Wizardry 6 - Bane of the Cosmic Forge
by Matt Welter

Wizardry 6: Bane of The Cosmic Forge is the continuation of the popular series of fantasy role playing adventures produced by Sir-Tech software. The basic premise of the game is to take a group of six characters through various sections of an abandoned castle and surrounding area in search of the Cosmic Forge, a mystical device which will grant its user any wish. Of course, the king of this castle was an evil man who got a little greedy with the Cosmic Forge, with the results of his ambitions being a giant maze stocked with numerous evil creatures and a few friendly faces as well. The game features a somewhat unique approach: there are three different endings!

Character generation has always been a strength of the Wizardry series; BOCF is no exception. After choosing a name for the character, the player can choose from one of the 11 possible races, including strange types such as a Mook, Faerie, Felpurr, Rawulf, and Dracon. Since each race has a different base set of characteristics, certain racial stocks are better suited for certain classes than others. If you'd like to create a Samurai, for example, a Felpurr, with its natural quickness and intelligence, would be the best candidate to become one. In addition, the different races have different resistances to various types of hazards dished out by monsters; this actually does make a difference while adventuring. For example, while I was adventuring, I stumbled upon some rouges who could cast sleep spells. While my human fighter dozed off, the elven alchemist and the dwarven ninja stayed wide awake due to their tendencies to resist these types of spells.

The next step in character generation is to choose the class of the character. The professions available are based on the number of bonus points which can be added to the basic racial characteristics; thus, in order to get the "upper" classes (such as the lord, ninja, monk, valkyrie, samurai, bishop, or psionic) the random bonus points would probably have to over 10, otherwise, the "basic" classes (fighter, mage, alchemist, priest, thief, bard and ranger) are probably all that will be obtainable.

Once the class has been chosen, the bonus points are distributed to the 7 statistics (strength, intelligence, piety, vitality, dexterity, speed, and personality) with karma being determined randomly. Once again, it was really nice to see that unlike most computer RPG's, these numbers actually did matter. A strong character does more damage as well as bashing down doors with ease, while the dexterous thief picks locks at will.

The next step is to distribute points to the various skills available for each character class; in my opinion, this is one of the most unique things about the character process. There are a vast amount of skills to add points to, including various weapon, spellcasting, and academic pursuits. For example, a ninja or monk may put points into such skills as kirijitsu (the ability to kill with a single blow), ninjitsu (the ability to hide in the shadows), hand and feet combat, and more general abilities such as scouting, mythology, and spellcasting skills. Once again, these skills really do matter in how the character performs; a fighter with low sword combat skills doesn't hit very often, a mage with poor oratory abilities botches a lot of spells, and a party which doesn't have someone with good scouting skills will miss a lot of secret doors and items. One nice feature of these skills the character becomes naturally proficient as he uses the skills; for example, a lord who fights constantly with a sword will see his sword abilities increase over time. Also, as a character goes up levels, he or she will be allowed to add additional points to their skills. After selecting a portrait, the journey into the castle begins.

The view is the classic 3-D maze viewpoint, although the view takes up about half of the screen. It is at this point, however, when my criticisms start. Both the graphics and the user interface are exactly as on the IBM, which may be great for PC users, but will definitely annoy a Mac user. The mouse interface is not quick to use and actually tends to slow down gameplay. I found that the keyboard worked much faster. The game is so much of a direct port that even in the game configuration display, the graphics mode is listed as EGA! The animated pictures depicting the monsters are far below Macintosh standards, with jerky movement and off-color blocky graphics. The sound is, once again, a very far cry from the abilities of the Mac, consisting of mediocre clangs, explosions and "roars" from the monsters. Its too bad Sir-Tech didn't do a better job on the graphics and sounds, because otherwise, BOCF is one of the best RPG's available for the Macintosh.

The meat of the game, the adventure storyline, is quite excellent. There are many places to explore, and the text descriptions do give the gamer a good taste of the surrounding he or she is in. The total game is huge, starting out in the castle and moving to an outdoor chasm, a pyramid, the river Styx, an enchanted forest, and finally the Temple of Ramm. Each of these areas are quite large, and sometimes the solutions involve traveling back to an area you've searched before; thus, mapping is very crucial in this game. Without a good map, a player will eventually reach a dead end because of forgetting about some unopened gate or locked door in the castle. When in combat, the normal feature of combat options are available (fight, parry, cast spell, etc.). The magic system is quite good, with a wide variety of spells available and the option of casting them at various power levels depending on the needs of the party and the number of magic points available. There are numerous Non-Player Characters (NPC) found around the maze, all of which serve to help guide the players, as well as buy and sell valuable items. Although the box boasts of full sentence conversations, I found myself using the old "key" word method of conversation, anything else resulted in a "I don't know about that" response. Also, the game sometimes leaves the player scratching his/her head because some items give no clue to their use, and unless the gamer randomly fools around a little bit, the solution will not be found.