
Subject: Ultima IV talk by Lord British
Posted by [peters](#) on Fri, 07 Mar 1986 15:04:47 GMT
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Glad to see a note on Ultima IV for the 8-bit Atari. I have it and my son has spent dozens of hours playing it. As a former Ultima III player, I find this game superb.

I also ran into the but - it is on all early-release disks. But getting a replacement is easy - just contact Origin Systems in Manchester, NH, for the procedure. They know of the problem and have replacement disks on hand (thats how I got mine).

While on this subject, I am the librarian for our local Atari user group, and since we are near the headquarters of Origin, I asked someone from there to come and speak to our club on the Ultima series of games. And who should appear but Lord British (real name=Richard Garriott) himself! He was extremely entertaining, and I jotted down notes as he spoke. The following is an excerpt, from a full meeting summary, of his talk.

The highlight of the evening was the talk by Richard Garriott (Lord British) of Origin Systems, Manchester, NH, who put out the Ultima series of computer games. That series is probably the best fantasy DND computer game set published. The quality of his talk was equal to the quality of his games, and he kept us all entranced for over two hours! Not only that, but he donated two of the newly released Ultima IV games for the Atari 800s. We will probably raffle them off the next meeting.

What follows is a rough translation of the notes I jotted down as he was talking.

Origin Systems

- there are about 24 people inside the company, and 12 outside authors
- Electronic Arts is their current distributor, but the distribution rights to all the Ultima games are coming back to them soon
- the order of machine availability for these games is Commodore, Atari,

IBM, and Mac. This ordering is simply due to conversion effort. All development is done on a Apple, since Richard is most familiar with it

Development plans

- the ST version of Ultima 3 is being worked on now; the ST version of Ultima 4 is coming after that
- Ultima V, which he is working on now (and which he demoed some initial graphics of), may be the last of the 8-bit games since he is pushing the current 8-bit hardware to the limit
- he plans to farm out bits of code in the future
- contrary to prior plans, there will be no Ultima 4, part 2: he will go directly on to Ultima 5.
- the company just bought several ST systems

Piracy

- he figures half his sales are lost due to piracy
- publishers claim Atari users have a reputation for piracy (Tom, from Compuclub, mentioned the same thing at our last meeting!)
- he has tried extensive software anti-pirate measures, but they have been defeated by determined hackers
- the need to transfer his software to RAM disk or hard-disk is appreciated, and he plans to require a boot disk to start the game, with the other disks being able to be copied freely
- the modified disk (laser zapped track) method is being considered for copy protection

General philosophy

- he got into the game programming field sort of by accident, and his first games were of the "hack and slash" variety
- he doesn't play his games much! He says after two years of developing a game, it gets tiring
- the plot is the last thing that goes into a game. He likes to program

"backwards", working on all the details first

- he strives for an "escapist" atmosphere, so you can "lose yourself in the game"
- If you can design an interesting non-player character and he uses it, he will put your name in the game
- he feels advertising is useless, it is the initial announcement that is of crucial importance
- his primary motivation for writing games is not to make money, but simply because he enjoys it
- at times he was so determined to complete a game that he brought a sleeping bag into work and slept there over nite; during these periods of intense concentration, he will often "dream Ultima scenarios"
- he does play games from other authors, and says Karataka is "really classy", but that there is lots of sub-standard stuff out
- he hates to read instructions, and figures you should be able to start playing a game right away
- he doesn't like working with people on making games (he always has the final say on the fidelity of a translation) but invites comments, and strives to personally answer each letter sent to him

Ultima 4

- While Ultima 3 was based upon only a half-dozen concepts for completing the game, Ultima 4 requires about 3 notebooks of info to complete the game
- victory over evil is the general goal, so don't kill neutral things unless they attack you
- a major emphasis of Ultima 4 is the demonstration of your virtues (so don't steal chests, kick beggars, etc!)
- rather than a roll of the (computer) dice determining your starting attributes, you are questioned regarding your actions in certain hypothetical situations, and your beliefs determine your starting attributes
- in Ultima 4, you can converse more with the players (but not nearly to the extent that you can in Infocom games)

- Some versions of Ultima 4 have a few bugs, and if your version is one of them, you can exchange your disk for a new one
- an attempt was made to eliminate all forms of cheating, and an especially strong effort was made to make it impossible to kill Lord British, as you can do in Ultima 3 under some unusual circumstances.
- the strange writing he uses, called Runes, comes from Tolkein's Lord of the Rings series, who in turn got them from old German writings
- if you take an action by mistake, hit the space bar to abort it
- if you need a ship, stay near the water when you travel
- when you get a vision at a shrine, write it down
- if you get stuck, type control-S and call Origin Systems. The counters displayed will enable them to tell you what you are doing wrong

Sales

- they do market games for authors, but the gaming market is presently hard to break into. He suggests first putting together a preliminary game, and then going and getting a publishers comments.
- they do play testing on games, and most anyone can do this play testing. BUT, you have to do it in their office and there is no pay (except an occasional free lunch). Therefore, their play testers tend to be local
- while some games companies are in financial trouble, his company is doing fine
- in 6 months, Ultima 4 has already outsold Ultima 3
- Up to recently, Apple sales lead Commodore, which lead Atari. With the mass merchandisers getting more involved in sales, Apple and Commodore sales are now close, and lead another group split between IBM, Atari, and the Mac.
- the company bias toward computer hardware is toward monetary payback, meaning the sales potential of software on a particular computer

Game programming

- a game translation to another machine costs about \$100k.
- the routine(s) to draw a graphics window are a very time critical part of the programming effort
- the ST and Amiga versions of Ultima will be written in C
- due to the CPU similarity, Commodore and Atari translations are relatively easy

He then discussed the game Road Warrior, which his company also markets, but I didn't take any notes on it. I figured the above would just about saturate any reader!

I hope you found that as interesting as our Atari club did! If you want to call Origin Systems, their phone is (603) 644-3360.

/Don Peters, Digital, 617-689-1242/

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