

# Gabriel Knight 3

**CATEGORY:** Adventure **DEVELOPER:** Sierra Studios **PUBLISHER:** Sierra, (800) 757-7707, [www.sierra.com](http://www.sierra.com) **REQUIRED:** Pentium 166 with 3D card (Pentium 233 without), 250MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, 35MB hard-drive space, Windows-compatible sound card **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium 300, 64MB RAM, 4MB 3D accelerator card **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

It's a long, deep adventure in the most classic sense, and that alone is welcome enough to make you overlook the game's flaws.

**G**abriel Knight 3 arrived at the tail end of our annual awards cycle, in which no winner was named in the "Adventure" category because almost no adventures were published. It's tempting to make a Serious Point about the decline of adventure games, but the simple fact is that gamers are choosing other, faster-paced forms of entertainment. The last noteworthy graphical adventure, *Grim Fandango*, died on the shelves despite being an incredibly fun, witty, stylish game. There's no point lamenting the death of the adventure game: you gamers killed it.

Now along comes *Gabriel Knight 3*, a classic-style adventure with 50-plus hours of gameplay, rich locations, a deep story, plenty of objects to pick up and use, and lots of situational and

environmental puzzles. It has everything that we loved in adventure games going all the way back to the text parser, and it's even in 3D. It also requires you to radically re-adjust your gaming expectations to a more leisurely pace. In the 3D action age of drive-by gaming, a title that requires you to find a piece of tape in the back of a closet requires a bit more attention to detail, a sharper mind, and a willingness to take your time and sort things out rationally.

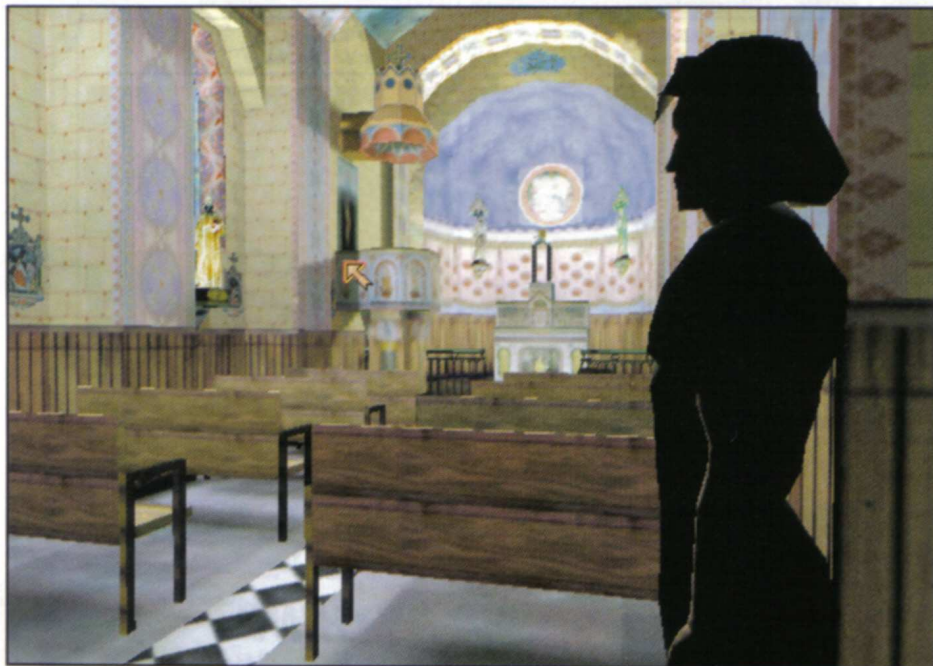
*Gabriel Knight 3*

does all this pretty well while offering a story full of fascinating turns. Gabriel — a Schattenjäger, or monster hunter — is in the French town of Rennes-le-Chateau, a nexus for alternative religious historians. A treasure hunt has drawn various oddballs and misfits to the town, and the kidnapping of a young girl soon makes them all suspects in an even greater mystery involving the Merovingian dynasty (see sidebar), vampires, Templars, Masons, and the rest of the grab bag of Fortean freakishness.



Your conversations with the chateau's various personages will unravel a spectacularly twisted plot that's worthy of any adventure.

The story is told in chapters over three days, with days divided into five, six, and eight time periods. You advance to the next time segment when you've spoken to the right people and solved the right puzzles. In some of these segments, you assume the role of Grace Nakimura, Gabriel's assistant. Interactions are based around an effective pop-up icon bar. Conversations are initiated by clicking on a character, and then on a picture icon keyed to a particular subject; object puzzles use the same interface. Inventory items are easily swapped in and out of Gabriel's active hand and are used to solve these puzzles. As you get further in the game, you'll gain access to other tools, including a fingerprinting kit and SIDNEY, the Schattenjäger Information Database. SIDNEY is a helpful computer that not only lets you look up information, but also enter key data on suspects for analysis. It all combines to create a very fulfilling and challenging puzzle-based adventure that manages to stay fresh and interesting. The only elements that feel out of place are a few time-based



A great deal of effort apparently went into accurately recreating the locations in the book, particularly Rennes le Chateau. There are some truly gorgeous scenes in the game.



Everything seems a bit too bright and happy-looking to sustain any real suspense.

## The Merovingian Dynasty

*Gabriel Knight 3* is based on a cluster of classic Fortean enigmas tied to the Merovingian Dynasty and the small French village of Rennes le Chateau, its church, and its mysterious pastor Father Sauniere. The dominant theory — popularized by alternative historians (or crackpots, depending upon your viewpoint) Baigent and Leigh in *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* — is that Jesus survived the crucifixion, was protected by Joseph of Arimathea, married, and had children. These children became part of the Frankish nobility, and the Templars, Masons, Priory of Zion, and other secret sects have spent 2,000 years protecting the bloodline and the secret. In the process, the Templars deposited the alchemical secret of transmuting base elements into gold in the chapel at Rennes.

While the theory may sound far-fetched, it sprang from indisputable historical fact. The chapel at Rennes did have links to both the Templars and the Masons. The Templars did loot a large amount of treasure from the Holy Land. They also performed secret excavations beneath Jerusalem (among the last to do so in the Temple Mount) and, some believe, found key biblical artifacts. Father Sauniere did indeed excavate in the chapel, and then mysteriously came into a great deal of wealth. (Most likely he came upon a cache of treasure looted from the Holy Land.) Anything beyond this is wild speculation.

Horror novelist Chet Williamson (father of our own *Killing Box* golden boy Colin Williamson) recently published an excellent trilogy of novels on this very subject. Collectively dubbed "The Searchers," the three novels are *City of Iron*, *Empire of Dust*, and *Siege of Stone*.



■ A lot of the game's characters are saddled with disappointingly caricatured voices and accents, the worst offender being Gabriel himself as voiced by Tim Curry.

and jumping puzzles, which mar an otherwise pure adventure experience with inappropriate action sequences.

Though the adventure elements and storyline are entertaining, they are seriously compromised by two critical failures. The most glaring hits you the moment Gabriel opens his mouth, and its name is Tim Curry. Without a doubt this is the single most grating voice performance since the early days of CD-ROM conversions. Curry, an Englishman, has adopted a slow, whiskey-slurred southern patois that demands a slug in the jaw every time he opens his yap. We've cut this guy enough slack since *Rocky Horror* (a crummy movie anyway) and it's time he be condemned to *Home Alone* sequels for the rest of his career. No matter how momentous the event, Gabriel can be counted on to react with world-weary sarcasm. Other characters also adopt ridiculous, high-school-play-quality accents and wind up sounding like Pepe Le Pew, Boss Hog, Fat Bastard or some other broad characterization dependent upon nationality.

The approach to numerous characters throughout the game seems to be straight out of a correspondence course called Character Creation Through Stereotyping. Everyone is a caricature, and though they move the plot along, they never convince as effective characters in a good story should. Making this far worse is Jane Jensen's utter inability to script convincing, clever, or sharp dialogue — it's an abundance of clichés, with a tendency to pass snide cynicism and sarcasm off as actual wit. This is too bad, since the plotting and



■ Get ready to plumb the depths of a religious land mine in the shadows of the chateau.

narrative structure are strong.

*GK3* uses a decent 3D engine for characters and environment. This enables the creation of some good models and attractive locations. The geography and layouts have apparently

been thoroughly researched, and there is indeed a veracity to the look and feel of various places. Characters have decent animations

and pretty good lip-syncing. Rooms are rarely so cluttered you can't zero in on important elements if you have a good eye. The camera can also be moved around the room independent of a character, so you may look around at things and *then* have Gabriel or Grace perform an action.

The problem with the graphical element is not the level of detail, but the overall dull look. After so many games with atmospheric lighting and positional sound, the environments of *GK3* sometimes wind up feeling like sets. Flat, even lighting is the culprit. There

**Characters also adopt ridiculous, high-school-play-quality accents and wind up sounding like Pepe Le Pew, Boss Hog, Fat Bastard, or some other broad characterization dependent upon nationality.**

are few of the evocative shadows that a horror adventure needs to sustain a mood. The result is acceptable, but Sierra would have done better to spend its money licensing *Unreal*.

*Gabriel Knight 3* is a decidedly mixed experience. On the one hand, you have a deep, interesting, and compelling story to ground some very clever and satisfying puzzles. The interface is unobtrusive and the environments interesting. On the other hand, you are forced to spend hours at a time with a lead character of almost unbearable obnoxiousness and possessed of a voice that makes an eloquent elocutor of Roscoe P. Coltrane. But if you're a fan of what many people have written off as the moribund adventure genre, *GK3* will definitely give you a nice fix for your habit.

—T. Liam McDonald

**PC GAMER** FINAL VERDICT

**HIGHS:** Classic-style object puzzles; interesting story; gorgeous scenery.

**80%**

**LOWS:** Awful dialogue scripting and voice acting; stereotyping.

**BOTTOM LINE:** The gameplay is quite excellent, but Tim Curry is so off-putting that it almost makes this one a tough call.