

## A PS2 Game Review

# Baldur's Gate Dark Alliance

By Le Chupacabra



**D**ARK Alliance is a true sleeper-hit. From a first glance, all you expect is an archetypal hack-and-slash title based on an existing license. By all means, it's an accurate description - which fails to see the true fun that awaits... The story is indeed simplistic at best, but its undeniably classic Dungeons & Dragons-style world still makes it an enjoyable ride. The first task (as it is in all D&D stories) is to curb the rat problem that plagues the rather voluptuous barmaid. Before you know it, you're lead to the nest of the Thieves' Guild (who said thieves weren't civil-minded?) that happens to run by another more powerful group. This group is also under



orders from someone higher up and the hierarchy continues, constituting the major "twists" of the story.

This is a 'dungeon-hack' in the purest sense; you make your way through several dungeons that seem to go further underground. On the way you'll be attacked by typical D&D fantasy creatures ranging from kobolds to bugbears to large gelatinous cubes. No, really, these lumps of Jell-O will attempt to maul you so it's better that you hack them to bite-sized pieces quickly. This isn't the deepest game in the world; you mostly have to attack by hammering X in between blocking (R1) and spell-casting. Despite its incredibly simplistic nature, the fighting is surprisingly

addictive and very fun! The intuitive control system for micro-managing Health and Mana items and magic only helps make it more enjoyable. There are plenty of boxes to bash and treasure chests to loot which in turn contain valuable items and gold. You can pawn these items and use the gold to buy better weapons and armour from the local vendor. It's a simplified shop system, yet the large range of products and your tight budgeting instincts make it an extremely fun mini-game. You'll be eyeing the *Flaming Bastard Sword of Defence +3* for a while and when you finally get the money to buy it, it's quite satisfying. And then the *Lightening Long Sword +5* looks enticing as well and



soon enough you'll fight against the hordes of darkness to get that little number as well. It's a superficial mechanism which ends up offering hours of genuine fulfillment and enjoyment.

Now here comes the part that makes turns this game from a solid, fun title into an insanely addictive joy-ride: Co-operative mode.

Playing solo is nice, but when you play Dark Alliance in Co-op mode, you will have the time of your life! The fun you get out of all those gameplay mechanics I mentioned increases fifty-fold. While you cast magic at enemies from afar, your friend/sibling/relative can be hacking the enemies apart from up close. You can quietly open the door

to a room and as the denizens of evil rush out, your partner takes out the welcoming party with his trusty bow-work; you rush in with your Flaming Bastard Sword to take out the rest. Teamwork has never been this exhilarating and rewarding. There's always a rush for the boxes and chest since, despite being a team effort, it's still 'finder's keepers'. Mutiny can often be heavy in the air as the faster Elf gets all the goodies while the slower Dwarf grumpily takes down the bugbears. This leads to a bout of competitiveness that ratchets up the fun-factor even higher. Since you also level up at different rates, it's possible that you make even become more dependent on your stronger team-



mate and once again, you're bound by his/her trust and skill with the blade. What can seem slightly frustrating at first leads to real camaraderie and sincere gratification. It won't be uncommon to ask your richer companion to buy you a weapon you need and then you can return the favour later; it's real-world dealing and interaction presented with much fervour in this amazing game. Having your partner scream words of encouragement as you take the last slashes at the final boss makes the whole game one emotional rollercoaster ride. Play the game in Co-op and I swear you will not regret your time spent.

This game's a looker, though its age

will show now since it's a 2001 title. The levels have a gritty fantasy vibe and the character designs are great, though the pseudo-isometric perspective makes it difficult to see the smaller ones. The lighting effects are divine! But the best part is the water - it has this strange, mercurial effect that's a joy to play around with. You can entertain yourself for hours as you run around in puddles and watch how realistically the waves form and interact with you, the edges and other waves.

There's a physics lesson on waves right there kids! But trust me, the water is amazing; you must see it! The game's music is minimalistic but the voice acting makes up for it completely. Each



character is very well voice-acted and it's joy to hear them speak their lines. There are plenty of cameos with John-Rhys Davies (Gimli of LOTR fame) voicing the dwarves while Cam Clarke (Liquid Snake from MGS) plays a meek, 'I'm-so-scared-I-WILL-piss-in-my-pants' priest.

Here's a pretty good game that you'll enjoy by yourself. When you play with a friend, it becomes a surprisingly emotional journey that's a pure blast. Oh and a word of advice: 'Ball Lightening'. Remember that phrase and you'll thank me later!

Comments, suggestions, flames and hate mail can all be directed to: [baka.era.sennin@gmail.com](mailto:baka.era.sennin@gmail.com)

The links below are also available in [niloywrites.blogspot.com](http://niloywrites.blogspot.com) for your convenience. And those who are interested in comics might want to keep an eye on my other site [BDcomics.blogspot.com](http://BDcomics.blogspot.com). And here's a little treat for those who've been following the Rockstar INXS: Marty Casey's "TREES" [[doiop.com/MartyTREES](http://doiop.com/MartyTREES)]

Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy e-Books

Many of you guys who've downloaded the mind-numbingly awesome Hitchhiker's guide to the galaxy audio-books emailed me requesting the books. Here's the link to the books: [[doiop.com/HHbook](http://doiop.com/HHbook)]. Also, if you missed out last week's Sites Unseen, here's the link to the audio books again: [[doiop.com/BDcomicsHitchhiker](http://doiop.com/BDcomicsHitchhiker)]

KEEP OFF THE INTERNET!!! [[citizensunitednegatingtechnology.org](http://citizensunitednegatingtechnology.org)]

The Internet Is Unambiguous Evil! CITIZENS UNITED NEGATING TECHNOLOGY FOR LIFE AND PEOPLE'S SAFETY urges you to turn this evil thing off. How to STOP your family from getting onto the internet: Kill the mouse! Remove its balls!

Jokes aside, this is one of the several new "parody" sites Rockstar launched to accompany its upcoming PSP title: GTA Liberty City Stories. In this site, the infamous Jack Thompson guy and stupid egotistical narrow minded people who campaign against the oh-so-negative consequences of the modern media (the net, games and all) are thoroughly ridiculed (BEFORE THE INTERNET, WE HAD \*NO\* PROBLEMS.) Take a look at the site, read the testimonials, have a good laugh. Here's an article on this from [Eurogamer.net](http://Eurogamer.net): [[doiop.com/EGarticle](http://doiop.com/EGarticle)]

Latrinalia [[latrinalia.org](http://latrinalia.org)]

To say that Mark Ferem has an unusual photographic hobby is a bit of an understatement. Mark believes that "the restroom wall is the last great medium for self-expression." To prove it, he travels the country and documents the graffiti he encounters on bathroom walls. From the purely artistic to the ridiculously sublime, Latrinalia showcases the gems of Mark's collection. Sometimes the messages are designed to amuse, sometimes the scrawling reek of frustration, but most of the time they're fascinating, right down to the most bitterly ironic ones.

Abandoned [[abandoned.ru](http://abandoned.ru)]

Travelling Russian photographer Uryevich has a penchant for exploring abandoned Soviet building projects. And he's not afraid to pen the occasional brooding verse, either: "Footprint of civilization. Cement, metal, and dust not claimed by anyone. They are eternity." Fortunately, his pictures are way better than his poetry; he fills this haunting gallery with beautiful images of ugly structures.

Whack yourself creatively [[creativethink.com](http://creativethink.com)]

Have you ever felt uninspired? Creatively worn out? Simply stuck, with nowhere to turn? Roger von Oech offers a website that can help. When you need a "creative whack", visit Creative Think. This site provides hints, inspirations and other tips to help "whack" you back into a productive mode whenever you feel creatively challenged. Each time you visit, you'll be met with a different suggestion the tips load randomly. Here's an example of one of von Oech's tips: "Don't Fall in Love with Ideas: If you fall in love with an idea, you won't see the merits of alternative approaches and will probably miss an opportunity or two. One of life's

great pleasures is letting go of a previously cherished idea. Then you're free to look for new ones. What part of your idea are you in love with? What would happen if you kissed it goodbye?"

Rag-doll Masters [[ragdollsoft.com/ragdollmasters.html](http://ragdollsoft.com/ragdollmasters.html)]

This game is simply awesome. By adding smooth rag doll physics into a 2D fighting environment, it creates an amazing gameplay experience. There are also bullet time effects in this, it'll take some time to get used to this, but when you do, you'll never want to turn back. Just don't ask me how to crack this game.

Early Google [[doiop.com/EarlyGoogle](http://doiop.com/EarlyGoogle)]

This is how Google started back in 1997. It's nice to see how much they've grown into!

Student Beats Microsoft Legally By Himself

This story is 6 months old, but is very entertaining. David Zamos is a student who found himself in a very strange predicament when he tried to resell two unopened copies of MS Software on eBay. Then the predictable happened; Zamos was sued by Microsoft, claiming (and I kid you not), that Zamos' sale on eBay cost Microsoft hundreds of thousands of dollars in "irreparable damage." They demanded that Zamos hand over his eBay profits (\$143.50) and also pay for Microsoft's legal expenses.

To read about how Zamos single-handedly won his case without hiring outside counsel, check out this article [[doiop.com/BeatsMS](http://doiop.com/BeatsMS)] and this page [[doiop.com/BeatsMS2](http://doiop.com/BeatsMS2)].

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By Niloy



## CAST

Valiant - Ewan McGregor  
Bugsy - Ricky Gervais  
Von Talon - Tim Curry  
Sergeant - Jim Broadbent  
Gutsy - Hugh Laurie  
Mercury - John Cleese  
Felix - John Hurt

ger.

The plot:

In a thrilling opening sequence, members of the Royal Homing Pigeon Service (RHPS) flap furiously to deliver vital intel for the war effort. Like death from above, enemy hawk General Von Talon (voiced by Tim Curry) swoops down to thwart them.

Ewan McGregor voices the title character, a diminutive wood pigeon whose heart is bigger than his wingspan. But the RHPS is desperate for recruits. In the words of one commander: "If we don't find some more birds fast, our goose is cooked."

Despite his size, Valiant signs on for service with Bugsy (Ricky Gervais), a bathing-averse bird who fills the manic buddy role usually reserved for Robin Williams' vocal talents. This is one of the characters in the movie that is underutilized. Cowardly Bugsy delivers the best laughs of the movie but he's ultimately a one-note character. Some-

# Valiant

Review by Gokhra



where along the plot a romance between Valiant and a nursing dove (voiced by Victoria Williams) develops but is unfortunately condensed.

The laughs come in fast and easy. There's the Rocky-esque training session where the small bird does some weightlifting with a barbell made out of two apples stuck at the ends of a stick. There is all the requisite potty humor and goofy pratfalls that may have been tried many times before but still hold their charm.

The movie also teaches valuable lessons in friendship, loyalty, teamwork and above all believing in yourself. The kids will love it and so will the wizened old world weary boring grownups. It's perhaps the first animated kids' film that can claim to be "based on a true story."

The verdict:

Firstly for a new company the animation is quite top notch although not along the finely polished lines of Pixar's "The Incredibles" or Blue Sky's "Ice Age". With

Valiant there is an obsession to hold out attention and keeping it with all kinds of action packed sequences allowing us little time to bond with his cast and emotionally attach the characters.

This movie is made with the intention of making it half the cost of other movies and finishing it in half the time. The corner- and cost-cutting shows. While the overall production design doesn't suffer, it also isn't as highly stylized as competitor films. Also the story could use some fine-tuning.

There's a scene where Mercury, a captured pigeon of war is taken off to provide us with a view of Von Talon's base. Not much else. Another character called Rollo who is a wild-eyed, pyromaniac mouse belonging to the The French Resistance is one that is criminally under-utilized.

But despite all the gripping and complaining of being a general wizened old world weary boring grownup it's a damn good movie.