This shield gives information on the current strength of the two populations and the status of a knight, if you've created one. The knights are particularly nasty because they will proceed to systematically destroy as many buildings and people as they can.

The open book shows a map of the whole world, from which you can judge the general shape of the landscape, how big the population is and where your people are.

The central area shows a magnified piece of the map on which you can view events as they occur. This is also where you modify the land, flattening it out so that the people can colonise it.

These are the icons which, when selected, control most of the action. As well as visiting acts of god there are options for determining how the people behave – they can concentrate on settling or be ordered to attack the enemy. There are also icons that allow you to call up several menus where the abilities of the players can be altered. For instance you can stop the computer player being able to perform earthquakes, which makes life easier for you.

This gauge indicates your energy level. It rises as more land is cultivated and the population increases. Along the bar are gradings, each of which allows you to perform a god-like act when the pointer reaches it. Going up the scale of energy required there are earthquakes, swamps, knights, volcanoes and floods. Judiciously used they can make a complete mess of an area and force your opponent to spend much time and energy reshaping the territory he controls.

GODS AT WAR

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the game is that not only is the computer opponent intelligent, but you can hook two machines together by interface or modem and play against another human. Much of the fine tuning of the game has been getting the computer opponent to play well. Every time a member of the Bullfrog team found a way to beat the computer, Peter carefully reprogrammed it so as to plug the loophole.

It's not just the opponent who displays intelligence, either. The individual people also behave differently depending on the circumstances, making a total of 300 individual intelligences wandering around the map.

Another idea, not yet implemented, is to network the game so that 16 people can play at once. This would really be the ultimate in multi-player games but sadly is unlikely to surface because of the lack of people who could actually make use of it. Looks like we will have to settle for two-player action for the moment.

AND FROG

Frog walked upon the face of the void, and it was all a bit dull, so in a fit of enthusiasm he created the world in six days. He saw that it was good. On the seventh day he rested, and thought how much he'd enjoyed himself: and on the Monday morning he played with his Lego set and created Populous, so that everyone could have a go.

The Bullfrog team (l to r)
Glenn Corpes, graphics and programming for *Populous* and for *Fusion*; Andy Jones, *Fusion* graphics and level design; Kevin Donkin, *Fusion* programming; David Hanlon, music and effects; Sean, frog holder; Peter Molyneux, *Populous* design and programming.

Would you like to be an omnipotent being, tinkering with the lives of hundreds of people, visiting all manner of natural disasters upon the unbelievers and trying to stomp on other deities? Thought so – no-one can resist being all-powerful every once in a while. Peter Molyneux of Bullfrog games looks like any ordinary mortal but, armed only with a Lego set, he too has created a world. In it, two rival gods battle to achieve supremacy by changing the landscape to make it habitable for the people who worship them and so stimulate the technological advancement of their civilisations.

The game has undergone several name changes including our favourite, *A Sea Monster Ate My Leader*, but under the title *Populous* it's going to be one of the best games of
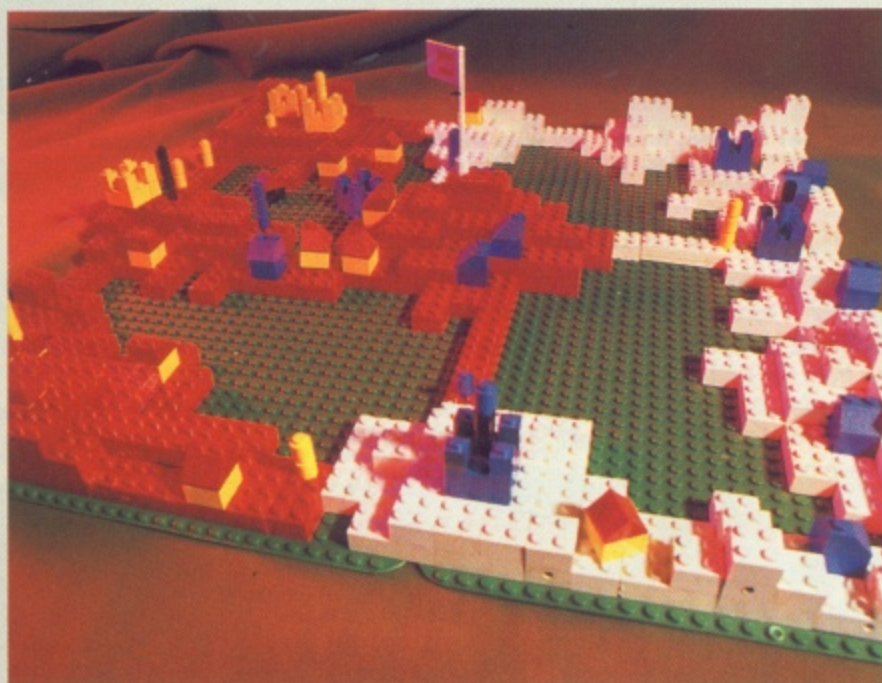
TIDAL WAVE HITS LEGO WORLD

Lego was used to design the gameworld, with the great advantage that the game was playable using the model. Although not as complex as the final computer version, the basic idea of reshaping the landscape and populating the world with your people could be fully tested in this real-world form.

As yet there aren't any plans to market Populous as a board game, but it would be ideally suited to the genre, so don't be surprised if you see it popping up on the shelves at some time in the future.

What you certainly wouldn't find in a board version is water. Not that Peter Molyneux didn't give

it a go. In order to test the idea of the water being displaced when blocks were added, thereby raising the water level and flooding low-lying land, he filled the Lego model with water. Unfortunately Lego isn't exactly watertight and the resultant flood dissuaded further experimentation.

Ice landscapes are inhospitable places where the people find it tough to survive.

An unpleasant deity has either flooded the land or whipped it out from underneath those men in the water. If some kind god doesn't intervene, they'll die.

The Lego model game complete with two players (red and white blocks), houses, castles and people represented by the small yellow cylinders.

This is the desert scenery and shows a castle, the biggest building that can be created. In the foreground are some trees, which occur randomly, as do rocks.

CREATED MAN

(Right) The volcano is a rotten thing to hit anyone with because it leaves these big rocks all over the place. The only way to get rid of them is to take the whole area down to sea level and build it back up again.

the year. As a god, the player has at his disposal many divine powers for wreaking havoc and ordering people around. There are hundreds of levels in which the two gods battle to annihilate each other's colony of people. The landscapes vary from barren deserts and fertile pastures to icy wastes.

Before writing Populous the Bullfrog team had only produced two other games – Enlightenment on the Amiga for Firebird and Fusion for Electronic Arts, the ST version of which is soon to be released. Populous, which could well establish Bullfrog as a major force among software developers, will also be available on both ST and Amiga through Electronic Arts, hopefully in March or April. A full review will appear in next month's ACE.

● Bob Wade