

= Barbarian : The Ultimate Warrior =

Barbarian : The Ultimate Warrior is a video game first released for Commodore 64 personal computers in 1987 ; the title was developed and published by Palace Software , and ported to other computers in the following months . The developers licensed the game to Epyx , who published it as Death Sword in the United States . Barbarian is a fighting game that gives players control over sword @-@ wielding barbarians . In the game 's two @-@ player mode , players pit their characters against each other . Barbarian also has a single @-@ player mode , in which the player 's barbarian braves a series of challenges set by an evil wizard to rescue a princess .

Instead of using painted artwork for the game 's box , Palace Software used photos of hired models . The photos , also used in advertising campaigns , featured Michael Van Wijk (who would later become famous as ' Wolf ' in the TV series Gladiators) as the hero and bikini @-@ clad Maria Whittaker , a model who was then associated with The Sun tabloid 's Page Three topless photo shoots . Palace Software 's marketing strategy provoked controversy in the United Kingdom , with protests focused on the sexual aspects of the packaging rather than decapitations and other violence within the game . The ensuing controversy boosted Barbarian 's profile , helping to make it a commercial success . Game critics were impressed with its fast and furious combat , and dashes of humour . The game was Palace Software 's critical hit ; boosted by Barbarian 's success , Palace Software expanded its operations and started publishing other developers ' work . In 1988 , the company released a sequel , Barbarian II : The Dungeon of Drax .

= = Gameplay = =

Barbarian : The Ultimate Warrior is a fighting game that supports one or two players . Players assume the roles of sword @-@ wielding barbarians , who battle in locales such as a forest glade and a " fighting pit " . The game 's head @-@ to @-@ head mode lets a player fight against another or the computer in time @-@ limited matches . The game also features a single @-@ player story mode , which comprises a series of plot @-@ connected challenges .

Using joysticks or the keyboard , players move their characters around the arena , jumping to dodge low blows and rolling to dodge or trip the opponent . By holding down the fire button and moving the controller , players direct the barbarians to kick , headbutt , or attack with their swords . Each barbarian has 12 life points , which are represented as 6 circles in the top corners of the interface . A successful attack on a barbarian takes away one of his life points (half a circle) . The character dies when his life points are reduced to zero . Alternatively , a well @-@ timed blow to the neck decapitates the barbarian , killing him instantly , upon which a goblin enters the arena , kicks the head , and drags the body away .

If the players do not input any commands for a time , the game attempts a self @-@ referencing action to draw their attentions : the barbarians turn to face the players , shrug their shoulders , and say " C 'mon " . The game awards points for successful attacks ; the more complex the move , the higher the score awarded . A score board displays the highest points achieved for the game .

= = = Single @-@ player story mode = = =

In the single @-@ player story mode , the player controls a nameless barbarian who is on a quest to defeat the evil wizard Drax . Princess Mariana has been kidnapped by Drax , who is protected by 8 barbarian warriors . The protagonist engages each of the other barbarians in single combat to the death . Overcoming them , he faces the wizard . After the barbarian has killed Drax , Mariana drops herself at her saviour 's feet and the screen fades to black . The United States version of the game names the protagonist Gorth .

= = Development = =

In 1985 , Palace Software hired Steve Brown as a game designer and artist . He thought up the

concept of pitting a broom @-@ flying witch against a monster pumpkin , and created Cauldron and Cauldron II : The Pumpkin Strikes Back . The two games were commercial successes and Brown was given free rein for his third work . He was inspired by Frank Frazetta 's fantasy paintings to create a sword fighting game that was " brutal and as realistic as possible " .

Brown based the game and its characters on the Conan the Barbarian series , having read all of Robert E Howard 's stories of the eponymous warrior . He conceptualised 16 moves and practiced them with wooden swords , filming his sessions as references for the game 's animation . One move , the Web of Death , was copied from the 1984 sword and sorcery film Conan the Destroyer . Spinning the sword like a propeller , Brown " nearly took [his] eye out " when he practiced the move . Playing back the videos , the team traced each frame of action onto clear plastic sheets laid over the television screen . The tracings were transferred on a grid that helped the team map the swordplay images , pixel by pixel , to a digital form . Brown refused to follow the convention of using small sprites to represent the fighters in the game , forcing the coders to conceive a method to animate larger blocks of graphics : Palace Software 's co @-@ founder Richard Leinfellner said they " multiplexed the sprites and had different look @-@ up tables for different frames . "

Feeling that most of the artwork on game boxes at that time were " pretty poor " , Brown suggested that an " iconic fantasy imagery with real people would be a great hook for the publicity campaign . " His superiors agreed and arranged a photo shoot , hiring models Michael Van Wijk and Maria Whittaker to pose as the barbarian and princess . Whittaker was a topless model , who frequently appeared on Page 3 of the tabloid , The Sun . She wore a tiny bikini for the shoot while Van Wijk , wearing only a loincloth , posed with a sword . Palace Software also packaged a poster of Whittaker in costume with the game . Just before release , the company discovered that fellow developer Psygnosis was producing a game also titled Barbarian , albeit of the platform genre . After several discussions , Palace Software appended the subtitle " The Ultimate Warrior " to differentiate the two products .

The sounds of the characters are taken from the 1985 film Red Sonja . Most notably the " EEY @-@ ECH ! " sound that plays when the player attempts to decapitate an opponent . This particular sound can be found near the beginning of the movie when Arnold 's character is ambushed after pulling an arrow out of the lady 's back .

= = = Releases = = =

Barbarian was released in 1989 for the Commodore 64 and in the months that followed , most other home computers . These machines were varied in their capabilities , and the software ported to them was modified accordingly . The version for the 8 @-@ bit ZX Spectrums is mostly monochromatic , displaying the outlines of the barbarians against single @-@ colour backgrounds . The sounds are recorded at a lower sampling rate . Conversely , the version for the Atari ST , which has 16- and 32 @-@ bit buses , presents a greater variety of backgrounds and slightly higher quality graphics than the original version . Its story mode also pits 10 barbarians against the player instead of the usual 8 . Digitised sound samples are used in the Atari ST and 32 @-@ bit Amiga versions ; the latter also features digitised speech . Each fight begins with the announcement of " Prepare to die ! " , and metallic sounding thuds and clangs ring out as swords clash against each other .

After the initial releases , Barbarian was re @-@ released several times ; budget label Kixx published these versions without Whittaker on the covers . Across the Atlantic , video game publisher Epyx acquired the license to Barbarian and released it under the title Death Sword as part of their " Maxx Out ! " video game series .

= = Reception and legacy = =

During the 1980s , the prevalent attitude was that video games were for children . Barbarian 's advertisements , showing a scantily dressed model known for topless poses , triggered significant outcries of moral indignity . Electron User magazine received letters from readers and religious bodies , who called the image " offensive and particularly insulting to women " and an " ugly

pornographic advertisement " . Chris Jager , a writer for PC World , considered the cover " a trashy controversy @-@ magnet featuring a glamour @-@ saucepot " and a " big bloke [in leotard] " . According to Leinfellner , the controversy did not negatively affect Barbarian , but boosted the game 's sales and profile tremendously . Video game industry observers Russell DeMaria and Johnny Wilson commented that the United Kingdom public were more concerned over scantily clad Whittaker than the gory contents in the game . Conversely , Barbarian was banned in Germany by the Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Medien for its violent contents . The ban forbade promotion of the game and its sale to customers under the age of 18 . A censored version of the game , which changed the colour of the blood to green , was later permitted to be freely sold in the country . Barbarian 's mix of sex and violence was such that David Houghton , writer for GamesRadar , said the game would be rated " Mature " by the Entertainment Software Rating Board if it was published in 2009 .

Reviewers were impressed with Barbarian 's gory gameplay . Zzap ! 64 's Steve Jarratt appreciated the " fast and furious " action and his colleague Ciaran Brennan said Barbarian should have been the licensed video game to the fantasy action film Highlander (which had a lot of sword fights and decapitations) instead . Amiga Computing 's Brian Chappell enjoyed " hacking the foe to bits , especially when a well aimed blow decapitates him . " Several other reviewers express the same satisfaction in lopping the heads off their foes . Although shocked at the game 's violence , Antic 's reviewer said the " sword fight game is the best available on the ST . " According to Jarratt , Barbarian represented " new heights in bloodsports " . Equally pleasing to the reviewers at Zzap ! 64 and Amiga User International 's Tony Horgan was the simplicity of the game ; they observed that almost anyone could quickly familiarise themselves with the game mechanics , making the two @-@ player mode a fun and quick pastime .

Although the barbarian characters use the same basic blocky sprites , they impressed reviewers at Zzap ! 64 and Amiga Computing with their smooth animation and lifelike movements . Reviewers of the Amiga version , however , expressed disappointment with the port for failing to exploit the computer 's greater graphics capability and implement more detailed character sprites . Its digitised sounds , however , won praise from Commodore User 's Gary Penn . Advanced Computer Entertainment 's reviewers had similar thoughts over the Atari ST port .

Reviewing for Computer and Video Games , Paul Boughton was impressed by the game 's detailed gory effects , such as the aftermath of a decapitation , calling them " hypnotically gruesome " . It was these little touches that " [makes] the game worthwhile " , according to Richard Eddy in Crash . Watching " the head [fall] to the ground [as blood spurts from the] severed neck , accompanied by a scream and satisfying thud as the torso tumbles " proved to be " wholesome stuff " for Chappell , and the scene was a " great retro gaming moment " for Retro Gamer 's staff . The cackling goblin , which drags off the bodies , endeared him to some reviewers ; the team at Retro Gamer regretted that the creature did not have his own game . The actions of the barbarian also impressed them to nominate him as one of their top 50 characters from the early three decades of video gaming .

Barbarian proved to be a big hit , and Palace started planning to publish a line of sequels ; Leinfellner said he received royalty cheques for approximately seven years , the first of which was for £ 20 @, @ 000 . Barbarian II : The Dungeon of Drax was released in 1988 , and Barbarian III was in the works . Van Wijk and Whittaker were hired again to grace the box cover and advertisements . After the success with Barbarian , Palace Software began to expand its portfolio by publishing games that were created by other developers . Barbarian , however , remained its most popular game , best remembered for its violent sword fights and Maria Whittaker .

In 2011 , Anuman Interactive (French publisher) launched a remake of the game , adapted to mobile devices and computers : Barbarian - The Death Sword .

In 2012 , the Italian guitarist Marco Sfogli included a cover of the main theme on his album reMarcoble .