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## BOOK REVIEW

*Jane Jensen: Gabriel Knight, adventure games, hidden objects*, Anastasia Salter, 2017, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 200 pp., ISBN 978 1 5013 2745 2, \$ 72 (hardback), ISBN 978 1 5013 2746 9, \$24.95 (paperback)

This volume is the first of the ‘influential video game designers’ series that, following the logic of other authorship studies, aims to understand this sector by focussing on the designers’ biographies. The series follows a similar structure in all its monographs: an introduction to the key topics about the figure to be studied, followed by various chapters analysing these dimensions in depth with a focus on a specific work, period or a methodology aspect related to the creative process. Interviews are also included, some of which, as in this case, were carried out exclusively to be included in the books. The Conclusions chapter redirects the text to the academic realm where the most important theoretical aspects of the historical and cultural reflection are highlighted.

An author linked almost exclusively to narrative video games, Jane Jensen (Palmerton, Pennsylvania, 1963) started working for emblematic titles with Sierra On-Line such as *King’s Quest IV: The Perils of Rosella* (1988), under the supervision of Roberta Williams, *Police Quest III: The Kindred* (1991) and *EcoQuest: The Search of Cetus* (1991). She arguably made her name in the ‘90s by writing and supervising the Gabriel Knight games saga, one of the most popular Adventure Games in history.

The volume devotes an entire chapter to the first three video games of this saga while highlighting two features of Jensen’s working method. Gabriel Knight’s charisma and Jensen’s ability to develop narratives through complex characters are highlighted. Knight has a similar appeal to many other iconic television and film personalities and, like them, is a modern Gothic horror character for teenagers, whereby main characters become simultaneously objects and agents of desire. Clearly, Jensen’s Gabriel Knight is part of a trend that will be followed by *X-Files* (1993-2002) and *Supernatural* (2005).

Anastasia Salter has produced an extensive and well-documented work, although she seems to make the mistake (so common in authorship theorization) of misunderstanding style as uniqueness and originality. Thus, she tends to ignore a whole creative system that surrounded the author: all those other professionals who contributed to and were fed by Jensen’s talent. Hopefully, the series will give us the opportunity to delve into the stories

and learn more about other Sierra contributors such as the ‘three key women’ (p. 3): Gano Haine, Lorelei Shannon and the aforementioned Roberta Williams.

The book also explains the methodology derived from the ‘research driven’ approach (p. 31). Here, the term does not designate a concept taken from marketing or social sciences applied to the figure of the user/reader of Jensen’s fictions but to the meticulous setting of her works and the elaborate process of ‘documentation’ she followed. This approach is similar to that of other successful novelists. Rather than a consequence of Jensen’s unquestionable talent, it is the natural result of the maturity achieved by the video game medium.

*Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers* (1993) and *Gabriel Knight 2: The Beast Within* (1995) were released when the narrative video game was hegemonic. This occurred when the major players of the video game Sierra and Lucas Arts competed in the market with their different approaches to digital storytelling. The use of visual commands, or the remediation of other sequential languages such as comics and movies, are part of the brand image of Sierra On-Line, which Jensen welcomed and contributed to later develop in her own work. The end of the ‘golden age’ of narrative games did not end Jensen’s career but forced the author to evolve and search for a new relationship with audiences, which ultimately made her migrate between genres and even between media. Another chapter of the book is dedicated to the time Jensen spent at Oberon Media, where she applied her storytelling skills to the design of puzzle and hidden object games. From this period, her more celebrated works may be the effective transliterary adaptations of *Women’s Murder Club*, a series of novels by James Patterson.

Finally, the book explores the latest stages (so far) of Jensen’s continuous metamorphosis as a writer of video games and, more recently, as a novelist. As an entrepreneur and manager of successful kick-start initiatives, Jensen has developed as a video game designer, just as narrative games have done. In this sense, this reminds me to the well-known Red Queen Hypothesis (Van Valen, 1973), in which species compete in a changing environment evolving in parallel. The book will be of great interest to those who know the field of narrative video games or, at least, are curious about the differentiation between historical genres such as Adventure Games, Hidden Objects, Interactive Novels, etc. In this sense, the text offers a detailed insight into Jensen’s work and creative processes. The video game environment has been considered ‘an industry without workers’ (Kocurek & DeWinter, 2017: ix). While the claim seems exaggerated, it reveals that style signatures are usually attributed to companies rather than individuals. The author of video games, therefore, is a relatively unknown figure compared to the popularity of authors from other creative industries. In this sense, the series is based on a fascinating concept and is a project which, over time, will be an obligatory reference for Video Games Studies.

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