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GAME

# PLAYERS

THE LEADING MAGAZINE OF VIDEO AND COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT



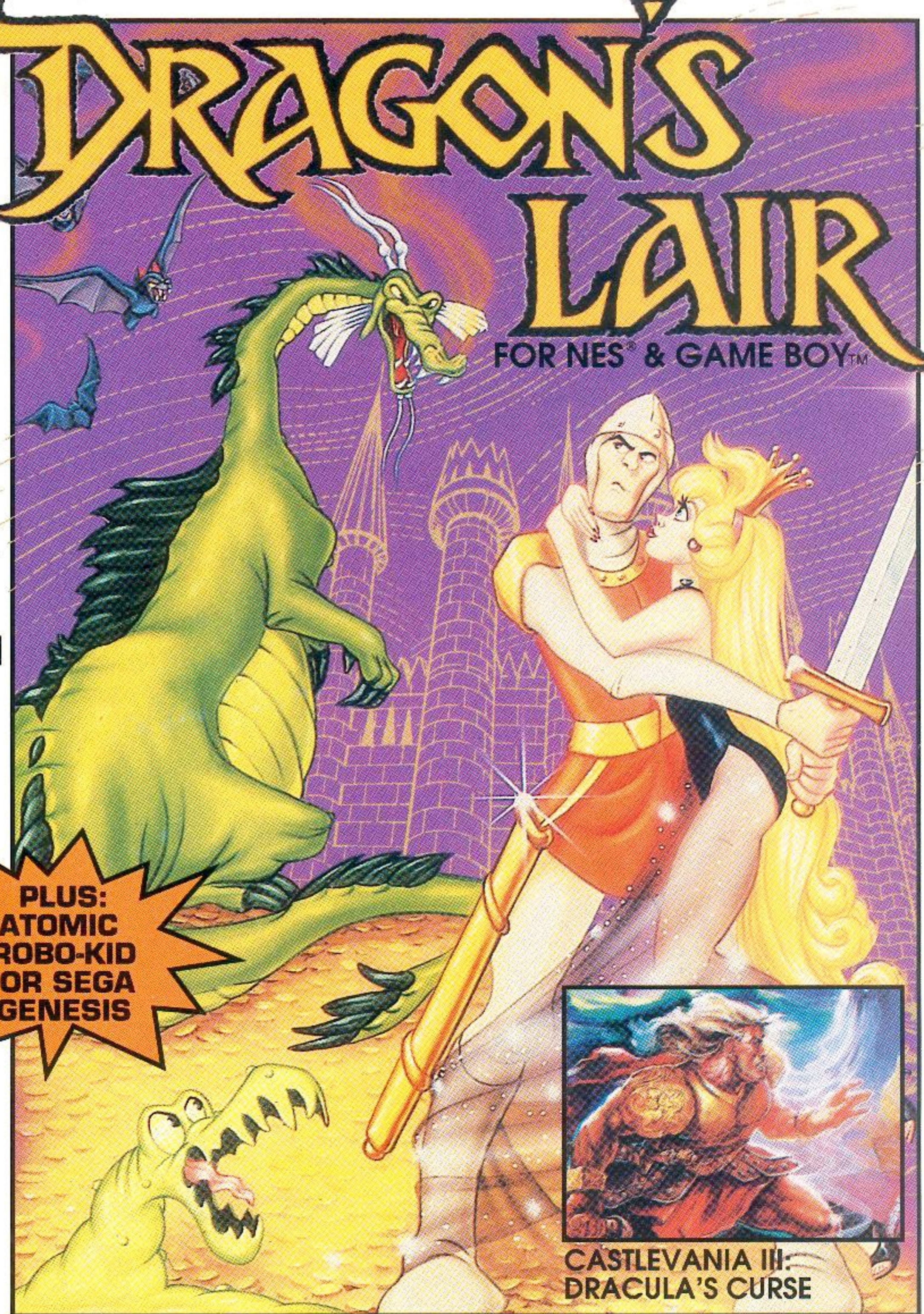
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## DRAGON'S LAIR

FOR NES & GAME BOY™



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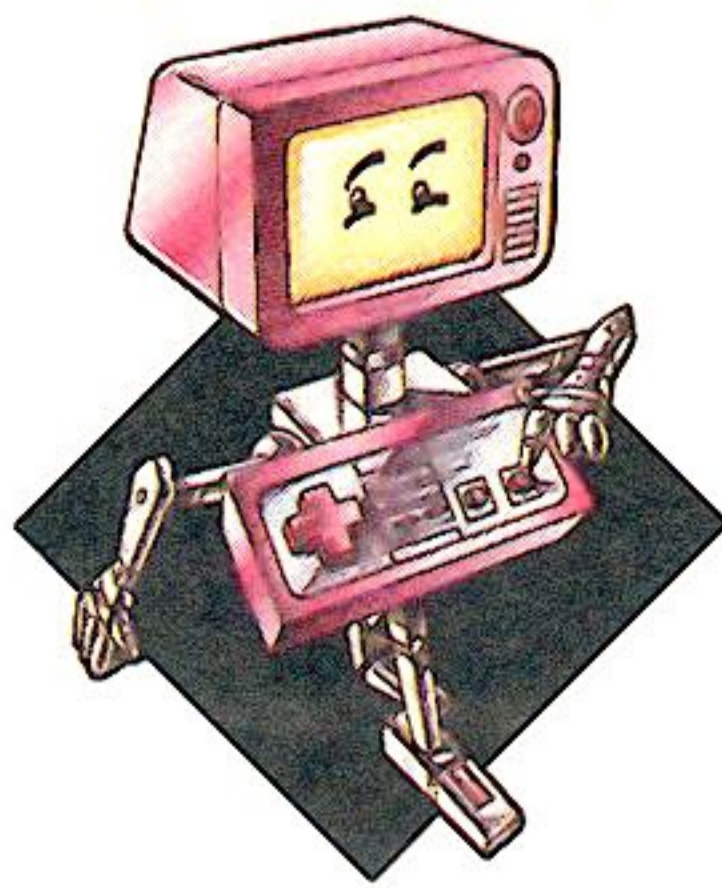
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If you were playing arcade games back in 1983, you probably remember *Dragon's Lair*. This stunning coin-op game is often regarded as the first interactive cartoon, a milestone in the field of electronic entertainment. When *Dragon's Lair* first appeared, it breathed new life into what was then a sagging videogame industry. Unlike other arcade games, which relied on conventional computer graphics, *Dragon's Lair* used a video laserdisc player to offer true cartoon-quality animation.

Even though *Dragon's Lair* cost 50 cents to play — twice as much as other arcade games at the time — thousands of arcade fans poured in their quarters. They played not only to win, but also to watch. The graphics and animation were like nothing anyone had ever seen in an electronic game.

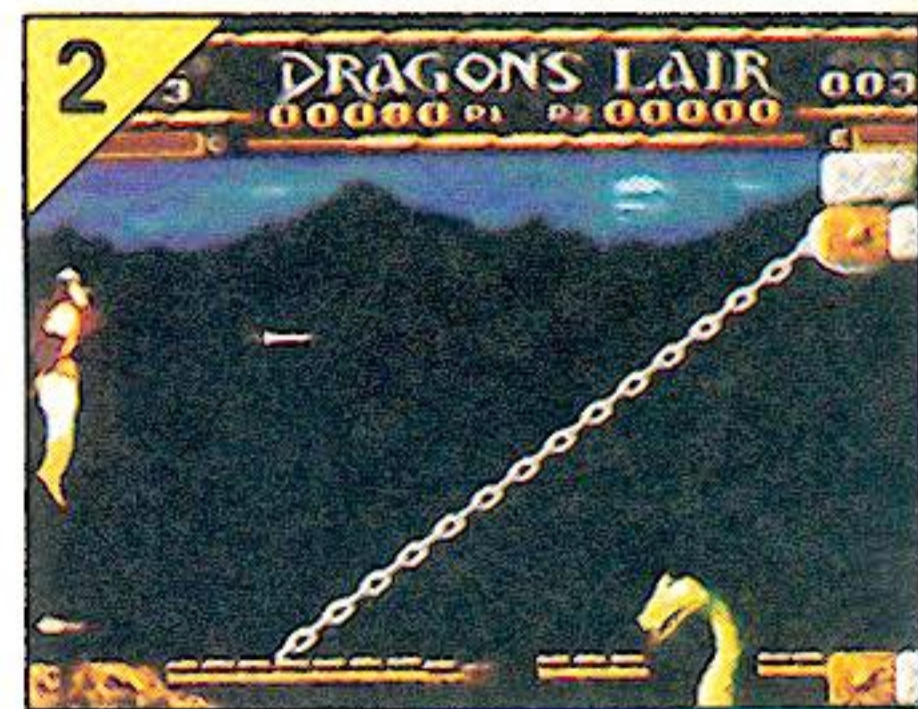
By industry standards, *Dragon's Lair* is now a golden oldie. The idea for the story and characters was conceived more than ten years ago by Rick Dyer, president of R.D.I. VideoSystems. In 1979, Dyer started working on the game,



# NINTENDO NEWS

## *Dragon's Lair* For Nintendo

Lance Elko

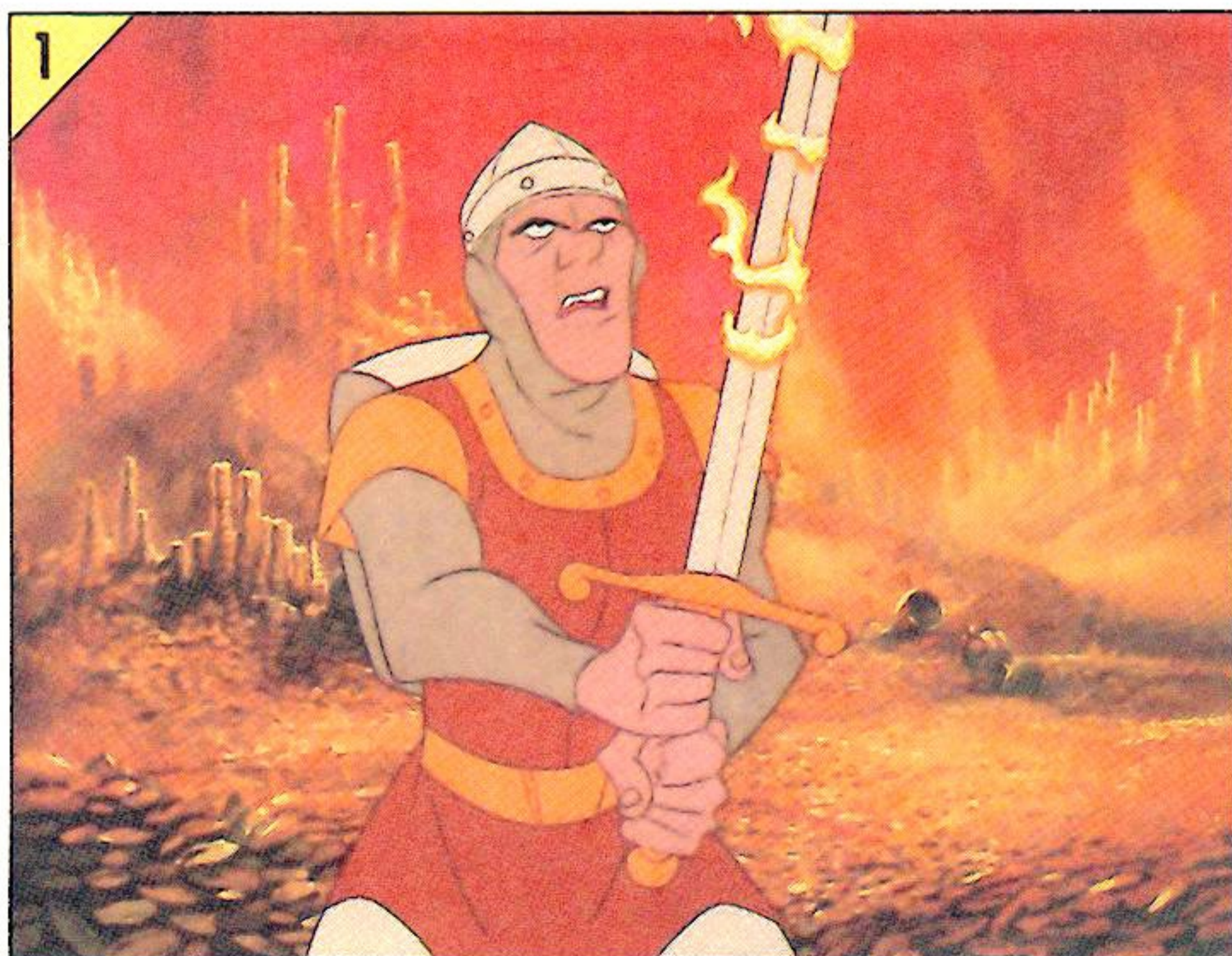


intending to move it eventually to home computers. His initial efforts included graphics drawn by hand on cash-register tape. He later moved his images onto film strips to sequence the game's events.

When video laserdisc technology became available in 1981, Dyer entertained another notion. After seeing *The Secret of Nimh*, a movie created by former Disney animator Don Bluth (see "Behind the Scenes"), Dyer decided that true cartoon animation was a must for his game.

The result was the coin-op version of *Dragon's Lair* — but it was an expensive project. Producing the game required an investment of nearly \$2 million (each arcade unit needed a Pioneer laserdisc player at about \$800 a pop) and about 73,000 man-hours in animation development time.

While the technology of *Dragon's Lair* is late 20th-century, the story line is straight from the Middle Ages. Dirk the Daring, a knight of comic-hero proportion, must battle various dragons, monsters, and other creatures to save the beautiful Daphne, who has been kidnapped by the evil Mordroc. The plot might seem like a cliché, but such a tale was never



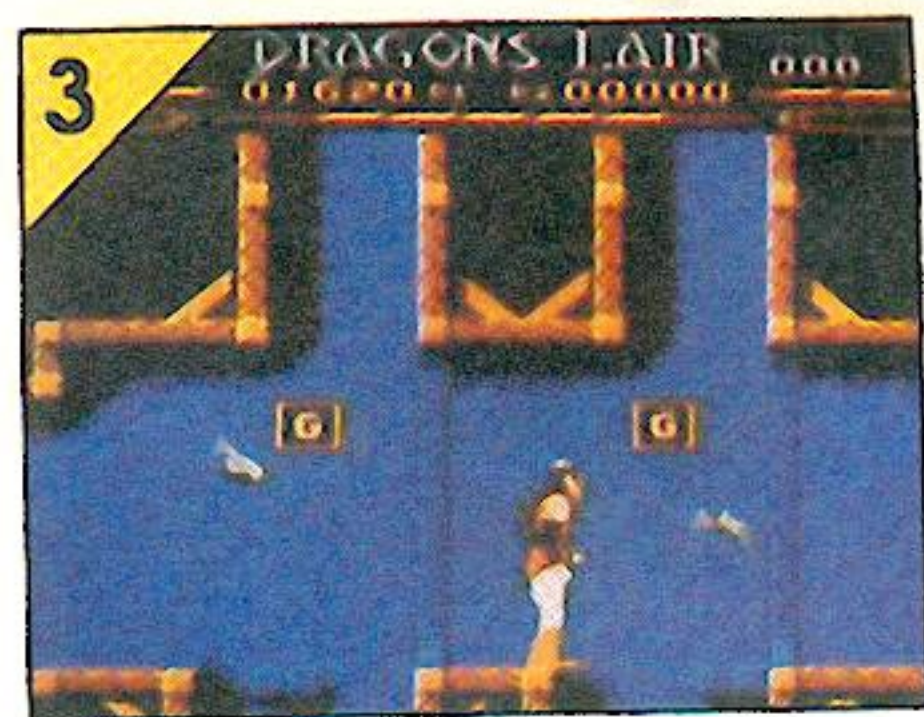
1 Dirk the Daring made his debut in the arcades with the 1983 laserdisc version of *Dragon's Lair*.

2 Your first mission is to cross the drawbridge into Mordroc's castle. It's not easy to make it past the moat's resident dragon.

rendered like this before.

Nearly two years ago, *Dragon's Lair* finally made its way to home computers, as Rick Dyer had originally intended. While the graphics and animation of the Amiga version were highly impressive (see the "Amiga Players" column in *Game Player's*, April/May 1989), some people said the game lacked playability. But there's no such

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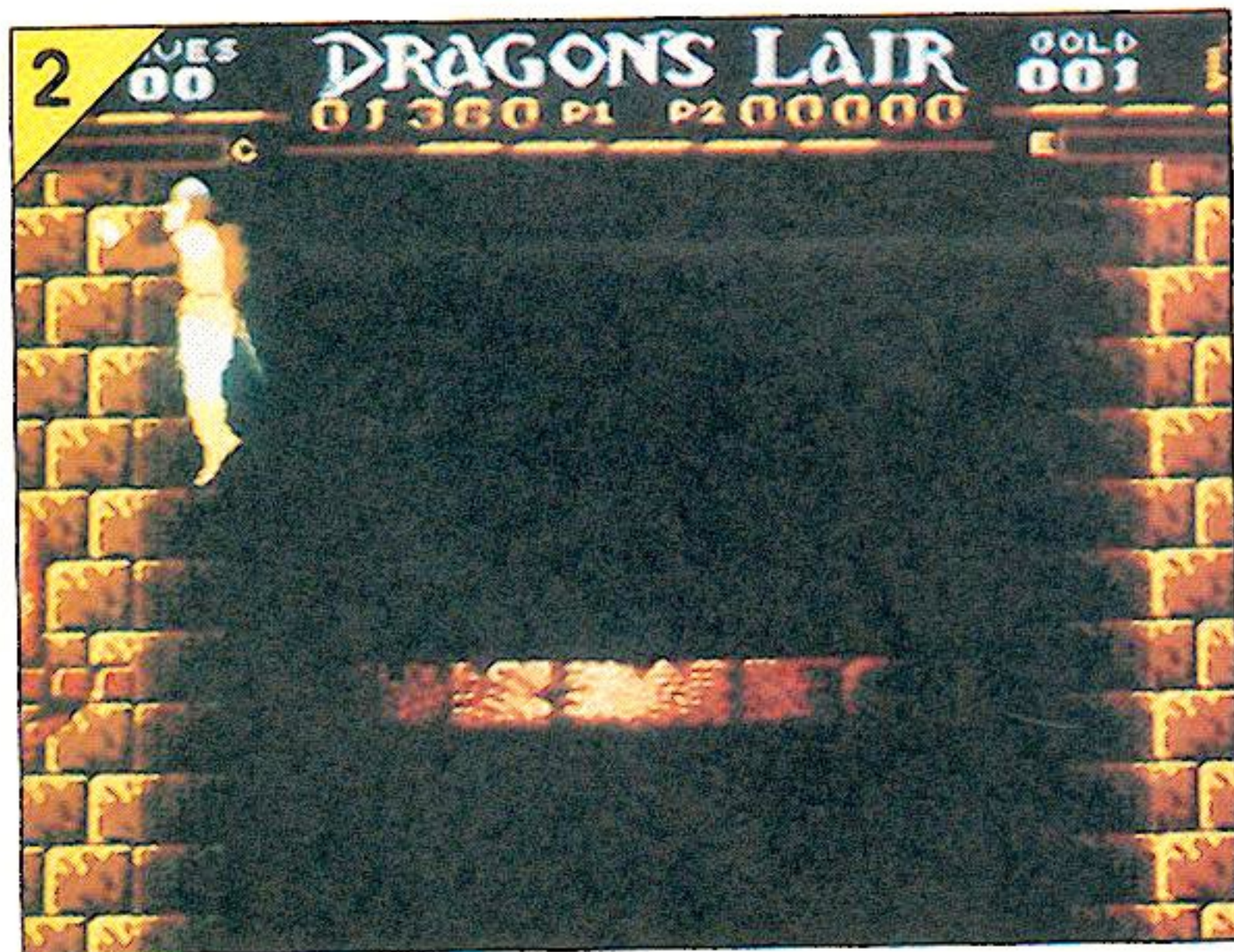
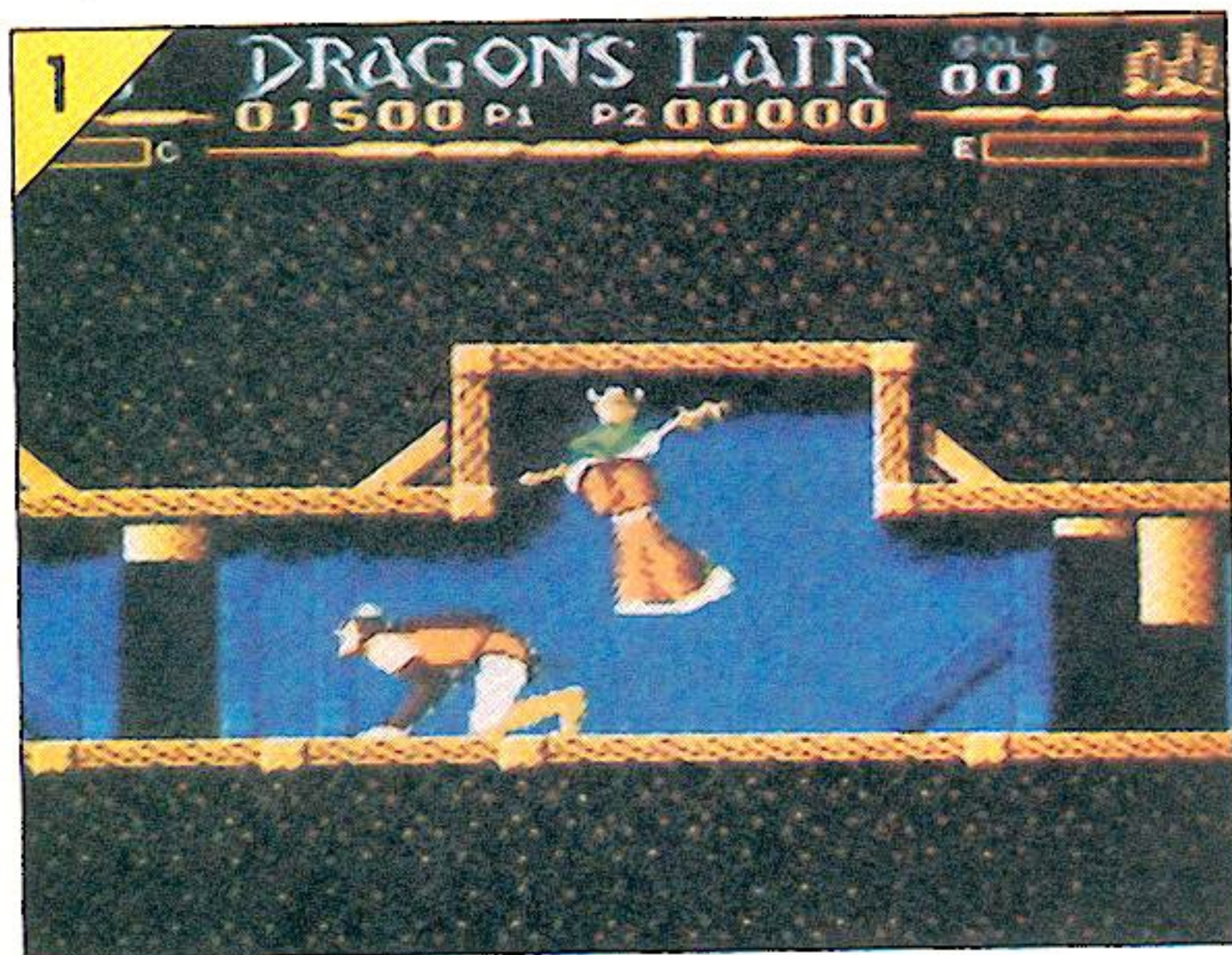
quibbling with the brand-new Nintendo version.

You have to see and play this game to believe it. It's so amazing, in fact, that *Dragon's Lair* is sure to set a new standard for graphics and animation in the NES format. Best of all, it's highly playable. You're involved every minute of the game—even though you might be distracted by the beautiful animation and graphics. The original soundtrack deserves accolades as well. The music does a splendid job of setting the medieval mood of the game.

The production of the Nintendo version of *Dragon's Lair* was similar to the production of a Hollywood movie. Sullivan Bluth Interactive Media (SBIM), a subsidiary of Sullivan Bluth Studios, hired MotiveTime, a software development company, to write the game. MotiveTime worked with the original laserdisc version to re-create the movements of Dirk and the other characters. The designers also adapted the arcade game's plot and use of color. The final product, finished this fall, is being sold by CSG Imagesoft.

There's also a distinctive international flavor to the game's production. Sullivan Bluth is based in Dublin, Ireland; MotiveTime is in Walsall, England; both SBIM and CSG Imagesoft are based in Los Angeles, California; and Imagesoft is owned by CSG, the Columbia-Sony Group based in Tokyo, Japan. Sound complicated? It is—but many current videogames are

*continued on page 24...*



**1** The Floating Lizard King appears early in the game and attacks frequently throughout.

**2** As the elevator descends into the castle, you must decide where to jump off.

**3** In the Gold Mines, avoid the vampire bats while leaping across the platforms. Don't forget to grab some gold.

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being developed with similar arrangements across continents.

The same network of companies is also delivering the new Game Boy version, *Dragon's Lair: The Legend*. It's totally different from its NES cousin in both concept and game play, but it too is a graphics knockout. (For a detailed look, see "Game Boy Players" elsewhere in this issue.)

## A Difficult Challenge

The NES version of *Dragon's Lair* is not a fast-paced, arcade-style shoot-em-up. You need your arcade skills, but you need your brain even more. If you rush Dirk into action, running and firing willy-nilly, you'll use up his five lives very quickly. Instead, you need to move cautiously and thoughtfully throughout the game, studying the best way to maneuver and fight.

There are plenty of occasions, though, when split-second action is necessary. For example, you'll have to duck, crawl, and throw your weapon at a fast-approaching enemy in just a few seconds' time. Dirk faces a host of enemies — including skeletons, snakes, bats, rats, spiders, the Grim Reaper, and Singe, Mordroc's pet fire-breathing dragon.

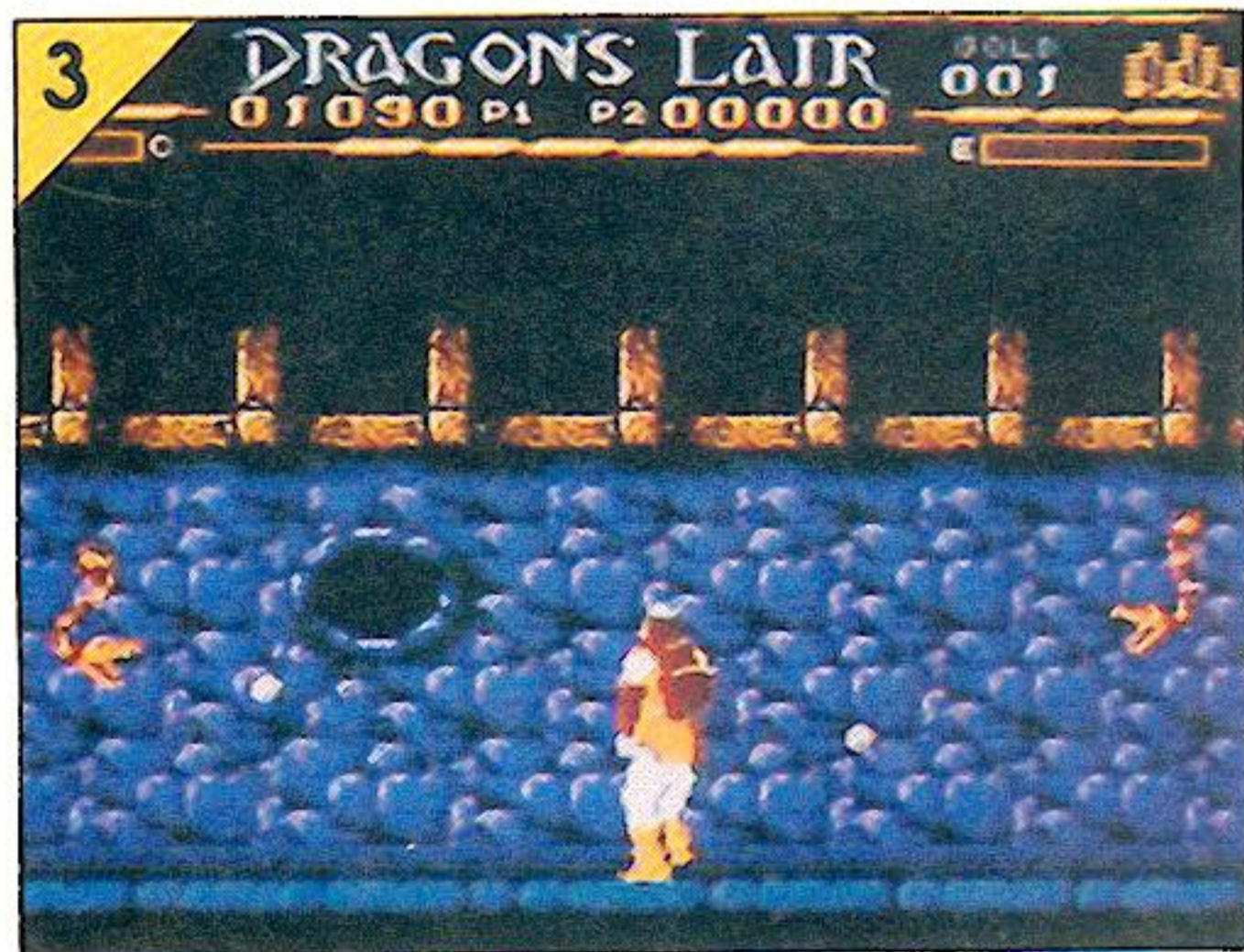
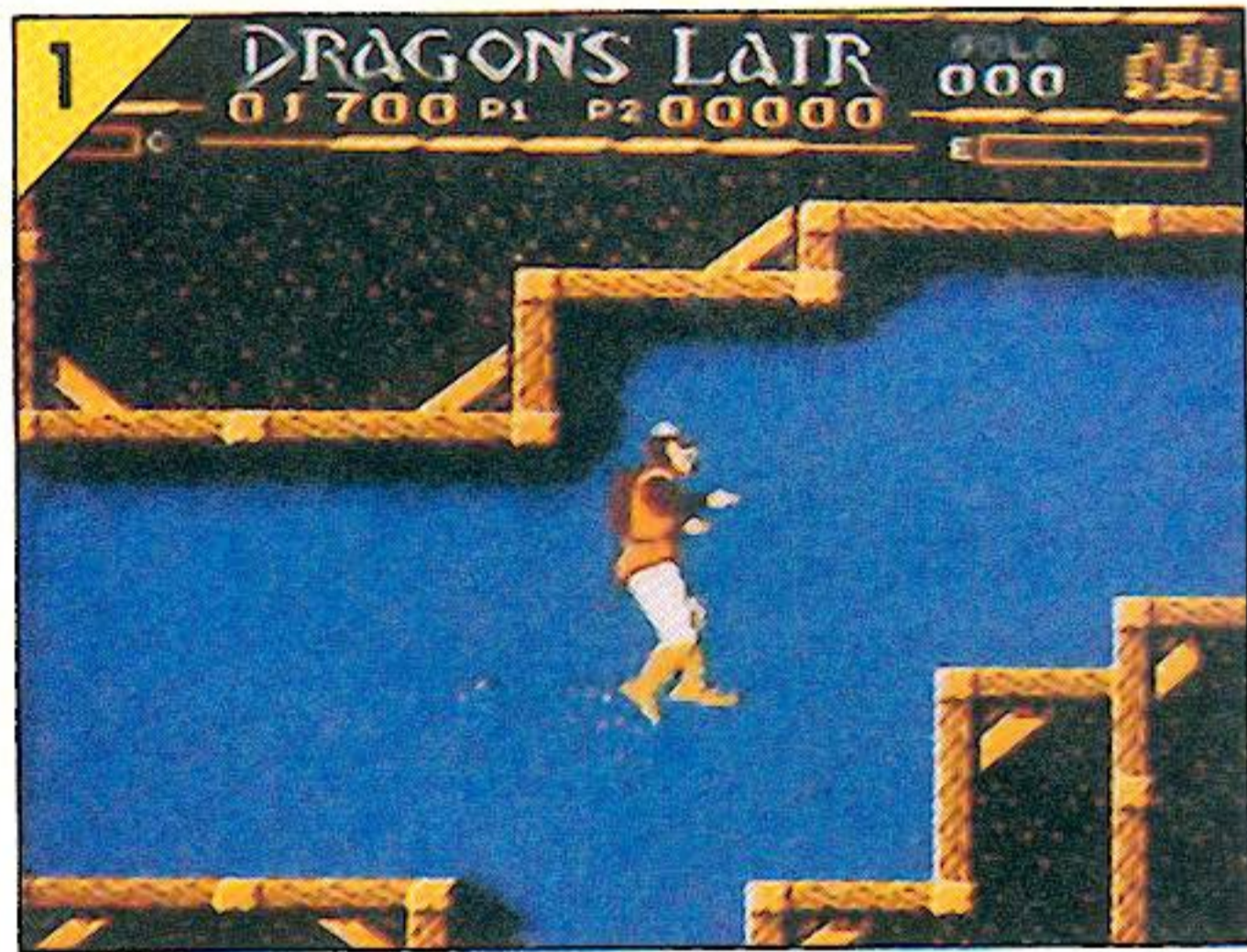
Some of these creatures merely drain your energy, while others spell instant death. Whatever the enemy, your arcade skills will be tested throughout the game.

Even if

- 1 Perfect timing is required to ride the gust from Singe's dragon breath across the Great Abyss.
- 2 This fireball from the Grim Reaper is about to cost you a precious life.
- 3 Poisonous snakes emerge from the castle walls at many stages of the game. Either crawl under them or be quick with your daggers — these snakes are armed and deadly.

you're the best game player around, you won't make it through *Dragon's Lair* on your first try — or even your second or third. To succeed, you've got to learn from the inevitable mistakes you made in your earlier games. Note which way you should have jumped, and when you needed to crawl or fire. Also, remember to get all the lettered blocks in the castle. The blocks help you gain energy, acquire gold, and obtain weapons, lives, extra points, and candles (a must-have to illuminate the dark chambers encountered later in the game).

*Dragon's Lair* begins on the drawbridge outside Mordroc's castle. Dirk must cross by jumping over missing planks, fighting off bats, and battling the moat's pesky resident dragon. If you get safely across the drawbridge to the castle gate, a screen shows you the number of gold bonus points you've



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onslaught of the rock-throwing Mining Car Trolls. You'll need your best maneuverability and aim to make it to the edge of the Great Abyss.

First-time players will have trouble at this point. To cross the abyss, you must wait for a mighty blast of dragon's breath from Singe, who lurks deep down in the castle. When a gust rises, time your jump

and ride the gust to safety on the other side.

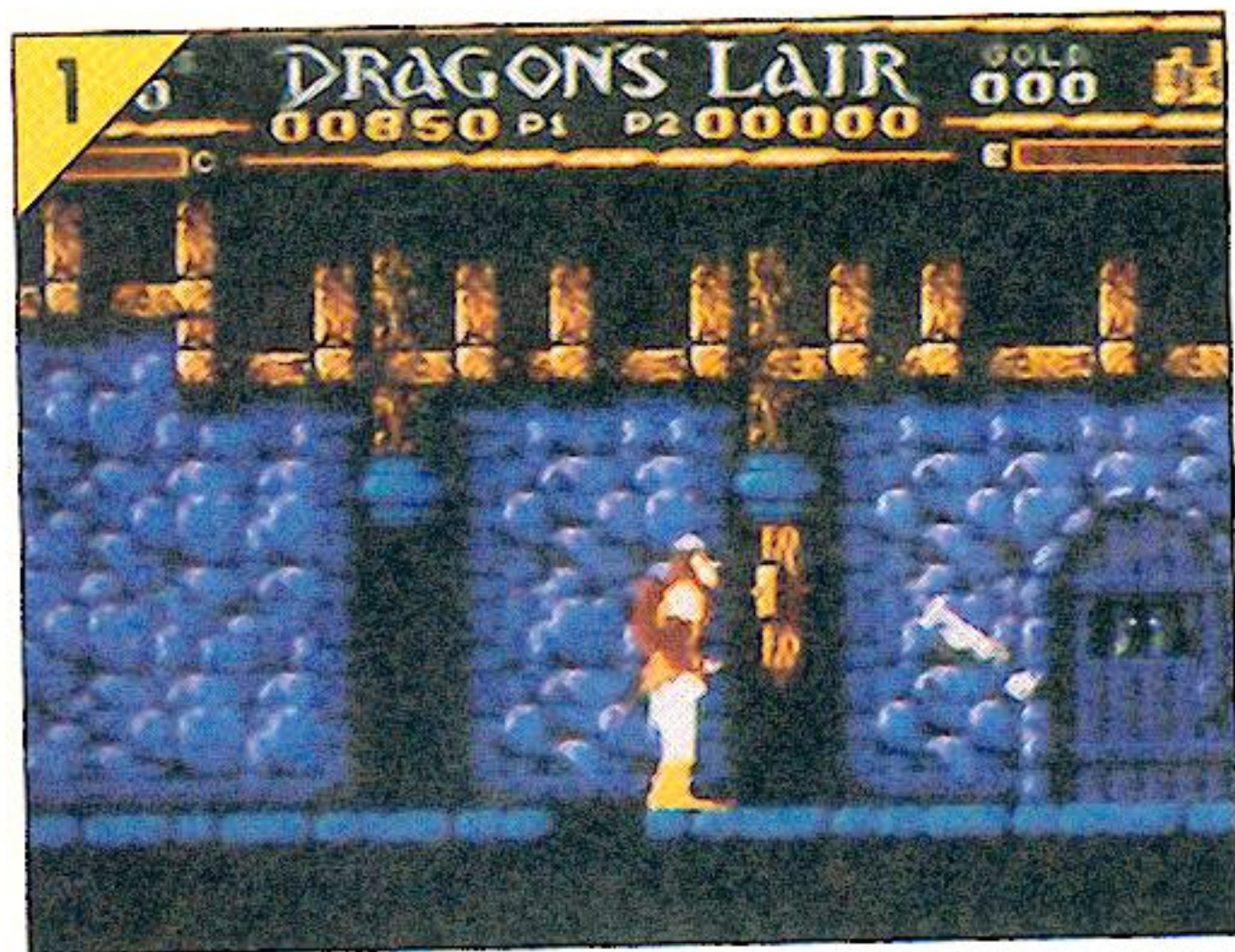
After crossing the abyss, you'll find yourself in total darkness. To light Dirk's candle (hopefully you've grabbed several along the way), press the Start button. If the area is properly lit, you can finally escape the Gold Mines.

Back on the elevator, you need to find out which floor leads to the Hall of the Grim Reaper. Dirk needs all his stamina here — he'll contend with collapsing floors, mov-

ing platforms, and, finally, the Grim Reaper himself. If you are victorious, you'll reach the final confrontation with Singe.

The last encounter of the game is tough. It takes great mobility to avoid Singe's fireballs and the repeated attacks of the dragon's babies, which emerge from their mother's belly. If you can survive the onslaught and lodge enough axes in Singe, you'll win the game.

The victory screen shows a



earned. Similar screens appear each time you complete a section of the game.

In the Entrance Hall of the castle, you get your first real taste of Mordroc's evil. Gates rise and fall (timing is everything), poisonous snakes attack, and the Floating Lizard King makes his debut. To survive, you must accurately throw your axes and daggers.

If you make it through the Entrance Hall, you're transported on an elevator deep down into the bowels of the castle. The elevator stops at different floors. You can explore any of these floors, but only one has an exit to the next section of the game.

Next come the Gold Mines, where you must contend with bloodthirsty vampire bats and moving stone blocks. Be careful not to rush across the moving platforms and bridges. Again, caution and timing are essential. The final challenge in the Gold Mines is the

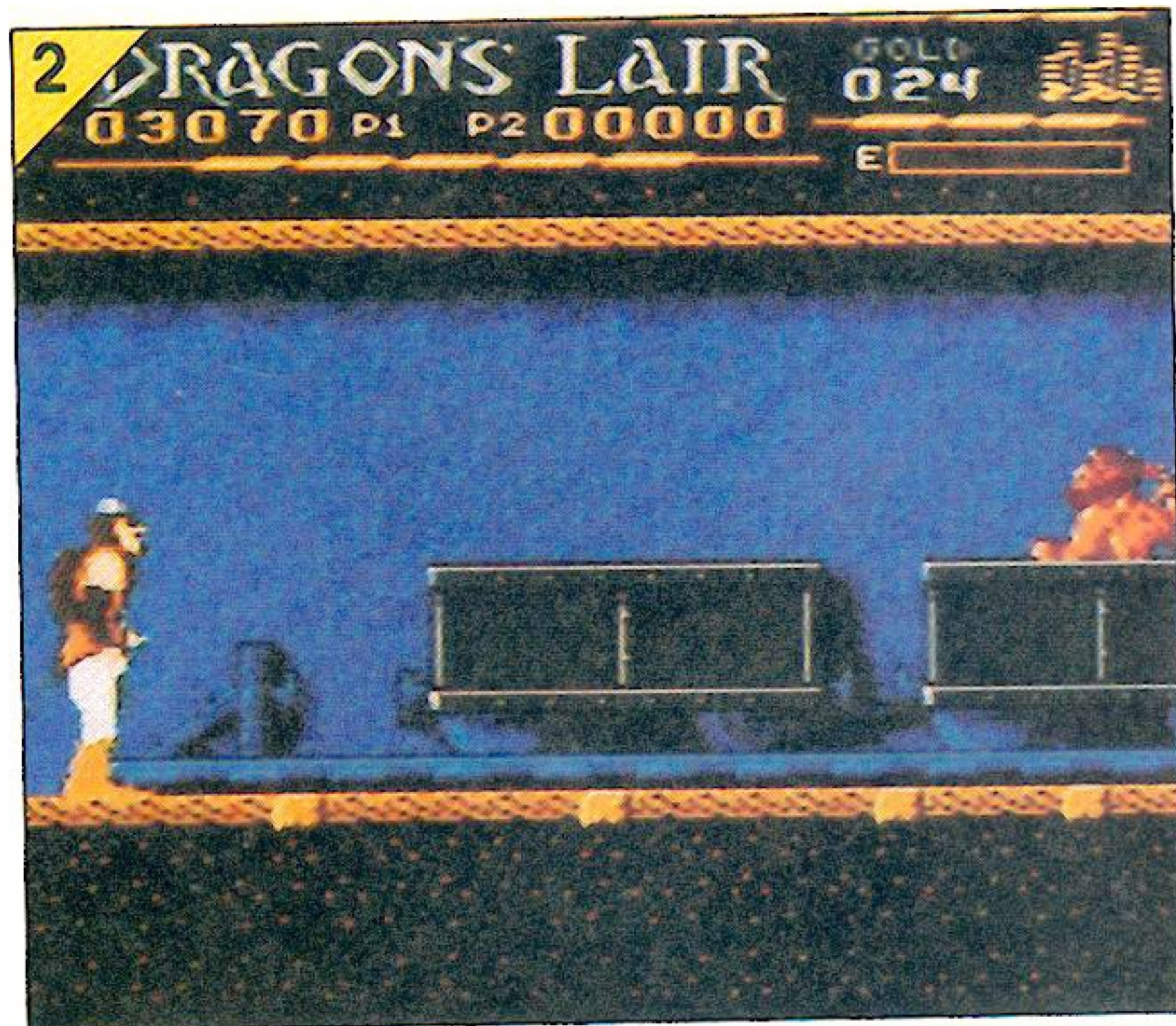
1 Dirk must watch out for this vertically moving gate and deal with the Cell Fiend, who hurls exploding skulls.

2 A Mining Car Troll is about to hurl a rock. Dodge out of the way, then counterattack by throwing an ax at the troll.

congratulations message with a smiling Daphne cradled in her hero's arms. It's followed by a scoreboard and a high-score screen, where you can enter your name if you're deserving.

The creation of *Dragon's Lair* was obviously a labor of love. It's an outstanding game that's blessed

*continued on page 31...*



# Behind the Scenes

*Dragon's Lair* has roots nearly as old as the videogame industry itself. In 1979, animator Don Bluth left Disney Studios along with two other employees, Gary Goldman and John Pomeroy. They set up shop in Bluth's garage with an ambitious goal: to restore the classic animation techniques they felt were being abandoned by Disney.

Besides Bluth's personal work on two laserdisc videogames — *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace* — the team produced a pair of feature-length animated movies: *Banjo, the Woodpile Cat* and *The Secret of Nimh*. Both met with great success. In 1984, they forged a partnership with financier Morris Sullivan and established Sullivan Studios in Van Nuys, California. It was there



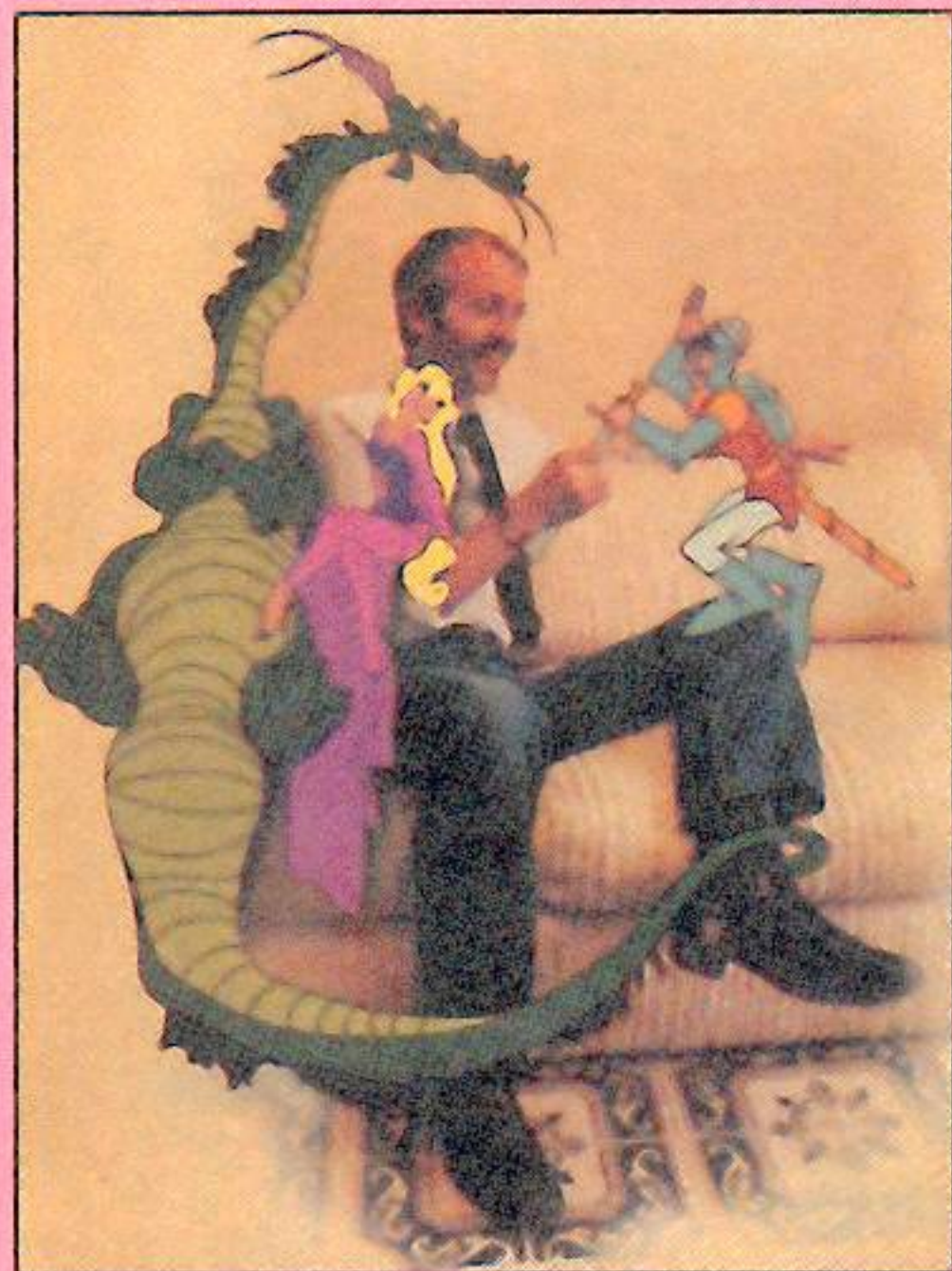
MotiveTime — a team of programmers, designers, graphic artists, and musicians — developed both the NES and Game Boy versions of *Dragon's Lair*.

that the smash-hit movie *An American Tail* was produced.

In 1986, the company moved to Dublin, Ireland — where the government levies no taxes on the arts — and changed its name to Sullivan Bluth Studios. Since then, Sullivan Bluth has produced two more hit movies, *The Land Before Time* and *All Dogs Go to Heaven*.

The company also formed a subsidiary called Sullivan Bluth Interactive Media (SBIM) to produce interactive entertainment. SBIM hired MotiveTime, a software development company in Walsall, England, to write both the NES and Game Boy versions of *Dragon's Lair*. The young and talented MotiveTime developers jumped in enthusiastically.

After carefully studying Bluth's *Dragon's Lair* video, they set out to capture Bluth's animation on the NES. The developers told *Game Player's* that they used five times the usual number of frames seen in an NES game to smoothly animate Dirk and company. After laboring night and day for eight months, and using all but four bytes in a one-megabit cartridge, *Dragon's Lair* was complete.



Don Bluth with two of his original *Dragon's Lair* creations.

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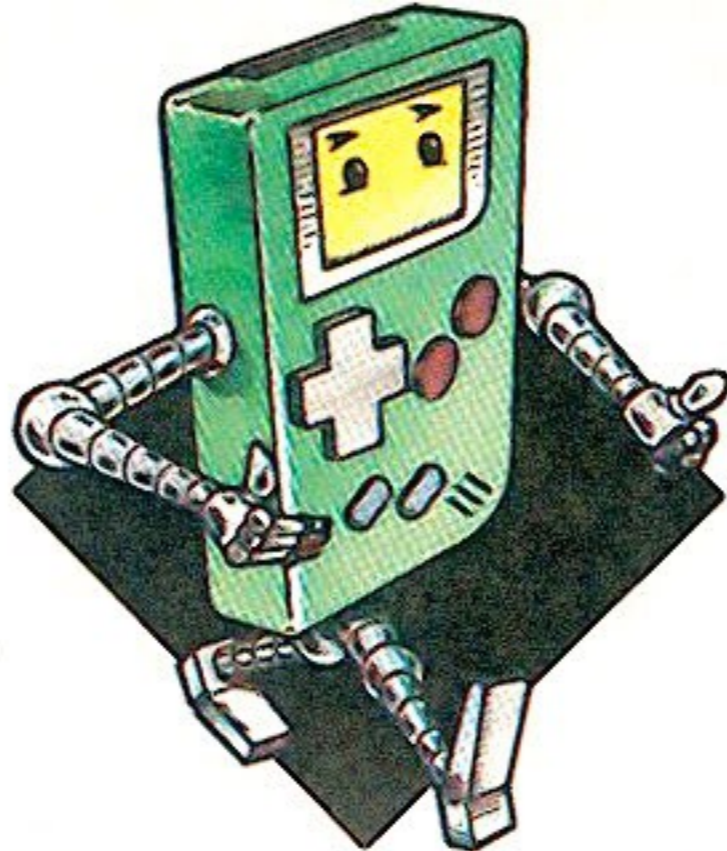
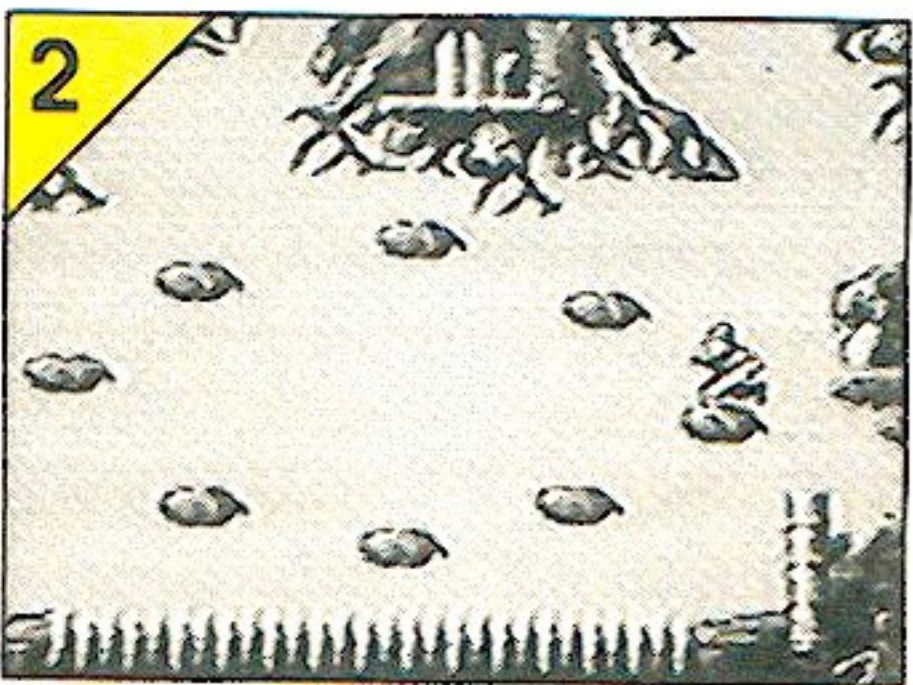
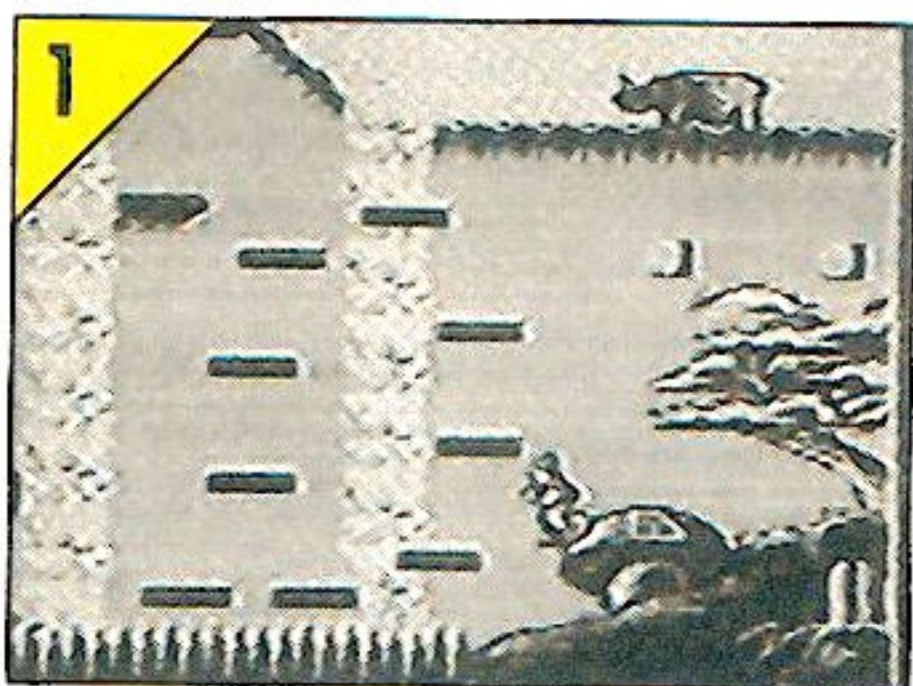


The final encounter is the toughest. Singe's fireballs keep you jumping and ducking — and you need more than a few accurate ax throws to win this battle.

with some of the best graphics, animation, and programming ever seen in the Nintendo market. True, it's a difficult game — young or novice players may find it frustrating. Experienced players, on the other hand, will find the Nintendo version of *Dragon's Lair* beautifully rendered and highly playable.

GP

**W**hen Don Bluth's *Dragon's Lair* hit the arcades in 1983, its success was so phenomenal that many experts predicted it would revolutionize the videogame industry. By using a video laserdisc player, *Dragon's Lair* offered true cartoon animation with the interactivity of a videogame. It was like being in control of your own animated movie. But despite the enthusiastic response, the predicted boom in laserdisc games never really materialized.



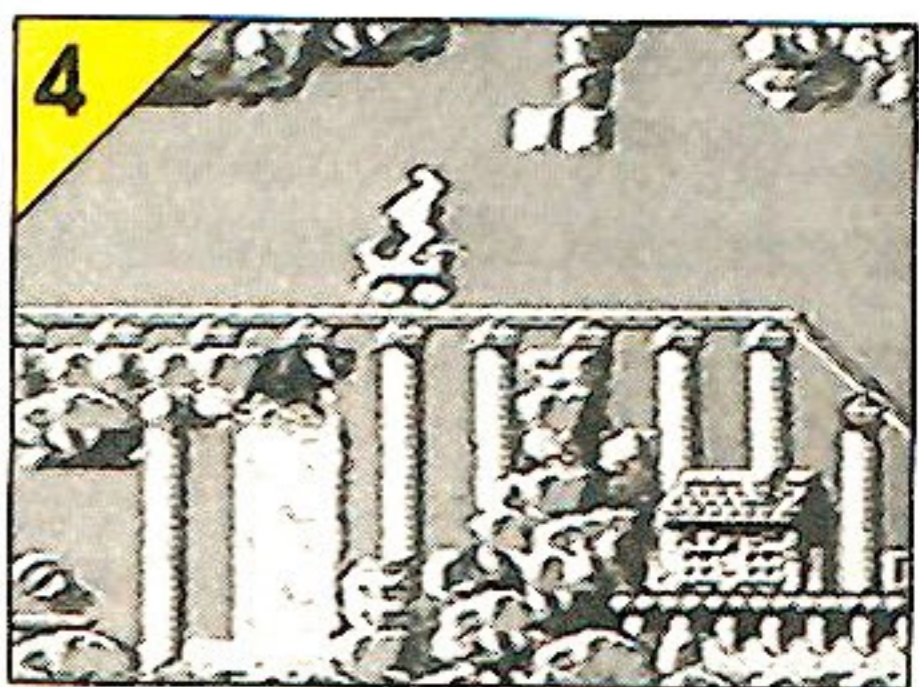
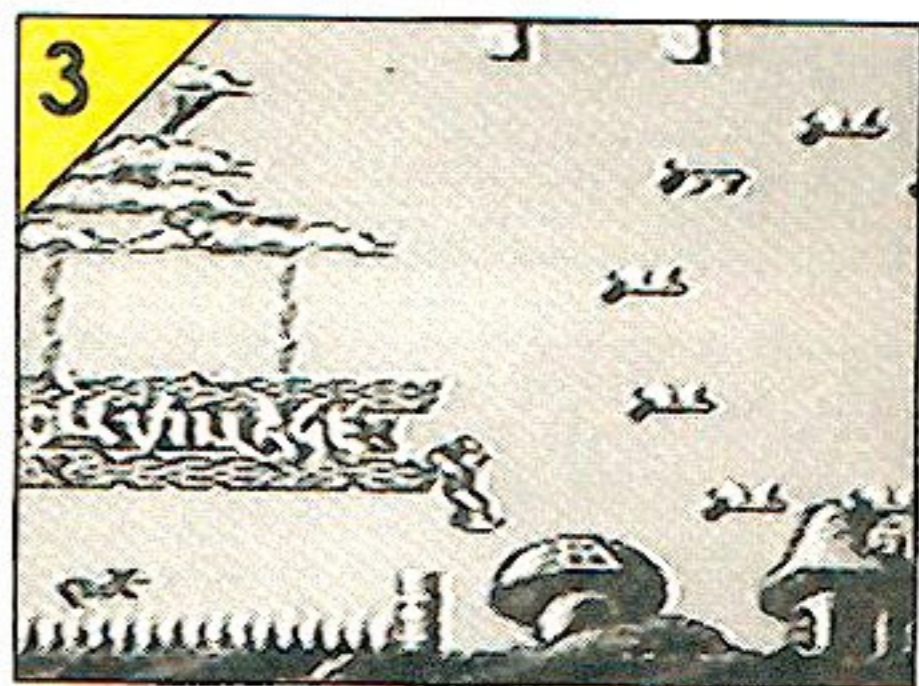
## GAME BOY PLAYERS

### *Dragon's Lair: The Legend*

Stephen Poole

both versions have, in their own ways, broken new ground in the design and look of cartridge-based videogames.

Both versions of *Dragon's Lair* are being released by CSG Imagesoft in conjunction with Sullivan Bluth Interactive Media. The actual development was done by MotiveTime, a company based in Walsall, England. After looking at both games, it's easy to see that the developers did plenty of homework in order to capture the charm and feel of the original *Dragon's Lair*. (For a close-up look



In 1989, a shortened version of *Dragon's Lair* was released for the Amiga personal computer (see *Game Player's*, April/May 1989). Although this version didn't use a laserdisc, the original graphics were accurately re-created with the Amiga's outstanding 16-bit graphics. Now, with the release of *Dragon's Lair* for Nintendo and *Dragon's Lair: The Legend* for the Game Boy, it has finally reached home videogame systems.

Obviously, neither the NES nor the Game Boy can offer the cartoon-quality animation made possible by video laserdiscs. Nevertheless,

**1** At the beginning of the game you can go either left or right. Unlike many other videogames, *Dragon's Lair* is circular, so you can reach all the screens no matter how you start.

**2** Landing on these floating objects requires good timing. But don't celebrate a successful jump too early — if you sink too low, you'll lose a life on the spikes.

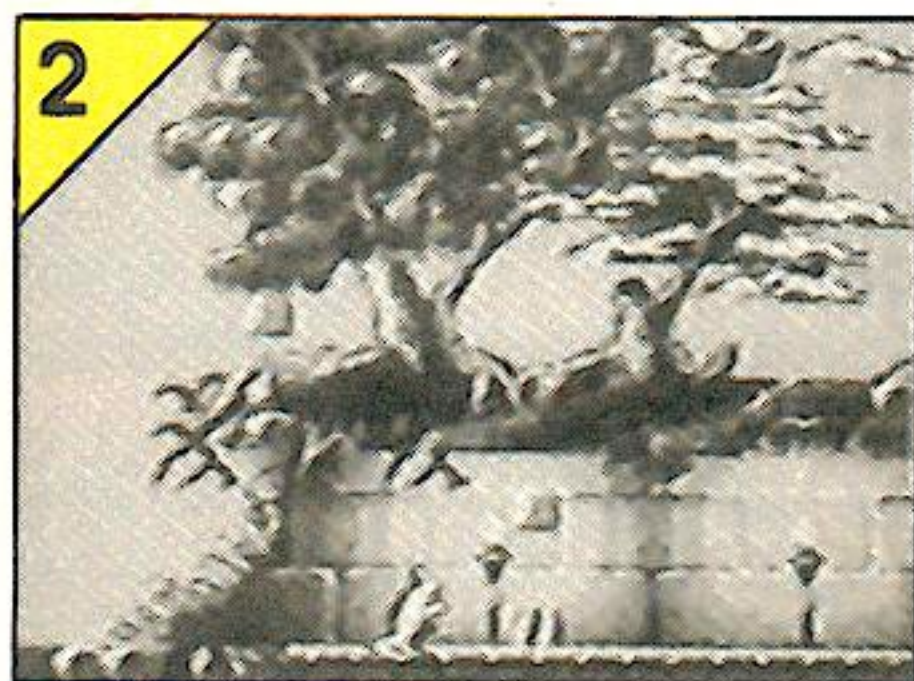
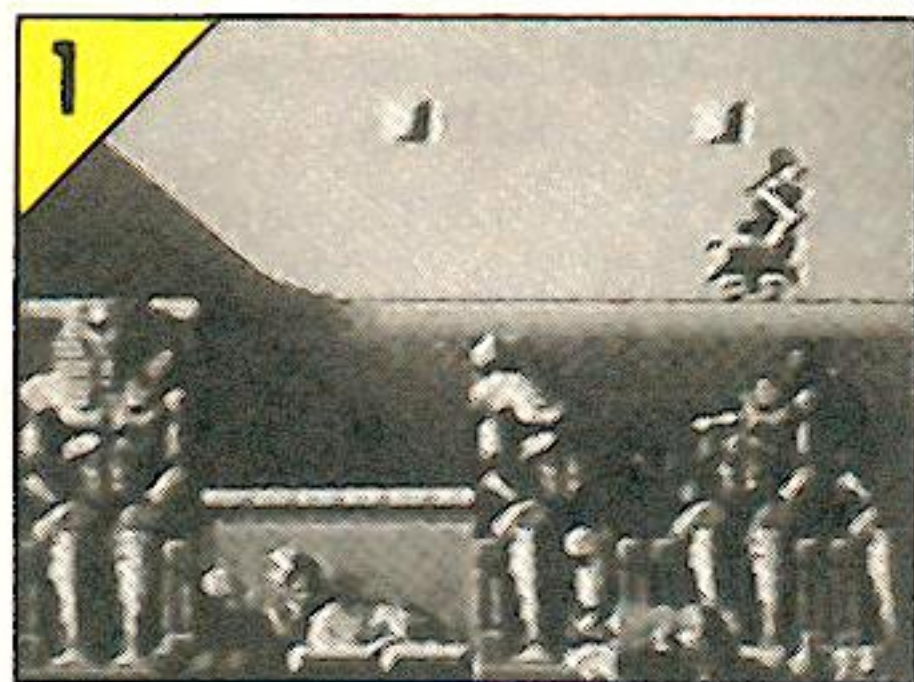
**3** Dirk can drop through a hole in the ground to reach Troll Village. Note the detail of the trolls' mushroom houses, the scampering hare, and the wooden sign.

**4** To grab pieces of the Life Stone while riding in the coal car, stay at the front of the car, then leap up and forward as you approach each one.

at the development of *Dragon's Lair* for the NES, see "Nintendo News" elsewhere in this issue.) Neither game looks or plays like any previous game for the NES or the Game Boy.

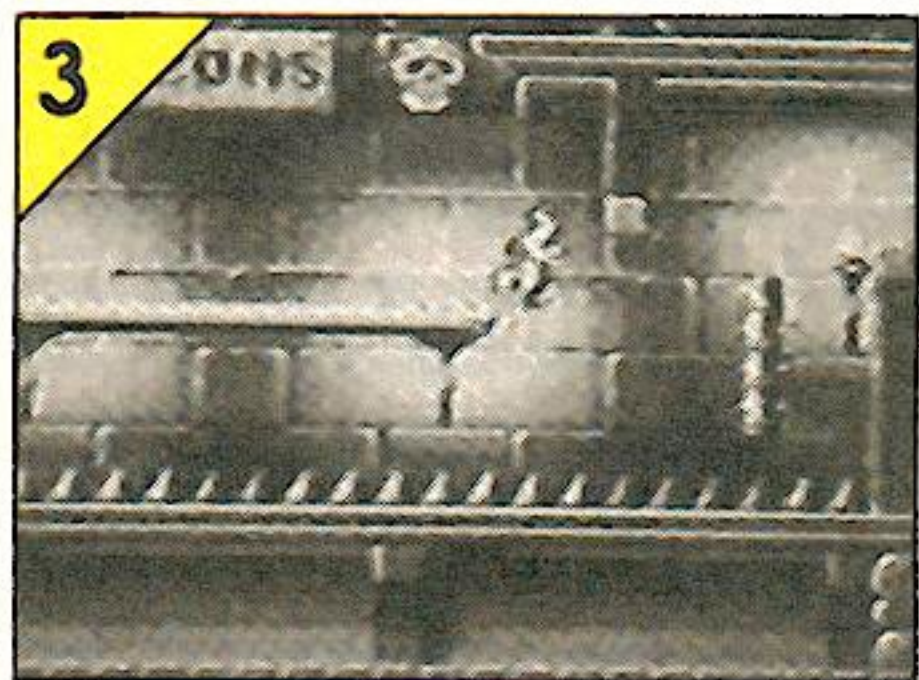
Developers Peter Cook, Mark Crane, and David Percival told *Game Player's* that the hardware limitations of the Game Boy meant that *Dragon's Lair: The Legend* would have to be completely different from its NES cousin. In the Nintendo game (which closely follows the laserdisc version), the action centers on Dirk the Daring's attempt to rescue Princess Daphne

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from the evil sorcerer Mordroc. To rescue Daphne, the brave knight must battle Mordroc's forces until he reaches a final showdown with Singe, Mordroc's pet dragon.

In the Game Boy version, Princess Daphne and her maid escape the castle during Mordroc's assault. They take with them the precious Life Stone — an ancient relic that gives unbounded power and eternal life to whomever possesses it. To keep the Life Stone out



of Mordroc's hands, Daphne's maid uses witchcraft to smash the relic. She scatters the fragments (194 pieces in all) throughout the land before Princess Daphne is captured. Now it is Dirk's job to find all the pieces. When he reassembles the Life Stone, he must take it to the Good Knight, who lies dormant in Mordroc's castle. The stone will resurrect the Good Knight, insuring Mordroc's defeat and restoring natural order to the land.

Gathering the pieces of the Life Stone might seem a rather ordinary premise for a videogame. But the designers of *Dragon's Lair: The Legend* have pushed the Game Boy to its limits. The game uses a one-megabit cartridge (the same as the NES version, incidentally), and there's only *one* unused byte.

When you start the game, the screen says you're "Entering Game World," and that's a very appropriate introduction. The world you

**1** No, you didn't make a wrong turn at Albuquerque! These lush Egyptian ruins are the backdrop for another coal-car ride, this time above ground.

**2** This conveyor belt can give Dirk's feet a rest, but be sure to jump over the spike just as you start your ride.

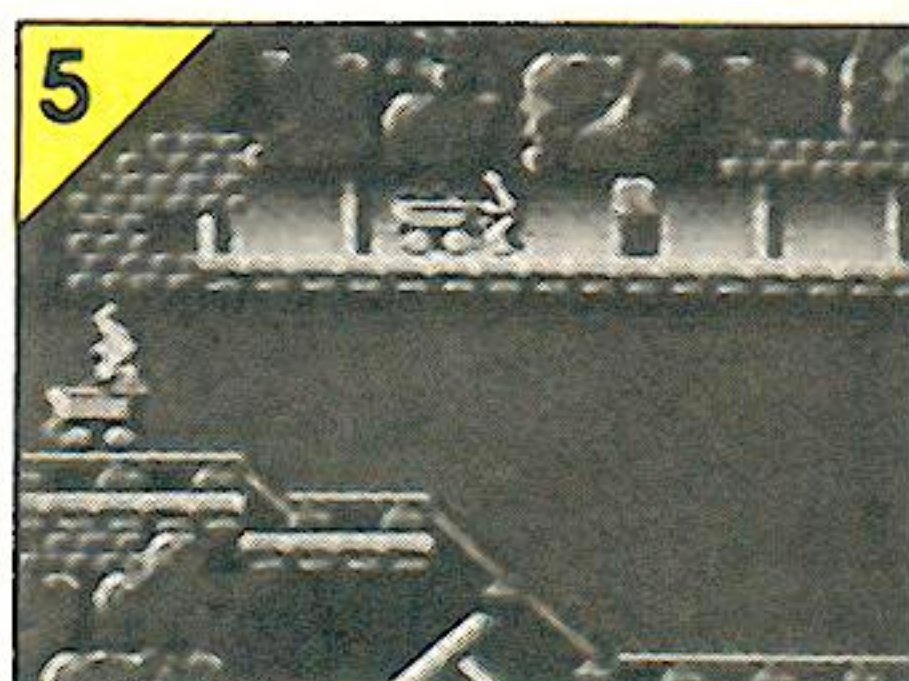
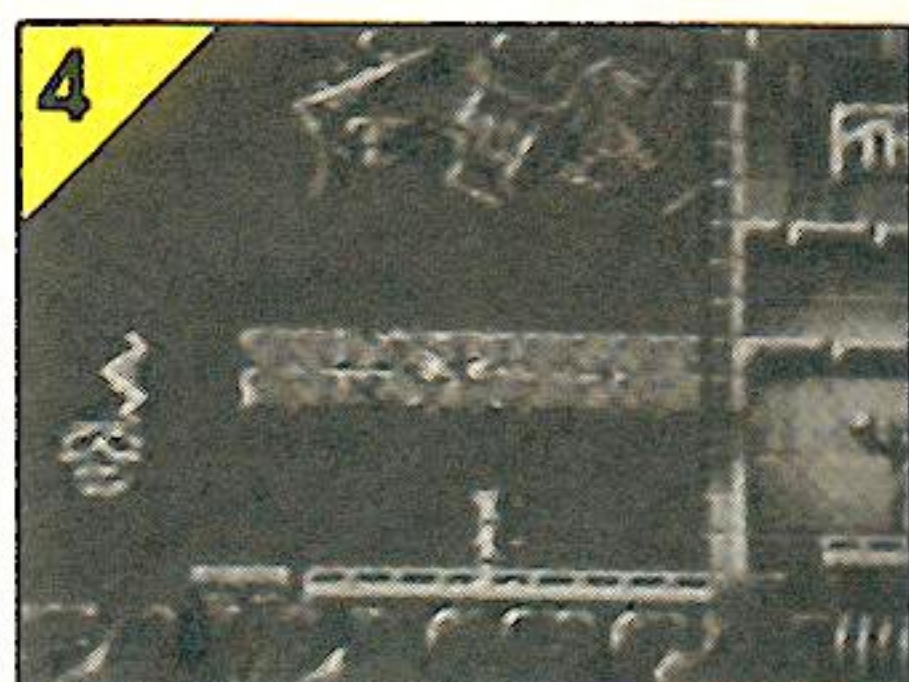
**3** It might appear that Dirk is falling to his death, but actually this beam in the dungeons has an invisible counterpart to the right which you can use to make a safe (though bouncy) crossing.

**4** A spinning skull looks ominous, but Dirk can hop onto it for a free ride to the ledge above. In fact, you can ride almost anything in the game that moves.

**5** The miner pushing wheelbarrows of ore just above Dirk is characteristic of the care given to even the smallest details in the game.

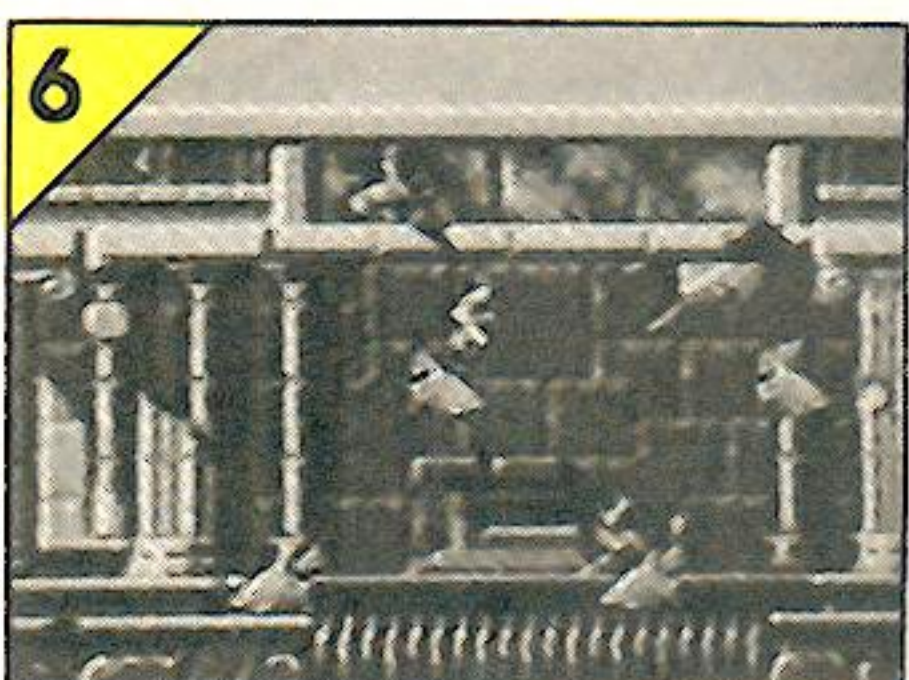
**6** Dirk catches a ride on one of a group of pterodactyls. They must have been summoned from prehistoric times by the smashing of the Life Stone.

enter is made up of 58 screens in all, each with some of the best graphics ever seen on a Game Boy screen. To get around the lack of color, the designers have skillfully used shading to produce texture and depth. Combined with an almost slavish attention to detail, they've created a game that's truly a joy to see.



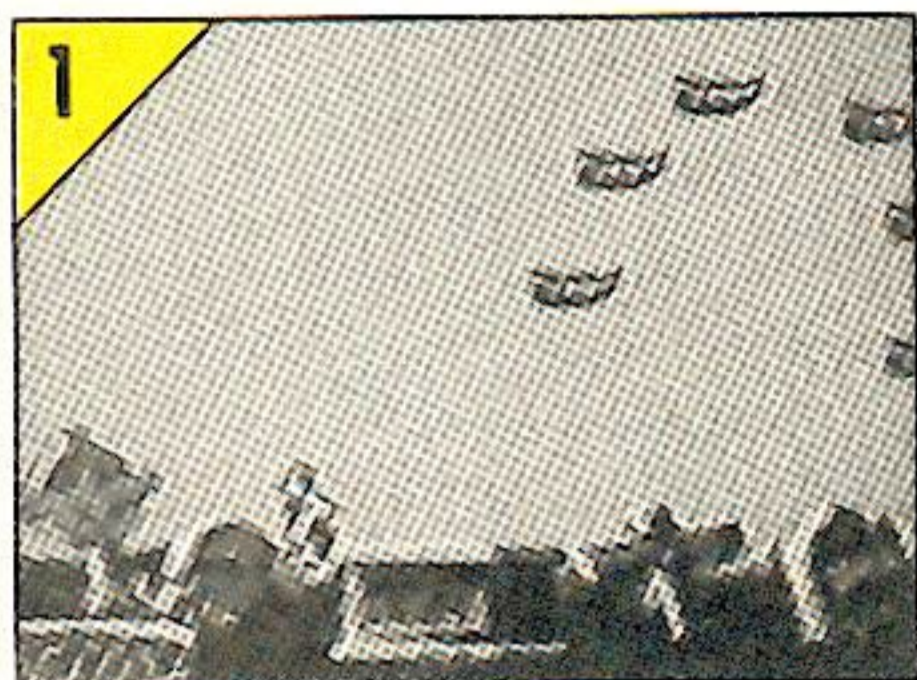
There's no time limit for collecting the pieces of the Life Stone. If you like, you can explore the whole domain without worrying about picking up any of the pieces. In keeping with the idea of recreating a complete world, your movements in *Dragon's Lair: The Legend* are not restricted. At any point in the game, you can go left or right, forward or backward.

Winning the game isn't as simple as just wandering around





# GAME BOY PLAYERS



the countryside, though. Even when you're simply exploring, you still have to make some very tricky jumps and maneuvers just to move from one area to another. In fact, you can expect to lose several lives just finding out what objects will support Dirk's weight. When you toss in the task of grabbing pieces of the Life Stone resting in some unlikely places, you've got a real challenge on your hands.

Dirk's possible movements have been kept to a minimum. You can walk left or right, jump straight up, and jump left or right. Dirk can also defy gravity by moving left or right during a fall — a very useful trick you should learn to master early on. But that's all you need to find and grab every magical fragment. You start the game with nine lives, and you'll probably need

every one of them. There are no continues, nor a save-game feature.

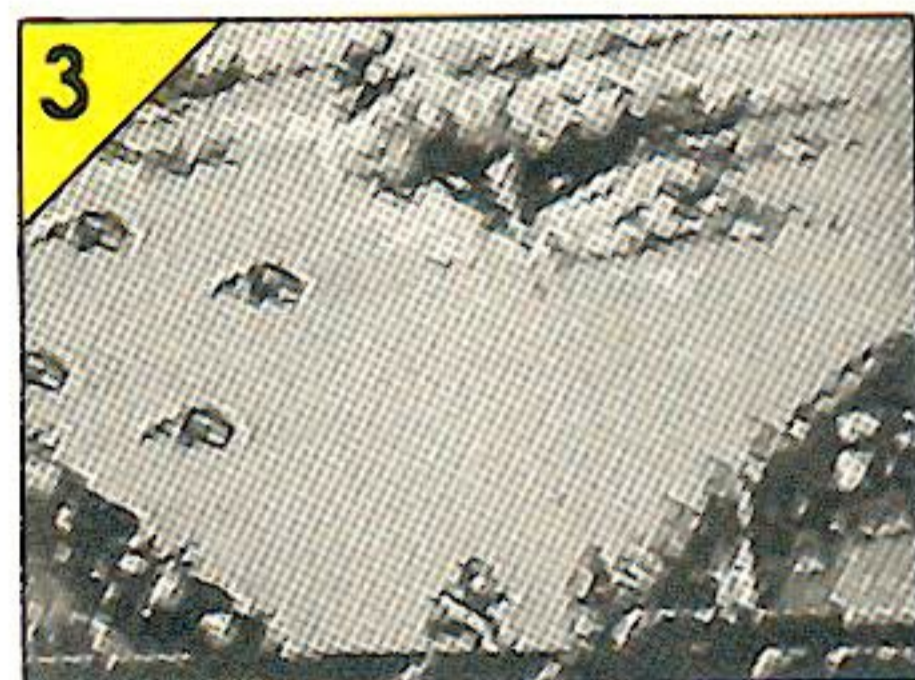
Some pieces of the stone practically fall into your lap, but reaching others can be *very* difficult. It's not just a matter of coordination, either. Although sometimes you have to be quick enough to clear a chasm or catch a ride on a scurrying rabbit, often you must look at reaching the stones as a sort of puzzle. For example, you may have to move ahead two screens to catch a ride on a skylift going back the way you came before jumping to a tree that allows you to enter the screen on which you began at just the right spot to snatch a stone...well, you get the idea.

*Dragon's Lair: The Legend* can be played in either slow or fast mode, but it's almost certain you'll choose the slow speed the first few times around. The slower speed makes it easier to get acquainted with the surroundings and to find out Dirk's jumping abilities, but it has another advantage, too. It significantly reduces *persistence* — the blurring of moving objects that is characteristic of the Game Boy's liquid-crystal display screen.

There are a couple of other features you can use to your advantage. Dirk's ability to move left or right while falling may be con-

trary to the laws of physics, but it can come in handy, especially in the mines. Also, you can avoid the fatal results of a long fall by guiding Dirk from one game screen to another before he hits the ground (as long as he doesn't land on a spike or some other dangerous object, of course).

*Dragon's Lair: The Legend* has a



simple story, but it's really a challenging game that requires you to view problems from different perspectives. At first, you may find yourself repeatedly covering the same ground (especially in the mines, where you are returned to the entrance of the tunnel whenever you take a spill). But if you get tired of a particular scene, you can always travel ahead and return to the trouble spot later.

*Dragon's Lair: The Legend* shows just how much can be accomplished on the Game Boy. It proves that the future of hand-held gaming is promising indeed.

GP

**1** Dirk lopes through a cemetery that's probably filled with some of Mordroc's victims.

**2** Aware that someone might try to thwart his evil plans, Mordroc left this message for anyone who would dare to enter his castle and revive the Good Knight.

**3** Even the clouds seem filled with the evil that Mordroc has brought to the land. Is that a wicked face looking down at Dirk as he struggles to reach the castle?

**4** Dirk rides a huge raven toward Mordroc's castle. If you haven't found all of the fragments of the Life Stone, you'll be sent back to complete your mission.