

GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 a Horror-Fest of Bad Puzzles and Bad Acting

Third Time's a Curse

GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 will go down in history as the game in which you have to make a mustache using a spray bottle, a piece of tape, maple syrup, and a cat. There are worse puzzles later on, but this one crops up early enough to discourage all but the most obsessive gamers from seeing the bulk of the game. Couple this with a diffuse story that takes longer than Christmas to get underway, and a lead character with all the charm and appeal of Andrew Dice Clay on a three-day bender, and you have a textbook example of why the adventure-game genre is dying.

GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 is sliced into "time blocks," each representing several hours. Once you've completed the requirements for that block, the game advances. There are some satisfying puzzles, particularly a series of brainteasers solved on a laptop computer. But most of the challenges are obscure and contrived. Steal hemorrhoid cream to loosen a stuck window. Slog through geometry puzzles, anagrams,

and riddles. Charge through the branches of clumsy dialogue trees. Drive a camera around the 3D environment in

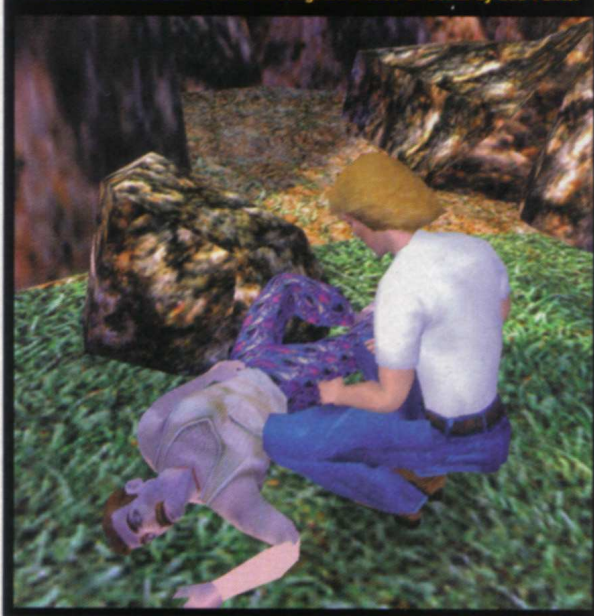
GABRIEL KNIGHT 3: BLOOD OF THE SACRED, BLOOD OF THE DAMNED

reviewed by Tom Chick

search of unspecified clues. There's even a jumping puzzle. The whole thing is governed by the kind of inconsistent internal logic that characterizes any bad adventure game. You'll spend a lot of time fumbling in limbo, wandering aimlessly, desperately trying to trigger whatever unknowable act will end the time block. It's as existential and glum as reading stilted translations of Sartre.

This is one of the reasons for GABRIEL KNIGHT 3's erratic pace, but the structure of the storyline is the main culprit. It's a long time before anything supernatural, much less dramatic, occurs. The first half of the game is excruciatingly slow, with no sense of focus or motivation. After chasing some kidnapers to a small French town, Gabriel leisurely meets a cast of characters on some indeterminate treasure hunt. It's not until the final third of the game that a story starts to gel, tying together a mélange of elements ranging from Freemasons to the Holy Grail to wineries to alchemy to French painters. Although there are some weak links (the vampire angle is forced, and there are a few silly unicorn refer-

FASHION VICTIM Gabriel investigates a case of Death by Bad Pants.



ences), writer Jane Jensen's greatest accomplishment is successfully fitting these pieces into a neat picture by the time it's all said and done.

Sim Lecher

The world of GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 is built with the 3D engine from Sierra's SWAT 3 game. It's used to good effect to create environments in rural France, adorned with Old World detail and rich color. A lot of the rooms are generously decorated with bitmaps of classical artwork. This somewhat eases the burden of all the backtracking and wandering. If you're going to pass through the same hotel lobby 50 times (this is not an exaggeration), waiting for it to load each time, it damn-well better look good. The character models, however, don't fare very well. They are stiffly animated, with brutal seams between their heads and bodies. They have eerie doll faces and vacant zombie stares. And because of clipping problems, when a character goes to run her fingers through her hair, for instance, she ends up jamming her hand into the side of her head like some sort of freaky alien.

The eponymous Mr. Knight has always been a ladies' man. But as he's written by Ms. Jensen in this third installment, he's a lecherous buffoon. He is not clever, he is not likeable, and he is certainly not smooth. He laughs at his own jokes — even when no one else gets them. In lieu of a sense of humor, he oozes sarcasm and flings insults at anyone within earshot. He does everything short of farting in an elevator full of nuns. His conversations with Mosley, the stereotypical pot-bellied Southern-fried cop, are absolutely painful. Mrs. Jensen either has an extremely low opinion of men or an awful sense of how they actually talk. At one point, a French maid in a short skirt offers to fix lunch for Gabriel. "A sandwich just ain't a sandwich without the white stuff," he leers at her as she fidgets nervously.

Tim Curry doesn't help matters much. The breathy "New Ah'lins" drawl he gives Gabriel is a cross between Frank-N-Furter from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and *Forrest Gump*. Many of the other

CGW RATED

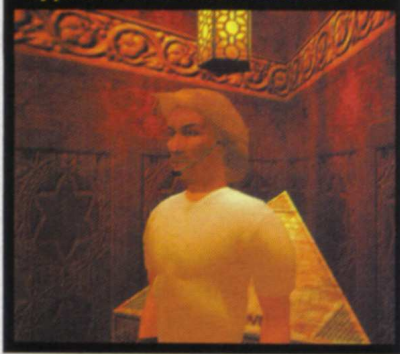
PROS

Jane Jensen weaves a compelling story from several diverse themes...

CONS

...but she takes her sweet time, litters your path with frustrating obstacles, and teams you up with an incredible boor.

I'M POLYGONAL! Gabriel gets ready for his day job as a character in UNREAL TOURNAMENT.



Requirements: Pentium 166 (with 4MB 3D card) or Pentium 233 (without 3D card), 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 266, 2nd-generation 3D card. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Sierra On-Line • **Developer:** Sierra Studios • \$40 • www.sierrastudios.com
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood and gore, mature sexual themes, strong language.

JUST ONE QUESTION... Does my mustache smell like pancakes and cat pee?



MEN BEING MEN TOGETHER What's Gabriel doing behind Mosley? You don't even want to know...



voices in *GABRIEL KNIGHT 3* are just as awful, but there are some impressive exceptions. Corey Burton as Larry Chester, a reclusive author, manages to embellish long passages of exposition with inflections that convey edginess, anger, or caution. The great Simon Templeman, the dark voice of the vampire Kain in *Silicon Knights' LEGACY OF KAIN*, is shamefully underused as Gabriel's employer. Well-known actors Rene Auberjonois and John de Lancie are similarly wasted in small roles.

But the game belongs to Charity James as Grace Nakimura, Gabriel's assistant. James brings Grace alive with a tender, vulnera-

WHAT WILL HER PARENTS SAY? Grace comes out of the closet.



The Knight Falls

GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 is a huge disappointment, especially in light of the impeccable track record of the series. The first game, *GABRIEL KNIGHT: SINS OF THE FATHERS*, was the Adventure Game Of The Year for 1994, with actress Virginia Capers winning the year's female voice-acting award. *GABRIEL KNIGHT 2: THE BEAST WITHIN* topped that, with its 1996 Game Of The Year award. The third game was nominated for the Adventure Game Of The Year for 1999, largely on reputation, since the game arrived so late in the year that we didn't have time to play it through until after our nomination deadline. A mistake, as it turns out.

Who would have guessed that Jane Jensen and crew could so botch the puzzle design? Or how bad a performance Tim Curry would turn in? His New Orleans accent has always been off, and his delivery a little too coy for his character, but he's never been *this* God-awful.

Alas, things broke down. The center could not hold. *GABRIEL KNIGHT* has fallen; let's hope he doesn't take adventure gaming with him. —Ed.

ble voice. After a twist that opens the third act, Grace's role in the game changes and James colors her with a gentle and affecting confusion. Her Grace is every bit as likeable as Gabriel is obnoxious. Partly because of this, Grace's portions of the game are a breath of fresh air. It's clear from the writing that Ms. Jensen is closer to Grace than to any of her other characters. It's probably no coincidence that the character model bears a resemblance to Jane Jensen herself.

Calling Inspector Clouseau

For a story that relies so heavily on characters, there's no substantial character development. Instead, there are abrupt twists in the endgame as hidden identities are revealed. The game's villain is almost completely external to the story, showing up for little more than a cameo appearance. This is a serious tactical error in a parlor drama like *GABRIEL KNIGHT 3*, which is more Agatha Christie than Anne Rice. The point of the hackneyed "the butler did it!" cliché in murder mysteries is the irony of a murderer who was under your nose the entire time. If *GABRIEL KNIGHT 3* were a murder mystery, the killer would be some guy we barely know who lives across town.

Although the game's finale is dopey, the dénouement is surprisingly satisfying. And this isn't just because you won't have to play anymore. Jensen ends the story with a shiny new perspective on Grace and Gabriel. If the market gods are willing and there's a fourth installment, we can only hope that Jensen will ease up on the embolism-inducing puzzles and give us *GRACE NAKIMURA 4: GRACE DITCHES GABRIEL AND GOES SOLO*. **CGW**

GOON SQUAD Hello, we'll be your supporting cast for this game.

