

'Dungeon' board game

Published by Wizards of the Coast, 2014

Review by Paul Le Long

Overview

This is a game that might be familiar to some of you as it originally appeared in the 1970s, published by TSR as a Dungeons & Dragons-lite boardgame that was designed as a stablemate for D&D. I had that game many years ago but the game under review here is the new 2014 edition.

This is a very simple game. The rules cover only a few pages and can be learned in minutes. Essentially what we have here is a dungeon-crawl where you run a hero around a dungeon, fight monsters and grab treasure. There are six dungeon levels, level 1 being populated by easy monsters like Goblins, level 6 being populated by Dragons and the like. The treasure increases with the level of the dungeon and the toughness of the monsters. Rogues are weak characters but only need to collect 10,000GPs to win; wizards are much more powerful but don't win until they collect 30,000GPs.

Can it be played solo?

There are suggestions for solo play as these are very simple. Otherwise it's a competitive game where each character races around trying to be the first to gain a certain amount of treasure. Nevertheless, I have no trouble playing solo as I find the best thing is to run 3-4 characters and simply see who wins. That doesn't sound like much fun but I think this game has a great deal of charm and playing it is a joy, regardless of who wins.

What are the components?

The board really is beautiful and a great improvement of the 1970s incarnation. You get 8 hero standees, 139 tokens which are printed on excellent-quality card and are lovely. You also get 165 cards representing monsters, spells and treasure. And 2D6. All of the components are really top quality and a pleasure to use.

What is the level of complexity?

This is a very simple game; you can learn the game in minutes and play is fast and simple. This is definitely a gateway game for young or non-gamers. The box says ages are 8+ which is about right.

What do you spend your time doing during play?

You move your hero around the board, entering rooms and fighting the monsters that you find there. Combat is simple as each monster is defeated if you beat a certain score on 2D6. Each monster has a score *vis a vis* the character that it is fighting as so the Dire Rat (a level 1 monster) is defeated on a 5+ by a rogue, 4+ by a cleric, 3+ by a fighter and 6+ by a wizard. When you kill the monster, you take its treasure. If you lose a fight, you generally miss a turn and drop your treasure. There are other rules for spells and things, but essentially that's it.

What are the tactical decisions?

None really, except that if you are a rogue (a weak character) then you'll have to plod around on lower dungeon levels. Fighters and wizards are the most fun to play because they can range further into the dungeon and fight more dangerous monsters. If you wanted to be cruel you could play a wizard and then depopulate the lower levels so you wouldn't get enough treasure there to win but you would stop the weaker heroes winning. That's an obvious strategy in competitive play, but you would have to be a kill-joy jerk to do it. The point of the game is to have fun rather than to win.

Points to note

The original game had some slightly different rules, as I recall, including the ability for heroes to attack each other so you can't do that in this version but then I don't mind that because as I said before, this game isn't about competition.

Final assessment

I really like this game. It isn't solitaire specific and it is incredibly simple, simplistic even. But it has great charm, the components are lovely, and it's just great fun. Also it's perfect for a quick game that you can play with little intellectual investment. If you want a simple old-school dungeon-crawl and can't find the energy for a proper RPG, then this is a good alternative that will provide plenty of uncomplicated fun.



