

## ***Kingdom Under Fire* Review – Windows**

**Developed by:** Phantagram Ltd. (<http://www.phantagram.com>)  
**Published by:** Gathering of Developers (<http://www.godgames.com>)  
**Reviewed by:** Tim Maxwell  
**Official Site:** <http://www.kingdomunderfire.com>  
**Genre:** Strategy  
**System Requirements:**

OS: 100% Microsoft Windows 98/ME/2000, DirectX 7.0a or higher compatible computer required  
CPU: Intel Pentium MMX 200MHz or faster required (Pentium II 300 or higher recommended)  
RAM: 64MB or higher required  
HDD: 900MB uncompressed space required  
CD-ROM: 8x or faster required  
Graphics Card: DirectX compatible 2MB graphics card required  
Sound Card: SoundBlaster compatible sound card required  
Input Device: Keyboard and mouse required  
Network for Multi-play: 56000bps modem or faster Internet connection recommended

**Supports:** N/A  
**ESRB:** Teen

**Overall Rating:** 6.5  
**Graphics:** 7/10  
**Sound:** 8/10  
**Documentation:** 7/10  
**Getting Started:** 6/10  
**Gameplay:** 67/10  
**Value:** 6/10

**The Good Press:** Solid graphics, sound, and storyline; RPG fans will enjoy the game's fantasy elements.

**The Bad Press:** Poor unit AI, boring, repetitive gameplay; I'd give my kingdom for a mid-mission save game feature.

### **Overview:**

#### **Tips:**

Always keep a few peasants and ranged fighters near your base to make repairs and stave off enemy ambushes.

Your best offense is a good defense. Take the extra time to fortify your base and train as many warriors as possible before going on the offensive.

After reading the press releases and previews for Phantagram's new strategy title *Kingdom Under Fire*, I couldn't help but be excited about what the game prospectively had to offer. The developers promised revolutionary gameplay with a solid infusion of both RTS and RPG elements, silky-smooth character animation, and an innovative hero creation feature that allows you to build up a character's stats and use them continually throughout the game. On paper, the game simply seemed to have it all. However, for a title that sounded as if it might define a new genre, I can't help but feel like I've played *Kingdom Under Fire* somewhere before.

The game's main plot tells the story of an ancient land known as Bersiah. For centuries the races of light (consisting of elves and humans) and darkness (orcs and ogres) had been entrenched in warfare. Now, the bloodlust has intensified as a sinister new leader (known as Rick Blood) has taken over as ruler of the darkness. It is now up to you to decide how the story concludes. Will you side with the elves and humans in an effort to bring prosperity to Bersiah, or will you (in my best Darth Vader voice) give yourself to the dark side in an effort to become the ultimate power in the universe?

Regardless of which path you choose to take, the objectives basically remain the same: obliterate every enemy on the map. Personally, I would have preferred a little more mission variety (which the aforementioned roleplaying elements try to provide but just can't), but unfortunately, the repetition arrives early on. Commanding troops is handled in standard RTS fashion, with a combination of the two primary mouse buttons assigned to character selection and movement, respectively. There are also an assortment of keyboard commands used to help with navigation and battle strategy. Overall, the control system works pretty well, but there certainly isn't anything revolutionary to speak of in this regard.

Once you've got the controls down and learned the basics in the tutorial mode, fans of Blizzard's *Warcraft II* and *Diablo* will find the gameplay mechanics eerily similar in KUF. The ability to control orcs, grunts, and rangers as opposed to vehicles and other futuristic commodities will have many comparing it to WC, while *Diablo* fans will recognize the ability to build up your characters' stats and search through caves to gain experience and hunt for hidden weapons. The roleplaying elements are certainly a welcome addition to the game, but it's just as easy to level-up your characters without searching caves (which often contain items you've already found anyway).

To keep the story together, players are treated to cut scenes or narrative voiceovers between missions to keep you updated on what's going on elsewhere in Bersiah. These cinematics also offer some tips on how to handle your next assignment. If I were forced to choose the game's best feature, I would probably make note of the storyline, and more importantly, the method of storytelling used. KUF is unique in this regard because the tale is told from the viewpoint of many different prominent characters on all sides of the spectrum instead of just one. This really gives your battles some meaning and allows you to see the "big picture" as opposed to the world through only your hero's eyes. Even though the game obviously borrows heavily from the Blizzard titles in terms of playability, Phantagram deserves some credit for devising a story that seems compelling and worthwhile—something that can't be said for many similar titles.

Aesthetically, KUF delivers a solid visual and aural effort. The game features a whopping 120,000 frames of character animation, and this certainly gives the battles a smooth and polished look. In terms of sound, the voice acting and environmental sounds are terrific, although the repetitive phrases used by your troops quickly get old.

Despite KUF's gripping account of life and war in an ancient fantasyland and solid presentation, the gameplay leaves much to be desired. I'm sure diehard RTS fans will be right at home with the game's familiar objectives (mine resources, build structures, train warriors, build up defenses, and attack), but KUF isn't particularly fun or challenging thanks to mediocre computer AI, shoddy pathfinding, and boring level design. The computer tends to take a conservative approach when it comes to offense, allowing you time to build up a formidable army with minimal threat. When the assault finally does arrive, the computer AI tends to send just a few troops that you'll usually have no trouble vanquishing. Late in the game, things become almost laughably easy if you've played your cards right, as most of the computer attackers won't be able to keep pace with the powerhouses you've developed throughout the game.

The layout of the levels is also conducive to defensive style, which certainly doesn't add much excitement to the missions. Thanks to all the trees and rock formations strewn around the already narrow paths, each mission is hampered by troops getting stuck behind anything and everything—including their comrades. This causes a lot of undue frustration, and almost makes some tasks seem more like work than entertainment. To make matters worse, there is no mid-mission save feature, which is especially annoying since some missions can take a significant amount of time to complete.

Overall, *Kingdom Under Fire* is a promising title that perhaps tries to do a little too much. Combining an RPG with an RTS is a great idea in theory, but unfortunately, monotonous gameplay and questionable computer AI send it to an early grave. The title might be worth a look for serious WC or *Diablo* junkies, but for casual fans, there are many better strategy titles available.