

# Knightmare

**Knightmare is the brilliant television adventure game now stunning audiences with its technical effects and computer wizardry. C+VG's Deputy Editor, Paul Boughton, visited the television studios to see how the show is put together.**

The situation is pretty dire. Brave adventurer Richard Wood faces a grim and sticky end trapped in the stomach of a monster.

"That will teach you to walk down a monster's throat," booms the deep, resonant voice of the mysterious Treguard, dungeon master of Knightmare castle.

The monster's stomach walls are pulsing. Time is running out for Richard. Safe with Treguard, Richard's three advisers are wracking their brains trying to save him.

There are two ways out. One is too ghastly to contemplate, the other is back up the monster's gullet. But how?

Then the solution! Get Richard to rub the monster's stomach with the bar of soap he found earlier. Brilliant! The trick works. The monster feels sick and Richard is ejected from the stomach, ready to continue.

This is the world of *Knightmare*, the brilliantly exciting fantasy adventure game now sparkling like a gem among the dull and tedious programmes being screened on Children's ITV.

Miss it at your peril. This is probably the only truly innovative show on TV right now, involving the problems of an adventure game combined with the graphical and technical wizardry of hugely powerful

computers, drama and special effects.

Anglia TV has made only eight shows and these are now nearing the end of their run. Hopefully, the powers which control television will give the go-ahead for another series.

Those who have already seen the show will probably be itching to get their hands on the *Activision/Electric Dreams'* computer version of the TV show which should be out soon. But for those who haven't yet been exposed to the magic of *Knightmare*, here is what all the fuss is about.

Teams of adventurers aged between 12 and 14 take up the quest to explore and survive in a computer-created world of fantasy. The aim is to survive for as long as possible — and that may mean over several of the thirty minute shows.

One player from each team of four — the adventurer or Dungeoneer — goes into the dungeon to face the perils and puzzles. He wears the Helmet of Justice which severely limits what he can see. In fact, he can only glimpse the floor. The others stay behind with the Dungeon Master to watch his progress on a television monitor and relay instructions to him by a radio-link.

When I visited Anglia Television in Norwich to see *Knightmare* being filmed, the adventurer was Richard

Wood, 12, and the three advisers were Edward Halliwell, 13, Jonathon Morley and Paul Knight, both 12. The boys all attend Queen Elizabeth Grammar School in Wakefield.

They had survived the perils of the first level of *Knightmare* and had embarked on the second level, having coped with huge scorpions, nerve-fraying skeletal monsters, solved riddles, collected food and cast a few spells.

*Knightmare* was devised and written by Tim Child whose full-time job at Anglia is a news producer. But it was his interest in computer games from his spell as presenter of *The Soft Spot*, a local computer programme, which sowed the seeds for *Knightmare*. It's taken him two long years to convince the television companies that the *Knightmare* idea

was viable and would attract a devoted following.

He says: "A true role-playing adventure game should never play the same twice. A lot of adventure games are based on mapping and solving a dungeon or some other sort of maze. This just wasn't good enough for a TV series. Once a good team worked out the correct route they would have cracked most of the problems. And worse still, so would the viewers.

"Contestants won't escape from the *Knightmare* dungeon that easily. For a start it's irrational — it keeps shifting and changing. And the perils and puzzles change with it."

This constant change can only be realised by the use of the sophisticated computer trickery. Conventional studio sets would be "too restrictive," says Tim.



# - A dream come true

He insists *Knightmare* owes more to computer adventure games rather than straight role-playing games such as *Dungeons and Dragons*.

"I'm a games player", he says, "but not *Dungeons and Dragons*. I played it for half-an-hour once but I don't have five hours to spare. It doesn't fit into my life-style."

He continued: "I admire computer programmers, people such as Steve Turner (*Dragonorc*, *RanaRama*) who do their research properly." He rates Turner's *RanaRama* as far superior to *Gauntlet*. "My sons reckon I'm the only over-40s arcade champ going."

It is really only possible for a show such as *Knightmare* to appear on television due to the technical advances in computer trickery.

The man behind the graphics is Robert Harris, who spent hundreds of

hours creating the mystical maze and special effects.

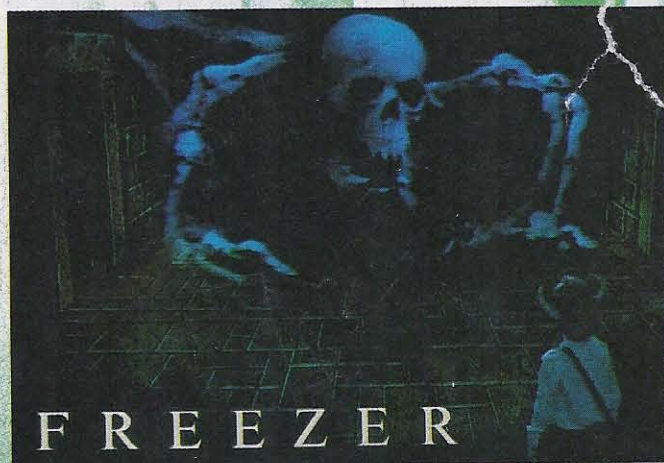
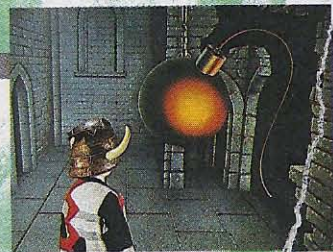
In the control room next to the studio he uses two Spaceward Supernova computers to change scenes, control apparitions and the surprises which confront the adventurers. But before you rush out to try and buy a Supernova, you'd better know that they cost around £50,000 each.

The backgrounds were originally painted by artist Dave Rowe. The pictures were then digitised, amended, relit and merged on the Supernova. Models of monsters were also made, photographed, digitised and then animated.

When all this is combined with the live action, the effect is breathtaking.

But it is all brilliantly executed illusion. The adventurers never see

The helmet he wears means he can only see the floor. He must rely on his



Treguard are filmed and these shots are later slotted in to the action.

One false move or dodgy advice from the advisers can put the adventurer in deadly peril. One wrong action and the game is over. And the game is for real. The adventurers can do what they like. They are not given any warning of what can happen.

As Hugo Myatt, the actor who plays Treguard, says: "My biggest problem is not knowing what the adventurers are going to say. It's not just a challenge for them, it's a challenge for the actors as well — we've got to be quick enough to react and respond in the right way."

And that is *Knightmare* — a dream come true for games players. It's a pity that everybody can't have a go.

There are already enough teams to compete in the first series but you could be lucky if the TV chiefs give the go-ahead for another series. And that will only happen if the programme is supported by you.

*Knightmare* is screened throughout the ITV network on Mondays at 4.45pm.

how the effects are done while playing the game because this would ruin the atmosphere.

A technique known as Chromakey allows all the different elements of *Knightmare* to be merged into what you, the viewer, and the adventurers see.

It works roughly like this. Richard, or the other adventurer, is placed in a studio which is totally pale blue in colour, with various objects or actors, if they are included that particular scene.

advisers totally for help and directions.

In the control room he can be seen on a monitor. On another monitor are the computer graphics, backgrounds, animations, etc. These two pictures are overlaid and it is this united image which is shown to the three advisers. So for them the adventurer actually appears to be in a monster's stomach, stone corridor, or dungeon with hideous monsters and strange creatures. Neat, eh?

In another studio the advisers and

