Did That Really Happen? Historicism in The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, Assassin's Creed Valhalla, Nioh, and Kingdom Come: Deliverance

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Historicism in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, *Nioh*, *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*, and *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*

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Abstract

This thesis explores four games and their relation with dominant perspectives on their histories: *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, Nioh, Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*, and *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*. Through historical simulation theory and theories on hegemonies, it argues that historical games are inherently political. This thesis further argues that historical games can portray conservative frames of thought, through unchanging systems and a focus on individualism. The artistic liberties these games take can lead to both playful and harmless counter-hegemonic play, as well as harmful play that reinforces frames of thought such as conspiracy theories. Furthermore, this thesis argues that claims of realism and accuracy within the genre of historical games are folly, as historical truths are almost impossible to verify. These truths are then left to the interpretation of game developers, which can lead to problematic presentations of history that can even be accused of whitewashing. The comparison between the games will suggest that one constant factor between them is that of an ahistorical protagonist, which gives the player freedom to explore the presented history without being tied to perceived accuracy. Finally, definitions of simulation theory are not yet sufficient enough to explain how *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* simulates its history.

This thesis adds to the field of game studies in a few ways. Not many comparative studies have been done in this field, as most papers and online videos focus on a single game. The comparisons lead to broader theories on historical games as a whole, noting similarities and unique errors when it comes to different approaches of historical simulation. Finally, an added definition of historical simulation is proposed, including linearity in an already existing definition of (non-)specific simulation.

Keywords: Historical game studies, simulation theory, hegemony, medievalism, neo-medievalism, ludology, narratology

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Introduction

"For a historicizing myth to function in [a] game it is, above all, necessary that it is *perceived* by players to be authentic or accurate, i.e., real." These words can be found in the essay "Why History in Digital Games matters", by Pfister (62). Similarly, Chapman mentions that games can re-affirm certain views of history, stating that while games are often fiction, they can still "produce strong and authoritative histories that tap into existing, and often dominant, narratives, cultural memories and ideas" (136). Copplestone goes so far as to name developers of historical and 'cultural-heritage' games 'developer-historians' (420). Hammar relates this to overall heritage culture noting that the 'pasts are re-enacted across cultures […] as entertainment or documentary' (372). Hammar further develops Chapman's notion of dominant narratives into one of cultural hegemony, with modern day hegemonies having a direct impact on what histories get told, and what characters play a role, noting that most historical games focus on European history. In light of this, it would be interesting to look at how games represent their histories, and whether they conform to, or deconstruct, a dominant view of them.

While this has been done for specific individual games, such as Assassin's Creed (Shaw, Hammar), there has not yet been a comparison between games with different approaches to depicting history. The question thus remains how games that focus largely on the fantastic compare to hegemonic history in relation to games that focus largely on a notion of historical 'accuracy' or 'authenticity'. This would help to offer a broad analysis of the medium, instead of a very limited one, and would shed light on how histories are played. Furthermore, much of the research on this focuses on western games, hegemonies, and histories. While this is understandable from the perspective that most historical games are about European histories as explained by Hammar, a different perspective on tension between hegemonic views of history and historical narratives in games might arise from non-western video games (373).

As such, the research question that this thesis will hone in on is: To what extent, if any, do the video games *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, *Nioh*, *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* and *Kingdom Come:*

Deliverance reinforce or deconstruct hegemonic views on their Norse, Japanese, and Czech histories through gameplay and historic simulation?

The games chosen for this question range from fantasy with medieval elements (*The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*), to a game that aims for historic realism (*Kingdom Come: Deliverance*). In between those two games are the two *Nioh* games and *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*, which blend history with folklore and mythology. As such, this thesis aims to represent a broader analysis of how games differ in their approaches to history. Furthermore, *Nioh* represents Japanese history, and can be compared to how *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* covers a Norse, and thus European, view of history. Through such a comparison, this thesis can explore whether such games provide different relations of the dominant views of history that are found in their respective countries.

To explore this research question adequately, this thesis will consist of 5 more chapters. Firstly, a literature review will provide an overview of the field of game studies, as well as an exploration of simulation theory, and cultural studies theories such as hegemony. Then, the games will have their own chapters, starting at medieval fantasy with *Skyrim*, then combining *Nioh* and *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* into one chapter, and ending with the self-acclaimed historically realistic *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (Warhorse Studios "Realism", n.p.). *Nioh* and *Assassin's Creed* are combined, since their approach to history is relatively similar, and it is possible to compare them directly. The order of these chapters as a whole goes from the most fantastical, to the game that claims to be the most historical. The final chapter is, of course, a conclusion, in which the findings of this thesis will be compiled and compared, and the research question will be answered.

1. Literature Review

This section will offer a literary review of academic writing that pertains to the aforementioned research question, in order to explore how to best answer the question itself, and to compare this research to already existing writing. First and foremost, several parts of the research question will need to be defined, such as video games and ludic simulation. These definitions will be combined with an overview of the relatively young field of game studies, linking historical simulation to the debate between ludology and narratology. Finally, the ties between these fields and cultural studies will be explored, using the concepts of heritage and hegemony, as they are essential to the research question.

It should be noted that literary analysis of video games is not just a matter of academic journals anymore. These days, this work can also be found online, through video essayists such as Dan Olson (Also known as "Folding Ideas" on YouTube), and educational channels such as Games as Literature. While these sources are not taking direct part in the academic space, their arguments can still hold weight. Beyond their argumentative weight, they also hold a large viewership, with millions of views and subscribers combined. If the realm of academics is to stay relevant to the topics it discusses, then it is important to note that in the case of video games most of the relevant discourse can be found online, and arguments found there need to be taken seriously. As such, online creators and outlets will be mentioned in this thesis and literature review whenever they are relevant.

What Are Video Games Anyway?

The realm of video game studies is a young academic field, having started around the late 90s and early 2000s, with journals such as "The International Journal for Computer Game Research" releasing their first volume in 2001. At this time critics like Henry Jenkins can be found comparing games to other media, with Jenkins in particular offering his theory on transmedia storytelling. This term is used to explain how video games can play a role in a larger story, told through the media of comics, movies, and games at the same time. Jenkins used the *The Matrix* franchise to explain this, as

at the time, it was using all these media to tell a continuous story (Jenkins, n.p.). Other critics aimed to move the discussion away from other media, arguing that games "cannot be read as texts or listened to as music, they must be played" (Aarseth, n.p.). This focus on gameplay would become known as "ludology" (Frasca, "Ludology Meets Narratology", n.p.).

If one is to focus on games in such an academic sense, then it is important to note the difficulty in defining what a video game is. One could try to define them simply by looking at a dictionary like Mirriam-Webster, which defines a video game as "an electronic game in which players control images on a video screen". Such a definition does not suffice, as it has varying problems. It defines a video game through the words it is made out of, as a game on a video screen, which is not very helpful. More importantly, there are immediate holes in it. One can ask whether an interactive movie is a video game, and not get much of an answer, after all, one controls images on a video screen there too. Another way to define games is through genres, such as sports games, race games, or role-playing games. While this is a form of defining, it serves more to specify a type of game one is playing or discussing, rather than what a game is. So, how to define video games then?

This is a challenge that Gonzalo Frasca faced in his thesis on video games in 2001. Noting that the definition is not going to ever be precise, he quotes Huizinga's definition of a regular game, which is as follows:

> "A voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is different from ordinary life." (Huizinga as quoted in Frasca, *Videogames of the Oppressed*, 5).

Frasca notes that other critics think there cannot be a single definition, but also that some things become clear, namely that games have rules, are voluntary, and have time constraints (*Videogames of the Oppressed*, 5-6). Online creator Harris Brewis, also known as "Hbomberguy" notes in his work on the video game *Pathologic* that games do not always have to be fun to be important or to be worth playing. *Pathologic* is a game in which a town is stricken by a plague, goes through great effort to

make the experience terrible for the player. The economy of the town crashes, making players constantly having to worry about hunger and getting infected, among many other problems. Brewis, throughout most of his video, argues that this is the point of the game, that the lack of fun adds to the experience of dread that the game wishes to put forward (2:00). This could be read as a criticism of Huizinga's inclusion of joy in the definition of video games. It should be noted, however, that joy and fun are not entirely the same thing. One can enjoy a tragic series like *Arcane*, even if it primarily focuses on psychosis and trauma, which one would probably not classify as fun. In a similar sense, Brewis appears to enjoy Pathologic for the experience it brings forward, even if those experiences are not necessarily fun. There is thus a clear distinction between fun and joy, which will become relevant later on this thesis, when 'realistic' games are received unfavorably in terms of fun.

Frasca also notes the work of Roger Caillois, who subdivided games into categories. While these categories of chance, competition, and pleasure are interesting, Frasca himself already mentions that games can overlap between categories (*Videogames of the Oppressed*, 6). Furthermore, this definition has the same issue as mentioned for game genres, in that it does not necessarily define video games, but rather adds adjectives in front of them. What is interesting here, however, is the notion of "play" and "game", called "paidea" and "ludus", respectively (*Videogames of the Oppressed*, 6). This distinction is one between child-like games such as tag, where the ruleset is simple, and more complex games, such as Risk, where the ruleset is complicated. Frasca rephrases this is as games that are classified as "ludus" having a win-condition, such as fulfilling one's mission in Risk (7-9). This does not seem to be accurate. *Minecraft*, a game originally released in 2011, did not release with any explicit way to win, but is still referred to as a video game. Frasca tries to explain this by noting that is possibly to switch between the two game states, making one's own rules on the fly in an otherwise "paidea" environment (*Videogames of the Oppressed,* 13). In *Minecraft* one can imagine they "win" by building a wooden house with a nice farm. This possibility of switching between two game states is intriguing, but it also blurs the line between the definitions, and makes it still unclear what a game is.

If a definition of video games is so hard to reach, how can one accurately research them? One way to do so is to stray away from a specific definition. As mentioned by Frasca, there are critics who

simply state there are similarities between games, and that none of them have everything in common enough to use a single definition for them (*Videogames of the Oppressed*, 5).

With such a lack of a clear definition, this thesis will not attempt to answer what a video game is. It will also avoid to discuss games such as *Minecraft*, that seem to blur the lines of definitions, or interactive movies, such as *Erica*, that question whether control is enough to be a video game (Heritage, n.p.). *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, *Nioh, Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* and *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* all have a gamic structure focused on missions to complete, interactivity and control of a character, end credits to reach, and conditions of failure as well as victory. While it is important to show that prior definitions are not entirely comprehensive, the four games for this thesis can work with the definitions brought forward by Frasca and Huizinga. As such, those are the definitions this thesis will adhere to.

Video Games as Simulations of history

Using simulation theory

While Frasca struggled to find a definition for games, he was quick to address the simulation found in them (*Videogames of the Oppressed*, 21). In his work, he uses a classic definition of computer simulation, which holds that it is "the use of a computer to represent the dynamic responses of one system by the behavior of another system modeled after it" (*Videogames of the Oppressed*, 22). Frasca relates this to computer programs, stating that folders in a computer simulate actual folders. Crucially, he argues that the representation is not one to one in accuracy, and that this is why it is merely a simulation (24). This is a notion where others, like Dubbels, would disagree, as their definition of a simulation is one of direct realistic imitation of an object or process (9). Dubbels argues that games are a form of simulation that make compromises for play, calling games that try to simulate 'serious games' (9-15). Sabin takes issues with this, arguing that if a recreational war game cannot be called a 'serious game', then something is wrong, as such games are to be taken seriously, whether they try to simulate realistically or not (n.p.). Sabin argued further that 'serious game' is the only

alternative that has been offered so far, and since it does not suffice, it is best to refer to simulation games simply as as simulation games (n.p.).

Keeping with simulation as a form of games then, Frasca argues that one should view games as such, because one can understand how they are interpreted by doing so. He argues that simulations have a source. If one is to simulate a bike, the source of the simulation is the existing idea of a bike, and anyone playing the simulation might know that it is. However, people can differ in their interpretation of sources, one can view Pong as two players kicking a ball, for example. This, Frasca argues, is where simulations differ from representations (*Videogames of the Oppressed*, 31-32).

Essentially, Frasca is arguing that games cannot be viewed as a single representation of a static object, like an art piece or a photo could. Rather, games as simulations are interpreted by the player, who can view what is being represented differently (*Videogames of the Oppressed*, 31-32). This whole idea of interpreting from an audience perspective is mostly reminiscent of the post-structuralist argument of the death of the author. This argument, originally put forward by Roland Barthes, states that one cannot rely on the author's view of a text, and that differing interpretations from an audience all have their own meanings (n.p.). In short, there is no definitive meaning to a text, or in this case, to a simulation. The authors of a simulation might have had a bicycle in mind, but an audience might view it as a tricycle, or a motorcycle. As such, games can be seen as a simulation, but their source is interpretative, and depends on the author as much as it does on the audience.

Another notion is that an author can have unconscious ideas that make it into a text or a simulation. A recent example of this is the video game *Celeste*, a 2D platformer, in which the player takes the role of Madeline, a character that, among other events, is confronted by her 'other self' in a mirror, and struggles against them. The game was speculated to be a narrative about a transgender character, struggling with their gender experience. The director and writer of *Celeste*, Maddy Thorson, publically came out as transgender after the game's development, and admitted to unconsciously writing a gender narrative into the game at a time where she thought she was cisgender (n.p.). So not only is authorial intent easily questioned from a post-structuralist perspective, authors might not even have a full grasp on their intent while creating their simulations.

It should be noted that not all academics agree that video games are to be simulations that are realistic in some way. Crawford argues that a simulation might be realistic, but a game will always be 'stylized' (6). While a simulation of a racing car might include all the gears, an actual wheel, and crashes, a game could forego all of those and offer a fast-paced scenario in which crashing into a wall has no effect, or bounces the player along. As such, game do not have to be realistic (6-7). Similarly, Poole mainly notes criticisms of realism in video games, stating that adding realistic movements to Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider* merely makes the player question everything Lara cannot do (99-100). Similarly to Crawford, Poole argues that a direct simulation of a formula one racing would not be a good game, and that games make choices similar to stylization (Crawford, 6; Poole, 186). Poole also argues that video games are able to create their own unique worlds, and that it is a shame for them to stick to realistic ideas (124-25).

These theories are interesting, but there is one part missing from them that is important for this thesis. This thesis concerns itself with historical games, which simulate history in some way, shape, or form. While Poole seems to be critical of any focus on realism in video games, it is undeniable that historical games will in some way coincide with realism, attempting to depict historical periods or people, or perhaps even writing. Meanwhile, Crawford might draw a line between simulations and games, but the recent surge of driving and flying simulator games blurs this line (5-7). Similarly, games as stylized simulations will still be simulations. And as historical games, those simulations will again be related to reality in some form. Poole might dislike that these games do not completely create their own worlds, and are representing realism in some way, they still are doing so, and a look at their realism is important (124-25). Essentially, these criticisms do not engage well with historical games, as those are inherently tied to some form of realism. As such, it is important to investigate theories on historical simulations, which are more likely to aid the research question of this thesis.

Historical game studies

Within the realm of the research question, the most important form of simulation to discuss is thus that of history. With game studies itself being a young field, historical game studies is, of course,

even younger (Chapman et. al, 358). In a comprehensive overview of the field, Chapman et. al define it as follows:

> "the study of games that in some way 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." (362)

They also claim that one of the first works is that of William Uricchio, although they admit that other narratives of who was first can be written too (358-59). Uricchio's work focuses on how games represent history through simulation. Uricchio specifies two forms of historical simulation: specific, and non-specific (330). For the latter, Uricchio mentions *Civilization*, which was a very popular case study in the early days of this field of study (Chapman et. al, 362). For the first, Uricchio focuses on *Grand Prix Legends*, a realistic racing simulation, aimed to simulate a Grand Prix that took place in 1967 (327).

This distinction is important for this thesis, as the way in which historical games simulate their history can give an insight into their relationship with it. If a game is non-specific, like how *Civilization* allows players to play with Gandhi in the stone age, then its relationship with history is rather playful, it suggests a "what if" scenario, rather than actual history. However, if a game calls on exact dates and events, and is thus being specific, they can be more easily criticized for their accuracy in this. As Lecaque puts it, the more claims a project makes towards historical accuracy, the more important it becomes for the work to be accurate, as for many, it might be the only exposure they have to this information. He makes a distinction between fantasy games and history simulations, and claims that the latter can be more problematic (52:00). One can, of course, still criticize fantasy games for representations that can fall back to reality. An example of Lecaque's that makes this very clear is one of the *Wolfenstein* games. It places itself in an alternate history where World War 2 was won by Germany, and the good guys are a secret underground Jewish cult. One can critique this by noting how, while the Jewish people are the protagonists, they follow a dangerous narrative of a conspiracy theory about Jewish control over the world (40:00). Basically, the game claims that Nazi propaganda

and conspiracy theories of the World War 2 era were correct. In this way, even while the game is not representing history, or claiming to, its representation can still have a problem that is rooted in history (Lecaque, 40:00).

Another such game is *Detroit Become Human*, which represented oppression of androids with representations of historical oppression of Jewish people, and people of color. Even though David Cage, the game's creator, claimed that the game had no representations of history, others disagreed (Yeo, n.p.). Their interpretation of the game as simulating historical oppression is one that can be explained through Frasca's interpretation of simulations, the ludic death of the author (*Videogames of the Oppressed*, 31-32). Through this, the audience can view what happens to the androids in the game, such as having to sit at the back of the bus, as simulating the past, even though the game does not present itself as taking place in any past.

Thus, simulation is an important way to look at games in order to research their historical representation. It is a way to nullify the importance of authorial intent, and put audience interpretation on the forefront, as well as to set games apart from other forms of media. After all, a book or a film does not simulate, it represents. Furthermore, it explains how historical references can be found in games that do not place themselves in history, since their simulations can still depend on references to historical ideas.

Fantasy simulations and ideology

While *Detroit: Become Human* places itself in the real world, albeit in the near future, and *Wolfenstein* places itself in the past, not all games have to choose a specific historic period. Some of the games discussed by this thesis are in the realm of the fantasy genre. The question then becomes how fantasy can be interpreted to say anything about history. Cooper argues that "all fantasy is politics", noting that the usage of historical references, especially to the Middle Ages, has been politically used, pointing at the British National Party endorsing a party store named 'Excalibur' (50-53). Excalibur is, of course, a direct reference to Arthurian myth, and naming a store such serves to

link whatever that store sells to an inherent cultural identity, tied to the history of that mythology. It is a direct call upon a cultural heritage of the British people, even if the source material is fantastical; Arthur never existed. Cooper then goes on to show that this same store sells xenophobic books and promotes an anti-immigration narrative (54). This political connection with Arthurian legend, the usage of it by political parties to underline their ideology of a British identity, shows a direct link between historical fantasy and politics.

Such a blend of ideology and games is one that Frasca was also aware of, as he notes that simulations can be inherently ideological. Frasca uses the Sims games as an example for this, pointing out that rich Sims do better, which means that the games incentivize hard work, and while the game has no way to win, a player that embraces such a capitalist mindset has more options within the game than one who does not (*Videogames of the Oppressed*, 50). Essentially, the rules of a simulation can be influenced by what a developer thinks of either history, or politics. Another good example would be *Civilization 6*. In an update of the game, declaring a surprise war on other nations no longer has as intense ramifications as it used to have, with other countries being wary of you for the rest of the game. Now countries build up grievances, which disappear over time. This change in the rules of the simulation also suggests a different view of the span of history, in which war is no longer a permanent blemish on a nation's record, but is either forgotten or forgiven over time. Whether this is a conscious ideological change or not matters less than that this reading is a consequence of the change.

While Cooper then concludes that "All fantasy is the product of the culture from whence it came; thus, all fantasy is political" (56), it is more accurate for this thesis to state the following: historical simulations are the product of the culture from whence they came, and thus, all historical simulations, fantasy or otherwise, are political.

Narratology

So far, this thesis has mainly touched on ludology and cultural studies, with the exception of defining the death of the author. In the early days of video game studies, the field of ludology clashed

with one of narratology, with ludologists arguing that the inherent freedom of gameplay limits the possibility of storytelling in video games (Juul, n.p.). Not all academics agree with this debate being necessary, with some arguing that it is better to explore differences *as well as* similarities between narratology and ludology (Frasca, "Ludologists love stories", 1-4). Academics such as Sebastian Domsch argued for a middle ground, with his focus on 'storyplaying', depicting games as playful narratives, rather than gameplay that comes in the way of a narrative (Domsch, 3). In 2003, Frasca would argue that this debate between narratology and ludology 'never even took place', claiming that it all rests upon a misunderstanding, in which it is assumed that ludologists would, or should, reject narrative as a whole. Frasca claims this is not the case, stating that the issue lies within the strict definitions of what a narrative is ("Ludologists love stories", 6-8). If games fall outside of these definitions, they can still be narratives within other definitions. As such, Frasca concludes that until there is an agreement upon a definition upon which to argue for or against narratology, there is no debate to be even had ("Ludologists love stories", 6-8).

Later academics seem to largely agree with the notion that there is no need for a disagreement, with some going even further, stating that games play a role in larger social narratives, as gamers tell each other the stories they experience within them (Crawford and Gosling, 60-61). Matt Sautman explores this storytelling by gamers through Eco's concept of the hyperreality. Sautman states that when a book is read, the reader experiences the events within them as lived by the character in the book. In games, however, these experiences are the player's own, as Sautman states "I have never lived as a Spartan warlord, but I have distinct memories of killing the God of War and usurping his deified throne" (n.p.). Similar to this, Galloway states that games use a specific first person perspective, named the subjective perspective, which "is used to achieve an intuitive sense of motion and action in gameplay" (40). The subjective perspective is one in which a character's perspective is not just in first person, but it also follows their movement. Such an intuitive sense of motion can be connected to the sense of hyperrealism. This all blurs the line between narratology and ludology, as one becomes immersed in the story through play.

Another connection between the two fields is the ways in which games tell narratives. At the Game Designers Conference in 2000 Mark LeBlanc stated that games had 'embedded' and 'emergent' narratives. Embedded narratives are linear stories designed and set in stone by game developers, while emergent narratives are created by the player interacting with a game's mechanics. One famous example of such an emergent narrative is from the multiplayer game Eve Online. In this space game, factions of players create their own narratives through waged wars, economical strife, and diplomacy, none of which is set in stone by the game, as players themselves create entire alliances within the game (Hall, n.p.). The aforementioned *Civilization* is such an emergent narrative as well, and it shows a connection between historical simulations and narratives. Even though *Civilization* is not presenting its own linear narrative of history, it will tell each player a different emergent tale, which they can experience as their own tale. When playing as Persia, players do not describe Persia as being at war with the Zulus, but themselves being at war with the Zulus.

Sautman, LeBlanc, Galloway and Domsch thus all propose theories that combine narratology and ludology, rather than reject one or the other. All in all, it would seem that the debate between the two sides of narratology and ludology has shown itself to be a false one. Nowadays, games such as *The Stanley Parable* quite literally use the narrator as a source of gameplay, after all. This, together with the notion of games as simulation will form a groundwork for this thesis to discuss games on. If players experience stories as their own experiences, and the line between game (or simulation) and narrative is blurred, one can criticize the narrative of a game for the impact it can have on players. As mentioned by Lecaque before, history is not a big focus in the education system, and for many players, the histories represented by games might be their only exposure to this information (52:00). If they can also construct their own narratives around it, that makes it all the more important to look at these games critically, and see what narratives can be interpreted. It is thus paramount for the research question of this thesis to keep in mind that gameplay and story go hand-in-hand, rather than being opposed to one another. Gameplay is simulation, simulation leads to interpretation, and interpretation leads to narrative.

Education and Heritage

Another focus of early writing in the field was the usage of historical games for an educational purpose. While education is not necessarily the focus of this thesis, it is important to note that this educational aspect exists. In his dissertation on 'edutainment' and games, Kurt Squire concludes that the effectiveness of using games to teach history is not entirely clear, although many have made the argument that games could be, and already are, used for this purpose, and seem to work (12-15). What is more interesting for this thesis, however, is the perceived accuracy, or need for such visions of accuracy, in video games.

In a research article on the perception of historical games, Tara Copplestone looks at the perception of historical games from three groups of people: developers, consumers, and cultural-heritage critics. Copplestone defines 'cultural-heritage' as "the link between the past and the present through the tangible, intangible and natural elements that are used, created, altered and passed between generations" (417). Essentially, it is an umbrella term for all the ways in which people pass on history and parts of their identity related to that history. As an example, *Grand Prix Legends*, the racing game mentioned by Uricchio, is a way to pass on the history of an old form of racing, by simulating it as best as the developers possibly could (327). This heritage process is visible in the aforementioned Excalibur store that was endorsed by the British National Party (Cooper, 53). In the case of this thesis, the cultural heritage might be found in the ways in which the three games present their history. In particular, concerning the research question, the way in which histories might be altered can be viewed as an aspect of a cultural-heritage process. This same concept of heritage is found in other papers, such as one about the Chinese mobile game *Honour of Kings*, which goes against the cultural-heritage laid out by the state, and instead goes along with what is called 'popular heritage', or the views on history popularly held by the people, rather than authority (Liboriussen and Martin, 319-320). This popular heritage, or even authoritative heritage, might be found within the games in this thesis. If games blend their history with popular folklore, for example, that can be viewed as a way in which they go against authoritative heritage.

Copplestone finds that the cultural-heritage experts are worried that histories brought forward by the games might be viewed as actual history by its players. It would seem they ascribe a power position to video games, and thus a responsibility to educate players in a 'correct' manner. Copplestone further argues that this could be an essentially knee-jerk reaction to a shifting of power, with games becoming a prime source of education instead of channels controlled by cultural-heritage experts (431-32). This is an anxiety visible in the commentary made by Lecaque before (52:00). It should be noted that not all experts thought this way, with some noting that history in and of itself is a fairly subjective process, and should be allowed to be played with (Copplestone, 432). Recently, there has been more of a bridge between education and video games, in the forms of projects such as Streaming The Past, created by the VALUE Foundation, which sees students stream historical video games, while exploring how they represent history. According to Copplestone's research, video game developers largely claimed to not find accuracy important (430-32). This response is not unique to the medium, and is similar to the reception of the TV show *Vikings*, where the director responded to claims of historical inaccuracies by simply agreeing that it is not accurate, and stating that the true history of the Vikings is not entirely known (Lawrence, n.p.).

This difference between experts and developers will play an important role in this thesis, as the more explicitly historical games, such as *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* will be more relevant to the worries of experts than the fantastical *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. As shown before, the more explicitly a game attempts to represent history, the more it welcomes criticism of its supposed accuracy. While authorial intent might play a role, and developers might not entirely care about the supposed accuracy of representation, it is not the end all be all to this argument to say that it should not matter. Once again, the death of the author argument comes into play. Games that simulate ideas of history will play a role in the heritage process, and it is interesting to see what role they might be playing in cultural memories.

This research by Copplestone also shows an important overlap between game studies and another field: cultural studies.

Games, History, and Cultural Studies

While cultural studies is a very broad field, there is one as of yet unmentioned concept from it that will play a role in this thesis, and must thus be defined: Hegemony.

The paper regarding popular heritage in the Chinese game *Honour of Kings* directly ties heritage to hegemony, stating that the popular can be defined as "characterized by hegemony, a dynamic situation which affords people opportunities for resistance and the elite opportunities to win consent" (Liboriussen and Martin, 319-322). The concept of a hegemony comes from communist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, and is defined by van der Meer as:

> "[T]he continuous process through which a dominant group […] tries to attain and maintain the consent of the great majority of the people it rules. […] this was accomplished through the manipulation of cultural values, norms, beliefs, and traditions in an attempt to validate the ruling group's worldview and make it appear favorable to all." (4)

The rate as to which a conscious effort is contributed to this process differs per definition, as Hammar, for example, defines it as a "process that is unknowingly inscribed to temporarily stabilize order". (374). Regardless, hegemonic relations are ones in which the values of the dominant group become the regular norms of the entire group, which keeps power situations and relations stable and the same. In Hammar's paper, he argues that white protagonists conform to a hegemony in which those in power are largely white people, and that *Assassin's Creed: Freedom Cry* offers a counter to this hegemony, by telling a story of a black protagonist who frees enslaved people (376). As a side note, the recent trend towards using 'enslaved person' rather than 'slaves' is also a form of countering hegemony, by focusing on the fact that those who were enslaved are still people, and not just 'slaves'. In a column on the matter, Eric Zorn notes that 'many will roll their eyes' at such a change, and that eye rolling does not matter, for the change is still important, and will gradually be adopted by the majority – in other words, the cultural hegemony –, instead of being ridiculed (n.p.).

While Hammar notes issues with the approach *Assassin's Creed III* takes, such as using a "angry violent black man" trope, as well as presenting a perspective on history that still conforms to

the hegemony, returning to a historical status quo in which slavery is not even partially solved by the main character, Hammar still argues that games such as these allow for an exploration of oppressed identities, and a freedom from hegemonic structures of history (370-376). This reading comes close to the theory of the subaltern, partially defined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, which argues that choosing to speak for oppressed groups can silence those groups instead, by assuming truths for them, or reinterpreting their histories (Spivak, 75-78). The issues Hammar finds in *Assassin's Creed: Freedom Cry*, that of still conforming to dominant views of marginalized communities and their history, is a core to the issue of this subaltern, where experts think they know better than those who are marginalized, and write their stories for them (Spivak, 75-76).

The theory of hegemony is core to the research question, and will be further explored throughout this thesis, as each game will be compared to hegemonic views of the history they represent. It is clear, however, that being counter-hegemonic does not have a moral implication on the game. One can still do this badly, by silencing those who already lack a voice, or by merely presenting a surface level counter to hegemony, while keeping the actual presented history close to an established status quo. If a game simulates a sense of history that holds problematic views, it is equally important to investigate.

3. History in Fantasy: *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*

Originally released in 2011, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Henceforth referred to as *Skyrim*), is a fantasy game in the action role-playing game series *The Elder Scrolls*. As the title suggests, it is the fifth game in the series, and the last main-line title, although *The Elder Scrolls*: *Online* has been released since, and *Elder Scrolls 6* is in the works. The game follows a player-chosen protagonist of one of 10 in game 'races', such as elves, orcs, and humans, as they travel through the nation called 'Skyrim'. Staying true to the role-playing genre, the player can make choices within the narrative, choose sides in an on-going civil war, and lead several guilds.

Skyrim does not shy away from its simulation of history and geography, with bards playing lutes in cozy inns, players fighting with swords and shields while cladded in iron armor, and an environment reminiscent of Northern-European mountains and cold climates, *Skyrim* clearly places itself in a Northern medieval setting. But, the setting is also a fantasy one, with magic, elves, anthropomorphic cats and lizards, dragons, and prophecies. It has been stated before that all fantasy, or rather all historical simulations, can be political, and can use their references to history to claim a certain idea of what history was like, and *Skyrim* is, of course, no exception to that rule.

Through an understanding of '(neo-)medievalism', this chapter will delve into how *Skyrim* represents the middle ages. In particular, it will show how its representation of the medieval leads to a particular conservative worldview, through its representation of race and othering. After this, an overview of the history of the world of Tamriel, in which *Skyrim* takes place, will suggest that *Skyrim* has a skeptical view of history as a whole.

It should be noted that the volume of writing on *Skyrim* in the world of academics is light. Cooper notes that there had not been another thesis-length writing on *Skyrim* when she wrote her dissertation in 2016, although Simpson had written his Master level thesis by then (4). Beyond this, there is a Wikipedia style website named The Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages, or UESP, which details the lore of the games, and allows for discussions around it. While this is an interesting resource, it is not maintained by anyone whose authority on these matters can be confirmed. It is similar to

Wikipedia in this way; using it as a source is not something to recommend. This means that a lot of this section will mainly reference Cooper and Simpson when it comes to written work.

The Middle Ages in Fantasy: (neo-)medievalism, *Skyrim,* and conservativism

Medievalism

The way in which modern day narratives represent the medieval is often referred to as 'medievalism'. This term, originally coming from Umberto Eco's "Dreaming of a Middle Ages", has also seen political use, as a desire for a return to medievalist politics. This latter use plays no role in this thesis, it is problematic on its own, but is not related to narratological or ludological theories. Eco's theory, then, is that "our return to the Middle Ages is a quest for our roots", in which Europeans struggle with problems of warfare, national states, and capitalism, which Eco claims to have originated in those same Middle Ages. Thus, Eco states that an exploration of the origins of our current state can only grasp at those same Middle Ages (64-65). Eco categorizes the way in which the middle ages are revisited in ten ways, from 'pretext' (merely representing a history, without being realistic), to 'national identity', reinforcing one's own identity with myths and stories of the days of old (68-72).

These ten categories are interesting, but they do not help much. Some of them have already been discussed in other ways, national identity in medieval works can be viewed as an inherent addition of ideology into a text, for example. But more than that, ten categories inevitably cause overlap (is the medievalism of 'tradition' one of 'national identity' too?). As such, it becomes difficult to apply this theory directly to *Skyrim*, and clearer categories are needed.

David Matthews categorizes medievalism into three types, on a kind of sliding spectrum. The first, is "the Middle Ages 'as it was'". This, in essence is trying to accurately recreate history, dressing the part, acting out historical events, or even referring back to history in contemporary discourse, such as referring to the war on terror as a crusade (Matthews, 37). This category is already more clear than what Eco began with, and it is also immediately clear that *Skyrim* does not portray such a

medievalism. The game does not attempt to portray real history, the land of Skyrim is not one found within our own world.

The second category of Matthews is one of "the Middle Ages as it 'might have been'", for which one can consider Arthurian legends. These are tales in which history is presented in a sense that could have been real, while knowing that the events and people are fictional (38). Once more, this category does not apply to *Skyrim*, although it will make a return in the next chapter on *Nioh* and *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*, as both place themselves in a mythologized version of history.

The third, and final category then, is "The Middle Ages 'as it never was'". This is fiction in which the medieval is called upon, but the work itself does not take place in an actual Middle Age. Matthews refers to Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* here, which is often referred to as medievalist (38-39). While Matthews notes that Tolkien found a way around representing the medieval directly, critics have responded to Tolkien's work by noting it showing his inspirations and disagreements with Germanic traditions (Porck, n.p.;Matthews, 38-39). As such, Tolkien could be framed in the second category as well. Regardless, *Skyrim* fits into this category. Its representation of the medieval is not placed within any medieval timeframe, it is purely fantastical, it has fantastical dragons as found in the manuscripts of the likes of *Beowulf*, swords and shields that are reminiscent of times of old, but it does not place itself in such a time. In fact, *Skyrim* places itself in a different realm to ours entirely, with its anthropomorphic beings that walk amongst the rest. Even though this final category fits *Skyrim*, the complete disregard of any timeframe still runs against the idea of a notion of an actual Middle Ages.

Neo-medievalism

A more contemporary theory is one of neo-medievalism, defined by Brent and Moberly as

> neomedieval works … do not simply seek to describe, reproduce, or otherwise recover the medieval, but instead employ contemporary techniques and technologies to simulate the medieval--that is, to produce a version of the medieval that is more medieval than the medieval, a version of the medieval that can be seen and touched, bought and sold, and therefore owned (Simpson, 15)

An immediate interesting part to this definition is the notion of simulation. Neo-medievalism is not just a medieval world that is depicted, but one that is simulated, that lives and breathes in its own way. As such, games can quickly fall under this definition of neo-medievalism, being simulations of history or ideas of history themselves, and *Skyrim* can find its place here. Another way to look at neo-medievalism, and perhaps a more accurate depiction, is that it is a form of medievalism that is inspired not by accounts of history, but by other medievalist works (Simpson, 16). As such, neo-medievalism itself is a mixture of popular culture with our understanding of the medieval, which becomes clear in *Skyrim* through the use of pop cultural references, such as a pickaxe from *Minecraft* being found at the top of its highest mountain, but also from references to Arthurian legend (Simpson, 17). This mixture is one to critically look at, especially considering that medievalist works, such as Tolkien's, are not clear of criticism themselves, and using their medievalist view for a neo-medievalist work can end up copying those same problems.

One such issue is brought forward by Cooper, who notes that *Skyrim*'s political situation is virtually unchanging and conservative in nature (70-71). As was mentioned, *Skyrim* places the protagonist in the midst of a civil war. While the questline for this war is entirely optional, it plays such a large role in the world that is essentially unavoidable. The war itself is between a faction called the Stormcloaks, and another called the Empire. Some details of this war will be discussed later, but for this point, the important notion is the consequence of it, or the lack of one. Whether a player sides with one side or the other, the world continues almost the exact same way. The status quo, as it were, does not change. This is not unique to games like *Skyrim*¸ as Cooper mentions games such as *Dragon Age* where one can revolt against a monarch, only to replace them with another monarch, barely effecting or changing the existing system as it is (71). Cooper speculates whether this has to do with writing constraints, as the land of Skyrim has to continue even after the credits, since the player can keep playing, and *Dragon Age* has a sequel, in which all the choices made by a player can be tough to keep up with, so the systems stay roughly the same (69-70). Whether this is true or not, it is notable that these neo-medievalist games start with a medievalist idea of the world, with kingdoms, castles, jarls and emperors, and do not significantly change from the problems those systems represent. They

never move forward, they are stuck in a history they represent. The suggestion in this is that the system in the realm of Skyrim is not the issue, but rather the people who steer said system.

While it is thus not interesting to look at *Skyrim* on the basis of any historical accuracy, since it does not try to be accurate to any form of history, the apparent inherent conservative nature of neo-medievalism is worth exploring further. Especially since neo-medievalism concerns itself with popular culture as well, as seen before. This can mean that neo-medievalist video games can put contemporary political issues into a medieval framework. And there is one major part of the game where this shows up: the playable races.

Races and Othering in *Skyrim*

Both Cooper and Simpson note that neo-medievalist works can racialize their characters, with Simpson stating that race plays a major role in *Skyrim* (Cooper, 89; Simpson, 25). Cooper notes that in fantasy, 'race' can often mean 'species', which becomes clearer in the *Skyrim* choice to play as anthropomorphic lizards known as Argonians, or anthropomorphic cats known as Khajiit (89-90). However, this difference in term does not actually mean that issues of race cannot be found within different species, or that forms of xenophobia cannot be expressed through the use of species. For example, the Na'vi from James Cameron's *Avatar* movie (and soon to be movies), can be seen as a representation of the problematic 'noble savages' trope, in which an indigenous people is taught to be civilized by the supposedly 'civilized' group (Robertson, 203-306). While the Na'vi are a different species of being, they can thus still fall into racialized stereotypes.

One way in which this functions in *Skyrim* is the not so subtle representation of its population. The Nords, Simpson argues, are a representation of Norse people (24). It is hard to see past this, with Skyrim's geography mimicking that of Nordic countries, "with a common topography that includes mountains, valleys, lakes and rivers" (Cooper, 32). Simpson argues that this system of races, in which existing people are represented, gives room to a process of Othering, or excluding people from a group.

This concept of Othering is one first brought forward by Edward Said, and compounded upon by critics such as Evertsen, who writes:

> [t]he process of constructing Others as different from, or in opposition to, the norm […] Othering is a fundamentally relational concept which relies on comparison with, and distancing from, the Other. We look to others to decide what we are not and, thus, the Other tends to be devalued. (392)

This quote is a bit more relevant than Said's definition, since it directly establishes an Other as being different from the norm, and those norms will often be set by a hegemony. This allows us to define Others in the realm of Skyrim by their difference from a supposed hegemony in the same world.

Simpson sets out to prove that Redguards are treated as an Other. They are said to not descend from the Nords, while all other humans in the game are, and they are regularly excluded from the cities in Skyrim. Simpson mentions the only quest that directly deals with Redguards, called "In My Time Of Need" (25). Simpson finds this questline problematic through Spivak's notion of "saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak as quoted in Simpson, 25). Spivak used a ritual of self-immolation as an example of this, where the ritual was not treated as superstition, or a cultural thing, but as a crime, and Spivak also notes that it seems that the mark of a good society is to seemingly protect women, even if that means promoting legal measures against matters that they might be doing out of their own accord (93-97). It is possible to tie this concept to the quest in *Skyrim*, as the player is tasked to save a Redguard woman from Redguard man. Later in the quest, it appears that the issue at hand is a cultural one, that perhaps the player should not get involved in. It is important to note here that it is impossible to make a white Redguard, they are people of color within the game's world. Thus, Spivak's exploration of "saving brown women from brown men" could apply here. It is difficult to say this with certainty, since it is essentially the only quest that directly interacts with Redguards, and the player can, of course, be a Redguard themselves. Spivak's notion of "saving brown women from brown men" mainly aims at white people doing so, which is hard to attach to a Redguard player, let alone a Khajiit or an Argonian (Spivak, 95-97).

What is more useful to note is the Othering with which the quest begins. The Redguards who give you the quest are not allowed into the city of Whiterun, they are simply excluded from its walls, especially in their native clothing. This is a direct Othering, but also a show of hegemony, the power majority in Whiterun does not allow Redguards inside its walls. With the Redguards being people of color, this raises questions of xenophobia and racism within *Skyrim*. Questions which, as Cooper points out, are never answered, because the color of their skin is never brought up in the game, even though Redguards are the only humans who are directly barred from taking part in Skyrim's country, and the player cannot play as a white Redguard (Cooper, 128-29).

The Redguards are thus Othered by most of the people in the realm of Skyrim, and the cat-like Khajiit are as well, often described as beggars and thieves (Cooper, 120-122). However, there is also an entire faction that Others everyone except the Nords: The Stormcloaks. This faction is at odds with the Empire in Skyrim. Historically, the latter group has allowed Skyrim to fall under control of the Thalmor, a specific group of elves, who had waged war with Skyrim before. To achieve peace, the Nords were no longer allowed to practice their religion, and Skyrim would essentially be partially ruled by the elves. This conflict is present in the game, as the Stormcloaks form a rebellion against this control. Their motive is often exclaimed as "Skyrim belongs to the Nords!", believing that Skyrim belongs to the humans who were there first, the Nords (Simpson, viii). Lecaque notes a problem of potential white nationalism within this narrative (00:00). When one creates a character of a Nord, the main option for the color of one's skin is a white one, with the darkest Nord skin tone being lighter than the lightest Redguard one (Cooper, 128-31). And since Nords are said to be the original inhabitants of the Norse inspired world of Skyrim, it is easy to state that the Nords are a representation of the Norse. When these characters start stating that their birth land belongs to them, and not to anyone who then does not belong there, this becomes problematic. There are then white people being explicitly xenophobic towards anyone who is not them, as a direct representation of a real life group of people (Lecaque, 10:00).

This problem further compounds in the afterlife section of *Skyrim*, when players visit Sovngarde, a not so subtle reference to the Nordic Valhalla (McKenzie, 10:34). If a player has finished

the civil war storyline, with a leader of one of the sides dying, they will encounter said leader here. While McKenzie sees this as a reflection of an honorable death, with both sides being Nords, and thus deserving to be in their afterlife, Lecaque notices a problem, which is that this means that *Skyrim* argues for both sides (Mckenzie, 10:40;Lecaque, 29:00). Neither the Stormcloaks nor the Empire are incorrect, they both make it to their honorable afterlife. In a way, *Skyrim* supports the Stormcloaks' view of the country belonging 'to the Nords' by granting them an honorable afterlife. Lecaque goes as far as to equate this to a still controversial speech by then President Donald Trump, in which he stated that a riot between a neo Nazi group and an anti-fascist group of protesters had 'good people on both sides' (31:18). This is a rather extreme position to take on its own, as the Empire is not a good side in *Skyrim*, they are religiously oppressing the Nords. It remains noteworthy that *Skyrim* takes a both sides approach to this civil war, no matter what side the player chooses to follow.

Someone who has not played *Skyrim* might now wonder how these relations between the various races impact the player, and it is unfortunate to have to say that there is no impact, as this is another problem on its own. Simpson simply concludes that developers do not have 'the courage' to have the player experience the problems that the non-playable characters experience, while Cooper finds a deliberate political problem here (Simpson 51-52). Cooper notes that the player can rise above any and all oppression found by the other characters, noting that Khajiit are seen as thieves and beggars by most in *Skyrim's* world, and that a lot of them do fill this role (112-122). The player character can easily become one of the most important leaders in the entirety of Skyrim. Cooper finds this to "[reinforce] the idea that social problems, particularly concerning race, are not due to rigid and oppressive societal structures but are simply the failings of individuals" (122). While this reading is valid, it might be worth pointing out the more explicitly political aspect of a game in which different races tackle the entire system of oppression that they might face, which can affect the reception of such a game. *Detroit: Become Human* attempted a more explicit narrative of systemic oppression, and has been criticized for it extensively (Yeo, n.p.;Seppala, n.p.). Perhaps such a narrative was not considered during development of *Skyrim* to avoid such discourse. Not to mention that players can choose who to play as in *Skyrim*, something that is impossible in *Detroit: Become Human*. If players

can choose to play as various different races, and one, such as the Nords, faces less systemic oppression, they might just choose to play as the Nords, furthering a reading of white supremacy that is tied to them, as players choose to play as the 'best choice' of race, which is obviously problematic. This is not to void any blame or criticism that *Skyrim* received and will receive. Of course, avoiding discourse or simply not finding a way to address issues does not free one from blame regarding the final product. It can merely explain how the problematic views make it into a game that uses race in the way that *Skyrim* does. Perhaps, a game like *Skyrim*, in which a player can play as anyone they want, should avoid topics of race entirely, as it does not seem to have any positive results.

Some more reasons as to why a conservative worldview can slip into games like *Skyrim* lies in its historical simulation and the need for sequels. The game simulates monarchies and systems of power that, while present in the current era, call back on the medieval as well. These systems did not change much back then, and as such also do not in the game. Furthermore, *The Elder Scrolls* is a video game franchise, meaning that it has sequels and prequels, and the player's choices logically play a role in future installments, either becoming part of the history books or affecting the world in other ways. This can complicate the way in which systems can change.

A good example here is the *Dragon Age* series of games by BioWare, mentioned by Cooper (71). The first game, *Dragon Age: Origins* presents a corrupt monarchy, and while one might expect to overthrow it, the only real options are to install someone else on the throne, who then shows up in the sequel, *Dragon Age 2*, and has a minor role in that story (Cooper, 71). In *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, the third installment, player choices from the previous two games are taken into account, and once again, play a minor role in the new story, mainly causing different characters to show up or not, with little to no actual changes to the broader narrative (Cooper, 71). This is an issue game franchises have, where player choices need to be accounted for, but massive changes can cause very large branching narratives that might be impossible to oversee when structuring a new narrative. It can thus be preferable to keep choices simple, and less impactful in the grand scheme of things, in order to make future narratives more possible to write.

A final note on the problematic nature of races in *Skyrim* is that each one of the races has their own unique ability, Orcs can use their rage and take more swings from a sword, while Khajiit can see in the night. This is a fun idea for gameplay, to give each species and race their own unique benefit, but it also suggests a genetic predisposition to certain traits, which can be viewed as a problematic view on races (Lecaque, 23:00). It goes even further than a genetic predisposition view, since that can still be left up to chance, one can inherit the stereotypical trait, or not. In *Skyrim*, all characters of a race have these traits. It is a certainty, the stereotype is made into a fact. All Khajiit have night vision and are stealthy, making them excellent thieves. *Skyrim,* in this way, does not just suggest a genetic predisposition for traits, it claims it as truth, which is a problem, as this kind of thinking supports xenophobia. If a character in the world states that Khajiit are beggars and thieves, their factual better stealth and night vision treats that as a logical statement, since it is just what Khajiit are good at within the game. It appears that populating a world like *Skyrim* with races or species is more trouble than it might be worth, especially if players can choose who to play as, can base this on inherent racial traits, and the game does not question its own systemic oppression enough. If all that is too much to ask of a video game to do, then perhaps issues of race should not play as big of a role in them.

All in all, the neo-medievalist worlds that are created by games such as *Skyrim* seem to fall prey to conservative frames of thought, in which racial othering, xenophobia, and both sides-isms are found. While one could easily halt here, and state that *Skyrim*'s relation to history is purely one of conformity to conservative hegemonies, in which the system is not to blame, but the individual is, that would neither be entirely fair, nor accurate. There is one more way in which *Skyrim* relates to history, and that is found within its books.

The Unreliable History of Tamriel

There are a lot of books in the world of *Skyrim*. In Brian David Gilbert's video for Polygon, he claims that there are at least 336 books, not counting journals. Of particular interest to this thesis are the historical works, of which there are plenty, and a few are of immediate interest.

One such work is mentioned by Michelle DiPietro, in the form of the *Annals of the Dragonguard* (204). This work tells of a certain historical point in time, in which Tamriel was attacked by dragons. DiPietro explains that the book is copied by a scribe from an older work, and as such, the player is far removed from the original writing (204). This is similar to texts that we have left of the middle ages in the real world, such as the *Beowulf* manuscript, which is likely copied from an older text, or perhaps an oral tradition, but we cannot even be sure of when the manuscript itself was written (Stanley, 197-98). In this way, *Skyrim* mimics our own sense of history, with its uncertainty of sources and source materials (DiPietro, 205). DiPietro mentions another book, the *Third Era: A Short Timeline*, an overview of the history of Tamriel, written by an author from the Empire, who mainly focuses on achievements by the Empire. DiPietro relates this to real life works by the Franks, who wrote a history in which achievements of Charlemagne were a central focus (205).

This all goes to show that *Skyrim* simulates a medievalist view of history that attempts to reflect how contemporary philologists have to deal with our knowledge and understanding of historical texts. There is, however, more to this. *The Elder Scrolls* does not just show that history is complicated, it also contradicts itself. One of the best examples of this contradiction is found within the battle of Red Mountain. This battle happens before any of the games in the series, and not a lot is known about it. There are several accounts of the battle, from varying sides, but they all contradict one another. For example, one account in *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* notes that there were two sides present, but one had 'Western Allies'. This can be interpreted as the Nords, but the account brought forward by them in *Skyrim* states that they were attacked by everyone else, so they were no one's ally. And then another character in the series, Vivec, states that the Nords were an invasive force during the battle. Some other accounts state that a character named *Dagoth-Ur* died in the battle, but he is found to be alive in *Morrowind*.

It is never made clear which side, if any, is speaking the truth. One cannot even trust what they are told by Dagoth-Ur himself, as he has an interest in claiming his own people were speaking the truth. With all these varying interests on historical truths, there is only one conclusion to make: no one truly knows what happened at the battle of Red Mountain.

This view of history is an interesting one, as it places historical narratives in a tale where the victors, or the believed victors, can tell the story they wish to tell. The Nords can tell their own people they were attacked, others can tell their people the Nords invaded. Such a view of history is, in essence, counter to authority. If a hegemony believes in one version of history, the perspective brought forward by *The Elder Scrolls* is a skeptical one, believing that history is an uncertainty, an unreliability without a single authority that has a claim to truth. In this way, *Skyrim* disagrees with the conservativism found in its neo-medievalism earlier on, and instead argues for a re-interpretation of history as a thin and uncertain foundation to build one's beliefs on. There is a disregard of the author in it, similar to the post-structuralist death of the author argument used earlier in this thesis. Those who wrote history are not to be trusted on their word alone.

This is why, earlier, it was stated that it is unfair to simply state that *Skyrim* conforms to conservative hegemonic frames of thought, as its presentation of the system of history is one that is skeptical of how history is read. However, this does not mean *Skyrim*'s depiction of race within a neo-medievalist frame is less problematic, it is still there, and still deserved being addressed.

All in all, *Skyrim* is a work of neo-medieval fantasy, which falls victim to conservative rhetoric that such a frame of thought can bring. These seem to stem from the historical simulation of conservative systems of monarchies, and the restrictions on game narratives and choices when sequels are considered. At the same time *The Elder Scrolls* build its world upon simulated historical writing that is similar to that of our own world, and, at times, equally unreliable. It conforms to those hegemonic systems that promote Othering and conservative thought, while also denying the existence of complete authority over history.

4. Re-imagining History: *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* and *Nioh*

Assassin's Creed: Valhalla (Henceforth referred to as *AC: Valhalla)* and the *Nioh* games are action role-playing games, just like *Skyrim*. *AC: Valhalla* was released in 2020, and the *Nioh* games were released in 2017 and 2020. Unlike *Skyrim*, neither game is fully fantasy. They depict a specific period of history, with *AC: Valhalla* focusing on the Viking invasion of England around 872, and *Nioh* 2 largely focusing on the end of the Sengoku era in Japan, around 1600. Both games contain characters from history and events from history, in a mixture of mythology, folklore, and historical accounts.

These games present a narrative similar to Arthurian Legend, where they claim to take place during a certain period of history, and give an idea of what such times might have been like, while being consciously inaccurate. They largely fall under Matthews' category of a middle ages that "might have been" (38). Although their fantastical and mythological elements are imagined, they still fall under a mythology of the time presented.

As such, the type of criticism that was aimed at *Skyrim* is not required here, one does not have to read into pure fantasy what is being represented in terms of real world politics or history. These games represent history, and do so explicitly. As with *Skyrim*, historical simulations are inherently political in how they choose to portray history. Thus, this chapter will largely focus on how the games compare and contrast to their written histories. It will show how the interaction with mythology and folklore is one where popular heritage rises above the authoritative, how the games take liberties with history itself, and how at times, those liberties might be controversial. Using *Nioh* and *AC:Valhalla's* game design, it will also show that Uricchio's definition of non-specific and specific historical simulation requires a change. Finally, this chapter will address the historical place of the protagonists of these games.

A short note for those who might be confused. Eivor, the protagonist of *AC: Valhalla*, is gender-neutral. The player can choose to play them as male or female, or as a mix of both, and let the game decide. As such, Eivor is referred to as 'they' throughout this thesis.

Witches and Yōkai

As said before, both games of this chapter blend history with mythology and folklore. *Nioh* adds Yōkai to historical events, while *AC:Valhalla* features encounters with mythological creatures and beings. Both games are aware that this practice is ahistorical, and portray their awareness in different ways. In this section, the mythology that these games refer to will be explored, as well as how they manage to mix it with actual historical events.

What are Yōkai?

Yōkai are part of Japanese folklore, but they are a larger part of popular western culture than some might realize, as they are present in the popular *Pokémon* franchise of games (Foster. 73). A good example would be Ninetales, a fire type fox Pokémon with nine tails, similar to descriptions of a 'kitsune', a fox whose tail can spread fire (Foster, 177-83;Tajiri, n.p.). A simplified definition of what a yōkai is would be "a weird or mysterious creature, a monster or fantastic being, a spirit or a sprite" (Foster, 5). They are thus spiritual in nature. Of course, these spirits, sprites and monsters are more complicated than this. The folklore behind them is old, and many different tales of yōkai exist (Foster, 5-7). The history and culture behind the creatures is old and vast, and a thesis the size of this one can never do it justice. What is an important take-away then, is that yōkai are not necessarily evil beings, they are spirits, monsters, sprites, they can guard people (a yōkai known as baku eats nightmares, and protects people who sleep), they can be angry (yōkai's known as oni are similar to demonic beings), and most importantly, they are a large part of Japanese folklore (Foster 5-235). A lot of the yōkai mentioned by Foster, such as the kappa, the kodama and the oni, are also found in the *Nioh* games (5-235). Some are present as boss fights, like Nue (Foster, 195-96). Others, like the kodama, are collectible creatures within the game. It is interesting to note that these kodama do not have a singular

appearance in folklore, they are tree spirits with no singular shape (Foster, 117). This means that *Nioh* could take artistic freedom here, turning them into tiny green beings that hide away, waiting for the player to help them. This representation cannot said to be wrong or right, and the developers of *Nioh* seem to have known exactly when they could take these liberties, as they represent a Nue similar to its depictions in folklore (Foster, 195-96). This description is static, there is no real ambiguity or unknown aspect to it, and as such, Nioh conformed to the imagery from folklore (Foster, 195-96).

Largely, *Nioh* stays true to written and drawn yōkai mythology with its demonic beings. A player who defeats enough of them can read more about their cultural history and folklore roots in a bestiary within the game. It is tough to say how accurate all of these descriptions are, as most information on yōkai is in Japanese, but, as far as translated information exists, the depictions seem as accurate as possible (Foster 5-235).

These yōkai are blended in with actual Japanese history. For example, in the first game, the player visits a temple in Honnō-Ji, a place of one of the major events in Japanese history: the assassination of Oda Nobunaga. This warlord played a role in unifying Japan, but was thus assassinated at said temple before he could complete this unification (256). The fate of Nobunaga's wife is largely unknown, and the history books are silent on this topic. In the first *Nioh* game, the player arrives in Honnō-Ji, and encounters a yuki-onna, a snow woman, a particular type of yōkai that exists in snowstorms and cold regions (Foster, 173-74). This particular yōkai is revealed to be Nobunaga's wife, revived. Her grief froze the region around Honnō-Ji, and transformed her into a yōkai.

While a lot of yōkai take the form of regular enemies to fight, some work like this yuki-onna. They reference a moment in history, and add popular folklore to it. While this is not accepted by actual historical accounts, this allows the game a sense of freedom, an added popular heritage that ignores what authorities might think, and adds more of a cultural identity to the narrative, by imbuing mythology and folklore into history.

It should be noted that *Nioh 1* offers a fairly simple explanation for the existence of these yōkai in its historical depiction. Near the end of the game, one of the major characters, Ieyasu, the first

shogun (military leader) of Japan, mentions that he will tell the tale of Japan, but he shall leave out the existence of the yōkai. This is a fairly simple way for the game to get away with its addition of folklore and mythology, and still pretend to be a historical game. Nevertheless, it does work.

Mythology in *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*

In *AC: Valhalla*, mythology works a bit differently. It does not mix its history with its mythology as much. When Eivor, the main character of the game, talks to historical figures like King Ælfred, they do not meet witches, or Odin, or Thor. Those storylines are told without any historical figures present. Essentially, within this game, history and mythology are separate parts. Eivor might be a mythological reincarnation of Odin, but this never plays a role when they speak to historical figures. When Eivor gets sent to Valhalla in the story, they do so together with their brother Sigurd, neither of whom exist in history, and both of whom are mythological, as Sigurd is a reincarnation of Tyr. Nevertheless, the addition of mythology is interesting, and that can be shown through the example of the daughters of Lerion.

In "The Kings Of Britain", 12th century scribe Geoffrey of Monmouth describes the lineage of King Leir and his daughters Goneril, Regan and Cordelia (62). To anyone who has played *AC: Valhalla*, these names will be familiar, they are represented as three boss fights all over the map of England. This is odd, as the reign of King Leir would be far before the events of *AC: Valhalla*. Of course, this also means that King Leir is largely a mythological figure, as any historical account that takes place over 500 years after such a King existed cannot be trusted to be true. As such, the inclusion of his daughters as essentially druid or witch-like beings and boss fights is entirely fictional, mythological, and placed in the wrong time. When questions about this, a developer for the game stated that

> The Daughters of Lerion are our own homage to Shakespeare and his play, King Lear. The play King Lear is actually based on a historic figure from quite a long time before our game is set, but we thought it would be fun to put a little quasi-historical stuff into this game. (Loveridge, n.p.)

This is interesting for a few reasons. For one, it shows a neo-medievalist inspiration for the inclusion of the Daughters. They are inspired by a play that itself is inspired by an account of history. There are multiple layers of medieval inspiration here. On top of that, the developers are aware that the history does not line up, and it did not matter to them. As we have seen before, neo-medievalism is not interested in a realistic timeframe or historical accuracy, and this developer comment seems to line up with such a view of history. It also conforms to the findings of Copplestone, which stated that a majority of developers do not value accuracy of historical representation as important for their games (432).

While *Nioh* goes off the rails of history near its end too, going far into yōkai mythology, seeing the protagonist even fight yōkai monstrosities in England, the games do not create inaccuracies of people's position in time. *AC: Valhalla* seemingly does not care about this, the game will blend mythology and legendary kings and their daughters into its gameplay, as long as there is entertainment value to be found. In a way, this is the counter hegemony that Hammar mentioned in his essay on *Assassin's Creed III*, with the player being able to play a historical narrative that is not conforming to a hegemony, that is not accurate to any perceived status quo. As it mainly serves a purpose of entertainment, and has no real world application, this is entirely harmless. However, once games start altering the path of actual historical figures, they might run into controversial ideas.

Changing History: King Ælfred and Akechi Mitsuhide

While most of *AC: Valhalla* historical representation can be explained by the lack of sources that exist on Norse mythology and history, there is one ahistorical moment in the game that does not serve the game well: turning king Ælfred into a Templar. Some might say that he is not a Templar, but part of the Order of the Ancients. It is worth noting that within *Assassin's Creed,* that order precedes the Templars, and it is Ælfred who starts this transition. Within the storyline of *Assassin's Creed*, there is an antagonizing faction in the modern world, known as the Templars, this faction secretly rules the world, and wants to have total control of it, limiting everyone's freedom. This comes eerily close to existing conspiracy theories of Templars who control the world's economy and future, and that their

war for control is responsible for tragedies such as 9/11 (Brown, 227-28). Little is known about king Ælfred, we mostly know that he was likely responsible for starting to translate Biblical texts into Old English (Faulkner, n.p.). Still, it serves no real purpose to assign to him the label of Templar, as it only reinforces harmful conspiracy theories, especially when the games claim that said conspiracy is still alive in the modern world.

This is, of course, an entirely counter-hegemonic view of history. Where the dominant view of history would be that Ælfred is decidedly not a Templar, let alone the founder of such a movement as the game suggests, the game suggests so anyway. The game frames the fight between Templars and Assassins in a fantastical way, using Christian imagery in the form of an Apple of Eden, which in these games is actually a machine of sorts made by beings that came before humans. These beings, known as Isu, hoped the humans could prevent a future solar flare from ever hitting earth. While such a framing is fantastical, and the fight between Templars and Assassins is less depicted as historically realistic because of this, this conspiracy existing in the game is still a definitive problem, as it references actual harmful conspiracies that exist in real life. This is similar to the *Wolfenstein* example at the beginning of this thesis. Even if the conspiracy is one made for entertainment, the stance held by the game is still that the conspiracy is true, or possible, and that is a problem.

Nioh also alters history, albeit to a less egregious extent. The first game does end with a player fighting John Dee, an actual historical figure, in the form of a massive yōkai (Barone, n.p.). This is after it is revealed that John Dee orchestrated the downfall of a lot of Japanese historical figures. However, it is not implied that John Dee is part of a large conspiracy, nor that he actually influenced history much. This is less egregious, and also less interesting, than the case of king Ælfred. A more interesting alteration of history is that of Akechi Mitsuhide.

Akechi was the person who attacked Oda Nobunaga, after years of serving him, and his motivations for the assassination of his warlord are entirely unknown, although the speculation is that he was angry about being treated unfairly (Sato, 265). Nobunaga would be avenged by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who would later complete Nobunaga's task of unifying Japan (Sato, 36). With the history here being unknown, *Nioh 2* offered an alternate explanation, one in which Mitsuhide and Hideyoshi

conspired to defeat Nobunaga, after which Hideyoshi betrayed his co-conspirator to rule Japan. This might seem to be an equally egregious change as what happened to king Ælfred being a Templar, but Hideyoshi is not part of a grander conspiracy. His history otherwise still plays out relatively the same, and he still dies. Furthermore, with the motivations for the assassination being entirely unknown, anyone can fill in an answer that satisfies them, there is no question of accuracy or hegemony here. Since, even if the popular answer is that Akechi was angry at Nobunaga, he could still have conspired with Hideyoshi.

So, to summarize, *AC: Valhalla* changes history in a way that conforms to modern day extremist conspiracy theories, whereas *Nioh* changes history in places where ambiguity is already present, without pretending that anything contemporary changes because of it.

The issue with (non-)specific historical simulations: *Valhalla*'s open world

As discussed prior, Uricchio's theory of historical simulations is one of specific and non-specific simulations (330). *Nioh*'s simulation is very specific, it has a non-linear structure, in which the player chooses a mission to play with a specific date in history. For *AC: Valhalla*, however, the case is not clear. It should be a specific historical simulation, since the timeframe (872-878) is relatively fixed. However, the open world setting means that the player can lose track of the exact date and times on which things happen. From personal experience, a player can have explored the entire map of England before doing most story quests, after which the Vikings supposedly already know about Northumbria, before ever going there to meet with anyone. Furthermore, within the game the player becomes allies with several other Nordic factions, and they can choose which factions to ally with first. While choices are limited, and unlocked after specific moments in the story, this freedom also blurs the timeline.

In a sense, *AC: Valhalla* is both specific and non-specific in its simulation of history. The player can be halfway through allying with England, and then choose to invade Paris in the expansion, something that does not line up at all with history. This freedom of a historical timeline is something

that Uricchio's terminology is not prepared for, and as such, it perhaps deserves a new idea of historical simulation. It makes sense to further develop the idea of a specific simulation of history, as both *Nioh* and *AC: Valhalla* simulate specific points in time. An additional term to add here could be (non-)linearity. *Nioh* provides a linear path through a specific history, whereas *AC: Valhalla*'s path is non-linear, with the player sometimes choosing which events happen before another.

How do you walk through history? Nioh's historical protagonist

As has been mentioned before, *AC: Valhalla's* protagonist is not a historical figure. Eivor, as they are presented, did not exist. This is different in *Nioh 1*, where the protagonist is William Adams, an Englishman that actually became a counsellor to Ieyasu, the first shogun – essentially: ruler - of Japan (Massarella, 1-15).

So how does the game manage to fit an actual historical figure into its mythological retelling of history? Well, Adams himself is somewhat of a myth, in a similar sense to Arthurian legends. In a paper by Massarella on Adam's history, they pinpoint the creation of Adams' as a myth to 1872, when an Englishman claimed to have found his grave. This same Englishman claimed facts of Adams' history, such as the date of the death of his Japanese wife, which are impossible to verify (16-17). Massarella claims that there are two versions of the man: "….William Adams, historical person, and Miura Anjin or Anjin, the stuff of myth" (21).

As was stated at the start of this chapter, the games discussed here are ones of the category of history as it might have been (Matthews, 38). As such the similarity between Miura Anjin, as William is thus called in Japan, and Arthurian legend is not as surprising. In fact, it helps to explain how *Nioh 1* manages to tell a tale with William Adams as the protagonist, without running entirely counter to Japanese history. Their tale is not one of the historical figure, but of the mythological. One that was more involved with all of Japan than he probably even could have been. As Massarella states: "In his life-time William Adams lived comfortably in Japan and was accepted into Japanese society. In his mythological incarnation Adams/Anjin has become Japanese" (21). It is this latter sense of William

Adams that the games call upon, similar to how *Nioh* uses yōkai to imbue history with folklore, it uses Adams to imbue history with its own Arthurian legend. It is a way to play with history, toy with the dominant hegemonic view that states that Adams was simply a man, and to imbue popular heritage culture into authoritative history.

To conclude, both *Nioh* and *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* add mythology to their histories. *Nioh* does this more directly, blending myth with history, and excusing the hegemonic views of history we have today by acting like historical people kept the mythology a secret. *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* mostly keeps its mythological references away from its historical characters, and thus avoids having to explain why there are druids and witches and other such creatures. At the same time, the games alter the paths of historical figures, and *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* does so in a way that conforms to harmful modern day conspiracies, while *Nioh* only chooses to answer ambiguity in historical accounts. Finally, *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* shows that Uricchio's definitions of historical simulations do not entirely suffice, and *Nioh* uses an Arthurian protagonist to play with popular heritage, and go against authoritative history.

5. History as Reality: *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*

*Kingdo*m *Come: Deliverance* (henceforth referred to as *Kingdom Come*) is a role-playing game released in 2018 by Warhorse Studios, a game studio from the Czech Republic. It follows the story of Henry, a peasant who becomes a nobleman in Bohemia in the year 1403. Unlike *Nioh* and *AC: Valhalla*, *Kingdom Come* presents a historical narrative without folklore or mythology. It represents historical people and the histories of Bohemia.

Since this game does not present its history with a mixture of fantasy, it is not a simulation of a history that "might have been" (Matthews, 38). Instead, *Kingdom Come* seems to try to present the medieval "as it was" (Matthews, 37). This aspect of realistic simulation is even part of the game's marketing material (Warhorse Studios "Realism", n.p.). This means that a neo-medieval perspective will not function with this game, as it is not representing the idea of a medieval found somewhere else, but rather attempting to represent the medieval more directly. This representation of history is similar to *Nioh* and *AC: Valhalla*, but different questions can be asked. Since a more explicit effort has been made to be realistic, leaving out folklore and mythology, one can ask why that realism matters, and if it serves a game well to be so realistic. Beyond that, the historical 'accuracy' aspect becomes more important in this game than it was in any of the previous games. After all, if a game that promotes its own realism has historical inaccuracies, why might that be?

This chapter will thus delve into realism and its relation to historical games. First, *Kingdom Come's* reading and combat systems will function as an exploration of realism at the possible cost of playability. This same combat system will be related to Historic European Martial Arts, addressing the perceived historical accuracy of the combat found in *Kingdom Come*. From there, the simulation of historical events will be compared to written histories, showing how the game's protagonist, Henry, is made ahistorical on purpose. Finally, *Kingdom Come* has been accused of whitewashing history, and this needs to be explored as it is a result of the simulation of the game's world.

It should be noted that the issue of historical accuracy within this thesis has so far been treated as questionable, often preceded by 'supposed', or 'perceived'. As Snyder states, any notion of

accuracy when it comes to history is often infused with a political or personal bias towards a rather confusing image of history (n.p.). Similarly, historical ambiguity was discussed in the *Skyrim* chapter of this thesis, historical writing can often be contradicting, or even simply leave unknowns. Chosen perceptions of historical accuracy will return quite often within this chapter, as such a claim of realism leaves questions of what history was chosen as accurate.

The area of Bohemia is now known as the Czech Republic. Some sources on the history that *Kingdom Come* bases itself on will be in the Czech language.

Realism and Perceived Accuracy in Simulations

Can a game be too realistic?

In a 2013 essay, Köstlbauer postulates that one of the reasons for people to play simulation games is their "claim of realism and authenticity", with players scrutinizing such games for perceived inaccuracies. This leaves out the dislike for realism that some players might have. The recent game *Red Dead Redemption 2* has garnered criticism from some players for being too realistic, and making minor tasks, such as skinning animals, rather tedious to go through. *Kingdom Come* has gotten similar responses from some outlets, mostly regarding the games style of combat, noting that it preferred realism over what they perceived to be enjoyable or playable (The Escapist, n.p.; Gardner, n.p.). Both of these outlets suppose this as a negative comment on the game. This is reminiscent of Poole's theory on games foregoing fun for realism (54). It thus becomes important to ask: can realism become too much for the medium of video games to portray, can the game become unplayable?

As stated in the literature review, a video essay by Harris Brewis - known online as "hbomberguy" - questions if games always have to be fun. Throughout the entire video, Brewis explores the game *Pathologic*, and argues that games can, at times, forego fun to make an artistic point, or to further drive home other experiences (1:00). In *Pathologic*, the player only has a few days to save a town from a plague, and as prices spike, and the player character moves very slowly through the world, stress and anxiety are on a player's mind at all times. While not fun, Brewis argues that this

lack of fun is essentially the point of the game, this situation is not supposed to be fun, it is a drastic scenario that one needs to try to overcome (2:15 and 9:05). While not exactly stating it, this gives a sense that games can forego fun when it makes narratological sense for an action to not be fun, to not have to be enjoyable. This does not have to be a problem with a video game, it can simply be a way to offer a different experience. Similarly, Huizinga's notion of joy in games also does not necessarily have to include fun or (re)playability (as quoted in Frasca, *Video games of the Opressed*, 5*)*. For some players, the joy in *Kingdom Come* could be derived from the attempt at realism. In a sense, criticisms of playability or fun can miss that there can be a (narrative) point to having such systems in a video game.

What, then, is the point to such systems in *Kingdom Come*? It might make sense to investigate such a system. At the start, the player character is a rather young peasant and cannot yet read. The player can opt to take reading lessons, during which the letters in a book are scrambled, and one needs to put in effort to make sense of the words, and relay what was being read. As time goes on, and the player does more of these training sessions, the words become more and more unscrambled. Essentially, the player character does not just learn to read by getting a skill point, but also by visually showing that it becomes easier for them to read texts.

The combat system works similarly. The inputs are rather sluggish, especially at first, with Henry swinging almost wildly at his foes. It is almost impossible to even fight the first serious enemies that Henry encounters, as he simply has not learned how to fight. Eventually, Henry is trained in combat, and becomes better at it. While the control scheme is rather complex, this does improve the playability of the game over time. Similar to Brewis, it is easy to argue here that the game is simulating learning, through actually being bad at something at first. While not enjoyable to some players, it offers an experience of 'realism and authenticity' that Köstblauer would argue some players want. It seems that while realism is not without controversy in the realm of video games, it can serve a legitimate purpose within a game's mechanics. As long as the realistic mechanics serve a narrative point, it can work. With *Red Dead Redemption 2*, for example, it is hard to state what point it serves to have a few seconds long cutscene for each animal that is skinned by the player, and it is quite easy to

see how such an effort for realism is more bothersome than useful. Ludology and realism can clash at times, but can also help each other. In the case of *Kingdom Come*, the two seem to work together.

Historically 'Accurate' Combat

On the topic of combat in *Kingdom Come*, it is interesting to discuss Historic European Martial Arts. This field of study is rather broad, as it essentially covers teachings of and research into the forms of fighting that have existed throughout all of Europe in its history. In the case of *Kingdom Come*, one of course is mainly focused on combat styles from the 1400s. There are some videos online of sword and fencing experts reacting to videos of combat in *Kingdom Come*, often rather positively, and some HEMA practitioners have gone as far as to perform the combat from the game in real life (Gamology). It almost makes sense that the game has gathered this praise, as the studio claims to have hired sword fighting experts to 'accurately' portray how people fought at the time (Warhorse Studios, "Combat", n.p.).

There is however one important note to make here, and that is that these expert claims on accuracy cannot be said to be objective. Both Bauer and Clements have found that there are gaps of knowledge when it comes to research into historical fighting styles, both linguistically and in practice. Bauer argues that it is rather easy to misinterpret older language, and Clements argues that a large portion of information is simply either not yet found, or entirely missing, and that what is being done within historical martial arts practice is not always going to be exactly what was done at the time one is trying to simulate (Bauer 58-59, Clements 211-14).

This is essentially what Snyder argues, although there is not necessarily a political bias present (n.p.). The perceived accuracy of combat within these games comes from experts who have decided what is accurate within a field where other academics claim such decisions can at times be impossible to make (Bauer 58-59, Clements 211-14). The information on this era is not complete, which means that the 'accuracy' as one perceives it within the combat of *Kingdom Come* is down to contemporary interpretations of texts, which might well be wrong.

When it comes to the combat then, claims of accuracy are complex to make, and largely seem to be a marketing tactic by Warhorse Studios. It is not entirely harmful to be wrong here, since there is simply a lot that is unknown, and a game like this would be odd if it had no combat at all. What is more interesting then, is when the game is explicitly ahistorical.

Henry's Imaginary World: A Fictional Protagonist In History

Throughout the game, the player plays as Henry. Henry lives in Skalitz, a Bohemian village, which gets attacked by forces of King Sigismund in 1403. This is all faithful to history as some have written it, as is the presence of Radzig Kobyla in Skalitz, albeit that his name in history books is spelled Racek (Cesty a Památky, n.p.; Vladislav, p. 554). While Henry encounters other people from Bohemian history throughout the game, the ones that have the most impact on him and his family are entirely ahistorical, either in nature, or in actions. There is Istvan Toth, a character who is entirely made up for the narrative of *Kingdom Come,* and seemingly is created as a villain for Henry, carrying his dead father's sword. Henry turns out to be Radzig's son, and while Radzig is real, him having a bastard named Henry is also nowhere to be found in any historical account. The most noteworthy character who is ahistorical is Markvart von Aulitz. He actually existed, but he died in 1402, according to historical writing (Vladislav, 552). In the game, he is at the 1403 attack on Skalitz, and kills Henry's parents.

So why go through the effort to have actual figures from Bohemian history in a game, and then add entirely ahistorical narratives to it? In a sense, it makes Henry a fly on the wall during the war of King Sigismund with Bohemia. He is present, sure, but he does not at all impact the events, as he is focused on getting his father's sword back from a man who apparently never existed. It allows the game freedom within its realistic constraints, to tell a narrative that is not just a retelling of history as it is written in the books. The question remains of why Markvart von Aulitz is seemingly still alive in the games. There is nothing said about this by developers, and it is rather unclear why he is there. It could simply be an oversight, as any mention of his death is rather complicated to find. One can only guess why he was included.

While William in *Nioh* was a figure of folklore and a figure of history, and *AC: Valhalla's* Eivor was entirely made up, but interacts with actual historical figures, Henry's story in *Kingdom Come* largely centers around people who did not exist, or were already dead. While the reveal of Radzig being his father ties Henry to someone real, it mainly serves the purpose of lifting him from peasant to nobleman, and does not alter Radzig at all.

In a game which claims to be as realistic as possible and as historically authentic as possible, it makes sense to have a protagonist that essentially cannot really affect history, that exists as a ghost in the room of historical people, and only really meaningfully interacts with other ghosts.

This ahistorical part of the game seems to be unproblematic, and is mainly interesting as a showcase of how a protagonist with some freedom of choice can fit into a game that claims to be historically authentic. It is, however, the claim to authenticity that forms this game's biggest problem, as it ran into one of the more egregious accusations in this thesis: whitewashing history.

Sticking To The Claim: Whitewashing Accusations

Kingdom Come has been accused of whitewashing history, and that is a serious accusation to face. As such, it is important to note that at this chapter's end, this thesis will not agree with the accusations presented, and will also disagree with the arguments of the game's lead director, Daniel Vávra. The accusations still need to be given their space and be addressed seriously, which means that a significant portion of this chapter will be about them. It should be clear that describing these accusations does not imply agreement, it is merely an overview of the situation at hand.

The world of *Kingdom Come* is only inhabited by people with a white skin color. For some, this might not raise any questions. But for others, it raised questions before the game was released. As described by Snyder, a Tumblr user who goes by "medievalpoc" pointed out that there is Bohemian art which shows people of color, from around the time that the game portrays, meaning that the people of Bohemia knew of, and might have been in contact with, people of color (Snyder, n.p.). This user was then told by Warhorse Studios that they "left ethnicities just because there were none in Bohemia in

those times. […] Or better: they were [sic] a very very rare" (medievalpoc, "in the face of harassment", n.p.). This, while in their original post, medievalpoc had pointed out various carefully sourced artworks which depicted people of color, made by Bohemians ("Untitled", n.p.). Rather oddly, one of those artworks was the Queen of Sheba, as depicted in a work by Konrad Kyeser, who is present within the game itself.

Snyder notes that race and ethnicity in Bohemia was more based on religion and language than the color of one's skin (n.p.). This could possibly have played a role in the stance of Warhorse Studio on the matter. While this could be the case, if the developers are as focused on historical accuracy as they claim to be, it stands to reason that this is something they should have known. Furthermore, a historical work by Berend et. al, claims that Bohemia became more and more ethnically diverse during the 13th and 14th century, before the game's story is set. They further state that before this point, the land was already inhabited by Jews, Christians, Germans, Italians, and more (258-263).

The game's lack of representation seems thus willfully ignorant of the history it claims to accurately represent. The game's director, Daniel Vávra, later defended the game, claiming once again that in the areas within the game there simply would not have been people of color. In the same interview in which he claims this, he seemingly supports the movement that became known as '#GamerGate' (Otton, n.p.). While this movement is far from this thesis scope, and exploring it at length could require a book instead, it is important to note that #GamerGate was essentially a misogynistic hate campaign, disguised as a genuine care for ethics in game journalism (Lind, 316-17). Vávra, in his comments on it, largely argues about journalistic ethics, and being called racist for his non-depiction of people of color (Otton, n.p.). What is more interesting here, is that he focuses on the image portrayed by Konrad Kyeser, and states that it is a woman who lived in Africa 2000 years before, but he does not state any of the other images referenced by the Tumblr user, which are of people of color seemingly being part of regular everyday life. It would appear to be a deflection of the issue, focusing on one image, rather than on all of them. The other images depict more of people at the time, rather than biblical imagery (medievalpoc, "Untitled", n.p.).

However, it is important to note that one cannot find the reasons for the Bohemian artworks to be made. Is it a regular everyday scenario? Was it something special that an artist found unique enough to depict? Was it based on hearsay, talk from merchants from other countries? None of these questions can be answered. Which means that, without clear statistics to back up arguments of representation, the arguments by the Tumblr user might appear strong, but are hard to impossible to prove a truth with.

It is important to note that Vávra later apologized for the previously mentioned interview, and it has since been taken down as well. The interview is only accessible through an archived link. Even in his apology Vávra reinterprets the #Gamergate movement into a positive message about freedom of expression, rather than the hate campaign it originated as. In this same apology, he uses this freedom of expression argument to claim that art should be free from politics, unless the art is clearly offensive (Gamestar, n.p.). As shown earlier in this thesis, with works of historical simulations always being political, this is not a very favorable stance, as the work made is in and of itself political. One could perhaps argue that a work is not political until it is explicitly so, but that both leaves out any possibility of nuance, and makes it so one has to explicitly state a negative thing to be able to be criticized for it. The game, after all, still does not have people of color. And while Vávra, or Warhorse, has never explicitly stated a political, ideological, or racist view, their chosen perspective of history can mean something too. And it can be criticized for it. Simply stating that nothing political was meant does not mean that nothing political was said.

Vávra mentions the usage of family trees and property rights to build the world, and as an argument for the lack of representation within the game (Gamestar, n.p.). This suggests a genuine effort of research into historical realism for the game. One can of course question whether these family trees and property rights can be related to the color of someone's skin, and without Vávra supplying the mentioned sources, it is almost impossible to tell whether they hold up to scrutiny. A source that one could trust instead would be professor Winfried Eberhard, who specializes in, among other subjects, Bohemian history. In an interview on the channel Game Two, he comments on this debate. He claims that the likelihood of people of color being present in Bohemia would be fairly small.

Although, he is quick to specify that this does not mean there were none, and that showing none in the game is a choice (4:35). He argues that no single account of history can claim to be true, and that there are only interpretations, which is similar to Snyder's argument on historical accuracy, shown earlier (5:00; n.p.).

It is thus possible that people of color were in Bohemia, yet Warhorse Studios decided not to represent that possibility in their game. It seems the studio interpreted such a low chance as statistically insignificant to represent, as shown in their 'very very rare' comment on the matter (medievalpoc, "in the face of harassment", n.p.). There seems to be no statistical evidence regarding demographics in those times, no certainty, as Eberhard mentions, stating that the time represented by the game is 'strange' to us (Game Two, 5:20). Thus, the claim by Vávra that there would be no people of color in 1403 on the stretch of land found in the game, is one that would be almost impossible to make with the certainty with which he expresses it (Gamestar, n.p.;Otton, n.p.). Equally, however, it is impossible to make a certain claim that contradicts Vávra's. It is false to pretend that this aspect of *Kingdom Come* represents a truth, but it is also false to pretend there is even a truth to be found or expressed.

On the basis of all this, this thesis will not claim that history was directly whitewashed by Warhorse Studios or Vávra. After all, there is no certainty of what the history even was. Either way, this debate can serve a better purpose than accusations regarding intents and whitewashing surrounding an uncertain period in history. It shows that claims of accuracy and realism have an unsteady foundation. It is almost impossible to claim that a historical game is accurate to history, as it depends on how one chooses to interpret it. There seems to be a lot that is not known, there do not seem to be statistics to back up claims on either side. Warhorse did choose to interpret these unknowns and uncertainties in a way that can certainly be questioned. Sadly, good faith seems to have left this debate, and so are the answers to those questions, as in both responses, Vávra more or less deflects questions, by simply claiming to have done extensive research, or disregarding all Bohemian artwork by focusing on one example. This suggests a willful ignorance of the topic, a desire to read history with a certain interpretation, as Snyder has argued is almost always the case (n.p.). One can claim to

have done historical research, but the accounts of history are almost never going to be complete, so that is not an answer to any question, it is a way to deflect, and merely claim to have more authority over truth than another historian, something which Eberhard seems to deny (Game Two, 5:00).

It reflects badly on the game, and Vávra, that the desire to be very historically accurate has led to the non-representation of a group of people who might have been present at the time. An apology is good, backing that apology up with actual evidence would actually help, and perhaps letting go of the claim of truthful authenticity might be best. Even when Vávra claims that in the tiny stretch of land in Bohemia that the game represents, there would be no people of color, based on sources he claims to have, that seems to not be enough (Gamestar, n.p.). One could suggest that the aforementioned Tumblr user could have been one of those sources, or at the very least, the sources they supplied could have been taken more seriously, as they are academic. The post was made in 2014 and the game was released in 2018. There was ample time to address the historical ambiguity, the unknowns, and perhaps even represent that uncertainty within the game. Instead, good faith rapidly left this discourse, with the Tumblr user facing harassment, and Vávra not accepting the criticsm (medievalpoc "in the face of harassment", n.p.;Otton, n.p.). The possibility of a discussion that could have been had on historical accuracy and attempts at historical 'truths' seems to have been lost.

All in all, *Kingdom Come* is an interesting case study for this thesis. Its historical accuracy can be questioned, both in a lack of historical accounts in the case of combat, but also in the rather blunt responses to questions of representation. On the other hand it is a positive example of games not needing to be fun to be worth experiencing, and realistic simulation working in harmony with gameplay. Furthermore, it would seem that a way in which games can offer a player freedom within attempted historical authenticity is to make the player character ahistorical, similar to *Nioh* and *AC: Valhalla*. Sadly, all of those findings are overshadowed by one conclusion: When deciding to be authentic, the choices made of what historical narrative is true can betray a bias. Sticking to those claims of truth might not be worth it, as a lot of history can simply be unknown. While it might be worthwhile to represent history as accurately as one thinks they can, claiming to be actually historically accurate seems to be a mistake. It might be worthwhile to be honest about unknowns,

rather than present interpretations as truths. A game as an interpretation of historical texts could be more honest than one that claims to be accurate to history itself.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

This work started with a research question, which bears repeating: To what extent, if any, do the video games *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, Nioh, Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* and *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* reinforce or deconstruct hegemonic views on their respective U.S., Japanese, and Czech histories through gameplay and historic simulation?

Through a close look at each of these four games, this question has not gotten a simple, singular answer, but rather there are multiple conclusions to pull from the chapters that came before. These conclusions can roughly be sorted into three categories. Firstly, there is the gameplay aspect, in which someone is playing through history, and folklore and mythology can be added to enhance the gameplay. Secondly, historical simulation plays a central role, especially the ways in which biases and political stances can show up in the way history is simulated, but also how historical simulation is defined. Finally, the pursuit of realism and authenticity can be problematic, and for some, is at odds with playability. This chapter will provide a short overview of these three conclusions.

Playing History: Player Characters and Folklore

One of the ways in which all these games treat history is through their gameplay, either through player characters, or through gameplay elements the player encounters. Largely, player characters serve the function of allowing freedom within a historical narrative. Whether that is the mythological William in *Nioh 1*, or the ahistorical Eivor in *AC: Valhalla* and Henry in *Kingdom Come (*Massarella, 21). There is a counter-hegemonic element here, in which player characters are simply ahistorical, and have relations to people from history, such as Eivor meeting king Ælfred. The player can be a fly on the wall type of character, in the form of Henry, who glides through the historical narrative as it is written in history books.

Through these characters, the player can encounter more counter-hegemonic variants of history. In *Nioh* and *Assassin's Creed,* history is infused with elements of folklore, which are largely encountered by the player character, and do not directly impact historical events. The gameplay in

these games –in which folklore is fought and spoken to as well as the historical – allows for a quite literal sense of playing with history. The games do not have to stick to what is seen as historical fact, and get to treat historical folklore as a form of fact as well. This form of historical revision, if one is to call it such, seems to be rather harmless. It mainly embraces popular culture and mythology as a part of history, similar to what Liboriussen and Martin called 'popular heritage' (319-320).

None of this applied to *Skyrim*, in which the world itself is ahistorical already, so the player character can freely influence the events in the world without drastically changing any written history of the real world. It would seem that for games that attempt to portray a period in history that actually happened, it is preferred for the protagonist to be ahistorical. This could easily be due to the increased freedom a player then has, such as Henry in *Kingdom Come* mostly taking part in his own story rather than the history being represented by the game.

It could also be to avoid scrutiny of a direct representation of someone who might have existed. If one was to play as King Ælfred, for example, the actions a player takes as him could almost immediately be criticized as unreal. Of course, this happened in *Nioh 1*, in which one plays as William. As mentioned before, the game manages to avoid most criticism here by displaying a more mythological version of the man (Massarella, 21).

All in all, player characters in these games seem to be a way to interact with history, without directly altering it. In a game like *Skyrim*, the player character could potentially impact the game's world, but largely keeps the systems the same. This makes narratives rather conservative, because the problems are not proposed to have to do with malleable (corrupt) systems, but with individuals. This conservative view seems to stem from the historical simulation using and sticking to systems of monarchies, as well as the inability to allow for drastic choices when one would need to keep those choices in mind when making sequels.

The less a game attempts to reflect actual history, the more noteworthy this argument about the use of historical systems of power can become. *Nioh*, *AC: Valhalla* and *Kingdcom Come* attempt to represent actual history, and as such, the systems that did not change in those years might logically

not change in the games. In *Skyrim* however, the choice to change systems or not is not bound by any desire to be historically accurate to the real world, as it does not take place in it. At the same time, allowing for changes to dominant history is something that has been argued to be important (Hammar, 370-76), meaning that the choices not to do so for the other games means they conform to hegemony by choice, as they could still choose to reinterpret history differently (Snyder, n.p.).

Historical Simulation: Definitions, Biases, and Politics

With historical simulation, a few issues arose, namely how to define historical simulation in video games, and the potential addition of political views and biases into historical works.

AC: Valhalla showed that a video game can take place in a specific time, while also allowing players to choose orders of events, making it rather non-specific. Uricchio's definitions for historical simulations seem to not entirely suffice, and an additional specification of (non-)linearity in a simulated narrative was suggested.

When it came to *Skyrim*'s simulated neo-medieval history, it became apparent that within it, conservative values could be found, particularly in the ways the game simulated race, with the player character being an exceptional individual, at whom systemic oppression is not aimed. It is also present in the games systems of ruling, where often the replacement of an individual is shown to be the solution, rather than the changing of the system itself. Issues with simulation of race also arose in *Kingdom Come*, which has been accused of whitewashing history by not presenting any people of color within the game. Such problems can betray a bias of how one reads history and chooses to interpret it (Snyder, n.p.;Game Two, 5:00). *Kingdom Come* seems to conform to hegemonic history in its simulation of race, agreeing with specific sources, and claiming a certain truth over history (Gamestar, n.p.).

In a counter-hegemonic simulation of history, *AC: Valhalla* represents dangerous modern day conspiracies within its narrative (Brown, 227-28). While this does run counter to history as one might learn it, that of course does not immediately mean it is without problems. These conspiracies are

harmful, and it might not be worth engaging with them as truthful within one's historical narrative. Linking important historical people to a hidden conspiracy that people nowadays actually believe in might be a rather bad idea. This is, of course, not to say that it cannot be done, the freedom of expression is there, and Hammar has shown that freedom of expression within historical writing is important (370-76). However, this freedom can be problematic if it potentially reinforces harmful ideas. Within *Nioh*, similar expression is found, such as claiming a reason for Nobunaga's assassination. This, however, does not seem to be a problem, as it does not play a role in modern day beliefs that might be harmful. Whereas *AC: Valhalla* uses counter-hegemonic play to alter history in ways that could have negative results in the modern day, *Nioh* uses it to play with historical ambiguity, to answer questions that history books mostly leave unanswered. And *Nioh* does so while not risking affecting the modern day.

What *AC: Valhalla* and *Kingdom Come* show is that there is a rather vague line between historic representation and artistic freedom. While *Nioh* uses artistic freedom in a way that causes no harm, *AC :Valhalla* uses this freedom to give credibility to harmful conspiracy theories, and *Kingdom Come* takes the freedom to interpret history in a way that is accused of whitewashing. Counter-hegemonic play might be a good thing according to Hammar, it can also be harmful when the freedoms taken can represent harmful ideologies and interpretations. *Nioh* seemingly walks this line well, while *AC: Valhalla* and *Kingdom Come* represent history in problematic ways.

Historical simulation is thus a rather complicated topic. Trying to simulate history comes with biases for what sources one will believe and it can betray political ideas. It also seems like the definition of historical simulation is not yet complete, and that counter-hegemonic play can be harmful, as the line between supposed historical fidelity and artistic expression is not clear and can allow harmful ideologies to enter the game's presentation of history.

A Quest For Realism

A few of the games in this thesis made an effort to portray history in some form of 'authentic' way, namely *AC: Valhalla*, *Nioh* and *Kingdom Come.* The latter explicitly mentions this on its own website (Warhorse Studios "Realism", n.p.). This thesis has shown that claims of accuracy are not based on very solid arguments (Game Two, 5:00; Snyder, n.p.). The fact that history is riddled with interpretations and unknowns is shown in *Skyrim* as well. While that game might have some conservative tendencies, its history is along a post-structural line, where truth is unknown, and authors cannot be trusted. In an odd way, the game that is mostly fantasy is the one with a more sensible view on history, not claiming anything as a truth, and rather presenting the ambiguity within our understanding of history in the real world.

Kingdom Come also showed that, the more realistic a simulation aims to get, the more questions of playability arise. This thesis argues that playability can more easily be foregone if the realism makes narrative sense, such as Henry not knowing how to fight, and thus fighting in a sluggish way at the start of the game. *Kingdom Come'*s combat also proved that accuracy of historical fighting is almost impossible to verify, since there are a lot of gaps in knowledge, and there might be misinterpretations as well (Bauer 58-59, Clements 211-14). This furthermore shows that 'accuracy' or 'authenticity' are not really terms one can apply to historical games.

For the general audience, however, there is a connection. Copplestone's research, mentioned in the literature review, suggests that developers largely do not value historical accuracy as important, while players do (430-32). While neither player nor developer found historical accuracy to be 'always important', players stated it most often depends on the game and the history, while developers largely denied the importance entirely (430-32). This could explain why a studio like Warhorse Studios markets its game as realistic and accurate, as that could be the type of game where that is important to the player. It also means that the historic games and their accuracy matters to players, and that this same marketing can be harmful, as it leads people to believe something can even be historically

truthful to begin with. It would be better for games to re-emphasize the fact that historical simulation is an interpretation, rather than a fact.

The quest for realism in historical games might be one that often does not stand up to scrutiny, but that does not mean it is not worth doing. For all its faults, *Kingdom Come* was a massive undertaking in historical research, and has sparked important discussion on how to read history.

The Final Conclusion

So, once more: To what extent, if any, do the video games *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, Nioh, Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* and *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* reinforce or deconstruct hegemonic views on their respective U.S., Japanese, and Czech histories through gameplay and historic simulation?

All of these games have aspects that deconstruct hegemonic views, such as the ahistorical player character that is placed within historical narratives that are found in *Nioh, AC: Valhalla* and *Kingdom Come,* and the skeptic historical perspective of *Skyrim.* The more fantastical games (*Nioh, AC: Valhalla,* and *Skyrim)* allow mythology and folklore to take part in historical settings, furthering a deconstruction of historical narratives written by historians. This counter-hegemony can be problematic, as it is in *AC: Valhalla*. These problems arise from the fine line between artistic expression and historic fidelity, a line which *Nioh* walks well, and a game like *Kingdom Come* approaches in problematic fashion.

Kingdom Come, as a game that strives to be most accurate to history, largely reinforces hegemonic views, and also tries to marry gameplay and history, attempting to reflect historical forms of combat as 'accurately' as the developers think they can. *Skyrim,* which is on the other end of the spectrum, as a fantastical game that uses medieval imagery, rather than a historical game by default, reinforces hegemonic views through its individualist and conservative perspective. This likely stems from the limits its narrative has and the usage of unchangeable medieval sources. While *AC: Valhalla* and *Nioh* might conform to hegemonic history in the sense that some events happen as written, they

also add mythology, with *Valhalla*'s developers even stating that entertainment is sometimes more important than conforming to history (Loveridge, n.p.).

Why This Mattered

After answering the research question, it is important to also ask: what has this research added to the field of Game Studies?

First and foremost, plenty has been written on singular historical games, but there has not been much research that compared historical games to one another. A primary reason for this might be that many write works on games they have played, or a single game that impacted or intrigued them. Instead, one could play a game for the purpose of writing about it, or play more within the field of historical games and compare them. A lack of research such as this means that broad, overarching theories are lacking or do not yet exist. Similarly, broad questions that one can ask for multiple games are also scarce. Most works in the field are singular case studies, and this thesis almost already stands out by being a comparative work. This thesis brought forward a question and a possible methodology with which to address multiple games at once, and thus filled a gap in existing research, allowing others to work from here on other games, or ask similar questions about these four games.

Furthermore, by comparing different types of historical simulation, from (non-)linear specific to non-specific, this thesis has shown similarities and problems that historical simulation games generally show. Similarities, such as ahistorical player characters, and problems, such as claims of accuracy, conservative views of race, and strengthening conspiracy theories. This could help create broader theories and broader overviews of similarities and issues within the genre of historical games as a whole, rather than individual games. It could also assists research into single games, as those same broad theories can be applied to smaller scale or singular case studies.

Finally, an addition has been made to Uricchio's notion of specific and non-specific simulations, noting that the linearity of the game's narrative can make a specific simulation rather non-specific in nature, and that, as such, linearity needs to be added to these definitions.

Further Research

While this thesis thus added to the field, there is of course more research to be done. When it comes to the matter of history as represented by video games, this Master thesis is not a fully comprehensive overview. A larger work would be needed to even come close to such a thing. Game studies is still a relatively young field of academia, and plenty more can be written. One could apply the research question from this thesis to other historical games, for example. When it comes to these four games, some issues have been left out of this work as well. One is that of architecture. This thesis is not written within the field of architecture, but rather in the field of literature and culture. As such, most of the criticism and research present in this work regards narratives, minority literature and representation, as well as (political) biases towards history, since that is closest to the author's field of expertise. Similarly, there has also not been a discussion of accuracy of a game's clothing as compared to what is known of the times represented. Such topics are worth studying, and could be part of a future work on these games, and for other historical games too.

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