

Police Quest 4: Open Season

REVIEW

by Andy Backer

Sierra claims Open Season to be their "first reality-based role-playing game, incorporating digitized photography for background art and video-captured actors for ultra-realistic game play."

Realism.

"We've accomplished what we set out to do, that is to put public citizens in the shoes of a homicide detective in the Los Angeles Police Department," says Daryl Gates. "If they wanted to get any closer to the scene of an actual crime, they would have to wear an LAPD badge." Realism.

Get the idea?

According to *Sierra*, 86% of you *Police Quest 3* owners say they intend to buy *Open Season (Police Quest 4)*. Since *Police Quest 3* was the fourth best-selling adventure/role-playing game for 1992, that's close to at least 200,000 sales they're anticipating. So, what are you all getting for your money? Realism. Lots and lots of realism.

There is a warning label on the box that states that the game contains adult subject matter. It does. One of the settings is a stripper bar where a dancer is topless, and the game uses some adult language.

The hero is a hard-working detective with a Clint Eastwood gait who must investigate a series of murders, some of which tie together. Solving the game takes a knowledge of police procedures, deductive reasoning and hours of repetitive movement. You interview the same people and cover the same ground again, and again, looking for clues. There is more than a tinge of bureaucracy involved. You have to do everything realistically, and that means you do it by the book (an Abridged Manual of the Los Angeles Police Department is your



only game-specific documentation).

There is even one puzzle in the game that requires you to show your badge and identify yourself to a five-year-old child!

Going by the book means that you learn everything you didn't want to know about writing reports in your notebook and transferring them to the correct "murder book" forms periodically. You must know how to find and mark evidence properly and book it. There is an exact procedure to follow when subduing and arresting a suspect (if you do not have quick reflexes, turn the game speed down to accomplish this arcade-type task).

Gates also wants the public to know that police have to put up with rude reporters, antagonistic citizens, and long, boring hours!

Yup, all for the sake of realism.

There is much about the game that I like.

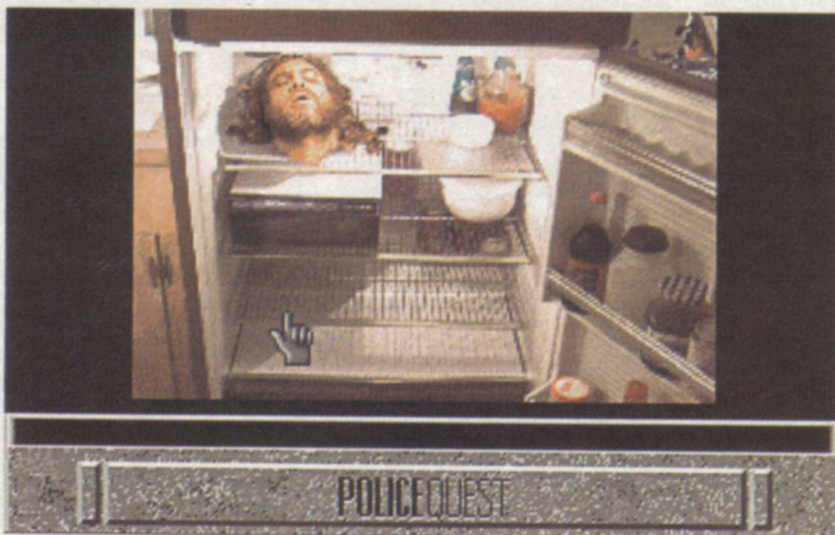
I particularly like *Sierra's* new graphic approach which uses new video capture techniques and a new *Kodak* digital camera for background shots (the camera doesn't use film, but has a computer chip and enough RAM to store 50 shots). The sound effects and music are also of the highest quality. I also like the character and relationship development throughout the game. The game presents its various police officers, detectives, suspects, witnesses and bystanders as likable, individual human beings.

There is humor, pathos and even a touch of romance in the story-line. Gates succeeds charmingly in "putting me in the shoes of a LAPD police detective."

Unfortunately, the game suffers from inconsistency, and although everything starts out realistically enough, unrealistic events keep popping up. The end of the game is a complete violation of good police procedure and even common sense, although it certainly is spectacular. It includes swapping possible evidence for something seemingly frivolous, illegally breaking and entering, and after finding convicting evidence not being allowed to leave the scene to call for help in subduing an obviously dangerous suspect.

The quality of the game and puzzles changes abruptly at the end, as if someone besides Gates had stepped in to jazz up this realistic (to the point of being a little boring) story with a few exciting (but illogical and irrelevant) *Sierra* fantasy-type puzzles. The ending is a farce, disappointingly obscure and completely unbelievable. Too bad.

I want to recommend this game wholeheartedly instead of only recommending it with qualifications, but can't. It is just too unrealistic, at least at the end. □



Author

Daryl Gates

Produced by

Tammy Dargan
(America's Most
Wanted producer)

Published by

Sierra On-Line, Inc.

Systems

IBM PC and
compatibles

Requirements

386/25 Mhz proces-
sor, A hard drive with
20 MB free, 4 MB
RAM, MS-DOS 5.0 or
6.0, VGA graphics (or
SVGA display when
running in Windows
3.1), a 100%
Microsoft Compatible
Mouse

Supports

Soundblaster, Adlib,
Pro Audio Spectrum
Plus or 16,
Thunderboard,
Roland MT-32 MS
Snd Sys, Gen Midi