

CIS 587 – Assignment 2 – Game Evaluation

Title: Kings Quest 3 - To Heir is Human



Written by Roberta Williams

Programmed by Al Lowe, Bob Kernaghan, Robert E. Heitman

Graphics by Doug MacNeill, Mark Crowe

Published by: Sierra On-Line

Type of Game: Graphical Text Adventure

Price: \$7-\$15 on ebay.com. \$25 for the collection. \$49.99 originally.

Minimum stated hardware requirements: 256K RAM, compatible operating system

Actual hardware required:

The independent interpreter Sarien (<http://sarien.sourceforge.net/>) runs on MS-DOS, Win32, BeOS, QNX and several Unix flavours (including Linux, Solaris, IRIX and *BSD), AmigaOS, MacOS X and WinCE for PocketPC. So any hardware that runs a processor comparable to the minimum stated should run this game perfectly. The default sierra interpreter may only works well under MS-DOS, but did execute in Windows 2000.

Game Summary

- Quick overview

King's Quest 3: To Heir is Human (KQ3) was third adventure in Sierra's long running King's Quest adventure line. It had a number of positive advancements made both in terms of story and graphics over any other adventure games available at the time. KQ3, for it's time, had the most superior graphic adventure engine available (Sierra's AGI [Adventure Game Interpreter] engine) and improved greatly on the first two games by having a story driven quest and constant suspense. Also notable, the designer of this game, Roberta Williams, is the only well known female game designer, and also still the highest selling ever female designer. She authored most of my favorite childhood and teenage gaming adventures.

- Story line



KQ3 was a tale of a young boy who was kidnapped as a child and enslaved by the evil Wizard Manannan. This boy was named Gwyndion and he had some idea that he would be killed as soon as he turned eighteen, because Manannan did not want clever slaves. He lived with Manannan on his cliff top house on Llewddor never venturing outside. Before his eighteenth birthday arrived Gwyndion decides he will need to plot his escape. Along the way, magic will be learned, quests solved and secrets of his past discovered. How Gwyndion fits into the royal Daventry family from other KQ Games is also revealed.

Evil Wizard

- Player's role

The player takes full control of the adventure, guiding the hero, Gwyndion around the world and interacting with the environment by typing actions on the keyboard. The player needs to be careful, as not to get the wizard suspicious, while also finding out how to use magic and exploring the house and the outside world. The wizard appears randomly, and leaves randomly, so avoiding him while carrying magical items becomes very tricky.

- Installation

No installation was ever required. In the original game, the player played everything directly off of the multiple floppy disks. Today, you can copy all of the files into a directory on your hard drive and play the game using a windows interpreter like Sarien or using the original files (May not work in newer operating systems).

- User Interface

The player interfaces by moving the character around either with the mouse or keyboard. When you get close to useful objects, you can look at them, pick them up or combine other inventory objects with them. A typical game screen is displayed below. On this screen you could navigate Gwyndion up the stairs or type “Look at stairs” to get a description of the stairs. You could also leave the room out of any of the 3 doors. Other actions, such as looking at the candles or picture on the wall may also be available on this screen. The main menu at the top shows the score, and current time and allows a variety of actions (save/load/speed).



- Game Play

You complete the game by successfully solving all of the required puzzles, such as defeating the wizard and defeating the dragon, and not getting yourself killed along the way. There are a number of ways for the player to die including falling off of a cliff, being zapped by the wizard, being turned to stone by medusa. All of these need to be avoided and can be if you save/restore often.

- Scoring

Many actions in the game trigger a scoring response. Generally picking up items or using items successfully will get you points. Sometimes just entering a new area will get you points. In KQ3, when you accumulate 210 points, you are essentially done with the game.

- Artwork (Insert ScreenShots)

The artwork for Kings Quest 3 really pushed the limits of the AGI engine. The resolution of 160x162 16 colors was very limiting on the artists, but every single pixel is colorful and vibrant. All of the background art is vector based to save space, and gave the game a very unique look. The sense of scale was also very apparent in the opening scene. You can see the village off in the distance, as well as the desert and other areas in the world. When you finally get to visit these places it's much more impressive than if you never knew they existed, because you actually made the trek to find the new area. Aside from the backgrounds, the wizard was nicely detailed, while the main character, Gwyndion, seemed mostly plain, looking very similar to graham in the original Kings Quest. As far as the engine and the era, these graphics were top notch and Mark Crowe and Doug MacNeill did a very impressive job.



House on the cliff town in the distance



Finally reaching the town

- Sound and Music

Limited sound effects and music are included in the game. Certain areas or sequences have music associated with them. These areas include: the spell book, the three bear's house, the pirate ship, and the bandits. Music at the time was limited to the PC Speaker, so there was nothing overly impressive but there were some memorable tunes. Player actions are sometimes rewarded with a sound effect, or an incorrect action is also accompanied by a negative sound effect. The AGI engine was one of the first that supported any sound at all, which was still a great accomplishment. The game was nominated for "Best Music in Computer Software" by the SPA in 1987, so some people, at the time, thought very highly of it.

- Special features

Most of the special features involve the spells that you create or actions associated with the wizard. The wizard always pops up in a cloud of smoke and can make you do ‘interesting’ chores if you misbehave. One of the spells can turn your character into a fly or eagle so you can move all over the screen and do things that an intelligent flying creature might do. There is also the added feature of an internal clock which directly impacts events in the game, and this was one, if not the only AGI game that used a clock which directly influenced game events. The wizard would randomly appear to check up on you, and leave for a random period of time to go on ‘quests’, leaving you time to explore the world. An additional special feature was the inclusion of an internal mapping system, which allowed you to easily warp around the game world.



- Manual

The instruction manual is around 30 pages long, and the only useful things it contains are the background story, which is also presented in the games introduction, and the spell book which is used as copy protection as well as to solve required puzzles. You needed to use the instruction manual to find the ingredients of the spells, the order of mixing and the magical incantation necessary to cast the spells.

- Bugs

Since KQ3 was written on an engine which had been in development for a few years prior, there were very few bugs, and some of the ones I discovered were only after hours and hours of trying every action in the game. They were both more 'feature' than bug. One of these allowed you to skip one of the main puzzles (Killing the wizard) by transporting an area of the pirate ship inaccessible to the wizard and then waiting around a half hour for it to sail across the ocean. There was also a bug where you could 'overkill' the dragon to go beyond the maximum number of points. Other than these two, I never experienced any other bugs while playing this game.

Game Review

Looking back on all of the games Sierra has made, King's Quest 3 (KQ3), while being a solid, fun adventure game also has a special significance to me. KQ3 was the first adventure game I bought and I owned first for the Apple //c computer and later for the IBM. One of my friends at the time also owned a copy for the Atari ST and we played together and exchanged hints and tips and success stories. This game did not initially ship with an available hint book, an extremely common reference today, and the internet did not exist, which made solving it extra hard, and this was one of the only adventure games I solved without hints. This added a lot to the fun factor of the game, but playing it again today reminded me of the other reasons I loved this particular King's Quest.

King's Quest 3 was the first King's Quest to have a real storyline and plot. The first two games were primarily treasure hunt adventures created to demo the new IBM line of computers. While KQ3 had plenty of treasures to collect, all of the action was story driven. The player had to collect the items, use the items to make powerful spells, destroy the wizard and other enemies on the island, escape the island and eventually save the princess and complete the game. The game had very nice looking graphics, although computer graphics at the time were very limited, being greatly surpassed by console systems like the NES. Computers did not get seriously good graphics until VGA was in wide release, and when KQ3 came out, unless you were lucky and had an EGA adaptor, you could only get good looking graphics on a computer was by having an Atari ST, Amiga or using a clever television hookup.

King's Quest 3 was released in 1986 and had a few good years before any competition came about in this market. The best known company, that is one of the only remaining adventure game firms left, was LucasArts. They released Maniac Mansion in 1988, around the time KQ4 was launching. Maniac Mansion had a completely different style of interface removing the text parser interface and making all actions controllable with the mouse. Sierra eventually abandoned their text adventures for a modified version of this style, but I became a much better typist and speller at a younger age, partially because of the sierra adventures.

LucasArts did make very well written, and funnier games in almost all cases. (Except for some exceptions in the Space Quest series) While Sierra has closed their adventure game development office, LucasArts is still releasing a few games a year, notably the excellent Grim Fandango and Escape from Monkey Island. However this game has very few notable weaknesses, and is accessible to anyone who can spell. It is a great way for kids of all ages to learn English spelling and improve their typing skills, and will likely be remembered as fondly as many of the great classic books.

- Strengths :

Strong, fun, and interesting story

Vibrant colorful backgrounds

Humorous 'death' scenes and punishments from the wizard

Magic spell mixing system and magic spell usage

Internal mapping features helped gameplay

Can teach players new and old typing skills and improve vocabulary

- Weaknesses :

Older game engine and low resolution

Lack of support for sound devices (Though Sarien sounds better than the original)

Navigation through some areas is tricky

Need to know English to play the game

- Is the game worth purchasing?

This game is worth it as part of a large collection (The most common method of current distribution). You can either find it in the Roberta Williams Anthology or the Kings Quest Collection. The newer Kings Quest 5-7 may have higher production values, but there is something special about using the keyboard text parser interface over the more modern adventure interfaces. All people who enjoy gaming should play some of these classic adventures, as the comedy, puzzles and story will be fun forever.

- How could it be improved?

This game could use a more modern graphics/sound facelift as well as a number of new areas to explore. Once you defeat the wizard and set sail on the ocean, there is only one place you go and there is plenty of opportunity for additional quests and adventures. An increase in the number of spells you can learn, and a slightly better interface to casting them would also be useful. If Sierra was still making adventure games, they could remake Kings Quest 1-4 and tie all of the adventures in together, but unfortunately I see this having to continue standing the test of time on its own.

Web references used

<http://www.mobygames.com>

<http://sarien.sourceforge.net/>