

# Leisure Suit Larry In The Land Of The Lounge Lizards

Studio: **Sierra On-Line**

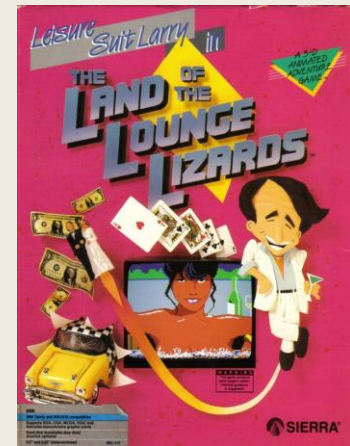
Designer(s): **Al Lowe**

Part of series: **Leisure Suit Larry**

Release: June 4, 1987

Main credits: Programming: **Al Lowe**  
 Development System: **Jeff Stephenson, Chris Iden, Robert Eric Heitman**  
 Graphics: **Mark Crowe**  
 Music: **Al Lowe**

Useful links: Playthrough: [Part 1](#) (65 mins.) [Part 2](#) (58 mins.) [Part 3](#) (33 mins.)



## Basic Overview

"I'm in the jacuzzi!!!! Oh boy- does this feel good!!! Water swirls around me - It's warmth soaks into my body. The feeling of relaxation is almost numbing. Over on the other side is the most beautiful girl!!!! I hope she doesn't mind my bieng here!" (*original orthography retained*).

In case you are still wondering, the above is a word-for-word quote from *Softporn*, Sierra's 1981 text adventure game for the Apple II whose plot would six years later be more or less faithfully followed by Al Lowe, the father of Leisure Suit Larry. These days, the «hottest» remembered thing about *Softporn* is its box cover, featuring Roberta Williams and two other naked women in a hot tub, but back in 1981 the text game itself was clearly as hot as digital erotica could ever get, and the silliness of the accompanying plot – or, rather, anti-plot – was utterly irrelevant next to the ultimate male cyberfantasy. Even if you could only «get the girl» in the luscious shape of a few lines of simple text on the screen, YOU were still the hero of the experience, and that was at least one major advantage over Ron Jeremy.

Fast forward a few years into the future, as former high school teacher and *Donald Duck's Playground* programmer Al Lowe is looking for new and exciting ways to make the world a better place while Sierra On-Line is now making headlines with its



amazing graphical interface and its digital visions of *King's Quest* fantasy tales and *Space Quest* sci-fi chronicles. For no clear reason at all, he suggests an idea — remake that old clunker, *Softporn*, as an expanded, reimagined graphic adventure game, with more emphasis on characters, jokes, and additional details than before, and thus add proper «adult entertainment» to the line of Sierra's already well-established marketable goods. Thus, *Leisure Suit Larry* is born — and humanity has never been quite the same ever since.

It is interesting that, although Al would retain a harsh monopoly over all the remaining games in the series as long as Sierra stayed alive, for the first game he was content to rather faithfully follow the «plot» of the original game (designed by programmer Chuck Benton). Most likely, nothing was changed because nobody suggested the plot could be of any real relevance to a game like this — all that really mattered was to bring the nameless character of the original to life on the screen, give him (and, more importantly, all of his lady friends) a proper sprite, and make you care, all the while trying to move a little bit beyond mere sexism and pure titillation by adding a healthy tongue-in-cheek attitude. The gamble paid off surprisingly well: after a brief period of hush-hush embarrassment, *Leisure Suit Larry* broke through and became one of Sierra's most successful titles. Was this because of the game's racy nature, or because of its genuinely funny humor? I am afraid that everything we know about humanity is rather suggestive of the former — but if so, hats off to Al Lowe who would *always* strive to keep his dignity by focusing on the latter. If there is any reason today to replay those old *Larry* titles, it is certainly not because of the pixelated nudity — it is because much of the humor and satire remains quite relatable.

## Content evaluation

### Plotline

Since, as has already been mentioned, most of the plotline for *Leisure Suit Larry In The Land Of The Lounge Lizards* had been straightforwardly borrowed from *Softporn*, the first game in the series is the weakest of them all when it comes to establishing some sort, any sort, of «storyline». You play as Leisure Suit Larry, a 40-year old virgin hopelessly stuck in 1970s' disco fashion (do remember that «leisure suits» in 1987 were not yet such a distant memory that they could be thought about without the proper feeling of horror), who has suddenly realized that life, after all, is hardly worth living without getting laid. Without thinking twice, he travels to the nearby sleazy city of Lost Wages and makes a bet with himself that he is either going to find the light of



his life and the fire of his loins this very night — or die trying. (*Literally*: the game kills you off if you do not finish it in seven real-time hours' time. Much to my honor, I never died *that* way).

Neither in the original *Softporn* game nor in Al's remake, nor, for that matter, in any subsequent *Larry* game, was the plot ever meant to be «realistic», despite being at least formally set in an approximation of the real world rather than in a pure fantasy or sci-fi environment. All of the characters, male and female alike, are cartoonish stereotypes (then again, how is this different from *Seinfeld*?), and most of the environments and actions in these environments are, at best, bizarre. Yet being bizarre is the only way to guide the player through the game without getting him (or her) offended — after all, you are not here to feel for the sorry plight of American sex industry workers or the everyday hardships of female security guards; you are here to have *fun*, and the only way to have fun in the city of Lost Wages is to make all of its inhabitants seem like the same kind of vice-driven husks which make it justifiable to blow everybody's heads off and not feel any remorse in *Grand Theft Auto*.

In a way, though, it is even cool that the game lacks a proper plot — making it one of the very few Sierra titles to get by through atmosphere alone. Not that you are going to spend a lot of time wondering what it is exactly you have to do: once you have become just a bit familiarized with the city of Lost Wages, specific goals begin to emerge very quickly. How do I get past the bouncer in the disco? How do I earn enough money to pay my taxi driver? How do I enter the secret door and lure the pimp away from his guardpost? And, of course, how do I woo all those girls, sitting there and waiting for their just rewards? It's all quite casual, but it all makes a certain amount of sense.

### Puzzles

Although the overall intelligence level of the game's text parser is not that far removed from the early *King's Quest* or *Space Quest* games (in other words, it's pretty dumb), most of the puzzles in the game are relatively straightforward, and I do not remember much ground for frustration. Graphic imperfections do require you to be thorough in your linguistic exploration, as every now and then there are objects unseen to the naked eye which can only be observed by questioning (mini-spoiler: do not forget to examine the sink in the bar's lavatory, even if it looks as if there is nothing in it or on it, or you will *not* be able to complete the game). Randomized appearances by characters, such as the drunk hobo outside the convenience store, or the apple merchant outside the casino, can also be nasty impediments. But overall, *Lounge Lizards* is one of the smoothest-



implemented games from Sierra's earliest period — despite the absurdity of most of the situations, on the micro-level each individual decision is fairly logical. Mini-hints are also scattered all around: for instance, if you find yourself at a loss trying to find a way to pilfer a bottle of pills from behind an adjacent locked window, you can always remember the information you may have read in a magazine. Or if you have no idea which gift would be most appropriate for your final chosen one, ask her for her name — it is actually a clue (and proof that at least Al Lowe remembers his Book of Genesis).

On a particularly happy note, *Leisure Suit Larry I* is completely free of any mini-arcade sequences and/or tricky staircase deathtraps that pester the worlds of *King's Quest* and *Space Quest* — as long as you remember not to walk out in open traffic or venture into dark alleys, you shall most likely be fine. You do have to earn some money by playing blackjack or slot machines, which can turn into a bit of a drag, but at least it does not require you to have lightning fingers or anything.

And, of course, one thing that is impossible not to mention is the game's original form of age verification: instead of crappy copy protection mechanisms, it just wants to make sure that it is not being played by a minor by asking you all sorts of cultural references which only well-seasoned Boomers should be aware of (e.g.: "Angela Davis is (a) the middle Pointer Sister, (b) a failed politician, (c) an example of split ends gone wild, (d) Bette's daughter"). If you are savvy with your cheats, there is a way to skip the test, but why should you? Where else are you going to learn so much precious cultural history, if not from a *Leisure Suit Larry* game?

### Atmosphere

I have already referenced *Grand Theft Auto*, and I must say it again: before *GTA*, there was *Leisure Suit Larry* if we are talking about having an «open world» (relatively speaking) largely populated by such disgusting, stupid, greedy, cartoonish, and ridiculously hilarious people that they make the stupid and cartoonish protagonist look like a winged angel in comparison. Al Lowe's vision of Lost Wages was that of a cheaper, sleazier, more provincial and miserable version of Las Vegas, and it was realized as perfectly as the graphic and programming standards of 1987 allowed him to do.



Because of the graphic limitations, much of the atmosphere still had to be conveyed by text ("This is the sleaziest bar you've ever been in. And you've been in quite a few"; "A filthy drunk sits on the filthy floor, leaning against the filthy wall", etc.), but somehow the words do a good job of offsetting the relatively prettier graphics (only in subsequent remakes would the

surrounding environments be made *truly* filthy to the eye). With just a little bit of extra imagination, you could easily immerse yourself in the world of Lost Wages — and once you found how to operate the taxi service, profit from the game's open-world setting where, at any time, you are free to navigate between all (three) of its areas and do whatever you like (play blackjack, drink alcohol, or go disco dancing). Not much, sure, but more than any other computer game could offer you in 1987.

One major innovation compared to Sierra's previous games were the full-scale character screens on which you could engage the various girls in all sorts of dialog — well, *technically* all sorts of dialog, considering how the silly vixens could only properly react to just a few different lines of input — introducing a sort of proto-dating sim. This also contributed a lot to the atmosphere, albeit in a different way — thousands of horny teenagers were probably bombarding the digital girls with questions, ranging from romantic "will you marry me?"s to stuff I don't even want to begin to think of, but sometimes freedom to ask a question is far more exciting than the opportunity to receive a proper answer.

As for the alleged sexism of *Leisure Suit Larry In The Land Of The Lounge Lizards*, supposedly making the game unmentionable, let alone unplayable, in the modern era, I am sure that any unbiased person will quickly see that there is none, as such (read [this](#) highly entertaining essay on how *Larry* can actually be lauded for its «feminist overtures»). While it is true that just about every girl on the premises is heavily objectified, this is completely mutual — and in the end, it is our poor protagonist who ends up getting duped, used, and humiliated every step of the way, rather than his women. If anything, Al Lowe is thoroughly egalitarian: in his imaginary world, *everybody* is a crooked scumbag, regardless of age, sex, race, or creed. Well, everybody, that is, with the possible exception of Larry Laffer, who is at least idealistic. (His idealism, of course, is best expressed in the unforgettable lines after finally scoring with the local hooker: "You vow to continue your quest until you please your heart, not just your other organs!"). Meanwhile, his love interests ooze an aura of general cynicism every bit as much as the annoying Asian store clerk ("sure, we've got lubbers!"), the monstrous-looking black pimp in the bar, and the trashy white comic in the cabaret — yes, Al really has it in store for everyone, no holds barred.

## Technical features

### *Graphics*

As with most of the early Sierra games, all the visuals were prepared by Marc Crowe and bear his trademark style — the toilets look exactly like the ones in *Space Quest* — but *Leisure Suit Larry* provides him an opportunity to switch to a fully realistic setting, and I will say that the flashy-sleazy pixelated city of Lost Wages still looks pretty decent on the big screen today, more

than 30 years since the original release. The colors are vibrant, thick reds, blues, and greens all over the place, flashing neon signs, loving attention to detail right down to little green candles on the tables in the Cabaret — it's a pretty vibrant environment whose only flaw is that when it comes to picturing the drab underbelly of the city, Marc still can't help making it colorful and flashy: even the bar, verbally described as rundown and decrepit, still looks freshly renovated.

Sprites and animations have also significantly stepped up since Sierra's early days: there are more facial details and more animated frames, and Larry's sprite is arguably the finest polished one from the 1984-88 AGI days — Larry actually looks a bit younger here than in the second game (and with a full head of hair, too!), and is certainly a long way off from the grotesque caricature which he would become by the time of the fifth game in the series. In a way, he actually looks quite dashing, and the animation of his doing Travolta moves with Fawn in the disco has to be seen to be believed.

Finally, oh those close-ups. Marc always did a terrific job bringing out all the potential of CGA graphics when it came to portraying the lovely ladies, and nowhere is this quite as evident as in *Lounge Lizards*: these pixel vixens, with their little bits of animation, still look fabulous even on the big screen. They even have their own emotionality — try to suggest something indecent, for instance, and not only are you going to get slapped, but the frowns on the ladies' faces will immediately let you know that you only got five seconds to rectify your dreadful mistake. (Well, not really, but you wouldn't know about that, would you?). For the record, there is absolutely nothing NSFW in the game — the closest you get is seeing a little bit of cleavage here and there — but there is plenty of genuine, though very innocent, eroticism.

### *Sound*

Given the fact that Al Lowe was also a jazz musician endowed with some composing talent, one would expect the music in *Leisure Suit Larry* to be at least a couple notches above *King's Quest's Greensleeves* theme, and Al did not disappoint: the *Larry Theme* (known as *For Your Thighs Only* among friends) quickly became one of the, if not simply *the* most recognizable piece of music in Sierra's entire original catalog. It is still insanely catchy and eminently listenable even in its crudest PC Speaker form — in fact, I might go as far as to say that I actually prefer it in [its PC Speaker form](#), where you can easily appreciate the perfect musical construction, to the later embellished versions with actual music cards or Roland synths, let alone all the variations in later games which add too much pizzazz and too many extra notes to the genius simplicity of the



original. It also somehow manages to do a good job letting us know, from the very start, that the whole thing is going to be a light, relatively tasteful, comedy, than straightforward softcore porn on the PC.

Next to the opening theme, there are no properly comparable melodies or sound effects worth mentioning. The PC Speaker «church version» of 'Love Me Tender' in the Quikiwed Chapel is hilarious, and the 1970s-themed disco dance track is mildly fun, but that's about all I can remember. At least, unlike in earlier games, they figured out how not to abuse the PC Speaker, meaning that you can safely play through the entire game without having to mute your sound.



## Interface

Gameplay in *Leisure Suit Larry* is typical of all of Sierra's AGI-era games: a dumb, but functional parser, the ability to move your character in all directions, and pretty much nothing else. To earn money, you can scum-save your way through playing either slot machines or blackjack (mechanics of the former was probably borrowed from *Space Quest*, while interface for the latter would eventually be incorporated into the slightly more complicated poker game event in *Police Quest*): this is tedious, but, fortunately, not long.

Of note is the introduction of several additional elements into the menu bar, such as «Calculator», «Puzzle» (these are minor gags rather than features), «Bodily Function» (where you have absolute freedom to type in your favorite body activity — I like making it into something like 'you quickly turn around, *read some Shakespeare*, and feel much better. A hint of a smile crosses your lips'), and, most notoriously, «Boss Key», which, I believe, made its debut appearance here: it is one thing if your boss captures you playing *King's Quest* or *Space Quest*, and definitely a whole other world if he captures you while you are busy choosing the right size, shape, and flavor of your «lubber» at the convenience store.

As far as difficulties and dangers are concerned, Al seems to have had an intentionally strict policy on arcade sequences and agility requirements — the game was supposed to titillate, not frustrate, meaning that there will be no chasing cars, avoiding debris, or climbing up winding stairs where a two-foot fall means instant death. This is not to say that life in *Lost Wages* is free from unfortunate accidents: as in any other Sierra game, death awaits you around every corner, but death often comes in totally unexpected forms — such as having unprotected sex with the hooker (okay, that one is not so *totally* unexpected, given it's 1987), forgetting to remove your utensil after having protected sex with the hooker (yeah, right), and even — remember

this, kids — soliciting oral sex from the hooker.

An original twist is that after some (though not all) death scenes, Al shows an additional scene in which the character is «revived» in Sierra's underground facilities — of course, since you have to restart your game anyway, this is just a little joke at the player's expense, shaming you into being more careful ("Now you know what we have to go through every time you press that 'Restart' key", Al says with scorn).

### **Verdict:** *Still sexy after all these years*

It is easy as pie to say that a game like this has obviously become outdated, that it was never all that funny in the first place and that what «fun» there ever was in it has washed away completely — but the truth is that it has dated only inasmuch as *any* comedy eventually becomes dated, since comedy is almost always inherently tied to that particular world which it satirizes. With a little bit of effort and cultural context, though, you can get through it — heck, we little Soviet kids were laughing our asses off at these jokes back in the late Eighties without being able to properly understand most of them due to obvious cultural reasons. Even today, even in its original form, the game brings back the same old feels: a bit of general irreverence, a bit of taboo-breaking, a few nice stabs at human obnoxiousness and hypocrisy, and a sense of proud accomplishment once you get to the grand prize.



Do yourselves a favor, though, and seek out the game precisely in its original form: there have been not one, but *two* remakes (an early one in 1991 and a post-Sierra *Leisure Suit Larry Reloaded* in 2013), and while both are obviously superior in terms of technical parameters such as graphics and sound, both made the mistake of trying to re-package the spirit of 1987 inside incompatible vessels — usually prompting negative reviews and failing to win over new generations of fans. Playing them without having experienced the original is like watching the modern day remake of *Sabrina*: a pointless and clueless endeavor which takes history out of the fun, and takes fun out of the history.