Titan Quest: Immortal Throne

With over 60 hours of gameplay spanning 3 difficulty levels, Titan Quest was one of the best value for money purchases of 2006. A refreshing Action-RPG, it dared to fill the very large shoes left by Blizzard's genre-defining Diablo series.

Titan Quest may have borrowed heavily in terms of gameplay from Diablo, but it also successfully established its own identity, with stunning 3D graphics, a flexible skill system and an authentic-looking Ancient World setting. Developers Iron Lore cleverly chose to step away from a traditional fantasy realm of orcs and elves seen so often in other RPGs. Instead, players interacted with characters from Greek, Egyptian and Eastern mythology.

In Titan Quest's expansion, Immortal Throne, the story begins directly after events in the original game. From Mount Olympus your hero travels through Rhodes to Hades, the shadowy Greek Underworld, to face off against an army of monsters, spirits and demons intent on conquering the world of the living. Once again, you'll encounter famous mythological characters, like Achilles and Medea, in addition to Lord Hades himself.

Even running the game on low settings, the detail of the game world is impressive. After clearing out an area you'll probably find yourself zooming in to appreciate special touches, like dogs who sit by their injured owners or mournful spirits who disappear as soon as you approach them. Given Immortal Throne's darker subject matter, the new areas, including battle-shattered towns and mist-saturated tombs, are appropriately sinister. The Passage of Souls descent into Hades is particularly eerie.

It's important to note that players will have to complete the original Titan Quest storyline to gain access to Immortal Throne's quests. However, given the challenging nature of many opponents in the expansion, it's better to enter the Underworld as a higher level character.

The best game expansions are not just about extending playing time. They're about enriching the overall gameplay experience, and ironing out annoyances in the original. This is where Immortal Throne excels.

The game introduces the Dream Mastery to an already wide selection of character classes. This skill set allows players to harness the reality-bending power of dreams for, among other things, destructive psionic waves of energy.

The Dream Mastery is highly compatible with all other masteries. Dream skills enhance abilities whether your hero is weapons-orientated or a magic caster. The only major gripe is the mastery's summoned nightmare minion. While the nightmare is a powerful "pet", with bonuses for all allied minions, it isn't as creatively visualised as you would expect. It flutters around looking like an overgrown tapeworm with wings.

One of the original complaints about Titan Quest was that characters accumulated too much money with little to spend it on. The best items were always found, not bought. In Immortal Throne, there's plenty to splurge your millions on, from the additional storage space provided by caravans, to very expensive but powerful once-off spell Scrolls. There's even a new class of merchant, called enchanters, who can separate items and Relics for a fee. More importantly, enchanters create ability-enhancing Artifacts by combining Arcane Formulae (essentially magical recipes) with Relics and other specialised items. Diablo fans will be reminded of the Horodric Cube's function. Artifacts are an exciting concept, but seem to be designed more for dedicated players because "ingredients" can be exceptionally difficult to find.

Immortal Throne introduces many more enhancements to the original game. These include all-new Relics and equipment, an inventory auto-sort feature, improved minion control and a revamped multi-player lobby. All this on top of an estimated 15 hours of gameplay and 10 additional character levels.

The only real complaints about Immortal Throne remain its lack of cinematics, and chugging performance on older CPUs, even with tweaked settings. The almost completely black swamp areas are also frustratingly difficult to navigate.

The degree to which you enjoy Immortal Throne, like Titan Quest, will ultimately depend on how easily you tire of Action-RPG staples – hack-and-slash combat and treasure hoarding. Even here though, Iron Lore have attempted to flesh out generic "find-this" quests with escort missions and surprisingly heartfelt character interactions.

Immortal Throne is an excellent expansion that adds all-round greater depth to the story and character-crafting strategy of Titan Quest. For fans of the original it's a must-buy. **NA**

Graphics	Excellent
Sound	Excellent
Control	Good
Variation	Good
Longevity	Excellent
Entertainment	Excellent
Originality	Good
FINAL SCORE	85%

G.E.A.R SILVER AWARD

Developer: Iron Lore **Publisher:** THQ **Distributor:** Mi Digital **RRP:** R299 **Age Rating:** 12+ **Other Platforms:** None **Genre:** Action RPG
Minimum Requirements: CPU 1.8 Ghz Intel Pentium 4 / AMD Athlon XP **RAM** 512 MB **Graphics** 64 MB **Hard Drive** 5 GB