

Pockets, eh? What bloomin' marvellous little fellas they are. Why, if it weren't for pockets then the fabric of our society would fall to pieces. Kangaroos would be pretty useless without pockets, and snooker players would be scuppered as well. Just imagine: a world without kangaroos or snooker.

Oh. Not so bad is it? So pockets aren't really that wonderful are they? In fact, they're not worth bothering with at all. So, enough banter, let's get on and check out the latest Bitmap offering.

It would appear that I'm not the only person to have problems of a pocket nature. The Bitmap Kid is having trouser receptacle bothers as well. You see, Bitty has been blessed with, yes you guessed it, Magic Pockets.

Just what's magic about them? Well, they're big. Very big. Magically big in fact. Just like the Tardis, the Kid's pockets are a lot bigger on the inside than they would at first appear.

As well as having pockets that defy the laws of physics, they also have an equally spooky ability to provide the Kid with whatever objects he desires. For example, if he's lounging in the sun and he feels a tad thirsty, he plunges his hand into his pocket and produces a refreshing, cool can of Fizzy Trendy Pop drink. Great, eh?

Of course, there's a downside to all this pantaloony japey. It would appear that the Kid has accidentally lost four of his favourite toys dans la poche and now he wants them back. And what better way to do this than to whip a black hole out of his kecks and leap in after his beloved playthings?

Well, he could just pop down to Toys R Us and buy some new ones. No? Please yourselves. Once inside his trousers – calm down at the back – he finds himself in a

world totally unlike any he has ever known. A world populated by strange beasts and bizarre landmarks.

It's Ashton under Lyne on a Saturday night! Except it's not, it's four levels of scrolling platform action played over 30 separate sub-sections, with one toy located on each level. And so we come to The Game.

Yes, it's a Bitmap Brothers concoction, and yes it's flaming marvellous. As with Gods, the bruvvz have taken the standard platform formula and added a little twist to make it a completely different game from every other platformer.

A lot of the innovations found in Gods crop up here too, albeit in a slightly bigger way, but we'll get to that later. First of all, before we get into all the complicated bits, let's take a shuffy at how the game looks as a platformer.

The screen layout will be familiar to anyone who's played a platform game – and let's face it, that's practically everyone. You have the main character, complete with a springy wee jump, some platforms to jump on to, some bogeymen to try and stop him, and an exit at the end of the level.

That's where the similarities end. The

Bitmap Kid can fight back with a variety of weapons from his infamous pockets. On level one, he fires whirlwinds, level two brings clouds, the third level has ice blocks and the final level has snowballs.

Like R-Type, he can fire at double strength by holding down the fire button that little bit longer. This unleashes an extra large whirlwind/cloud/ice block/snowball which will trap the nasties, Rainbow Islands-style.

These extra strength power-ups also have a second purpose, depending on which level you are on. For instance, on level one the whirlwinds can be used to fling the Kid all over the screen, allowing him to reach higher platforms. A sprinkling of tactical planning will be required to puzzle your way out of certain situations, so don't disengage your brain when you pick up the joystick.

The sub-levels within each main one are designed so that no two levels will play alike. Some require you to navigate mazes of interlinked platforms, others demand quick reflexes, and others call upon puzzle solving skills.

At the end of each main level, there is a bonus one which involves using the toy you retrieved from that level in some



Pleeease release me, let me go! The Bitmap Kid gets trapped by the killer bubble that appears if you loiter too long

VISION

GGGGG

Uncluttered, smooth scrolling screens packed with zillions of weird and wonderful sprites.

AUDIO

GGGGG

Whether or not you're a Betty Boo fan, the music is great, plus some nifty little speech FX.

PLAYABILITY

GGGGG

Plenty of new touches ensure that this is a platform game like no other.

ADDICTION

GGGGG

Each level is designed to teach a new aspect of the game, so you'll be drawn in like fluff to a cough sweet.

90%

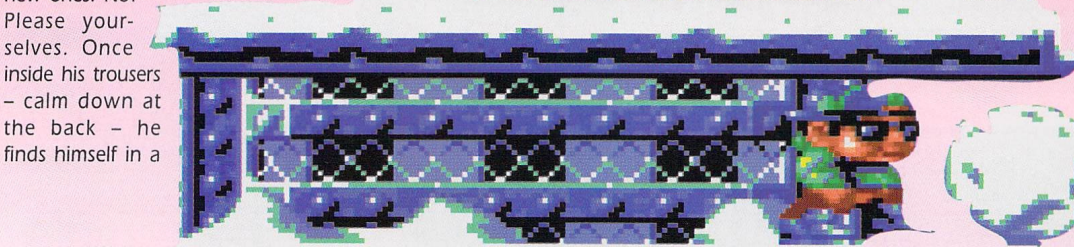
sort of test. These range from the relatively normal, such as a bike race, to the positively bizarre: try a boxing match with a gorilla.

All of these little touches help to keep the game fresh and exciting by changing the formula every time you play. And that's it more or less. There are more "little touches" than you could shake a very large stick at, but you'll just have to take my word for it.

As you can see from the screenshots, the graphics are excellent. There are literally hundreds of sprites, and thou-



The Kid's just trapped a snail in one of his trouser tornados. If he pops it, he'll get a pressie



Look before you leap. A TV will crop up every now and then to show you what to expect



Have a rummage in the Bitmap's pockets

MAGIC POCKETS

RENEGADES ■ £25.99 ■ 1/2 meg ■ Joystick ■ Out now



Once you've retrieved your lost boxing glove, you must use it in a fight to the death

expect the enemy. Pretty damn clever, huh?

Another new Bitmap invention is the gradeable power-up. By killing nasties you can decide what power-ups you get when you trap a nasty. The more nasties you kill, the better the power-up when you trap and burst your next foe. Cunning or what? This isn't just a gimmick either, as later levels require you to plan carefully what power-ups you'll use and when – if you're to stand a cat in hell's chance of finishing it.

That, in the space allowed, is as much of the game as I can tell you about. Suffice it to say that I didn't have room to tell you about the secret rooms full of bonuses, the fun reward bits when you're totally invincible and can just leap about killing things, the ability to kill nasties by tumbling onto them, the TV sets that give you a sneak preview of what's around the next corner, the bubble gum machines that allow you to float up to platforms, the plants that can be watered to grow into new platforms, and the assorted helmets that give you all manner of special powers. Phew!

Yep, Magic Pockets is a big, big game and one that should keep most people glued to their joysticks for weeks on end. Those Bitmaps have done it again. What next? A Bitmap beat-'em-up with an S-Xpress soundtrack? We can but dream...

Daniel Whitehead



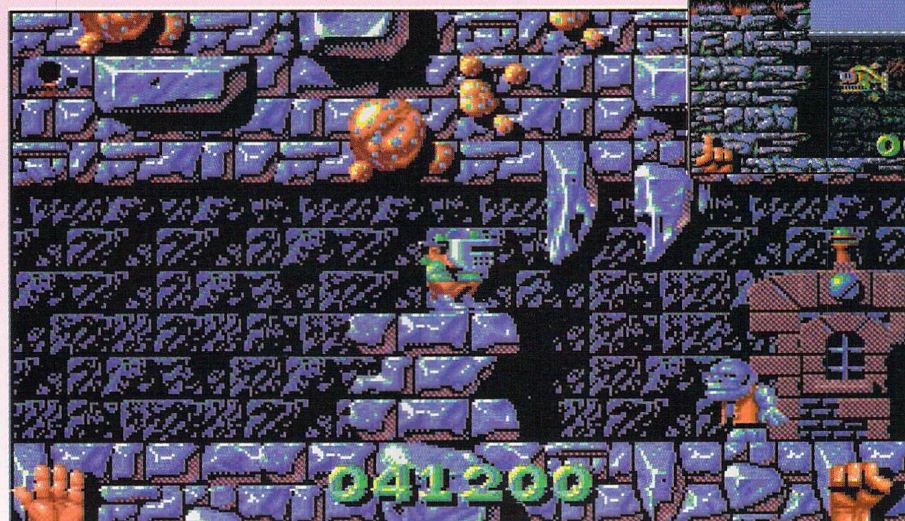
The third level takes you to the lakes, where you must freeze the water to cross. But if you had a diving helmet...

He's found his bike, so now it's time for a quick race to the exit

applies in Pockets, except that now we have many different grades of nasty.

Some are passive and won't harm you unless you actually walk into them, others are aggressive and pelt after you the minute they spot you, while some are really vicious and will attack from off screen and follow you everywhere you

go. Some of the baddies are weak and can't get over the obstacles in your way, and some are even better at jumping than you and can scale even the most daunting walls. This system means that you'll never be able to waltz through Pockets just because you know when to



Unfortunately, the ice didn't hold your weight, and the Bitmap Kid takes a frosty bath

Deep in the jungle, the chimps can't find David Attenborough so they're bothering the Kid instead

sands of rooms – or so the Bitmaps claim, but who's counting? – all of them laden with detail.

Each of the four levels represents a different environment and the screens change to reflect this. From underground caverns to snow covered mountain peaks, via the jungle and the lakes, the graphics remain at the highest standard.

The boring techy stuff like animation and scrolling is brilliant as well in case you were interested. You probably could have guessed that though.

Soundwise too, things are as hot 'n spicy as those bits they put on pizzas to burn your mouth when you least expect it. The music is provided by that stormin' rap vixen, Betty Boo.

Perhaps it's a bit of a shame that just as the game was being completed, Ms Boo got booed off stage for miming, but that's the way the cookie crumbles. Whether or not you're a Boo fan, the music is great and suits the game perfectly.

Thankfully you only hear that cheery "Doing the Do" refrain at the end of each level, otherwise there could be a lot of unnecessary violence committed against innocent loudspeakers. In-game we are treated to some equally well suited FX, with little voices going "Yeah" when you get a power up and so forth. And it's all very, well... bouncy really.

Ok now comes the bit where we find out just what the Bitmaps have done to make the game different. Remember in Gods how some of the nasties were intelligent? Well, the same