

## Leisure Suit Larry Goes Looking For Love

Studio: **Sierra On-Line**

Designer(s): **Al Lowe**

Part of series: **Leisure Suit Larry**

Release: October 1988

Main credits: Programming: **Al Lowe**  
 Development System: **Pablo Ghenis, Stuart Goldstein, Robert Eric Heitman, Jeff Stefenson**  
 Graphics: **Bonnie Borucki, Douglas Herring, William D. Skirvin**  
 Music: **Al Lowe**

Useful links: Playthrough: [Part 1](#) (65 mins.) [Part 2](#) (65 mins.) [Part 3](#) (65 mins.) [Part 4](#) (80 mins.)



### Basic Overview

It is hard to imagine today just how scandalous the release of the original **Leisure Suit Larry In The Land Of The Lounge Lizards** may have been back in 1987 — today, the game could probably ruffle some sensitive feathers due to being «offensive», but back in the moralistic climate of the Eighties, it was rather the digital smut (a.k.a. «pixelated nudity») that ruffled those feathers, so much so that certain stores refused to carry the game, and certain reviews were seriously worried about this new hairy-palm direction that video games seemed to be taking. And although in the long run, all this extra publicity only ended up boosting the game's sales, Al Lowe allegedly took it to heart, purporting to make the inevitable sequel focus less on the lewd stuff and more on the humor. Whether he truly yielded to pressure or was really intent on making history as «Al the Joker» rather than «Al the Lecher» is something he probably will not ever fully disclose in any of his numerous interviews. But I, for one, am very glad that, for once in his life, he took that kind of deliberate turn, because in the end, it unquestionably made **Leisure Suit Larry Goes Looking For Love (In Several Wrong Places)** the most unique game in the entire franchise — and, questionably, also the best one.



It did not hurt, either, that the game was released right at the start of what I consider to be Sierra's Golden Age, following right upon the heels of the trailblazing **King's Quest IV** and making use of not only the same new game engine (Sierra's Creative Interpreter), but also of some of the same creative talent (such as art designer William D. Skirvin, for instance). It catapulted Leisure Suit Larry into a new age of gaming, where we could expect more depth, more width, more detalization, and as much of Al's trademark humor as a set of four or five floppy discs could carry. In all honesty, out of all of Sierra's ongoing continuous projects at the time, **Larry** was clearly the most dubious one when it came to the idea of a sequel — just how tenable would it be in the first place to go on creating further adventures of a middle-aged loser on a single-minded quest to score with as many women as possible? It is one thing, after all, to generate multiple **King's Quests** or **Space Quests** or **Police Quests**, all of which already have a respectable premise — and quite a different one to go on making **Fuck Quests** which could be enjoyed by somebody other than horny teenagers... or, at least, by somebody other than the horny teenager inside any of us. So was Al Lowe able to rise up to that challenge, and make his second **Larry** game into anything «special»? Read on to find out.

## Content evaluation

### Plotline

Like I already said, the most astonishing thing about the second **Larry** game is that it actually has a plot — and that a lot of that plot is *not* about getting laid. Obviously, do not expect a Charles Dickens novel or even an Indiana Jones movie here, yet there is definitely a James Bond influence where you least expect it. The first part of the introduction is sufficiently predictable: Larry is caught getting kicked out of a Los Angeles mansion by «Eve», the lovely lady with whom he'd finally made it at the end of the first game — unfortunately, she has no intention of making it permanent. But just as we find him mired in this next predicament (stuck in the middle of L.A. with nary a cent in his pocket, wondering what to do next), the intro unpredictably cuts to a distant tropical island in the Pacific, where the evil scientist Dr. Nonookee (hello, 1962!) is cooking up some evil plan to take over the world... seemingly *completely* unrelated to poor Larry and his love life issues. How are the two storylines connected? There's your bit of intrigue, right at the beginning; every bit as befuddling as the start of **King's Quest III**, where you were expecting to have another reunion with King Graham and got a completely unrelated evil wizard and his oppressed disciple instead.



You do get to establish a connection between Larry and Dr. Nonookee even before finishing the first section of the game — but only *you*, the player, and you alone, since for poor Larry this connection remains unknown until almost the end of the game, and even then some details of the story are kept from the protagonist forever. What this provides us with, however, is an opportunity to criss-cross a sex comedy with a spy thriller, and do so in a fairly natural manner, since the spy stuff and the sex stuff are tightly intertwined: for instance, the deadly assassination squad of Dr. Nonookee consists entirely of hypnotized and enslaved native women who use their charms to constantly lure Larry into deathtraps. (And might I add that, although sex and death always go hand in hand in Al Lowe games, **Leisure Suit Larry II** is the only game in the series where unbridled sex drive *almost always* results in death — if ever horny teenagers began taking the game's message seriously, abstinence would be their epitaph).

As in every respectable spy thriller, action takes place in several locations. Larry begins his journey in a rather downtrodden district of fictional Los Angeles, not totally unlike the sleazy Lost Wages of the first game; but once fortune begins smiling (or smirking?) on the dubiously-lucky protagonist, we follow him on board a luxury cruise liner, then to the shores of a tropical resort island with its own airport, then on board a plane, and then to yet *another* tropical island where our hero is doomed to finally meet the love of his life, defeat his archenemy, and settle down for good. To a certain degree, this sequence of locations, in which each next one locks out previous ones, was motivated by technical features, namely, the necessity to swap floppy discs — Al took pity on the players so that, theoretically, they could only insert each disc once over the course of an entire playthrough (in practice, of course, it would never be that easy because of all the dead ends — see «Puzzles» below). But whatever were the reasons, the result is that **Leisure Suit Larry II** not only features more different settings than almost any other preceding Sierra game, but also that some of these settings could not be more different from one another — who could have imagined that a game opening in the vicinity of the Hollywood Hills would be closing in the vicinity of an erupting volcano on a tropical island?

Of course, every single element of the plot is at best parodic, though the chief targets for Al's humor are not so often tropes and clichés of spy movies as the commercialism and narcissism of the Eighties (lambasted with delicious cruelty during the Los Angeles segment when Larry gets to take part in the «Dating Connection» game on live T.V.). But silly or not, the plot is almost completely unpredictable: you never truly know which new danger awaits round the next corner, or which new means of escape will appear before poor Larry at the last moment. When your presumably delightful luxury cruise turns into a game of hide-and-seek from covert KGB agents, bikini-clad henchettes of an evil overlord, and the overweight BDSM-practicing mother of your conveniently eloped cruise partner, you know this is no longer just a game — it's a sex-and-death experience

beyond the wildest imagination of Marquis de Sade! (But do not worry — sex-and-death with Al Lowe is always fun, never disgusting! Well, okay, *almost* never disgusting...).

Yet somehow this mix of terror-and-humor (where one minute you are trading jokes with lovely stewardesses and the next minute you are *literally* getting scalped by none other than Ken Williams) gets a totally sensible resolution at the end — and there's even a bit of moral sentimentalism thrown in at the end, when Larry defiantly rejects the abovementioned commercialism in order to fully devote himself to his newly found love. You probably won't be tearing up or anything, but yes, there is actually a slightly touching finale to this game, which, for one brief moment, makes Larry Laffer rise an inch above caricature (to which he would, alas, be thoroughly and irreparably reduced after the original trilogy). In the end, his bizarre journey through ball-splitting lasers, poisoned KGB darts, endless airport queues, quicksand, and artificial glaciers appears to have had a true purpose, and the conclusion seems far more satisfying and well-deserved than the out-of-nowhere penthouse sex romp of the first game.

### Puzzles

A game as patently absurd as this one should have you prepared for some patently absurd puzzles as well — unfortunately, this is where the experience suffers quite a bit, since the challenges you have to overcome in order to progress in the game are not so much «absurdist» as, much too often, poorly designed. Most of the actual puzzles are really uncomplicated — I do not seem to remember any situations that would require more than one or two relatively elementary actions to resolve, once you have the necessary ingredients in your possession, and humorous clues are quite abundant without hintbooks (the best bit are probably the trench coat-clad KGB officers on the beach teaching Larry on how to cross-dress properly, exactly five seconds before inserting gramophone needles behind his fingernails: "only in Russia do women wear leisure suits to the beach!", "only in Russia do women have such flat chests!", "only in Russia do women have such body hair!").

Where stuff does get complicated, and rather unreasonably cruel, is in the number of situations where, after being locked out of an area in which you forgot to collect something, you will get hopelessly stuck in the next area with no hopes of completing the game. Fail to properly loot all the stores in Los Angeles, and you will never make it off the U.S.S. Love Tub alive. Fail to thoroughly explore all the locations on the U.S.S. Love Tub, and you will never get past the pesky KGB agents on the resort



island. Fail to ransack the airport, and you will not manage to escape the plane; fail to thoroughly search the plane, and you will never defeat Dr. Nonookee. Given that some of the required objects are hidden quite well — remember, this is not point-and-click, you actually have to type in commands to examine visually undetectable spaces — the consequences are brutal, particularly since the game still follows the classic logic of «grab everything that is not nailed down regardless of whether you actually need it at the moment».

If you are a seasoned adventurer and do not mind thoroughly sniffing out every nook and cranny on every screen, it is not *that* much of a problem, of course; the toughest kind of situation is one in which, for instance, you have to remember to try to (SPOILER!) ‘dive’ while swimming in the U.S.S. Love Tub’s pool even if there does not seem to be any incentive to that on the surface. But this, too, is somewhat aggravated by irritating imperfections of the parser — in certain versions of the game, it was stupidly broken in a few places, most notably the hotel room at the resort island where (SPOILER!) a command like ‘*put soap in bikini*’ refused to be recognizable and you had to type in ‘*put soaps in bikini top*’ to get it to work. Worst of all was the very last puzzle — opening the doors to Dr. Nonookee’s elevator — which combined both problems, since you had to own a very easily missable object from the plane *and* type in a fairly complicated phrase to make the required combination (because a simple ‘*put bag in bottle*’ just would not work). Unfortunately, situations like these only made players further frustrated with Sierra’s text parser — eventually leading to its execution.

On the positive side, **Leisure Suit Larry II** is *almost* completely free of tedious arcade sequences — except for a brief streak requiring some finger-nimbleness while traversing the perilous jungle of Nontoonyt Island, there aren’t even any ladders to fall off. In fact, the whole «watch that treacherous pixel» attitude, so typical of Roberta Williams, is directly lambasted by AI in a sequence where Larry has to cross a range of impossible-looking cliffs on his way to the airport — at first, you might be horrified, but it soon becomes clear that not only is there absolutely no danger of dying, as the AI takes it straight off your hands by rescuing Larry each single time you fuck up, but that you are actually awarded extra points for each stumble. (AI still takes them away from you at the end of the road, but hey, having been played is always preferable to having been forced to restart your game, right?).

Actually, throughout the game AI is so engrossed in his humorous constructions that action is *way* too often wrenched from the player’s hands. Discovered a suitcase with a bomb at the airport? The game will decide for itself what you have to do with it. Given the impossible challenge of writing a program in the Assembly language for the village tribe’s Sacred Peesea? Don’t worry, Larry will take this off your hands, what with his presumable pedigree as a software programmer (on second thought, this was probably a wise decision). And once you have finally managed to breach Dr. Nonookee’s defenses, the game

completely takes control in what must have probably been Sierra's longest outro section to date: you cannot even take proper satisfaction in getting the world rid of the evil genius, since you have no control over what happens. Sometimes this locking out strategy may result in misunderstandings: for instance, on the resort island you have to take a really long walk through the jungle to get anywhere, and although the walk itself happens automatically, with you unable to control your character's movements, you are still able to type in commands — meaning that frustrated players were probably wasting their time trying to get poor Larry out, typing in stuff like 'dig a tunnel' or 'call for help' or 'pray to Al Lowe' when all they had to do is just wait.

In short, puzzles are clearly not a strong side of the game, which is unfortunate since, after all, most people play adventure games for the puzzles rather than humor and atmosphere — whenever you encounter a really low rating for the game on the part of a critic or a fan, it is highly likely that the poor guy probably forgot to bring the Grotesque Gulp on board the U.S.S. Love Tub and had to replay a large part of the game because of it. Too bad, because concentrating too much on the poor design of the puzzles takes you away from the real assets of the game.

### Atmosphere

As I already said, **Leisure Suit Larry II** gives you the best possible combination of humor and horror in a Larry game, *ever*. Although Al has never been found lacking on the funny bone side, **Larry II** has the distinction of featuring all these highly distinct locations — the most geographic, cultural, ethnic diversity there is in a **Larry** game — and this, in turn, gives a great opportunity to apply Al's satirical jabs all over the place, as he makes fun of everything from retarded TV show culture to stereotypical portrayals of Russian special agents to Latin American guerrillas to native Polynesian culture (or, rather, stereotypes of native Polynesian culture: thus, the main argument which makes Larry jump into the strong arms of his future wife is, of course, her traditional custom of walking around *topless!*).

One single overriding theme is the all-pervasive commercialism: it is one thing to see snobby socialites, fame-hungry bimbos, and sleazy MCs dominate life in sunny L.A., but quite another when you hear that Nontoonyt Island's main problem with Dr. Nonookee is that he effectively thwarted their plans for commercial expansion. (Quote Kalalau: "We had it bagged: they were going to build a huge, casino/resort/hotel complex right here on this lagoon, provide employment for our lazy men in the growing field of slot-machine repair, and even fund a day-care center so, even though we women would continue to work



our normal, 16-hour days in the taro patches, at least we wouldn't have to carry our children on our backs!") This kind of humor, of course, remains every bit as relevant in the 2020s as it was in the 1980s, if not more so, making the game well worth your time even if you have to slog through all the poorly designed puzzles as punishment.

Of course, a **Larry** game still has to be sexy, doesn't it? This is where you are going to be disappointed. The only sex scene in the game (carefully arranged behind bushes) is at the very end; any attempts to have actual sex before — with Mama on the ship, for instance, or with the hotel maid on the island, or with any of Dr. Nonookee's henchettes — lead to a quick, and usually quite painful, death. Larry does encounter quite a large number of women on the way, but interactions with them are extremely limited, and at best, their «close-up» images are just slightly enlarged face portraits triggered by 'look at girl' type commands (usually accompanied by mocking two-liners such as "You find Southern / Italian / Latin / working girls sexy... but then, you find any women sexy!"). Strange enough, despite all that, the game still manages to titillate — I am pretty sure that every single person who has ever played the game always tried following at least one of Dr. Nonookee's bodacious henchettes to his (or her — yes, girls are known to have played the **Larry** games, too!) death, despite understanding full well the possible consequences.

And speaking of death, yes, death awaits you everywhere in this game, at least once you have reached the point of no return after accidentally coming into possession of Dr. Nonookee's treasure in the musical shop in L.A. (before that, I think you can only die attempting to shoplift). Sometimes it is timed, adding to the tension (for instance, you have only a limited timeframe to roam around the ship or the airplane); othertimes it just springs out at you for no reason, like when you try to order a dish at a food joint or make regular small talk with your next seat neighbor on the airplane or make a wrong move around a clumsy woodchopper in the native village. But this is precisely what makes the «safe zones» feel so much safer — like the hilarious running gag of having exactly the same barber shop follow you around each and every place you visit, from L.A. to all the tropical islands, and although all of the attached barbers mostly submit you to various forms of tonsorial humiliation, at least you can never die in any of their safe havens.

In the end, **Larry II**'s mix of colorful locations, spy thriller elements, crude sexiness, satiric humor, and (towards the end of the game) a tiny touch of genuine romance thrown into the pot, makes it an absolutely unique entry in the franchise. To truly appreciate it, though, you have to accept Al Lowe as your personal world-builder, rather than just a sleazy adult game maker who rewards you with pixelated nudity in exchange for solving adventure game puzzles. I have, and found the reward totally worth it.

## Technical features

### Graphics

Despite having a whole team of three visual artists working on the game (oh, the innocent days when three artists for a video game could be two too many!), the graphic aspects of **Larry II** are, at best, pragmatic: you get where you are and what is what, and that is usually it. The early «scenery porn» of **King's Quest IV**, a game virtually intoxicated with its own new technical capabilities, is reduced here to a few screens of relatively luxurious vegetation in the tropical jungle and a few impressive paintings of Dr. Nonookee's volcano. The barebones locations of Los Angeles look like aliens have just landed and taken everyone — although some care is taken to animate a by-passer or two from time to time, the streets are generally empty, the stores have no customers, and even the KROD Television Studio where Larry gets his big break has nobody inside except for one bubblegum-blowing receptionist. (Altogether, I think there are more people sunbathing on the poop deck of the U.S.S. Love Tub than there are on all the streets of L.A.).

The lovely ladies, too, are a relative disappointment after the high standards of the seductive close-ups in the first game — apparently, since you cannot hold real conversations with most of them, they decided to save up the budget and limit their appearances to small portraits, usually emphasizing ugly aspects over pretty ones, too (though, of course, there is no accounting for personal taste). The only two true close-ups are that of Larry's coveted Bachelorette Barbara (an image from his soon-to-be-shattered dreams as he boards the ship), and of his future bride Kalalau (who does walk around topless, but the close-up is just that of her face, you naughty pervert). They are both finely drawn for 1988 standards, but nothing special.

At least the Larry sprite is decent — he has been slightly aged here, largely by thinning out the hair and giving our guy a mighty bald patch; the hair actually becomes another running gag in itself, what with Larry trying on a wig, growing it shoulder-long, bleaching it blonde (all through the help of our friendly barbers), and, finally, covering that bald patch once and for all at the end of the game. This is the game in which he probably looks the least caricaturesque of all — just your normal average guy in a leisure suit — and that's the way I like him the most, too. Too bad he couldn't keep that long blonde hair for longer, though.





## Sound

The single best thing about the sound is that we get to hear the pristine classic Leisure Suit Larry theme in its original form (no embellishments or variations) through normal sound cards or MIDI interfaces — a full pseudo-orchestral performance if you have MT-32 emulation. The second best thing is that this is the first Larry game to actually boast a full soundtrack... well, maybe not «full» as such, but at least there are three or four more complete compositions, all written by Al, of which the Nonookee theme, with a moody Andean flute melody, is accordingly creepy, the Dating Connection TV theme is accordingly annoying, and the True Love theme is accordingly dreamy and sappy.

Much of the game is still draped in silence (presumably because in 1988 most players were still restricted to PC, and the idea of being beeped-and-bleeped through the entire game was not so hot), but there are nice touches such as short recurring motives adding to the tension (for instance, each time a large-bosomed beauty approaches you and starts flirting, the alarming Dr. Nonookee motif begins playing — and what's up with that, I wonder?..); a very brief and suitably cheerful excerpt from Larry's theme sounds each time you score some points; oh, and if you screw up and get carried away by the bees on Nontoonyt Island, you do get to hear a brief, but powerful digital rendition of 'Flight Of The Bumblebee' (what else?). Overall, though, just like the graphics, the music in **Larry II** largely just serves its pragmatic purpose.

## Interface

The game runs through a fairly standard version of then-current Sierra's Creative Interpreter, meaning that all action is paused while you type in the commands. Special tweaks commandeered by Al include the options «Trite Phrase» ('*Have a nice day*' by default, but you can change it to anything you like — when store clerks let you go with '*may the force be with you*', the game suddenly takes on a whole new dimension) and «Filth Level», which you should never forget to turn all the way up right at the beginning of the game, because it occasionally makes the game at least the *tiniest* bit raunchy (a few extra nude pixels here and there! additional expletives! fun for the whole family!). There are also a couple of situations in which you feel like you might have more control than you actually do — for instance, in the Dating Connection game you have the choice to type in your full answers to the questions asked by the lovely-but-dim Bachelorette Barbara, but, of course, nothing of what you type in makes even the slightest difference to her reaction. (Not that it would today, for that matter — how many video



games feature even the most rudimentary AI after all these years?). Other than that, the game plays it fairly straightforward, and the near-complete lack of arcade sequences is a blessing.

**Verdict:** *One of the weirdest «adult» games of all time*

Most of the people I know rate either the sixth or seventh **Larry** game as the finest in the series — because point-and-click, because graphics, because voice acting, because lewdness-a-plenty. That's all fine and dandy, and they are decent gaming experiences in their own right, but first and foremost, they are formula. *This* game, however, of all the **Larry** games out there feels the least like formula: it represents Al Lowe's one and only attempt to elevate the franchise to something slightly above humor and titillation — what exactly, I am not sure of, but neither was Al when he was probably just spontaneously generating these weirdass ideas, one after another, bouncing each one off the wall to see which ones will stick. Sure, not all of them do, but the very lack of methodical calculation still feels so refreshing after all these years that I easily forgive and forget all those endless wasted hours of my adolescence when I had to patiently wait for Mr. Laffer to traverse the jungle for the umpteenth time on my slowass PC XT.

Echoes of this approach — mere echoes — would still be felt in **Larry III**, my second favorite game in the series, but it would already be announcing a return to the formula of the first game (after the fans complained about the relative lack of sexual content in this one — so you can't please all the people all the time, it seems). **Leisure Suit Larry Goes Looking For Love**, on the other hand, gave our protagonist a brief chance to shine as The Hero, comparable in his achievements to such Sierra stalwarts as King Graham, Roger Wilco, or Sonny Bonds, and with Al Lowe's sarcastic guidance, he passed that test with flying colors.

