

King's Quest: Mask of Eternity

CATEGORY: Adventure **DEVELOPER:** Sierra Studios **PUBLISHER:** Sierra, (800) 757-7707, www.sierra.com **REQUIRED:** Pentium 166MHz; 4x CD-ROM drive; 32MB RAM; Windows 95/98; 400+ MB hard-drive space; DirectX compatible sound card; DirectX compatible video card; mouse **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium II 266MHz or faster; 64MB RAM or greater; 3Dfx or D3D compatible video card; 32x CD-ROM drive **MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS:** None

Roberta Williams proves once again she doesn't shy away from change — but many will be left wondering why she fixed something that wasn't broken in the first place.

Whatever else you say about Roberta Williams, you certainly can't call her complacent. Besides creating the innovative and highly successful *Phantasmagoria*, Williams has continually revamped the hugely popular King's Quest series, constantly exploring new ways to draw would-be adventurers into the enchanting medieval world of Daventry.

With *King's Quest: Mask of Eternity*, though, Williams and the King's Quest development team just might have outdone themselves. The interface has been completely overhauled, with the familiar point-and-click movement and perspective replaced by an option to play from either a first-person view or a *Tomb Raider*-style perspective that allows you to pan and zoom the "camera" at will. Combat in previous King's Quest games was almost non-existent, but in *Mask of Eternity* you'll be faced with it from start to finish; it might not take up the lion's

share of actual play time, but there'll be points during the game where it sure feels that way. And longtime King's Quest fans eager to catch up on the doings of characters like King Graham, Prince Alexander, and Princess Rosella will be shocked to learn that the only inhabitant of Daventry found in the game (aside from a couple of very minor characters) is the hero himself.

Naturally, some followers of the series feel a little betrayed by such

major changes, even going so far as to say this isn't a King's Quest game at all. But while Williams is to be commended for taking the chance of alienating King's Quest veterans in pursuit of her artistic vision, she's to be chided for not ensuring that the changes were implemented in a way that made the game more immersive and enjoyable. Almost everywhere you look in *Mask of Eternity* — story, combat, characters, control, and even saved games — you'll find that

The Seven Realms of Mask of Eternity

Despite the horrendous load times between levels, one of the best features of *Mask of Eternity* is the diversity of the worlds Connor explores as he tries to recover the missing pieces of the Mask. With distinct environments and unique enemies, the variety of worlds he visits lends an epic air to his quest.



action, but before rushing off to find the Dimension of Death, make sure you explore every single house and building in the village.



but the real challenge lies in using the clues provided by the Boatman to unlock the gate in front of the Bridge of Life.



are made even more perilous by huge pools of poisonous water. To purify the swamp you must slay this witch and find a way to disable her magical cauldron.



The Underground Realm of the Gnomes: Finally, a place to spend all the gold

dropped by the enemies you've slain! If you don't have enough gold to upgrade your weapons and armor and purchase the essence of Sun Tzu, go for the weapons instead.



The Barren Region: These lava-dwelling dragons can pop up at a moment's notice in the Barren Region,

so keep your bow at the ready.



The Frozen Reaches: The yeti-like creatures that roam the Frozen Reaches might not move very quickly,

but what they lack in speed they make up for in sheer numbers. Make sure you have room to retreat as you fire arrows at them.



The Realm of the Sun: Pay close attention to the whispered voices you hear in this room full of

Archons; they provide clues that reveal the story of the broken mask and how to defeat Lucreto.



To defeat this dragon, all you have to do is figure out how to jump on him from above — provided you've acquired the weapon to slay him, that is.

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it's not up to the high standards we've come to expect from Williams.

Take the story, for instance — or what little there is of one. As the game opens, you see a mysterious figure cast a spell on a golden mask, shattering it into pieces. One of the pieces lands at the feet of our hero Connor, who's chatting with his friend Sarah. Just as he picks it up, a black tempest rolls over Daventry, leaving everyone in the kingdom turned to stone — except for Connor. As he moves through the village, he meets a wizard who tells him that the only way to restore Daventry and its inhabitants is to recover the missing pieces of the mask.

It's a good start, but unfortunately that's pretty much all there is. Sure, Connor travels through a lot of different worlds (see sidebar) and gets to see a few clues as to the identity of the big bad guy, but there are no plot twists, flashbacks, or expository scenes to make the experience or characters more interesting. And while the variety of game worlds provides an epic feel, the flow of events in each of them is almost identical: Connor arrives, learns from an

inhabitant that the destruction of the Mask has screwed things up, figures out what has to be done to restore order and sets about doing it, then moves on to the next world and starts the process again.

Though you'll meet all sorts of characters as you seek out the pieces of the Mask, none of them have any memorable qualities; in fact, they feel like little more

than talking heads placed in your path as a convenient way of telling you what you need to do or where an important object is located. The only characters that stand out at all are a girl lost in the Dimension of Death and a unicorn in Daventry that's been transformed into an ugly beast by the tempest — and it's possible to complete the game without even meeting them.

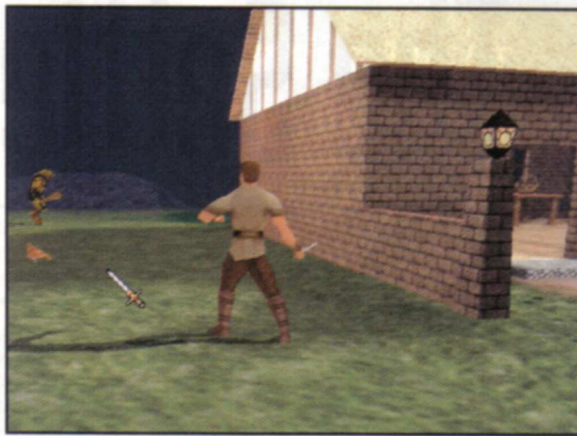
And the biggest changes — in the new viewpoints and the heavy emphasis on combat — also aren't quite as polished as you'd expect. To be blunt, combat is little more than drudgery: most encounters consist of walking up to a baddy and clicking madly with the weapon icon until he falls to the ground. Faced with an end-level monster? Not to worry — it just takes more mouse clicks to defeat (oh, and you might need to use a restorative potion or crystal to restore your health meter during battle). Why include combat — and so much of it, at least on the Normal setting — if it's not challenging or fun?

For the most part, the new perspectives work well once you get used to their quirks, but there's still some weirdness going on here. Play from the first-person perspective, for example, and you'll discover you can use the mouse only to look up or down. The mouse is more useful in the third-person view-point — you can zoom and pan in order to see enemies or objects hidden behind walls, as well as look up and down — but playing from this perspective is still something of a pat-your-head-while-rubbing-your-tummy affair.

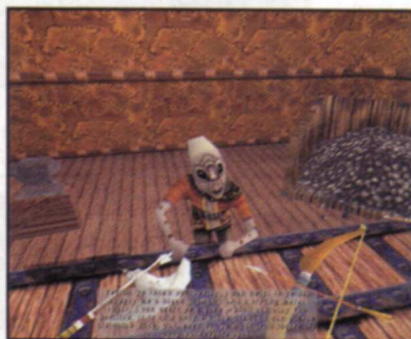
Even after you find the point of view that suits you best, you're still likely to run into frustration when it comes time for the tricky jumping sequences. Because

the keyboard is used for directional control instead of the mouse, it's nearly impossible to get Connor lined up exactly the way you want him to, and even after hours of play, it's still tough to tell just where he'll land. I died countless times misjudging distances — so much, in fact, that I found myself pounding my desk in anger and wondering why these sequences were in the game in the first place.

Outweighing these rough



Take time to search out all the enemies in Daventry; the more you slay, the faster your experience level rises.



Near the start of each level, you'll encounter a character who'll give you a mission.



After working your way through seven perilous regions and hordes of enemies, Mask of Eternity rewards you with... a sliding puzzle you must solve from an inefficient third-person point of view.

edges, though, is a huge slew of puzzles. Most are traditional "find object A to use on object B" fare, but you'll also encounter machine-based puzzles and some very subtle pattern-recognition problems that will challenge even veteran adventurers. Even without well-developed characters with which to interact, there's plenty to do in *Mask of Eternity* — and thankfully, the interface has been designed so you've got a pretty good idea what to do next and a general notion of how to go about it.

But there's one flaw in *Mask of Eternity* that's nearly inexcusable: the longest load times I've ever seen in a game. Loading games from within the same level is bad enough — somewhere around 45 seconds — but it can take up to three and a half minutes to load a new level. If you have to return to a previous world to retrieve an object — something which happened to me on several occasions — you're looking at up to seven minutes of down time before you can get back to your quest. I won't go into the reasons for the long load times except to say they're the result of Sierra's desire to save hard-drive space; personally, I'd gladly give up a gigabyte or more if it would let me get on with the business at hand.

There's no question that *Mask of Eternity* has plenty to offer adventure-gaming fans, but this is a case where too much attention was paid to technology and not enough to the concepts that attract people to adventure games in the first place. You'll likely get your money's worth out of *Mask of Eternity*, but whether or not you'll ever think about it again after you've finished it is debatable — and that's not the mark of a great game.

— Steve Poole

PC GAMER

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Good scenery graphics; excellent puzzle variety; large world.

LOWS: Too much combat and not enough plot development; shamefully long load times; NPCs are just talking heads.

BOTTOM LINE: A fun game, but improving the interface and story would make it so much better.

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