

# Game Concept

Ultima-style FRP-Action game

## Design Team

Producer & Publisher

Tim Sweeney  
Epic MegaGames

Potomac, MD 20854

Dave might be able to help with the graphics coding:

Dave Cooper (Shadow Productions)

Barrington, NJ 08007

Game Programmer:

Todd Daggert

Seattle, WA 98105

Samuel creates amazing ray-traced artwork:

Samuel Goldstein

Artist:

Jeff Rubin

Skokie, IL 60076

## Game Overview

This game melds the great fantasy role-playing aspects of Ultima with the great graphics and non-stop action of Duke Nukem. We need to make a game that is extremely impressive and interesting enough that people will play it over and over, while the game is also playable -- so that anybody without FRP experience can enjoy the game right away, no learning required.

**View:** The slanted overhead view is a great idea, especially combined with a three-deep tile system. I've never heard of anything like that before, and the effect of walking under then over a bridge can be astounding! The hard part will be designing a game engine to handle the tiles -- you'll definitely need to use **dual-paging**. That will make the design much easier -- you can draw the bottom plane, middle plane, and top plane in that order and the screen will look right, rather than trying to compute what should appear where. Need to make it so that the **artwork** design is simple and versatile, i.e. minimize the number of "building blocks" required.

**Tiles:** I'd expect from 250-500 tile blocks. Problem is, the tiles won't appear to be exact squares (think of a slanted view of a cube.) This will probably require all of the blocks to be stored as big cubes (24x24 maybe), with masking for the see-through parts. You'll need to write very fast code for drawing masked shapes (My 'Jill' code is way too slow.) Maybe Dave Cooper (White Shadow) can lend us some of his ultra-fast sprite code.

**Color Palette:** The VGA's standard palette is awful, and the standard PC-Paintbrush (PCX) palette isn't much better. Two choices: (1) Use weird palette tricks -- rotation or 3D information mapping. These tricks would be great because virtually no games do this, and the effect looks great. (2) Pick a set of 32 primary colors and use 8 shading levels for each. Great for 3-D shading effects, much better than the blending

effects that most games use. Also -- try to use 320x240 256-color mode, which gives you square pixels and more vertical resolution (thus more text will fit on the screen.)

Game Layout: Let's be the first to have a true FRP-action game. The player accumulates traits (strength, dexterity, whatever!) and those traits affect the player's outcome. The difference is **how** the traits affect the player: In **Ultima**, they are factors in the mostly-random battle calculations. In **This** game, they give the player an action advantage: More/stronger firepower, faster shooting, higher jumping. No random calculations. All fighting is **real** fighting where the player's physical actions always determine the outcome.

Artwork: Looks like Jeff Rubin will do most of the tile drawing and creature animation. His work is truly outstanding, and he's an experienced D&D player, so Jeff probably contribute lots of ideas to the project also. He's a full-time artist (also working for Apogee), so we need to impress him by doing a great job on the programming and design. Todd will be doing lots of artwork too, especially at the beginning while the framework for the game is being designed. Also we might find a way to incorporate Samuel Goldstein's ray-tracing into parts of the game (for example, imagine a giant 3x3x3-block magic sphere on a pedestal with all the correct shadows, etc.

Character building: I like your idea of classes (Mage, Rogue, Warrior). Suggestion: Warrior looks like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Rogue is a "hot dungeon babe", and Mage is a kid (need to appeal to everyone!) The characters start out with different abilities, gain more powers, and eventually reach a limit based on their class. **Keep it simple!** Maybe 3 or 4 different traits to keep track of, no more.

Creature animation: This is the largest artistic task of the game. For just the player, you need walking and jumping sequences in 4 (or maybe 8?) directions. Also other sequences (picking something up, fighting with weapons, dying in a very gruesome manner.) On top of that, we'll need 25 or more creatures (lots of animation) and objects (easy.)

Playability: This is THE point of a shareware game, it needs to be very playable! If you buy Ultima for \$40, you'll have motivation to learn the game (which isn't easy), but for a shareware game you need to be able to jump in the game RIGHT AWAY! The difficulty and complexity comes later once they've learned the style. 75% of our users will have ZERO experience with FRP gaming, and they'll need to learn it here! Look at Commander Keen I & IV for the ultimate in playability.

Controls: I like the idea of arrow keys, optional mouse (for pointing at screen), and optional joystick (for moving around only). Keep this extremely simple -- the controls need to be totally self-evident (keys are simple, and also listed there on the screen.) Use three action buttons maximum -- predefined, not user-selectable. Jump/Shoot/Menu. The lesser-used options (open object, etc) are in another window. Most things should be automatically touch-activated: Touch a chest and you'll have the option of opening it right away, touch a wiseman and you automatically interact. **STAY AWAY** from non-obvious ideas, such as jumping by aiming the mouse as a target.

Other controls: Spell casting is a great idea, as long as it's made obvious by hints, etc. Casting spells needs to be easy. Todd's ideas: Levitate, Flame arrow, Knock, Paralyze, Teleport, Invisibility, Fireball, Summon, Dispel, Bridge, Heal, Dispel Magic, Armor, Transform into creature etc.

Screen Layout: Todd, your sketch was great. One big game window, a status window, an option window, and a misc. window. That's better than split-screen. The screen can scroll in multiples of 4 pixels, which is smooth enough.

Game Layout: Tilted overhead view of 3-Deep tiles. The square base of the tiles is 16x16 -- but to incorporate DEPTH, the tiles need to be 24x24 with parts of the edges masked. Player scrolls through a large board, maybe 100x100. Don't want it to be TOO big or people get lost. Anyway that board would take up 100x100x2x3 bytes (<64K). The tilted view creates a problem -- you can't see things that are "behind"

buildings and walls. Solution: The game will be layed out to avoid hidden doors and items (but monsters can hide there, then jump out and attack!)

Marketing: This is a three-volume series. Volume I is shareware and the others are commercial. Each game has a new theme, but most of the creatures and blocks are the same (so that 2/3 of the objects and tiles appear in Volume I.) The themes are intertwined to motivate the player to continue on -- but they are **seperate** games with unique goals and endings.

Royalties: As with all our other projects, the authors get a great 40% royalty (authors are -- programmer(s), artist(s), musician, but not producer/publisher.) Everybody will have significant input into the game **design**, so that's not counted in the royalty. We'll follow Apogee's lead and go with 60% for the programming, 25% for the artwork, and 15% for the music and sound. Contracts will be signed as soon as everybody is acquainted and right before the actual development work begins.

Time Frame: This is the largest project we've undertaken yet, and development will likely take 6-9 months. That may SOUND like a lot of time to work, but it'll likely take a lot of hard work, on a daily basis, for the entire time (for the programming and art.) We **MUST** stay within that time frame, or else our very innovative work will be considered old technology once it is released.

Competition: We're competing against the best: For FRP games, that's Origin Systems. We need to beat their comparable Ultima games in entertainment and graphics (though probably not size.) In shareware, that's Apogee Software. Their crews are working extremely hard on new games, and they'll beat us **UNLESS** we can develop something spectacular.

Expectations: The shareware game market is expanding very fast! Even right now, Commander Keen is selling about 1000 copies per month. In 6-9 months, the market will be much larger but also more competitive. So IF we can make an extremely impressive breakthrough game, expect to match Keen as a minimum. **BUT** if the game has any weak links (playability, wide appeal, user interface, graphics, sound) it will only be a flop. Take this as incentive to work hard!

#### THE WORK AHEAD:

Now that the concept is defined, we need to design all of the specifics of the game, then begin development. Very important! Keep in mind that the game needs to be very playable, marketable, and visually pleasing.

Need exhaustive plans for:

- Terrains and blocks that need to be drawn and programmed (250-500).
- Creatures and living things (20 or more). Need lots of animated frames for each one.
- The three volumes, and the individual goals of them. Then the board layouts for all 3.
- The user interface (menus, startup/ending screens, save/restore, config.)
- Musical themes and sound effects, music style and format, integration into the game.

The very first things we need to work out are:

- Program layout and board editor
- Graphics style: color palette and format (Jeff needs this before he can do a single **pixel!**)