



# Emergent Stories in Crusader Kings II

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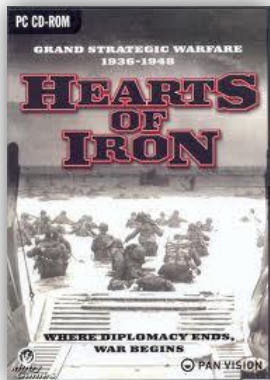
Game Designer, Paradox Development Studio

*“Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void but out of chaos.” – Mary Shelley*

# Narrative Forms

- **Linear (written):** Gears of War, The Secret of Monkey Island
- **Branching (written):** Mass Effect, Fallout
- **Improvised:** Second Life, Eve Online
- **Emergent:** The Sims, Crusader Kings

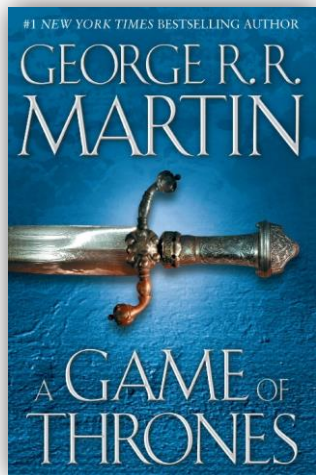
# The Games we Make



- Historically accurate
- Open-ended
- Freeform / Sandbox

- Complex
- Pauseable realtime
- Multiplayer support

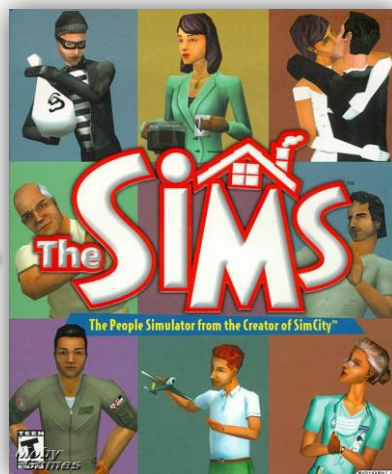
# Inspirations for Crusader Kings



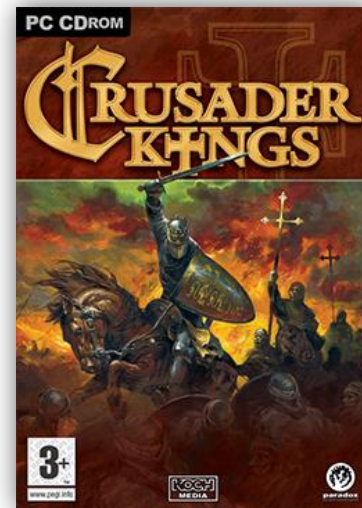
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# Crusader Kings I (2004)

- Strategy-RPG
- Medieval Era
- Feudal Simulation
- Character Focus
- Big Noses



# Crusader Kings I Character Sheet

- Skills
- Personality Traits
- Family Relations



# Crusader Kings II – Design Goals

- Increased Character Focus
  - You are the *ruler*, not the nation
- Story Generating Mechanics
  - Opinions, Personalities and Strife – Drives the AI
- Order out of Chaos
  - Randomness as a creative force
- (Vast Graphics and GUI improvements)



## Crusader Kings II

- Prettier Map
- More Characters
- More Intrigue
- Smaller Noses



# Emergent Story: The Sons of King Mielus



- King Mielus of Finland had four sons
- The king gave them all titles (player action)
- Mielus dies (chance) – the player is now Lalli, the oldest
- The second, Prince Urho, starts a civil war (AI agenda)
- Lalli loses and dies (chance) in the dungeons of his brother
- Lalli's son Miemo succeeds to the remaining titles

# Emergent Story: The Sons of King Mielus

- Miemo, the player, starts a war for the throne (**player action**)
- Miemo loses and is beheaded (**AI hatred**) by uncle Urho
- The player now becomes *Urho*, his own killer!
- King Urho, "the Possessed", has five sons of his own
- The impatient oldest son, or possibly his Ambitious (trait) wife (**AI ambition**) has father Urho murdered
- Another round of civil wars ensue
- More sons and grandsons of Mielus perish one by one

# Emergent Story: The Sons of King Mielus

***“This is not a tale of how I lost my ruler in a dramatic way. No, it is a tale of how I lost my dynasty. For they are beyond redemption now. I am certain that house Hämäläinen is cursed. Ukko save me!”***



# Emergent Story: A Deal with God

- The king of Norway has a pathetic son and heir (Craven, Shy, Slothful)
- The wastrel dies of Consumption (**chance**) after siring a Genius son
- The king gives his grandson the best education (**player choice**)
- The kid comes down with Pneumonia at age 16 (**chance**)
- Being Zealous, the king prays for his heir (**scripted event**), begging God to take him instead (**player imagination**)
- The grandson recovers (**possibly scripted effect**). Two days later, the king dies... (**pure chance**)

***“No console was involved so it was actually a bit creepy... and a bit heartwarming in a way.”***

# The Crusader Kings II Story Engine

*"If it bleeds, it leads."*

- Journalist Adage

# The Crusader Kings II Story Engine

- Quantity of Agents
- Quality of Agents
- Limited Resources
- Changing Conditions
- Multiple Courses of Action
- Repercussions
- Dubious Morality

## Personalities

- Attributes
- Traits (with AI values)
- Drives AI

The screenshot shows a detailed character profile for King Æthelred of Wessex. The interface includes a portrait of the king, a smaller portrait of his wife, and a portrait of his heir. The king's name is "King Æthelred of Wessex" with an age of 27. The profile lists various attributes and traits, including a table of skills and a list of titles. A red box highlights the skills table and the trait icons at the bottom right.

Skill	Value	Max	Cost	Value
Knowledge	12	(30)		69.1
Warfare	3	(17)		30.0
Construction	6	(21)		15.0
Commerce	6	(26)		0.0
Religion	5	(25)		

**Titles:** [Various heraldic symbols]

**Zealous**

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This character burns with religious fervor and cannot tolerate heretics, infidels, or heathens.

Monthly Piety: +1.00 (monthly)

Martial: +2.00



## Opinions

- -100 to 100
- Situational or Timed
- Drives AI



# AI Actors are Crucial



# Scripted Narrative

*“Life is a dark chain of events.”*

- Friedrich Nietzsche

## Scripted Narrative

- Branching "Events"
- Increased Immersion
- Grounds the Player



### aldrada's Baby

My little daughter Irmgard is not like other children. She does not scream or cry or even get upset, but she observes the world with keen interest. This morning, she burst into bubbling laughter when a cook cut his hand badly and there was blood everywhere. Animals do not like her and she makes a strange buzzing sound when near other children. Courtiers whisper 'demon spawn' and the servants have started to avert their eyes and make covert signs to ward off evil.

I must fast and pray to God..

Consult my Court Chaplain



# From Holy Kingdom to Unholy Nightmare

- A player got the "Joan of Arc" narrative events
- Soon, the demon child narrative events also started
- Little Sebdan was believed to be the child of Satan
- Lasairfionna, the Maid of Ormond, was made the tutor of the child
- Sebdan appeared to turn out well
- When she turned 16, she still became the incarnation of evil
- Her older siblings started mysteriously dying off

# Scripted Narrative

*"So now I have put down the revolts, and my army of the damned terrorize the Irish High Kingdom and there's not a damned thing anyone can do about it but stare in utter horror of the fulfillment of a satanic plot to overthrow a kingdom blessed by the arrival of a warrior saint who now weeps over the corpses of her dead family.*

*Help me."*

# Crusader Kings II – The Verdict

*"Crusader Kings II is a constant source of dark comedy."*  
– [IncGamers](#)

*"Crusader Kings II is the most adept game I've ever played at generating dynamic narratives. Even at its most basic, the game's events hang together in fascinating and occasionally hilarious stories."* – [PCGamer](#)

*"I've never played a game that lets me revel in my own stories quite like this one."* – [Kotaku](#)

*"Anyone interested in emergent gameplay, dynamic narrative and the humanising of strategy would do well to spend a few days in the company of Crusader Kings II. "* – [Rock, Paper, Shotgun](#)

# Future: Contextualized Scripted Narrative



Soon you shall meet your Prophet, friend.



No, perhaps this is a bad idea...



Where is your Blessed Virgin now, Odalrico?



No, perhaps this is a bad idea...





# Future: Emergence Detection

- Direct Feedback
  - Emotional music, animations and graphics.
- Chronicling
  - The emergent stories are chronicled.
- Reactive World
  - AI actors react appropriately
- Story Achievements



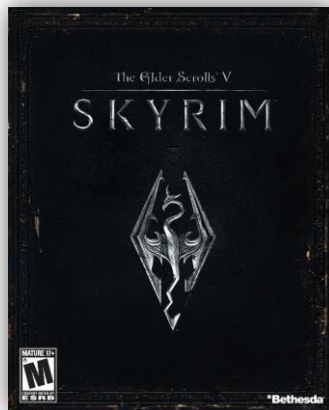
# Future: Directed Emergence



# Future: The Massively Singleplayer Game



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# Recap: CKII Recipe for Emergent Drama

- Open-ended gameplay
- A great many AI actors
- AI personalities and opinions
- Changing conditions
- Conflict!
- Low Morals

Add salt, sprinkle with scripted narrative, and stir!



# Takeaway

- Emergent stories allow for enormous replayability
- Think of story “emergence” as mimicking real life
- AI actors are crucial
- Scripted and emergent narrative make great friends