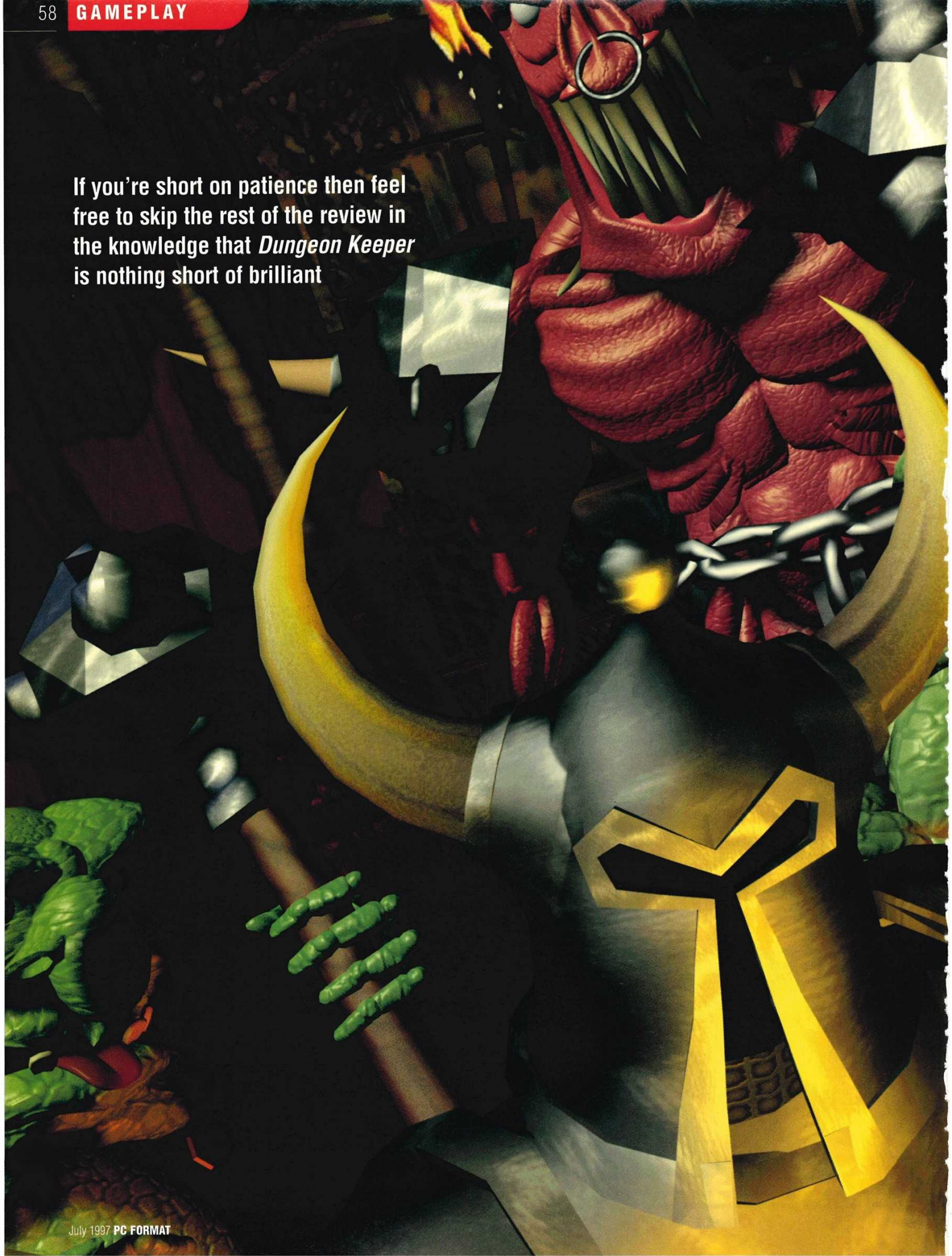


If you're short on patience then feel free to skip the rest of the review in the knowledge that *Dungeon Keeper* is nothing short of brilliant



DUNGEON KEEPER

£39.99 Electronic Arts/Bullfrog ☎ 01753 549442

Strategy

No game has been so eagerly awaited for so long, by so many. But at last Peter Molyneux is ready to bid you welcome to his world – a dark and nasty subterranean domain of gleeful evil. Your host: **Jim McCauley.**

Naturally loquacious types that we are here, with an average vocabulary on par with the entire contents of the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, it's a painful experience when we find ourselves blurting out meaningless diphthongs when put on the spot to explain what's so good about *Dungeon Keeper*. But having spent too long in the company of this masterpiece than is (a) strictly necessary; and (b) good for your health, one's brain is awash with images, intellectual premises and recollections, all of them positive in the extreme.

Bear in mind it's nigh-on impossible to organise almost a week's worth of *Dungeon Keeper* into something intelligible in just four pages. If you're short on patience then feel free to skip the rest of the review in the knowledge that *Dungeon Keeper* is nothing short of brilliant, and that whatever your fave game type you will love, worship and possibly become *Dungeon Keeper*.

There's a blue circle near the beginning of this review, attempting

to sum up this title in one tiny media-friendly soundbite. It says Strategy. It's shallow. Ignore it. We put it there as an instant indicator, but in this case it's too small to encompass the truth.

Something closer would require a much larger circle, containing the less snappy phrase:

"Every Bullfrog game ever, mixed together in one all-encompassing parcel that will take over your life, given half a chance."

It contains elements of *Populous*, *Populous 2*, *Syndicate*, *Theme Park*, *Gene Wars*, *Magic Carpet*, *Magic Carpet 2*, *Syndicate Wars* and *Theme Hospital*.

All right, we've missed out *Hi-Octane* (*DK* doesn't contain naff flying cars) and *Creation* (*DK* has actually been completed).

It's a God game like *Populous 1* and 2. It's a management game like *Themes Park* and *Hospital*. It's a build-up-your-territory-and-steal-your-oppo's-game like *Magic Carpets 1* and 2. It's an amoral (actually, immoral is closer to the truth) game of commanding your evil troops, like *Syndicate* and *Syndicate Wars*. It's a mess-around-with-the-gene-pool, like *Gene Wars*. It's a toast rack! It's a power drill! It's a thousand games in one!

Which is enough to make even the most hard-nosed and experienced gamer throw his hands up in the air and admit defeat without so much as a look at the game itself. And truth to tell, on the surface *Dungeon Keeper* looks →



Who wants to be the hero? Not us, especially if the alternative involves taking those pesky heroes and subjecting them to all manner of interesting deaths. Nya ha ha haaa!



Lots of spacious lairs are a must for any serious dungeon keeper, because many of your denizens simply won't share the same room. You try getting a vampire to bunk down with a warlock...

→ fiendishly complicated. Just beneath the surface is the suspicion that, having spent four years in gestation, it's going to be another *Battlecruiser* with more going on than you can keep track of. It's scary – what if Bullfrog has become so involved in *Dungeon Keeper*, adding as much detail as possible, that it's lost sight of ensuring it's still a great game?

Thank God that this isn't the case. And then kiss goodbye to your God and embrace the dark side of omnipotence, omniscience and every other piece of theologian drivel. Because evil rules and you get the chance to emanate evil from every pore, nerve and fibre.

Didn't you always get to a point in *SimCity* where you just *bad* to drop an alien on your townsfolk? We know that you couldn't resist building a stand purveying nauseatingly sweet and sticky snack treats

Whatever your chosen game type you will love, worship and possibly become
Dungeon Keeper

right next to your *Theme Park* rollercoaster. And we're certain you wished that there was a wider selection of civilians to gun down in *Syndicate*. The problem was that acting out the PC equivalent of pulling the wings off flies usually resulted in failure (or complete indifference and unwanted police attention in the case of *Syndicate*).

Dungeon Keeper gives you a new perspective on the nature of good and evil, straight from the premise that you're on the dark side and up against those irritating heroes.

From the very beginning you're trained in the ways of evil – even when you just have a single room and a few imps ready to obey your every command.

Whereas in any other game you'd encourage them to work harder by giving them money or special treats, in here you treat them like the scum they are and slap them around (literally) until they pull their socks up. Try not to kill them by accident

though – imps are the key to the success of your dungeon. Tell them to dig out a room and they dig it for you, send them out mining for gold and they retrieve it, never so much as considering the possibility of lining their tiny pockets and doing a runner. Your imps are loyal, so reward their faith by torturing them often.

As your imps do all the hard work for you, you need never get stuck in the rut of confusion over what's going on, even though there really is a lot happening. Four training dungeons guide you through all you need to know about running a successful underworld, with pots of on-line help to prevent you from getting truly lost.

From your first attempts at carving out a new room through to the moment where your dungeon sprawls over a massive

area with a huge population of assorted monsters, you're in no doubt what to do. The learning curve manages to feel both incredibly steep and amazingly gentle – you feel as if you've managed to pick up all the essentials in just under five minutes.

You haven't. Look at your watch – it's probably been something in the region of five hours. This title is nothing short of enthralling and engrossing, and it's no exaggeration to state that the hours do pass like minutes without ever leaving you twiddling your thumbs and waiting for something to happen. Even if you're not under attack from enemy dungeon keepers or well-meaning adventurers you still have your hands full expanding your dungeon, smiting any denizens that you feel are slacking, and pumping gold into the task of training your monsters, researching new spells and building traps, doors and all those other important things that a good dungeon needs.

Should it become too much for you, fear not. This title features a variety of computer-assisted modes that can give you as little or as much help as you feel you need, and we reckon this throws it wide open to every aspect of the gaming public. If you're a battle-worn RPG fan you'll be happy to do everything yourself, while those of you who believe that life games begin and end with *Quake* would do well to leave as much as possible to the PC and play *Dungeon Keeper* as a first-person blaster. You can seize control of any

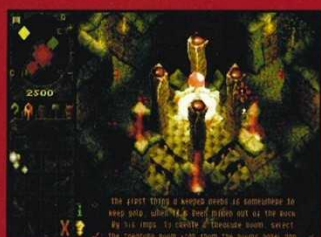


So *this* is how a beetle sees the world. Bear that in mind next time you plan to crush one into the earth with your hob-nail boots.

THE FIRST
60
MINUTES



Evil never sleeps. Certainly not for the first hour of in your dungeon, and maybe never again. Welcome to the wonderful world of insomnia!



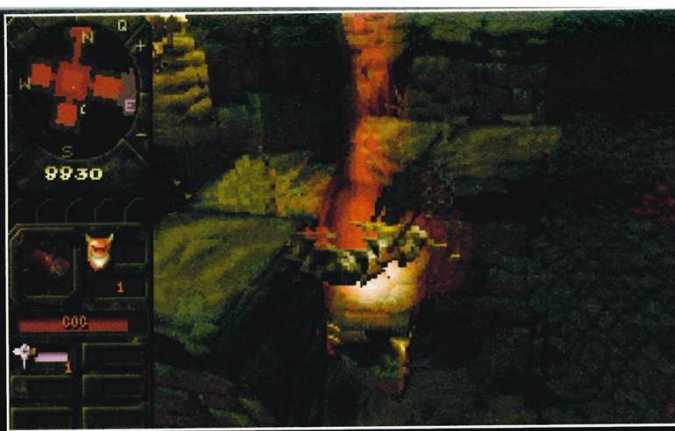
1 Starting with the dungeon essentials – that glowing thing in the middle is the heart and gathered round it are four imps. Clicking the mouse on any of the surrounding earth earmarks it for excavation, so point at what you want to be dug out.



2 Not that you want to excavate just anywhere – you need some method to your badness. Look around your local environs and you'll find what you need to get your imps' eyes gleaming – a rich seam of gold. Set them to work on retrieving it.



3 Put your gold into a treasure room and then your wealth starts to increase. Select an area three by three, and when your imps have dug it out and click the treasure room icon and each square of the new room to do business.



There's nothing so gratifying as the sight of the battered corpse of an adventurer who should have known better. Especially when seen through the eyes of a giant fly.

particular creature (down to the chickens that your dungeon occupants eat), then see the dungeon through its eyes and do everything that it would do under its own control. All right, it's nowhere near as rewarding as trying to do everything, but it does at least give you a taste for what's going on and maybe inspire you to have a go at taking the reins.

Everything about *Dungeon Keeper* is dazzling – it's been a ridiculously long time coming, but it's evident that not a second has been wasted. It all works beautifully and looks equally gorgeous – you initially see your world through a *Syndicate Wars*-

style isometric viewpoint, which can be rotated and scaled as much as you like, but Bullfrog has also included a top-down view which can be less confusing. No matter how packed your dungeon is, it's easy to get a grasp of everything

that's going on – you can see what your monsters are thinking and how powerful they are. If they simply refuse to do what you want, just pick them up and

put them in the right place until they get the right idea. Then slap them a bit until they know in no uncertain terms just what's expected of them. Discipline is the key.

But damn it, we're almost out of space and there are still so many

The learning curve manages to feel both incredibly steep and amazingly gentle



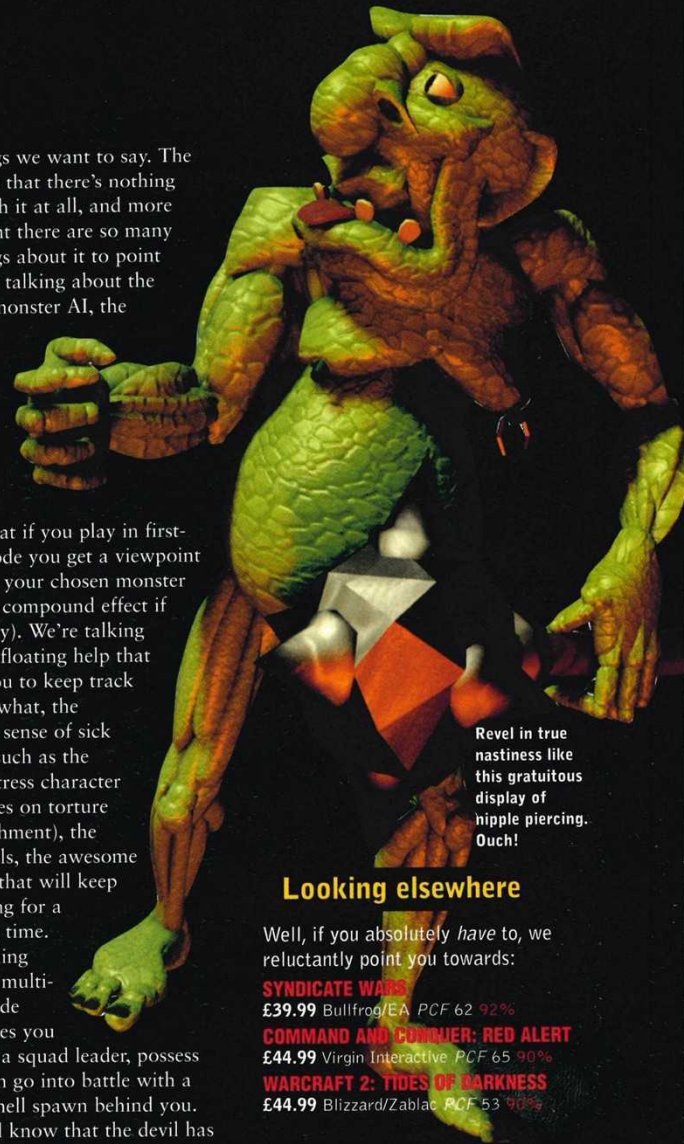
They might be utterly loyal to you, but yourimps are likely to skive off work as soon as they think your back's turned. Reward their indolence with a few hefty whacks.

good things we want to say. The problem is that there's nothing wrong with it at all, and more to the point there are so many great things about it to point out. We're talking about the excellent monster AI, the dynamic lighting, the huge variety of spells and traps that you get to play with,

the fact that if you play in first-person mode you get a viewpoint specific to your chosen monster (such as a compound effect if you're a fly). We're talking about the floating help that enables you to keep track of what's what, the pervading sense of sick humour (such as the Dark Mistress character who thrives on torture and punishment), the secret levels, the awesome challenge that will keep you playing for a long, long time.

We're talking about the multi-player mode that enables you to specify a squad leader, possess it and then go into battle with a legion of hell spawn behind you.

We all know that the devil has the very best tunes, and we suspect that he not only supplied Peter Molyneux with his Bullfrog swan song, but also transcribed the full orchestral arrangement and sat at the mixing desk for the duration of the 12-inch mix. *Dungeon Keeper* is faultless, gripping and it will destroy your social life for the foreseeable future. It rocks, it rolls and it rules. Just buy it and embrace the dark side, all right? You know it makes sense. **PCF**



Revel in true nastiness like this gratuitous display of nipple piercing. Ouch!

Looking elsewhere

Well, if you absolutely *have* to, we reluctantly point you towards:

- SYNDICATE WARS**
£39.99 Bullfrog/EA PCF 62 92%
- COMMAND AND CONQUER: RED ALERT**
£44.99 Virgin Interactive PCF 65 90%
- WARCRAFT 2: TIDES OF DARKNESS**
£44.99 Blizzard/Zabrac PCF 53 90%

DUNGEON KEEPER

- ✓ Huge challenge
- ✓ Dazzling graphics
- ✓ Warped humour
- ✓ Playable on any level
- ✗ Goodbye, real world

Processor Min: 486DX2 Rec: P90
Memory Min: 8Mb Rec: 16Mb
System ✓DOS ✗WIN 3.1 ✓WIN 95
Video ✗VGA ✓SVGA ✗3D card

PC FORMAT Rating 94%



4 A healthy stash of gold is just part of what you need to attract monsters to your dungeon. The other absolute must is somewhere for your monsters to sleep. So set theimps to work again on a new room and when it's finished, turn it into a lair.



5 All you need now is food for your denizens, so it's time to build a hatchery where chicks grow out of the ground, ready for eating. If yourimps aren't working fast enough you can buck their ideas up with a few slaps.



6 Get ready to open your dungeon for business. If you look around you'll find a portal not close to the heart of your dungeon. Tunnel through to it and wait for theimps to claim it as yours, then the monsters will come.



7 Expand/build as necessary and you'll attract the attention of one of those adventurers. If you've built properly and kept your monsters happy, paid, fed and trained you'll have no problem in killing him, before moving on to new realms.