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he Legend of Kyrandia has a long and complicated history: a mixture of legend and fact, magic and machines. In the third installment of this popular series (the second was never ported to the Macintosh), the story is told from the viewpoint of Malcolm, a slightly mad royal court jester exiled by a power-hungry king. Mixing your own ingenuity with Malcolm's penchant for sarcastic wit, one must adventure through three worlds to clear Malcolm's name of charges of murder and restore some semblance of order to the realm.

Satire and Attire

One of the first things you notice is that this game is meant to be funny. After all, you are a court jester. Malcolm has many witty asides and comments about the scenery around him, and a devil named Gunther pops up in the corner of the screen to help things move along with sarcastic remarks. There is even an option to have a studio audience which functions as an automatic laugh-track synced to the funnier jokes. I turned the laugh-track and the music off almost immediately: both were abysmally boring.

Many of the situations are quite absurd (a Kyrandian killer squirrel plays a large role) and the Kyrandian scenery gives Malcolm lots of material for the joke mill. Most of the humor is pretty standard stuff such as tripping over logs or other such pratfalls with many acid comments (done in a well-acted, gravely voice-over) about the local color. It's funny but not particularly inspired.

One of the first things Malcolm must do is find a disguise which is, of course, an amazingly complicated affair. Standard procedure for adventure games of this type. Once you have a feel for how things interact in the Kyrandian environment, you must assemble a collection of props in your ten inventory slots and set some events in motion. Most of Malcolm's activities involve pranks or deceptions and often call for bizarre inventions or innovative uses of mundane objects.

[A Twisted Tale](#)

Gameplay moves well with Malcolm keeping up a steady stream of sarcastic comments. Luckily, the game is smart enough not to repeat jokes a second time. Puzzles present themselves pretty clearly, although logic is not a tool you can rely on in Kyrandia. When all else fails, do the absurd. There are enough clues both in the scenery and from other characters to keep things moving, but occasionally I found myself just randomly grabbing objects and clicking on anything. I felt this to be the equivalent to typing random words into an old text adventure in hopes of finding new clues. Many objects you find have multiple uses such as Malcolm's favorite toy, the "nut on a string." You never run out of objects but often run out of inventory space. There are also multiple ways to reach the same goals such as two different ways to acquire a Fish Cream (don't ask) sandwich.

As with most adventure games, the gameplay is stretched out by repetitive actions (grab the flask, fill it with water, water the seeds, repeat) which can be a little annoying. Luckily on both a 7100/66 and a Quadra 610, the transitions from one screen to the next were very swift.

The cast of characters is large with most people only having a few lines of dialog or a single function. Malcolm must talk to everyone and find out their secrets which in turn sets new events in motion, etc. Voices are very well done and you can switch to "helium mode" (double speed speech) when you get tired of hearing the original voices.

[he In-Your-Face Interface](#)

Kyrandia took a pretty standard approach to the graphic adventure which will be quite familiar to players of Indiana Jones or the first Kyrandia installment. The mouse is your only tool, and you must click on objects, scenery, and people to explore the environment. Inventory is handled by an automatic pop-up window similar to a dresser drawer that jumps up from the bottom of the screen when you move your mouse to that area. This was handy, but a bit problematic when you are trying to head "down" from the screen you are currently on. You have to be faster than the pop-up and click before it appears.

The pop-up holds your ten inventory slots, a button for setting game options, a slot for your jester's staff (a rarely-used prop) and the Moodometer. Using the Moodometer you can set Malcolm's personality type, changing him from a sarcastically nice jester to a malicious liar. This, in turn, allows you to find out information or get past obstacles because characters respond to your attitude.

The pop-up inventory gives the game plenty of room for scenery which takes up nearly all of a 640x480 screen. Kyrandia is a pseudo-3D environment where Malcolm can travel toward the viewer or into the distance, but he never passes behind or around objects or buildings which tends to flatten the 3D effect.

[A Colorful but Blurry Realm](#)

Kyrandia itself is a bizarre place, and the other realms Malcolm travels to (The Isle of Cats, Limbo, the Underworld, and the Ends of the Earth) just keep getting stranger. Killer squirrels and talking dogs and cats seem pretty mundane by the middle of the story. The artwork is a mixture of hand-illustrated scenes and animation blended with 3-D rendered objects and backgrounds. Each scene is a static plane, and continuity from scene-to-scene is generally good though you often enter at odd angles to the way you exited the last screen. The colors are bright and playful, and the animation is generally good (though very simplistic.)

I know carping about low-resolution games is pretty commonplace in IMG, and this often comes from our Mac snobbery toward the VGA way of seeing things. However, reviewing games on a Mac calls for slightly higher standards for graphic resolution. Sadly, Kyrandia III doesn't live up to our expectations: the blocky 320x240 VGA graphics really gave me a headache. Kyrandia III is a straight port complete with lo-res fonts and chunky MPEG video, and there's just no way to make that look good to Macintosh-spoiled eyes. There is an option to play with a smaller, high-resolution screen. However, as this reduces the view area to a space smaller than a playing card, I found it just as tough to see. Viewing it in high-res did reveal the hand-crafted nature of the games artwork, and the imagination and detail that went into every screen. As a video artist, I would find it extremely frustrating to work in such a low resolution, and I'm sure the entire industry will breathe a sigh of relief when the last VGA-only PC bites the dust.

[An Equally Blurry Plot](#)

Kyrandia III also suffers from another vision problem: it's not clear whether the game was intended for children or adults. The box states it is for both, but the content is not as certain. Most of the humor is pretty low-grade (let the killer squirrel loose in the shop and watch the fun) yet some of the plot elements, particularly your ability to lie and maliciously deceive, are more adult. There's a funny sequence having to do with a revolution between slave cats and ruling dogs, full of pseudo-Marxist dialog and inside jokes ("We will rise up and conquer these capitalist dogs!" the cat says.) that would unfortunately soar right over the heads of my little cousins. Yet they would love the cartoonish backgrounds and silly animations, which

seem straight out of Saturday morning cartoons. Malcolm is fleeing charges of murder (as told in the ridiculously convoluted plot outlined in the manual) and can actually die in several nasty-but-funny ways, yet the jokes are often of knock-knock complexity. If I were a child, I would find some of the more abstract puzzles pretty tough, but as an adult, I was often irritated by the knee-slapper jokes. Also, parents might be a little alarmed by the harshness of Gunther, Malcolm's bad angel, who often praises some pretty evil behavior and loudly advises Malcolm to "LIE to these idiots." Neither he nor Malcolm are particularly good role models. The mixed content leaves the game in a kind of limbo: Kyrandia is either a dumbed-down adult adventure with kids' scenery, or a too-complex and less than wholesome kids' game.

Pros

- Fast and smooth operation on suggested systems
- Good intro movie
- Silly, Monty Python-esque pratfalls and pranks
- Lots of bizarre characters and inventions to interact with
- Long game, not to be finished in a weekend
- Good voice narration with lots of variety

Cons

- Low-grade humor a bit irritating for adult audiences
- Chunky VGA graphics call for Tylenol and glasses
- Music is horrible beyond mention
- Much of game time is spent simply assembling inventory items and repeating tasks
- Gunther is rarely funny and often downright mean
- Game plot is illogical to a fault and doesn't mesh with the story told in the intro movie or in the game booklet
- Too harsh and abstract for a 12-year-old - too silly for twentysomethings and above

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