

ROB STEEL'S GETTING ADVENTUROUS

SPACE QUEST II – VOHAUL'S REVENGE

Sierra On-line Inc

ATARI ST Diskette: £19.99

AMIGA Diskette: £19.99

IBM PC Diskette: £19.99

Ken and Roberta Williams are best known in the UK for their adventures, but they've been creating leisure and business software from an American base since 1980. Their first game, *Mystery House*, was made known to the public via a small ad in a local magazine – and to their surprise and delight it eventually sold more than 10,000 copies. A family business was formed and christened Sierra On-Line Inc. With successes such as *The Wizard And The Princess* and *Mission Asteroid* under its belt the company quickly expanded. Today, Sierra employs nearly 80 people in very grand offices, although Roberta and Ken maintain a homely working atmosphere. This month THE GAMES MACHINE features *Space Quest II* and *Police Quest* from Sierra.

Space Quest II – Vohaul's Revenge follows the adventures of sanitation engineer Roger Wilko (the 'hero' of *Space Quest I*). Wilko is captured by the evil Sludge Vohaul, who informs him of his devilish plans to dump hordes of life-insurance salesmen on his home planet – and gloats that this time Roger won't be able to stop him. The unfortunate Wilko is to be transported to the mines of Labion

for a life sentence of hard labour.

But during Wilko's forced journey to Labion he gets his chance to escape. His escorts have neglected to refuel the hovercraft which is taking him to the mining site, and after spluttering over the treetops of a Labion forest the craft coughs and dies, sending the two guards and Roger hurtling to the ground.

Luckily our hero is saved by the

Face to face with the nefarious Sludge Vohaul – Atari ST screen



Uh-oh, out of gas and it's a long way down...

cushioning effect of one of the goon's bodies. This is where the adventure proper begins.

HILARIOUS

Space Quest II is hilarious. From the opening sequence outside the space station – Roger is sweeping up and inadvertently lets go of his broom, allowing it to drift away into deep space ('That's the third one this week!' shrieks the supervisor) – to the conversation between the two goons as they realise their hovercraft is out of fuel, the animation, text and overall appearance of the game had me crying with laughter.

The Sierra programmers have a keen eye for detail, and the program permits even obscure inputs tenuously linked with the current surroundings and situations. The hero (who can be renamed by the player) walks around each screen and can interact fully with the objects and creatures he comes across: he may walk behind rocks, open doors, climb trees and wade through swamps in an impressively realistic fashion.

Most of the screen is taken up by graphics of the locations and events. Roger's movements are controlled via keyboard, joystick or mouse, and the speed of events may be altered by the player at any

A relatively safe landing ensures that our hero may continue on his quest



time (this feature is very important at points).

Below the graphics window is a single line for text input. The parser is surprisingly comprehensive, considering the amount of graphics, sound and animation the program has to deal with. Each location has to be loaded from the disk, but the results are well worth the short wait.

I played *Space Quest II* for about five hours, enjoyed every minute of it and wanted more. The game

is vast, and the creature in the swamp prevented my progress, but when the pressure of deadlines has faded a little I will return to this adventure and attempt to thwart the plans of Sludge Vohaul.

ATMOSPHERE 93%
INTERACTION 96%
OVERALL 95%

SHADOWGATE

Mindscape/Mirrorsoft

AMIGA Diskette: £29.95

From the award-winning creators of *Deja Vu* and *Uninvited* comes another icon-driven interactive graphic adventure. Icom Simulations Inc, Mindscape and Mirrorsoft once again join forces to bring the game-playing public another masterpiece of cursor-clicking questing.

Shadowgate, once a shining fortress forged in the era of freedom and sunlight, now stands all but forgotten, a cold mouldering ruin. It is into this desolate and evil place that you, the last of an ancient line of kings, must venture. And it is in Shadowgate that you must confront the evil warlock lord and confound his dread purpose: to raise the titan Behemoth from its rest and bring about the destruction of your homeland.

The adventure opens at the door of Shadowgate, and the first

problem is discovering how to get into the place. Once you're inside, the puzzles and instant deaths come thick and fast although the recurring problem is maintaining a light source for yourself - moving around in the dark is detrimental to one's health. Fortunately there are ample torches lying around in the first few locations.

Shadowgate is very attractive to look at and interesting to listen to, if a little embarrassing - the whole office can hear when you've died for the fifth time in an hour. And indeed there are too many instant

deaths. Almost every location contains a deadly trap which can mean starting the game.

True, some of these traps can be avoided with a little logical thinking, but most are hit and miss, even bordering on the unfair. Helpfully, there's a save facility, but those regular deaths are tedious.

WORD POWER

The screen layout is very neat. Top left is a graphic of the current location and visible objects; top right is the command box, which includes words like EXAMINE, OPEN, SPEAK and OPERATE.

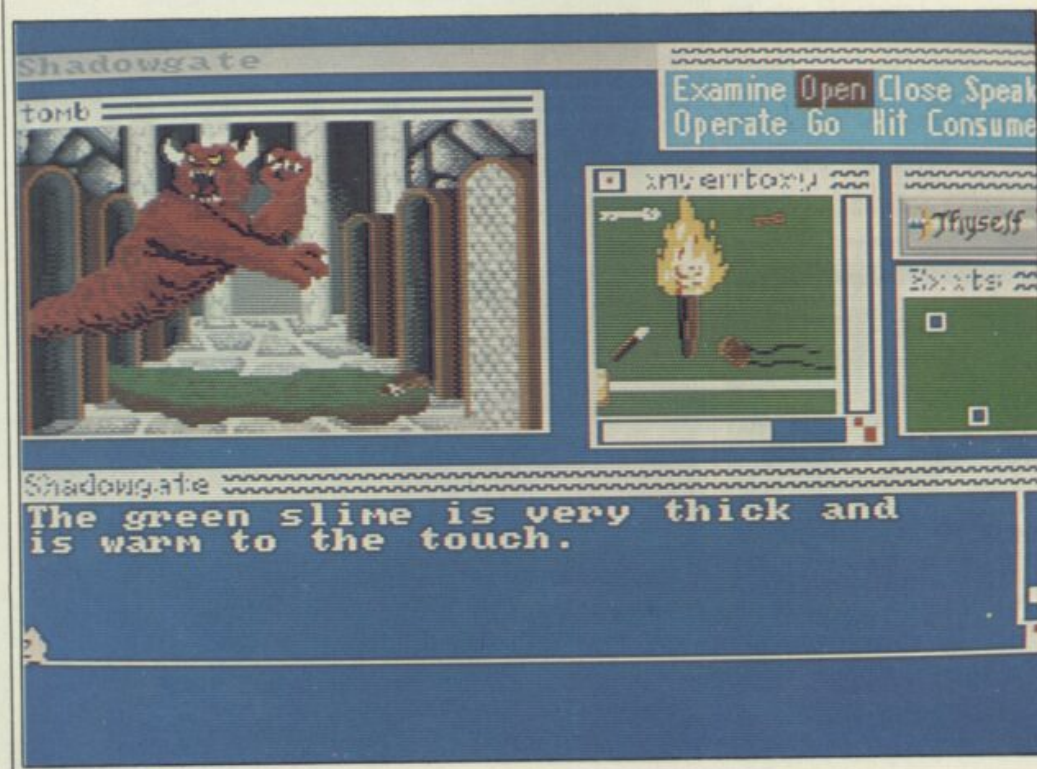
OPERATE is interesting - coupled with OPEN it encompasses almost everything one can do with objects or creatures found in *Shadowgate*.

For example, keys need to be OPERATED on doors to unlock them, and you must OPEN creatures to discover what they're carrying.

Moveable items displayed in the location window can be dragged into the player's inventory window (situated below the command box) as long as they're not too heavy and the player isn't already overloaded.

To the right of the inventory is the exit window which displays all possible ways out of the current location. And at the bottom of the screen is the text window, with messages concerning locations and events.

Commands are input via the mouse by moving the cursor and clicking on the desired command, such as EXAMINE, and then on the chosen object. In some cases double-clicking on the object alone will do the trick - the



program understands that if you double-click on a closed door you probably want it opened. This also works with EXAMINEing some objects, CLOSEing opened containers or doors and GOing through exits.

Shadowgate is enthralling, exciting, interesting and extremely frustrating. In one location, with several closed coffins, the atmosphere is so strong that opening each coffin becomes literally a test of nerves - you know that death may lurk inside any of the caskets.

An adventure which can evoke that kind of emotion within the player has to be a winner, regardless of how many instant deaths one meets. *Shadowgate* stands proudly beside its successful predecessors, *Deja Vu* and *Uninvited*, perhaps even a couple of inches taller.

ATMOSPHERE 87%
INTERACTION 86%
OVERALL 87%