

The Bride With The Disney Dowry

Sierra Creates Their Own Magic Kingdom
in *KING'S QUEST VII: THE PRINCELESS BRIDE*

by Charles Ardai

CONSIDER THIS GAME TO BE KING'S QUEST I. THIS IS WHERE IT ALL OUGHT TO HAVE STARTED; OR, TO LOOK AT IT another way, this is where it all starts.

Yes, KING'S QUEST VI got a lot of attention for its snazzy opening cartoon, crammed with swooping camera movements and full-screen characters rendered three-dimensionally; but once you got past the opening, the game was just another KING'S QUEST. Decent graphics, but nothing to stand up and cheer over—the graphics even felt like something of a letdown after the outstanding animation of the introduction.

KING'S QUEST VII, on the other hand, is a visual marvel from beginning to end. I tried this game on my mother (a big fairy tale fan), who asked, "Is that a game from Disney?" When I replied in the negative, she said, "But they're trying to do Disney, right?"

They are indeed. From the opening frames, where drops of dew in an enchanted forest drop on the tummy of an enchanted ladybug, to the scene a few seconds later in which lovely Princess Rosella sings her royal heart out in a tuneful paean to her about-to-be-lost adolescence,

KING'S QUEST VII exudes Disney-like quality from each of its cel-animated poses.

Every frame is beautiful, every line is neat and pert, the camera soars and glides, and the notes of the musical score tinkle out in bounding effervescence like the fizz out of a bottle of soda pop. This is the Disney of *The Little Mermaid* or *Beauty and the Beast*, or *Aladdin*, if you deduct that film's adult-targeted sense of irony. It's the Disney of *The Sword In the Stone* and of *Alice in Wonderland*, light and fluffy as a soufflé. It's not the Disney of *Bambi* or *Snow White*; here even the menaces are adorable bits of whimsy. If the villains ever frighten, it's only for a brief time, and then everyone gets together again

King's Quest VII

Price: \$79.95,
CD-ROM

System

Requirements:

IBM compatible 386-33Mhz or better (486 recommended), 4 MB RAM (5 MB RAM rec.), SVGA graphics, Windows 3.1, CD-ROM, mouse; supports Windows compatible sound cards.

Protection: None

Designer: Roberta Williams

Publisher: Sierra On-Line, Inc.

Bellevue, WA

(800) 757-7707

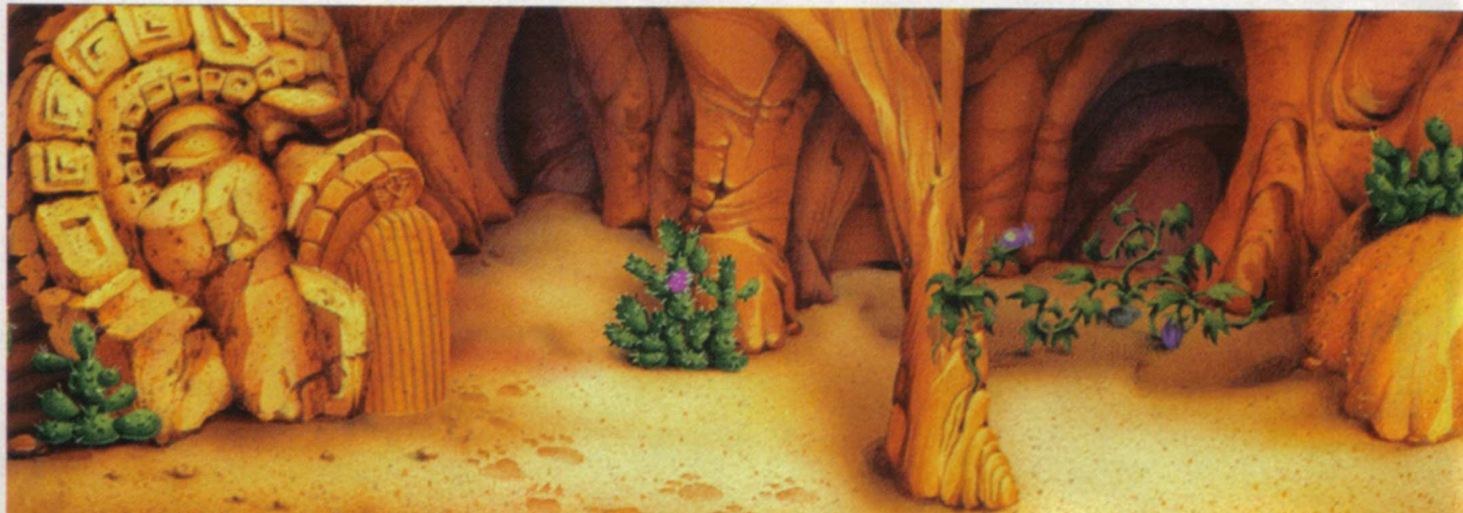


for one more song.

It matters not at all that the game is from Sierra rather than Disney. It is true to the Disney spirit, just as any movie about a rugged hero who wears a leather jacket and gets out of one scrape after another is really Indiana Jones, and any movie about a suave secret agent is essentially James Bond. At the same time, KING'S QUEST VII is also KING'S QUEST

through and through, meaning (among other things) that it cribs from other sources left and right. A bit of a familiar fable here—is that Chicken Little running about the streets of the town called Falderol?—a bit of a legend there, a bit of a modern fairy tale two screens over.

Rosella falls down, down, down into a magical pool like Alice down the rabbit



hole, and when her mother, Valanice, follows her, she actually meets a rabbit and goes through a number of tiny doors. "The Wizard of Oz" is in the game, too, in Rosella's opening song about being transported to "a land beyond dreams." So is Guinevere's soliloquy from Lerner and Loewe's *Camelot*, when Rosella sings, "[I'm] about to be a bride/[But] I want to run and hide." (Guinevere sang, "I won't be bid and bargained for like beads at a bazaar...I've run away, eluded them and fled..." Same idea; KING'S QUEST VII just eliminates those nasty, complicated words like "eluded" and "bazaar.")

What else is lurking in this game? For one thing, a Halloween land that suspiciously resembles the town from Tim Burton's *Nightmare Before Christmas*, and even uses the name "Ooga Booga." (The bad guy in that flick was a heavy named "Oogey Boogey." A subtle distinction.) Anyone else? Sure: the three Fates from Greek mythology, Titania and Oberon from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a comi-



JACK'S FLAT Princess Rosella's journey will take her through a Halloween land reminiscent of Tim Burton's *A Nightmare Before Christmas*.

cal carnivorous Venus flytrap, and a headless horseman, all lifted from other sources and jumbled together in the mythic hodgepodge that is KING'S QUEST VII.



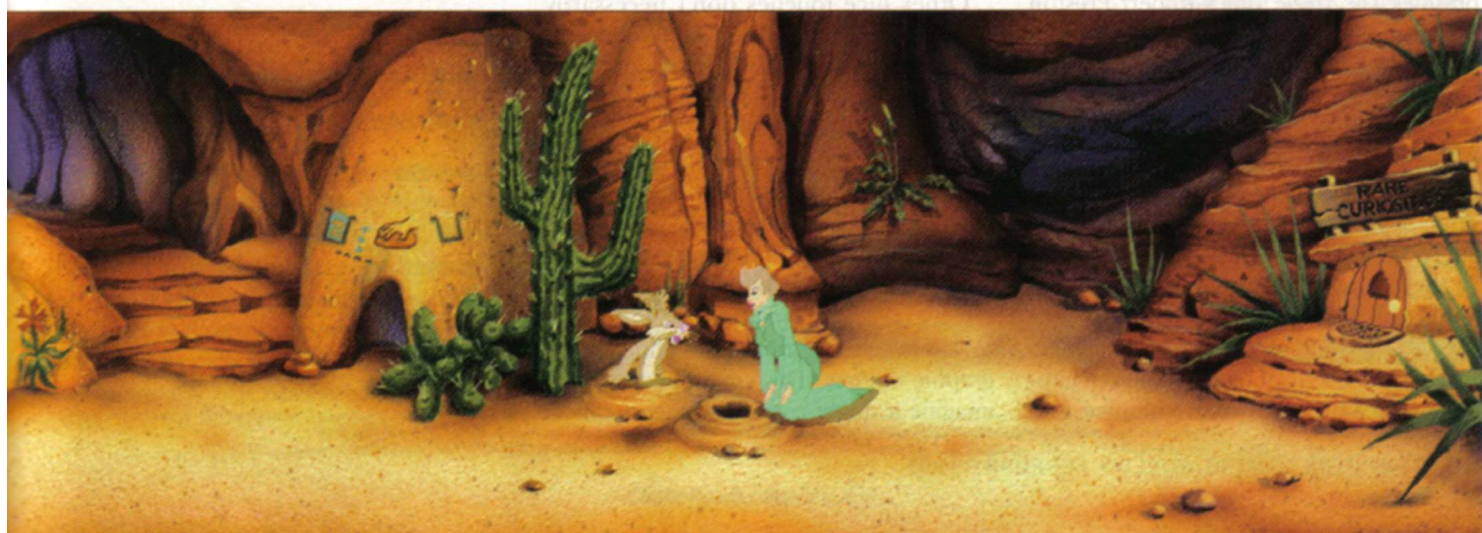
FISH OR FOUL? Valanice will encounter a number of colorful characters with "fishy" motives while looking for her princess daughter.

Everyone you meet gives you a quest to carry out; that's tradition, too. It wouldn't be KING'S QUEST if you actually had to go out and look for puzzles to solve, now would it? It never struck me before now just how mercantile a world-view the KING'S QUEST series presents: everyone wants something, everyone's got something you want, everyone's willing

to make a trade. The jeweler troll in the caverns wants a jewel to buy new tools with, and he'll give you his old tools if you bring him same; the crystal dragon wants a spark, and if you bring her one she'll give you a nice big ruby. You have a lantern that can carry a spark, and you need a hammer and chisel to chip off one of the dragon's scales while she's asleep.

Do I smell trades in the offing?

Trades are at the heart of this game, an ironic subtext for a story whose stated topic is the marrying off of a nubile girl, and not just any nubile girl, a nubile royal, in whose person is presumably vested some claim to political authority over and ownership of her father's lands. But enough of that—this is neo-Disney, remember. This is KING'S QUEST, where the closest you get to sexual politics is Rosella going "blech!" after being kissed by a troll. This is magic and wonder and happily ever after, and the crew of designers and artists who worked on the game have pulled it off so well that, by gosh and begorrah, it really does cast the spell a good animated movie does. It's the first computer game to do so, certainly the first KING'S QUEST. The puzzles may be the familiar sorts of puzzles and the characters may be the usual sorts of characters, but in another sense nothing is the same. A new era begins now.



HANDS, LANDS, AND SHIFTING SANDS

It must be the result of inbreeding, these four-fingered hands that Rosella and Valanice have. If you never noticed them before, it's not cause for a trip to the ophthalmologist.

They've never had hands before, at least not like this, with fingers and everything. Now you can see their fingers move, and their eyes, and their facial expressions. You can see Valanice stick her finger in her tiny mouth when she samples a piece of birthday cake and Rosella's yellow tongue unfurl in the mirror after she's been turned into a troll.

It's every bit as good as the animation in the last adventure game to win acclaim for its cartoon-style animation, **LucasArts' THE DAY OF THE TENTACLE** (where the characters also had four-fingered hands—go figure).

Denny Delk, **DAY OF THE TENTACLE**'s Hoagie, turns up here as the voice behind King Otar, Lord of the Trolls, who snatches Rosella out of the magic pool, transforms her, and claims her as his fiancée. (The versatile and wonderful Delk also turns up as a badger in **Falderol** and a shrunken head in **Ooga Booga Land**.) While Rosella goes about getting herself un-trolled and then labors to escape Ooga Booga's creepy environs unmolested, Valanice searches for her through an endless desert and a cursed forest where she encounters a snake oil salesman (Roger Jackson) who outdoes *The Music Man*'s Robert Preston for sheer oiliness, and a mockingbird in the best Don Rickles tradition (Jim Cranna), among other interesting creatures. With the exception of Chicken Little and one or two of the trolls, all the characters' voices are extremely well done. It is a pleasure to think about how far we've come from the days when Sierra used to corral random staff members to do the voices on the CD-ROM editions of their games.

The game's story unfolds in six chapters, alternating between Valanice and

Rosella as on-screen heroine. First, Valanice has to struggle through the desert to get a stone idol to open its mouth; when, upon pulling this off, she finds herself menaced by a giant gila monster, the game suspends her story and turns its at-



OUT OF CON-TROLL Rosella had better watch her tongue around the grumpy trolls lest she find herself turned into one.

tention to Rosella's travails in the land of the trolls. When Rosella finds herself clinging to the edge of a graveyard sink-hole by her fingernails, the game leaves her to return to Valanice. A bit of cleverness gets Valanice past the gila monster and into Falderol, where after much ado she ends up on trial for stealing the moon. (Don't ask.) Before we get to see Valanice exonerated, we return to Rosella; then it's back to Valanice, and so on, until you've made it through the last chapter.

Or, if you prefer, you can jump around instead, starting a new game at any chapter you like. This is one of several nice touches that make **KING'S QUEST VII** easier and more user-friendly than most adventure games on the market. Also, if you "perish" or "expire" in the game you have the option of retracting your fatal move and trying something else.

Other nice touches don't necessarily make the game easier, but do make it more fun. For instance, clicking an object from your inventory on the eye icon in the command line calls up a window in mid-screen that displays a fancy 3-D rendering of the object, which you can rotate to examine it from all angles.

There are some unfortunate weaknesses, too. The eye icon in the command line, for instance, can only be used to look at inventory objects, not at anything in the graphic window. This confused me, and I imagine it might confuse younger gamers

even more. Also, there is a large, ornate letter 'K' at the end of the command line, which looks like it ought to do something, but turns out not to have any function at all. Another peculiarity is that the game has no save game feature and only saves your position in the story when you quit.

These are minor complaints; the only major one I have is that the copy of the game I had crashed several times as a result of internal errors. I had been warned that this might happen, but the warning didn't make the fact any easier to take. It's no fun when your game stops dead and displays an arcane error message like "Error 48: myCursorView is not a selector for pInventory," especially when the lack of a save function means that if you haven't quit recently you'll have to replay a good-sized chunk of the game.

It's a shame that in order to get the game into stores in time for the holiday season, Sierra had to release it with bugs still present; the silver lining is that at least this is one of the rare games that, because of its great animation, is fun to replay. Nevertheless, you may want to wait until Sierra has all the kinks worked out and new copies on the shelves before taking the plunge.

LUCKY SEVEN

Whether sooner or later, though, gamers who like their gaming light, and certainly gamers with kids, will want to take the plunge. Even if this is not the sort of game you typically enjoy, even if earlier installments in the **KING'S QUEST** saga have left you yawning or bristling at their interminable cuteness, **KING'S QUEST VII** is one game you'll have to see. Not so much because of the puzzles, which are negligible, or the brilliance of the writing, but simply because its execution and the quality of its presentation make this game one of the landmark titles in the field. 🍀

THE EDITORS SPEAK

KING'S QUEST VII

RATING ★★★★★

PROS Animation as good as you'd get from a middle-quality Disney feature, with voices and writing to match.

CONS Sierra's quick left turn at Mass Market Street may have left some hard-core gamers in search of a challenge. Also, there are a few crash bugs in the initial release.