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▶ GAME REVIEWS

THE REVENGE OF THE ENCHANTRESS: ULTIMA II

Sierra On-Line, Inc.
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List Price: $59.95
Requires: Apple II, II Plus, or IIe; 48K RAM; one disk drive

Question: What do you get when you cross your Apple computer with a fantasy adventure game, the movie *Time Bandits*, arcade action, and graphics wizardry?
Answer: The Revenge of the Enchantress: Ultima II.

Ultima II, an outstanding arcade adventure game, whisks you through time and space on a magical, mystical quest. Not only do you scour the Earth searching for clues, recovering ancient artifacts, and slaying evil monsters, but you also rocket to other planets in the solar system, including those not yet discovered. If that isn't enough, you travel through time itself via time doors—gateways connecting Earth's past, present, and future—if you can catch them.

Ultima II is a sequel to Ultima I, but you do not need Ultima I in order to play Ultima II.

Ultima I's villain was a powerful sorcerer named Mondain. Presumably, if you have finished Ultima I, you've already vanquished him. In Ultima II, Mondain's apprentice, Minax, the "enchantress of evil," takes Mondain's place. She's so vile she makes Mondain look like a Boy Scout. Your mission is

twofold—discover what will eliminate Minax, and then proceed to do so.

As all role-playing games do, Ultima II requires you to create a character—a computerized alter ego—to adventure across Earth, space, and time. You have 90 points to distribute among your character's six attributes, which are strength, agility, stamina, charisma, wisdom, and intelligence. The higher the point total, the better the attribute.

Next, you choose one of four races—human, elven, dwarven, or hobbit; one of four professions—fighter, cleric, wizard, or thief; and one of two genders—male or female. Each race, profession, and gender adds points to a particular attribute. For example, selecting elven increases your agility five points, wizard adds ten points to intelligence, and male boosts strength by five points.

You can add points to your attributes, up to 99 points apiece, during the adventure. You must discover how to do so, however, and the points are costly.

Your character starts with 400 hit points, 400 food points, and 400 gold pieces. The hit points, which indicate how much physical damage you can take, decrease quickly during battle, especially if you are not wearing armor. The food points gradually dwindle as you explore. The gold pieces allow you to purchase weapons, armor, information, and other items—if you can find a place that sells them.

You then begin your quest in earnest by being dropped somewhere on Earth—usually in the middle of a hostile wilderness with no friendly village in sight. Your first order of business is to find a village and buy some weapons

The Revenge of the Enchantress...
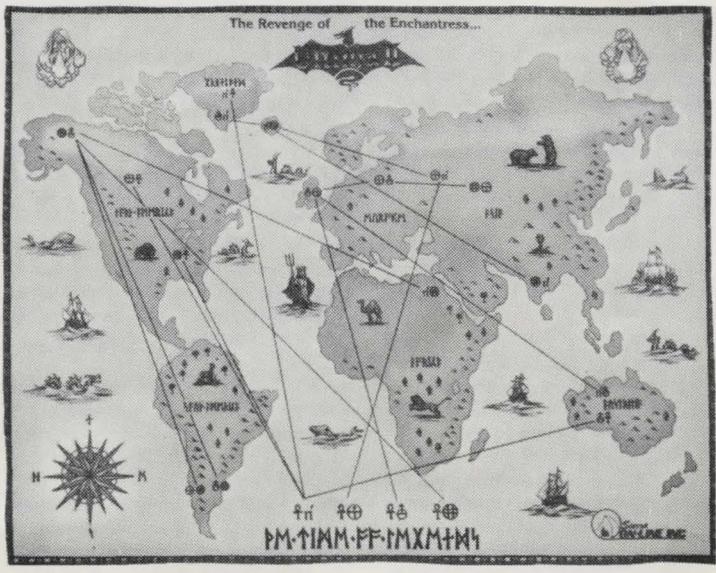
and armor, and then you can start exploring and have a reasonable chance to survive.

Ultima II contains truly impressive graphics with seven colorful types of terrain. The deep-blue ocean rolls between the coasts. Blue-and-green swamps mingle with dark-green forests, and purple mountains tower majestically over plains of green spotted grass. White walls flank the purple cobblestone streets in the villages and inside the castles.

That's just the surface. When you enter dungeons and towers, you see corridors and rooms displayed in three-dimensional perspective. Since you face only in one direction, long corridors fade into the distance, and you cannot see around corners.

▶ **Evil monsters populate the countryside, and they swarm around you like piranhas after fresh meat.**

The monsters, creatures, and men on the surface are small, slightly fleshed-out white stick figures. Despite their diminutive size, you can easily tell the difference between an orc, a thief, a daemon, a jester, and anything else.

The monsters in the towers and dungeons are another story. They're colored green—perhaps with envy of the aesthetic quality their surface counterparts possess. These monsters are much larger than their surface cousins and are sculpted with block graphics more reminiscent of a TRS-80 than an Apple.

The game also contains good sound effects. About the only thing missing is a speech synthesizer. As you explore, you hear the click of your heels echoing off the ground. During battle, you can hear the swish of a miss or the crunch of a hit. A high-pitched whine signals your entry and teleportation through one of the blue time doors.

The movement controls permit rapid responses, and they are very simple to use. As in an adventure game, you travel in the four compass directions. Ultima II is a real-time arcade adventure game, however, so instead of typing in a direction, you press the Return key, the / (slash) key, the right-arrow key, or the left-arrow key to move north, south, east, or west respectively.

Into Battle

Only evil monsters populate the countryside, and they swarm around you like piranhas after fresh meat. If you're clever, you'll put your back to something impassable such as a wall or a mountain. Some monsters are easier to kill than others—for example, a daemon is pretty tough, but an orc is "more pest than peril." To attack, you press the letter A and then a direction key.

Pressing two keys in sequence during a real-time battle can be tricky. Sometimes you accidentally reverse the order, pressing the direction key first, followed by the A. This sequence causes you to try to move through the monster, which you can't do, and you end up losing your turn. Even the manual notes that "the timing will come."

Ultima II contains 26 letter commands ranging from A, for attack, to Z, for character status. Some of the more interesting commands include C, for cast one of nine magic spells; H, for engage the rocket's hyperspace drive; S, for steal item from a store; and Y, for yell something nasty to release your frustrations.

An 18-page illustrated booklet, skillfully crafted to look like old parchment, provides instructions to start you on your quest. The documentation contains a one-page story on the rise of Minax, but pitifully few hints on how to depose her. After all, the manual says, "Your purpose is to learn how to fulfill your quest and then do what is required."

That's a pretty tall order, though, especially when you can roam all over the globe, enter dungeons and towers, rocket around the solar system, and pass through time doors to five distinct periods of Earth's past, present, and future.

Even worse, all those time doors are not fully mapped. You receive an artistic, 16 × 22-inch cloth map of Earth with interconnecting time corridors printed on it. Unfortunately, the map is not all that accurate. You can get real lost real fast trying to navigate the corridors, but that adds to the fun of exploring the game.

Ultima II has many plot twists that mix technology and magic across time and space. With each accomplishment, you receive experience points. The more experience points you accumulate, the more powerful you become. In general, the tougher the battle, the greater the points. Thus, you receive more experience points for defeating a devil than you do when you get a lowly orc.

Whenever your character dies, and that will happen all too frequently during the first few times you play Ultima II, the program will "reincarnate" your character with all attributes, gold, and

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belongings. The character will be reborn right where you were the last time you saved the game.

If you play Ultima II once, you'll be hooked for a long time. The game boasts more than 300K of machine-language programming spread over three disk sides. You are not going to solve the puzzles, recover the artifacts, and finish the quest in one afternoon. Prepare to receive your money's worth from this program. The Revenge of the Enchantress: Ultima II places you in the middle of a maelstrom in Lord British's fantasy realm. It captures your imagination as you battle across time and space in a fast, fun, and exciting quest against evil. Ultima II is the ultimate arcade adventure game.

Russ Lockwood