eviews: The Bottom Shelf

What is The Bottom Shelf? It's where the older Mac games are usually found at your local software store. The games reviewed in this section have been released for some time now but are still selling, so you should get the Inside (Mac Games) Scoop.

Space Quest Mania
by Robert Lewis

Space Quest 1-The Sarien Encounter

You have been stationed onboard the spacelab Arcada in the Earnon planetary system. The scientists are trying to develop a star generator to replace their dying sun.   It is also well known that the scientists have just completed the generator.   It appears to be fully operational even though the generator is still in the testing stages.

The good news is then radioed back to their planet Xenon.   Regretfully this message is intercepted the Sariens (mortal enemies of the Earnons).   The Sariens then attacks the Arcada in order to steal the star generator.   As the Sarien ship attacks, you (Roger Wilco) are rudely   awakened from one of your on-shift naps in the janitorial storage closet.   As you exit the closet, you discover that you are the last survivor on the Arcada.   The star generator is gone and the ship is set on self destruct.   Welcome to Space Quest-The Sarien Encounter by Sierra On-Line.

You are Roger Wilco, apprentice sanitation engineer (or any other name you wish to enter at the beginning of the game) and it is up to you to track down those Sariens. You also must retrieve the plans to the star generator and destroy the one the Sariens stole.   Control of your surrogate character can be done by either with the mouse or the keyboard.   I recommend using the keyboard because it gives you the best control.

The user interface is fantastic.   There are command keys for everything.   Pressing the return key or clicking on the input icon allows you to enter text commands. Control of animation speed and volume can be adjusted by just entering words like fast and loud respectively.   Clicking on the status icon will reveal your health, inventory and score.   You can even use the ResEditor to enter new commands into the verbs and look menus.   This is one very versatile piece of software.

There is a lot of subtle humor built into your quest. This is well shown in the cantina scene. Make sure you view all three acts. The game even has an arcade flavor at different points in the story. Try playing the slot machine in the cantina, it's a killer.

The three dimensional graphics are really amazing. Your are not in a flat universe. Your on-screen character can walk in front of or behind objects or other characters on the screen. To work control panels you must walk your character up to the panel. It is almost like acting out a role in a movie.

As with any gem this game does have one flaw. The graphics lack the gray tones we come to expect on the Mac. These graphics were designed for PCs that offer color output. There are times when our on-screen character really loses his head against the background. Adjusting the brightness control can help to bring out more details in the graphics. Since this writing, Sierra has re-released SQ I in full color and with much better graphics.

Solving your quest will not be simple. The story line is long but very entertaining. The puzzles you will have to solve can be complex yet solvable. Many of the puzzles even have multiple solutions. The more inventive the solutions the better your score will be. If you do get stuck in your quest, you can always buy the clue book from Sierra.

Space Quest II: Vohaul's Revenge
In our last chapter,   we left our hero Roger Wilco foiling the plans of the evil Sariens by destroying their star generator. Life for Roger was pretty good after that day.   He made all the talk shows and it was beamed from planet to planet.   As with all things, life goes on. With time Roger's popularity finally waned to the point that he went back to what he was best suited for: Sanitation Engineer of Xenon Orbital Station 4.

One day, which was no different from any other day, Roger is sent to clean up a mess in a shuttle craft.   It seemed that somebody got a little space sick on the way to the station.   It is up to Roger to make things right.   Upon entering the craft, Roger cannot locate the mess. Instead, he is greeted with several blows to the head.

Upon awakening, Roger finds himself in front of the king of nastiness, Sludge Vohaul. It seems that Vohaul is rather angry with Roger.   Vohaul is the   master mind behind the star generator and was not very happy when it was destroyed.   By some twist of fate, Vohaul intercepts a video transmission of Roger on some late night talk show .   Roger is rehashing how he destroyed the star generator. Vohaul is enraged when he saw it and has Roger (you) kidnapped.

Vohaul decides to be kind and sends you to one of his prison planets to work in the radiation pit.   Before sending you on your way, Vohaul also reveals to you his new plot to take over the planet Xenon.   So once again it is up to you to escape and prevent Vohaul from carrying out his evil plans as you enter the realm of Space Quest II by Sierra-on-line.

As with their other role fantasy games the primary game screen can be broken down into three parts .   At the top of the screen is the menu bar.   All the parameters (animation speed, volume, direction, etc.) of the game can be controlled   from here.   You can even use ResEdit to enter new commands into the verbs and "do it" menu.

To the left of the screen is a set of five icons. Clicking on the status icon   gives information about your health, score, and a listing and description of your possessions.   You can also

turn the sound on and off from here.   The input icon allows you to enter commands while clicking on the look icon will give you general information about your surroundings.   You can hide the menu bar by clicking on the menu icon.   The swim icon is self explanatory.

The last window (which accounts for about 95 percent of the screen) is the graphics window. This is the focus of the entire game.   It is here where you will navigate through Space Quest II.   This is also (regrettably) the weakest link in the chain.   As with SQ I, the graphics lack gray tones.   These graphics were designed for computers that offer color output and will show up in color on a Mac II.   Also like SQ I, SQ II has been upgraded by Sierra resolving these weak spots.   I found Space Quest II to be a lot of fun to play. Even if the graphics are not perfect, all the other parameters of the game play more than compensated for it.

Space Quest III - The Pirates of Pestulon
In our last chapter of Space Quest, we left Roger Wilco successfully escaping from a very defeated Sludge Vohaul in an emergency space pod.   Just when Roger thought his worries were over he   discovers that the ship's oxygen was almost gone.   In a last ditch effort to survive, Roger decides to enter a hibernation chamber and be entertained by the inside of his eyelids.   His only hope is to be picked up as Roger's ship floats aimlessly throughout space.

Time passes.   More time passes.   Even more time passes and Sierra finally gets the bugs out of their translator so that Roger can get on with his life.   With Sierra's translator fixed Roger's ship is found by a droid-driven trash freighter.   When the ship is brought into the freighter, Roger's sleep chamber is jarred, bringing him out of suspended animation.   Upon awakening, Roger quickly realizes that he is going to have to build a ship in order to escape from the freighter.

Many solutions later Roger discovers that the Two Guys from Andromeda have been kidnapped.   For some reason Roger looks at these two dudes as major mentors in his life. So, he sets out in search of the hidden base to rescue the Two Guys from Andromeda from The Pirates of Pestulon.

Space Quest III, The Pirates of Pestulon from Sierra-on-Line was the long-awaited sequel in the continuing adventures of Roger Wilco, Space Janitor.   It had been over two years since Sierra released any form of their new generation of role fantasy games.   These new games took advantage of the resolution of the IBM VGA systems.   This produced a major improvement in the game's graphics which used to be their weakest link in the chain.   Their entire line of software got a full face lift.   This face lift also caused Sierra to take an unplanned 2-/2 years hiatus on the Mac.

Since all games Sierra releases on the Mac are IBM ports, Sierra had to write a new translator for their new generation of games.   This quickly became the fly in the ointment. At one point they had it where it ran fine in color but not in B&W.   For some reason the gray tones would not translate properly when it went from color to B&W.   Objects that would stand out in color would get lost in the gray tones.

Although it took over two years to get the bugs out, the wait was well worth it.   The graphics look great.   This was the one thing that always took their games down a peg on the Mac.

Playing Space Quest III was very refreshing.   I had almost forgotten the wit and humor that went into their games.   Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy do a great job spoofing science fiction

films.   Even Arnold (that's right, he's back!) gets into the act as you try to rescue those two guys from Andromeda.

Sierra also replaced the old computer sounds of beeps and bops with fully digitized sounds. It adds a level of excitement that pulls you deeper into the game.   A full musical score (over 30 minutes long) was written for Space Quest III by Supertramp's own Bob Siebenberg.   If that is not enough, then try playing it with a Roland MT-32 sound machine tied in.

Regrettably this gem still has one major flaw. It is not compatible with system 7.0 (if you run the game with the sound on).   You will have to run it with system 6.07 for now.

Since our last encounter with Space Quest III, we left Roger piloting his ship into deep space after he had skillfully rescued his mentors, the Two Guys from Andromeda from the Pirates of Pestulon.   What else could he do? The Two Guys from Andromeda had not had a chance to scope out Space Quest IV yet.   So Roger flew the vaporware avenues of space until the two guys came up with a new plot.

Finally, Roger flies his trusty ship, the Aluminum Mallard, to the planet Magmetheus for some well deserved R&R.   Quickly, Roger spends most of his money on drinks for those who wish to listen to his daring feats of heroism.   Suddenly, the Sequel Police show up and cart Roger off in order to deliver a message to him.

The message is from Roger's worst enemy, Sludge Vohaul and boy is he mad!   As Sludge begins to describe what he has in store for our hero, another person appears out of no where and rescues Roger from the Sequel Police.   The man tells Roger that there is no time for questions and operates a device that produces a time rip and pushes Roger into it. Although the time rip gets Roger away from the Sequel Police, his stomach yearns for some other mode of transportation.

Suddenly Roger arrives at his home planet Xenon.   Upon his arrival, Roger's keen senses notice that things are not right.   The whole planet has been ravaged by some great cataclysm.   He also notices (by looking at the menu bar) that he is now part of Space Quest XII.   What the devil is going on?   It is up to you to unravel this mystery and stop Sludge Vohaul from putting an end to Roger's life as you enter Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers.

This has got to be the best interactive role fantasy game Sierra-on-Line ever released.   I use to say that their weakest link in their chain was the graphics.   This is not so anymore.   The screens are like works of art.   The animation really gives you the feeling that you are truly part of a movie than just controlling an on screen surrogate character.

To correct this weak link Sierra wound up removing an entire link in the chain.   Space Quest IV will only run on color Macs.   Sierra will no longer support any of the B&W Macs from this point on.   You will also need a Superdrive in order to load the game on your HD. The playability of Space Quest IV has been immensely improved.   Commands no longer need to be typed in.   All functions are icon controlled and can be accessed either by the mouse or keyboard.

To round out the fine graphics are the sounds.   The sounds are more like a soundtrack to a movie than a video adventure.   As long as you use system 6.0.7 or later, you will be able to access the full gambit of music and sounds.   Eventually Sierra plans to release a CD version

of Space Quest IV.   Not only will there be additional sounds but the characters will speak as well.   That will truly turn this game into a role fantasy movie.

As with the other Space Quest stories, the story line is great.   Throughout the game you will zip from one Space Quest sequel to another.   Eventually, you will have to rescue Roger's son, Roger Wilco Jr. from Sludge.   Although this is the darkest of the four Space Quest stories, there is still a lot of humor mixed in throughout the game.   One of my favorite parts involves an unstable ordinance.   Let's just say that Roger got a bang out of it and my game SIG members got a good laugh at my expense!