

# PLAYING THE GAME

## THE GREAT ESCAPE

By Neil Shapiro

Where do you go to get away from it all? If you're an adventure-game aficionado, chances are you head right for your PC. There's something for everyone there. Whether your taste runs to swordfighting or sexual satire, whether you're battling The Mob in Miami or a bunch of malevolent knights run amok, whether your hero's named Larry or Lancelot, when you need a break from routine you can always escape into the mists of the distant past — or maybe just somebody's on-screen hot tub.

### You've Gotta Love It

Adventure role-play games often put us into situations we may never face in our real lives. That can involve dragons and tigers, other planets and climes, or villains that make Saddam Hussein look like your Aunt Maude. But few adventure games permit us to examine our own ways of thinking, our own lives, in unique ways.

Although Sierra On-Line's popular Leisure Suit Larry games sell like hot cakes, many people seem to think they're just sophomoric excursions into adolescent fantasy. Although it's true that Larry does get his share



Leisure Suit Larry's got something for every vice.

of kicks (or almost-kicks) and we do recommend the eye-opening 256-color versions of the games, playing this series means more than just partaking of off-color jokes and pin-up art. I think it goes to the very heart of what humor is and why something that's "funny" makes us laugh.

My thesis is that when you play Leisure Suit Larry you wind up laughing not just at Larry and his escapades, but at some of the worst and most sexist attitudes many people unfortunately still cling to. By making Larry a jerk, Sierra has made it easy to find humor in his method of "thinking." When you play, you wind up questioning — through humor — certain preconceptions that such a game brings to the surface.

**Leisure Suit Larry 5: Passionate Patti Does A Little Undercover Work** carries a label of "Warning! Parental Discretion Advised."

Yet the game contains nothing you won't see on any number of prime-time TV shows. In fact, looking at some of Larry's ideas — because they're treated for laughs and not for-real-with-a-leer, as on TV — may be a way to get your kids to question false values.

In this latest installment, poor old Larry lands the job of auditioning hostesses for the new TV show *America's Sexiest Home Videos*. It's a rough assignment, but somebody has to do it. And who's better suited than Larry? Unfortunately, Larry is unknowingly working for The Mob, and The Mob is trying to put porno on TV. The FBI sends out its best undercover agent — Patti. When Larry and Patti get together, the game starts rockin'-and-rollin' (and not just thanks to the great background music).

Now for a few Larry tips:

- One of the keys to playing Leisure Suit Larry (and

any other Sierra game) is to use your eyes — or at least the **eye icon** — to look at everything, everywhere you go. Now, some of the things you'll be looking at are pretty easy on the eyes, for sure, but there are other details not so enticing that you should search out, too.

- You'll find this out almost right away at the New York airport. When you want to put a video tape into your **camera**, make sure it's fully charged and ready for action. Pan and zoom your way to the west-side wall of the terminal where you'll spot an electrical outlet. Put the camera onto the charger, but use the eye icon to keep looking at the camera until it reaches a 100 percent charge. Don't leave home without it. (You'll have to go through this routine at almost all the airports you visit.)

- You may wonder what Patti should do at the offices of Des Rever Records. Take a look around and you'll note a **gold record** on the wall. Take it down and play it. If you still don't have all the information you need, think about this: You know how every so often some group gets into the newspapers by saying that if you play records backwards at different speeds you'll hear evil things? It may hardly ever prove true in the real world, but you're in Larry's world now.

- When you're leaving Miami, your plane back to Los Angeles (where else

would Larry live?) will get into trouble. When the stewardess asks for a volunteer to fly the plane, speak right up. She'll take you to the cockpit, where you'll find numerous controls. Just click the **hand icon** all around and sooner or later you'll find the autopilot.

I must admit that I'd never played any of the Leisure Suit Larry games before. I found this one a lot of fun, and, if you don't have too many hangups, I think you'll agree. Now all I need are the first four installments . . .

### Two-Edged Sword

Here's a first: I'm going to give you some tips for playing a game I personally don't like at all — and yet I don't hesitate to recommend it to you. What's going on?

The game is **Spirit of Excalibur**, from Virgin Mastertronic, and it purports to be an adventure game set in the Britain of King Arthur (or, actually, just following Arthur's

death). It's a fine game in many respects — lots of puzzles to solve, beautiful graphics. But for those of us who have studied the legends of the knights of the Round Table, **Spirit of Excalibur** almost completely fails to capture that true Arthurian feel.

It's a fascinating subject, of course. I've read the original Malory manuscript, as well as Malory's sources, including Wace and Layamon, Chrétien de Troyes, and the *Vulgate Cycle*. I'm probably the only person you know who once taught himself the rare Midlands dialect of Old English solely to be able to read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the original language. (It was well worth it, as the internal rhythms of the poem are lost otherwise.)

And it's certainly true that some modern-day authors, including Mary Stewart in her *Crystal Cave* trilogy, have managed to change certain aspects of the legend without losing it. Unfortunately, I feel **Spirit of Excalibur** loses the

legend — and injects some inaccuracies. (Among other things, Sir Ector, Sir Bedevere, Sir Palomides, and some of the other knights who died along with Arthur in written versions of the legend show up here in good health.)

So for the 1 percent of you who might share my feeling for "The Matter of Britain," I can't recommend this game. But for the 99 percent of you just looking for a good time with your computer, you can certainly find it herein.

That said, let's check out some hints for **Excalibur**:

- One of the first things that gave me trouble was the close-mouthed **Friar Albert** in St. Albans. He gladly and quickly mentions the sword **Excalibur** as a way to kill off that pesky giant — but where's the sword itself? The only way to find out is to have Nineve cast a charm spell on the Friar, who will then tell you to check a lake near Oxford.

- Now pay attention here: The **sword** isn't in that particular Oxfordian lake. But this isn't the kind of program you can skip around in; the Friar's information will still prove important in many ways.

- When Lancelot wipes the floor with **King Andred**, search Andred twice, not just once — you'll find the fabled (albeit not in any fable I ever read) "Gaunts d'Poer" (power gloves).

Give **Spirit of Excalibur** a shot. But if knights in armor appeal to you, go to the library and check out some books, too. (I recommend Howard Pyle's four volumes on the legend as a

good introduction.) It'll lead to a lifetime of reading pleasure, in addition to the pleasure you've found in computer gaming.

### The Check Is in the Modem

Here's another great escape — for those times when you're looking for a somewhat more intellectual challenge. Chess, anyone?

Most of the chess games on the market today offer a complete line of bells and whistles — and near-master-level play. At best, they're a way to study chess with an opponent more skilled than you are; at worst, they're a frustrating way to demonstrate that a computer is faster than the human brain.

Masque's **ChessNet for Windows**, however, adds a new dimension: You can play with human opponents via modem or network (and try to "chat" your opponent off guard). **ChessNet** lacks a tree of moves and an opening-book editor, and the graphics images aren't anything to crow about, but the game offers hints, a built-in opening book, and time-controlled levels.

So check out your chess club for computerists and your computer club for chess fiends. Computers are great, but there's nothing as enjoyable as person-to-person game play.

### Send Your Hints!

Don't be shy — mail your tips and techniques to me at P.O. Box 520, Bethpage, NY 11714, and see your name in lights (well, at least in print). Meet you here next time. □

### PRODUCT INFORMATION

#### CHESSNET FOR WINDOWS

Masque Publishing  
P.O. Box 5223  
Englewood, CO 80155  
(303) 290-9853

\$49.95

640K IBM PC,  
Tandy, or compatible  
EGA, VGS, super VGA

#### LEISURE SUIT LARRY 5

Sierra On-Line  
P.O. Box 485  
Coarsegold, CA 93614-9850  
(800) 326-6654  
\$59.95

#### 640K IBM PC,

Tandy, or compatible  
requires 286 or higher  
VGA

#### SPIRIT OF EXCALIBUR

Virgin Mastertronic  
1800 Cowan St.  
Suite A  
Irvine, CA 92714  
(714) 883-8710

\$49.99

640K IBM PC,  
Tandy, or compatible  
VGA