

Police Quest: Open Season

By George Fontaine

PC games can't yet convey the smell of half-dried blood on asphalt or the cold damp of a morgue. But Sierra captures the intensity of a murder investigation in *Police Quest: Open Season*.

Sierra enlisted former Los Angeles police chief Daryl Gates as a technical advisor. But you're on your own as Detective John Carey of the LAPD, Major Crimes Division. Your assignment is a series of murders in

then click on the person or object you want to act upon. If you've used a paint program, you'll have no trouble interacting with this game.

The background scenes are digital photographs of LA locations, including



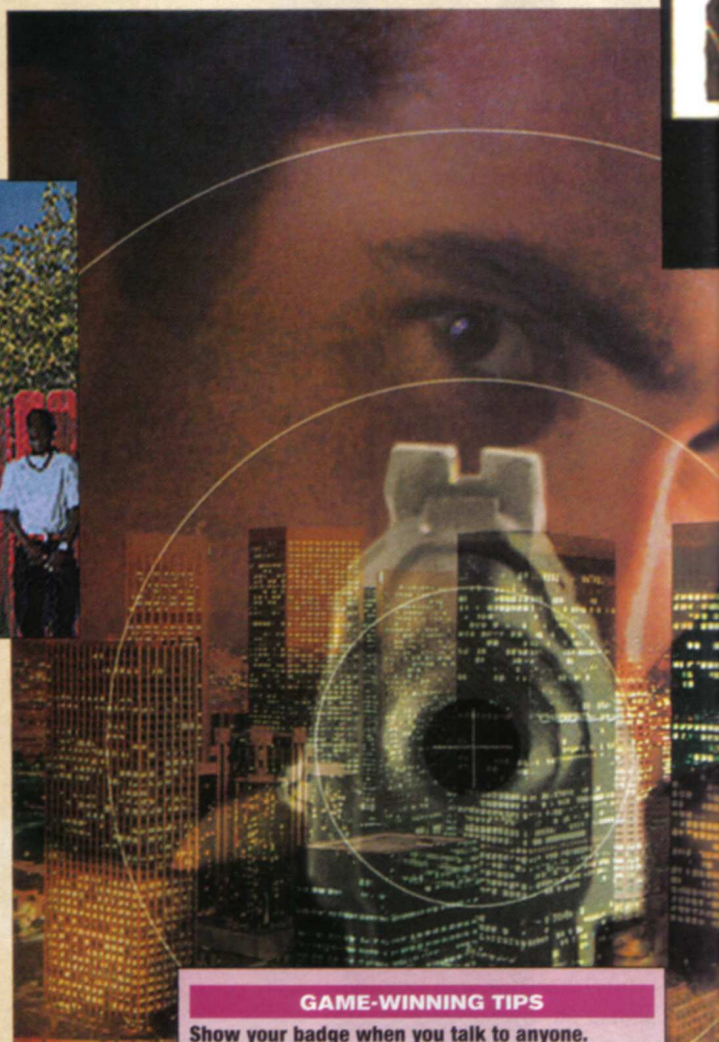
Somebody's been bumped off and dumped in an alley. You itch to hunt down the killer.

South Central LA. The first victim is a police officer who just happens to have been your friend and ex-partner. The second victim is a young boy whose body is found near your buddy.

The plot twists and turns over the next several days as you discover links between the two deaths. You're responsible for gathering evidence, interviewing witnesses, following leads, and even smoothing out media relations. If you follow LAPD procedure and make the right decisions, you catch the culprit. But make one mistake, and it's curtains.

A word of caution to those with young children: Some pictures are gruesomely detailed. This story is aimed at a mature audience.

The point-and-click interface is superb. You choose an icon from the bottom of the screen,



GAME-WINNING TIPS

Show your badge when you talk to anyone.

Record everything in your notebook.

Follow departmental procedures to the letter.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Though Sierra's graphics and interface are predictably excellent, the procedural requirements of the game bog down play.

It's No Game At a Real Crime Scene

In *Police Quest: Open Season*, your first task is to process the scene where your slain ex-partner and an unidentified dead child are found. The simulation requires that you follow dozens of police procedures, but you still don't approach the scene the way real cops do. Here's how most police departments would process the crime scene that opens *Police Quest*.

Normally, the first patrol officer on the scene makes a preliminary determination of the type of crime, notifies dispatch, and blocks off the scene. In the opening scene of *PQ*, this has already been done for you.

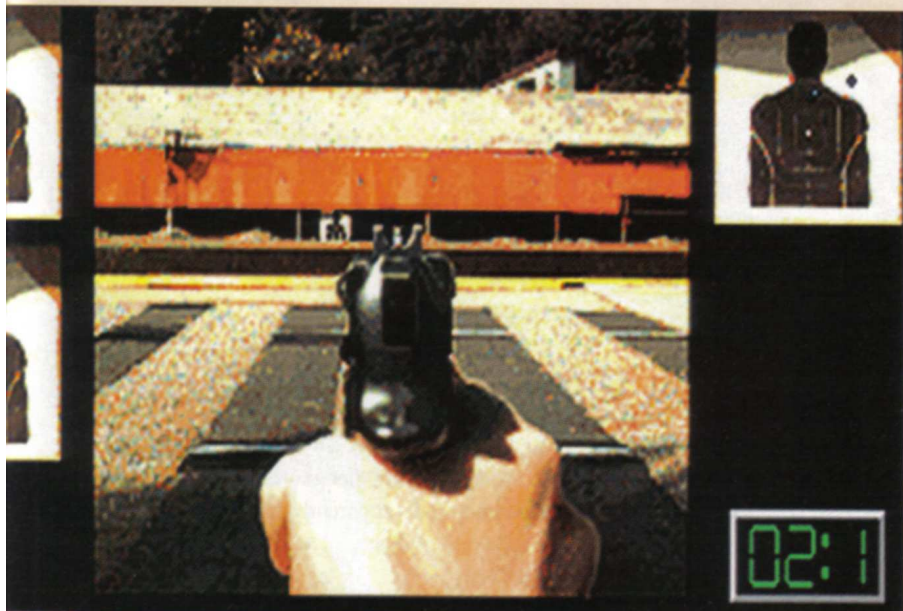
The patrol officer then identifies witnesses and bystanders, taking preliminary statements as needed. In *PQ*, the officers stand around doing nothing, requiring you to interview the bystanders.

Once the primary investigator arrives, the patrol officer goes over preliminary findings. *PQ* approximates this step by having you talk to the officers at the scene. They give you a fairly general report of what has happened when you announce that you're taking over the investigation.

Large departments usually have evidence technicians who also respond to the crime scene. Their job is to process the crime scene—photograph and recover evidence, complete a crime scene sketch, and photograph the entire scene. They relay any immediate findings to the primary investigator at the scene. The technicians report subsequent findings in a written report.

Normally the technician processes a scene without much direction from the primary investigator—an evidence technician has had more training in discovering and recovering evidence than a police detective. This is especially true when a technician uses high-tech equipment or chemicals. The detective of a large department concentrates on interviewing witnesses or victims.

PQ, on the other hand requires that you chalk and note evidence, and make a close examination of the scene by disturbing it before the evidence technician begins photographing and recovering the evidence. Normally the technician finishes photographing a crime scene before anything is disturbed or marked.

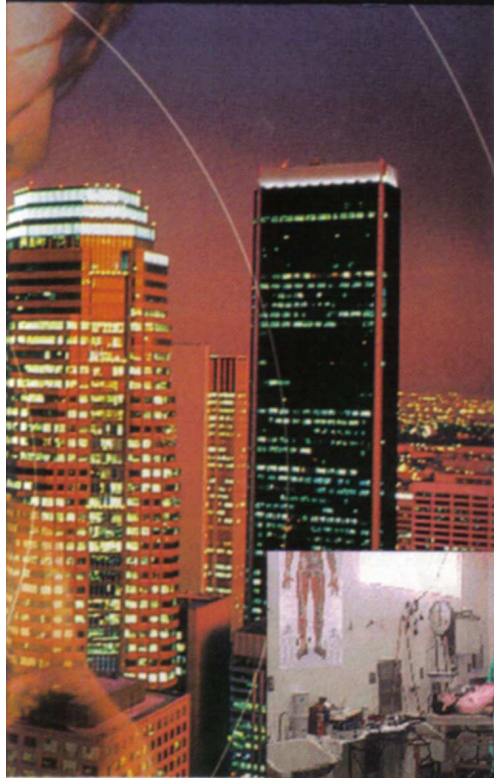


Police work is more dangerous than ever with all those guns on the street. Practice your marksmanship—it could save your life.

police work figures significantly in this simulation. One clerical error can bring the story to an abrupt halt. And some of the attempts at humor are lame, if realistic. Players who want to experience the paperwork and chitchat that real police officers contend with will certainly get their fill.

But overall, *PQ* is entertaining and challenging. If you've enjoyed other Sierra adventures, you won't be disappointed in this release. Though it's the most realistic police

simulation yet, it still falls short of what true police work is really like. I would know. I'm a Lieutenant with the Maui, Hawaii police force. (Sierra Online; 800-757-7707; CD for DOS/Windows, \$69.95)



inside and outside views of Parker Center

(police headquarters), City Hall, the morgue, the police academy, and South Central LA. (The actors, however, saw only Sierra's Oakhurst studio.) The South Central backdrop is especially evocative, as are the expressions and movements of the characters you meet there.

Unfortunately, the procedural aspect of



It's a bloody job, but somebody's got to do it.