

= Ironsword : Wizards & Warriors II =

Ironsword : Wizards & Warriors II is a platforming action @-@ adventure video game for the Nintendo Entertainment System ( NES ) developed by UK @-@ based company Zippo Games , a subsidiary of Rare Ltd. it was published by Acclaim and released in North America in December 1989 and in Europe on March 27 , 1991 . It is the sequel to Rare 's 1987 title Wizards & Warriors . In Ironsword , the player controls the knight warrior Kuros as he ventures in the land of Sindarin . He must defeat the evil wizard Malkil , who has assumed the elemental forms of Earth , Wind , Fire , and Water . Kuros must collect the parts of and assemble the legendary " IronSword " in order to defeat Malkil , who resides at the top of IceFire Mountain .

Ironsword : Wizards & Warriors II was developed by Zippo Games ' founder Ste Pickford and was the first game that he developed for the NES . Steve Hughes also assisted in development , while Rare 's video game composer David Wise did the music and sound . Pickford wanted to expand on the previous Wizards & Warriors game . Having experience with developing computer games , Pickford used various animation and graphics techniques to try and show off the NES ' graphical capabilities . In addition , Acclaim hired Italian male model Fabio Lanzoni to pose as Kuros on the game 's cover .

The game was fairly well @-@ received , selling 500 @,@ 000 copies in North America and 50 @,@ 000 copies in Europe . Various video game magazines praised Ironsword for its size , graphics and sound , detailed characters and bosses , and gameplay . Other reviews criticized its lack of originality as compared to other games that were released at the time . The game led Zippo Games to develop additional games for Rare on the NES such as Solar Jetman : Hunt for the Golden Warpship and Wizards & Warriors III : Kuros : Visions of Power . Ironsword won " Game Player 's NES Excellence Award " from Game Players magazine as one of the better NES titles of 1990 .

= = Gameplay = =

Ironsword : Wizards & Warriors II is a platforming video game where the player controls the renowned warrior Kuros as he explores the land of Sindarin to defeat the evil wizard Malkil . This time , Malkil has taken the form of the four " Elementals " , based on the Greek classical elements ? Earth , Wind , Fire , and Water ? to stop Kuros in his quest . The objective is to assemble the legendary " IronSword " ? the only weapon that can defeat Malkil ? and defeat the evil wizard who lies at the peak of IceFire Mountain . In the game , players can move Kuros left or right , or make him crouch with the control pad ; the buttons allow Kuros to jump , to use his sword or a magic spell to defeat enemies , to access the " Magic Spell Screen " , or to pause the game . Kuros has a life meter that decreases every time he sustains damage from an enemy or a dangerous projectile , or if he falls for too long a distance . Along the way , players can collect chicken and brew to replenish Kuros ' life meter . Kuros loses a life when his life meter runs out , and the game ends when he loses all his lives . However , players may continue and restart the game where they left off up to two times . The continue feature would normally be disabled after the player had completed the earth domain , but due to an in @-@ game bug , the player actually loses the continue function immediately upon merely setting foot in the domain .

Ironsword : Wizards & Warriors II consists of four levels called " domains , " each named after the four elementals . In each domain , Kuros must find a golden artifact that belongs to the domain 's " Animal King " and return it to him . Upon doing so , the path to the second part of the domain will appear . In the second part , Kuros must find the magic spell necessary to defeat the boss ? the domain 's Elemental . Without the spell , it is impossible to damage the boss . Once the elemental in each stage has been destroyed , Kuros obtains a piece of the IronSword , which is needed for the final battle on Icefire Mountain . Throughout the game , players must collect items , spells , and money to progress . Money helps buy magic spells , more powerful weapons , shields , helmets , keys to open locked treasure chests , and additional food . Treasure chests ? located throughout the game ? can contain one of the following items : Additional money , magic spells , or weapon and armor upgrades . In each domain , players can visit inns where they can buy food , keys , or items ;

they may also participate in a " Bonus chance " game where they may gamble their money to see which cup a bouncing skull will fall into .

In the game , magic spells help against enemies and Elemental bosses ; some are bought , while others must be found . Magic spells include " The Familiar Spell , " which turns enemies into money and helps retrieve golden objects , the " Dragon Tooth Spell , " which turns enemies into food , the " Asp Tongue Spell , " which slows down enemies , the " Silver Fleece Spell , " which makes Kuros temporarily invincible , and the " Water Spout Spell , " which creates an upward column of water that allows Kuros to reach high places . Each spell has a limited number of uses before it vanished from the player 's inventory . Other magic spells are necessary to defeat the Elemental bosses . These spells are found in each of the four domains , and include " Windbane , " " Blightwater , " " Firesmite " and " Earthscorch . " These spells can be used only in the corresponding levels in which they are obtained , and each consumes magic upon use. players can obtain additional magic by collecting small , floating , gold bubbles that appear randomly or are triggered by the player 's proximity to secret locations .

Players may also increase their score by defeating enemies or collecting items . Hidden along the way are the " Relics of Sindarin , " which are worth many points when collected . At the end of the game , players with a high enough of a score can place their names in the " IronSword Hall of Fame . " However , the list resets when the console is turned off . The game also includes a password feature in which players can obtain a password from the " Magic Spell Screen " to use to continue the game at a later time , even after the console has been turned off .

= = Development = =

Ironsword : Wizards & Warriors II was developed by UK @-@ based computer game company Zippo Games , headed by Ste and John Pickford ; this was the first game Zippo developed for fellow UK @-@ based video game company Rare . At the time , Zippo Games had just completed a previous game titled Cosmic Pirate - a game that was published by Palace Software and released for the Commodore 64 , Atari ST , and Amiga in 1988 . New to the technical capabilities of the Nintendo Entertainment System , the Pickford brothers visited Rare and were pleased with their NES library , though they thought they were backtracking by deciding to develop games for the console . According to Ste Pickford : " The NES seemed primitive by comparison , sub @-@ Commodore 64 . But the games were ten times better than everything being released for home computers , which we appreciated , and we wanted to try to make games as good as that . " Rare decided to hire Zippo Games to develop this Wizards & Warriors sequel ; Pickford remarked : " Rare showed us Wizards & Warriors and asked us to develop the sequel , and pretty much left us to it . " Rare felt that Zippo Games was trustworthy enough to develop the sequel without much help from them .

Development started in early 1989 , when the Pickford brothers were still learning about the NES and what it could do . At the same time , as being new to developing console video games , they were also learning about the market aspects and Nintendo 's policies and restrictions on games . Feeling that the graphics in most of the games in the NES library were poor , they placed emphasis on the graphics and animation . Pickford was particularly pleased with the animation of the enemy eagles and their movement . Rare assisted with the sound , and all of the game 's background music was composed by video game composer David Wise , who Pickford said " did a fantastic job on IronSword " . As far as gameplay was concerned , they tried to expand upon its predecessor , introducing more adventure @-@ based gameplay and additional RPG elements such as magic , inns , and money .

= = = Graphics and animation = = =

Ste Pickford developed the gameplay map for Ironsword . According to him , he basically copied the map that was used in a conversion port of Ghosts ' n Goblins that he developed a couple of years earlier . Moreover , the Pickford brothers were trying to resemble Ghosts ' n Goblins and similar

games by Capcom as part of their attempt to earn the rights to develop the game from Rare . For the map screen , Ste Pickford used specific character data in the ROM itself , used the font from elsewhere in the data that was inserted separately , and overlaid the Elementals ' floating heads over the top of the graphic . According to Pickford : " The job of graphic was always about 30 % drawing , and about 70 % fiddly technical stuff ( which was why so many terrible artists ? people who couldn 't draw at all ? made decent video game artists back then , if they could manage the technical side of things well enough ) . "

In developing the game 's graphics , Ste Pickford translated black and white sketches into the character maps in the game . For the bosses , the plan was to use the entire screen while involving as few moving sprites as possible " to fool the player into thinking the whole thing was alive " . The same was done with the " Dragon King " , which was not one of the game 's bosses ; the dragon 's head and neck were composed of sprites , while the rest of the body was considered part of the background . The dragon 's neck stretched out vertically due to NES hardware sprite limitations horizontally .

The animation of the eagle ( the " Eagle King " ) that transports Kuros to the Wind Elemental was one of Ste Pickford 's first graphics which he drew for the NES . It was done in Deluxe Paint for the Amiga with sketching done by mouse - without assistance from graphics tablets or other scanners . He took eagle drawings from a book on animals in motion by Eadweard Muybridge . Pickford wanted to show off the possible graphical capabilities of the NES ; he said , " I wanted to do something ' flashy ' early in the game , trying to show off my amazing graphic art skills on the rather primitive NES . We were working on Amiga and ST games at the same time , so were always trying to push the NES with bigger and better graphics , right from the start of our work on the machine . " The eagle consisted of only three colors and between 11 and 17 sprites per frame of animation . There was a smaller version of the same eagle , which was used as a regular enemy in that level .

Development of the game 's title screen was inspired by loading screens that were used in most computer games at the time ; the objective was to create a nice @-@ looking graphic while waiting for the game to load , even though the NES , more rooted in arcade traditions , did not require that . Pickford spent most of his character space on the title screen image ; he was limited in the number of available colors due to the more limited graphic capabilities of the NES ( as opposed to most home computers ) , as it was more designed for scrolling and animation and not for stationary graphics . The sword in the title screen used character sprites and used a different palette from the picture of Kuros himself ; the sword had to be vertical as the NES hardware did not allow for too many sprites horizontally . Pickford planned to use and completed an Ironsword logo of his own when Acclaim made him use their planned logo , which he said " was a bit more bland and blocky , with detail that didn 't work very well at such a low pixel resolution " .

= = = Release = = =

Ironsword : Wizards & Warriors II was first unveiled in North America as part of the 1989 Winter Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas , Nevada and was displayed with other games to be released later that year by Acclaim . It was mentioned as a future game in the May 1989 premiere issue of video gaming magazine Electronic Gaming Monthly . It was also covered in GamePro 's premiere issue in May 1989 . Finally , it was previewed by Nintendo Power in its July ? August 1989 issue .

For the game 's cover , Acclaim hired Italian male model Fabio Lanzoni to pose as Kuros ; Fabio was presented on the cover bare @-@ chested and without armor . When Zippo Games saw the image of the cover a week prior to its release , they were perplexed . According to Ste Pickford , " Our jaws hit the floor when we first saw this image ( which was , being merely the developers , probably about a week before the game 's release ) . Why on earth did they choose a photograph of a bare @-@ chested barbarian to promote a game starring a knight in shining armour ? " . Pickford added that " We used it as an example of the lack of imagination of Americans " , while suggesting that having an actual suit or armor would be too costly to use for a photo shoot . Ironsword : Wizards & Warriors II was released by Acclaim for the NES in North America in December 1989 and in

Europe and Australia in 1991 . It managed to sell about 500 @,@ 000 copies in North America and about 50 @,@ 000 copies in Europe . Following the game 's release , Zippo Games would proceed to develop its next game for Rare , Solar Jetman : Hunt for the Golden Warpship ; they would eventually also release the third installment in the Wizards & Warriors series , Wizards & Warriors III : Kuros : Visions of Power .

The television advertisement consisted of a boy who is shown playing the first Wizards & Warriors game when a Conan the Barbarian @-@ lookalike enters his room after having defeated a monster and hands him a copy of Ironsword . After describing the brief plot and shortly showing clips of the game , the Conan @-@ lookalike leaves his room while exclaiming , " The fate of the world is in your hands ! Back vile beast ! " . At the end of the commercial , after briefly playing Ironsword , the boy opens the door in his room , only to find his dog , who now has smoke coming from his behind .

= = Reception = =

Ironsword : Wizards & Warriors II was initially reviewed and received positive ratings in the June 1989 issue of Electronic Gaming Monthly . Steve Harris said that the game was very large and expansive , noting that it " is so big , and has so much to offer , most of the competition pales by comparison " . Ed Semrad called the game " a worthy sequel that fortunately is better than the original " , similarly noting the game 's size as well as difficulty . Donn Nauert appreciated the game 's good graphics which complement the adventure theme , but he noted that some of the precise movements that are required in various areas may cause some frustration in gameplay . Jim Allee praised all the aspects of the game , saying " if you liked Wizards & Warriors , you 'll love Ironsword " . All four reviewers lauded the game 's involving gameplay and graphics .

The game would also be featured in the magazine 's September 1989 issue , in which it was named the magazine 's " Game of the Month " ; it also featured the game 's box art , with Fabio , on the cover . The reviewers , the U.S. National Video Game Team , noted that the game was superior to its predecessor as well as other games released at the time , noting that it was particularly better than Castlevania II : Simon 's Quest . They praised its well @-@ detailed and thought @-@ out graphics , the inclusion of well @-@ drawn out large bosses and supporting characters , the sound which " has an eerie tone that sets the mood for the whole game " , and additional features which expanded upon the game 's predecessor . They concluded that Ironsword was " one of the most welcome Nintendo Entertainment System games in a long time " . The game was also one of the featured games in the November ? December 1989 issue of Nintendo Power , where it received six pages of coverage and featured a poster of the game . Game Players magazine awarded Ironsword the " Game Player 's NES Excellence Award " as one of the best games for the console in 1990 .

The game was also featured in UK @-@ based magazine Mean Machines in May 1991 . Matt Regan said that he was not impressed with the game , saying that similar platforming games such as DuckTales and Gremlins 2 : The New Batch were superior to Ironsword and had a more original approach in gameplay . He also criticized the fact that players cannot hit enemies while in mid @-@ air . However , he noted the game 's good gameplay . Julian Rignall also said that the game was fun , but it was not spectacular . However , just as Regan noted , Rignall said that the game did not offer anything special like with better titles such as Mega Man 2 or Super Mario Bros. 2 . However , he noted the game 's good graphics and challenge , though both noted that the backgrounds " are slightly bland " . Both reviewers said the game was well @-@ presented with good introductions and a password mode , easy controls , fair challenge , and " fairly good tunes and effects which fit the action well " . Overall , they said that Ironsword was " a fun but ultimately limited game that will appeal to platform fans " .

Ironsword : Wizards & Warriors II was listed at # 64 in IGN 's list of " Top 100 NES Games " . Reviewer Sam Claiborn said that the game was more expansive than its predecessor and that it featured many of the good graphics , gameplay , and usage of Middle English . He also noted that " Fabio 's bare @-@ breasted likeness smoldering on IronSword 's cover art that made this game a smash hit with kids and moms alike " . Website GamesRadar praised the game 's music , especially the title theme ; Brett Elston said it set a serious tone for the game , saying " its heavy , droning

beats mix with a fantasy @-@ minded melody that make it sound like a funeral dirge in the Shire " .

The game 's cover , which features Fabio , has received significant coverage from many gaming websites . IGN listed Ironsword as having one of the most notable covers in video game history , listing its cover as the 2nd best of all time behind Ninja Golf . Conversely , 1UP.com listed Ironsword as having one of the worst covers of all time , comparing it to the cover for Mega Man . GameSpy listed it as the 4th worst video game cover in history , saying that " thanks to the presence of Fabio on the cover , gamers got confused and thought they had accidentally picked up one of their mom 's romance novels " . In a retrospective of the NES for the console 's 25th anniversary , Nintendo Power wrote that " the game 's quality will be forever overshadowed by Acclaim 's choice of Fabio as the cover model " .