

PLAYING WITH THE GODS

Valhalla is an adventure game flavoured with references to Nordic mythology. Written for the Spectrum and Commodore 64, it has proved hugely successful, capturing the public's imagination through its innovative programming and spectacular graphics. It has won for Legend, its manufacturers, several software awards.

There are 81 locations in the Valhalla adventure, of which 16 are in Asgard — including the elusive Valhalla, the place of your dreams. Midgard consists of 20 locations, and the remaining 45 collectively make up Hell. There are eight exits from each location, although some of these may be blocked or require you to have possession of a magic object to let you pass. To make things more complex, there are 'ringways' connecting distant locations; if you are wearing a suitable ring you can 'jump' to the far-off scene.

Valhalla has a cast of 36 characters (at least three will be on the screen at any one time), who are either good or bad. They interact continually, having fights, giving each other food or wine or throwing objects at someone they dislike.

You can interact with them at any point, entering the actions you wish to perform via the keyboard. On the other hand, it is possible for you to sit back and watch the fun, though the silent observer types will invariably end up dead.

The game does not present a single path of action to success; the player can take many possible routes. You have to convince the good characters that you are worthy of being helped by them. So, if you are feeling in a dark mood, you could just as easily decide to spend your energy being thoroughly nasty and get the support of the bad guys.

The graphic displays of Valhalla are particularly good, especially on the Commodore version. A background for each location is first drawn on screen, in vivid primary colours on the Spectrum and subtle pastel hues on the Commodore. Next the characters appear: on the Spectrum, these are rather stick-like and drawn in black, while the Commodore's greater colour potential and higher resolution allow for finer character detail. Finally, the objects present at the location appear: these could include food, wine, jewels, keys and weapons. Once again, the Spectrum's representations are far less realistic than those of the Commodore version.

The characters then interact with each other, and their actions are described in words at the bottom of the screen. And this is where you come in. The range of actions that the player can perform is extensive: you might like to try persuading one of the Nordic Gods to part with some of his treasure, or you could try attacking him with a weapon to test your strength. After a while, though, you will want to go off and explore new territory to seek out the fabled Valhalla. Finding the magical objects that will eventually give access to this Paradise is not an easy task; many are incredibly difficult to lay hands on — and the exasperation that this can cause is perhaps a limitation of the game.

Valhalla: For 48K Spectrum, £14.95

For Commodore 64, £14.95

Publishers: Legend, Freepost, 1 Milton Road, Cambridge CB4 1UY

Authors: Graham Asher, Richard Edwards, Charles Goodwin, James Learmont, Jan Ostler, Andrew Owen, John Peel

Joysticks: Not required

Format: Cassette

Day For Night

Valhalla is one of several games produced recently whose graphics indicate the passage of time by darkening the screen. This creates the effect of 'day' and 'night'

