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urse of Dragor and Dungeon Master II, both coming out in the same month, beg for comparison. Both utilize the format of a fantasy/adventure four-adventurer party game with "real-time" combat. Both are on CD and both offer a simplified character creation scheme that allows you to access the start of the game easily. In addition, both have slightly unusual interfaces. This is where their approaches diverge.

### [Strong Story](#)

You can't help but love the manual to Curse of Dragor. The storyline is much more interesting than the usual "There's a bad guy who lives in this tower" approach. In fact, the good guys used to live in the castle -- a Council of very diverse individuals -- who were led by a sorcerer-king. Well, as many of these kings do, this one has the stereotypical evil brother. And, as these things go, the good brother once had captured the bad brother, but being the good brother, just couldn't bring himself to put his brother's head on the block. So the banished bad brother gets in cahoots with demons and comes back for revenge.

That's when the story, and the game's approach, become interesting. The bad brother can't penetrate the wizardly defenses of the castle. He sends an spellbound young girl in who carries inside of her the taint of evil magic. She gets past the defenses and all hell breaks loose.

The good brother is weakened and banished, it appears, to God knows where. The council cannot fend off the evil brother by themselves so to spoil his fun they teleport all the villagers out to other kingdoms and change themselves into household objects around the castle. Dragor, our lovable bad brother, comes in, pitches a fit at his hollow victory, and leaves in a rage. Your job: reawaken the council and free the castle from the curse Dragor left behind. No, you don't get to free the good king or battle Dragor or his demonic fiend / friend but what the scenario sets up (and near the end of the game, where the plot really takes off) is a real part of a larger storyline, and for that the designers at Banshee should be commended. The whole scenario is also enhanced by the storybook opening (obviously a strong investment in production time went into this opening) which is reminiscent of the 7th Guest's opening.

### he Interface

First, you get to create four characters. You select a portrait, a class for your character (from six different classes), weapons and armor (actually pretty much a no-brainer -- choose the best in each case,) and then you can fudge the numbers a little by raising or lowering your scores among strength, life points, and dexterity. (Basically they are set at opening levels but you can futz with them by lowering one by a point to raise another one by a point). The interface for the game is rather simplified. You either move in a direction, attack with the weapon in your hand, or click on the weapon in your hand to cycle through weapons. Spells are all scroll-bound and each scroll holds an indeterminate number of spells and are basically treated like any other weapon. What makes Curse of Dragor very unusual for most gamers is that you literally only control one of your four characters at any given time. While some monsters can attack any of the four party members, only the character in the lead can act, and only the character who lands the killing blow gets experience from the death of the monster. You can switch characters by going into the inventory screen and hitting the Lead

icon, or as a time-saver, you can click on the portrait while hitting the command key and that character becomes the lead character.

### Nice Features

One of the best features about the Curse of Dragor is its auto-mapping function. A quick click on the map icon below and you can see where you've been and where your party is. In addition, a compass above you always points the direction you're facing. The battles are relatively straightforward as is most of the game. A few puzzles offer interesting challenge. The two hardest, luckily, do not need to be solved in order to win the game. However, winning strategy puzzles (bypassing doors through various means) gives the entire party some amount of experience points. The key to the game is finding secret passages which are detectable by looking at the wall faces and sometimes there are audible clues too. During the game, the ghost of the little girl harasses you at certain points which is a nice connecting feature throughout the game. And the simplified interface also helps make most choices of weapons or spells relatively easy. If you pick up an item your character cannot use, it has a red slash through it. Having played the beta, Banshee had originally made the level of the game way too hard. I am glad to report the balance is back, and while challenging, it is not impossible.

### Not So Nice Features

Most of the puzzles involve getting past doors. The game offers thieves that can pick locks or fighters to force them, but I was never able to successfully use either the force or pick lock feature. Many objects appear to be openable but are not. One problem is that if you examine an object, it should offer an "unlock" feature rather than open. It is a little bizarre to get to a chest of drawers, click on "open", and then get the message "This [X] does not appear to be locked" which translated means you cannot open it up. Two of the puzzles were very esoteric and one -- which I am happy to say I solved -- actually wasn't even solved by the main internal tester at Domark. One key is near-impossible to find which is an unfortunate design choice. While the game auto-saves your position, if your characters die, you cannot resurrect just before you made your error. You need to have multiple saves. This alone is not a bad thing, but the save games take up 2.3 megs apiece. Also, installing Curse of Dragor's engine is about a 25 megabyte commitment (before the saved games,) and you still need to access the CD after that. You can play directly off the CD, but the slower response time makes this option not recommended. For what is a relatively shorter game, this seems an inordinate amount of space, especially considering that the more complex Dungeon Master II game runs at only 16 megabytes and you can ditch the CD after the install. Finally, the game saves every keystroke you make so if in battle you nervously were pressing the space bar 20 or thirty times, you end up making all those weapon swings. This is not so bad unless you are a spellcaster in which case you will keep on shooting at a dead target and can't cancel the commands. And, since spells are based on a limited number of times per scroll, it would have been better if after the death of a creature the computer canceled for a second all combat commands.

### Bugs

The biggest negative of Curse of Dragor is that it has the unfortunate habit of crashing most often when accessing the mapping feature. It appears this feature first shows up after you access a hidden passageway in level three. After it first tripped, any time I tried to access the map on that level the game crashed. There were occasionally similar problems in the cellar level, but for the most part if your game crashes, you'll be able to pick up near to the last place you left off because of its auto-save feature, but I still recommend making two or three saved games as back up just in case. Domark is aware of the problem and is working with Banshee to send out a patch. Also, at the time of release, the number for automated customer service did not have any information about Curse of Dragor. By the time this review is out that should be rectified.

## Cool Things To Come

One of the exciting options soon available will be the ability to use free modules to customize the game. The first will allow you to substitute any graphic file for the portraits in the gallery is nice, but more exciting are the next two: maze and object/monster editors. This should add replayability value to the Curse. Of course, the ultimate replayability will depend on how extensive the editors are and if they allow you to install any puzzles of your own. IMG will carry these free editors on our CD once they become available, and they will appear on most major online services and through Domark's web page.

## In Summary

The Curse of Dragor is a nice opening-level adventure. It has some serious problems. Some of which are subjective (only being able to use one character at a time and one really bizarre hidden key) and some of which are objective (the mapping bug, the game is rather short). However, it also has a strong opening hand in a storyline. A storyline which I for one hope they will develop because it offers a strong taste of future possibilities. The game is a departure for Domark, and it is very good to see a company of their caliber willing to enter something into the fantasy genre. It appears they plan another fantasy release soon, and Mac gamers desperately need, nay, thirst for more adventure games. Dungeon Master II is a superior game for experienced adventurers, but Curse of Dragor should not be overlooked especially if it can be found at a lower street price. Once the editors come out and the bugs are cleaned up, it may become the engine that Unlimited Adventures meant it to be on the Mac but failed.

## Pros

- Very strong storyline
- Automap function
- Straightforward items make it easier to choose weapons
- Items in inventory that can't be used by your character class are marked so
- Expandable editors soon available
- Solving puzzles can give you experience
- The hardest puzzles can be bypassed; not essential to solving game

## Cons

- Mapping bug causes crashing
- Game is relatively short
- Controlling only one player at a time while all can be attacked is uncomfortable
- One entirely obscure puzzle and obscurely hidden key
- Saved games are extremely large; large install but must still use CD as well
- Expensive for the length of game

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