



Left, an eerie scene in the office of the man who hires you to find his daughter in Access' *Martian Memorandum*.



Right, your first glimpse of Mars is a pretty seedy one.

rooms for hidden objects, or figure out appropriate uses for visible ones, such as that tripod by your office window. One person leads to another — if you're clever enough in your questioning — and sometimes you'll need to backtrack as new names come up. You've got to be tricky and persistent, sometimes even threatening. It's a dirty job, but somebody has to do it.

The flight-simulator segments of *Mean Streets* gave it a certain snap beyond the technical thrills of VGA (it was one of the early VGA games) and Access' impressive RealSound technology. But *Martian Memorandum* has a distinct feel of its own. There's a whole cast of characters, all appearing in digitized insets, most of them quirky-looking and animated, and many squeaking out their lines through the PC's speaker via the good graces of RealSound. Music through an AdLib board is spare and somber. There are lots of drum tattoos, which is perfect for a detective yarn.

*Martian Memorandum*, a ten-disk game, gives us a glimpse of CD-ROM's possibilities. It's both wild and wonderful to see a hard-boiled police detective turn his head toward the screen, then hear him snarl from the PC's speaker, "Waddaya want, Murphy?" Such cinematic techniques and PC tricks are used far more extensively than in *Mean Streets*, and

make *Martian Memorandum* fun to play whether you're making progress or you're just stuck.

The only detraction is the game's help menu. Although it doesn't help you solve the most elaborate puzzles, it does give you information on virtually every object — visible and invisible — in the room. It's like giving away the store. Half the fun of an adventure game is uncovering and discovering these things for yourself.

But *Martian Memorandum* is a terrific time, because of both its tech-

nical expertise and its clever and complex story.

### Go Graphics

Digitized graphics images are all the rage these days. They're also used prominently for cut-scenes and close-ups in Sierra's **Police Quest III: The Kindred**. This game continues the tough-minded realism of its two predecessors while adopting VGA graphics images and Sierra's icon-based control system.

The *Police Quest* series has always



In this closeup from SSI's *Shadow Sorcerer*, your party is about to face off against a pack of skeletons.

## ROLES ON REQUEST

had a pleasant dynamism — a combination of gritty real-life subject matter and adherence to police procedure — that survives splendidly in the new episode. Your nemesis from Police Quests I and II is gone (you killed him off in II), but there's a new series of murders to solve. (You don't know about that at first, of course.)

You control Sonny Bonds as he fills in as sergeant, handles the afternoon briefing, straightens out an abrasive police officer, subdues a disturbed man in a city park, gets a computer-access card, and drives — once you figure out how to control the vehicle with the mouse.

Then his wife is attacked, and the evidence at the scene ties her case to what seems to be a series of murders. As long as you make the best of your office computer — it's an essential tool once the story's set in motion — you'll work through the details.

VGA is an especially good choice for Police Quest III, because it makes an already-realistic game even more thrilling and, in spots, even more emotional. Police Quest III should stay with you for a while.

Strategic Simulations has been busy, too, with **Shadow Sorcerer**, a new isometric adventuring system set in the Dragonlance world.

Shadow Sorcerer is a lot of fun, on several counts. You're not only stomping another world-beating bad guy, but also leading a party of refugees to

safety. You can't think about just your party's hit points; you've got to think about the greater good of the group. And they're not following you blindly, either. When you direct the group to a particular spot, for instance, the refugees' governing council takes a vote. You have to decide how to persuade them — shades of group dynamics.

All this takes place on two types of screens: A hex-based overhead map of movement shows your party, the refugees, and your enemies (but only portions of the map you've already visited); a zoomed-in, angled-down perspective displays encounters and combat.

That's where the fun begins. There are all kinds of side trips into buildings and caves — the party of four stays in close-up mode during them all. Seen from a Populous-like perspective, these scenes are beautiful in VGA, with all sorts of nice details, objects to discover, and chummy enemies to cut down.

Command and control are fairly simple. You can make objects pop up in a small window when you click on them, you can set default actions for characters in combat, and you can summon a box of icons by clicking, so that you can direct the characters individually or *en masse*.

Shadow Sorcerer isn't a big game, not by today's role-playing standards, but it will keep you — and especially

the younger adventurers among you — occupied for a good long while.

### Monsters and Maladonna

A prerelease version of **Elvira II: The Jaws of Cerberus** made it to my desktop in time to convince me that this fantasy-horror role-playing game is a monster in more ways than one.

For one thing, Accolade claims that the final Elvira will feature 4000 locations, five times as many as the original. Three back lots — a haunted house, a cemetery, and a maze — are open for exploration as you look for the famous mistress of horror. She's presumably held in the depths of her giant movie studio by an unspeakable creature, he of the title. Monsters of all kinds are underfoot. You've got to hack and puzzle your way through the whole mess.

The original Elvira broke some new ground in role-playing games with its authentically scary and occasionally disgusting action. Elvira II keeps the tradition alive. You start outside Elvira's movie studio, ready to pay a visit to the guardhouse. It looks a little dicey in there, with signs of a struggle everywhere. Maybe you should try the closet — yikes! And inside a haunted house, I uncovered a dish only to find a head — which then *smiled* at me, and then . . . well, I won't say, you may be eating.

Everything wasn't in place yet, but



Left, this skeletal warrior — blocking your path in Accolade's *Elvira II: The Jaws of Cerberus* — looks as though he means business.



Right, Accolade's *Lost in L.A.*: Fresh from his search for *The King*, Les Manley takes to the road in his search for kidnapped movie stars.