eview: Dragon's Lair

by Joshua D. Rothman

Type: Arcade CD-ROM
Publisher: ReadySoft
Retail Price: $59.95
Street Price: $39.00
Requires: CD-ROM drive with 150 k/second transfer rate or better, 8-bit color, 4 MB of RAM
Protection: None

ragon's Lair: the quarter-vacuum. For those of us who remember it, Dragon's Lair was the big black hole in the middle of the arcade. Featuring incredible graphics and sound, Dragon's Lair was the example of what true laserdisc technology could do: create a completely fascinating, totally addictive game which ate up quarters faster than formerly thought possible. ReadySoft's Macintosh re-release, however, is marred by serious problems which drag this otherwise great game down.

Your Quest Awaits . . . In Dragon's Lair, the player controls the actions of Dirk the Daring, a knight who is trying to rescue the beautiful (and rather ditzy) Princess Daphne from the clutches of Singe the Dragon. To do this, you must navigate Dirk through a grand total of 35 scenes, each with their own set of obstacles and traps.

The game is very linear, and once you've gotten through a scene once or twice, it's almost possible to do it with your eyes closed. To play, you must guide Dirk through obstacles and traps using the four direction keys (8, 4, 6 and 2) and the sword key, which is 0. Since the game is based entirely on hand-drawn animated sequences, timing is crucial to keep the action going continuously. Although this makes the game more difficult, it often reduces play to trial and error. In some scenes, the direction in which to guide your character is obvious; in others, it is so unclear that you just try everything to see what works. The reaction time required to make a logical choice about your next move is just not available in most scenes, and guessing is often the best way to beat the game. You basically have no freedom of movement; you either go where you're supposed to or die. The game's control tends to be somewhat inconsistent: sometimes you need only tap a key, but in other situations you have to hold the key down. Despite the limited nature of play, the graphic

detail and movie-like action make this game a joy to play the first few times you go through a scene.   No other game out there can compare to the cinematic impression put forth by Dragon's Lair; you really are part of the movie.

Graphics and Interface.   The graphics in Dragon's Lair, while not the high-resolution shots found in the arcade, are more than acceptable.   The speed of the game depends more upon the speed of your CD-ROM drive than on the speed of your computer, and on my 660av I achieved around 30 frames per second with full-screen 320x200 graphics. As with most Mac games, Dragon's Lair allows you to shrink the size of the screen and increase the resolution, but I generally found that full-screen play greatly enhances the game.   Graphics are incredibly smooth and fluid, and the game plays just like a film.

One of the nicer features of Dragon's Lair is its ability to optimize itself for your particular configuration.   This process can take anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes, but it speeds up the game so much that the time is well worth it.   Without optimization, I could get only 12 fps on my 660av with an Apple 300i double-speed drive; with optimization I could get upwards of 30 fps.

he interface, on the other hand, could use some serious work.   The game only allows you to change its settings from the opening screen; once play begins, it is impossible to return to the setup screen without quitting and reloading the game.   There's no way to hold your place in the game; you can neither save your game nor get some kind of password to continue with.   Although this was obviously necessary in the arcade version, there's really no reason for it in the Mac version; it only causes you to replay scenes you've played far too many times.

Finally, the game is somewhat unstable.   Generally speaking, one in every six or seven games would crash on my Quadra.   Although the game ran fine speed-wise on a PowerMac 6100/60, it was prone to crashes on that machine as well.

Beware, Brave Adventurer . . . Although Dragon's Lair is certainly a fair reproduction of the arcade version, its poor interface, instability and repetitive nature drag it down.   Despite its excellent graphics and sounds, the game lacks some basic elements and amenities that could have improved it greatly.   Dragon's Lair achieves challenge through deficiency; the

game is difficult because of poor control and the inability to save games.   The re-release of Dragon's Lair is worth the money only for those who have to relive the good old days of arcade games.

Pros
• Excellent graphics and sounds
• Interesting and fun for the first few games
• Faithfully reproduced from the arcade version
• Saves money in quarters

Cons
• Unstable and prone to crashes
• Bare-bones interface
• No way to continue from the point where you stopped playing
• Gets repetitive and boring after a few games
• Control is inconsistent and difficult