Day Of The Tentacle

Studio: **LucasArts**

Designer(s): **Dave Grossman / Tim Schafer**

Part of series: **Maniac Mansion**

Release: June 25, 1993 (original) / March 22, 2016 (remake)

Main credits: Programming: **Jonathan Ackley, Ron Baldwin, Dave Grossman, Tim Schafer**
Artists: **Peter Chan**
Music: **Clint Bajakian, Peter McConnell, Michael Land**

Useful links: [Complete playthrough, parts 1-5](#) (5 *hours*)

Basic Overview

It is a little unfortunate, in my opinion, that *Day Of The Tentacle* was designed as a sequel to *Maniac Mansion*, rather than a completely stand-alone title. Essentially, it means that without playing *Maniac Mansion* first, the player is bound to be somewhat confused by the opening of the game — who are these green and purple tentacles? how and why are they connected to that bunch of kids? what sort of history does Bernard have with the proverbial «mansion»? etc. — not to mention that all the tribulations of the Edison family work best if you know the backstory. Yet *recommending* that each player complete *Maniac Mansion* first (subtly hinted at by the designers, who went so far as to include the original title as a game-within-a-game — see below) is fairly harsh, because while *Day Of The Tentacle*, especially in its remastered form, is perfectly playable by anybody even in this day and age, *Maniac Mansion* remains a museum piece with outdated graphics and no sound, playable only by game historians and truly dedicated aficionados.

This is particularly unfortunate because in every other respect, *Day Of The Tentacle* is not really a «sequel», but a fully autonomous enterprise. It was designed not by *Maniac Mansion*'s original creators, but by the *Monkey Island* co-designers Dave Grossman and Tim Schafer, who first worked with Ron Gilbert, then took over his duties after his departure from
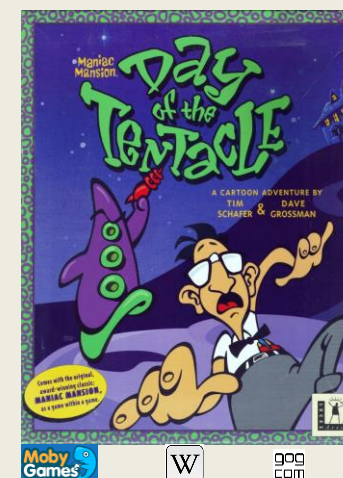
LucasArts — even though one of Ron's earlier concepts (involving time travel) was indeed chosen as the basis for the game's storyline. The game involves a completely different roster of playable characters (except for Bernard, who still goes through a complete character transformation, from a forgettable and interchangeable nerdy sidekick in *Maniac Mansion* to a fully fleshed-out, personality-endowed hero in *Day Of The Tentacle*). The story itself has few, if any, ties to the plotline of *Maniac Mansion*. And in terms of puzzle design, world-building, story intricacy, witty and funny dialog, music, voices, and graphics, *Day Of The Tentacle* blows its predecessor out of the water — even taking into account the predictable raising of standards from 1988 to 1993, the boys did such an outstanding job here that, in quite a few aspects, *Day Of The Tentacle* has yet to be bettered by any game that followed it... and perhaps it never will.

Of course, this unfortunate little chain link is only a stumbling block for situations where, for instance, you want to make a point about video games as an art form to somebody who has never played a video game before. General players will hardly be bothered with a little confusion (certainly no more so than all those millions of people playing *The Witcher 3* without ever having tried out the first two) — and, in fact, I am pretty sure that many of the critics who gave glowing reviews to *Day Of The Tentacle* upon its original release had never experienced *Maniac Mansion* (I almost wanted to write "had not yet been born in the times of *Maniac Mansion*", but people might have a hard time understanding that one figuratively).

Yet the fact that so many people who have actually played the game were willing to bestow upon it the title of the most perfectly designed adventure game of all time — just check all those Steam or MetaCritic pages — contrasts quite radically with the fact that, like most LucasArts titles, it was never a big seller (80,000 copies sold in 16 years, according to a report on Wikipedia — compared to, say, 400,000 copies of *King's Quest 6* allegedly sold on its first week). And this is understandable, because, maybe more so than any other LucasArts game, *Day Of The Tentacle* is the high point of the studio's hip, post-modern, wildly absurdist ideology. You do not need to go past the box cover, featuring a nerdy guy pursued by a giant purple tentacle, to realize that this purchase is, perhaps, best suited for those looking for "something completely different". That it was produced at all, by a subdivision of one of the major film and game companies of its time, is an impressive testament to an epoch in video gaming the likes of which we will probably never see again.

The good news is that, following *Grim Fandango*, *Day Of The Tentacle* would also be eventually picked up by Tim Schafer's studio, Double Fine Productions, and, more than 20 years after its original release, would receive a major facelift, allowing old fans to refresh their memories and new fans to once more breathe in that air of liberty from 1993, enhanced by convenient updates in graphics and interface. The overwhelmingly positive response to the remake clearly proved that the game hasn't aged one day — except for, maybe, carrying over a whiff of that time period's adorable innocence.

Content evaluation

Plotline

In a different age, in a different environment, in the hands of different... uh, *alternately* talented people the plot of *Day Of The Tentacle*, resting on the shoulders of two of the most tired tropes of existence — «evil monster wants to take over the world» and «time travel fucks things up» — would have turned into a boring mess. Actually, the brief introduction sequence, in which Green Tentacle fails to stop Purple Tentacle for imbibing the radioactive waste flowing into the river out of Dr. Fred's laboratory, *is* a bit disappointing. It is merely a plot device intended to set things in motion, but we do not know that yet, and the sheer fact that it is not Ernst Stavro Blofeld or Emperor Palpatine, but a giant Purple Tentacle thundering "I FEEL LIKE I COULD TAKE ON THE WORLD!!", is not altogether reassuring.

Anybody familiar with the history of LucasArts, though, will immediately remember that the studio's basic principle is rarely, if ever, to invent entirely new plots, but rather deconstruct and play with traditional ones in ways that simultaneously mock their conventions and breathe new life into them. In order to stop Purple Tentacle from his nefarious activities and ensure the survival of the human race, our heroes (what heroes? we'll get to that momentarily) have to go back in time and prevent his incident rather than neutralize it post-factum. In the process, due to the fact of Dr. Fred "Stingy" Edison using a fake diamond instead of a real one, they end up in three different time periods — the past, the present, and the future — making their task far more complicated, since now they have to find different ways to power up their «Chron-o-Johns» (don't ask) for the return journey; a particularly daunting challenge for the one stuck in the era of the Constitutional Convention, though somewhat alleviated by the opportunity of having Ben Franklin sticking around.

The three heroes in question are Bernard Bernoulli, a nerdy student first introduced in the original *Maniac Mansion* and now turned protagonist; Hoagie, an overweight, nihilistic, non-plussed metalhead roadie; and Laverne, a medical student who's seemingly breathed in one too many chemicals. Of these, Bernard is the least interesting character by himself, more or less a generic blank slate for an inventive nerd — but Hoagie and Laverne are among the most unforgettable playable characters ever created in computerland, and, dare I say it, only made possible by the generally whacky atmosphere of the early software

industry. Fortunately for us, the least interesting character (Bernard) stays in the least interesting time period (the present), while Hoagie is sent off to remain colorfully unperturbed at the sights of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, and Laverne is propelled into the future, where Tentacles have taken over and are now keeping humans on leashes like the pet poodles they deserve to be.

What makes this plot truly outstanding, however, is not the idea of human history as a gradual evolution from the Constitutional Convention to the replacement of *Homo sapiens* by the Tentacle as a dominant species, but the idea of it as a chain of causes and consequences, one slight tweak at one end of which will bring on radical changes at the other. Not only do the deeds that Hoagie and Bernard perform on their end influence the fate of Laverne's Tentacle-dominated future, but all three characters can actually use their stuck Chron-o-Johns to pass objects from one era into another, accelerating those influences and changes when necessary. This simple, but utterly unrealistic mechanic could hardly be thought of in a serious sci-fi novel or movie, but it is perfectly fitting for a video game — and it creates a nearly limitless sack of possibilities, only a few of which, unfortunately, have been realized in the actual game (this is not a criticism, though: had Grossman and Schafer gotten *too* carried away with all the fun, the final product would not have shipped before the dissolution of LucasArts).

To be sure, this feels more like a triumph of algorithmic intellect rather than a showcase of substantial philosophical depth. There is no strong moral tale told here, and the overall convoluted web of motifs feels like an outrageous mish-mash of elements from *Back To The Future*, *Planet Of The Apes*, and maybe a little *Dr. Strangelove* thrown in for good measure. In other words, *Day Of The Tentacle* is still, first and foremost, a LucasArts video game, albeit one of the very best. But then, complaining about this is a bit like begrudging the fact that, although the current Olympic champion *did* set an absolute record for pole vaulting in the history of mankind, he did not, in fact, clear the Empire State Building. LucasArts Games were rarely about telling an impressive story; they were always about breaking the limits for imagination, unpredictability, humor, and outside-the-box thinking. And in all these matters, *Day Of The Tentacle* sets such high watermarks that the game still remains more memorable than many later games with formally more deep and complex storylines and philosophies.

Puzzles

Many of the puzzles designed for *Day Of The Tentacle* have long since passed into legend, and for damn good reasons. This is one of the toughest LucasArts games to beat without a walkthrough (or a hintbook, if you take the Chron-o-John back to 1993) — because it takes the base mechanic of *Maniac Mansion*, where you had to think your way out of any situation by correctly applying the combined talents of your squad members, and sends it to the next level by separating your squad members with

the sheer factor of *time*.

Even when you get used to the idea that your characters can communicate with each other through the bowels of a spacetime-continuum-disrupting portable toilet — even when you actually get used to *that*, the necessity to constantly switch between characters and have them pass to one another a variety of objects can remain disconcerting for the most meticulous players. This is rigorously superimposed over the classic LucasArts logic which you also have to adhere to at all times — the same logic that makes it perfectly reasonable that not only can a candy machine hold about eight hundred seventy-six thousand six hundred dollars worth of quarters, but that a single living person can fit them all in his pants and then quickly insert all of them into a washing machine to keep it running for the next couple hundred years. Makes perfect sense, doesn't it?

I would not necessarily agree with the popular opinion that all, or even most, of *Tentacle*'s puzzles are exemplary models of perfect puzzle design. At least one serious flaw is the lack of direct communication between the characters once they are separated: in order to have one of them help out the other, he or she must essentially *guess* (on some sort of telepathic level?) what the other one might need in the future or past. This results in weird experiences where sometimes you feel like you *must* do something without clearly understanding what you need it for. Thus, early in the game it is obvious that you *must* somehow convince George Washington to chop down a cherry tree — because the legend demands it — but it actually takes putting more than two and two together to understand how this will benefit Laverne in her state of distress. The puzzle itself is not too difficult, but you have to find some extra internal motivation to solve it.

Later on, things get progressively more and more complicated, with Laverne truly getting the short end of the stick — in order to have her mummy win the Best Hair, Best Smile, Best Laugh competition, she must receive chrono-stream donations from both Hoagie and Bernard, as well as make some pretty unorthodox grooming decisions on her own. Top prize, however, goes to the infamous multi-part Hamster Puzzle, which would take a very large paragraph to describe (a.k.a. spoil) in detail — suffice it to say that in order to have the little guy powering up the engine needed to transport Laverne back into the present, nothing works short of an entire constitutional amendment that will require every American to keep a vacuum cleaner in their basement (quote John Hancock: "What's a vacuum cleaner?").

Although it would be a stretch to call the three universes of *Day Of The Tentacle* an «open world» (most of the action does, in fact, take place within one and the same mansion in three different chronological states), many of the puzzles may be performed in pretty random order, depending on which of your guys you want to focus on first or last. There will always come a time, though, when you will get hopelessly stuck in one place and be forced to move on to the next character, and then to the next, and it does require a pretty neat ordering of your brain — or, at least, of your notepad — to not get paralyzed in the ocean of possible (and impossible) choices. Of course, you will not get overwhelmed with pending quests the way it happens in modern RPGs, but most of the quests in RPGs are laughably simple anyway: *Day Of The Tentacle* gives you fewer things to do, but makes you work *really* hard for each specific result.

That said, the game lays out its rules of conduct — harsh, but consistent — quite clearly from the beginning, and never lets the player down with dead ends, deadlocks, or dead bodies (in *Maniac Mansion*, there were situations in which your characters could actually die; *Day Of The Tentacle* is deathproof all the way). The game plays out at a leisurely pace, where (after a short while) you can freely navigate between any of your characters at any given time; only at the very end a drop of tension is introduced when you have to run circles around the annoying Purple Tentacle trying to shrink your characters, and even then it is quickly understood that it is more a matter of calmly and properly timing your actions rather than action-style reflexes. All in all, cracking these puzzles is a fun thing to do — and if you feel lost every once in a while, you might as well just enjoy being lost, soaking in the game's overall atmosphere while waiting for a stroke of inspiration.

Atmosphere

As inventive and ingenious as the game's many challenges are, let me tell you this: unless you yourself are made out of silicon or any other semiconductor, you are *not* playing *Day Of The Tentacle* to solve puzzles. You are playing *Day Of The Tentacle* to soak in its seemingly endless humor, whose expanse in this game is at least several times wider than in *Monkey Island* — with the player controlling three totally different characters for the price of one Guybrush, and guiding them through three different worlds, with an atmosphere of total whackiness being the sole tube of glue joining them together.

It is still a pretty large tube of glue, resulting in what I would call the only major weakness of the game's spirit: despite lots and lots of formally different elements that separate the Past, Present, and Future (most notably visible in the graphic representations of the respectively «colonial», «modern», and «futuristic» models of the same mansion), all three settings still unfurl as rather insignificant variations on the same panorama of absurdist characters. This is at least partially intentional, given that some of the characters in different epochs have their *doppelgängers* in other time periods: for instance, the 18th century Benjamin Franklin, flying his electricity-attracting kites on the lawn, becomes the stereotypical 20th century novelty goods salesman with his gun lighters and exploding cigars (if you were looking for a philosophical edge to this game, here's a good spot to stop and think). But the downside is that, while switching from Hoagie to Laverne and back again, you are probably not going to go «*wow*, now I'm in 18th century America! and *wow*, now I'm deep in the future!» Because essentially, you are just staying on different screens of the same comedy world.

Arguably the most fantastic thing about the game are the characters of Hoagie and Laverne themselves. Unlike the classic time-travel or Alice-in-Wonderland type setting, neither of the two shows the least bit of confusion, giddiness, or amazed disbelief — instead, finding themselves actually physically present in their new temporal surroundings, they largely continue to behave the same way they would react to just reading books on the subject, the only difference being the ability to get some direct feedback from the info source itself.

Hoagie's type is well established by an early dialog between Dr. Fred and Bernard ("Good boy. Does he have any experience with electronics?" – "Uh... I once saw him take 3000 volts directly through his head without batting an eye" – "Didn't he pass out?" – "Well, he was already passed out when it happened"). He may seem to be taken out directly of some early Nineties' teen comedy, but the dialog he is given reveals him to be quite sharp and inventive when he feels himself triggered — which, admittedly, does not happen too often. His interactions with quasi-18th century Founding Fathers are hilarious because neither of the two parties seems to pay much significance to the decidedly odd looks of the other, though Hoagie does not mind tweaking a bit of history to make it more adaptable to his modern tastes (hence his endless stream of recommendations for the American flag to Betsy Ross: "How about a skull with scorpions in its mouth?", "We need a babe in a leather bikini, swinging a broadaxe", "The guys say they want a big family crest, and in the four corners, they need a keg, some babes, a guitar, and some drum sticks, and underneath it all put AMERICA ROCKS!!"); clearly, his actual interest in his country's history goes a bit deeper than he allows to let on.

In the end, Hoagie may be a caricaturesque representation of the damn-it-all-to-hell mindset of the astute, but lazy, rebellious, but nonchalant American teen from the early 1990s, but then the game's Founding Fathers are equally caricaturesque — and,

in some ways, *extremely* sacrilegious — depictions of the American Ideal as putting personal profit, vanity, and pomp before everything else ("Does Mrs. Washington know you wear so much makeup?" – "One must wear makeup when one receives the phenomenal amount of media attention that I do", Mr. Soon-To-Be-President humbly remarks). Unlike Sierra's *Pepper's Adventures In Time*, an «edutainment» project which was, coincidentally, also released in 1993 and which actually tried to give the players *some* sort of history lesson, *Day Of The Tentacle* is more concerned about, perhaps, giving you a hint that there may be far more in common between the immaculately memorialized Founding Fathers and the lazy, dirty, scruffy, value-less, nihilistic kids of today than one would suspect.

But my favorite character by far — arguably, one of the top 2–3 playable female characters ever written in the history of video games — is Laverne. Nobody truly knows why she looks, walks, talks, and acts the way she does — is it drugs? cerebral palsy? too much formaldehyde in her medical lab? Officially, she qualifies for the status of «strong female character», particularly seeing that she is chosen to survive in the most dangerous environment of the game (the dystopian future in which humans have been enslaved by Tentacles), but that strength is truly one of a kind; throughout her segment, Laverne remains a mystery, and although we do get that she is smart, on the whole her morals feel weirdly skewed, as she allows herself to flirt with the tentacles and seems upset when the Tentacle Doctor refuses to operate on her ("Are you gonna use your scalpel?" – "No" – "Darn. Do you wanna use mine?"). The ambiguity is all-pervasive: on one hand, she does warn us about the risks of putting hamsters in microwave ovens, as if apologizing for the wanton cruelty of *Maniac Mansion*, on the other, Laverne's very first lines in the game, upon seeing the little animal, are "Look, Hoagie, it's a hamster... just what I need for the dissection lab tomorrow!").

Despite the fact that modern players, upon coming across Laverne's character, tend to use (or even abuse) the word "creepy" (indeed, I have a hard time imagining somebody writing a character like Laverne into any video game released after, say, 2010), it is precisely her "creepiness" that allows her to thrive and come out on top in the Tentacle Dystopia, where she watches humans suffer their fate with more scientific interest and, perhaps, even curious excitement rather than such boringly predictable reactions as horror or pity. Humorous takes on futuristic dystopia were nothing new in comics or cartoons by 1993, of course, but I am not sure if any of those had such colorfully written characters as Laverne to act as witnesses of the human race paying for its pride and stupidity. Whenever I play as Laverne, I somehow get a vague, but awesome feel of total invincibility coming over myself — verily the freaks shall inherit the tentacle-ridden Earth, I say unto you.

Beautifully and hilariously written dialog is so abundant in the game that, had it been adapted into a movie, it would have become an endless source of quotations to rival at least *Monty Python*, if not the more popular and mainstream giants like

Tarantino. "If you want to save the world, you gotta push a few old ladies down the stairs". "What was your favorite part of the Declaration of Independence?" – "I like those S's that look like F's...". "Hello, my silent gauze-wrapped friend... do you think it's strange, me talking to a mummy? It's not so different from talking to guys at med school... except even you dress better than they do". I could go on like that for hours, but I think you get the drift even if you haven't played the game (or were an utter fool and rushed through it way too quickly, because a *lot* of that golden content is totally optional).

It might, in fact, be the first computer game ever whose atmosphere is created 90% by character interaction: not fighting monsters, not running away from ghosts and ghouls, not wandering around in beautiful and mysterious forests, not flying around in outer space (the Chron-o-Johns would look decidedly silly in such an environment), not going after pixelated romance, not enjoying the illusionary wonders of 3D physics, but simply bumping one sprite against another and absorbing the absurdist juiciness of the aftermath. And if you needed any additional proof of that, there are a couple of objects, like the Textbook and the Invisible Ink, which can be used on *any* NPC in the game, past, present, or future, just to elicit a variety of responses from the targeted crowds. (If you have Laverne taken out for a walk by the Tentacle Guard and use the Ink on the monster, his response is "ON THE GRASS! DO IT ON THE GRASS!", which always cracks me up). In doing so, *Day Of The Tentacle* really made your machine come alive — although, of course, in order to achieve the required goal, the game also had to make good use of technical progress, and this is a good pretext to stop ranting on matters of substance and raise a glass to the techie guys.

Technical features

Note: *The following section will cover (and, where necessary, compare) both the original 1990 edition of the game and the 2016 Remastered Edition. No separate review for the remake is necessary, since it changes nothing in the base game but rather just provides a complete overhaul of its visuals, sound, and gameplay interface.*

Graphics

In terms of visuals, *Day Of The Tentacle* marked a significant stylistic departure for LucasArts games. Peter Chan, who had previously worked in a subordinate function on the art of *Monkey Island 2*, was assigned the leading role, and his vision for the game demanded that it be made more explicitly cartoonish and grotesque, *Loony Tunes*-style. This approach did not quite stick with the studio — it certainly influenced the style of such games as *Sam & Max Hit The Road* (released the same year and also artistically directed by Chan) and *Curse Of Monkey Island*, but overall, *Day Of The Tentacle* probably remains the one

LucasArts game that is closest in style to a classic old-fashioned cartoon — something that was fairly innovative back in 1993, when videogames were generally more busy thinking about how to make their imagery *more* rather than *less* realistic.

The difference is particularly obvious if you survey the transformation that the Edison Mansion has undergone since the days of *Maniac Mansion*. In the old game, although severely limited by lo-res EGA graphics, the Mansion itself looked «normal» — at least, in that it had normal walls, normal doors, normal beds, normal tables, next to which one could find all sorts of weird objects and characters. The renovated Mansion is all bent, curved, and twisted, with the main shapes and features remaining largely unchanged all the way from colonial times into the future. So are the characters, each of them drawn as a cartoonish type — Bernard with his 50/50 head to body proportions, Buddy Holly glasses, and obligatory bowtie; Hoagie with his baseball cap, huge wads of eye-covering hair, pot belly, and skull-adorned shirt; and, of course, our Supergirl Laverne, with naturally explosive hair making all perms run for cover, clothes that ignore the very existence of the word «fashion», and one eye twice as large as the other. Animation of the leading sprites closely follows their basic shapes — Bernard is always limp and slithery as a snake, Hoagie waddles like a tank (though, when necessary, he displays an unusually uncanny ability to squeeze his huge body through tiny holes), and Laverne… well, suffice it to say that she is certainly in line to inherit John Cleese's position at the Ministry of Silly Walks.

Nobody is spared the ignominy, least of all the Founding Fathers who, admittedly, bear fairly little resemblance to their historical prototypes, but are at least recognizable by the… umm… shapes of their wigs? The important thing is that the graphic representation matches the personality — poor John Hancock has a permanently terrified and beaten up expression on his face, while Jefferson, on the other hand, holds aloof with a look of absolute smugness and haughtiness, and George Washington is just dandying around (he actually looks about twenty years younger here than he really was at the time, so I'm guessing Chan must have been a secret admirer, despite the strictest directives to picture the Founding Fathers as anything other than narcissistic fops).

Similarly, the fascist / dystopian elements of the game are also neutralized by the visual style: Purple Tentacle and his minions are portrayed as not in the least frightening, clownish buffoons jumping around on suction cups, with their evolutionary

victory achieved not so much through a diligent quest for self-improvement as by the humans' own unbeatable propensity for self-destruction. If there is a single *mildly* terrifying graphical presence in the game, it comes in the shape of the IRS agents coming for an audit in Dr. Fred's mansion, though, admittedly, most of the terror comes from their carefully emotion-stripped voices than their identical identities.

The game features very few close-ups or cut scenes, but in this particular case, it does not really need them: the cartoonish characters manage to be pretty expressive even as mid-size sprites, and there are no significant stylistic differences on those rare occasions when Chan and his team zoom in on the little guys (one could argue, for instance, that the close-ups in *Secret Of Monkey Island* looked stylistically jarring next to the general look of the game). The cartoon style also works wonders on facial animations during talking; although the animations are still largely restricted to the mouth (sometimes the characters bob their heads, too), they are more detailed, and come across as more «cartoonishly realistic» than facial animations for more traditional digital sprites (e.g. Guybrush Threepwood from the *Monkey Island* games, or just about any Sierra game at the time).

All this means that when it finally came to remaking the game for modern graphic systems, more than 20 years later, it was decided that the original graphics — unlike those in the first two *Monkey Island* games — would only receive a proper facelift, instead of being completely redrawn from scratch. Indeed, once the remaster finally appeared on the market, with all the graphics upscaled and shiny and de-pixelated, it became clear that this was the right approach. Just like a carefully remastered movie from the old days, *Day Of The Tentacle Remastered* looks 100% true to its original artistic vision, except that it is actually possible to gaze upon it on a modern monitor without shedding tears of disappointment — replacing them with tears of joy. If the new graphic styles of the first two *Monkey Island* games can have their supporters and detractors, it is hard for me to imagine even the most hardcore nostalgia-phile complaining about the game's new look. (Other than, perhaps, the re-designed interface — but even if one prefers the old mechanics, from a purely visual point of view the game still wins, since the new pop-up interface allows the game picture to completely fill up the screen).

Sound

Music for the game was created by resident LucasArts composers — Clint Bajakian, Michael Land, and Peter McConnell (legend says that each of the three was primarily responsible for one of the three time periods: Bajakian for the 18th century, McConnell for the 20th, Land for the 22nd). As usual, the soundtrack is never ambitious enough to steal the spotlight, but it contributes heavily to the atmosphere, with the music enveloping you every step of the way and the iMUSE system of

LucasArts ensuring for smooth transitions between the various parts of the soundtrack — particularly important now that the player has the option of randomly switching between three different characters (and thus, three time periods) at any point in the game.

As you can probably guess, Bajakian's 18th century soundtrack is significantly different from the other two: little baroque themes accompany Hoagie on most of his travels, except for his presence in the Constitutional Hall, where a louder and prouder martial theme replaces the more courteous music of elsewhere. The other two parts are more similar, especially since Land's «futuristic» soundtrack is created by relying more heavily on electronic tones while often playing fairly conventional vaudeville tunes for comic effect (apparently, musical tastes of the Tentacles had been formed some time around the Jazz Age, if you can believe it).

That said, the soundtrack being nice and all, it is clearly not the music that *Day Of The Tentacle* will be remembered by, but the fact of it being one of the first ever fully voiced LucasArts games (the very first, I think, was *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*) — and not simply voiced, but voiced by professional voice actors, prepared to give it their all. Voice director Tamlynn Barra (who had also worked on *Indiana Jones*) has to be given credit for making all the right choices and giving all the right coaching, the result being sheer comedy gold where pretty much every actor nailed pretty much every personality.

This inevitably means that my own silver prize goes to Denny Delk for his deep, thick, ever-unperturbed, mock-Zen impersonation of Hoagie (Denny would become an absolute LucasArts veteran, starring in almost every game; arguably his most classic performance is that of voicing Murray the Evil Skull in latter-day *Monkey Island* games) — and the gold, of course, goes to Jane Jacobs as the bug-eyed, creepily somnambulant Laverne. Jane, unfortunately, would soon afterwards forever disappear from the acting radar — but not before giving Laverne that fit of terrifying evil laughter which you can encounter from her at the most unpredictable of times, making you feel glad that she and her scalpel, after all, are over *there* and you, the fortunate player, are over *here*. She also seems to have somehow intuitively designed her own unique set of emotional expressions — her Laverne is not actually bereft of emotionality, as she is quite capable of expressing amazement, excitement, sadness, and anger (not fear, though: that particular part of our girl's brain seems to have been amputated), but her semi-retarded, semi-philosophical way of processing all these takes some getting used to.

If we really feel the need to nitpick, a small problem is that the studio's budget was seemingly limited to only a few actors, so that too many characters are voiced by the same person, and every once in a while they might feel a bit overworked. For instance, David "Mr. Zed" Traylor does a fantastic Ed Edison (the son of Dr. Fred, recovering from the horrible trauma of his microwaved hamster), *and* a properly unpleasant Thomas Jefferson, but his Ben Franklin comes across more like a fussy old Victorian lady than (even a parody on) an 18th century American intellectual. And Delk's Hoagie is much more convincing than Delk's George Washington, who doesn't exactly sound authentically «Virginian-English» (of course, nobody *really* knows what the general sounded like, but I think a little more historic authenticity would have sounded fantastic when combined with "I was just admiring my reflection in the window... striking, aren't I?"). That said, the absurdist-comedic nature of the game easily absolves the actors from all such sins — after all, they are not here to give you a lesson in American history, they are here to subvert it and, if possible, send up the grotesquerie of its mythologization.

Interface

The basic mechanics of the gameplay was arguably the only aspect where the original *Day Of The Tentacle* did not introduce any innovations — essentially, it runs on the same version of the SCUMM engine as several previous LucasArts games, starting with *Monkey Island 2*: the bottom left part of the screen is given over to nine command verbs which you combine with objects, while the bottom right part displays your inventory (represented by pictures rather than verbal descriptors). The only addition is a special character icon, which you can change to another character if you want to switch from Bernard to Hoagie or Laverne.

All of this has, however, been redesigned in the *Remastered* version of the game, where changes to the interface system are the second biggest modification after the upscaled graphics. As in the *Monkey Island* remakes, the screen-bottom interfaced has been completely removed — the inventory window can now be brought up as a separate pop-up with a keyboard or controller shortcut, and other shortcuts allow you to switch between characters. Meanwhile, operations with objects or people are performed simply by clicking on them and selecting one of several possible actions represented by pop-up icons (LOOK, OPEN, CLOSE, USE, etc.). I think that the primary purpose for this re-design was to avoid the issue of too many useless choices, as in the original game, technically you could, e.g., TALK to the OUTHOUSE or OPEN GEORGE WASHINGTON, which typically gave you just a generic negative answer. The new system means more work for the designers (since each object in the game has to be manually correlated with a specific set of actions), but less unnecessary fuss for players, making the game a little easier to beat, as you no longer find yourself flooded with tons of extra useless choices.

Interaction with other characters takes place largely in the form of dialog, for the options of which you get some space freed in the bottom of the screen. The way dialog is structured, by the way, constitutes another minor nitpick from me: a huge part of the game's charm is simply to engage your contacts in small talk, and much of that small talk comes in the form of mutually exclusive options — as much as you want to ask *all* the questions and retort with *all* possible reactions, you cannot (unless you abuse the hell out of your save and restore buttons). This is actually typical of contemporary LucasArts games, which liked much more than Sierra to give you the illusion of free choice, but is a bit frustrating for a game which essentially does not need multiple playthroughs. (Note that the guys at LucasArts eventually realised the problem — starting around *The Curse Of Monkey Island*, you were given far more free rein in exhausting those dialog options).

On the other hand, this does give you the option to «build your own Bernard / Hoagie / Laverne» if you wish — a bit more mean, a bit more sympathetic, a bit more curious, a bit more indifferent, whichever you think suits the game's atmosphere best. When chastised by the Tentacles for her appearance, for instance, I always go with "I guess I'd better go shoot myself, then", but you might want to choose "Where I come from, I happen to be quite the babe" or "I think I'm going to kill you" if you feel your Laverne feels more like it.

As I have already mentioned (and this is a commonplace for LucasArts), the game mechanics completely excludes death situations or lock-ups: useful objects do not expire until they have really run out of use, your heroes are always free to trade stuff across the chronostream, and if you fail at some task (like, for instance, getting the Tentacle Judges to judge your entry in the Best Hair, Best Smile, Best Laugh contest), you can always come back and try it again after making some changes. But do not expect the *Remastered* edition to make life significantly easier for you: other than including a separate Developer's Comment, there are no thrown-in hints to be had — so either brace yourself for the challenge, or use your trusty Chron-o-John to look up a walkthrough on the Web.

Verdict: *Probably the single greatest piece of adventure game comedy in existence.*

Day Of The Tentacle is a game that will not be appreciated by «just about anyone», much like *Monty Python* or the Simpsons or *Catch-22* or just about any work of art built around a specific, idiosyncratic sense of humor — great comedy, maybe even more than great tragedy, tends to be limited to certain wavelengths which some people catch easily and some do not catch at all. And with adventure games long since relegated to the dusty back shelves of videogaming, you do not see it all that often listed in those predictable «best games of all time» lists which typically begin with *Mario Bros.* and end with *God Of War* or something. But taken on its own, outside of its humiliating historical context and genre limitations, *Day Of The Tentacle* is as

close to perfection as a comedy-oriented adventure game could ever get (and the fact that it came out in the same year as *Gabriel Knight*, as close to perfection as a tragedy-oriented adventure could ever get, clearly makes 1993 the single greatest year in adventure game history). The brilliant premise of the plotline; the complex and absurd, yet oddly logical puzzles; the uniquely unforgettable characters; the tasteful and intelligent quality of the humor — the game succeeds at practically each goal it sets before itself.

In the end, one could argue, there is even a sort of general moral to the game — illustrated by the brilliant final shot, as the Tentacle Flag is hoisted up on the Mansion instead of the old Stars'n'Stripes (right after Bernard's closing words: "Looks like everything's back to normal!"). If you do so desire, the game *can* be rationalized as a general warning for humankind, well on its way out due to greed, vanity, and stupidity as illustrated by many of its characters. Yet that motif in itself is nearly as old as humankind itself, and what matters, of course, is not the message but the way it is delivered. And in the end, both the message and its mechanisms of delivery feel just as relevant and poignant today as they did back in 1993 — even if the game itself, as I have already indicated, could *only* have been done around 1993. So, if ever you needed an argument that old video games are worth playing in the first place, go no further than *Day Of The Tentacle* to clinch it and crunch it. And put in flying-V guitars instead of stars, for that matter.