

VALLEY OF THE TROLLS

Adventure gaming allows the player to perform heroic deeds in fantastic surroundings. Like a crossword puzzle, an adventure is really a battle of wits between the writer and the solution-seeker, and players often spend weeks grappling with a particularly difficult problem. Here we look at Bug-Byte's Twin Kingdom Valley.

Adventure games on computers originally derived from the Dungeons and Dragons role-playing game. In the 1960s, mainframe programmers began developing the first computer versions, using the large amounts of available memory to store details of a complex fantasy world full of wizards and monsters, dwarfs and trolls. Today's microcomputer adventures are all descended from these early examples, but are set in a much wider variety of locations — ranging from abandoned spaceships to the streets of Chicago in the gangster era of the 1930s.

But all the good adventures have one thing in common; the player must be made to feel that the fantasy world is real. The best adventures are almost like novels, with the player becoming totally involved in the situations depicted. Originally, all adventures were text-only, but the new breed use high resolution graphics to bring an added sense of realism to the games. The first big-selling graphic adventure was *The Hobbit*, based on J. R. R. Tolkien's book of the same name. The adventure we examine here, *Twin Kingdom Valley*, uses graphics in a traditional adventure setting of mediaeval castles and forests.

While graphics may add a certain gloss to an

adventure, it must be said that they cannot disguise a lack of imagination on the programmer's part — and this is the case with *Twin Kingdom Valley*. The story behind the game is very simple. The player takes the role of a wanderer who ventures into the valley, which is ruled by two warring kings (the Desert King and the Woodland King). In the valley are several rivers (all of which look remarkably similar) that flow into the magical lake Watersmeet. While roaming the Kingdom, the player — a somewhat mercenary hero — must collect as much treasure as possible. When enough has been accumulated, and the player's score has reached 1,024, something surprising — we won't spoil the game by revealing what this is — happens.

Movement and actions are controlled by typing in instructions. The program accepts 23 verbs, which are combined with nouns referring to objects in the game. An instruction such as 'Hit guard with hammer' will be accepted, always assuming that you have a hammer in your possession and there is a guard within range. Directions are indicated by points of the compass, plus the words 'up' and 'down'. Other characters populate the Kingdom, and you may use the word 'ask' to try to acquire their possessions. In most cases, however, you will be met with unprovoked violence if you attempt to talk to them.

Graphics are used to illustrate 175 of the game's locations. The BBC Micro, in particular, uses a large amount of memory to produce high resolution displays, so most of the pictures are composed of different combinations of the same basic shapes; for example, a forest comprises 10 or 12 tree shapes repeated in various patterns. The Commodore's larger memory and sprite graphics allow animation in some screens, with squirrels climbing trees and water dripping from stalactites. The graphics may be switched off, but still use memory space that could have been better used to make the adventure more exciting.

Twin Kingdom Valley is only moderately difficult to solve, and is hardly original in concept. There are many other text-only adventures that are far more complex and which give the player a much greater sense of involvement in the world that they depict.

Kingdoms Of Experience

The BBC Micro graphic displays are often different combinations of basic shapes, while the Commodore 64's larger memory and sprite graphics allow more variety and some animation



BBC Micro



Commodore 64

Twin Kingdom Valley: For BBC Micro, £9.50
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Publishers: Bug-Byte Software, Mulberry House,
Canning Place, Liverpool L1 8JB

Author: Trevor Hall
Joysticks: Not required
Format: Cassette