y Bill Jahnel

've been reviewing for Inside Mac Games since January of 1994 — and since then I have given the coveted four and a half joysticks only three times previously (twice in 1994). Under a Killing Moon — previewed here in IMG in our January / February 1996 issue, has finally arrived. With a strong storyline, a sardonic wit, well over 20 solid hours of play (my clock, not theirs), and a snappy new variation on a game interface that heralds the future of interactive gaming, I am extremely excited to give Under a Killing Moon my fourth-ever near-perfect score.

CyberGumshoe
Under a Killing Moon is a futuristic cyberthriller where you play a hard-boiled detective, Tex Murphy, trying to make his Sam Spadish way through the nuclear-mutated world of the 21st century. The game is a mixture of wry and juxtaposed characters from hard boiled detective novels and end of the world Armageddon novels. On rare occasions does mixing genres works very well — look at the success of Who Framed Roger Rabbit? Under a Killing Moon similarly gives the player a world in which to travel.

Be seeing you (in 3D), Sweetheart: It is the traveling in this world of Under a Killing Moon that makes the game experience, well, INCREDIBLE. You see scenes in a sort of standard

first-person mode, similar to Sierra-style game interfaces. But hit the spacebar, and you move in 3D space, where objects have height and depth. You can move under and around, and you can search above and below items. Quite simply, the movement in 3D reality and being able to REALLY search for objects in such an environment makes this game spectacular.

While PowerMacs are strongly recommended (especially for the time it takes when you switch from scene to scene) the game was admirably handled on my Quadra 800. The areas are lush and well-rendered and for the most part finding objects and hitting hotspots are pretty well defined. One other very nice feature is that inventory objects are also rendered in 3D for examination and combining two objects into a single useful object is handled gracefully.

## Lifestyles of the famous

One other nice touch to the game is the appearance of a number of relatively famous actors — Brain Keith, Margot Kidder, and best of all, the voice of James Earl Jones as God. The characters you interact with are all interesting and quirky. You interact with characters by being given a few approaches to a conversation. Once you have figured out how to get them to talk, you are given a list of keywords that you have picked up — people, places, objects, events — and you simply click on the keyword to ask the character about that thing.

ntriguing Puzzles, Delightful Flourishes: There are a lot of small but extremely well done things in Under a Killing Moon. My favorites include some torn-up or shredded notes that you reassemble in order to find another clue, some gaming in-jokes and occasional perverse humor. Among the best moments: an Alien-like monster called a Geiger (after the famous

flesh-bending artist and designer of the alien in the Alien series), a moment at the piano where the title character notes it is a brand even better than a STAUFWAY (a reference to the Steinway-parodied piano in 7th Guest, after the villain in that game, Stauf), and listening to the detectives' comments on every painting in sight. He leaves no great work of art unscathed from his alternative titles (such as, "Oh, Renaissance couple returning library book!" or "poor guy — his leaf isn't very big!" in reference to a painting of Adam with a strategically-placed fig leaf.)

Saving the game is easy and can be done almost anywhere. Movement between scenes can be done through a travel map to places you've already visited, and you can cut a video you've seen with the click of a button. There is a good variety of background music during the action, a remarkable achievement with the 3D environments on only 4 CD-ROM's.

Another fine addition to this game is that as you play, you gain points — and if you are stuck, you can spend points on hints in a very well-designed, step-by-step hint interface. The hints only become a problem when you know what you are looking for but can't find it — the hints don't always tell you WHERE to find something, which is sometimes the real stumbling block. (I have included a few hints in the hint section for some of the hardest to find objects in the game)

## Gets on your case

In fact, there were only a few things that caused Under a Killing Moon to loose a the final half a joystick. One problem is that it managed to pack a LOT of gameplay in 4 CD ROMs — much more, I would note, than even in the 7-CD ROM Phantasmagoria. However, the tight use of space also causes you to have to do some rather heavy disk-swapping after the first chapter — not all the time, but occasionally. While they might have tailed it so that duplicate information was on a number of disks and expanded out the disks (reducing swapping), it is still hard to fault the game too much for the large amount of information that was probably required in order to pack all of a chapter onto one CD per chapter.

ne thing that frustrated me with the interface was in the interaction of an object you had in your inventory . When you pick up the item to use, there is a crosshair to the upper left of most objects — but lining up the crosshair with where you wanted to use the object often didn't trigger it. You had to place the picture generally on something, and hoped it worked. Sometimes you'd have to try 2 or 3 times just to make sure something really didn't interact on an object.

Another annoyance was that a large part of one chapter involved being chased around by a security robot and having to search multiple offices while avoiding the security drone. Unfortunately there is no way to turn the darn thing off, and while you sometimes can hide from it, the amount of things you have to do in this guarded area made dying a repetitive and annoying feature — a puzzle to knock out the security droid would have been welcomed.

### In Summary
What more can I say? If you like puzzle / adventure games, particularly if you enjoy detective genres, Under a Killing Moon is without doubt a must-have title. I played it for well over 20 game hours and very little of that was consumed in some of the delaying tactics that some games have that add time but little gaming experience (like mazes). Grab this one today, yesterday, or buy it for someone you love (and whom you can borrow it from) for Christmas. Or be more honest and put a copy for yourself in your stocking. . . and make sure to add Access software to your Christmas Card list for sending this title to the Macintosh.

### Pros
• AMAZING 3D interface
• Sarcastic and wonderful humor
• Good storyline and overall playability
• A LOT of playtime packed in 4 CD ROMs
• Elegant Hint interface
• James Earl Jones as the voice of God
• Just go out an buy it already. :)

### Cons
• Disk-swapping got annoying after the first chapter
• Using objects sometimes must be tried 2-3 times to hit hotspots properly
• Finding some objects can be tricky

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