

When *Ultima VI* was in development, the programmers originally intended to combine the 3D, first person perspective view in the dungeons, with a top-down graphic viewpoint for exterior scenes. While this idea was eventually abandoned in favour of the top-down viewpoint throughout in both *Ultima VI* and *VII*, developer Paul Neurath (who designed *Space Rogue*) was called in to mastermind a fully-fledged standalone *Ultima* dungeons game. The result is *Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss*.

Ultima Underworld is a complementary program to the *Ultima* canon. It's still set in Origin's mediaeval-flavoured land, Britannia, but deep in its catacombs. The object throughout the development of the game has been to create a realistic look and feel to the underground passages and caverns. Rather than you controlling an on-screen character, or looking down from above, the screen shows the dungeons as they would appear to you as you run, walk or crawl through them.

Origin has said that *Underworld* is 'no simple open the door and kill the monster dungeon' crawl, but "nothing less than the first Virtual Reality game". Let's say instead that the effect is more that of a substantial leap forward from Incentive's *Freescape* idea.

Your ultimate quest is to find the abducted daughter of Baron Almruc deep within the Stygian Abyss and defeat the powers who have taken control the abyss for their own evil ends. (Some of the plotline ties in quite closely with Britannian events in *Ultima VII* – nobody could ever accuse Origin of keeping things simple). To find her, you must explore the eight dungeon levels and defeat or thwart the 50 or 60 monsters you'll find lurking in the dark corridors. These fall into 16 distinct types, each with their own characteristics and fighting ability.

Drawing up your own map, however, is a chore you can forget



Ultima Und

Examples of magic

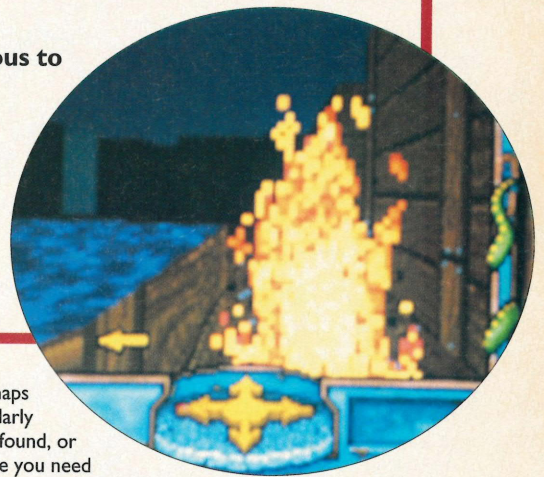
Iron Flesh – will render your skin impervious to sword and knife attacks.

Sheet Lightning – useful for electrocuting marauding lurkers (a type of monster).

Fly – for bridging those yawning chasms in the dungeon.

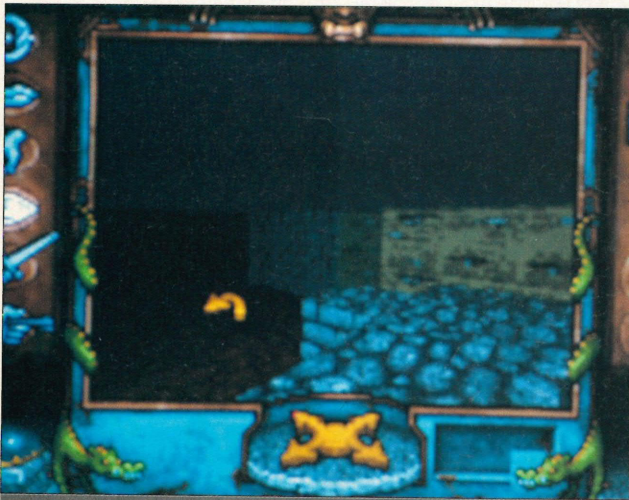
Fireball – to roast the bastards (visually spectacular, this one – see picture).

Tremor – create a rockfall in the dungeon



about, since *Underworld* will automatically map your progress and the map, showing where you have travelled so far on this level, can be called up on screen at any

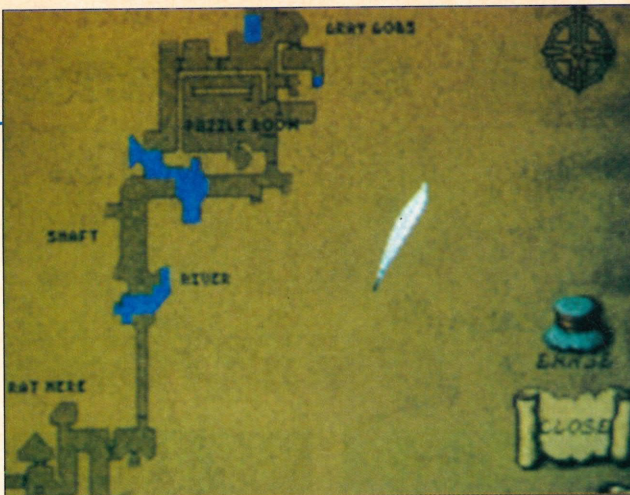
time. Also, you can annotate the map – perhaps marking where a particularly unpleasant lizard can be found, or to remind yourself where you need



Careful with the controls here – you don't want to tumble over the edge.



Looks like a fight brewing. It's a good thing you've acquired some armour.



Underworld's automatic mapping will plot your movement so far on the level, and also show only water or lava flaws you have encountered. Use the quill pen to make your own notes.

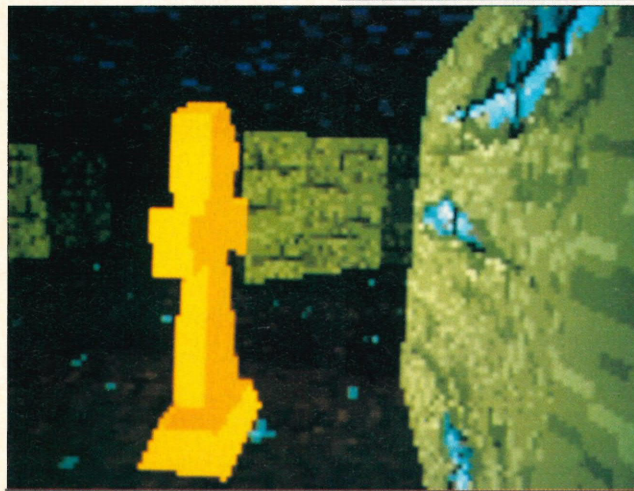


Title: **Ultima Underworld**
 Publisher: **Origin Systems**
 Release date: **March**
 Price: **£TBA**

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to be careful with the mouse control to pull yourself up short before tumbling into a lava river. Mouse control is your best bet in Underworld, although it will take a joystick or keyboard input as well. The left button controls movement and the right button actions.

Aside from exploration, combat and the use of spells are also important. Weaponry includes swords, maces, slings and arrows and picking the appropriate weapon for each monster will go a long way towards ensuring success. Again, Origin aims to make the control system in combat sequences as intuitive as possible: select a weapon by dragging it out of your inventory screen and it will



Underworld contains solid 3D objects you can walk right round.

then appear in your hand. Select how to hit your target with a single mouse click on the part of its body you wish to inflict and the program does the rest for you.

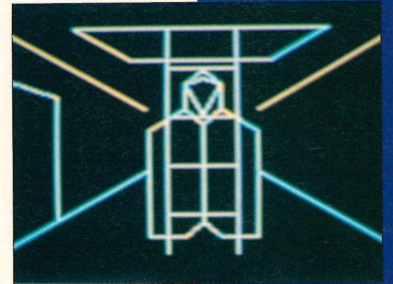
Spells are cast by pronouncing the spell name in the runic language by typing it in the dialogue strip at the foot of the screen. In the finished game, there will be over 40 to be mastered and cast.

Underworld looks smooth and fast-moving, and the claustrophobic atmosphere of the underground passages is evoked well. The mouse control, while simple and requiring only single-clicking for the most part, will take some getting used to if you're to become proficient at rounding tight corners at speed.

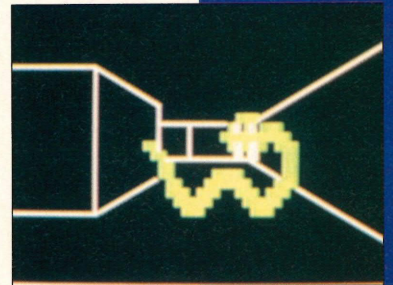
The game's producer, Warren Spector, who was also responsible for Bad Blood and Martian Dreams, believes that Underworld will appeal to the same people who liked Dungeon Master and Eye of the Beholder, and claims a significant advance in visuals, ease of use and tactics on both. "Basically, we reckon these two will be yesterday's news once this comes out."

Underworld is also good news for anyone with a 286-based PC who feels rather left out in the cold by forthcoming Origin titles

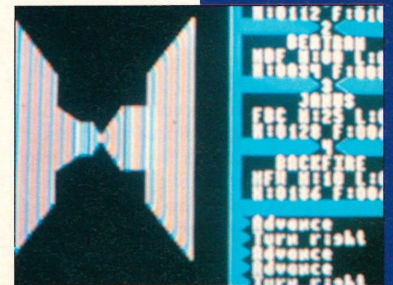
3D Dungeon Development



Ultima I



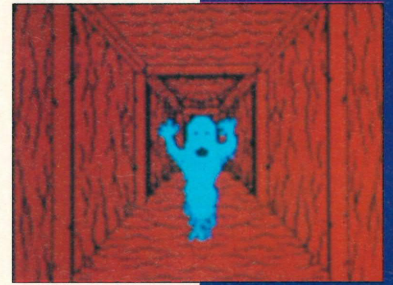
Ultima II



Ultima III



Ultima IV



Ultima V



Ultima Underworld

Right: how the Ultima dungeons have progressed in the ten years since Richard Garriott wrote Ultima I.

From the top: Ultimas I, II, III, IV, V, which all used the 3D, first person perspective, and finally, bottom right, Ultima Underworld. Note how the wire frames of I and II have gradually become more solid and richly textured.

such as Strike Commander and Ultima VII, which need a 80386-based machine to run. Underworld will run on a 286, but needs 2Mb memory and will take up a good 10Mb of your hard disk – which is still pretty compact by Origin's standards.