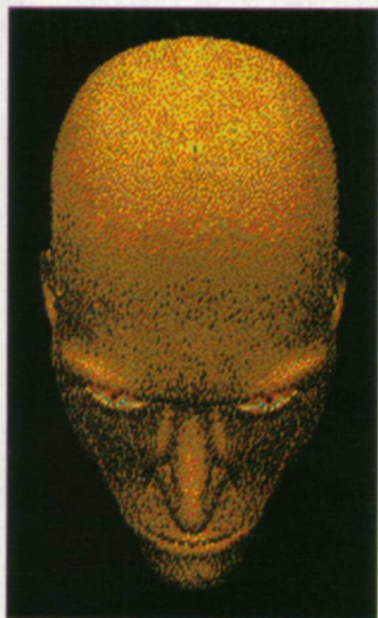


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disk and consequent balky movement haven't diminished a bit. Be warned, though: The switch renders your saved files unusable, so if you're well on in the game and not scratching a glitch, stick with the original version and just hammer in the Forge.

A LOOSE NUT HERE AND THERE

Forge fits very snugly into Ultima VII. The seams don't show, and if you didn't know of the existence of this Ultima McNugget beforehand, you'd never suspect it was anything other than part-and-parcel of the mother game. I do wish that the game's designers had used a few more stitches to weave it in, however.

Forge of Virtue pretty much stands as a separate unit within the game, with quests for the sake of quests rather than as integral parts of the story. It may not *look* like a data disk, but it sure *feels* like one.

And for a game whose creators so dearly love sending players hither and yon in search of solutions, the introduction to the island is disappointingly straightforward. You've barely arrived in Trinsic when the screen shakes with a tremor.

Your pal Iolo, who's just had the shock of seeing you for the first time in 200 Britannian years, somehow still has the presence of mind to suggest that Lord British might know something about it.

Which, of course, he does — Lord British knows all. In fact, he gives you the deed to his boat, which lets you get there if you haven't already bought one, and a crystal, which . . . well, never mind. The designers could have made this part more challenging. Finding the island could have been a quest in itself.

Finally, although the installation program does its complex work neatly and swiftly, it's not without a few snags. Worried that I'd chosen the wrong option at the outset, I tried to reinstall Forge of Virtue and found that, rather than correctly identifying the presence of the new executable file and add-in, it didn't recognize my Ultima VII directory at

all. And it balked at the presence of a CD-ROM drive on the system — odd, given Origin's recent dip into that market — until I rebooted with a CONFIG.SYS file that omitted reference to the CD-ROM drive.

But these laments don't amount to more than a few loose nuts in the Ultima VII machine. Forge of Virtue stands as a solid addition to a wonderful game.

Origin Systems, 110 Wild Basin Road, Suite 230, Austin, TX 78746, (800) 999-4939; IBM PC or compatible, 386SX, 386, or 486, 2MB RAM; 256-color VGA; requires Ultima VII: The Black Gate; requires hard-disk drive, 21MB free space; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster, Sound Blaster Pro (music and sound effects), supports Sound-Blaster digitized speech; mouse recommended; \$24.99

KING'S QUEST VI

By Tom Carlton

Come one, come all, you wizards of Daventry: Sierra's newest quest ups the ante for even the most dedicated prestidigitators among you. Put on your turban, pull up a joystick, and hold on tight, because King's Quest VI: Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow is a fast-paced game featuring a rich vocabulary, intricate and intriguing puzzles, and a robust plot. This most-recent incarnation of Roberta Williams' fantasy land demands and delivers more than ever before.

A SPECTACULAR START

King's Quest VI's cinema-style graphics, illustrations, and sounds are noticeably enhanced. The introductory scenes are just the start. Imagine 3-D renderings zooming from distant to close-up frames, while simultaneously panning and rotating 360 degrees around the Grand Hall of the Castle of Daventry. This glimpse into virtual reality is one spectacular intro. Similar "photo-



King's Quest VI offers a fast pace, intricate puzzles, and a robust plot.

realistic" illustrations are scattered throughout the story, as are short cartoon segments — both enrich the visual narrative. (We can only imagine what's in store with the soon-to-be-released CD-ROM version of King's Quest VI.)

The plot revolves around Prince Alexander's quest for his true love, the tumultuous Cassima. Does she really care for him? Even if she doesn't, his compelling adoration drives him to save her from a fate worse than death. Shipwrecked, then spewed out upon the treacherous shores of distant lands, Prince Alexander, son of King Graham, faces doom and demise while searching for his beloved in the Land of the Green Isles. New magic and additional spells mark this continuing saga.

The peripatetic prince will find himself using a magical map to travel all around the archipelago formed by the islands of Wonder, Sacred Mountain, Beast, Mists, and Crown. Mistakes result in a one-way ticket — a visit to the denizens of the deep in the Realm of the Dead. You'll want to obtain your passage to visit the Lord of this underworld by good deeds and quick wit. Be prepared to obtain a skeleton key to a chest of secrets in the castle, play *Them Bones*

on another's remains, throw down the gauntlet, and collect concoctions for spells yet to be cast.

The vile vizier of the Land of the Green Isles holds Alexander's beloved Cassima captive in the Castle of the Crown, while assuring others that she mourns only the recent death of her parents. But what evil part did he play in their demise? What spells must Alex cast to overcome immense odds? You'll want to visit the friendly bookseller and turn the pages of the *Book of Spells*.

Next door to the bookstore is the pawnbroker. Alex must hock his dearest treasure to become a regular client of the clerk there. Here, as everywhere else, the vizier's genie observes Alex's every move. You can't miss him: He's the one with the nasty glint in his eye, even when he's shape-shifting into human, reptilian, or other guises. Containing the genie's power will require assistance from the clown of the court and the wandering lamp peddler. The plot's thick, but don't ignore the swamp stick.

The vizier bears the burdens and assumes the duties of the office of governor of the kingdom. The Isle of the Crown will remind you of the islands of the Aegean, with turban-

clad characters from the Ottoman Sultanate, plus some anthropomorphic, sword-wielding, canine court attendants. But the vizier has grand designs for becoming king via marriage to Cassima. Can Prince Alexander prevent this dastardly villain from taking his beloved's hand in marriage?

FAMILIAR, BUT STILL UNCHARTED

Passage to the Isle of Wonder offers an abundance of objects you'll need for a successful mission. Beware and (like a Boy Scout) be prepared, because danger lurks in the bite of a black widow, within the stranglehold of a vicious vine, in the persons of four grisly gnomes, and in the discovery of an incomplete sentence soaking in the surf. If the gnomes believe you're not human, you must collect a number of mandatory items and some optional ones from a bibliophile, a widow's web, an enchanted garden, and a checkered land of royal games. Each new isle is as dangerous as the one before, but offers similar rewards.

Also, let's not forget to mention still another dimension: The Isle of the Beast holds a magical mirror you'll need to bring a tear of grief to the Lord of Death. In addition, the Isle of the Mists provides opportunities for increasing your score. In the Castle of the Crown, Alex assembles his final clues, consolidates his compatriots, corks the genie, and challenges the vizier to a duel to the death.

The puzzles in King's Quest VI are intricate — and more than adequate at keeping out all but the most-ardent pirates of intellectual property. Climbing the Cliffs of Logic requires complete documentation and an imagination worthy of a cryptologist. Serious trouble faces Alex during his sojourn up Sacred Mountain: Walking the catacombs, Alex faces a spike maze, a bottomless pit, and the possibility of crushing death.

This adventure/love story is laced with objects and images from previous Quests, so it maintains a sense of familiarity, while wandering into

uncharted adventure. Enhanced graphics and sound combine with an excellent plot to satisfy even the most experienced Quest maven.

It's better than King's Quest V, and it's longer, too, with a unique approach that should please both novice and experienced adventurers. A single, relatively straightforward thread gets you from start to finish, but lots (and I mean *lots*) of subplots and subthreads will sidetrack you if you want to draw out game play.

Like a good wine, King's Quest grows on you. King's Quest VI may be subtitled *Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow*, but it's guaranteed to thrill even the most intrepid PC game player for a long time to come.

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (800) 326-6654; IBM PC or compatible, 286 or faster, 640K RAM; EGA, VGA; supports AdLib, Roland MT-32, ProAudio Spectrum, Sound Blaster, Sound Source, Thunderboard; mouse recommended; \$79.95

THE LEGEND OF KYRANDIA

By Barry Brenesal

Welcome to the fairy-tale kingdom of Kyrandia, where (as you must by now anticipate if you dip into role-playing games at all) times aren't so good and evil stalks the land. The villain (there's *always* a villain) is the former court jester, Malcolm, whose broad smile wins few friends once they see his pointed teeth. Many years ago he killed the royal couple, then captured the fabulously magical Kyragem housed in the castle.

Since then, Malcolm has learned how to harness the Kyragem's powers for his own sadistic goals, while all other magic in the realm has begun to wither. The only hope for The Legend of Kyrandia lies with young Prince Brandon, who needs your help to solve the quests that will

arm him against Malcolm. The alternative is much too gruesome to contemplate: a kingdom destroyed, a disease-ridden countryside, and \$89.99 gone from your wallet.

BUT IT'S GREAT WINDOW DRESSING

Kyrandia's visuals are all you'd expect of Westwood Associates, the company that gave us the first 3-D, first-person-perspective role-playing fantasy, *Eye of the Beholder*.

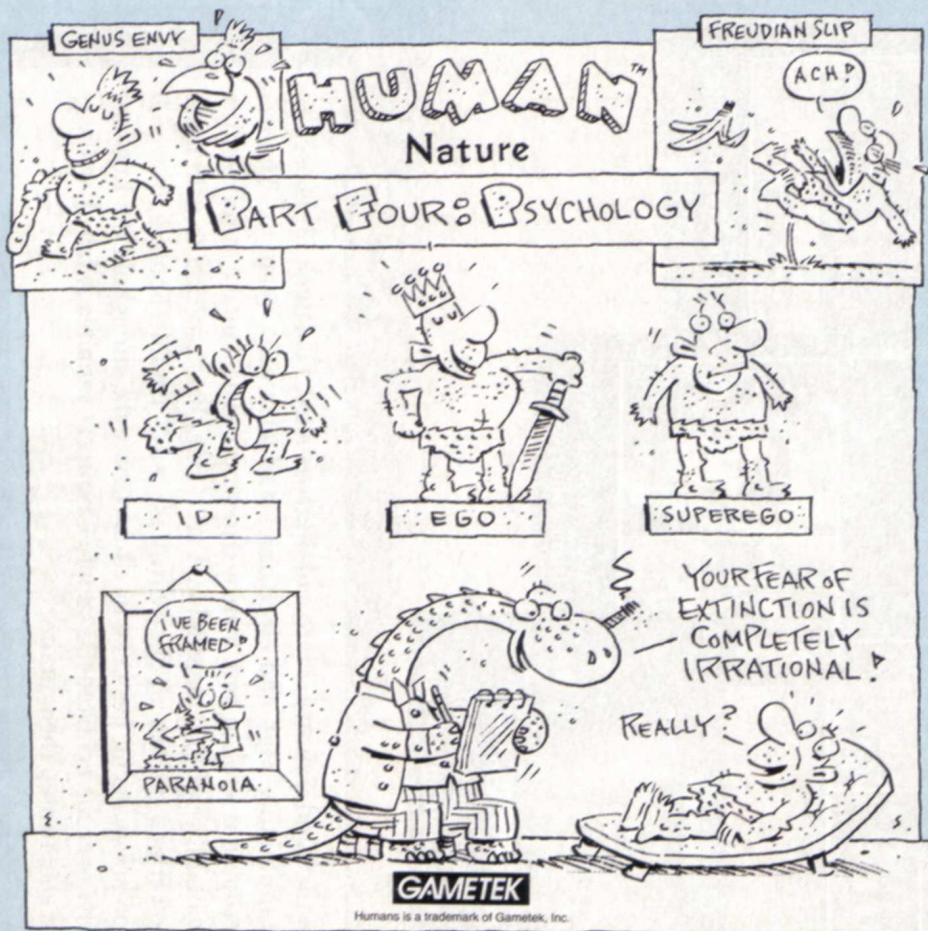
Background scenery throughout Kyrandia is extraordinarily good, though some of the finest screens — the *Thriving Tree*, the *Cavern of Twilight* — are pure window dressing and don't contribute much to the story line. (Mind you, they're *great* window dressing.)

Because true 256-color VGA artwork animates so slowly on most current systems, Kyrandia's human characters are drawn in MCGA. What's gained in speed is lost in definition, however. Prince Brandon's face is typical, nothing more than a smear of lines and color.

As it is, there aren't many faces or forms to draw. Fewer than a dozen animated figures cover the entire Kyrandia landscape. This, plus the developer's general skittishness about any character-to-character discussion, makes Kyrandia an unusually quiet game, with almost no speech (except for Brandon's largely repetitive jokes, which eventually get old). Most of the Prince's time is spent alone, as he finds objects and figures out how they fit or work together.

It's a very different approach from that of nearly every other graphics adventure. Given the game's environmental subtext (Malcolm also is destroying the land itself, which is the foundation of Kyrandia's magic), interaction with the environment might have been interesting. But Westwood doesn't choose that course. Instead, the game provides conventional handling of manmade items, plants, and polished gems.

Equaling the quality of the game's visuals is its excellent soundtrack, which surpasses anything done for,



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