

# G O D S

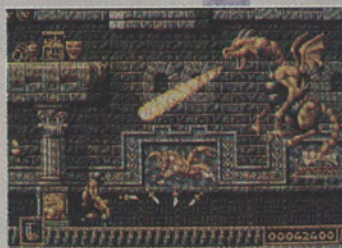
**B**e still, reader, and hear my tale. The journey from the sin pits of Farringdon to the wastes of Wapping was long and fraught with great peril. Thanks only to my wit, courage and all-zones travelcard did I prevail. As I sat in the reception room at the mighty castle of the Bitmap Brothers I am not ashamed to admit that I did soil my undergarments. A dark-clad figure approached. "Greetings, Eric, son of Matthews", I offered. "Hail, ACE, and well met. Hast thou come to see our new games?". "Aye," I replied. "Then let us tarry not, the Gods await..."

It's been a fair few months since the razzmatazz CES launch of Renegade. Born from the successful collaboration between the Bitmaps and Bomb the Bass for the music to Mirrorsoft's *Xenon 2*, this new computer software label is an off-shoot from Rhythm King, home to such pop music luminaries as Betty Boo and S'Express. At last, the release of their critical first title is almost upon us.

## IN THE THRALL OF THE GODS

*Gods* bears a strong (though it turns out to be superficial) resemblance to the arcade game *Black Tiger* (converted some time ago by US

**Minotaurs, harpies, satyrs, gargoyles... and a little lad with much more than fluff-covered old boiled sweets in his pockets. The BITMAP BROTHERS reveal their forthcoming RENEGADE releases to ACE**



The end-of-level foes are big and fast. Apart from this dragon you'll have to confront a giant living statue and a vicious minotaur.



Gold and jewels can be picked up from slain monsters and unlocked chests, which you can spend at the shops situated at the end and mid-way through each level. On offer are fifteen varieties of weapon (including magic as well as the more mundane axe, daggers and throwing stars - you can carry up to three different weapon types at one time), restore health, and so on. Best is the faithful familiar, who will fly around the screen, intelligently picking out your enemies and attacking them for you.



Baddies are typically 32 x 32 pixels big, and there can be up to ten of them on screen at any one time. Your character is 48 x 32 pixels, with 10 frames of walking animation and 8 frames for the attacking poses.

## SOUND AND VISION

The thing that first grabs your attention are *Gods'* superlative graphics (often the case with Bitmap games). As with *Xenon 2* and *Speedball 2* they're drawn by the very talented Mark Coleman.

The detailed 16-colour backgrounds scroll smoothly in eight directions at a speedy 17 frames per second - and this is on the ST! This and *Turrican 2* must hail the dawning of a new age for ST owners starved of good scrolling games.

As with *Speedball 2* the music will be written by Nation 12, while Simon Rogers is responsible for the in-game sound effects.

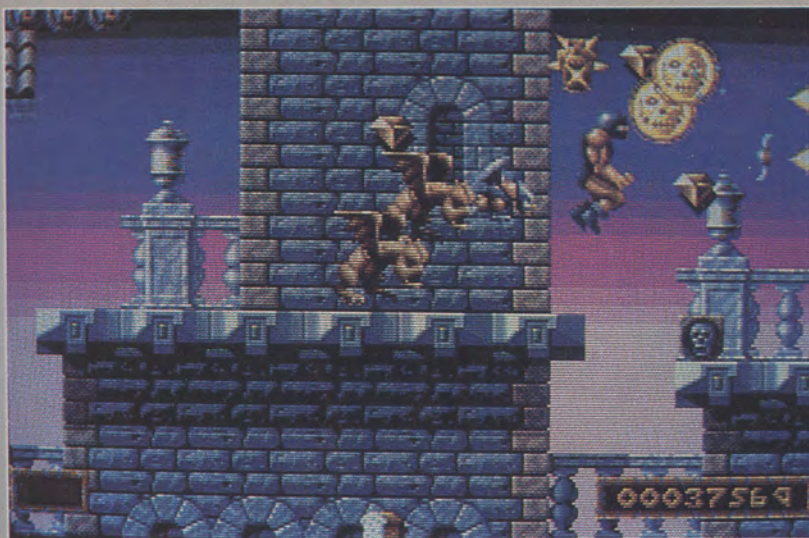
Gold). Set in mythological Greece, you control a strapping hulk of a man on a quest to defeat the evil ruler of the Underworld. Your appointment with destiny will lead you on a trek through a ruined Greek city, a desecrated Temple and labyrinthine catacombs to the entrance to Hell. The four levels (each split into three sub-levels) are depicted in a distinct graphical style and feature increasingly tough and intelligent baddies to overcome.

The power behind the code is Steve Tall, who seems to spend a fair bit of his valuable time shuttling between his home in Newcastle and the Bitmap's Wapping HQ. Along with Eric Matthews, fellow game designer and founder Bitmap, they've been working on the game for around a year now. From what we've seen it looks like all that effort has been well worth it. *Gods* should be hitting the shelves in the next couple of weeks.

## PUZZLE POWER

Progress isn't achieved by just hacking your way through horde after horde of ugly critters. The only exit from each level is via a locked door,





## BRAINY BYTES

On the first level the enemy monsters behave just like most of their ilk, i.e. very stupidly. It's not until the second level that they show signs that their youth wasn't entirely mis-spent and that they earned the odd GCSE in Player Killing at school.

Monsters will start to hunt you down, leaping from platform to platform in pursuit, taking the more optimum routes depending on how clever they are. This intelligence spreads to self-preservation: some monsters will actively try and avoid your shots to a lesser or greater extent.

The more avaricious monsters will seek out treasure items or weapons and try to make off with them rather than attack you. A well-aimed shot will put paid to their nefarious plans and you can retrieve the nicked item for yourself. Some problems require that you cunningly manipulate a monster's greed and intelligence.

A simple example occurs fairly on in the game: a valuable power-up is located behind a spike trap and there are no switches to turn it off. On trots a thieving baddy. Give him a couple of seconds and he'll grab the bonus, and try to escape off screen. If you quickly drop a gold item that you're carrying then the sneaky so-and-so will do a U-turn and head for the more valuable prize, walking neatly past the spikes (they don't affect him, of course). When he gets close, let the meany have it and pick up both goodies for yourself.

So how's it done? Basically each monster's behaviour is governed by a wealth of statistics, such as speed of movement and firing rate, how far they can 'see' when facing you (you can even sneak up behind these villains), how good they are at avoiding shots (dodgy devils) and whether they'll swarm before attacking (i.e. stay back until they've got a few mates along).

Most important are a monster's primary and secondary objectives. Generally a monster will always do it's utmost to achieve the primary aim and, if this isn't possible, try for the secondary one. These objectives can range from the obvious (attack the player) to seeking out bonus items or tripping switches.

The hardest thing from the programming point of view is making sure that the routines are fast as well as workable. Steve and Eric have been perfecting the intelligence code for well over four months, but now it's ready they are deservedly proud of their achievement. These are villains with character and personality traits, and are much more of a challenge than your usual game nasty.

Attack of the Harpies from Hell! The rapidly-draining jar in the bottom left of the screen indicates how much life energy you have left. Empty it and you've lost a life - lucky you've got two more! There's also a password system to allow you to skip levels you're proficient at. However, the Bitmaps have packed so many hidden features into each level that repeat playing may reveal special surprises, such as a concealed pathway to the treasure room or a heap of secret bonuses.

## ACE PREPLAY



● Amazingly fast and smooth full-screen multidirectional scrolling for the ST, with no skimping on the colour and detail in the backgrounds either.

● Huge and speedy sprites - the end-of-level guardians are particularly impressive.

● Monsters act with real intelligence for once, and add some clever gameplay twists to the fairly standard plot.

● Lots of puzzles add depth to the basic hack-'em formula, plus loads of secret rooms and passageways to be discovered by the experienced player.

● Gameplay tailors itself to the player's ability (or lack of it).



● The game's plot is a bit bog standard (a minor point, really).

and you've got to find the key. Unfortunately the key may be some way away in a hidden room, which will only be revealed when a series of puzzles are solved or tasks completed.

There are switches to trip, that may or may not help your progress by activating or disabling traps and causing hidden passageways, chests or even monsters to appear. Sometimes more than one switch will have to be tripped or certain objects will have to be taken from one location to another before the required result is achieved. You can carry up to three objects at any given time. Sound effects are used as clues to the off-screen effects of your actions, i.e. you'll hear doors opening or traps starting up.

Steve and Eric's puzzle manager can handle up to 100 knotty problems per level. When the player reaches certain 'puzzle' locations the routine checks to see whether up to three preset conditions have been met (i.e. switches tripped/not tripped, locations visited, objects held - there are seventeen possible) resulting in one of fourteen possible events (i.e. doors or passageways opening, monsters appearing, traps turning on/off).



"I want to ride my bicycle," yells The Kid. "So do we," reply the baddies in harmony.

## MAGIC POCKETS

Due for an early summer release, programmed by Sean Griffiths is this strange tale of The Bitmap Kid. The trendy little tyke, all baseball cap and Rebok trainers, is on a mission to rescue his toys, stolen from him by a marauding band of beastly bandits. The game is spread over four multidirectional-scrolling platform-packed levels, which are in turn split into several sub-levels. Each level The Kid has a new weapon to use, based on one of the four elements: air, water, fire and earth.

The first level is the only one fully working at the moment, and here the Kid wields powerful tornados as he bounces around in pursuit of his stolen bike. Pressing fire causes the Kid to tuck his hand in his pocket and have a rummage for a tornado. The longer you hold down fire the more powerful the tornado and the more swollen the Kid's pockets get. At maximum power The Kid can jump into the tornado he's just thrown and it will spin him around the screen for a while, bumping off all the baddies in his way.

Along the way there are bonus sweets to pick up and various power-ups to collect, many reminiscent of *Rainbow Islands*, one of Sean's favourite games. Very amusing is the bubble gum machine - it'll cause The Kid to blow a huge bubble which you can use to reach high platforms.

Using a slightly simplified version of the intelligence routines used in *Gods*, Sean has given the monsters their own characters - one will even run around the level trying to reach the bike before you! At the end of the level there's a race based on the toy just recovered. On the first level it's a hilariously frantic bike race with the monsters, where you keep pedalling by wagging the joystick.

The later levels sound like they'll be even more novel: in the water level you throw clouds that'll rain on the ground below, causing plant platforms to grow! *Magic Pockets* is lots of fun - look out for an update on the game's progress nearer its June release date.