

# review: Buried in Time

by Douglas Kiang

Type: CD-ROM Adventure

Publisher: Sanctuary Woods Multimedia Inc. (800/245-4525)

Retail Price: \$84.95

Street Price: \$55.00

Requires: 68040 Macintosh or faster, 8 megs RAM, system 7.0.1 or later, CD-ROM drive, 640x480 screen capable of displaying thousands of colors

Protection: None

Power Mac Native: Yes

As a reviewer for Inside Mac Games, I am lucky enough to see many, many games come across my desktop on a regular basis. Every so often, perhaps once a year, a new title comes along that impels me to throw off my staid reviewer's necktie and dance a little dance of joy around my office, at which point my wife usually comes along, unplugs my Macintosh, and shoves me outside. ("See that? That's called the sun.") Generally, the only titles that will get me into such a state are games that either define a new genre, or take an existing genre and propel it a generation forward. Presto Studio's *Buried in Time* is such a game.

*Buried in Time* features a first-person perspective, beautiful 3D-textured photorealistic scenes, and seamlessly integrated animation. What does all this techno-babble mean in layman's terms? Simply put, "you-are-there." *Buried in Time*'s beautiful interface and attention to detail literally puts you in seven incredibly detailed environments, including a medieval fortress under siege, Leonardo da Vinci's Milan studio, the Mayan catacombs at Chichén Itzá, and a meteor-damaged space station. The historical locations are painstakingly researched and accurate to the smallest detail. The original soundtrack and digitally sampled sound effects add further credence to these environments, and an intriguing plot and challenging storyline make *Buried in Time* a fascinating game to lose yourself in. Honestly, I haven't gotten this excited about an adventure game since I first booted up *Myst*.

**A Bit of Background.** Presto Studios' *The Journeyman Project*, released in 1992, sets the stage for *Buried in Time*. As a member of the Temporal Security Agency, an organization

charged with protecting history from being altered, you successfully stop a plot to sabotage Earth's plans for peaceful coexistence with an alien federation. Buried in Time picks up the plot where The Journeyman Project left off.

Someone has framed you by going back in time and altering key events. Your task is to retrace the infiltrator's steps and gather evidence that will clear your name. Along the way, you find Arthur, a helpful sidekick who offers witty commentary along the way, not to mention a hint or two should you become stuck. The plot of Buried in Time is well written and well-researched, and touches of wacky humor every so often keep the game lighthearted and fun. In Buried in Time, the perfect balance is struck between humor and drama, action and suspense. Together with the breathtaking artwork and driving soundtrack, the game sets a new standard for realism in first-person adventure games.

[he Need for Speed](#). Buried in Time is a substantial game not only in scope, but in its hardware requirements. First of all, the game requires a computer capable of displaying thousands of colors (players with older machines may need to purchase more VRAM if their system cannot display thousands of colors, or decrease their screen resolution to 640x480.) To Presto's credit, problems with excessive load times on the original Journeyman Project have been largely eliminated; most of the transitions in Buried in Time load quickly and play back as smooth as glass, even on a low-end 68040. Still, you will need at least 8 megabytes of RAM in order to view all of the subtle touches that make playing Buried in Time such an extraordinary experience—like torchlight flickering on the walls, flags waving, or moving spears. In addition, players with 8-megabyte PowerPCs will not be able to view some of these features, due to the larger memory requirements of the system software. Sanctuary Woods is developing a workaround for this problem.

Buried in Time ships on three CD-ROMs. There are over 30,000 different photorealistic scenes, a figure easier to imagine when you consider that from a given vantage point it is possible to see as many as a dozen different views of the scenery, depending on which direction you look: up, down, left, right, up-right, up-left, etc. As a result, when exploring a scene it is important to look everywhere to avoid missing key items; not everything is placed right under your nose! The game offers an online hint system in the form of an AI (artificial intelligence) named Arthur who is usually helpful and occasionally annoying. From time to time, you will also come across puzzles that you need to solve in order to progress. Although some of these puzzles are simply dressed-up versions of classic puzzles, there is much more to the game than simply solving puzzle after puzzle. Buried in Time makes it great fun to explore.

**The Cool Suit.** In order to navigate in time, you need to wear a special jumpsuit that provides easy access to all of the game's functions. This metaphor is a handy way of putting everything right in front of you, as well as making it somewhat less obvious that the game window is actually pretty tiny! This fact is more than made up for by the quality of the graphics and animation. Besides, Buried in Time is so well done that after a while you don't even notice the size of the screen—kind of like watching an enthralling movie on your 13" television.

The game interface is very well done; everything you need to play the game is right in front of you. You can view your inventory by selecting from a scrolling screen; clicking on an object will bring up a slick rotating 3D view, along with more detailed information. Items to be used can be dragged right into the main view screen, and books, journals, scrolls, and other items can be read right in the main screen—you don't have to pick them up. Other game features, such as cloaking, time travel, evidence, and file access, are accessed through "biochips" located in your inventory. Conveniently, there are also command-key equivalents for most of these features. This inventory system is really elegant and easy to use—rare qualities for an interface this extensive.

**"Where'd He Ho?"** Navigation within the Buried in Time world is accomplished by clicking on arrows at the bottom of the screen. From most views, you can look up or down as well as to the left or right. Combinations of these views allow you to see items you may have missed. Explore rooms thoroughly, and ask Arthur for feedback wherever you go to avoid missing crucial items. Unfortunately, the ability to use the arrow keys on the keyboard to navigate, a helpful feature in The Journeyman Project, seems to have been dropped from Buried in Time. Another minor annoyance is the fact that the navigational buttons don't always turn you a consistent amount; consequently, in some rooms, it is sometimes confusing trying to figure out how to navigate yourself to a certain spot. It seems odd, for example, to have to turn left, go forward, turn right, and go forward to reach something that looks like it is right in front of you. The fact that the edges of some of the views don't always line up next to one another can also make it difficult to get around, but after a while, you get the hang of it. Hey, it's a big time travel suit, it's supposed to be clumsy.

**You are There!** In terms of submerging you within a virtual environment, Buried in Time does more to encourage the Willing Suspension of Disbelief™ than any other adventure game I have seen to date. So much attention is paid to details of all sorts that it is easy to forget you are playing a computer game. You can hear the boulders from catapults whistling over your head, hear fires crackling in the fireplace, feel footsteps literally getting closer to you as guards approach, see the subtle light changes on stone as torches flicker... the list goes on and on. The original soundtrack changes as you enter each room; in the blacksmith's forge, for example, the music suggests the clanking of metal on forged steel. The sound effects are also eerily realistic, multi-channel effects. Rather than using canned footsteps, for instance,

the game's designers recorded different sets of footsteps depending on where the character is—you hear the muffled sound of footsteps on carpet, for example, or the echoing thud of footsteps on stone, or the effect of footsteps actually getting louder and closer as guards in suits of armor run toward you. Just like the graphics, plot, and interface, the sound and music in this game are simply first-rate.

[History Repeats Itself](#). Historically, the game is accurate, as well. Arthur provides a running commentary on everything from medieval siege tactics, to what passed for pro sports in Mayan culture (and you thought hockey fans were rough!) The various time periods were painstakingly researched, and the attention to detail is nothing short of amazing. The variety of authentic details (not to mention occasional references to skits by a certain British comedy troupe) really add to the game and make it fun to play (not to mention—gasp—educational!) There are other photorealistic adventure games out there, but this game's historical accuracy and attention to detail place this game a cut above them all.

Another remarkable aspect to *Buried in Time's* graphics is the smooth integration of animation with the backgrounds. Video is blended in seamlessly with the game, giving all the environments a dose of realism that heightens the sensation of "you-are-there." In Gage Blackwood's apartment, for example, there is a wonderful water effect that occurs when you enter the living area, and on the futuristic television set you can even watch a music video from the one and only Geno, the "Michael Bolton" of the 24th century. There is even a set of Journeyman Project action figures sitting on one of the shelves that will talk to you using digitized samples from the blockbuster holo-flick.

[Putting the "Fun" into "Funeral"](#) There are many, many ways to die in *Buried in Time*. Many

of them are quite humorous. The old adventure game saw of "Save Early, Save Often" certainly applies in this case, all the better to see what the various and sundry ways of dying are. At the conclusion of the game, whether you were successful or unsuccessful, you receive a score based on the items you found, the evidence you collected, and the number of hints you needed to request. This gives this adventure game some replay value, as the truly hooked may want to go back after completing the game to see if they can better their score. In addition, the game is so lushly detailed that I would bet most players will probably want to go back and journey through some of the environments one more time, since there is simply so much to see and do. Buried in Time is not a game that people will tire of quickly.

Buried in Time is a masterpiece of an adventure game, the one title you whip out to show your friends why you bought the new quad-speed CD-ROM drive and a large monitor. Every aspect of Buried in Time's production—from the graphics, to the live video, to the sound effects, to the music, to the storyline—was undertaken with such dedication and research that the finished product is a generation ahead of other adventure games of its type. If you have a system capable of running Buried in Time, and have ever felt the desire to explore an ancient castle during a siege, or prowl the Mayan catacombs, or travel through time, now is your chance. Buried in Time is a must-have.

#### Pros

- Fantastic graphics, animation, sound.
- Historically accurate
- Great plot and puzzles

#### Cons

- Demanding hardware requirements
- Some features not functional on 8 meg PPCs
- Small game window