Jewel Box
by James A. Best

Jewel Box is a Macintosh port of the classic arcade game Columns. There have been a couple of different attempts at creating Columns on the Mac, but this is by far the best. I'm for one very grateful to Rodney Jacks for pouring his time and effort into this game, since I've already spent the better part of my life savings on playing the arcade version.

In case you've missed it in your local arcade, here's the basic premise. Jewels are dropping from the sky in vertical blocks of three. You must align identical jewels either vertically, horizontally, or diagonally. You can rotate the order of the jewels in the block as they are dropping, as well as decide where the block will drop. If the unused jewels pile up to the top of the screen, you're toast! Sound similar to a certain Russian puzzle game that swept the nation a couple of years back? Well clear your mind. This game is just as refreshing and the strategies are quite different from games like Tetris and Welltris.

The playability of Jewel Box is as good as you can get on the Mac. You have your choice of using combinations on the keyboard with either your left or right hand, or you can use the numeric keypad. You can get comfortable with Jewel Box by using the Practice feature, which allows you to start out at any of the 20 levels. A complete DocMaker manual comes with the game, but if you're not one for manuals, there's a full on-line help feature.

The graphics and sound of Jewel Box are absolutely incredible.   The jewels that are dropping are identical to the original jewels and the background scene is that of a treasure chest. Definitely, a lot of work went into giving Jewel Box an unsurpassed interface.   For the sounds, an even greater labor was undertaken. The game event sounds are premium samples and a full 4-track sequence was created to accompany your play. If you're not one for having bleeps and blurbs going off in your ear as your play, you can disable the sounds, the music, or choose the volume level you like, all in the menu bar. If you do choose to turn the music off, you're really missing out.

The most important feature of any game is fun. No worries about Jewel Box in this department. This game will keep you entertained for hours. I'd say years, but I want people to think that I actually get out of the house now and then. I qualify Jewel Box as one of those "show-off programs". You know, the one's we show off to friends and family to show them just how good the Macintosh is. I'm sure you'll be proud to display Jewel Box along with all your QuickTime movies or sound files of Arnold Schwartzenegger, Bill & Ted, and Wayne's World.

Beyond the few bugs in Jewel Box that are always present in a first release, I do have one or two suggestions for improvements to the game. My biggest one is that the game currently needs at least an 8-bit 13" monitor before you can even consider playing it. Being one of the many Mac owners that naively purchased a 12" monitor, I was rather shocked to see a nasty dialog box pop up and tell me this. I sure hope that future versions of Jewel Box will support 12" monitors. Another suggestion would be to allow games to start at levels other than level 1 with a point bonus for doing so, just like the original game.

Now, given all these bells and whistles, beefs and bouquets,   how much would you expect Jewel Box to set you back? Go on, guess! I'll wait.....$50.....$40 ....less?!? Not only is Jewel Box shareware, it's only $10 dollars!! I think that's an incredible price for a game of this caliber. I would also expect this game to go commercial any day now, so you're forewarned to snap it up now and register your copy before you have to buy it at the local software store. Rodney Jacks is

to be celebrated for releasing such a high quality program as shareware.   Keep up the good work, Rodney!