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## Game Review

# A Bohemian Rhapsody in Red – KINGDOM COME: DELIVERANCE II

Warhorse Studios, 2025

After years of meticulous work, Warhorse Studios has returned with KINGDOM COME: DELIVERANCE II (henceforth: KCD II), a faithful and vivid portrayal of 15th-century Bohemia, released in spring 2025. Known already for their commitment to historical authenticity, Warhorse now offers a sequel to KINGDOM COME: DELIVERANCE (2018, henceforth: KCD 2018) that deepens the religious, theological, and liturgical textures of the world it created.

As the descendant of Bohemians, a researcher of games since 1995, and a theologian by profession, I saw playing this game as not merely recommended but a scholarly and personal imperative. Yet, is it really a game? Is it perhaps more of an interactive movie? The distinction is hard to make here, because the embedded film sequences are voluminous and mostly of impressive quality.

From the outset, I was struck by how “real” religion feels in KCD II, serving not simply as ornamentation but as an ever-present fabric of life. The game immerses players in the brutal realities of medieval politics and warfare but also in a world shaped by faith, through the presence of prayers, blessings, devotions, a pervasive moral framework rooted in Christianity, and, most obviously perhaps, architecture (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup>

The very title “Kingdome Come – Deliverance” will immediately ring a bell for the religiously literate. In the Lord’s Prayer, which is central to Christian-

1 The following text is influenced by my decision to pursue the path of the warrior, with a particular emphasis on diplomacy and alchemy. Furthermore, my individual ethical preferences had a significant impact on the course of the game.



Fig. 1: The Church dominates Kuttenberg (Screenshot from the walkthrough by theRadBrad@ Youtube, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0cbQdrxIXk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0cbQdrxIXk)).



Fig. 2: As he dies, Markvard von Aulitz recites lines from the Lord's Prayer (in-game screenshot: Wessely).

ity, two of the eight petitions are “Thy kingdom come” (fig. 2) and “Deliver us from evil”. This prayer is part of the European cultural memory. With the game situated, however, in a time and place overshadowed by the Western Schism and the Bohemian succession dispute, its title has dual significance. On the one hand, the people depicted in the story are either intertwined with the conspiracies to place one of two candidates (the brothers Sigis-

mund and Wenceslas) on the Bohemian throne, or they belong to the vast majority of the inhabitants of the region who try but barely manage to survive.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the main task of the protagonists is to deliver a message that might alter the situation profoundly and could bring peace to the war-torn country. Both meanings are implied by the game title.

As in KCD 2018, the protagonist is Henry, a young man in his twenties and a blacksmith by profession. He is an orphan – his parents were killed in Skalitz when the village was raided; he escaped at the last second. How he managed to become a squire for Hans Capon, a young nobleman, is told in the earlier game. For gender-sensitive players (of whom I am definitely not one), it must be said that the player’s character is definitely that of a European Caucasian male. Where other games have options to choose gender, race, skin color, or more for one’s avatar, KCD II offers nothing of the like. Even Henry’s sexual orientation is obvious: although his friendship with Hans Capon is not without tension, he has a clear preference for female NPCs throughout the game – in a romantic or physical way, depending on the choices the player makes.

Although several women play a role in this game, and some of the quests cannot be solved without their support as skilled archers, experienced healers, or clever scouts, the game focuses on masculinity (and not always its best version).

By default – and without taking side quests into account – the simplest form of the game’s structure follows the concept of Campbell’s Hero’s Journey.<sup>3</sup> The game’s narrative arc is not, however, simply extended by these side quests. They are complete missions, including their own formal “mythological cycles”,<sup>4</sup> that contribute to the main quests but could be analyzed as separate rites of passage.

The first moments of KCD II already evoke a sacral subtext. Amidst a bloody siege the priest Father Godwin is asked, “Have you come to anoint us before we die?” The unconventional priest (who can be played in some of the quests) comforts Henry before the battle commences. The player (Henry)

2 The game is set around the year 1400. Alongside dynastic disputes, the incompetence of King Wenceslas, and widespread famine and plague, this was also the era of fierce conflict surrounding the reformer Jan Hus and the Western Schism – an age as catastrophic as the Thirty Years’ War and even comparable to our own, given today’s global threats.

3 Campbell 2008.

4 See Wessely 1995.



Fig. 3: Father Godwin saying prayers for the dead (in-game screenshot: Wessely, markup by the author).

has to defend the battlements against an overwhelming force (at which point the new player discovers that the fight controls are a pain when using only keyboard and mouse). Amidst the battle a flashback sets in, and the story begins 14 days earlier, with a cinemascope sequence in which Henry and Hans ride through a beautiful landscape accompanied by a small escort. In this sequence, the reason for the journey is outlined: they have to deliver a message to Otto von Bergow concerning a possible armistice between the supporters of the rival kings, Sigismund and Wenceslas. At this point, the player can select his special abilities and skills – does the way of a swordsman, an advisor, or a scout seem more promising? However, soon the little party is attacked by robbers, who kill everyone but Henry and Hans, who are both severely wounded. The self-confident, somewhat cocky heroes have fallen. They will need to work their way back up the ladder, step by step, and will find themselves involuntarily involved in political developments.

Daily life is as interwoven with religion as are the quests. Talking to the herbwoman Bozhena? Cross oneself. Make a promise? Cross oneself. Lucky to have won a tough fight? Cross oneself. During the quest “Divine Messenger”, Henry has to bury the victims of a raid, and Godwin (correctly) reads the Latin prayer for the dead, *Requiem aeternam* (fig. 3).

About to be hanged, Adder confesses his sins, and to free Janosh Uher, Henry prays for a gravely wounded man (in “Devils pack”); in the silver

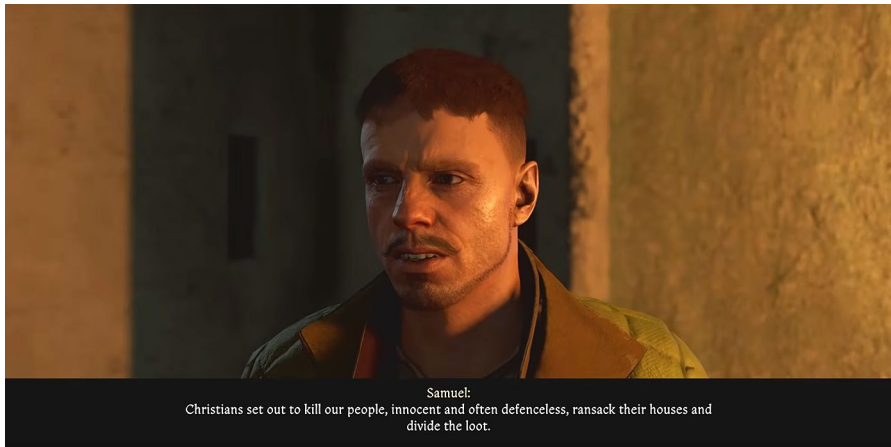


Fig. 4: Samuel tells of frequent pogroms in Kuttenberg (in-game screenshot: Wessely).

mines of Kuttenberg, Henry prays for the victim of a mining disaster (in “Via argentum”). The examples are numerous. Whether Henry’s devotion changes the course of the game is not clear, but it does at least increase Henry’s reputation and might improve his chances of success. Yet these details are likely only decorations on the game’s clothing, which is made of carefully woven cloth.

The darker dimensions of the dominant religion are not left unexamined. Through the character of Samuel, a Jewish resident of Kuttenberg, the game exposes the recurring pogroms faced by the local Jewish community, along with the irrational and often grotesque justifications offered for them (fig. 4). Samuel’s initial encounter with Henry is marked by deep mistrust. Unaware of Henry’s true intentions and shaped by bitter memory of betrayal and persecution, Samuel even sends two men to ambush and kill him. Only after Henry survives the attack and returns in peace does Samuel begin to reassess his assumptions. It emerges that Samuel is in fact a loyal supporter of those opposed to Sigismund’s oppressive regime. Once the two men realize that they are fighting for the same cause, a tentative trust forms, and it will evolve into a meaningful alliance. Their friendship becomes a subtle yet powerful testimony to the possibility of reconciliation, even across boundaries determined by fear, religion, and violence.<sup>5</sup>

5 On the sidelines of a meeting of those opposed to Sigismund, Godwin meets and comes to respect Jehuda, the rabbi of Kuttenberg.



Fig. 5: Godwin blesses Henry and Samuel (who is jewish!) (in-game screenshot: Wessely).

The soundtrack fits the game perfectly, both the sound design and the music, which, as far as I can judge, is honed to support the game experience as best as possible. Even though I can assume that the vast majority of players do not understand Latin and/or do not care about the lyrics, the emotional setting is well supported by music that hits the spot. And even more so if we attend to the details: when Adder – an NPC whose rescue was part of a quest by Henry and is now a reckless, cunning member of the party – dies, a choir chants *Agnus Dei* and *dona eis requiem* – not quite liturgically correct, but especially touching since the dying scoundrel, all alone because the other members of the party have fled, starts confessing his sins (in part referring to the Ten Commandments), asking God for forgiveness.<sup>6</sup> When Henry and his new found half-brother Sam depart in a desperate attempt to bring in relief forces, Father Godwin blesses them and a *Kyrie eleison* is intoned (fig. 5).

When Henry encounters his parents' murderer, the *Dies irae* can be heard, the sequence about the wrath of God on the Day of Judgement. Diegetic music is also heard in some sequences, carefully crafted to fit with the medieval atmosphere, but the aforementioned pieces show that the composer is as skilled in his craft as he is familiar with his great predecessors, specifically Bach and Mozart.

6 This evokes associations with the parable of the lost sheep at Luke 15:3–7: "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke 15:7, King James Version).

Warhorse Studios is said to have invested around €40 million to get the game running,<sup>7</sup> and between 2018 and 2024 up to 200 persons worked on the project.<sup>8</sup> The realism of the game atmosphere and the movie sequences is stunning. The player also reaps the benefits of input from professionals: the historical setting is accurate, and most of the locations and many of the main characters are historic persons, including the feuding brothers Wenceslas and Sigismund, Otto von Bergow, and Radzig Koblya.

On my i7-10750 with 32GB and an Nvidia Quadro RTX 3000 connected to a 5K screen, the gameplay and the movie scenes are just about smooth *if* – and that is quite an *if* – the framerate is reduced to 30.

Yet the game is technically not perfect. Even though the character animation is excellent, sometimes the spoken words and the body language do not fit together. The collision detection has some flaws (I encountered NPCs able to walk through solid tables and dead/wounded persons who seem to sink into the ground). There are some minor issues with the character design (Peter of Pisek seems to have LED illumination under his brim, and the teeth of Rosa Ruthard or Anna of Waldstein are at time just white stains). And sometimes the audio and video do not match up – for example, when a character takes a drink, the sound effects are spot on, but the figure does not move – which disrupts the player’s immersion. But these are mere moments within hours and hours of fascinating gameplay.

KINGDOM COME: DELIVERANCE II is not a “religious game”. It neither evangelizes nor preaches. Rather, it depicts a world in which Christianity is the air everyone breathes – natural, imperfect, vital. It offers a rare opportunity for theological reflection in gaming: on sin and redemption, on grace and justice, on death and hope. It invites players to consider not only the cost of their actions but also the eternal destinies of their souls.

However, the ability to make nuanced ethical and moral decisions is by no means a prerequisite for playing the game successfully. Hundreds of videos on YouTube are now dedicated to KCD II<sup>9</sup> – testimony to the game’s popularity but also an opportunity for interesting observations. For instance, walk-throughs that favor a path of almost splatter-like violence attract high view

7 <https://t1p.de/5nbx1> [accessed 22 May 2025].

8 <https://t1p.de/mmaqj> [accessed 22 May 2025].

9 <https://t1p.de/wxspc> [accessed 21 May 2025].

counts; many players are evidently willing to take the option of escalating individual quests into radical overkill.<sup>10</sup>

With its beauty, moral seriousness, and occasional tragic grandeur, KCD II stands as a digital cathedral: a monument to what it means to live, sin, pray, and die for a greater cause and *sub specie aeternitatis*.

## Biography

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