

Using the DAZ Millennium Dragon

This is one of the most detailed figures from DAZ, and very good it is too. However, as a Poser newcomer I found it rather difficult and frustrating to use... particularly given the inadequacy of the documentation DAZ supply. These are some notes of my experience in using it. They may be of use to you if you are also wondering how to get the best out of this figure.

1. Adding body components

The basic dragon comes with several additional components such as tail adornments, head spikes, and body fins. These are all separate figures and have to be loaded separately. A careful read of the DAZ web site and the read-me file indicates that these are conforming props and must be treated as such. Some of them are shown in the screen shot below.



As an example, suppose you want to add a forked tail. The easiest way to do this is in the following sequence.

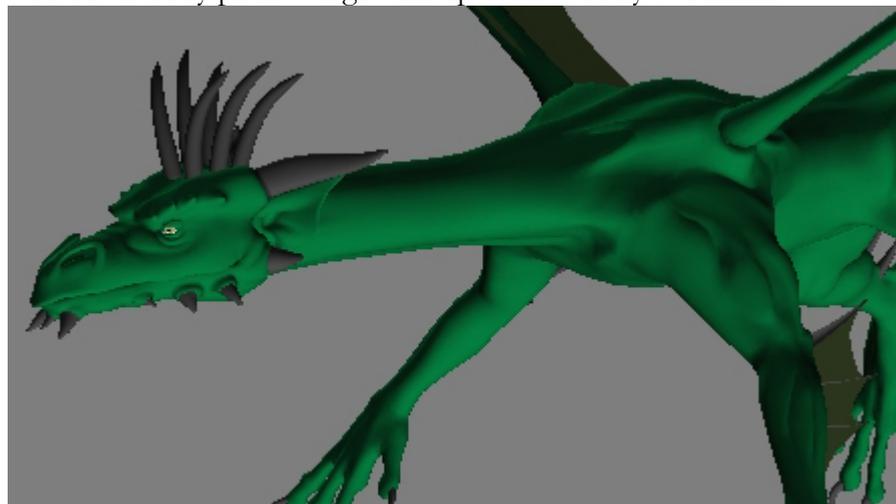
- Add the Millennium Dragon figure to the scene. **Don't** alter its size or position; you can zoom out with the camera if the dragon fills the entire scene.
- Now add the forked tail – make sure you add this as a new figure, not by replacing the current figure (i.e. click the double check mark, not the single one, and don't double-click the forked tail in the Figures palette).
- The tail will add itself into the scene in the correct position. However, if you bend the tail, for example, the fork stays in the same position, detached from the dragon which is obviously no good. To get round this, firstly select the body of the forked tail – chances are the body part 'Tail13' is selected when you load the figure. Then go to the menu Figure->Conform to... and make the forked tail conform to the figure of the dragon. Now you can move the tail as required and the fork will follow it.
- You can do the same with the other components as desired.
- Now you can resize, move, and pose the dragon and the added components will conform as expected.
- What if you want to add a component after you have resized and/or posed the figure? Well, you can do it... but it's tricky, because the new component is loaded into its default location and that probably won't be anywhere near where the rest of the dragon is. So you'll have to resize the component, then laboriously move it into position, and only then conform it to the dragon. It's a lot of work – I've done it.

There are quite a lot of these additional body parts, and remember that some have their own morphs, so there is a lot of flexibility. The additional morphs (over and above the usual rotate, trans, scale, etc.) are shown in the table below.

Table 1. Additional body components for the dragon and their morphs (if any)

Component	Body parts and their additional morphs	
Body fins	No additional morphs	
Head large spikes	Head	Peacock, TurnDown
Head small spikes	No additional morphs	
Tail claw	Tail13	Four morphs to move the claw up and down, left and right
Tail fin	Tail13	Four morphs to move the fin up and down, left and right
Tail flipper	Tail13	Four morphs to move the flipper up and down, left and right
Tail forked	Tail13	Four morphs to move the tail up and down, left and right
Tail mace	No additional morphs	
Tail membrane	Tail13	Four morphs to move the membrane up and down, left and right
Tail spade	No additional morphs	
Tail spikes	No additional morphs	
Tail stego	No additional morphs	

Additional body parts – large head spikes and body fins added



2. Applying textures

Thankfully these are all done with MAT files – although you can change the results with the material editor, obviously. In the Poses palette you'll find two folders – MAT Millennium Dragon P4 and MAT Millennium Dragon PP. These are identical and are for use with Poser 4 with or without the ProPack (that's the PP folder). You can delete whichever you don't need – if you use PP or Poser 5, delete the P4 folder, if you use P4, lose the PP folder.

From here you can add any textures you have, and there are separate MATs to texture the add-on body parts. You can also turn visibility on or off for various parts of the dragon. If you purchased the extra textures, then another folder, named rather confusingly MAT Millennium Dragon (without the 'P4' or 'PP' suffix) will also be present. I guess there's no reason why you can't just move all the texture MATs into one folder. Anyway, this lets you apply the red, gold, or blue textures, although there don't seem to be any MATs for some of the tail add-ons, such as the bludgeon, which is a bit of a shame.

3. Applying poses

You can also buy additional poses for the dragon, and I recommend these as posing this complex figure is not easy. If you do, then the poses appear in another folder called !Millennium Dragon, also in the Poses

palette (you can rename this to something more useful, like 'Mil. dragon poses' if you like). This will add a number of additional morphs to the dragon and corresponding poses. Note that if you add a pose before adding the morph, the result doesn't look quite right. For example, load a dragon and apply the 'majestic' pose. Do those hands look right to you? No, nor to me. If you then apply the majestic morphs, then everything looks right again.

Posing the dragon can be quite simple. Posing hands, limbs, and the head is not difficult – once you work out what all the dials do (experimentation is recommended). The main problem is with the tail and the wings.

3.1 Bending the tail

There are 13 tail segments and each one has a 'Bend' parameter. You could bend the tail by bending each segment in turn. It would take forever, and you'd probably get a tail which looked as though it had been broken in several places, but you could do it that way. Alternatively, you could use the 'TailBendEnd' parameter which all segments except Tail 13 have. This will bend the tail at every segment distal to the one whose dial you are spinning. In other words, if you spin this dial on Tail 4, all the tail segments from 4 to 13 will bend to give a nice smooth arc, but Tail 1 to 3 will remain straight. This is why Tail 13 doesn't have this parameter – there are no more segments after it.



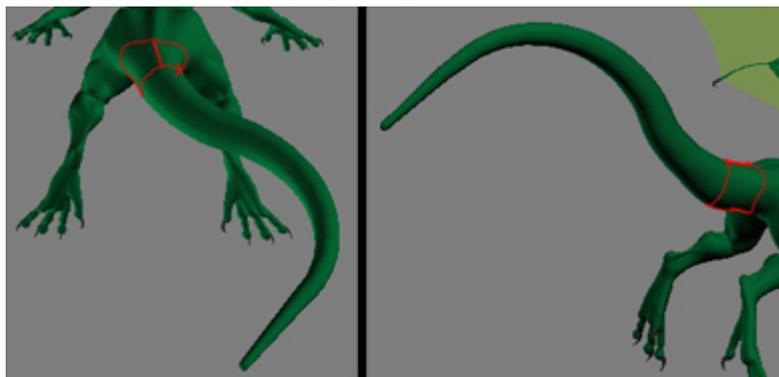
Each segment, except Tail 1, also has a 'TailBendHp' parameter dial. This is exact opposite of 'TailBendEnd' and using this will bend all segments proximal to (nearer to the body) than the segment whose dial you spin. So using the dial on Tail 8 will bend all segments from 1 to 8, but 9 to 13 will not bend. Finally, Tail 1 also has 'TailSBend' which does exactly that – bends the tail into a vertical 'S' shape. By using these dials on the various segments you can bend the tail into any desired position.

The tail segments have two other sets of parameters. Tail 2 to Tail 12 have 'TailSideHp' and 'TailSideEnd', which do exactly the same as the TailBend parameters, only they move the tail side to side rather than up and down. Tail 1 has 'TailSSide' which creates a horizontal 'S' bend in the tail. Finally, segments 2 through 12 also have 'TailTwistEnd' and 'TailTwistHp' which cause the tail to twist. In both cases, Tail 1 and Tail 13 omit the parameters which don't apply to them (TailTwistHp and TailSideHp for Tail 1, and TailTwistEnd and TailSideEnd for Tail 13).

Note that Tail 1 also has a 'TailLength' parameter which allows you to alter the length of the whole tail, while Tail 13 has a large number of additional parameters intended to be used in conjunction with any tail attachment. Some morphs are shown in the screen shots to left and right.



Horizontal and vertical tail S-bends





3.2 The wings

These are easier than the tail. The left and right shoulders have the usual Bend/Twist/Side-to-side morphs which are quite useful. So do the wing forearms and fingers, although these seem to be less useful. The real bonus though is on the Chest, which has controls to allow the wings to flap and collapse (fold), and for the wing arms and fingers to be posed (see screen shot to left). This is much easier than posing the various components of the wing individually.

3.3 The neck

The four parts of the neck, like the tail, have morphs to enable the head to be bent, twisted, or moved side to side. These are fairly obvious in function. One of the really nice ones is in Neck1, the NeckSBend morph, which easily poses the neck into a vertical S-bend and which makes a real difference to the otherwise somewhat stiff-necked dragon.

4. The head

The head has a huge number of morphs – DAZ really went to town here! Most of them are self-explanatory, but the tongue deserves a mention. The tongue, like the tail, is segmented and each segment can be moved individually. The segments have the same set of controls for bending, twisting, and moving side-to-side as do the tail segments, and they operate in the same way. The other confusing point is regarding the forked tongue. In the Poses palette, there is a control to make the forked tongue visible or not. This is slightly unfortunate as in reality the dragon has two different tongues. The default tongue looks like a conventional tongue and can be posed in the Head section using the dials which begin (fairly obviously) ‘Tongue’. There are nine of these, in addition to the controls on each segment. If you turn on the forked tongue, then the whole shape of it changes (I think it looks a bit weedy, but that’s just me) and you use the six dials which begin ‘fTongue’ to control it. However, you don’t need to use the forked tongue, because the default tongue has a ‘TongueForked’ morph which forks the tongue and looks much better (in my opinion) than the alternative tongue. The different tongue shapes are shown in the screen shots below.

Different tongue morphs



Left to right: default tongue; long tongue with forked morph and large teeth; alternative tongue

Also, note the stricture in the ReadMe file that this figure has a hinged jaw, and that it’s easiest to select the jaw by clicking on one of the spikes surrounding it. Then you can use the Open-Close morph to manipulate the jaw; it seems to give better results than using the OpenLips or OpenMouth morphs in the head. The eyes also have morphs, so if you want him to have a slit pupil, then you can do it here.

5. The body morphs

If you select the Body, a large number of additional morphs are shown. These are all self-explanatory, and the best way to find out what they do is to load the dragon up and spin some dials. Some of these have obvious uses – the belly scales, the large belly (useful for a dragon who has just consumed an impertinent adventurer!), the claw length and talon shape, etc.

Well, that's it – I hope that is of some help to those trying to understand how to use the Millennium Dragon. This is a superb figure but it's a lot easier to use when you know what's going on. Here he is in all his rendered glory (using the DAZ gold texture):

