

ASSASSIN'S CREED: NOTTINGHAM: THE MEDIEVALISM OF UBISOFT'S LUDIC OUTLAWS

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In a recent post on r/AssassinsCreed, the Reddit page devoted to the videogame series of the same name, a user named “u/PhazePalm” suggests a plotline for a new *Assassin's Creed* installment:

Looking back it seems as though the legend of Robin Hood could easily be described as a [Rogue] assassin. I wouldn't actually mind seeing a game where you play as an Assassin in the medieval time that becomes known as Robin Hood. Instead of just murdering people in a nonsensical war you fight for those who cannot, you steal from the rich and give to the poor. I personally [think] that both the classic and modern gameplay styles would also work well for said game. Modern day 1v1 combat, classical style free running. Imagine exploring and climbing castles with the graphic[s] of today, overlooking vast woodlands while wearing a leather green hood, an Assassin hood[.] Robin Hood and [*Assassin's Creed*] could easily be one of the best AC games made.¹

His post received 39 “upvotes” (analogous to “likes”), a decent number, but a commenter who claimed to be a Nottingham resident pointed out that “Robin Hood has been shown to not have actually existed in history,” ultimately stating that “while [*Assassin's Creed*] games aren't necessarily that historic [sic],” Ubisoft, the game studio behind the *Assassin's Creed* series, would not make it because their games rely on real historical figures to flesh out the world encountered by each fictional protagonist.² Nevertheless, a quick Google search for “Robin Hood Assassin's Creed” reveals over one hundred separate Reddit discussion threads, fanart, and fanfiction devoted to the idea of a crossover.³

Why does the idea of the legendary medieval ludic outlaw Robin Hood resonate so powerfully with *Assassin's Creed* (hereafter *AC*) fans? In their Reddit post, u/PhazePalm suggests a few reasons, ranging from Robin's trademark hood, which mirrors the typical costume of the main characters in the *AC* franchise, to the gameplay elements that emphasize stealth, archery, and climbing skills, as well as the modern stereotype that Robin Hood robbed from the rich and gave to the poor.⁴ Indeed, the struggle between Robin Hood and his Merry Men versus the Sheriff of

¹ u/PhazePalm, “r/Assassinscreed—Robin Hood the Assassin,” *Reddit*,

https://www.reddit.com/r/assassinscreed/comments/fnmhar/robin_hood_the_assassin/, accessed March 23, 2020.

² u/ZadTheLad, “Damn i always thought medieval england...” Thread comment in “r/Assassinscreed—Robin Hood the Assassin,” *Reddit*,

https://www.reddit.com/r/assassinscreed/comments/fnmhar/robin_hood_the_assassin/flaajlh/?utm_source=reddit&utm_medium=web2x&context=3, accessed March 23, 2020.

³ For an example of fan-made crossover content, see Leo Stableford, “Assassin's Creed: Outlaw,” *Wattpad*, <https://www.wattpad.com/621270940-assassin%27s-creed-outlaw-book-one-robin-hood>, last modified September 13, 2018. For an example of fanart, see FableFoxWeaver, “Assassin's Creed: Robin Hood,” *DeviantArt*, <https://www.deviantart.com/fablefoxweaver/art/Assassin-s-Creed-Robin-Hood-654242478>, last modified December 30, 2016.

⁴ What u/PhazePalm identifies here reflects what Lesley Coote refers to as the “four major elements in the way that people have understood and represented Robin Hood in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries [...] social function,

Nottingham and the authoritarianism of King John translates well to the larger struggle that underpins the *AC* series of Assassins vs. Templars; like the Assassins, the outlaws of Sherwood Forest are, in the modern imagination, agents of resistance to tyranny. Yet, the wide range of social media posts fantasizing about an *AC: Nottingham* or something like it suggests that the connection between the medieval outlaw and the modern video game is deeper than these superficial similarities. In both medieval *ludi* and in their modern forms, games create cultural meaning and memory through play.⁵ Robin Hood's cultural meaning is particularly mutable, allowing the tradition to belong to a variety of times, places, and purposes.⁶ This essay examines the cultural meaning and memory invoked in the video game series *Assassin's Creed*, revealing that parallels to the Robin Hood legend are built into its very gameplay and narrative framework, despite the fact that the series contains no significant references to the legendary figure.⁷

First released in 2007, the *Assassin's Creed* franchise now includes twelve main games, several spin-off games, novels, comics, symphonies, and a blockbuster film. Though the setting and plot of each game in the series varies, many of the games follow an overarching theme that blends medievalism and science fiction into an epic single-player role-playing game. Unlike many video game series that incorporate medievalism, *AC* is largely devoid of magic and mythical creatures.⁸ Though there are seemingly supernatural elements at stake throughout the series, such as a potion that allows the player-character to see the past in *Valhalla* and a battle with a Gorgon in *Odyssey*, such encounters are usually revealed to be manifestations of the technological superiority of Earth's past. All *Assassin's Creed* games purportedly take place in our own world, blending modern and historical settings. For instance, the first game, titled simply *Assassin's Creed*, takes place simultaneously in twenty-first-century New York City and in the Holy Land during the Third Crusade. *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* is set in 1511, during the rise of the Ottoman Empire in Constantinople; *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* takes place during the ninth-century Viking invasion of Britain, and, most recently, *Assassin's Creed: Shadows* begins in sixteenth-century feudal Japan.⁹ In each game, players are forced into the past through an in-game

appearance, chronology and place." See Lesley Coote, *Storyworlds of Robin Hood: The Origins of a Medieval Outlaw* (London: Reaktion Books, 2020), 8.

⁵ Betsy McCormick, "Afterword: Medieval Ludens," in *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, ed. Serina Patterson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 209.

⁶ Douglas Gray, "Everybody's Robin Hood," in *Robin Hood: Medieval and Post-medieval*, ed. Helen Phillips (Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2005), 22. Neil Cartlidge, "Robin Hood's Rules: Gang-culture in Early-modern Outlaw Tales?" *Cultural Dynamics* 28, no. 1 (2016): 16. Alice Blackwood, "By Words and By Deeds: The Role of Performance in Shaping the 'Canon' of Robin Hood," in *Robin Hood and the Outlaw/ed Literary Canon*, ed. Lesley Coote and Alexander L. Kaufman (New York: Routledge, 2018), 57.

⁷ The most recent installment of *AC*, *Valhalla*, includes an NPC, "Ryce Sherwin," found in the game's ninth-century version of Sherwood Forest. After aiding Sherwin against a band of Picts, the PC arrives at Sherwin's camp in the forest. This camp contains archery targets and references to "merry men," the closest reference the *AC* franchise has made to Robin Hood to date. For more on this encounter, see Blaine Smith, "Where To Find Robin Hood In *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* (Sort Of)," *Gamers Heroes*, <https://www.gamersheroes.com/game-guides/where-to-find-robin-hood-in-assassins-creed-valhalla-sort-of/>, accessed November 9, 2020.

⁸ In their chapter "Experiential Medievalisms," Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl conflate *Assassin's Creed* with games such as *Guild Wars* and *Baldur's Gate* to argue that "you can't have medieval games without magic," yet an emphasis on technology rather than magic is part of what defines *Assassin's Creed* as a franchise. See Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl, *Medievalisms: Making the Past into the Present* (London: Routledge, 2013), 127.

⁹ "Assassin's Creed Valhalla for Xbox One, PS4, PC & More: Ubisoft (US)," *Ubisoft*, <https://www.ubisoft.com/en-us/game/assassins-creed/valhalla>, accessed August 31, 2020; Matt Purslow, "When and Where Is *Assassin's Creed*:"

device called an “Animus,” which allows the modern-day protagonist of each game to access the memories of their ancestors through samples of their DNA. The strength of the memory depends on the user’s “synchronization” with an ancestor’s actions; the more they accurately follow each step of an ancestor’s journeys, the stronger the connection between past and present. The synchronization system, along with the ability to pause and save mid-game, allows *Assassin’s Creed* to engage in a “fully recursive temporal system.”¹⁰ By encouraging players to immerse themselves in this recursive timeline through the Animus, *AC* reinvents historical narratives in what Anna Reading and Colin Harvey term “nostalgic-play.”¹¹

Each of these games thrusts the player-character (hereafter PC) into a millennia-long conflict between two opposing forces: the Assassins, who desire free will for all humanity, and the Templars, who believe that only by controlling humanity can world peace be attained.¹² Based in part on the historical medieval Orders of the Nizari Isma’ili Assassins and the Christian Knights Templar,¹³ these games present an alternate history wherein humanity was bred as a slave race for Earth’s “First Civilization” known as the Isu and manipulated by mind-control technology called “Pieces of Eden.”¹⁴ In every game, the Assassins, who aim to destroy the Pieces of Eden left behind after the fall of Isu civilization, must fight members of the Templar Order, who try to claim the Pieces of Eden for their own schemes.

Throughout the series, PCs interact with historical figures like King Richard I of England, Salah ad-Din, Lorenzo de’ Medici, Caterina Sforza, and Julius Caesar. The games’ reliance on ahistorical interactions between the PC and historical non-player characters (NPCs), have motivated some medievalists to protest that *AC* may constitute a “great loss to the complexity of [historical figures’] achievements in their contemporary periods.”¹⁵ Yet as the earlier rebuttal to u/PhazePalm’s Reddit post makes clear, the series is known among fans for its efforts at historical fidelity despite its fictional history. In an attempt to ensure historical fidelity as a core value and a selling point of their games, Ubisoft hires archaeologists, linguists, and historians to consult on everything from architecture to language to historical accuracy with regard to the games’ real-world settings, which have generated calls to consider the *AC* games useful pedagogical tools.¹⁶ It

Shadows Set,” *IGN*, <https://www.ign.com/articles/when-and-where-is-assassins-creed-shadows-set>, accessed March 27, 2025.

¹⁰ Christopher Hanson, *Game Time: Understanding Temporality in Video Games* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 142.

¹¹ Anna Reading and Colin Harvey, “Remembrance of Things Fast: Conceptualizing *Nostalgic-Play* in the *Battlestar Galactica* Video Game,” in *Playing the Past: History and Nostalgia in Video Games*, ed. Zach Whalen and Laurie N. Taylor (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008), 164.

¹² Though a thorough account of the history of popular Templar paranoia is outside the scope of this essay, Harry J. Brown explores this history in “The Consolation of Paranoia: Conspiracy, Epistemology, and the Templars in *Assassin’s Creed*, *Deux Ex*, and *Dragon Age*,” in *Digital Gaming Re-imagines the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel T. Kline, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 227-239.

¹³ Vicente Torres, “The Original ‘Assassins’: Medieval Warriors of Alamut,” *National Geographic*, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/magazine/2018/11-12/nizari-ismaili-muslim-warriors-medieval-times/>, accessed November 21, 2018.

¹⁴ *Assassin’s Creed* Wiki, s.v. “The Isu,” <https://assassinscreed.fandom.com/wiki/Isu>, last modified January 22, 2023.

¹⁵ Pugh and Weisl, *Medievalisms*, 126.

¹⁶ Angela Jane Weisl and Kevin J. Stevens, “The Middle Ages in the Depths of Hell: Pedagogical Possibility and the Past in *Dante’s Inferno*,” in *Digital Gaming Re-imagines the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel T. Kline (New York:

is this emphasis on “real history,” despite its fictional prehistory, that prompted the Reddit user from Nottingham to dismiss the notion of an *AC* game based on Robin Hood. Nevertheless, outlawry is a central component of the series. The PC in each game does not get to choose to side with the Templars or Assassins; instead, they are automatically forced into outlawry by reliving the memories of ancestral Assassins. Members of the Order of the Assassins work in the shadows of history, often as spies, thieves, and murderers who operate for the greater good. The Templars, on the other hand, are typically aligned with the ruling state powers and/or corporate interests that exploit the common man.¹⁷

Regardless of the games’ historical settings, the PC never has the ability to kill or steal indiscriminately without consequences imposed by the game, such as negative reactions from bystanders surrounding the PC, detrimental quest outcomes based upon undesirable PC behavior, and (at least in early games) punishments linked to a system that tracks PC notoriety. Instead, the franchise imposes a code of honor, the titular “Creed,” onto the Assassin Order and provides in-game ramifications for any murder or theft that violates this Creed. The Assassin’s Creed consists of three main tenets:

- 1) Stay your blade from the flesh of an innocent.
- 2) Hide in plain sight.
- 3) Never compromise the Brotherhood.¹⁸

The ethical code of the Assassins is essential to the games’ overarching plot. Jade Raymond, a game developer for the first *AC* game, which takes place during the Third Crusade, states,

As the Saracens and Crusaders battle one another for control[,] the Assassins are working to find a way to end the hostilities. They see the war as pointless. There is no reason Crusaders and Saracens should not co-exist in peace. The Assassins are not allied with either side of the conflict, nor are they driven by a desire for profit or power. In *Assassins’ Creed* [sic], Crusaders (and the Saracens) are not the Assassins’ true enemy. War is—as are those who exploit it.¹⁹

Exploitation and senseless violence, embodied by the Templars’ grasp for power, are posed as the true enemies of the Assassins across the series.

Medievalists and Robin Hood scholars may recognize immediate parallels between the Assassin’s Creed and Eric Hobsbawm’s idea of the “social bandit.”²⁰ The social bandit is regarded as a criminal by the state, but is considered an avenger or freedom fighter by the general populace. These figures are often found participating in revolutions.²¹ Hobsbawm identifies nine traits of the Noble Robber, a subset of the social bandit and an appellation Hobsbawm explicitly applies to

Routledge, 2018), 175. Huaxin Wei, Jim Bizzocchi, and Tom Calvert, “Time and Space in Digital Game Storytelling,” *International Journal of Computer Games Technology*, 2010 (2010): 1-23.

¹⁷ This framework exists even in the games that take place before the in-game official founding date of the Orders of the Assassins and Templars. For instance, in *Assassin’s Creed: Odyssey*, the PC works as a mercenary-for-hire fighting members of the Cult of Kosmos; mercenaries and cult members serve as analogues both logistically and historically for the future Assassins and Templars, respectively.

¹⁸ “The Three Tenets of Assassin’s Creed,” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u04oxJqoQe0>, July 10, 2017.

¹⁹ Magy Seif El-Nasr, Maha Al-Saati, David Milam, and Simon Niedenthal, “Assassin’s Creed: A Multicultural Read,” in *Loading...* 2, no. 3 (2009): 13.

²⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969), 41.

²¹ Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 17, 23.

Robin Hood. The Noble Robber begins as the victim of injustice; he rights wrongs; he “takes from the rich to give to the poor”; he “never kills but in self-defense or just revenge”; he never actually leaves his community; he is admired, helped, and supported by his people; he must die through treason; he is, “at least in theory—invisible and invulnerable”; and lastly, he is not the enemy of the king or emperor, but the enemy of oppressors.²² Though Hobsbawm’s categorization of Robin Hood depends upon postmedieval understandings of the figure, a system of rules and *gentilness* can be found in some of the earliest literary mentions of the outlaw.²³

In the fifteenth-century *A Lytell Geste of Robyn Hode*, for example, Robin has a “good maner” and is extremely religious, hearing up to three Masses a day.²⁴ (For comparison, kings at the time only heard two Masses a day.²⁵) Because of his love for the Virgin, Robin never harms a woman or any company that includes women.²⁶ Indeed, Robin outlines his own Creed when Little John requests instruction:

But loke ye do no housbonde harme
 That tylleth with his plough
 No more ye shall no good yeman
 That walketh by grene wode shawe
 Ne no knyght ne no squyer
 That wolde be a gode felawe
 These bysshoppes and thye archebyshoppes
 Ye shall them bete and bynde
 The hye sheryfe of notynghame
 Hym holde in your mynde²⁷

[But look that you do no man harm that tills with his plow, and do not harm any good yeoman that walks by the greenwood shade, nor any knight nor squire who would be a good companion. These bishops and these archbishops, you shall them beat and bind; the high Sherriff of Nottingham, hold him in your mind [as a target].]

While the legendary Robin Hood did not “rob from the rich and give to the poor” until his Renaissance refashioning,²⁸ the *Geste* clearly gives his outlawry a moral code. Robin and his men will avoid harassing not only poor farmers (“housbonde ... plough”) and lower-class yeoman in

²² Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 43.

²³ The use of Hobsbawm in this essay is not meant to wholly endorse his argument, which has been challenged by historians and anthropologists since its publication. His argument does, however, provide a useful framework that is referred to throughout Robin Hood scholarship, and its preeminence in modern understandings of banditry make it useful for the limited scope of this piece. For a relevant recent critique of Hobsbawm’s thesis, see Graham Seal, “The Robin Hood Principle: Folklore, History, and the Social Bandit,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 46, no. 1 (2009): 67-89.

²⁴ For my essay, I am using the Wynkyn de Worde edition of *A Lytell Geste of Robyn Hode* (ca. 1506) in Thomas H. Ohlgren and Lister M. Matheson, ed., *Early Rymes of Robyn Hood: An Edition of the Texts, ca. 1425 to ca. 1600* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2013), 94, line 28. All further citations from the *Geste* are from this edited version.

²⁵ Stephen Church, “In Search of the Medieval Outlaw: The Tales of Robin Hood” (public lecture, Gresham College, London, May 1, 2018).

²⁶ Ohlgren and Matheson, ed., *Early Rymes of Robyn Hood*, 94, lines 34-39.

²⁷ Ohlgren and Matheson, ed., *Early Rymes of Robyn Hoode*, 95, lines 50-59.

²⁸ Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, ed., “General Introduction,” in *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, 2nd ed. (Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), 9-11.

the forest (“no gode ... shawe”), but also “knyght[s]” and “squyer[s]” as long as they are “good felawe[s].” The enemies of the outlaw band are the bishops and archbishops of the local land, against whom Robin urges violence (“bete and bynde”), as well as the Sherriff of Nottingham; the combined targets represent corrupt local authorities both ecclesiastical and secular.²⁹

All nine of Hobsbawm’s social bandit qualities can also be applied to the protagonists of the *Assassin’s Creed* series. There are, for example, clear connections between the first tenet of the Assassin’s Creed—“Stay your blade from the flesh of an innocent.”—and Hobsbawm’s assertion that the Noble Robber “never kills but in self-defense or just revenge,” which recalls Robin Hood’s own rule in the *Geste* to harm only those who abuse power. In the *AC* games, “innocence” is determined by the cultural mores of the PC’s gameworld as well as each party’s role in the larger conflict between the Assassins and the Templars, much as the definition of moral goodness in the *Geste* is shaped both by its fifteenth-century context and the allegiance of “felawe[s]” to (or pledged animosity against) Robin Hood and his men. In *Assassin’s Creed II*, for instance, the cultural system of “goodness” followed by PCs is shaped by the laws and culture of the Italian Renaissance as well as the Creed they must follow as members of the Order of the Assassins. The *AC* series impresses a moral code upon its PCs that encourages PCs to follow the Creed even if they themselves exist outside of it. The most striking example of this may be in the most recent *AC* installment, *Valhalla*, in which the PC is neither a Templar nor an Assassin, but a Viking from Norway. Achieving the “good” ending wherein the PC maintains their family ties is only possible through making several in-game decisions that support the honor system of Danelaw, while killing English civilians—an act that violates the Creed, though not the code of a Viking in enemy territory—produces an on-screen warning that “[c]ivilian casualties will result in desynchronization” between the Animus and the historical timeline.³⁰ Desynchronization generally occurs when the PC fails to meet game objectives and resets the character to the last major save point, making it impossible to both kill indiscriminately and progress further in the game. This process encourages the PC to kill only in revenge or self-defense, creating a gameplay limitation that aligns the mechanics of the *AC* series with the moral code of Hobsbawm’s Noble Robber.

Community relations are critical both to the ludic outlaw of Nottingham and the dynamics of *Assassin’s Creed*. Membership in the Order of the Assassins is for life; it is clear throughout the series that an Assassin can never truly leave the Order. Later games suggest that there is a genetic predisposition to becoming an Assassin, further driving home that, like the Noble Robber and Robin Hood in the *Geste*, the outlaws of *Assassin’s Creed* can never choose to leave their

²⁹ Sarah Harlan-Haughey connects the figure of the Sherriff of Nottingham and Robin Hood’s outlawry more broadly to the imposition of the Forest Charter in medieval England, while Richard Firth Green connects the lawlessness that caused outlawry during the period to the clash between two legal orders, the folklaw and the king’s law. This clash contributed to the tensions that resulted in the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381. For more on this topic, see Sarah Harlan-Haughey, “Forest Law Through the Looking Glass: Distortions of the Forest Charter in the Outlaw Fiction of Late Medieval England,” *William and Mary Bill of Rights Journal* 25, no. 2 (2016): 549-589; Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

³⁰ WoW Quests, “What Happens if You Kill Civilians Assassin’s Creed Valhalla,” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vANJT3YDXO4>, November 20, 2020.

organization behind for good.³¹ Additionally, in each installment of *AC*, playthroughs require leveraging the local community to progress the game. Just as Robin Hood relies on the support of the common populace, the PC outlaws of *AC* work with and are supported by local communities. The PC has opportunities to help the downtrodden through quests, thereby righting wrongs, and through monetary donations. These objectives resonate with the character of Robin Hood depicted in late medieval and early modern Whitsun tales. During these celebrations, a local dressed as Robin would “steal” (with permission) from the pockets of a crowd of churchgoers; the money thus “stolen” would pay for church needs.³² *AC*’s gameplay adapts this combination of outlawry and play through the incorporation of community-based rewards: local informants reward generous PCs for redistributing ill-gotten gains by helping PCs track down objectives, upgrade gear, and obtain new opportunities.³³ By stealing on behalf of populations that facilitate their survival—and in the name of an Order they can never leave—the protagonists of the *AC* series evoke the Noble Robber’s indebtedness to a local community.

The games also share ethical critiques with medieval English outlaw tales, particularly regarding the impact of corrupt religious figures on common people. In the medieval tale *Robin Hood and the Monk*, for example, Robin is betrayed by a greedy monk who sees him at prayer and summons the Sheriff. The monk can identify Robin because, he tells the Sheriff, Robin once stole £100 from him. Only through the help of Little John, who kills the treacherous monk, does Robin survive.³⁴ The monk’s actions pose a threat not only to Robin Hood and his accomplices, but to the larger community of Nottingham as well, given the possibility that this monk may have stolen or otherwise misappropriated community church funding. Little John’s rescue of Robin, in turn, symbolically restores communal support. The tale suggests that an individual’s religious faith and good works are separate from—and more powerful than—the institutional offices that claim to promote the same.

Just as the monk in *Robin Hood and the Monk* betrays his order for the sake of greed, several Assassins threaten to destabilize their own Order through treachery. These threats are central to each *AC* plot, usually to the benefit of the Assassin’s ultimate enemy, the Templars. In the first game, for instance, the PC is betrayed by his character’s best friend since birth, a fellow Assassin whose treason exiles the PC from the Assassin Order and becomes the impetus for the next chapter of in-game play: revenge.³⁵ Just like the Assassins, the Templars also work outside

³¹ Though Ezio Auditore da Firenze, the protagonist of *Assassin’s Creed*, has technically retired in the short film *Assassin’s Creed: Embers*, he continues to train and be involved with the Assassins until his death. For more on this plotline, see Assassin’s Creed Wiki, *Assassin’s Creed: Embers*, https://assassinscreed.fandom.com/wiki/Assassin's_Creed:_Embers, last modified March 23, 2022.

³² For more on this Maying tradition, see John Marshall, “Show or Tell? Priority and Interplay in the Early Robin Hood Play/Games and Poems,” in *Telling Tales and Crafting Books: Essays in Honor of Thomas H. Ohlgren*, ed. Alexander L. Kaufman, Shaun F. D. Hughes, and Dorsey Armstrong (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2016), 177-202. See also Christine Richardson, “The Figure of Robin Hood within the Carnival Tradition,” *Records of Early English Drama* 22, no. 2 (1997): 18-25.

³³ Although PCs must travel extensively in each game, the open-world mapping system usually requires the PC to return to each visited location repeatedly—which expands the PC’s communal outreach and influence but does not provide a spatial escape from social responsibilities.

³⁴ *Robin Hood and the Monk*, in Ohlgren and Matheson, ed., *Early Rymes of Robyn Hood*, 9, lines 75-94.

³⁵ Assassin’s Creed Wiki, s.v. “Abbas Sofian,” https://assassinscreed.fandom.com/wiki/Wiki/Abbas_Sofian, last modified January 21, 2023. Note that exile from the Order is not synonymous with leaving the Order; the games emphasize that Assassins remain as such even as exiles.

of geopolitical borders and governments, though they have agents placed within most major governments throughout time. The Templars of *AC* are religiously aligned with the Roman Catholic Church and consistently present themselves as the true, perpetual form of the medieval Knights Templar. In the original *AC* trilogy, set during the Renaissance following the collapse of the medieval version of the Order, the PC frequently confronts Vatican agents in league with Templars who abuse their offices. To defeat them, the PC at times works directly for honorable local authorities, from soldiers and guards to kings and emperors, much as Robin Hood is depicted working for King Edward III in the *Geste*.³⁶ The criticism of treacherous clergy and monastics found throughout the *AC* series parallels social criticisms raised by *Robin Hood and the Monk*, further reiterating that occupation and moral goodness in outlaw narratives are not always in sync.

Hobsbawm's final point in his description of the Noble Robber—that the criminal must remain hidden to complete their goals—is integral to the gameplay of *AC*, as well; it is built into the basics of gameplay. In their efforts to defeat the Templars and track down Pieces of Eden, the PC of many earlier *AC* titles must be careful to avoid detection through an in-game mechanic known as “social stealth” or “notoriety.” This system keeps track of how alert NPCs are to the presence of the PC based on how overtly the PC participates in criminal behavior.³⁷ When the PC brazenly engages in public crimes such as killing civilians, pickpocketing, or trespassing in unauthorized areas, local guards will attempt to kill them, potentially causing city-wide alerts that signal all non-civilian NPCs to attack the PC on sight. If killed, the PC is immediately “desynchronized” from the ancestral memory and forced to reload from a previous saved game.

Despite the punishments for in-game crimes, there is no way to opt out of outlawry, even if the PC does not support the aims of the Assassins.³⁸ Instead, the PC must engage in theft and kill authority figures to complete the game, all while keeping to the Creed. Though PCs can attempt to role-play the protagonist as wholly self-serving, the notoriety and synchronization systems make it incredibly difficult to do so. The first game, *Assassin's Creed*, even includes a violation of the Creed and a subsequent punishment by the Assassin Order to reinforce this lesson of morality.³⁹ In the first memory played by the PC, they take on the role of Altaïr Ibn-La'Ahad, a member of the Assassin Brotherhood in the year 1191, as he attempts to steal a Piece of Eden from the control of the Knights Templar. Altaïr, in his efforts to defeat the Templars, breaks each tenet of the Creed

³⁶ Though scholars do not agree as to the identity of the Edward-figure mentioned in the *Geste*, I am persuaded by Thomas Ohlgren's argument for Edward III as the most likely candidate. For more, see Thomas H. Ohlgren, “Edwardus Redivivus in *A Geste of Robyn Hode*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 99, no. 1 (2000): 1-29. A. J. Pollard argues that Robin Hood is decidedly not a social revolutionary because of his relationship to kingly authority; instead, he claims that Robin Hood serves as an example of strength and agency to lower-class men. See A. J. Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood: The Late-Medieval Stories in Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2004), 157. However, Robin's official service in the *Geste* terminates on his own terms when he leaves the service of the king for his forest, potentially complicating Pollard's claims.

³⁷ Assassin's Creed Wiki, s.v. “Social stealth,” https://assassinscreed.fandom.com/wiki/Social_stealth, last modified April 15, 2020. Intriguingly, social stealth and notoriety mechanics are most present in the codified “Middle Ages” and later in the games, represented by the formal creation of the Templar and Assassin Orders that temporally occurs between *Valhalla* and the first *AC* game.

³⁸ *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey* introduces the possibility of knocking out enemies, encouraging PCs to attempt a “Pacifist's Creed” runthrough wherein they do not kill any NPCs. This version of the game is extremely difficult to pull off, as most side-quests require some form of killing.

³⁹ “Assassin's Creed—Prologue: Altaïr's Execution—Gameplay,” *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RCLb0ssk_X8, August 29, 2012.

and still fails to secure the Piece of Eden. Upon the PC's return to the headquarters of the Assassin Brotherhood, Altaïr is punished by his mentor by demotion to novice, which sets the stage for the game's major objective: rising back through the ranks of the Brotherhood. This unavoidable lesson has dramatic consequences, and its position as the first quest encountered by the PC drives home its centrality to the larger ludic outlaw narrative of the *Assassin's Creed* games. The *AC* series emulates the social banditry of Robin Hood not only through its use of a moral code for its system of outlawry, but also through its use of the notoriety system and in-game moral instruction.

Fans and scholars who, like u/PhazePalm, expressed an interest in an *Assassin's Creed: Nottingham* game in 2020 did not have long to wait for something like it. On August 6th, 2020, Sony PlayStation and Sumo Newcastle announced a brand-new multiplayer game, *Hood: Outlaws and Legends*. In a sneak peek on the *PlayStation* blog, head game designer Andrew Williams describes the game:

[It's] a multiplayer heist game that blends combat, stealth, and strategy. You will assemble a team of Outlaws as you attempt to steal treasures from an oppressive government known as The State in a dark and gritty reimagining of the Robin Hood legend.⁴⁰

Though *Hood* is not by Ubisoft, videogame journalists like Michael Lopez have already commented on its similarities to *Assassin's Creed*, referring specifically to the “parkour, covert operations, and rebalancing of power” that is emblematic of the *AC* series.⁴¹ Lopez, and the makers of *Hood*, have picked up on something that the *AC* fandom has long recognized: both the figure of Robin Hood and video games themselves create opportunities for imaginative outlaw-play that are perfectly aligned with the mythos and ethos of the *Assassin's Creed* world. Historicity of Robin Hood aside, the resonances between his embodiment of the Noble Robber and *AC*'s titular Creed and gameplay make clear the series' indebtedness to the Robin Hood tradition.

⁴⁰ Andrew Williams, “Hood: Outlaws & Legends Reimagines the Robin Hood Legend on PS5,” *PlayStation.Blog*, <https://blog.playstation.com/2020/08/06/hood-outlaws-legends-reimagines-the-robin-hood-legend-on-ps5/>, August 6, 2020.

⁴¹ Michael Lopez, “Hood: Outlaws & Legends Looks Like The Best Assassin's Creed Game,” *TheGamer*, <https://www.thegamer.com/hood-outlaws-legends-state-of-play-reveal-assassins-creed/>, August 7, 2020.

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