

Lord of the Dungeon

by NAP / Probe 2000 (1983)

Designed by Rex Battenberg.

This game appeared as "Caverns and Creatures", and was shown in early ColecoVision catalogs that were packaged with the system.

Released at the Classic Gaming Expo by CGE Services in 2001. Only 70 were cartridges were made. From their description: Plays along the lines of classic RPG's like "Wizardry". "This fantasy role-playing game for one to four players puts you into an adventure of the most fascinating kind. Your expedition involves your entrance into a mysterious dungeon made up of uncharted hallways and hidden chambers. You enter in search of priceless treasures. But - the underground is populated by monsters. Choose to fight or run! Select from a variety of weapons, cast magic spells or use your wits to defeat the monsters and claim the treasures! Will you emerge victorious?".

It would have been the first battery-backup cartridge ever if it was released in 1983/1984.

Reviewer: Unknown

Lord of the Dungeon is a fantasy role-playing game that plays almost exactly like Advanced Dungeons and Dragons. This NAP game has battery back-up, and, having been made in 1983, is quite probably the world's first such video game cartridge. Keep in mind that this method became "known" in 1988 with the Sega Master System's Phantasy Star.

If there is an "ultimate purpose" in this game, then it is currently unknown, as the only directions known to exist are the ones I wrote and they are by no means complete. As a result, at this time the objects of the game are simply exploration and survival. The adventure itself takes place in a maze-like dungeon of at least (so far as I've seen) three levels, filled with traps, pits, teleportation rooms, and, of course, wandering hordes of many different kinds of monsters (you can encounter up to three different kinds at once). You do battle with these fiends with weapons and spells, and if victorious you just might gain gold, or even one of numerous magic items.

Monsters not only come in many different forms, but can attack in any number of ways- including weapons, spells, poisons, and hypnosis- and some may not be vulnerable to attacks which can wipe out other kinds. If this was all there was to LOTD then it would be a great game, but there is so much more - such as the character creation process. You can choose one of eight different races (including Gnolls, Ogres, Dwarves, and Elves), each with advantages and disadvantages. You can be one of almost a dozen (!) classes, including Fighter, Priest, Courtesan (females only), Monk, Ninja, or Multi-Class. You roll up your statistics at random: Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, Charisma, Dexterity, Constitution, and more; these determine what you can be, and how well you can do it- a Mage with a 26 Intelligence is a better magic-user than one with 14. You can name your character, and they even age as time goes on, affecting certain of their abilities.

You can buy weapons, determine the marching order, and even give items to other characters. Since there can be six characters in a party, up to six people can play this game, just as they would an AD&D campaign. Best of all, just as in AD&D, characters gain experience levels as they go on, becoming stronger and tougher. For example, bring Mandrack up to Sixth Level, and he gains the ability to raise dead companions. Even the spells are well-done. A quick look at the spell list in the instructions will reveal that Mages and Priests can do anything from turn invisible to harm an enemy, from controlling enemies to resurrecting dead characters! Offensive spells often have disadvantages, so use them carefully!

You can (and should) map your way through. This in itself is very enjoyable- again, just like AD&D.

The graphics in this game are limited to the dungeon exploration itself; otherwise, it is entirely text-based. You see the dungeon from a first-person point of view, rather like the 2600 Escape From the Mindmaster or Dragonstomper. The dungeon itself consists of simple (but effective enough) red line drawings. When you encounter monsters they appear as non-

animated, single-colored pictures, and this is the only weakness in the game itself; the programmers were obviously rushed and unable to program in enough images. As a result, gorillas, wolves, jelly stings, cave rats, and such are represented by the same image, as are certain other groups of enemies. Overall, they are appropriate at least 85-90% of the time, and what is there is beautifully done (especially the Seers, Dragons, and Sirens). It's a minor flaw, if it can be called one.

Sound is also limited to the dungeon, consisting of a good marching sound, and a few others to indicate hits and encounters. Effective enough, especially in a game of this sort. Gameplay is, in my opinion, at least a nine, if not a 10. This is because I've always enjoyed role-playing games, and this is a good one. However, it means that, unlike Gateway to Apshai, there isn't any real-time combat; upon encountering enemies players are asked, one at a time, what they want to do, and then wait to see the results (if any). Therefore, people who like AD&D will like the gameplay of LOTD, while those who do not like it will not. The fact that this is a battery-backed cartridge means that a game could last for days or even weeks, which makes it a one-of-a-kind cartridge for ColecoVision owners. It really is remarkable.

It's also a pity that NAP never released the game in 1983. In those days, computer adventure games had the overwhelming advantage of the ability to be saved in progress, which is why adventure games for home consoles could never match them. This game would've done away with that, and would've surely boosted home video gaming in general, several years before the NES did.