

Ultima Ascension--Plot Summary

In the ninth edition of Ultima, otherwise known as Ultima Ascension, the player awakes in his own home in real time. As he begins playing and passes through a magical gate, he finds that he has been incarnated as the heroic Avatar in the land of Britannia--a time-bent, enchanted, but often troubled world ruled by the benevolent Lord British. Inexplicably, eight huge columns have sprung from the ground and are slowly ripping their way through the land and concurrently agitating the seas, disorienting the moons, and emitting eight anti-virtues that inspire dark sentiments in the people of Britannia.

Understandably, Lord British is deeply troubled, and though he himself had originally joined the fractured peoples of Britannia into a prosperous whole, he has been unable to act in the face of evil. Historically he has come to rely on the person he knighted as Avatar, originally a mere Stranger who proved himself through countless acts of courage. And while Lord British has also in the past had the assistance of loyal companions, this time many of these friends are not responding to his distress. He agonizes that even his loyal Avatar seems slow to appear, though when he does, Lord British entrusts him with the salvation of Britannia.

As the Avatar prepares to solve the riddle of the columns and dismantle the evil loosed in Britannia, he is once again aware that this is the handiwork of his arch-enemy, the Guardian. It seems that Britannia, in spite of the Avatar's protection and service, has not been able to sustain peace and prosperity, but has been vulnerable to the forces of evil, particularly those of the Guardian who wishes to conquer it once and for all. As the Avatar accepts the task at hand, the spirit Hawkwind tells him that this will be his last visit to Britannia. The Avatar, having come back to Britannia repeatedly for the purpose of saving it, wishes to teach it to become a self-sufficient system for good that is resistant to evil. Having undertaken this noble task eight times previously, the Avatar is no longer the boy enthralled with the challenge of battle, but a man with a maturing perspective. If in the future Britannia is to survive without him, it must prepare itself for forthcoming battles and prosper independently and beyond direct help. Britannia must not remain in a position of helpless stasis, but must ripen into an empire capable of defending its borders, protecting its people, and ridding itself of those who would harm it. Likewise, the Avatar must face the challenge of ascending as a being, of becoming actualized morally, ethically, and spiritually. He is ready to attain closure with Britannia and call an end to his perpetual adventuring there.

The Avatar learns that he must find the Codex, or holy book of past, present, and future, for it will impart unto him vital information. He must also journey to the Shrine of Compassion and there the physical mechanism will be revealed which will allow him to dismantle the columns. But his ultimate success will be contingent on matters spiritual but tangible. The Avatar will be tested in regard to the three primary virtues of truth, love, and courage, as well as the eight auxiliary virtues of honesty, compassion, valor, justice, sacrifice, honor, spirituality, humility. He'll be faced with the eight anti-virtues of deceitfulness, hatred, dastardliness, wrongfulness, covetousness, shame, evil, pride. He will visit cities which embody virtues: Moonglow, Britain, Valoria, Yew, Minoc, Trinsic, Skara Brea, and New Magencia. He may be imperiled in dungeons of Deceit, Despise, Dastard, Wrong, Covet, Shame, Abyss, and Hythloth. He may or may not encounter his former companions: Mariah, Lolo, Geoffrey, Jann, Julia, Dupre, Shamino, and Katrina. And in performing his tasks he will use magical runes, which in some cases have been transformed into evil-emitting glyphs.

The Avatar will encounter a new companion, a pirate/thief named Raven, who at first will seem nothing more than a cunning new opponent. Though the Avatar's original interest in Raven will be to find help

in accomplishing his tasks, he will gradually come to see her as an accomplice, romantic interest, and spiritual ally. Together the Avatar and Raven will inspire one another to new heights of actualization.

The Avatar will also be faced with Blackthorn, the Guardian's greasy lackey who confidently believes that he will most easily defeat the Avatar and inherit Britannia. Instead, Lord British will finally be roused from his paralysis and will defeat Blackthorn.

After successfully performing all of his tasks, the Avatar finally faces the Guardian who toys with him sadistically and threatens to rape and kill Raven. When Raven responds with horror and disgust, he savagely kills Samhayne right in front of her, thereby infuriating the Avatar.

The Guardian, sure that victory is upon him, finally reveals his intense jealousy of the Avatar; in fact, this is the thing that caused him to so passionately oppose the Avatar. But upon securing the Codex, the Avatar reads that he and Guardian will die together in a bloody embrace as reunited twins. This is unfathomable to the Avatar; how could he and the Guardian be twins? But Hawkwind tells Avatar that to perform his final task, to undo the evil force and destroy the Guardian for good, the Avatar himself must die with the Guardian, and in doing so he will actualize and transcend his destiny. The Avatar knows that he has been called to his final sacrifice.

When Raven and the Avatar learn that he must die they are filled with agony and despair. Raven especially is devastated as the Avatar is the first person she has really loved and now she must lose him. Yet she herself has become heroic, and when the Avatar tells her that his sacrifice will save all of Britannia and allow her to live, she realizes that his love for her is true and real. "To stay here with you would be to kill you," he says. Raven has transcended her destiny as pirate/thief and is willing to die for love, and she asks to remain with him, but he will not let it be. The Avatar tells Raven that in dying for her and Britannia, "I will be free."

The Avatar and the Guardian literally struggle to the death, thereby undoing the Armageddon force and absorbing it. All goes black and silent. Then the ghosts of the Avatar and the Guardian join together in Oz-like illusion: man dueling with himself, with the angels and demons of his nature, the good and the bad, the chaos and the order, the selfishness and heroism. The Codex lies open. It says, "You, Avatar, and You, Guardian, are One—aspects of the Same." Like night and day, like winter and summer, they are natural forces that flow into one another.

Through the deaths of the Avatar and the Guardian, their opposite energies are loosed in the world in a balanced form. The Avatar's selfless heroism and ethics and the Guardian's selfish solipsism and quest for pleasure join to form a healthy whole that is embodied in an advanced new ideology: that of Ethical Hedonism. Ethical Hedonism is the marriage of ethics checked by healthy desire for fulfillment and pleasure, and pleasure which in turn is checked by a healthy regard for the health of others and society. Thereby, the severed forces are reunited.

To ascend is to rise upward, to succeed, and to achieve a position of domination. The word is usually used when referring to the triumphant climb to the throne or the rising to a better place after a long and arduous struggle. In Ultima Ascension, characters and player are challenged to ascend, to transcend, to live out potential, to quench a destructive force and allow those that are constructive to flourish.

