

# Dragon Ruins 2: an extensive review



I played this game during christmas 2025 & new year 2026 - I had a lot of fun early on, as it breathes a lot of fresh wind into a long-standing usually slow paced genre. And later I really had fun picking it apart and analyzing it thoroughly. I kept all my notes and thoughts. This document contains a review part and another part with some well-meant, but extensive design criticism and ideas for improvements (spoilers). I am eagerly waiting for part 3, or a spiritual successor.

## The best early 3-hour dungeon crawler experience you can have in 2026:

Dragon Ruins 2 is described as a „Dungeon-Crawler for tired people“ and while I agree, I much rather would describe it as „Dungeon-Crawler for impatient people“ or „Dungeon-Crawler for newcomers to the genre“.

### Conclusion:

Up to the 3 hour point the experience is amongst the best you can have with a dungeon crawler in 2025/2026. I'd recommend to anyone who can spare 10 bucks for 2-3 hours, to try an indie-game made with love and which shows some cool innovation! Or if you never played a game of this type, it's also worth it

### The Experience:

You sit down, you install the game, you create a party from 4 heroes from a roster of ~20 choices which also contains some funny ones, like a monkey, all of them have a unique skill – so this feels meaningful and then you get to play. It takes you a couple of clicks/buttons to check the options in town and to choose a quest. Literally you get to the action in just 5

minutes. If you don't like your team you can exchange it any time in town, the only drawback is that new members will stay at level 1, but early on this invites you to experiment with different skills and setups.

You explore, when you're weak you go to the town and rest, or invest money in level ups or gear upgrades. You loot some chests, or if you have a thief you unlock them with multiple tries. You explore your first dungeon in the first half hour. For the first 3 hours this is a great experience.

## **How you can play it:**

The game works wonderfully well on a steam-deck, it works well on a laptop and there is zero friction. If somebody doesn't know what a dungeon crawler is, or never tried one, this game is so smooth and frictionless and fast, that you can recommend it to literally anyone. And that's the single greatest strength of this game and I love it for this simple reason.

## **What it does differently:**

In a genre which is slow, sometimes arcane and mostly outdated, Dragon Ruins II sticks out, because it's not front-loading overburdening choice like how to build a party, maybe even dice-roll it. You don't have to consider countless stats or arcane small differences between 2 very similar classes and the battles are neither slow nor cumbersome, you keep moving and doing things. Dragon Ruins II simply cuts a lot of that perceived friction and manages to be lean, quick and easy to pick up and that's a great innovation.

## **Music & art:**

The music and art direction also are on-spot, the atmosphere of "Dark Fantasy" clearly comes across.

## **I didn't find a single bug:**

That must have been the first game in a decade, which didn't let me down in any way... simply remarkable.

## **The negatives:**

This great advantage and novelty for the genre however comes at a simple and easily understood price: after about 3 hours the game clearly shot out all its content and very little new stuff is happening. At this point the great strengths of the start even start to turn into weaknesses for the game. After this initial great time, the only new things you will discover are new enemy artworks in the bestiary, dungeons add little new content, tile-sets even repeat and the games' economy breaks down and classes become more and more similar to each other and loot becomes mostly meaningless!

### **Sometimes the Camera is weirdly tilted:**

-Sometimes when you turn around, the camera seems to be tilted at 10°. This means the walls or hallway is diagonal. It's an odd little glitchy behaviour I couldn't reproduce consistently...

### **Problems with visual variety:**

- There are too few props in the dungeons (especially too many gravestones and beds)
- A dungeon always uses only 1 tile-set throughout, so all doors and walls always look the same in a dungeon.
- Gear of a type always has the same icon, no bigger illustration or any other variety is visible, also gear doesn't seem to have any flavour-text, only stats.

### **There are some small Inconsistencies in the mini-map design:**

Some of the later dungeons lack an icon for entrance stairs, while some of the early dungeons have those.

Pitfalls are marked on the map, but only if you actively went into them, spike-traps and pentagram traps are not marked on the mini-map

## **Compared to the first game:**

Compared to Dragon Ruins 1, outside of 1-2 minor not noteworthy stumbles, this sequel is absolutely & clearly the superior choice. It improves flawlessly 95% of all aspects! There is no need to even try game 1, as this is available now and people should start here.

## **How the design back-stabs itself**

Continue on the next page with "How the design back-stabs itself"

This is a **SPOILER-WARNING**, I will talk about most mechanics of the game in great detail, you've been warned!

# How the design back-stabs itself

As a game-designer I want to analyse the game mechanics a bit deeper and also talk about some of the flaws which pop up after the initial fun period. Why those flaws do show up and I also want to throw some ideas on the wall, on how to potentially solve them. If you like design analysis and you also like to think about game design and played the game, this part might be for you. Otherwise this is for the developer, whom I also wish the best, as I've been greatly entertained!

## 1.) Each 5 levels heros can pick a new (random?) skill:

The great strength, that separates characters in the very early game, soon becomes a bit meaningless, as you will learn that each 5 levels you can add a new skill to the character, which softens their unique purpose. The problem of these skills is, that literally every character draws from the same list of skills and some of them are clearly better than others:

### **Bad skills:**

- You got some real stinkers, like the skills which upgrade just a stat by 3... which is 1-2 level-ups depending on the character.
- You got 2 skills for selling stuff more expensively, or getting better upgrade prices. These can be easily exploited by just inviting the characters which start with those skills into your party when you perform those actions.
- You got some skills for weapon mastery: most of them are useless for a class, as a class's growths are set in stone and literally there is a "best" weapon for each class.

### **This then leaves you leaves you with the skills which are useful:**

- Higher likely attack / less likely to attack this character.
- The priest skill which heals 1HP after a battle (and lets you go on for much much longer in a dungeon).
- Skills which add defenses against status effects are occasionally useful.
- Skills which pile status effects on enemies are mostly useful.
- A skill which makes medicine much more effective is generally a good investment, if you use potions in your run.
- Having a single party member which has a locksmith skill is overpowered, the thief adds it from the start

### **What could be done to improve this design is:**

- cut the bad stats skills, or make them useful in other ways e.g.
- skills could appear as multiple levels, so you can keep learning a skill and level it up, the higher the level the more benefits you gain
- some skills are more expensive / less expensive to learn, which is still prone to error or...

-a character class could have a predetermined list of skills, out of which the skill is chosen, so classes don't move towards the same skills, just suitable for this class

## **2.) Chests, master keys and locksmithing:**

There are chests in the dungeon, which can be opened with master keys or the locksmithing skill. The locksmithing skill is added to your party with the thief, the master keys cost you money and their price slightly increases with each master key you purchase. The thief is a frail class, so he will die quite easily early on, but there is clearly a lot of financial pay-off in the early game to justify this decision.

Later in the game, sturdier classes with much better stat-growths are presented to learn locksmithing (I had this with my priest), so the early decision of the thief is inferior in late game. Also you could say, that on the early chest you anyway could lose out, because they have the least loot of worth in it, so this decision seems twice bad.

However once you learn that the locksmithing skill let's you try to open chest infinite times, the master keys totally lose their worth. There is no point in buying a single master-key any more once you have unlocked a single locksmithing skill.

Also the loot in chests doesn't feel-able improve. At the very beginning chests are super cool, at the time of master dungeons around 3 hours in the game, you will find a lot of trash in chests and if you bought master keys in the game, the cost for a master key on average easily will be higher than what you gain from the chest, even if you sell it.

### **What could be done to improve the design:**

-Add better quality more consistently to later chests, so they stay exciting.

-Add traps to chests, so even if you unlock them with a thief, there still is a chance to suffer damage, while a master key also removes the trap, so the master key has a clear advantage over chests.

-Have locks of chests snap, if you tried to lock-pick them, so that you need to still use a master key if you didn't successfully tried to open it first time.

-Give the thief some probes which need to be bought (and don't refresh in town) or any other way to limit lockpicking tries.

-Keep the locksmith skill to only a few classes, and maybe make it upgradable, that it performs better.

## **3.) Dungeon layouts – the boss is consistently in the furthest away room and always in the same spot:**

The first dungeon is fun to explore as you learn the game, is symmetrical and easy to get through. The second dungeon is asymmetrical and longer. The mansion dungeon (third dungeon) adds the concept of floors and bottom traps so content wise the game seems to get more complex. The Mausoleum then adds teleporters and early on I felt like: now you

need to use a warp scroll to get out of here ... as you seem to be locked from directly running out of the dungeon in fear. Which was really a cool moment.

Sadly from this point on, none of the later dungeons adds anything interesting to the list of potential context.

The wizard tower and colosseum are then 2 dungeons which play out about the same, and both of them are in the mid-game next to each other. The only difference is that the colosseum has 3 floors and the wizard tower has 9 floors. Still it feels like running the same dungeon.

Also dungeon bosses are just always the furthest away from the entrance. Once this pattern becomes clear, around dungeon 3, you simply start to always try to get as far away from the dungeon entrance as possible and don't even explore early rooms, as there is anyways nothing of interest to be found.

Boss spawn-points for more quests are always in the same location, so re-doing a quest lets you just retrace your steps.

### **What could be done to improve the design:**

- Put the colosseum as dungeon 1, greatly enhance money reward each time after beating it, and the levels of the enemies too (so you can go through it every 10 levels again).

- Have the boss of some dungeons closer to the entrance that not always the same strategy leads you to success. If you have the boss in the middle, have a clearly determinable good path and bad path. So there could be a better way to the boss, if you keep exploring the dungeon later on.

- Switch around boss spawning positions for quests, spawn treasure with a higher likelihood in chambers, where the boss didn't spawn.

- Add secret passages to dungeons, right now there is no single illusory wall in the game, what you see on the mini-map is what is there. These could be determinable by the in-game graphics, so you don't keep playing the game just with the mini-map.

Add doors to dungeon you can only open with levers, to create shortcuts to the entrance, so the first time through a dungeon you have to work harder (would work nicely for earlier dungeons)

Add obstacles to the dungeon e.g. a bridge which needs to be raised by activating multiple levers etc. so you sometimes feel you have to explore.

## **4.) Weapon upgrades are first a fun choice, later they are too expensive and boring**

In the early game the money-economy is very tight, Costs of weapon upgrades and levels make sense. There is a decisive element of asking yourself what you rather go for.

Later in the game, level ups tend to cost you about as much as the money you make while exploring in a dungeon. Better weapons you mostly find through enemy drops, or maybe in chests. But since at this point you spend all the money on level ups, because a level up improves 5-10 stat-points and a weapon upgrade which is about 6 times as expensive as a level-up only improves 2 stat-points, the choice lacks any sense of meaning.

Selling items brings a very minor amount of money, usually only as much as 10-15 enemy battles, so it's not even necessary to sell anything.

Here the mid-late game economy is clearly broken for the gains.

### **What could be done to improve the design:**

- You could make it, that if you have two types of the same weapon you could unite them into the higher level version, this would be more meaningful than selling and gaining the same weapon or a weaker one your class can use, but you already have.

- Material could be introduced to upgrade weapons, so you need to find the material in the dungeon, which is based on your party level. And upgrading is at the same time way cheaper. Or you need to buy the material expensive in the smithy. This then would require from you to loot more chests in the dungeon, to bring down costs for improving gear.

- Some weapon upgrade paths could diverge, so at higher levels you have more weapons with different effects to choose from. This would add at least some choice for equipping

## **5.) Quests simply do loop, after you completed a whole series:**

Yep, after you ran a dungeon a bunch of times and got all the texts of the questgiver, they simply start again from the first index. There is no star, no indication and nothing, which tells you that you already did the quest.

- It'd be at least nice to get a star icon or something, which shows you that you completed the quests.

- Even Better would be a newgame+, which mirrors the dungeon in some way and even more importantly resets the map, maybe makes enemies in it harder, compared to the normal strength formula, so at least something is happening. Maybe newgame++ could hide the map... there is a lot left to be explored.