

Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned

Gabriel Knight 3



Exclusive
Hands-On
Look

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GENRE: Adventure
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DEVELOPER: Jane Jensen
PUBLISHER: Sierra

by Johnny Wilson

The Jacobites might have thought a bit differently of Bonnie Prince Charlie if they had known the mystery underlying GABRIEL KNIGHT 3: BLOOD OF THE SACRED, BLOOD OF THE DAMNED (GK3). Designer Jane Jensen is no longer content with drawing us into mysteries that are tied into voodoo and werewolves. Now, she is deftly pulling together the rumors and conjecture, the theories and the shocking speculation that surround the most mesmerizing conspiracy of all time: the Holy Grail.

GK3 has everything: a kidnapping, a treasure, a cover-up, a secret society, a reunion, and some of Jensen's classic use of the supernatural. Gabriel, our hero, is still the lugubrious, drawling bookstore owner and novelist by chance, who has inherited the title of *schattenjäger*—a shadow-hunter of the supernatural. He is still assisted and occasionally accompanied by Grace Nakimura, and he also runs into his old pal Mosely. Plus, there's a new supernatural adversary: the night visitors, Jensen's fresh take on vampires.



ONE SCREEN FOR ALL MANKIND GK3 gives you a full-screen perspective with a free-flying camera view, a pop-up command toolbar, and occasional cinematic cut-scenes within the 3D engine.

Like its predecessors, GK3 features terrific puzzles and an extremely well written story. It differs mainly in that you don't have the graphic novel effect of the first game (although there is a graphic novel introduction to the game) or the interactive video experience of the second. Now, the entire environment is 3D, and gameplay is friendlier as a result. You no longer have to walk Gabriel all over the screen in order to get him into position to see something. You can fly the camera independently; then, when you're ready, you click on the floor or on an object and Gabe immediately walks into the picture from off-camera. We also like the fact that the cursor lights up whenever it crosses a hot spot, thus doing away with those annoying "hunt the pixel" puzzles. Another improvement is that there is no onscreen toolbar unless you decide to call it up by right-clicking your mouse. This gives you a full-screen perspective at all times with a pop-up interface only when you really need it.

In addition to using a pop-up toolbar, the interface also has the capacity to grow. Want to talk to the innkeeper? Icons show up for each topic, reminiscent of the interface in another Holy Grail game, CIRCLE OF BLOOD. Want to attach an item to a verb for regular use? You handle everything with an easy click. The new 3D engine and improved interface make everything about GK3 easier, except the puzzles themselves.

Another major difference here is that instead of being divided into chapters (as in the first two games) GK3 is divided into days with several time blocks within each day. Each time block has several "must do" actions before you can advance to the next time block—and each time block has enough optional actions that it's highly unlikely that you'll be able to do them all in your first playing of the game.

Glastonbury Heir

The story itself begins with an invitation for Gabriel and Grace to meet an heir to the Scottish throne. Grace believes that this is because of Gabe's position as heir to the venerable Ritter heritage. Naturally, because of Gabe's heritage, the *schattenjäger* tradition comes into play. The principal characters meet in Paris and, after a sinister series of events, a chase sequence takes Gabriel to the south of France. There, in Rennes-le-Chateau, a small village in the Languedoc region, the mystery begins to be decoded.

Languedoc is a province noted for heresy,



TOPICAL FRUIT Conversations throughout the game are driven by icons that reflect dynamically the topics that Gabriel has uncovered during the course of his investigation.



BANNER EAR Gabriel hides behind a banner in order to eavesdrop on a key conversation. Ambient audio adds depth to GK3, but important audio clues are close-captioned.



ALTAR EGO As in the "virtual museum" sections of the first two Gabriel Knight games, you'll be able to scrutinize items of interest—such as this altar piece in Rennes-le-Chateau—at your leisure.

witchcraft, and a mysterious treasure trove, reputed to include the Holy Grail—the chalice that Jesus used to serve the wine during the Last Supper and into which Joseph of Arimathea collected the blood of Christ while he was on the cross.

While those of Celtic descent would heed the Grail legends surrounding Glastonbury, Rennes-le-Chateau is a worthy rival with significantly more mysteries surrounding it.

It is a place where Mary Magdalene is more revered than the Madonna herself. It is the birthplace of the Cathars and the Priory of Sion. It is a mysterious place held holy since ancient times; a place where the mountainous geography is strangely symmetrical, forming a virtual pentacle of peaks for sacred bonfires and ritual observation. It is a locale where many believe that Egypt's Isis cult flourished in the days before the region's conversion to Christianity under Clovis I (circa AD 496, prior to his AD 507 victory over the Visigoths). It is the ancestral homeland of the Merovingian lineage, the long-haired and reputed magical kings of the land that would eventually become France. In short, a perfect place for a mystery.

The game re-creates the church at Rennes-le-Chateau with exacting detail, much the way GK2 did Mad Ludwig's castle. The strange devil holding up the holy water fount, the statue of Mary Magdalene with a skull at her feet, the extremely unusual Stations of the Cross, and bizarre

inscriptions are presented in a 3D virtual museum in which you can fly the camera and examine anything.

Of course, purists may not like Jensen's addition of a hotel to the mysterious village and her use of a museum dedicated to Sauniere as a handy source of clues. Just remember, poetic license has been around at least since the time of Homer, and the use of a fictional hotel and a museum speeds up the pace considerably over having to travel around the countryside for clues.

Digital Divination

Fortunately for Grace and Gabriel, they are not on their own in figuring out this mystery. Since some of the mystery has to do with strange geometrical clues in paintings and natural landscapes, they are assisted by SIDNEY, a computer interface. SIDNEY will not only assist in following up on basic clues, but will also provide a rich, searchable database on Egyptian mythology and the ties to Isis and Osiris that you are likely to uncover in the search for the treasure.

Certain items have to be "scanned" into SIDNEY in order to solve the mystery. Indeed, you will have to superimpose geometrical shapes over these images in order to reach the proper conclusion. Naturally, this is no problem for gamers who are familiar with the literature concerning Rennes-le-Chateau. Books such as Henry Lincoln's *The Holy Place* and David Woods' *Genesis* feature diagrams superimposed over topographical maps all the time. Both researchers note that there is both a pentagon and a hexagon construction that overlay the geographical area.

For those who are into the mystery, placing points and shapes on a map has a real ring of truth. For others, this will still be an intriguing puzzle, since it hinges on one other vexing element. Jensen has taken a poem called "Le Serpent Rouge" and built a series of riddles around the wordplay in the verses. If you can figure out the secondary meanings and obscure references, then you'll have no trouble solving the geometrical puzzles.

Once out in the countryside, you'll face a timing puzzle or two. Think of it as basic surveillance. Indeed, you'll occasionally have to direct Gabriel to hide and observe in order to get the clues and answers you'll need to get to the endgame. This section has a very different look to it; but in effect, the overview map recalls the New Orleans map in the first game and the U-bahn map in the second.

All of this sleuthing serves as preliminary to the scenes in the underground temple, however. The temple contains puzzles based on paradoxes, chessboards, and more. Think of the motif as a mixture of Egyptian mythology, alchemical symbolism, and Gnostic philosophy. Nothing is what it appears. Considering the Arian and Catharite heresies that flourished in the Languedoc region, the mixture is perfect for the mystery.

With all of the conspiracy, heresy, treasure, and crime abounding in GABRIEL KNIGHT 3: BLOOD OF THE SACRED, BLOOD OF THE DAMNED, you could almost assume that the supernatural elements so prevalent in the first two games would be missing. You would be wrong. Jensen has weaved a vampire plot into the game (isn't this logical, given the emphasis on blood in the Grail legends?), and you're not likely to forget the antagonist in the final showdown. There is also an intriguing supernatural connection to the kidnapped baby that initiates the action.

As with the previous games, GK3 won't frighten you with gore and nightmarish creatures, but it will mess with your mind. In any game in which Jesus, conspiracy, magic, and vampires intermingle, you'd expect to be more than a little disconcerted. As well-crafted as any of its ancestors and, if anything, even better written, GABRIEL KNIGHT 3: BLOOD OF THE SACRED, BLOOD OF THE DAMNED seems destined for controversy, if not preternatural success.

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