

-

-

y Greg Kramer

-

o you want to win a million dollars? Sure, we all do. What if someone told you that you could do it by playing a computer game? "Great," you'd say. "I play computer games and I'm pretty darn good at them if I do say so my own darn self." Well, then you should thoroughly consider playing "Treasure Quest" from Sirius Publishing. It's very simple. Just be the first person to solve the game and you, yes you, will win one million dollars. Pretty intriguing idea, right? If you said yes, you probably haven't played Treasure Quest because no computer puzzle games can prepare you for the mental demand of this computerized Gordian Knot.

It's not only the intellectual and educational requirements that put this game out of the reach of most gamers, its the very precise, very difficult kind of thinking which few have mastered let alone even attempted. Treasure Quest is a solid game, make no mistake, but it is certainly not for everyone - in fact, it is only for the very few. Treasure Quest is probably ideal for those who can do those surreal London Times crosswords in a single morning. I have no doubt, however, that if you have the mental acumen and lots of time to spend, Treasure Quest could be a VERY rewarding purchase. For most of us, though, buying it is an infuriating mistake.

[Lost Love and Found Money](#)

The dearly departed Professor Jonathan William Faulkner has left his considerable fortune to whichever of his students can unlock the mystery enshrined in his spacious and eclectic mansion. A quote is hidden in each room of the Professor's house. Taken together each of the ten quotes leads to a mystery about the death of the Professor's only love. Solve this (and write the required ESSAY on how you did it) and the big prize is yours.

To decode these quotes, you as the student must cull together a series of hints hidden around the rooms. These hints come in a wide variety of forms: rebuses, riddles, sounds, visual clues, song lyrics, and puzzles. Suffice to say that if you see it or hear it, it is probably a clue. You are also guided by the ghost of the Professor's fatal beauty (played rather well by Terry Farrell of "Deep Space Nine") who speaks in riddles and offers up vital clues. It will be necessary to take copious notes (either by hand or in the provided online notebook) and make a map of the screens you see.

If this sounds easy, it is not. First, there is no guarantee you will even know the quote once you think you have the words. Second, the puzzles are easily the most difficult I have ever seen in a computer game — they are the kind more often found in the Mensa Fun Book.

[Up the Creek](#)

Needless to say, with this kind of money on the line, there are no hints available. In fact, you are cast adrift in this little adventure with almost no information as to what is required of you. There is some help available, however.. for a price. The companion book (for an additional \$20) offers up game rules, story background, and most usefully, transcripts of important audio hints, the lyrics to the background music (which, of course, contain clues) and Ms. Farrell's dialogue. None of this makes the puzzles an ounce clearer, but it does save a great deal of trouble in transcribing these items yourself.

If you want to have any hope of solving Treasure Quest without spending the first two or three DAYS fumbling around without the slightest glimmer of your mission, I highly recommend this book. I am somewhat disturbed by the rather brazen gouging exhibited by charging additional money for a book that is essentially a manual, but I guess it is a small investment for a chance at a million bucks. That's capitalism for you.

Once you have some idea of your mission, it is time to attack the puzzles. Let me give you an example to show you what you are up against. For those who have already started the game and are on the verge of a quivering rage because I am giving something away, relax! This solution is already used as an example in the companion book. On the screen are written a series of words: Beryllium, Yttrium, Titanium-i, Gold. The first thing you should notice is that these are elements of the periodic table. The second thing is the odd "Titanium-i". The third thing is the numbers superimposed over the names. Now you are ready to begin.

he numbers are atomic weights of the respective elements. Thus, you need to consult the periodic table for the elements' abbreviations: Beryllium=Be, Yttrium=Y, Titanium=Ti, and Gold=Au. If you take away the "i" from "Ti" (as indicated if you read the clue as "Titanium MINUS i") you get just "T". Now you read the letters in counterclockwise order (as hinted by the mirror in the center of the picture) and you get "be-au-t-y". There, you have just found a word in this room's quote. You might also notice the other clue in the puzzle: the Spanish word for "truth" spelled backwards. Is it any wonder the book recommends consulting your public library?

If nothing I just said made you go "huh?", you are probably equipped to play Treasure Quest. If it made no sense at all, stick to "Doom". For those of us in the middle, though, Treasure Quest presents a dilemma: we know we are pretty smart puzzlers but this is a different, more classical kind of puzzle game for which, smart as we are, we may not be properly tuned. Ultimately, the buying decision is yours, but I feel a duty to make it as informed as possible.

[Remember, it's a computer game](#)

The visuals in Treasure Quest are complex and well executed. Gameplay is smooth, but it's not the usual puzzling system of turning and walking. On each screen are hot spots (areas which take you to another screen if clicked). One of the challenges of the game is finding these spots by clicking on every object you encounter. While the environment is unusual, it doesn't take too long to become accustomed to it.

The house is structured around a wheel off of which the game's ten rooms branch. Many rooms also have secret passages leading to other rooms. Unlike most puzzle games, navigation is not a major part of the game, and suitably, the designers have made it very straightforward. Since there is scant chance you will get lost, you can focus on the challenge of solving the puzzles and finding all the hot spots (if you miss a screen you may lack a vital clue.)

The controls are a little awkward. First, they are symbols: the paper airplane is "exit", the notebook is self-explanatory, the globe returns you to the room wheel, and the pocket watch takes you back to the previous screen. They are clustered close together on the screen, and hence, I was constantly clicking on the wrong one. I can't tell you how many times I wanted to back up but instead ended up in the atrium. Additionally, there is no save command. The game remembers what rooms you have visited and what puzzles you have solved. This will require a bit of an adjustment for most gamers, but given the structure of Treasure Quest, it makes a certain kind of sense.

Overall, the interface is a bit clunky but workable. The same cannot be said for the built-in notebook - it's just clunky. Other than its annoying habit of duplicating my entries, it proved fairly useless. I vastly preferred taking my notes by hand.

The Bottom Line

Treasure Quest is an ambitious and challenging game and is certainly worthy of its lucrative payoff. Despite its rather shameless commercialism (Sirius also tries to sell you Internet access), it is a principled and pure example of literate, abstract puzzling of the utmost difficulty. My only warning is to be honest with yourself before plunking down your purchase price (plus the companion book). When I say this game is hard, I mean REALLY hard. On one hand, it's refreshing to see a computer game that dares to be high-brow and virtually insoluble. On the other, that doesn't mean that I am going to try it myself.

Pros

- o Very complex and rich puzzles
- o \$1 million prize for being the first to solve it
- o Good acting and a well told story.

Cons

- o Awkward interface
- o Online notebook is useless
- o A bit too difficult and esoteric for many gamers.

Publisher Info

Sirius Publishing, Inc.
7320 East Betherus Drive
Scottsdale, AZ 85260
(602) 951-3288

- <http://www.treasurequest.com>

-