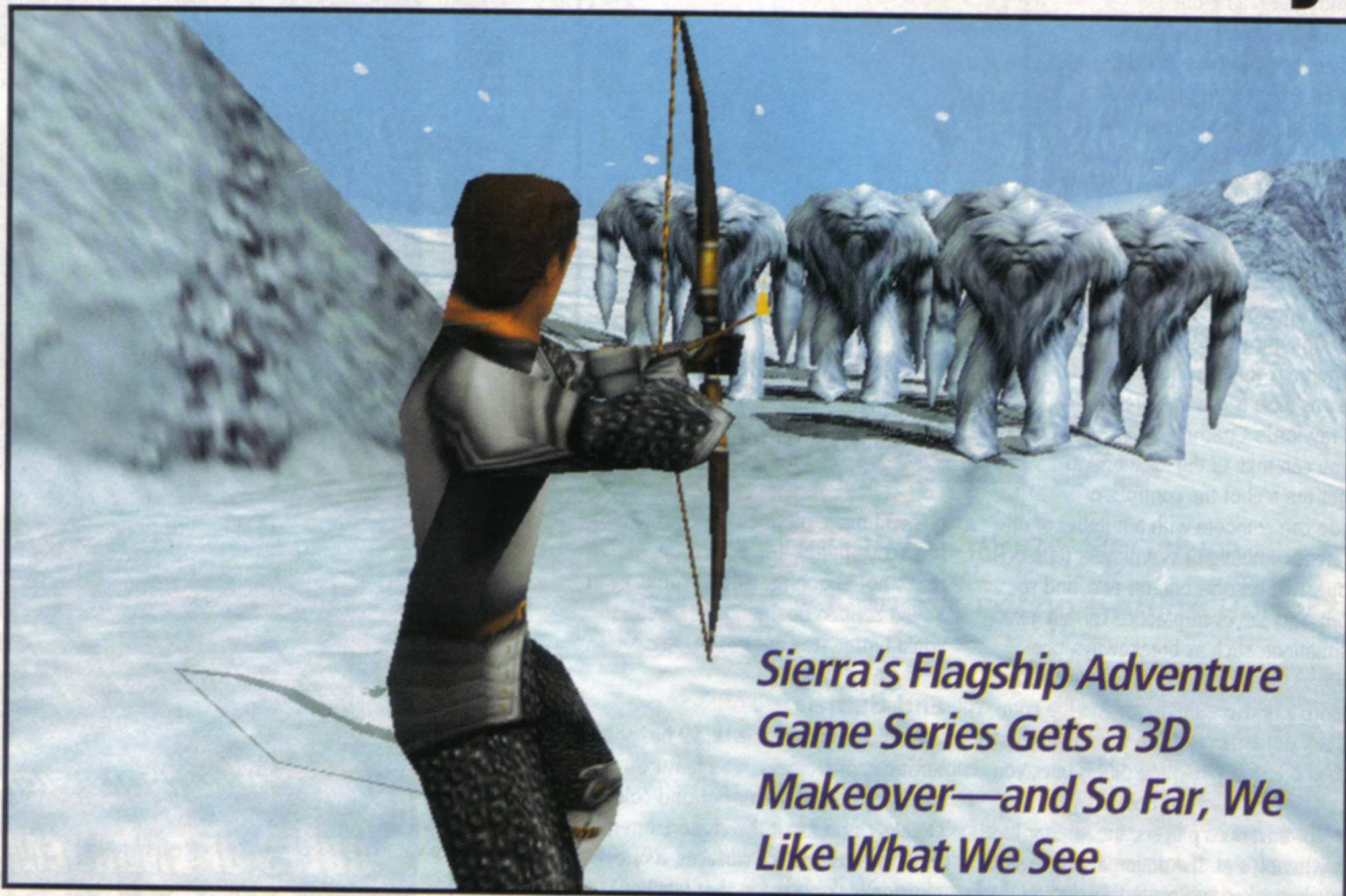


# King's Quest: Mask of Eternity



*Sierra's Flagship Adventure Game Series Gets a 3D Makeover—and So Far, We Like What We See*

by Jeff Green

**W**hen we first took a look at KING'S QUEST: MASK OF ETERNITY, it was over two years ago at Sierra's office in Seattle, and frankly, we didn't know what to think. Sierra On-Line had long been one of the main purveyors of the traditional adventure game, and the KING'S QUEST series, begun in 1984, was one of the longest-running, best-selling series of them all. Now, however, the series' legendary designer, Roberta Williams, was starting to talk like a crazy person. The eighth game in the series, she said, was going to be a major step

forward, with a 3D engine and action-style combat sequences.

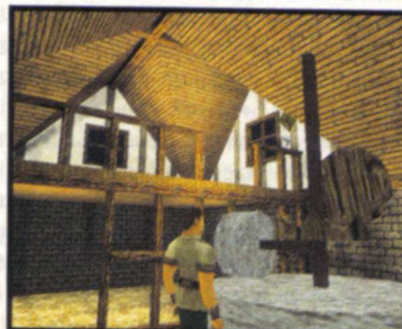
Remember—this was early 1996. QUAKE had yet to rear its monstrous head, Lara Croft had not yet donned her short shorts—and adventure games were still dabbling with "Hollywood-style" FMV presentations, as in Sierra's own GABRIEL KNIGHT II and PHANTASMAGORIA. So, while Williams talked passionately about the game's new direction, we dutifully took our notes but kept thinking: Has she gone mad? If you're going to make a 3D action game, why attach the KING'S QUEST name to it? Why alienate the old fans?

Now, however, it looks as though Williams' instincts were dead on. Like LucasArts' upcoming GRIM FANDANGO, KING'S QUEST: MASK OF ETERNITY is indeed going to be a huge leap, and should be a major shot in the arm for a genre that has been on its last legs creatively for over a year now. Over

the last week we've been playing a beta containing the game's entire first three levels (there are seven total), and we've been able to log in enough time to tell—based on firsthand play rather than marketing hype—that, barring any 13th hour catastrophes or bad decisions on Sierra's part—this game is going to rock.

## Return to Daventry

Old-school fans need to know right away that MASK OF ETERNITY is not a complete departure. It is once again set in the mythical kingdom of Daventry, and will still take you on a heroic quest. Characters still talk Ye Olde Waye. Most importantly, it is still an adventure game, with a developing storyline and puzzle-based gameplay. As



**NEED BIGGER BRAIN** The heart of the game will still involve puzzle-solving. There's a grapple hook on that second level, but how do you get up there with this water wheel spinning around?

the game opens, a horrifying magical storm has bombarded the kingdom, turning everyone in the land to stone—everyone except the character you play, Connor Mac Lyr. As Connor, you meet up with a wizard, frozen in stone except for his head, who informs you that you must seek out the five scattered pieces of

## King's Quest: Mask of Eternity

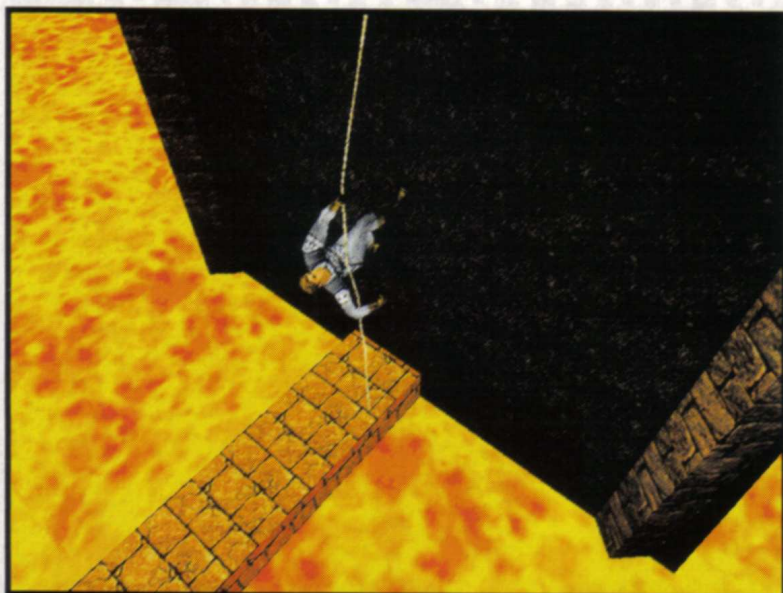
**GENRE:** Adventure

**RELEASE DATE:** Q4 '98

**DEVELOPER:** Sierra On-Line

**PUBLISHER:** Sierra On-Line





**DON'T CALL ME BATMAN** Once you get the grappling hook, you'll be able to use it at key points in the game to scale walls.

the Mask of Eternity to restore Daventry and its people to normal.

Even for those who have now experienced MYTH, BATTLEZONE, and other 3D games, MASK OF ETERNITY's 3D engine can hold its own. In fact, as I maneuvered Connor through the world—crossing streams, climbing walls, exploring hillsides—it crossed my mind that this is what MYTH would look like at ground level, rather than from a "god view." Played on a P233 MMX with a 3Dfx board, the game runs smooth and looks great—instantly rendering a game like RIVEN laughably out of date. (How well the game ramps down to lower-end systems remains to be seen, however.) You'll play most of the game in a TOMB RAIDER-style third-person point of view, but you can switch to a first-person perspective at any time. By holding down the right-mouse button, you can completely swivel the camera around in all directions, creating a wonderful sense of immersion—more than has ever been seen in an adventure game.

The first level, set in the Daventry countryside, introduces the game's interface and gameplay, gently ramping you up with skills such as basic movement; camera manipulation; jumping; objects manipulation; and, yes, fighting. Combat is definitely a part of the game, but traditional adventure gamers can rest easy—it is not that tough, and anyone who's ever played DIABLO (which is just about everyone) should be right at

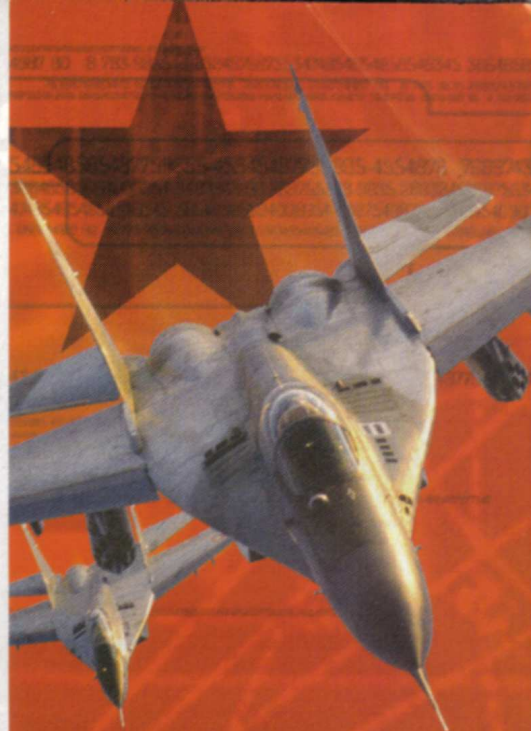
home. It's your basic click-on-the-enemy-until-he's-dead stuff. Fighting can be set on one of three levels, and on the medium-level setting I felt suitably challenged—dying a couple of times—but not frustrated.

The designers have also added a rudimentary "role-playing" aspect to the game in the form of an experience bar that fills up as you defeat enemies. When the bar maxes out, you rise a level and your weapon skill grows stronger. It's a surprisingly nice touch—giving you another goal to focus on, another way to progress your advancement through the game.

Overall, despite the huge changes in gameplay expectations that MASK OF ETERNITY is asking of adventure gamers, the balance and design is such that by the time you move on to the game's second major area, the City of the Dead, you should be completely at home with all the necessary skills. You'll probably be having a lot of fun, too.

### Still the Same

The greatest thing about the gameplay, though, is that it really still is an adventure game. You won't—you can't—make it out of the first level just by bashing on things. Perception, observation, and wit are still key to navigating through the world and solving the puzzles. Yes, you'll need to kill zombies, demons, and more to keep playing, but the overall game requires much more



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## KING'S QUEST: MASK OF ETERNITY

SNEAK PREVIEWS



**GET STONED** Everyone in Daventry has turned to stone except you and part of this wizard, who kept one arm and his head intact in order to tell you what the heck is going on.

logical thinking than it does mouse-clicking. The only real difference between the puzzle-solving here and in previous games is that now you are a more active participant in the world.

For example, if you realize that you need to push a crate out of the way to locate a hidden item, you will physically push the crate and watch it move (in the old days you would have just hit a "Use" button, or—in the really old days—typed "Move crate").

This kind of immersion really keeps you in the game world—something that, until now, the QUAKES and TOMB RAIDERS have always done better than adventure games. This immersion is further enhanced by the game's cut-scenes, which also take place right in the game-

world, with the same look and feel as the game itself (as in INTERSTATE '76). You are never taken out of the environment, and never made to focus on the game mechanics more than the game itself. And, since the heart of adventure gaming has always been the storytelling—this is the best possible news.

### Quest for Glory

As of this writing, the game is still not finished. The alpha I played was not without its problems, but the designers have promised to fix them all (including long load times between levels and some collision detection weirdness) by the ship date. There is still plenty of time for something to go wrong, like Sierra deciding to release it before it's finished

(and we urge them to please not do that). But KING'S QUEST: MASK OF ETERNITY, after a long time in development, looks like it's shaping up to be one of the year's biggest and most exciting new adventure games. I've played through the whole first three levels now—and I can't wait to play the rest. **CGW**



**ZOMBIE TIME** Don't venture into the churchyard without a weapon. There are some hungry zombies there, waiting for a lunchtime snack.

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