Myst and Riven

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Published by University of Michigan Press

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Myst and Riven: The World of the D'ni.

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Glossary

Achenar  Atrus's son who appears in the blue book in the library on Myst Island. He appears to be insane, and his rooms in the various Ages are usually in disarray, with an air of darkness and feral evil about them.

Age  The world that is described in a Descriptive Book and linked to with a linking book. Each Age is a small world that corresponds to the description written in its respective book. Most of the Ages in Myst and Riven are islands, and each is a separate world that can only be reached through the use of linking books.

Atrus  The father figure in Myst who narrates the opening sequence (about how he lost the Myst book that the player uses to get to Myst Island), and whose sons have been imprisoned in Ages reached by the red and blue books in the library on Myst Island. Atrus also is the son of Gehn, and appears in Riven, and is the character who interacts the most with the implied player-character in both games.

cannen  A music recorder found in Gehn's office.

Catherine  Atrus's wife, and the mother of Achenar and Sirrus. Catherine does not appear in Myst, but in Riven she is imprisoned by Gehn on Riven, and rescuing her is one of the player's goals. In the Myst novels, it is revealed that it was Catherine who wrote the Descriptive Book for Myst.

Descriptive Book  The book in which is written (in the D'ni language) the description of a world that can be visited by means of linking books. The Descriptive Book is the founding link to a particular Age. Early on in the development of the Myst mythology, the writing of a Descriptive Book was said to create the world that it linked to, but after later adjustments to the mythology it was revealed that this was a misconception held by some of the characters (like Gehn), and that the books merely linked to preexisting worlds that matched the ones described in them. While this change does not greatly affect the mechanics of the stories or the games, it does make a difference in the underlying philosophy of the Myst mythology, bringing it more in line with a Christian worldview in which human beings are not able to create ex nihilo.

diegesis  The world in which a story takes place, made up of everything that the characters who live in that world can experience. For example, the music played by musicians appearing in a film is said to be diegetic, and can be heard by the other characters in the film, while the film's soundtrack and credits, which the audience sees and hears but the characters cannot, is said to be nondiegetic.
D’ni  Literally, “New Start.” The word refers to the culture that developed the Art of Writing the Descriptive Books that link to Ages, as well as to the great underground cavern in which they live.

ex nihilo creation  An act of creation that is literally “out of nothing,” as opposed to creation that uses existing forms, concepts, ideas, or materials. Only God’s creation can be said to be completely ex nihilo.

Gehn  Atrus’s father and the main villain of Riven. Gehn is the D’ni who wrote the Riven Descriptive Book, and as such he passes himself off as a god to the villagers of Riven, scaring them and trying to subject them to his will.

interactive fiction  Fiction in book or software form in which the reader’s decisions and choices influence the flow of the narrative or experience of the work. Although the use of the term varies, it usually refers to text-based fiction.

linking books  Books that are smaller than Descriptive Books, and that contain the linking images that allow someone to travel to the world described in the Descriptive Book that is associated with the particular linking book being used. Linking books are also used to return to the place from which the traveler came. If a Descriptive Book is altered or destroyed, all linking books associated with that Descriptive Book are rendered useless.

linking image  The image within a linking book, usually on the first page (on the right-hand side of an open book), onto which someone can place his or her hand and be transported to the world associated with that linking book. This is how the player-character gets to Myst and to Riven at the start of the games, and also how the player-character moves from one Age to another within the games.

maral-obe  A musical instrument played by Gehn.

ontological status  Ontology is the study of the nature of being, and ontological status is a determination of the state of a kind of being. Thus we would say that a fictional character has a different ontological status than a real person, or that a computer-generated object has a different ontological status than a real object.

player-character  The main character of the game, whose point of view is ours when we play. The player-character is addressed directly by other characters in the game, but never seen, since everything is shown from the player-character’s point of view.

Sirrus  Atrus’s son who appears in the red book in the library on Myst Island. He appears to be intelligent but shady, and his rooms in the various ages are usually ornate and orderly, but include sinister details (like syringes and the flag of the Black Ship).

subcreation  A term coined by J. R. R. Tolkien to distinguish the creations made by human beings from God’s ex nihilo creation. Subcreation involves taking existing concepts or materials and combining them in new ways, and includes the building of an imaginary world, which involves a great deal of the process of invention.

Sunners  Creatures lying on the beach on Village Island in Riven, who move into the water and swim away once the player-character approaches too closely. Their sound and shape are also part of the clues in Riven.
text adventures  Adventure games that are mainly text-based, in which the environment and actions within the game’s world are all described by means of text. Players interact with the world of the game by typing directional commands like “north” or “up” to move, and other actions like “use key” or “open door.” Text adventures can be seen as part of the much larger category of Interactive Fiction.

verisimilitude  The appearance of truth or something that appears to be true or real; often used to describe fictional works or worlds that succeed in conveying a realistic setting, appearance, or feeling.

wahrk  A marine animal in Riven whose name is a combination of the words whale and shark.

ytram  A small, froglike animal found underground on Book Assembly Island. The name comes from the name “Marty” spelled backwards.