

King's Quest VI: a landmark game

I remember once breaking a number of traffic laws in order to attend a special film industry premiere of *The Empire Strikes Back* in Hollywood, and finally sitting in front of Muppeteer Jim Henson, who also confessed to having gone out of his way to get there. Stanley Kubrick's film *The Shining* was premiering at the same hour, and was virtually ignored in the rush to see if George Lucas could surpass *Star Wars*.

A new *King's Quest* game is like that: having defined (if not invented) the animated adventure game, each new sequel sells by the truckload, and is examined and discussed, not just by fans, but by the entire computer entertainment industry. *King's Quest* has become the benchmark against which all other adventure games — including new *King's Quest* titles — are judged. It is also the best selling series of such games ever.

The end of an era

Welcome to the Age of *King's Quest VI: Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow*. Play it. Cherish it. You'll love it. Big, confident, colorful, complex, deep, difficult, perplexing; sometimes cute and always involving, *KQ6* is a landmark computer game. It's fitting that it also marks the end of an era.

The plot is almost trite: princess imprisoned in a tower, a really evil Vizier running amok, kingdom in turmoil, and a lone prince to set it all arights. But then, *Star Wars* was little else than boys meet girl, they all save the universe.

by Peter Spear

Down and out in Daventry Hills

The game picks up about three months after *King's Quest V* ended, where Prince Alexander of Daventry (Gwydion of *KQ3*) and Princess Cassima of the Green Isles were last seen making goo-goo eyes at each other. Alex is at home pining away when the castle's magic mirror shows an image of Cassima looking troubled. The combination of infatuation and being a noble prince

sends him rushing off to the Green Islands, despite the fact that no one knows where they are, or that they are surrounded by nasty reefs and currents. Yup, he ends up washed up on a beach.

This entire opening cartoon was produced by a Hollywood company that has done animated special effects for *Batman Returns* and *The Lawnmower Man*; the smoothness of animation and use of animated camera moves are quite impressive, unlike what you might expect to see in a computer game.

Islands and legends

From his soggy, sandy arrival, Alexander will have to find his way to and around a half-dozen island kingdoms, each of which is unique and based on a different fantasy or fairy tale tradition. There is an Arabian Nights island, one for Beauty and the Beast, Wonderland, Greek mythology, Druidic religion, and one inspired by the Orpheus story.

Alexander has to unravel what's going on and watch out for the vizier's genie, who alternates trying to spy on him or attempting assassination. All this occurs

against a background of murder, political intrigue and a "...Does she love me? Does she not?" sub-plot. It is not what you might call a typical *King's Quest* story.

Did I say "not typical?" In a first for the series, and for Sierra, *KQ6* has not one ending, but over a dozen. It is not as loose as it seems, though. There are really just two major finishes — based on a short path through the game, and a longer one — but they differ in tone, emotion and detail.

Once the two paths split, they become mutually exclusive. All the other endings are variations on these two, but the spectrum of finishes is wide. A goodly number of actions (and combinations of actions) that the player does, or does not perform, have a direct effect on just which ending you will experience. On the other hand, the game is very replayable because of this. And Sierra also loaded the game with many "optional" tasks and puzzles. Jane Jensen, who wrote *KQ6* along with Roberta

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The Latest Quests

This month I've spent time in all the new adventures. Feature reviews on most of them won't arrive until next month, so maybe these one-liners will help you choose the best game for you from a crowd of excellent new titles.

Might and Magic: Clouds of Xeen has the slickest graphics and monsters, and though its many quests pose significant challenges, the interface makes it easy to play. Sir-Tech's *Crusaders of the Dark Savant* doesn't look as good but offers more opportunity for interacting with NPCs as you participate in a sophisticated story, and it is the toughest RPG of the year. I still don't like *Darklands*, even with the patches, because of the overemphasis on menus and all those things to keep track of (it should come with its own database) — but if you like that kind of RPG, this is your kind of game.

Spellcasting 301, no pushover in the puzzle department, is clearly the funniest game of the year and features the raciest graphics too. *Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes* is more sedate and easier to solve. *Quest for Glory III's* biggest competition is *King's Quest VI: KQ* is tougher, and adventure fans already know which one they'll play first. *Gobliins* is great if you like logic puzzles and hate to map.

Maniac Mansion 2

LucasArts has finally announced a sequel for their first animated adventure. *Day of the Tentacle*, due this spring, is "loosely derived" from the 1987 game. This fall LucasArts is rereleasing the original game in a collection of five IBM adventures that also includes *Zak McKracken, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*,

Loom and *Monkey Island 1*; hint books for all games are included.

Spearheading the quest

This month's lead review was done by Peter Spear, who has been playing beta versions of *King's Quest VI* for several months. His updated edition of *The King's Quest Companion* will include the complete solution. Spear and his son also have a clue book that covers the *Space Quest* series. Both are from McGraw-Hill.

Adventurous screen saver

Jeff Tunnell, best known for *Willy Beamish* and *Heart of China*, has a new kind of "adventure."



Quest for Glory III

Johnny Castaway is a unique *Windows 3.1* screen saver — the first to feature an animated story with sound effects. Randomly generated events depict the life of Johnny as he strives to escape a desert island. Tunnell also has a "one-of-a-kind" game due for Christmas: *The Incredible Machine*.

Paragon joins CD Throng

Though the disk-based version haven't shipped yet, Paragon recently announced that CD versions of *Mantis* and *Challenge of the Five Realms* have been scheduled for fall.

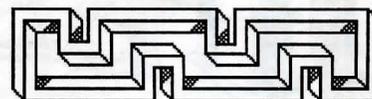
Patches

Look for patch updates on all quests and simulations in our upcoming newsletter, *Patches*, which will also report on home-made quilts and rag dolls.

Ragnarok's revenge

From Norse Helm, *Ragnarok* is a Viking mythology-based RPG that looks like something from 1985, even with VGA graphics. The display is reminiscent of *Ultima II*! We won't run a feature review on this one, which is not recommended.

The Mail Maze



Dear QuestBusters:

About last issue's page 14 — is the editor in a coma or something?

Curious Reader

Dear QuestBusters:

Was page 14 of the October issue printed in *Zork P's Echo Room*?

Enraged Reader

Dear QuestBusters:

Send me the real page 14 or die! And get a proofreader!

Outraged Reader

We ran an ad in the Tucson paper for a proofreader, but no one could read it because of all the typos. Anyway, I fired the person responsible for this disaster. (Then I immediately rehired him, since it was me.) For page 14 of October, see our "Patch A" on page 14 of this issue. No, make that page 13. Or was it page 2...?



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And just who is this Dark Savant, anyway?

The last few months have been a real teaser for me — I received a series of early beta copies of Sir-Tech's long-awaited *Crusaders of the Dark Savant*, their sequel to *Bane of the Cosmic Forge*, to play around with. Incomplete puzzles and world, but playable nonetheless. I could not import *Bane* characters in the earliest versions, so I waited in frustration until the final beta was available.

Well, after long and interminable delays, *Crusaders* is finally here. This review is based on the final beta version, which has completely implemented the world and puzzles; all that was left to do was for the dedicated beta testers to whip out their +4 fly swatters and comb the terrain.

Like father, like son

Crusaders has remained true to David Bradley's vision, for better and worse. The first noteworthy improvement is that *Crusaders* takes you out of the cave and into a huge and richly detailed world, above and below ground. Shimmering seas, dark caverns, forest roads are spread out

course. There is a limited drag-and-drop aspect too, as items can be dragged from one player to another.

Automapping added

Automapping has been added as well, but it doesn't nearly match the implementation seen in *Ultima*

Underworld. Your automap becomes more detailed as your skill in Mapping increases. Automap even maps areas of darkness, which makes sense — after all, if the gamer could map the area by trial and error, your characters should be able

to do so too. A few other quirks also linger throughout the game, such as Bradley's partial adherence to the dungeon abyss janitor system: if you kill a foe, he explodes and his weapons disappear. This fiction works for the robotic Savant minions, but not for Gorns who swing +2 spears.

The object-oriented realism of *Underworld* and *Eye of the Beholder* is not present here. Still, you can drop items and they will remain on the ground for you to recover. Good thing too, because it's awfully hard to swim weighted down.

As I mentioned before, the game system is a direct descendent of the well-designed engine that *Bane of the Cosmic Forge* used to emulate pencil-and-paper systems. *Crusaders* takes advantage of the computer's inherent power to crunch numbers, so every swing of the sword, every wave of the wand sends the computer into a flurry of calculations involving numbers and statistics the gamer will never see. Bradley's sense of continuity, a rare thing in computer role-playing games, allows you to import your party from *Bane* — an option that is highly recommended. They will be demoted to fifth level charac-

ters, and only some of their goodies will be transferred, but this option gives you some instant firepower. And you'll need it: *Crusaders* sports a huge outdoor and indoor world for you to explore, not to mention intense battles — the groups of Ratkins that bar the path to the first city are so powerful that slaying them nets you thousands of experience points. A starter dungeon is available for developing new characters.

Alternative beginnings

The plot, and its implementation, are fascinating. Depending on which of three endings you finished in *Bane*, or a new cold-start beginning, you end up on the planet Guardia, searching for the secrets of the wizard Phoonzang. But other races are searching for the same secrets — it appears that the planet is now the proving grounds for a race to uncover its mysteries. Your actions and choices will form alliances and antagonism between your party of humans and the various aliens.

How does the Dark Savant, a mysterious other-worldly being, fit in? Are you merely pawns? Do you write your own destiny? All these issues are present. Science mixes with sorcery, and you will encounter disgusting and sublime beings that may test your notions of good and evil, beauty and ugliness. As in *Bane*, *Crusader's* great strength lies in its management of NPCs and the involved plot your characters must unravel. Similarly, you can talk to NPCs so inclined through an Infocom-style parser that allows conversation in full sentences.

I'm not sure how the plot fits in with the reality-altering *Cosmic Forge*, but I can't wait to find out. I'd



by **Bernie Yee**

Continued on next page

Type: Fantasy Role-playing
System: MSDOS (640K and hard drive required, 10 MHz or faster, DOS 5.0 and mouse recommended, extended memory supported; EGA, VGA; Ad Lib, Sound Blaster, Thunderboard, Covox Voice)
Planned ports: Amiga

before your party's feet. The display remains the same as in *Bane*, but was revamped in rich 256-color VGA.

If *Might & Magic III's* graphics remind you of Lichtenstein, *Crusaders* looks more like a Bruegel. The world is rendered in a dark, moody fashion that surrounds your party in an air of pensiveness. (Gotta get new music though, Dave!)

Nor have the improvements stopped at graphics either. The interface is a full point-and-click affair, of

Dark Savant.....from 3

wager that *Crusaders'* long gestation period was to balance out the web of



competing parties and interests that occur with every passing day. *Crusaders* has the most interesting story, and well-developed plot devices and development, that I've seen in a long, long time.

Parts of the game system still feel a bit anachronistic. The music and digitized sound effects, while realistic, can become a little tiresome. Monsters don't fall when you kill them; they explode. And the graphic engine, though it provides wonderful images, still works in that "move 10 feet" reality, like *Eye of the Beholder* and *Might & Magic III*. The truth is, *Ultima Underworld* has indeed changed the face of role-playing. Will the next *Wizardry* follow suit?

Who cares! With well-balanced gameplay, such an expansive world, populated with fascinating characters involved in the midst of a well-written epic, *Crusaders* demonstrates that a game can still come on two disks, take up less than 20 megs of hard drive space, not use earth-shaking graphics modeling, and still be utterly captivating.

Conclusions: There is no doubt that *Crusaders* allows you to set foot in a complex, character-driven milieu where you don't feel like you are the only ones there, or that the entire world revolves around your party. David Bradley must make one helluva dungeon master.

Difficulty: Advanced

Company: Sir-Tech Software

Price: \$69.95

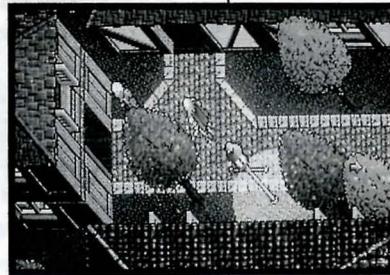
QuestBusters price: \$59

Ultima: Forge of Virtue

Dubbed an "add-in" disk, *Forge* requires *Ultima VII*. The disk also contains an upgrade to Version 3.4 of *Ultima VII*, which is free of most of the bugs that plagued the earlier versions. Since saved games created under earlier versions won't run under the latest one, you have the option of either doing the upgrade or keeping the old version. [It has not been confirmed, but at least one person said he could no longer start the game with the "cheat menu" option revealed in the August issue, so it's possible the upgrade eliminates the cheat menu.]

Great Isles o' Fire

Installing *The Forge of Virtue* adds a new island to the map of Britannia. The Isle of Fire was once home to the evil Exodus (whom you destroyed way back in *Ultima III*). After defeating Exodus, Lord British built the shrines of Truth, Love and Courage there. These were supposed to be part of the Quest of the Avatar (*Ultima IV*), but before the Avatar arrived, the Gargoyles summoned the spirit of Exodus to inhabit their Shrine of Diligence (as seen in *Ultima VI*). Their summoning released so much magical energy that the Isle of Fire sank to the ocean floor, where it remains to this day.



Whole o' shakin'

After installing the disk, you start up *Ultima VII* in the usual manner, by either restoring a saved game or starting a new one. Either way, your party will be shaken by an earthquake, which signals the mage Erethian's success at raising the Isle of Fire to the surface. You can then visit Lord British, who will tell you how to find the island and give

you a free ship to speed your journey.

Upon reaching the Isle, you'll quickly find the three shrines, the mage Erethian, an angry demon trapped behind a mirror, and the remnants of Exodus. Several quests will be presented, requiring you to explore the vast labyrinth beneath the isle. Completing the quests will allow you to raise the Avatar's attributes to the maximums and to forge the legendary Blackrock Sword, a weapon powerful enough to kill even Lord British (be sure to search his body after you've done the experiment).

This add-in quest doesn't affect any of the major events in *Ultima VII*; it just gives you an opportunity to build up your characters. You can visit the Isle of Fire at any point...some of the quests can be completed by an inexperienced party, but several involve some tough battles and shouldn't be attempted until you have a strong party with some magic weapons.

Conclusions: I'm not sure whether there is enough "game" here to justify the price. At \$25, *The Forge of Virtue* costs a third as much as *Ultima VII*, but adds far less than a third to the game. I also thought that some of the puzzles were unfair. The solutions aren't at all obvious, and there aren't enough clues to point

you in the right direction. [See "Keys to the Kingdom" for help with these puzzles.] Hard-core *Ultima* junkies will enjoy this package, but less fanatical gamers are likely to be disappointed.

Difficulty: Hard

Company: Origin

Price: \$24.95

QuestBusters price: \$19

by Charles Don Hall

Sierra On-Line's ever encompassing mantle has expanded once again, this time to accommodate their acquisition of North American distribution rights for Coktel Vision games, and the introduction of *Gobliiins*. That's right, *Gobliiins*, not *Goblins*. Why? Because there are three of them: iii — get it?

First Sierra picked up Game Arts, who did *Sorcerian* and *Thexder*.

Then they acquired Dynamix, with adventures such as *Rise of The Dragon*, *Heart of China* and *Willy Beamish*. *Sorcerian*, an arcade-style game was not to my liking. But in late

1990, it did stimulate me enough to move up to a 386, which I've never regretted. I may even get back to *Sorcerian* someday.

Dynamix, on the other hand, has shone in my opinion and should continue to do so in the future. Coktel Vision? Well, if *Gobliiins* is any indication, I'd have to say that we have a winner.

For a pleasant change you don't have to track down and kill the Evil Wizard/Warrior/Sorcerer to save the Kingdom/Empire/World. You don't have to find and restore the lost/stolen runes/gems/artifacts to their rightful owner/ruler/god.

Goblins galore

No siree. In *Gobliiins* all you have to do is help a King regain his sanity by locating three ingredients and giving them to Niak the Wizard so he can prepare a medicine that will nullify the effects of the Voodoo doll out there with the King's name on it. Easy? No way!

Even after you have located the three ingredients, which you'll accomplish in the game's first six screen sequences, you'll now be sent on a new assignment that will take you through many more puzzle-oriented encounters. All the puzzles are of the object-manipulation type, with a little magic thrown in.

Gobliiins

by Fred. J. Philipp

You solve these puzzles by directing actions of three fun-loving Goblins: Hooter, BoBo and Dwayne. Hooter is a Magician who casts spells. The spells have no names, and you don't have to find, buy or steal ingredients to make them. You don't



even have to mix them. As a matter of fact, you won't even know what they do until you try one out. And each time Hooter casts a spell, it does something different than it

did the last time! Here are a few early examples to get you on your way: Hooter can join objects together, make things bigger and cause plants to grow.

BoBo, on the other hand, is a Warrior. All he can do is hit things and climb. Why, he can hit an arch to knock things off, topple an apple (or two) from a tree and climb plants.

Dwayne is perhaps the most interesting of the trio. Only he can pick up and carry items. And he can carry just one item at a time. That's right, I said one — no object management to worry about here! The advantage is that you don't have

to worry about what to keep and what to drop.

Some items can be used by themselves, while others must be combined with a

second object to produce a third object. Confused? Try having Hooter zap a branch while Dwayne is carrying a horn (he must blow it first).

You have to solve all the puzzles in each individual screen before moving on to the next, and every screen is unique. There is no scrolling, and you don't walk off either side to reach another location as in a conventional adventure game. Only after all the puzzles have been solved does a

flashing 'GO' sign allow you to move on to the next screen.

Each time you complete a scene's puzzles, you get a code that enables you to restart your game at the place you left off. Write it down. I initially had trouble because I mistook a 'V' for a 'U' and got an 'error code'.

The cartoon-style graphics are hand-drawn, 256-color works of art. A horizontal display across the bottom consists of a crystal ball that shows the active Goblin (you can control only one at a time), a skull for restoring and quitting, an energy line, and a row for four magic items that must be found during the game. While sound effects and digitized voices abound, there is little or no music. (On my Ad Lib sound board it sounded like I was back in Japan again! Before I learned the language.)

The energy bar

The key thing to remember is that each goblin has a job to do in order to complete every scene's puzzles. It's also important to keep in mind that the group as a whole possesses a certain amount of energy, which goes down every time you perform a wrong action. So after you have completed a screen, be sure to restore and go through it again in as few moves as possible, to conserve your energy. Otherwise you'll never have enough energy to finish the game.

Conclusions:

Gobliiins is different, an adventure in which you positively can't get lost and never have

Type: Object- & magic-oriented logical puzzles
System: MSDOS (640K, VGA, hard disk & Microsoft-compatible mouse required; Ad Lib, Pro Audio)

to draw a single map. This also makes it about as linear as you can get. Music would have added a nice touch, but anyone who enjoys object- and magic-oriented puzzle-solving will love *Gobliiins*. Highly recommended. ☞

Difficulty: Intermediate

Company: Coktel Vision/Sierra

Price: \$39.95

QuestBusters price: \$35.95

THE SUMMONING: HEED IT OR WEEP

by Clancy Shaffer

Of my favorite role-playing games this year was Event Horizon's *Dark Spyre*. Their latest is being distributed by SSI, and it's the biggest, most advanced RPG yet from SSI. As designer Chris Straka told me about it, "My first and foremost design goal was to create a game that was fun and enjoyable to play...people buy games to be entertained. To ensure that you do indeed have fun, I had to make sure you spend your time playing the game, not *learning* how to play the game."

The story — in which you must destroy the Shadow Weaver before he gains a stranglehold on the world — held my attention from the first lines in the manual: "As evening fell, a wind began to penetrate the hall, a wind that came through the slits in the stones where archers watched..." to the final paragraph, "Here was the only victory good men might grasp from their first encounter with the Shadow Weaver, a triumph of second chances, a victory well enough to start the game again..."

The new benchmark?

As incredible as it may be, *The Summoning* could become the game that is used as a yardstick for all RPGs for some time to come. Not because of its great music or graphics, though these are very good, and not because of the ease of play with keyboard or mouse, though these are excellent — but because it holds your interest from the first colorful scene, during the choosing of a champion, until you arrive at an ending so startling that it's hard to believe.

The Summoning combines numerous great features, many of which other games lack, that endow it with an amazing flexibility in game-play. It will print out all the maps and all NPC's conversations, for example,

and offers unlimited saves.

In some adventures it is difficult to see small items on the ground, but not here: you can magnify the picture if you wish, so that an apple looks as large as your head. Then you can pick it up and put it into any one of

20 boxes or bags, which hold from eight to ten objects.

And here's an unusual feature: if an NPC is gray in color (which means he is both good and bad),

you must decide how to handle the encounter based on your own perception of their intent. Another convenient feature is that when you clear an area of monsters, it stays cleared.

Magic fingers

The magic system consists of twelve hand gestures. By combining them, you have at your beck and call 28 Spells, from Flame Arrow and Fireball, to Shape Change and Heal.

As you find or locate scrolls, the hand signals begin to appear, and during the first four levels you will have them all — not the spells, but the components of the spells. As your magic points increase, you can store as many as nine or more of each spell. There are also 24 Runes used to perform magic, from teleporting to poisoning or even killing. The interface is one of the best I have seen, and as far as I have seen, the magic always works.

Complex puzzles

The puzzles will at first seem familiar to those who have played *Dark Spyre* or *Bane of the Cosmic Forge*, but these are much more complex. In some cases, they involve things that

happened earlier in the game. It's also a long quest, but one that I hated to stop playing. My usual midnight deadline often became 3:00 AM, due to my desire to go further, or to try a new combination on a problem.

The animated sequences are as good as any I have witnessed, and the artists did a remarkable job of creating such great graphics. Music is fine, and is not distracting, which occurs with some games.

The game spans up to 40 levels of dungeons. Your sole character may begin by playing a training or beginners dungeon that is composed of three different levels, or go directly into the game. You must operate in a somewhat linear fashion. On the first five levels, for example, you need six parts of a seal to proceed further.

Conclusions: *The Summoning* is well thought out and written, with a great plot, and I was literally drawn into this world. One of the most remarkable things is that it all comes on two disks, for this truly is the lengthiest and largest of the more than 600 adventures I've played. It lives up to the designer's wishes, for it is enjoyable and will give you many hours of play at the lowest cost per man hour of any game now on the market.

And it never gets tiresome. In fact I have traveled through *The Summoning* three times, and each

time I discovered something new. Any role-playing fan or adventure game player will love *The Summoning*. 

Difficulty: Advanced

Company: Event Horizon/SSI

Price: \$59.95

QuestBusters price: \$55



PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE



Imported from Ireland, this is Konami's best adventure yet.

Gremlin's transformation of the worst movie ever made into a game has a creative plot, nice interface, good graphics, music and sound effects — and even actual video from Bela Lugosi's schlocky flick.

Obscure references

Plan 9's plot is pretty neat. For anyone lucky enough to have missed the atrocious film that inspired the game, many sight gags and references may fly right over your head like the movie's pie tin flying saucers on strings (but at no great loss).

The movie is so terrible that you may laugh at it and the effects, and the acting and scenery are so cheesy that you'll probably wonder why director Ed Wood Jr. even bothered to make it. It starred Bela Lugosi, Lyle Talbot, Vampira and Tor Johnson, and the plot is anyone's guess. Many scenes are thrown together haphazardly, and one chase sequence even changes from night to day and back again. Get the picture?

Type: Graphic Adventure
System: MSDOS (640K, hard disk, VGA required; all major sound boards); Amiga (one meg)
Planned ports: None

The game is as much of a mystery as it is an adventure. It still incorporates a lot of the schlock you would expect, but in a funny way that is not meant to be taken seriously like the movie. For example, Tor Johnson plays so many characters in the game that I wondered when I *wouldn't* see him in a scene.

A treasure hunt

The goal is quite simple. Bela Lugosi's double from the flick, insanely jealous of the actor, has stolen the six reels of film that make up *Plan 9* and plans to edit Lugosi out of the prints and himself into them. You must find the

six reels among the game's more than 70 locations, return them to the producer and edit them as they should be. The reels you edit are the actual footage of the film, which you can view frame by frame.

Plan 9 works surprisingly well, and some puzzles are quite challenging. None of the reels are out in the open, and it takes some effort to find them and put the crappy movie back together. The editing room has a VCR interface to view the footage, and the regular game interface is just as simple to operate.

The action fills a picture window that covers a third of the screen and is surrounded by a montage of pieces of the film's lobby poster. To the right of this window is your inventory list, below it is the text area. The bottom right houses a gravestone on which are engraved the game's ten commands. The gravestone commands are the standard ones players have come to expect. Command entry works like LucasArts' games, in which you click on the command and then on the object from the picture window or your inventory.

Movement is an entirely different story. Since the locations are static images that feature spot animation, characters that move around, and other action, movement simply brings up another location picture. If you move the mouse over the picture, words like "Go to street" or "Go to diner" pop up along with a signpost. Click on the mouse when these show up, and you move to that location. Players will get the hang of the game in no time, but solving it is another matter.

When you talk to people, a list of messages pops up for you to choose



from. Once you exhaust them, you usually don't need to talk to that character again. Your main efforts will be spent trying to find uses for the available objects, from stuffed spiders to wooden stakes, and opening paths to new locations. Puzzles are challenging, but not unfair.

Plan 9 is entertaining and works well as an object-based adventure.

Playing with the scenes on the VCR

Graphics are quite good. It supports only VGA, treating the players to clear images, easily identifiable objects and characters, and many digitized images — from posters to the movie reels. Playing with the scenes on the VCR is neat! How many people get a chance to really edit a movie reel on their computer? The game's overall look reflects the time period of the movie and the sci-fi gimmicks and gags you might expect.

Sound effects and music stand out too. There are snippets of speech here and there, but the sound effects help keep the game funny and in your face. Atmospheric music plays in the background and borders on sounding like those goofy 1950s sci-fi soundtracks — hopefully on purpose.

Conclusions: When I first heard about *Plan 9*, it seemed like a novel idea, yet I was afraid that the result wouldn't be quite as interesting. But it turns out to be wacky good fun for adventure fans and B-movie enthusiasts everywhere. Don't let the lousy film's poster on the box cover scare you away from the quality game contained inside. May Tor Johnson's image be with you forever! ❧

Skill Level: Intermediate

Company: Konami

Price: \$39.95

QuestBusters price: \$36

by Russ Ceccola

Darklands: "son of Samurai" takes

"A highly informative, historically accurate setting that goes beyond any yet seen."

After two years in development by designer Arnold Hendricks, *Darklands* emerges as one of the most intriguing and detailed RPGs ever. In it, a group of four to five adventurers in Germany during the early 1400s receives their holy quest in a vision: to stop the witches and demons from prematurely triggering Armageddon.

The unique element is that the setting is historically accurate down to the smallest details, such as a brass handgun causing more damage than an iron one. As with *Dusk of the Gods*, the subject was extensively researched. The result? A highly informative, historically accurate setting that goes beyond any yet seen.

Alchemical, rather than wizard, spells are bottles of chemicals that you toss, rub into items you want to activate, or swallow. Clerical magic is achieved by expending virtue points in prayer to one of the 140 saints, who have different personalities and often comical and obscure methods for helping in many situations.

Hey Jude...

Call on St. Appolinus, for example, to save a merchant caravan, and he will make you appear as an approaching army horde and scare them off, allowing you to be rewarded by the grateful merchants. But call on St. Jude, the patron saint of lost causes, and he will strengthen the caravan defenders enough to throw off the attacking bandits, who will now mistake you for more bandits and will chase you away with arrows. It is such attention to detail that makes *Darklands* unique.

Son of Samurai?

Microprose incorporated parts of the game engine from *Sword of the Samurai*, a poorly received strategy-war game hybrid, into *Darklands*. The menu screens, many descriptive unanimated graphics, the overhead perspective, and animated overland travel strongly resemble *Samurai*.

To the *Samurai* framework was added *Darklands'* combination combat and exploration screens, which make up the interior of caves, mines, dungeons, castles,

keeps and monasteries. Movement within the cities, towns and peaceful areas is achieved through an overly complex series of menus displayed over watercolor-style graphics. [Consequently, you will devote a lot of time to making menu choices.] A cleverly designed character screen shows statistics, skills and paper-doll characters with equipped artifacts.

You may opt for the pre-rolled party, but should create your own to get the full effect. Childhood experience, heritage, and primary and secondary occupations develop the character by giving you additional experience points at the expense of age, which can be used to boost attributes, alchemical formulae, saints and skills.

Real-time combat

Combat is carried out in the overhead oblique-angle, real-time mode. Options include melee, missile and berserk attacks, throw potion, pray for divine aid and the like. The menu system wisely dispenses with the need to manually equip an item, doing so with the selected command.

All commands require using a target to indicate the center of impact for an area-effect potion, an individual enemy character for all types of commands, or a location to walk to. Any command except

berserk or parry can be overridden by enlightened self-interest: if the command would cause the character to be exposed to death, it is replaced with parry or retreat.

Another interesting and useful combat command is the enemy information command, which gives you a breakdown of the armor, weapons and combat skills of the enemy. Handy while using the exploration menus is the shift key: it tells the chances of success of a particular action, enabling you to act more shrewdly.

Puzzle doors

Dungeons feature special puzzle doors that require the solution of one or a series of riddles in order to pass safely through them. Incorrect answers to puzzle doors,



the lead in realistic role-playing

or unsuccessful lock-picking of doors in the evening city marketplace, may result in permanent loss of attributes, so save first.

Alchemy is the basis of the magic system, in which you combine nineteen special substances and four special bases with the catalytic assistance of a philosopher's stone, according to 66 alchemical formulae that are divided into 22 groups of three variations. Formulae, substances, bases, mixed and bottled potions, and improved philosopher's stones are obtained by purchase or trade from alchemists, merchants or universities, or as treasure after a battle. The strength of the philosopher's stone can be increased, thereby increasing the probability of success in mixing the components.

Ye quests

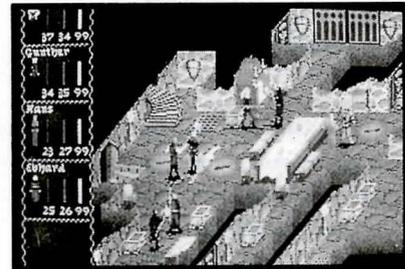
The quests obtained from the town leaders, the Fugger bankers, the Medici, The Hanseatic League and the city merchants were the most endearing portion of the game. As in *Pool of Radianc*e and *Might and Magic I*, specific people assign quests to the group, which then returns for a reward of money and fame. The completion of the quest circle is a uniquely satisfying event, akin to the completion of a project — which is lacking in many RPGs.

Fame is the most important commodity in *Darklands*. It endures longer than cash, and gives you a decided advantage in bargaining and dealing with people. Every door is open to famous adventurers, but fame is hard-won and may take years to accumulate at considerable cost.

An infinite number of games can be saved, but for some unfathomable reason the restore game screen displays only eight save games that can be restored. In order to restore the undisplayed games, you must first delete many of the others. You can't save or scroll the map outdoors. There is

no automapping, autocombat, or other features that most of us take for granted.

Watercolor-like animation and still backgrounds and graphics are highly detailed, attractive and colorful. Cut scenes at the beginning, middle and end of the game show detailed animated depiction of the plot. The cut scenes are nice and worth seeing at least once; animation is simple and unremarkable, but fulfills the need. Figures may be personalized with a variety of color schemes and hair colors. Music consists of beginning music, ending music and theme music that was professionally mixed and enhanced with very accurate sound effects.



Bugs and patches

The first release was riddled with bugs [the reason last issue's *Adventure Road* cautioned against the product then]. This led to a spate of patches. As I write, the current patch is 483.06. Arnold Hendricks

informs me that a version after 483 is due and corrects minor problems in the current version.

Conclusions:

Darklands is one of the most complex role-playing games I have ever seen,

and Microprose should be congratulated for such a highly innovative and enjoyable product. I especially enjoyed the quests and the historically accurate depiction of Germany in the 1400s. I recommend it to anyone who likes role-playing games with real-time combat and lots of intricate, historically accurate details.

Difficulty: Advanced

Company: Microprose

Price: \$69.95

QuestBusters price: \$59

Type: Fantasy Role-playing
System: MSDOS (2 megs RAM, hard disk with 20 megabytes free space, VGA, DOS 5.0 or equivalent, mouse, 16 MHz+, high density floppy drive required; Sound Blaster, Ad Lib, Pro Audio Spectrum, Roland)
Planned ports: None

by Al C. Giovetti

WALKTHRU: The Dagger of Amon Ra

by Clancy Shaffer

Act I

Look under blotter for a key. Unlock desk. Take paper. Look in wastebasket next to desk and get baseball. Use question cursor on everyone to ask about everything in notebook. Ask Crodfeller about burglary.

The Police Station

Cross the street (use eye cursor on both sides until you get a message "no cars coming"). Wake drunk outside station. Enter station, exit and get newspaper the drunk left on the pavement.

Go to Luigi's stand by the Tribune office and trade coupon from paper for sandwich, then give it to the Desk Sergeant Police Station. Ask about speakeasy, password "Charleston" and robbery. Talk to O'Riley.

All around the town

To travel by taxicab. bring your press pass up as a cursor and use it on the driver to give him your destination. Then use the notebook, click on destination and exit the notebook.

Go to all addresses in note book, starting with the 12th St. Dock. Ask Steve about everyone and everything. Then go to Lo Fat's and talk to the three boys. You must approach several times before the subject of a hobby comes up, then you can trade baseball for magnifying glass.

Getting inside the Museum

Take cab to the Lyendecker Museum. If this cab is full of trash, use your finger cursor to sift it until you find a claim ticket for Lo Fat Laundry. (You may have to use the cab many times to locate the trash-filled unit.)

Take the claim ticket to Lo Fat and claim an evening dress. Go to the Speakeasy, use password, talk to Ziggy at first table. Go to the ladies room, use the evening dress on the dressing room partition.

Act II

Go to Museum. Use press pass on Heimlich to get in. Eavesdrop on everyone who isn't a happy party-goer. There are 14 different conversations you must listen to before you will be permitted out of the Rotunda, though you may visit the gift shop. You must also talk to Steve.

Enter gift shop and use magnifying glass to look at the daggers. You'll see some from Pittsburgh, but you'll also see the real Amon Ra dagger. (At this point you will be kicked out of the shop, and the dagger will be gone if you return later.)

Go to the front of the rotunda. Take a drinking glass to use and hear conversations through doors. Talk to all and ask many questions. Shortly after this you can enter the Mastodon room. Go through the door into the Armor room and into the Mummy Display. Examine Medallion and blood, open Mummy Case, and you will find Pippin Carter's body. You will find "PS" on the Medallion it belongs to Ptahsheptut "Tut" Smith. Keep it for evidence. Examine body for evidence and get notebook. Keep it for evidence.

Act III

Go to Olympia's office. Remove cloth from article from beside her desk. By reading the Rosetta stone with magnifying glass, you will automatically copy it to the note book. If you push the one horn on her desk, a secret door will open to the alcohol preservation lab. Go to Yvette's office.

Yvette's Office

Look in her wastebasket. Get carbon paper. Read it by holding it in front of the light. Then turn the light off and enter Carrington's office. Examine all. Return to Yvette's.

Go to the light, use eye cursor on the lamp twice, take the bulb. As you leave, go to the Rodin statue, and examine the back of the neck by

using the hand cursor of the head. Walk through the archway, and you will discover a secret stairway leading down. Use Yvette's bulb on old one. Save the game. Go down the steps.

Downstairs

Enter Hemlich's office. Examine room, move to left of the rat trap. Get and use dinosaur bone to spring the trap, then take the cheese. Examine books until you find one that is reversed. Take and open it, remove the garter and note and keep for evidence. Try pushing the button behind one of the medal pictures, but don't use the secret passage.

Go out into the hall and look at the mirror-like alcove in the wall. Use dinosaur bone to break the glass. Take the lantern. Go through the other door into alcohol preservation lab. Go through the door to right

Ernie's Office

Get wire cutters from tool box. Take snake lasso at end of desk. Look at the desk and check the alcoholic index. Around this time you should hear a message on the intercom telling Ernie that Vat 13 leaks. Check the Warthog vat, which is 13 (the second on the left as you come in the front door). Push button over Ernie's desk.

Leave office and go to the vat. Use the hand cursor on it, and you will climb up and obtain the Amon Ra Dagger. Go to the back door, enter, and you will see an opening (to the Mummy Room). Save game.

Light lantern by using your hand cursor on it, then go up the passage. In the Mummy's room, use magnifying glass on Rosetta stone to copy the characters into your note book. Go back to Carrington's office.

Carrington's Office

On the way here you will see Ziggy's body in the Pterodactyl room. Use wire cutter to get a section of wire. In Carrington's office you will find a dead body. Examine the two letters

QuestBusters

"CP" in blood on his desk, which stand for "Crime and Punishment." Check books there to find this book, then open it and take Police file .

Examine his phone list: under "B.SAYFF" you will find combination to safe behind big picture. The number is KL 0527. Use hand cursor to click on each number, and the safe will open. Read diary, but leave it for evidence. Check calendar and clock.

The Galleries

Go into the Old Master's Gallery and check Bosch painting. Note the glinting, then examine this spot until you see a key glued over another key. Use Dagger to pry it loose, and take it.

Go to Armor room, then south to Head room. Examine heads: Ziggy's head is mounted on the wall. As you return through the Mastodon Room, you will see Ernie Leach's body on the Mastodon Tusks. Examine it and get the Warthog hairs as evidence.

Go to the Rodin Gallery. Take stairs down and go to back door of the Preservation Lab. This is the Mammalogy Lab. Take Snake oil bottle, and make sure it full. If not, fill it with oily substance near entrance hall from the stairs. Save game. Go to the cold storage box at the back of the room. Open top and take the meat. Use key to open the trunk, and quickly throw meat to the beetles. Examine trunk, get watch.

Act IV

Go to Yvette's office and talk with her. As you leave you will bump into Steve. As he enters Yvette office, use water glass to listen to their conversation. Leave and wander around.

When you return to her office, there will be signs of a struggle. Examine the scene, and you will find a piece of fabric, red hairs, and a shoe. Take shoe and leave the other evidence.

As you enter the Old Masters gallery you will find a new statue. Examine it, then use Dinosaur bone to break plaster casting. Inside is Yvette.

Examine body. Take red hairs and bifocals. Go to the Armor room and look at the dog. You will notice one of Steve's boots near it. Get it.

The Cobra

Return to the Rodin statue. The Countess is apparently dying in Olympia's office. Save game. As you enter the office, you will be attacked by a cobra: shake the snake oil at it three times. It will back into a corner. Use Snake Lasso to capture it. By using your hand cursor on the cage in the corner, you will dispose of the Cobra.

Examine the Countess. Look at her ankle to see how she died. Get Smelling Salts from her. Get grapes on the floor. (You may need to go to the container in the alcohol preservation room to refill the Snake Oil Bottle if it's less than one-quarter full.) Save. Using the notebook, decipher the scroll on the wall: the solution is "Womb" and "Tomb."

Act V

As you enter Mastodon Room, the murderer appears. Run to Pterodactyl room, close door. Use the wire on it to wire the door knobs shut. Run to Medieval Armor Room, shut door, drop bar in place.

Go toward Mummy Room. Stop at locked door. Move chair in front. Open transom on top. Run to Mummy Room, open and enter mummy casket, shut lid. After murderer leaves, save game. Run to the transom door and enter. Push the crate in front of door, cut rope, push to crate back of you to one side. Enter elevator, push lever. Save. Go to mummy storage room, take a mummy out of its case, prop it against the door. Use Snake Lasso on the mummy case on your left. Use hand cursor on it, and it will open. Enter and shut the case.

You are captured by Rameses Najeer. He'll free you if know the answers from the scroll in Olympia's

room: "Womb" and "Tomb." (Spell them out from your notebook.) You are allowed to go free upon your promise to keep their secret. Save.

Furnace room, cobras, rats

As you enter, you see Steve under a coal pile. Clear his face and use Smelling Salts, but give him his boot before he stands up. Move the Sun Symbol, light lantern, enter passage. Shake the snake oil at cobras.

As you near the top, you see a lot of rats. Throw the cheese through the first opening and enter the second. You will hear gun shots, so you know the killer is still after you. You will emerge from the talking Rex mouth. Hurry and press the button to start him talking and capture the Killer.

Act VI

At the Coroner's Inquest, you must have the Amon Ra dagger, Watney police file, ankh medallion, red hair, pocket watch, wire cutters, carbon paper, Yvette's shoe, garter, grapes, Pippin's notebook, bifocals, and warthog hairs.

The majority of the answers you must answer are O'Riley, for Financial gain, or to Hide a Crime. (You can use any of these.) The exceptions are:

For jealousy or revenge: Yvette
Whose skeleton was in the trunk: Dr A. Carrington

Who murdered and impersonated Carrington: Watney Little

Who stole Amon Ra's Dagger: Watney Little

Who was behind robbery: O'Riley

Who was the women involved in stealing paintings: Countess

Who was the man involved in stealing paintings: Watney Little

Who was the middleman who forged the painting: Ziggy

Who was the High Priest of The Amon Ra Cult: Rameses Najeer

What museum employee ran a fencing operation: Ernie Leech

Keys to the Kingdoms™

Darklands

The starting town has unlimited special missions for easy, fast money. Get plate armor, two-handed swords and long bows as soon as possible. To acquire gear and money quickly, pick an unimportant town (with no university, an inept doctor, etc.) and battle the city guards as much as you want (otherwise, always avoid ruining your reputation). Always have character with highest charisma deal with all people and do buying and selling.

Character with highest artifice skill should carry lockpick. Laying siege to a castle is the easiest way of killing robber knights, but you get more loot by sneaking in. When witch offers something in return for her life, save, then find out date of Sabbath, then reboot and get her three potion formulae. In any town, always sneak into all central market offices at night to increase stealth and artifice skills.

Mike Prero

Plan 9 from Outer Space

Rio de Janeiro: Take taxi to EWJ Airport. Enter. Give ticket to attendant. Go to runway, plane and cockpit. Talk to pilot. Note name (Steve Peters). Taxi will take you to Macho Hombre Hotel. Examine guest register for Peter's room # (21). Get key to room 21.

Go to room 21 and get pilot I.D. Use passport photo on I.D. Go to beach. Go to cave. Get film reel labelled 'Lo'. Go to projection booth and give reel to projectionist. Watch movie. Go to airport.

Enter. Police will arrive. Bribe policeman. You'll end up in jail. Give rum to guard. Get statuette. Use hammer on statuette. Get slimy pupa. Drop hammer. Go to airport. Fly home.

Paul Shaffer

Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen

Passkeys: Castle Basenji, there wolf. Sphinx, Golux. Witch Tower, rosebud. Dwarf Mines, Mine 1 through 5, omega, alpha, theta.

Items: Last Flower of Summer, B2: 1, 10. Yak Opening Stone, D4: 12, 3. Key to Tower of High Magic, Cave of Illusion Level 4: 2, 14. Key to Darzog's Tower, Tower of High Magic Level 4: 7, 12. Amulet of the North Sphinx, A1: 11, 5. Faery Wand, D4: 8, 14. Celia, D4: 15, 15. Bone Whistle, E4: 5, 14.

Attributes: F3: 0, 1 — +5 levels. F3: 12, 12 — +5 armor. E2: 3, 4 — +50 speed. A1: 7, 6 — +50 energy resistance. D3: 15, 4 — +50 electrical resistance. F3: 14, 6 — poison resistance. Asp 8, 3 — +100 HP. Nightshadow 7, 7 — +10 levels.

Where to find Mega Credits needed to build the Newcastle: Ancient Temple of Yak at 13, 9; 18, 9; 20, 9; 23, 9; 27, 9. Tomb of 1,000 Terrors at 1, 16; 6, 9; 11, 30; 13, 13; 17, 28; 17, 15. Golem Dungeon at 4, 1; 6, 1; 11, 22; 11, 28; 15, 6; 17, 17.

Tommy Russell

Legend of Kyrandia

The saw is under the table in Grandpa's house. If you drop a fireberry in a room in the cave, it will never burn out. The first time you meet Malcolm, give him back his knife. Drop the pinecone, the acorn and walnut down the hole in the deadwood glade for the first stone in the amulet. This is healing. Use healing on the cardinal for the quill. When mixing potions, combine gemstones with flowers of similar colors.

Eric Grosskurth

Ultima: Forge of Virtue

Quest of Honesty: look for secret passageway after the X room, all others are bogus. Quest of Love: find

the Tree of Life by entering a teleport in one of the caves. Use pick on tree with bucket underneath. You may want to use your virtue stone here, because you'll need to come back. Quest of Valor: kill black dragon with Black Sword. Black Sword: talk to mirror with fire, defeat dragon, obtain crystal, talk to mirror and trap demon; talk to Erithian, and he'll set you up, then head the blank until extreme red and use hammer on the blank until you get a message. Talk to Erithian, place gem in one hand and the sword blank on the other. (The Black Sword is a very powerful weapon but also a curse, because you can never get rid of it.) Finale: destroy Exodus by using the three slices of virtue and using gargoyle and Britannia armor from museum.

Name not provided

Legend of Kyrandia

Maze & fireberries: a fireberry lasts a maximum of four rooms, but won't run out once you drop it. So get four berries and drop one in each room. Go back and repeat as needed, and soon the entire cave will be lit and you won't need the berries anymore. If you keep a map, this will help locate the "secret" places, and you can go back and forth between places without having to worry about losing light. Remember, there are four rooms between bushes, and you will be eaten many times before finishing the task, so save frequently.

Liria Morrell

This month Mike Prero and Tommy Russell were randomly selected to receive the game of their choice for sending in Keys.

So send in yours today! (All submissions become exclusive property of Eldritch, LTD. until October 11, 2317 A.D.)

Patch A

In the tradition of games whose names we won't even mention, *QuestBusters* is proud to announce our first "patch." To install, put your October issue of *QuestBusters* into drive A, this patch into drive B, and type "Install Patch A, homina homina"

Legend of Kyrandia...from 1

Picking up an item and clicking it on yourself will also elicit a response: sometimes comical, sometimes informative, sometimes providing a clue. If you try to use an item on something it can't be used on, it will fall to the bottom of the screen with a thunk.

Chapter by chapter

Each Chapter consists of a few minor quests and one major quest. Ranging range from novice level to difficult, puzzles become harder and more complex as you progress. Everything involves object manipulation or magic orientation. Characters provide clues, humor, quests and leads as to "What do I do now?, Where do I go next?, Who should I seek out next to keep going?"

The first Chapter, which takes place around your house, is novice level. Chapter Two, set in Timbermist Woods, is intermediate. (Contrary to the axiom, it is sometimes beneficial to place all your eggs (nuts) in the same basket (hole). And note Darm's clue: you're looking for seasonal birthstones. How many seasons are there?

Copy protection occurs when you move from one Chapter to the next by matching an item on screen with an item in the manual. If you have extended memory, the program will recognize it and use it to allow more fluid movement in scene transitions.

Conclusions: I really liked this game. I enjoyed the graphics, animation and music, and story line. It's got my vote for Graphic Adventure of the Year — so far — and I can't wait for *Book 2*. But, I guess I'll have to — just like everyone else who plays it. ✻

Difficulty: Novice to Advanced

Company: Westwood/Virgin

Price: \$59.95

QuestBusters price: \$55



The Dark Half...from 6

scenes and some black-and-white dream sequences and trances that improve the look of the game and its overall tension level. Illustrations are sufficiently detailed and bring to life the visual images scribed by King and suggested by storyboards and some scenes from the motion picture version. Closeups look a little choppy, but the side views work nicely. Most locations also have day and night versions, a simple detail left out of many games but necessary for realistic plots.

The music and sound effects are some of the best Capstone has produced. Tense music plays throughout and sets a grim tone for the events that take place.

At the very least, the music puts you in the right frame of mind for a horror story. Sound effects also reflect some of the care Capstone gave this game.

Though the bone saw in the introduction could have been more convincing, digitized sounds like the telephone dialing, sirens, birds and screams make the experience a little more realistic.

Conclusions: As a horror buff, I was quite satisfied with the work done on *The Dark Half*. While the game is not particularly difficult, it closely follows the plot of the original work — unlike many other King adaptations. Capstone managed to successfully interject puzzles into a story that at first glance have none, and created a challenging environment in which to solve a mystery, avoid suspicion and, most importantly, stay alive. Give *The Dark Half* a try! It's the only box on the software shelves with the unique, unusual shrink-wrap imprinted with bloody handprints! ✻

Skill Level: Novice to intermediate

Company: Capstone

Price: \$49.95

QuestBusters price: \$ 45

The Two Towers.....from 9

the level of most currently available role-playing games. Still, I have enjoyed both Volumes. Sharing the experiences and companionship of the Tolkien characters within the many plots and subplots of the richly woven Interplay adaptation of *The Two Towers* makes hours of enjoyable play, and should be the deciding factor in evaluating the worth of this game to the buying public. ✻

Difficulty: Intermediate

Company: Interplay

Price: \$49.95

QuestBusters price: \$45

Amon Ra...from 5

which will determine the fate of the killer or killers and Laura's present and future fate, so be sure to take notes throughout the investigation. You'll probably find yourself wandering around a lot in Acts 3 and 4 until you can piece things together. When a clock appears in the upper-left corner of your monitor, you'll know you're moving along. The only arcade sequence is in Act 5. All I can say is: keep moving, close/bolt doors and end up hiding in a coffin (for awhile). Not enough? Hey, this is a review, not a walkthrough, for which I am better known. Look for one in *QB* soon, though, by C. F. Shaffer.

Conclusions: The game was too short, and the graphics fall short of Sierra's standard. The sound was great. The early 'ask someone about something' was annoying and tedious. The copy protection was cumbersome (I am not an Egyptologist, nor do I want to be). If you liked *The Colonel's Bequest*, however, you'll probably like this one. It gave me something to play during the normal summer doldrums. ✻

Difficulty: Novice to Intermediate

Company: Sierra

Price: \$69.95

QuestBusters price: \$59

King's Quest VI.....from 1

Williams, claims more than a million ways to play through the game.

Hardest King's Quest ever

The world of *KQ6* is quite constrained. None of the six islands extends more than a half-dozen screens or so. Only the catacombs and the Castle of the Crown are substantial in size; the mazes in the catacombs are confusing, but not overly extensive, and it's hard to get lost in the castle. Instead of walking around, *KQ6* requires that Alexander teleport himself from one island to another often. Very often. This is because the game is enormously dependent of one event or action triggering another as a way to increase playing time, gather clues, solve extended puzzles and just make some puzzles more difficult.

At this level the ploy works; *KQ6* is the most difficult of all the *KQ* games to solve. Just figuring out where to go next is a constant problem, and each visit to an island is like peeling just one layer of an onion. A large onion. There were times I felt motion-sick with all of Alexander's comings and goings.

There is one weak spot in this toughening up of the game, however. The most difficult sequence is climbing up the Logic Cliffs, a series of five logic puzzles. Two of the questions constitute the game's copy protection; once you figure out the answers (not easy), they must then be translated into an iconic alphabet included in the Guidebook to the Green Isles. The guidebook comes with the games; don't lose it! But the other cliff puzzles cannot be solved without using the guidebook, and the solutions there are well hidden. Between the obscurity of the puzzles and the need to translate the copy protection, be ready for a frustrating time.

This is especially vexing because no matter which path through the game the player takes, all must solve the cliffs. The situation has the potential to induce some inexperienced adventurers to turn their computers off and never return to *KQ6*. Since Sierra is making a strong

effort to create games that all levels of players can complete, yet still be challenged, this is a problem.

More animation

The graphics are especially nice. The backgrounds are not nearly as elaborate and detailed as those in *KQ5*, but they don't lower Sierra's artistic standards at all. Detailed and varied, each island in the game has a different look, from the oriental quality of the Island of the Crown, to the fantastic and colorful Isle of Wonder, to the game's artistic masterpiece, the Isle of the Dead. The company's decision to spend less money on backgrounds and invest it in more animation was a good one: playing *Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow* is more like controlling an animated feature film than any other game I have ever seen.

The game's climactic sword fight, the dance of the skeletons, the strut and shuffle of the Sense Gnomes — all flow from the player's actions, enhance the story, and entertain at the same time. Even little bits, like Beauty's pirouette when her clothes are transformed, add the kind of gloss that separates a very good game from a great one.

There is full musical scoring throughout; each scene seems to have its own theme, and a couple of the melodies rise above the tonal muddle we normally expect in games. With a sound card, there are voices in the opening, and wall-to-wall digital background effects throughout add a realistic aural dimension that rounds out the game world.

A landmark game

KQ6 is not just good, it's a landmark game. But as *KQ1* invented and defined the animated adventure, *Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow* marks its end in a most important way. No, adventure games will not go away, but *KQ6* represents a *fin de siecle*, the end of an era. It is a game that should have been — needed to be — first published on CD-ROM. For all of its strengths and gloss, it is ill served being played from a hard drive. If only because of its prominence in the

world of computer entertainment, *King's Quest VI* is the proof that the era of CD game playing is upon us.

Why?, you may ask. It's not just because the game takes up over seven-teen megabytes of disk space. Games today routinely break 20 megs and have already approached 30 megs in size. But even 486-class computers are routinely being sold with 40-meg hard drives, and with DOS and Windows installed, there is no room for the average consumer to even load the newest games.

Why? It's not just because *KQ6*'s opening animation is over seven megs in length and the company suggests removing it after you've seen it a few times in order to save disk space. That opening is much less than half of what was produced; to add more would balloon the game's size enormously. We won't be able to see the rest until the CD-ROM version is released early next year.

Why? It's not just because the game is full of fully animated sequences that also take up an enormous amount of space. *KQ6* is the closest thing we have yet to an interactive animated feature, and it could use even more of those sequences.

Why? Perhaps because of the enormous amount of dialogue in the game. We have ears, but we cannot hear. Why? Perhaps it is because Sierra cautions us that if all that wonderful animation runs slowly, or the on-the-fly sound decompression might hang up the game, we should consider defragmenting our hard drives before we play.

Why? It is all of these and more. It is because imagination has no limits, and current hardware does. There are other games proving this point today, but *King's Quest* has always been the benchmark. It is the end of one era, and when it is released on CD near the beginning of next year, it should be the beginning of another. Kill your hard drives! ❧

Difficulty: Intermediate
Company: Sierra On-line
Price: \$79.95
QuestBusters price: \$69



Swap Shop

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