

RYG Evaluates Spacebase DF-9

by

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Viewed in isolation and away from the misfired hype through its Steam Early Access phase, Spacebase DF-9 is a carefree space-building simulation that adds promise through its frequent game updates and, eventually, a modding community outside of Steam. At least it's carefree to the same extent as *Banished* or *Rimworld* as being carefree building simulations in their subjectively harsh world. However, much of the issues surrounding Spacebase DF-9 were tightly bound to its intended goals during its Steam Early Access and its admission of failure in getting their visions on board. Suffice to say those who purchased the game were naturally angry at the outcome. The question is how angry should they be in knowing that there's a cautionary "buyer beware" bow wrapped around games pushed through Steam's Early Access banner (or the pre-order slash crowdfunding banner for that matter)?

RYG's Assessment

62%

Bargain Basement Material

(64% and Below)

Our Thoughts

Somewhere between the promises made in building a future game, the visions it entails and monetary transactions made is an unspoken bond of trust brokered between player and developer. At its basic level is an expectation that the purchase made, say in a preorder or an early access title like Spacebase DF-9, will net the release of the final game – a version 1.0. However, some purchases and, of course, relationships with certain companies, go beyond the mere transaction and, over time, it becomes somewhat deeper. Depending on our experiences, be it positive or negative, we can choose to trust certain companies and their products – advocate them with fervor...or choose to voice dissent, disapproval and outright rejection.

It's easy to say or suggest that there should be a buyer-beware tag slapped on every Steam Early Access title that comes through its doors because of the perceived risks it entails. After all, developers going through this particular channel aren't just selling an incomplete game – they're selling both a vision and the promise of a developer-player relationship through voluntary testing and feedback. The risk(s) here are evident – players can pay full price for an incomplete game in return for a unique access to the developer's ear as well as future updates to said incomplete game. However, what must be noted here is that there's a certain audience for those buying into the Early

Access machine: experimentalists, players with enough disposable income to satisfy their curiosity, fans of a certain development studio, believers.

The same can be said for players who, say, buy into a finished game for the very same reasons above. The only difference here is that a full price is paid for a complete game, or so the expectation that comes with that at least. But the "buyer-beware" mantra remains the same. Players will not know for sure if they made the right purchase until they've sampled the game for themselves, in their own eyes, filters, biases, etc. For the cautious players who are curious there are many reviews made in the written, aural and visual formats across the Internet and review aggregators for those who simply want a summarised perspective on said game. Still, it may not be enough to make an informed decision – players still want to play the game and decide for themselves if it's worth the price as advertised.

And so this is where we found it hard to determine if Spacebase DF-9 was a game worth playing primarily because many reviews made on the game, both through media outlets and through player reviews, talk about the game that was in its Early Access state. The general consensus, as it appears right now, seems to be on the negative side citing the failed model of Early Access in contributing to the demise of the game (or that little money was made through Early Access to make the dreams come true for Double Fine in making Spacebase DF-9). And yet when we had looked at Spacebase DF-9 post release it seems as if the updates in fixing version 1.0 were frequent enough to suggest that the developers aren't entirely abandoning this particular game. Somewhere along the line there's a certain impression that the admission of financial failure from Double Fine in not realising their vision is countered with the hopes of its regular updates, a release of another free game as well as the future release of their source code to build a modding community. It's all confusing, to say the least, and much of that stems from how Steam Early Access is driven from the developer and player side of things.

As we've briefly mentioned before Spacebase DF-9, in its current state, is a space station building simulation that requires a combinational element of patience and curiosity from the players part in designing their sustainably-driven space station. Both the fun (and the frustrating) part in playing Spacebase DF-9 is figuring out the best way to go about building the space station and for players who find it difficult to adapt to specific situations on the fly (such as aliens!) it can become a case of start-restart until they feel they can get it right. Personally it's the sort of game that reminds you why Lego exists and why looking into more of the game's history can bring about a sense of loss for what the game could've been under naturally-favourable conditions.

As a game pushed through Steam we can't say we can fully endorse it given the way Steam's designed. Players will have to buy into the Steam ecosystem first before giving Spacebase DF-9 a chance as there's no known DRM-Free options out there. Spacebase DF-9 is also a threadbare PC game in terms of the in-game settings and features provided. This, of course, is countered with the fact that Spacebase DF-9 is a cross-platform game that's pretty much playable on any PC (or laptop for that matter) on systems that are 2007/2008 or later. Still, one can only wish for better visual eyecandy when it comes to anything building simulations given some of its interests in these games are the ability to see your creation(s) in a visually-pleasing way.

Overall we do find Spacebase DF-9 a game that's worth waiting for when prices do come through future discounts and Steam-related sales. The "hate" that came with this game through its Early Access phase is understandable, but otherwise is more complicated than just the buyer-beware notion. It's just looking past the disapproval / hatred because it is pretty hard given it's the majority voice right now.

About Spacebase DF-9

Spacebase DF-9 is a space-station building simulation that was developed by Double Fine Productions through Steam Early Access. It was released in full on October 27. Please refer to each section for our results we've evaluated and our summarised thoughts to gain a better understanding of how Spacebase DF-9 affects PCs and plays as a PC Game.

RYG Disclaimer

This Windows version of Spacebase DF-9 (Build: 1.04) was obtained through Steam independently with RYG funds for the purposes of evaluation and product testing. Spacebase DF-9 was evaluated on the following system specs: Windows 7, Intel i5-4460, 16Gb RAM, AMD Radeon R9 290 as well as on a system bearing an Intel HD 4600 Integrated Graphics.

Availability

Steam: <http://store.steampowered.com/app/246090/>

Recommended System Specs

OS: Windows XP above (*Windows 7 Version Tested*)

CPU: Intel Core 2 Duo (*Chipsets released in 2006*)

GPU: NVIDIA GeForce 9800 GTX or Intel HD 3000 Graphics and above (*GPUs released in 2008*)

RAM: 2Gb

HDD: 200 Mb (~280Mb was used in this evaluation)

Source: [Spacebase DF-9's Steam Gamecard](#)

Section 1 - Content Strategy and Product Marketing

- + Was released globally on 27.10.2014
- + Is available through Windows, MacOS and Linux
- + Is available through Steam and Humble Bundle
- + Spacebase DF-9's Steam Gamecard advises how Steamworks (Steam) DRM is used in its game
- + In-game documentation and/or tutorials provided
- + EULA, [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#) accessible through steampowered.com

+ All game-related info is conveniently found on spacebasedf9.com

- No known DRM-Free version
- Minimum / Recommended Specs not provided on spacebasedf9.com
- Complete download size not provided through spacebasedf9.com
- No known free demos (apart from the Early-access version)
- Released with Steamworks DRM through Steam

Our Thoughts: While there's little information from the official site by way of specs, policy documentation, updates, DRM, etc. the Steam official site has enough information for players to decide upon making an informed purchase.

Section 2 - Digital Distribution

- + Is available worldwide through Steam
- + Download / Client Manager is optional for download of Spacebase DF-9
- + Minimum / Recommended specs provided through Steam
- + Steam advises how Steamworks is used in Spacebase DF-9
- + Only Username, Email and Password are required to create a Steam account
- + Alternative payment options provided by Visa, Mastercard, Amex and Paypal
- + Confirmation of purchase and receipt provided
- + Free and unlimited access and downloads after purchase
- + Can backup purchased games 'offline' (e.g. external or optical drives)
- + Can access personal data
- + Can review and dispute and validate breaches in [Steam's Terms of Service](#)
- Is [No refunds or exchanges](#) for purchased games
- All players warranties waived whenever they use Steam
- Cover waived against any unforeseeable damage and/or service disruptions within Steam
- Very difficult and/or impossible to terminate account
- Account termination voids past purchases and licenses to play Spacebase DF-9
- Can't review and question changes made in Terms of Service
- Past purchases voided after refusing to accept Terms of Service

Our Thoughts: Steam offers a robust form of paying, downloading, installing and storing PC games and, for the most part, is quite simple and friendly to use. Steam does offer a trading platform between players in respect to PC games, but will not offer any consumer-related safety nets, such as refunds in the event of downloading a faulty product, service disruptions and a balanced terms of service. Other issues of contention, such as their elastic pricing options for players situated in various global regions, remains a constant sore spot.

Section 3 - Privacy Policy

- + Privacy Policy found on [Steam](#)
- + Applies to Steam only
- + Formatted for easy reading online
- + Written for easy comprehension
- + 'Personally-identifiable' & 'non-personally identifiable' info are clearly defined
- + Policy specifies what information are collected at specific areas of the platform
- + Data centres are 100% safe and secure
- + Info is used solely for payments, opt-in email campaigns & acct management
- + Visible opt-in / opt-out process in respect to email and marketing promotions
- + Players given visible access to all their game and player data
- + Players can access, modify and validate their Steam account

- Players not visibly notified of any changes made to the Policy
- Players not consulted on future revisions to the Privacy Policy
- Not advised where the info is specifically stored
- Third parties not identified
- Players cannot export their information tied to their Steam account
- Player data is retained by Valve for an extended period of time
- Can't review and query (legal) changes made to the Policy
- No specific information on how info will be used in the event of a sale/merger
- Players must accept ALL changes made to the Policy before using Spacebase DF-9

Our Thoughts: The good news here is that Spacebase DF-9 won't connect through to Steam's or DoubleFine's servers during gameplay other than a blog update from DoubleFine before and after gameplay. The Privacy Policy (mostly Steam's) also applies heavily on how players use and manage their Steam account (as well as their games), including how Steam functions in respect to its achievements features.

Section 4 - EULA and Steam's TOS

- + EULA and/or TOS accessible through [Steam](#)
- + Covers Spacebase DF-9, Steamworks and Steam
- + Refunds and/or exchanges offered for purchased games under specific provisions
- + Terms and conditions for Steamworks are clearly defined
- + Can legally make archival copies of Spacebase DF-9
- + Spacebase DF-9's source code is open for modifications and revisions
- + Permitted to create [free 'mods'](#) of Spacebase DF-9
- + Players can create content based on Spacebase DF-9 and [monetise it online](#)
- + Spacebase DF-9 won't blacklist specific background services or software

- Not formatted for easy reading online
- Cumbersome / difficult to read
- Drafted to only abide by the laws of the US

- Players not visibly notified of any changes made to the EULA and/or TOS
- Players not consulted on future revisions to the EULA and/or TOS
- Can't review and query (legal) changes made to the EULA and/or TOS
- License to play the game only provided
- Circumvention of Steamworks prohibited
- All players warranties waived whenever they use Spacebase DF-9
- Cover waived against any unforeseeable damage and/or service disruptions within Spacebase DF-9
- Termination process dictated by Valve
- No known resolution process available for players experiencing issues with Spacebase DF-9

Our Thoughts: The EULA and TOS from Valve are quite stacked against players and, apart from the license to play the game, leaves little room for players to actually do anything with the game other than play it on their terms. Please bear in mind that most of the wordings found in the EULA and TOS are similarly-worded in comparison to other EULAs and TOSes found in other games and distribution platforms.

However, Spacebase DF-9, since its version 1.0 release, has been quite helpful in regard to its modding services. The only issue some players might have with this is that there might be a difficult pathway in enabling this through Steam Workshop.

Section 5 - Installation

- + Custom installation options provided
- + No third party software required
- + All game files installed in main installation directory
- + All DRM files installed in main installation directory
- + Currently-executing background services won't interfere with installation
- + Error-free installation

- No installation logs of files and registry keys

Our Thoughts: A lack of a comprehensive installation log to document what/where files and registry keys are installed is the only blemish found in this evaluation. However, the installation of Spacebase DF-9 are quite self-contained to where players want to install their games and will not install any rogue or foreign files outside of their intended destination. However, please bear in mind that removing Spacebase DF-9 completely may require the full removal of Steam if the intent of having a clean system is there.

Section 6 - Automatic and/or Manual Patching

- + Automatic updates are optional
- + Day-One patch optional
- + Can play Spacebase DF-9 unpatched and with minimal bugs
- + Patch free from any other third-party DRMs

- + Patch free from any other third-party apps
- + Detailed list of changes provided prior to installation
- + Alternate notifications provided for existence of new patches via. Steam
- + Spacebase DF-9 is playable with latest patches

- Download / Client Manager required to download and install patches
- Changes / Amendments to Privacy Policy, EULA and/or TOS not provided prior to installation of patches
- No installation logs of files and registry keys
- Rollback option not provided
- No plans for a sunset patch to remove Steamworks DRM

Our Thoughts: The latest version of Spacebase DF-9 (1.04) is quite stable (through our iterations of testing). There is a version 1.05 released not too long ago. Players can optionally install patches through Steam. Depending on how players see this, automatic updates through a single platform can be a timesaver or an inconvenience.

Section 7 - DRM and Activation

- + Instructions provided on activating Spacebase DF-9
- + Currently-executing background services won't interfere with activation process
- + Firewall and AV settings not modified
- + Unlimited online activations
- + Can play Spacebase DF-9 offline
- + Only Steamworks is implemented
- + Unlimited hardware activations
- + Unlimited Installations
- + Troubleshooting process provided for failed activations

- Can't verify safety and reliability of the activation process
- A non-transferrable user account is required
- Game is locked to specific account after activation

Our Thoughts: Players will need to activate the game by logging into their Steam account after launching Spacebase DF-9. After that they are free to play the game offline or even online if they wish to do so. As far as we've been looking at games Steam has come a long way in keeping activations and verifications quite simple for players.

Section 8 - Gameplay

- + Can play on minimum specs (tested on Intel HD 4000)
- + Can play a backup copy of the game
- + Can play in borderless full screen mode
- + Can play in windowed mode

- + Can play in multiple resolutions (players can freely define the game's resolution in windowed mode only!)
- + Separate volume controls provided for Sound Effects and Music only
- + Full subtitles and/or captions provided
- + Can play Spacebase DF-9 in offline mode
- + Won't 'phone home' during gameplay
- + No known connectivity issues during gameplay
- + Can opt out of achievements and leaderboards
- + Can play Spacebase DF-9 error-free
- + Spacebase DF-9 won't blacklist specific background services or software
- + Can play game at last save checkpoint
- + Can manually save gameplay
- + Can modify savegame and/or configuration file
- + Steamworks isn't running after gameplay of Spacebase DF-9

- Only fullscreen settings are provided in-game
- No options in remapping keyboard and/or mouse controls
- No options in remapping console controls
- Only English Audio is supported
- No option for players to provide custom subtitles and/or localisation
- Can only play on one PC at a time

Our Thoughts: Spacebase DF-9 is, as mentioned in our thoughts, a threadbare game in terms of its settings provided and, as such, is a game that relies heavily on its gameplay only. The game is playable across many system configurations going as far back as systems potentially dating around the 2005 mark. For the most part we did find Spacebase DF-9 quite enjoyable and playable without any perceivable errors. Spacebase DF-9 won't connect back through to Steam or to Double Fine's servers apart from a blog update which is only provided before and after the launch of the game.

Section 9 - General PC Maintenance

- + PC clean of viruses, malware, spyware and rootkits after installation and gameplay of Spacebase DF-9
- + HOSTS was clean
- + Windows Startup was clean
- + Steam isn't running after gameplay of Spacebase DF-9
- + No other PC settings were modified after gameplay of Spacebase DF-9

Our Thoughts: Spacebase DF-9 is a clean game and won't impact on players PCs nor alter its settings outside of its gameplay.

Section 10 - Uninstallation

- + Players provided with options to back up their savegames and in-game settings
- + **Steam's support** offers a process in removing Steam completely from PCs
- Some Steam files and registry keys remain after manual and automatic removal of Steam

Our Thoughts: Removing Steam will require some further work and if players did need to remove Steam it will require some searching and patience in performing a full removal. Removing Spacebase DF-9, however, should be relatively easy in respect to its filesystems. There is nothing found on Spacebase DF-9 in its registry.

Section 11 - Customer and Technical Support

- + From The Official Website: <http://www.spacebasedf9.com/>
- + From Steam: <http://steamcommunity.com/app/246090/discussions/>
- + From SteamDB: <https://steamdb.info/app/246090/>
- + From PCGamingWiki: http://pcgamingwiki.com/wiki/Spacebase_DF-9

If you would like to discuss this report, you can do so here on our **forum** (membership is required), or via our **Twitter** page.

Changelog

08.11.2014 – Report published on RYG