

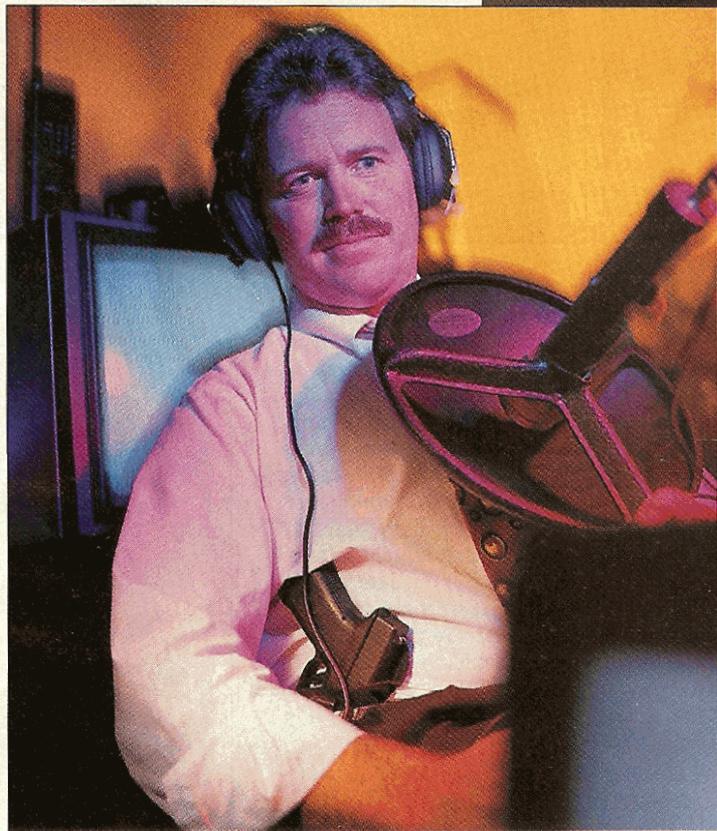
# The Prying Game Under New Rules

**Trends:** As police get swamped, more crime victims and their families are turning to private investigators for fee-for-service justice

**T**HE CASE BEGAN LIKE MANY OF them. A phone call. From a distressed millionaire woman, in Paris. "I want to know who killed my niece and I want to know it before I get back to the United States," the woman told Los Angeles private eye Logan Clarke. The woman's 9-year-old niece had been stabbed more than 50 times in her house in Orange County. The police were on the case but Clarke was dismissive. "They had the same intensity that I have when I go to the pool," he sniffed. (A sheriff's department spokesman said the case was given "priority one" treatment.) Clarke assigned no fewer than 12 of his investigators to the case. In three days, he later bragged, "we told the police who did it, why it was done." Indeed, on Clarke's evidence, the family says, an 18-year-old pregnant girl was found guilty of killing the niece in what was described as a drug deal gone wrong. The perp sits on California's death row.

Sam Spade and Logan Clarke aside, most private investigators really don't spend their days solving high-profile murders. They are glad to earn a few bucks spying on cheating spouses, checking on phony insurance claims or—for the lucky ones—doing lucrative corporate or defense work; look at the dozen gunshoes working the O. J. Simpson case. But more crime victims, particularly in private-eye-rich California, are turning to private investigators to help solve cases that normally would be handled by police departments. Many are frustrated that police, swamped with too much crime and too few cops, are neglecting their cases, especially "low priority" offenses like burglaries, fraud and missing persons. Critics worry about a two-tiered rent-a-cop system dividing the poor and the rich: most PI's charge about \$65 an hour and some as much as \$175. But even the police are reluctantly conceding the obvious. "The victims want to get something done and the police just don't have the time and the resources," says Sgt. Bob Bell of the Long Beach, Calif., Police Department.

Often, investigators say, their clients are well-heeled people who aren't convinced the police have the right man—or want to make sure they do. Wealthy friends of Nicole Simpson, for instance, have hired a private-detective agency to look for spousal-abuse evidence and "18 other angles," says Pete Peterson, the agency's owner. Why do people hire him? The police "aren't as intelligent as we are for the most part," he says, a comment sure to win him friends over at the LAPD. Josiah Thompson, a Haverford College philosophy professor turned private eye, says police are so overworked that sometimes they tend to focus only on a particular suspect. So families, believing that



## Gumshoes

Peterson (left), Dear (top) and Voss displaying the tools of their trade. Some cops welcome their aid in criminal cases; others tell them to stay clear.

