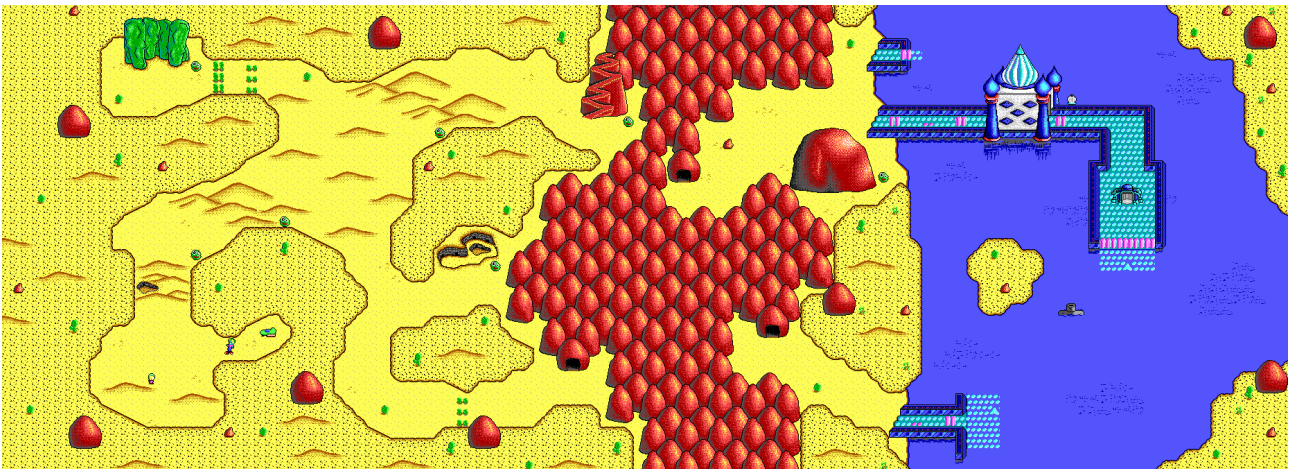


PCKF

- Modding Theory - World Map Development



all hints and tips by Public Commander Keen Forum Members
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The World Map (by Ceilick)

The world map is one of the most important levels in a Keen game. The reasons are many:

- It plays the role of one third of the game's story and helps direct the game's plot.
- It is a level to be explored and progressed through like any other level.
- The player will see more than any other level.
- It creates the setting and ties all the individual levels into a cohesive whole.

Bottom line is that a good world map is important. But what goes into a good world map? A good world map will keep the story fresh in the player's mind and provide a sense of purpose and direction (why are they in this place? What is their mission? Which levels need to be beaten? Which area should they explore? Which area do they need to gain access to?).

It will also give the player new exciting, interesting, meaningful and mysterious things to see (the world map will have variety, it will feature detail objects and unexpected sights, it will feel 'alive'). Let's consider these things in some detail.

1. [Interaction with the Player](#)

How does the world map interact with the player in respect to the story? The layout will help convey what kind of mission Keen is on. Compare Keen 4 and 5. Keen 4's world map is open to the player to freely explore. Keen 5, on the other hand, gives the player a direct path toward their goal. These different paths reflect directly to the game's stories.

In Keen 4, the story is that Keen must search to find the Council Members — exploration.

In Keen 5, the story reveals that Keen must reach the QED by deactivating the four machines on the middle deck — a direct path.

Choose carefully where and how levels and other obstacles are placed. Pace your sub-missions (like those found in Keen 6) to work in harmony with your story rather than as a diversion from it.

2. [Relation to the Story](#)

How the world map relates to the story will directly affect the player's sense of purpose and direction on the world map.

“That's the thing about the [world] map... it's the one that the player sees most often, so if it starts to feel stale, you're in trouble because the player is going to keep getting sicker and sicker of your map and is likely to get distracted from the game easily (especially if your levels are particularly difficult.)”

Strategically placed backgrounds can easily give the player an impression that the map is alive (at least for a bit longer than usual). Things like a launchpad with a rocket or small village areas on the inaccessible areas of the map to keep the world alive, unusual flora to fascinate the player, later areas in plain view to amp up the player's anticipation. Simple things, but very effective.

3. Input of fascinating elements

Remember, the player is carrying out two roles: Commander Keen (or a substitute character), and him/herself. Things that would fascinate Keen are likely to fascinate the player, so 'useless' background objects serve a purpose in making the world feel like it is more than 'bare essentials'. It gets the player involved in the game, thinking 'wow' because they're seeing things through Keen's eyes. Mysteries that the player can't explore add a lot of interest to the map (try to avoid frustrating elements that logically Keen should be able to explore, like purely aesthetic caves or buildings where Keen can walk – that has the opposite effect).

The map needs to be more than just a representation of the levels, too. It needs to feel alive, and there need to be things that are difficult to reach but right in front of me. I want to be taunted with undiscovered mysteries. (Commander Spleen, 2006)

4. Hidden parts

And yet, at the same time, the 'player-view' factor must be taken into consideration – things that Keen wouldn't be able to see. Distant levels, beyond a range of mountains or hovering in space, for example, excite the player and keep them moving on in the game. Small details that probably wouldn't be noticed on a first glance make the player want to find more such 'easter eggs' even after playing the game many times through.

Your world map is as important a level as any other. Just as normal levels will use switches and have keys to open doors, think of your map this way: map out which levels must be beat to gain access to new areas, which levels will give Keen an item so he can progress further, etc. Just as in a normal level in which variations of graphics must be used and unique graphics occasionally appear, do the same for your map.

Be strategic with such subtle details. A huge patch of identical space platforms or the same plant growing in every single corner, or even too many future levels in plain view, are detrimental to your cause. Think 'glimpse' and you can't go wrong. (Commander Spleen, 2003)

5. Representation of level Insides

When designing graphics for your world map, keep in mind things like level entrances will be a direct representation of what the player will see inside the level.

“[Give] the levels a sense of meaning, like the way Keen 4-6 have levels that fit in with their appearance on the map.” (Commander Spleen, 2006)

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