

LABYRINTH

(For the Commodore 128)

by Jon Mattson

LABYRINTH is a one- or two-player arcade/adventure game which makes full use of the 80-column screen and 8563 VDC. In it, each player becomes a valiant warrior, powerful wizard or clever rogue, exploring the maze-like tunnels of a subterranean labyrinth and trying to wrest treasures from the evil inhabitants therein. While this idea is nothing new, I think that you will find the arcade-like format refreshing: LABYRINTH has much of the detail of a fantasy RPG (complete with MANY character classes, spells, weapons, armour, magic items, etc.), but plays in only one or two hours and doesn't require any intricate mapping skills, since it draws the map as you go along. Due to the detail and short playing time, you will have to play many, many games before you discover all of the game's secrets. Best of all, two people can play - in fact, the game is most interesting with more than one challenger.

When you first run the program, there will be a slight pause while the labyrinth is created: even in FAST mode, the massive amount of unique data involved in each quest takes time to generate. Next, you will be asked for a number of players, 1 or 2. Note that Player 1 uses Joystick 2 and Player 2 uses Joystick 1; the reverse procedure was designed to avoid using the often problematic Port 1 in the one-player game. Unfortunately, keyboard control is simply not practical for a game of this nature and interferes with joystick readings, in any event. You will also be asked for a difficulty level, Hard or Very Hard - there is no such thing as an easy labyrinth! Generally, you will want to play the Hard game. Very Hard is just that: among others things, traps will be more frequent and harder to remove, and The Shop (see below) will not be present. If you finish the last level completely in Very Hard mode, you may consider yourself a REAL wizard!

Finally, each player will be asked to choose his character and name him or her. There are many, many character classes to choose from, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Using the joystick, you can cycle through all of their listings, which display all of the game attributes and the character's capability therein. In brief, these are as follows:

SPEED: This affects the character's initiative (who hits whom first) and movement speed for fleeing.

PROWESS: The character's ability to strike a foe in combat.

AGILITY: The character's ability to dodge attacks and certain types of traps.

STRENGTH: The amount of damage the character dishes out in combat.

HEALTH: The amount of damage the character can take in combat.

WILL: The character's ability to use and resist magic.

PERCEPTION: The character's ability to spot traps, learn spells and so on.

CHARM: The character's "charisma" and ability to influence others. Note that some character types

which are normally pictured as being popular with humans - e.g. Elves - have low Charm scores when it comes to monsters.

ABILITIES: There are eight different abilities that a character may possess, including:

SCROLL LORE: The ability to learn new spells from a scroll.

ARCHERY: Allows the character to fire an arrow or two at the beginning of a fight when he gains the initiative.

STEALTH: The ability to move silently, hide when the initiative is gained and so on. In theory, anyone can hide, but people with stealth are better at it.

DETRAP: Gives a large bonus in detecting and neutralizing traps.

PACIFY: Works only if you gain the initiative and try to negotiate at the very beginning of a fight. It may have a very strong positive effect on the monster's reaction to you. It will not work on undead and certain especially vicious monsters.

FLIGHT: You have wings! This is good for avoiding ground traps and also helps you flee from monsters, especially those which are difficult to avoid because they have wings themselves.

FAST HEALER: You recover Health and Endurance (see below) faster than other characters.

FENCER: In game terms, this magnifies the effect of tactics in combat. When you charge, you will do extra damage; when you parry, you will be even harder to hit.

WEAPON: Each character starts with one of two weapons, either a staff or sword. The latter is more powerful. A few characters have no weapon at all and will probably have to rely on good Strength or spells.

ARMOUR: A character may begin with either Leather Armour or Chainmail, or may have no armour at all. Obviously, this will influence the amount of damage he takes in combat.

MINOR ARCANA: Some characters begin the game with one or more magic spells, and those with Scroll Lore can later add to this list. Spells are split into two groups: Minor Arcana and Major Arcana. The latter are more powerful but also more difficult to cast, and they can only be learned later on the game from scrolls. Due to the large number of spells and the fact that I have a nasty streak, I won't describe all of them here. Most of them are obvious, but a few will have to be figured out through trial and error. Two should be noted here, as their effects are not readily apparent.

FLAMETIP is cast on your normal weapon: the flaming aura allows you to do extra damage to undead and stops creatures which normally regenerate from doing so. Most importantly, it enchants your weapon to do full damage against those creatures which normally only take half-damage from non-magic weapons (werewolves, gargoyles and the like).

WARD simply instills fear in the creature and may cause it to flee. Repeated castings of this spell have a cumulative effect. The first eight statistics are rated verbally as follows, from weakest to strongest: Dismal, Poor, Low, Average, High, Good, Excellent and Superhuman. Scores below Low or above Good are exceedingly rare and are not normally possible at the beginning of the game.

Once both players have chosen and named their characters, the game begins. You will find yourselves on the first level, near the staircase out of the dungeon. Player One has a brown figure and Player Two has a yellow one. The joystick is used to move your icon around the dungeon, which will begin to "form" around you as you enter new areas (at the beginning, everything will be dark grey). The area at the very bottom of the screen lists relevant information for each character. Two numbers to keep careful track of are Health and Endurance: the former indicates the amount of damage you can take before dying, and the latter indicates the amount of energy you have for spells and the like. Resting will gradually restore both to their original levels.

Except during combat, you can open a command window by pressing the joystick button. A menu will appear, and you can control the highlight bar with the joystick, making a choice by pressing fire. "Oops!" closes the window without doing anything; most of the other choices are obvious. Note that some spells can only be cast in combat, and some can only be cast outside of it. Of course, while the command window is open, all other action stops for both players.

As you travel about the labyrinth, here are a few things to watch for:

STAIRS: These point either up or down, letting you traverse between each of the six levels. Taking the stairs up on level one ends the game or that character; thus, your ultimate goal is to journey down to level six and, when you are finished there, escape out the stairs on level one. Due to the nature of the game, if two people are involved they must both take the same staircase. The player who goes down (or up) first gets a "patience bonus" to his final score which increases the longer he waits there, so it is not a good idea to try and trick your ally into taking a staircase while you clean up the rest of the level. Naturally, the lower levels are much tougher than those nearer the surface, so only move downwards when you feel you are equipped to do so.

CHESTS: Small brown boxes are scattered around the dungeon, and some of these contain useful treasure. Gold is handy when a monster indicates an interest in accepting a bribe and is also worth points at the end of the game. In the "Hard" version, it is also used to buy things at The Shop (see below). The real treasures, though, are the many different magic items which may be found:

SALVES: Each salve will heal some damage ONCE. The "Use Item" command gives access to any that you are carrying.

POTIONS: Each potion will have a random effect ONCE - many different effects are possible. In the "Hard" version, these are all beneficial, but, in the "Very Hard" version, a few are not. The "Use Item" command gives access to any potion carried.

SCROLLS: Each scroll will cast a random spell ONCE. A character with the Scroll Lore ability may also be able to learn a spell which he does not already possess; in this case, he will be told the name of the spell and be given the option of learning it or casting it IF he is not in combat. Anyone with Scroll Lore can learn all spells of the Minor

ARCANA: Certain spells of the Major Arcana can only be learned by certain characters. Anyone can CAST any spell from any scroll with the "Use Item" command.

OTHER ITEMS: A number of permanent items exist which add to your character's abilities. Since these are "always on", you need not access them with the "Use Item" command. I will leave it to you to discover what each does - most are obvious.

TRAPS: You may stumble over an invisible trap in a corridor or on a chest (see above). In the latter case,

you may detect it by searching and be given an opportunity to try and remove it. In the former case, only your agility and luck can save you. Traps have many different effects, including the ability to dump you into the next lower level.

MONSTERS: Many and varied are the inhabitants of the labyrinth, but most have one thing in common: a taste for adventurers. When you encounter a monster, several things may occur depending on whether or not one of you is surprised and, if not, who gains the initiative. A special menu appears during combat which is controlled in the usual manner and has many of the usual commands (e.g. Use Item, Cast Spell and so on). In terms of straight forward attacks, three different options are available: Attack, Parry and Charge. The first is a normal swing; the second concentrates on defense; the third concentrates on offense. The Fencing ability will "magnify" the latter two effects. The menu system makes combat very simple and allows you to concentrate on strategy. Don't hesitate to flee if things go badly, especially if you are small and quick.

THE SHOP: This will only appear in the "Hard" version and may be located anywhere on either the first or second level. It allows you to buy and sell any of the "one-shot" magic items and also has a temple. Here you can get rapidly healed by paying gold and, most importantly, can resurrect a fallen companion - assuming, of course, that you want to help out. Note that this latter ability is free; in fact, the character who resurrects his companion/rival earns extra experience (see below) for being a nice fellow.

As you explore the levels, fight monsters and gain treasure, your character will become more experienced and his abilities will improve. If you notice after resting that your Health and Endurance have suddenly increased past their usual level, then you have benefited from this effect. In any event, the "Status" command will indicate your current rank of experience: Novice, Experienced, Veteran or Master.

Note that there are at least two very different ways that the game can be played with two people. In the "competitive game", each player is simply out for himself, trying to get as many points as he can. The resurrection feature of The Shop will probably not come up much here, since a dead player's point total is halved at the end of the game. In the "cooperative game", the players try to work together and share what they find, splitting up "exploration zones" in some fair manner. The latter method can be especially interesting if each player has a very different sort of character - say, a fighter and a spellcaster. The Wizard, Warlock or Faerie partnered with the Warrior, Berserker or Molok can be a formidable combination. If one player gets into a fight he is not equipped to deal with, he can flee and let the other player mop up the nasty.

I have been deliberately vague in explaining many of the secrets of the game, since most of the fun comes in exploration. It is actually very easy to learn the control system. It will take you much longer to learn all of the strengths and weaknesses of the character types, monsters, spells, items and so forth. Becoming a master dungeon-explorer isn't easy, and you will probably lose a large number of characters to the labyrinth initially. No doubt, you will discover certain favourite character types after trying a few out - I am partial to the Elf and the Wizard, myself, although the Swashbuckler and Faerie are also fun. Once you have learned the basics, you will be ready to make the long trek down to the sixth level...

JM

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