Ultima II

By Lord British.

Wizard and warrior—elf, dwarf, hobbit, or human—dust off your wands, phasers, light sabers, and bows. Gather up your cloaks and armor, your helms and rings, and prepare to do battle. The door to a new dimension is open, spanning all time and space; a universe of ultimate adventure and ultimate magic. *Ultima II* has arrived.

Lord British's sequel to the legendary *Ultima* continues the interplanetary fantasy saga with a creative programming flair far beyond the scope of most fantasy or adventure games.

Like its predecessor, *Ultima II* takes you on an adventure across planetary landscapes fraught with danger. Foes from pushover orcs and pesty demons to evil wizards and vicious balrons conspire against you as you travel on your quest across a scrolling landscape of marshes, forests, and plains on a variety of planets.

With each encounter you gain experience; every victory brings spoils of gold, magical items, weapons, or tools.

Deep in deadly dungeons and high in tall towers an adventurer explores three-dimensional mazes in search of treasure. Armed with a myriad of weapons, armor, spells, and tools, all available instantly at the touch of a key, you struggle to prevail against the traps and treacherous monsters that strike without warning.

In towns or villages you may buy food and supplies for the fight, upgrade your transportation, even have a drink at the local tavern, in complete safety. And here, from the inhabitants, you may gain helpful hints on playing. You may even run into someone you know. In fact, it's rumored that some members of the *Softline* staff have been seen hanging around one of the more unsavory villages.

When prices are steep, even the most noble of adventurers may resort to a little grand larceny. Beware. The brawny guards take a dim view of such activities in their towns and will give chase. Guards aren't hired for their charm, so don't let one catch up to you unless you're prepared for a knockdown, dragout fight. Bribery is sometimes a better tack.

Castles—but one—are friendly places, assuming you keep your nose clean. The monarchs are generally goodhearted (if greedy), and there's lots to see. Remember that locked doors respond to keys, and don't forget to visit the prisons.

Periodically, a time portal opens in the wilds of Ultima. Entering one instantly transports you to a different one of the five time periods of *Ultima II*. A colorful cloth map for traversing these helps a lot and doubles as a crying towel should you lose.

Time periods range from the predawn Legends era to the postapocalyptic A.D. 2112, and the available transportation varies from one time zone to another.

The goal of *Ultima II*, spanning the local solar system and all history, is to rid the universe of the evil Minax. Residing in her secret stronghold, she is the cause and leader of all the evil in the Ultima dimension. Only the strongest and most skillful of adventurers may hope to survive even the approach to her domain.

Just surviving the harsh and demanding life in *Ultima II* is difficult enough. Many are the adventurers who go to Valhalla without ever managing to enter a town or dungeon.

Programming excellence and flawless execution are the trademarks of *Ultima II*. From the unique variable-volume sound effects to the scrolling landscapes and animated oceans, it's obvious that you are in the hands of a master.

Keyboard controls are fast and simplified to single keys for quick response. There's a command for every letter of the alphabet, so keep handy the crib sheet provided with the package.

Although the Ultima shapes aren't individually animated (especially regrettable in the 3-D mazes), the symbolic shape-types are highly recognizable, much like chess pieces, and lend a feeling of significance to the game. (It's rumored that in the third *Ultima*—don't hold your breath, but you can bank on its eventual appearance—*everything* will be animated.)
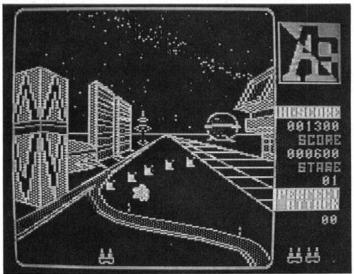
Overall, Lord British has another, greater hit on his hands, a faster, drastically more advanced game that really is the ultimate in real-time D&D type fantasy games for the micro.   HAS

Apple II, Apple II Plus; 48K, disk. $59.95 from Sierra On-Line, Sierra On-Line Building, Coarsegold, CA 93614; (209) 683-6858.

AE

By Jun Wada and Makoto Horai.

The trouble with a lot of game producers is that, once they come up with a product that sells relatively well, they'll stick with the formula, cranking out games that follow the same pattern. Shoot this, chase that, eat these. The end result for the user is, "Oh, no, not another one!"

The trouble with Broderbund is that they release their games so fast that no matter how good one is it's pushed aside by their newer

releases. That doesn't mean that as soon as a new game appears the previous one disappears, but *Star Blazer*, *Choplifter*, *Serpentine*, and the *Arcade Machine* all had to share the limelight for a while. Too bad.

Too bad, because, with the arrival of *AE*, they're all going to have to scrunch even closer together to fit on the stage.

The last time Jun Wada's name graced the bestseller charts was about a year ago underneath his Pac-game, *Snoggle*. After that, *Snoggle* was ordered off the market and Wada quietly disappeared. Now he's returned with *AE*, the debut game from his new development company, Programmers 3.

What makes *AE* fun is the same thing that made *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* fun—special effects. Broken down to its basic elements, *AE* is a game you've seen countless times; you shoot from the bottom, they attack from the top, and they eventually get you. But then, the Creature began as nothing more than a man in a rubber monster suit. Add some 3-D effects and a variation on the missile launcher, and you have yourself a game on the level of *Choplifter*—only, if this were *Choplifter*, you'd also have to defend the post office once you'd rescued the hostages.

Even the plot is original; no killing aliens here. The AE are pollution combatants that somehow slipped through quality control inspection with failing grades. Your mission is to drive them to the outer reaches of the universe, where they won't bother your planet anymore (hopefully). Shooting them is not as simple as holding down the paddle button and waiting for them to walk blindly into your bombs, though. Wada makes you earn your points.

To shoot the AE, you press the paddle button to launch a missile and let up on the button to detonate it. This feature alone makes the game a challenge to master, yet, once you're used to this new gunning technique, your job is only beginning.

The AE snake their way through space in single file. Where the leader goes, the rest mindlessly follow. If you're good at recognizing flight patterns, you'll be ahead of the game. The plus here is that, once you detonate a missile to destroy one of the AE, most of the rest don't know enough to turn away—a dense pack if ever there was one.

The 3-D effects form an artistic backdrop for all this shooting action. Converging lines make the battle zone appear to go all the way across the horizon. Growing and shrinking AE give the impression that these critters really are coming toward you from miles away.

Despite its original approach, fine graphics, and general addictiveness, *AE* is unlikely to make you forget about Broderbund's current offerings.

Other games, however, had better watch out. **MTY**

Apple II, Apple II Plus; 48K, disk. Atari 400/800 (to come). $29.95 from Broderbund, 1938 Fourth Street, San Rafael, CA 94901; (415) 456-6424.

Crisis Mountain
By David Schroeder.

Crisis Mountain is a highly addictive game of the *Donkey Kong* persuasion. In it, one must defuse nuclear devices planted in the caverns beneath a volcano. This operation is complicated by an inordinate number of boulders, rocks, and fireballs, as well as an irrepressible radioactive bat named Bertram. All the nuclear devices are equipped with timed fuses, adding to the stress.

The player sees a cross section of the volcano, complete with tunnels, ramps, and lava pits. The sundry debris tumbles down the ramps and along the paths after being spewed forth from the lava pits. Should a boulder head in the player's direction, the player must hurdle it or suffer the consequences—which vary with the type of object that strikes the player.

The player starts out with three little men, each with a total of three strength points. Should an ordinary boulder or rock hit the tiny fellow, his strength is temporarily reduced by one point. This causes him to slow down considerably. After several seconds his strength goes back to the three-point maximum, provided he doesn't collide with another object. Should a fireball or two other objects strike the little hero, his strength is reduced to a single point. With a strength of one, he can only crawl along on his hands and knees, unable to hurdle any oncoming hazards. Reduction to zero points results in our hero's demise.

To get to some of the bombs that are planted throughout the screen, the player must occasionally hurdle the lava pits themselves. Timing is critical in such endeavors; failure results in instant death.

Each of the bombs, which increase in number at higher levels, has a timer that counts down as the game progresses. The player must reach each bomb, drop to his hands and knees, and dig through the surface to defuse the bomb.

After each level sucessfully completed, there is a bonus round in which the hero can collect various bonus items including rods, novas, and a shovel and earn points for just staying alive. As soon as any injury occurs to the player, the bonus round ends, regardless of the amount of time remaining on the clock. The items appear during regular play as well and can be gathered for extra points at any time, if you have time. The shovel makes digging through to a bomb go much more quickly.

Should the hero clear all of the bonus items from the screen dur-

ing either round, he automatically enters a nova round. A nova appears; if the hero passes over it, he earns points, and two more appear elsewhere, worth more points each. If the two are won, three appear, and so on.

One of the nicest things about *Crisis Mountain* is that no two games seem alike. You can be getting along just fine and suddenly be devastated in a matter of seconds, or you can struggle all the way for a good score. There are enough things going on all the time that it never becomes boring. The only drawback is that a fair player needs about half an hour to complete a game, if not more. And, since the game is so confoundedly addicting, you can blow an evening, if not an entire week, quite easily. **HAS**

Apple II, Apple II Plus; 48K, disk. $34.95 from Synergistic Software, 830 North Riverside Drive, Suite 201, Renton, WA 98055; (206) 226-3216.

Lunar Leeper
By Chuckles.

Coming to the planet of Opthamolia was not as much fun as it seemed. The Lunar Leepers have captured all your men and are guarding them on the surface of the planet. Now they have their eye on you, but you decide to attempt to rescue your people. Your only problem is that the Lunar Leepers live up to their name, so you had better look before they leap.

In most other space games, your object is to destroy everything in sight. The first part of *Lunar Leeper,* however, is very different. Your goal is to rescue the captured humans and bring them back alive. Of course, the Lunar Leepers carefully guard the humans. If a Leeper gets too close to a human, it will zap him instantly. They will also leap off the surface of the planet in attempts to grab you or one of your rescued men. To complete the first part, you must rescue all the humans or destroy all of the Leepers. Bonus points are awarded for each Leeper that has *not* been killed.

The second part takes you to caves that descend to the heart of the planet. Here, it's no more nice guy. After all, everyone is entitled to a little revenge. Your goal here is to destroy the Eye, the ruler