



# Jane Jensen's Gray Matter

Geek picks the famed game designer's brain

// WORDS: NEILIE JOHNSON

**J**ane Jensen's worn a lot of hats. For PC gamers, she's a respected game designer; for aspiring female game designers, she's a role model and for adventure game fans, she's a gaming icon. Having been mentored by the legendary Roberta Williams and cut her teeth on the venerable *King's Quest* series, Jane is most famous for the *Gabriel Knight* games which include some of the best and most well-loved adventure titles in the history of PC gaming.

After releasing *Gabriel Knight 3: Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned*, Jane took a break from games, penning two critically-acclaimed suspense novels, *Dante's Equation* and *Judgment Day*. Rumor had it the last couple of years, though, that Jane was once again hard at work on a new game; fans were thrilled to have these rumors confirmed by the announcement of her new project, *Gray Matter*, currently in development by French company, Wizarbox. We recently spoke to Jane from her San Diego home and asked her to talk about life as a designer, author and proud parent of a brand new game project.

**"I've always enjoyed weird news, the paranormal, mysticism..."**

## Interview

Jane Jensen



**Geek Monthly: Your education is in Computer Science—how did you start writing?**

I went into computer science out of a desire to earn a decent living but I always wanted to be a writer. I enjoy technology but finding computer games was the best possible fit.

**Is there a difference in the way you approach writing for reading audiences vs writing for gaming audiences?**

Yes, it's very different. In a book you want the narrative to flow seamlessly—and hopefully engagingly, and you have complete control of how it unfolds. In a game the story is more like a screenplay—gotten across in dialogue and visuals, but also the player needs the freedom to move around in the story so you have to allow for different ways the story can unfold.

**How important is it to educate your audiences as well as entertain them? Do you hope your games will inspire people to learn more about say, the Templars, King Ludwig of Bavaria or Kabbalah?**

Entertaining is definitely the priority, but if people are excited about some of the topics

in my stories and do further research that's terrific—that's a sign that I managed to convey my own enthusiasm for the topic. **Your books and your games revolve around mysterious, esoteric themes. Where do you find ideas you can really sink your teeth into?**

I've always enjoyed weird news, the paranormal, mysticism, so I consume a lot on those subjects. When I find something that really strikes a cord, such as the Rennes-le-Chateau mystery, it usually ends up in my own fiction.

**Game development is a collaborative process, while writing is generally done in isolation. Which do you enjoy more?**

By nature, I am more of an isolationist. I prefer to sit in a chair with a laptop and get lost in my own head. So in that sense, writing a novel is ideal. But on the other hand, I enjoy the art, music and other artistic aspects that come in to play in a game—seeing your interior world interpreted into a visual experience. You don't get that with a novel unless you're lucky enough to be made into a film. So in the end there's good and bad about both

mediums. For now, I'm happy making games. So *Gray Matter* tells the story of neurobiologist Dr. David Styles who, since his wife died, has become a recluse, never leaving his English country estate. A young American girl, Samantha Everett becomes his assistant and then all sorts of strange things start happening. For fans of the *Gabriel Knight* series, do Samantha and David have something of a *Grace and Gabe* dynamic?

They are very different characters than Gabriel and Grace so not sure I would say it's the same dynamic. You do play as both characters and they do have a relationship of some type that they will need to work out. But they are much more separated by years and circumstance than Gabriel and Grace were. As for roles, Sam is more of the investigator in this series while David is perhaps more the researcher, but his sections are very different from anything Grace would ever do or that I've ever done before in my games.

***Gray Matter* has changed developers a few times, correct? What are the challenges associated with changing developers mid-project?**

There was one change of developers. It's not ideal because obviously you lose a lot of time. But in the end hopefully it will mean a better game.

**Is *Gray Matter* made in the vein of your past adventure titles? If not, how does it differ?**

It is in that it's a mystery, it's got paranormal aspects and relationship aspects. It's different in that the paranormal is approached much more scientifically and subtly (vs werewolves, etc). And the types of things you do as ego (Sam or David) are often quite different from the kinds of puzzles in GK.

**Will Robert Holmes, your husband and composer for the *Gabriel Knight* games be providing the score for *Gray Matter*?**

That's the plan.

**Years ago when asked about the prospects of adventure games you were pessimistic. With the surging popularity of casual/downloadable games and the gaming audience growing all the time, how do you feel about the adventure genre's prospects today?**

I think they're definitely making a comeback in the casual game space. There are more 'adventure lite' titles everyday. It's the right audience for it.

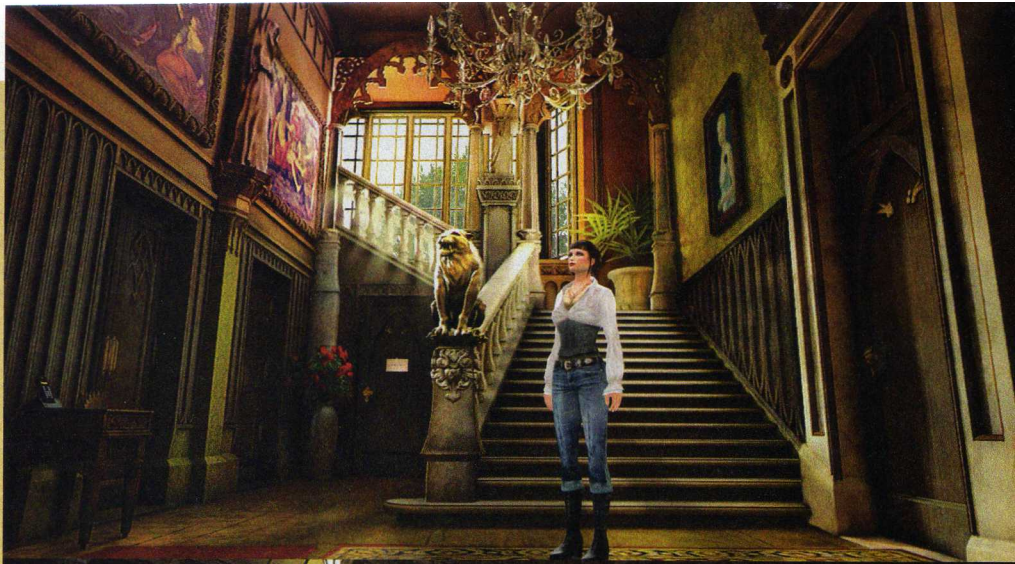
**In a 2007 interview, you mentioned thinking that in the future games will become something like interactive movies. I'm imagining living in David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*. Is that what you have in mind?**

I'm not sure which interview, but 2007 sounds a bit late to be talking about interactive movies! I would say the future of games is more holodeck like—interacting within a world that seems real but is a fictional construction, a virtual reality. That would be very cool.

**Any new novels in the works?**

The gaming stuff has been pretty all-consuming for the past few years. I have several novels on a back burner but not sure when I'll be able to get back to them.

***Gray Matter's* slated for release this year, yes? 2009, yes. Fingers crossed!**



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As the images here suggest, don't enter the world of *Gray Matter* without your puffy shirt.

