

The Puzzling Plight of a Princess in Peril



Following a very successful series of installments, the latest chapter in one of adventuredom's most popular game series is ready to unfold. **Sierra's King's Quest VI: Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow** looks to outdo all previous installments in quality of story line, graphics and audio, sheer number of puzzles, player amenities and overall game play.

An Heir Raising Experience

As the story unfolds, Prince Alexander, heir to the throne of Daventry, finds himself shipwrecked and washed ashore on The Isle of the Crown, one of several mysterious islands which provide the backdrop for this quest. It seems that young Alexander was on his way to visit Cassima, Princess of the Green Isles, when his ship went down. (It was when King Graham rescued her from the evil wizard, Mordack, that Alexander and Cassima first met, apparently, with more than a passing interest in each other.)

However, upon his arrival at the Royal Palace, Alexander finds events have taken a turn for the worse. While Cassima was away, her parents became ill and died. Now, he finds her sequestered in mourning, taking no visitors. At least, that is the sequence of events according to Vizier Alhazred, the man in charge and Cassima's recent intended. His inhospitable stance toward Alexander and refusal to allow him to even see Cassima, seems more than a little strange. Determined to see the Princess, Alexander sets out to discover the true nature of the events that have transpired. Thus, the stage is set for yet another *King's Quest* or, in this case, that of a prince.

Get That Heir Out of Your (Inter)Face

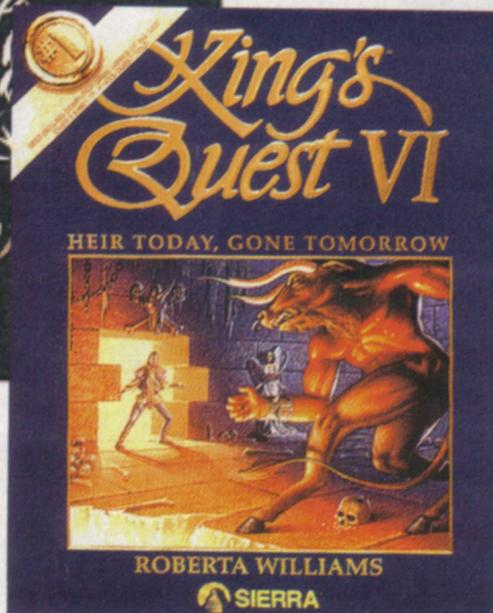
One of the most difficult acclimations I have ever undergone is the transition from Sierra's old text parser to their new icon-driven one. This is not, of course, because it is more complex, but because of the loss of some of the conversational interaction and depth of personality (if only perceived as such) found in the characters resident in the game world. It seems that the move from a textual to a graphical parser has forever changed the nature of the puzzles and interactions of the past. Yet, with its demise, the textual parser has taken with it the last vestiges of the multifaceted difficulties and cumbersome nature associated with pre-graphic adventures, and replaced it with a more intuitive, user-friendly window to game interaction.

It has taken some time on the part of seasoned adventurers (those who cut their teeth on text parsers) to become acclimated to the new interface, and for Sierra to begin to really exploit its possibilities. However, the new parser seems to have finally come into its

own with *King's Quest VI* in a way beyond that of any previous offering. This is a result, in part, to the increased overall scope of the adventure and the many optional puzzles included. Such additions serve to provide a more expansive, and consequently more enjoyable, playing environment (it is nearly twice the size of *King's Quest V*, weighing in at 18MB). Indeed, this is the first of Sierra's newer adventures where I actually did not miss the character interaction of old.

An Heir of Distinction

It seems almost redundant to speak of good graphics in a Sierra game. The graphics are up to Sierra's usual high standard of quality, beautifully rendered in 256-color VGA and featuring some intriguing and picturesque locales to visit. Background music is also very good, providing a rich, atmospheric environment in which to explore this new world. However, I'm most impressed with



TITLE: King's Quest VI: Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow
 SYSTEM: IBM
 PRICE: \$79.95
 GRAPHICS: VGA-256, EGA-16, Tandy VGA Only
 SOUND: All Major Sound Cards
 PROTECTION: Documentation Look-up
 DESIGNERS: Roberta Williams and Jane Jensen
 PUBLISHER: Sierra On-Line
 Coarsegold, CA

Review

the advancements exhibited in the animation department. Character movement is improved over previous efforts, offering a more life-like appearance. Especially effective, though, is the spot animation provided throughout this newest *King's Quest*. Leaves on trees and ferns move realistically, indicative of a "digital breeze," and water appears to lap against the shore. These little touches all help bring the game world to life.



Only Her Heir Dresser Knows

Many stylistic additions accent *King's Quest VI*. A unique introduction created by Stanley Liu of **Kronos** (best known for his work in *Batman Returns* and *Lawnmower Man*) features realistic 3-D perspective animation and incorporates powerful "camera angles" to provide dramatic effect. This six megabyte animation (based on an original design that used 1.2 GB of hard drive space) does a more than ample job of setting the background for the story that is about to envelope the player. Art and animations employed in inset boxes have also received significant attention.

Other new and notable additions include a built-in help facility for the novice gamer, a brief history of past *King's Quest* games, playing hints for *King's Quest VI* and a beginner's walkthrough for the first few puzzles — all available on-line from within the game. The help feature, in actuality, is an animated tutorial that walks the player through the use of the game interface and the exploration of the opening game screen. Use of icons, insets and object manipulation are fully explained, as are the mechanics of the graphic interface.

Information is also provided about the song *Girl in the Tower*, a love ballad from *King's Quest VI* that will be one of the first computer game songs to be played on the radio (DEVO's "Some Things Never Change" was digitized for *Neuromancer* prior to its being released on the *Total DEVO* album). As part of a special marketing effort, 1000 radio stations have been provided with a copy of the ballad to play by request. A listing of these stations with their request line numbers is included in the game box. All the player need do to hear the full rendition of the song is call a local station and request it.

Heir Apparent

As mentioned previously, *King's Quest VI* benefits significantly from a larger game world, featuring more puzzles and sub-plots than actually need to be completed in order to finish the quest. Nearly 50 percent of the total puzzles in this adventure are optional, with many having multiple solutions.

Due to an open-ended game world, no fixed order is imposed on most puzzles encountered. The player is free to move on to solve other conundrums when

faced with an overly perplexing puzzle, and then return to solve it at a later time. Up until the end of the game, the player is relatively free to travel between the four islands making up The Land of the Green Isles. There are even two possible ways into the Royal Palace at the game's conclusion — an easy and a more difficult route. The choice made determines the parts of the palace seen by the player.

Neither Here Nor (T)Heir

Since I had played beta versions of the game prior to playing the finished release, I ran across a particular bug early on which necessitated running the game without sound and music to keep a certain action from locking up the computer (it, of course, has been corrected). This left only the IBM speaker avail-



able for sound. Gag! Ptoooie! Yuck! It has been so long since I played an adventure without a quality sound card, I had forgotten how bad the emanations from a IBM speaker sounded. I could not believe what I heard, or rather, did NOT hear. Players still without a sound card should install one before playing *King's Quest VI*. It will be money

well spent, and will greatly enhance the playing experience.

The only area where Sierra adventures still lack polish and professionalism is that of digitized speech. Though there is little speech encountered in *King's Quest VI*, what speech there is suffers from the contrived and corny sounding voices exhibited in the CD-ROM version of *King's Quest V*. Professional voice actors are desperately needed. Hopefully, **Sierra** will make use of trained professionals, rather than their staff personnel, in the CD-ROM version of *King's Quest VI* that is scheduled for an early 1993 release.

Though *King's Quest VI* supports both 256-color VGA and 16-color EGA on the same set of disks, there is no contest between the two versions. All serious gamers should have a VGA card installed by this point in time, as well as a quality sound card. It is the only way to get the greatest enjoyment from the playing experience.

To Heir an Opinion

It is evident that a great deal of time and talent was invested in this animated adventure, which is, in my humble opinion, the best of the *King's Quest* games to come out of Daventry, and **Sierra's** finest adventure to date. The game world is intriguing and entertaining, and the puzzles are varied in difficulty and style, providing a rich and enjoyable playing experience for gamers of all skill levels. *King's Quest VI: Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow* has all the signs of becoming a classic. I guess it would be fair to say that *King's Quest VI* has a certain heir about it. **CGW**

