

MIDNIGHT RIDERS

Beyond Software's Lords of Midnight is claimed to be a new concept in computer games programming, because it combines elements from war games and adventures. The program's most spectacular claim to fame, however, is its use of an advanced graphics technique that gives literally thousands of different views of the action.

Computer war games, which are derived from board games such as Blitzkrieg and Diplomacy, differ considerably from adventure games, most of which are based, however loosely, on the classic Dungeons and Dragons. A war game requires the application of strategy and tactical planning, with all the pieces — armies, supplies, weapons, etc. — displayed on a map of the battleground. An adventure relies on surprise and resourcefulness — a player must solve a series of problems that are revealed one by one as progress is made through the scenario. In Lords of Midnight, for the 48 Kbyte Spectrum, Beyond Software has combined the two forms to produce a new type of game.

You are provided with a 30-page booklet, which contains a map of the Land of Midnight, in which the action is set. You play Luxor the Moonprince, Lord of the Free. Luxor has the Moon Ring, a device that allows him to control — and see through the eyes of — his four companions and any Lord of the Free that he can recruit. The Free are in control of most of the south, which must be defended against attack from Doomdark, the Witchking of Midnight. Doomdark's forces are controlled by the computer; based in a northern citadel, they attempt to take control of the southern areas.

Doomdark is aided by the Ice Crown, a magical device that casts the 'Ice Fear' into his enemies. This weakens any of the Free who approach the northern lands. However, one of your companions, Morkin, is immune to the Ice Fear, so his mission is to move stealthily northwards to destroy the Crown while the other characters are involved in openly fighting the forces of Doomdark.

Traditional war games are based on a map that allows players to keep track of the forces arrayed against them. In Lords of Midnight, this constantly updated map is not available to the players but is held in the Spectrum's memory. The view of the action that you have is through the eyes of a Lord of the Free, who can look in any one of eight directions, which are selected from the keyboard. So, although there may be an enemy army lying in wait beyond that range of hills ahead of you, you

will be unable to see it until you go around the hills and look in the proper direction. This adds a new dimension to war gaming.

The most impressive feature of Lords of Midnight is the game's superb graphics. Beyond Software claims that 32,000 different scenes are available, and there are 32 characters with which to view them. Obviously, the Spectrum cannot hold this number of screens in memory, so Beyond has developed a technique called 'landscaping'. The thousands of different screen displays are all composed of 15 different shapes, each of which is available in four different sizes to indicate perspective. These basic shapes are combined to allow complex displays to be built up — hills, forests, mountains, armies, villages and citadels are all shown in detail. The Spectrum's memory holds a map giving the position of the elements in any one of 4,000 locations. This information allows the computer to calculate the view from any given point.

Lords of Midnight is beautifully conceived and presented. In keeping with the game's theme, Beyond has even redesigned the Spectrum character set to give a gothic flavour to text messages. What's more, unlike many other games that rely on beautiful graphics to hide a mundane plot, Lords of Midnight is gripping enough to keep you playing again and again.

Lords of Midnight: For the 48K Spectrum, £9.95
Publishers: Beyond Software, Competition House, Farndon Road, Market Harborough, Leicestershire LE19 9NR
Author: Mike Singleton
Joysticks: Not required
Format: Cassette



Gothic Effect

Beyond Software claim that there are 32,000 different scenes in the game, although it is doubtful whether anybody has attempted to count them! Note the Gothic lettering in the text. Beyond has redesigned the Spectrum character set to give the game a more 'teutonic' feel

Card Index

Lords of Midnight comes with a keyboard overlay card, making it easier for the player to find the correct command key