There is one certain means by which I can be sure never to see my country's ruin: I will die in the last ditch.

William III, King of England

Collaborative History: After Action Reports in *Empire: Total War* and the ways players can re-write history

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The illustration on the cover is a loading screen of *Empire: Total War* developed by Creative Assembly

Abstract

The 21st century has seen a rise in the growth and popularity of the gaming industry. Video games present a unique opportunity to provide individuals with a new form of historical learning as players can interact with history and even form their own version of history. Recently, academics have studied first-person shooters and action/adventure games but strategic video games have received little scholarly attention. An even less studied area is that of After Action Reports (AARs), which are defined as "the recounting of a single game, often in a series of episodes that the author updates as the game is played". AARs are often writer by strategy game players and contain unique narratives regarding counterfactual history.

The following thesis analyses AARs in *Empire: Total War*, a turn-based strategy and real-time tactics video game that is set in the 18th century. The thesis aims to answer the research question: How is the past narratively configured in the 'After Action Reports' of the game *Empire: Total War*? The thesis will apply theories such as historical culture, emergent narrative and imagined communities. Additionally, it will analyse the narrative produced in AARs by means of various narratological tools such as narrator, identity, discourse and plotlines. Prior to the analysis of the AARs, the thesis will study the video game *Empire: Total War* and research how the past is represented in the game. The analysis examines AARs which are from non-modded and modded gameplay separately. Mods are modifications added to the game by players themselves aiming to increase realism and improve the gameplay. The thesis concludes that narrative has a significant effect on the configuration of the past in AARs. AARs with a character-bound narrator develop more distinctive narrative and AARs from modded gameplay create unique types of narratives which include combined narration and interactive narration which adds elements of roleplaying.

Keywords: Popular history, video game, after action report, historical culture, narrative, community, *Empire: Total War*, mods

Foreword

Video games had a pivotal role in motivating me to learn more about history. *Total War: Shogun 2* was probably the most important video game for me. I wrote an extended essay at high school about a battle that shaped Japanese history that I had played in that game. It also led me to appreciate Japanese history and culture which inspired me later to go to Japan to study it. Those six months in Japan proved to me that studying history at an academic level brought me a lot of joy and is one of the main reasons why I chose to do a master's degree in history. All of that led me to write this thesis about a historical video game and how players can narrate their own version of events transpiring in the 1700s.

It is my hope that video games and other forms of popular culture inspire other people to study history and enjoy it as much as I have. Video games and history are two elements of my being and I hope that I can share this passion with others as they read this thesis.

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, dr. Pieter van den Heede for his clarity and critical analysis of my work, but especially for launching my interest in AARs and the unique elements they provide to the gaming community. I would also like to each of the authors for writing their AARs and providing me with an account of their counterfactual history bringing me a lot of joy while reading them.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents and Eva. My parents for their endless support during my studies, the process, and the finalising of my thesis. Eva for pushing me forward, making me strive to do better and keeping me sane.

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Chapter 1: AARs & *Empire: Total War*

1.   Introduction

With an apparent lack of interest in history[1], reading or watching popular history might be a way for future generations to become more involved and to learn about the past.[2] The popularity and success of recent films indicates that people are interested in the past, as demonstrated by the critical and commercial success of films such as *Dunkirk*, *1917* and *The King* all being released to positive reviews. Similarly, TV-shows like *Vikings*, *Band of Brothers* and *The Crown* have been very popular. This popularisation of history provides an incentive for further research into what has potential to further the learning of history.[3] Another sector which has seen a lot of success is the video game industry. In 2020 having over 2.7 billion users and a revenue of more than $165 billion.[4]

In fact, since the 1970s, video games have catered the needs of various communities of gamers. Nowadays, as a video game player, you can immerse yourself into countless other realities and each of these have their own community.[5] In historical video games you can walk the streets of Rome during the Renaissance, storm the beaches in Normandy in June 1944, send explorers to the Americas during the 16th century or choose to conquer the entirety of Europe as Napoleon Bonaparte.

A historical video game is a way for contemporary players to directly engage with history, rather than passively sit in a class or spend time consuming research. Some players further add to the narratives that have been created by literally developing their own in the form of After Action Reports (AAR), which are a common genre in relation to strategy games. AARs can be defined as "the recounting of a single game, often in a series of episodes

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[1] Eric Alterman, "The Decline of Historical Thinking.", The New Yorker, February 4, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-decline-of-historical-thinking.

[2] Kees Ribbens, Historical consciousness in contemporary society. Popular historical culture in the Netherlands, 1945-2000 (Utrecht: Utrecht University Repository, 2002).

[3] Jerome de Groot, Consuming history: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture. Routledge, 2016.

[4] Omri Wallach, "The History of the Gaming Industry in One Chart," World Economic Forum, November 27, 2020, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/11/gaming-games-consels-xbox-play-station-fun/.

[5] Carly Kocurek, "Community," in The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies (New York; London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 364-72, 365.

that the author updates as the game is played".[6] This is illustrated below in Figure 1 Yet, as shown in Figure 1.[7] the AARs are not diary entries which are simply to be read. On the
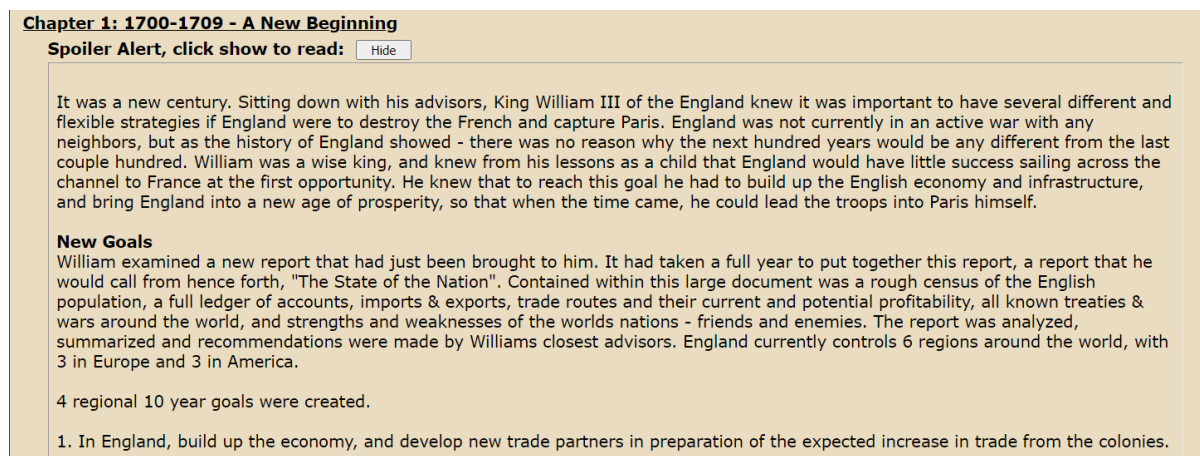

Figure 1

forms, other players will react and even suggest or question the actions of the author as illustrated in Figure 2.[8]
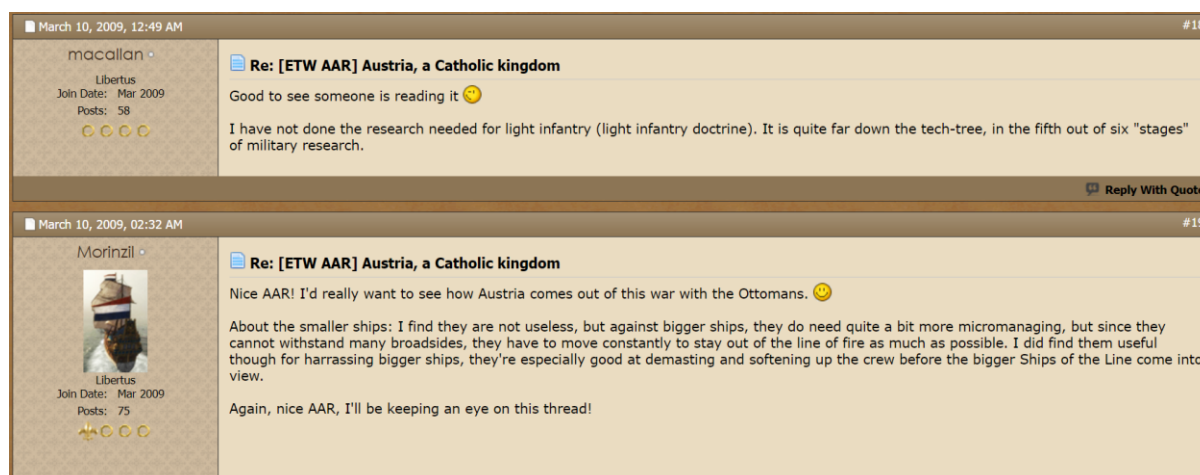
Figure 2

With most of the current research analysing shooter and action series such as *Call of Duty* and *Assassin's Creed*, the strategy genre has been studied to a lesser extent. In this genre, the most significantly studied game is *Civilisation* and then some studies on the games by Paradox Interactive, with the *Total War*-series (Creative Assembly, 2000-present) studied the

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[6] Tom Apperley, "Counterfactual Communities: Strategy Games, Paratexts and the Player's Experience of History," Open Library of Humanities 4, no. 1 (2018), https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.286, 13.

[7] Samsmithnz. "[ETW AAR] Great Britain Expands the Empire (COMPLETED)." Accessed February 01, 2022. https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?276553-ETW-AAR-Great-Britain-Expands-the-Empire-(COMPLETED).

[8] Morinzil. "[ETW AAR] Austria, a Catholic kingdom – FINISHED!" Accessed February 01, 2022. https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?232908-ETW-AAR-Austria-a-Catholic-kingdom-FINISHED!

least. *Empire: Total War* is a turn-based strategy and real-time tactics video game and is set in the 18th century. The player must pick a faction and the aim is to achieve domination over the known world through military force, diplomacy, espionage, and economics, or a combination of them. In the game you are free to create your own story, be it as Great Britain, the Ottomans, or the Maratha Confederacy. The choice of faction and path taken leads to every person having a unique playthrough. This is reflected in AARs as no two AARs are alike. The analysis will broaden the research done into AARs which are understudied. Additionally, some *Empire: Total War* AARs include the use of "mods" which are modifications to the game that enhance both the gameplay and the Artificial Intelligence, by including new units, graphical, sound and gameplay features.[9]

2.   Research Question & Sub Questions.

Analysing how the narrative was constructed following historical events has always been of interest to professional scholars, yet nowadays, as people feel that interest in history is in decline, perhaps history should become more 'mainstream'[10]. According to historian Jerome de Groot, films, TV-series and games should not viewed as marginal to historical culture but should be established as true practices of historical awareness, comprehension and narrative.[11] Historical culture is therefore potentially the way in which contemporary history can be brought to the fore. Grever and Adriaansen define historical culture as "people's relationships to the past".[12] This definition can equally be important for narratives that are produced in, and based upon, so from, historical video games.

Kapell and Elliott conclude their book about digital games and the simulation of history by saying that "...a narrative of the past— once the purview mainly of professional historians—is now also available to everyone who wishes to play with it.".[13] Games like Assassin's Creed, Age of Empires and Europa Universalis have further increased people's interest in history. While some of these have been researched in depth, one which has not is the Total War franchise. While Burgess and Jones have examined narrative in various Total

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[9] DarthMod Productions, "Darthmod Empire for Empire: Total War," Mod DB, 2009, https://www.moddb.com/mods/darthmod-empire.
[10] Alterman, "The Decline of Historical Thinking."
[11] Jerome de Groot, "Introduction: Perverting History," in Remaking History the Past in Contemporary Historical Fictions (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-10, 6.
[12] Maria Grever and Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, "Historical Culture: A Concept Revisited," in Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education (London, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 73-89, 73.
[13] Matthew Wilhelm Kapell and Andrew B Elliott, Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History (New York, New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 312., 367.

War games, they only focused on one aspect of the game which in fact lacks any involvement of the gaming community. While their research focused on co-creation between the developer and the player, it did not look at the various narratological elements produced by players.[14] Therefore, *Empire: Total War*, will be an added innovation in the research of AARs, as there is little research in the analysis of the unique narratives written in player AARs. The thesis will also look into how and if mods change the narrative in AARs.

This leads to the following research question:

How is the past narratively configured in the 'After Action Reports' of the game *Empire: Total War*?

Additionally, to further give context and answer the research question, the following sub questions will be analysed:

Question 1: How is the past represented in the game *Empire: Total War?*

Question 2: How do players use narratological tools to create counterfactual history in their non-modded AARs?

Question 3: How do players use narratological tools to create counterfactual history in their modded AARs?

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[14] Jacqueline Burgess and Christian Jones, "Exploring Emergent Co-Creative Narrative in a Strategy Video Game Brand," Journal of Media Business Studies, 2021, pp. 1-18, https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2021.1959705, 12.

3.   Literature Review

3.1   Video Games & (Historical) Narrative.

Narrative in video games has been a topic of contention as some scholars believed narrative to be unimportant while others speculated that narrative could be the main attraction of video games. Majewski believes that the study of narrative in video games should be analysed in depth, but ultimately questions how genre would impact narrative.[15] Playable stories allow for a player to involve themselves in an interactive narrative where their active participation is rewarded with further immersion.[16]

Through the past decades, literary/video game scholars have split into two different theoretical fields, narratology, and ludology. While narratology, the study of narratives, and ludology, the study of games or gameplay, are the pillars of video game study they are embroiled in a disharmonious relationship.[17] Despite the vast range of narratives, in video games narrative can be overlooked by the player. Still, this should not discredit the relevance of narrative and even when it is not central to the game, narrative adds to the story structure which is a heavily researched area.[18] Arsenault states that research should look into the actions of the player further. Players create stories and develop characters in the world of video games as the game becomes their own story in which 'their' actions lead to further progress.[19] Therefore, an analysis of AARs will shed more light into how people engage with the history in games, and by extension, how they engage with game narratives more broadly.

Not only the gameplay, but also the player's actions are key to forming the narrative of the AAR. This led to the development of ludology, which aims to clarify games, game research and gameplay.[20] As ludology came after narratology, the supposed disharmony emerged after a conference where the ludologists wanted to focus on the mechanics whereas the narratologists wanted a focus on games as a storytelling medium/format. Aarseth believes that the feud between the two fields was hyperinflated and that it therefore is a

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[15] Jakub Majewski, "Theorising video game narrative." Bond University (2003), pp: 1-56, 52.
[16] Marie-Laure Ryan, "From Narrative Games to Playable Stories: Toward a Poetics of Interactive Narrative," StoryWorlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies 1, no. 1 (2009): pp. 43-59, https://doi.org/10.1353/stw.0.0003, 45.
[17] Ibid, 221-222.
[18] Dominic Arsenault, "Narratology," in The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies (New York; London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 475-483, 480.
[19] Ibid, 182.
[20] Espen Aarseth, "Ludology," in The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies (New York; London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 185-189, 186.

misunderstanding, as the two fields go hand-in-hand. Gameplay and narrative overlap and one can therefore not overshadow the other. Many ludologists apply narratology and Aarseth believes that the use of narrative is the best way to understand games and their stories.[21]

Within videogames, the combination of narrative and ludology create the ludonarrative. However, according to historian Adam Chapman, ludonarrative cannot be explained without first defining the framing narrative. Framing narrative is a concept in which narrative is layered, a game provides said narrative by pre-scripted events, cutscenes (non-interactive sequences) or set pieces. Produced by the game developer, the framing narrative are essential to in-game player progression. Additionally, the developer provides framing goals which, in combination with different narrative fragments, like a cutscene, contextualise the game narrative and provide direction for the framing of the ludonarrative.[22] Ludonarrative, which is the gameplay narrative created by the decisions of the player is equally affected by the decisions of the developer. Chapman hence states that ludonarrative should also comprise of both *lexia* and *framing controls.* Lexia are a combination of various elements within a game which interact with each other throughout the gameplay due to the actions of the player. The construction of the player's ludonarrative therefore depends on lexia, like agents, architecture, actions etc. A more concrete example of this would be a skill tree. [23] Framing controls are the rules which limit and govern the player's interaction with lexia within the game. They provide structure and logical gameplay and can be as simple as the price of certain units, or the view a player has over the territory he owns.[24]

Future narrative (henceforth FN) is a term defined by Christoph Bode. FN, according to Bode is a new type of narrative. At the core of FN is the idea that "every now contains a multitude of possible continuations".[25] FN breaks away from the so-called 'past narratives' which created meaning and brought understanding of past events. To contrast these past narratives, FN explains narrative through nodal situations - nodes which are situations allowing for more than one continuation. Such nodes are everywhere, in films, books and games and can be fictional or non-fictional.[26] Furthermore, most FNs need an individual for

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[21] Ibid, 187.
[22] Ibid., ch 5
[23] Chapman, Digital Games as History, ch 5.
[24] Ibid, ch 5.
[25] Christoph Bode, Rainer Dietrich, and Jeffrey Kranhold, Future Narratives Theory, Poetics, and Media-Historical Moment (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 1.
[26] Ibid, 1-2.

each continuation, as an individual making different choices at nodal situations allows the narrative to go in different directions.[27] In summary, a FN needs one node and at least two continuations, but above all it needs the player. Nodal situations are similar to the lexia presented by Chapman. Nodes and lexia allow a player to create further continuations and by interacting with them, a player therefore creates a FN.

In his book *Digital Games as History*, Adam Chapman examines the engagement of history through video games and why they are so important. Chapman covers the interaction between digital games and history. He subdivides the activities of players into two categories, *doing* and *reading*. *Doing* history is the interaction of the player with the game as they play, creating the narrative for themselves.. Whereas *reading* is when the player interacts and consumes history through reading and watching in a video game, much like when reading a textbook.[28] These terms can be translated as the production and reception of history. Ordinarily, only historians would produce or do history and in so doing, produce their own definitive narrative which the public can then receive or read. The combination of producing and receiving historical narrative is defined as the *(hi)story-play-space.*[29] In the case of this thesis, writing an AAR would be an extension of *doing* history, whereas analysing and reading an AAR would equally be *reading* history.

Each video game has limitations due to the narration events created by the developer. Due to such limits, the conflict between what the player is permitted to do and what they want to do or can choose to do, is always present in the representation of the (hi)story-play-spaces. Furthermore, historical video games also allow for shared authorship as the player's actions combined with the developer produce historical narratives.[30] The core argument which Chapman puts forward in chapter 2 is that historical video games go beyond simple representation. The (hi)story-play-space, where a player has the ability of *doing* history, allows the games to become a system for historical practice, which Chapman calls *historying*. While historying, players can create different narratives as each game provides different opportunities and therefore the player is inherently producing narrative multiplicity.[31]

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[27] Ibid, 17.
[28] Adam Chapman, Digital Games as History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice (New York, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), ch 2.
[29] Ibid., ch 2.
[30] Ibid., ch 2.
[31] Ibid., ch 2.

The authors of Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction have divided storytelling in videogames into three separate categories; who, the actors, what, the story of the game, and the how or why, the experience of the player.[32] This third category is the one which portrays the player's own story and one which ties in with AARs. While this section of the book analyses the reception of the narrative by using the horror game *Resident Evil*, the same theory can be applied to historical video games. Reception theory, which allows the researcher to see how the player interacts with the game narrative is used in this case. Players read a majority of their story within a game and therefore context knowledge is important. Player knowledge should cover the genre of the game, the inspiration of the game and how to move on, or cheat once they get stuck.[33] In contrast to a horror game player, where they must just understand the premise, an *Empire: Total War* player would ideally have knowledge of grand strategy games, the time period which the game covers, for cultural context, and finally, knowledge of what groups or forums to visit to help them get past obstacles or to optimise their gameplay. This knowledge would also be foundational in the development of their AARs.

The aforementioned *historying*, is when games have a structure that allows the player to delve into their own narrative agency and also allow that player to produce or write historical narrative.[34] By combining the framing controls and lexia which provide a boundary in the structure of the game, it allows all players, regardless of their expertise or experience, to write their narrative as the structure ensures an overall coherence. Chapman states that strategy games are the best suited for counterfactual historying as they have the most complex and adaptable narrative process. These games allow a player to become a player-historian.[35] Such strategy games are examples of digital games that appear to be capable of providing both intricate representations and chances for historical practice in popular culture due to their ability to provide access to counterfactual historying. Many gamers cherish these historical traits, as seen by the fervent meta discussion found in various forums and chatrooms. [36]

In contrast to historying, storyplaying uses nodal situations, rather than lexia and framing controls as a method to analyse player narrative. As many video games fall into the FN

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[32]Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Tosca, Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction (New York, New York: Routledge, 2020), 205.
[33] Ibid, 217.
[34] Chapman, Digital Games as History, ch 9.
[35] Ibid., ch 9.
[36] Chapman, Digital Games as History., ch 9.

category Domsch applies FN in a study which analyses such video games, gameplay and the link between creator and user.[37] Domsch defines storyplaying as the combination of gameplay and the reading of narrative. One of the main reasons why the focus for research lies on video games is due to its ability to provide a player with agency which allows them to play the story for much longer. Additionally, video games have a large space for play as well as bound rules which due to the development of video games has made them more accessible and varied. Player experiences with video games are therefore progressive and often unique as the narrative changes during each gameplay.[38]

3.2 (Historical) Games & Community Engagement.

Over the past two decades, there has also been an increasing amount of research into game communities. As the game industry grew, so did the desire for improved communication among video game communities. Developments in instant messaging and software programs led to platforms like Discord which now has over 250 million users.[39] On Discord players are part of groups which sometimes are even established by the game manufacturer. Through this system, some of the communities even aid in the production of games, by way of co-development as players continuously give feedback through their experience of the game.[40] Apperley examines a historical grand strategy game from the perspective of player experience. He highlights that Sid Meier's *Civilisation IV* has been researched by many scholars and analysed the scholarly work by Galloway, Wark and Chapman before going into detail on the games from Paradox Interactive, *Europa Universalis II* and *Victoria: Empire Under the Sun*.[41] Here Apperley stresses the importance of the gaming community as they also push individual players to set goals in their games. Despite the relative weakness of some factions in *Europa Universalis* and *Victoria*, the player community sets goals for a 'community negotiated win', which emphasises the input from other players. One example of a goal is to only occupy regions that were historically colonised by that faction.[42] Before defining player narrative in the Paradox games, Apperley already puts forward the importance of the community and how they add to the framing

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[37] Sebastian Domsch, Storyplaying: Agency and Narrative in Video Games (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 2.
[38] Ibid, 5.
[39] Boris Bankov. "The Impact of Social Media on Video Game Communities and the Gaming Industry." Varna: University of Economics in Varna (2019): p-7.
[40] Thierry Burger-Helmchen and Patrick Cohendet, "User Communities and Social Software in the Video Game Industry," Long Range Planning 44, no. 5-6 (2011): pp. 317-343, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2011.09.003, 323.
[41] Apperley, Counterfactual Communities, 7.
[42] Ibid., 9.

narrative of players. Forums, chat rooms and internet sites provide the players with a community and the aforementioned goals. Players also post AARs, which build on the counterfactual imagination of players. AARs are a show of both game and literary power, which players even illustrate with screenshots of maps and characters during gameplay. The game invites players to define their own objectives, bridging the gap between their counterfactual imagination and historical portrayal. In other circumstances, AARs are focused on the previously specified goals, and hence try to faithfully reconstruct the past.[43]

Another author who researches AARs is Mukherjee. Mukherjee analyses the concept of 'Empire' in video games, taking *Empire: Total War* as one of the examples. He lays out the campaign objectives for Britain which include capturing areas which Britain held at the end of the 17th century.[44] Key elements of the game, the diplomacy, geography, and even spying are available to the player to construct their own narrative. According to Mukherjee, historical video game AARs create a counter historical account. Such an alternative history is exemplified by a player who decided to conquer Europe as the Barbary States thereby converting Europe to Islam as a pirate faction. Personal choices in gameplay lead to interesting AARs which can even lead to reverse-colonisation as players choose to counter the official history.[45] Mukherjee defines such actions as counter-narrative which is similar to Apperley's counterfactual narrative.

In conclusion, previous research on video games and narrative has covered a wide variety of different games and various types of narrative. Chapman laid a foundation for the research on historical game narrative as in his research he proposes three approaches, (hi)story-play-space, historical ludonarrative, and historying. However, further research on narrative and ludology, and future narrative can bring forward different scopes with which to analyse video games. Domsch uses the FN typology of Bode to analyse video games and defines storyplaying. Despite the abundance of research on narrative in video games, there is little work which focuses on the AARs of players. Apperley and Mukherjee both research AARs, but their research is limited to other games or a postcolonial perspective. In addition to the AARs, the aspect of a player community is also under-researched and adds another compelling dimension to the thesis. The combination of video games, historical narrative, and

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[43] Ibid., 12-14.
[44] Souvik Mukherjee, Videogames and Postcolonialism: Empire Plays Back (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 30.
[45] Ibid., 39.

community engagement paves the way to the research question posed in the introduction as it aims to address and fill these gaps in the research. By analysing AARs from the game *Empire: Total War*, this research will further the study of collaborative storytelling.

4. Theoretical Concepts

4.1 Historical Culture

As shown in the literature review, the conception of the past in this research does not correlate directly with the traditional idea of historical knowledge. Due to this, a more fitting term for the following research is, as defined by Grever and Adriaansen, that of historical culture, the relationship of individuals with the past. Their definition of historical culture is inclusive and divided into three separate domains. Firstly, the historical narratives and performances of the past. This domain can include both academic and popular conceptions of the past, such as historical schoolbooks, stories, media, and re-enactments. Secondly, the mnemonic infrastructures which rely on the past for their definition they are material and immaterial, for example museums, archives, and commemorations. Finally, the conception of history, which is influenced by the underlying ideas about what constitutes time, history, and historical consciousness and how they relate to one another. [46] Contemporary history benefits from historical culture and this term will be useful for finding how video games can influence historical configuration. As the three domains of historical culture interact with each other, each will be important in the following analysis. Video games are a product of a material mnemonic infrastructure, Creative Assembly The video game becomes the historical configuration and narratives which are produced in the games influence the conception of history.

4.2 Emergent Narrative

For the current research, emergent narrative, rather than co-creative narrative, will provide a better underlying explanation for the type of narratives which players will produce. Jenkins pointed out that video games can utilise multiple types of narrative architectures, emergent narrative offers players the tools to create their own narrative.[47] While Jenkins uses *The Sims* (Maxis, 2000-present), emergent narrative is directly applicable to the type of

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[46] Maria Grever and Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, "Historical Culture: A Concept Revisited," in Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education (London, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 73-89, 84.
[47] Henry Jenkins, "Game design as narrative architecture." Computer 44, no. 3 (2004): pp. 118-130, 129.

narrative which is present in *Empire: Total War*. Louchart et al., state that emergent narrative develops interactive narratives which come from players, characters and environments that interact with each other.[48] Interactive emergent narrative could potentially occur in the instances where players collaborate with the author of AARs and consequently produce a new narrative. As emergent narratives need an author to create a more extensive story, AARs are an ideal tool to research emergent narratives.

4.3   Imagined Communities

The AARs which both Apperley and Mukherjee analyse are player reports that are typically posted on forums. For players, a website which has a forum dedicated to their game can create an environment which allows them to feel accepted and welcome to post AARs, questions about the games, reviews etc. These websites become a community as players engage and get to know each other. Anderson's definition of an imagined community describes such a player community accurately. It is an imagined community due to each of the members believing in their community while acknowledging that they do not know a large part of the community they are in. Rather than inventing a nation, they invent this community which believes in the same things, in this case, the game or series of games they play.[49] The *Total War* community will be part of the research when the AARs will be analysed as the players in the forum are part of that community. Their interactions with each other stem from their feeling of community with each other.

5.   Innovative Aspects

Historical game studies are a more recent field of study which adds to the relevance of the research. While there are already seminal works and renowned scholars which have paved the way for research in this area, the majority of the research covers gameplay and not the creation of AARs during and after gameplay. The thesis will cover the game *Empire: Total War*. This game has been chosen because of the limited scope of research that has covered it and the associated AARs. The field of historical game studies covers a huge amount of game genres, ranging from first-person-shooters, to adventure role playing games, grand strategy. These genres are then studied by analysing the way games relate to or represent the past, how

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[48] Sandy Louchart , Michael Kriegel, Rui Figueiredo, and Ana Paiva. "Authoring Emergent Narrative-based Games." J. Game Dev. 3, no. 1 (2008): pp. 19-37, 33.
[49] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 2016), 6.

historical game players practice history in the form of modding, collective memory and games and much more.[50] .

In studying player data in the form of AARs, the thesis will be able to further analyse how AARs affect the conception of history as well as how players create counterfactual history. The choice of source will also further diversify the literature which focuses on AARs as it is a relatively small group of researchers which have looked at the combination of AARs and *Total War*. With the importance of digitisation and the apparent lack of interest in history, the analysis of empirical data of online primary sources will lay the groundwork for further analysis into the *Total War* genre and mods to diversify future research.

6.   Sources: Empire: Total War AARs

The primary sources which will be used for the empirical analysis of this research are after action reports (AARs) written for *Empire: Total War* gameplay. There are currently dozens of threads of AARs available online for this game. I have chosen to study the AARs for *Empire: Total War* published on the website 'Total War Center' which has more than twenty different AARs from different authors. 'Total War Center' is one of the largest and oldest Total War fan sites on the internet, spanning back to the first *Total War* game releasing in 2000.[51] The website has AARs from various other *Total War* games and has AARs which use a modded game. I will use all 23 AARs available on the forum which are listed under the "Finished AAR Index".[52] Other AARs not selected will be used as further background for the study. This method is both the most efficient and cost-effective as the selection of data for graduate thesis needs a cut-off point, as some AARs can reach up to 30 chapters. This choice has both advantages and disadvantages. A first advantage is that the primary source is readily available online. Therefore, there will be no delay in gaining access to the source and analysis can start immediately. However, this also creates an obstacle, as AARs can amount to a lot of data as campaigns can span over the course of several weeks, sometimes with daily updates. Secondly, due to the choice of the website and covering each of the AARs, there will be no bias as to which source was selected. The choice will cover each AAR in equal detail, no

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[50] Adam Chapman, Anna Foka, and Jonathan Westin, "Introduction: What Is Historical Game Studies?," Rethinking History 21, no. 3 (2016): pp. 358-371, https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2016.1256638, 361.
[51] TWC Wiki. "Total War Center." Total War Center - TWC Wiki. Accessed June 26, 2022. https://wiki.twcenter.net/index.php?title=Total_War_Center#A_Brief_History.
[52] Total War Center "Finished AAR Index", , accessed June 21, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?254090-Finished-AAR-Index.

matter the length, the amount of people upvoted it in polls, or how many responses it got. Thirdly, being able to use such content allows for a direct interpretation as the source is untouched which is a benefit of using a primary source. However, by relying on these reports there is sole reliance on the interpretation and knowledge of the author of the source. For this reason, the second chapter will go in depth into the game. Another disadvantage of simply picking this website out of convenience is that it automatically excludes all other websites. Therefore, all the data which will be analysed from these AARs will generalise all *Empire: Total War* AARs.

7.   Methodology: Qualitative Narrative Analysis

The overarching framework will be a qualitative case study analysis. By using data which has been produced by others, specifically the players and writers of AARs, the type of research strategy employed is desk research.[53] Due to the scope of the thesis, desk research will allow for a systematic approach to the large number of sources available.

The analysis of the narrative will be done by using the principles set by Chapman (Chapter 5), of *Digital Games as History*. By analysing both the framing narrative and the lexia of *Empire: Total War* AARs, this thesis will be able to present new information about the outcome of players' own created history.

In order to analyse the various narratological tools used in AARs, this section will define narrator, identity and discourse which will be present in each of the AARs. Bal defines the narrator in two separate categories. Firstly, a narrator who narrates from their perspective as "I", therefore in clear reference to themselves, is a character bound narrator. Secondly, an external narrator, which is when the narrator never refers to themselves and only speaks of others, which will be referred to as the omniscient narrator.[54] Identity is complex and evolving constantly as it is both how people perceive someone as well as how they perceive themselves.[55] Hall states that identity is not fixed, but it grows, connected to the way in which individuals interact with others, history, culture, and language.[56] Finally, discourse can

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[53] Sandra Van Thiel, "Desk Research," in Research Methods in Public Administration and Public Management: An Introduction (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 102-117, 102.

[54] Mieke Bal, "The Narrator," in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative, Fourth Edition* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2017), pp. 19-30, 21

[55] Richards Jenkins, *Social Identity*, (London: Routledge, 2004),, 2-4.

[56] Stuart Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (California: Sage Publications Ltd,2012),, 4.

be described as spoken, nonverbal, or textual communication. Discourse is impacted by several elements, the most important of which are culture and identity.[57]

Additionally, Zerubavel's theory of narrative plotlines will be used to analyse the AARs. According to Zerubavel, plotlines are formed by the mental process of emplotment as individuals form storyline narratives of historical events.[58] Zerubavel indicates that these storyline narratives can be formed in different types of plotlines. Such plotlines can be used to analyse the patterns of AARs and whether the collaboration of other players influences them. There are six different plotlines defined by Zerubavel, progress, decline, zigzag, ladders and trees, circles and rhymes and finally, mountains and valleys.[59] To structure the plotlines, Zerubavel uses the terms legato and staccato as indicators of change.[60] These could also help analyse the input in AARs from the readers.

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[57] Stephanie Taylor, "Theories and Common Concerns." In What is Discourse Analysis, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), pp 102-117, 18.
[58] Eviatar Zerubavel, "The Social Shape of the Past," in Time Maps Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 11-36, 13.
[59] Ibid, 14-33.
[60] Ibid, 34-36.

Chapter 2 - Empire: Total War & Narrative

The following chapter will introduce the game of which each of the AARs have been created from. *Empire: Total War* according to the game manual is "an epic strategy, combining turn-based empire building on a vast campaign map and massive 3D real-time battles on land and sea".[61] To allow every reader to fully comprehend each element of the AAR, this chapter is dedicated to contextualising *Empire: Total War*.

The central question of this chapter is: How is the past represented in the game *Empire: Total War*? Firstly, the chapter will introduce the *Total War* game series, then the developers and the historical research done by the team. Thirdly, the game mechanics, ranging from the type of game to the way a player can achieve victory. Fourthly, the historical elements, the lexia created by the developers, and how the player interacts with the lexia. Additionally, this chapter will analyse the various elements left out of the game and the significance of these elements.

1. The Total War Series

Total War is a series of personal computer games developed by game developer Creative Assembly. Released in 2009, *Empire: Total War* was the fifth instalment of the series after *Shogun*, *Medieval*, *Rome* and *Medieval 2*. Since 2009 they have released more games, all feature periods before the 20th century. Additionally, the series has gone into a non-historical direction with the Warhammer trilogy set in the *World of Warhammer*.[62] From spears and crossbows to steam engines and gatling guns, the *Total War* series covers various periods of history to allow a player access to control the future of a Japanese clan, Napoleon's France, or the British Empire. Each of these three examples are different types of classes that the Series are based in. The first, *Fall of the Samurai*, is a Saga class, a standalone title which focuses on a pivotal moment in history which covers only a few years or decades. Then, the Character class, which are standalone follow-ups of the final class, the Era class, such titles follow a notable character, like Napoleon or Attila and aim to add to the story of the Era class. Creative Assembly's main game releases are Era class, they focus on a

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[61] "Empire Total War Manual", Creative Assembly, 2009, 2.
[62] Total War on Steam, accessed June 21, 2022, https://store.steampowered.com/franchise/TotalWar-Official/

whole era in time and therefore have unique technology and features for the players to enjoy.[63]

For *Empire: Total War* Creative Assembly used a new engine that allowed the developers to create completely new codes, increasing the speed, technique and capabilities of the game. A new engine enabled the developers to fix all the quirks and reinvent army movement, diplomacy and naval warfare.[64]

2.   Historical Research by Creative Assembly

On the Total War website, the developers share their aims for historical accuracy. "The term we use in our approach to history and its representation in our games is historical authenticity."[65] To allow players to feel authenticity, the feeling of that age and the actual events, they consult leading historians of the period they are working on. They also do their own research, but they acknowledge the influence of media portrayal as the players also use those as reference. The starting point of each campaign aims to be as historically accurate as possible, especially in relation to arms, armour and tactics, however, as soon as a player makes their first decision the campaign becomes counterfactual history.[66] Much of the research done by the developers at Creative Assembly comes from a team of enthusiastic "armchair historians" people who are keen developer historians, but they are not academic historians. This creates shared authorship between academic historians and the developer historian which occurs again when players create AARs.

Two of the developers of *Empire: Total War* wrote a developer diary for the game. They both worked on historical titles prior to *Empire: Total War* and have interacted with the community on the official forums. Mike Brunton, one of the developers, stated: "In other words, the 18th century sometimes looks rather modern.".[67] He pointed out that the similarities between the 18th century and now inspired him to work on the development of the game. Researching the wars, new inventions and the enlightenment of that era showcased that the period was perfect for *Total War*.[68] According to Brunton, "power projection"

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[63] Creative Assembly, "What's the Difference between the Era, Character and Saga Classes of Total War" Total War, October 22, 2020, https://www.totalwar.com/faq/.

[64] Tim Edwards,Exclusive: It's time to master and command the world, web.archive, last modified August 27, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20080614055214/http://www.computerandvideogames.com/article.php?id=170570

[65] Creative Assembly, "Total War: Historical," Total War, October 22, 2020, https://www.totalwar.com/faq/.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Mike Brunton and Jamie Ferguson, "Dev Diaries: Total War," Dev Diaries (ETW) - Total War Wiki, October 16, 2008, https://wiki.totalwar.com/w/Dev_Diaries_(ETW).html.

[68] Ibid.

became a major element in the 18th century. Therefore, when playing factions like Great Britain and France, the battles you conduct will not only be fought out in the Channel, but also in India and the Americas. Due to the shipping of troops, naval combat became even more important, which is why *Empire: Total War* is the first game with naval combat.[69]

One of the main focus areas of the era and therefore the developers were land battles. Each theatre of war contains various types of factions who have different type of units. Muskets, bayonets and canons are plentiful, but in India the British faced elephants, while the French line infantry faced light skirmishing warfare in the forests of North America. Brunton points out three additional features of the 18th century indicated in his research. The purpose, as well as the context for warfare had changed significantly, as "the concept of a war of ideas – republicanism, liberty, patriotism, tyranny, equality, freedom – had arrived.". Lastly, revolutions were an ever present factor and thus players will even be able to create them themselves. Specifically, the French revolution brought about many military changes which then only strengthened the French military might.[70] Jamie Ferguson, the second developer, indicated that the research showed that the common myth of the slowness of 18th century warfare was untrue. The 18th century was a time of ingenuity and therefore constant change as it was the era of Enlightenment, the agricultural and industrial revolution. The developers aim to bring that forward in *Empire: Total War* in the form of revolutionary gameplay as they force players to invest time into research so they do not fall behind their competitors.[71] However, the game does not include any non-state actors involved in research. Not only technology will affect the way in which the units are recruited. Players will also have to take into account the type of government, the buildings they construct and the local region in order to advance their military capabilities.[72] The research that these developers conducted will allow them to create historically accurate lexia and framing controls for the final product of the game. However, it does represent a significantly simpler version of history.

3.   Game Mechanics

Empire: Total War is a turn-based strategy and real-time tactics game. Simulating the state of the world in the 18th century, in campaign mode, the player faces off against AI factions with elements of a 4X game, meaning exploration, expansion, exploitation and

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[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

extermination. To highlight these individually, firstly, exploration is the least present as much of the map is already revealed. However, there is a fog of war, when foreign terrain and enemy units are being hidden from the player. This means that recklessly sending a small fleet into the Atlantic might lead to them being captured by an enemy faction lying beyond the scope of your vision. Secondly, perhaps the most dominant feature of *Empire: Total War* is expansion, especially as the victory conditions set for each faction are linked to conquering specific regions of the map. For example, as the Prussians, to achieve a long campaign victory Alsace-Lorraine, Denmark and Silesia must be under your control. Similarly, as the Maratha Confederacy the player must unite all of the Indian sub-continent in order to achieve a campaign victory, including Goa and Ceylon owned by the Portuguese and the United Provinces.

Thirdly, exploitation, the aim of the game is to conquer territories, many of which provide the player with resources, extracting resources from their colonies or from trade nodes is the main way for the player to accrue more money. Lastly, extermination, which is also linked to expansion and a large factor of the game as exterminating rival factions will allow a player to have a smoother game. For example, as the Maratha Confederacy it is a smart choice to invade Britain and Portugal as early as possible as those are the two main factions which will look to create additional colonies in India.

Besides the aforementioned long campaign victory which must be achieved by 1799, there is also a short campaign victory which gives the players until 1750 to conquer a specific amount and specified regions. There are two other victory conditions which the game has set for players. One being a prestige victory in which the player must acquire certain regions by 1799, but also on aggregate have the highest prestige of all major factions. As seen in figure 3, prestige is divided into four categories, military, naval, enlightenment and economics, and industry. All four categories can be increased by research, while military and naval can also be increased by winning battles and enlightenment and economics and industry can also be increased by building specific buildings. The more prestige a faction has, the more influence and power it has in diplomacy as well. The final victory condition which a player can choose is world domination, which means that a player must hold 40 regions by 1799, including their starting capital.
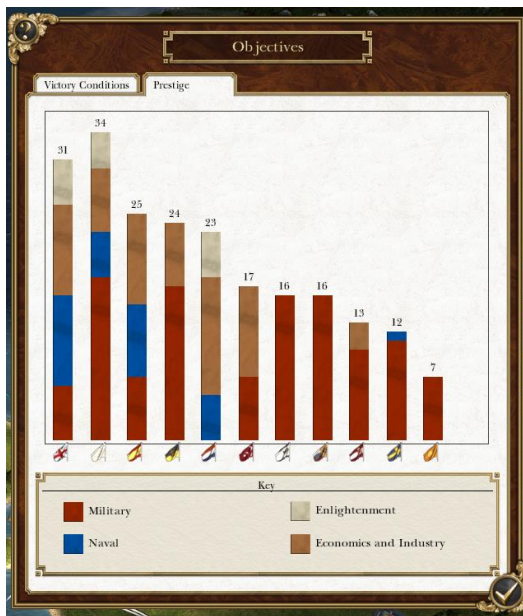
Figure 3[73]

4.   Historical Representation in Empire: Total War

Empire: Total War represents history through various means. Throughout the game the developer provides the player with various historical facts, but even prior to starting the game history is portrayed. Similar to how the player experiences this, starting with the start screen and then the actual campaign, the following subchapters will be ordered accordingly.

4.1.   Campaigns & Introductions & Scenarios

The start screen of *Empire: Total War* provides the player with various choices. Players can choose from three campaigns, various battle scenarios or even battle other players online. The main focus of this thesis will be the grand campaign where players can choose from eleven playable major factions with territories spanning the globe. From the eleven factions, nine are European factions, with only the Maratha Confederacy and the Ottoman Empire being non-European. The Maratha Confederacy is based in the Indian subcontinent where the Dutch are also present in Ceylon. Of the nine European factions, the British, Dutch, French and Spanish have overseas territories in the Americas. The Ottoman Empire has territory in the Middle East, Africa and in Europe bordering Austria and Poland-Lithuania. The focus of the game is clearly Eurocentric, as all but one faction has their capital in Europe. Even Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, is located on the European side

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[73] Each faction their prestige progress is shown in this tab of the game, France is currently ahead of the British player mainly due to their large military capabilities as shown in red.

of the Bosphorus, in Rumelia. As mentioned earlier, each of the factions have specific regions they will need to conquer to achieve their victory objectives. The game aims to replicate history as far as possible, for example, as shown in figure 4 below, some of the regions which a British player will need to win are Bengal, Egypt and Malta. The game also allows the British, French, and Spanish to assimilate their protectorates in the Americas if they conquer specific regions. In the British case, this means that the 13 Colonies become part of the British Empire and therefore never gain independence as the United States. However, if the British faction is destroyed or the regions in the Americas rebel, the United States are formed.

Figure 4[74]

The previous paragraph focused on the campaign objectives of the 'Grand Campaign' which is also the setting for the AARs. The player is also able to play a narrative-driven campaign which is strictly historical. The campaign serves as a tutorial for each of the military, economic and political mechanics of the game. Spaced over three episodes the "Road to Independence" campaign starts in the Americas as the player develops Jamestown, the first English settlement. Then the focus switches to George Washington, who narrates the remaining episodes as you first follow his campaign against the French and then the War of

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[74] The dark green showcases the lands currently held by the British player while the light green is held by their protectorate and the red are the territories that must be captured to achieve victory.

Independence. The other campaign, which came out as a downloadable content pack, also focuses on the Americas, this time on five Native American tribes as they fight for control of the North American territories. Appendix A showcases each of the three campaigns available. Prior to starting any of the campaigns, the player will still receive two separate introductions. First, as shown in Appendix A, the player will receive a description of the nation they will be playing as, usually describing the events leading up to the starting date, such as major conflicts and alliances formed prior to 1700. This sets the scene for that nation, for example, in the case of Great Britain it first gives an overview of the turbulent previous century which means that there are currently internal divisions within the country and that the player should be mindful of its starting regions. Then, once the player enters the campaign map, "The Advisor", see figure 5, will begin a narration which also introduces the neighbouring factions which are important to consider, specifically, who to ally with and those who might go to war with you.

Figure 5[75]

As well as the single-player campaigns, players are also able to fight battles against others in multiplayer. Each player receives a set amount of gold to purchase units to go to battle with. Just as in the campaign, they are able to play land or naval battles, with land battles allowing players to select from a siege battle. Finally, players can choose historical battle scenarios as shown in figure 6. These battle scenarios are based on actual battles that happened during the 18th century, specifically around The War of the Austrian Succession, the Seven Years War and the American Revolution. These battles exemplify Rankean History as there is an emphasis on narrative history and international states.

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[75] The in-game narrator begins with the naval capabilities of the British player and then continues to list the potential diplomatic options which they should pursue.

Figure 6[76]

4.2.   3D Battles & the Campaign Map

A significant reason why *Empire: Total War* is not characterised as a 4X game is due to the real-time 3D battles that take place throughout your campaign. Each of the four previously mentioned battle scenarios can occur during a campaign where the player can choose to manually fight those battles or to auto resolve them. Depending on which faction the player selects, they will start in one of three theatres, America, Europe, or India. Besides these three main theatres of war, there are four water theatres. These each contain a specific resource which can be shipped back to the faction capital for trade. The Coast of Brazil allows the player to gain sugar as a trade resource. The two African water theatres produce ivory for the player and the East Indies produce spices for the player. Each of these resources are linked to the prevalence of that resource to the region. Due to the limitations in the game, the trade nodes only supply a single resource as in the 18th century gold was discovered in Brazil which led to a gold rush.[77] On the campaign map, the player can move around various lexia which are provided by the game. The most important lexia are the units, split into land troops and naval ships. There are also various agents available for the player to use. These agents, gentlemen, rakes and missionaries, serve a faction to help with research, espionage and religious conversion. For non-Western factions, the game introduces isomorphic units, a hashashin or thuggee replaces the rake, Imams and Brahmin replace the missionaries and

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[76] Each battle has a description which introduces the circumstances which led to the battle, when it occurred, who was involved and how it came to happen.

[77] Manuel Cardozo, "The Brazilian Gold Rush," The Americas 3, no. 2 (1946): pp. 137-160, https://doi.org/10.2307/978703.

Eastern Scholars replace the gentlemen. Each of these isomorphic changes are made to make the game more historically accurate.

4.3. Politics, Trade & Diplomacy

Based on history, each faction begins with rulers and governments which existed in 1700. Each ruler, minister and general has character traits ascribed to them in order to replicate the characters which existed over 300 years ago. Each character will define how the faction plays as they affect internal politics, trade and diplomacy. In *Empire: Total War* a faction can be one of three types of Government, an Absolute Monarchy, a Constitutional Monarchy, or a Republic. The player can choose to side with a rebellion in order to change the government type if they successfully take control of the capital with the rebel army. Each type of government will give the player various bonuses, but they could also give disadvantages. The main difference in each of the types is that in an Absolute Monarchy the cabinet will sit for life unless a player chooses to change a minister, while in the other two your ministers could change due to elections. In the long run an Absolute Monarchy will lead to growing unhappiness as the lower classes will clamour for reform due to research, such as "Government by Consent" and the lack of bonuses to increase lower class happiness. The ruler and ministers have a large effect on wealth, public order of the upper and lower class, and trade. The choice of the lower/upper divide adds a political dimension to the game, however, it also generalises and bands together many social groups. Specifically, the lower class, groups together the middle class and lower class, but potentially also includes slaves. As the following paragraph will explain, trade resources which were often produced at plantations worked by slaves are present, yet slavery is not mentioned. Class relations only become a factor when the player does not keep either happy which causes either a lower or upper class revolution.

As described in the previous section, trade in *Empire: Total War* largely depends on the occupation of trade nodes in the water theatres. Each faction is still able to gain trade resources depending on the regions they own. Besides ivory, spices and sugar, a player is also able to trade coffee, cotton, furs, tea and tobacco. For example, furs are available in North America, but also in Northern Europe. Similarly, cotton is available in the Americas, but also in India. Depending on the amount of such resources in circulation, as well as their base value, the in-game world market will calculate the worth of each resource. Players can trade with other factions depending on whether they have neighbouring regions or have trade ports

to ship the resources. Due to the time period, the game has placed a high value on trade which also makes it lucrative for the player and AI to block ports or raid trade routes. Besides trading with other factions, the player is also able to engage in more extensive diplomatic ties with other factions. As shown in figure 7 below, the diplomatic map shows the attitudes the other factions have towards you and your diplomatic status with them. Just as the characters are historically accurate, the game also replicates the then existing alliances and animosity between certain factions. Additionally, factors like religion, type of government and territorial expansion will affect the attitude of factions towards you.

Figure 7[78]

4.4.   Research & Technology

In *Empire: Total War* technology will be a deciding factor for your progress. Technology trees are a common lexia in video games, yet here they are intricately linked with buildings, such as a university, which will allow you to do research and also with constructing the next tier of a building to unlock new technology. The research and

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[78] The green territories are those which the player has good relations with whereas the red have a negative relation with the player.

technology field is split into three separate areas, military, industrial and enlightenment. The military technologies drive the arms race, both increasing the capabilities of land and naval units. Industry helps develop agriculture as well as the profitability of industry. Lastly, the enlightenment technologies increase the wealth of towns and regions, increase the trade capabilities of the faction and bring education to the lower class which then increases public unrest. The various technology trees can be seen in appendix B. Due to the framing controls of the game, the player is only able to research technology in specific buildings and can only upgrade those buildings when researching specific technologies. One example of the limitations of the technology tree in relation to historical accuracy is that all factions, except the Prussians still need to research the first bayonet technology which is historically inaccurate as early in the 17th century, bayonets were already in use.[79] The technology tree is limited to the state as all the player only acts on behalf of the state which also limits the historical accuracy as the focus is solely nationalist.

4.5.   In-game Historical Events

When playing *Empire: Total War* over the course of the campaign events will be triggered when a player reaches a certain year. These are hard-coded events added by the developer historians to add more historical narrative to the game. For example, in 1700 the game will trigger "The Gregorian Calendar" when most Europeans adopted the reforms to the Julian calendar and introduced the leap year. In 1701 it will trigger "Captain Kidd". when the buccaneer William Kidd was brought to justice and hanged on five counts of piracy and murder. Other events, which occur at random, are the births of children of the ruler of the faction. Unlike the historical events, these are not historically accurate as there is no hard-coded timeline for the rulers in the game. For example, this will mean that King William III, will not die in 1702 when he actually died, nor will the throne pass directly to Anne as it is possible that he will have sired another child in the game who will then take the throne. This takes away from the historical accuracy, but as the player is able to change the type of government by overthrowing the Absolute Monarchy, it would have been impossible to hard-code which successor would sit on the throne.

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[79] Bobby Cervantes, "10 Facts about Bayonets," POLITICO, 2012, https://www.politico.com/story/2012/10/10-facts-about-bayonets-082750#:~:text=The%20inventor%20is%20unknown%2C%20but,was%20for%20close%2Dcombat%20fighting.

5.   Empire: Total War - DarthMod

Empire: Total War, DarthMod is one of the most popular mods for the game, with thousands of positive reviews from the game playing community.[80] The main aim of the mod is to improve both the gameplay and the AI, by including new units, graphical, sound and gameplay features.[81] The following are some of the major changes made by the overhaul mod, to increase historical accuracy, player satisfaction and re-playability. On the battlefield, Darthmod makes the following changes. Musket range is increased and depending on the range they will do more damage. Cavalry is made more realistic as their charges will affect morale more quickly, but a wall of bayonets will make short work of a poorly executed charge. Melee is made more realistic and less static than in the regular game. It also increases the regiment sizes to allow for more options. Furthermore, the AI is made smarter and more challenging, diplomacy will be more reasonable, campaign movement will be more strategic and the armies will adapt quicker in battle.[82] Each of these make the game more historically accurate. Yet, as they are mainly technical changes, they do not overhaul the Eurocentric lens of the game.

6.   Conclusion

This chapter aimed to answer how the past is represented in *Empire: Total War*. The developer historians tried to create an accurate representation of the world at the beginning of the 18th century. By combining faction descriptions, introductory narratives and intricate characters present in each faction, the game starts as a relatively accurate historical representation of 1700. However, once a player moves their character, changes a person in government or chooses to go to war with another faction, the game becomes ahistorical.

Empire: Total War aims to bring the player as close to factuality as possible. The inclusion of religion, politics, social class and technological development all give the player a wider range of possibilities, but also inform them of real-world history as many of these elements come with additional information. In-game actual historical events are triggered when the player reaches the year in which they occurred, like the execution of Captain Kidd in 1701. Finally, the chapter explained how DarthMod works as an overhaul mod, adding

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[80] DarthMod Productions, "Darthmod Empire for Empire: Total War," Mod DB, 2009, https://www.moddb.com/mods/darthmod-empire.
[81] Ibid.
[82] TWC Wiki, "Darthmod Empire," DarthMod Empire - TWC Wiki, 2009, https://wiki.twcenter.net/index.php?title=DarthMod_Empire.

lexia to the existing game aiming to make the game more realistic, enjoyable and historically accurate.

Empire: Total War is the configuration of history of which a player will base their conception of history on. For this reason accuracy is important as the narratives produced by the game will affect each player. This chapter showcased the historical configuration produced by the mnemonic infrastructure which is partly accurate, especially at the start of each campaign. Combined with DarthMod the game becomes more accurate and therefore the conception of history of the player will also be more accurate. Finally, the emergent narrative of the game becomes even more intricate as a result of the mod. Prior to the inclusion of the mod, the emergent narrative of each player's gameplay developed from the interaction between the player, the lexia and framing controls in the game created by the developer. With the mod, there is an additional factor which builds on the existing narrative and therefore creates an even more intricate emergent narrative.

Chapter 3 - Non-Modded AARs & Historical Narrative

Every AAR is a unique narrative of a player's campaign as they write about their gameplay from various perspectives, adding in historical facts, or simply describing what they are doing. The gameplay is the key factor as it will drive the creativity of each author to create their own story about the faction or person they play. The preceding chapter was dedicated to contextualising *Empire: Total War*, as the way in which the game presents history will lead to the player their own configuration of history. To provide a full overview, this chapter will specifically analyse ten AARs from gameplay without mods. These authors have played *Empire: Total War* as the game was released, without any modifications. Combined, the non-modded AARs have over 1000 replies in the forums. Per AAR they range from 59 to 178 replies. This chapter will analyse the way in which players narrate their AARs and will aim to answer the following question: How do players use narratological tools to create counterfactual history in their non-modded AARs?

Firstly, this chapter will look into the type of narrator used by the authors and how they use that narration to tell their story. Secondly, the various identities the authors create in their story will be presented. Then, the chapter will analyse the different types of discourse used in the AARs. Lastly, Zerubavel's theory will be used in order to determine whether plotlines can be applied to the AARs.

1.   Narrator

When analysing these ten AARs, the type of narrator used was equally split. Five used a character-bound narrator and five used an omniscient narrator. There are two types of character-bound narrator, an individual in the story and one where the player is also the narrator. The former, which authors 'Obadiah Hakeswill', 'cartel' and 'Zhangir' use in their AAR are centred around certain individuals who are part of the faction chosen by the player. Each of them have a different background and allow the player to narrate a story from a unique perspective, a soldier, courtier or a nobleman. The format in which each of these characters write their story also differs. 'Obadiah Hakeswill' uses his character, the soldier, to bring forward the experience of battles through the eyes of a common soldier. This soldier tells his story throughout the AAR and allows the reader to undergo the same experience. For example, they write: "I have told of every battle I have fought in or watched from the line, as

has the original holder of this journal".[83] On the other hand, 'Zhangir', uses a newspaper format where the main protagonist narrates his story.

> 1700 year from the Birth of Christ.
> 14th of May.
>
> "Die Wien Presse" is officially opened by its patron Moritz von Amerling. Readers from all continents and lands, able to read and write seek to enlighten themselves with the new paper, journal of our lovely Vienna.
>
> May I remind the shortmemoried or careless, unpatriotic people, that today we are in the Archdutchy of Austria, ruled by His Imperial Highness, Leopold I, King of the Romans, King of Bohemia, King of Hungary and the Holy Roman Emperor, the patron of Arts, Wisdom and a generous donator to this humble paper, journal.

Figure 8[84]

This AAR is introduced by an omniscient narrator, but the majority of the AAR is a character-bound narration. The other two character-bound AARs are those which are narrated by the player themselves. These types of narrators lead to the narrator essentially embodying the ruler of the faction which they have chosen. For example, in the AAR by 'Musthavename' he writes: "Though, I had other things on my mind. Even with no taxes and a full stack in the capital, the Spanish weren't happy being under my rule."[85] By choosing to play as the ruler of the faction, the player has direct oversight of the entire campaign, enabling them to narrate each event, despite being an individual in the campaign. The courtier in the AAR written by user 'cartel' would not be able to plausibly know as much as Sgt. Valenzuela would as the ruler of Spain.

Conversely, an omniscient narrator can narrate all the events occurring throughout the faction without straying from their character. Similarly to the character-bound narration from the ruler's perspective, the most common type of omniscient narrator is one which focuses on the ruler, the government and their generals. This is the case in three of the five AARs with an omniscient narrator. For example, in *Britain. 1700.Civil War.* by 'marquismark' the AAR starts with "This is the story of the reign of George I, the man who incited Civil War and deposed William III, this is the story of Britain in ruins."[86] This sentence sets the scene, but also portrays the type of narration and who will be followed through the story. The other two omniscient AARs both vary in the way that the type of narrator is used. The AAR by

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[83] Obadiah Hakeswill, "The Orange Occupation" Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed February 25, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?277581-ETW-AAR-The-Orange-Occupation, 9.
[84] Zhangir, "Sacrum Romanum Imperium Nationis Germanicæ", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed May 7, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?239228-ETW-AAR-Sacrum-Romanum-Imperium-Nationis-Germanic%E6, 1.
[85] Musthavename, "Rule Brittania - My First Empire Campaign", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed May 7, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?231532-ETW-AAR-Rule-Brittania-My-First-Empire-Campaign-*Complete*, 1.
[86] marquismark "Britain. 1700. Civil War", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed May 7, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?360477-ETW-AAR-Britain-1700-Civil-War, 1.

'Morinzil' is a detailed description of the campaign, following the faction as a whole. For example: "In the Caribbean, an army is still being raised. Due to funding problems the anti-pirate campaign had been delayed for probably a year."[87] This narrator is all-knowing as they even predict when the financial situation would be optimal to start raising an army. Lastly, the AAR by 'samsmithnz' follows the story of a revolutionary, financed by a rich merchant, who aims to take control of the Ottoman empire and conquer the world. The omniscient narrator enables the readers to follow his story and the Ottoman expansion from a bird's eye view.

These first two forms of narrator create the two main types of narration. Throughout the following two chapters both character-bound narration and omniscient narration will be employed by the authors of both non-modded and modded AARs. The use of narration will influence the way in which the author will convey their story and how characters will be present in the story as they will either be the main focus of the story or one of many generals and rulers. The AARs which use a character-bound narrator can opt to portray the people's history, as is the case in *The Orange Occupation*, as it follows the life of a poor militiaman as shown in the figure below. The militiaman states that he went into the army for monetary reasons and that battle is not just glory, but survival. Yet, they also follow the lives of rulers, such as in *Spain's Holy War*. Both types are social history as these AARs allow the author to focus on the interaction of various groups in society.

Many years ago I joined into the first regiment of militia. I was a young man, and looking to make a living. We'd trained most of the time and slept in our gutters: most of us had nowhere to live, we'd joined the militia for housing, but we'd had no such luck. Still, it passed the time and we were getting income. A fair number of us, I included, kept to stealing anyway: we'd keep the money for bribing officers to be favourable (though we soon learned that our meagre wealth wasn't enough for them to so much as give a hopeful glance).

Then came the day when the Stadtholder sent out the news that the Spanish navy had raided our trade routes in the Indian Ocean. We all knew the Spanish navy did not even nearly reach as far, but the government were desperate for an excuse to take back Belgium. They ordered all regiments, including militia, to march south. And so, early in the Summer of 1700, we marched south into Belgium. And we marched on. And on. And on.

And finally, at least three months later, we found ourselves outside Brussels. Our tiny army didn't come close to being able to surround the city, but that didn't matter, because the Spaniards would refuse to sacrifice their cavalry in mere raids.

It was August when they finally decided to attack. We were ready for them and our pike regiment was the first to charge. Our provincial cavalry then charged into what was now the flank of the buckled enemy line. Our line infantry pressed farther. And then it was our turn. I couldn't bring myself to move. Who was it I was going to kill? Would I survive to kill anyone in the first place? How would I survive? I forced myself to march with everyone else. Our regimental sergeant major turned and looked at me, a concerned look on his face.

"This your first, son?"

"Yes." I replied hesitantly.

"It was mine only a year ago, a small attack on a bandit camp." I suddenly saw he himself seemed unsettled by the battle. "In fact, that was my only battle until today. What I recommend is this: try and stay to the back and watch the other soldiers do the fighting."

"Yes. Thank you."

And so I was in the rearmost rank of our unit when the rout began. First it was the armed citizens, then the pikemen and cavalry followed suit as their numbers disintegrated around them.

Figure 9[88]

In contrast, the omniscient AARs are a more traditional type of history, as they focus, most often on the affairs of the state. As the omniscient AARs mainly focus on the rulers and generals of their respective faction, these AARs also allow for the inclusion of political, economic and diplomatic history. The figure below showcases the AAR by 'Majonga', where

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[87] Morinzil, "United Provinces - Concordia res parvae crescunt", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed May 7, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?234860-ETW-AAR-United-Provinces-Concordia-res-parvae-crescunt, 1.

[88] Obadiah Hakeswill, Orange Occupation, 1.

the author writes each chapter in the AAR with specific headings, identifying either the political or military situation in the campaign.

The Confederacy 1707

Political Situation (January - March):

By January 1707, the Confederacy had enjoyed over 4 years of peace with the Mughal Empire. Relations were still poor and the international situation now included Persia and the Ottoman Empire. The Confederacy was stronger than it had ever been. It had a powerful economy bringing over 8000 gold coins a year, a population of almost 15 million. A fledgling Navy and a combined military force of almost 3000 men. A strong nation in the global scale.

Sayyapparaju was the main antagonist for war, supported by Akurdikar, the two argued that now was the time for a renewed war against the failing Mughal Empire. Rawat was against it, he wanted more troops and a stronger diplomatic situation. However the nation had stagnated, attempts to ally with the Ottomans had failed and growth was slowing. A war with the Mughals would stimulate growth, and a victory would bring the Confederacy recognition with the larger European powers. All they needed was Tarabai's support and the Confederacy would have the unity to fight a war. Tarabai consulted the young and ambitious general Roy. Roy supported the idea of going to war, but was not swept up in the euphoria of victory and councilled that the Confederacy would be engaging war with a stronger or at least equal opponent. In late February Tarabai gave her support to the war.

Then began the debate on where to fight. Rawat suggested fighting on the fringe of Mughal territory, Orar and the Circars onto Calcutta. Akurdikar and Roy preferred a more conventional war on the current front line. The rich Narmada Basin lay to the north of Confederacy included some of the territory that had rebelled in 1703. having been returned to the Mughals in the treaty of Mysore. The towns of Ujjain and Nagpur and the city of Ahmedabad formed the heartland of the Mughal Empire. The Council backed a plan for a two pronged strike into the Narmada Valley. Roy and Uppalapati were to combine and work their way up the coast supported by Admiral Tatya Dhekale, their key objective was Surat, the main Mughal garrison south of the Narmada River, and base for the Mughal Navy. Akurdikar and Malwade were to combine forces and assault Nagpur, seizing the upper part of the Narmada Valley. Rawat was to be in overall command, his army held in reserve. On paper it was a solid plan.

Military Situation (April - August):

On the 1st of April 1707, the Confederacy declared War on the Mughal Empire. Persia enacted on it's alliance treaty and declared War on the Confederacy by 8th of April, Mysore chose to remain Neutral. The War began well, Admiral Dhekale was able to trap the majority of the Mughal navy in their port of Surat, Uppalapati and Roy were quick on the uptake and forced marched to Surat reaching it on the evening of the 18th of April. The Confederacy had over 1000 men, the Mughals just under 800. The Confederacy had the chance to wipe out both the Mughal Navy and their main land army in a single day.

Figure 10[89]

2. Identity

Both character-bound narrators who focus on the ruler of the faction allow for the readers to focus on the development of personality of the ruler. In the case of 'Sgt. Valenzuela', the character development is most striking as there are elements of role play as the author simulates conversations between the various lexia provided in the game, such as the king, advisors, ministers and generals. Relatively early on in the campaign the king dies and his brother seizes power, the following excerpt sets the tone for the type of king that Luis will be.

Luis - bring all professional troops home and assemble them into new army's raise more conscript troops to fill the void!

Simon de Castaneta - Excuse me sir! we must not lower the quality of our troops in the area! they are the power of the fist to smite all those who show aggression to the empire and in doing so we may loose foot hold and unable to maintain order!!!

Luis - DO SO AT ONCE if you feel you are unfit to be Lord High Constable of the Army you will do as I say!

Figure 11[90]

King Luis becomes a ruthless King, crushing any rebellion without mercy and conquering lands to secure wealth for himself. 'Musthavename', only uses the King and later

[89] Majonga, "The Maharatha Confederacy", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed May 7, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?306402-ETW-AAR-The-Maharatha-Confederacy, 1.
[90] Sgt. Valenzuela, "Spains Holy War", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed May 7, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?231918-ETW-AAR-Spains-Holy-War, 2.

his heir, Queen Victoria I as the viewpoint of the AAR.[91] As the AAR is very descriptive, there is little added character development, due to it mainly providing a descriptive overview of gameplay choices. On the other hand, the three other character-bound AARs have much more development around each of their respective characters. The AAR with the most replies, *The Orange Occupation*, is one of those. The following excerpt is from the second character which the AAR follows:

> "I now watched propped up by two comrades, but I watched nonetheless as the dragoons mounted and galloped to the edge of the town outside which the battle was being fought. They then dismounted and, marching into fire, took the building where the final enemies waited, and the battle was done."[92]

Symbolically, this battle is in the character's final moments, just as it is the final battle of the AAR. The two soldiers the AAR followed rose through the ranks of the army of the United provinces, from militiamen to veteran *Republic Guards*. Despite all the battles they had won for their faction, the character acknowledges that they are simple soldiers who will not be remembered. Only their General, who led them to victory countless times will be remembered by the historians. His reflections about life also show how much he has changed through the AAR. The character, unnamed, just as the first soldier that the AAR follows, is a continuation of the first soldier who only joined the army to earn money. As the AAR continued, he became accustomed to death, more nationalistic as he conquered territories, and finally content with the life he lived, despite dying in battle. Each of the chapters of his diary are an extension of the identity that he creates around himself and even the second soldier who adds to that diary becomes an extension of himself.[93]

Another AAR with a character-bound narrator is *The Maratha Story* by 'Cartel'. In the AAR 'Jayanthi Sayyapparaju' is the main character, a Minister of War, yet this character chooses to be near the action, at every battle and every siege, this minister of war travels wherever he is needed. Along the road he befriends other characters who become spies or soldiers for his faction.[94] By doing so 'Cartel' creates a backstory for each of the characters in the game, using the lexia to further enhance his story. This backstory is based upon his own

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[91] Musthavename,Rule Brittania, 1.
[92] Obadiah Hakeswill, Orange Occupation, 9.
[93] Ibid., 9.
[94] Cartel, "The Maratha Story", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed May 7, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?246682-ETW-AAR-The-Maratha-Story, 1.

research into the period and locations.[95] Similar to the intricate use of lexia employed by 'Cartel' for character development, 'Zhangir' also makes use of the various characters in the faction to tell his story. In *Sacrum Romanum Imperium Nationis Germanicae*, the main character, Moritz, an Austrian nobleman, runs a journal out of Vienna. In this journal, he reports on the numerous characters, events and battles occurring across Europe. Starting as a gossip tabloid based on personal beliefs, the journal grew to become one of the largest Viennese newspapers also containing exclusive interviews with foreign ambassadors, reports on the progress of the war. It also included state propaganda.[96]

Of the five AARs which used an omniscient narrator, only one user, 'Samsmithnz', created a new character for the AAR. In *The Ottoman Art of War*, the main character, Ahmed is a well-read soldier who knows of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. Throughout the AAR Ahmed employs strategies from the Chinese general, using them to first overthrow the current ruler and then to secure territories for his newly established regime. 'Samsmithnz' writes: "Ahmed's war council was reactivated for the first time in 10 years, and this time the Sultan wouldn't settle until India was completely conquered.".[97] Ahmed's identity develops over the course of the AAR in tandem with quotes from Sun Tzu, each explaining why he undertakes certain actions. When Ahmed grows too old for battle he even assumes a teaching position as he trains one of his generals over the course of two decades, combining his own knowledge and that of Sun Tzu in his teaching.[98]

Just like *The Ottoman Art of War*, the next three omniscient AARs also focus on the rulers and generals of their respective factions. These AARs have used the characters which the starting lexia of the game provided. The most structured and detailed of the two is another AAR by 'Samsmithnz' who this time plays as the British. Each chapter of the AAR spans 10 years, focusing on different characters on different continents. Still, the main focus and all the goals come from the King, or Queens, Victoria I and Anne I following Victoria's death. Every 10 years, following the state of the union, the author describes what the map looks like and what the faction is earning every year. By primarily focusing on the royalty of the faction, the generals only have a small role in the AAR. Each development in the character of the royalties is distinct. Based on the lexia which grant character traits to each individual in

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[95] Ibid.
[96] Zhangir, Nationis Germanicae, 1.
[97] Samsmithnz, "The Ottoman Art of War", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed May 7, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?296350-ETW-AAR-quot-The-Ottoman-Art-Of-War-quot-(Chapter-8-added-9th-Jan), 2.
[98] Ibid., 3.

the game, 'Samsmithnz' creates a more intricate story around each character. For example, in figure x, here Queen Anne I has just taken the throne and has two character traits which diminish her popularity with the lower classes. The author later goes on to use these traits and augments these traits in the AAR by adding stories about her wild parties and lavish dinners which only further enrages the lower classes.[99]
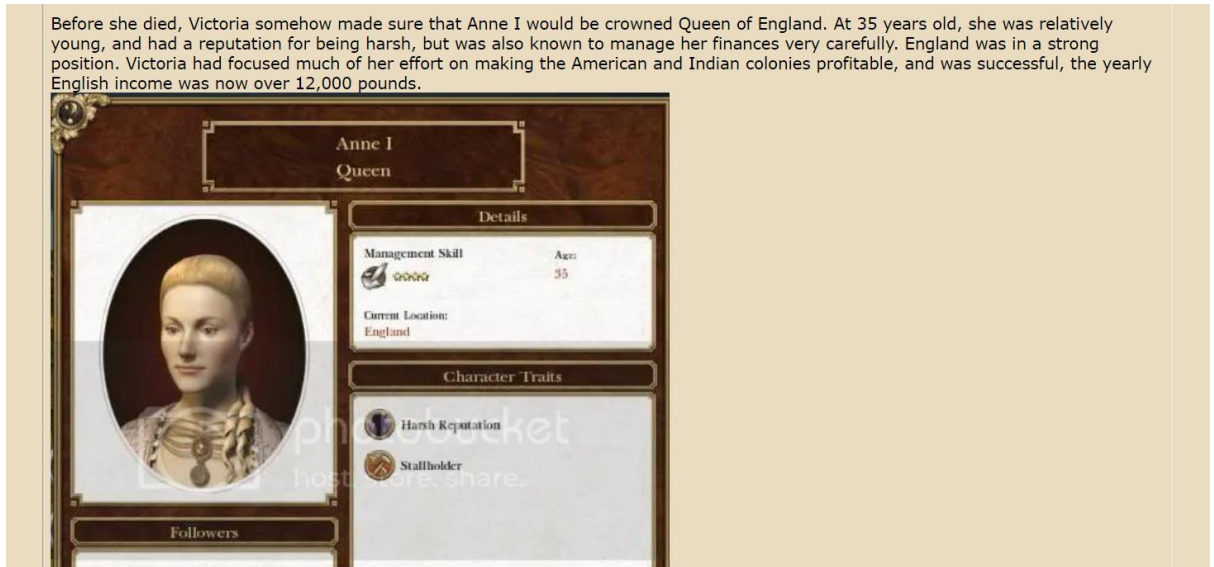

Figure 12[100]

Another AAR which covers the British empire is by 'marquismark'. Just as the previous example, William III sits on the throne, however, the following excerpt quickly changes the status quo: "Victory was secured, the battlefield was Jackson's and more importantly the ascension of George I of England was complete. The civil war was brief but decisive.".[101] Here the author created a civil war to change the starting lexia and start the reign of George I. The author also stated that this was done intentionally as they wanted to create a harder challenge by changing to an absolute monarchy and abandoning all territories except his capital. Completely changing the start of the campaign caused many complications for George I and his generals. Despite facing near bankruptcy and rebellions in Scotland and Ireland, 'marquismark' is able to overcome these challenges.[102] By doing so, the author is able to create an entirely different story despite the initial lexia being the same as those of 'samsmithnz', highlighting the ability of each campaign to be wholly unique.

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[99] Samsmithnz "Great Britain Expands the Empire", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed May 7, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?276553-ETW-AAR-Great-Britain-Expands-the-Empire-(COMPLETED), 3.
[100] Ibid., 2.
[101] Marquismark, Britain. 1700., 1.
[102] Ibid., 1.

The next AAR, *The Maratha Confederacy*, by 'Majonga' focuses on the interactions of the elite, specifically Tarabai the First and her three generals. The initial challenge which Tarabai faces is the Mughal Empire to the North and the divided subcontinent. Only by expansion would she be able to free all her people on the subcontinent. As she overcomes her initial challenges, she then faces an imperial threat, described as follows: "So Tarabai rose to pre-eminence. As leader of the council she became de facto ruler of the Confederacy with more power than she had ever held before. Only the British invasion stood between her and total power.".[103] It would take over a decade to repulse the invaders from their homeland and a second generation of generals, all sons of the initial three that joined the army of the Confederacy. Once the wars for India were over and it was united, all power was in the hands of Tarabai. Only then did the signs of despotism start emerging. Even with the aim of uniting India, it was still a land divided by religion and class, struggling to overcome the differences between neighbours. Additionally, the ever-present European ambition steered the mind of Tarabai into changing the Confederacy into an empire and solidifying her rule as dictator.[104] An interesting addition to identity in this AAR is that some of the enemy generals also had some character development during their war with the Marathas. One of the Mughal rulers was such a fierce opponent that his previous campaigns in Persia, as well as his prowess against the Confederacy, were mentioned in the AAR.

The final AAR is of a much more descriptive nature, perhaps the most like a report. Still, 'Morinzil' creates some identity around the characters that are in the AAR. The main focus of the AAR is on the generals and, rather than the King, the *stadholder* and his government. Despite being dominantly descriptive, the AAR occasionally adds conversations between generals and their infantry and the stadholder with his ministers. Each of these interactions add to the identity of the respective character. The battles are able to create a better understanding of the generals, as they react to the opposition calmly, heroically or aggressively. Each time a battle is waged, other aspects of the general's character come to the fore and their character becomes more comprehensive. Similarly, in each diplomatic conflict which is resolved by the stadholder or when an economic affair needs to be decided by the government, the characters involved are able to show new personality traits.[105] Unlike the previous AARs however, Morinzil does not specifically use the lexia provided in the game to

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[103] Majonga, Maharatha Confederacy, 2.
[104] Ibid., 6.
[105] Morinzil, United Provinces, 1.

create the characters. The story is led by his imagination and not by the specific character traits granted to ministers, generals or the stadholder.

3.   Discourse

In line with the framing goals of *Empire: Total War*, the most common dominant discourse present in each of the AARs is war. As will be shown later, war often becomes intertwined with other discourses due to the prevalence of war throughout each of the AARs. War as a discourse comes up both about their own faction as well as to explain what happens with their allied factions. Sometimes the start of a war somewhere else will trigger the player to change their plans and become engaged on a new front. War discourse can be both positive and negative, the narrator hopes to win the battles and wars they are embroiled in, yet this cannot always be the case. At times, wars lead to the death of a main character or even to domestic struggle when the war is not supported, as shown here: "However as the war dragged on, and the stalemate continued, the anti-war forces grew in strength."[106]. Additionally, when conquering new lands, which is a positive development for the player, the newly conquered territory will often be dissatisfied with their new overlords which may cause rebellions later. When a player is at war, there needs to be more recruitment of units, generals will gain experience and thus more character traits, and conquest will acquire more buildings to develop. Therefore, war also benefits the players narrative as it leads to the inclusion of more lexia.

Politics as a dominant discourse is featured in six AARs, both with a character-bound narrator and omniscient narrator. Politics can be further subdivided into two categories, internal politics and diplomacy. Internal politics plays a smaller role than diplomacy but is still used in order to explain important events, such as elections for the government or interactions between the ruler, generals and the ministers. As mentioned before, the better the war effort goes, the more likely the government will stay in power, but if the war goes badly their popularity decreases. It is vital for the player to therefore only go to war when they are able to succeed, as a new government could completely change the structure of their game as the character traits could be less useful. The AAR by 'marquismark' starts with a civil war described as follows: "Somewhere on this battlefield, on this day, former friends, maybe even family were fighting each other based on political allegiance."[107] This internal political

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[106] Majonga, Maharatha Confederacy, 1.
[107] Marquismark, United Provinces, 1.

struggle was entirely fabricated by the player to enhance their own experience. The struggle also elevates the narrative and combines the dominant discourse with war. As for diplomacy as a political discourse, it features heavily in the AARs where factions also have economics as a sub-dominant discourse as it often aligns with trade and their allies. AARs with trade focused factions, such as the United Provinces and Great Britain also needed diplomacy to maintain their income as war would only lead to the worsening of their trade and therefore lead to bankruptcy. Alliances could also lead to war as shown in the example below: "A messenger arrived with important news, Prussia had declared war against Great Britain. This caused a conflict of interest, and support needed to be publicly declared for one nation or the other.".[108]

Another dominant discourse which is even more linked to war is imperialism. Both AARs which feature imperialistic discourse focus heavily on acquiring land by military means, the first being the British in *Great Britain Expands the Empire*, for example: "As 1709 closed, England had just suffered two critical losses in the colonies... what would become of the English empire...?".[109] The other is the United Provinces in *The Orange Occupation*, as the conquest of India, the Americas and even Ottoman Turkey are major goals in this AAR.[110] Historically, both factions were empires and due to the framing goals of the game in which these factions need to acquire territory outside of Europe, the AARs are guided by the developer-historian to at least come close to a fraction of historical accuracy. However, this can quickly be removed as actions can lead to the loss of such territories or an even larger expansion which did not occur in that faction's history.

Religion as a dominant discourse comes forward in two AARs. In these cases religion is a dominant discourse in relation to the Islamic faith. Firstly, in *The Maratha Confederacy*, as the player aims at reuniting the whole Indian subcontinent and putting an end to the Mughal Empire. 'Majonga' uses this discourse to justify the actions of the Maratha's as the regions which they liberate are actually Hindu, not Muslim, as shown here: "The Islamic Mughals stamp their rule and religion over the predominately Hindu India.".[111] Similarly, 'Sgt. Valenzuela' uses religion as a justification, yet the nature of his justification comes from a historical analogy, as seen in figure 13.

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[108] Samsmithnz, The Ottoman Art of War, 3.
[109] Samsmithnz, Great Britain Expands the Empire, 1.
[110] Hakeswill, The Orange Occupation, 1.
[111] Majonga, The Maratha Confederacy, 1.

Playing as the Spanish, one of the Catholic factions plagued by raiding from barbary pirates, Sgt. Valenzuela often refers to the military campaign to conquer Jerusalem a holy war or crusade. This is an analogy to the crusades in the 11th to 13th century.

The Holy War (The March of Destiny)

In Madrid Luis I King of Spain boards his Ship of the line and sails to Tripoli do give his men a encouragement.
Luis - Men today we stand! We stand with pride! with honor! Our lord and savior! Has commanded us all! All to cleanse the evil the resides within the wall of the holy city of Jerusalem. With every hand with every breath we shall push forwards with great vengeance and crush the Muslims a fake god they believe in!

!Troops Cheers!!!

Figure 13[112]

The final dominant discourse present in the non-modded AARs is gender of the leaders. Due to the lexia of the game, the Maratha faction begins their campaign with a female ruler and 'Majonga' chooses to use the character to add narrative to the story. Throughout the AAR her character develops, gaining additional traits which are added both by the game as well as by 'Majonga' to make her more captivating. The following excerpt is written at the start of the campaign as an introduction of the character in the AAR: "She was a political animal of no compare in India, fuelled by a ruthlessness that shocked even some of her best soldiers. It was not unknown for her political enemies, after they had been crushed and defeated, to be fed to her pet tigers, and it was through this that she became known as the Tiger Empress.".[113]

The non-modded AARs contain a large amount of sub-dominant discourses, with many of them featuring in multiple AARs. What is noticeable, just like with war as a dominant discourse, is that most of the sub-dominant discourses are features in the game which the player needs to accommodate. Some of the features are lexia, such as buildings, armies and trade agreements. Those lexia are tied to the sub-dominant economic discourse. As players aim to expand their territory, they must balance their treasuries to develop their home region, but equally reinforce their armies. In the AARs, five of the authors bring forward economic matters. 'Morinzil' discusses his colonial empire and how it benefits his trade agreements with the European powers as they have a monopoly on the export of spices from the East Indies.[114] The cost of war is also often mentioned in the AARs, 'samsmithnz' playing as the British, even weighed up the benefits of conquering Portugal's territory in India, despite having a trade agreement with them, as they believe the trade resources in Goa will benefit them more.[115] On the contrary, 'Marquismark' faces economic challenges at the start of the AAR due to the choices made to create a more intriguing story. "Finally the

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[112] Sgt. Valenzuela, Spains Holy War, 3.
[113] Majonga, The Maratha Confederacy, 1.
[114] Morinzil, United Provinces 1.
[115] Samsmithnz, Great Britain Expands the Empire, 1.

Secretary to the Treasury reported to King George I that the country would not go bankrupt...for this year at least.".[116]

Gender, imperialism and religion also featured as sub-dominant discourses in three AARs. Similar to these as a dominant discourse, they appear in the AARs, but as a less strong discourse. Mentioned by the author to add context or passingly. 'Cartel' for example, does not go into detail about Tarabai, merely mentioning her in the story as she is the ruler of the faction.[117] Furthermore, 'Zhangir' only once uses religion to add to the AAR, when their Catholic faction fought against a Protestant enemy, the Pope was mentioned to have prayed for victory.[118] Equally, imperialism is mentioned in both the Maratha AARs, but in this instance when speaking of the Western factions trying to conquer India. Class also came forward in three of the AARs. Unlike the previously mentioned discourses, class had not featured as a dominant discourse. Still, class is used on various occasions to either set the stage for the AAR or to explain opposition. In *The Orange Occupation*, the main character is a lower class militiaman who accepts his position in society and even addresses the differences between him and his upper-class general: "Christian van Egmont would be remembered for a thousand years or more. I, however, once dead, would be remembered only by equally nameless soldiers.".[119] This is quite the contrast from the start where the soldier mentions his life as a thief, whereas at this stage in his life he makes an educated statement about the fact that history rarely studies the lower classes.

Interestingly, in two of the character-bound AARs, politics only features as a sub-dominant discourse. In *The Maratha Story*, politics is featured when describing the role of the main character and sometimes the internal politics between the ruler and the ministry is present, it still only features minimally. Moreover in *Sacrum Romanum Imperium Nationis Germanicae*, politics is mentioned occasionally in the journal written by Moritz, once to explain a situation that the main character would normally not be educated about. Then, 'Zhangir' uses a foreign ambassador interview to explain the political situation in Western Europe.[120] 'Zhanghir' also employs nationalism in his AAR, as the main character publishes the journal more often, he gains attention from the government due to Moritz following the course of each of the wars Austria is embroiled in. This goes to the extent that he even publishes government propaganda in the journal, often writing about the strengths of their

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[116] Marquismark, Britain. 1700, 1.
[117] Cartel, The Maratha Story, 1.
[118] Zhanghir, Sacrum Romanum Imperium Nationis Germanicae, 2.
[119] Obadiah Hakeswill, Orange Occupation, 9.
[120] Zhangir, Sacrum Romanum Imperium Nationis Germanicae, 1.

nation, its leaders and the people.[121] 'Obadiah Hakeswill' also employs nationalism as a sub-dominant discourse in his AAR. The main soldier becomes nationalistic during the AAR as he wins battles for the United Provinces, believing in his faction and their right to conquer other lands. For example: "We could win this. A nation which a mere 3 decades ago occupied the tiniest corner of Europe.".[122] *The Orange Occupation* is also one of the only to use orientalism as a sub-dominant discourse. This is done specifically in relation to the Russian and Ottoman factions. When describing the Russians, the author uses "horde", a derogatory term to describe the large number of soldiers they are fighting.[123] The goal of the United Provinces in that AAR is to conquer those non-western factions and also showcases the willingness to overthrow the orient.

4. Plotlines

After analysing the ten non-modded AARs, two types of plotlines were apparent in the AARs. The first is zigzag plotlines, a combination of a rise and fall narrative, and the second mountains and valleys plotlines, a variation in density of events,which occurred in almost all of the sources. To further elaborate on each of the visible plotlines, one AAR will be used as an example for each of the plotlines. Firstly, in *Great Britain Expands the Empire*, as shown in the figure below, 'samsmithnz' sends an army to India as it is one of the goals of the campaign. The start of the India Campaign went well as the army was able to capture Goa as a staging point for the rest of the invasion. Though aiming to capitalise on the victory and continue as a progress plotline, the army is defeated, and the plotline turns into a decline. Many of the AARs feature similar events, unable to overcome the AI or when a character dies of natural causes, they must rethink their strategy and change the narrative accordingly. Zigzag narratives are also to be expected due to the very nature of the game, as a completely progressive plotline would not challenge a player and most likely minimise re-playability.

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[121] Ibid., 1-3.
[122] Obadiah Hakeswill, Orange Occupation, 4.
[123] Ibid., 3.

The Churchill Satara Incident
Meanwhile Churchill decided to march ahead to Satara, just North of Goa with most of his forces. He hoped to ride on the momentum of the recent Portuguese victory. He arrived at Satara...

..and was never seen again. First hand reports were not available, but Churchill's army was completely destroyed. There were no survivors or reports on what happened that day. This was particularly terrible because Churchill was one of the most highly experienced generals in the English army, that army contained over 50% of the English crack special forces, and Goa was effectively undefended.

Figure 14[124]

The second plotline is that of mountains and valleys, as shown in the figure from *The Maratha Confederacy* below. 'Majonga' structures the AAR by alternating between "Political Situation" and "Military Situation" in each chapter, however, as shown below the chapters vary significantly in quantity. Some years will have no military advances whereas some will have multiple battles in a short span of time. Similarly, other AARs also have denser narrative in certain chapters, due to being involved in a large number of wars or having to deal with a vast amount of different territories. This will lead to some years or chapters of the AAR standing out more than other uneventful ones. On account of the game being unable to constantly have the AI oppose or interact with the player, it would be nearly impossible for the narrative to consistently be eventful.

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[124] Samsmithnz, Great Britain Expands the Empire, 1.

Political Situation (March - July):

In 1713, the Mughal Emperor Mohammed Aurangzeb died. Following his death his grand Nephew Alamgir the 2nd took the throne. Alamgir was a military man, and had spent the last few years fighting the Ottomans in Kashmir. It was he who defeated their armies at Kishtwar and recaptured the province. Having ascended the Throne he gathered the Mughal military. Despite the Narmada war, the Mughal Empire was still a major military power. He drove West smashing the Ottoman armies back and capturing Kabul in 1714.

With that Victory he now looked South to the expanding Maharajahs. While the Narmada war was fought he had been in the North and had been unable to take command. However now the situation was ripe to recapture lost territories. The Confederacy had only just driven off a European invasion Fleet and was still recovering from it's inner turmoil. Its defences in the North were weak and ready to collapse.

Military Situation (August - December):

Even as the Confederacy recovered from the British attacks, the Mughal Empire declared war. It immediately became apparent that the Mughals were serious, troops from Sindh marched south and captured the lightly defended Ahmedabad, compromising the entire Narmada Valley. The Mughal General Dalphat Borah had several familiar names under his command, Skinader Shafi, Jaswant Suresh, Mriza Panni and Firuz Rathor were all sons of generals who had fought the Maharajahs during the Hyderbad and Narmada wars.

The war was not limited to the Narmada Valley, in the East marching from Calcutta came Nizam Suresh and his lieutenant Musrat Rathor, with a large army of troops who had missed out on the fighting in the Narmada. It was clear that the Mughals were pulling out all the stops, and their goal could be nothing less than the total conquest of the Confederacy.

The Confederacy reacted with whatever it had. Roy moved North with the 1st and 2nd Brigades to stop the Mughals from capturing Surat and destroying the fleet stationed there. His main objective being to recapture Ahmedabad. Meanwhile Janil Rawat arrived in Hyderabad, the face of the old General was a sight for sore eyes and he was awarded a hero's welcome. In this time of crisis even the old general would be needed. Rawat was sent north to Ujjain to command the fledgling force there. With just irregulars and Militia Rawat was the perfect man to turn this into a fighting force. In the south the 3rd Brigade under Katoch was still organising, so Roy formed them as a reserve.

So began the 3rd Mughal War, as it was known in the Confederacy. 1716 would be stained with new bloodshed between the two nations. With a modern organised military the Confederacy had an advantage, however they were badly outnumbered and lacked defences in much of the Northern provinces. It would be a hard fight ahead.

Figure 15[125]

5.   Conclusion

In summary, two types of narration were observed in the analysis of the non-modded AARs. The first, character-bound, which was used in five of the examined AARs. The character-bound narrator followed a specific character throughout the story, yet the class of the character differed in each of the AARs. As a result, the main type of history which came out of character-bound AARs was social history as the interaction between various groups came forward in those AARs, however, there is a focus on the motivations and emotions of individual actors. The identity of the narrator developed strongly throughout the stories, either that of the soldier, nobleman or ruler. Each interaction with others further strengthened their identity, becoming accustomed to death in the case of the soldier or a more successful investigator for the nobleman writing a journal. The second type was the omniscient AAR, used for the other five non-modded AARs. For those, a traditional focus of history was more common as the overarching storyline focused on the rulers. This enabled the authors to implement various types of history, such as political, economic and diplomatic history. The viewpoint of the ruling class allowed for more varied character development as the author was able to focus on different identities throughout the AARs. The most striking AAR was *Great Britain Expands the Empire* by 'samsmithnz' where the author used the lexia provided by the game to create a more elaborate character identity.

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[125] Majonga, The Maratha Confederacy, 3.

The non-modded AARs contained five dominant discourses of which war was the most prevalent and was also intertwined with many of the other dominant and sub-dominant discourses. Politics, split into internal politics and diplomacy also featured heavily in the AARs as authors used political discourse to explain their rule or to build alliances. Additional dominant discourses were imperialism, religion and gender. The most recurring sub-dominant was economics, which was often a reason to either avoid or go to war. Gender, imperialism, class and religion featured in equal amounts in the AARs. Then politics and nationalism each featured in two AARs and lastly orientalism came up as a sub-dominant discourse in one AAR. After analysing the ten non-modded AARs, zigzag and mountains and valleys plotlines were found to be present. As players are unable to account for AI choices, the campaign will not always progress the way they like, leading to a declining plotline, hence the zigzag narrative. As the faction's strength grows, so does their territory, which additionally creates for more narrative and development of plotlines. Still, not each chapter of an AAR will be as long despite covering the same amount of years, thus the mountains and valleys plotline can be applied.

The sections above aimed to answer the sub-question: How do players use narratological tools to create counterfactual history in their non-AARs? As for the theoretical concepts which were brought forward in this chapter, historical culture and emergent narrative are the most relevant with imagined communities only playing a relatively small part as the community engagement was rather limited. The lexia and framing controls put forward by the mnemonic infrastructure, allows the author to create their own narrative which subsequently creates their conception of the counterfactual history. With the combination of these elements, the game, developer, and player, the emergent narrative develops into what becomes the AAR.

Chapter 4 - Modded AARs & Historical Narrative

In the previous chapter, the empirical analysis aimed to identify the narratological tools which were used by players who wrote their AARs on *Empire: Total War* without any mods. This final chapter will do the opposite as it will look solely at modded AARs. The ten AARs in this chapter ranged from over 220 replies to just under 100. In total these AARs have more than 1500 replies from readers, about one third more than the non-modded AARs. As mods are designed by the players themself, this chapter will differ from the previous one. The ten AARs which are analysed in this chapter are ones which have overhaul mods which aim to improve the game by trying to make it even more realistic. Specifically, they intend to balance the gameplay, fix inconsistencies, AI bugs and historical inaccuracies. Therefore, these AARs feature a combination of the game created by the developer-historian and the overhaul mod which allow the players to write a unique counterfactual history with each AAR. This chapter will look over the three narratological tools used in AARs as well as analyse whether plotlines can be applied to them. The question it will aim to answer is the following: How do players use narratological tools to create counterfactual history in their modded AARs?

1.   Narrator

In order to draw readers into following their AAR a writer needs to decide how to tell his story. Of the ten modded AARs that were analysed, five used a character-bound narrator, yet none of them use the same type of character. As the AAR is character-bound, a reader might expect it to be limited to that character's perspective. For this reason, each author choses a different way to tell more than just that character's story, but one of the whole empire. This ranges from a journal written by a courtier of the Sultan of the Ottoman empire, to the ruling government of Prussia. Each of these AARs allow a reader to take a different lens and watch the story unfold. In *Osman's Vision: An Ottoman AAR,* the ending takes an unexpected turn as the character which the story follows dies. As a result, the writer changes to an omniscient narrator to end the AAR as follows: "Later that winter Ibrahim passed to be with his ancestors. His story is unique because it gives a perspective of the Ottoman Empire that had not been seen before"[126]. Despite utilising a character-bound narrator, two of the

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[126] Chirurgeon, "Osman's Vision: An Ottoman AAR, Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed April 8, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?320198-DM-AAR-Osman-s-Vision-An-Ottoman-AAR, 6.

AARs, *Cold Winter's People!* by 'tuore'[127] and *The Prussian Republic* by 'Derpy Hooves'[128], feature a narrator that is all-knowing. In the former, the story is written from the perspective of the actual gamer whereas in the latter we follow the cabinet of the Prussian faction. In both cases we know more than what one character would know, as they are in a position which allows them to make decisions over the whole country.

Next, two of the AARs used both a character-bound narrator and an omniscient narrator. Both AARs do this by combining the story of the character with a diary. In *Hail Caesar* by 'Tim1988', the narrator overcomes the limitation of a third-person point of view in the biography of the character by adding excerpts of his diary to portray more than just the character's actions.[129] 'Heartfire' uses an omniscient narrator to follow the life of a 21st century character who reads a diary which is character-bound, for example:

When he finally got home he made himself some lunch, his second of the day, and pulled out the book from under his bed. He opened the cover and did something no teenager should ever be required to do, he read.

Vienna, Austria. September 16th, 1705

I hate waiting to be awarded something. The clock always seems to slow down when you want something to begin, or be over. It's a conspiracy. I'm sure of it. Last time I was in this city, I thought it woud be my last. I can recall everything about that day.

Figure 16 [130]

By combining the two types, character-bound and omniscient narrator, these modded AARs feature a new typology of narration. Rather than being confined by one of the types, the authors use the combination to create a more distinctive story which can be seen in the following figure.

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[127]Tuore, "Cold Winter's People", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed April 8, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?234308-DM-AAR-Cold-Winter-s-People-A-Russian-AAR-COMPLETED-

[128] Derpy Hooves, "The Prussian Republic", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed April 8, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?597848-The-Prussian-Republic-Participatory-AAR-All-Can-Participate!, 1.

[129] Tim1988, "Hail Caesar!", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed April 8, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?380233-(DMUC-AAR)-Hail-Caesar!, 1.

[130] Heartfire, "The Center of Conflict 2: Renaissance of the Fallen Empire", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed April 8, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?250220-DM-AAR-The-Center-of-Conflict-2-Renaissance-of-the-Fallen-Empire-COMPLETED, 1.

The rebellion had been put down at a cost of around 200 Italian lives, most of whom came from the militia. Vasari had confirmed the faith put in him by Caboto, proving himself to be an able commander and competent General. On hearing of his victory back in Rome, Clemet XI confirmed Vasari's position as General of the army, the posting having previously been a temporary one following the death of Caboto.

The thoughts of Vasari on his victory can be read in his diary.
Extract from the diary of Amadeo Vasari, 12th September 1713
Spoiler Alert, click show to read: [Hide]

What a glorious day! My first victory as a General in the Italian army. This is a moment that I have dreamed of all of my life. I cannot describe in words how I feel. This must be how Caesar felt all those years ago after his defeat of the pirates that had formerly held him prisoner. It is fitting that my first victory is, like Caesar's, not against the troops of some foreign power, but instead against scum that do not deserve to live. These men had broken a promise. Not one man, woman or child was harmed in our occupation, nor one tile smashed, yet these men dare to defy me. Caesar had the right idea when he crucified the survivors of his battle. Alas, I do not think I can get away with doing such a thing in this modern society. Such things are looked down upon now, by the weak fools that decide what is wrong and what is right. Once day I will have my way. I will be the one who says what can be done and what can't. But for now, I must follow my duties, and continue in the rebirth of this great nation.

Figure 17[131]

Lastly, the omniscient narrator is present in three of the modded AARs. The omniscient narrator and the scope of these AARs is accurately described by the start of the AAR from 'IneptCmdr', "This AAR follows the armies and navies, and the men who command them, as they fight their way through glorious victories and shameful defeats"[132]. Here, unlike the omniscient narrators which combine with character-bound, the narrator is unable to portray more than the actions and events which occur at the hands of the player. That being said, these AARs do reflect each aspect of the game a lot more clearly, such as diplomacy, trade and war. The omniscient, all-seeing, all-knowing character can comment on the personality and actions of various characters as this form of narration allows them to do so. Both 'IneptCmdr'[133] and 'RoyalNobody'[134] do so in a systematic way as they created a detailed overview of their AAR, complete with events, characters and veteran units.

2.   Identity

The identity of the narrator is often reflected in the characters which they embody. For this reason, you might think the omniscient narrator would usually be the least developed character. However, as stated in the previous section, the writers of those AARs were able to create various characters whose personality they developed throughout their story. Additionally, they created 'veteran units' which also had their own story, for example: "Brigadier General Sutton was given command of the British 3rd Army in 1706, during the height of the Anglo-French Colonial War"[135] and "The Grasshoppers, the regiment were

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[131] Tim1988, Hail Caesar!, 2.

[132] IneptCmdr, "For King and Country", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed April 8, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?625366-For-King-and-Country-(Great-Britain-AAR)-Updated-November-10-2015, 1.

[133] IneptCmdr, For King and Country, 1.

[134] RoyalNobody, "Of Glory Lost", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed April 8, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?543790-(DMUC)-Of-Glory-Lost, 1.

[135] IneptCmdr, For King and Country, 1.

given their nickname after joining the 1st Expeditionary and because of their unusual green uniforms. Battle Honours include: Battle of Cambiano 1748, Battle of Rome 1750, Battle of Halle 1753"[136]. As seen in these two AARs, the start is relatively slow as the empire, in both cases Britain, can only field a small number of troops and therefore is only active in one area. Consequently, they only have one general whose personality they can develop. Once the player is able to expand and gets involved in more wars, there is a development of additional characters as more generals and units are needed to fight in the numerous wars.

The last of the omniscient AARs, *Thunder in the East,* follows the Prussian High Command, but due to the focus on the east and the tactical orientation the character development in this AAR is very limited. That being said, this AAR does allow readers to interact with the player as they are part of the General Staff and help the player make decisions. For example: "Early in spring, 1710, Operation Siegfried, the Invasion of Russia, kicked off. As per Field Marshall Von Planks instructions, the first move of Prussia was not deployments, but rather diplomacy."[137] and "After much lively debate amongst the General Staff […] A hybrid of Plan Yellow and Plan Black has been selected."[138]. Field Marshal Von Plank, is actually another user called 'Plank of Wood', who has been advising the writer of the AAR what to do. In the latter example, the writer has offered the various users who are part of the General Staff various action plans, yellow, black and red. As shown, the users were divided and therefore Santini has chosen to implement a hybrid plan. Throughout the AAR, 'Santini' never refers to himself, but the other users are prominent characters in the development of the story as they essentially choose the direction. The AAR is therefore a unique representation of identity, as these users have become the main characters of the AAR.

Similarly, the AAR written by user 'Derpy Hooves' also has interaction with the readers, just as the previous AAR, *The Prussian Republic* has a council where other users can participate in the decisions of the player. According to the player, the council was formed to overthrow the negligent Prussian monarchy. "By the brilliant command of General Justuce [sic] Loder, the first stage of our Revolution is over."[139]. The council, consisting of 10 other users on the forum, each suggest what the player should do next, then, after careful

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[136] RoyalNobody, Of Glory Lost, 1.
[137] Santini, "Thunder in the East", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed April 8, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?250413-DM-TGOTRE-BSSM-Thunder-in-the-East-Completed, 1.
[138] Santini, Thunder in the East, 3.
[139] Derpy Hooves, The Prussian Republic, 1.

consideration, the player implements the various suggestions. These interactions, occurring on a weekly basis, will start when 'Derpy Hooves' reports to the council how the campaign is going. The council has its own identity, as it appears to be a shadow government. Each of the councillors create and develop their own character's personality during the AAR, choosing a name and title for themselves, such as "Councillor Baldur von Wolfwinkel" and "Councillor Friedrich Schwarz".[140] The way in which these councillors interact will also differ for example "Ulrich von Hinterpommern, a 37 year old man who was a keen supporter of the revolution, surveys the reports and the proposals of other councillors."[141] Here, user 'The Kybrothilian', introduces his character before addressing the council in the first-person. Some of the users also use the first-person to speak in the council, while others do so from the third-person point of view which therefore also makes the narration of the whole AAR more complex and distinctive.

The interactive nature of these two modded AARs are also unique styles of narration, which leads to it becoming another type of narration. Not limited to character-bound or omniscient narrators, an interactive narration enables the author to create additional storylines together with their readers. These storylines go beyond the lexia and framing controls of the game as the readers become a special type of lexia themselves, a minister or general in the game. Each of these new 'players' further enhance the narrative as they become another central character to the story who also has an identity that develops throughout the AAR. The author can either be the storyteller as the omniscient narrator who enacts the decisions of the council, or they can be a character-bound narrator who will most likely be the leader of the faction implementing the outcomes of the meetings. In the following figure we see the replies of two players in the AAR by 'Derpy Hooves' debating what steps they should take next.
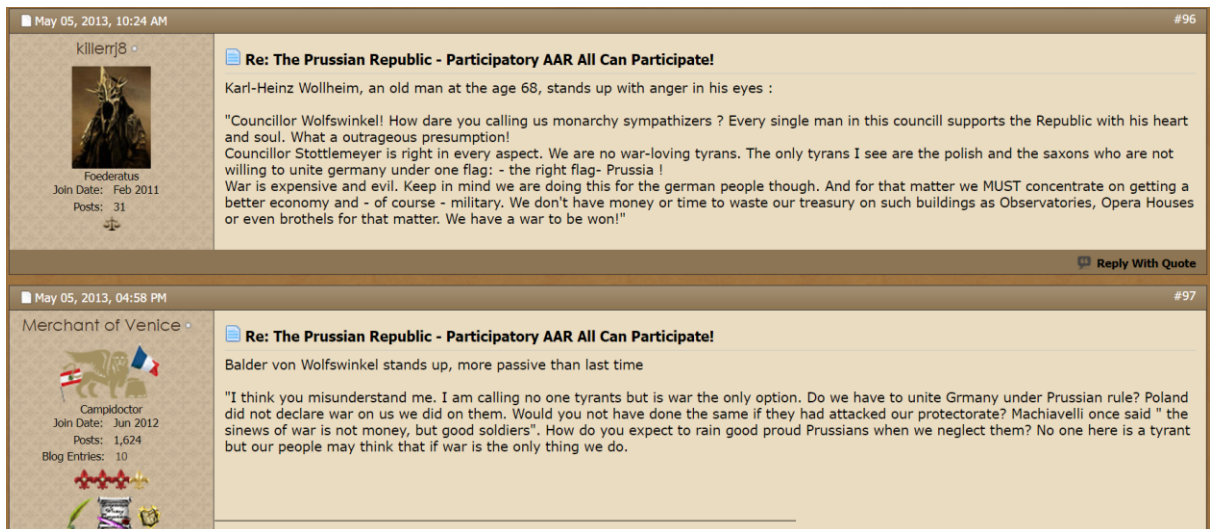
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[140] Ibid., 2.
[141] Ibid., 2.

Figure 18[142]

 The remaining AARs can be divided into three categories of identities: a character who rules the faction which the player is playing, a biography of a character who plays a role in the army, and finally, a character who chronicles the story of the faction. The two AARs that follow the faction from the ruler's standpoint are written by user 'tuore'. The first, *Cold Winter's People!*, follows the ruler of Russia, who changes throughout the AAR due to various rebellions. This character is the embodiment of Russia, serving the people, at times referring to himself in first person singular pronouns, as he is narrating what is happening in Russia. Yet, on various occasions he uses the first person plural pronoun, as he represents all of Russia, for example "We were attacked by Spain and France. Luckily we managed to make peace with France without any acts of war."[143]. The second AAR, *For Tea and Country!* follows William the Third and later his daughter Victoria. Using the British monarchy as a way to turn the AAR into a comical text, the premise for expansion and the raison d'etre of the monarchs is tea, which is also the most recurring theme throughout the AAR. The AAR begins as follows: "I'm the king of Great Britain, I like uniforms and tea."[144]. Over time, the King becomes more obsessed with tea, however, setbacks in the campaign lead to the King having a heart attack which results in his daughter taking the throne. The personality of Queen Victoria is also comical, but she is portrayed with occasional temper flares when the conquest of India or Europe is going against her. When this happens, the

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[142] Ibid., 5.
[143] Tuore, Cold Winter's People, 4.
[144] Tuore, "For Tea and Country", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed April 8, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?250456-DM-AAR-For-Tea-And-Country!-COMPLETED-AAARGHHHH, 1.

Queen threatens to crucify her advisor or make him bring her more tea. Still, the character developments of these two AARs are relatively simple compared to the following four.

The two previously mentioned AARs which combined character-bound narrative and an omniscient narrator construct two identities in each of the biographies. In *Hail Caesar!* the AAR focuses on Amadeo Vaseri's life, it is a biography with occasional excerpts from his diary. The AAR starts as follows: "It is clear from this that the dream greatly affected Amadeo and is widely believed to have been one of the main factors influencing his decision to join the army 2 years later, at the tender age of 14."[145]. The dream shapes the character development of Vaseri as he dreamt about Caesar who spoke to him about recreating the Roman Empire. This subsequently became the goal of Vaseri to the extent that he names himself Caesar later in his life: "Vasari himself held the position of Emperor, and added Caesar to his name, becoming Amadeo Vaseri Caesar."[146] Throughout the story Vasari chooses to conquer the same territories that Caesar conquered in his time or territories that were part of the Roman Empire. The biography culminates at his death following his successful conquest of Britain, succeeding even in taking Scotland which even the Romans were unable to do. Following the death of the Vaseri, the newly formed Italian Empire starts crumbling until another historical figure is referenced, this time Napoleon, whose story continues in a separate biography.

The subsequent AAR which has a biographic element is *Renaissance of the Fallen Empire* by 'Heartfire'. In the AAR we follow two lives, firstly, Andreas Traeger, a curious and eager to learn Austrian boy who is about to go to college and secondly, Xaver Traeger, an ancestor of Andreas. After finding an old book, which turns out to be Xever's autobiography, Andreas spends hours reading it, which subsequently shapes his own choices and ideas of Austrian identity. The main focus of the AAR is on Xever rather than Andreas as he climbs the ranks of the Austrian military from Lt. General to Commander of the Emperor's Guard. Xever serves Emperor Leopold of Austria, therefore Leopold's goal is his own, "Leopold may not advertise as such, but he knows in his heart that our kingdom is bound for great things. We will one day rule the world."[147]. At the start of the story, Austria is a kingdom under siege, but as Xever becomes a more prominent figure in the army, the kingdom grows into the empire, fighting the Ottomans and Polish-Lithuanian forces. Xever believes in the greater destiny and the Austrian unity which he portrays is eventually passed

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[145] Tim1988, Hail Caesar!, 1.
[146] Ibid., 3.
[147] Heartfire, Renaissance of the Fallen Empire, 1.

down to Adreas. The AAR finishes with Andreas at a hearing at his prospective college due to him blowing up a rocket. Besides members of the college, the minister of education is also present and asks him the following question: "Tell me, do you know what it means to serve your country?"[148]. As a result of reading the accounts of his ancestor, he believes to have the right answer, this is when 'Heartfire' ends the AAR. The AAR centres around him finding his own identity by learning of his heritage and therefore also the history of his country.

The final AARs follow the life of a courtier. Firstly, an imam who chronicles the life of the Mughal Sultan and secondly, the diary of Ibrahim, whose father is a vizier to the Ottoman Sultan. In the first, *Charging Through Darkened Seas* by 'Ashu-Siralis', the Imam chronicles every decision made by the sultan, his generals and ministers. Appointed thanks to his prowess, as shown here: "my Liege-Lord believes that my insight, my superior education, my background in shari'ah, military tactics, and history-- and the felicity of my pen-- make me the only candidate suited for the job."[149]. The Imam follows up on each individual account of battles, how money is spent and who the sultan chooses to initiate diplomacy with. Some of these matters are written in a conversational style, ""Certainly, you are pleased," the Emperor said.[150]" while others from his perspective, "Ram Duraz arrived at the ahead of his marching columns"[151]. The main character development in this AAR does not occur with the Imam, but with the individuals whose story shapes the Mughal Empire, specifically the Sultan and his general Ram Duraz. Throughout the AAR the friendship and rivalry between these two powerful men grows. At a certain point, the Sultan even struggles to give orders to the General as he has grown too powerful: "Ram Duraz, you must return to Goa to defend it, and its port, from a counter attack. Ram Duraz, you must return. Ram Duraz, obey me."[152]. These developments are what bring the AAR to life as their personalities add more to the story than the narration of the Imam.

On the contrary, in *Osman's Vision*, by 'Chirurgeon', all the focus is on the main character. In the AAR, Ibrahim, inspired by his father, keeps a detailed journal of his life. As Ibrahim's father is a vizier, his life will also be intertwined with that of the court of the Ottoman Empire. Throughout the AAR his career, Ibrahim, first as a records keeper at a Mosque later as a wine broker, becomes more knowledgeable of the politics of the Ottoman

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[148] Ibid., 6.
[149] Ashu-Siralis, "Charging Through Darkened Seas", Total War Center Forums RSS, accessed April 8, 2022, https://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?357866-DM-AAR-Charging-Through-Darkened-Seas-A-Mughal-Campaign, 1.
[150] Ashu-Siralis, Charging Through Darkened Seas, 2.
[151] Ibid., 2.
[152] Ibid., 4.

court. Another aspect of his identity is that of his family, the start of the AAR focuses on his siblings, one in the harem of the Sultan and the other a janissary in the army. Later he has his own family which causes much distress to him as he slowly starts losing his son to the West: "On several occasions he has told me that this is his calling. A calling that has fractured our family deeply."[153]. Equally important to note is that as Ibrahim is a courtier and not a soldier, his accounts of war are quite different to the AARs in which the character is a soldier, for example: "Seeing so much pristine white inside these pits made me realize the true cost of war. By morning the ground had been stamped and the evidence of the graves only present by the recently disturbed earth."[154]

3.   Discourse

"July of 1715 marked a number of tremendous victories in the twilight of the western front."[155] As we see, the most prominent dominant discourse in the ten modded AARs is that of war. As stated earlier, the main goal of the game is to conquer specific territories so that you can win with your faction. Yet, the AAR is not limited to this and because of the unique ability of each of the players to write different AARs, various other dominant and sub-dominant discourses have been identified. In six of the AARs political discourse was dominant. This type of discourse was common but varied in the AARs in terms of whether it was politics between internal politics, such as various political groups within the faction, and court politics or diplomacy, the politics between multiple factions. 'Tim1988' uses left/right wing politics to explain the opposition which his general is facing at home, blaming the right-wing for the rebellion occurring in the capital.[156] 'Chirurgeon' points out the danger of living at the court during the 1700s as Ibrahim's father chooses to step down as Vizier once the Sultan passes away to avoid getting deposed or even killed by the new Sultan. The ambition of the new Sultan leads to his brother being appointed to a position as army general, one which he can keep as long as he wins battles.[157] These dangers, allotted to the type of monarchy, absolute in the case of the Ottomans are portrayed in this type of discourse. The differences between the Ottomans and the British in terms of politics is better explained by the following excerpt:

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[153] Chirurgeon, Osman's Vision, 5.
[154] Ibid., 5.
[155] Santini, Thunder in the East, 3.
[156] Tim1988, Hail Caesar!, 1.
[157] Chirurgeon, Osman's Vision , 6.

"The war in India is unpopular, but Churchill uses his connections in London and promises that the Maratha Confederacy can be taken within the year. He is convincing enough, as Britain sends more than just men to replace the dead."[158]

Here 'RoyalNobody' explains how the army in India can get reinforcements due to the political prowess of General Churchill. These types of political discourse are not as common as the cross-faction ones, as many of the players write about the diplomatic actions taken in their campaign. The following example is one of the many instances of diplomatic talks between factions, here specifically one in which a player chooses strategic alliances in order to have a successful campaign. "To secure our borders in order to focus our assault on the Maratha pests, my Liege Lord has allied himself with the British and the Mysorian kingdom."[159]

The other dominant discourses are all featured in three separate AARs. Firstly, class comes forward in the AARs most often through rebellions which occur in their provinces due to the unhappiness of the lower or upper class. For example: "Few turns later, our government had problems. Small riots had spread out to a full-scale revolution!"[160] Here, in 'Tuore's' AAR, the lower class, unhappy with the government, decides to rise up against the ruling class and eventually turns the monarchy into a republic. 'Tim1988' showcases the class struggle by highlighting the various groups which support his general. Much like Julius Caesar, who was champion of the people as seen in Vaseri's dream, he also struggles against the ruling class as follows: "He returned home to a hero's welcome from the commoners, who lined the streets of Rome, hailing him as their saviour and demanding that he be knighted. The reception he faced from the aristocracy, the Pope and the military command however, was very different…".[161] The authors of the AARs which use class therefore choose to use this type of discourse either to change the starting lexia of the game or in order to explain the consequences of their actions throughout the campaign. The former mostly occurs when the author wants to change the government type to accommodate for their playstyle while the latter either occurs due to conquest or scientific discovery which often affects the lower class.

Secondly, imperialism as a discourse stems from the vast amount of time spent going to war with other factions in the AAR. Each case of imperialistic discourse is linked to India,

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[158] RoyalNobody, Of Glory Lost, 1.
[159] Ashu-Siralis, Charging Through Darkened Seas, 1.
[160] Tuore, Cold Winter's People, 4.
[161] Tim1988, Hail Caesar!, 3.

each of the AARs deem India to be the future of their faction, with two of the factions being British and the other Russian. They all believe in the wealth of India, both in resources, such as tea, but also in gold. Only one of the three also speaks of the Americas in terms of colonisation. Imperialism is only a discourse in the AARs in which a Western faction is played, as their goals often are linked to foreign conquest, especially for the British.

Then, with a strong link to the previous discourse, orientalist discourse comes forward in two ways. Most commonly orientalist discourse occurs when a faction, such as Austria and Great Britain are at war with the Eastern factions. The way in which their enemies are depicted are in line with orientalism. Yet, in one of the AARs the orientalist discourse switches perspectives as the author uses it to depict his own faction when playing the Ottomans.

Finally, religion as a discourse features heavily during the AARs, both the conflict between religions as well as cheering the religion of the faction as shown in the following examples:

"In the land of the fertile crescent a new movement of Islam is gaining ground"[162] and "With a cry of "Allahu Akbar!", the elite light artillery unleashed its load into the statues. Shouts of "Allahu Akbar" rang out amongst the Muslim troops".[163]

Religion is mostly associated when the player chooses a faction which has a nemesis with an opposing religion. However, it does not occur as strongly between different Christian factions, such as Protestant and Catholic factions, like the British versus the French. It mainly occurs when there is interaction between the Christian, Islamic and Hindu factions in the game. Sometimes it is used as a reason for conquest while other times it is are used as a tool of suppression in new regions

Class features as a sub-dominant discourse as it was featured in one AARs, but in passing, to describe how a farmer became a general. The most prominent sub-discourse was the economics or trade discourse which was apparent in four of the AARs. This way his was expressed ranged greatly across the AARs, as it could be the economic costs of recruiting new armies and building ships, to the cost of holding new territories or even the cost of war affecting local businesses. Finally, in two AARs gender was a sub-dominant discourse. In *Osman's Vision*, the character spoke of women, like his sister and wife and their daily tasks

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[162] Chirurgeon, Osman's Vision, 1.
[163] Ashu-Siralis, Charging Through Darkened Seas, 3.

and what they did to help the family, despite their relatively small involvement in the course of the AAR.[164] In *Of Glory Lost,* women are portrayed as innocent and helpless. For example, "The hunt for the Harrington daughters begins and Churchill and Rooke receive new orders from London. They are to seek out, engage and destroy all piracy on land and sea."[165] Even the ruler of the Maratha is portrayed as incompetent to rule the mighty India.[166]

4. Plotlines

When analysing the ten modded AARs the two most prominent types of plotlines which can be perceived are zigzag and mountains and valleys. While many of the AARs initially just try to have a progressive plotline as that would mean that the character is able to achieve all of their goals, either as a soldier, ruler or the whole faction. *Hail Caesar!* had a progressive plotline throughout most of the AAR as Vaseri was able to overcome the elites of Italy and eventually become Caesar and conquer the territories which Julius Caesar held in his time. Nevertheless, at the height of his power he is defeated, thus the ending becomes a decline plotline. Yet, the zigzag narrative is much more apparent as the player will have setbacks throughout their campaign no matter their expertise in the game. Often these setbacks are corrected and therefore the zigzag plotline fits these AARs better. Additionally, the modded AARs had the mountains and valleys plotline due to changes in writing where some chapters would span multiple years and the next would comprise one battle. Furthermore, some of the AARs would also skip through years as sometimes there would be nothing to write about.

Darthmod, as a complete overhaul, could have led to the change in plotlines, especially as the added elements and difficulties changed both the lexia of *Empire: Total War.* Despite these changes, no specific change in narrative employment can be perceived as there is no fundamental change in the structure of the game. The additional lexia do not make enough change to radically affect the ludonarrative of a player. The analysis does show that the plotlines in the modded AARs are more visible as the narrative is much more detailed. As the modded AARs contain more content, development, and structure, the plotlines become more apparent.

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[164] Chirurgeon, Osman's Vision, 1.
[165] RoyalNobody, Of Glory Lost, 2.
[166] Ibid., 1.

5.   Conclusion

The aim of the chapter was to answer the research question: How do players use narratological tools to create counterfactual history in their modded AARs? Firstly, the chapter analysed the type of narrator used by the authors of the AARs. Of the ten AARs character-bound narrators were used by half of them, three used an omniscient narrator and two combined both forms of narrator. Most of the AARs differed in the way that the narrator was used, be it a royal of the faction they were playing, a courtier or a simple soldier. This leads to the second part of the chapter where each of the AARs developed the character of the narrator. Due to the rich storytelling nature of the modded AARs, character identity and development differed greatly. Some AARs even developed the character by interacting with the readers, three of the AARs used polls and another received advice between chapters from the readers. The advice from the readers ranged from who to attack next, which alliance they should seek, or whether they should focus on trade or plunder. These additional 'players', much like roleplay, would form a council and further build on the story created by the author. These two unique variations in the narration of the AARs create two additional typologies of narration. First the combined narrator, which was used in two modded AARs and second the interactive narrator which was used in AARs with a character-bound narrator and one with an omniscient narrator.

Thirdly, the various dominant discourses and sub-dominant discourses were brought forward, after war politics was the most common dominant discourse, followed by religion, class, imperialism, and orientalism. Most of the discourses are intertwined with war, the internal politics leading up to a declaration of war, religious reasoning to free areas from an opposing religion and classes rising up against a conqueror are a few examples. The sub-dominant discourses present were economics, religion, gender and class. These were also often linked to a dominant discourse, such as economics to war and politics.

The most recurring plotlines were zigzag and mountains and valleys as the AARs were affected by the sandbox nature of the game which could lead to defeat but also to moments in the game which were unimportant to the AAR and therefore were skipped. Despite adding more lexia to the game, Darthmod did not enable a change in the plotlines which are created in the narrative of *Empire: Total War* AARs.

Finally, each of the three theoretical concepts were relevant to this chapter. In essence, the configuration of history of the game is not drastically changed though there are additions to the game in the form of the mod. These changes lead to the increase of possible

narratives which can be formed by the authors of the modded AARs. By adding narratives and with an aim to add more realism to the game, from a technocentric perspective, the conception of history is more accurate,. Still, the framing controls of the game are not changed thus it is still a simulation of history, making the narratives counterfactual. Emergent narrative is much stronger in the modded AARs, firstly by the additional content from DarthMod, which provides an additional element that interacts with the existing lexia created by the developer, but also by the inclusion of the game community. The analysis showed that there was significantly more interaction with readers in the modded AARs, therefore the emergent narrative that developed in the modded AAR became more intricate. Closely linked with the interactive element of emergent narrative, the imagined community was even more apparent in the modded AARs. Due to the inclusion of the community in the development and the improvement of Darthmod, the features are already the product of an imagined community. Additionally, the modded AARs gain a large number of replies, which only further enhances the community and engagement with the AARs.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

This thesis analysed the historical narratives produced in the After Action Reports of *Empire: Total War*. The research focused on the different narratological tools that authors use in both non-modded and modded AARs. The theoretical framework of the thesis supported the search for differences between the historical configuration of the AARs. The aim of the research was to answer the following research question: How is the past narratively configured in the 'After Action Reports' of the game Empire: Total War?

The thesis first brought together the literature on (historical) video games, narrative and community. Then, the AARs as a source and its relevance were discussed and finally the theoretical concepts which guided the research, historical culture, emergent narrative and imagined communities were defined. The second chapter contextualised *Empire: Total War* by showing how the developers created the game by aiming to create a game with a strong historically accurate starting point. As it is a video game which has intrinsic limits to the breadth of its coverage, the amount of content could not always completely represent history. This was the case with slavery and the various characters which came to power after 1700. The game serves as an interactive historical configuration that allows players to create their own counterfactual history. DarthMod further enhances the player's experience and technically helps create a more factual conception of history.

The next two chapters individually analysed narrator, identity, discourse and plotlines in non-modded and modded AARs. Through this analysis four types were defined, character-bound AARs, omniscient AARs, combined narrator AARs and interactive AARs. Character-bound AARs were the most common type of AARs, followed by omniscient and then combined and interactive both being present in two AARs each. Of the twenty AARs analysed, ten used a character-bound narrator, eight used an omniscient narrator, two combined the narrator and both a character-bound and omniscient AAR had an interactive element. The biggest variation in typologies was present in the modded AARs as they contained the combined and interactive AARs. Modded AARs also had more identity development than the non-modded AARs. However, it was clear that AARs which focus on an individual, rather than the ruler and the generals, had more identity development. The character-bound AARs had more depth in characters whereas the omniscient AARs contained more variety and more extensive narratives. Non-modded AARs generally had more sub-dominant discourses, while in modded AARs dominant discourses were more present in the AARs. Many of the discourses were closely intertwined and therefore modded-AARs had

richer discourse, especially with the combined narrator and interactive AARs, as this dimension added more narrative to the AARs. The plotlines in the AARs did not vary depending on whether the game was modded or not. As there are no framing control differences, the plotlines did not differentiate between non-modded and modded AARs. The zigzag and mountains and valleys were the two plotlines identified in the AARs. However, they do not account for player skill or their choice to create a story, for example purposefully losing battles to create narrative. Therefore, there is need for more nuance as the typologies for plotlines might be too rigid.

In conclusion, narrative has a significant effect on the configuration of the past in AARs. In relation to historical culture, the mnemonic infrastructure which is created by the developer historians and enhanced by the mod produces narratives which form the player' conception of history. As the narrative develops because of the interaction between players, characters, and the environment, which in this case is *Empire: Total War*, emergent narrative is a useful concept to study narrative in video games. The addition of modders reinforces the emergent narrative created in the game. Finally, the inclusion of the imagined community, here both the Total War AAR community and the modder community, creates more narrative possibilities for the AAR and supplements the existing lexia. In this way, DarthMod strengthens narrative and its effect on the configuration of the past in AARs.

At the onset of the research the thesis was to analyse the interaction between the author of the AARs and the community. However, when analysing the sources, it only occured in two of the AARs. This led to a wider analysis of AARs, establishing what they are, how the player connects them to the game, and how they represent history. Still, the inability to fully reflect the actual complexity of history is a weakness of the research. The data pool could also have been expanded beyond Total War Center and based on more than popularity.

The future research on AARs in strategy games should focus on two factors. Firstly, modded AARs, as these can contain various new and more unique elements, especially the interactive elements in two of the AARs. Specifically, I would recommend the study of other mods which change the Eurocentric core of the game, which will then showcase Eastern and new world factions. Secondly, future research should analyse the character-bound narration type as these were the most unique forms of historical counterfactual narrative. The advice would be to widen the search and include different databases for the AARs.

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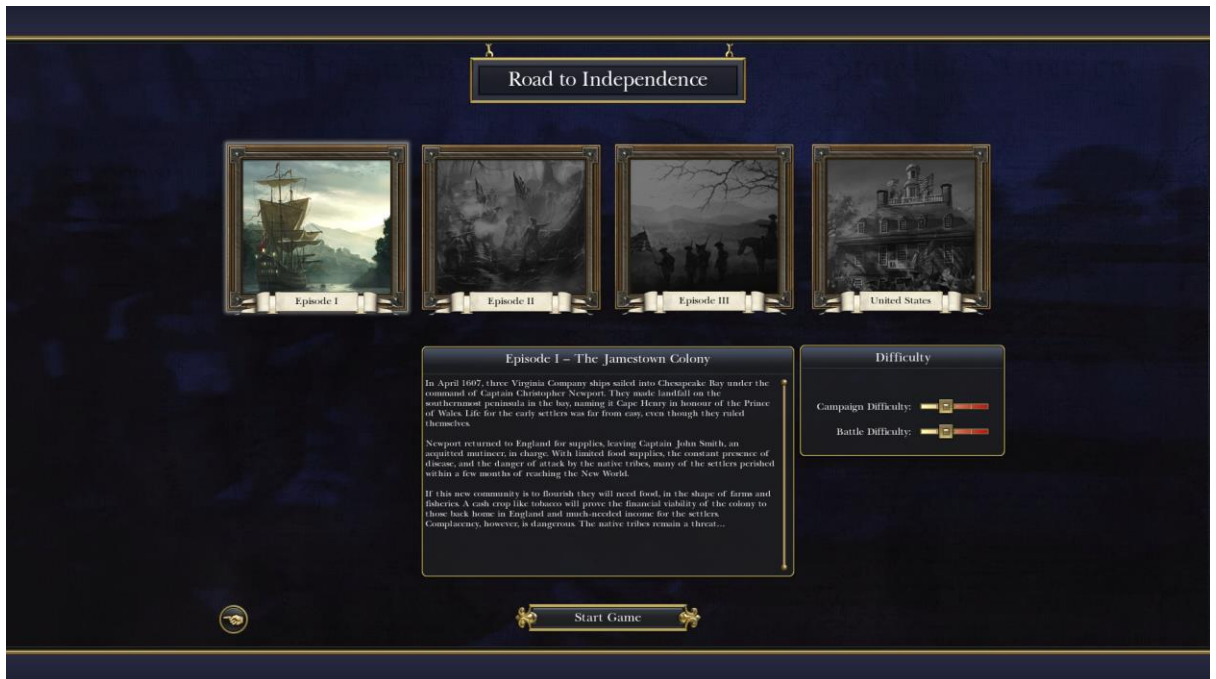
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Appendix A - *Empire: Total War* Campaigns

Appendix B - Research & Technology