

Dungeon Keeper



Proud owner of a big basement with a gimp, Dan Toose was already a qualified Dungeon Keeper.

Bullfrog are generally noted amongst all the video game developers around the world as one of the quirkiest game design outfits, and their latest effort, *Dungeon Keeper* is no exception. How many times have we seen the release of a game where you're the terminally boring do-gooder who ventures off to slaughter the forces of darkness (fun) with sword and sorcery? The answer is heaps, which is why Bullfrog decided to make you play the bad guy, to help breathe some new life into the rather predictable mediaval fantasy genre. Rather than do the RPG approach, *Dungeon Keeper* is something off a cross between *SimCity* and *Warcraft*, bringing together the strategical elements of "town" planing, and real time combat.

A new perspective

For a strategy game, *Dungeon Keeper* has quite a powerful visual interface, using a 3D engine with lighting effects, and fairly customizable graphics options for those that have less beefy PCs. The game essentially works on a square grid, but you can spin the view around to suit your tastes, or the situation at hand. The creatures in *Dungeon Keeper* vary from looking really cool, to somewhat dull, but most of them look spot on. Assuming your PC can handle everything at high res, combat looks quite good, however, once you learn that the way to win battles is to pile as many monsters into the combat as possible, it will soon become a mess. There's plenty of character in the game, with nice animations for situations like the various torture processes which you can put your adversaries (and your own minions) through.



The other visual element to *Dungeon Keeper* is a first person view, which you can use to look through the eyes of any of your minions, and take matters into your own hands, which is very handy if you've got a powerful servant who can tear up the enemy ranks a bit. This isn't the best first person engine you'll see, but it's still pretty impressive considering it takes a dynamic environment that you've been creating, and instantly lets you walk around in it, and continue the game in a different manner.

More impressive than the visuals are the excellent lineup of sound effects, which add enormous amounts of feel to the game. If you take a peek in your torture room and find a dark mistress strapped to one of the tables, you'll hear the screams of delight as she gets whipped silly. There's awesome attention to detail with great samples of crumbling dirt for the excavations, the sound of gold coins tinkling onto the stone floor, and of course your minions screaming as they go down in combat. The music is pretty good too.

Complex, but not...

Dungeon Keeper is essentially a game where you attempt to amass a powerful force of monsters by designing a dungeon that will attract new minions, and keep them both happy and secure. There are many different types of room you can build, like lairs, treasure rooms, torture rooms, barracks, graveyards, training rooms, workshops, etc. Different rooms attract different monsters, for example, build a library, and you'll get warlocks joining your forces, dying for a place to study their arts. Like most strategy games you can research new types of features to use, such as room types, traps, spells. A bit of a minus though for those that crave resource management, the only



thing you need to do to speed up research is to build bigger libraries and workshops, which is a bit too simple for those after some mental gymnastics.

Actually, *Dungeon Keeper* has a few flaws which simplified a game that had enough features in it to make it a deep strategy game. You pass each level by defeating either the other Keepers that are trying to take over the same land as you, or by finishing off the Lord of the land (the heroic do-gooder) when he finally ventures into your realm. Defeating enemy forces is a little more simple than it should be, because you can simply grab your minions, and place them where you want, at will. This makes winning battles very simple, and thus kind of boring. If your troops had to run from their current location to meet the enemy in combat, the game would have been a much deeper strategical challenge, as you'd need to plan your dungeon layout very carefully. Of course as you progress through the lands, the scenarios are made more challenging, and it's not like anyone can just breeze through the game blindly, and some levels will take a couple of attempts to figure out what the key to victory is. There's also the fact that despite the mechanics being a bit too easy to master, the game has gobs of character, and is really quite cool and addictive.

Playing with mates

Like other real time strategy games, *Dungeon Keeper* essentially puts a huge emphasis on building up a strong force fast so you can wipe your opponent out ASAP. The problem here in *Dungeon Keeper* is that the player with the strongest force can quite easily just push on into the enemy territory with an imp, capturing land as they go, then just bring all their forces instantly to the fore, and wipe out any opposition they encounter. There's no real tactics in battle, just dump everything in at once, and heal your troops as they get hurt. It's not bad multiplayer, but it certainly doesn't have the pull that a game like *C&C* or *Warcraft* did. To call *Dungeon Keeper* a great strategy game might be stretching things a bit...

However, the audio-visual experience is pretty cool, and it is one of those "morish" games where you plough through the levels, unaware of how you've just become addicted to the thing. If you've enjoyed Bullfrog's games in the past, then you'll love *Dungeon Keeper*.



AVAILABLE: NOW

CATEGORY: STRATEGY

PLAYERS: 1-4

DEVELOPER: BULLFROG

PRICE: \$89.95

RATING: M15+

FREAKOMETER



Not too hard core, but it's definitely aimed at those that love both strategy and medieval stuff

MULTIPLAYER

Flawed - The ability to add troops into combat at will makes it a bit dull

VISUALS

80

Whilst having a technically impressive engine, the graphics won't make your jaw drop

SOUND

89

The perfect range of sound effects to give the game some feel

GAMEPLAY

80

A lot of features and variety, but the winning strategy is a bit too simple

OVERALL

81

A good fun game, that would have been great without teleporting troops