

Sawbones: Freddy Pharkas, Frontier Pharmacist

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["Medicines" by The Taxpayers plays]

Justin: Hello, everybody, and welcome to Sawbones, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your co-host, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: So, it's been a weird week for me. A weird couple of weeks...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: You know, it's been a weird couple of weeks. And we're about to go on vacation.

Sydnee: We are.

Justin: So, this is a weird sort of midpoint between the weird time before and sort of a weird time after. And so, we were looking for a Sawbones episode that would just be... just a pure delight.

Sydnee: We go straight from the school year into summer theater. And then also with that, like we're working and touring, and then there were other things that came up, and like family stuff. And with all that, our vacation is crammed into the last possible week.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Before school starts!

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Did you realize that?

Justin: Literally.

Sydnee: It is the last opportunity to get out of town.

Justin: We go from school to theater, to... to school.

Sydnee: School. To school.

Justin: So, hey—

Sydnee: So, we wanted to do something fun.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah, this is—this is our back to school episode, I guess. [titters]

Justin: Yeah, we're having fun. I wanted to talk about Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist. *Whoo.*

Sydnee: Whoo, this—

Justin: Whoo...

Sydnee: When Justin first said "I want to talk about Freddy Pharkas," I have to be honest, he said it to me kind of in passing. And we were talking about like what we're gonna do for this next episode, and he said, "I'm gonna talk about Freddy—I want you to do that." And in my head, what I sort of like took in was, there was a medical history figure named Freddy Pharkas that I needed to research.

Justin: Uh-huh?

Sydnee: And that was what I thought I needed to do.

Justin: Okay...

Sydnee: And then you said, "We need to do this." And I said, "I'll be honest, I haven't researched Freddy Pharkas." [chuckles]

Justin: Yeah, you said, what, "Tell me about this guy, Freddy Pharkas." And I'm like, "Huh?"

Sydnee: [chuckles] It did not compute that this was a computer game.

Justin: 'Ey! That was great.

Sydnee: Is it a computer—I don't know what system it's supposed to be on. We played it on a computer.

Justin: Fantastic. Okay, so, that is what I'm here for, Syd.

Sydnee: Right.

Justin: I'm gonna give some of the context, and then in the second half, we'll talk about the game itself.

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: That we've been playing. Does that sound good?

Sydnee: That sounds great.

Justin: Okay, so... and a lot of this is gonna be from memory, and me pulling out of my butt, but some of this will be from information that I actually am having to research. [chuckles] Because I don't, as a former game journalist, I don't want to just get stuff wrong.

Sydnee: Well, actually did play the game. So, the gameplay stuff, the stuff that happens within Freddy Pharkas, that is—I mean, we *just* played the game, just now.

Justin: I want to take you back to 1979. There's... Justin McElroy is just a glimmer in the eye of young Clint and Leslie. So, he is just a year away from being born. And Ken and Roberta Williams are very much in love. They have just released their very first game, Mystery House. And they found a company called Sierra, later Sierra Online. And it is a company that focuses on adventure games, point and click adventure games. That's what Sierra comes to be known for.

Sydnee: Hm.

Justin: When I say that genre, if I were to say to you before Freddy Pharkas, the point and click adventure game, do you have like a frame of reference for that as something that you played as a kid? Or—

Sydnee: Is that what Maniac Mansion was?

Justin: For sure, yeah. It's a perfect, perfect example, absolutely. Maniac Mansion, interestingly—

Sydnee: This is why you love me.

Justin: I do, yeah. There's many reasons, but yeah. So, Maniac Mansion is sort of the second half of this sort of like bifurcation, right? The Sierra lineage is a huge part of the point and click world. And then on the Lucas Arts side, you have Maniac Mansion, Loom, The Dig, a lot of classics. Like the—a lot of Indiana Jones game—classic—

Sydnee: Never beat Maniac Mansion, never knew what I was supposed to do, never could figure it out, but played it a lot.

Justin: They're tough. So, Sierra has a lot of franchises that are best known for being sort of like long-running and usually humorous takes on a different kind of genre, right? So, for example, the one that they are probably best known for is King's Quest. And that is a—

Sydnee: I've heard of that.

Justin: Okay, so King's Quest is a, I would say, slightly sort of silly fantasy adventure. You play King Graham, and you wander through the countryside. Throughout the course of the adventure, you know, you will... There's seven games, eight games, so... Yeah, the last one, Mask of Eternity, came out in 1998. The first one was in 1980, called Wizard and the Princess. That's kind of a precursor.

Sydnee: And is it like, he's fae and she's like a human, and she shoots one of his wolves, and then he takes her over the wall and then...

Justin: Let me give you the subtitles of these games. Romancing the throne, To Heir Is Human, The Perils of Rosella, Absence Makes the Heart Go Yonder. Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow, that's our second heir one.

Sydnee: Are these romantasy—

Justin: The princeless—

Sydnee: Games?

Justin: The prince—no, they're like goofy fantasy games. There's, number seven is The Princeless Bride. And then mask of eternity.

Sydnee: So, there's no jacked fae in this?

Justin: There's no jacked fae.

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Justin: There's King Graham stumbling his way through the adventure. I am more partial to a different fantasy series, So You Want to Be a Hero or Quest for Glory, depending on which entry you're talking about. That is a similarly kind of silly series. Arguably, I think it's funnier than King's Quest, but that's just—that's just me. There's also—

Sydnee: Like ha-ha funny? [chuckles]

Justin: Eh, yeah. Yeah! I think so. It's a little bit more refined—for a more refined palette. If you're not so punny, you know, not a punster. You know, you like a little bit more of a satirical thing.

Sydnee: You know, Shakespeare thought... [chuckles]

Justin: Same... the same sort of vibe was found in Space Quest, which there were I think seven Space Quest games. Same idea, it's sci-fi, but you are—point and click your way through the world, picking up items, interacting with stuff, et cetera, et cetera.

Sydnee: Sometimes you look at them.

Justin: Sometimes you look at them, and other times you walk to—I'm gonna have you describe the mechanics of this, Sydnee.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Because I can't wait to hear all of your great takes on the mechanics of this game. I did want to mention a couple other—because like this is like one of my favorite genres in the world. So, I wanted to also mention Gabriel Knight, which is sort of like a gothic horror series. Now, those are the sexy ones about vampires.

Sydnee: Ooh?

Justin: And they're set in like New Orleans. And you have voice actors—and listen, this is the cast of Sins of the Father, the first one, okay?

Sydnee: Sins of the Father?!

Justin: Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers, okay? Tim Curry, Leah Remini, Virginia Capers, Mark Hamill, and others.

Sydnee: Jeez!

Justin: Yeah, it's a stacked cast.

Sydnee: Star-studded!

Justin: It's a stacked cast.

Sydnee: Now, do you have any—

Justin: Computer Gaming World declared Jane Jensen the interactive Anne Rice, so... need I say more.

Sydnee: *Wa-ah*, okay?

Justin: Maybe we should play Gabriel Knight games, Sydnee? That would be fun.

Sydnee: Okay, no, listen, I read—I read some Anne Rice, so that—now that gets down to what I like. No, can you tell me any about the vampire lore in these books? Like, do they sparkle in the sun, or do they melt in the sun? And like, what's the...

Justin: I don't even know if—

Sydnee: Do they have to eat humans? Can they eat animals? Like—

Justin: They don't have to, they just love it.

Sydnee: Is garlic a thing? Or...

Justin: So—

Sydnee: Do they go to high school? [chuckles]

Justin: These are all of the Sierra games that are most beloved, most well-known. But there in the corner, who is that sitting by himself, Sydnee? It's Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist, okay? Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist is a... a one-off in—the in the Sierra world. It was done one time, and it was not ever really sequelized. It get—it will get another release—

Sydnee: Were these companies—can I ask question? Were these—

Justin: Please!

Sydnee: I mean, today, we kind of expect that when media comes out, of any—of any kind, not just games, but like anything, that in a lot of cases, there's some sort of like idea of what demographic you're looking at, and like some sort of testing that has happened. Like, "We think these concepts, these ideas, these characters, whatever, appeal to the people we're trying to sell this to. And so, that's why we created this." Was there research done that led to them thinking like, "Old West pharmacist, this is a demographic we—that's rich for like exploitation." Like was there—

Justin: Oh, honey, that's such an excellent—an excellent question. Because that is very much at the heart of how Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist was created. If you think about, Space Quest is the sci-fi one, right?

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Justin: King's Quest is the fantasy.

Sydnee: Fantasy, yeah.

Justin: There weren't western games on the market, so they had the opportunity to be the Western game or—and they wanted to be a funny Western game. So, for them, that was one model. And as one of the designers, Al Lowe called it, it was going to be the blazing saddles of video games.

Sydnee: But why—

Justin: That was the idea.

Sydnee: Why pharmacy? Like, I understand—like, when you say that, I get why not shooting. Because like if we think of old Westerns, like the movies, you think of like shootouts, right? Like, and I get that. Like I don't particularly love a lot of violence. And so, a gun violence video game is not—does not appeal to me. And so, you want something funny, you're gonna

skew away from violence. If I think Old West, I don't think pharmacy. Like pharmacy is not high on the list.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Like maybe like a bar thing? Or like—

Justin: So, I'm going to tell you—

Sydnee: A saloon, like some sort of saloon situation? [chuckles]

Justin: I am going to miraculously answer your question even more specifically, with a quote from Al Lowe. Or at least the anecdote from Al Lowe himself is that, "In a brainstorming session with Roberta Williams—" Which, by the way, I've interviewed Roberta Williams before, when I worked at the Ironton Tribune, for a story I worked at the—The Escapist. Not for Ironton Tribune, the story—

Sydnee: Okay, okay, I was gonna say, the Ironton Tribune did a story on this? [laughs]

Justin: No, no. No, not on this, but—

Sydnee: Because that's awesome!

Justin: But in a brainstorming session, they accidentally came up with the term "farmercist." They misspoke and said farmercist when they were trying to come up with ideas for an Old West game. So they said farmercist, and it struck them as funny, and that was the inception of Freddy Pharkas. Because the idea of a farmercist was funny. And he's not really a—he's a former gunslinger that becomes a pharmacist when he loses a gunfight.

Sydnee: Which, I mean, I don't know if we're going to talk about this more in the back half of the show, but have you ever played the entire game? Can I just ask that? Have you played the entire—

Justin: No, I'm not—no.

Sydnee: Do you know how it ends? Like have you read ahead to figure out—

Justin: No.

Sydnee: What happens? I just... like, he is a former gunslinger.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: And so far, we have not finished the game, but so far where we are, I don't know why that matters. [chuckles]

Justin: I don't know why that matters. I assume it will.

Sydnee: I mean, that's—I have to trust that the fact that he is, A, a former Gunslinger, and B, missing an ear, will come into play at some point. But so far, this was a prolonged song that I heard that has not paid off.

Justin: I will say—yeah, there is a prolonged song at the beginning.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: That is—

Sydnee: For the backstory.

Justin: Yes, that is performed by Al Lowe. Who is, I will say, most notable—okay, quick—here's my quick thing on Al Lowe. He was a music teacher for fifteen years in public schools. That was the first thing he did. Then he went on the show Name That Tune, and he did so well that he was a semi-finalist in the—in the championships. This was before all this. He worked on a bunch of different stuff at Sierra. His first three games were all Disney-inspired. It was Winnie the Pooh and the Hundred Acre Wood, Donald Duck's Playground and The Black Cauldron.

Sydnee: Did he—I mean, he got... he got licensing for all this?

Justin: Yeah, this is while he was at Sierra. These were Sierra projects.

Sydnee: So Sierra has something to do with Disney?

Justin: Well, they were creating—

Sydnee: They were licensing Disney—

Justin: Yeah, they were licensing—

Sydnee: It's, I guess—I guess, in today's climate, the idea that Disney would license itself to anything that wasn't the most gigantic—you know what I mean?

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, I think it's a different time. That's what I'm grappling with here.

Justin: Al Lower is best known by people, most people, for his adventure game series, that I did not cover. And is the Sierra series—is perhaps the black sheep of the family. It is Leisure Suit Larry.

Sydnee: I've heard of that—

Justin: Which, okay—

Sydnee: You've told me about this. You've talked about this.

Justin: Leisure Suit Larry are the.... those are the sort of like sex-obsessed, puerile game series. That's Al Lowe's other, I would say, most notable contribution.

Sydnee: Is that the—is what leisure—

Justin: Those were on a ton of stuff.

Sydnee: Is that what leisure suits—is that the connotation? Because the only thing I know about leisure suits is Uncle Eddie in Christmas Vacation. And so...

Justin: Yeah... I guess that's—leisure suits I feel like is the—has that sort of vibe. Lounge lizard—

Sydnee: That's a great question, like what else is a leisure suit for?

Justin: 'Ey—

Sydnee: Like, it's a suit—

Justin: Well, it's not for work, that's dang sure.

Sydnee: Of leisure.

Justin: Yeah. A few other quick, like just fun trivia stuff. The other name on this game in the—in the design phase was Josh Mandel, who was not related to Howie Mandel that I could find out. But he was—

Sydnee: Is that the only fact you have? [chuckles]

Justin: Yeah. No, he was the first person that played the voice of King Graham, the—in King's Quest.

Sydnee: Oh, okay.

Justin: The series that we talked about before.

Sydnee: Not romantasy?

Justin: No. And also, the last person I want to talk about is Cam Clark. He was the voice actor for the game. Funny thing about how this worked when the game was originally released, it was not voiced. It was just written in text, by Al Lowe and Josh Mandel. And the game did well enough that they decided to do a re-release with voices. So, Al Lowe got tired in the studio and got bored in the studio, and he cut the script by about fifteen percent so

he didn't have to sit through all the recording. [chuckles] And Josh Mandel had already moved on to a different team. He was working on Police Quest 6 at the time, so he didn't have a hand in it. So Al Lowe cut a bunch of stuff off. And apparently, it was—it was frustrating to Josh Mandel, because there were like puzzles and jokes that got cut. And ad libs that changed the original script, that they had written.

Sydnee: Interesting.

Justin: The actors, the most notable is Cam Clark, who plays Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist. Best known as the voice of Leonardo and Rocksteady in Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

Sydnee: Interesting.

Justin: Also—

Sydnee: Didn't pick that up. Didn't pick that up.

Justin: Also, frequently a voice double for Matthew Broderick. And was Liquid Snake in the Metal Gear games.

Sydnee: Can I say that, knowing that there was dialog that was like cut out or left out, or just not recorded, or whatever, I —my personal opinion is that's fine. There's plenty. There's so much talking.

Justin: So much talking!

Sydnee: There's so much talking—

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: All the time.

Justin: We're gonna—

Sydnee: Like that's—

Justin: Okay—

Sydnee: I think they—that was an okay editing choice.

Justin: We're gonna talk about, after this, Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist, the video game. There's your context. But after this, the game itself. And just how closely it overlaps with the medical world, right after this.

[theme music plays]

[ad reads]

Justin: What's cool about Freddy Pharkas—hi, welcome back. What's cool about Freddy Pharkas, to me, the reason that I thought that it would be fun for this, is it very much overlaps with an era of medicine that we are pretty fixated and fascinated by here on Sawbones.

Sydnee: Mm-hm. We talk about it a lot.

Justin: Yeah. So, Syd, tell me, as a first-timer with a game like this, other than Maniac Mansion, strangely, how did—how did this—tell me about Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist?

Sydnee: Well, okay, to be—to be completely blunt, I've never been great at video game mechanics. I often have trouble with just getting people to move in the way I need—like to go where I want them to go. [chuckles] And so, there are like—okay, first of all, there's, as we've mentioned, a very long song. There's a very long backstory song—

Justin: It didn't seem like a very long song!

Sydnee: It felt very long to me, because it had nothing to do with anything. Like at the end of it, after he's a gunslinger and he gets his ear shot off, he decides never to be a gunslinger again. And then he's a pharmacist. Was there like—

Justin: You, honey, you know that that's gonna be important again, he's definitely gonna have a—

Sydnee: Okay, well, so far, he hasn't, and he's—he—and they're like, "And he decided to pursue his childhood dream." We met him as a child, so they could have said he wanted to be a pharmacist.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: And then he had to be a gunslinger, for some reason. But they don't say that. So anyway, there's the song, and then you start, and you're on like a dusty Old West street, in a mining town looking kind of thing. You know, like Tombstone. I think like Tombstone.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And he's walking down the street, and there are buttons at the top. And you click on like the boot button if you want to walk.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And then you have to just like move the boot to the end of the screen to make him go there.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: But going somewhere doesn't do anything.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: There's another button, and it's a finger pointing, and that means you poke something. So if you—if you use the finger button on something, you poked it. And so if you poke a door, it opens. [titters]

Justin: Yes, that's right.

Sydnee: If you poke an object, you pick it up.

Justin: That's the use—the hand button is usually like a use or interact with.

Sydnee: If you poke a person, in this game, you poke a person. Like you poked them, and they don't like it, and they tell you that they didn't like it. It's not a way to interact with them, it's a way to poke them. And I don't like the idea—

Justin: [chuckles]

Sydnee: That when I—when I use a pokey finger on a door, the door miraculously opens. But when I use a pokey finger on a human, I literally poke them.

Justin: Right. I understand that is—that's tough. I understand why that's frustrating.

Sydnee: There's a set of eyeglasses, there's like a pair of eyeglasses, and I can use those to look at things.

Justin: Correct, yeah.

Sydnee: Which means that then the narrator tells me about them.

Justin: Yes. And that's more talking for you, which I saw that—I noticed you didn't—I wouldn't say you seeked that out a lot, the more talking.

Sydnee: No, because—well, there's jokes all through the talking. [chuckles]

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And so it's not just like, here's the information you need. It's like, here's some gags.

Justin: Now, you're notably not a big fan of jokes, you've said in the past. Is that accurate?

Sydnee: [chuckles] That's not true. I don't—I don't necessarily want—I'm like trying to solve the puzzle. I'm trying to do the thing. I have a goal, I have a mission. I don't need the...

Justin: It's all a bunch of falderal and fiddle-dee-dee.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: As you're concerned.

Sydnee: I don't go at life that way. Just like tell me what you need, and I will fix it for you.

Justin: So—

Sydnee: I am a pharmacist, man. I take that seriously. And then there's a, hold on, there's a talk bubble. And that's how you talk to—

Justin: There is a talk bubble, yes.

Sydnee: Talk to humans.

Justin: Correct.

Sydnee: And I think that's—and then there's like, you know, a little thing for saving and a little thing for your inventory.

Justin: Freddy Pharkas is interesting in that... you can't die in all these kinds of games. This is one where you can die, and you die for weird reasons. Like—

Sydnee: Like if you just don't figure things out fast enough, you die. Which is very frustrating when we figured out pretty quickly that there's a manual, that we did have access to. Because we were playing the game legally, we weren't illegally—

Justin: That's right, we got it on gog.com, you can get it for like five bucks, I think, on there.

Sydnee: But we didn't know that we had access to the manual. So, for a minute we were like, we don't know how to play this game, and it's because there's a manual that we didn't know we had. But—

Justin: The manual is cool, and I think it's kind of neat. It kind of ties into this like the whole aesthetic. It looks like one of the medical textbooks that we've looked at. Do you want to look—

Sydnee: Yeah, the—

Justin: Can you read just like the first—

Sydnee: The manual is called The Modern Day Book of Health and Hygiene. And it does, it looks—it is a very Sawbonesy kind of look. And the introduction, just to give you kind of like a snippet, is, "Mankind has made phenomenal strides in the diagnosis and treatment of disease. No longer are we taking the naive viewpoint of our ancestors, pointing our fingers at the sick and scabrous, and crying, 'Gadzooks, he's infested by evil spirits and demons.'

No, we know—we now know that the root causes of diseases are far less ethereal and far more commonplace. Some are caused by the collection of toxins within the system, and some are caused by poorly shaped or missing bumps on the skull." And anyway, so then he goes on, and there's like a list of household pharmacopeia, stuff that you need. You know, everything from like an alcohol lamp and bandages, to a gas spectroscope. [chuckles] Which is pretty advanced for the time, I have to say.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Pill making machine, thermometers. And then on the medications. And the medications, I mean, some of this stuff is real, right? Like ammonia, that's a thing.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: That's the thing. Aspirin is a thing. Anesthetic, balm, these are things. Like 'balm' is a general term, right? Like—

Justin: Of course, yeah.

Sydnee: But like these are actual things. And then there are things like bismethylquinolone...

Justin: That's not real?

Sydnee: Not that I know of.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Bismuth subsalicylate is. Bleach is real. Borax is real. Boric acid, caffeine, calamine...

Justin: Borax is real.

Sydnee: Calcium carbonate... Let me see, there's some—but then there's stuff like, I don't know what estros... estrosterine, which is like a birth control thing. So, there's some fake stuff.

Justin: So this is cool though, I—

Sydnee: Mixed in with like mercurochrome, that was a real thing. So like, there's real stuff in the manual.

Justin: It's a cool way of like bridging into that. Because I think what's kind of interesting about this game, it is different from a lot of... these point and click adventure games. Usually, the flow is, you walk around, you collect a bunch of items. You know, you pick up whatever isn't nailed down. And then you use that to solve the puzzle. You pick up those items, you'll use them together sometimes. Sometimes you'll, you know, you'll find the key. The most classic example, you know, it's never that direct.

Like, there is one sort of like very notable example where you have to create a mustache to fool a hotel clerk. And the way you do it is you put maple syrup on some plastic and then convince a cat to run through a hole. And then you get the cat hair on the plastic. The Monkey Island games is another

notable one where you have to put a pulley in a rubber chicken, and that is a device that you need to progress at some point. And it's very counterintuitive and kind of silly. But this game, you are collecting stuff around the world, but it's always in service of creating these like cures. Like creating stuff in your pharmacy.

Sydnee: And you have a lot of those—so, you can go back to your pharmacy, and you have a lab where a lot of this stuff already is, right? Like you have the beakers and graduated cylinders and, you know, a weight, and something to weigh things, and measuring spoons. And you have various ingredients in water, medicinal papers and boxes, an alcohol lamp. And a gas spectroscope, which is kind of cool that you have that.

I assume this was invented by this—I didn't do that research, I don't know how long a gas spectrometer has been around. That is actually a real thing. But anyway, there's a lot of ingredients in there that you can use to make the cures that people need. And so that's part of the game, is like, you're at your counter in your pharmacy. People come in and are like, "Here's my prescription." There's a drunk doctor at the saloon you can meet. [titters]

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: I don't know that I love the doctor representation in this—

Justin: [laughs] It's not great.

Sydnee: Game. But at the same time, like we've done a lot of shows on patent medicines and medicine shows, and sort of that era of medicine. So, the idea that the town just has this one doctor, and listen, he may not be great—[chuckles] but he's all we got. And maybe we pay him in booze at the local saloon.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Is actually not that wild. Like, that's not that far-fetched. That is possible.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: And medical education was not standardized at the time. And so the idea that he would write these wild prescriptions...

Justin: It's just not that—you're right, honey, the doctor representation is—they should have been more thoughtful with the way you're... you all are presented. Now, once you do sort of like get the prescription, though, once you can suss out what needs to happen, you have to actually go to the manual for advice.

Sydnee: Yes. You have to go to the manual, where it will tell you. Sometimes they need something that is on your shelf, but for the most part, they don't. They need something that you have to make. And to make it, you have to take various ingredients and do like little chemistry experiments. So you take liquid ingredients and pour them in a graduated cylinder to measure 'em out. And like, in milliliters.

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: You take solid ingredients, and you've got a little balance so that you can weigh how much it is. You gotta mix it all together in a beaker, you have to stir it. And then you have to either like put it in your pill maker and make little pills out of it, or put it on medicinal papers sometimes. Or in a pill box of some sort. And then you hand that over to the customer, hopefully, the right thing. I assume—I mean, we got it right every time, I assume I would have murdered people if I had—

Justin: Yeah, what's interesting, the manual is where a lot of the instruction—I mean, it would basically be impossible to play without that.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Justin: Do you know why they do that?

Sydnee: Mm-mm.

Justin: So, it's a... in this game, it is probably the most sort of like advanced form of this I've seen, but it's copy protection, is what they would call it. So,

this game initially was on floppy disk. And floppy disk was, at this point, like the actual, you know, five and a quarter inch square shaped floppy disks. And they were really easy to copy. And so, what they would do is they would put something where you need to put in information that you find in the physical manual.

Because the idea would be, if your buddy had copied the game for you, or, you know, probably not downloaded off the internet at this point, maybe, but you know, if your buddy had copied it, then you wouldn't have the manual, and you couldn't answer the questions. This game, it into the narrative. Other games, it's more obvious. I remember there was a Monty Python game where you had to look up a certain page and tell them what kind of cheese was on that page. And then when you type the name of the cheese in, that's how you got past the copy production.

Sydnee: And I will say too, there are jokes in the manual.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: I was like reading through the ingredients. They kind of know like some of these things are silly. They have a Ureaphilofine. "Liquid version of Ureaphine, used to alleviate the dreaded purple urine syndrome, common to children who have ingested purple crayons." Yeah, so they've got—they've got all kinds of like funny little things. They have—we didn't get to procedures, like broken bones, acne—

Justin: Yeah, there's a lot more—

Sydnee: Burns, choking. There's a lot more that you can do. And they're all—I mean, I will say, like, it's pretty—it's pretty fun to read the manual itself. So, I don't know.

Justin: Yeah, you can look it up online. Or buy the game, and you can get it with your purchase. Like I said, I got it on gog.com. You might be able to find it other places, I don't know. But it was very affordable. If you like our show, you like this kind of thing, I don't know, it's, I think it's worth checking out.

Sydnee: Can I—can I give you—

Justin: Some of the—I will say this, some of the gags have not aged super well. You know, the '90s was a different—a different time, and there's some—

Sydnee: Some representation of people from different parts of the world—

Justin: That's not great. It's trying to be urbane and clever, but it's, I don't know, it is very much a different time.

Sydnee: Yeah, like a Blazing Saddles thing, like you said. I will say, I was looking through here and the heart attack, they talk about like how to manage a heart attack in this manual. "One of the most feared sicknesses of all time, heart attack is a result of a sickly constitution. Preventive medicine is best. A healthy constitution must be fomented by a varied healthy diet. Eat plenty of red meat, liver, pork, eggs, cream, cheese and fried foods. Supplement this with homegrown vegetables such as potatoes, corn, peas, pure white bread—"

Justin: [chuckles]

Sydnee: "Fruits, when available. However, be warned, fruits may contain worms and other impurities and should be eaten sparingly." [chuckles]

Justin: Great.

Sydnee: So, it's got a good sense of humor.

Justin: That's fun.

Sydnee: I thought it was a lot of fun. I like the mixing. I like the making the potions—

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: So to speak, kind of aspect of it. And solving people's problems. I think that that was all really cute. The time limit, the time thing was stressful.

Justin: It was stressful.

Sydnee: But it was—but it was a fun little game, and it was an interesting—I wouldn't say like, did this—was this sort of a play on the medicine of the time? Yes, but in the vaguest way. Like they're not really depending on a knowledge of what kind of—

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: You know what I mean?

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Like they reference hysteria and the vapors and stuff in a very vague way, which would be an accurate thing. But then they're not like, nobody—I—well, I don't want to say nobody did any research, but it doesn't feel like they're trying to be accurate, you know? They're not trying to talk about the medicines of the time, they're just sort of joking about it.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: But it was fun!

Justin: Yeah, it is a lot of fun. That's gonna do for us. Thanks to The Taxpayers for the use of their song, Medicines, as the intro and outro of our program. And thanks to you for listening! That's gonna do it for us for this week, until next time. My name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: And as always, don't drill a hole in your head.

["Medicines" by The Taxpayers plays]

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