

# King's Quest VII: The Princeless Princess

**Category:** Graphic adventure

**Developer:** Sierra On-Line

**Publisher:** Sierra On-Line, 3380 146th Place SE, Suite 300, Bellevue, WA 98007 (206) 641-7617.

## Required

CD-ROM drive; 386; DOS 3.3 (or Windows 3.1); 4MB RAM; 5MB hard-drive space; Supported sound card; SVGA; Mouse.

## We Recommend

Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486; 8MB RAM

**M.S.R.P.:** \$49.99

Once upon a time, there was a lovely princess named Rosella who was so happy she didn't even realize that she came from one of the most dysfunctional royal families in history — and isn't that saying something!

Her father was always putting on a green felt hat and leaving the kingdom, her brother would disappear for days without explanation, there were wizards and witches out for her blood, and the one guy she really could have gone for has disappeared from the scene. Now her mother, with whom she's shared a good relationship (even during those difficult early teen years), is trying to marry her off.

Well, enough is enough. Luckily, there are always magical pools around that a princess can throw herself into. But no

**It's tag-team gaming as the Daventry women split up to save an endangered kingdom from another evil magician.**

sooner does Rosella — the young princess of Daventry — toss herself into a mysterious pond than her mother, Queen Valanice, follows her. The two are separated by the swirling waters, and land in different, mysterious areas of a land called Eldritch. Now they must reunite — not only to return to Daventry, but also to save Eldritch from the enchantress Malicia.

There's a lot that's new in Sierra's *King's Quest VII: The Princeless Princess*: The look is new, the interface is new, and the lack of options is new. Sierra's gone for a cartoony — dare we say Disneyesque? — touch with this one, from the opening musical number to the creative creatures who bound through the seven chapters of the adventure.

You don't have to switch icons to walk or talk or get or use objects this time around, either. You simply use a magic wand icon to walk to new areas or interact with different things. The wand icon sparkles when there's something to see or use, so you end up doing a lot of the dreaded "metal-detecting" action — especially when you get stuck and think you might have overlooked something. Once you have an object, you can hold it over an eye icon to see it, or rotate it in well-shaded 3D.

As far as customizing your game or trying lots of different methods to finish the adventure, forget it. Your only options seem to be volume control, playing a new or saved game, and exiting (see sidebar).

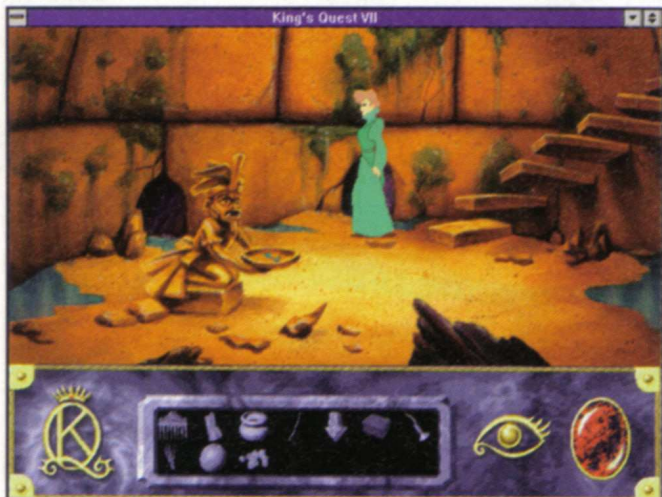
Something else that's new in *KQ7* is its non-linear, tag-team approach. You play both Valanice and Rosella in alternating gaming chapters. You don't even have to play



Some might find the troll Rosella cuter than the willow princess. Certainly the king... or is he the king?... seems to.



A neat feature about *KQ7* is the ability to see items in your inventory in 3D. Far corners of certain items hold vital secrets.



Use logic when you're stealing pieces from the statue at the bottom of the well. The gods get angry when you take everything from them.

straight through the quest to reach the end-game sequence. You can jump right to it, or you can play all Valanice's chapters, or you can play all Rosella's chapters, or... you get the picture. If you skip ahead, your character begins with any vital items in her inventory, or else she can find anything she needs a hop, skip, and a screen away.

As is often the case in games that allow you to skip around, you'll find that the best way to play *KQ7* is from beginning to end, just the way the designers intended. Each chapter ends with a cliffhanger in which the queen or her daughter are endangered, and putting off the conclusion for another chapter is some of the only suspense you're going to get in *The Princeless Princess*.

You see, *KQ7* is a typical mixed bag. The look the designers chose to go for



# ss Bride



**The crystal dragon holds the final ingredient Rosella needs to escape her life of warts and scaly skin. Getting the item, however, must wait until the dragon takes a nap.**

works well — if it doesn't look as incredible as Disney, it at least equals Don Bluth. Each character has a lot of animation, too. But it unfolds too slowly even on a 486, so the comical stretches and funny facial expressions take about twice as long as they should.



**What would a *King's Quest* game be without a person under an evil spell? Attis may be a stag now, and his wife Ceres an oak tree, but hopefully Valanice can change all that.**

Most of the voice actors are good (and be sure to read the credits to spot some surprising multiple roles), but they sound like they're recording a kid's disc; every line is full of high emotion, and oh-so-much feeling. On the other hand, the music is great, and the sound effects are just perfect.

The best thing about *KQ7* is the imagination that's evident in every chapter. As always, the game is influenced by everything from *Mother Goose* to *The Wizard of Oz*, and from *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* to *Lost City of the Incas*. As an example, the engaging Chapter 2 traps Rosella in the underground lair of the trolls. But where



**Just as every chapter ends with a cliffhanger, every chapter begins in dire straits. Valanice must escape the gila monster before you can get started with chapter 3.**

earlier games would have the princess simply wander around trolldom, in *KQ7* she's transformed into a stubby, warty little troll herself — and she's darn charming, too. If it's spookiness you're after, Chapter 4 takes place in Ooga Booga Land, where mummies, ghouls, and bogeymen are shadowy and threatening. There are also haunted woods, swamps, and cloud cities.

As adventure games go, *KQ7* is fairly simple to get through. There are plenty of the standard pick-up-this-to-work-that puzzles, but since each chapter is self-contained, it's too easy to figure out how all the pieces of the puzzle fit together. And that magic wand icon sparkles on items in your inventory, too, so there's no real sleuthing required to figure out which items you can combine or dismantle.

This latest visit with the Daventry royals is an enjoyable trip, but an all-too-brief one. The technical aspects are in place — all on one disc, too! — but gameplay seems to have been shoved aside. If there's such a thing as a pleasant disappointment, this is it.

—Leslie Mizell



**You can't trust anyone in Ooga Booga Land — even a distressed mourner can turn out to be deadly.**

## Save While the Savin' Is Good

Anyone who has played Sierra games for more than a year or two has had some adjusting to do. First we lost our text parser, so we couldn't check out the designers' vocabulary of naughty words. Then we lost the familiar characters as Sierra experimented with digitized actors.

But now Sierra may have gone too far. In *KQ7*, we not only lose the familiar icons we've finally gotten used to, but we also lose a traditional standard of adventuring — the ability to save, and save often.

Part of the fun for a masochistic *KQ* adventurer is the idea that villainy and danger lurk behind every castle corner and every leaf in the haunted woods. You can die at any moment, and if you haven't saved your game, hours of questing can be lost. Similarly, you're often given choices in the game — should you pick up the sword or the tea cup? — and your decision can affect the rest of your game. That's the suspense that keeps you glued to the computer for days on end.

In *KQ7*, however, you can't save the game with the click of a button and try something new. You can save only by quitting the game — and each time you quit, the game is saved automatically. So if you reach a point in the game where you have a choice to make, there's no way to save and then try each alternative. Because if you pick up the cup and then exit to reload from your previous save, you'll be saving the game after the choice is made.

There's no way to create a "gaming tree" of selections without setting up troublesome alternate directories. Of course, the game is designed so that you won't have to worry about that: When you die, you can just try again. But where's the challenge? Where's the sadistic satisfaction of having just saved when the anvil falls on your head? Where's the frustration of being decapitated by an unexpected beast? The loss of the save-game feature takes control out of the player's hands — and in compensating for its loss, the designers make the adventure that much easier.



**Died on the job? No problem — you can repeat the game as often as you wish. You're not required to save the game.**

## PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

**HIGHS:** Sierra always delivers pretty, enjoyable graphic adventures.

# 84%

**LOWS:** The interface doesn't leave much for the gamer to do, and the save-game method stinks.

**BOTTOM LINE:** It's not the best graphic adventure — or even the best in the *KQ* line — but it's fun and pretty and not too hard.