

# POWERMONGER

Publisher: Electronic Arts Price: £24.99

**F**or a long time it was as if Powermonger was going to be Populous 2. After all, the game featured the same style of graphics, and was being programmed by the same programmers. As it transpires, Powermonger is anything but Populous 2, and any familiarity with the original Populous will count for little in this game.

Miremer, your ex-kingdom has gone up in flames and molten ash, making you take your people to the seas in order to find a new home. Arriving at the top left corner of a large map containing 195 islands, your mission is to conquer each and every one, by trade, espionage, and naked steel in the vitals.

The first few islands are quite easy to conquer (if two thirds of the population are under your sway, this counts as conquered), but getting down towards the bottom right hand corner of the map, the opposing armies get bigger and nastier, requiring food and resources need to be skillfully managed. Conquer the final island in the bottom right corner of the map and overall victory is yours.

The display is familiar territory for Populous players, a 3D filled vector centre display shows the rolling landscape, numerous surface features, towns and centres of population, wildlife (sheep!) and of course, armies. This can be zoomed into and out, but if you try to move the map while on max zoom, you can easily lose track of what it was you were looking at. It's best to keep at maximum distance until a fight breaks out, as all your men and Captains are displayed anyway, no matter what the scale.

Initially you start with one Captain, who is in fact yourself. So if you get killed in battle then it doesn't matter how many others you have, its game over time, and a particularly gory end scene. Captains have three aggression levels (peaceful, neutral, aggressive) which affect how they trade, the numbers of men they will recruit in one session and quite

how bloodthirsty they are when attacking a settlement. Although initially its great fun to send your men off on a mad killing spree, when you get to the harder islands you need to keep them to the minimum force so that all those defeated troops either end up forming a new army on your side, or are put to work harvesting the fields.

Troops can be recruited from any of your established settlements, but leaving them empty simply invites an attack by a rival. The troops will faithfully follow your Captain, but only as long as morale is high, food

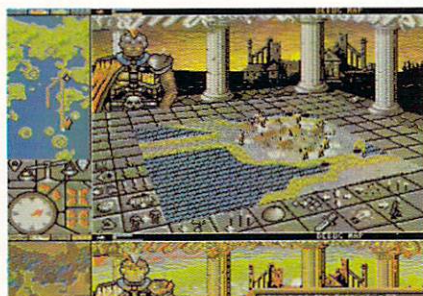
is plentiful and the weather is nice.

Forcing an attack in winter (yup there are seasons along with snow and rain) can lead to mass desertions if food is scarce, so food management as well as battle tactics need to be incorporated in to the successful powermonger's strategy.

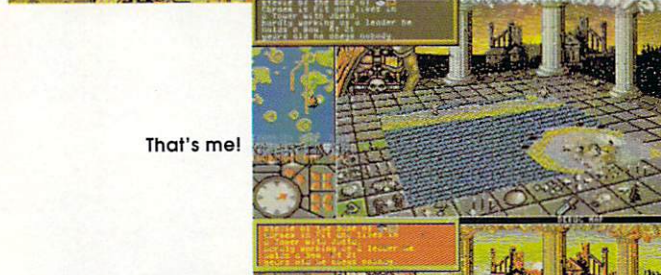
The detail in the graphics and the continuously evolving world is astonishing. Every person in the game has a name, profession, allegiance and health rating, sheep wander the meadows, birds flock to and fro, and fishermen go out to sea. Added to this the sound

effects are just brilliant. You can hear the livestock making their own particular noises, the sound of wood sawing comes from forests where inventions are being made, and your Captain grunts 'Yeah', in tones designed to tell you how happy he is with your orders.

Powermonger really is a step beyond Populous, but it isn't as immediate. You have to read the manual, and work out and experiment on courses of action. Initially, the game is intriguing but baffling however, bit by bit you get drawn into the intricate, evolving and utterly marvellous world of Powermonger.



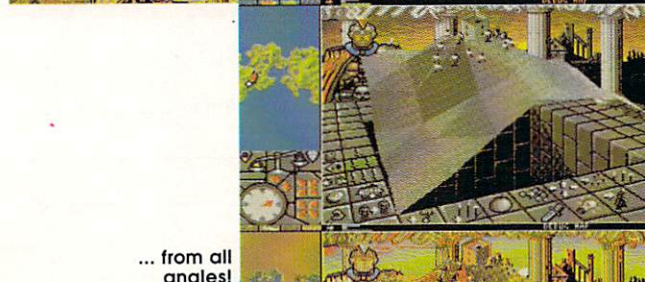
A budding career in rape and pillage begins



That's me!



You can examine any part of the map...



... from all angles!

## Graphics

It isn't that the graphics look good, it's that there is just so much detail. In fact the small map of the current land is a bit too small for you to really see where everything is, and only the clever sound effects lead you to attack a nearby settlement rather than half a dozen stunted trees.

## Sound

Sound is fabulous and no mistake. Where the graphics become too congested it is the effects that save the day. A large variety of effects alert you the various events taking place in your neck of the woods, and even the tone of your Captain's voice has meaning.

## Gameplay

Powermonger is nowhere near as simple as Populous, and the straightforward, up and dice 'em approach may work initially but is doomed to failure later. If you like managing resources as well as fighting battles then this is a treat because the detail and interaction are amazing. I suspect everyone will buy this game, but a sizeable number will not play it for very long. For myself, and many other people though, Powermonger is nothing short of sensational.