The Castle Doctrine

The Castle Doctrine is a 2014 strategy video game developed and published by Jason Rohrer for Microsoft Windows , OS X , and Linux via Valve Corporation 's Steam platform . The game was released on January 29 , 2014 for all platforms and is available as public domain software on sourceforge . Set in the early 1990s , it pits players against one another as they invade others ' houses and attempt to steal money from their vaults , while also setting up traps and other obstacles to keep their own vaults safe .

In creating the game , Rohrer was influenced by his childhood fear of his house being robbed , numerous publicized shootings , and his own political views regarding gun rights and home invasions . During development and beta testing , the game went through several changes that increased its difficulty . It received mixed reviews from critics , with some praising the design and creativity and others finding it hard to empathize with the game 's intended message .

Gameplay

The Castle Doctrine incorporates elements of puzzle , strategy , stealth , and roguelike games , viewed from a 2D perspective . It focuses on maintaining and protecting a vault of money stored in one 's house from intruders . These intruders are actually other players of the game ; likewise , the player can invade others ' houses and steal their money ? presented in a list rather than found through exploration ? in the same way . This list shows a pre @-@ determined three @-@ name pseudonym of each player , the number of dollars contained in their vault , how many others have tried to rob it , and how many have died in the process . All deaths in the game are permanent ; upon dying , the player must create a new character .

The player can protect their vault in a number of ways , such as building walls , keeping guard dogs , setting up traps such as electrified floors and bottomless pits , and giving guns to the player 's family members so that they can defend the vault as well . The game does not punish the player for family members ? by default , a wife and two children ? being murdered by intruders ; the player can even view footage of the incident afterwards . Rather , protecting the money is the goal the game emphasizes . The player starts off with $ 2 @,@ 000 in cash and steals more from others ' vaults ; it can be used to purchase more objects to defend one 's own vault . Additionally , a house is not accessible by thieves when its owner is retooling it for defense .

When invading another 's house , the player can attempt to deter these defenses in such ways as smashing windows , dismantling walls , short @-@ circuiting machines , and even drugging guard dogs with tainted meat , in addition to killing any residents that are armed . Reaching a vault is always possible with enough skill ; the game forces players to escape their own traps before other players can access them . Being caught in one 's own traps has the same consequence as any other trap in the game : permadeath .

Development

Conception and design

The Castle Doctrine was created by indie developer Jason Rohrer ; its ideas were drawn from Rohrer 's childhood anxieties about his family 's house being burgled , and his adult sense of responsibility over protecting his family . The game 's central theme is the castle doctrine and includes the issue of gun rights ; Rohrer created it partially as an " artistic statement " on defending one 's family through violence . He summarized his goals with the game as creating something " that makes you feel violated and makes you want to protect stuff that ? s yours , and puts you in the process of securing what ? s yours . " However , he has remarked that the consequence of making players feel hypocritical ? since they are invading others ' homes as well ? was partially intentional and an " elegant " idea .

Rohrer noted in an interview his aversion to creating a " ridiculous caricature of some post @-@ apocalyptic man ? s world , where we ? ll all just robbing each other , " and instead called his game pre @-@ apocalyptic in setting and style . In terms of aesthetics , Rohrer aimed for a " very clean , no frills , no fluff , no filler kind of design " that emphasized function in all of its objects . He has noted that some players have complained about not being able to decorate their houses non @-@ functionally , but is unsympathetic , saying that the game is not FarmVille . The game was , however , influenced by Minecraft , which ? while heavily tied to cosmetic decoration ? involves similar themes of protecting one 's creations from other players as in The Castle Doctrine .

Rohrer thought of adding family members for the player 's character early in the game 's development , but scrapped it at first because of the extra complexity and not knowing how to make them more than inanimate objects . After a dream , however , he was inspired to see if there was a practical way to implement them that would further the game 's " moral dimension . "

= = = Testing and releases = = =

The Castle Doctrine was first released as a paid alpha and sold at half @-@ price from March 2013 until its official release on January 29 , 2014 . As was visible through its history of updates during beta testing , it went through several changes , primarily the increase of gameplay difficulty . One was the addition of dedicated " perma @-@ perma @-@ death " servers , where players could not even re @-@ create characters after dying , in contrast to the game 's generic " perma @-@ death " servers . Another was " blueprints , " which allow players to get a general sense of a house 's layout before entering and thus encourage setting up puzzle @-@ based ? rather than luck @-@ based ? vault defenses . Rohrer did not , however , want the game to be impossible , so he took the step of forcing players to evade their own traps before the houses would be accessible to others . The game has been placed in the public domain and is hosted on SourceForge .
Upon release , the game 's 50 % discount was scaled back to 25 % for one week . It has not gone on sale since , as Rohrer believes that " sales screw your fans " as they discourage buying games one wants during non @-@ sale periods . Following the game 's release , Rohrer used $ 3 @,@ 000 USD of alpha release earnings to fund a competition in which players could win money , paintings , gift cards , and other prizes by having the highest worth in @-@ game houses . The highest prize awarded was $ 316 USD .

= = Reception = =

The Castle Doctrine received mixed reviews from critics , with a score on review aggregator Metacritic of 58 / 100 . Patrick Carlson of PC Gamer reviewed the game well , responding positively to the game rewarding experimentation and being easy to understand , describing it as thoughtfully designed . Game Informer 's Daniel Tack also rated the game well , commenting particularly on its creativity , stating though that he did not think the game was " deep enough to stay interesting for long . " Writing for Destructoid , Patrick Hancock shared Tack 's opinion that the game was a good experience , but said he would find it hard to recommend .
Polygon 's Russ Pitts found the game a frustrating exercise , his experience determined by the arbitrary quality of player designed houses , and further obstructed by the harsh consequences of failure . Pitts felt the game valued its message over the player 's time and yet found the message hard to take seriously ; he would describe the game as the most disturbing he had ever played . Keza MacDonald , in her review at IGN , shared these frustrations , finding that tackling player @-@ constructed houses made the game over @-@ reliant on trial and error . She also found it hard to empathize with the small , pixelated characters , leading her to believe that the game failed in " communicating much of a message " . Nick Capozzoli of GameSpot also gave the game a largely negative review , criticising the nihilistic feel , and saying that it did not bring out the emotions it was aimed to .