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The game always worked best for me, when my avatar was left alone. Even a brief attempt at hunting ended rather frustrating, when the hunted hare, surrounded by fifteen of my arrows, that most apparently have missed him, stared back at me with an unnerving calm. The same can be said for all my attempts at socializing with the locals. They did not have much to say and I did not know what to ask. We were never meant to exchange pleasantries or to get to know each other. My short-lived friendship with the son of the baron was therefore ill fated. This does not mean that I constantly avoided all other human NPCs. I was still curious. I wanted to visit their settlements, their castles and of course the affectionately reconstructed Sázava Monastery. I liked to watch them working in the fields, gossiping at the taverns or working in their shops. They had their daily routines, their life seemed to me full of purpose and peace, at least for those who were not slaughtered by barbaric invaders. But the closer I looked the more they began to resemble hollow automatons. A moment exemplified by the mother of the protagonist dusting the earth floor in front of their house. And what is worse, almost all women look the same, and almost all of them had nothing of purpose to say (Brandenburg 2018).

That is precisely my problem with this game, it has a beautiful backdrop and some intricately costumes, but no actors/agents to fill the gameworld with life. Of course, the same can be said about almost all open-world games. It is extremely difficult to program lifelike NPCs.

William Thatcher in *A Knight's Tale* (2001), or like the young blacksmith Balian in Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), or – truth to be told – the story of Luke Skywalker in George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977). The story works because it successfully taps to the fantasy of so many teenage boys in the whole world, who dream of secretly being a prince that rescues the world. And there is nothing wrong with that. It sometimes works for me, too. But as a historian, I most definitely have a problem with the claim of the developers, that *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* is more historically accurate than any other RPG. Because it is not.



Figure 2: Henry, the game's protagonist © Warhorse Studios

Let me explain: Sure, there are no orcs, no dragons, no demons, no warlocks, no elves and all of the mentioned historical personalities have really existed. It is also true, that the developers have spent many working hours to painstakingly recreate the architectural façade of a medieval Bohemia. The beautiful Sázava Monastery is the most remarkable example for this. But as I said, it is first and foremost façade, a historicizing background for a timeless young boy fantasy. The problem is the idea of *historical accuracy* transported here. For Warhorse Studios, this means the

reconstruction of medieval architecture and costumes and the landscape. But we learn almost nothing about the true everyday life of Bohemian peasants or craftsmen in the 15th century, we learn almost nothing about their way of thinking – an intricate and intelligently woven side quest about Hussites being the noteworthy exemption.



Figure 3: Sázava Monastery in Kingdom Come: Deliverance © Warhorse Studios.

This is why I have a problem with creator Daniel Vávra’s declaration: “Since the Czech historians were kind of cut off from the world, there was no one to tell our history. So basically, we are using pop culture to spread the word” (Brillaud 2017). If asked, any medievalist will tell you, that the history of Bohemia in the Middle Ages is very well researched, especially the military history. There have been hundreds of conferences, anthologies, monographies. In fact, the Czech colleagues that were credited as historical consultants of the game in the credits are very well connected internationally. Vávra’s claim should therefore be read solely as a marketing tool. Trouble is, it is more because his claim is fueling national sentiments of a neglected Czech nation:

“For the purposes of *Deliverance*, it’s enough to say that setting a game during the struggle of for power between Sigismund and Wenceslas IV is loaded with historical significance relevant to the modern day. By turning them into easy symbols for good/Czech versus evil/foreign, they foreshadow a nation’s century long fight for sovereignty, recalling a more recent past in which the Czech lands have had to contend with Soviet, Nazi and Austro-Hungarian domination” (McCarter 2018).

And in the end, the game teaches us nothing new about Czech history, it dresses an almost ancient fantasy in a historical costume, a beautiful historical costume, but only a costume.

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