

y Gene Alloway

From one of the best known science fiction houses in the world comes Day of the Tentacle, a veteran of Intel-based computing fame but a welcome and entertaining addition to the Macintosh game family. It's a cartoony, slapstick B-movie on steroids (or perhaps toxic mutagens) which will grab your attention and your funny bone from the word go. There are few games like it for any platform, and any successors will have quite a task to better it.

[Suddenly, It Grew Arms...](#)

The Day of the Tentacle is the further adventures of Bernard Bernoulli and Dr. Fred in Maniac Mansion (The original Maniac Mansion is included on the disk as well). This time, a hamster brings news that the green Tentacle, a friend of Bernard's, has been imprisoned with the Purple Tentacle and is about to be destroyed by Dr. Fred. What Bernard doesn't know is that the Purple Tentacle has drunk the waste from Dr. Fred's Sludge-o-Matic™, and has grown both arms and an evil disposition to take over the world. Bernard, rushing headlong to save his friend, releases both Tentacles, but soon realizes his mistake. Bernard and Dr. Fred seek to avert the change in the Purple Tentacle by sending Bernard back in time to prevent the Sludge-o-Matic™ from releasing waste. Joining the quest, Bernard's sidekicks Hoagie and Laverne are sent 200 years into the past and future, respectively, while Bernard goes nowhere and must find a way to save his friends and the world.

[First, Attach the Thingamajig to the Discombobulator](#)

The system requirements for Day of the Tentacle (DotT) are fairly steep. Most notably, it will only work on machines with 68040 or Power PC processors, which leaves some folks using older machines out in the cold. In addition to the system requirements listed at the beginning of this article and above, DotT also demands that Virtual Memory and other memory managers (like Ram Doubler) be turned off. This shouldn't be a problem, but if your system file is large due to extensions and fonts, and you have only 8 MB of RAM, you might need to work to get the necessary RAM from the game. In fact, the more extensions you turn off the better the game runs. Also, File Sharing must be disabled.

[So, How Do You Steer This Thing?](#)

The play of DotT is very straight-forward. Interface and preference settings are well done and virtually self-explanatory. After you go through the extensive opening cut, or short animated sequence like a movie scene, you begin to explore. The interface for movement, communication, and exploration presented is simple and elegant. The lower left part of the screen has a number of actions you can perform while Bernard (under your control) follows his quest. Simple commands like "Give," "Pick Up," "Use," and "Pull" (there are 9 in all) can be chosen and applied to an object on the screen by pointing and clicking.

Regardless of what command you have chosen, whenever the cursor passes over an object which is interactive in some way, the appropriate command is highlighted. This hint enables Bernard to identify the important things in a room or situation rapidly, and keeps the game lively. At numerous points there are other cuts, some of which are fairly long. During these cuts, you are simply along for the ride, so clicking on things won't have any effect. However, the easy interface and the cuts do keep the game moving along at a good clip.

The preferences allow you to save and open games and alter the way you receive information. In particular, you can easily set whether you want all voice, all text, or both. You can also set the sound level of music, sound effects, and voice, and turn music and sound effects on or off. This is easy to do, and I would be surprised if very many players could not tell what to do from just looking at the screen. Again, good features with a clear interface.

[hat Do You Want First, the Good News, or the Bad News?](#)

The good news is that DotT plays smoothly, sounds great, has a very good interface and good documentation, and is well written. In both animation and sound, I found no skips, delays, remnants, or crashes. In fact, the information and actions on and coming out of the screen were so responsive that I needed to pay a little more attention to them, not unlike being at a movie. Also, the voices were well acted, unique, and very animated in their own right. They definitely added to the atmosphere of the game.

The interface I have gone on about above, but it is important to note that the main benefit I see from its design is that it lets you concentrate on the game, not the tools to play the game. Though it seems a simple thing, a good interface is worth a lot to me as a game player, especially if I am being asked to “suspend disbelief” by the designers of a game.

The documentation is very thorough as well. It includes a standard manual covering setup, play, technical support, and troubleshooting, and a very extensive tip book which gives you three levels of clues for each situation, a list of items you need and why, and the entire adventure written in story form. There is literally no need to go elsewhere to get info for the game. They give you all the tools up front.

The writing is very good, and very funny. Three things became clear to me early on. One is that the writers enjoyed their work. There was no sense that scenes or dialogue were written just to fill a gap or to move things along. Another is the writers' familiarity with the B-Movie genre. These folks did not just make something up after one viewing of Plan 9 From Outer Space. They have been to the fabled run-down, drive-in temple, and worshipped at it's multi-storied altar of bad celluloid. And it shows in outlandish situations, weird premises, unfathomable machines, and a hilarious mixture of science and fantasy. Lastly, they are good storytellers. You learn about characters, you like them, and you more or less care about them and get drawn in.

The “bad” news is really not so bad, but it is important to note. What I noticed the most is the configuring of the system. I had to work more than on other games, in that I had to turn off extensions and rework my memory management. Maybe I am old fashioned, but I like to think of Macintosh programs as plug-and-play applications, and it is a standard I hold up to both hardware and software.

Other “newsworthy” things I noticed were a few too many cuts and the lack of replay value. I did enjoy most of the cuts, but there were several which presented parts of the plot or information which might have been learned from interaction, rather than presentation. In particular, I would have liked more interaction with the professor and with the initial exploration of the house in the beginning before Hoagie and Laverne were sent through time.

The lack of replay value is fairly endemic in many adventure games. Once you go through it, there is little reason to go through again, unless you just want to try something goofy or funny you didn't do (or didn't do enough to suit yourself) the first time. I am a fan of multiple story paths to the same (or similar) ends, but I also understand that is always an ambitious undertaking.

IT'S ALIVE! IT'S ALIVE!

Day of the Tentacle is very entertaining, very humorous piece of work. It has all the important elements of a good, bad B-Movie, but with a cartoon feel. The price is reasonable, the time of play is good, the interface well-done, and the story entertaining and engaging. When it came out on the PC side, it stayed pretty high on the better adventure game lists for most of 1994. I wouldn't be surprised to see it at the same level on the Macintosh game lists as well.

Pros

- Funny Story Line
- Great sound
- Great Imagery
- Interface very well done

Cons

- Too many "cuts," or scenes without interaction
- Significant demands on system configuration
- Little replay value

Publisher Info

LucasArts Entertainment Company
Post Office Box 10307
San Rafael, CA 94912-9978

(800) 985-8227 (toll free phone)

(818-587-6629 (fax)