

Space Quest II: Vohaul's Revenge

Studio: **Sierra On-Line**

Designer(s): **Marc Crowe / Scott Murphy**

Part of series: **Space Quest**

Release: November 14, 1987

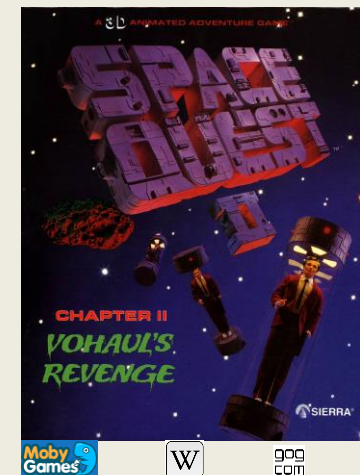
Main credits: Programming: **Sol Ackerman, Scott Murphy, Ken Williams**
 Development System: **Jeff Stephenson, Chris Iden**
 Graphics: **Mark Crowe**

Useful links: Playthrough: [Part 1](#) (66 mins.) [Part 2](#) (63 mins.)

Basic Overview

In 1987, *Space Quest* became Sierra's first franchise to break the hitherto unchallenged monopoly of Roberta Williams' *King's Quest* on the sequel trade — a fact more easily explained by the impressive commercial success of the original **Space Quest** than by the, no doubt overwhelming, personal charisma of Scott Murphy and Marc Crowe. It seemed like adventure game fans, many of them natural sci-fi geeks, were eagerly willing to accept Roger Wilco, space janitor extraordinaire, into their hearts, and so the Two Guys From Andromeda set out to oblige.

However, compared to the first game, **Space Quest II** can hardly be said to represent a giant leap for mankind. Much like **King's Quest II** next to its revolutionary predecessor, it essentially ends up offering more of the same, with cosmetic improvements on all fronts — more content, better dialog, more clever parser, minor improvements in graphics and gameplay — but no major broadenings of the creators' vision. It is a good kind of sequel, relying more on the power of creative imagination than on in-jokes, running gags, endless navel-gazing self-references and stale humor, but it is still very much a typical sequel in nature, and also one that somewhat downplays the Two Guys' usually acute flair for satire and parody. Once again, Roger Wilco is supposed to save the world — this time, from a clichéd megalomaniacal scientist planning to invade Earth with millions of cloned life insurance salesmen — and once again, his good deeds largely go unnoticed by the galaxy's



inhabitants, even if adventure game fans did buy the game in droves and turned it into yet another bestseller for Sierra, thus ensuring the future of the series. In short, we do have the success of **Space Quest II** to thank for the appearance of **Space Quest III**, which brought a whole new life to the franchise. But on its own, this title is relatively lackluster, though it still has its fair share of hilarious moments.

Content evaluation

Plotline

The main premise of **Space Quest II** is actually more intriguing than that of its predecessor. Captured by the archvillain Sludge Vohaul (apparently an evil clone of the Star Generator's benevolent architect Slash Vohaul from the first game, though I do believe this explanation still involves quite a bit of retconning), Roger Wilco is introduced to his newest heinous plan of bringing the world to its knees — mass-launching the invasion of an army of genetically engineered life insurance salesmen — before being sent off to die in Vohaul's mines on the nearby planet of Labion.



This is cool and all, but, unfortunately, the idea of salesman clones is not explored any further (in fact, if you do not screw things up, not a single one of these guys even gets the tiniest chance of leaving his pod before they are all melted down). Instead, it is all about being stranded on Labion, a planet where each and every step breathes danger, and about making your way back to Vohaul's ship, where you have to do what you have to do. The Main Story — Wilco's conflict with Vohaul — takes about 10% of the game and involves precisely one puzzle (and a very uncomplicated one at that, at the heart of which lies the challenging task of pressing a button). Everything else is the journey, consisting of disconnected strings of little accidents — Roger Wilco gets caught by a feral hunter; Roger Wilco is cornered by the Labion Terror Beast; Roger Wilco has to escape another of Vohaul's traps by means of a roll of toilet paper, etc. — and while some of these vignettes are fun, in the end it still seems as if the game's authors were just making this stuff on the spot, without any general strategy for the game other than «Vohaul must go». As far as *Space Quest* games go, the second one has easily the thinnest storyline of them all.

Puzzles

You would probably think that if the game places more emphasis on the micro-management of current problems than it does on the general plot development, then at least the specific puzzles could be a major improvement on the previous game. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Most of the problems that Roger has to solve along the way fall into two distinct categories: (a) laughably trivial and (b) frustratingly impossible, at least by modern gaming standards (old school adventurers were inarguably a much tougher breed than latter day snowflakes, heh heh). Serious trouble does not even start until about 1/4 into the game when Roger gets into the swamp area — and then prepare to get screwed if you do not hit the right area of the screen. Needless to say, in classic Sierra fashion there are also a few ways to get hopelessly stuck by forgetting to pick up an important object you never knew could be needed in the first place (though not a lot this time).



Moon logic hits hard in a couple of places, most notably in the situation where you have to pacify the Labion Terror Beast — although, to be frank, this is arguably the single most hilarious puzzle in the game, worthy of appearing in a LucasArts product; also, if you get stuck here you actually get the alternate option of simply rushing past the Beast, at the cost of a few points and a good hearty laugh. Some tough challenges also await you inside the winding corridors of Vohaul's huge space station — involving a fairly unorthodox use for a toilet plunger, among other things. That said, on the whole the puzzle design is okayish: not too great, not too terrible... in other words, nothing particularly memorable except for the Labion Beast thing.

Where the game *does* become terrible is in its abuse of the maze-type stuff. To compensate for the relative lack of stairs from which you can tumble to your death, the Two Guys decide that Roger must demonstrate true wonders of agility and ingenuity — first, by having to navigate between the highly sensitive tendrils of a giant flesh-eating plant (where each wrong pixel results in instant death), and next, by being forced to blindly explore the corridors of an underground cavern where a single wrong turn may easily turn you into a happy meal for the cave's squishy owner. There are other challenges, too, which involve finger dexterity, but these two were somehow enough to turn **Space Quest II** into one of my most disliked Sierra games from the early AGI period (God, I *hate* mazes!).

Atmosphere

Perhaps the worst problem of **Space Quest II** is that, less than any other game of the series, does it actually feel like an authentic *Space Quest* game. It is (almost) always recommendable to think out of the box and break conventions, but I am not sure that this is quite what the Two Guys had in mind when they designed the planet of Labion which, honestly, feels more like it belongs in a *King's Quest* instalment, what with the little red furry guys roaming (like elves or dwarves) in the underbrush, or the various other cutesy or dangerous representatives of the local flora and fauna. About half of the game is spent in those jungles, which may be well illustrated and all, but provide few opportunities to flaunt the classic *Space Quest* humor — and, to make matters worse, apart from the first and final conversation with Vohaul, Roger spends the entire game virtually *alone*: no talking companions along the way, no drunken barroom customers, no weird robots with personality crises, heck, even Vohaul's security guards are only there to be able to quickly drop dead.

Things get even weirder in the second part of the game, when you have free roam time to navigate Vohaul's huge space station — which, as it turns out, is also completely empty, apart from an undistinguished alien or two locked deep inside a toilet stall. Perhaps the emptiness was supposed to feel intimidating; in reality, navigating those long empty corridors quickly becomes a bore (at best), or a hassle (at worst — whenever you are pursued by a security droid or an automated vacuum cleaner, neither of whom are willing to stoop so low as to exchange a word or two of greeting with you).

Eventually, **Space Quest II** becomes more of a *Silent Quest*, with its own odd feel that may or may not be a good thing. Personally, I far prefer the loneliness and silence of something like the garbage freighter at the beginning of **Space Quest III**, because *that* environment actually has a distinctive sci-fi feel to it, with space debris and intimidating robotic structures all over the place. Here, though, it's as if at least parts of this game were supervised by Roberta Williams — you half expect King Graham or, at the very least, Rumpelstiltskin to jump out of the nearest bush. The funny thing is, there are actually more ways to die in the jungle of Labion than there are in the garbage freighter, yet because of all the little furry friends, the environment of Labion feels much less scary. I sure wish there had been a moment for the Two Guys, sometime during development, to sit back and take an outside look at what they had created — but things were probably in a rush.



Technical features

Graphics

At least on the technical front, **Space Quest II** consistently improves on the first game in just about every respect, starting with the graphics: although the AGI system remains essentially the same and so do the color palettes, resolutions, and sprite animation systems, Marc Crowe clearly put in more effort to make stuff look as realistic and detailed as possible. Compared to the relatively bare-bones detalization of locations like the desert planet of Kerona or the Sariens' commanding ship, Labion and Vohaul's baze are positively brimming with detail — more rocks, more plants, more tiny bits of animation which make the screen come to life; notice, for instance, the neat trick of making the firelight from the feral hunter's lit bonfire reflect on the hunter himself as he is sitting outside Roger's cage, or the (still rather hilarious!) befuddled look on the Labion Terror Beast's face as he scratches his head in utter bewilderment over the challenge issued by Roger.



Special care was taken to depict and animate Vohaul, the first and main archvillain of the series — his closeup impression in the game's prologue was probably unforgettable back in the day, bulky belly, creepy facial expressions and all (too bad there was no budget to come up with a proper representation of his downfall at the end of the game). We also get to see Roger Wilco himself in close-up for the first time ever, as he tries to pilot the kidnapped shuttle away from Labion — if I am not mistaken, this is the first ever close-up portrayal of the protagonist in a Sierra adventure game, and although, for understandable technical reasons, it gives Roger a somewhat cruder and burlier appearance than he would have in the next two games, it still counts as an achievement. Other than that, there is little to talk about when it comes to graphics in this game.

Sound

Not much to speak of, either: the game seems even skimpier on sound than its predecessor — the only music is the already familiar Space Quest theme at the beginning and in the end, as well as a single bar of «Vohaul's Theme» announcing the entrance of the archvillain (twice). Sound effects are limited to annoying PC speaker alarm bells, gunshots, occasional nature effects (waterfalls, etc.), and the tornado-like behavior of the Labion Terror Beast (*very* annoying: please stop him as quick as possible!).

Interface

Like the first game, **Space Quest II** features quite a rudimentary interface — unlike Al Lowe, the Two Guys never thought much about tinkering with the menu bar — and only marginal upgrades to the parser system (at least now you can simply type in *look* to get a general account of your environment). Also, the obligatory answer to *fuck* and *shit* has been changed from the oddly formulated "A mind is a terrible thing to waste" in **Space Quest I** to the more comprehensible, though fairly boring "Would you want your mother to hear you say that?" in **Space Quest II** (implying that you would still have to probably be a teenager to play the game).

With arcade sequences largely esewed in favor of mazes (ugh!), the closest you get to good old school gaming is in a brief sequence where you have to swing on a rope to get to one side of a chasm while trying to avoid a hungry monster on the other — fairly trivial, though you might still die on the first couple of tries before you figure out the correct timing. Other than that, **Space Quest II** is about as hardcore as puzzle-based adventure games ever get.

Verdict: *Sophomore slump which has its moments*

As you can already tell, I have never been too fond of this game, though I certainly accept it as a legitimate part of the Space Quest canon. It simply feels too short and too rushed — something you could probably disregard if this were the first game in the series (just because its main function would be to conduct the first round of world-building), but even **King's Quest II**, for all its similarity to the first game, felt expansive and boundary-breaking. **Space Quest II** does introduce you to the series' greatest villain, but that's about all it does. Only the relative scarceness of well-designed adventure games at the time and Sierra's overall reputation can explain the commercial success of the game — fortunately, contemporary praise never went that much to the Two Guys' heads, and I surreptitiously hope that they themselves were able to reflect on all of the game's shortcomings, which would largely be corrected for the masterpiece-to-come, **Space Quest III: The Pirates Of Pestulon**.

