


POLICE QUEST 4: OPEN SEASON

Category: Graphic Adventure
 Developer: Sierra On-Line
 Publisher: Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485,
 Coursegold, CA 93614
 Rating: 

REQUIRED
 386DX/25
 4MB RAM
 22MB hard-drive space
 MS-DOS 5.0 or higher
 VGA
 Mouse

WE RECOMMEND
 486SX/25 or faster
 Sound Blaster or
 compatible sound card

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n the box for *Police Quest 4: Open Season*, in big, block letters above the title, is the name Daryl F. Gates. Yes, the Daryl Gates, the former Los Angeles Chief of Police whose last years on the job were marked by such controversy. When Jim Walls (the ex-cop behind the first three *Police Quest* games) left to work for Tsunami, Sierra had to find a high-profile law-enforcement type to help sell the new *Police Quest*. And they've certainly succeeded.

Gates is credited as the author of *Open Season*, and Sierra's box copy would seem to indicate that his most important contributions to the project were realism and attention to police procedure. Sounds interesting, until you open the box and see the abridged LAPD manual that ships with the game. Just browsing through the many regulations might be enough to scare some players off. But fortunately, almost none of the stuff in the LAPD manual comes into direct play during the game. And while there are plenty of procedural details in *Open Season*, most are pretty straightforward. If you've played any of the previous *PQ* games, you won't have much trouble.

Another selling point, much-touted on the *PQ4* box, is the game's gritty, realistic look. Adding to that look are the use of digitized scenes shot on the streets of Los Angeles, and the contribution of "America's Most Wanted" producer Tammy Dargan as producer and director for *Open Season*. The result is very believable, with some quite memorable scenes. One very weird thing, though: while the game supports both VGA and SVGA, there's practi-

cally no difference between the two. In VGA, your icon is bigger and chunkier than in SVGA. But the game graphics seemed identical.



Unfortunately, that sought-after realism never creeps into the game's storyline. The game opens on an East L.A. back-alley, where your ex-partner has been found murdered. There are two Black witnesses standing there, and five upright law-enforcement types (one of whom, a patrolman, is Black — the only Black police officer in the game). The cops all deliver their lines in melodramatic, grammatically correct "Dragnet" speak, while the Black witnesses are incapable of anything but jive.

Perhaps the game's most fatal flaw, though, is the nonsensical serial-killer plot itself. The first two murder victims are cops — not the usual prey of serial killers. By the end of the game, as you close in on the killer, the author stoops to a series of unbelievable contrivances to force a final confrontation. But the final bit of absurdity, in which you have to lasso a stray dog



who then drags you all over town and finally into the killer's basement, is such a cheap plot device that it absolutely destroys the game's lofty intentions. I'd already figured out who the killer was. I knew where he lived. Why couldn't I simply present the evidence to a judge and get a legal search warrant?

Open Season does have a few good action sequences, and some moments of real tension. But these are isolated by long stretches with absolutely no dramatic pacing or action. In fact, you may find yourself wishing there was more of that promised police detail, just so you'd have more to do.

If Gates did indeed write the story for *Open Season*, I'd have to say he should find something else to do with his spare time. I enjoyed the first three *Police Quest* games, but found this one to be a real disappointment. I hope Sierra will cut its losses, and find a new author for the next game. Let Gates endorse it, but please don't let him write it!

