

= Barbarian II : The Dungeon of Drax =

Barbarian II : The Dungeon of Drax is a video game first published in 1988 for various home computers . It was also released as Axe of Rage in North America . The game is the sequel to Barbarian : The Ultimate Warrior (Death Sword in North America) , which was published in 1987 . In Barbarian II , the player controls a princess or barbarian character , exploring the game world to locate and defeat an evil wizard . The game 's plot is an extension of its predecessor , although the gameplay is different . While the first game offers two players the opportunity for virtual head @-@ to @-@ head combat , the second is solely a single @-@ player adventure with fewer fighting moves .

Palace Software , the developer of the two Barbarian games , marketed the sequel with the same strategy they used for the first game . They hired Maria Whittaker , a model known for her topless work , to pose on the cover and posters as the princess in the game , attempting to recapture the controversy that had boosted sales . Barbarian II received a mixed critical reception . Reviewers were split in their opinions over whether the game was a refreshing and gory adventure , or a boring and lonely sojourn through a confusing digital world .

= = Gameplay = =

Barbarian II : The Dungeon of Drax is an action video game released in 1988 for various personal computer platforms , such as Commodore 64 and MS @-@ DOS . It is the sequel to Barbarian : The Ultimate Warrior (released in 1987) , which offers sword fighting action to one or two players . Unlike its predecessor , Barbarian II features only a single @-@ player mode , in which the player assumes the role of either sword @-@ wielding Princess Mariana or the titular savage , who is armed with a battleaxe . Their common quest is to pursue the evil wizard Drax , who has fled to his dungeon hideout after his defeat in the first game . The player characters battle their way through an inhospitable wasteland , a system of caves , and a dungeon before facing Drax in his inner sanctum for a showdown .

Using a joystick or keyboard , the player moves his or her character through Barbarian II 's world . Each of the four stages ? wasteland , caves , dungeon , and inner sanctum ? is a series of interconnected rooms , populated by monsters , traps , and items . The game displays one room at a time in a flick @-@ screen manner : as the protagonist leaves a room , the screen is updated to display the next . The connections among rooms are disjointed : the exit on the left of one room might be connected to the entrance on the same side of another . A compass at the bottom of the interface serves as a directional guide , always pointing to the north . The player directs his or her player through the rooms , seeking the exit to the next stage while avoiding traps and collecting items .

The protagonist is also challenged in his or her quest by 20 types of creatures . By moving the joystick while pressing its button or by performing the equivalent keyboard commands , the player defends the protagonist with four styles of attacks : a low slash , a high chop , a kick , and a spinning neck chop . The life of the combatants are represented by gauges at the top corners of the screen . Successful attacks on a character reduce its gauge and the character is killed when its life is reduced to zero . A well @-@ timed neck chop (or the bites of certain monsters) decapitates the opponent , killing it instantly . Monsters disappear in a puff of smoke when killed , reappearing with a full life gauge in the same room some time later . Although the player character likewise reappears fully rejuvenated in the room after being killed , he or she can only do so for a limited number of times . This limit (number of lives) is represented in the form of globes at the top centre of the screen . The protagonist increases his or her number of lives by collecting skulls that are scattered throughout the game world .

= = Development = =

Barbarian II 's predecessor , Barbarian : The Ultimate Warrior , was a critical and commercial

success on its release in 1987 . Reviewers enjoyed the game 's exciting sword fights , and its profile was greatly enhanced by marketing strategies employed by its developer , Palace Software , a subsidiary of media company Palace Group . The developer had engaged Maria Whittaker , a model known for topless shoots , to pose on the box covers and posters of the game . The image of bikini @-@ clad Whittaker created a hype that pushed the game beyond the attention of the video game industry , producing a controversy in which members of the public criticised the industry for promoting Barbarian in a sexist manner .

Palace Software repeated the strategy for the sequel , publishing a poster of Whittaker as Princess Mariana , this time in metal bikini armour , and Michael Van Wijk as the barbarian . Steve Brown , creator of the Barbarian games , recalled that the bikini 's chain " snapped a number of times " in comical Carry On fashion during the shoot . Brown was behind the concept of the poster , which was brought to fruition by Lee Gibbons , a commercial artist , over the course of four weeks . The image of the barbarian and princess poised over the fallen body of a large , scaly monster was a photomontage , created by superimposing three photographs ? one of each subject ? on one another . The creature was a small scale model made of Plasticine . After cutting out the subjects from their photos and composing the cut @-@ outs to form a new scene , Gibbons painted the background and added effects such as smoke to form the final image .

Brown had filmed sword fights and used the tracings of the combatants ' movements to produce the animations in Barbarian . For the animations in the sequel , he turned to the works of photographer Eadweard Muybridge , who made a name for himself through his series of photographs of animals and humans captured in motion . The movements of Barbarian II 's characters were based on the pictures in Muybridge 's book Human in Motion , which was published in 1901 . The resulting animation was judged very realistic and detailed by several reviewers .

First released in August 1988 for the Commodore 64 , Barbarian II was ported to various personal computers . The various versions differed in features , depending on specifications of the platforms . The Amiga version of the game was given several improvements . It has digitized speech and better graphics in the form of greater details and number of colours . The introductory and disc loading sequences were revamped , featuring animated skeletons with maniacal voices . In contrast , the ZX Spectrum version has monochromatic graphics ; the first level comprises black @-@ outlined sprites against pink backgrounds .

As with its predecessor , Barbarian II was licensed to Epyx for release in North America . The game was published there under the title Axe of Rage and included a tattoo in its packaging . The North American version featured a different cover art , showing the close @-@ up visage of " a screaming berserker with homicidal tendencies " . Dragon magazine 's reviewers found the cover ugly , and according to Computer Gaming World , a Canadian wholesaler refused to sell Axe of Rage because it considered the game 's box cover art crass enough to offend customers . Similarly , in the United Kingdom , pharmacy chain Boots banned displays of Barbarian II , featuring Whittaker , from their stores .

= = Reception = =

Barbarian II received praise for its audio , mostly for the versions on more powerful platforms . Reviewers of The Games Machine pointed out that the " most remarkable feature of the ST version is its crystal clear sampled effects " . Zzap ! 64 's staff and Computer and Video Games 's Julian Rignall were impressed with the digital thuds and whacks produced on the Commodore 64 , and particularly the rendition of a certain monster 's laughter . Mike Pattenden of CU Amiga claimed the " manic clucking of the mutant chicken would be enough to send [the player] running in the opposite direction " . Although rating the audio @-@ visual components of the Amiga version on par with that for the Atari ST , Pattenden and reviewers from The Game Machine felt the flashy introductory sequence on the Amiga made it stand out ; Tony Horgan of Amiga User International called it the best introduction he has seen in Amiga games .

Although reviewers were less than impressed with the graphics on lower @-@ end systems such as the ZX Spectrum , the colours and large detailed sprites on the higher @-@ end platforms won

their acclaim . The animation of the characters also captured their attention . Tommy Nash of Your Sinclair hailed it as " first class " , while Paul Glancey of Zzap ! 64 called the sprites " beautifully defined " and " realistically animated " . Similar accolades were given by other reviewers . The staff of The Games Machine were " constantly [amazed] " at the designs of the monsters in the game .

Several reviewers had a common complaint about the game . As the difference between executing an attack and a movement was the pressing of the joystick button , they were irked to find their characters frequently switching directions instead of attacking with a low slash . Their frustration was increased when the protagonist took damage from enemy attacks as he or she executes the unintentional command to change facing . Chris Jenkins , however , praised the game for responsive joystick controls in his review for Sinclair User . Paul Lakin of Zero pointed out that the flick @-@ screen presentation could lead to confusing situations in combat as the protagonist retreats across an exit and appears at the other end of the screen . Horgan had another grouse with the combat , moaning the loss of simplicity from the Barbarian series . According to him , while players could enjoy the first Barbarian game without much effort , intense practise was needed to defeat the monsters in the second game .

The change in combat systems was not the only difference between Barbarian II and its predecessor that influenced reviewers ' opinions about the sequel . The first Barbarian game was enjoyed by reviewers for providing exciting head @-@ to @-@ head action between two players . Barbarian II abandoned this , setting up an adventuring experience for the single player . Jim Douglas , reviewing for Sinclair User , doubted that players who were looking for quick action would appreciate plotting a path through the maze to reach the final goal . Your Sinclair 's Marcus Berkmann felt the two genres ? slash ' em up and arcade adventure ? were " fundamentally incompatible " , agreeing with Douglas that the maze was a distraction . Crash 's reviewers , however , felt the combination of genres made the game interesting . James Price wrote in Amiga Force that the adventuring element and unending number of enemies made Barbarian II a far better game than the first , while The Games Machine 's staff said the expanded menagerie of foes adequately made up for a reduction in combat moves .

In their review for Dragon magazine , the Lessers called Axe of Rage " an engrossing slash ' n hack that 'll please most arcaders . " Zzap ! 64 's reviewers were unanimous in recommending Barbarian II to their readers ; however , two years later in a re @-@ review , the magazine 's staff said the game has aged badly , finding the gameplay " lot more crude and clichéd " and of dubious replay value . Martyn Carroll concurred in his article for Retro Gamer , 17 years after the game 's release , calling Barbarian II " hugely disappointing " for " [messing] up almost everything that was great about the first game . " Brown and Palace Software 's co @-@ founder Richard Leinfellner admitted as much ; they said they had mixed feelings about Barbarian II , thinking the idea of a simple fun game was lost by stuffing too many features into it .

When Barbarian II was released , Palace Software went ahead with plans for Barbarian III . For two years , the third game in the series was publicised in gaming magazines . Your Sinclair held a contest for its readers , asking them to submit concepts of gruesome monsters . The winning entry would be implemented in Barbarian III . The Barbarian series of games were , however , brought to a halt in 1991 when Palace Group sold its software subsidiary to fund its expansion into the movie industry . Titus Software bought Palace Software and after reviewing its holdings , cancelled several of its new acquisition 's projects , including Barbarian III .