

King's Quest VII: The Prince

Equal Opportunity Adventuring

This time around, that familiar green adventurer's cap is worn by the women of Daventry.

by Leslie Mizell

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Game: King's Quest VII: The Prince-Less Bride
Developer: Sierra On-Line
Publisher: Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485,
Coarsegold, CA 93614 (209) 683-4468
Projected Price: \$79.95
Percent complete: 85%

In a nutshell:

In this latest King's Quest adventure, Queen Valanice and Princess Rosella are thrown into a wild fantasy world, and take turns looking for 1) each other and 2) a handsome, mysterious stranger.

What's so special?

With *King's Quest VII*, Sierra promises not only the usual high-quality puzzles and plot people have come to expect from this classic series, but also some of the slickest animation the company has ever produced.

Why should I care?

There's a reason the King's Quest series is one of the most popular in PC gaming history. Whether you're new to graphic adventures or a fan from way back, you get your money's worth in plot, puzzles, animation, sound, and all the other stuff. There's no such thing as a sure bet in PC gaming, but if anything comes close, it's a new King's Quest game.

And when's it coming out?

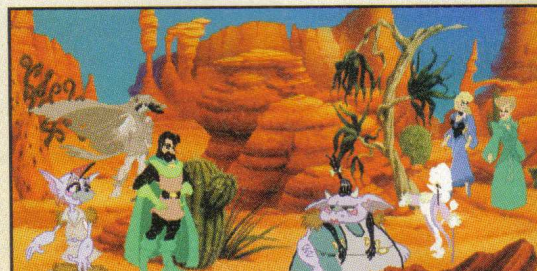
Look for *The Prince-Less Bride* in late November.

The people of Daventry must look at their royal family the same way the Brits look at theirs — just what are they going to be up to next? If the king's not off fighting wizards, then the queen's kidnapped or the prince is bringing strange foreign girls back to the kingdom.

Well, those wacky royals are at it again in *King's Quest VII: The Prince-Less Bride*. This is a watershed in the series, in more ways than one: It's the first time that you'll be able to switch between two characters; you can stage-select to get past sticking points (for the record, it's frowned upon); and it's Queen Valanice's first foray into the world of graphic adventuring.

Lorelei Shannon, co-designer of *King's Quest VII*, started at Sierra as part of the marketing staff before working on *Laura Bow 2* and the VGA version of *Police Quest*. The prospect of this, her biggest game yet, might have seemed daunting, but Shannon had the good luck of getting to work closely with King's Quest creator Roberta Williams — one of the most respected game designers in the business.

"Roberta and I developed it together from the beginning," says Shannon. "We got a huge stack of resource materials and



The cast of characters in *KQ7* includes, from left to right: the jeweler troll, the Desert Spirit, Attis, the Troll King, the Archduke of Folderol, Princess Rosella, and Queen Valanice.

slowly narrowed things down and developed a storyline, and then we worked out all of the puzzles."

So just what is that storyline? Well, King Graham and Queen Valanice have decided that it's high time Princess Rosella get married. Valanice takes Rosella for a

walk in the woods to suggest a particularly loathsome (and therefore especially eligible) prince. Rosella isn't really listening to Valanice's suggestions as she sits next to a pond, and suddenly a vision of a strange land appears. When a tiny dragon leaves the pond and buzzes in front of her face,

Rosella realizes that her eyes aren't playing tricks on her, and does what any hero of an adventure game would do — she dives in. Mom jumps in after her.

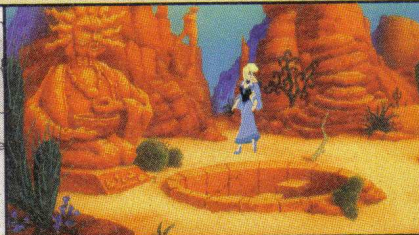
What follows are the adventures of the two women as Rosella searches the land of Eldritch looking for the cloud-land of Etheria, while Valanice searches for Rosella. You alternate between the two



It looks like Rosella has run into some trouble in the troll kingdom — are those pointy ears we see as she faces the Troll King?



Here's Andy Hoyos' original rendering of the well in which Rosella and Valanice enter Eldritch, and how it finally appears in the finished game scene.



ce-Less Bride



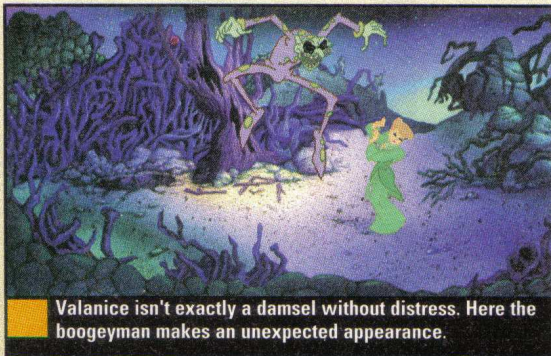
The landscape in Ooga Booga land includes the ghoulish kids' treehouse, complete with black cat.

characters, each of whom is pursuing her own goals. Every chapter is a game unto itself in which you must complete some sort of sub-quest, and you can jump around and play any chapters you wish. You can even sit down and choose to play the final chapter first, complete with the end-game payoff.

"We think there are very few people who will play Chapter 7 right off the bat," notes Shannon. "It's like skipping to the last chapter in a novel. Being able to choose the chapter you play mainly has to

do with the game's replay value."

"It's like reading a book," adds Mark Seibert, KQ7's producer. "You can pick it up, even for half an hour, and get some satisfaction from it. You can check to see how much farther you've got to finish the chapter, and you can bookmark your place when you've finished. It's not like you have to spend two or three hours with the thing just to make some progress."



Valanice isn't exactly a damsel without distress. Here the boogeyman makes an unexpected appearance.

Once upon a time...

A King's Quest Retrospective

It's possible to play *King's Quest VII* without looking at any of the other games in the series. But to appreciate the inner workings of the Daventry crowd, you need at least a passing familiarity with the stories that have gone before. Here's a wrap-up:

•*Quest for the Crown*

This title introduced us to Graham — knight, adventurer, and all-round nice guy. As King Edward, ruler of Daventry, lay on his deathbed, he told Graham of three quests he must complete in order to inherit the throne. You lead the king-to-be on his journey.

•*King's Quest II: Romancing the Throne*

A king needs a queen, and Graham finds his better half in lovely Valanice of Kolyma. But no sooner does he marry the lady than she's kidnapped and imprisoned in a Crystal Tower. King Graham dons his adventurer's cap once again to uncover the keys to the tower doors.

•*King's Quest III: To Heir Is Human*

Seventeen years have passed since the last adventure, and King Graham and Queen Valanice have had twins, Alexander and Rosella. But there's no happily-ever-aftering for the reigning monarchs — Alexander is kidnapped as a baby and brought up to be a slave to the wizard Manannan. KQ3 chronicles Prince Alexander's escape from the wizard's clutches and return to his family.

•*King's Quest IV: The Perils of Rosella*

This adventure begins literally seconds after KQ3 ends. His family reunited, King Graham throws his adventurer's cap to his twin children — only to collapse. Rosella is told by the fairy Genesta that he will die unless she can recover a magical fruit from Tamir. The princess begins her first quest, only to find that she must also save Genesta from the evil fairy Lolotte.

•*King's Quest V: Absence Makes the Heart Go Yonder*

The first of the series with an icon-based interface, KQ5 puts King Graham back in the driver's seat. This time around, the wizard Mordack has swiped the king's castle, family and all. With the help of a talking owl named Cedric and a wand belonging to the magician Crispin, Graham journeys far from Daventry to rescue his family.

•*King's Quest VI: Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow*

A shipwreck threatens the life of Prince Alexander, but he washes up on an island far from Daventry. And, there's a beautiful woman held captive by local tyrant Vizier Alhazred, and his evil shape-shifting genie. KQ6 marks the series' experiment with digitized actors.

The other big change in KQ7 is its single-icon interface, which it shares with Sierra's other new game *Phantasmagoria* (also created and designed by Roberta Williams). Instead of selecting from a bank of Walk-Talk-Use/Pick Up icons at the top of the screen, you have an on-screen inventory and an icon that changes to indicate the different ways you can interact with items

"There's a huge debate as to whether or not you can have a challenging game with a single cursor that changes to indicate actions instead of a selection of cursor icons from which the player can choose," Seibert says, "but *King's Quest VII* is fun and complex, and there are some really good puzzles.

"This interface was originally planned for just *Phantasmagoria* and *King's Quest VII*, but then again we designed a new interface

just for *King's Quest V* that proved so popular that all the Sierra games went to it. The fact is that the main goal in designing a game and interface is to make sure people will have fun with it, and that's what we've done with this game.

"KQ7 is all in high-res, and it's a Windows-only product that's as close to plug-and-play as it gets. The animation is really extensive — there's so much animation that I think people will be shocked. There are cartoon movies at the beginning and end, complete with flying camera angles, full lip-synching, songs, and choreography. The colors, look, and feel are a lot of fun. *Phantasmagoria* is such a dark game; it leaves you with a whole different attitude. It's interesting to go from that into something cute."

There are six major regions in KQ7, including a volcanic underground filled with trolls and Ooga Booga. This latter land, Shannon insists, was totally designed prior to the release of *The Nightmare Before Christmas* last October, though it features the same spooky but silly characters. The final chapter is set in the cloud-land of Etheria. And how about that end-game sequence? Does Rosella find true love in Eldritch, or is she forced to enter a (gaspl!) loveless marriage?

"Well, I can't give you any hints," Shannon says, "but there's a big surprise at the end, and a big payoff for people who've played the entire series." And for a lot of gamers, that's reason enough to grab this one as soon as possible.