



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR—KINGDOMS

Braveheart meets *Apocalypto*

PUBLISHER: Sega DEVELOPER: The Creative Assembly GENRE: Strategy AVAILABILITY: Retail, E-tail (www.steampowered.com) ESRB RATING: Teen MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 1.5GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 9GB hard drive space, 128MB videocard, *Medieval II: Total War* MULTIPLAYER: 2-8 players VERSION REVIEWED: Near-Final Reviewable

REVIEW

✓ Install *Medieval II: Total War—Kingdoms* on your PC and you get not one, not two, but *four* separate executables and desktop shortcuts to enjoy—you can almost hear developer Creative Assembly shouting, “Cripes, man, look at how much game you’re getting here!” And it’s true: *Kingdoms* is a monster of an expansion, though instead of piling on new features or fiddling much with the game design, it takes the route of simply offering players a ton more to do. You liked the first game? Well, here’s a lot more of it, dammit.

TETRALOGY

Pretty much everything we said about the original *Medieval II* holds true here: the turn-based campaign is the game’s strength, and the real-time battles are impressively detailed and tactically rich, but ultimately too same-y. (I personally prefer tapping the “autoresolve” button and playing the game that way.) The developers evidently understood the campaign’s strength, too, as that’s the crux of the new content: four complete, very distinct new campaigns—titled Britannia, Crusades, Teutonic, and Americas—with new maps and factions to play with.

A new faction in *Medieval II* isn’t the same as a new faction in most RTS games, of course; the difference between the Aztecs and Wales is hardly the difference between the Protoss and the Zerg. And so the maps are the biggest draw, as they focus the theater of war to the Middle East (in the case of the Crusades campaign) or the New World (Americas) or a far more detailed representation of the British Isles (Britannia) than you stomped on in the original *Medieval II*.

That’s a whole lot of new ground to cover, especially given that the campaigns play out quite differently depending on what faction you choose. Pick Aztecs, and you find your-

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self-pitting legions of infantry against Spain’s abundant conquerors in shining armor; pick the Teutonic Order, and priest agents become paramount; pick any faction in the Britannia campaign, and priests (and the game’s entire religion mechanic, really) are nonexistent. Major events—such as the arrival of a Crusading noble to join in your jolly pagan fox hunt, or the forming of a new faction—keep you on your toes and inject personality, encouraging you to almost “role-play” the tyrannical zealots or freedom-fighting underdogs you’re controlling.

For those who *are* into the real-time battles (I was bored of them in the original long before I grew tired of the campaign), the game boasts a new unit count somewhere over 100, but I suspect most players will parse everything as “weak infantry,” “strong artillery,” or “shoots arrows” anyway—even when they’re hurling hornets’ nests or javelins instead. I suppose someone out there might be paying close attention to all the stats of the varying units, so they know what separates one spearman from the next—but for me, *Medieval II* already has enough numbers to worry about. I’m still busy counting desktop shortcuts. **•Sean Molloy**

VERDICT

- ✦ **Tons of new content.**
- ✘ **No major new features.**

8/10

GOOD



• *Kingdoms’* campaign supports local 2-player “hot seat” matches. Online skirmishes are still restricted to one-off real-time battles only.

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