



# Knight of Diamonds



*GABRIEL KNIGHT 2's Blend of Suspense And The Supernatural Is A Full House For Gamers*

by Johnny L. Wilson

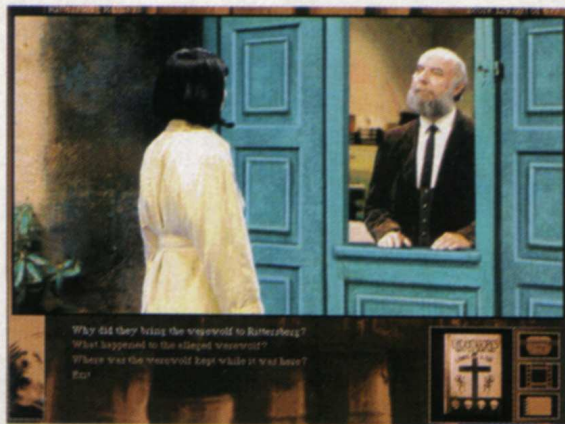
**W**hen I saw the initial GABRIEL KNIGHT game, I raved about it as "...an exceptional blend of art, game and understanding." GABRIEL KNIGHT 2: THE BEAST WITHIN is even more so. The story is fascinating, the writing is deft, the acting is well above the computer game norm, and the soundtrack is near perfect.

Those who have never experienced a Gabriel Knight adventure will need to know that Gabriel, the protagonist, is a bookstore owner from New Orleans. In the first game, he is a wannabe novelist who, with assistance from his female associate Grace, ends up solving a series of voodoo murders and writing a bestselling novel based on his efforts. The game's story was a study in contrasts: light vs. darkness, black vs. white, logic vs. the supernatural, and dream sequences vs. reality. By the end of the story, Gabriel becomes a *schattenjaeger*, a hunter of the supernatural. With its sophisticated handling of psychological archetypes and titillating use of the supernatural, the original game was as much a work of interactive literature as it was a game.

GABRIEL KNIGHT 2: THE BEAST WITHIN (GK2) takes the quality up another notch. This time, the *schattenjaeger* has taken up residence in the family castle in Germany and, as a result of his mystical responsibilities, must solve a case which borders suspiciously on lycanthropic behavior. It maintains the sophisticated dream sequences which foreshadowed both danger, solutions and inner turmoil in the first game, as well as a well-defined symbology. St. George continues to hold the place of light in GK2, and there is an interesting interplay between the swan and the wolf. By the time the adventure is through, gamers will have linked Ludwig II of Bavaria, Richard Wagner and a few historical liberties in a most remarkable plot.

GK2 also provides more balance between the principal characters. In the original, Gabriel's associate Grace is definitely a supporting character. In GK2, she has equal weight with Gabriel, allowing gamers to view the story from more than one perspective—more story and movie than traditional game.

The new game retains the style of clever dialogue used in the



**WO IST ME?** Grace, Gabriel's assistant, takes a much more aggressive role in GK2. In this standard interface shot, she interviews a city official.

original. Sometimes, this is handled as throwaway humor and sometimes with profound foreshadowing. I was amused when a fireplace was described as adequate for the big bad wolf to come down in a story about werewolves, but I particularly liked the way Gabriel would allude to the case with double-entendres. When a Hunt Club member asks Gabriel if he hunts, he quietly responds, "I hunt. I hunt all the time." Another time a suspect complains to Gabriel that, "No matter how much I spray them down, they still stink." Gabriel retorts, "Yeah, I guess some creatures are like that." These are very nice touches within the context. Some of Grace's lines seem unnaturally testy at first, but as noted later in this review, it actually works.

The first adventure offered high production values in sound and music. In GK2, Composer Robert Holmes and his colleagues raise the bar further by using the operatic style made famous by John Williams in *Star Wars* (different theme music for each character) so that Gabriel's theme has a heavy lugubrious counterpoint, Grace's theme is a delicate and romantic melody blending piano and harp. Even such minor characters as a police inspector has a theme with a martial percussion. Certain locales like the Rittersberg church and the secret passage also have their own themes. I also liked the delightful guitar version of "When The Saints Go Marching In" at the



Price: \$59.95

System Requirements:

PC compatible 486-25 or better, 8 MB RAM, 5 MB HD space. SVGA with 256 colors, 2x CD-ROM or higher, Windows 3.1 or Windows 95; supports most major sound cards.

# of Players: 1

Protection: None (CD must be in drive)

Designer: Jane Jensen

Publisher: Sierra On-Line, Inc.

Bellevue, WA 98007

(800) 757-7707

Reader Service: #320



*Okay, I'm going to log this, even though I have no idea if it's complete garbage or not, just in case it means something later or Mrs. Smith did Gabriel's last and more. Basically, she claims that there's this "high priestess" - a powerful feminine spirit guide, trying to warn Gabriel about this Black Wolf, Hoff and assist him because Gabriel is in deep doo-doo. He's supposedly got this dual nature (yeah, dumb and dumber) and he's going to be going through one of two possible transformations. The spirit guide is trying to help him pick the right one - supposedly not just for him (Gabriel) but for herself and/or someone she represents as well (maybe one of his old mentors?).*

Recording Log of Log II - Gabriel

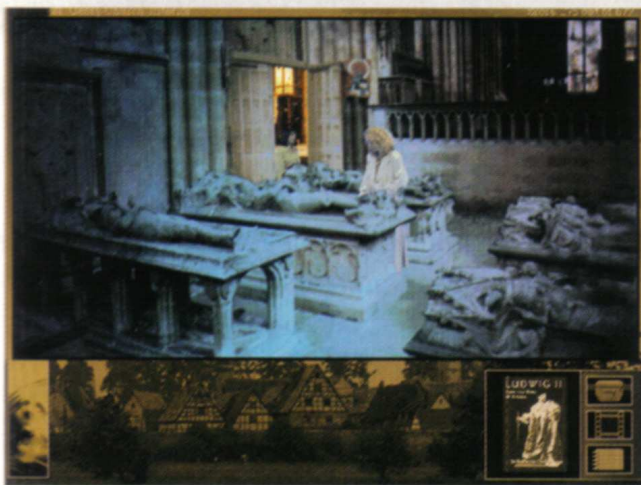
**WAS IST DAS?** When examining an item in inventory, such as Grace's notebook shown here, you will get this close-up view.

Marienplatz fountain during Chapters 1 (where author Jane Jensen makes her Hitchcockian cameo) and 3.

**METAPHOR METAMORPHOSIS**

The first game used the visual metaphor of a graphic novel (a book in the style of comic book art for mature readers) to unfold the story. The New Orleans settings and backgrounds looked a lot like what you would expect to see in a Dark Horse Comic. Players navigated from location to location using a tourist map interface where all the famous sites appear as colorful icons whenever the character learns of a clue.

GK2 uses the film metaphor. Nathan and Darlou Gams have blended the photographic backgrounds and digitized video (using a chromakey or green screen process) almost seamlessly, so that the whole look is significantly better than the video with rendered backgrounds of PHANTASMAGORIA. Actors move in front of actual Bavarian locales with photographic resolution, and it is very effective. Players navigate from place to place using an actual mass transit map of Munich (for Gabriel) and a



**WAILS FROM THE CRYPT** Grace encounters Gerda grieving at a local crypt. This moving scene shows how well the photographs and video have been integrated in GK2.

tourist map of Bavaria (for Grace) with active locations appearing as the characters learn about them.

Best of all, the digitized film sequences don't get in the way of the game. A mouse click will let you bypass a sequence and, whenever a walker (the on-screen character moving through a scene) needs to traverse the entire screen (such as at the Marienplatz of Munich), there is a fast-forward icon that moves the character to the next virtual fork in the road. As for the film sequences themselves, a variety of styles in close-ups and other camera angles are directed with flair by Will Binder and some sequences use an entirely different look. The posterized wolf's-eye view and the television camera view in Chapter 3 were particularly effective in adding visual variety, as was the Francis Ford Coppola-esque opera staging of the final chapter.

Another fresh look occurs when Grace investigates some castles. Not only can the player click on various objects and locations, but there is a button to click which plays a docent tape and allows the player to discover more about each sight. This adds to vocal variety so that players don't always have to hear the character's voice describing each object or locale.

Frankly, the film clips are paced so well and spaced so effectively throughout the game that they often serve as mini-reward sequences. They are generally exciting enough to keep you pushing from puzzle to puzzle in order to see more and more of the story evolve. Unlike many games which utilize any sort of interactive movie technology, I found myself experiencing delighted anticipation

rather than frustrating impatience whenever the hour-glass icon would signify that the program was calling up a film sequence. Of course, the fact that I could skip scenes I'd already seen enhanced that feeling that the film clips were rewards for a triumphant puzzle solver.

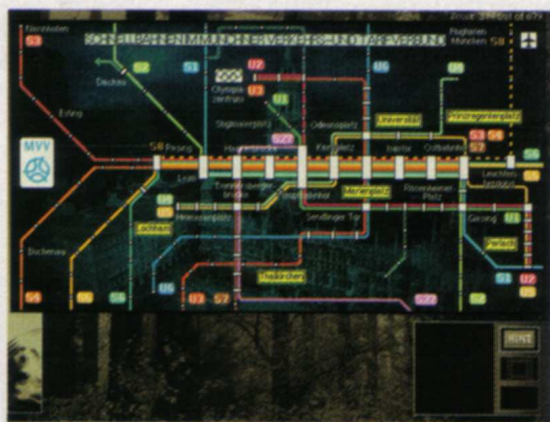
**CHARACTER TRANSFORMATIONS**

From the start, the characters in the Gabriel Knight adventures have been characters with solid motivation and inner conflict. In GK2, the digitized performances make the characters even more believable. To be sure, some of the performances are "over the top" in a near-melodramatic perspective (Xavier, the Hunt Club doorman, and Mrs. Smith, the cliché-ridden demonologist from Pennsylvania, come to mind), but most of the performances are both credible and pleasing. As a cast, I think they offer the most even quality of performance,



**LOVE STORY** The paintings depicting Wagner's Tannhauser provide additional clues to the mystery, and the Tour Tape button adds vocal variety to the harvesting of the clues.





**MAPPED METAPHORS** The tourist map of Bavaria and the mass transit map of Munich provide the travel interfaces for GK2.

from Dean Erickson's Gabriel Knight through the lowest-ranking supporting character.

To complement the characterization, GK2 offers plenty of dramatic tension to bring the characters into focus. Grace is played to sardonic perfection by Joanne Takahashi. One quickly understands that her bitter view of the world is as much rage turned inward as it is rivalry with Gabriel and jealousy of Gerda. Of course, Kriminalkommissar Leber's territorial protection of his professionalism and the hostile paranoia of von Zell, one of the Royal Bavarian Hunt Club members, add to the opportunities for dramatic interaction. Flare-ups and tender reconciliations abound in GK2.

**PUZZLING TRANSMOGRIFICATIONS**

Most importantly, the puzzles aren't dumbed down to reach a broader audience. Though some are relatively simple, some are diabolically clever. Nearly everyone will immediately know what to do with the quick-drying cement or mirror image puzzles, but some will have trouble figuring out the tape-splicing puzzles and the cuckoo clock. Plus, the pacing of each investigation isn't bogged down by having every clue delivered via a short movie.

Clues are to be found by reading books (with or without the accompanying voiceover), examining museum artifacts, interview-

ing witnesses in film clips, and listening to audio clips. This is extremely positive because it lends variety to the game. Unfortunately, one disease common to most modern adventure games still infests GK2—pixelitis. On several occasions, gamers will have to find and click on a precise spot to get the next clue,

even when they think they have already clicked there. This is particularly true in Chapter 1 when the key is hidden in a dark shadow, and Chapter 4 when you must click on a display case on the exact corner twice.

You'll also have to keep returning to most locations several times before you solve everything, but that's a common adventure game convention. Thankfully, Jensen has divided your progress into 697 points of information-gathering/puzzle-solving, so you feel like every incremental point counts and know when you're making progress. Fortunately, the blinking cursors on the map symbols let you know when you haven't yet collected all the clues or performed all the actions in a given location.

The only unfair clue I can remember in the game is the magazine/tape recorder schtick in Chapter 3. Now that I've mentioned it, the reference may come in handy when you've reached the end of your patience. Still, the blend of history and clever storytelling make the exposition of the plot a joy, in spite of occasional clumsiness in the puzzle system.

**WEREWAGNER**

Plot, puzzles, characterization and art all lead to one of the most ambitious denouements ever in graphic adventure game history. The lost-opera-of-Wagner scene is worthy of a film epic. It offers tense moments, comic relief, and a fascinating catharsis. We've always believed that a significant amount of production resources should be spent in rewarding the gamer who plays all the way through the game. GABRIEL KNIGHT 2: THE BEAST WITHIN transforms game endings—a dynamic finish to a most dynamic game. Jane Jensen just may have become the interactive Anne Rice she's always wanted to be. **S**



**ANGEL OR DEVIL?** Gabriel examines his inventory to decide what he might share with his attorney.

**APPEAL:** Readers of Anne Rice-style gothics and traditional graphic adventure gamers are in for a rare treat in this one.

**PROS:** Great story, extravagant backgrounds, exceptional acting, and a near-perfect soundtrack makes this a graphic adventure benchmark.

**CONS:** Some puzzles may be obscure enough to seem unfair.

