



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BULLFROGS

Now eight men strong, Bullfrog began modestly back in 1985 as Taurus, a two man partnership of Peter Molyneux and Les Edgar producing professional software for the Amiga (that's a laugh for a start). Rather than go bankrupt trying to eke out a living producing productivity programs for a mere games machine they turned to games programming, starting Bullfrog in 1987 by converting *Druid II: Enlightenment* for Firebird. "None of us even knew how to put a sprite on the screen at that time!" admits Molyneux. Their first original project was *Fusion* in 1988. Then, from nowhere, Bullfrog became highly sought after and, presumably, somewhat better off with the release in March 1989 and the subsequent truly astonishing success of *Populous*, a game which has received 37,985 awards to date. "We had no idea at all it would be as successful as it was," Molyneux recalls: "it was terrifying."

■ Six Bullfrogs and assorted *Populous* awards: Kevin Donkin, Sean "Probs in the trouser department" Cooper, Peter Molyneux, Glenn Corpes, Simon Hunter and Gary Carr. Missing: Andy Tidy (ill), Les Edgar (off visiting the French)

# bullfrog:

A year and a half ago no-one had heard of Bullfrog. Then, out of the blue, came a modest little game – you may have heard of it – called *Populous*. The scenario, in which you played God, was so startlingly well thought out, original and just plain bloody brilliant that the game picked up every award for which it was eligible and some it wasn't. Even Anita Sinclair of *Magnetic Scrolls*, a woman not generally known to go over the top with enthusiasm for other people's work, estimated she spent 800 hours playing it. Naturally the whole ST world is agog to discover what Bullfrog come up with next.

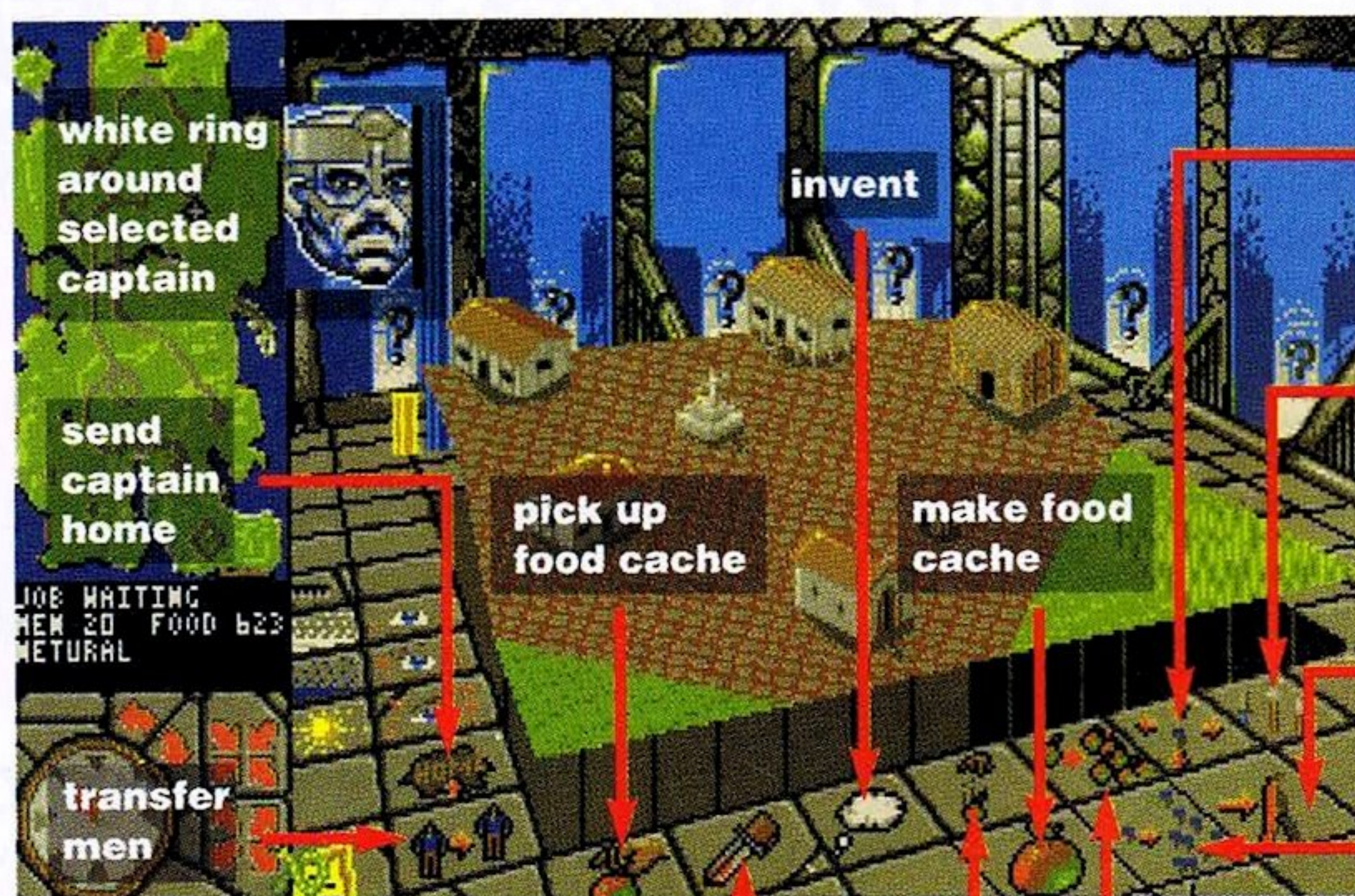
Who could have guessed, though, that what they would come up with was not one but two new games? First is *Flood*, a cutesy platform game executed with enormous panache and ingenuity (reviewed this month on page 40). But *Flood* is small beer compared with *Warmonger* – or *Powermonger*, as we must learn to call it – a game that Bullfrog themselves reckon puts *Populous* to shame.

In *Powermonger*, a name chosen for the Bullfrogs by Electronic Arts USA, and one they seem, er, reluctant to adopt, you play a king, accompanied by 20 followers, deposed and expelled from your kingdom. Shipwrecked on an island, you're trying to become a king again, using persuasion, diplomacy, trade or sheer force to take over more and more people.

"When we were designing *Populous*," Bullfrog boss Peter Molyneux recalls, "we decided that the view looking from a mountaintop down on a landscape would also be really effective in a totally different game." But because *Populous* was made out of graphical blocks glued together the variation in the landscape was very slight. "You could have a hill, a little beach or a

*When your first big game is Populous, everyone's favourite from '89, what do you do for an encore? The next Bullfrog game, Powermonger, has much to live up to: head honcho Peter Molyneux gives Steve Carey a conducted tour*

# back



■ *Powermonger's* icon system (still at the development stage) – like *Populous* only simpler, reckons Molyneux

derank men (return them to professions)

equip with invention

send captain somewhere

get men from town

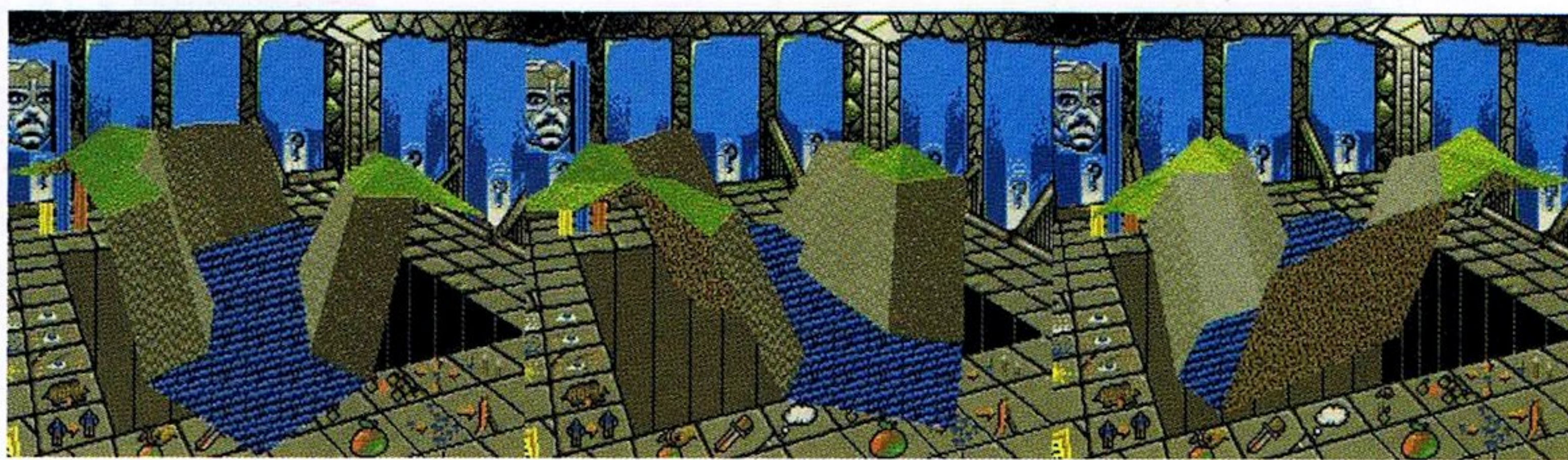
get food from town

attack

drop food



"I wanted the game to work in real time," says Peter, "all the time, no matter what you're doing. So while this landscape is turning round (right) it's still processing all the people and so on. You can also do wacky stuff like tilting, zooming in and out. The problem is, it starts getting a little slow. Zoomed right out as far as it allows, it's drawing almost 2,000 vectors on screen and about 200 bitmap sprites."



"This is a small village of farmers farming fields (above), going back home, taking food home and coming out again. Each person – and there are about 1,000 of them – has their own name, address, family history and their own individual history. In other words each one of these people will react differently to different situations. You have farmers, fishermen, cattle ranchers, shepherds, traders and even thieves. We're trying to make a world of individual people, rather than icons that all do the same things. Everyone remembers their original profession, and even whether they're the son or daughter of someone you've already killed."

"Everyone's personality is based on where they are on the map. We reckon someone near the sea will behave differently from someone who lives on a mountain."

"Here your leader is sending in a rank of people (below), marching over the terrain in rank. You can design your own ranks, though there's no need to do so. The ranks you see here are all based on 16th century Spanish fighting ranks – the only book I could find!"

"So the town sees the rank coming, and the people either build a fence or go out and fight. These villagers only have hand to hand weapons at the moment. And as someone gets killed you see a little angel floating up to heaven."

"All that took just two clicks: the attack icon, and a click on the village – it's not like those complicated wargames. But success depends on how you attack."

If you come over the brow of a hill or come out of a forest you can't be seen – the game actually understands planes and distance."



# with a splash

flat and that was it." The alternative was to create the landscape out of vectors, enabling the creation of roads, undulating land, coastal blocks and special features such as cliffs and even waterfalls.

Use of vectors enables the player to rotate the whole terrain in real time. There are two types of landscape, in fact: bitmapped, which are drawn for you, and fractal generated. Between them, Peter estimates, there are more than four billion different worlds up for grabs!

"You're the destabilising influence in the world," he explains. "Without you it would be fine. It's like when the English went to Australia and wrecked the native way of life. But you must be responsible, not just an utter bastard, or you can get everyone going against you."

**Food is the key** element. When villagers are working for you they're not producing food, so you need another village nearby to be >

## POWERMONGER versus POPULOUS

"There's an awful lot more in this game than there was in *Populous*," says Peter. "*Populous* was written in C and this is written in pure assembler, so there's a hell of a lot more code in it. It's a lot faster too: we're not claiming the vector routine is the fastest in the world – it probably wouldn't touch anything Argonaut and Jez San have done, like *Starglider* – but it's very respectable."

"The real world element wasn't in *Populous*, giving everyone individual personalities, which we believe is new and hasn't been done before."



■ *Populous*. Not a bad little game, in its own way

Bullfrog also claim that *Powermonger* has much more depth to it, and numerous little touches that enhance the illusion of a "real world." Where there are two farming villages close together, for example, you can see them in the autumn, when there's nothing much to do, go out, meet and play a game of baseball. You'll

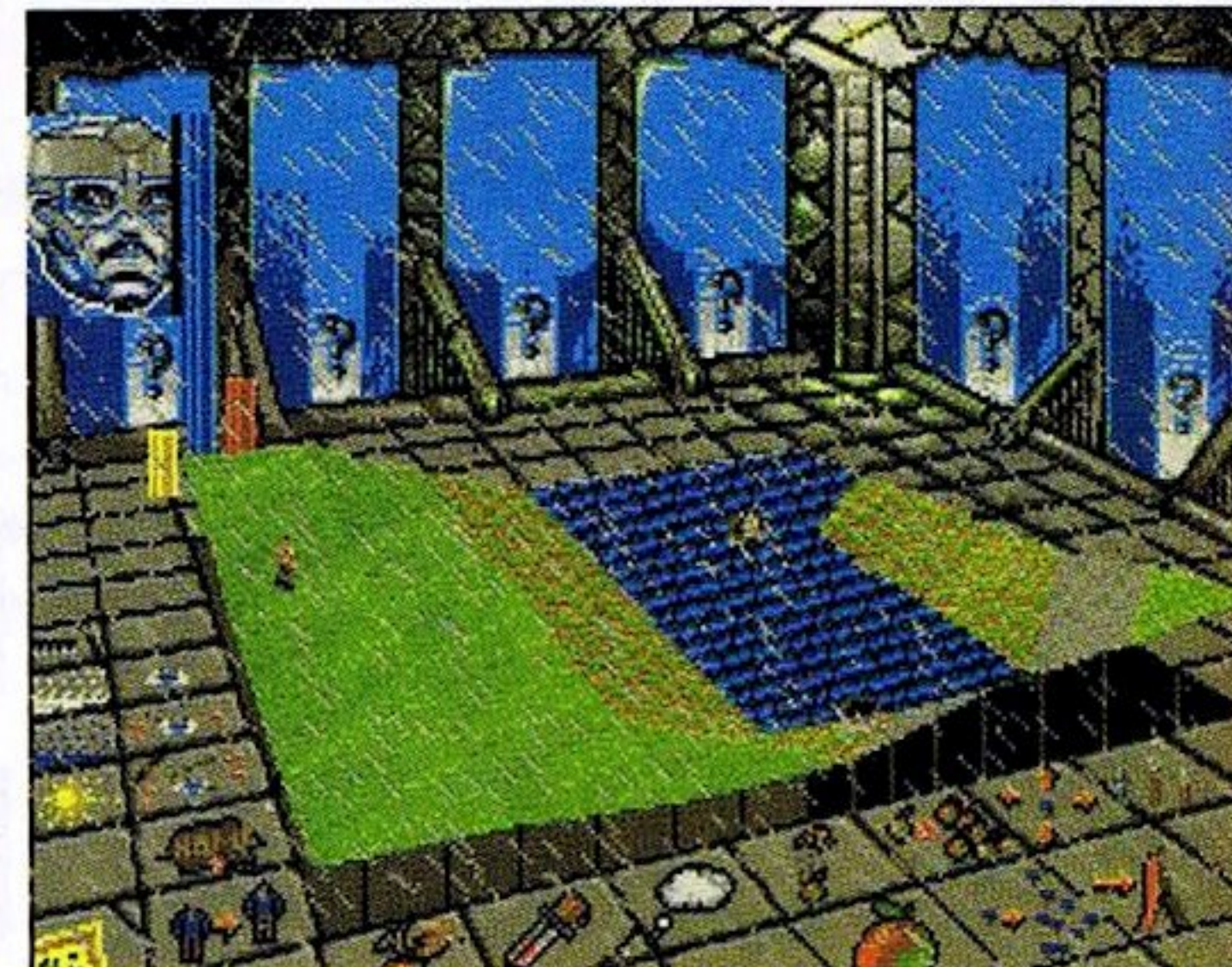
see them lay out the bases, you'll see the bowler throw the ball and so on. "That's the kind of real world thing we really, really wanted to do." And yes, it will be fully STE compatible, taking advantage of the better sound and enhanced colour palette.



## HOW TO CONQUER

The Bullfrogs' own advice for playing *Powermonger*:

1. Be responsible.
2. Try and get weapons invented for you early on, while making sure you have enough food to feed your people.
3. Then make a quick grab for all the other captains.
4. Another strategy is to go straight down the middle of the map getting those essential central territories.
5. Er...
6. That's it.



"There's weather going on here: this is the snow building up. Or you can have rain or fog. We had a problem making the weather regional, but how do you show it on the map? As the game goes on the information builds up and there's a lot going on there."

"If the weather gets bad the farmers won't farm, or perhaps some will farm because they're very hungry. If it gets very bad the fishermen won't go out, and so on."

➤ producing food on their behalf.

As you play there are up to four others also attempting to take over the land. These players are either generated by the ST, or alternatively played by humans across the MIDI port or over multiple serial ports.

What about the sound, which played such an important part in the success of *Populous*? Is Dave Hanlon also doing the sound for *Powermonger*? "Dave doesn't seem so interested in it any more. We asked him to do the sound for *Flood*, but it took him about nine months and even then it wasn't very good. So we used someone from outside, Charles Callét, for the first time. He did the sound for *Flood*, and before that he did *North and South*, *Drakkhen* and *Fred* for Infogrames.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

From conception and for a long time *Powermonger* – a name Bullfrog themselves seem less than keen on – was called *Warmonger*. Electronic Arts in the States rejected it as too belligerent, and came up with a list of some 50 alternatives, including *Captain's Feast*, *Captain O My Captain* (bit of Dead Poetry going on there), *In A Faraway World*, *Megalomania* and *All-out Superpower Confrontation* (and *Warmonger* was too aggressive?).

EA in the States apparently go in a lot for "focus groups," in which a pack of brats get together and give their considered opinion on a new game's title or how it plays.

"The sounds are going to be really difficult, too. You want them context sensitive, but it depends on what you're looking at at the time."

One idea originally mooted but finally discarded was to have the game record the real time when you finish, so that when you returned to it a week later, a week would have elapsed in the game!

"But we eventually decided against that, because so few ST owners have a real-time clock, and anyway people would try altering it and run the clock forward to 2029 or something and expect to see the villagers developing space rockets and so on!" **stf**

■ Don't miss the full and definitive ST review of *Powermonger* – coming to these pages very soon!

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