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CIS 587
Spring 2000
Assignment 1.
Due May 16, 2000

Game Review

Title: Dungeon Keeper

Produced by: BullFrog Productions LTD., an Electronic Arts^{TM} Company.

Game design by: Peter Molyneux, Simon Carter, Mark Healey, Dene Carter, Jonty Barnes, and Alex Peters

Game Type: Strategy Simulation

Price: $39.98

Minimum Hardware Requirements
- **Operating System** - Windows 95 or MS DOS 6.22 or higher
- **CPU Type & Speed** - Intel Pentium or 100% compatible
- **Hard Drive Space** - 65 MB plus space for saved games. Additional space required for Direct X and Windows 95 Swap file
- Memory - 16 MB RAM
- **CD-ROM Speed** - Quad speed (MPC3 compliant); DOS requires MSCDEX v2.21 or higher; Windows 95 requires native drivers
- **Graphics** - DOS: 1MB PCI SVGA video card (VESA 1.2 compliant); Windows 95: DirectX 3 compatible 1 MB PCI SVGA video card
- **Other Needs** - DOS: 100% compatable Microsoft mouse & driver v7.04 or higher; Windows 95: DirectX 3 compatible sound card
- **Network (LAN) (2-4 players)** - IPX compliant network, network card, 1 CD per network player
- **Modem (2 player)** - 100% Hayes compatible 14,400 or faster, High Speed (16550 UART) serial port, 1 CD per modem player
- **Serial (2 player)** - Direct Link: Null modem adapter High Speed (16550 UART) serial port, 1 DC per serial player.
- **Other Supported Devices -** Sound Blaster or 100% compatible, Sound Blaster Pro or 100% compatible, Sound Blaster 16 or AWE 32, Ensoniq Soundscape, Microsoft Windows Sound system and 100% compatible, ESS Audio Drive, Roland RAP 10, Media Vision Pro Audio Spectrum or 100% compatible.

Recommended Hardware Requirements
- Intel Pentium 120 MHz or better for single player
- Intel Pentium 133 MHz or better strongly recommended for multiplayer
- High color (65,6535 color) capable VESA 2.0 compliant PCI video card with 2MB Video RAM
- Sound Blaster or 100% compatible

Actual Hardware Requirements
- The game runs well even on a 100MHz Pentium and 16MB RAM.

Game Summary

"Welcome to the realm of the *Dungeon Keeper^{TM}*. This is your world. Above ground all might be peace and harmony, but deep in the bowels of the earth you rule over a realm of chaos and violence." (Dungeon Keeper Manual) The game is played from both a 3rd person overhead orthographic view or a first person view. The player is the designer of a subterranean dungeon. The player attracts monsters and evil beings and directs them to do the keeper's bidding. Unlike many other games, the player is in horde gold and jewels while caring for and controlling all that is Evil. An Evil Overlord's work is never done. One must provide sleeping quarters, training arenas, temples, graveyards, prisons, and torture chambers. One must also research spells, train the underlings, and manufacture doors, traps and other implements of mayhem. Sometimes a good "Slap" teaches those lazy, disobedient minions their place. To top everything off, troublesome "Heroes" and rival keepers try to ruin your fun.

Installation

Installation is automated and pain free. Both the DOS and Windows installation completed without incident. Place the CD in the drive and the CD auto play's an installation menu.

User Interface

The screen layout is well packaged. The play area is optimized and the tools are not intrusive. The user interface is primarily mouse driven. There is a tool pallet docked on the left third of the screen. The pallets include tools for viewing the play area, controlling your minions, building, spell casting, other book keeping information. There are keyboard shortcuts which enhance game play. The novice can get around quite well with only the mouse, but as the player progresses, the keyboard shortcuts become make for smoother play. The help system is easy to use and accessible during game play. The user interface is explained well in the documentation, which includes helpful illustrations and quick summaries of commands.

Game Play

Sound is used extensively to aid in plunging the player into the game. Mood music plays in the background. Descriptive sounds are heard as the player explores uncharted regions of the dungeon, giving a hint of what's hiding in the shadows. The colors are foreboding as they should be in any proper dungeon. There is a well rounded cast of beings to control. Game play is usually fast paced and exciting. I found myself saying, "I'll play just five more minutes, only to find an hour had passed. The manual is helpful and well organized. It explains the basics while not giving too much away. The player is left with an urge to explore and find secrets hinted at in the manual.

Scoring

The player is evaluated at the end of each level. A breakdown of game elements is displayed. Points are awarded for the number of minions attracted, battles won, rooms built, efficient use of resources, and a myriad other details. Statistics like chickens slapped, souls tortured, enemies converted, maimed, or killed also appear in the roster. The litany of evil deeds goes on and on.

Game Review

Not many games allow the user to be the villain. The concept is well thought out and implemented. It is refreshing to champion from the other side of the tracks. The game does not take itself seriously and dark humor is abundant. There are many twists and surprises like extra levels or short humorous poems appearing based on the date and moon phase. The artwork is well designed and helps to bring the player into the game. The first person perspective is fun to use and gives considerable tactical advantage. Each being has its own attributes such as vision and speed and noise profile. The first person perspective takes these attributes into account. For example, a fly has faceted eyes and buzzes through the dungeon very fast while the Vampire sees through a thermal haze, and sulks silently through the darkness.

Sometimes it is troublesome taking over the slower beings in first person perspective especially when there is a long distance to travel, as it takes for ever for the creatures lumber slowly through the dungeon. The most distracting aspect of the game is the micromanagement. The player must constantly slap the creatures around to make them obey commands. The game also allows the player to get computer aided assistance for building the dungeon. However, the Artificial Intelligence leaves something to be desired. The computer tends to over slap the minions, sometimes slapping them to death, When the computer is helping the player build the dungeon, it will build rooms willy-nilly without regard for strategic placement. In the process the computer tends to open the dungeon up for attack from the good heroes. There are no glaring design mistakes

I like Dungeon Keeper much better than most other simulation games. I feel the micromanagement required is far less than other simulation games like Sim-City. Other games which are similar are the Populous series and Power Monger. The thing that sets Dungeon keeper apart is the way the game pokes fun at itself and revels in its own irony. After all, its hard to be a villain in the midst of heroes.

The most appropriate audience for this game is 15 to 24 year olds. However, as an older player I still enjoy the game.

<u>Summary</u>
The game could be improved by adding additional monsters, and better artificial intelligence, but these are minor annoyances rather than major stumbling blocks. The game has many surprises and is a delight to play. The graphics and sound are very immersive. The interface is simple to learn and integrated well with the game. The game is definitely worth getting, although Dungeon Keeper II was recently released and promises to take Dungeon Keeper to new depths. Overall I am very happy with the game