

# Dungeon Keeper

Publisher	EA
Developer	Bullfrog
Price	£40
Minimum System	486/66, 8Mb RAM (2D Display only)
Recommended	P166, 16Mb RAM
Graphics Accelerator	None
Sound Support	All major cards
Multi-Player	Modem, serial, network
Web Address	<a href="http://www.bullfrog.co.uk">http://www.bullfrog.co.uk</a>
Release Date	Out now



## Releas

Was it worth the wait? It'll need to be *damn* good to say 'yes'. Read on to find the answer.

**I**T'S DONE. PETER Molyneux's farewell fling for Bullfrog, and the most anticipated game this side of *X-Wing vs TIE Fighter*, is finished. It's here. No more delays. But can it possibly be good enough? One thing's for sure: describing it is not going to be easy.

In many ways *Dungeon Keeper* is the culmination of classic Bullfrog game ideas, tweaked to perfection (but then it should be, after that unbelievable development time). It will remind you of *Populous* to

begin with, then perhaps *Theme Park*, mixed with a little *PowerMonger* and the graphical style of *Magic Carpet*. It borrows the best bits from all, shakes them up and overwhelms you with one hell of an enormous epic.

As the name sort of implies, your job in the game is a dungeon keeper. Deep beneath the ground, you rule over your own private hell of violence, evil and degradation. Above you are lands of happiness and contentment; your job is to spread foul contamination and stinking decay to each of the 25 levels. To do this, you must plan, create and maintain your dungeon, attracting a variety of infernal creatures along the way. These you must feed, house, train and pay to keep them happy.

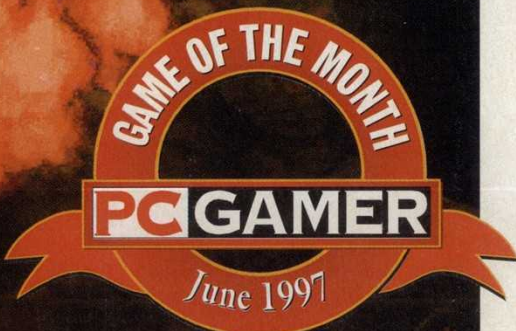
Once your dungeon is large enough, it will attract the attention of heroes who come



Dramatic scenes (left) like this occur every few minutes in *Dungeon Keeper*.



*Dungeon Keeper* used to feature predominantly brown scenery. This has been cured by a series of 'climatic' levels (above). The rosette above each of the creatures' heads represents strength and level and governs the combat.



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looking for your enormous wad. When they do, your foul horde can strike them down and capture their wealth... until eventually, the Lord of the Land comes. Defeat him and you've won the level. Mostly, there will be rival dungeon keepers which you also need to crush, as they lust after your gold and creatures too.

Sounds straightforward enough? Oh no.

Each game begins with the life force of your world, the Dungeon Heart, beating away in its own prebuilt room. If the Heart is destroyed, it's game over, so it needs to be protected at all costs. You're also supplied with a few Imps, your invaluable minions. Imps take care of a great deal of dungeon maintenance and are the only creatures that you can directly create with a spell.

The first job is to dig out some space from the surrounding earth, by marking out an area of square tiles à la *SimCity 2000*. Your Imps then scurry to the scene, dig out the earth and claim the tiles with your colour, which are now ready to build on. Then they start reinforcing

## Lair one and two



From above, your creature's Lair displays a neat, organised pattern full of various creatures...



... but dive into a creature and it all changes. This is the direct control underworld of *Dungeon Keeper*.

the walls with stone. This is important, because enemies (and you) can't dig through walls without a certain spell.

At this point you get the first taster of just how exquisitely detailed *DK* is. It leaves a pleasant tang in your mouth that will persist for every second you play the game. The Imps actually rush to the spot, tiny footsteps echoing, and hammer away at the earth with their picks,

*"Torture Rooms attract the Dark Mistress, a kinky chick who enjoys being slapped."*

accompanied by faultless sound effects. After a short time, the earth collapses in a heap of rubble, which they then clear up. When claiming a tile, the Imps do a little dance,

resulting in an ethereal chord and a small puff of translucent red smoke. Nothing much has happened but already you're fascinated.

Creating rooms is simply a matter of placing tiles of the appropriate room type. But you can't just bang down tiles willy-nilly, because the shape of a room defines its efficiency and productiveness. Square with one door is ideal but other considerations mean this is not always possible. You need a Treasure Room to start with, to store the gold you mine from gleaming seams here and there. Of course, everything you build or do costs money, so a reliable cash source is vital (from the gold). But there are only a finite number of worker Imps and they have to be split between digging for cash and expanding your dungeon. You can create more, but they become increasingly expensive and the amount of treasure in your bank is a major draw for powerful monsters.

The next essential rooms are a Lair and a Hatchery. The former is where all your creatures make their home, so it needs to be large enough to accommodate everything. But high-brow sorcerers don't research new spells as well if

## Future proofing



The Dark Library is the home of your sorcerors at first. Research a while and then train 'em up.



A Workshop provides you with the tools to secure your dungeon. May not seem vital but really is.



The Training Room is the key to your battles. Pop your creatures in early and accelerate them.



This is what you spend most your time looking at. The green box is your cursor; the sphere is your Dungeon Heart, the plan and your gold live in the top-left and the key to playing the game (the panel to the left) all blend perfectly together.

they have to sleep in squalor with beetles. So you might need a separate little Lair for them. The Hatchery is just a chicken coop, full of squawking chucks; when a creature gets peckish, it wanders in and rips one to shreds. Nice. Oh, you can become a chicken by the way.

With these in place, you can tunnel to a nearby entrance and claim it. Entrances are the primary way creatures enter your dungeon. Outside are a set number of creatures in the land waiting to be lured into your service, tempted by riches and power. But the other dungeon keeper is also tempting them, so you have to work fast. Your first inmates are usually weak, lowly critters such as the beetle or spider. They wander in to the dungeon, scuttle off to the Lair and make their home.

To gain more powerful creatures, you need to build specific rooms of a certain size. Creatures driven by hunger respond to a large Hatchery near their Lair. Those interested in power love Training Rooms and sorcerors (naturally) prefer to lock themselves away in huge Libraries. You don't have enough cash to go for them all at first. So a Dark Library is the next priority, because it attracts sorcerors who can research there. You'll also want a Training Room to build up your creatures' strength and experience levels. As these increase, they become more powerful and gain new spells or capabilities... but of course it costs a lot of money.

As your sorcerors' research progresses, new room types become available. The Workshop

attracts Trolls, who bash away at their machines to produce doors and traps. Again, it's not quite that simple, because there are four types of doors (ranging from the weak Wooden to the almost impenetrable Magic) and six types of traps. Doors are placed in corridors as a security measure and can only be opened by your own creatures (unless you lock them). Traps, such as Poison Gas and Lightning, are excellent devices that you drop at strategic points and which go

*"The real-time light-source effects are simply staggering."*

off when stepped on by an enemy.

Build a Prison and you can capture defeated enemies (that's if you've ordered your minions to attempt to imprison enemies rather than kill them), which can then be tortured in the Torture Room. They might crack and reveal the enemy keeper's dungeon layout... or they could just die and spur on their comrades to fight harder. You can imprison and torture your own creatures. Placing food outside Prisons makes them more willing to co-operate, but if they die, all the creatures of the species will rebel. Torture Rooms attract the Dark Mistress, a kinky chick who enjoys torture and being slapped. Hmm.

Bile Demons, the big red horned gits, eat

loads and like toiling in the Workshop. The massively powerful Vampires, however, hate manufacturing. They appear if you build a Graveyard and after a certain number of creatures have died. Unhappy creatures can be palliated in a Temple. Your creatures might get narky if, for example, you don't have enough money for their wages at payday, and could start fighting among themselves.

You also gain more spells through research. These include Heal, Turn to Chicken (wahey!), Disease (spreads disease through the enemy camp), and Sight of Evil (which gives you a brief overview on the map of an undiscovered area, so you can reccy where the enemy is). The Scavenger spell (think about it...) lets you woo enemy creatures with vague promises of riches. Creatures have their own, different spells, which can be improved through training. One spell which needs some explanation is always present: Possess Creature.

Most of the time, you view the map from an overhead isometric perspective view, which can be zoomed and rotated. When you cast Possess, you zoom down into the creature and control it, seeing the dungeon through its eyes with a *Doom*-style 3D world. It's a remarkable change, seeing your hand-built dungeon from afar and then actually *being* in it, wandering about the rooms and watching other creatures. You also have control of the creatures' weapons and spells, which is useful in a battle. But this isn't just any old 3D. When you're a beetle the



*“It will take you a long, long time to exhaust all that DK has to offer, and every step of the way will be a delight.”*



The Lightning spell (top) looks fantastic, but you won't see it if you own a 486. One of your chums (above).

view changes to a great lens effect, when you're a fly there's this sort of drug-induced composite visual break-up that looks oh so spesh.

Oh yes, sooner or later a battle occurs, usually when you find the enemy. Then it's an all-out pitched fight to the death. Your creatures automatically use their best tactics and spells against the enemy, though for finer control you can possess one and do it yourself. Taking direct control of a creature makes it much more effective. It's not simple, though. I've been playing this for two weeks now and am just getting to grips with all the possibilities.

Crowded battles can sometimes be hard to follow, with umpteen creatures flinging various weapons at each other, though it's easy to see the health of both your and the enemy's battalions. With so much going on, it's often tricky to pick up an individual creature or see who's doing what to who. Generally you have to just sit tight and hope your army is strong enough – there's not much room for clever tactics once the war has started.

These battles are accompanied by the most wilfully godawful noises you've ever heard. Creatures emit bizarre, wordless squeals and grunts at the best of times; put them all together in a scrap and you have one huge horrible cacophony of pain. It's incredibly effective at conveying the chaos of battle. Indeed, sound is a vital part of *DK*, artfully employed to maximum effect throughout.

The battles were the only element that

disappointed me at first. Initially, it seems as if you have very little control over them, but slowly two things happen. First, you realise that the battles should be won or lost before they occur because your strategy has put highly trained creatures in the right place at the right time. When there is a problem, nip inside a level 8 sorcerer and blast some spells off from a distance.

*DK* has the visual flair of *Magic Carpet*, with that strange 'organic 3D' appearance and oddly curvaceous angles. The real-time light-source effects are simply staggering. By default, everything casts up to four (translucent) shadows. Your cursor acts as a torch, lighting the immediate area, and with the light from wall torches, spells, fire and so on, a hugely atmospheric arena is created. The first-person view isn't quite *Quake*, with the characters appearing as blocky bitmaps, but it's good enough. All this splendour takes its toll at times. High-res mode is ideal, but isn't really playable on less powerful machines (less than a P133). Even the low-res mode chugs a bit when there's a lot happening on screen. For lower specs there is a flat option that is just about playable.

*Dungeon Keeper's* prolonged development time has paid off just because of the amazing attention to detail. For example, when you place a trap, it doesn't just appear on the spot; a spare Imp has to go to the Workshop, collect the trap and drag it to the right place. At payday, creatures drop everything and immediately head for the Treasure Room to get their wages.

Sacrificing various creatures in the Temple can bring good or bad results from the gods, so you have to experiment. Each creature has its own name, wage and even blood type. And so on.

I've just about covered the basics here, but *DK's* subtleties go much further. There just isn't room to mention the slew of creatures' spells, or the thrill of multi-player games, or the effect a new lunar cycle has on the game... or the guest appearance of a very famous character from certain other EA titles.

It's a breathtaking achievement. We've all had our doubts for years, but Molyneux and his team have locked them away forever. With an end result so full of good things, seething with finely balanced perfection and packed with innovation, you can't help but love *Dungeon Keeper*.

To rationalise this further, there are about 30 dedicated single-player levels in the game. I reckon the above enthusing covers playing half way through an average sized level at the start of the game. There is more in *Dungeon Keeper* than any game I have ever played. Ever. And I know I haven't even found half of it yet.

JAMES FLYNN

## PC GAMER – THE VERDICT

A stunning achievement. Amazing depth, incredible balance and Broadway quality drama to get here.

95%