

Title	Space Quest V
Publisher	Sierra On-Line
Contact	(0734) 303322
Price	£39.99

Who's the clumsiest, dumbest, laziest and luckiest hero in the galaxy? Roger Wilco, of course — and he's back to bumble and bluff his way through the latest Space Quest adventure

Space Quest V:

Roger Wilco - The Next Mutation

The janitor returns. If you've never played a Space Quest game before, these three words will be about as meaningful and stimulating as 'John Major puts his coat on'. Space Quest fans, however, have been waiting almost two years for the latest episode in the life of Roger Wilco. Roger Wilco, for those of you who've never heard of him, is one of the shining stars in Sierra's software firmament, an inveterate hero of several space-age spoofs. He's also a bit of a twit.

If you want to know more about Roger's life as an accident-prone space superstar, take a look at the panel on The Story So Far, on page 52. In Space Quest V, Roger's performance in the examinations at the StarCon Space Academy (he scores top marks) has rewarded him with the command of his own starship.

Well, not quite. First of all, he has to cheat to pass his exams, and then he relies on a computer malfunction to award him a perfect score. All of this serves as a neat introduction to what the game is all about: a few conversations

with fellow-cadets teach you that no one has the slightest respect for Roger, a dry sense of humour accompanies every scene, and the initial puzzles are solved using a combination of mishap and guile.

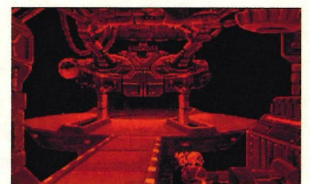
The StarCon Space Academy is also where Wilco learns of his main mission for Space Quest V. Eavesdropping on an important conference, he discovers that Sludge Bandits are illegally dumping bio-hazardous waste all over the galaxy. His first job is to clear up some of the mess

that they have left behind — but that's only part of the story.

In Space Quest IV Roger met his future wife in a hologram; in Space Quest V he encounters her in the flesh while he's polishing the floor. Being a bit of a nerd he makes a complete hash of the encounter, and one of the problems you'll face is how to convince the wife-to-be that Roger is a cool dude.

Other 'minor' problems include a gang of mutants knocking about the galaxy in

Roger Wilco's ability to make the worst of the few talents bestowed upon him is a constant feature of Space Quest V. His first challenges include cheating during an exam, cleaning the floor and finding a space craft ...



A brief cut-scene introduces our hero, as he steps shamefacedly from a session in the combat simulator. All he can do is dream that one day he will have a ship of his own, roaming the galaxy in search of fame and fortune.

a stolen spaceship, a killer android whose sole aim is to rip Wilco limb from limb, a pet face-hugger who won't stop burning holes in his ship, the Eureka – and Captain Quirk, Roger's clean-cut but decidedly dodgy nemesis.

Under control

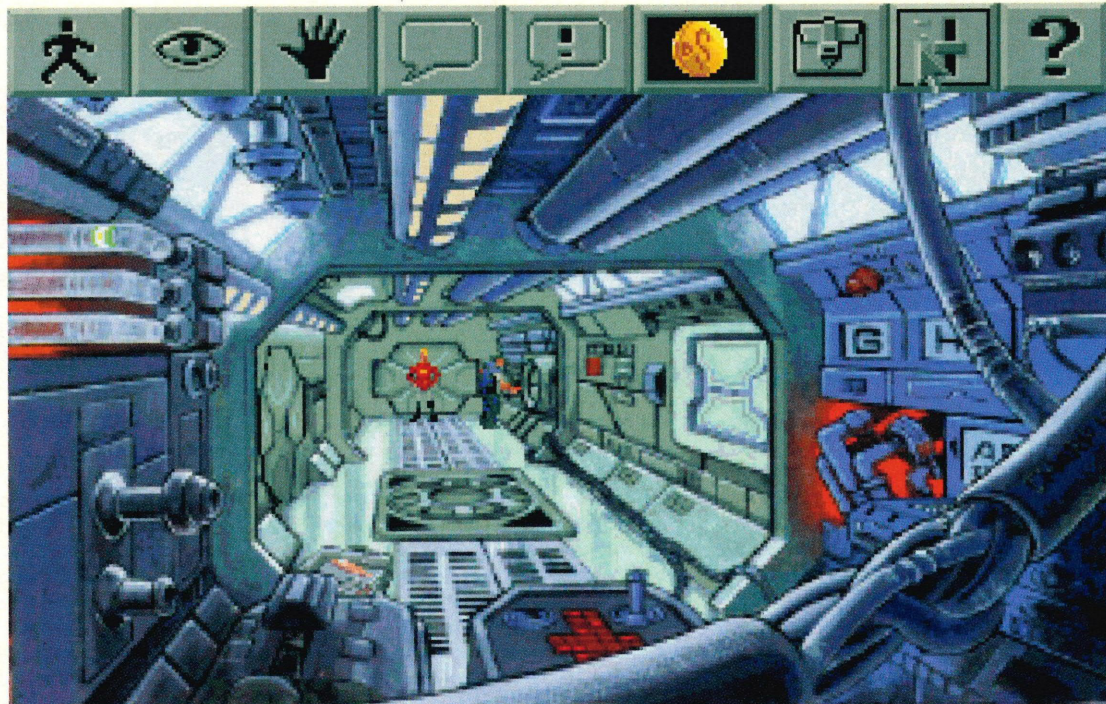
More about the plot later. When you first rip open Sierra's meaty-looking package you discover five disks, a magazine (Galactic Enquirer) and a manual. The manual is admirably simple: a few technical details, a brief run-through of the icon controls and some general tips on playing.

However, anyone who has Space Quest IV will struggle to spot the differences between that manual and this one, which is slightly annoying if you've just forked out £40. In addition, for all its clarity and brevity, it doesn't really reflect the spirit or humour in the game.

This function is left to the Galactic Enquirer – a genuinely funny National Enquirer spoof which mixes bizarre and occasionally useless stories with some tips on playing the game. It also contains a map of the Space Quest galaxy – something which isn't immediately obvious to anyone who hasn't read the Readme file supplied on disk. It's a good idea to look at the Readme file anyway, because it also contains a few handy technical tips.

The brief introductory animation introduces Roger to anyone who doesn't know what he's like: a self-important (but loveable) idler who spends most of his time playing games and annoying authority. After that you're thrown straight into the game itself, aboard the StarCon Academy space station.

The control system in Space Quest V is virtually the same as that employed by its immediate predecessor. The basic icon commands of walk, look, use and talk are the same, but Wilco's latest adventure includes an 'issue orders' icon for direct-



ing the crew of his spaceship. This command brings up a couple of text menus allowing you to plot coordinates, open fire, raise shields, hail planets, and so on.

Other icon commands are object-driven, ie, when you select an object from your inventory, you can use it like any other icon. For example, when you're cleaning the floor in the introduction to the game, your cursor changes to a 'brush', and by moving the cursor around the screen you activate the cleaning equipment.

Switching between commands couldn't be much simpler: you can either call up the icon panel at the top of the screen and make your selection, or use the right mouse button to cycle through the available icons. The only trouble I found with this was that I occasionally went one icon too far, and had to cycle through the list again. It's no great hassle.

The screen display, apart from a thin bar detailing your current score and the game's title, is dominated by the view of

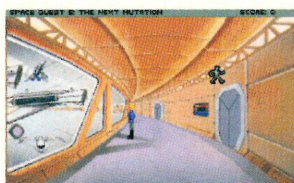
your current location. The advantages of this are obvious: you get full-screen graphics (rather than the two-thirds view offered by LucasArts games) which look impressive and help to generate atmosphere. Unfortunately, there's a disadvantage that goes with this: you haven't got an on-screen inventory, which means that you can't manipulate objects with instant ease.

However, there's a more important problem with the control system. For me, Sierra's history of interface design in the Space Quest series has been a constant struggle between easy-to-use controls and sufficiently complex puzzles.

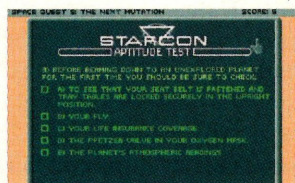
The parser used in The Sarien Encounter (SQ1) wasn't abandoned until after the Pirates of Pestulon (SQ3), by which time it had developed into a decent system. Parsers, of course, went out of favour – and Sierra's solution in Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers (SQ4) was an icon-only interface. Although it's fair-

There are two ways for mouse users to manipulate the action: by cycling through the icons with the mouse button, or by selecting them from this menu. As well as the five basic commands shown here (walk, look, use, talk and issue orders), special commands appear when you use objects.

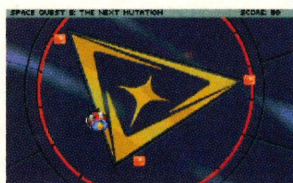
Two Minutes of life as a cosmic dustman



Staring at all the space craft in the docking bay only inflames Roger's ambition to be master of his own vessel. He knows, deep down, that if he's going to get anywhere he'll have to take his exams like every other student.



Unfortunately, it's exam day, and (as usual) Wilco knows nothing about anything. There's only one solution -- cheating. Checking that the robo-teacher isn't looking, he casts a beady eye at his fellow-students' papers.



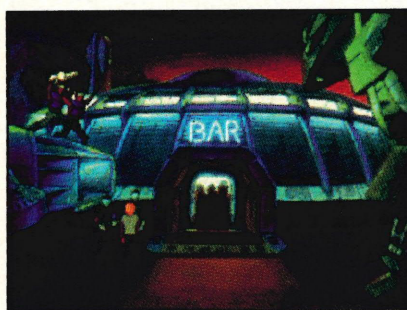
As punishment for being late for his exam, Roger is ordered to polish the Academy crest. A new icon is added to the five already available, and Wilco whizzes around the floor bringing a shine to the insignia.



A severe computer malfunction awards Roger the highest cadet ratings ever. As a result he's been given command of his own starship at last! No more mopping floors for him! But... er... what does he do next?

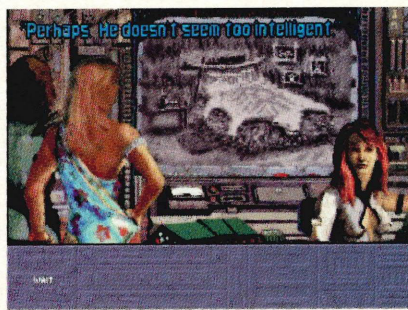


A few quick conversations with his insubordinate crew and his nemesis, Captain Quirk, reveal the answer. His mission is (literally) a load of rubbish, but for now he can feel the thrill of leaving the space station and heading for deep space.



Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers
Sierra, £39.99

The fourth instalment in the life of ridiculous Roger Wilco is different in more ways than one. For a start, it replaced the previous trio's slightly awkward interface (including text commands) with an all-new icon control system. More importantly, the weird sense of humour, intricate puzzles and original plot are all entertaining enough to keep you hooked. You'll need a hard disk and a fast machine to enjoy it, though.



Rex Nebular
MicroProse, £44.99
Rated 8, Issue 14.

More famous for its simulations than its graphic adventures, MicroProse's first step into the world of icon control and object manipulation is nonetheless a good one. The hero is Roger Wilco-esque in his bumbling buffoonery and the plot is Space Quest-meets-Leisure Suit Larry, but there are enough original features to maintain interest. Three difficulty levels cater for novices as much as experts, and the control system is good.



Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis
Lucasfilm, £37.99
Rated 9, Issue 11.

The latest and greatest of Indy's adventures might be a little easy for experienced gamers, but the quality of the graphics, sound, and storyline make it irresistible. The control method (the latest version of the SCUMM system) is almost always intuitive, and even if mind-bending puzzles are all too rare, helping Indy find Atlantis via three different routes is a pleasure for any graphic adventure fan.

Below left: What Roger keeps in his inventory could mean the difference between life and death. Items can be used on each other as well as on the main screen.

Below: It looks like curtains for our hero. This is only one of dozens of different ways in which Wilco can kick the bucket. Just pray that you saved the game.

ly intuitive, this system – also adopted for Space Quest V – places restrictions on interaction and allows less scope for imaginative, multi-faceted puzzles.

On the positive side, it does make playing the game very simple indeed. You can use objects on one another, or on areas of the landscape, you usually only have a maximum of half a dozen main icons to choose from, and any mental effort you expend can be channelled wholly into puzzle-solving.

Even so, I feel that Lucasfilm's SCUMM system (from Maniac Mansion, Monkey Island, the Indy games, et al), and even MicroProse's MADS system (seen in Rex Nebular), provide more flexible control over the action and result in more interesting puzzles. The SCUMM system, in particular, may be less precise and less impressive to look at, but it's also less rigid and gives an illusion of greater complexity.

Different graphical perspectives add variety to the game: this unusual view shows Roger fiddling around inside a fuse box.

Riddles and ribaldry

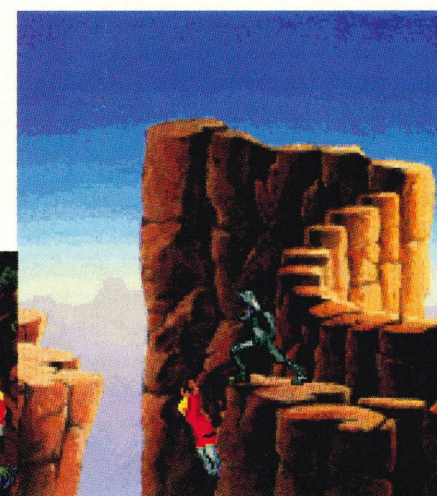
Whatever the drawbacks in the control system – and they don't radically affect your enjoyment – Sierra's strength lies, as ever, in its ability to tell a good story. Space Quest V certainly doesn't disappoint in this respect: the plot is as twist-



ed and bizarre as ever whilst maintaining contemporary interest with its ecological undercurrent. Apart from the main task (which you are obliged to follow) there are constant surprises which take you off on a tangent.

Non-linear progress isn't new in graphic adventures – most recently, Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis has featured multiple routes to the same goal, and King's Quest VI has two end sequences – but Space Quest V allows more freedom to explore than its immediate predecessor.

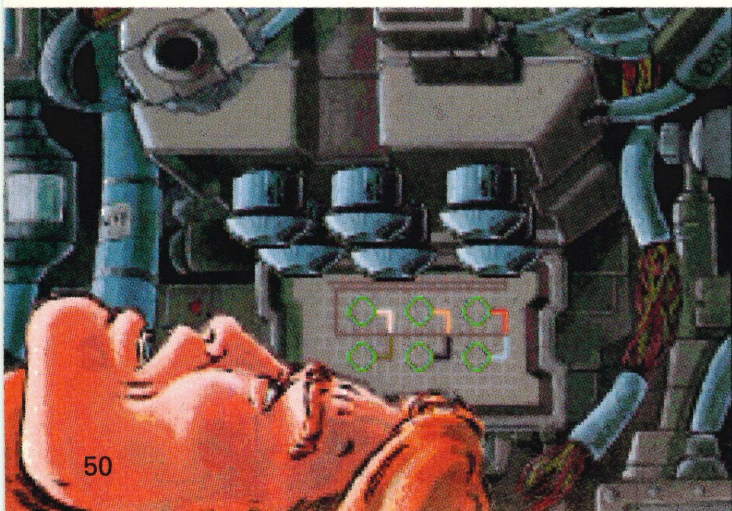
Roger Wilco's initial mission involves cleaning up a trio of planets which have been dumped on by the Sludge Bandits, but you can actually wander around the galaxy, virtually picking any planet you like. OK, there are some restrictions – one



planet has a poisonous atmosphere, some are uninhabited, and so on – but the feeling of general liberty to wander at will is welcome.

The puzzles are always of a decent standard and can be quite tough. If you want an easy introduction to the series you should try Space Quest III, but for more experienced adventurers there are enough challenges here to keep you scratching your head until the hint book becomes available. Examining everything and constantly talking to people helps, because there are plenty of clues in what people say and in the concisely-worded descriptions of objects and places.

Saving the game regularly is also beneficial. It can be a pain because it interrupts the flow of the action, but you haven't really got much choice. The



major problem is that there are so many ways in which Roger can be killed, ranging from death at the hands of an enemy or from neglecting the ship's functions, to instant, unexpected exits caused by experimenting with the wrong objects at the wrong time. You can also find yourself encountering a minor cul-de-sac if you haven't solved the right puzzles earlier in the game. Fortunately though, there's often more than just one way to solve a problem.

Apart from solving the puzzles, what really keeps you going are the characters and the sense of humour. All of Space Quest's wide cast of characters are beautifully drawn, but Roger's sarcastic exchanges with his crew, his confrontations with Captain Raems T Quirk, and his hopelessly sentimental view of Ambassador Wankmeister (the prospective love of his life) are especially funny, and in the last case, it's *not* (thankfully) because of her name — the word just doesn't have the same connotations in American English.

The amount of detail packed into the graphics and conversations is outstanding. It ranges from minor effects — such as heads turning to face people who are speaking, rare sightings of Elvis, or security officers playing video games — to

Roger's quest takes him to many planets in the galaxy. Some are friendly, some are uninhabitable, some are simply poisonous, some won't let you land, and some won't even let you orbit.



whole sequences of events. Every time Wilco returns to the bridge aboard the Eureka, Droole and Flo (his crew) are wasting their time with a variety of different activities.

The humour is almost always funny, although it won't be to everyone's taste. A mild streak of anti-feminism and an occasional puerile pun failed to impress only because the rest of the game is so well done. The gags are visual as well as verbal, and trying to repeat any of them here would only lessen their effect — so I won't bother. All I can say, though, is that if you don't laugh out loud at some of the jokes you haven't got a funny bone in your body.

Waddle and strut

Visually and aurally Space Quest V is well up to scratch. It doesn't mark a significant improvement on Space Quest IV, but the quality is still very high. Sprite scaling gives a convincing 3D effect, and the animation is reasonably smooth, although characters can look a little blocky in close-up. In truth, though, this is barely noticeable, because your attention is drawn much more to the way the characters move rather than their immediate appearance. For example, Roger Wilco's bizarre waddle-cum-strut is a triumph of comic animation.

You might have expected sprite scaling and decent animation, but what you don't anticipate is the sheer variety of graphic perspectives on offer. Much of the game is dominated by flick-screen and scrolling backgrounds, but there are many occasions in which unique still-graphics screens are used for special events. Added to this are

dozens of animated and comic strip-style cut-scenes. These are sometimes a little lengthy and intrusive, but on the whole they provide a decent reward for making progress in the plot.

One more thing about the graphics. The endgame screen displays a potted animation of Roger's death throes, which varies according to the manner of his demise. It's a nice touch, and typical of the attention to detail throughout.

The music and digitised sound effects are similarly accomplished. The weird and wonderful collection of tunes suit the tone of the game perfectly, and change according to the scene. If you have an Ad Lib card you get all the music and some sound effects, but you also get an odd silent moment as well.

If you have a Sound Blaster card you get the full and impressive range of digitised effects, which add an extra dimension to the atmosphere — whether it's the Star Trek-style 'swish' of opening doors or the constant sound of Roger's pratfalls.

The only real technical problems occur on slower PCs. The action can be irritatingly sluggish on a

Techspec Before you're ready to blunder around space space — you'll need a little more for saved games — and a high density floppy drive (the game comes on five disks). Tandy graphics mode is VGA-only, but everyone else can choose between VGA and EGA. As well as the sound cards listed below, SQ5 also supports ProAudio Spectrum, General MIDI sound driver, Microsoft Windows Sound System, and Tandy 3-voice. The manual warns that you may experience lock-ups when using a Sound Blaster card, but I had no problems. Also, if you're close to the minimum RAM required you could experience slowdowns in some areas; to help you out, instructions for creating a boot disk to disable memory-resident programs are included. A 286 is the bare minimum system required; at 12MHz you can reduce detail to accelerate the action, but loading/saving games and travelling between screens is time-consuming. Finally, a mouse will increase your pleasure no end.

Disk requirements

High density	✓
Hard disk only	✓
Space taken on hard disk	7.9Mb

Graphic modes

CGA	x	EGA	✓	Tandy	✓
VGA	✓	SVGA	x		

Soundboards

Ad Lib	✓	Roland	✓	Sound Blaster	✓
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Control

Joystick	✓	Keyboard	✓	Mouse	✓
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Performance

Optimum speed	20Mhz
Minimum memory	640K
Free RAM required	580K

286, with screen loading times and some cut-scenes being particularly irksome. However, an in-built feature allows you to alter the level of detail and the game speed, which can reduce the number of annoying moments on low-end machines.

A load of rubbish?

There are very few problems with Space Quest V. The control interface isn't perfect, some of the puzzles are slightly tough for beginners, the graphics and sound don't mark a major step forward in adventure game technology – but the urge to play the game to the bitter end is very strong indeed.

This is partly because of the constant barrage of jokes, ranging from slapstick visual effects, through groaning puns and ancient jokes about toupees, to sophisticated parodies of science fiction films and television series. However, it's also down to the depth of the plot and its characters, and the quality of the writing.

The only major problem I have with the game is that it's quite similar in style and tone to all the previous episodes, and particularly similar in look and feel to Space Quest IV. If you're the kind of person who prefers sequels with established formulas to original ideas – and you've enjoyed the previous games in the Space Quest series – you should go out and buy the latest instalment straightaway.

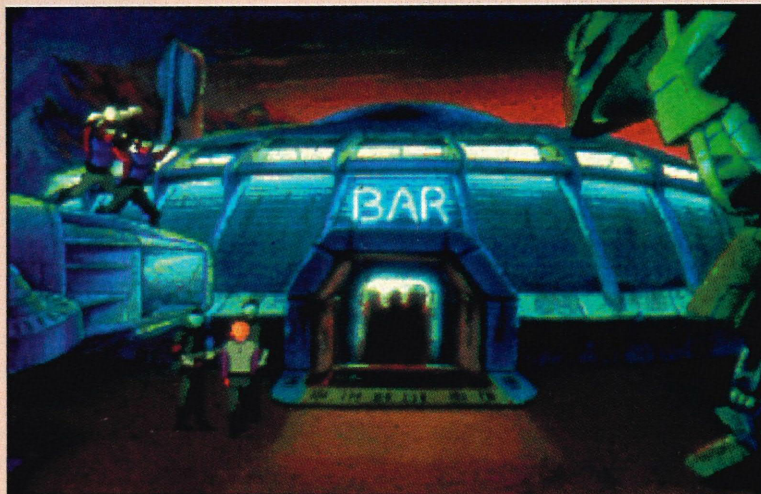
However if, like me, you want something that knocks you off your chair with an all-new cast of characters and breathtaking technological advances, you may be slightly disappointed.

Space Quest V is an imaginatively programmed and very entertaining game. If it weren't for a few minor control faults and a general lack of innovation, it could have been a great one.

■ **Gordon Houghton**

THE STORY SO FAR ...

Like no other software company, Sierra is the sequel specialist, combining tried-and-tested plot formulas with technological advances to create 'original' games. Space Quest is just one of seven series, which also includes King's Quest (six games), Leisure Suit Larry (four), Hoyle Book of Games (three), Quest for Glory (three), Great War Planes (seven), and Police Quest (three). Space Quest details the exploits of Roger Wilco, a man with more brawn than brains, and more brains than sense. The intergalactic janitor is now the legendary hero of five Sierra adventures:



SPACE QUEST I: THE SARIEN ENCOUNTER

Now available in an updated VGA/EGA version, this was originally a graphic adventure from the old school, right down to the clumsy text input. The plot? Roger's spaceship has been stolen by Sarien creeps -- but worse still, they've also wiped out his crew and hijacked the top secret Star Generator.

SPACE QUEST II: VOHAUL'S REVENGE

Roger's task is to destroy Sludge Vohaul and foil his plot to infest the universe with robotic insurance salesmen. The control system isn't much of an improvement on Space Quest I, but the sense of humour is more refined. However, it wasn't until ...

SPACE QUEST III: THE PIRATES OF PESTULON

... that the series hit the high spots. Roger's job was to rescue the Two Guys From Andromeda (actually the creators of the Space Quest series) in a quirky jaunt through time and space. It's self-referential, self-mocking and occasionally self-indulgent. It's also the easiest in the series.

SPACE QUEST IV: ROGER WILCO AND THE TIME RIPPERS

A strong vein of humour in this fourth instalment pulls you through a series of tough puzzles spread across multiple historical periods. It first appeared almost two years ago, boasting an improved interface, VGA graphics, scrolling screens and a pretty weird plot. Very good, but not great.

