

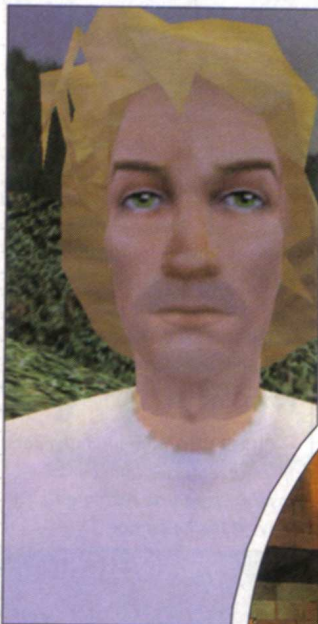
DEVELOPER	→ Sierra Studios
PUBLISHER	→ Sierra
REQUIRED	→ P166, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 250MB HD
IDEAL	→ PII 400, 128MB RAM, 8X CD-ROM, 3D-accelerator card, 3D sound card, 3Deep, girlish tendencies

Gabriel Knight III

Aristocratic French vampires are a royal pain in the neck

ACCELE-RATED

Supports D3D. The software mode looks good if your system is fast. The graphics are 3Deep-optimized, too. Low-end systems may chug, so turn off detail and lower resolution if the game gets too slow.



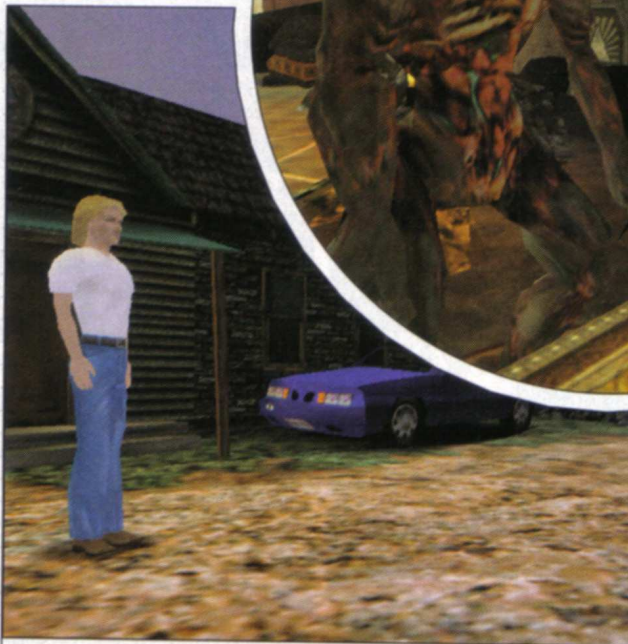
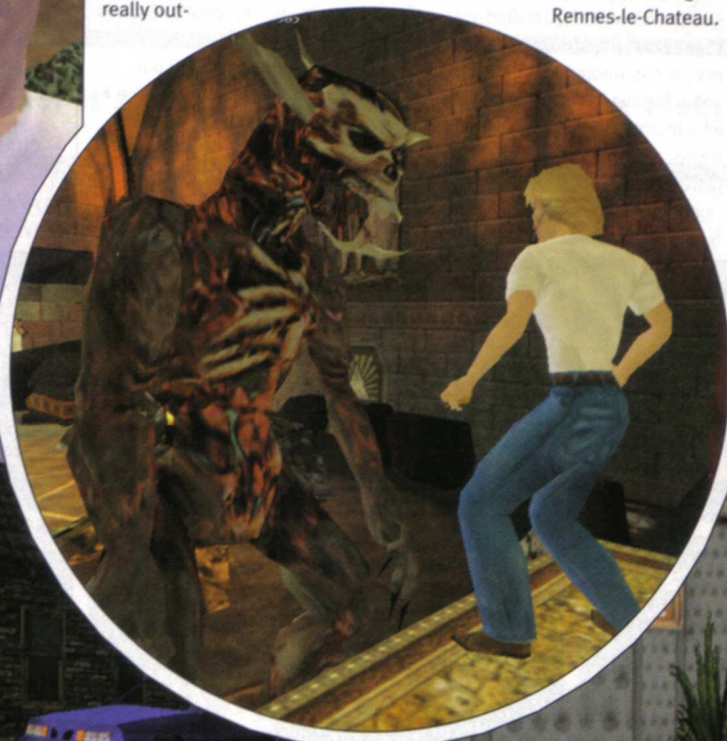
Let's make this clear from the start: Adventure games are not "chick games." All the other PCXL editors razz me because I've been primed to play *Gabriel Knight III* all year long, zoning out while I describe the touching "platonic romance" between Gabriel and Grace in *GKII*. Oh, crap ... maybe it is a chick game after all. Well, regardless of your gender, there's a lot to like about this latest occult mystery starring blond pretty boy (and Mike Salmon look-alike) Gabriel Knight, even if it's not quite the best in the series.

Once again, designer/writer Jane Jensen has really out-

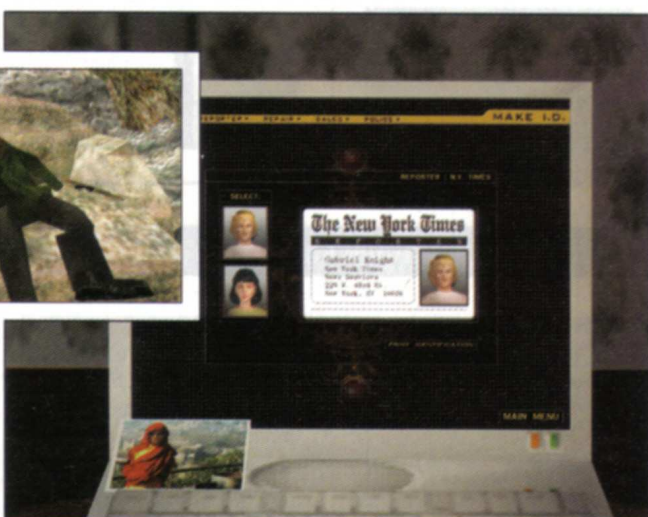
done herself, creating a meticulously researched and well-crafted storyline tying together a child's kidnapping, vampires, the Holy Grail, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and Gabriel's ancestry into one epic plot. This is as close to literature as a PC game (or gamer for that matter) will ever get. *GKIII* begins when Gabriel and longtime assistant Grace are invited to the home of Prince James on what they think is a social visit — only to end up protecting James' infant son from "night visitors." (The prologue appears only in a graphic novel on the CD.) Of course, the kid is snatched, resulting in Gabe tracking the evil kidnapers to the quaint little French village of Rennes-le-Chateau.

Once there, he discovers that a tour group, including his old New Orleans cop buddy Detective Mosely, has arrived to search for a mysterious treasure, which may or may not be the Holy Grail. (Incidentally, both the town and treasure legend are real — Jensen weaves real-world locations, history, and religion into a convoluted, yet plausible, mythological soap opera. This could be the only game you'll ever play that lists sources and recommended reading material in the game manual.) "Last Temptation of Christ" picketers watch out: If the thought of our Savior doing the horizontal mambo and producing offspring offends you, steer clear because Jensen isn't afraid to take thematic gambles.

Graphically, *GKIII* looks completely different from its predecessors, bringing the characters into a rich 3D environment and giving the player a moveable camera. Unfortunately, it's as if the move to 3D was an afterthought — the game design is still very much 2D. There isn't a single puzzle that couldn't have been done using the old 2D engine (in fact, sometimes it helps to think in 2D when solving a few of them). Click and point



Gabriel faces down horned psychos, but we'd rather get a closer look at that rip in Grace's jeans.



Here at PCXL, we've decided that every game should have a French maid. (Center) Hey, looks like OJ's on a vacation!

Get used to this screen. SYDNEY, the Schattenjager database, will help you solve many of the puzzles.

all the way, the multi-icon interface hasn't changed much since *GKII*. Too bad the camera's not mobile enough to let you see up and down instead of choosing a "look" icon to get a better view. Oddly, inventory items don't rotate in 3D like they did in *GKII*. Can someone explain this to me?

The characters are at the same time stiff, yet constantly in motion, like animatronic mannequins mimicking life by perpetually bobbing and weaving, but never fooling you into thinking they're real. For that reason, and because of the decision to use the in-game engine for cut-scenes, *GKIII* just isn't that scary. At one point you discover two dead bodies. The cut-scene begins, ominous music blares as onlookers gasp in terror — you know something ghastly is coming

— but the polygonal corpses instantly remind you that it's all just a game. Cut-scenes in *GKI* and *GKII* were used for dramatic effect, incorporating graphic novel images or on-location FMV to elevate horror and suspense when the 2D engine couldn't sufficiently do the job. Watching the completely unterrifying *GKIII* 3D engine do the same is like watching an all-hand puppet production of *Dracula*.

And speaking of *Dracula*, for a game about the undead, *GKIII* is surprisingly vampire-light. Considering the depth of the story, that's forgivable, but the bad guys don't show up in a major way until the finale, leaving the bulk of the story heavy on conversation and short on action. The game is broken up into time chunks, progressing to the next once certain requirements

are satisfied. Like *GKII*, gameplay is alternated between Gabe and Grace, with Gabe looking for the baby and Grace attempting to solve the Rennes-le-Chateau mystery. As always, interaction between characters is handled via dialogue trees. The format works well, I just wish the pacing were snappier and that the vampires didn't keep to the shadows so much. *GKIII* is a stand-alone game, but *GK* fans will be delighted with references to Gabe's past mysteries and the series' running gag of playing "When The Saints Go Marching In" at the local bar.

Most of the puzzles make sense, though solutions aren't always readily apparent. Luckily, an in-game hint system helps get you through the toughest ones. The voice acting is excellent and

the cast includes "Star Trek" actors Rene Auberjonois and John de Lancie, but, ham-for-ham, they can't match the Shatner-esque extravagance of Tim Curry's encore performance as Gabriel.

So, what about Gabe and Grace's "platonic romance"? I'm sworn to secrecy, but the cliffhanger ending almost guarantees a *GKIV*, which is definitely good news for all us "girl game" lovers.

— **CHUCK OSBORN** *isn't a bloody hint line, so don't don't even think about e-mailing him for help*

KNIGHT OR NOT

Though he won't admit it, PCXL Editor-in-Chief Mike Salmon (with groovy blond highlights) sports an uncanny resemblance to Gabriel Knight. In fact, we wonder if he might be the inspiration. Let's run down the similarities:



- GABRIEL**
- Named after an archangel
 - Has a Schattenjager talisman
 - Treats assistant Grace like mud
 - Writes mystery novels
 - Is a blond
 - Deathly afraid of commitment



- MIKE**
- Eats at "the golden arches"
 - Does too many Jaeger shots
 - Hopes to see Gia wrestle in mud
 - Novel writing style a mystery
 - Acts like a blond
 - Wears a flesh-colored wedding ring



Quit sticking out your chest, geek! Don't you hate tourists?

GRAPHICS

Uniformly good, but it's not exactly *Unreal*, either.

SOUND

A beautiful score compliments superb voice acting ... and Tim Curry's overdone Cajun caricature.

DEPTH

Wow ... it's so ... wow. You'll want to play it again just to see what you missed the first time.

DESIGN

A 2D game in a 3D world, the first half could use some more action.

RATING



+ Pluses

- A brilliant and detailed story
- Fantastic music and sound
- Leaves you wanting more

- Minuses

- Not scary enough
- Vampire-light
- Doesn't fully use 3D environments