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What Does it Mean to be Orlanthi? Hermeneutic Challenge in *King of Dragon Pass*

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ABSTRACT

The game *King of Dragon Pass* (A Sharp 1999) portrays what it is like to live as an *Orlanthi*, a member of the Storm Tribe. In order to successfully play the game, the player must understand the values that guide a tribe of *Orlanthi* in a hermeneutic process that requires the constant evaluation of the players' prejudices of how people should live and be governed. This paper examines the hermeneutic process of interpretation the player goes through and shows how meaning works as a game mechanic in *King of the Dragon Pass*.

Keywords

hermeneutics, interpretation, *King of Dragon Pass*, meaning

INTRODUCTION

King of Dragon Pass[1] (A Sharp 1999) is a narrative strategy game first published on Windows and Macintosh operating systems in 1999, and later converted onto a variety of mobile platforms (iOS 2011, Android 2014, Windows Phone 2014). It received a cult status among players mainly because it blended storytelling into a strategy game in a uniquely successful way.

This paper analyses how *KoDP* portrays the fictional world of *Glorantha* and the culture of *Orlanthi*. *Orlanthi* have a distinct culture that the player has to understand in order to proceed in the game. Playing the game requires entering into a hermeneutic circle of interpretation, where the player's understanding of ethics and law encounter the values of *Orlanthi* (see also Arjoranta 2015, 78).

The next section introduces the hermeneutic framework used in this paper. Subsequent sections provide some background information on the game, describe how it is played, and then interpret some specific scenes from the game as examples. Finally, the paper introduces the concept of *hermeneutic challenge* to describe the interpretive challenges games present to their players.

UNDERSTANDING GAMES

This paper uses the term *game hermeneutics* to refer to the theory of how games are interpreted and understood. The hermeneutics used here is mainly based on Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics (e.g., Gadamer 1977; Gadamer 2004). Other hermeneutical approaches are also possible (e.g., Arjoranta and Karhulahti 2014; Karhulahti 2015; Leino 2010), but not as relevant for the current analysis.

There are two types of interpretations players make of games. In the general sense of game hermeneutics, players interpret games in the same manner as (other) works of art are inter-

preted: as expressive artefacts, or in the Gadamerian sense, as things that have a claim for truth (Gadamer 2004). These interpretations relate not only to evaluations of value (e.g., "Is this a good work of art?"), but also to the existential claims the work makes (e.g., "Is this an accurate portrayal of what it means to be human?"). These interpretations are made in the general cultural context the player resides in, and are independent of how well the player does in the game (e.g. "This game speaks to me, but I am bad at it").

The other sense relates to the interpretations the player has to make during a game, and is here called *real-time hermeneutics* (cf. Aarseth 2003; Arjoranta 2011). 'Real-time' refers here to the fact that the player has to make interpretations as they play. In this case, the term may be slightly misleading since the turn-based game can be played at a pace of the player's choosing. Nevertheless, the interpretations need to be made while playing, even if the pace is leisurely. These real-time interpretations affect whether the player is successful in completing the game.[2] Bad interpretations are punished by difficulties in proceeding and eventual failure, while good interpretations are rewarded with success. While playing, the player iterates on their understanding of the game until it is correct enough for them to continue playing – or they quit in frustration. Importantly, this means that players do not typically have a perfect understanding of a game, just good enough to go on.

This paper is interested in how the latter type of interpretation (real-time hermeneutics) opens up possibilities for the former type of interpretation (game hermeneutics). The player tests their expectations against their experiences of the game, and in order to succeed in the game, forms an understanding of what it means to be *Orlanthi*. While understanding this fictive culture may not lead to great revelations about the player's own worldview, it shows how games can provide a chance of understanding a foreign culture, its values and views.

I frame this question in terms of hermeneutics, because I want to explore games as a medium for meaning-making. Other approaches would have also been possible, for example, with a focus on cultural appropriation or ethnography. These would follow the same general line of argumentation, but focus more on the cultural issues while here I focus on the hermeneutic insights.

I discuss games as *meaning machines* (cf. Aarseth 1997), a specific type of medium capable of creating meaning in a specific way. This is not supposed to be a game exceptionalist stance, as games are seen simply as another medium among other media – different in some of their features, but similar in the fundamental qualities of medium-ness.

GLORANTHA, ORLANTHI, AND DRAGON PASS

KoDP draws heavily from the fictional universe of *Glorantha*, a fantasy world created by Greg Stafford and featured in a number of board- and role-playing games, most notably *RuneQuest* (originally Perrin 1978, with many later editions). *Glorantha* is a Bronze Age world with magic, personified gods and fantasy creatures, such as elves, trolls and dwarves, but it differs significantly from the Tolkien-inspired continuum of *Dungeons & Dragons* (Gygax and Arneson 1974) games. For example, *Gloranthan* elves are physically closer to plants than animals while dwarves are living machines.

KoDP focuses on the *Gloranthan* tribe of *Orlanthi*.[3] *Orlanthi* have a distinct, Celtic-influenced culture, and name themselves after their main god, the storm god *Orlanth* (reminiscent of Thor and Zeus). They grow cattle, farm land and raid their neighbours. Disputes are set-
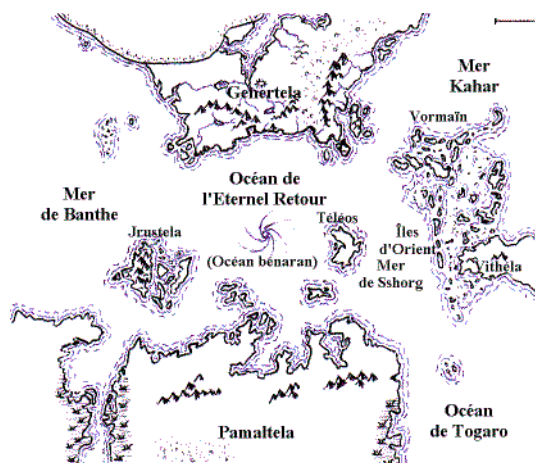
Figure 1: Map of Glorantha by Cristophe Dang Ngoc Chan (CC BY-SA 3.0)

tled with the aid of clan leaders or by wrestling, competing in poetry or fighting. Killing somebody is acceptable, as long as it is done honestly – a knife in the back is abhorrent and attracts the attention of evil gods. Life in the clans is affected by gendered assumptions about what is proper for men and women, but the traditions also support ways of questioning these assumptions.

Orlanthi life revolves around five seasons, each characterised by the main activity of that season. The Sea season is when the farmers plant their crops. The following Fire season is traditionally when the clan raids other clans for their cattle. Earth season is the time of harvest. It is followed by the Dark season, when everything is covered by snow and people stay indoors. The last season is the Storm season, when the weather is unpredictable, but bold clans may use it for more raiding. The year ends in the Sacred time, two magical weeks devoted to rituals and worship.

A good *Orlanthi* respects their elders and ancestors, pays their dues to the gods – the gods expect sacrifices – and is bold, brave and honest, just like the gods they worship. The clan is divided into the common folk and nobles. The common folk are cottars, carls, and crafters, tending to sheep and cattle and manufacturing goods for the clan. The common folk can also become hunters, who patrol the clan's area, known as the *tula*. Some clans also keep thralls, or slaves.

The nobles consist of weaponthanes, who fight for the clan by defending the *tula* and by raiding other clans, and *thanes*, who are the wealthy leaders of the clan. *Thanes* can be chosen for the clan ring, the ruling body of the clan. It consists of seven members, one of which is the clan chief, who most often follows the clan's main god – almost always the storm god *Orlanth*, but some clans also honour the horse god *Elmal* or the earth mother *Ernalda*. The clan ring gives advice to the chief, and people come to them to settle disputes.

The game takes place in Dragon Pass, where the player's clan settles after an exodus from their old homeland, *Heortland*, fleeing the tyrannical rule of the conquering warlord, *Pharaoh*. The pass is already inhabited by other *Orlanthi* clans, other human cultures and creatures, like the weird people to the east whom *Orlanthi* call "horse-spawn", because they seem to

live on their horses.

KING OF DRAGON PASS AS A GAME

KoDP consists of a few different types of menu sections, most of them accessed through the main screen. In different sections the player can adjust things like the type and amount of crops planted, the number of weaponthanes employed, and who sits on the clan ring. Different functions are separated into different menu sections. For example, the player can send expeditions to explore, trade with other clans, conduct diplomacy or raid the neighbouring clans.
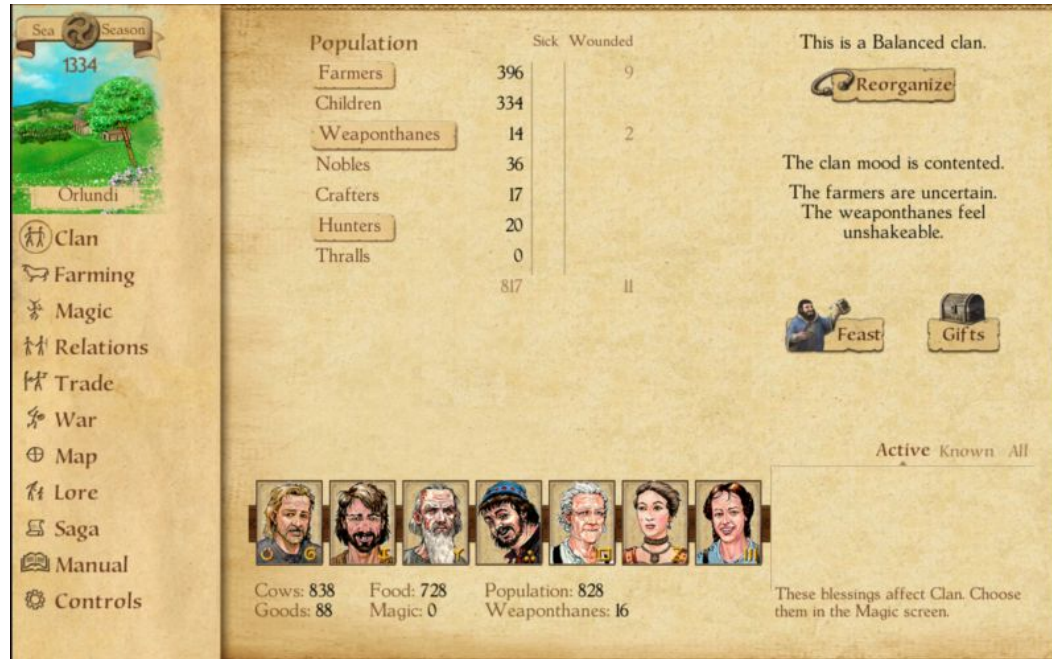

Figure 2: The main screen of *King of Dragon Pass*. The menu on the left provides access to different aspects of governing the clan

Trade and diplomacy are important in establishing and maintaining the relations to the clan's neighbours. Good relations are important, as the goal of the game is – as the name implies – to become the king of Dragon Pass, which is only possible if the other clans accept your clan as the leader. This requires building good relations to the neighbouring clans and eventually forming a tribe with them. This tribe then has a chance of ruling other tribes in a unified *Orlanthi* kingdom.

Sending troops on raids is a central mechanic, and the player is given options on how to approach them: the amount of troops to send if attacking, which gods to sacrifice to, and the tactics and objective chosen. All of these work in a complex rock-paper-scissors against the tactics chosen by the enemy, the relative strengths of the fighting troops, and other factors, like defensive buildings.

Raids rarely have severe consequences by themselves, but constant raiding can weaken a clan enough that they are unable to defend themselves, grow enough crops, and take care of their herds. Not all raiding is done by fellow Orlanthi, who generally follow the accepted

Figure 3: The diplomacy screen, showing the different clans an emissary could be sent to and the different goals the emissary could have
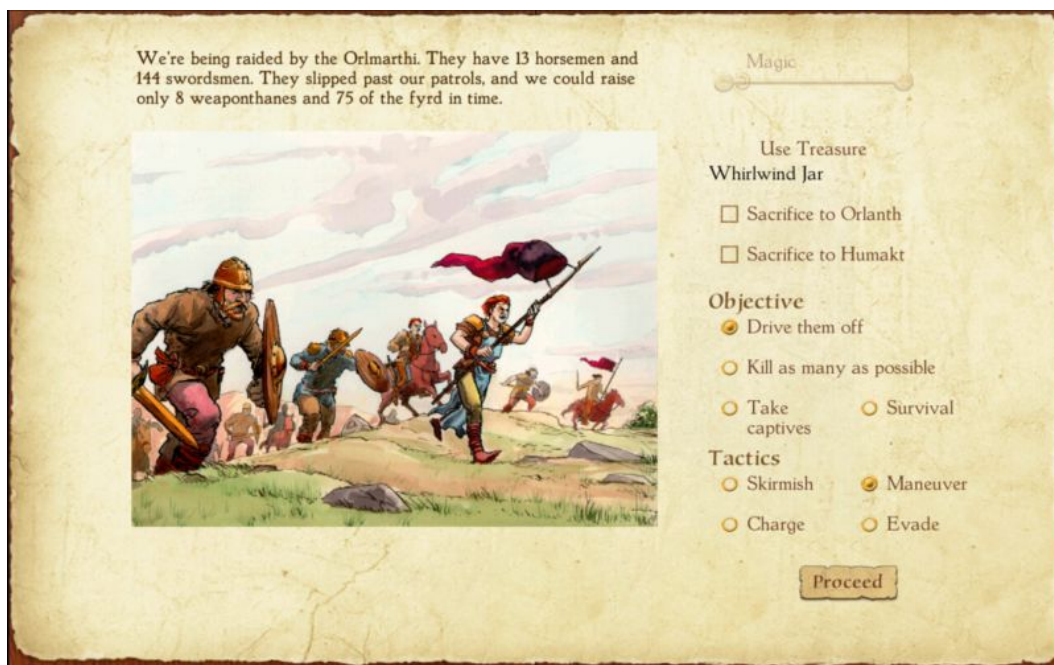

Figure 4: The raid screen, shown because a neighbouring clan is raiding your clan

rules of engagement. The player's clan is also threatened by non-human enemies, like trolls, winter-demons, and beastfolk (which include centaurs, minotaurs, and anthropomorphic ducks).
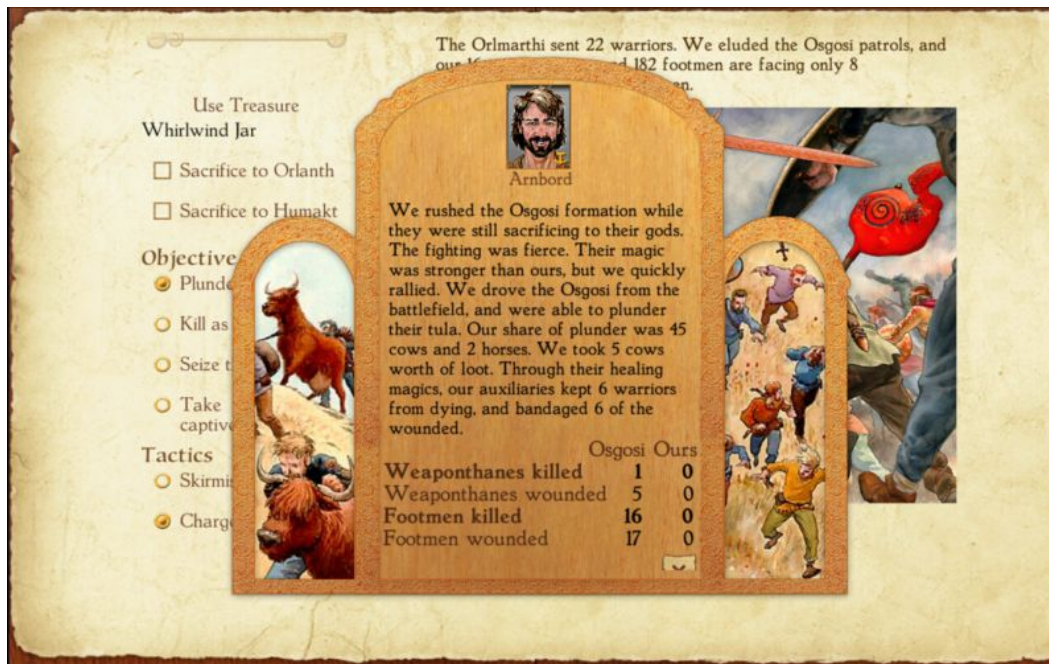

Figure 5: The raid screen showing the consequences of a successful raid

Every time the player adjusts something in one of the menus time passes, eventually rolling onto the next season or year. This slow-paced play is punctuated by narrative moments, where the player is presented with a situation which requires making a choice on the options presented.

A short narrative text presents the situation, with several options available under the narrative text. The screen also contains additional information on the current situation and the faces of the clan ring, who will present their opinions on the matter if prompted. The choices favoured by the clan ring members are also highlighted among the available options. After making the choice, the player is either immediately shown the consequences of their actions or the consequences become clear only later (sometimes much later) in the game.

Success in the game requires careful long-term strategic choices in managing the clan, good tactics in the unavoidable battles the clan will end up in, and in developing sensitivity to diplomacy so as not to make too many enemies among the neighbouring clans. However, simple managing is not enough – the player must also be sensitive to the *Orlanthi* way of life in deciding on how to react to the countless situations that require making judgements on behalf of the clan ring. The following examples elaborate on *Orlanthi* customs and how they operate as a game mechanic.

MEANING AS A GAME MECHANIC

In order to play *KoDP* successfully, the player must understand what it means to be *Orlanthi*. I look at three examples that show how the player must make interpretations of what the
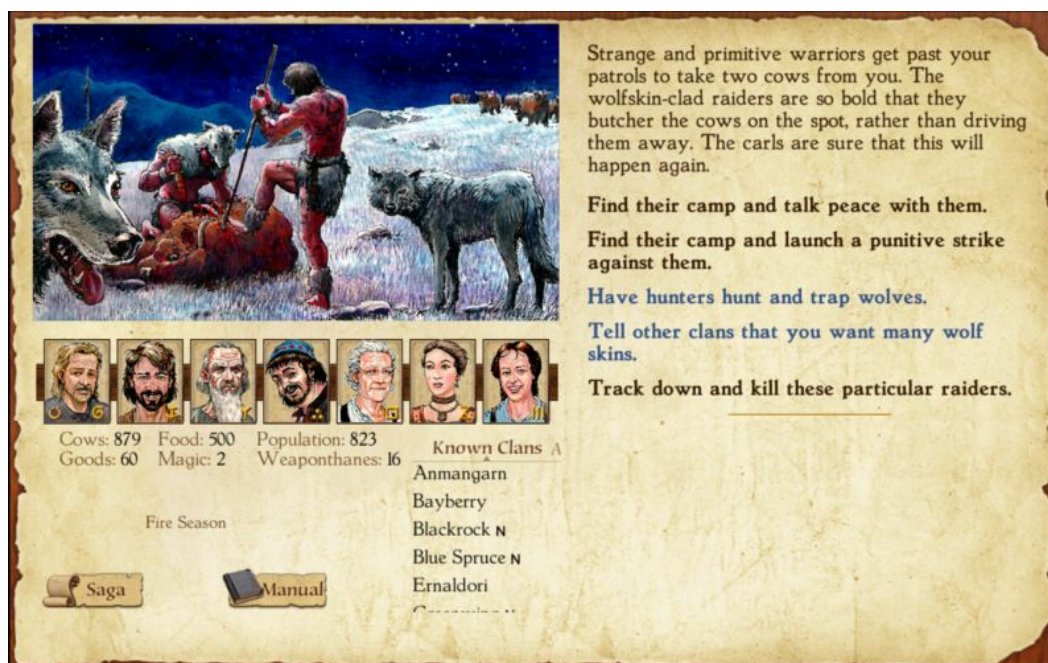
Figure 6: The narrative choice screen showing five different reactions the clan could take against the wolf-raiders

correct course of action is and how the game frames what *Orlanthi* culture is. The examples I look at are related to everyday social categories that differ from the everyday experiences the player is (likely) accustomed to.

However, I should acknowledge that everyone playing *KoDP* does not share my context of interpretation. In hermeneutic theory that context of interpretation is called the *horizon* (Gadamer 2004, 301). The horizon of my interpretation is the mental landscape – a combination of personal qualities, social surroundings and cultural assumptions – that both enables and limits my interpretations. My horizon is necessarily limiting since I make my interpretations from a certain cultural context and with a certain purpose. My horizon is also enabling, because without some kind of cultural context I would not be able to make interpretations at all – there would be nothing I could compare the *Orlanthi* culture with.

It should also be noted that the game itself privileges a certain type of player, building upon Nordic, Germanic and Celtic myths. Knowledge of these myths helps in understanding the world of the game, as does familiarity with other works in the genre of medieval fantasy. In addition to the myths, the people portrayed in the game are also recognisably European. The horizon of the game's development prioritises Western values, assumptions and interpretations. Nevertheless, the culture portrayed in *KoDP* probably differs from what most players are accustomed to in their daily lives, which is the crucial point for my analysis.

Killing Legally

Orlanthi organise into clan units which are composed of around 500 to 1000 people. The relations between different clans differ, but there are at least two different formal relations clans can have:

1. Clans can be allied, which means that they can ask each other favours whenever they choose to. However, asking too many favours may lead the alliance into being dissolved.

2. Clans can also feud. Feuding clans do so openly, declaring that they are each other's enemies. Killing members of a feuding clan is accepted, even encouraged.
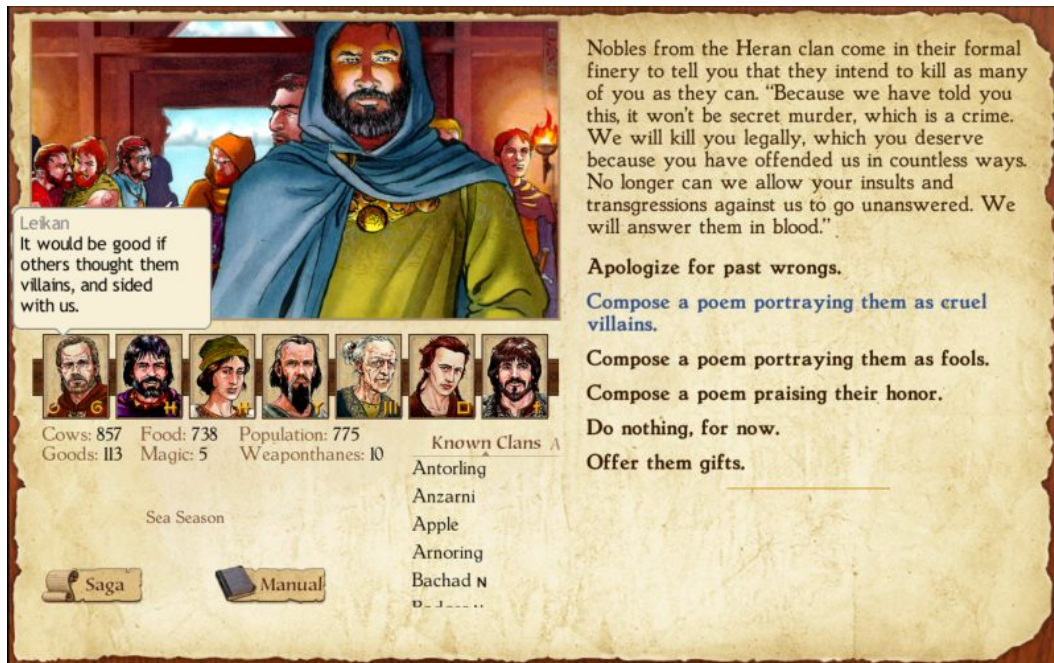

Figure 7: Nobles from the Heran clan come to declare their intentions of killing members of your clan

Figure 7 shows nobles from the Heran clan formally declaring a feud. When they attack my clan and kill its members on the battlefield, this is not wrong because "it won't be secret murder", which would be against *Orlanthi* values – killing itself is not bad, only if it is done dishonestly. Note that there is no option to "kill the messenger" – they are safe, because they have openly come forward with their intentions. Again, a surprise attack against a group openly declaring their intentions would be against *Orlanthi* values. The exchange is probably in stark contrast with the everyday ethics the player is accustomed to, where any intentional killing is seen as a breach of ethics (with the possible exception of euthanasia). I choose "Compose a poem portraying them as cruel villains", earning them the nickname "The Vile clan". My clan is happy that other clans will see our actions against Heran (including killing them in battle) as justified.

The Customary Amount of Cows

The relations between clans are also defined by a complex web of favours given and due. A favour is a relatively established unit of value, exchangeable into different actions or goods. For example, a favour may be exchanged into support in battle, a certain number of cows or goods, or support in magic rituals. It is a matter of honour for *Orlanthi* to give what is asked although unreasonable demands will be seen as dishonourable and refused.
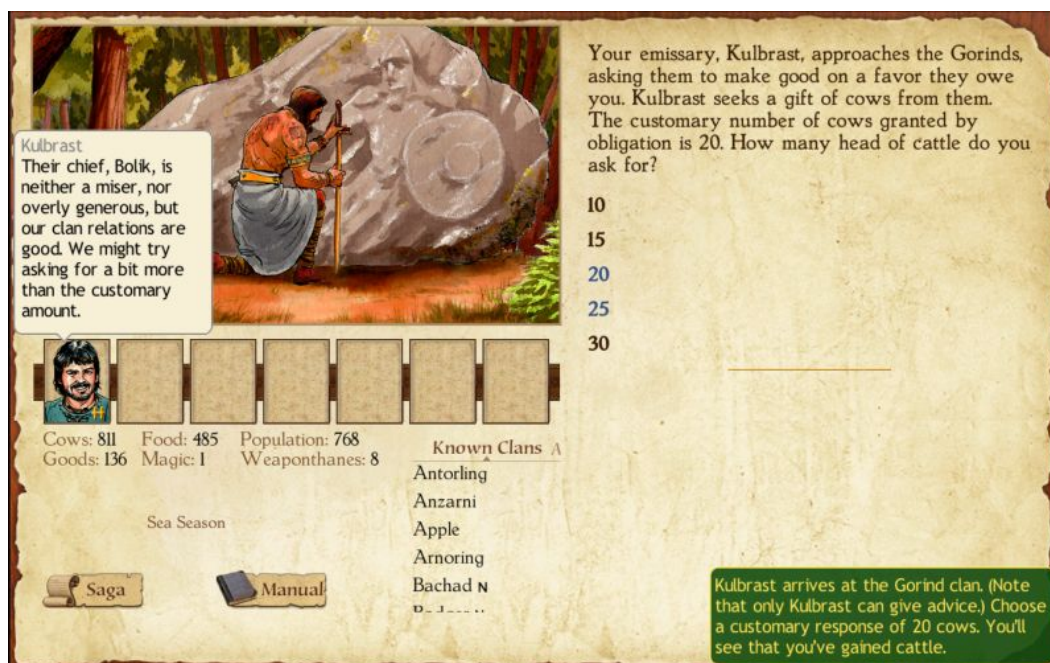
Figure 8: A diplomatic emissary is asking for a favour from the Gorind clan

In Figure 8, Kulbrast has been sent as an emissary to the Gorind clan. They owe my clan a favour, which I can exchange for cows. The tutorial box on the bottom right corner suggests that I choose 20 cows, which is the customary amount. I could ask less in exchange for my favour, which might raise my clan's standing in the eyes of the Gorinds. I could also ask more, in which case the Gorinds might decline, because that would be against the customs. They might also agree to a larger number, if they respected my clan enough and had cows to spare. I choose 20 cows, because that is the customary amount. The Gorinds honour their obligation and give me the cows.

While it is pretty common to ask and give favours to other people, the idea that favours would be defined in relatively concrete terms – 20 cows – is something a player probably does not know unless they are familiar with *Orlanthi* culture.

Blood-Money

The last example starts with the adoption of a warrior from another tribe, Orlkensor Bronze-bones. He has been outlawed from another clan due to some unknown transgression. A thane from my clan vouches that Orlkensor is an honourable man and my clan ring suggests that the reason for his exile might be political. I adopt him as a weaponthane in the hall of the thane that vouched for him.

Orlkensor is later sought out by Vingulf, an Uroxi warrior from the Blue Spruces clan (see Figures 9–12). Vingulf wants to fight and kill Orlkensor for some unknown act of transgression. Uroxi are berserkers sworn to fight the evil influence of chaos everywhere and notorious for their lack of manners. The clan ring must make a decision on how to handle the situation. Neither of the men will discuss the reason for their dispute and Orlkensor refuses to confront Vingulf, so the only options left are to demand Orlkensor fight Vingulf,
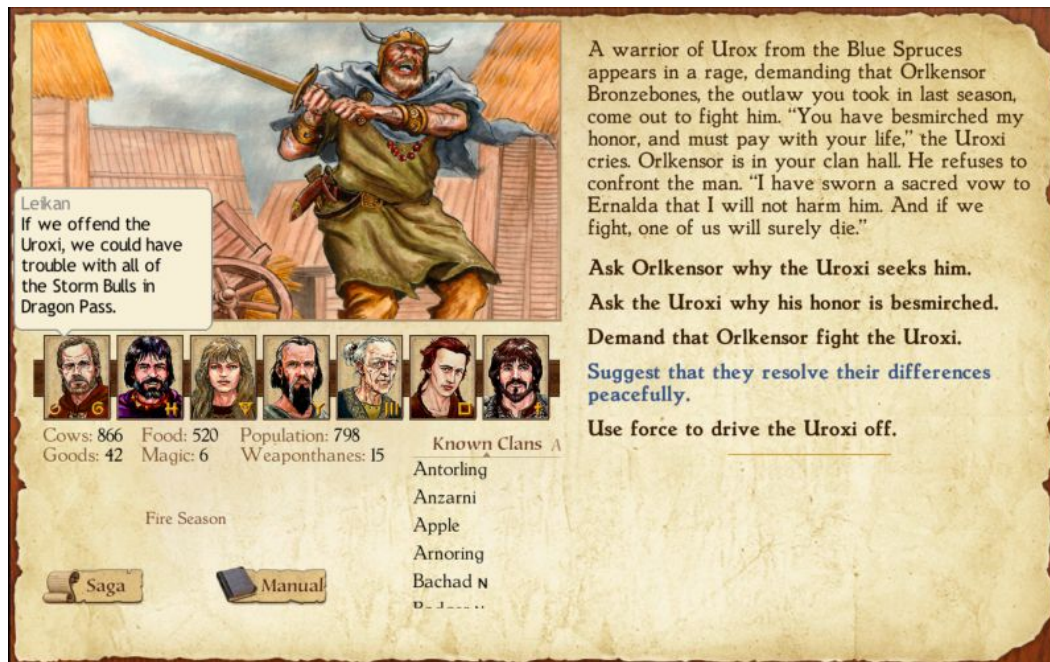
Figure 9: An Uroxi warrior comes searching for Orlkensor Bronzebones

suggest they work it out peacefully or to use force to drive the Uroxi off. Knowing the reputation Uroxi have, a peaceful solution seems unlikely. I choose to drive the Uroxi off; he kills and wounds a dozen warriors before leaving.

Later, Orlkensor is found dead. He has either been suddenly and secretly killed, or he has refused to fight back since there is no blood on his sword. There are no clues, but one obvious culprit. It would be possible to lay the matter to rest by declaring a time of mourning, and the people of the clan might accept this since Orlkensor was only recently accepted into the clan. However, that would leave the killing unresolved. Guessing that the killing is related to the earlier dispute, I seek his killer in the Blue Spruce clan.

Vingulf does not try to hide his actions. When accused of the deed, he confesses – and pays wergild, or blood money, for Orlkensor's life. The act is not secret murder, because he acknowledges he has done it. At this point, I have only two options: demand an apology for the harsh words used or treat the matter as closed. Note that the killing itself has now been dealt with, as Vingulf has paid the proper compensation for the killing. It is only the insult that can be questioned at this point, not the killing.

This transaction between clans shows how *Orlanthi* view matters related to killing others and how they understand the value of life. Vingulf is in the wrong for having killed Orlkensor, but he can pay the customary amount of silver in exchange for Orlkensor's life to make amends. Holding a grudge after that would be possible, but retaliation against Vingulf is not an option – it is simply not an *Orlanthi* thing to do.

Use force to drive the Uroxi off.

Enraged, the Uroxi fought off the warriors we sent to drive him away. He killed some of our fighters and wounded others. Then said he would leave. "Orlkensor should not consider our dispute settled," the Uroxi said. "I will not violate the sanctity of your clan hall by going in to get him now. But I shall get him. That I swear, by Urox's horns."

Done

Cows: 866 Food: 520 Population: 798
Goods: 42 Magic: 6 Weaponthanes: 15

Known Clans A
Antorling
Anzarni
Apple
Arnoring
Bachad N

Fire Season

Saga   Manual

Figure 10: Driving off a berserker does not prove easy, resulting in the deaths of five warriors

Your carls find the body of one of your warriors face-down in a creek deep within your tula. It is Orlkensor, who you adopted after he was outlawed by the Blue Spruces. He was savagely beaten, and his skull is crushed. His sword lies by his side, and it is clean of blood.

Declare a time of mourning.

Perform a divination.

Sacrifice to the gods in Orlkensor's memory.

Seek his killer in another clan.

Seek his killer within the clan.

Cows: 895 Food: 585 Population: 806
Goods: 27 Magic: 2 Weaponthanes: 15

Known Clans A
Antorling
Anzarni
Apple
Arnoring
Bachad N

Fire Season

Saga   Manual

Figure 11: Orlkensor is found dead

Figure 12: Vingulf confesses the killing

DISCUSSION

When a new player starts playing *KoDP*, they enter into a hermeneutic process of trying to understand the game based on their earlier experiences in life (Gadamer 2004 calls these pre-understandings "prejudices" in an attempt to rescue the word from its negative connotations). This process has traditionally been called the *hermeneutic circle*, the constant interplay between having an idea of what something is like (*prejudice* or *pre-understanding*) and forming a new interpretation of it when encountering it anew (see Grondin 2016). The circle form of the process is meant to convey the endlessness of the interpretation, with new information always ready to call into question our previous understanding.

In the case of *KoDP*, the player enters the hermeneutic circle with preconceived ideas of justice, morality, and social order. These ideas are soon tested against the ideals of *Orlanthi* culture. If the player manages to interpret the situations facing them correctly, they succeed in making correct judgements in the choices the game presents to them. It is possible that (especially in the beginning) the player relies on the opinions of the clan ring in making judgements on how to handle different situations. However, just listening to the ring is not enough: their opinions are carefully written not to give out the correct answers, but different views on the current situation. For example, listening exclusively to the clan trickster can have disastrous consequences, as the trickster's purpose is to question *Orlanthi* values and customs. Similarly, following the advice of more warlike members of the ring can lead to more confrontations than any *Orlanthi* clan can handle. By forming an understanding of what is properly *Orlanthi* the player learns to control the extremes of what different *Orlanthi* want and find solutions that are both contextually correct and in accordance with the customs.

It is in this sense that meaning and interpretation work as game mechanics. Learning to

understand *Orlanthi* culture is as central in *KoDP* as learning to jump is in *Super Mario Bros.* (1985) or learning to shoot is in *Call of Duty* (2003). It is also one of the things that make the game a challenge: *KoDP* does not feature any kinaesthetic challenges (cf. Karhulahti 2013), so the difficulty is determined by strategic and hermeneutic challenges.

Of course, not all choices relate to understanding *Orlanthi* culture. The proper amount of barley to plant is related to the weather, the size of the fields, and other factors that the player has to learn during play. That is also a hermeneutic process of interpreting the rules of the game, but is not related to understanding *Orlanthi* culture. However, solely this kind of understanding of the game is not enough to successfully play the game. Only by forming a sufficient understanding of *Orlanthi* culture the player can succeed in the game.

Traditionally, games have shied away from interpretive challenges and focused on either kinaesthetic or strategic challenges. Normally, when a player has problems related to understanding a game, it is thought to be a failure in game design; games usually aim for ease of interpretation in their systems, design and interface. By embracing ambiguity, interpretative challenges and problems in understanding, games could conquer new areas of difficulty. However, it is not enough to simply make a game difficult to understand. That leads only to frustration. Designing hermeneutic challenges needs a new tool kit, a design language for building things open to interpretation. *KoDP* seems to be exemplary in demonstrating how this could be done.

Iteration and Cultural Change

The examples presented show only one possible playthrough, while in reality it is possible to play *KoDP* several times, exploring the different options and their consequences. It is also possible to save the game while playing and reload the saved state if the consequences of a choice are undesirable.[4]

This is complicated by the unpredictability of the game. It is certain that things will happen when time moves on, but it is not certain what those things are. The game randomises the narrative scenes the player is shown, so reloading a game might result in encountering different scenes, or the same scenes in a different order. The longer narratives that are formed by combining individual scenes are an exception to this. In the example of Orlkensor Bronzebones discussed above it is certain that the events will happen in the order presented, but the conclusion of that small narrative is not certain.

In order to demonstrate this, I will shortly introduce the different outcomes of the Orlkensor Bronzebones saga. I will not go through all of the options the player might try, because there are so many of them and some of them are not as interesting.

1. It is possible not to adopt Orlkensor. He might be refused or referred to another clan. This effectively ends his interaction with your clan.

2. If Orlkensor is adopted, Vingulf will come seeking him. It is possible to turn Vingulf away, which leads to the result presented above.

3. When Vingulf comes for Orlkensor, it is possible to convince Orlkensor to fight him. Orlkensor may refuse, which leads to the previous outcome. If they fight, either of them can win the battle.

4. Regardless of who wins the fight, your clan is later visited by Valensta, a noblewoman from the clan that outlawed Orlkensor. She is/was Vingulf's wife.

5. If Vingulf won the fight, Valensta mourns for Orlkensor. It is possible to accuse her of adultery, which she denies, claiming that Vingulf was insanely jealous. Being outlawed is a common punishment for adultery in *Orlanthi* law.

6. If Orlkensor won the fight, he will leave your clan. When Valensta comes seeking him, you can either point her in the right direction or not.

7. If you point her in the right direction, an explorer from another clan contacts you after a year and tells you that they found a man and a woman, frozen in ice, holding each other. The man has your clan's symbols on him and it is possible to confirm that they are Orlkensor and Valensta. You can then commemorate them in various ways, with more effort rewarding more respect.

A player may encounter this narrative multiple times if they play *KoDP* through several times – but it is also possible that they never see it because the scenes are randomly chosen from a pool. Investigating the different branches of the narrative gives the player more information on what happened between Orlkensor, Vingulf and Valensta. Different endings also shed light on different aspects of *Orlanthi* culture: friendship, love, violence, law and how these all intertwine in *Orlanthi* lives.

What if you disagree with the *Orlanthi* values? What if you think killing somebody is wrong, regardless of situation? Or that it is foolish to sacrifice to the gods? You can try to play against the system, disagree with the ethics *Orlanthi* hold to be right and try to impose your own cultural assumptions on them. In many cases, this will not have immediate catastrophic consequences, but will slowly make your clan weaker, more miserable and more likely to feud with their neighbours – like driving against the traffic: possible but inadvisable.[5]

However, there are some situations where it is possible to change your clan's culture. When starting the game, you are presented a list of options on several narrative questions that determine what kind of a clan you will be playing. These include things like choosing the clan's main god, how warlike the clan is, what skills they are particularly good at and what their traditional enemies are. One of the questions specifies whether the clan takes slaves or not. Playing the game according to these choices means honouring your clan's traditions and ancestors, who reward the clan with more magic. Going against these choices leads to the ancestors being unhappy and taking away your magic.

During a game, the clan may be approached by groups of refugees from *Heortland*, also fleeing the *Pharaoh's* rule. If the player chooses according to the traditions, either making the refugees thralls or adopting them as full members of the clan, the ancestors reward this choice with more magic. If the clan takes thralls, the player may later in the game be asked to make a further choice on the matter: a cultural shift is sweeping through a nearby *Orlanthi* clan and they are freeing their thralls. If the player decides to free their thralls, their ancestors are unhappy and take away some of the clan magic. Progress can be hard if even the dead have a say in matters.

Note that while this change could be read as a progressive change in *Orlanthi* culture, both

practices are acceptable and seen as equally valid right from the beginning of the game. Instead, it is a reminder that cultures are not monolithic – there are different practices and norms within the *Orlanthi* culture.

CONCLUSIONS

As the examples discussed in this paper show, it is impossible to proceed in *KoDP* without forming an understanding of *Orlanthi* culture and making correct choices based on that understanding. A player starting the game for the first time has to test their understanding of what is right, just, and good in society against the values appreciated by *Orlanthi* in a hermeneutic circle of interpretation. Choices that lead to a happy and successful clan show that the player has understood what it means to be *Orlanthi*, while choices that result in an unhappy and unsuccessful clan show the player that they have misunderstood how *Orlanthi* should be governed. However, the game itself privileges certain prejudices and interpretations by building upon a Western mythology.

This paper uses *KoDP* and *Orlanthi* as a fictional example of cultural understanding, but this line of argumentation shows that games in general could be used for developing cultural understanding. These are not limited to the cultural simulations usually used for training intercultural communication, but similar goals could be achieved with more traditional games.

Additionally, this paper presents a category of challenges related to interpretation, showing how games can use *hermeneutic challenges* as a game mechanic. Hermeneutic challenges focus on ambiguity and cultural understanding but provide consistency that minimises arbitrariness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ENDNOTES

1 *KoDP* from now on.

2 This is, of course, not the sole deciding factor. Games can have other challenges besides the interpretive – in this case the challenges relate to strategic choices (see e.g., Karhulahti 2013).

3 *Orlanthi* are, of course, a fictional tribe. There is no *Orlanthi* culture separate from the fictional descriptions of it. The following discussion proceeds with the assumption that the portrayal is coherent and builds an understandable and meaningful picture of *Orlanthi* culture. Of course, cultures are not simple monoliths and even fictional cultures do not need to be entirely homogeneous.

4 In the original Windows and Mac versions the game could be saved whenever there was nothing going on – narrative choices, battles etc. In the mobile relaunch the game saves automatically at the end of each year.

5 Dyer-Witheford and Peuter (2010) discuss the idea of *counterplay*, or playing against the system. They discuss the idea in relation to resisting the all-encompassing power of capitalism, but we can also try to understand playing against the system in relation to *Orlanthi* values. It seems that the structure of the game leaves very little room for this kind of play: refusing *Orlanthi* culture or the procedural structure of the game quickly leads to failure.

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