

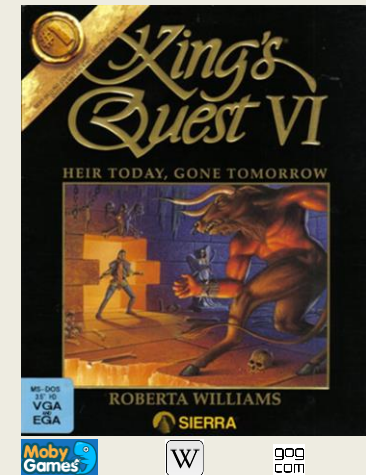
## King's Quest VI: Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow

**Studio:** Sierra On-Line  
**Designer(s):** Roberta Williams / Jane Jensen  
**Part of series:** King's Quest  
**Release:** October 13, 1992  
**Main credits:** Lead Programmer: Robert W. Lindsley  
 Music: Chris Braymen  
 Art Designers: Michael Hutchison, John Shroades  
**Useful links:** [Complete playthrough](#) (7 parts, 430 mins.)

### Basic Overview

By the beginning of the 1990s, Roberta Williams' *King's Quest*, the series that once upon a time singlehandedly turned Sierra On-Line into the reigning king of adventure games, was clearly in a state of crisis. While each of the first four games in the series represented some sort of substantial and/or technical breakthrough, *King's Quest V* was the first title to clearly show that Roberta was falling behind the times — if not in purely technical terms (after all, the game did introduce Sierra's new point-and-click system, new graphics engine, and voice acting), then definitely so in terms of user-friendly game design and, perhaps even more importantly, in terms of deeper and more meaningful storytelling. Like everything else in the digital age, plot-based computer games were growing up; their characters and plot devices were becoming more sophisticated and less conforming to pre-existing literary stereotypes. Or, at least, they were *expected* to become all that. With Roberta in charge, for some reason... they really weren't.

So how exactly did *King's Quest VI*, a game which only the most adoring fans could have really been looking forward to with trepidation, break that predictable streak? — and not just the *King's Quest* streak, but, actually, the entire streak of fairly mediocre Sierra games that had marked the studio's transition into the new decade? *King's Quest V*, *Space Quest IV*, *Police*



*Quest III*, *Leisure Suit Larry V* (ugh) — all of those titles from 1990-91 were extremely subpar when it came to good storylines and intelligent design (for lack of a better term), sort of like the earliest sound movies, still transitional between the old and new aesthetics and technology and extremely clumsy as a result. To reverse those ill fortunes, it was evident that new blood was required — people who could introduce subtler, more fine-grained lines of thinking and action into the older, stale formulae, and do it on several stylistically different fronts if possible. One such jack-of-all-new-trades happened to be Josh Mandel, the mastermind writer behind some of Al Lowe's, Marc Crowe's, and other peoples' projects. The other was Jane Jensen — another recent acquisition for Sierra who had already cut her adventure game teeth on several earlier projects (including Gano Haine's *Eco Quest*) and now would go on to prove that she could be a better Roberta Williams than Roberta Williams when it came to writing about kings, queens, and digital damsels in designer distress.

I do not know — and probably nobody knows or will ever know — precisely how much of the game's vision ultimately belongs to Jane and how much of it still stays with Roberta, but from what I have read it seems that by that time, Roberta was fairly happy with the role of «creative consultant», ensuring that everything stay true to the established style and lore of the series, whereas most of the actual work, including dialog writing and puzzle design, was done by Jane. However it was, the result was smashing: for the first time ever, a *King's Quest* game managed to achieve a level of depth and complexity that put it at least on the *Princess Bride* level of entertainment. The game did precisely what was necessary at the moment — signaled to the world that Sierra On-Line had finally gotten its shit back together, and that it was prepared to move forward not only as far as technical specs were concerned, but, more importantly, with a certain degree of intellectual growth.

Admittedly, *King's Quest VI* has never suffered from being underrated. Upon release, especially after the arrival of the fully voiced CD-ROM version, most of the reviews were glowing, and even today quite a few gruff game historians who would normally want to forget that Sierra On-Line ever existed still have no choice but to place this particular title on their best-ever lists. In my own book, it still battles with *King's Quest IV* for the title of best game in the series — if only because few things can beat that subtle feel of heavenly exuberance which permeates *The Perils Of Rosella* — but it goes without saying that it is hard to compare an adventure game from 1988 with one from 1992 when it comes to length, detail, technical parameters, and voice acting. It is probably safe to say that without *King's Quest VI*, there would be no *Gabriel Knight* — it was only due to this game's major success that Jane Jensen, a relative newcomer to the Sierra planet, was given the green light to pursue her own creative vision to the fullest. But this consideration should not be downgrading the game itself, which remains as eminently playable today as it was thirty years ago: showing its age, of course, but still remarkably well crafted to allow for total immersion.

## Content evaluation

### Plotline

Condensed to its basics, the story of *King's Quest VI* does not stray too far from conventional fairy tale clichés — which makes it safe to assume that the basic draft still came from the time-honored, narratively conservative imagination of Roberta Williams. Stepping once more into the shoes of Prince Alexander, who makes an assured comeback from the faraway days of *King's Quest III*, we are tasked with rescuing a beautiful damsel in distress (Princess Cassima, a recent acquaintance from *King's Quest V*) who is kept locked in a tower in the Land of the Green Isles by the evil Vizier Alhazred, regent of the kingdom after a tragic «accident» has taken away the lives of both of Cassima's parents. The Vizier, not so much in love with Cassima as with wealth and power, is planning to use her as a pawn in his own evil game — and it is up to Alexander, washed up on the shores of the island after a shipwreck, to unravel the Vizier's plot, save the lady, and restore justice.



So far, nothing too special. But in terms of plotline, the most interesting thing about all *King's Quest* games had always been the colorful, unpredictable, and sometimes downright absurdist mish-mash of its various influences, and one of the chief goals of this game is to literally pull all the stops in this particular respect. The gameplay for *King's Quest VI* is significantly longer than for any previous game in the series, and this allows to include a larger and more diverse number of locations. While at first stranded on the Isle of the Crown, Alexander soon gains possession of a magic map (hello *King's Quest III* once again!) which allows him to travel between it and three other destinations — each of which has a distinctly individual character. If the Isle of the Crown itself has more of a general *1001 Nights* flavor to it, then the Isle of the Sacred Mountain, with its winged Guardians and Minotaurs, is decidedly steeped in Greek mythology; the Isle of the Beast, as you can probably tell, is all about recreating a version of *Beauty And The Beast*; and the most original location in the game is the Isle of Wonder, most of which is clearly inspired by the works of Lewis Carroll — given that this is decidedly the first time that references to *Alice* crop up in a *King's Quest* game (unlike Greek or Mid-Eastern motives), I would definitely chalk this one up to Jane Jensen's fantasy.

A somewhat less welcome feature of older *King's Quest* games was that, whenever they borrowed a classic motif, they would

usually exploit it in its most predictable form rather than invert it in any way — thus, if you met Medusa, you most surely had to turn it into stone; if you met the Ogre, you had to steal his golden egg-laying hen; if you met Count Dracula, you had to carry a mallet and a stake around with you, etc. In *King's Quest VI*, some of this predictability still remains in place — for instance, the story of Beauty and the Beast is reproduced quite faithfully, albeit in an abridged version. But some of the plotlines are instead resolved in more original ways: for instance, in order to find your way around the Labyrinth and defeat the Minotaur it is no longer sufficient to simply have read the story of Theseus and Ariadne — at the very least, you have to combine that with certain stereotypical knowledge about bullfighting.

Arguably the finest bit of storytelling in this game, and, one might argue, in the entire *King's Quest* series in general, is to be found when Alexander travels to a particularly challenging destination, the Land of the Dead, to try and bring back Cassima's parents. Obviously inspired by yet another piece of Greek mythology (the tale of Orpheus), this sequence nevertheless has a denouement all its own, which, incidentally, happens to be the single most emotionally heavy moment in *King's Quest* history — perhaps the only time in its history when the game taking itself seriously managed to have me impressed rather than amused. Of course, Prince Alexander's encounter with Death is still no Ingmar Bergman, but by the standards of video games in 1992, this is pretty heavy stuff, and even today I am pleased to occasionally see comments of genuinely stunned YouTubers accidentally stumbling upon this piece of ancient history.

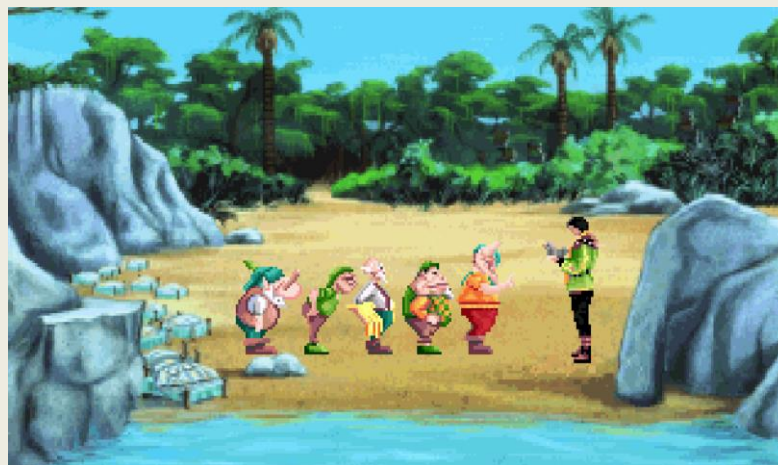
Ironically, if your playing style happens to be a bit careless, you might even whip through the game without witnessing that particular climactic moment — because, unlike any other *King's Quest* game, this one allows for several distinctly different pathways, essentially a shorter, «lazier» one, and a longer, more difficult and more rewarding scenario. Both are worth trying out: the shorter route, which does not require a journey to the Land of the Dead, has its own set of puzzles and challenges — but, of course, it still functions more like a teaser, or, rather, a «taunter» for the inexperienced player not smart enough to have suspected that a much more satisfying solution to all of the Land of the Green Isles' problems was very much in reach all along. If my memory serves me well, this seriously bifurcating plot was the first, and last, time that Sierra implemented this technique — multiple solutions to puzzles are one thing, but different endings provided by seriously divergent paths (rather than simply making one or two different choices at the very end of the game) were not their cup of tea at all, not even in the RPG-influenced *Quest For Glory* series.

With this colorful mix of influences and characters, heavily improved dialog writing, emotional impact, and different paths to take, *King's Quest VI* clearly breathed new, exuberant life into the Roberta Williams formula which some people, after the disappointment of the previous game, probably were already taking for dead. But the awesomeness of *King's Quest VI*

certainly does not end with the intricacies of its storyline — video games tend to be fairly consistent on all fronts in regard to their greatness or suckiness, and a strong plot was just one of the strong points that Jane Jensen and the other team players brought to the experience.

### Puzzles

First, the classic disclaimer: when all is said and admired, *King's Quest VI* is still a Sierra game, and yes, this means that you are going to die more than once — sometimes due to your own stupidity, sometimes due to circumstances beyond control of your intelligence — and that, one way or another, you are going to run into dead ends due to deficiencies in your inventory. So, as usual, save-early-save-often, and for God's sake make a *full* and *thorough* sweep of all the islands before daring to enter the Minotaur's Labyrinth. (To be fair, the game actually warns you about this, but impatient gamers will not take the warning seriously). It is not as bad as it used to be in the early days, but the game still wouldn't get the Ron Gilbert seal of approval.



Other than that, however, Jane and Roberta really worked their asses off to make the game's puzzles look like a solid balance between the challenging and the user-friendly. The first act of the game, in which you have to find a way of transportation between the different islands, is fairly simple (other than a bit of pixel-hunting on the beach, perhaps), but once Prince Alexander acquires the basic means of teleportation, his challenges quickly begin to multiply — amusingly, in more or less the same way as in LucasArts' *Monkey Island 2*, which also came out the same year: both Alexander and Guybrush have to solve puzzles on Island X by making use of an object picked up on Island Y, which then gives them access to yet another object that they have to use on island Z, and so on. This means a lot of backtracking, but, fortunately, all of it is done even quicker than in *Monkey Island*: the fast-travel open-world mechanic is implemented very smoothly.

An excellent example of this approach is the Five Senses puzzle, where Alexander encounters a group of five gnomes guarding the entrance to the Isle of Wonder — each of the gnomes being challenged by way of four out of five senses, but heavily overcompensated by way of the fifth; you have to find just the right way to block out that single sense (vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch) in order for the guardians to leave you alone. This is a brilliant sequence in all possible ways — starting from how

it plays on certain traditional folk motives while at the same time being completely original (I know of no fairy tale that would play it out exactly the same way), and ending with fairly logical solutions to each of the five challenges, for which, however, you must first scour the neighboring islands. In addition, there is no unnecessary risk of dying (you can always flee if you miss one of the ingredients), and having each gnome talk in verse, even when Alexander is captured, denounced, and executed, is hilarious.

A somewhat less ideal, but still interesting piece of design is the Labyrinth — a location which I am obligated to hate due to my inborn aversion toward mazes, but still find myself somewhat fascinated by, probably because of the atmosphere (see below). On one hand, it is really the mother of all dead ends in the game: without at least two special objects in your possession, you have no hope of getting out of there alive, and nothing in your previous experience informs you that they will be in some way relevant for that location. On the other hand, their usage in both of the relevant situations is super-logical — in fact, the climactic scene of the Minotaur battle adds an excellent (somewhat anachronistic, but fully justified) touch to the Minotaur trope, and is far more enjoyable than if you just had to battle the beast the traditional way, like Theseus is supposed to have done. (The entire game implies anyway that Prince Alexander isn't much of a sword fighter: like most of his computer nerd fans, he always prefers brain over brawn).

Finally, the two-path strategy for winning the game is also implemented fairly well. At one point, the game gives you a seemingly straight hint about how you might be able to sneak inside the impenetrable castle of Vizier Alhazred; later on, upon resolving one of the islands' quests, you seemingly get the means to effectuate that penetration. But all the while that you are there inside the castle, you will be tormented with the suspicion that you just *might* have done something wrong — especially if you still find yourself in possession of certain unused items, or unprepared spells from your magic book, by the time the game is over. And then, when you do it more carefully in order to reach the «perfect» ending, you see how you could actually use the same object in two different ways. Okay, so this is really not much of anything in the modern days of choice-based games, but for Sierra On-Line in 1992 it actually counted as a breakthrough (*Gold Rush!* did something similar several years earlier, but there the different pathways were laid out for you explicitly, just as they were, of course, in the character-dependent *Quest For Glory* adventure/RPG mixes).

*King's Quest VI* is also an ideal standard for an adventure game in that it features absolutely no arcade sequences whatsoever (other than a few situations where you must quickly time your reaction to something), and, in what must have been a first for the series, no frickin' ladders or ledges to fall from because of your keyboard or mouse malfunction. It is less than ideal in terms of copy protection, though: arguably the single least pleasing thing about it are the Cliffs of Logic, in order to scale

which you have to rely on your wits about half of the time, and on carefully reading the Guidebook the other half. They even retained that bit for the CD-ROM version of the game, which is absurd, since CDs in the early 1990s were largely uncopyable (for instance, the *Gabriel Knight* games never had any copy protection). But oh well, every rose has its thorn.

### Atmosphere

Oh, this is going to be a little weird. While I do believe that *King's Quest VI* has one of the most well thought out plots in *King's Quest* (and maybe even overall Sierra) history, and that it features one of the strongest and best balanced sets of puzzles in Sierra history, I would not say that the game is nearly as «atmospheric» as the ones before it. For some reason, the Land of the Green Isles just never struck me as much as, say, the land of Tamir or even the land of Llewddor when it came to making the player feel the «amazing joyous wonder» of the game's surroundings. I am still not quite sure why that is.



Perhaps it has to do with a somewhat pragmatic orientation of the game: Prince Alexander is definitely not there on the Islands to admire the scenery — he is on an urgent mission, and pretty much everything and everyone around him happen to be only as important as the part they have to play in that mission. All the locations in the game are beautifully portrayed, for sure, but they are all relatively sparse: each island is small, cannot really be explored in depth, and is strangely depopulated. Despite the fact that the game space is formally larger than Rosella's Tamir, there is no large open space here — and *now* you actually realise that all those «useless» additional screens that you simply had to walk through on the way somewhere else were there for a purpose, helping you identify with your character in her time and space. In *King's Quest VI*, there are no purposeless screens: everything is crammed with important objects and clues, and although a few of the text / voice descriptions of some components of the local scenery are quite colorful, most seem to be of the «Alexander could use this» / «Alexander has no use for it» variety. Cold!

There are two important exceptions. First, the Isle of Wonder — once you have made it past the Sense Gnomes, its space opens up to you like a sprawling, barely cohesive tribute to the imagination of Lewis Carroll, with bookworms looking for Dangling Participles, sibling rivalries between stick-in-the-muds and bump-on-a-logs, trash-talking rotten tomatoes, cowardly holes-in-

a-wall, and an entire Chessland with Chess Queens arguing over spoiled eggs and charcoal hunks. This is the most colorfully absurdist that *King's Quest* ever got, and I presume that we have to thank Jane Jensen for that, so thank you, Jane. Too bad that there are only four screens on it, and you cannot really tarry in Chessland, so only three to roam at will.

The second exception is the Land of the Dead. This is the first time *King's Quest* has dared to visit the afterlife, and no expense was spared to make it look like a really fun place to spend your vacations. Ghosts, ghouls, dancing skeletons, monster-shaped gates, Charon in his boat, and, finally, the Lord of the Dead himself are all there for entertainment, during which you can actually die at any moment (actually, you can enter the Land of the Dead many times over the course of the game — upon dying, that is). As I already said, the culmination of your visit to that place is one of the emotionally strongest moments in Sierra history, and the whole thing is just so damn well scripted that it is hard to believe some players may have originally missed it entirely (the ones who were naïve enough to follow the «easy» path).

The ending, on the other hand, is a little anticlimactic: the palace of Alhazred is formally beautiful, but cold, lonely, and somewhat boring when it comes to navigate its seemingly endless (though, in reality, quite short) corridors and stairways. And even if, objectively, there is tension here because you could get caught and thrown in jail very easily, it still loses in that department to the creepy suspense at the end of *King's Quest V*, in Mordack's castle, where it looked like the walls themselves were ready to pounce on you and bite your head off at any given moment. *This* might also reflect a certain difference in style between Roberta and Jane: the former seemed to love the universe she was creating much more than the story she gave you to play out, whereas for Jane — here, at least — it is mostly all about the story, while the universe takes second place. (You can see traces of the same problem in the *Gabriel Knight* games, though by the time she was allowed to make her own games, she got a little better at solving that dilemma).

## Technical features

### Graphics

I would not call the visual art of *King's Quest VI* particularly exceptional: rough comparison with *King's Quest V* shows comparable levels of skill and detail when it comes to painted backgrounds (credited here to John Shroades), and while both games look very pretty, most of the drawings are more or less what you would expect for a fairy tale book. Again, this relates to what I wrote above about the atmosphere: the game seems to place its largest investments in the storyline and the puzzles, far more complex than ever before but forcing all the other aspects of the game to adapt to those needs — and, frankly, there is



nothing wrong with that: not every game in the world needs «scenery porn» to fully involve the player. Which is not to say that the scenery looks bad or anything — the graphics are lush, realistic, and look quite decent even on modern day computer screens. The animations have been improved as well: for instance, when you are standing on the shore, you not only see ripples on the water, but plant leaves rustling in the air, and (occasionally) birds and rabbits scurrying around, a pretty solid achievement for 1992 (and a solid tax on system resources back then — I do not remember about myself, but I am pretty sure that many players had to move that «Details» slider down and cut out the animations to get the game to run without stuttering).



Compared to *King's Quest IV* and *V*, there is also a significant increase in the number of close-up images: they only appear during cutscenes, but they do a good job in letting you have a good look at the principal characters (Cassima in the tower; the Vizier and his Genie in Alhazred's chambers; the Lord of the Dead on his throne; the winged Lord and Lady of the Isle of the Sacred Mountain, etc.) otherwise represented by subpar sprites during the actual game. A particularly favorite animated closeup of mine is the horseback trip to the Land of the Dead, with the sun gradually setting or rising depending on the direction of the trip — it is minimalistic, but very efficient in preparing you for the dread of the Dead, or relieving you from it on your way back. It is not the overall quality of the graphics, but exquisitely thought out little touches such as this one which still make the game worth revisiting.

Sierra did pull all the stops when it came to the game's introduction — a nearly 5-minute animated pseudo-3D mini-movie, with sliding and panning cameras, fully (or partially) animated characters, and arguably the most realistic digital representation of a sea storm up to date; the whole thing was commissioned from Kronos Digital Entertainment, a freshly formed digital animation company which later went on to design games like *Dark Rift* and *Fear Effect*. Today, it is strictly a museum piece: the pixellation looks more awful than anything in the actual game, and it is really only watchable in its native resolution, which means that, in order to look good, the mini-movie has to be settled in a tiny corner of your display. But back in 1992, the effect must have been amazing — for everybody, that is, who was able to get the animations to run properly.

Special mention must be made of the 1993 CD-ROM version of the game for Windows, which included enhanced, high-

resolution graphic segments — though only for the small cut-out animated pictures of the characters appearing onscreen during dialog. They create a bit of incongruity, given the contrast between their sharp and clear level of detail and the relative blurriness of everything else (as well as the fact that the faces in these cut-outs do not always match the sprites or the big closeup images), but they are still beautifully painted and realistically animated; it's a shame they lacked the resources to upscale at least the cutscenes in the same way (let alone the walking sprites, all of which suffer from the same ugly blockiness which haunted all of Sierra's VGA-era products).

### Sound

The musical soundtrack to *King's Quest VI*, mostly designed by Sierra's then-resident composer Chris Braymen, stands out a little from previous games by being nowhere near as dependent on British folk motives and thus, in a subtle way, also moving the game away from the classic Roberta Williams model. Instead, background themes range from the more Mid-Eastern-influenced ones on the Isle of the Crown (in keeping with its *1001 Nights* setting) to more whimsical music hall-influenced ones on the Isle of Wonder (in keeping with its *Alice In Wonderland* setting) to baroque harpsichord themes on the Isle of the Beast (because 18th century origins and all). Since I only ever played the talkie version of the game, I never paid as much attention to the music as I did to the voice acting, but I could never complain about any of the themes not being in proper emotional sync with whatever was going on in the game (particularly in the Land of the Dead, where the dark, slowly-paced keyboard notes mesh particularly hauntingly with the overdubbed sound effects of constantly howling spirits).

Of course, the one thing *King's Quest VI* is most often remembered for in the musical department is not Chris Braymen's subtle soundtrack, but the horrendous power ballad 'Girl In The Tower', composed by Mark Seibert and performed by his wife Debbie and some other dreadful male singer. Fortunately, it is only performed at the very end of the game over the final credits, so you are not forced to hear a single note of it these days — *unlike* back in 1992, when, in a much-maligned crass commercial move, Ken Williams included in the game package a call for all players to flood radio stations with requests to play this tripe. (The fact that stations actually threatened to sue Sierra for this does, however, indicate the amount of serious influence that the company had over millions of computer users those days). I can only assume from this that Ken Williams



has likely been tonedeaf from birth, because by 1992 this style of power balladeering was already going out of fashion, and even if it weren't, 'Girl In The Tower' is such an inane collection of musical and lyrical clichés, it makes any given Aerosmith power ballad sound like 'Hey Jude' in comparison. (At least Sierra managed to somehow redeem itself for this travesty by including several 'Girl In The Tower'-related gags and spoofs in subsequent games, such as *Space Quest VI*, for instance).

Far more important than the music in the game, however, was the inclusion of Sierra's first professional voice acting cast for the 1993 CD-ROM version. Before *King's Quest VI*, most of the voiceover work was still done by regular Sierra employees working overtime — but here, for the first time, they had the proper budget to hire professionals, and the effort paid off splendidly. Robby Benson, who, ironically, had just provided his voice for Disney's Beast, was hired to bring to life Prince Alexander, and although his character is one of the few in the game to have no sense of humor whatsoever, he still manages to produce a likable character, with touches of innocence, naïveté, sweetness, but also bravery and a bit of trickery where necessary. Bill Ratner (who is perhaps best known now among gamers as Ambassador Udina from *Mass Effect*) is the stern, rock-solid, but clearly sympathetic Narrator, never intending to show off but always trying to find the right emotional coloring to describe whatever is seen on the screen. Veteran comedy actor Chuck McCann voices most of the game's goofiest characters, such as Jollo the Jester; Shakesperian actor Tony Jay (The Supreme Being in *Time Bandits!*) provides an aura of superb nobility for the guard-dog Captain Saladin; and a personal gift for myself is the first ever appearance in a computer game of the inimitable Dave Fennoy (much-later-to-be Lee Everett in TellTale's *The Walking Dead*) in a relatively small, but important role of Pawn Shop Owner.

In short, the cast of *King's Quest VI* is the real deal — although the talent assembled here would arguably be matched at least several more times in the studio's history, the only time when they would assemble an objectively more stellar cast would be with 1993's *Gabriel Knight: Sins Of The Fathers*. This time, though, as usual, it was the next-in-line Roberta Williams project that got all the breaks, but honestly, I don't mind: an overall excellently designed package like this one deserved the best it could get. Anyway, from that point onward, most, if not all, of Sierra's games would be voiced — and most, if not all of them would be voiced by professional industry workers, even if getting proper A-level talent would still very much remain a hit-and-miss affair until the very end.

## Interface

In terms of actual gameplay, changes from the interface of *King's Quest V* to *King's Quest VI* were absolutely minimal: the same overhead menu activated by the mouse, the same ability to right-click your way through several different mouse cursors

to quickly select the required action (of which there are but four: Walk, Look, Talk, Operate). The good news is that there are now many more actions with real consequences: many, if not most, of the objects scattered around the screen allow for different dialog lines from the Narrator depending on whether you look at them, «use» them or even talk to them (e.g. «talk to wheel» — "The wheel is well-traveled, but it says nothing of its voyages"). I only hope that poor Bill Ratner was well-paid for all those extra lines, but in the end it pays off splendidly, because for the first time in a point-and-click Sierra game it really feels as if all those different options are there for a reason. In *King's Quest V*, for instance, «talking» to anything but the animated NPCs just gave you a red cross — here, it makes the game more fun even if you can rather safely predict that talking to inanimate objects won't ever get you anywhere proper. (Other than, perhaps, on the Isle of Wonder, where quite a few allegedly inanimate objects are... well, *wond'rous*).

Navigating your character with the mouse is relatively easy; although the land around you is definitely not a safe space, there are few locations where you can fall to your death, and most of these are fairly logical. The infamous King's Quest Treacherous Stairs™ are present only once — as the Cliffs of Logic, where one wrong mouse click can leave you with a broken neck in an instant; however, it will take some seriously shakey hands to fuck up that particular challenge. As usual, some puzzles require timely responses, but other than that, there are no distracting arcade sequences to break this quintessential adventure experience. Overall, all the details of the interface and the gameplay system are sparse, minimalistic, and pragmatic — no jokey options, no boss keys, no zipper icons (hello, Al Lowe!), just a clean, easy-to-use mechanics which honestly does not deserve a huge-ass Beginner's Guide to familiarize yourself with (but just in case you love reading lengthy instructions, you can enjoy that Guide, as well as an equally long-winded Beginner's Walkthrough, right there on your screen after clicking the «About» button).

**Verdict:** *One of the best designed digital fairy tales ever told — probably the very best one in the family-friendly category.*

The King's Quest series always worked as the morning herald for Sierra: any major good news or any major bad news was sure to be announced by the arrival of the next installment in Roberta Williams' pet series. *King's Quest V* had previously announced a ratio of about 50% good and about 50% bad news for the company — a model which was followed quite strictly by most of the games for about a year and a half. *King's Quest VI* almost seemed to apologize for everything that was done poorly — coming up with a better and less predictable plot, a more complicated set of possible paths and choices, more intelligently designed puzzles, and more entertaining use of the point-and-click system. Whereas the technical enhancements

in graphics and sound were pretty much to be expected, all these *other* things had a 50-50 chance of being or not being implemented; but there they were, largely courtesy of Jane Jensen, and they set a good model for the next couple of years at Sierra, ushering in what I like to call the company's «Silver Age» (others might want to take it one step further and call it Golden, but for me the system is simple: No Parser = No Gold).

The most important thing, though, is not how influential this title turned out to be, but that it is, I believe, still eminently playable and enjoyable even thirty years later. The visuals have aged nicely, obviously identifiable as coming from the early 1990s, but colorful and distinct enough to be appreciated by any potential gamer. The MIDI and voice soundtracks are crisp and timeless (other than 'Girl In The Tower', which still remains a monumental cultural artifact of the cringiest kind). And the story, though surely not on the *Witcher* level, still boasts a reasonably high level of sophistication — about the same, I'd say, as the average animated movie from the Disney Renaissance period (whose levels of sophistication have certainly not been outdone by anything Disney has produced in the past 20 years), or maybe even slightly higher in spots (could you imagine a quest to find the Dangling Participle in any Disney movie?).

My only serious (well, not *too* serious) gripe with the game is that it still fails to be as immersive for me as multiple other Sierra titles — as I wrote above, it is always more about the plot than the atmosphere. Were it up to me, I'd make sure that the player got to see more of the Land of the Green Isles, being able to wander around the Sacred Mountain, properly visit the Chessland, actually enter the huts of the druids on the Isle of Mists, and maybe even spend extra time in the Land of the Dead. But I can also understand that it was hardly the intention of Roberta or Jane to try and turn *King's Quest* into a *Quest For Glory* — the adventure-RPG hybrid which succeeded in putting a completely different spin on Sierra's fairy tale fantasies. And, after all, unlike the aimlessly wandering protagonist of *Quest For Glory*, Prince Alexander made it to the Green Isles for one specific and urgent reason. So it might be high time for you to stop wasting it on this review and go help him secure the hand of Princess Cassima, if you have not done so already!

