

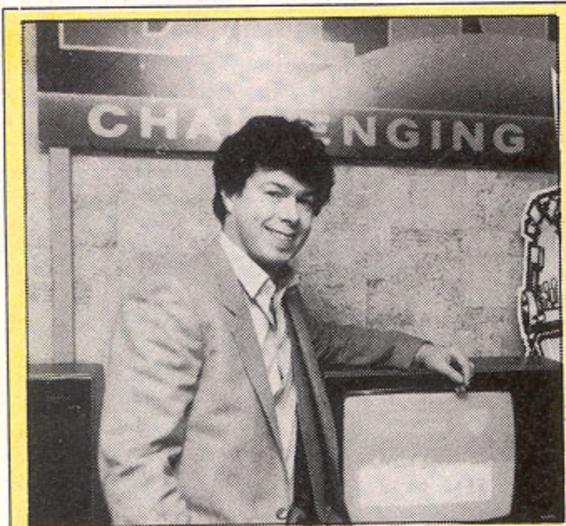
# War of the Solstice

**Phil McDonald goes in search of the Ice Crown — the object at the heart of the Lords of Midnight**

LORDS OF MIDNIGHT is described as an epic rather than an adventure, something completely new. After extensive testing — I have immersed myself till midnight and beyond — I think epic is a fair description.

*Lords of Midnight* is well packaged and includes an excellent instruction book, printed on best quality glossy paper. Here you will find the story of the mysterious Land of Midnight, and the war of the Solstice.

Also included is a keyboard overlay to fit the Spectrum keyboard. Unfortunately, I am one of the many people who have fitted a full stroke keyboard, and the overlay doesn't fit. Still, it is an excellent feature and makes the package that bit more professional. Inputs for the game are all by single key, but there are so many options that this does not detract from it.



*Lords of Midnight* author Mike Singleton revealed to MAD:

There are roughly 4,000 locations on the map of Midnight.

Possible allies include the Wise, Lords of the Free and of the Fey — and at least two rather unusual characters.

Thirty or more characters can be recruited to aid Luxor.

Lords will not always be in the same place; Doomdark's armies can force them to move before you can reach them.

Icemark, a land to the north east of Midnight, will be the setting for the first sequel, *Doomdark's Revenge*. The third in the series will take place to the south of Midnight, and is to be called *The Eye of the Moon*.

A Commodore 64 version is planned, as is a French version for the Thomson micro.

At the start of the game, you control the four main characters. The central character is Luxor the Moonprince — he must rally the forces of the free to defeat the evil Doomdark (Spectrum). Luxor wears the moonring, which enables him to see through the eyes of his allies.

Morkin is Luxor's son, half man and half Fey. Corleth the Fey may be able to raise an army from the Forests of Midnight, while Rorthron the Wise may be able to seek help from the wise who live like hermits in their tall towers. If more than one person wants to take part, it is possible for each to play one or more characters, which is ideal for a family.

There are two methods you can pursue to defeat Doomdark. The first is to gather as many allies as possible to your banner and attempt to defeat the evil hordes on the bloody field of battle.

You could also send Morkin north to find the Tower of Doom and capture the dreaded Ice Crown. However, Morkin cannot be accompanied safely by an army and, having found the Ice Crown, must discover how to destroy it. The wise may be able to offer advice in this matter, but it's still up to you to fulfill the conditions.



Of the two victory conditions, defeating Doomdark's armies can be a protracted affair, likely to take several sittings (I still haven't done it). Fortunately, there is a save game option. It is possible to try either quest, or both simultaneously.

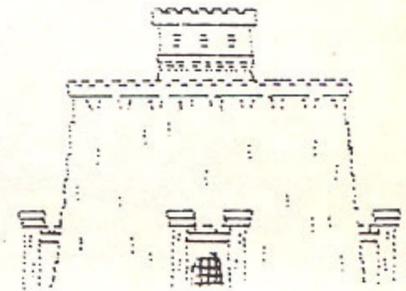
There are no animated graphics in *Lords of Midnight* and yet graphics are the strongest point in an altogether excellent program. By a method described as landscaping, the scenery is put together in blue and white. The perspective is superb.

There are no set 'pictures' in memory, each feature in view is constructed starting from objects farthest away and working towards you. However, it is all done in a

split second, before the view appears on screen. Therefore, you cannot see things which are hidden from view and some features may be partially obscured, say by trees.

Some of the features you will come across are citadels, keeps, towers, mountains, forests and lakes, all beautifully drawn. The best view of all is of advancing armies, banners flying. Any ally, denizen or enemy in the adjacent area in the direction in which you are looking, is drawn in the foreground in multicolour. There are 32,000 possible views, eight from each location. You can look and move N, NE, E etc. It is possible to hide in forests and mountains.

The first thing to do is to attempt to enlist some allies quickly. Having done that, you can use them to enlist further allies, thus freeing your main characters for more urgent matters. Enlisting an ally such as Lord Blood or Lord Shimmerill, automatically brings their armies to your aid. Visiting a ruin, a henge, a lith or a cave, you may find a magic sword such as Dragonslayer or Wolfslayer. On the other hand, you might find something altogether nasty.

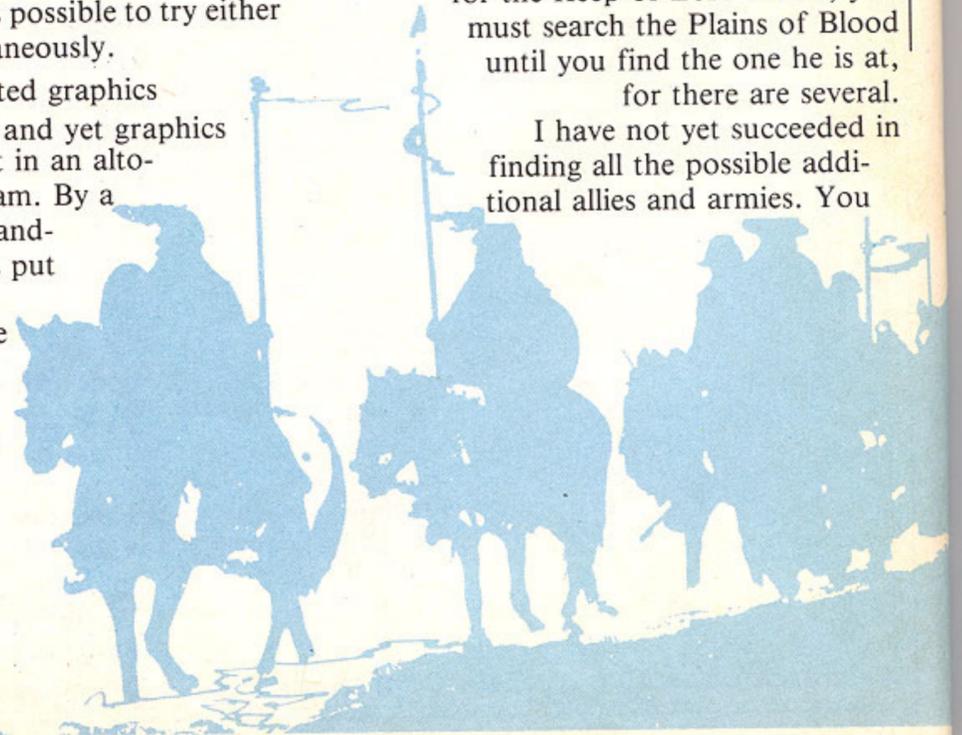


If you want to frighten yourself, you could approach the pass to the north of the Plains of Blood to see Doomdark's hordes flooding through each night. Doomdark's warriors and riders have different shield emblems for each army. In addition to these, other nasties that you will encounter include dragons, wolves and skulkrin.

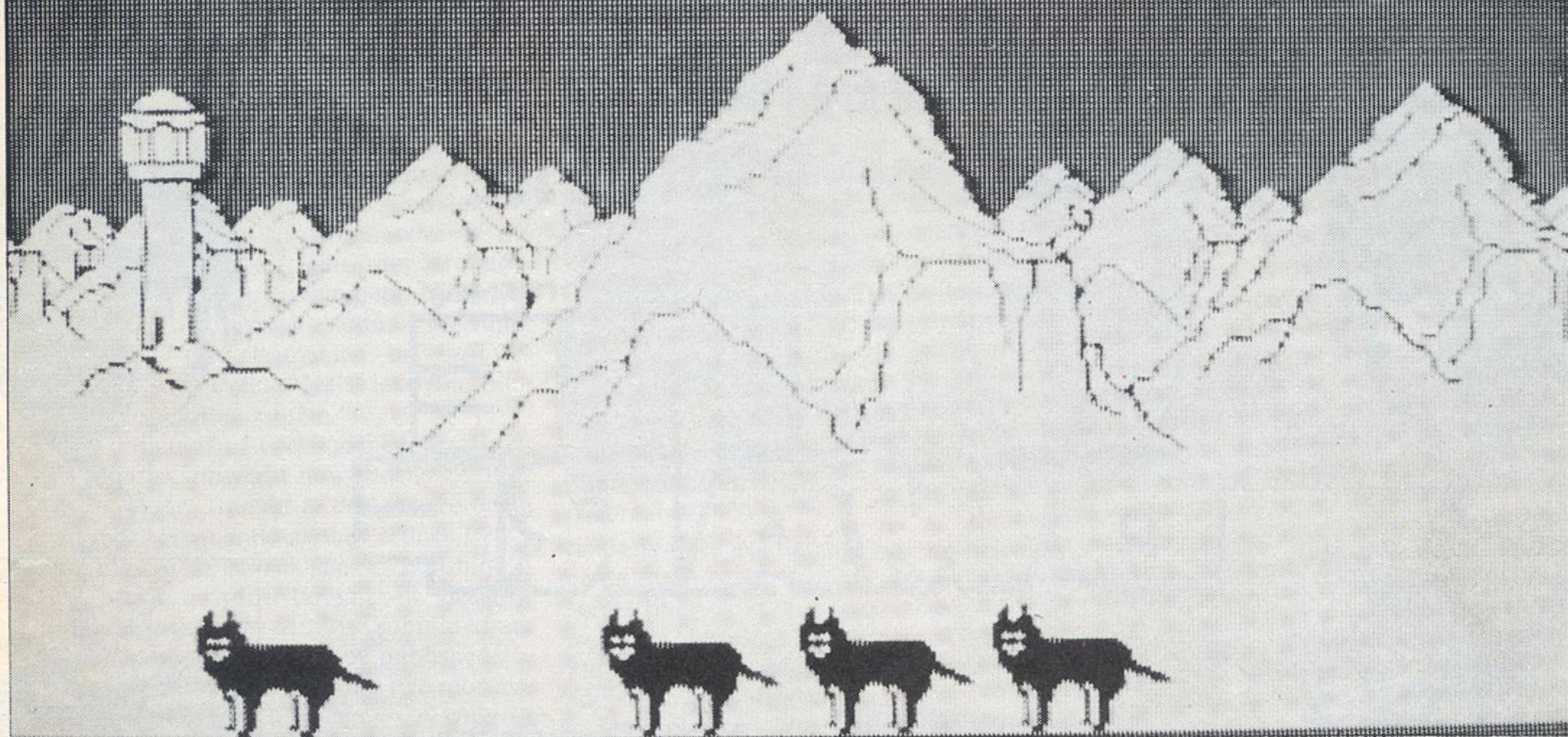
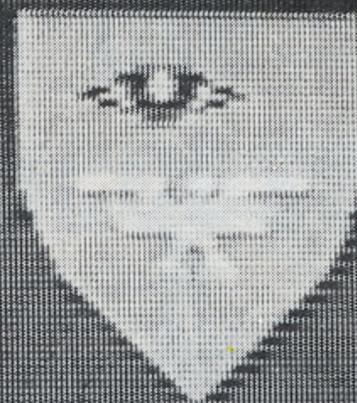
Atmosphere, that elusive ingredient sadly lacking in so many other adventures and games, fairly oozes from *Lords of Midnight*. You can spend hours just exploring the landscape. The book includes a map of the Lands of Midnight, which shows major features such as plains, mountain ranges and forests. However, if you are looking

for the Keep of Lord Blood, you must search the Plains of Blood until you find the one he is at, for there are several.

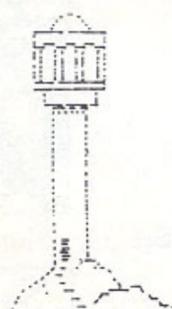
I have not yet succeeded in finding all the possible additional allies and armies. You



RORTHRON THE WISE  
He stands in the  
HORIZONS OF ASHIMAR,  
Looking East.



aren't told how many, or where they are, but I would guess at about 20. They take quite a bit of controlling once you've found a dozen or more! There are several extra nice touches such as Gothic writing and, best of all, whichever character or ally you are controlling, their own heraldic shield appears on screen.



Each character has up to eight moves a day, depending on the terrain through which they are passing. Travelling in mountains can be particularly exhausting. Characters and armies can be invigorated

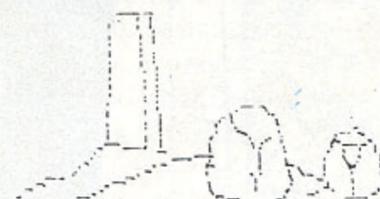
to a greater or lesser degree, depending on what fighting or travelling they have done. Exhaustion can be alleviated by resting at villages, citadels or keeps, or negated by drinking at magic lakes.

Even when a citadel or keep contains no new ally, you can recruit a few warriors or riders from the garrison. If an army is facing insurmountable odds, it is easier to defend a keep, or better still, a citadel, than fight in the open. Your characters' horses may be slain in battle, and your warriors become exhausted quicker than riders.

Doomdark bends the Ice Fear towards his enemies and if the Ice Fear is strong, his armies are harder to defeat. The Ice Fear can be diminished if Morkin captures the Ice Crown or by defeating Doomdark's armies. Your allies will be afraid to a greater or lesser degree depending on the strength of the Ice Fear. If they become too

afraid, some of them may refuse to obey or even desert. Several armies can take part in any one

battle or seige. When all of your characters and allies have used their move allowances for the day, you press the 'night' key. At this stage Doomdark moves his armies and the outcome of any battles, sieges and skirmishes are decided.



Factors affecting battles include the strengths of opposing armies, the strength of the Ice Fear, the quality of your commanders and the involvement, or not, of Luxor. If Luxor is killed, you lose control of the Moonring and therefore all of your allies, unless Morkin can find the Moonring. If Morkin wears the Moonring, he can no longer continue his quest to destroy the Ice Crown.

To sum up, *Lords of Midnight* is well designed, well programmed, with excellent packaging, and is reasonably priced. This program deserves to be a financial success, to encourage other software houses to be more *Adventurous*. The author of *Midnight*, Mike Singleton, tells me there are two sequels in the pipeline. Personally, I can't wait!

**Adventure** : *The Lords of Midnight*  
**Micro** : *Spectrum 48k*  
**Price** : £9.95  
**Format** : *Cassette*  
**Supplier** : *Beyond Software*