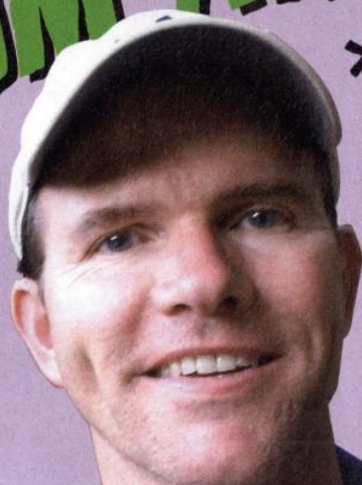




He came... FROM ANDROMEDA!

>> Maurice Branscombe



THE WORLD'S FOREMOST EXPERT ON
SNOUTS, MOHAWKS, AND SPOCK EARS;
GUY FROM ANDROMEDA *MARK CROWE*
SPILLS THE BUCKAZOIDS ON THE
SECRETS BEHIND ROGER WILCO AND THE
SPACE QUEST SERIES...



» It was the 1980s, *Dexy's Midnight Runners* were burning up the music charts and had a long and illustrious career ahead of them, *Rocky III* had taught us that Mr. T wasn't quite the "toughest man in the world" as he would so self-assuredly claim a mere two years later in the film of the same name, and the biggest thing in computer games was the graphic adventure. For this brief moment in the industry's history games that needed mental dexterity rather than lightning quick reflexes, and required at least a rudimentary knowledge of the written word, were at the very peak of gaming's technological evolution, and Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy's *Space Quest* series were unquestionably one of the finest examples of the graphic adventure genre. It was with great anticipation then, for Hyper to

sit down with the original guy from Andromeda, Mark Crowe, to chat about Roger Wilco and nearly two decades of *Space Quest* history over a Monolith Fillet-O-Orat Burger and a jumbo sloppy-slurper...

THE SIERRA ENCOUNTER

Sierra Online Systems, a small but talented company, had been working hard since 1979 to establish an enviable reputation, and had thus far succeeded. At the time Sierra was arguably already the leading adventure game developer in the world, having crafted the first ever adventure game with graphics in 1980 (*Mystery House* for the Apple II), and published the first ever game on an IBM PC (*Adventure in Serenia*) two years later. 1982 was also the year that a young artist named Mark Crowe unassumingly wandered into

Sierra's path not yet knowing the future that awaited him.

"My parents, who lived in the Sierra foothills, told me about an article in the local paper about this small company called Sierra Online Systems that made computer games" recalls Mark of his first encounter with Sierra. "[At the time] I was working for a company in Fresno, CA. called California Labels as a graphic artist designing labels for food and beverage products... It was very boring work."

"I got curious and decided to check them out," says Crowe, "I dropped by their modest offices without an appointment to leave a resume and ended up talking with the head art director. After showing my portfolio, they offered me a job on the spot."



[above] Farting turned out to be a mistake

For Mark however, landing the job was the easy part, the hard part was actually figuring out what the heck Sierra were making, and what were the strange beige boxes they were using to make them with.

"I had never heard of Sierra Online," admits Crowe, "I had never even heard of a personal computer before I walked into their offices and laid eyes on an Apple II!" he recalls, "I remember my first week

We were feeding off each other's enthusiasm - a creative synergy.

of working there because I got to bring home an Apple to get familiar with their games. I was instantly addicted - playing text adventures and arcade games till the wee hours every night."

Mark didn't jump directly into the game development side of things, instead spending a great deal of his early time at Sierra working as a paste-up artist and illustrator in Sierra's game documentation department, long before the days of desktop publishing. It wasn't long though before Sierra management took notice of Mark's creative talents.

"The first game I worked on was *Kings Quest 2*," recalls Crowe, "I was tapped to learn how to use the sprite animation tools. The very first thing I ever animated on a computer was the jumping fish in KQ2. From that point I was promoted into the game development side of the business."

From the humble beginnings of a single fish Mark Crowe would go on to work on some of the company's most memorable adventure games of the early 1980s. He created all the graphics for Al Lowe's original *Leisure Suit Larry* game, directed an episode of the popular *Police Quest* series and worked on numerous Sierra/Disney collaborations including *The Black Cauldron*, *Mickey's Space Adventure*, *Donald Duck's Playground*, and *Winnie the Pooh*. Mark's greatest adventure however, was yet to come...

CALL OF THE TERROR BEAST

In 1986, Mark Crowe's latest project *The Black Cauldron* had just been released, and it was while working on this game that the first seeds of what would soon become the *Space Quest* series were planted.

"Scott [Murphy] and I were both working on the *Black Cauldron* project with Al Lowe," remembers

Mark, "That is where we got to know each other and began talking about designing our own games."

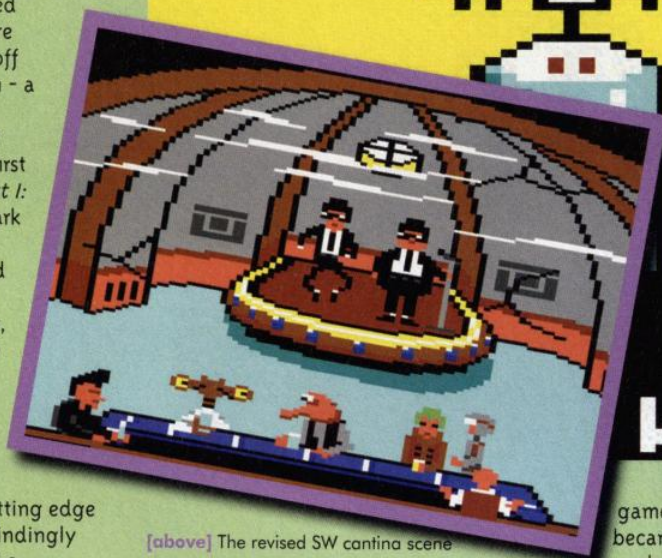
Both Mark and Scott were more than a little tired of working on "sword and sorcery" themed games (of which the likes of the *Kings Quest* series were Sierra's main livelihood), and the more they worked together the more they discovered that they had much in common; both shared an interest in classic science-fiction and both had a twisted sense of humour.

"The concept just sort of evolved as we batted the idea around," recalls Mark, remembering how the *Space Quest* series came to be. "I got inspired enough to create the graphics for 2 spaceship hallway interior scenes in my spare time and showed them to Scott. He got excited and programmed them to work in his spare time. We were feeding off each other's enthusiasm - a creative synergy."

After completing what would later become the first four rooms of *Space Quest I: The Sarien Encounter*, Mark and Scott showed their efforts to Sierra's CEO and cofounder Ken Williams, and he liked what he saw, commissioning the game immediately. When the final product rolled onto shelves later that year, his decision paid off. Big-time.

Running on 1986's cutting edge IBM PC technology, a blindingly fast 4Mhz processor and a near-colossal 246 Kilobytes of RAM, *Space Quest I: The Sarien Encounter* was a fantastic feat of both graphical and game design ingenuity. Utilising a text parser interface, *SQI*, and indeed the

following two *Space Quest* games, would accept commands in the form of the player typing their actions in two word sentences. For example; if you wanted to blow your Labion terror beast whistle, attracting a slaver, furred, flesh eating creature, or if you wanted to consume a deadly poison-gas-



[above] The revised SW cantina scene

filled spore, you'd simply type in "BLOW WHISTLE" or "EAT SPORE" respectively. The parser always resulted in much hilarity and frustration, as you'd both laugh at the many gags that would be impossible to produce with any other kind of interface, and at the same time damn the arbitrariness of many of the combinations of words. With knowledge of the English language in tow the player had to guide the accidental hero of the series, bumbling space janitor Roger Wilco, through the tribulations of an alien raid on his spaceship, a crash-landing on a strange planet, and an eventual counter-attack on the aliens' own headquarters. Upon release the

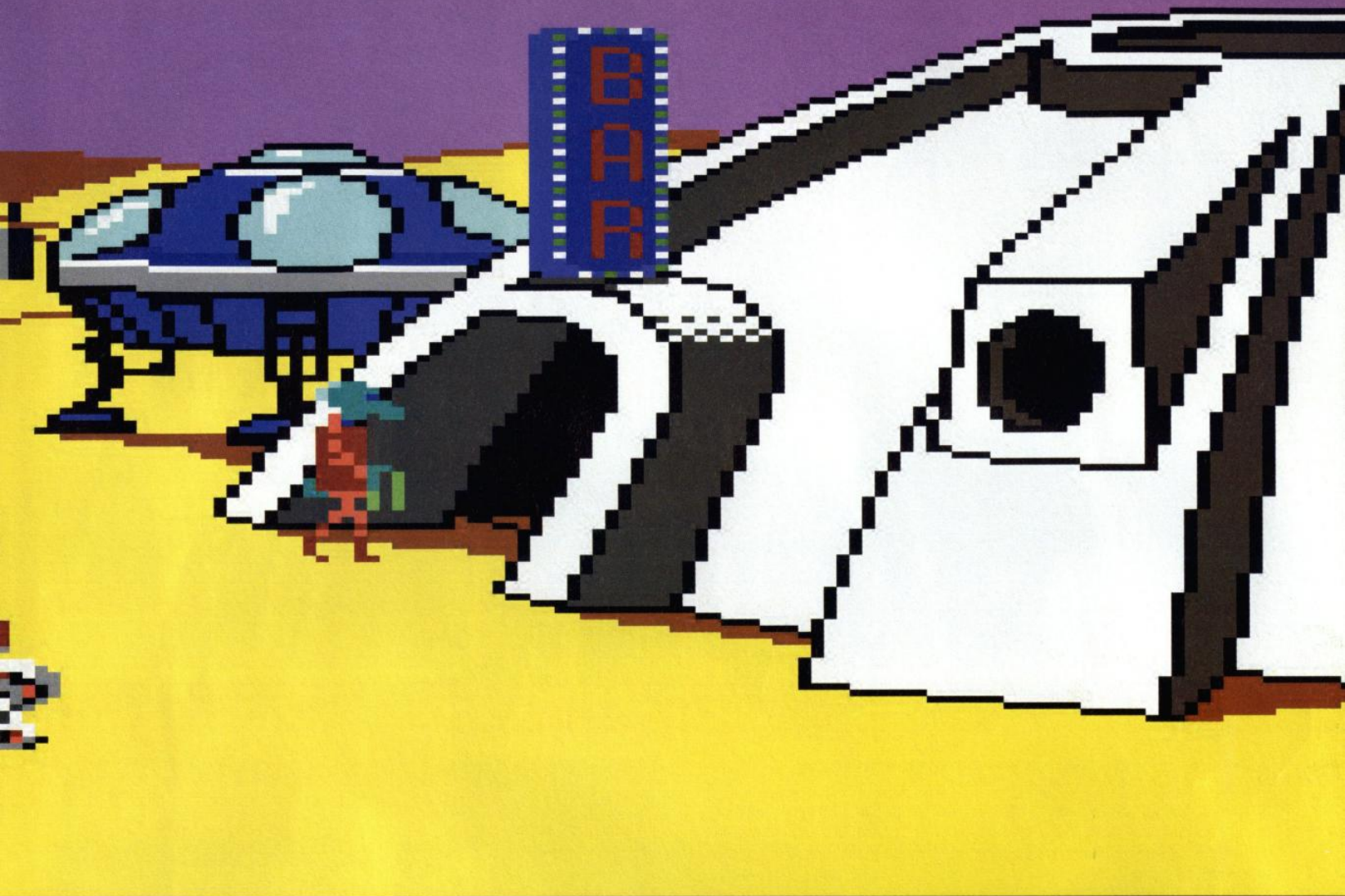
game immediately became a hit, filling a much-neglected corner of the medieval/fantasy saturated adventure market.

"I honestly do not know exactly how well we did in regards to numbers sold," says Crowe, "The series certainly put some gum money in our pockets, which was nice, but the success of the series really didn't sink in until we began hearing from the many, many people who played and loved the games and were compelled to write and thank us. That was priceless!"

TWO GUYS IN TROUBLE

Part of the reason so many gamers were putting pen to paper and mailing their admiration to Mark and Scott is that the two hadn't merely signed their names to the





me to Ulence Flats

project and sent it out into the world; they had instead developed a rather unusual, but undeniably fascinating and hilarious gimmick.

"We were wrapping-up development on SQ1 and had to think about how we wanted to be represented on the box as the authors." Remembers Mark, "We really didn't take the whole idea of promoting ourselves as software authors seriously and thought it would be fun to come-up with alter egos that were in keeping with the zany nature of the game... It was all very last minute. I went to a Halloween costume store to look for anything we could use to make some cheesy alien getups. We bought these red Mohawks, rubber Spock ears and punk visor sunglasses. Next came the noses. I dabbled in creating monster makeup

prosthetics as a hobby and sculpted a pair of rubber snouts. Viola! We had our costumes. The 2 of us raced up to Yosemite Valley armed with a tripod and snapped a picture of us pointing up at Half-Dome (Sierra's emblem)." Mark continues, "The name 'Two Guys from Andromeda' was a take-off of a pizza chain; 'Two Guys Pizza'....We got a much needed chuckle out of the whole thing and figured that would be the end of it. Boy were we wrong. Ha!"

The Two Guys from Andromeda quickly became gaming icons, and with each successive *Space Quest* sequel their status also climbed, arguably peaking with 1989's *Space Quest III: The Pirates of Pestulon*, where Mark and Scott actually coded themselves into the game. The player, as Roger Wilco was quested with the challenge of rescuing the two guys





from an evil game developer called Scumsoft, who had plans to work them like slaves churning out insipid arcade games.

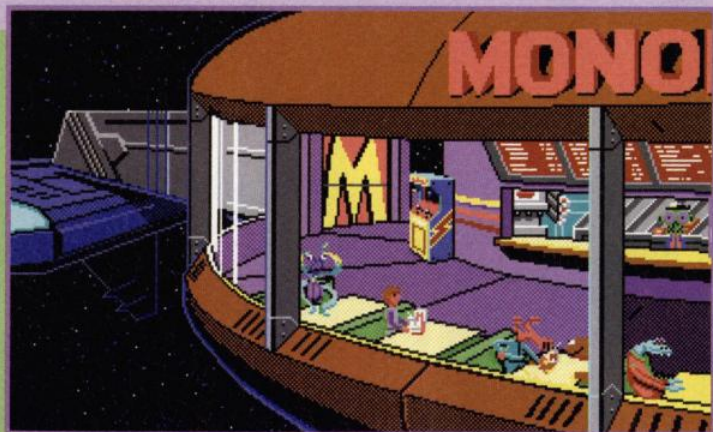
"It's funny but I've never given this much thought until recently." Admits Crowe, "The whole 'two guys' gag seemed like a very inside joke that only loyal SQ gamers would appreciate. It's amazing to me that we got away with making them such major characters within the SQ3 storyline. Looking back, that was very risky for Sierra... Little did we realize how this would propel us to 'Genius Game Designer' status in the minds of impressionable young adventure gamers. Ha! It certainly helped put us on the map within the game development community."

THE TIME RIPPERS

The greatest Roger Wilco adventure was yet to come however, and in 1991 what Mark Crowe describes as his "one true masterpiece", *Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers*, was released.

"When Ken told us we were going to do a SQ4, we were fresh out of ideas." Remembers Mark, "I felt we'd taken it as far as we could and had nowhere else for Roger Wilco to go. [At first] the only thing that kept me excited about the project was that it would be done in glorious VGA graphics..."

The game did feature beautiful hand-painted backgrounds, video-captured animation, plenty of cinematics, and the dialogue was fully voiced by a perfectly selected



cast, including a particularly humorous narration by Gary Owens, the voice of the 1960s variety comedy show *Laugh-In*. SQ4 was also the first in the series to abandon the text-parser for the increasingly more popular "point-and-click" interface, and while Mark Crowe may have initially had reservations about whether or not Roger Wilco could be taken any further, as the project took shape it was obvious that SQ4 was going to be something very special indeed.

"[We had the] idea of revisiting old *Space Quest* games and intermingling their original, retro graphics with the new VGA look," remembers Mark, "The idea of time tripping through previous, and future, *Space Quest* games evolved

from that. The whole concept came gushing forth after weeks of creative dry heaving. Wow! How's that for a visual!"

With this idea in their minds Crowe and Murphy crafted an adventure in which the player time-traveled from sequel-to-sequel, through all of Roger Wilco's adventures, both past, present and future, in an attempt to escape the clutches of the "sequel police". To hilarious effect, when travelling backwards through time, Roger would retain his cutting-edge (at the time) VGA appearance, however the backgrounds and other characters would look just as they did all those years ago, in magnificent 16-coloured EGA graphics. The blocky, pixelated



characters of Roger's past would even ridicule his new "fancy-pants" appearance at any given opportunity.

"In my humble opinion it is the craziest of Roger's adventures," says Mark. "We had a great team of artists and programmers that were fun to work with and the end result was something we were all very proud of."

As fate would have it however, SQ4 would end up being the final *Space Quest* game that both Scott Murphy and Mark Crowe would work on together.

"There was no falling out," asserts Mark. "Like with any team that works so closely together for long stretches, they have to take a breather. Scott and I always worked on separate projects in between *Space Quest* games, and after SQ4 an opportunity to move to beautiful Eugene, Oregon presented itself. Dynamix (a newly acquired division of Sierra) extended an offer to come work with them... So [I] jumped at the chance. My main motivation for going to work for Dynamix was to work on Simulations, which is what I was into playing at the time. So, after starting there, they came to me and said; 'Guess what?! Sierra wants you to do SQ5 here at Dynamix!'"

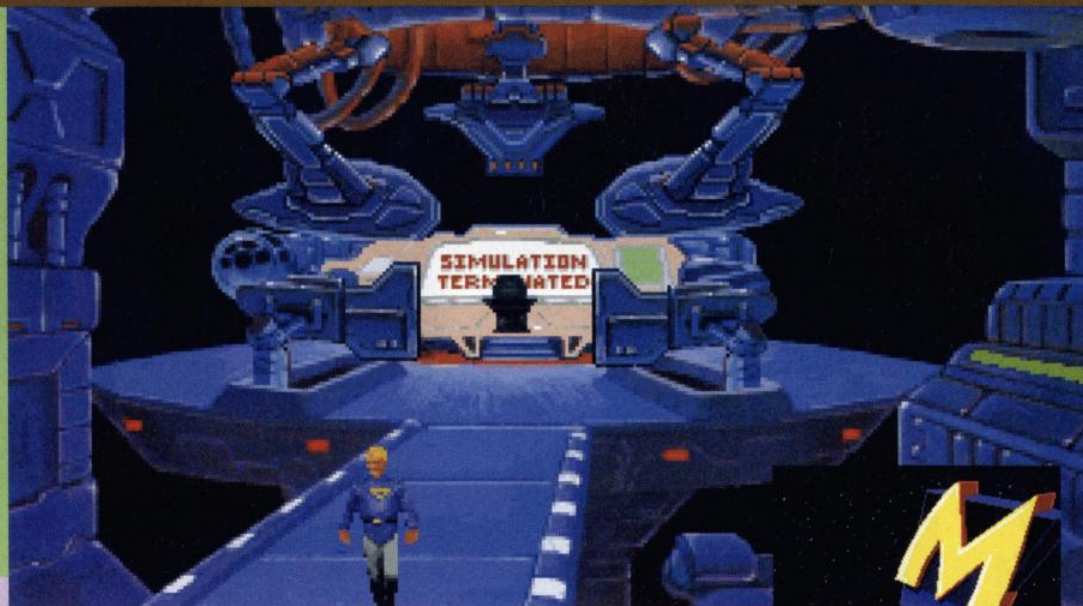
SEE YOU ON THE CHRONOSTREAM

After completing production of SQ5: *The Next Mutation*, and after almost a decade of toiling away on the *Space Quest* series, Mark Crowe decided it was time to hang up his Andromedan garb. Settling into a new design position at developer Dynamix (which has since disbanded), Mark would go on to develop the popular giant-mech-sim, *MetalTech: Earthseige* and its sequel, among others.

The 1996 release of the sixth *Space Quest* game, SQ6: *The Spinal Frontier*, while guy from Andromeda Scott Murphy would eventually return to work on the title, it barely registered a blip on Mark's radar, and in fact he admits that he hasn't really ever played *Space Quest 6*.

"When SQ6 came out I was deep in development on 2 other projects and simply had zero spare time to play other games." Recalls Mark, "But I was curious and did start to play it. It just kept getting pushed to the back burner and I eventually lost interest. I can't deny that a *Space Quest* burnout probably had something to do with it though."

Today Mark is a leading designer at the Eugene, Oregon-based development house Pipeworks Software, who are at the time of writing working feverishly away



on the sequel to their successful Gamecube and Xbox smash-em-up *Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee*, otherwise known as *God: DAMM* (best. acronym. ever.).

"It's great to be making console games," comments Mark, "You don't have all the compatibility nightmares that plague PC development... It's been very different from anything I've done in the past, which keeps it fun for me."

With the exception of the in-development (and terrible looking) *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude*, these days Sierra seem comfortable to adopt an "ignore it and it will go away" attitude toward their glorious adventure gaming past, and even the most optimistic

Quest episode, and perhaps even to reunite with fellow Andromedan Scott Murphy.

"I would seriously consider it," says Crowe. "The last time I spoke with Scott we discussed that possibility. There was a big fan-based campaign to get Sierra to publish a new *Space Quest* a few years ago, and that got us both thinking about it... but we both got involved with other projects or interests, and the notion withered." recalls Crowe, "I cannot completely rule out the possibility that we might join forces sometime in the future though. I am certainly open to it. Either on a new *Space Quest* or a new concept."

Whatever the future holds, the

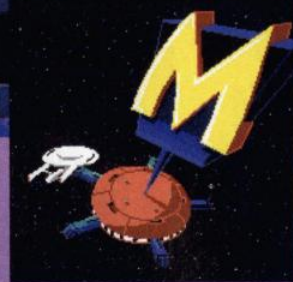
We might join forces sometime in the future...

gamer would have to concede that the odds are stacked against the likelihood of a new *Space Quest* adventure materialising anytime in the near future. Over the years numerous promising *Space Quest VII* projects have been announced, and a few have even made it into full-scale production, but all thus far have met with the same fate, ultimately being kyboshed by Sierra management. With so many cancellations and false starts the future of Roger Wilco seems as shaky as

ever, but as unsure as it is, Mark Crowe admits that if the opportunity arose he wouldn't mind once again donning his red Mohawk, snout, dark shades and Spock ears to take the lead on a new *Space*

fact remains that Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy's *Space Quest* series has already left an indelible mark on video gaming history. The adventures of Roger Wilco, the most blundering space janitor the universe has, and perhaps ever will see, are some of the funniest, most referential and ultimately influential adventure games ever conceived. For that Mark Crowe, Hyper salutes you! See you on the chronostream time-jockey... <<

The Two Guys from Andromeda go on to create the *Space Quest* series of adventure games reaping fame and fortune. They grow fat on their success and soon become burnt out and begin a drunken tailspin into obscurity.



LAWSUITS 'R' US With the sheer volume of sci-fi parodies and pop-culture references flying around in Mark Crowe and Scott Murphy's *Space Quest* series, it was only a matter of time before someone took offence. In one particularly famous case the big chain store Toys'R'Us sent their lawyers to knock on Sierra's door after having played *Space Quest: The Sarien Encounter*. The retailer didn't much appreciate a sequence in the game that depicted a shady second-hand robot dealer vending his wares out of a similarly named store "Droids'R'Us". "We were slapped with a cease and desist," recalls Crowe, "which resulted in the removal of [the sequence from] the game."

After the legal action all future print runs of SQ1 contained the slightly tweaked, and now entirely legal "Droids'B'Us". Not only that but Crowe and Murphy's creative reigns were tightened, at least a little.

"From that point on, Sierra's lawyers were taking more interest in what went into our games," recalls Crowe, "We put the Energizer Bunny into SQ: IV and were certain it would get axed. But, instead of mandating that we cut it, Sierra got in touch with the Eveready company and they were actually cool about us using it..."

"The industry as a whole was just beginning to become a blip on corporate lawyer's screens in regards to copyright infringement. We were just doing our part to push the envelope."