

y Glenn Goldberg

<Ring>>

I blearily eyed the alarm clock. Jeez! It was 6:00 am. I thought I set the damn thing for 7:15.

<<Ring>>

I slammed my hand down on the snooze bar. Now to get back to...

<<Ring>>

That wasn't the alarm clock.

"Hello?" I said picking up the receiver.

"Rookie, this is Chief Weber. Hustle yourself down to the station. There's been a 187. Anna Elk Moon's been murdered. It's already all over the news."

I hung up the phone and switched on the TV. Teresa Chavez, reporter for KITT—TV was standing in front of an adobe house talking about one of Santa Fe's most famous Native

American artists, Anna Elk Moon. She had been found shot to death in her studio. Anna's husband was the person who had discovered the body and called the police.

I switched off the TV and pulled on my jeans. Looks like this is gonna be a busy day.

Boy, was I wrong.

Welcome to the Santa Fe police department. In Activision's newest game *The Elk Moon Murder*, you take on the role of Santa Fe's newest detective. This full motion video (FMV) thriller follows on the footsteps of Activision's highly acclaimed *Spycraft: The Great Game*.

The plot of *The Elk Moon Murder* is actually quite simple. Anna Elk Moon was found dead in her studio, with a bullet hole in her head. You have been called in and, along with your partner John Night-Sky, have five days to solve the case. After that time, the case will be turned over to the FBI (It seems that Anna had a lot of friends in very high places and they want the crime solved ASAP). As you dig into the case and Anna's past, the plot quickly becomes tangled as everyone in Santa Fe seems to have a reason to want Anna dead. Greed, jealousy, and revenge all become motives as you race to untangle the web and figure out who done it?

Installation

As with most FMV games, the more you install on your hard drive, the faster the game will run. *Elk Moon* is no different. The disk comes with an installation program that gives the user three options; small (15 MB), medium (40 MB), and, "It needs how much room?" (60 MB).

Game Play

Elk Moon follows in the tradition of other FMV mysteries like CMC's *Virtual Murder* series and Broderbund's *In the 1st Degree*. Your first job is to scope out the crime scene and try to find clues. Look very carefully because anything may be a clue. Be careful! Every crime lab test you order takes time, and time is a commodity you do not have. After you have checked out the crime scene, taken pictures and ordered the forensics tests, it is time to start questioning the suspects. This is another place you must be careful. Every question you ask costs you 15 minutes. Again, your time MUST be spent wisely. Your line of questioning will have consequences on the future (leading to other suspects or other clues) so you must balance your need for evidence with your need for time.

When you arrive at a location that contains a suspect, you are presented with an introductory movie and the suspect's name. After the small talk, the questioning begins. When you question a suspect (actually it's Night-Sky who does all the talking), you are given two questions you may ask. You choose by clicking on the mouse and the program shows you a movie of the suspect's response. After you feel you have gotten enough information, you may end the interview. After you finish the interview, you may ask Detective Night-Sky about his feelings about the subject. The last part of the interview process is to "fill out" a suspect report on your PDA (more on the PDA in a moment). This report allows you to classify your suspect, enter his relation to the victim, and guess their motive for the crime. This suspect report also allows you to order an investigation of their alibi for the night in question.

ou navigate through the city of Santa Fe by using a beautifully rendered map of the area. The map includes all buildings that you may need to visit: the Police H.Q. (evidence and interrogation rooms), the Library (the local paper is a very good source of info), and the Mongoose Tavern (where the local “gumshoes” hang out). Of course, any suspects you can visit also can be found on the map. Locations you can travel to blink and glow, and when you move your mouse over the location, the name of the person that resides there is shown on the screen. You go to the location by clicking on it.

Your main connection to the police department is through the use of the Personal Digital Assistant (PDA). This handy little gadget allows you to access your E-mail, list the suspects, access any evidence cataloged, and allow the Chief to talk to you “face-to-face”. If you have played Spycraft, you are already familiar with the workings of the PDA.

You have eight hours a day for five days, so you must work quickly. On the third day there is

a breakthrough in the case that allows you to go back and re-question your suspects. Use this time wisely and be careful, because they are not very willing to talk to you a second time. On the fifth day, Chief Weber lets you know that time is getting tight and it's time to make a move. At this point you can go back to H.Q. and use your desk computer to fill out a warrant application. You just click on the suspect's name and click on the "Apply for warrant" button. If your information is correct, the warrant will be issued. If any of the information you entered into your PDA is incorrect, the computer will inform you of the problem and you must adjust your data. If you try to arrest the wrong person things can get embarrassing ("He was at an adult establishment at the time") or painful (It hurts when a suspect staves in your skull with a shovel). If you are correct, you will not know immediately because there are some other details to uncover but fear not, the end is quite a ride.

Technical Considerations

FMV games rely on three major components to be entertaining: graphics, sound, and of course, acting.

The graphics in the game are sharp and clear. The program automatically sets your monitor to thousands of colors so all the rendered graphics are photo-realistic. The movies are, again, like the movies in Spycraft. They are all quarter screen and obviously filmed in a real location. Unfortunately this does have its drawbacks. Although the movie is virtually skipless (I didn't notice any appreciable frame drop on my 7100), the fact that it was filmed on location gives the movies a slightly unpleasant graininess. Also, to make the image smooth, Activision again resorted to line skipping to keep the picture large enough to see. This is also a minor annoyance.

The sounds are beautiful. The voices are clear and the sound effects are crisp and clean.

he acting, unfortunately is the downfall of this program. It is, at best, B-movie material and even the big name, Amanada Donohoe (from L.A. Law), leaves something to be desired. There are a few actors who do a very good job, most notably the two who play Chief Weber and Det. Night-Sky. However, overall there are no Oscar level performances.

There are also some editing problems during the movies and transitions between questions. The most notable was the following: while questioning Karen Gordon (ex-wife of Anna's husband, Jack) she sits and talks, asks a question and she sits and smokes a cigarette. Ask the next question and she reaches over, picks up a cigarette, and lights it. This was not the only problem. Characters suddenly switch positions and eat food they prepare during the next question. All of these editing errors make playing the game a bit disconcerting. I understand that this is a danger inherent in the game genre, but there could have been ways around it.

Summary

Although the game tries, it does not live up to its predecessor. The load times are extremely long, the acting is not up to par, and the clues are too vague at times. There was also a problem with the second CD. If you have CD-ROM Toolkit and AOL Scheduler loaded together, the computer will not be able to read the second CD, and will instead tell the user that, "This is not a Macintosh Disk. Do you wish to initialize?" A strange error indeed. As much as I tried to like The Elk Moon Murder, it just doesn't cut it as a great mystery game.

Pros

- Beautifully rendered map of Santa Fe
- Movies are virtually skip free on a PPC 7100

Cons

- B-grade acting
- Movies are a bit grainy
- Strange error with some inits
- Some extremely long load times

Publisher Info

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