

Best Quest of the Month: Space Quest IV

What began with *King's Quest V* has reached fruition in *Space Quest IV*. What am I talking about? The new presentation and interface of Sierra adventures, of course. Sierra has outdone themselves with "Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers." Indeed, they are spoiling adventurers with their latest games.

And *Space Quest IV*, combining the perfect interface for animated games, excellent scanned artwork, a compelling musical score and neat sound effects with a wild time-crossing plot, is the best and wackiest of the series.

A cartoon introduction recaps Roger Wilco returning from his adventures in *Space Quest III* to Magmetheus for a little rest and

Type: Animated Adventure
System: MSDOS (640K, 286 performance & hard disk required; VGA, EGA, CGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster, PS/1, Game Blaster; mouse or joystick recommended; VGA and 16-color versions are in different packages, 3.5" and 5.25" disks in same package
Planned conversions: Amiga

relaxation. Poor Roger! His rest lasts only a few minutes before the Sequel Police enter the bar where he's bragging about his exploits to take him away to kill him.

Ripping through time

Next a young blond-haired guy shows up, knocks out the time cops and push Roger through a rip in time. Roger looks up at the status bar and realizes that he has gone into the future — into the time of *Space Quest XII: Vohaul's Revenge II*. Yes, Roger's nemesis is at it again!

The rest of the plot unfolds rather slowly. To talk about specifics would only spoil the game for you. However, there are a few surprises! Roger must find out what Vohaul's up to and spoil his plans, but Vohaul is kept from Roger until the middle of the game. Until then, Roger must

journey to *Space Quest X: Latex Babes of Estros* and *Space Quest I: The Sarien Encounter* via the time pod he finds on the destroyed Xenon of *Space Quest XII*.

The time travel stuff doesn't get as intense as the *Back to the Future* movies, but if The Two Guys from Andromeda (Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy) ever make it to *Space Quest X*, they will have to integrate the plots very well, or one of those space-time paradoxes might happen and we all go boom.

Icons all over the place

With its all-icons interface, *Space Quest IV* is as easy to play as it was frustrating to play previous Sierra games when you picked the wrong phrase with which to accomplish something, and told the program about it with a type-in-the-words parser. I strongly suggest using a mouse or joystick to play *Space Quest IV*.

After using the interface, you will see why. A row of icons pops up at the top of the screen every time you move the pointer up there. Otherwise, the screen is devoted entirely to the current scene.

There are just enough icons to do the job, which makes for a streamlined interface. From left to right, they are: Walk, Look, Action, Talk, Smell, Taste, Inventory and System. If you click the right mouse button or second joystick button, the cursor on the screen will change in order to the shape of the first six icons, and then cycle back again.

Next you simply click on the location, object or person that is the target of the command. Or you can select the icons from the row at the top of the screen until you are comfortable with the mouse or joystick. The choice is yours.

If you want to use a particular object from your inventory, go to the inventory screen by clicking on the inventory icon, then select the object. When you return to the game, that object is added to the cycle of icons accessed by the right mouse or second joystick buttons.

Arts and crafts

The graphics are as nice, if not better, than those in *King's Quest V*. Once again, the backgrounds come from scanned paintings and the moving objects blend right in, especially in VGA. Even in 16-color graphics, *Space Quest IV* looks really



The 256-color version

nice, but it's best in VGA. A couple of visual puns will not be as funny at other graphics levels.

In particular, when you travel back to *Space Quest I*, all the graphics except Roger and the time pod are exhibited in the old Sierra style. The difference is noticeable, and you really feel as if you've traveled back in time.

The animation in *Space Quest IV* is very fluid and the bit-mapped characters look nice while moving, instead of jumbled. *Space Quest IV* takes advantage of expanded memory on your machine if you have it. This feature comes in handy with the level of detail in the graphics, which is player-adjustable.

Scrolling graphics!

Brand new to *Space Quest IV* are scrolling graphics. As a first for Sierra, *Space Quest IV*'s scrolling scenes turned out really well. Though the scrolling is fluid, the game does slow down as you are walking between locations that are 'connected.' Not all parts of the game involve scrolling graphics, but where it comes into play, it is a nice addition to an already great game.

Space Quest IV could have been done without the scrolling graphics, but this technique helps you realize the spatial relationship of a lot of locations. In a couple of places, this knowledge helps in solving puzzles.

Music and sound effects are excellent. The game takes full

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advantage of sound boards and the internal speaker. Playing *Space Quest IV* with a sound board in place is another experience entirely. The game is fully scored, and the background music sets the tone for the current screen. More than anything, this atmospheric music makes for a fun listening experience. The sound effects, from the pings of laser shots to the digitized voices of certain characters, are top-notch and realistic. Hats off to the talented musicians on *Space Quest IV*.

If *King's Quest V* and *Space Quest IV* are any indication of future Sierra titles, you'd better get a VGA card and Sound Blaster or Roland sound board now, because the experience with them is unmatched in the 3-D adventure genre.

Puzzles: lost in time

The puzzles are not terribly difficult. In fact, there aren't many objects you can manipulate in solving a puzzle. Most of them have a straightforward purpose and are discarded after use. The puzzles are sequential in the Galaxy Galleria Mall in the *Space Quest X* sequel, and it is pretty obvious what to do and where to do it.

Space Quest IV's difficulty comes from the use of the time pod. Because you can journey between at least two time periods at any given point, you may get confused about the need or lack thereof to solve additional puzzles in one of the time periods. I spent an hour walking around in *Space Quest I* before I realized by journeying back to one of the other time periods that I was done with *I*.

However, there are two places you can't get past unless you have paid careful attention to the background animation on a couple of screens. In both cases I was frustrated and would not have made it any further without hints. Many of you may stumble upon the solutions by accident, and only after this will you realize how much these parts of the game should have been removed or made more obvious.

Sierra has been notorious in the past for allowing their players to get to a point in the game beyond which they can go no further because they were not at an exact spot at the right time. Hopefully, *Space Quest IV* is

an indication that Sierra is making their games more player-friendly, since the number of such situations was reduced significantly from past games.

You'll find two arcade games. One involves making burgers at Monolith Burgers by adding the ingredients on an assembly line. You will only do well at this game with a mouse. You play it to get money needed elsewhere in the mall, but you can take the money by skipping the game. Naturally, you don't get the full number of points.

The Ms. Astro Chicken game in the arcade requires a buckazoid to play (you have some to spare) and is only included as a humorous diversion. You throw eggs at dogs and hicks with shotguns as you fly through the air. You can actually finish the game, but you get no points (a disappointment).

Time pod time

Using the time pod involves choosing six alien symbols from three rows of fifteen to make up a destination code. Because of the large number of combinations, you would be wasting your time to try to figure out the codes manually.

Discovering two of the codes are puzzles in the game, I did manage to stumble upon a code that transported me back to *Space Quest III*, again drawn with primitive graphics. So there may be more codes in the game that take you to other places for fun without needing to get there to finish *Space Quest IV*. I'll leave that up to you. Please send other codes to our QuestBusters for publication.

Humor runs throughout the game. The *Space Quest* series has always been one of my favorites because it spoofs other space games, movies and books. Nothing is protected from the Two Guys from Andromeda and their poisoned pens.

In *IV*, Monolith Burgers and buckazoids are back, as are a lot of references to previous games in the series. Check out the software bins in the software store in the mall. You'll even find spoofs of other companies' games!

Probably the funniest parts of *Space Quest IV* are all the references to modern day pop culture, from the

'I've fallen and I can't get up' commercial and the pink bunny beating a drum a la the Energizer bunny to the stores in the mall, *Twin Peaks* and the movie *Poltergeist*. *Space Quest IV* is full of chuckles. **Conclusions:** This one is better than *King's Quest V*, Sierra's best quest until now. The Taste and Smell icons serve no purpose other than humor, but it looks like they'll be standard icons in future games, because *Space Quest IV* comes with a generic manual. Only the supplementary issue of *Space Piston* magazine talks about *Space Quest IV* via articles and ads. It also acts as copy protection.

Hopefully Sierra will leave well-enough alone and not change the interface or new presentation, intermission animations and all. Everything that was great about the *Space Quest* series shines through and is made more enjoyable because you have to devote a minimal amount of time dealing with an interface to express your ideas.

The stories in this game and *King's Quest* were weaker than those of previous Sierra quests, not as holistically structured so that all the little parts fit together to form the big picture (sort of like building Mount Rushmore with Leggos). Maybe the designers have been concentrating so intently on the new interface, they let the creative side of the quest slip. Now that the interface that began in *King's Quest V* has been perfected here, they have no excuse.

I'll be anxiously awaiting *Space Quest V* because of *IV*'s anticlimactic ending. Just like an episode of *Twin Peaks*, *Space Quest IV* leaves you cursing the designers for ending the game the way they did. It finishes the plot lines of the current game, but leaves too many questions in your mind for future sequels.

Aaaaargggghhh! Now go rip through time as Roger Wilco, the Rodney Dangerfield of outer space!

Difficulty: Novice to Intermediate

Protection: Code in manual

Price: \$59.95

Company: Sierra