

review: **Freddy Pharkas**

by Douglas Kiang

Type: Adventure

Publisher: Sierra On-Line (800) 326-6654

Retail Price: \$59.99

Mail Order: \$45.00

Requires: 8-bit Color Macintosh, 4 MB RAM.

Protection: Manual based

With the possible exception of Oregon Trail, I know of no other adventure game for the Macintosh with a Wild West theme. That's a shame, considering the amount of material this genre has given to Hollywood and the entertainment industry. Filmmakers from Sergio Leone to Mel Brooks have found the Western a rich environment for a story's setting. Now, Al Lowe (creator of the immortal [infamous?] Leisure Suit Larry series) and his crazy crew at Sierra have taken this original concept and put a unique spin on it by throwing in enough zany characters, absurd situations, bawdy humor, and awful puns to make Freddy Pharkas a near-masterpiece of slapstick adventure.

After a song-and-dance routine (literally) at the introduction of the game, we meet Freddy Pharkas, former gunslinger. After an unfortunate bout with a rival, Freddy decides to hang up his six-shooters and begin a new life, remaining ear and all, as a pharmacist in sleepy Coarsegold, California. And so it is that Freddy, "peerless, earless, and free," becomes involved in this sleepy little town where everything is not as placid and carefree as it seems. Evil forces are plotting to overthrow the town and only Freddy can stop them. But can a lowly pharmacist stop them using only his wits? Or will he be forced to take up arms once again and enter the life he renounced? All of that is up to you.

reddy Pharkas utilizes a simple point-and-click system to perform actions. The cursor changes to display any of six different icons in order to indicate which action you are about to take. In Freddy Pharkas, the icons fit into a Western theme: to walk somewhere, you point and click with the boot. To look at something, you use those “newfangled spectacles.” The key to using these indicators is finding the “hot spot” in a given scene and clicking on it with the right tool.

[The Pharmacist Needs a Pesticide](#). The Macintosh version of Freddy Pharkas is riddled with other annoying bugs as well. Several times the program unexpectedly quit while I was playing it; this problem can be fixed by upping the memory allotment in the Get Info box. The Read Me file included with this version mentions this problem; it also advises that if the music and sound effects suddenly stop playing, your only course of action is to restart the computer (!). I never encountered this problem myself. Also, due to an incompatibility problem the game can crash if After Dark kicks in while it is running.

Interface problems aside, most of the puzzles are quite well constructed, and Al Lowe and crew have done an excellent job of creating unique and sometimes bizarre solutions to the . . . well, unique and sometimes bizarre problems that you encounter. For any given problem you face, whether it be horse flatulence (dally too long, and you will die of asphyxiation), stopping a herd of stampeding snails, or concocting a prescription to increase the already bountiful womanliness of Madame Sadie Ovaree, it is a good rule of thumb to disregard the obvious in favor of the more subtle and ingenious. Another tip is to read the game manual very carefully while you’re playing; it contains vital clues that you will need to solve at least one portion of the game.

Which brings us to the pharmacy section. Throughout the game, you will need to concoct one prescription or another according to the directions found in the “Modern Day Book of Health and Hygiene, 1881 Edition” that comes with the game (alarmingly, the modern cover is yellow and creased with age.) Mixing chemicals was never more easy and productive than with your fully equipped pharmaceutical laboratory — well, really a shelf and assorted bottles, beakers, and balances — and as long as you follow the directions precisely, you should have no problem at all. Yes, this is a form of copy protection, very subtle, yet

effective. It's a wonderful idea to take the typical manual-based lookup type of question and integrate it so seamlessly into the game.

The sound effects and the scenes are wonderfully realistic, and they work together to really make you feel as if you are traversing a dusty old road in a dusty old town, with the piano player in the saloon cranking out such tearjerkers as "I've Grown Accustomed to Your Ace" or "Hot Lead in the Old Town Tonight." When some of the figures come up close, the graphics tend to be a bit blocky and pixelated; the effect can spoil what is otherwise a very well done graphic environment. Apart from that, the scenes are very detailed and the music and sound effects sound great on a set of external speakers, even punctuated with occasional speech samples (during the Dancing Sheep routine in the saloon, Freddy can be heard shouting an exuberant "Shear it off! Shear it all off!" [groan].)

Overall, Freddy Pharkas is a well-conceived, original game with a wacky sense of humor and an invasive little theme that you will find yourself humming under your breath all day long. Needless to say, this game's off-color thematic underpinnings are not for all audiences and ages. Caveat lector. And, unfortunately, the interface needs some work, and the Macintosh version is still a bit buggy. The bottom line is that this game was originally developed for DOS machines, then was ported over to the Macintosh platform. Until games are either co-developed from the start with both platforms in mind, or completely rewritten to take advantage of the Macintosh's unique graphics routines, games that are ported from a DOS machine will always be a little quirky and make your Mac look like it's running Windows, which is quite ironic. Reports are that in the future Sierra will begin to release high-resolution games for the Mac instead of releasing versions that were originally written for the PC's lower-resolution screen. Hopefully this is the start of a trend that will see more ports brought over whose wit, intelligent storyline, and original ideas aren't lost in the translation.

Pros

- Great sense of humor
- Well-designed puzzles
- Good music and sound effects

Cons

- Poorly designed interface
- Game crashed several times
- Doesn't save screen preferences