

The Crusades Campaign

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G'day, I'm Dan Lehtonen and I am one of the designer's working on Medieval II: Kingdoms. My primary focus in the expansion is combat, faction and unit design with a bit of level editing thrown in. Today I get to tell you about one of the four exciting campaigns in the Kingdoms expansion, the Crusades!

First off, allow me to give you some of the history leading up to the Crusades campaign that will introduce the factions and their background leading up to the campaign.

The Crusades campaign begins at a tumultuous time in the Middle East. The year is 1174 and nearly 80 years after the first crusade and the capture of Jerusalem, wars still rage. Despite the efforts of the Seljuk Turks and the Fatimid's of Egypt, the eastern coast of the holy lands abutting the Mediterranean is still in control of the Crusader states. This important region includes the Holy city of Jerusalem, the ports of Acre and Tyre, The powerful city of Antioch and the mighty fortress of the Hospitaller knightly order, the Krak Des Chevaliers. With control of these important settlements the Crusader states manage to hold the tide of the east at bay.

The Crusader states though have found it very hard going to conquer much land inward of these settlements. Antioch, under Prince Bohemond III has had little success capturing and holding any lands in the Turkish dominions to the east and now casts an eye over Anatolia to the north. The Kingdom of Jerusalem has failed to exert much influence over the lands to the south and east of it. Now under the dynamic leadership of Baldwin III, called the Leper King, they are beginning to expand their domains and look south towards Egypt.

The Byzantine Empire suffered a tremendous defeat of its army by the Turks at the battle of Manzikert in 1071. Subsequently Byzantium lost most of Anatolia over the following 100 years, is only now beginning to regain its former territory in Anatolia at the expense of the Turks. This can be attributed to the aggressive leadership of their Emperor Manuel I who is determined to re-establish his empire as the super power it once was.

However, the Turks have been successfully unifying the disparate Muslim peoples, under the powerful leadership of Nur el-din, who dreams of driving the hated Crusader infidels into the sea and reclaiming the Holy lands.

Meanwhile, in Egypt one of the greatest leaders of all time has stepped forward and shone under difficult circumstances. His name is Saladin, having been sent to Egypt to represent Nur el-din at the Egyptian court, he seizes control of Egypt from the Fatimid caliphate. He now faces the difficult task of rebuilding Egypt and defending it from the Kingdom of Jerusalem's depredations, before following his dream of unifying the entire Muslim world.

The Crusades campaign is spread across the eastern coast of the Mediterranean and into the Middle East. From the mighty city of Constantinople in the north, to Baghdad in the east, down to Cairo in the south and includes Antioch, Krak des Chevaliers and the Jewel of the Holy lands Jerusalem in the center.

These significant regions are known as “Power Centers” in the Crusades campaign and have a direct impact on the game with each faction required to hold them for a continuous period of time to meet victory conditions, and to be able to recruit some of the most powerful units in the campaign. An example of this would be the mighty Marshall of the Hospitaller’s who can only be recruited by holding Krak Des Chevaliers.

Along side “power centers”, the unique character leading your faction will play a vital role on your road to victory. Each faction has a special character, who in real life played a critical role in Crusade history, such as Saladin for Egypt. Each of these characters gains a unique special ability that can change the course of combat in a moment. For example Saladin can use his ability “the righteousness of faith” to inspire *all* of his men, *anywhere* on the battle field to fight to the last breath against their enemies. The game consequence of this is that Saladin’s troops will never route whilst under the influence of his inspiring call, this can have a massive impact on how a battle plays out. I will leave the rest of the abilities as a surprise, but believe me when I say that once players learn to use these special abilities, they’ll be making sure their generals survive every battle.

Now lets begin to look in some more depth at the factions found in the Crusades. There are five factions in the crusade with a surprise or two thrown in. Firstly we have what I like to call the “super factions” these are the Kingdom of Jerusalem and Principality of Antioch. These factions are actually made up of three smaller factions each, which when viewed on a battlefield in their own individual finery is quite an awesome sight.

The Kingdom of Jerusalem consists of Jerusalem itself, the County of Tripoli and the feared Knights Templar. The “Power Center” for Jerusalem is of course Jerusalem itself, which allows the recruitment of not just the Marshall of the Templar’s but also the Constable of Jerusalem, which is a very large and powerful unit of heavy cavalry. Jerusalem’s army is weighted towards using its many heavy cavalry units such as the Knights of Tripoli, Templar Confrere knights and those mentioned above. Jerusalem of course also fields infantry and missile troops including the Templar crossbowmen who are feared all throughout the holy lands for their unerring marksmanship.

Jerusalem begins the game in a strong alliance with the Principality of Antioch, which it would be wise to keep intact, as it faces the wrath of Saladin’s Egypt and Nur el-Din’s Turks. To strengthen the kingdom of Jerusalem requires expansion. Jerusalem has several options at hand. Firstly it can expand eastward conquering Arabic lands not associated with its two mighty enemies the Turks and Egypt. Secondly Jerusalem can turn and confront the burgeoning power of Saladin and Egypt early on but this will be a draining engagement which could leave Jerusalem open to vultures that are waiting for her to weaken. A wise and leader must also be aware that many jealous eyes regard Jerusalem itself as one of the most holy and important cities in the world and perhaps even the strongest bonds of loyalty can be overcome by greed.

The Principality of Antioch is made from Antioch itself, the county of Edessa and the Knights Hospitaller. The power center for Antioch is surprisingly not Antioch itself but the mighty Hospitaller fortress of Krak des Chevaliers which allows for the recruitment of not just the Marshall of the Hospitaller's but also for other Hospitaller units. Antioch's army, unlike Jerusalem's, is geared more towards powerful infantry units. Whilst they do have the Mighty Marshall of the Templar's and knights of Antioch, they also field the powerful Edessan guard infantry unit and the awesome Canons of the Holy Sepulcher. These men have served as guards to the tomb of Christ and are rightly feared for their unshakable faith in battle and maybe the fact they wield huge two-handed swords.

The Principality of Antioch begins in a strong Alliance with the Kingdom of Jerusalem, which it would be wise to keep as Jerusalem acts as a buffer between Egypt and Antioch, who already have to worry about the Turks trying to drive them into the sea. Antioch must either reach an accommodation with Byzantium or it will add another enemy to the list, leaving it vulnerable to being picked apart from two fronts at once. The Principality of Antioch can quickly expand north into Anatolia which risks angering the Byzantines who wish to reclaim it themselves. Alternatively pushing east into Turkish controlled lands will lead to an escalation with the Turks, either way Antioch's future is certain to be dangerous.

That covers the background to the campaign, the power centre settlements and hero characters. I've also introduced you to our two crusader state factions. In the second and final part of this diary, I'll give you some in-depth information on the remaining factions included in the campaign – the Turks, Egypt and the Byzantines.

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Part Two

G'day, I'm Dan Lehtonen and I am one of the designer's working on Medieval II: Kingdoms. In this diary I've been telling you more about one of the four epic new campaigns included in Kingdoms, the expansion pack for Medieval II. In part one I introduce the setting to the campaign, some of its new gameplay mechanics and described in depth, our two Crusader State factions included in the campaign. In this second part I'm going to look at the three remaining factions – the Turks, Egypt and the Byzantines.

The Turks are no newcomers to anyone who has played Medieval II. The Turks unlike any other faction do not start with their power center, which in this case is Baghdad. If the Turks wish to access some of their most powerful units they will need to take Baghdad, which is very well defended at the start of the game. This offers the Turks a strategic choice; either conquering several weaker settlements at the start of the game or wait till they can amass a large enough force to crack the mighty defenses of

Baghdad. The potential rewards of taking such a large city at the start of the game versus the amount of time spent and men lost must be balanced carefully by the player.

The Turks start in a very interesting strategic position. They can take the fight to the accursed Crusader states early on or they can focus on dominating Anatolia and defeating the Byzantines. The Turks army is still based around its powerful array of mobile horse archers but they have received new units that help in other areas as well. Examples of these are the Turkish crossbowmen, which allow the Turks to use crusader weapons against crusaders, and the Hasham which provide the Turks with a solid unit of heavy cavalry. Of course the Turks gain more excellent horse archers and the new iqta'dar are the most heavily armoured horse archers in the Turks arsenal, able to take the fight to their enemy if their arrows run out. The Turks begin allied with Egypt in the fight against the crusaders, and at war with Byzantium. Deep down they know that in the future there is only room for one great Islamic power in the Middle East and if they are successful it won't be Egypt.

Players from Medieval II will be comfortable knowing the Middle Eastern powerhouse that is Egypt remains strong in the Crusades. Egypt's powerbase is built around the Nile and they start with their "Power Center" of Cairo. Holding Cairo allows the player to eventually recruit Egypt's most powerful unit and one of the most stunning units we have ever produced, the Khassaki, but more on them later. Egypt has the option at the start of the game to either progress up the coastline to engage Jerusalem early on or to spread eastward and capture the tribal lands in the desert, which can prove surprisingly rewarding. A daring Egyptian general can also launch a seaborne attack on the crusader states and Byzantium across the Mediterranean if audacious enough. The Egyptian army has a more even approach to their unit disposition, with good cavalry, infantry and missile troops already at their disposal. Never the less Egypt has still gained several new and exciting units. The Al Haqa infantry are skilled swordsmen sworn to protect Egyptian settlements and the Sibyan al Khass are an impetuous unit of youngsters good enough to join the Royal Mamluks regiments as armoured horse archers. The pride of the Egyptian army must go to the Khassaki, these elite heavy cavalry units serves the Sultan himself, and are armoured in the heaviest armour seen in the Crusades.

Egypt begins allied with the Turks in their war against the Crusader States and would be wise to foster that alliance whilst the thrice cursed Crusader states continue to exist. Ultimately Egypt will want to unite all Muslims under one unified control- Egypt's control!

The Byzantine Empire is one of my favorite factions from Medieval II and with an important part in the history of the Crusades they were guaranteed to reappear in the Crusades campaign. Byzantium starts with control of its "Power Center" The most powerful city in the world, Constantinople, which it must keep to access its most powerful units and great income. In the context of the crusades Byzantium has a unique position. Whilst initially supportive of the crusaders it soon came to realize that it would not be able to control the forces it had unleashed and would have to deal with the possibility of fighting the Crusader states for control of lands it previously owned. Byzantium also has problems with the Turks, who have been taking control

of previous Byzantine territory in Anatolia and of course it has enmity with Egypt after a series of strikes across the Mediterranean. Byzantium though is anything if not crafty, recruiting new units from amongst their own people, neighbors and even the crusading Franks. Byzantium has gained some strong new units. One of these new units is the Alamanoi which consist of German and Flemish mercenaries wielding massive two handed swords. In a nod to some of our more vocal fans, Byzantium finally gets gunpowder in the form of Byzantine gunners and bombards as well. Most exciting of all are the Greek Firethrowers employed by Byzantium. These units can burn through a crusader unit faster than the time it took to type that.

The Byzantine Empire sits at a crossroads. Not just the crossroads between Europe and the Middle East but Between the Crusader States and the Muslim forces of Egypt and the Turks. Byzantium can tip the scales one way or the other, affecting the balance of power between the Cross and the Crescent, but with the ultimate goal of being the only one left on the scales in mind.

Have I wet your appetite yet? With such a diverse political situation and with massive forces at your control, the situation that you find yourself in when playing the Crusades is dynamic and only you can change the outcome... can Byzantium regain its previous land and become a Superpower once again? Can the Turks take over the entire Middle East? Can Jerusalem stay in the Hands of the Crusader states and resist the implacable advance of Saladin and Nur el-Din? Only by utilising the full potential of the "Power Centers" and using your Heroes and their Abilities to their full extent will you be able to win... the Crusades!