

Emergent Stories in Crusader Kings II

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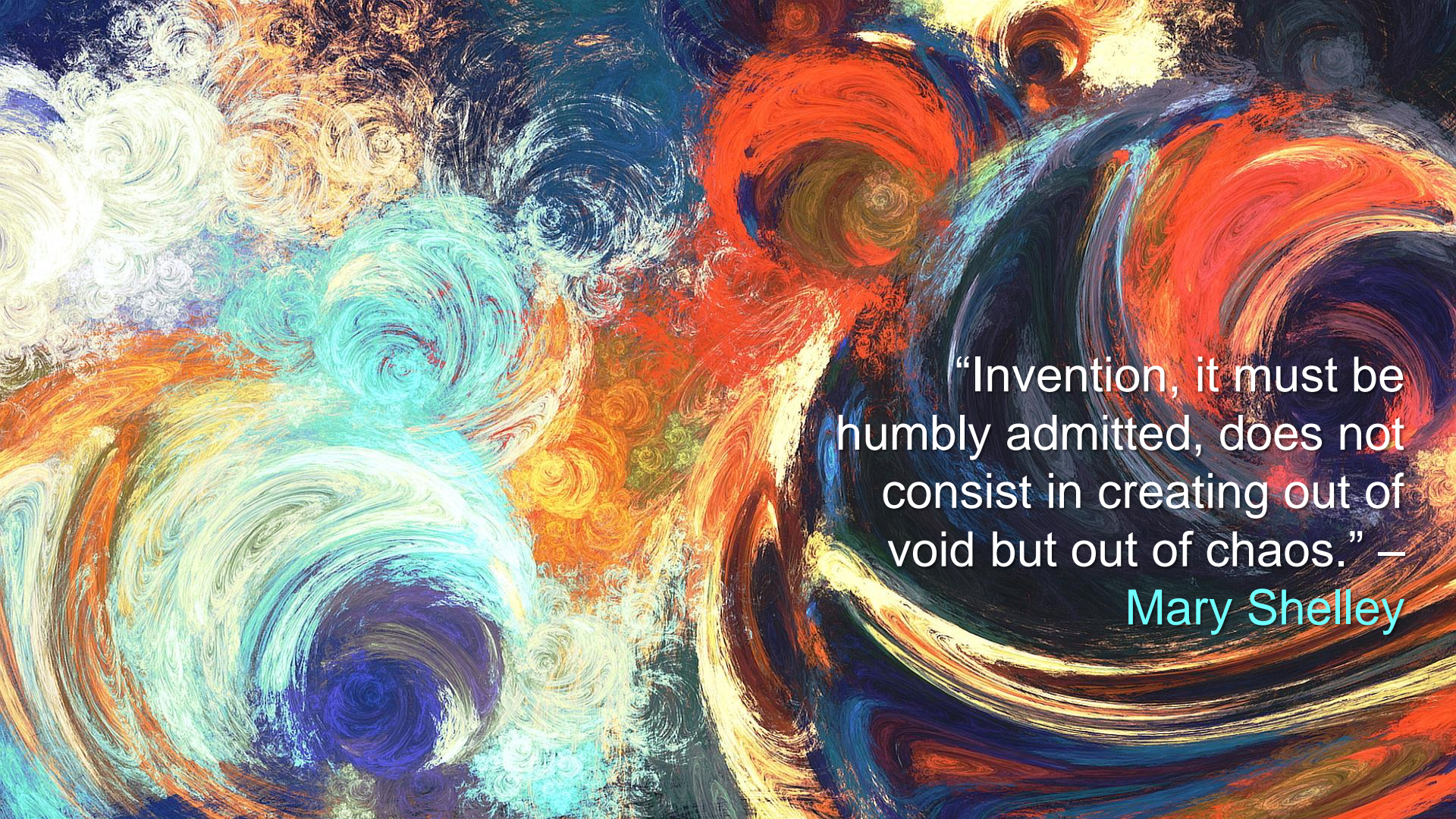
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So, who is this guy?

Designer and/or Programmer on:

- Europa Universalis II
- Hearts of Iron
- Victoria
- Crusader Kings
- Hearts of Iron II
- Europa Universalis III
- Hearts of Iron III
- EU: Rome
- Victoria II
- Crusader Kings II

An abstract painting featuring a complex, swirling pattern of colors including deep blues, vibrant reds, bright yellows, and cool teals. The brushstrokes are thick and expressive, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall composition is dynamic and energetic, with various shades of color blending and swirling together in a chaotic yet harmonious manner.

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



Emergence – Why the Hype?

- Interactivity separates games from other forms of entertainment
- Interactivity -> replayability -> \$\$\$
- Less interactivity with fixed narrative
- But... narrative is engaging!



Linear Stories

Pros:

- Highly evocative

Cons:

- Not interactive





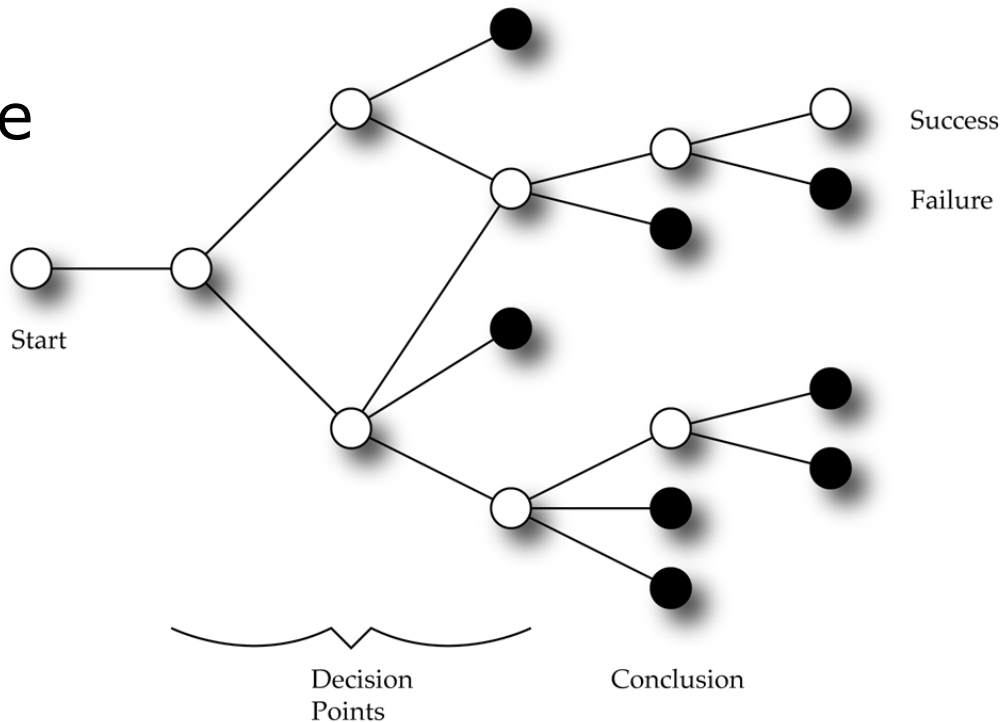
Branching Stories

Pros:

- Somewhat interactive
- Highly evocative

Cons:

- Still quite limiting
- Needs more content





Improvised Stories

Pros:

- Highly interactive
- Social

Cons:

- Creative effort
- Social





Emergent Stories

Pros:

- Highly interactive

Cons:

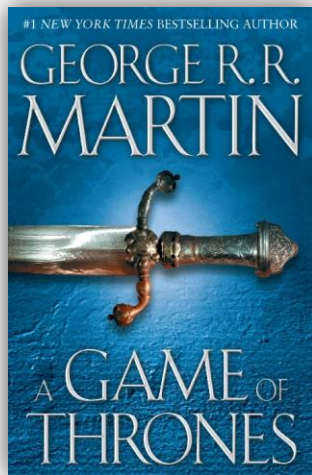
- Hard to realize
- Less evocative



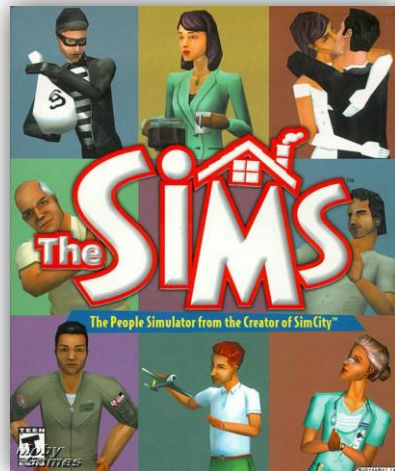
Emergent Stories = Game Anecdotes



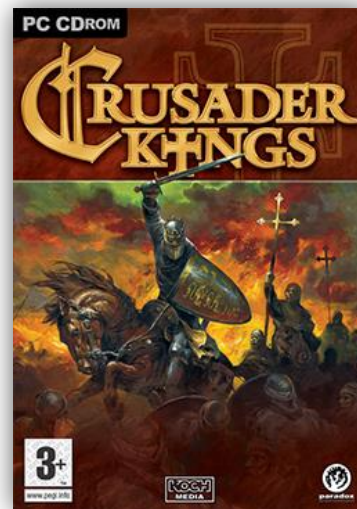
What is Crusader Kings?



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Crusader Kings I (2004)

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





Crusader Kings I

(2004)

- Skills
- Personality Traits
- Family Relations





CKII – Design Goals

- Thousands of Characters
- Family First
- Opinions and Personalities
- Ruthless Conflict
- Lady Luck is Fickle



Bohler

Crusader Kings II

- Prettier Graphics
- More Characters
- More Intrigue
- More Stories
- Smaller Noses





Emergent Story Example

- You, the popular king's vassal and a claimant to the throne, have him assassinated with poisoned wine
- His little brother, a mere toddler, succeeds to the throne
- The queen mother (AI) suspects you and tries to have you killed (AI action), but only wounds you (chance)
- You revolt against the weak regency, win the war, and become the new king
- You throw the queen mother and her whelp in the dungeon and let them both rot (evil bastard satisfaction!)
- Your wound festers, and you die (chance) (bummer!)



Systems Soup?



Systems Soup: Flat interactions that do not amount to anything. No tension, no peaks and valleys.





Systems Soup with Dumplings!



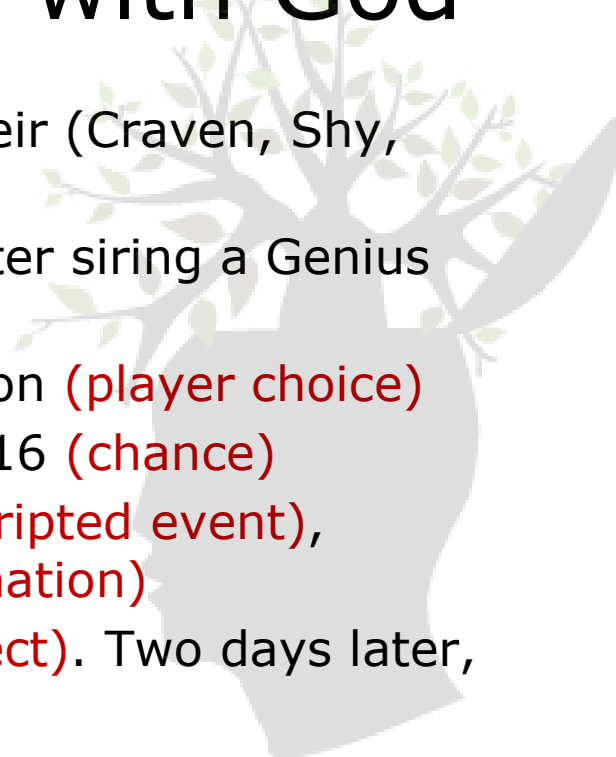
- Plausible AI Actions
- Plausible AI Reactions
- Consistent AI Behaviour

Perceived nuggets of Meaning (Anecdotes)



Emergent Story: A Deal with God

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

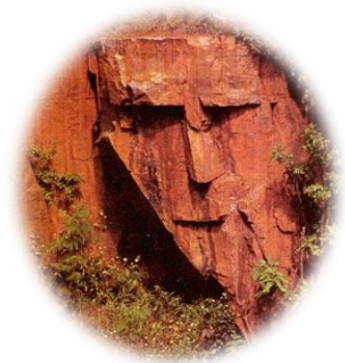




Apophenia?



Apophenia: The experience of seeing patterns or connections in random or meaningless data.





Imagination, not Hallucination



- Daydream, not psychosis
- Players do not expect real meaning
- The "art" is expressed through the simulation itself, not any single emergent story



Conflict, Complexity & Drama

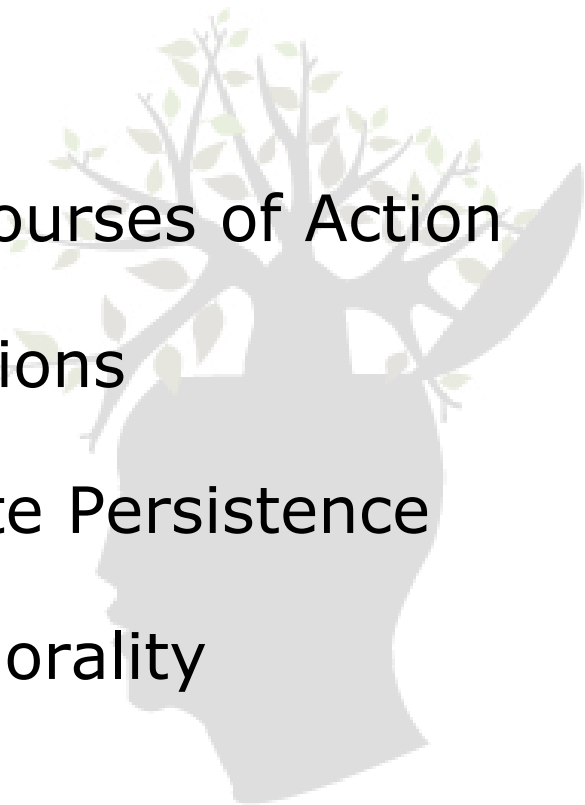
"If it bleeds, it leads." – Journalist Adage





Story Engine

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





Personalities

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

King Æthelred of Wessex 27

of Wessex

Anglo-Saxon

Catholic

Reigning in Winchester, Wessex

12	(30)	69.1
3	(17)	30.0
6	(21)	15.0
6	(26)	0.0
5	(25)	

Titles:

Zealous

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

Monthly Piety: +1.00 (monthly)

Martial: +2.00



Opinions

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





AI Actors are Crucial!





Custom Narrative

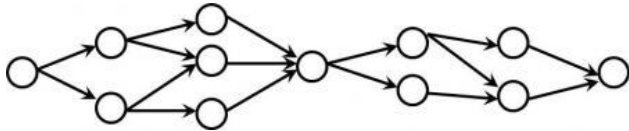
"Life is a dark chain of events."
- Friedrich Nietzsche





Custom Narrative

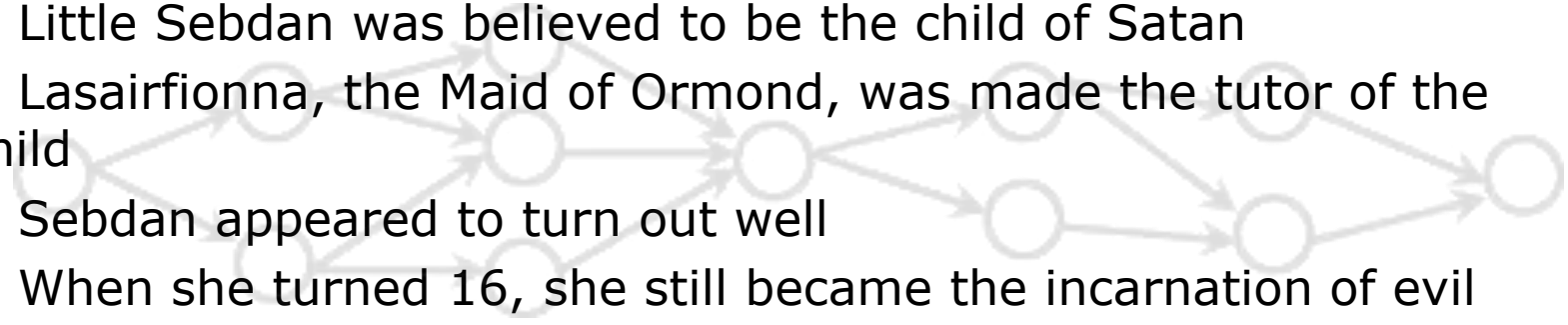
- Starts situationally
- Branching "Events"
- Grounds the Player
- Evocative / Immersive
- AI still "in character"





From Holy Kingdom to Unholy Nightmare

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





Custom Narrative

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

Help me.”



Emergent-Custom Stories

Pros:

- Highly interactive
- Evocative

Cons:

- Not "pure"





Crusader Kings II – The Verdict

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

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

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

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



Future: Contextualized Custom Narrative



Wāli Fadil is brought up from your dungeons and escorted to the temple. Your guards place the noose around his neck while he murmurs a passage with closed eyes from the Mohammedan holy book.

Soon you shall meet your Prophet, friend.

No, perhaps this is a bad idea...



Count Odalrico is brought up from your dungeons and escorted to the temple. As the noose is placed around his neck, he steadies himself and murmurs several passages that you recognize as being from the Christian holy book.

Where is your Blessed Virgin now, Odalrico?

No, perhaps this is a bad idea...



Future: Emergence Detection



- Direct Feedback
Emotional music, animations, etc
- Chronicling
The emergent stories are chronicled
- Reactive World
AI actors react to whole stories
- Story Achievements



Future: Directed Emergence

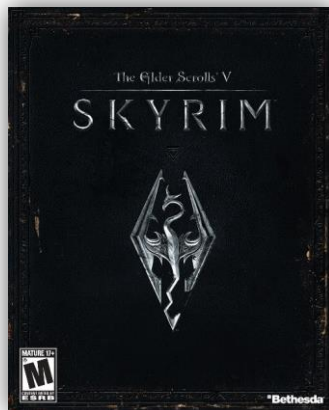




Future: The Massively Singleplayer Game



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Recap: CKII Recipe for Emergent Drama

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

Add salt, sprinkle with custom narrative, and stir!





Takeaway

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

