

Review: **The Journeyman Project**

Reviewed by Neil Shapiro

Type: Puzzle-Oriented Graphic Adventure

Publisher: Presto Studios Inc.

Retail Price: \$99.95

Mail Order: \$69.95

Requires: Mac II or better, 256 colors on 13" or larger, 5 MB RAM and CD-ROM drive

Protection: Off-disk copy-protection

IMG Rating: ✓✓✓✓ 1/2

THE JOURNEYMAN PROJECT from Presto Studios is the latest entry into the Macintosh CD-ROM gaming sweepstakes to see what company will turn this revolutionary technology into a winning formula. Journeyman features wonderful digitized graphics, sound and animation, an involving story line and a puzzling plot. Is it not just a story about the future but the actual future of gaming itself?

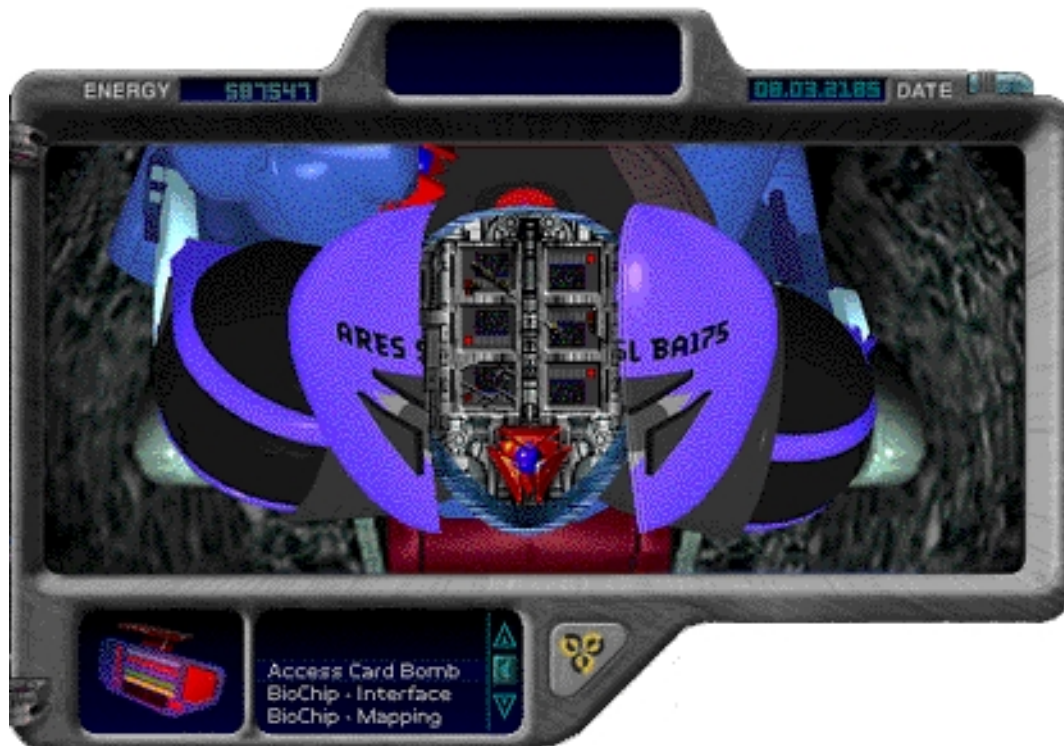
Future History. First, let's consider the story background. The game opens up in the city of Caldoria in 2318—about two hundred years after a unified world government was established. In 2308 the first contact was made with an alien race who gave Earth ten years to consider their Galactic proposal of having humanity join with them. Now, the ten year waiting period is up and the aliens are asking for a decision.

But the decision is being influenced by the past—and the past is being changed. Time travel is a working discovery and some force is using it to change past history in order to make peaceable settlement with the aliens less possible. The player takes the part of a secret agent in the time-traveling Temporal Protectorate. The mission is to restore the time track to what it should be by thwarting the changes made in time before they are made!

So far, interesting enough—but that could be the synopsis for just about any game on the scale from putrid to let's-not-eat-today-and-play. Any game player worth their scoreboard knows that the proof lies in how the graphics, interface, and "feel" of a game all add up.

The Eyes Have It. Graphics are the first thing in Journeyman that leap out at you, grab you by the lapels and say in a sort of excited, slobbering voice "This is IT! You're going to like THIS!"

Too many games on CD-ROM and on one of those fifty-floppies in a box packages go for graphics that are bright and colorful and with-it and totally unbelievable. But the artists behind Journeyman have obviously studied their craft and would be capable of, say, storyboarding the next Ridley Scott movie. Better, the graphics all work together in an interactive manner that adds to the game's feel of being almost a virtual reality.



Biochips are used by cyborg player to add functionality to their implants.

As an agent of the Temporal Protectorate you have a cyborg bioattachment on your left eye called a Biotech Interface. Your Biotech Interface, depending on what biochips you have plugged into it, will display on a pop-up viewscreen below the main window all sorts of information. The Interface comes with game saving functions and ones are soon added to help you time-travel, map, and track enemies through different time zones. Chips are plugged in and out from their biosockets via mouse control.

Meanwhile, in the main window it's look, click, and explore. It's a real kick to find the hidden controls in your own living room that holographically change the wall designs and background music, as well as the more obvious sorts of things you might "pick up" in any adventure game. Every so often a detail pops up that makes you realize that the only people who probably had more fun with this game than the players were the designers.

Twisty Time Zones. An adventure game must have puzzles and must appear at least to be open-ended to be a true success. If the puzzles are of a nature where it begins to seem like simply "pick up the cage, pick up the bird" without a real -world flavor, then the game can quickly pall on one.

The puzzles in Journeyman are all based around the concept of time travel and stopping unknown people from doing such things as shooting other people before they make some history-changing speech that they really did make in the main line of history. The first assignment is to go back in time and retrieve a log disc that contains the most salient features

of real history and that has been stored 50 million years in the past. The idea is that if history is being changed, say, three hundred years ago, then everything from then to now changes but not before. Thus, a true History can be preserved.

So you scoot on back in your time machine to that period, find the log and get back. That will be your first look at the good, old 1960's hallucinogenic Timothy Leary on budget drugs kind of graphics and sound that accompany the time trip.

Back at HQ the true history is compared to history as it has been changed and suddenly we are no longer in the Kansas of everyday gaming. At that point the use of Quicktime "talking heads" on computer monitors details what History is and what History should be. The acting of the people involved in these video segments is as good as a fine film and the QuickTime does well in that they are presented as believable images on a computer screen (on your screen!).

Each time one mission is completed in one time zone another mission is offered. Gradually the Player gets an idea as to who is trying to change him—and why.

However, the weakest part of Journeyman is that the actions that are needed in each time zone are extremely linear and sequential in nature. There is little or no room for creative exploration. Many of the puzzles are the variety this reviewer likes the least in that you must guess what almost unimaginable thing the programmer wants of you—and do it. Few of the puzzles have more than one path to solve.

Some unique mini-games are used to help solve various puzzles. For example, those good at the "Mastermind®" game will recognize the way one must puzzle out the color code to enter at a certain terminal.



Interact with all sorts of human, bionic and robotic characters. Some nice, some not.

Worth the Time Slip? But, overall, I found Journeyman to be always straining to try to be a revolutionary concept in gaming but never quite busting out of the mold of what we have today into what we may have tomorrow. What it does—it does superbly. It's one of the best computer role-playing, puzzle-oriented adventure games—possibly the best if we limit discussion to the Mac. But given the possibilities of its graphics and CD-ROM interface one can look at this and have a great deal of respect for it and still say, "Gee, I wish they had gone that extra mile into the real future of gaming." But, I'm willing to bet their next release may.

Overall, the only truly poor feature of the game is that it has what can only be described as off-disk copy-protection. Yep—you heard it right. A CD-ROM game that would cost maybe \$700 for a dedicated hard disk big enough to copy it onto—and it has read-the-manual-based copy-protection. One of the programmers tried to explain this to me as a plot feature and, yes, they do work it into the plot. I don't care. If a game tells me to refer to page so-and-so in the manual to continue (as does Journeyman three or four times during gameplay) then that breaks the mood for me. And, when I lose the manual as I am absolutely sure to do, it destroys the game and steals from me what I paid for it (or what I would have had I not snarfed up this free reviewer's copy).

That aside, I recommend that if you have a Mac and the hardware needed to support the game that you pick up The Journeyman Project. It is not the next revolution in gaming. But it is, indeed, a fun game that offers challenge and involvement along with some of the absolute best graphics and interface yet seen on the Mac. :->

Pros:

- Wonderful digitized graphics
- Great QuickTime video segments
- Excellent storyline

Cons:

- Off-disk copy-protection
- Puzzles are linear and sequential