

# The Beast Within: A Gabriel

**Category:** Adventure game

**Developer:** Sierra

**Publisher:** Sierra, P.O.Box 85006, Bellevue, WA 98105-8506 (206) 649-9800

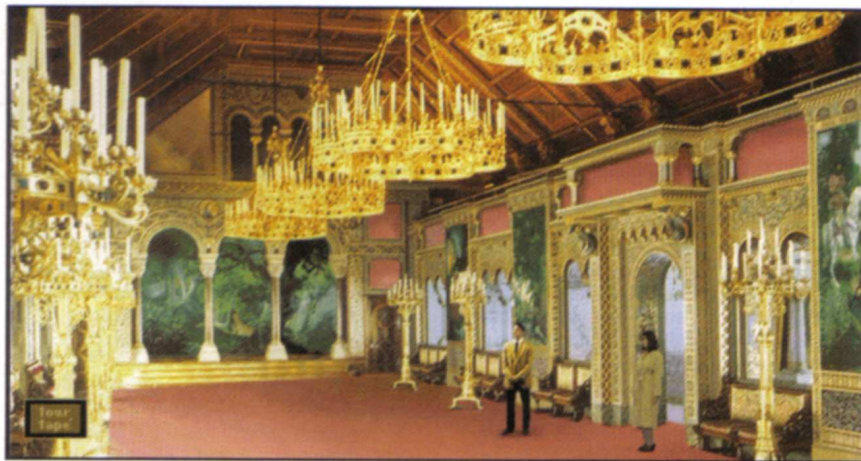
Required	We Recommend
Double-speed CD-ROM drive; 486/33; 8MB RAM; 20MB hard-disk space; Mouse; SVGA	Quad-speed CD-ROM drive; Pentium; 16MB RAM

**Most gamers considered the original *Gabriel Knight* the best horror game ever published, but this spectacular sequel dethrones it.**

**T**he *Beast Within*, opens with a scene straight out classic monster pictures of yore: Horror writer Gabriel Knight has returned to his ancestral castle in Germany, Schloss Ritter, and is quietly pursuing his own affairs when a crowd of local citizens appears at his door, *lederhosen* and all, with news that the daughter of a local farmer has been slain by a werewolf.

The good burghers of Rittersberg know that Gabriel is a *schattenjaeger*, a "shadow-hunter," with special powers for combating the forces of darkness, so they've come to him for help. Naturally, Gabriel takes the case.

You don't have to progress far in the game to realize that *GK2* is no ordi-



**The Music Room in Neuschwanstein — have Grace examine all of the "wolf paintings" here; it's a very important event-trigger.**

nary werewolf yarn. Gabriel (along with his doctry assistant, Grace, who flies over from New Orleans to lend a hand) soon finds himself enmeshed in a complex web of characters and events, with side-plots involving illegal animal smuggling, an exclusive hunting club of wealthy Bavarian snobs, a lost opera by Richard Wagner, and the romantic but tormented history of Bavaria's last king, the eccentric —

some would say insane — Ludwig II.

All the skeins of the fabulously intricate plot gradually come together to reach two extremely powerful climaxes: a nocturnal werewolf hunt in the Bavarian woods (by all means, *save your game* before embarking on this perilous affair — it's one of the toughest challenges I've ever encountered in an adventure game), and a truly spectacular production of the "lost" Wagner opera, which serves as the backdrop for Gabriel's final confrontation with evil, both external and internal.

There are significant differences between this sequel and its predecessor, *Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Father*. This is an interactive movie, not an animated game; it is neither as difficult nor as long as the original (although even experienced gamers will find plenty to challenge their wits); it relies heavily on mood to create its sense of menace; and it uses real actors.

Some players may not respond well to Dean Erickson's interpretation of Gabriel, who was animated, cartoon-style, in the previous game: he looks a lot like Kurt Russell, brushes his long hair back much too often, and tends to rely on his "Aw, shucks!" smirk too much whenever there's a second of dead-time while the next scene loads.

Others may find him charming and lovable; when the script calls for stronger emotions, he certainly can provide them, and this helps compensate for his over-reliance on acting-class mannerisms.

Joanne Takahashi, however, simply runs away with the part of Grace. She gives us a young woman of spunk, wit,

## SOME TIPS FOR THE FLEDGLING SCHATTENJAEGER

**H**ere's a good example of how the "event trigger" system works in the game — and how it can be a problem if there's a misfire:

Grace needs information from the curator of the Wagner Museum in Bayreuth about the "wolf panels" in the castle Neuschwanstein, and about the lost Wagner opera. In the Ludwig Museum at Herrenchiemsee, there is a letter from Ludwig to the conductor of the Munich Opera about those topics; there are also a lot of other letters and documents that Grace needs to read. So many, in fact, that the player is likely to read them silently, rather than have Grace read them aloud, to speed things along.

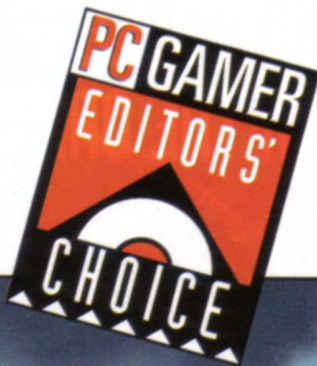
But that particular letter from Ludwig *must* be read aloud, or the "trigger" won't be tripped and the topics it addresses will never show up in the conversation tree. Consequently, when Grace talks to the Wagner Museum curator, she won't be able to ask the right questions. This is a program-



**In Display Room No. 1 at the Ludwig Museum, in Herrenchiemsee, Grace *must* read the leftmost letter aloud in order to trigger important topics of conversation when she later visits the Wagner Museum in Bayreuth.**

ming glitch — to be corrected in a patch — but you *must* let Grace read the letter aloud, or you'll get stuck in a dead-end loop and your progress through the game will take a major wrong turn.

# Knight Mystery



In one of the game's most moving scenes, Grace visits the spot where Ludwig II drowned (probably with the assistance of some thugs from the Prussian secret service).

determination, and exceptional screen presence. She's also deep-down beautiful (I think I'm in love...).

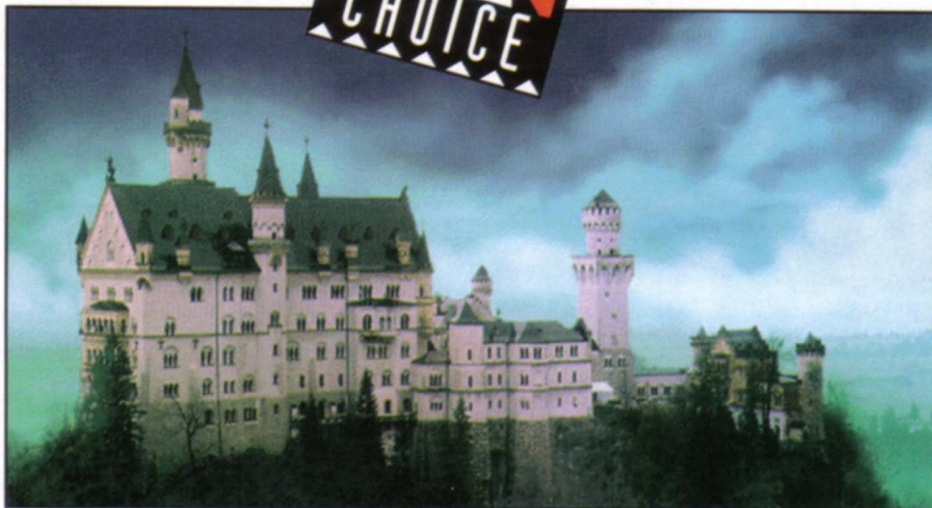
Video quality is first-rate, and the use of music to heighten mood — and, indeed, to provide reinforcement to the players' actions — is cunningly done. Hats off to composer Robert Holmes: I've been a Wagner fan since high school, and damned if his "lost Wagner opera" doesn't sound authentic!

And the location scenes in Bavaria are often ravishing to behold. By the time you finish the game, you'll be an expert on Munich and on the fairy-tale castles built by Ludwig in the alps surrounding the city.

The real star of *GK2*, however, is writer Jane Jensen, who also scripted the first Gabriel Knight game. Her characterizations are sharp and economical, her dialogue sparkles, and her subtle way of weaving German myth and legend into the story, in an ever-darkening crescendo of mood, would be the envy of any big-name horror writer you care to mention.

Jensen does not give us the sunny, jet-set Bavaria of the travel posters, but the old Bavaria of dark forests and legend-haunted mists. I once fantasized writing a historical novel about Ludwig II (it's been done, of course), and I was spellbound by the way in which this lonely but noble figure gradually emerges as a major character in *The Beast Within's* plot, even though he's been dead for more than a century. There is a scene where Grace evokes the spirit of the (probably) murdered monarch that moved me as much as anything I've ever seen in a computer game. Writing of such quality is rare in any format, and in PC games, it's almost never to be found.

There's a formidable paradox involved in writing horror for the interactive genre: gamers *must* have their puzzles and conundrums, but since successful horror depends so much on the steady building of atmosphere (it ain't enough anymore just to have a dismembered corpse pop up every now and then), the trick is to integrate the event-triggers (industry term for the-things-you-must-do-in-the-right-order in order to make progress in the game) into the



Neuschwanstein — Ludwig II's most extravagant dream-palace. *GK2* takes full advantage of Bavaria's many beauties. Rarely has there been a game so drenched in sheer atmosphere.

## ON THE HUNT



There's a locked door Gabriel need to get through to explore the hunting lodge's basement. Have him wind the cuckoo clock and hide it in the big plant.



When the woodpecker in the clock begins to "knock," the sound will distract the snooty doorman, Xavier, long enough for Gabriel to snatch a set of keys from his desk.

plot so that they break the mood as little as possible. Jensen has managed that tightrope act with skill and aplomb.

The game is structured in six chapters, alternating between Grace's point of view and Gabriel's, until the sixth and final chapter, when their paths merge. It's an effective way of telling a story which might otherwise become unwieldy in its mass of detail.

One technical note: Sierra lists a double-speed CD-ROM drive as one of

the hardware requirements for *The Beast Within*, but a quad-speed is probably a more realistic minimum. This is the first game I've been assigned to review that my three-year-old Panasonic double-speed CD drive just couldn't handle. The amounts of data being transferred in numerous full-motion video scenes are simply too much for some older drives — I was crashing every 20 minutes or so because my drive just choked on the data-stream and shut itself down. I went out and bought a new quad-speed drive, and after that, things went smoothly. (Okay, I was planning to buy one sooner or later, but it tells you something about how powerful the game is that I actually did it now, just so I could finish this one game!)

In fact, I devoured this game as I would a good horror novel — which, in a sense, it is. Sierra learned a lot about this kind of game in the process of making *Phantasmagoria*, and it shows.

Breathtaking visual impact, across-the-board good acting, a complex and engrossing story that builds to a truly horrific climax: *The Beast Within* sets a new standard — within the graphic adventure genre, at any rate — for interactive entertainment.

—William R. Trotter

## PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

**HIGHS:** Superb script, excellent videos, a fresh "take" on the traditional werewolf theme.

**LOWS:** Extreme system demands; if you get hooked on it, you may have to invest in a quad-speed CD-ROM drive, whether you're ready or not.

**BOTTOM LINE:** A great horror adventure, driven by a script that puts the competition to shame.

# 96%