.3F – Mysterious Ways (VII)

One example of the player (Henry) choosing the correct statement by its close relation Jan Hus' teachings during the sermon at the Uzhitz chapel. Recorded in 'Mysterious Ways'.⁸⁴²



⁸⁴¹ Had I failed, another objective of the quest would have been given ('Mysterious Ways' is linked to *KCD*'s main storyline) but involving a different and more difficult path in finding information regarding Lubosh's former involvement with the gang from another source in order to continue the game.

⁸⁴² Redder, min 23:34.

When the entire sermon finished, the audience were immensely entertained and left in awe of Henry's impressive skill in public oratory while mitigating Father Godwin's behaviour last night as an occasional impulse that would not be repeated. Godwin thanked Henry again and provided important information regarding Lubosh's role in the raid and clues to the identity of the other deserters [representational].

'Mysterious Ways' is one of several quests within *KCD* containing gameplay representations of some of the major facets of Christian religious life and dilemmas prevalent in early fifteenth century pre-Hussite Bohemia. Alongside other *KCD* quests containing lore histories on Christian religious life and conflicts (such as 'Waldensians', 'A Man of the Cloth', and 'A Needle in a Haystack'), 'Mysterious Ways' comprises another integral body of gameplay historiography regarding the wider history of late Medieval religion in Bohemia. In de-constructing this manifestation of realist-fiction, we can already establish that this quest's entire story, events, and characters (e.g. Henry and Father Godwin) described earlier are fictional creations by the developers of Warhorse Studios, with the village of Uzhitz and its church where Henry gave the sermon being exceptions [representational].⁸⁴³ As a work of fiction, combining historical minutiae (e.g. Jan Hus and his sermons in Prague during 1403) with elements of drama (e.g. Lubosh's murder, comedy, and character relationship between Henry and Godwin) provided a humorous and conversationally enriched experience in spite of my initial uncertainty to the historical legitimacy of this quest [representational]. Its use of comedy extended to a more poetic tone where Henry's sermon regarding sin and the current Church corruption were ironically used to pardon Father Godwin's recent actions while saving his reputation with the community [representational]. The fictionality of the 'Mysterious

⁸⁴³ The formal name of the church in Uzhitz is 'Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary', which in the early fifteenth century was undergoing re-construction. Both the town and church still exist today.

Ways' quest is further supported by its overarching procedural function as a type of narrative structure called quest chains. Instead of an individual quest with a standalone story, quest chains usually comprise of the game's main story or stories that are told and progressed through a chain of multiple interlinking quests, with the completion of the starting or current quest a pre-requisite to the beginning of the next quest [procedural].⁸⁴⁴

Concurrently however, the core historical realism of this entire quest's narrative set-up is that it re-constructs an actual real-life religious dilemma prevalent throughout late Medieval Bohemia as a fictional story [representational]. This dilemma concerned was the growing rise of spiritual laxity and moral transgressions among the Czech priests and prelates in both poor and affluent parishes, which lasted from about the early fourteenth century until the beginning of the Hussite Civil Wars (1419 – 1433).⁸⁴⁵ Warhorse Studios' codex entry 'Priest' mentioned earlier (p. 492) is a simple yet effective introductory source into understanding the carefree vices of certain Medieval Czech clergyman while validating 'Mysterious Ways' and its fictional storyline as a major gameplay source of experiential historical lore. Yet this correspondence can be corroborated further with other written evidence from passages in secondary historical literature and several primary historical sources.⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴⁴ Chris Bateman, *Game Writing: Narrative Skills for Videogames* (London: Bloosmbury Publishing, 2021), p. 328. In addition, when a player progresses through a quest chain and its accompanying game objectives, each new quest the player encounters or unlocks gradually increases in difficulty in respect to the level of challenge or obstacle and skill of opponent(s), but also offers a material or monetary reward(s) higher in quality than the previous quest.

⁸⁴⁵ It must be made clear, as confirmed by Thomas Fudge and Joanna Nowak respectively, that not all clergyman and parish priests within Bohemia engaged in moral and social vices, and that these activities does not automate to a complete castigation of the "Bohemia clergy as profligate thugs living off the wealth of the Church" (Fudge, p. 16).

⁸⁴⁶ Most of these sources were provided to me as titles of texts by Warhorse Studio' historian Joanna Nowak in one of my later follow-up emails. These sources (including those obtained from Joanna) include: Thomas Fudge's *The Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia*; Brigitte Rath's chapter ' "De Sacramentis, Concubinatu et Ludo Taxilorum..."', A Bohemian visitation protocol from the 14th century'; Alexander Patschovsky's *The Beginnings of a Permanent Inquisition in Bohemia. A Prague Inquisitor's Handbook from the First Half of the 14th century*; and Zdeňka Hledíková's *The Visitations of the Worldly Cleric in Pre-Hussite Bohemia*. The Latin phrase 'De

One primary source explicated as an example is the surviving visitation record conducted between the years 1379 – 1382 by Archdeacon of Prague Pavel of Janovic. Pavel visited more than three-hundred parishes within his archdiocese of Prague, gathering evidence from interviews and corroborative witness testimonies containing “among other things, an extensive dossier of clerical abuses, immorality, and an absence of concern for spiritual matters.”⁸⁴⁷ In broadly highlighting some of Pavel’s findings:

Married pastors took delight in song and drunkenness more than the divine service. Other priests lived openly with concubines. Priest Václav, in the deanery of Podbrdy, frequently drank himself senseless and behaved improperly in the town of Hostomice ... More shocking was the case of a presbyter who managed a lucrative brothel in his home. Many of the regular customers and frequent patrons were fellow clerics.⁸⁴⁸

Archdeacon Pavel’s report of his visitation protocols is one of the few extensively written documents on the “regular and irregular lives of Prague priests”, because it shows us that not only were these sorts of transgressions “possible” but were already relatively common in Medieval Bohemia in a wide range of activities.⁸⁴⁹ To summarise a couple,

Sacramentis, Concubinatu et Ludo Taxilorum’, part of a title of the second source listed, approximately translates into ‘The Sacraments, Concubinage, and Game of Chance’, with game of chance a phrase synonymous to gambling.

⁸⁴⁷ Pavel Janovic, *Protocollum Visitationis Archidiaconatus Pragensis Annis 1379-1382 per Paulum de Janowicz, Archidiaconum Pragensem, Factae*, ed. by Ivan Hlaváček & Zdeňka Hledíková (Prague: Academia, 1973);

Fudge, p. 16. The actual specific name of the visitation record by Pavel of Janovic is in Latin ‘Protocollum visitationis archidiaconatus Pragensis annis 1379-1382 per Paulum de Janowicz, archidiaconum Pragensem factae’.

⁸⁴⁸ Janovic, pp. 45-46, 48, 49, 63, 69, 71, 142, 144, 146, 163;

Fudge, p. 16.

⁸⁴⁹ Thomas A. Fudge, *Jan Hus: Religious Reform and Social Revolution in Bohemia* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), p. 24;

Martin Vincurský, ‘Clerical Celibacy in Bohemia and Moravia in pre-Hussite times. Comparison with the Situation in other European Countries’ (unpublished Masters thesis, Masaryk University, 2017), p. 84. The corruption and/or materialistic excesses among Catholic priests was not isolated to Bohemia. It was a wide problem in many parts of late Medieval Christian Europe, such as the Holy Roman Empire and England.

one of the major patterns accounted is that many of these instances of Prague prelates breaking celibacy was in their partaking with the city's sex workers or prostitutes, with Pavel's report accumulating in total (after verification) that up to "forty percent of Prague parishes had issues with prostitution."⁸⁵⁰ Another relatively large group documented in this report pertained to the offences of priests in small towns and villages in the outskirts of Prague who not only broke celibacy and/or married and fathered illegitimate children with their concubine or mistress.⁸⁵¹ Moreover, as evident in cases such as the priest Valentín from Zbraslav, they also openly admitted their transgression to Pavel when interrogated, as well as having made minimal or no attempt of keeping their relationship secret from their parishioners.⁸⁵²

This primary source and its findings are also demonstrated with a remarkably extensive array of evidence into both its historical veracity or truthfulness and discerning the key purpose for Pavel's visits. In elucidating two examples of this evidence by relying on Czech historian Martin Vincurský's discussions of Pavel's report from his corroborative analysis, Vincurský highlights that Pavel's recorded descriptions on each specific case usually details his careful skill of cross-examination in distinguishing quality credible statements from those giving the impression of "gossip and unsubstantiated defamation."⁸⁵³ For instance, Pavel would give notice of his visitation in advance and then interview and/or interrogate the accused priest, often bringing a pre-prepared list of questions for use and which could be adjusted or have some questions skipped

⁸⁵⁰ Fudge, p. 23.

⁸⁵¹ Vincurský, p. 76.

⁸⁵² Vincurský, pp. 76-77.

⁸⁵³ Vincurský, p. 73. The title of Martin Vincurský's thesis in original Slovak is 'Klerikálny celibát v Čechách a na Morave v dobe predhusitskej. Porovnanie so stavom v ďalších krajinách Európy'.

depending on each case.⁸⁵⁴ Whether obtaining direct confession or at least an initial denial, Pavel would then obtain and record further confirmation or proof by interviewing and corroborating statements from a multitude of witnesses under a similar procedure.⁸⁵⁵ These witnesses ranged from other clerics in the parish, head parishioners, and even women with knowledge of or suspected of being involved in a sexual relationship with the accused.⁸⁵⁶ Pavel's cross-examination with multiple sources as recorded within his report were effective in validating most of his originally weak substantiated allegations.⁸⁵⁷ However, Vincurský also added that Pavel's report gains some further assurances of its reliability, as its recorded statements given by the alleged and witnesses were usually to proper accordance "carried out under oath [of testimony]."⁸⁵⁸ Another piece of evidence Vincurský reveals is that Pavel's report was one of a handful of known visitation protocol documents largely intended to identify and, once proven, apply (or present the information to their superiors who would enact) the necessary punishment to the respective offenses committed by the prelate(s).⁸⁵⁹ Particularly breaking celibacy and/or partaking in clerical marriage. These documents were essentially instruments for Archdeacons like Pavel, deans, and other assigned prelates tasked in overseeing compliance with canonical legislation in celibacy while ceasing clerical concubinage.⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁵⁴ Vincurský, p. 73. Vincurský referenced general examples of pre-prepared questions preserved in the Olomouc Interrogatorium document that visitors like Pavel would likely have used regarding their investigation into concubinage.

⁸⁵⁵ Vincurský, p. 73.

⁸⁵⁶ Vincurský, p. 73.

⁸⁵⁷ Vincurský, p. 73.

⁸⁵⁸ Vincurský, p. 73. Vincurský still acknowledged a degree of caution to confirming complete reliability of this source as he states that Pavel still encountered on occasion easily suspicious testimonies or in other cases those reluctant to swear and testify.

⁸⁵⁹ Vincurský, p. 83.

⁸⁶⁰ Vincurský, p. 83. Other small but important pieces of evidence Vincurský mentions, in support of the other two presented in this chapter section, is that Pavel's notable record of visiting over three-hundred Czech parishes, and inputting his own supplementary notes to the rest of the main text of this report written by his scribe, confirms that Pavel was heavily active and thoroughly meticulous in these protocol visitations.

From this evaluation, we can affirm that Pavel's report is one of the few written sources to constitute the core body of historical realism in foregrounding 'Mysterious Ways' as a religious-based lore history containing historiographic gameplay scholarship via authentic multimodal experiences on the "Corruption and abuses among the [Czech] clergy."⁸⁶¹ To elaborate, 'Mysterious Ways' remediates these actual religious incidents among the Czech priesthood by condensing them into a single fictional quest contextualised to the local Rattay-Sasau region, but with its entire gameplay sequence offering comparative historical lore into how these incidents might likely have occurred as physically lived experiences. For example, Father Godwin's actions (accompanied by Henry) in gambling, intoxication, and fighting the bailiff and his men outside the Uzhitz inn are gameplay re-constructions of the vices or indiscretions underscored in Pavel's visitation cases, such as "Gambling, fighting, absenteeism ... [and] violence among priests."⁸⁶² Another subtle historical insight unveiled in this quest was that the Uzhitz congregations' scolding of Father Godwin was directed not at his openly public relationship with the cook but at his drunkenness severely inhibiting his duties for the parish. While perhaps coincidental, this incident bears experiential correlation to Pavel's discovery of some of the communities with parishioners who culturally tolerated their priests' concubinage because they are "not capable of restraint, so it is better for ... [the priest] to have one woman ... [than] to seduce all the others."⁸⁶³

However, 'Mysterious Ways' also contributes some new and/or contrastive sources of historical lore that extend or complicate this historiography of religious dilemma within Medieval Czech society. Broadly, this quest's representation of Godwin's clerical

⁸⁶¹ Fudge, *The Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia*, p. 16.

⁸⁶² Fudge, *Jan Hus: Religious Reform and Social Revolution in Bohemia*, p. 23.

⁸⁶³ Vincurský, pp. 76, 78.

improprieties or transgressions occurring just over twenty years after Pavel's report was finished conforms to the consensus among historians like Fudge and Vincurský that by the early fifteenth century sexual activities by members of the Czech priesthood of varying rank still remained as a "permanent and unresolved issue."⁸⁶⁴ Certain reform measures were applied by the Bohemian Church prior to and after the release of Pavel's findings, most prominent being the dismissal of guilty pastors or priests from their office and the closure of a number of brothels.⁸⁶⁵ Nonetheless, a complex series of factors beyond inhibiting the permanent success of these countermeasures was likely the main cause. Among these factors were the ongoing crisis of Papal authority between rival Popes known as the Western Schism (1378 – 1417), and Bohemia's severe irregularity of synodal (Church council) meetings since the fourteenth century to thoroughly debate and devise wide-reaching solutions to clerical concubinage.⁸⁶⁶

Yet the most prominent piece of experiential lore as a nuanced perspective into this facet of Medieval Czech religion is its experiential re-construction of the distinction of clerical impropriety between the poorer prelates and the wealthier high-ranking prelates, as evident specifically in Godwin's defence of his lifestyle to Henry at the inn during their conversation. This incident occurred when I briefly mentioned in my gameplay recounting earlier Henry's inquiry into Father Godwin's unapologetically lack of restraint from some of his vices (fornication, gambling, and indulgent drinking) as expressed through both his dialogue and later his performances in front of (and in part

⁸⁶⁴ Vincurský, p. 81.

⁸⁶⁵ Fudge, pp. 24-25.

⁸⁶⁶ Fudge, pp. 3, 13, 22. The Western Schism or Papal Schism was a major split within the Catholic Church, where rival Popes based in Avignon and Rome (and later a third claimant based in Pisan), supported by their respective political allies, claimed to be the true leader of the Church, which detrimentally damaged the prestige of the office. Although finally resolved in the Council of Constance (1414 – 1418), it accentuated the already growing problem of Church corruption and decline of authority in influencing European politics.

partaken) by my character Henry [representational]. Henry's inquiry was in response to Godwin's praise of Jan Hus' harsh criticisms of and declarations for reform against the many higher-ranking wealthy prelates and clerics in both Bohemia and abroad due to their excessive materialistic lifestyle, having mistresses, and owning rich palatial estates with servants, all at the expense of taking wealth from the commonfolk who pay expensive tithes toward the Church [representational]. When Henry highlighted the hypocrisy in Godwin's statements on sexual and social improprieties by his own explicit vices and laxity in the moral codes of the clergy like that of his superiors, Godwin disagreed:

My situation is completely different! Hus preaches against the prelates and clerics who are robbing the poor! Look at me – I don't have a pot to piss in. I'm no better off than the folk I preach to. I'm the one with them in poverty and suffering ... I drink with them and curse those stuffed habits in Sasau monastery.

Figure 8.3G – Mysterious Ways (IX)

Godwin making a defence of his lifestyle. Recorded in 'Mysterious Ways II'.⁸⁶⁷



This explanation does not exempt Godwin from his conduct as a priest of the Church. Nonetheless, the significance of this crucial piece of dialogue is offering a relatively new and alternative insight that potentially can open further study into the actions and improprieties of the rural village priests rather than being fully equated to the improprieties of their affluent urban counterparts, such as Pavel's investigations of the Prague priests. Namely, for poorer rural or village priests as embodied by Father Godwin, their actions are viewed as harmless because their choice of lifestyle and non-celibacy, in spite of breaking canonical legislation, does not come at the expense of taking and spending extensive wealth from their fellow parishioners. As a conversational

⁸⁶⁷ Redder, min 7:17.

experience, this declaration from a fictional village priest reveals the most important historical factor as to why the activities of moral transgressions continued among the Bohemian priesthood until the Hussite period. These clerical improprieties stemmed less from external issues (closures of brothels) than internal problems within the Church itself by failing to address its own recurring political corruption, excess materialism, and frequent conferment and ownership of vast ecclesiastical properties that accompanied these illicit sexual activities.⁸⁶⁸

Godwin's admission of the reasons for partaking in these activities was later used by Henry in his implicit defence of Father Godwin to the congregation in his sermon. This occurred when a phrase I had chosen via the dialogue system labelled "continue wordily" successfully struck well with the congregation. Particularly, choosing this phrase showcased an eloquent statement from Henry by combining his rhetorical skills and Biblical metaphor with thematic reference to both the current climate of the Church's excessive corruption and materialism and Jan Hus' sermon notes [procedural/representational]. This segment of the eloquent speech given by Henry also implicitly contextualised Godwin's vices as a less harmful (though still wrongly) form of sin without any comparison to the more overly excessive debauchery committed by the powerful wealthy prelates that were paid for by the parishioners' money. As stated:

And what about those bishops? They sin without remorse and with the money grasped from the poor for indulgences, they keep fine horses and hordes of

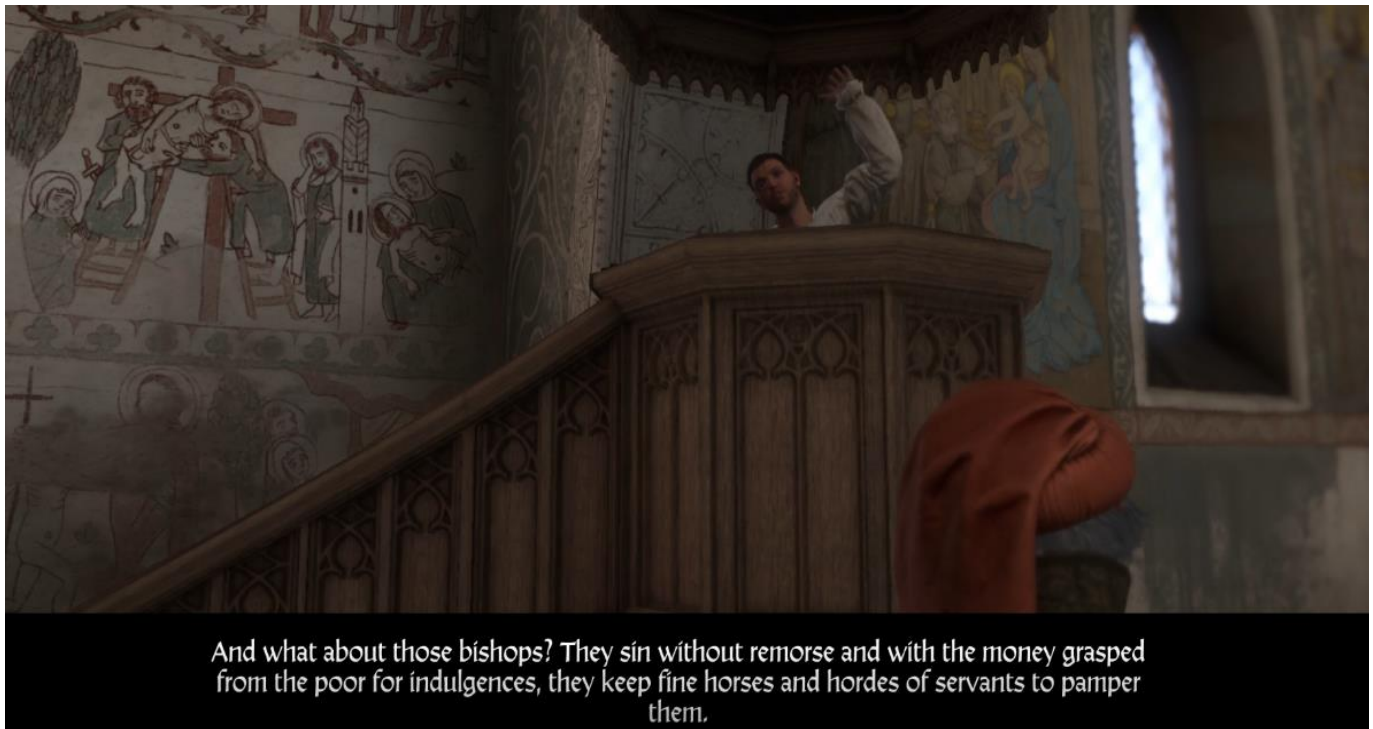
⁸⁶⁸ An adjacent outcome to that factor was the closures of the brothels did not end prostitution permanently for "they sought employment in one of the other brothels of Prague or worked in the streets. Brothels may have undermined morality but they also contributed to the Prague economy" (Fudge, *Jan Hus: Religious Reform and Social Revolution in Bohemia*, p. 24).

servants to pamper them. They play dice and garb their mistresses in expensive furs.

Figure 8.3H – Mysterious Ways (X)

Henry's sermon when he is discussing on the corruption of the wealthy prelates at the pulpit.

Recorded in 'Mysterious Ways II'.⁸⁶⁹



This example exhibiting conflation of clerical iniquities with preaching also overlaps with a broadly authentic inclusion of sermon preaching as a popular medium within Czech society for raising contemporary religious and social topics and issues, as re-enacted in a condensed version through Henry's sermon. For the common laity within Bohemia, religious instruction was usually encased in charismatic preaching as popular

⁸⁶⁹ Redder, min 26:27.

entertainment through storytelling, current major events, and everyday experiences resonant to the current “cultural world of [the] common people”, while still containing some theological concepts or moral lessons.⁸⁷⁰ Therefore, successful Czech preachers were those who managed to captivate their listeners by mastering “theatrical performances with exaggerated gestures, dialogic inserts, and visual aids ... [and] the use of illustrative stories, living examples, [and] instructive allegories.”⁸⁷¹

These elements of how late Medieval Czech sermons were typically given during Christian mass and instruction are re-enacted in Henry’s sermon by reciting content mediating between Henry’s personal views and those thematically accurate to Jan Hus [representational]. The earlier inclusion of factual references to the main historical figure Jan Hus from conversations at the inn and (in condensed form) some of the numerous written sermons Hus gave in Prague between 1402 – 1403 on sin and Church corruption found in Godwin’s written copy (pp. 494, 497 – 499) are closely related to the particularity of the main history expressed in this quest.⁸⁷² During the first years of the fifteenth century, Jan Hus was at this time one of several main preachers and theologians who began to gain popularity when he openly spoke out for major reform against the unchecked moral vices and materialism of the clergy and prelates in both Bohemia and the Papacy while living and teaching in Prague.⁸⁷³ More importantly however, these

⁸⁷⁰ Fudge, p. 16.

⁸⁷¹ Pavel Soukup, *Jan Hus: The Life and Death of a Preacher* (West Lafayette, I.N: Purdue University Press, 2015), p. 32.

⁸⁷² Soukup, pp. 27-28. These historical references within the 'Mysterious Ways' quest factually correspond to Jan Hus’ life during 1403 when he was lecturing at Charles University in Prague and preaching as rector of the Bethlehem Chapel in the city (since 1402). Hus was also serving his last months as rector at Charles University while recently being appointed a new role by Roman Archbishop of Prague Zajíc Zbynek of Hasenburg as a synod preacher of the clergy’s biennial synod as an opportunity for Hus to invite conclaves of priests and prelates in order to call and address the sins of the clergyman and endeavors for moral reform.

⁸⁷³ Pánek and Tůma, p. 152;

Fudge, p. 17;

Soukup, pp. 39-40, 44.

specific references are utilised as historicized verbal expressions in theatrical performances via the dialogue system mechanic when giving the sermon as Henry [procedural/representational].

For instance, when I selected the statement labelled “Continue wordily”, Henry correctly re-iterates almost word-for-word passages from one of Jan Hus’ written sermons in Godwin’s copy concerning the subject ‘Mother Church’ [representational]. This sermon is likely a condensed version of one of Hus’ surviving sermons on the gospel ‘Nemo Potest’ that was formally published later in his collection of sermons *Collecta* between 1404 – 1405.⁸⁷⁴ To provide several segments of these passages recounted by Henry:

The accursed wealth that the Church is drowning in is poisoning almost the whole of Christendom ... Just like the flock of ravens that has descended on this land to peck up every speck of gold and silver ... You want to baptize a child? Pay! You want to steal and murder? Pay and you will have absolution!

⁸⁷⁴ Soukup, pp. 39-40.

Figure 8.3I – Mysterious Ways (XI)

A segment of Henry's re-iteration of Jan Hus' topic 'Mother Church' while standing at the pulpit. Recorded in 'Mysterious Ways II'.⁸⁷⁵



In another statement regarding the subject of intoxication from drinking in another condensed version of a sermon by Hus within the heading 'Intemperance', Hus' criticism is overzealous:

The drinker, when he drinks his wine is disgraced before God ... and shall be trampled into the dust. Priests ... must lead with reason, [and] turn their backs on

⁸⁷⁵ Redder, 'Mysterious Ways II', min 24:46.

debauchery ... Therefore the apostle says that ... a priest who drinks must be punished or deprived of his priesthood!

In contrast, when I chose the dialogue option "To sin is Human", Henry on this occasion gave his own judgement on the subject of drinking in lining with his own experiences at the inn with Father Godwin. Shortly after making a Biblical reference to Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine in the 'Marriage at Cana', likely a subtle criticism or counterpoint to Hus' view of complete absolution from alcohol, Henry then stated:

Drink to lighten the cross you bear in this vale of tears, but not with such abandon that you cannot keep holy the Sabbath. For there should be moderation in all things and it is not drinking itself that is sinful, but intemperance and beastly indulgence!

Figure 8.3J – Mysterious Ways (XII)

Selecting the conversational option 'To Sin is Human' during the segment on 'Intemperance'.

Recorded in 'Mysterious Way II'.⁸⁷⁶



In combining his own and Hus' views in instances like these, Henry's sermon can be interpreted as an implicit means to persuade the congregation to view Godwin as an imperfect yet still decent fellow who deeply cares for his community despite some of his own moral shortcomings. Yet this kind of engagement embedded within a realist-fiction narrative also broadly alludes to how sermon preaching in both Medieval Bohemia and abroad were often devices to convince their Christian audiences on the justified or unjustified acts of virtuous or immoral practices, ranging from "reformist preachers who offered education and uplifting religious rhetoric; [to] sermons ... [that] propagate the selling of indulgences."⁸⁷⁷

⁸⁷⁶ Redder, min 25:04.

⁸⁷⁷ Soukup, p. 32.

8.6 Chapter Evaluation:

We can establish that different versions of realist-fiction exist within gameplay representation when interacting with either lore history or imaginative history as the game's primary modality. By using additional examples from recorded gameplay sequences, *KCD* showcases some of the different manifestations or modes of realist-fiction and its capabilities intertwined with and reframed by the principles and functions of lore history. These examples also provide new scholarly insight into how imaginative fiction can be harnessed by lore history in conveying scholarly historical experiences pertaining to the minutiae and locality of the game's respective historical period and society. Overall, these findings prove that multimodal interplays between lore history and certain types of imaginative history are not only compatible but vital for future development and study of historical gameplay mediums. While more research and accumulation of findings are still needed to fully validate this view, this chapter still addresses research questions i, ii, and iii by providing expanded conceptual commentaries and findings of gameplay representation that extend the contributions contained in the preceding analytical chapters.

Being a supplementary chapter, no further areas of investigation and queries are outlined here except one. Namely, the full inclusion and analysis of the 'orientational function' which qualifies a particular modality's capacity to make its game's respective history relatable to its player audiences and their recognitions or impressions of that history through its cultural and media receptions. The orientational function was introduced and defined in Chapter 3 as the third of the interconnected 'contextual' modalities that exist within and help operate the respective historical modality(ies). Yet as was previously established, only the representational and procedural functions of lore history and

imaginative history were applied in this thesis.⁸⁷⁸ To develop this area of the historical modality system further in future research, I argue that the orientational function within certain gameplay mediums can facilitate scholarly content and learning through analytical play rather than exhibiting orientational resources signifying popular yet inaccurate historical stereotypes, tropes, and beliefs. To briefly exemplify, the two previous gameplay examples within *KCD* discussed earlier fit this paradigm of the orientational modality. Both the forest setting and prelate moral transgressions are some of the prominent orientational signifiers or tropes of the 'Medieval' continually renewed through past literary and media iterations of Medieval history as part of attracting or incentivising certain players' desire to live out their impressions of the Middle Ages resonant to public and popular media discourse. However, as evident from earlier gameplay analysis, the orientational function of these signifiers also facilitated opportunities to encounter and examine their Medieval lore histories, and subsequently uncover their gameplay scholarship contributive to the relevant Medieval historiography.

⁸⁷⁸ Redder, pp. 119-120.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

This thesis highlights and analyses historical gameplay as a legitimate and innovative yet understudied medium of historical representation by making several key arguments. First, historical gameplay can signal a means of renewing, documenting, and studying the past, and more broadly instigates gameplay historiography that contributes a valuable representational function and promotes new forms of historical literacy. This was demonstrated via game utilisation of ‘lore history’, ‘imaginative history’, and ‘alternate history’ within its historical expression. The first two modes of history were thoroughly explored and illustrated via analysis of approximately ninety hours of game footage generated from *KCD* and *APTI*. Second, this thesis established that gameplay is capable of providing and presenting a nuanced engagement with history as a result of combining historical research with game design and game form to produce an evidenced (historically steeped) form of gameplay communication, action, and interactivity. Thirdly, historical gameplay engages history and the historiography of representation as a multimodal enterprise. It is an enterprise that comprises an integrated assemblage of its different theoretical and methodological traditions (e.g. empiricism, biography, oral history), modes of communication (e.g. visual, narrative, and performative) and their styles (e.g. realism, imaginative, and factual), and utilisation of historical sources (for example gameplay recordings, written records, and archaeological and heritage sites).

A key contribution and departure from other approaches to historical research was the employment of multimodality as a conceptual framework for de-constructing and

elucidating the different communicative modes and literacies of historical gameplay. This resulted in the development of a working taxonomy framework 'historical modality' to signal how multimodality can be applied in the analysis of various types of gameplay expressions of history. This thesis has begun the process of demonstrating the efficacy of this approach and framework by contributing findings and representational insights on several modalities of gameplay history and their effects. Therefore, I wish to continue improving the historical modality framework in future historical game research in order to provide a new theoretical or conceptual system of language for scholars to unravel, describe, and illustrate the modalities of history manifested in and conveyed through gameplay representation.

This thesis advances the notion that the medium of gameplay can constitute a form of multimodality containing academic scholarship. The examination of recent historical game releases, such as *KCD* and *APTI*, showed them to be critical holistic works of gameplay historiography. In the process of advancing gameplay scholarship, the research design of the study was required to be appropriate and innovative. The empirical approaches used in the research are particularly noteworthy. One approach was the use of gameplay experiences as a primary historical source for exploring new and expanded historical findings or knowledge. Equally important in illustrating the scholarly value of gameplay was the cross-examination of gameplay with other historical sources (written sources, fieldwork, interviews). The success in combining multiple traditional with digital historical sources revealed how historical gameplay functioned as an effective entry point and platform for expanding historical knowledge and understanding.

Also essential to the value of gameplay as a valid source of historical knowledge was the expansion of different forms of historical modalities. As Henry in *KCD*, the lore history modality was found to be an emergent mode of historical gameplay that amalgamates and animates detailed historical evidence and information, historicized fiction, re-enacted performances, and other bodies of historical lore and content to present and enhance scholarly historical research and knowledge-building. For instance, the recorded footage of my experience of *KCD*'s notable histories of the Silver Skalitz siege as a military-directed massacre and the daily Medieval minutiae of some of Rattay's existent Medieval buildings (such as castle Pirkstein) within the backdrop of the Bohemian Civil War presented historical lore as one of the main types of gameplay scholarship. As Amicia and Hugo in *APTI*, I experienced poetic gameplay renditions of folklore as another kind of scholarship. This was uncovered in the imaginative history mode within *APTI* via the game's various historical fantasy remediations of pre-modern iterations of plagues and folkloric storytelling traditions. This discovery was notably explicit in *APTI*'s imaginative rendition of the innumerable flesh-eating rat swarm as a playful yet poetically corroborative re-construction in homage to some of the past folkloric and fantasy adaptations, including those situated in the context of rat plagues such as the folktales *Mouse Tower* and the *Pied Piper of Hamelin*.

These two different modes of historical gameplay, and their contributions to a number of identified Medieval historiographies, were significant in extending knowledge typologies and engagements with history. *KCD*'s utilisation of lore history was both supported by and led game developers from Warhorse Studios to develop interdisciplinary collaborations with experts from other fields such as history, Medieval martial arts, and museum curators. The outcome of these collaborations demonstrated the potential for historians to undertake multimodal historiography within a game

design process or context. That is, by contributing to a multimodal approach to historical representation, historian researchers and consultants for games can achieve new forms of dissemination beyond written historical literature.

The approach taken in this thesis also led to refinements to new and existent academic terms and concepts within both historical game studies and the wider history discipline. In applying a gameplay lens, refinements have been made to pre-existing concepts such as developer-historian, historical game developer, player-historian, content, knowledge and lore, historical fiction, experiential re-construction and realist simulation style. The re-working or refinement of these terms alleviated conceptual limitations or gaps attached to their previous iterations or usages. To provide some examples, historical game developer (Chapter 2) was applied to my game developer interviewees to address the plethora of different types of designers and artists working in game studios with different aims, approaches, and strategies for their historical game development process. Likewise, evidence of the potential efficacy of player-historian was found in the player-analyst method, and the process in which gameplay evidence is actively captured, archived and analysed. However, more research, testing and reflection by myself and other video game historians will be needed to fully verify the research practices of the player-historian. Player-analyst practices led to the exciting discovery of new or extended modes of historical fiction. Analysis of *KCD* led to examination of a gameplay variation of 'realist-fiction' that extend beyond narrative conventions or devices employed for dramatic effect, but instead generate or enhance scholarly historical learning. Examination of histories via multiple narrative quests within *KCD*, such as 'Mysterious Ways' (rural prelate impropriety) and 'The Prey' (forest) used as examples in Chapter 8, represent this new and interactive employment of historical fiction.

Additionally, a multimodal gameplay history opens potential future pathways or ideas to expand the teaching of history and its varying literacies in secondary school classrooms and universities. The historical modality framework could be another useful addition to the current valuable work and practical applications of historical game education and teaching practice (e.g. Jeremiah McCall's 'historical problem space' framework, and University of Texas' Epoch Games). Namely, a learning and analytical tool or resource to assist in both pedagogical teaching and immersive student learning, including knowledge acquisition, research, and critique of specialised historical periods, subjects, and/or imaginative and fantasised history contexts through historical game texts. Applying historical modality for historical game education and teaching has already been started in a 2022 video journal article co-authored by myself and Gareth Schott titled 'Rats, Plagues, and Children, Oh My! Multimodal Representations of the Past in Historical Games'.⁸⁷⁹ In the article, we highlight a way in which historical gameplay could work in a history teaching curriculum and learning environment.⁸⁸⁰

Finally, I anticipate that the historical modality framework with amendments could have value as an effective game design model by large game studios and indie game developers for their future projects in producing and releasing historical games, as opposed to current practices of historical game design (e.g. *Assassin Creed* and *Call of Duty* series). The games *KCD* and *APT* offer two distinct yet highly innovative templates across their game design, gameplay immersion, and scope of historical content.

⁸⁷⁹ Redder and Schott, 'Rats, Plagues, and Children, Oh My! Multimodal Representations of the Past in Historical Games'.

⁸⁸⁰ Redder and Schott, p. 18.

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Appendix 1

Questions for Warhorse Studios (Kingdom Come: Deliverance):

1.) What were the reasons for depicting the historical event of the sacking and massacre of Silver Skalitz?

Follow up Question: Was re-constructing and depicting this event in the game meant to show players the darker or grimmer side of Medieval life?

2.) What were some of the main historical and game design approaches used to re-construct the history of the Fraternal Civil War between King Wenceslas IV and King Sigismund of Hungary into *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*?

Follow up Question: How would the combination of both historical and game design approaches historically inform and influence gameplay and player agency?

Follow up Question: What were some of the main limitations and compromises between using game design and historical techniques in re-creating early fifteenth century Bohemia?

3.) What were the kind of combat experiences your studio was trying to integrate into the game?

Follow up Question: Aside from Hans Talhoffer's Fighting manual, were there other Medieval combat sources used as well?

4.) How was Warhorse Studios able to recreate the urban and rural environments in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*?

Follow up Question: What kind of historical effects were you achieving, and were there any challenges to representing the past on a visual level?

5.) With regards to the dialogues, interactions between historical characters, social classes, occupations, and cultural practices, were they all constructed as social and behavioral forms of historical authenticity?

Follow up Question: Would you also consider the perk, reputation, and skill systems in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* as another historical technique or approach, and if so how?

Follow up Question: Were the representations of and interactions between the different ethnicities and communities an historical illustration of the conceptions of race, religion, and social attitudes that existed during the late Medieval period?

Follow up Question: If so, what were the reasons for undertaking a Medieval construction of racial and social attitudes?

6.) What were the main highlights and issues or limitations of researching and re-constructing the history of the Fraternal Civil War in *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*?

Follow up Question: How were those issues resolved?

7.) What were the primary historical sources that you uncovered from research, and how did you apply them into *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*?

Follow up Question: Were there any academic historical texts on the period used, and if so what insights or gaps in the literature were uncovered?

8.) Could you list some of the major institutions that you accessed as part of Warhorse Studios' research process, and how were they useful?

9.) What are your main roles and responsibilities in your position as part of developing the Medieval game?

10.) What has the collaboration with game designers been like in developing *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*?

Follow up Question: Throughout development of the game, were there moments where game designers were thinking as or utilising approaches of an historian?

11.) In developing *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, were the quests, storylines, people and the battles based on or influenced by the context and events of early fifteenth century Bohemia?

Follow up Question: Were these elements designed to provide players interactivity with the history of the Bohemian Civil War?

12.) What are your ideas or perceptions of historical realism?

13.) What were Warhorse Studios' main goals of developing *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* when they first started and were they able to achieve all of them?

14.) What were your motivations or interests in developing a more historically faithful or realistic Medieval game?

Final Questions:

15.) What are some of the things that you think players might have taken away from experiencing *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, and its period of history?

16.) Do you think that a player's approach or style of play in the game can be considered an historical representation of the Middle Ages?

17.) In regards to a possible sequel of the game, what are some of the things pertaining to Medieval Bohemian history that you and the game studio would like to do differently?

Appendix 2

Questions for Asobo Studio (A Plague Tale: Innocence):

1.) One of the major themes in the game and its historical setting is the rats and their presence in the game as both an enemy and at times a useful ally. In your words, explain the reasons for implementing rats in the game's representation of the Black Death?

2.) What are some of the main historical and game design approaches that you are using to re-construct this particular history into *A Plague Tale: Innocence*?

Follow up Question: How would the combination of both historical and game design approaches historically inform and influence gameplay and player agency?

Follow up Question: What are some of the main limitations and compromises between using game design and historical techniques in re-creating Medieval France during the Black death?

3.) How is Asobo Studio recreating the urban and rural environments in *A Plague Tale: Innocence*?

Follow up Question: What kind of historical effects are you and the rest of the team achieving, and are there any challenges to representing the past on a visual level?

4.) How are you representing the different historical groups, such as the Inquisition and the peasantry, and what is the basis for representing these groups within the game.

5.) What are the reasons for representing this dark and turbulent period of Medieval history through the role of orphan children?

Follow up Question: How does the use of orphan children enable historical learning or immersion in terms of game play?

Follow up Question: In your own words, how would this approach contrast with or provide a different historical experience of the Black Death to other historical depictions in film and books?

6.) What were the main highlights and issues or limitations of researching and re-constructing the history of Medieval France during the Black Death in *A Plague Tale Innocence*?

Follow up Question: How were those issues resolved?

7.) What were the primary historical sources that you uncovered from research and how did you apply them into *A Plague Tale: Innocence*?

Follow up Question: Are there any academic historical texts on the period that you are currently using, and if so what insights or gaps in the literature were uncovered?

8.) Can you list some of the major institutions and experts that you have accessed as part of Asobo Studio's research process, and how were they useful?

9.) What are your main roles and responsibilities as Lead Narrative Designer in developing this Medieval game?

10.) What has the collaboration with other game designers been like in developing this historical game?

Follow up Question: Are there moments where you are thinking as or utilising approaches of an historian?

11.) What are your ideas or perceptions of historical realism?

12.) What are your studio's main goals of developing *A Plague Tale: Innocence* when they first started and do you think you are currently meeting your goals?

13.) What were your motivations or interests in developing a more historically fantastical Medieval game?

Final Questions:

14.) What are some of the things you think players might take away from experiencing this period of history in *A Plague Tale: Innocence*?

15.) Do you think that a player's approach or style of play in the game can be considered an historical representation of the Middle Ages?