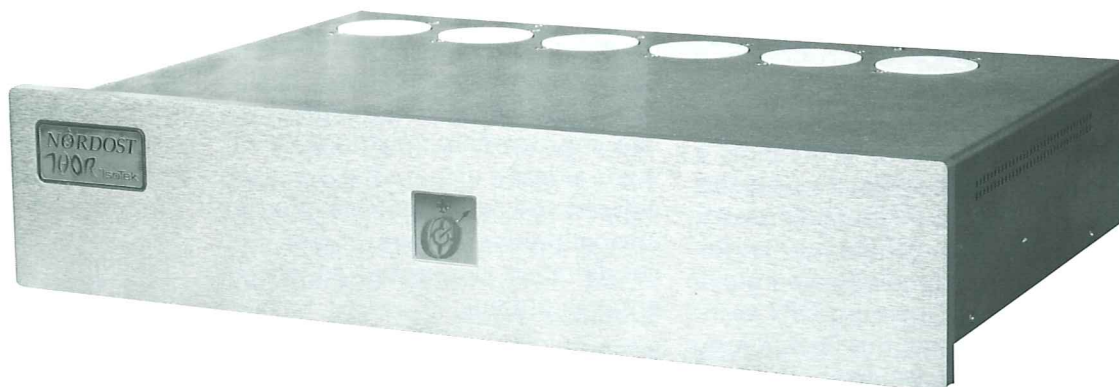


Nordost Thor Power Distribution Centre

Source: Nordost/Konnect Son Canada Inc.

Price: \$4,500.00 Cdn; \$3,200.00 US

Rating: ♪♪♪♪



Thor, Norse mythology's thunder god, is commonly depicted as a large, strong, red bearded manly figure with a hammer. He was believed to ride through the heavens on a chariot (pulled by goats) during a thunderstorm, and his hammer, when thrown, is believed to cause lightning. His godly function was to protect the Valhalla gods and humans from the forces of evil.

Nordost's Thor, however, can be thought of as the protector of high fidelity and the warrior to battle poor connections for a home entertainment system. Make sense? Be that as it may, the Thor addresses an important issue in eliminating problems caused at the onset—the AC receptacles. In an effort to complement their interconnects

and speaker cables, Nordost has developed a power dispensation device for high-end system applications. The company worked with the UK-based firm IsoTek—specialists in power distribution products. Nordost's R & D facilities and expertise in signal transfer technology combined with IsoTek's proficiency in power distribution apparently made it possible to produce this inconspicuous accessory.

Appearance:

We said inconspicuous, because the Thor, unlike its name sake, wouldn't attract attention were it not for a blue LED and logo (a combination of Nordost's and IsoTek's) on the front—a 10mm thick aluminum face plate. The chassis is made of steel and is the

size of a regular component, making it easy to harmonize with the electronics connected to the outlets. It sports six premium grade receptacles on the rear panel, where the fuse and the inlet are also located. The unit measures 454mm wide, 85mm high, 305mm deep and weighs 9.5Kg. The chassis is supported by small rubber feet and should be placed on a hard surface such as a shelf to promote proper cooling. However, the chassis is equipped with the necessary hardware to hold Nordost's Pulsar Points that elevates the unit while keeping it vibration free (the tungsten Pulsar Points are best). Nothing in the unit's appearance hints at its purpose, until one looks at it's...

Technology:

For some years now, US-based Nordost has been developing cables in various price ranges, consummating their product range with the top-of-the-line Valhalla series of cables (reviewed in Vol. 13 #2) and a power cord. However, they realized that signal transfer technology began and ended at the AC outlets used to connect electronics. This prompted the association with IsoTek as both companies began to explore the possibilities of combining their expertise, signal transfer and power distribution technology to produce an audiophile grade product. The result is a distribution centre completely wired with Nordost's Valhalla cable based on the company's Micro Monofilament design—that's Nordost's technology that incorporates a Teflon microfilament spiraled around silver on a copper extruded conductor, thereby creating a quasi-suspended signal or electrical path. To complement Nordost's signal transfer technology, IsoTek designed a system which employs Polaris-X and Quantum QRT technology. Although this technology is unclear to us, we do know that it relates to special circuits employed within the unit—it's hush-hush stuff and we were not informed of details.

In addition to the Valhalla wiring, the unit's interior holds a large circuit board with silver-plated copper tracks. The circuits' layout is rooted in a distribution system that leads the negative and positive conductors back to a single ground. A very complicated shunt filter is combined with a classified circuit. The circuits and their components, indeed all elements of the design, are superbly grounded to eliminate what is known as eddy currents. An eddy current is a circular current, induced into a sheet of electrically conductive material by a magnetic field moving within the plane of that material.

Each of the six outlets provides vir-

tually uncorrupted AC by removing electrically generated noise with a shunt circuit that modifies the amount of the current. This and the surrounding circuit layout prevents the electronics plugged into the Thor from transmitting or corrupting its clean AC power. In other words, each plugged-in component is assured immaculate power from the Thor. Each outlet can accommodate a 10 ampere rated component, although the plugs are rated at 13 amperes.

The Sound:

Of course, the Thor does not provide self-generated sound, but allows the plugged-in components to perform unimpaired by corrupted AC current. It was a simple task to unplug our existing components from the various outlets (we have an upscale power distribution bar) and connect them to the Thor. We expected very little audible improvement inasmuch as we were already using what we considered the best possible plug-in arrangement—various power line conditioners connected to different wall outlets.

We connected a preamplifier, a tuner, a CD player, a couple of power amplifiers and an integrated amplifier to the Thor without a power line conditioner and began with the job at hand—listening. To our surprise, the system's all-round sound had improved, not subtly, but quite dramatically. The Thor was plugged into our wall outlet with the previously reviewed Nordost Vishnu Power cord (reviewed in Vol. 16 #1) and all system connections were wired with Valhalla cables, matching the Thor's internal wiring. As these were our initial auditioning sessions, we could not ascertain tangible evidence that the Thor worked its "hammer", thinking that perhaps the Thor's wiring worked in a synergistic arrangement with the Valhallas used in our wiring.

Our next step involved testing the

Thor with systems wired with different cables and different components. Again, we heard improvements loud and clear. What improvement? Let's begin with the most striking element—clarity. In the electronics industry clarity is divided into two parts:

- a) ability to perceive changes (the changes we noticed were dramatic and "clear" to us) and
- b) sound that is free of contamination.

Of course this relates to what we understand as a pollution-free audio signal—music without colouration. The reasons why we hear changes or improvements are much more complex to explain, involving the inevitable personal taste and some familiarity with musical performances. It helps to have had experience with various components and performance characteristics—our basis for the examination of the Thor.

We consider the Thor's primary benefit to be the lowering of the noise floor, which improves a system's ability to provide superior imaging and unwavering resolution, thereby "unraveling" inner detail to die for. Sound-stage stability, focus and space/time elements all fall into place and leaving one with the impression that the system's very supporting structure is musically dependable.

Dynamics (often misconceived) are modifications or control of a musical signal, accomplished automatically in correspondence with the nature of that signal—regardless of its source. When one is acquainted with the performance of a system under familiar conditions, dynamics are revealed as correct kinetic replicas of the instruments producing sound. The Thor elevates that sensation, not the dynamics, to an understandable, clearly higher level. But it also improves dynamic range—that's the range of volume levels from the softest to the loudest of

sounds—handling it with skill thereby improving perspicuity.

Then there is what audiophiles and music lovers may know as texture—the distinctive, underlying structure of instruments and voices—the harmonics. With the Thor in the audio system, the many tonal gradations of instruments come alive, making it a lot easier to identify the make of a piano, for example. Gary Karr's Amati double bass, on an album titled *Adagio d'Albioni* (a Cisco label)—one of the CDs used for almost all listening tests—never sounded better. We found that the instrument's unique tonal texture was more distinct, more lifelike than when played on the many previously auditioned system combinations we have had in our listening studio. With the Thor ahead of the operating electronics, the system managed to capture the Amati's definitive timbre resulting in a more authoritative reproduction of the instrument's vintage—astonishing indeed (the Amati bass was built about 150 years ago).

Synopsis & Commentary:

The Thor performs the important function of providing a stable elec-

tric environment for the plugged-in components. This makes it a fundamental device and even skeptical listeners will hear improvements. Though made by Nordost, the improvements are not restricted to systems using cables they make nor is the Thor a component for high-end audio gear only. It works with most, if not all electronics including, of course, where one has a plethora of components—the home theatre system, including the monitor (we tested it using a 61 inch Pioneer Elite Plasma reviewed in this issue). A "Thored" audio system will provide an increased level of musical authenticity, while a home theatre system will surprise you with improved dynamic range, dialogue clarity and texture. Monitors are only as good as their power source and signal quality, but with other components, such as digital devices, sharing (and feeding back digital trash to) the AC outlet, the Thor makes a huge difference. In addition to the above documented performance parameters, the Thor works wonders with bass resolution—a very audible improvement, especially in lower priced systems.

High-end? Yes, but reasonable when considering an investment in quality. In a high-end audio system, the Thor should not be considered an (expensive) add-on one can live without, but rather, a component that helps unveil information produced by a signal source and provides the opportunity to ascend another few rungs up the performance ladder. We tried it in conjunction with the Exact Power unit (reviewed in our last issue) and discovered that the two components work well together, upping the system's performance still further.

And one more thing: once the Thor has been installed and used for a few days, you probably won't be able to live without it (as it hammers home its effectiveness). Don't believe us? Try it! ;|

For more information contact:

Nordost Corporation
200 Homer Avenue
Ashland, MA 01721 USA
Tel: (705) 742-5325
Fax: (705) 742-0882
1-800-836-2750
www.nordost.com

DEALER INFORMATION:

[Empty box for dealer information]