Myst and Riven

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Notes

THE MYST PHENOMENON


4. Sales figures are from a search of Amazon.com and eBay done on February 18, 2004.

MYST AND THE ADVENTURE GAME GENRE


2. The history of Colossal Cave Adventure and its various versions can be found at http://www.rickadams.org/adventure/a_history.html (accessed October 13, 2010).

3. On the connection of the game and the actual cave on which it is based, see http:// www.rickadams.org/adventure/b_cave.html (accessed October 13, 2010).


5. For an in-depth look at the problems encountered in adapting Adventure into a graphical game, see Robinett’s foreword in Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron, eds., The Video Game Theory Reader (New York: Routledge, 2003).

9. Video clips had been used in laserdisc games as early as Astron Belt (1982) and Dragon’s Lair (1983), and even in Rick Dyer’s Halcyon home laserdisc game system, but the amount of memory needed to store video clips was not available in home computers until the advent of the CD-ROM.

EARLY WORKS OF THE MILLER BROTHERS

3. Even the later versions of these games were small compared to the CD-ROM’s capacity: version 1.2 of Cosmic Osmo was only 83.2 megabytes, with the remaining space used for 43:41 minutes of music; and The Manhole Masterpiece Edition was only 202.3 megabytes, accompanied by 32:21 minutes of music.

THE WORLD OF MYST

1. According to Richard A. Watson,

   There were things in the original Myst that were “cheated” that worked fine in the pre-rendered stills environment but didn’t work as well in the real-time environment. There is just a different “feel” to the environment when you are moving around it in real-time, and a better sense of scale.

   Everything in realMYST had to be remodeled and retextured anyway to work efficiently in the real-time 3D engine. As everything was remodeled, the intent was to keep the “feel” of Myst Island as close as possible to the original while making the changes necessary for the environment to hold up in real-time.

   E-mail from Richard A. Watson to the author, June 9, 2004.

2. I am aware of the debate regarding the use of the term interactive when writing about video games, and what exactly constitutes true interactivity, but I will use it here as it is used in common parlance, to indicate the pointing, clicking, and keyboarding that the player does during gameplay.

3. While the images could have been deliberately designed to withhold views of the tree elevator, a more practical reason for this structuring absence could be the pre-ren-
dered views themselves. Since the tree elevator can be at several different positions or states, and move between these states, a greater number of pre-rendered views and animations would have been needed if the tree elevator could be seen from other locations. As the game is, the elevator can only be seen moving if you are standing in front of it.

4. A simple algorithm solves the problem for most of the numbers between 1 and 99: take the total you are trying to reach and subtract the largest number possible (starting with 22), and continue subtracting the next smallest number that fits (19, 16, 10, etc.) until the total is reached. The only numbers this will not work for are 14, 26, 36, 45, 55, 61, 71, 80, and 88 (these numbers can still be easily reached, however), and 4 and 95, which cannot be reached at all.

5. E-mail from Richard A. Watson to the author, September 17, 2004.
6. Ibid.
9. There are indirect answers to the problem, however. For example, page 161 of Myst: The Book of Atrus mentions “specialized books” used by the Guild for the harvest worlds, which were “much less restrictive than ordinary books” and could “take the great loads that were regularly brought back from those Ages.”

BEYOND THE GAME

1. All figures regarding file sizes are from the Macintosh versions of the programs.
2. E-mail sent from Richard A. Watson to the Riven Spoiler Lyst, on December 1, 1998. The e-mail was posted at http://www.dnidesk.com/rawabod.html, where I accessed it on August 16, 2004.

FROM MYST TO RIVEN

2. Although in Riven it is capitalized and used as a name, moiety is an English word meaning one of two parts into which something is divided, suggesting that the people of the Age are riven (split in two) as well as the actual physical age itself.
3. An excellent collection of Riven details that one could easily miss in the game, as well as Easter eggs and mistakes, can be found at Stewart Bradford’s Riven Illuminated website (http://www.geocities.com/p_aarli/main.html).

THE WORLD OF RIVEN

1. According to an e-mail from Richard A. Watson to the author, September 17, 2004, As with Myst, the user’s manual for Riven was done by the publisher. They wanted to use the animal icons to decorate the user’s manual. We were afraid
that they’d give away the solution to the animal puzzle, and told them so. They assured us that they wouldn’t give anything away. Apparently, that got translated somewhere along the line as “don’t use the icons from the animal puzzle,” so . . . all of the animals are used except for the five used in the animal puzzle’s solution. So if someone pays close enough attention, seeing which icons are missing will tell them which animals to use. So much for “not giving anything away . . .”

2. All the journals of Riven and transcripts of spoken monologues were found at The D’ni Desk Reference website, at http://www.dnidesk.com, which is no longer available.

3. One could also ask how the underground city of the D’ni dealt with sewage. I suppose there could have been something like “bathroom Ages,” which the D’ni could have linked to whenever needed.

Regarding the Sunner outline, Richard A. Watson writes,

Story-wise, at one time there was an outline for the Sunner in the jungle where the Sunner’s eye is seen. The outline was destroyed by a fallen tree. Gameplay-wise, it’s to give the animal puzzle a little variety. Three of the animals can be identified by either shape or sound, so they’re the easiest. One (the fish) is a little harder, as it can only be identified by sight. One (the Sunner) is a littler harder, as it can only be identified by sound (which requires you to figure out how to approach the Sunners slowly to get close enough to hear what sound they make.)

E-mail from Richard A. Watson to the author, September 17, 2004.

4. Regarding the hidden button that opens the wahrk totem’s mouth, Richard A. Watson writes,

People ask why we put something as arbitrary as the tiny secret button on the top of the lamp there to open the wahrk statue, since “random little click hunts” are not what our puzzles usually are. In fact, the player was not intended to find that until after they’d come from the other side (Garden Island) where you see that little peg standing up and going down when you come out of the wahrk statue. That’s one of the drawbacks of not forcing the player to do things in a certain order (whenever we can).

E-mail from Richard A. Watson to the author, September 17, 2004.

5. My speculation that wahrk came from whale and shark proved to be correct. Richard A. Watson confirmed this in an e-mail:

Yes. “Whark” was our temporary name for the creature and it stuck (as most of our “temporary” names end up doing). The problem is that is was supposed to be a D’ni word and “wh” is not a D’ni consonant combination, so the official spelling was changed so that it reflected how the D’ni (Gehn) would have spelled it (even though he’s the one that misspelled it in his journal).

E-mail from Richard A. Watson to the author, September 17, 2004.

6. E-mail from Richard A. Watson to the author, September 17, 2004. Watson must be referring to the hardcover edition of The Book of Atrus, as the passage he describes comes later than page 123 in the paperback edition that I have.

7. Commenting on this, Richard A. Watson writes,

This is one of the biggest exceptions to our standard that things should work like in real life (at least as closely as we can). In real life, it doesn’t make sense that the combination is set when Gehn is captured. If you were really there, you’d obvi-
ously be able to open it by trying every possible combination even before Gehn was captured. Unfortunately, letting Catherine out before trapping Gehn opened up too many possibilities, and would have required even more endings (the biggest problem with that being all of the live filming that was required) than we already had, so we had to make sure that Catherine could not be released until Gehn was captured.

E-mail from Richard A. Watson to the author, September 17, 2004.

**Riven’s Fortunes and the Rest of the Myst Series**


3. According to a figure from Cyan, reported in an e-mail from Richard A. Watson to the author, August 27, 2004.

**Myst’s and Riven’s Influence on the Adventure Game Genre**

1. *Just Adventure +* is at www.justadventure.com. The categories into which the site divides all adventure games are 3-D, Adventure, Adventure/Action, Adventure/ARG, Adventure/Children, Adventure/Console Game, Adventure/Puzzle, Adventure/RPG, Adventure/Text, Casual Game, Episodic Games, Fantasy, Full Motion Video (FMV), Historical, Horror, Humor, Keyboard, Match-3 Game, MMOG, MMORPG, Myst-like, Mystery, Point & Click, Puzzle-Solving, Science Fiction (Sci-Fi), and Strategy. Most games on the list appear in multiple categories, and some of these categories, like “3-D” and “Point & Click,” seem to include Myst and other games like it. Oddly, other games like Aura (2004) and even Myst III: Exile (2001) which should be included in the “Myst-like” category are not.
