**THE WORLD OF MYST**

*Myst* is the story of a father, Atrus, and his two sons, Sirrus and Achenar. They are part of the D’ni culture, a people who have perfected the art of writing Ages, which describe worlds that can be traveled to with “linking books.” Placing one’s hand on the image inside the book, allows one to travel (or “link”) to the world described. While initially in the Myst mythology it was hinted that the worlds were brought into being by the writing of the books, later adjustments to the mythology suggested that the books merely allowed their users to link to the preexisting worlds that matched the descriptions authored by the writers of Descriptive Books (bringing the Myst universe more in line with Christian theology in regard to *ex nihilo* creation and Tolkien’s ideas of subcreation, described later in this book).

When the game begins, Sirrus and Achenar are trapped in damaged linking books in the library, and Atrus is nowhere to be found, though the player finds his messages, intended for his wife Catherine, early on in the game (and in the opening sequence, Atrus narrates how he fell into a fissure, but this remains unexplained). As the player repairs the damaged books page by page, question arises who should be freed first, Sirrus or Achenar, and the role Atrus plays in the story, as well as his whereabouts, must also be discovered.

But none of this is known, initially; *Myst* does not reveal much up front. Unless one first encounters *Myst* the way I did at the Digital World Expo, dropped into the game *in medias res*, the first impression one has of *Myst* comes probably from the game’s box and the booklet accompanying the CD-ROM. Both display an image of Myst Island as seen from afar, surrounded by blue waters and skies. A tagline announces the game as “The
Surrealistic Adventure That Will Become Your World.” An outline of a falling person is in the clouds, suggesting Atrus falling into the fissure (or even the player’s arrival on the island). On the back of the box and booklet are images from the game, a variety of lavishly detailed and moodily lit settings. Perhaps the most striking thing about the packaging that sets Myst apart from other games is that there are no characters or action scenes depicted; only the handwritten note from Atrus, which appears to have been cut off abruptly, suggests anything in the way of character or action. And as it turns out, the note is deceptive, since it does not appear in the game itself, nor is Atrus dead as the note’s very abrupt ending (“before it’s too la——”) seems to imply. According to Richard Watson, the note was the idea of Brøderbund’s marketing department, and Cyan could not persuade them to change it.

Inside the booklet (which the player can only see once the game is purchased) the premise is described as the finding of the Myst book and the arrival at the island (which we will see and hear again in slightly more detail during the opening credit sequence). Beyond that, little is said about the game itself, and instead the booklet stresses the “realness” of the game. In “A Message from Cyan,” we are told that Myst is an “alternate reality,” that it has “the most depth, detail and reality that you’ve ever experienced in a game,” and that “Myst is real.” The player is told to “react as if you were really there,” an idea repeated again in the “Playing the Game” section, which describes the mechanics of playing, without revealing much about the game apart from a few small black-and-white images of scenery. Finally, near the end of the booklet there are three black-and-white development sketches of overhead views, which in retrospect tell us little about the game and turn out to be red herrings, since they are older designs that are different from the ones in the game.

The later two versions of Myst follow in a similar fashion. Myst Masterpiece Edition has a slightly fancier box with an embossed picture of the island, and bluer waters and a darker, more clouded, more foreboding sky. The back of the box no longer shows Atrus’s note (it has been moved inside the front flap, where the DigitalGuide is described in more detail), and concentrates instead on the new features of the new edition, which amount to better graphics and sound and a DigitalGuide hint feature. As though the original claim “Myst is real” was not enough, realMyst (tagline: “The Adventure Becomes Real”) continually reemphasizes the game’s realistic nature both on the back of the box, where it, too, exchanges Atrus’s note
for a list of new features (all relating to graphics and sound), and in the instruction booklet, which says that "realMYST is everything Myst is, but more real." There is, however a noticeable difference in the cover images of Myst and realMYST (see fig. 9).

The realMYST island appears smaller, while its buildings and other salient features are larger, almost like a caricature. The land mass of the island itself is less prominent, the conical rock formation on which the tower sits is much shorter, and the rocks supporting the gear plateau are smaller as well. The differences are due to the rebuilding of the island for the real-time 3-D experience, which cannot rely on the same kind of spatial cheats used in the slide-show HyperCard-based version of Myst. Just as it is interesting to compare remakes of films made in different eras with different technologies available (for example, the three versions of King Kong from 1933, 1976, and 2005), comparisons between Myst and realMYST reveal some interesting ways that technology affects the design possibilities, player expectations, and game experience, examples of which will be given in the sections below.

After discovering how little the booklet reveals of the game, the player then moves to the game itself. After the obligatory company logos (another way that the video game industry models itself after cinema, along with the opening credit sequence), the letters spelling "MYST" appear, with falling chords (along with a falling man and falling book) that set a grim and foreboding, yet not dark, tone for the game. The enigmatic backstory narration, which mentions the fissure, starry expanse, and falling book we are seeing, raises more questions than it answers and encourages players’ curiosity. When the book finally lands (which takes even longer in realMYST, due to several added screens of credits), everything comes to a halt except for some ambient sound, as the first interactive opportunity presents itself.

There is nothing on-screen but the book and the cursor (which becomes a hand, similar to Cosmic Osmo’s cursor), so inevitably the player must click on the book. The music continues as the book, now opened, appears closer, a video clip playing within the linking book’s image that shows us the journey to the island that we are about to take (one that, in retrospect, contains a clue; the location of the tall tree elevator that is rarely seen from a distance on the island, despite its height). Clicking on the image, the virtual version of placing one’s hand on the linking book’s page (which we will see various characters actually doing during the course of the game series), is now the next step taken by the player.
Fig. 9. Images of the island appearing on the boxes of *Myst* (top) and *realMYST* (bottom)
At this point the idea of the “linking book” is established nonverbally, and the hand-on-page activation is, in a way, analogous for the point-and-click nature of gameplay itself, since it is the CD-ROM that links us to the world of the game (one difference, however, is that whereas the CD-ROM actually contains the game, the linking book links to the world described in the Descriptive Book, but does not contain it). But it will be a while until the player encounters another linking book.

**Myst Island**

After the flyover in the linking image, the player lands on a dock on the edge of Myst Island, appropriately, as the dock is a place of arrival, the sunken ship tethered to it giving a sense of the surreal nature of the place. The phrase “in the dock” can also mean “on trial,” and so the player is, as one is left standing there with no apparent objective other than exploration of the immediate surroundings. Unless, of course, the player is playing *Myst Masterpiece Edition*, with its DigitalGuide providing clues (or even solutions) and a map of the island with various locations pointed out and labeled. The more the DigitalGuide and map are used, the less the player’s experience of the game will involve puzzle-solving and the deciphering of enigmas that would normally be present, so in the analysis that follows I will assume no use of the DigitalGuide (just as players who played the original version of *Myst* would not have had it available). In some ways, the use of it is another experience altogether, one more like a cross between *Myst* and a text adventure, since many of the clues it provides have wordings reminiscent of text adventures. Therefore, the analysis that follows will concentrate on the original version of *Myst*, but will include comparisons to later versions where relevant.

Directly ahead of the player arriving at the dock is the first marker switch, and the first opportunity to interact with something on the island (the forechamber is there, too, but it is off to the side, its door lacking any handle that would indicate its function as a door; but we shall return to it later). The player then clicks on the switch, only to be propelled closer to it as the image changes to a closer view, and it is clear that another click is still needed to move the switch handle, which the player does. Apart from an animation of the switch handle moving and an accompanying sound effect, nothing seems to happen, leaving the player momentarily baffled; not only
is no objective given, but even such a deliberate action as throwing a switch appears to have no effect. (This must have occurred millions of times, with roughly the same puzzling reaction, as players began the game.) This wonderfully sets the tone for the game, where discovering the links between actions and consequences is often part of the puzzles. The marker switch is one of two types of machines that are encountered in the Myst series; state-changing machines (like the switches or the eight plaques on boxes that surround the fountain) that appear to do nothing or very little when their state is changed, and useful machines (like the safe, generators, forechamber imager, the clock in the clock tower, and the machine in the planetarium) that are obviously useful but only if the player knows which numeric code or sequence will make the machine function as desired. Sometimes a machine can be both. For example, the eight plaques around the fountain, taken individually, are state-changers, with green and red as the two possible states, but all eight together are used like a combination lock, which only opens when the right combination of plaques is activated.

Next the player either goes up by the gears to encounter yet another seemingly functionless switch, or goes down the walkway to the stairs, where Atrus’s note to Catherine lies on the grass. At this point the player will have become familiar with the HyperCard slideshow-style series of images that can be clicked upon to change one’s standpoint or position, which also introduce Myst’s world as a consistent three-dimensional one where objects can be seen from various angles and at various distances. Atop the gear plateau, the narrowing conical hill in the distance leads the player to look up, where the tower can be seen. This is the first instance of “looking up” that will become important elsewhere in the Myst series, as will “looking down” (which seems to be used less often in puzzles than “looking up” is). With the slideshow-style movement, however, the player’s gaze is limited to the pre-rendered views, rather than free and mobile (similar discussions can be found in film theory, where Eisensteinian montage is compared to Bazinian long takes). The player’s gaze is framed and directed, so that the compositions of the pre-rendered views can both indicate what objects or places are important simply by providing views of them (including compositions that give prominence to certain objects over others), or withholding views that might give additional clues to the player. An example is the tall tree elevator; despite its great height, it can only be seen from a few places on the island, like the walkway overlooking the dock, the tower window when it is properly aligned, and right in front of it, which is the
only place it can be seen moving or in different states. Other places on the island where you could normally see it by looking up are not given any pre-rendered views, and not only is the player kept from seeing the tree from a distance, but the views are so artfully arranged that the player has no reason to believe that any views are being withheld or hidden. This is particularly noticeable when one compares Myst to realMYST, with its free and mobile point of view, where the player can walk between and all the way around the planetarium and see new views of the library, or off the path and into the woods where new objects like Ti’ana’s grave can be found (a nod to the Myst novels, where Ti’ana is from). Previously unavailable angles also reveal new objects, like the ceiling fan in the room where the Stoneship Age’s linking book resides, and unseen events like the rising of the ship model and the ship in the harbor can now be observed. While realMYST strives to keep the feel of the original, the implied size of the spectator and the distances between locations does seem quite different at times from the original. For example, figure 10 shows how the view up the hillside from the dock varies greatly from Myst to realMYST. The implied size of the player, at least at this standpoint, appears to be much smaller in realMYST, where the hillside appears steeper and there is less of the library and planetarium to be seen (the library pillars are almost completely obscured in realMYST). Also note the different alignment of the stairs and the forechamber door, which is much more prominent in realMYST.

Whether or not the player has taken the detour up to the gears, the next object found is the note to Catherine. The note, and the forechamber it mentions, were both added late in the design of the game to give the player another hint as to what to do next. One wonders whether this would have been deemed necessary if the original version of Myst had the DigitalGuide providing verbal clues, or if the game would have been just as successful without the added help provided in the forechamber. Since the forechamber is there, it is hard to say just how difficult the game would have been without it, since in 1993 the tradition of the kind of visual, situation-based puzzles one finds in Myst was simply not as rich as it is today (thanks largely in part to Myst). At any rate, the forechamber provides the player the first example of an obviously functional machine, perhaps allaying the growing frustration that the player may have experienced up until this point. The player is given several numbers to enter, two of which are useful and one of which is the interesting but ultimately extraneous topographical extrusion map. Another red herring occurs at the end of Atrus’s recorded message
on the imager. After giving some background to the situation at hand and alluding to things elsewhere on the island (the hiding places of the linking books and the tower rotation), he tells the player to erase the message on the imager, which sounds like a good idea, and yet there is no way the player can do it. Considering how urgent Atrus sounds in the message, this seems, in retrospect, a bit of a joke made by the game designers (one of which is, of course, Rand Miller, who plays Atrus, a rare example of a game producer and designer starring in the live action imagery of his own game).
The design of the forechamber is typical of locations we find throughout the Myst series, as it includes what we could call the “on the wall behind you” effect. When we enter the chamber, we first see the imager, but it is only when, after puzzling over it, we finally turn around to leave that we notice that there is something on the wall behind us that we passed by when we entered the room. This will happen again with the wall safe in the cabin, the note pinned to the wall in the underground generator room, the light switch in the planetarium, and numerous other places in the other Ages and Myst series games. Even when one is aware of this device, there are enough variations on it (like looking up and down, or closing a door to reveal something behind it) to keep the player guessing and engaged. Another more noticeable element is the mood music in the forechamber. Although the music appears to be nondiegetic (that is, not coming from a source within the game’s world, and not something that the game’s characters could hear), it is still location-specific and designed to add to the player’s experience of the location. Throughout the game, location-specific mood music generally occurs in (and signals) those locations where the player stays awhile to solve some problem, or operate a machine, or just search or look at details. Finally, the forechamber’s underground location, which is no doubt due to its late appearance in the landscape, is also a nice reference to the underground world found in Crowther and Wood’s Adventure program, and a foreshadowing of the great underground world of the D’ni civilization itself.

Continuing past the note up the hill brings us to the planetarium (or rather, what we will come to discover is a planetarium, once we’ve turned off the lights and looked up to notice the stars on the ceiling). Here we encounter our second combinatorial machine, which gives small constellation maps when dates are entered into it. Unlike the imager in the forechamber, playing around here will not get us very far; if we were too lazy to go around the island and count the number of marker switches to enter the correct number, we could have simply started at two or three (since that’s how many we already encountered so far after arriving at the dock) and keep trying until the message appeared after “08” was entered. But the machine in the planetarium has far too many combinations to sample; the 12 possible months times 31 days times 10,000 possible years times 1,440 minutes per day gives us 5,356,800,000 possible settings (which includes thousands of impossible dates like February 31). And at this point, the correct combinations are not noticeably different from the wrong ones, with-
out a sense of which constellations are useful ones, or why we need to see
them at all.

After the planetarium, provided one is not lured away toward the foun-
tain or spaceship, the next place encountered is the library. Inside, the
bookcase is positioned in the center so as to be the first thing one notices
upon entering. On the bookcase itself (in the closest view) the viewer’s eye
is guided to the four books whose spines are wider and more brightly col-
ored (we later find out that this is because the books are unburned), which
turn out to be the books containing information about the various Ages
(another book, hidden amongst the burned ones, contains 300 patterns
that narrow down the possibilities of some other combinatorial machine
that remains unknown until the player ventures into the fireplace). It is not
surprising that the library should be the heart of Myst Island since books
are central to the game and the D’ni culture, giving Myst a strong proliter-
cy stance rarely found in video games. The four books, which are jour-
nals about the Ages (or five in realMYST, when the book for the Rime Age
is added), each contain visual clues about the geography of the Ages and
some of the machines there, and in the case of the Selenitic Age, the player is
given a five-note sequence at the end of the book, the solution to a problem
that has not even been encountered yet. The term “Age” also suggests travel
through time (although this does not appear to be the case), and adds to the
feeling of going to somewhere very different and remote.

It is unlikely that any player will read all the books before leaving the
bookcase, and so an interesting reversal occurs; after being given frustrat-
ingly little information up until this point, the player has now been given
so much that most players will likely leave some of it untouched until later,
raising the question of how much information a particular player needs to
move on. This may also have the function of eliminating further frustration
regarding clues, since the player will have to acknowledge that some infor-
mation was left behind for later viewing.

After the player leaves the main bookcase, and before the machinery
of the library is explored, the player will likely find the red and the blue
books, each sitting out in the open on a shelf on either side of the library,
with a color-coded page next to it. Opening the book starts an animation
in the linking image window. The results are similar for both books: inter-
ference and static obscure a communication being made (we do not know
if it is live or a recording, at least initially) and in each case we do get two
pieces of information clearly; the speaker’s name (Sirrus in the red book,
Achenar in the blue book), and the request for pages of the book’s color. The page nearby serves as a test; when inserted in the book, the communication channel becomes clearer, more is revealed about Atrus’s two sons, and more pages are requested. Since only one page can be carried at a time, the player must decide which book to add pages to, and even if one alternates, the player will still need to choose which book to complete first. As a later search of the island reveals, there are no more pages to be found, so now the player has additional motivation (beyond that of mere exploration) to travel to the different Ages of the game.

With the library’s information available, the player can now begin unraveling the three layers of puzzles that lead to the linking books for the other Ages. The first layer involves learning to use the machinery of the library and observatory tower in order to obtain clues for the next layer, and once a player has an understanding of how these work, the same operations will reveal clues for each Age in turn, using the same methods. First, of course, the player will have had to switch on the marker switches to activate the locations on the map. And the map is not immediately visible as well; when the player enters the library, the view includes the bookcase and the two framed images on the walls on either side that open and close the secret passageway behind the bookcase. When the player clicks on either side of the screen, the point of view is turned 180 degrees, and only the doorway framing a view of the island is seen, bypassing the map, fireplace, and the red and blue books. Only after turning away from the bookcase toward the doorway one has just entered and then turning back again do views of these items become available (quite unlike how one would experience it in person). Once the player has activated the map and clicked on the tower long enough to rotate it, the tower rotation (signified by both a sound effect and the flashing words “tower rotation” to make it as clear as possible; the presence of redundant visual and aural information will be discussed later) is the next step, although the reason for rotating the tower is not yet clear. Finally, the ability to open and close the bookcase is required, which the player is likely to discover even before learning why the tower rotation is needed. If the player does venture into the tower before rotating it to one of the island locations on the map, another enigma is created that is only explained in future visits once the rotation occurs. When the player is successful, music greets the player once the elevator door opens in the tower, indicating that there is something to examine in the room, whereas previously neither music nor clues were present. In addition, the tower is
designed in such a way that the player might notice the “book” side ladder (since the elevator opens right in front of it) and miss the “key” ladder on the other side. The fact that one cannot walk around the elevator on the library level could discourage one from exploring behind the elevator on the tower level, and keep the keys from being seen.

The key clues given on the plaques in the tower are the combinations that lead to the second layer of puzzles, each of which, when solved, will give either clues or access to the third layer of puzzles, which when solved, will give the player access to the linking books. The first step in solving the puzzles is learning which clues go with which Age. While the tower clues and the clues found in the books in the library are clearly connected to particular Ages, others like the generator room or the clock tower are less obvious at first (although in retrospect many of the connections seem very obvious). We could describe the two layers of puzzles for each Age in the following way: for the Stoneship Age, there is the control panel in the planetarium for which we are given dates, and then the plaques around the fountain that correspond to constellations (the Stoneship book links the constellations to their shapes as displayed on the plaques). For the Mechanical Age, there is the setting of the clock in the clock tower, and then the machine with the levers inside the clock tower (some machines in Myst do not appear to have either names or functions apart from selecting one combination out of many possibilities). For the Channelwood Age, there is the wall safe, and then the giant tree elevator. For the Selenitic Age, there is the powering of the spaceship, and then the playing of the organ inside it. For the Rime Age, there is the finding of the switch that opens the door into the chamber beneath the spaceship walkway, and then the combinatorial machine that hangs from the ceiling inside the chamber. Only the linking book back to Dunny (called “Dunny Age” in the game’s program file names, even though it is not an Age, revealing how the importance of Dunny (later D’ni) evolved as the world of Myst grew) has only one layer of clues (the right pattern for the fireplace panel), but getting the number of the right pattern requires getting enough of the red or blue pages from the other Ages first.

Once the last puzzle for an Age is solved, the player is finally given access to the linking book for that Age. Taking the giant tree elevator into yet another underground chamber, the player finds the Channelwood Age linking book waiting directly ahead, and likewise in the spaceship the book is present where the player is. The Stoneship Age and Mechanical Age link-
ing books, however, are not present, but a model indicating the actual hiding place moves to indicate some change in its large-scale counterpart. The trickiest linking book to find is the one for the Rime Age. When the right combination is entered into the machine hanging from the ceiling in the underground chamber, it merely rises into the ceiling, leaving the player to wonder where the book is. Conditioned by the other Ages, one expects to find it right away, since there are no miniature models in the underground chamber. Instead, it turns out to be a geographical puzzle, the solution of which the player more than likely stumbles across than figures out, when the library is reentered.

Given that there are six different places to travel to using linking books, is there any particular order that the player must visit them in? It would appear from the design of the game that the Rime Age is designed to be seen last, and Dunny second to last (or last in the first two versions of Myst). While the Stoneship, Channelwood, Mechanical, and Selenitic Ages are designed to be encountered in any order, getting the combination for the machine in the underground chamber (beneath the spaceship walkway) involves going to Dunny first, and the clue for getting to Dunny is given by Sirrus or Achenar after one has brought back pages from the four Ages that have them. Of course, one could travel to either Dunny or the Rime Age without having been to the other Ages, if the right combinations (for the underground machine or the fireplace panel) are guessed correctly. Which leads us to another question: Are players more likely to encounter the other Ages in a particular order, or are they all equally difficult? Which Ages are the easiest ones to get into, either by solving the puzzles or by stumbling into the solutions by chance?

While many of the puzzles in Myst involve the player’s intuitive grasp of how the world works, including the geography of the island, the ability to make connections (for example, between the large and small sunken ships), or the making of analogies to real-world technology (like the throwing of the breaker switches to reset the generator), the combinatorial puzzles require the right combination rather than intuition (although the machine with the levers in the clock tower requires the player to figure out how to spin the lower gear without changing the ones above). The right combination is something that must be found, not figured out, and most often one cannot guess at it; for example, the control panel in the planetarium, with 5,356,800,000 possible settings, makes a brute force search impossible.
Ironically, the Stoneship Age is still probably the easiest Age to get into, because one can bypass the planetarium machine altogether and simply guess at turning on and off the plaques around the fountain with the miniature ship in it. Because there are eight plaques that each have two states (green and red), there are only 256 possible combinations. Of course, this is assuming that no plaque needs to be pressed more than once, and that the plaques need not be pressed in any particular order. If the plaques were used only once but the sequence in which they were pressed mattered, the number of combinations would jump to 336 for three plaques \((8 \times 7 \times 6 = 336)\) or 1,680 for four plaques, 6,720 for five plaques, 20,160 for six plaques, or 40,320 for seven or eight plaques. If plaques can be reused in the correct sequence, there are even more possibilities, and no limit to how many need to be pressed before the combination is reached. But this is not the case, and the Stoneship Age is, I believe, the easiest Age to enter by accident. I have even seen it happen: while visiting me and trying Myst for the first time, a friend of mine randomly clicked on three plaques without knowing what he was doing, and actually stumbled across the right combination that raised the ship. He was not all that interested in the game and did not play for very long, but had he continued, he still would have been faced with the question of the purpose of the machine in the planetarium.

Looking only at the solving of the combinatorial puzzles by brute force, we find that there are 300 pages worth of settings for the fireplace panel, one of which reveals the linking book to Dunny; 1,000 possible combinations for the safe in the cabin connected with the Channelwood Age; 3,888 possible combined settings to try to get into the Mechanical Age (144 for the clock \([12\) hour hand positions times 12 minute hand positions] times 27 for the machine with the levers \([three\ levels\ of\ gears,\ each\ with\ three\ settings\ \{3 \times 3 \times 3]\]); 10,000 possible combinations for the Rime Age combinatorial machine in the underground chamber; and even more possibilities for the Selenitic Age, which first requires the right voltage (which could be any number from 1 to 99) and then the right sequence of notes on the organ (with 36 keys to choose from, there are 36\(^5\) or 60,466,176 five-note sequences possible \[although\ the\ book\ in\ the\ library\ reveals\ the\ sequence,\ so\ no\ guesswork\ is\ needed\]). There is also the factor of how long it takes to enter a random guess into one of these machines; one can try random numbers on the cabin’s wall safe fairly quickly, whereas entering each pattern on the fireplace door is a far more laborious process. At the same time, some clues
are readily available in the books in the library, like the five-note sequence for the organ, whereas other puzzles, like the giant tree elevator, rely not on clues but on the player’s ability to connect actions and consequences. In the end, the order in which the player encounters the Ages will be based on the player’s own strengths and weaknesses, which also come into play within the puzzles contained in the Ages themselves. That the puzzles involve different approaches and ways of thinking is yet another way that Myst is able to reach a broad, crossover audience.

Before we leave Myst Island for the other Ages, it is worth noting a few of the general changes added to the island in realMYST. Whereas the earlier versions of Myst used ambient sounds and a few background animations to bring the island to life and give a sense of time passing, realMYST has a sun that rises and sets, and gradually changing lighting conditions (as the day wanes, night falls, and a new day breaks) over a roughly half-hour cycle.

Figure 11 shows some of these different conditions, although black-and-white illustrations do not give a sense of the subtleties of color as the light shifts. The top image is of late afternoon, and in the second image, taken 6 minutes later, night has fallen. The third image, taken 12 minutes after the second one, is right before sunrise. Because distant objects are rendered closer and closer to gray to simulate haze, the tower behind the library appears as a pale silhouette rather than the darker silhouette that it would be under real lighting conditions. But this only occurs for a short time, and in the fourth image, taken 3 minutes later, the sky has brightened enough to balance out the tonal differences. Shadows, however, never change or move, and the light is always a diffuse, ambient one, compared to the very bright and specular light in the earlier versions of Myst, where lens flares and very black, high-contrast shadows can be found.

The cycle of day and night continues even when the player goes indoors, so that one may emerge from a building and abruptly realize the passage of time. The sky above the island also features passing clouds, which always move from left to right, regardless of what direction the player is facing (although the illusion is done so smoothly that the inconsistency is hardly noticeable). There are also more butterflies and birds flying around the island, adding a bit of life to the place. All the new angles and the changing variety of lighting conditions give players much to explore (as well as some new areas, as mentioned above), even if they are already very familiar with the island and all the other Ages.
Fig. 11. Varying lighting conditions during the cycle of day and night in *realMyst*
Having used a linking book to travel to Myst Island, the player can watch the preview of the Age about to be entered, which, unlike the Myst book, loops repeatedly. When the player links to the Stoneship Age, the point of arrival is on the deck of the ship facing into a stone entrance leading underground. In realMYST, however, the player’s first view is turned around 180 degrees, facing the stern of the ship and the stairway leading down into it. Another striking difference between the two versions is the weather; in realMYST the sky is overcast and rain is falling, whereas in Myst it is a bright sunny day in the Stoneship Age, and dark, high-contrast shadows lie across the wood of the ship’s deck.

Without using the pump, the only places the player can go are the lighthouse, in which there is a ladder leading to a locked hatch and a key chained to the floor, and the telescope, which while being a nice vantage point does not reveal anything useful as yet. The pump buttons under the umbrella give us access to the other places, and they are far enough away from the areas being pumped that even in realMYST one cannot run and watch the progress of the water draining away; it is always gone by the time you arrive. The arrangement of the pump buttons (ship, rock, lighthouse) combined with the default tendency in the Western world to read left to right, means that the buttons are arranged in the opposite order of what the most efficient walkthrough would use, with the ship the most likely place to be drained first. After draining the ship, we can venture inside, but it is dark and there appears to be nothing to interact with or read.

Next is the dark passageway inside the stone entrance. As one descends the stone stairs, the screens get darker and darker until they are completely black, leaving one clicking in the center of screen and hoping to get somewhere safely. It can be a good, scary moment of being lost in the dark (especially if you have your room lights turned low or off), and very few first-person video games feature complete darkness. Oddly, the experience does not occur in realMYST, where the stairway is dimly lit at all times, even when it is night outside. In the darkness the player misses the door with the red square on it that leads into the walkway to the compass (nor can it be opened in the dark even when you know where it is), but in realMYST the door is visible and one is even allowed to enter it. At the bottom of the stairs there is a small green light glowing in the darkness, waiting for us to dare to press it, with no indication of what lies beyond it (the player may have also
encountered a similar situation on Myst Island on the way to the generator). The game’s instruction booklet has already removed some of the suspense by saying “And like real life, you don’t die every five minutes. In fact, you probably won’t die at all.” It does, however, let a little doubt remain, as the player presses the button and the door opens with a loud abrupt sound.

Instead of finding a dank basement or dungeon, we arrive in an elegantly appointed bedroom, and the red page there suggests that the bedroom belongs to Sirrus. The room seems to tell us something about its owner; it is neat and clean and symmetrically arranged, well lit, with globes, classical-style paintings on the walls, and a tidy writing desk and chest of drawers. The desk drawer contains a possibly diabolical clue; syringes and what appear to be drugs. On top of the desk is a strange little animated plaything, one of several different kinds we shall see throughout the game. Such little animations that do not function as clues add a bit of richness and whimsy to a game that might otherwise seem too utilitarian (though, of course, we do not realize they are functionless when they are first encountered).

In the left-hand top drawer of the chest we find what appear to be gold and silver coins (of the same pattern that was on the door of the planetarium), and in the right-hand top drawer, some gems and a necklace (inexplicably, this drawer is empty in realMYST). Another drawer holds plates, cups, and wineglasses (all of which look better in the original Myst than they do in realMYST, where they appear polygonal instead of round and smooth). The next drawer contains bolts of cloth and a flag bearing the insignia of the Black Ship, which was mentioned in the book about the Mechanical Age (although anything that appears in two places seems like a clue, the Black Ship turns out to be just a detail in an undeveloped part of the backstory, and not crucial to either the puzzles or the plot). And finally, after an empty drawer, we find the red page in the bottom drawer (just as the game’s design assumes the left-to-right order of the pressing of the buttons under the umbrella, the opening of the drawers in top-to-bottom order is assumed, with the page appearing the last drawer to be opened).

On the other side of the stone is a passageway leading to Achenar’s bedroom, and its location suggests that we are meant to find his bedroom after Sirrus’s. Whereas the background music in Sirrus’s room was relaxing and smooth, though with a hint of intrigue, Achenar’s bedroom is scored with slow, low-toned, foreboding music suggesting sorrow and something gone wrong. His room is asymmetrically arranged, lined with dark wood, bones, antlers, primitive masks, and (in realMYST) slowly swinging lamps
that barely light the place. The bedspread is dirty and unattractive. The rib cage so prominently displayed as we enter suggests skeletons and imprisonment (a cage), and jars of poison sit out on the tabletop beneath it. The holographic toy that morphs a rose into a skull also fits the persona being developed. As for clues, there is only the blue page waiting for us on the bed, and one half of a note in one of the drawers of the map cabinet. Visitors to other Ages will also have similar impressions of Sirrus and Achenar based on the contents of their rooms, but the sons and their father, along with the frame story, will be discussed in a later section.

With either the red or blue page in hand (since only one can be carried at a time), the player is ready to return to Myst Island. Draining the lighthouse, however, gives us access to a wooden staircase spiraling down the wall, at the bottom of which we find a large wooden trunk. It can’t be moved, only drained by a spigot on its side. And that’s all there is to do. At this point we have encountered one of Myst’s environmental puzzles, perhaps the best kind of puzzle found in the game. Unlike the puzzles involving machines or written clues, they involve problem-solving that requires the player’s knowledge of how the conditions of the environment can be manipulated (for example, turning on or off the lights, draining water, turning on a heater, and so on). These puzzles are the most integrated into the game’s world, and will often make use of things that do not appear to be part of a puzzle (like the light switch in the planetarium), which make them more difficult and more elegant in their simplicity. The lighthouse puzzle requires players to consider that the drained wooden chest will float, so the player must drain the chest, close the spigot, and then flood the lighthouse, to bring the chest up to the key. Even if the player realizes the chest may float, there is little reason to do so unless the connection is made between the lock on the chest and the key chained to the walkway above, which the player may have already mentally connected to the lock at the top of the ladder. Such misdirection and artful use of simple things combine into nice puzzles that can be quite hard to solve yet seem simple in retrospect. (Another such puzzle appears in the Rime Age, at a point where there seems to be little that the player can do.)

Once the chest is opened, the key inside can be used to unlock the overhead hatchway. The key and the lock both drop away and fall into the water. And sure enough, if the lighthouse is drained again, there they are on the ground at the bottom of the staircase; a little extra detail that can be easily missed by players (in the original version of Myst, the key can even be
picked up again at this point, though it has no further use). Upstairs, the battery and charger await us. The battery and the giant tree elevator are the only two puzzles in which the player must do something within a limited amount of time, although both can be reset, allowing the player to try again, and neither really requires split-second timing for success. It may even take a while for the player to determine what exactly the battery is powering. The player will now have to drain the rock and see the lit halls, and it is at this point that the hidden passageway behind the sliding door with the red square on it can be found. Inside the passageway, the compass presents the next part of the puzzle, and the right button must be pressed before the battery runs out (and there’s only one chance, since the lights go out and the buzzer goes on if a wrong choice is made). Seeing this area for the first time is likely to slow down the player and require another charge of the battery (and perhaps even a rechecking of the telescope, once the connection to the compass is made). In *realMyst*, however, the player already has access to this area, which changes the order in which things are found and experienced. Since the telescope is easily accessible, a player might press the correct button on the compass, only to have nothing occur because the battery has not been charged.

Finally, when the lights are turned on, and the ship is drained, the player can go down into the ship and find the empty desk that produces the Myst book when it is clicked. The mysterious image in the Myst linking book, which is also our first view when we arrive back on Myst Island, turns out to be the library ceiling; the player who has missed this view thus far will be momentarily disoriented until he or she realizes what angle is being viewed. In *realMyst*, however, the point of view is automatically adjusted to a view of the library walls, so this little momentary enigma is lost (though presumably most people who bought *realMyst* had already seen or owned another version of *Myst*).

**THE CHANNELWOOD AGE**

The preview movie in the linking book does not reveal much of the Channelwood Age apart from the windmill, except in *Myst Masterpiece Edition*, where the first click on the linking book image takes the player not to the Age, but to a large version of the linking book movie, which in the case of the Channelwood Age gives the viewer a better look at the Age. We arrive in the Age standing at the end of a dead-end boardwalk, where a tree rises
out of the water. A pipe also appears in the frame, one that really has no use except to attract our notice upon arriving. In realMyst, our starting point faces the water rather than the tree, perhaps because we are standing closer to the tree this time.

A preliminary exploration reveals a network of pipes, leading to elevators, a locked door, and gaps in the boardwalks, most with motors nearby. The windmill appears in the background of many of the views, providing the only ambient movement. The inevitable trip there reveals the water power for the pipes, which we must guide to the various machines. Here again we encounter the combination of visual and aural information that we find so often in Myst. Both the valves and the sound of the water flowing in the pipes let us know where the water power is going, and one could even trace the flow of the water using either the visual clues or the aural clues by themselves. Such audiovisual redundancy makes the clues easier to find, and also alerts the player to use multiple registers during the exploration of the Ages, skills that will be especially required in Riven. Yet sometimes the player’s desire to be observant is deliberately blocked; although we are given hints that there are huts and walkways up in the trees, we are not given any good views of them from the boardwalks (the instruction booklet tells us to “act as if you were really there,” but never says we will get views of whatever we want to see; only in realMyst will we get to look more freely about the environment [which also makes solving the maze much easier]).

The next question the player faces is where to send the water. With all the valves left in their original state, the water flows out to a useless pipe that merely goes back underwater. The easiest choice, requiring the resetting of only one valve, sends the water to the engine by the stairway behind the locked door, itself something of an enigma as a stairway, unlike an elevator, would not need power (nor does it seem likely that power is required to unlock the door). The next easiest choice is an elevator, and beyond that is the machine that raises the bridge, which leads to the more distant elevator (which still is without power). This second elevator is more work to power than the first, and so it appears that it was designed to be encountered later. One could extend the bridge and pipe and use the elevator, only to find the linking book back to Myst Island, which typically would not be used until the Age has been fully explored.

Taking the elevator up to the first level, we find a mazelike arrangement of tree huts and walkways connecting them. The smaller, rounder ones look alike, and the constant changing of direction can be disorienting (albeit in
a pleasing and fun way, if you like mazes). Even in realMyst, where turning around does not involve jumping between still images of different views, the effect is still much the same. Myst Masterpiece Edition provides a map of the Age, but it represents both lower and upper levels in one image, and not everything is labeled (there’s also a mention of a “windmill staircase,” though none exists), nor are there any “you are here” arrows to locate the lost player. The DigitalGuide provides hints and clues, but sometimes they do not seem to acknowledge what is right in front of the player. For example, in figure 12 we see the switch that opens the staircase door, yet the clue tells us, “There’s nothing of interest here.”

The player must find the way to the staircase door and the switch that opens the door, but there is a simple rule that will allow the player to find both easily and in the right order. When you leave the elevator right after arriving, all you need to do is to keep choosing the rightmost walkway at every junction. This takes the player to the switch, and then to the stairway door. After descending to power the elevator, the player can ascend to the second level of huts.
The second level of huts is designed to be seen in a specific order; Achenar’s temple, then his room (which is behind it), then Sirrus’s bedroom, which is hidden from us using the “on the wall in back of you” effect, with the walkway to Sirrus’s bedroom going behind the elevator. Opening the door to Achenar’s temple triggers the projected message over the Venus flytrap–like offering table, one we might suppose is intended to intimidate the primitive indigenous people of the Age and gain their submission (a similar situation and door-triggered message occur in Riven, where Gehn lords it over the villagers). The carved masks, the low, slow music, and the spartan furnishings identify the room as Achenar’s even before the message appears.

Beyond the temple we come to Achenar’s bedroom, where a blue page awaits us. While the room is so sparsely decorated that the bedframe does not even have a mattress on it, the furnishings do vary greatly from one version of Myst to another. In the earlier versions of Myst the back wall of the room is empty, while in realMYST there is a table in the back with spikes, shackles, spears, and sticks, underscoring Achenar’s cruelty in a way that the early versions do not (see fig. 13).

The imaging device containing the temple message is also there, with four recordings, and the one on the far right (the one which is most likely to be read last) is a taunting message from Sirrus to Achenar, which also warns, “He is preparing. Take only one page, my dear brother.” While it could be a reference to the sons’ destroying of Atrus’s books, no further explanation of the comment is ever given. Beginning with the note and imager message on Myst Island, messages left for others and journal entries are important expository devices that would be used again in Riven and later games of the Myst series. While most of these are worked into the storyline fairly well, some are not. Half of one such note is found in one of the drawers under the bed in Sirrus’s room (the other half was in Achenar’s room in the Stoneship Age); this note tells how to access the marker switch vault, but is not addressed to anyone in particular. Even if we assume it is intended for Catherine, there is no clear reason why it should have ended up with each half in bedrooms in different Ages. Likewise, one could ask how all the red and blue pages ended up where they did. Like many of the machines, then, the pages are motivated more by the game’s structure rather than the game’s narrative.

Sirrus’s bedroom is again finely furnished and neat, except for some bottles lying around and the broken chairs at the back of the room, which
are presumably Achenar’s way of repaying Sirrus for putting messages on his imager. Here, too, some designs have changed in realMyst; in the earlier versions of Myst, there appears to be a dark slice of something like cake on the plate on the table, but in realMyst it looks more like a yellow wedge of cheese. The pattern on the bedroom door is also different. Yet despite the fact that new models were made for the objects and locations, a few things, like the messages on the imagers and the halves of the note about the
marker switch vault, use the same graphics as the original version of Myst, resulting in low-resolution images that are blown up and look blurred as a result. One would at least expect that the halves of the note would have been redone, since they have text on them, which would have been easier to read with better resolution.

As mentioned before, there is a great difference in lighting between Myst and realMyst, and this is perhaps most noticeable in the Channelwood Age,
where the overhead foliage casts shadows on all the walkways and huts. Even in the black-and-white versions of images in figure 14, one can get a sense of the difference in mood created by the lighting and the details of the digital models used. The hard, specular light in the top image (from *Myst Masterpiece Edition*) gives the scene greater contrast, darker shadows, and more of a sense of foreboding, while the flat, diffuse lighting in the bottom image (from *realMYST*) is less moody and atmospheric. The computer modeling used in *realMYST* is geometrically simplified for real-time 3-D rendering (note how the boards of the walkway are more even and regular than in the top image), but it allows greater detail and player interactivity, even while placing limitations on the graphics and the lighting of the scenery (some specular lighting with hard shadows does occur in *realMYST*, but only in smaller, enclosed locations such as Achenar’s bedroom in the Stoneship Age, where swaying lamps cast moving shadows). The image quality is much higher in *realMYST*; however, as the real-time rendering of the 3-D models also makes a variety of resolutions possible, and *realMYST* can be displayed at varying resolutions from 640 by 480 pixels to 1,920 by 1,440 pixels.

Finally, once the red or blue page is in hand, the player descends to the walkway and uses the third elevator to the Myst linking book. The Channelwood Age and the Stoneship Age, both by Robyn Miller, are the most painterly, and have the most subtle lighting effects and natural imagery. The Mechanical Age and the Selenitic Age, both by Chuck Carter, have a very different look and feel, containing mostly machinery, metal, rock, and sand, and it is to these that we now turn.

**THE MECHANICAL AGE**

The clock tower puzzle is another case of the player having to find out how actions and consequences are connected, since the clock cannot be seen when the wheels are turned on shore. In *realMYST*, however, both can be seen at once, making the control of the clock a little easier. Once the player is inside, the correct combination leads to the opening of the small gear, as well as the big one on the island. Players stand inside the giant, opened gear before linking to the Age, and find themselves standing inside another one after linking; only by moving does the change of Age become evident (*realMYST*’s point of arrival is slightly farther back, and the ocean can be seen).

The pedestal with the four-symbol combinatorial machine and the closed metal stairway provide some initial enigmas, but the player can pass
them by and enter the fortress, gaining access to both throne rooms (instead of bedrooms) right away without any puzzles to solve. The forked hallway makes both throne rooms equally likely to be seen first, and the décor of both further affirms the personalities of the two sons established in the sets of bedrooms in other Ages. Sirrus’s room has paintings, luxury items, colored crystals in boxes, models, and a telescope, and his hidden room contains crates and coins on the floor, another red page, a wine rack with bottles, and the note from Achenar regarding Sirrus’s greed and tax, which Achenar says his subjects will not pay, indicating further strife between the brothers. In realMYST the crystals are animated, and the tapestry undulates slightly. Even the skeleton seen in the telescope when the fortress faces north is given an ambient swaying movement, along with the changing lighting of day and night behind it.

Achenar’s room is again a dark and dismal place with weaponry lying in disarray and another carved wooden face on the wall, and his hidden room contains crates, a rack of poisons, and an electrified cage, which in realMYST has a nice little animation of sparks and smoke when the switch is thrown. Achenar’s throne room also has the fortress rotation simulator, a practice machine that associates directions with sounds, which the player must learn as the real rotation controls only indicate direction by four sounds (the same sounds that are also used to indicate directions in the maze in the Selenitic Age). In realMYST, a few things change; the helmet and sword lying on the trunk are gone, and the chain links are now rectangular instead of rounded, due again to the economical 3-D modeling of the objects.

Some directorial guidance also occurs in realMYST. In both sets of rooms, when the player passes from the throne room into the low doorway to the hidden room, the control of the player’s point of view is momentarily taken over by a prechoreographed move, ducking inside and standing up again. Such moments of directorially guided nudges occur in places requiring difficult moves (the hatchway in Stoneship Age is also choreographed for the player), or are used to reposition the point of view for machine usage and animated sequences (this occurs when one approaches the machine inside the clock tower on Myst Island, the four-symbol pedestal and the lowering stairways in the Mechanical Age, various imagers, and other machinery throughout the game. Like shot selections in cinema, we are automatically given the best possible view, although we are usually responsible for finding it ourselves).
Passing through the sons’ rooms we come to the central hall of the fortress, where a tubelike elevator awaits us at the end of a short hallway (in realMYST, one can walk all the way around the elevator, as one would expect). The red button lowers the stairway, where a machine is used to rotate the elevator above so that the player can enter it. In realMYST, just clicking on the handle causes the machine to slowly rotate, allowing the player to run up the stairs and watch as the elevator rotates into place, an extra animation not present in the earlier versions.

The tube elevator is then taken to the top floor, where there appears to be nothing to do, which usually means that an environmental puzzle has been nicely integrated into the design of the location. There is a tiny clue; a white triangle over the doorway pointing up, reminding the player to look up at the ceiling, where the tops of controls can be seen on top of the elevator shaft. In realMYST, with the player-controlled point of view, one is expected to look up, so the white triangle is no longer present. The way to access the controls is, of course, to send the elevator down by itself, by pressing the button and jumping out of the elevator before it goes down; a clever twist on elevator usage that one wishes were possible with the other elevators in the game (one is encouraged to go back and look for them).

Finally, the player is able to rotate the fortress and visit the small islands to gain the four symbols needed for the pedestal machine. (In the original Mac version 1.0 of the game, a bug prevents one from getting back to the small island where the pedestal is, which prevents the player from returning to Myst Island. This bug was corrected in all later versions of the game.) When the pedestal is reached, we are led into another underground room where a linking book awaits us with an ambience of theme music.

**THE SELENITIC AGE**

On the way to the spaceship, the player receives several views of the electrical cable, which is easy enough to follow to the underground generator room (the tips of the ladders are also visible, and will be useful if the player adds too much voltage). There the player is faced with 10 buttons each of which adds a certain amount of voltage. The note on the wall behind the player numbers the 10 switches, but the numbers are not helpful, for they do not correspond with the 10 different voltages of the buttons (the amounts are actually 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 19, and 22, which add to a total of 99). With these numbers, the player can generate any amount of power from 1 to 99,
except for settings of 4 and 95. The magic number the player needs at this point is 59, and there are twelve different combinations of buttons that yield that number:

\[
egin{align*}
59 & = 22 + 19 + 16 + 2 \\
59 & = 22 + 19 + 10 + 8 \\
59 & = 22 + 19 + 10 + 5 + 2 + 1 \\
59 & = 22 + 19 + 9 + 8 + 1 \\
59 & = 22 + 19 + 9 + 7 + 2 \\
59 & = 22 + 19 + 8 + 7 + 2 + 1 \\
59 & = 22 + 16 + 10 + 9 + 2 \\
59 & = 22 + 16 + 10 + 8 + 2 + 1 \\
59 & = 22 + 16 + 9 + 7 + 5 \\
59 & = 22 + 16 + 8 + 7 + 5 + 1 \\
59 & = 22 + 10 + 9 + 8 + 7 + 2 + 1 
\end{align*}
\]

The choice of 59 makes the puzzle easier, as there are so many different ways that it can be obtained. Mathematically speaking, another nearby number like 61 (which can be formed in only eight ways) or 45 (which can be formed in seven ways) would have made the puzzle a bit more difficult.4

Once the correct voltage is entered, the player can open the spaceship. Whereas in the earlier versions of Myst both the door to the generator room and to the spaceship are clean, smooth, shiny metal, in realMYST both doors are stained and corroded, giving them a slightly more sinister feel. Inside the spaceship we find the organ to which the keyboard clue in the library book refers, and realMYST adds a metronome for ambient sound and movement, and shuts the spaceship door behind the player to reduce the roar of the ocean waves outside. Playing the organ is easy enough, but the notes must be transferred to the machine on the other side in order to start the spaceship. This proves one of the more difficult tasks in the game, as the other machine is three mouse-clicks away (the last click taking a bit longer as more of the game loads). Unless one has perfect pitch, counting the notes up from the bottom is one way of getting the sequence right, although the mouse must be moved carefully in tiny increments to do so, making the puzzle easy to figure out but a bit frustrating to maneuver.

When the correct sequence is entered, the linking book animation appears. Unlike the other linking book animations, there is simulated interference making it difficult to get a sense of the lay of the land (in realMYST
the movie is blown up larger, and appears even more fuzzy and blocky). A map of the Age appears in the book in the library, but does not show anything useful other than the coastline.

Once the spaceship arrives at the Age, the organ and the other machinery no longer function. In traveling to the other Ages, the linking book sends you to the Age by yourself, but here the entire spaceship seems to have traveled to the Age; or perhaps you do travel alone and you arrive in an identical duplicate of the spaceship on Myst Island, only one with non-functional machinery; the game is unclear as to which is the case. Once you leave the spaceship, the door closes and cannot be reopened from outside, one of the few irreversible things that can happen to the player (although one could return to Myst Island and then come back to the Selenitic Age, and it would be open again).

Next we leave the walkway and go onto the island, and the first place we encounter is a doorway that appears to be controlled by another sound machine similar to the one in the spaceship (one of the sounds is the tree elevator from Myst Island). The sequence is unknown, and this immediately gives us a goal to complete within the Age. Moving around the Age, we may come next to the oasis, finding what will be repeated at each location in the Age; a microphone recording some sound source, a dish antenna, and what appears to be an “on” button (at least it may appear to be so, once one has experienced the marker switches and the plaques around the fountain on Myst Island). There is also a red page here, which seems to indicate that there are no bedrooms on the island, as there were in the other Ages.

A sequence of other locations follows as we move along the island; a chasm, a ruined clock, a forest of large crystals, and finally a wind tunnel. At the ruined clock, we can turn to see in which direction the clock’s dish antenna is facing, and see the tower out on an island by itself, (the central island, if we have seen the map of the Age). The large crystals are apparently selenite, a variety of gypsum, and the source of the Age’s name. And finally, the wind tunnel hole has a ladder sticking out of it (reminiscent of fig. 4) down which we must next go. In case we wonder where it leads, an extra bit of stairway near the ladder points us directly at the antenna tower in the distance.

Descending into yet another underground passageway, the ladder ends and there appears to be nowhere to go until we turn around (a trick that will be used with an elevator in Riven to good effect). We also find a light
switch, which is optional since we can travel the passage in the dark as well. On the opposite end of the short passageway is another switch and ladder, and the same screens of graphics have been used to represent both (note the patterns of colored bricks in the background). The screens we see going up and down both ladders also have the same brick background, although the lighting changes as the ladder goes up. At the antenna tower, we find a device to align the antennas with sound sources, which we not only hear but also see on a small viewscreen. When we near the right location, the left or right button blinks for the final adjustments. The audiovisual redundancy of the clues here is such that one could solve the puzzle completely without the sounds, but as it turns out the sequence of sounds is the combination for the door we first encountered. The numbers representing the coordinates of the sounds, however, are unnecessary and are not needed anywhere else in the game.

The realMyst version of the Selenitic Age offers some nice touches and a few surprises. Here, too, the cycle of day and night changes the lighting and mood of the age. Ambient movement is added throughout the age, including the microphones and trees swaying in the wind (leaves also fall from the trees, though they disappear before reaching the ground). At night the chasm is lit by the dancing firelight from below, and smoke rises from the fire as well. The hands on the clock move, the hour hand moving all the way around, with the minute hand moving a little but remaining broken. The hours, however, do not correspond with the diurnal changes as one would expect; sunset can occur at nine o’clock, noon, three o’clock, or six o’clock, depending on the timing (but of course the clock is said to be broken). Oddly enough, the clock does not have the low jangling sound it does in the earlier versions of Myst, though the sound can be heard when the clock is viewed on the viewscreen in the antenna tower (the viewscreen graphics are also larger, sharper, and in color in realMyst). Finally, the best addition to the Age can be found down in the wind tunnel, where a flock of bats inhabits the passageway. The bats fly back and forth through the passageway, complete with sound effects as you pass them, making one wish there was more such fauna in the other Ages.

With the sound sequence, we can unlock the door and descend to the small fish-shaped car (reminiscent of the Osmobile) that takes us down into the underground maze. (In all versions of the game, you can travel the walkway all the way around the car, another nice touch.) The maze itself
has 35 nodes between its start and end, which are laid out in a schematic diagram in figure 15. (Even Myst Masterpiece Edition’s DigitalGuide, which gives the sequence of correct turns, does not provide a map of the maze.)

Some of the roads curve 90 degrees and some are S-shaped curves, but these have been simplified in the diagram, as have the roller-coaster hills added to the maze in realMYST and the overpasses (which do not appear in realMYST). The maze is similar in form to the maze of walkways in the Channelwood Age, as both are experienced in the first-person mode as though one were inside them. On paper, one solves a maze with the entire maze in view, and false paths and dead ends often must be long and involved in complex networks so that the correct path is difficult to find. In a first-person maze, by contrast, dead ends are less obvious, so they need not be as long. In addition, the turning and backtracking done by an individual inside a maze makes disorientation and unintentional backtracking much more likely. Thus even a simple maze design, if you cannot see the entire maze at once, can prove to be difficult and take a while to solve. From the start to end, the Selenitic Age’s underground maze has nine points where the solver must choose between multiple pathways: seven with two paths, and two with three paths. A player who randomly chooses which path to take, then, has a 1 in 1,152 chance of choosing the entire correct path. Various sounds occur when the player arrives at a node (or when the red button is pressed) and these are intended as clues as to which way to turn, match-
ing the sounds associated with directions in the Mechanical Age’s fortress rotation simulator, the only time clues from one Age are used in a puzzle in another Age. According to Richard Watson, this crossover was due to programming difficulties:

Actually the sounds were added to the fortress very near the end of the project so that you could tell if you’d stopped the fortress at the direction you wanted without walking all the way out of the building. Originally, it was much more important to get good with the simulator before trying to rotate the actual fortress.

In the Mac version, the simulator and the actual fortress worked identically and predictably. So you could practice with the simulator to learn the timing of the actual fortress and hit the direction you wanted almost every single time.

Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on your perspective), the PC version that Brøderbund was working on was much less reliable. You could do the exact same actions on the fortress and sometimes it would rotate one position, sometimes two, sometimes three. It was far too frustrating to try to do it by timing. So the sounds from the Selenitic maze were added so you could tell which direction the fortress stopped at and try again if it wasn’t the direction you wanted.

(This is the reason that the Mac v1.0 fortress has the problem you mentioned earlier. One little typo when adding these sounds to the fortress at the last minute . . .)

Although players could use the fortress rotation simulator to learn which sounds indicated which direction, the sounds could be learned strictly from the Selenitic Age maze itself:

Actually, the maze itself was designed to teach you the sounds as you went, once you realized that the sounds were telling you where to go next. The first node (start) only has one exit, so the “ding” sound must mean “north.” The second node only has two exits, west and back the way you came (which you can eliminate if you know the sounds are guiding you through the maze), so the “pwiddtt” sound must mean “west.”

The third node only has one “forward” exit, reinforcing that “ding” means “north.” The fourth node goes north and east so this new sound “Pssshhh” must be “east” since you already know the sound for north.
The fifth node reinforces the east sound. The sixth teaches that “bonk” means “south.” The seventh reinforces south, and the eighth reinforces west. Once those are given and reinforced, we start with the combinations of sounds. The first one in the ninth node is given as the only other way out of the node is the way you came and a direction you already know the sound for. And so on.6

One could learn the sounds, but as it turns out, there is a simple rule that will guide the player on the correct path all the way to the end: whenever you arrive at a choice of paths, choose the one the farthest over on the right-hand side (the same rule used in the Channelwood Age maze of huts).

In addition to the differences noted above, realMYST features a bigger window by which to see the maze, and new animations. The end destination is also more detailed, with an extra room where the car arrives and a door to the room where the Myst Island linking book resides.

**DUNNY (D’NI)**

After all the Ages are visited, and enough red or blue pages are collected, either Sirrus or Achenar reveals the number of the pattern to be used on the fireplace grid. Thus the player comes to decide between the four endings of Myst: to free Sirrus from the red book, free Achenar from the blue book, or visit Atrus in Dunny with the white page or without the white page. The careful player who wants to hear all of Sirrus’s and Achenar’s messages will have to make two trips to every age to gather both sets of pages, and then consider the evidence against each of them. From their manner and the objects in their rooms, both appear to be untrustworthy, and the only difference between them is that Sirrus appears to be sane while Achenar does not. Atrus’s speech from the green book in the fireplace seems to confirm this, and there is really nothing in the game to cast doubt on his character. The choice, then, seems to be an easy one. Atrus also warns the player not to enter without the white page, so players are most likely to choose the correct or happy ending the first time around, if they are playing seriously. Giving players reason to doubt Atrus, or reasons to believe that Sirrus and Achenar were not as evil as they appeared, might have made for a more interesting endgame. Clues leading to the truth could have been scattered throughout the Ages, with their full meaning only clear once the entire context was revealed and understood. There are, of course, some clues, like the
flag of the Black Ship, the notes, and so forth, but nothing that contradicts or gives a twist to what the story appears to be as it is unraveled. Still, there is enough present to make the ending interesting and entertaining.

If the player does not end up trapped in the red or blue books, a trip to Dunny is inevitable. Dunny, or D’ni, as it is now called, is the culture and people from which the art of writing linking books comes. Although it is called “Dunny Age” in the program file names on the CD-ROM (as though it were originally intended to be one of the Ages), it turns out to not be an Age at all, but a part of the large underground cavern on earth where the D’ni people live (the name also doubles as the name of the location, at least in Myst, which does not refer to the culture or people). This is not evident in Myst itself, but rather in the novels that followed and provided some backstory for the events and the characters of the game. As for the change of the name from “Dunny” to “D’ni,” Cyan programmer and D’ni historian Richard A. Watson explains,

The D’ni language has a completely different alphabet, so translating a word from D’ni to English requires transliteration, which is very subjective to say the least.

The example I used to give when this question used to be asked more often was the spelling of Mohmmar Qadaffi’s name. At the time, his name was in the news frequently, but everyone spelled it differently: Qaddafi, Qadaffi, Khadafy, Qadhafi, and at least 28 other spellings (not an exaggeration) . . .

“Dunny” is a good transliteration because it is easy for English speakers to at least get close to how the word should be pronounced. “D’ni” is a more accurate transliteration of the D’ni characters for the word, but most people don’t know how to pronounce it (most people who haven’t previously seen it spelled as “dunny” tend to pronounce it like “deny”). For Myst, we went with what would get people to pronounce it right. Later, (when making The Book of Atrus) we decided to go with the more accurate spelling.

The prison in D’ni shown at the end of Myst was always known to be a small room on an island in a vast underground cavern on Earth. That wasn’t changed for Riven.7

The player arrives in Dunny facing a crumbled ruin in the corner (the rockfall) in the early versions of Myst, or facing Atrus (as one would expect from the image in the linking book) in realMYST. The player can then
explore the single underground chamber before approaching Atrus, who sits writing at his desk. (In *realMyst*, you can even move from one side of Atrus to another, and see the video loops of him writing from slightly different perspectives.) Once the player approaches Atrus, he or she is greeted and is asked for the white page, and whether or not the player has it determines which ending is chosen. Without the page, the player is berated and stuck in Dunny with Atrus, but with the page, the story continues as Atrus leaves to remove the red and blue books, and after returning, describes the situation that sets up *Riven*; that his wife Catherine is being held by his father, Gehn, in the Age of Riven.

We also get to see what happens to a person who links to an Age and returns from a third-person perspective, although in *realMyst* the effect differs somewhat from the earlier versions of *Myst*. In the former, Atrus grows brighter and fades away, and returns in a similar fashion, while in the latter, his form distorts as he departs and returns (the first *Myst* novel describes a link stating: “he felt himself being sucked into the page”). One can ponder further about the “rules” that govern the linking books. For example, when Atrus links, his clothes go with him, and in the *Myst* novels characters take supplies and other things along with them. If a player was wearing a long robe, one would suppose the entire robe would be transported with the player. But what if the player is chained to a larger object, or is holding onto something large? What are the limits to the transporting of objects around the player or carried by the player? While the way linking books function is discussed more in the *Myst* novels, some questions regarding their operation still remain. (Similar questions could be asked of other such devices, such as Tolkien’s Ring, which makes its wearer [and the wearer’s clothing] invisible.)

Finally, when Atrus is done speaking, the remaining option is to return to Myst Island, but once the player returns, there is nothing left to do, and no one to interact with. The game does not end, resulting in a weird, lonely feeling of being in an empty world with nothing to do, making the ending strangely anticlimactic and without closure. This, however, is not the case in *realMyst*, which has the pleasant surprise of an additional Age.

### The Rime Age

In *realMyst*, the action advances a little farther with the addition of the Rime Age, added, no doubt, to convince fans who had the first two ver-
sions of Myst that there was a reason to buy a third. The presence of the Rime Age, which is announced on the game’s box and CD-ROM case, is played down within the game itself; the Age has a new book on the shelf that players can read, and the book reveals the hidden compartment behind the panel in the forechamber, but no way to open it, and nothing more can be done until after the visit to Dunny. Upon returning to Myst Island, the player finds the Rime Age book on the floor in the library (which is easily missed, since one does not typically look down at the floor), and it reveals a button that opens the panel and the number 2735, both written in blue ink, ostensibly by Atrus when he returned to the library. The Rime Age, then, is more of the “reward” (the use of the library books) promised by Atrus. The area behind the forechamber’s panel contains a button that opens a hidden door in the walkway to the spaceship, and beyond the hidden door is a chamber where another combinatorial machine lies in wait. When 2735 is entered, the machine is drawn up into the ceiling, leaving us with nothing at all to do in the chamber; a startling appearance of another environmental puzzle to solve. Eventually the player may decide to check the Rime Age book again, and in returning to the library, finds the center of the library floor has risen up to reveal a compartment where a linking book resides. On further reflection, the clue was there all along; the rising machine was spatially positioned beneath the center of the library floor.

It is always night in the Rime Age, and later in the exploration of the Age we will realize why. Snowflakes twirl down from the sky above, and the Age has a remote and lonely feel to it. The only place we can go is a small hut on the island, and inside is a gas stove, what appears to be a locked door, and a Myst linking book in plain view (which feels strange, considering how carefully the books were hidden in the other Ages; but there is no need for a puzzle since there is no reason to return to Myst Island). The only object that does anything is the valve on the gas pipe outside the hut. Once this is opened, the stove can be lit. And then it seems that nothing more can be done.

This is one of the best environmental puzzles in the game; and one that requires us to imagine what we would do if we were really there. The answer is to close the door and then do nothing but wait; perhaps the most counterintuitive thing the player could be asked to do. The heat warms the room and melts the ice coating the door (the “rime” of the Age, in fact), which can now be used. (I thought of another alternative and had to try it; to turn the gas on without turning on the stove, and then close the door so the gas
builds up in the room. I was hoping that lighting the stove with the room full of gas would result in an explosion, maybe even the player’s death, but nothing happened.)

The door leads down a hall with vapors blowing across the floor, a fine effect. An elevator at the end of the hallway takes the player up to a balcony, where controls allow the player to make huge electrical lightning bolts in three colors, which result in colored aurora borealis in the sky, a very pretty effect (just as it was described in the Rime Age book in the library, and the reason for perpetual night).

Turn the elevator around, open the door, and there’s a small room with a writing desk, and another Rime Age journal, describing more work with the crystals that allow one to view another Age, and Catherine’s interest in them. If the elevator, now turned around, is taken down again, another vapor-laden hallway leads to the last room of the Age, in which a viewing machine requiring a five-crystal combination awaits us. A note from Catherine gives the combination, and we must figure out how to get the crystals to change shape and color, but it is not a difficult puzzle. Finally, when the combination is entered, a view of Riven appears, suggesting that Catherine may have linked there accidentally. So realMYST ends, then, by linking the Myst storyline more firmly to that of its sequel, Riven. There is still no definite ending where the game ends and the credits appear; the player is still allowed to wander and even return to Myst Island, but at least now there is a sense of closure and anticipation of the next chapter in the story. Before turning to Riven, however, there are some other Myst products we might consider.