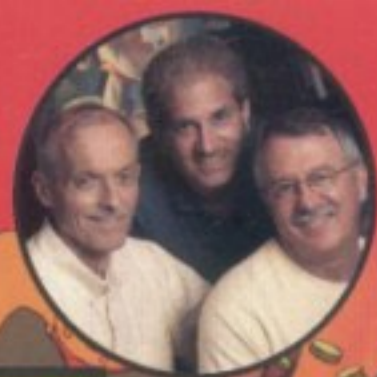


VGC Exclusive! Interview with the original Dragon's Lair creators PLUS the "lost" Dragon's Lair 2 scene!



VIDEO GAME - COLLECTOR -

**VGC Hears
"Confessions of the
Game Doctor"**

**The Prototype That
Never Was**

**R.I.P., e-Reader &
Working Designs**

**New and Classic
Games Reviewed**

And Much More!



**WIN AN
ORIGINAL
INTELLIVISION
AND 20 GAMES!**



Issue #5 - Spring 2006
\$5.99 USA - \$7.99 Canada

WHAT ARE YOUR GAMES WORTH?

**Comprehensive Checklist and Price Guide: Over
10,000 Game Prices from Atari to Xbox 360!**

Dragon's Lair Interview

In 1983, Cinematronics released *Dragon's Lair*, the first laser-disc animated arcade game. Over 20 years later, *Dragon's Lair* has been released on a variety of systems and was recently added to the *Guinness Book of World Records*. It sits along side *Pong* and *Pac-Man* as one of only three arcade games in the Smithsonian. All three creators, designer Rick Dyer, producer Gary Goldman, and legendary animator Don Bluth, sat down with *Video Game Collector* for a rare, exclusive interview.



The three *Dragon's Lair* creators Don Bluth, Rick Dyer and Gary Goldman

On Getting Started:

Don: I worked at Disney in 1955 on *Sleeping Beauty*. This was while Walt was still alive and he just brought this energy to the whole place. I left in 1956 (originally to go on a mission to Argentina with the Church of Latter Day Saints) and returned in 1971. I worked there until 1979, and was being groomed to become Director/Producer, but things were different. A lot of the production values were removed and the defense was always that it was too expensive. There was a group of us who were very interested in sort of the more traditional style of animation. We found that a lot of the "Old Masters" at Disney couldn't really remember or show us some of the processes to achieve certain special effects. We learned that you could do this really great animation and it didn't have to cost that much, because we were doing it ourselves. We bought some equipment and over four and a half years we produced a 27-minute film entitled *Banjo the Woodpile Cat*.



Dirk just saved 15% by switching his magical flying horse armor insurance to GEICO

Gary: We decided to leave and start our own company. Seventeen people resigned including me and Don and John Pomeroy. The media made a big deal about it, saying Disney's best animators were leaving and Disney took it very hard. I think it would be years, though, before we really realized how much they had it out for us after that.

On getting the Bluth Group to animate *Dragon's Lair*:

Rick: I had been designing video games for another company. We were making handheld games and I had an idea for an animated game. My wife Jen and I went to the movies and we were seeing *The Secret of NIMH*. As soon as I saw it I pointed at the screen and said "That's who I want to animate my game!"

Gary: We had just finished the release of *Secret of NIMH* and

we were working on our second feature film titled *East of the Sun: West of the Moon*. But a union strike shut down production and our investors walked away. Next, we were approached by a very distinguished Japanese businessman who said he wanted to finance our next film. We were really excited and every time he would call we would have the whole office gathered around the phone to see if he had the money yet. Finally, he called to say he had our money. He told us it was in gold bars, buried under the runway of the airport in Switzerland. Obviously, this could not be true – but I got his name and maybe someday I'll find out where he lives. Then, along came Rick Dyer and his idea for *Dragon's Lair*.

More money problems:

Gary: We agreed to work on *Dragon's Lair* for Rick and the next three months were spent trying to finance the animation part of it. We borrowed from friends and friends of friends but were still short the money we needed to have a clip ready to present at the Chicago coin-op show. Then one day, Don's brother showed up with a grocery bag stuffed with a huge amount of cash. Fifty thousand dollars! We weren't too sure where it came from and it looked a little suspicious but we took it to the bank and over the next three hours explained its origin and made sure it was ok to deposit it. It turns out, Don's brother had found an investor, accepted their first payment and as a joke he cashed it and brought it over in a Safeway bag.

On the struggle to bring *Dragon's Lair* to life:

Rick: I had a staff of about 30 people, but they weren't animators. They were programmers and they would write scripts and send them over for Don and his guys to animate.

Gary: But we would often re-write the scripts as we animated, and what they got back was sometimes very different than what they sent. This caused a lot of friction within their group, but we were shielded from that. Rick was the buffer.

Don: The animators just loved working on *Dragon's Lair*, because it wasn't a feature (film). On a feature everything is about discipline and control and I think for many of them working on *Dragon's Lair* was a lot more fun.

Gary: All of the play testing was done in house. At the time, it wasn't turning out very good. It ended up that 30% of the animation was either re-done or cut from the game. The Mudmen scene made it in; another scene called 'Gargoyles' was cut but appeared on the *Dragon's Lair Special Edition* by Digital Leisure.

On the success of *Dragon's Lair*:

Rick: This was a very expensive game to produce. At the time the average coin-op budget was around 150 or 175 thousand dollars and we spent 10 times that on the animation alone! No one was really sure how it would do. We spent three months on five minutes of footage for the Chicago coin-op show but we didn't have a finished product to show them. After the show, when I asked Jim Pierce



Deleted Scene from the *Dragon's Lair 20th Anniversary Special Edition* set: Hey, why is Dirk heading into the Tunnel of Love alone?



Girls Gone Wild: Mordroc's Castle Edition

Dragon's Lair Interview

(President of Cinematronics) how things went, he got this big smile on his face and said "we booked 10 million dollars in orders."

Don: Part of the appeal was watching yourself die in funny ways. We had done research and found that, at the time, teenagers didn't watch animated films. Part of growing up is that you have to spit out your childhood and cartoons were part of that, so teenagers weren't really supposed to like animation. But we thought our audience was teenage boys, so we had to make something different than the cartoons of their childhood and these death scenes are funny, but more mature. In *Space Ace*, we took it a step farther with Dexter. If you lost, you actually lost your manhood by having him turn into a child again.

On Who Created Dirk the Daring:

Rick: Well, Don did a lot of the character studies.....

Don: Oh, it was all Rick. We went over to his office and I remember him showing us his ideas, and he had this sort of bumbling character for the game.

Rick: But *Space Ace*, that was mostly Don.

On selling the home console rights to *Dragon's Lair*:

Rick: I had met with Al Kahn (President of Coleco) at the Chicago game show. He was very excited about *Dragon's Lair* and every time we talked he would say "Rick, how much you want for those home rights?" to which I would always reply "four million dollars." And this went on for awhile, until one time we were on a conference call and he asked about the home rights again and when I again told him four million dollars he got really angry, and shouted "dammit, Rick! There is no way we're gonna pay you four million dollars. The most we will pay you is two million dollars!" I don't know if he heard this over the call, but Jim Pierce was in the room with me and his head just hit the table. This was a time when most home console rights were selling for maybe 25 thousand. This game changed everything.

David Foster, President and Founder of Digital Leisure, has rescued many laser-disc and full-motion video games from obscurity. Now, the Toronto-area self-taught programmer turned video game publisher talks about the past, present and future of "his kind of games."



On getting started:

In high school I worked for a Commodore dealer who sold systems but also published and sold their own software and hardware products. I was self-taught and worked on word processing and spreadsheet applications that were originally designed for the Commodore Pet, but went on to become huge sellers on the Commodore 64. I became their senior programmer while still in high school.

I left there and along with one of their VP's created a company called Digital Solutions. Our biggest product was a word processor called *Paperback Writer*, but we were contacted by KayPro, who owned that copyright and the title was change to *Pocket Writer*.

On his previous company Ready Soft:

We started ReadySoft and one of our first products was a Commodore 64 emulator for the Amiga, which was just a huge success. One of my former employees had separately been working on a home version of *Dragon's Lair* that would feature the game play in its original

arcade glory, and he was really interested in doing it himself, but when he was about 75% done he ran out of funding and we stepped in to finish it.

The Amiga was one of the first computers that could really handle the video of those games but due to space limitations of the floppy discs any one release would only contain about 15% of the arcade version.

We started Readysoft in 1998 and sold it in 1996 to a Canadian film company called MaloFilm. This was during the full motion video craze when Hollywood was trying to get into gaming. MaloFilm had just gone public about a year earlier and they bought us and three other companies. They were trying to expand too fast and fell on hard times. They quickly gave up the rights to *Dragon's Lair*, which they had never been too interested in, and we were able to get them back because of our long relationship with The Bluth Group.

On *Cliffhanger*:

Without a doubt the biggest hole in our library is *Cliffhanger*. We have pursued that game for 10 years, and sometimes we have been very close to getting the rights to re-release it. I'm not really sure why it hasn't worked out, there have been other games based on *Lupin the Third*, but one factor may be that the director of the original *Lupin the Third* video footage used in *Cliffhanger*, Hayao Miyazaki, has since become very famous and successful. He directed *Spirited Away*, and it may be possible that he just doesn't want his footage used in a video game. Another game we pursued was *Super Don Quixote*, but again it was a Japanese company and we have chased the rights to a dead end.



On the future of "video" video games:

It's fortunate that the technology has improved and we are able to release these games in their original format. It's great that the new systems, even the ones that aren't that new anymore, support DVD's so we can release these games in DVD quality. Also, we are exploring new formats to deliver games, like digital cable and satellite.

On publishing original titles:



Digital Leisure specializes in games using full-motion video. They have brought new generations of gamers such classics as *Dragon's Lair*, *Space Ace*, and....*Drug Wars*?

Publishing new games isn't really our goal, but with our acquisition of the American Laser games we did acquire a game called *Shoot Out at Old Tucson*. This was a full-motion video game that was never released, though all of the video had been shot. This title was a little more advanced than their other games, in terms of blue screen and matting, but it is a bit challenging for us in that there is no reference for a finished product. In a way, it is similar to the 20th Anniversary of

continued on page 48

David Foster

continued from page 19

Dragon's Lair, in which we had access to scenes that had ended up on the cutting room floor, and we were able to integrate those into a finished product.

On Thayer's Quest:

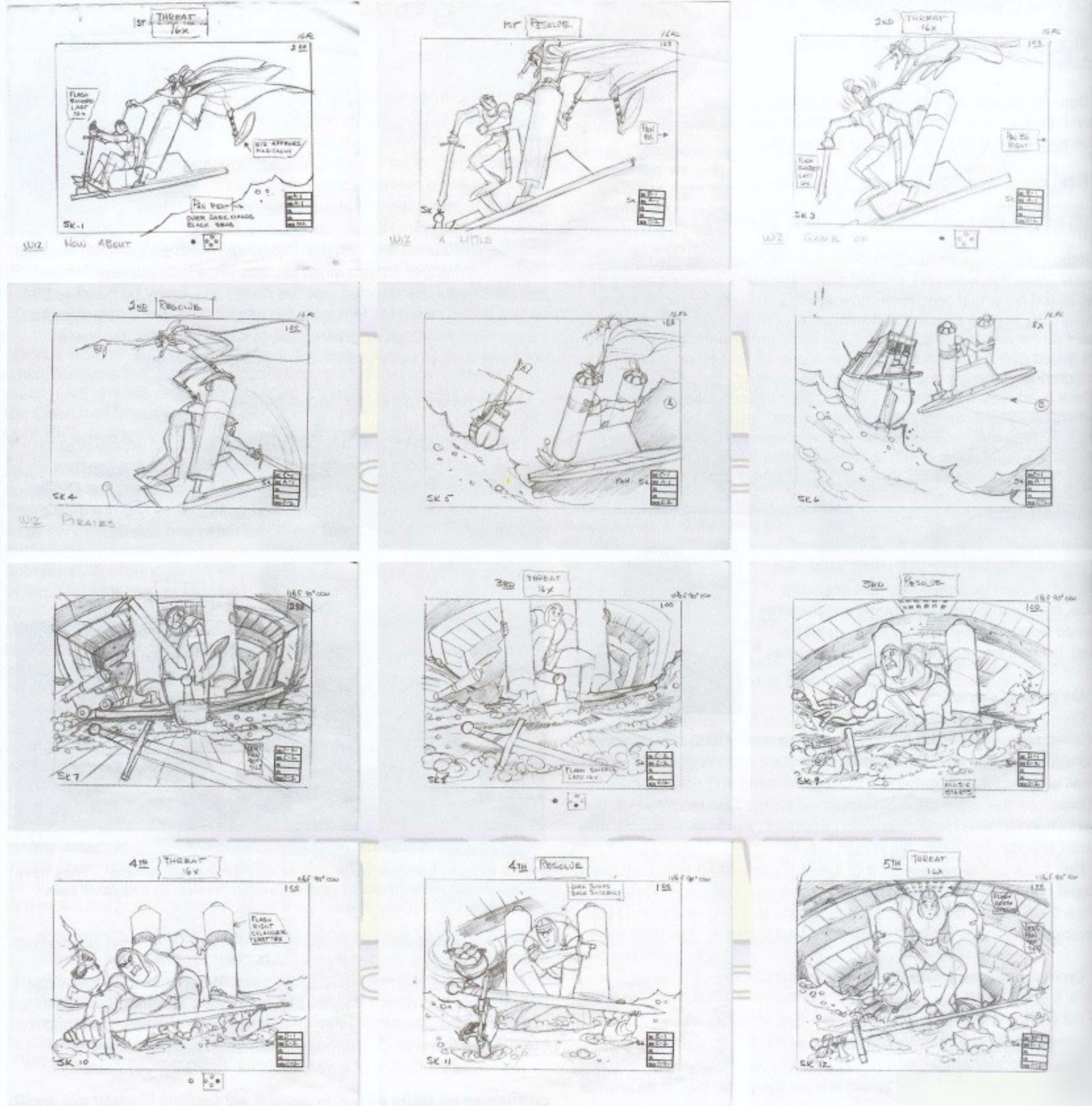
All of the coding was done from scratch, but there wasn't a film master to use for the footage, the laser discs are the only video masters that exist. Luckily, there is a great group of enthusiasts who were able to help us with the finished game. Historically, the fans, especially from the *Dragon's Lair* project website (www.dragons-lair-project.com), are a great resource. They hand picked frames from the original laser discs to create a new video master. They also gave us insight into ways some of the original game play could be enhanced and that allowed us to include two versions on the same disc—a "home" version with some great enhancements and an "arcade" version that includes the original arcade release.

On Dragon's Lair in High-Definition:

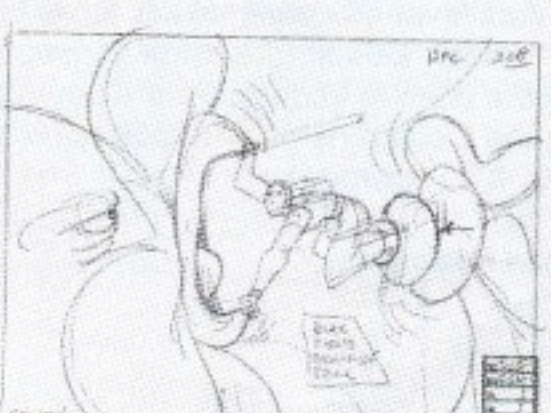
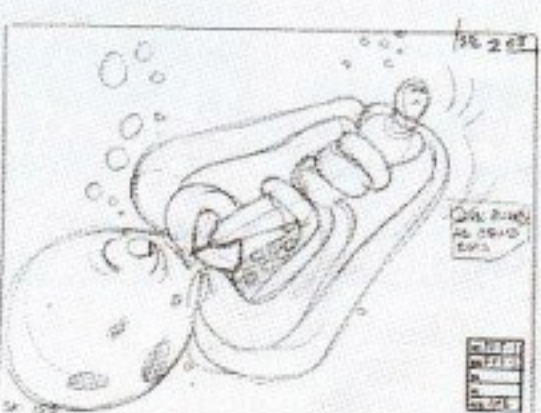
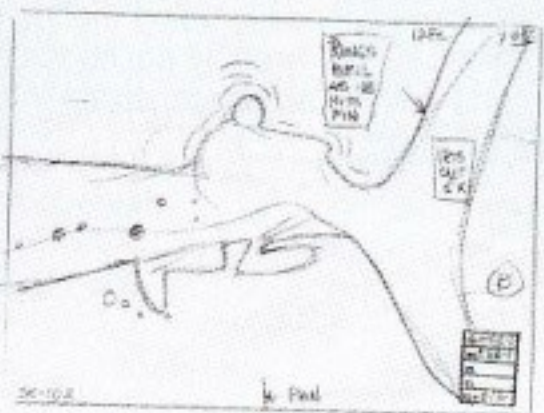
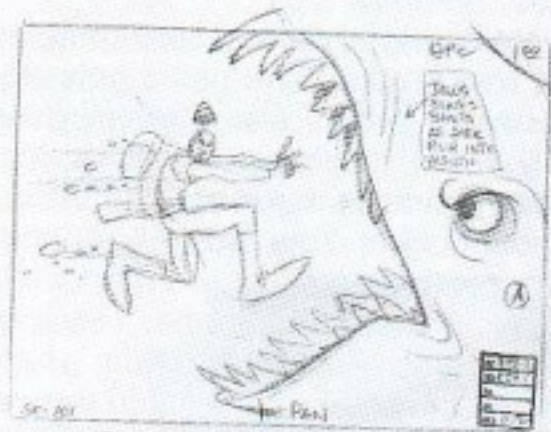
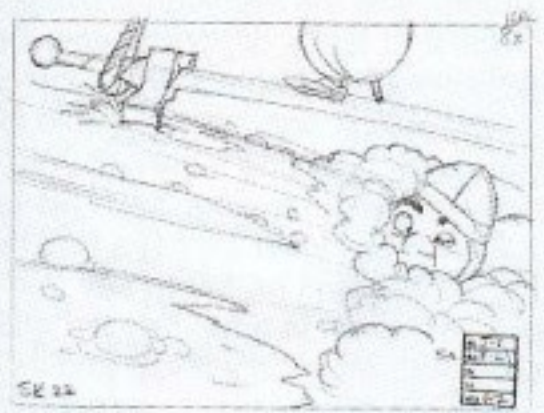
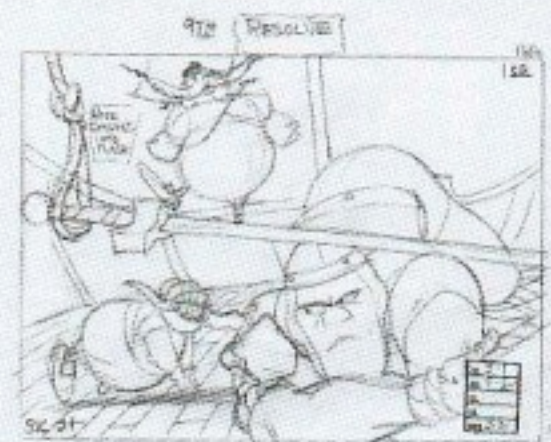
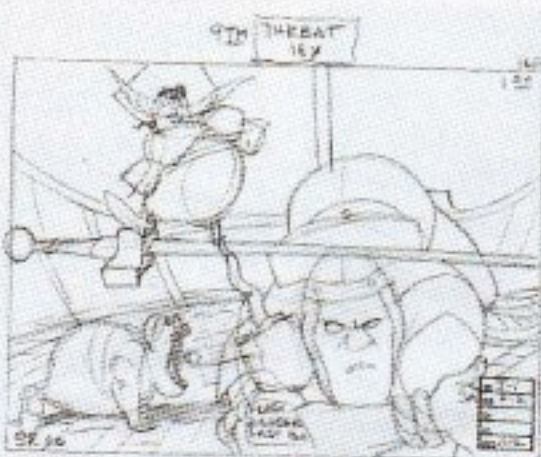
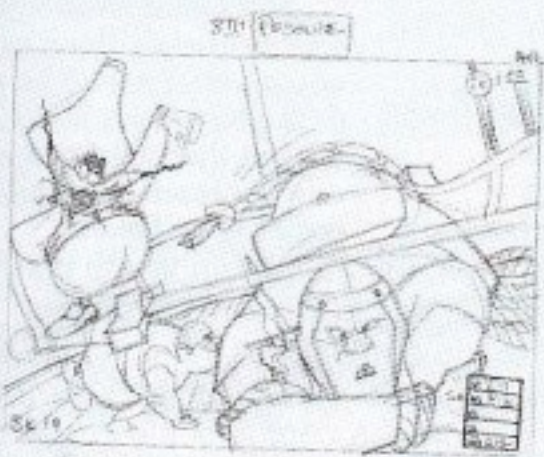
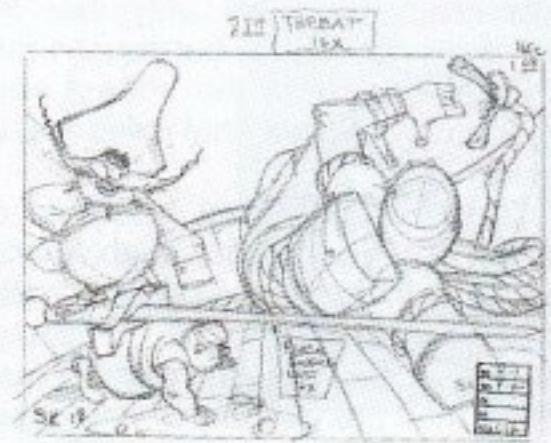
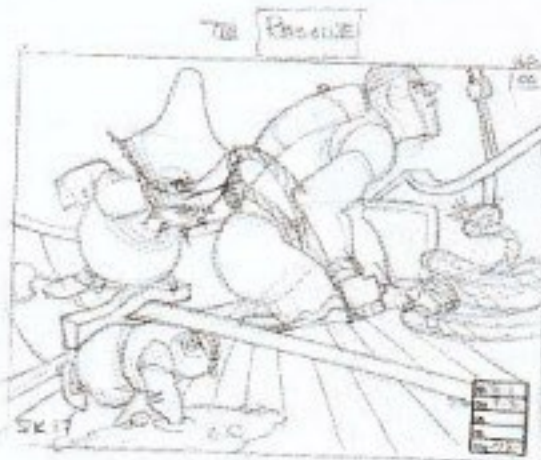
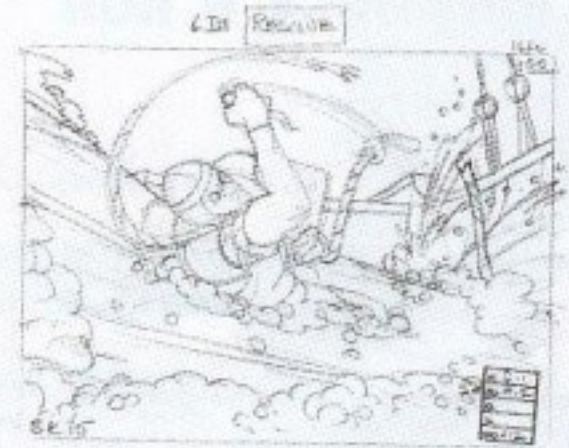
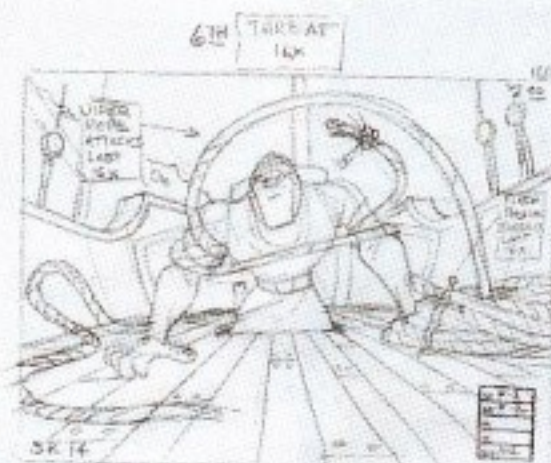
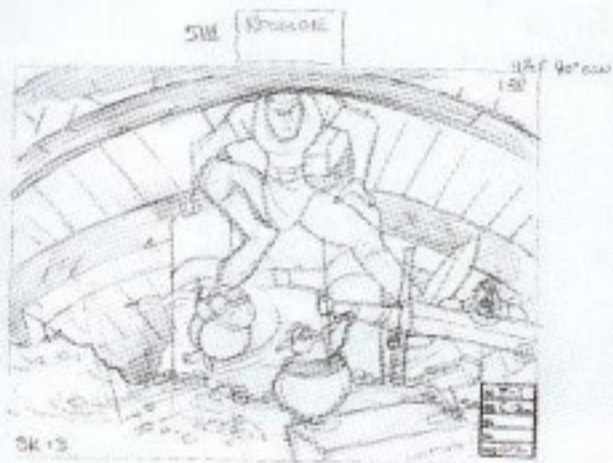
Originally, when we met with Sony and Microsoft (about releasing classic laser disc games for next generation consoles) they weren't that interested. They really wanted to focus on games that showcased the 3D capabilities of their systems. But now, we are creating a version of *Dragon's Lair* in high-definition that would be perfect for HD systems like Xbox 360. *Dragon's Lair*, *Space Ace* and *Dragon's Lair II* are perhaps the only laser games that could be created in high definition since, unlike *Thayer's Quest* and most other laser disc games, the original film masters for the Don Bluth games still exist. As we work on a high-definition version of these games hopefully the hardware makers will look at them again with an open mind.

Dragon's Lair 2 – The Lost Scene

Few games have received as much lasting attention, dedication and fanfare as *Dragon's Lair*. The recent special edition DVD games published by Digital Leisure have restored many of the lost and unreleased scenes, but in our exclusive interview with the creators, *Video Game Collector* uncovered an important piece of *Dragon's Lair* history that had remained hidden—until now. When asked about the unreleased laser disc game *Barnacle Bill*, Don Bluth recalled that their studio had built a scale model of a 3-masted tall ship to use in creating animation scenes for the game. When partner Gary Goldman reminded him that the ship had actually been built for a sequence in *Dragon's Lair 2*, the memories came flooding back. The two had created, scripted, storyboarded and scored an entire 2 minute sequence that would have been perhaps the most complex animated scene in *Dragon's Lair* history. The scene was actually a musical number featuring a character called The Pirate King, singing the 'I am a Pirate King' song from Gilbert and Sullivan's musical *The Pirates of Penzance*. The music would have continued with Dirk battling The Pirate King and a host of sea creatures. Although the scene was never completed due to the high cost of animating such a complex sequence, most of the production work was completed and the creators are hopeful that the scene will one day be completed for inclusion on yet another upcoming special edition *Dragon's Lair* compilation. Presented here, for the first time anywhere, are the original storyboards, hand-drawn and by Don Bluth himself. The storyboards are in sequential order, with a "threat" scene which shows the correct movement at the bottom, and a "resolve" scene which shows the continued animation after a successful move. The final six panels on page 21 show the "death resolves" — the animated sequence that would follow an incorrect move.



Dragon's Lair 2 – The Lost Scene



Death Resolves

Access I-1

Access J-2 K-1 L-1 M-1 P-1

Access Q-2 R-1 S-1 T-1 U-1 V-1
W-1 X-1 Y-1 Z-1 AA-1 BB-1

Access CC-1 DD-1 EE-1 FF-1 GG-1
HH-1 II-1 JJ-1 KK-1 LL-1 MM-1 NN-2