THE MAKING OF...

DUNGEON MASTER

When tiny San Diego studio Faster Than Light (FTL for short) released Dungeon Master on the Atari ST in 1987, they knew they had created something special. What they couldn’t have predicted was the tremendous worldwide success the game would achieve and the impact it would have on future videogame design. Damien McFerran speaks to the creator of this legendary game.

L
ike so many partnerships forged in the early days of the videogame industry, the team responsible for Dungeon Master came together at school. Andy Jones and I met during college, attending the University of California,” recalls Doug Bell, who worked as a producer, lead designer and designer on Dungeon Master. Andy had received Apple II from his parents and had already developed a DIY game called "Pencil and Paper." It was during those early gaming sessions that Bell first realized his true calling. "I thought I could create a better game than Pencil and Paper," he modestly comments. This year in 1983 the two friends founded their own development studio called "FTL" and the Atari ST version was released on Christmas Eve, 1984. A returning game on the Apple II is unsurprisingly less than the tremendous success on Atari's shiny new home computer.

With one triumphant and valuable experience of creating on the cutting edge DEI under their collective belt, Bell and Jones became full-time members of the FTL team and started their attention back to Crystal Dragon, which had now been renamed Dungeons Master. The creative process called upon additional commitment in terms of programming and the results were encouraging. "We started with a poem of commit code to use a parser's algorithm lowering from back to front to create the dungeon," says Bell. "We wanted to see what the player would do for itself, but we reassured that we needed a ied from Pascals to C. I spend three weeks learning C and testing the dungeon code.

in time for the debut of the new 16-bit machine. "We decided it was important to have a game at the launch of the ST, which was scheduled for late 1983," says Bell. "Valina, Andy and I decided that coming San-Diego was a better project than trying to develop a new game for the new platform. The team swiftly updated the set for gaming on the 16-bit generation in C and the performance was better than we expected.

Compared to the preceding development studio’s output, the new team behind Dungeon Master was minimal. "There was basically a team of us, "notes Bell. "Valina did only a little of the programming — her biggest contribution was to figure out how to do digital sound on the Atari.

sound chip. Andy had all the artwork.

Mike Maximov created the cards, including the DOS Dungeon Master menu. Bell, Dennis Walker and I did 90% of the game programming. I think the development was welcome, as Bell and I worked for 10 years and the whole team had their own responsibilities. But additional overloading was welcome, as Bell concludes. "We all printed the games because we

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SUNDOG SYSTÈMES: APPLE I, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1983

DUNGEON MASTER II SYSTÈMES: ATARI ST, PC, MS-DOS, 8-32K, 8-32K
YEAR: 1985

DUNGEON MASTER III SYSTÈMES: ATARI ST, 8-32K, 8-32K, 8-32K
YEAR: 1995

IN THE KNOW

DUNGEON Master

"THERE WERE BASICALLY ONLY FIVE OF US, DENNIS WALKER AND I DID 90% OF THE GAME PROGRAMMING" DOUG BELL

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"Dungeon Master was developed with the idea of creating many scenarios." - Doug Bell

Doug Bell produced the stunning cover art for Dungeon Master and Chaos Strikes Back.