= Uru : Ages Beyond Myst =

Uru : Ages Beyond Myst is an adventure video game developed by Cyan Worlds and published by Ubisoft . Released in 2003 , the title is the fourth game in the Myst canon . Departing from previous games of the franchise , Uru takes place in the modern era and allows players to customize their onscreen avatars . Players use their avatars to explore the abandoned city of an ancient race known as the D 'ni , uncover story clues and solve puzzles .

Cyan began developing Uru shortly after completing Riven in 1997 , leaving future Myst sequels to be produced by third @-@ party developers . Uru required five years and $ 12 million to complete . Uru was initially conceived as a multiplayer game ; the single @-@ player portion was released , but the multiplayer component , Uru Live , was delayed and eventually canceled . The online video game service GameTap released the multiplayer portion of Uru as Myst Online : Uru Live in February 2007 , but the service was canceled again the following year due to a lack of subscribers . GameTap passed the rights to Uru Live back to Cyan , who re @-@ launched the game for free in 2010 .

Uru was not as well received as previous Myst titles . Critics admired the visuals and new features of the game but criticized the lack of multiplayer in the retail version and clunky controls . Compared to previous games in the series , which had sold millions of units , Uru 's sales were considered disappointing . The game was a critical and commercial disappointment for Cyan , causing the company financial troubles ; nevertheless , it has attracted a cult following .

= = Gameplay = =

Uru : Ages Beyond Myst is a puzzle @-@ adventure game that takes place on worlds known as Ages . Gameplay can be viewed from first- and third @-@ person perspectives , a departure from other Myst titles . Players navigate Ages from the third @-@ person perspective , but can switch to the first @-@ person view for closer inspection of clues and objects . Players in Uru can neither pick up objects nor carry an inventory of items ; puzzle items must be pushed or kicked into place . The onscreen interface is minimal , having no health meters , maps , or compasses to distract from exploration .

Players create their own avatars when beginning the game . Different skin tones , facial features , clothing , and hairstyles are available for customizing these player representations . Players also receive a special linking book , a volume that serves as a portal to a personal world or Age , known as Relto . The main objective of the game is to explore and restore power to other Ages ; players must also find seven " journey cloths " . These cloths serve as save points in lieu of a game @-@ saving option ; characters are transported to the last cloth they touched when they restart . As in previous Myst games , player characters cannot die . For example , falling off a cliff sends characters back to Relto . The personal Age serves as a hub in Uru , containing a bookshelf with linking books to Ages players have explored , as well as avatar customization options and game information .

During the course of the game , players uncover clues about the D 'ni , an ancient civilization , and the archeological group dedicated to learning more about them , the D 'ni Restoration Council . Aspects of the D 'ni civilization such as social structure , marriage , and how Ages came about are also imparted as players progress through the Ages . Players may collect Relto pages , which offer cosmetic customization to the player 's personal Age ? for example , making it rain or adding a waterfall .

Uru was originally to ship with a massively multiplayer online component , which was delayed and never integrated into the retail release . Initially branded Uru Live , the multiplayer portion was designed to allow two or more players to work together to overcome obstacles or complete puzzles . Players would be able to chat in real time and cooperate in specially @-@ designed puzzles . In previews of the multiplayer component , there were three distinct types of Ages . The personal Age provided links to other Ages , which were unlocked by solving puzzles in prerequisite worlds . Neighborhood Ages were analogous to an invite @-@ only party , and City Ages provided places for

players to congregate ; IGN called the Age " a giant lounge " .

= = Plot = =

 Uru takes place many years after the events of Myst IV : Revelation . Unlike previous games in the series , Uru 's story mixes fictional plot elements with real @-@ world events . According to the game 's fictional history , archeologists found an entrance to a vast underground cavern in the 1980s near a volcano in New Mexico . The caves led to an ancient abandoned city built by the enigmatic D 'ni civilization . The D 'ni practiced an ancient ability known as the Art . By writing a description of another world , the D 'ni created " linking books " which served as portals to the worlds described , known as Ages . Soon after making contact with a single human , the entire civilization suddenly disappeared two hundred years ago . In Uru 's story , the video game Myst was created when the archeological leaders approached a development studio , Cyan , and asked them to create a game to educate the public about the D 'ni . Myst sold millions of copies , and Cyan continued to produce games based on D 'ni findings . In the present day , a group known as the D 'ni Restoration Council or DRC reopens the passages to the D 'ni caverns and begins to rebuild the abandoned cities .
 Players begin Uru 's story in New Mexico near the Cleft , a deep fissure in the ground near the entrance to the D 'ni caverns . A man who introduces himself as Zandi sits in front of his trailer by the Cleft , encouraging the player to discover the environment and join the exploration . The player stumbles across a hologram of a woman , Yeesha , who tells the story of the D 'ni and requests help to rebuild the civilization .

= = Development = =

 Cyan Worlds began development on its next project after the company finished 1997 's Riven , the sequel to the bestselling Myst . The game that became Uru would take more than five years and $ 12 million to complete . While under development , Uru was codenamed DIRT (" D 'ni in real time ") , then MUDPIE (for " Multi @-@ User DIRT , Persistent / Personal Interactive Entertainment / Experience / Exploration / Environment ") . Uru was officially announced as Myst Online , before being renamed Uru in early 2003 . Myst co @-@ creator Rand Miller released a statement along with an outline of the game :
 Uru is a revolutionary adventure game that takes the best qualities of the Myst franchise and makes them even better . The single @-@ player experience will eclipse the beauty , grandeur , and mind @-@ challenging elements of previous titles . Plus , with the option to join a constantly updated online universe , the adventure never has to end . From new machines and puzzles to special events and entirely new Ages , players will find more to do , more to see , and more to explore each time they return ? and this time , they can discover everything with old and new friends .
 Miller considered Uru a major departure from Myst and Riven in that Cyan wanted to create a persistent world , where actions occurred while the player was not online . Miller did not consider the game a true massively multiplayer online game , saying " there is not leveling and skills and monsters and experience in any artificial sense . The ' leveling ' is finding and exploring and owning new Ages that are released regularly ; the experience is what you really learn while exploring that will help you later ? not points on a scale . " Miller considered there to be two benefits to such a system : firstly that players would care more about being part of the story , and secondly that even new players could make discoveries and be part of the community . The game was designed as more of a spin @-@ off than a sequel to previous Myst games , due to the merging of items from the contemporary (traffic cones and T @-@ shirts) to the fantastic (books that transport the user to new worlds) .
 The game was originally conceived as a multiplayer @-@ only game , where players could meet and solve new puzzles that would be added monthly . At the request of publisher Ubisoft , Cyan eventually developed a single @-@ player portion as well . Cyan announced players would be invited to participate in a multiplayer beta test , which drew 10 @,@ 000 to 40 @,@ 000 participants

. Uru was released in November 2003 , while the multiplayer portion was delayed . Small groups of players were allowed to come online to test the multiplayer part of the game , and journalists were told they would be invited to play soon after , but Uru Live was canceled before being released . Cyan stated that there were not enough projected subscribers to support the service .

Expansion packs and Uru : The Complete Chronicles

After Uru 's release and Uru Live 's demise , Cyan announced that new content would be added via expansion packs . The first , Uru : To D 'ni , added the never @-@ released Uru Live online content , thus focusing on the past of the D 'ni . Uru : The Path of the Shell , extended the story of Uru in the present and added multiple never @-@ before @-@ seen Ages . Unlike the first expansion pack , Uru : The Path of the Shell was not free , but was boxed and sold in stores . Uru , To D 'ni , and The Path of the Shell were also packaged together and sold as Uru : The Complete Chronicles .

Audio

Uru 's music was composed by Tim Larkin , who had started his career at game publisher Brøderbund , and lobbied hard to be included on Riven 's development team . Larkin worked on creating different sound effects for Riven and was chosen to score Uru after composer and Myst co @-@ creator Robyn Miller left Cyan in early 1998 . The music for the game was collected as a soundtrack , Uru Music , that was released in 2003 .

Larkin chose the instrumentation for each track based on the various digital environments in the game . When the player is in the game 's representation of New Mexico , for example , Larkin used a resonator guitar and flutes , creating what he called something " indigenous to a southwest type of feel that 's very contemporary " . In other areas Larkin described the game 's music as being " less typical than you would find in most games " because of the exotic landscape the developers had created . To create contemporary and exotic types of music in the game , Larkin employed a combination of real and synthesized instruments . Sometimes Larkin replaced synthesized performances with those of real musicians , as in the track " Gallery Theme " , where a synthesized vocal part was eventually discarded in favor of soprano Tasha Koontz . To create an exotic feel , Larkin used a group of Maasai tribesmen 's chanting , who were recorded during their visit to Spokane , Washington , where Cyan Worlds was located at that time .

The Uru soundtrack received two Game Audio Network Guild (G.A.N.G.) nominations in 2004 ? one for " Best Original Vocal Song (Choral) " for the " Gallery Theme " (which won) , and another for " Best Original Soundtrack . " Beyond its use in Uru , " Gallery Theme " was later used in the theatrical trailer for Steven Spielberg 's film , Munich . The Uru soundtrack comes on an enhanced CD , containing a (nearly) four @-@ minute music video called " Uru : The Makers " and an audio @-@ only interview with Rand Miller and Tim Larkin .

Uru Live

To compensate for the cancellation of Uru Live , Cyan published all the developed online content as single @-@ player expansion packs . Meanwhile , a small group of dedicated fans , many of them the Uru Live beta testers , were allowed to maintain their unofficial servers , called " shards " . Cyan released binaries of the original Uru Live servers under the banner Until Uru and coordinated with the fan shards so that players could verify their authentication keys , necessary to play the game . The shards were often unstable and no new content was released ; rather , they provided a place for fans to socialize . In February 2006 , Cyan opened their own official shard , called D 'mala , open at no charge to Uru owners , though an invitation from the community was required . Miller revealed in a letter to fans that Cyan had received " limited funding from a third party that allows us to breathe some refreshing new life and optimism into all things Uru . " As with the fan @-@ operated servers , D 'mala would feature no new content , instead allowing Cyan staff called " surveyors " to interact with fans and gather information .

In April 2006 , GameTap announced it was relaunching Uru Live as Myst Online : Uru Live . A major reason for the resurrection of the game was the fan support . According to GameTap 's vice president of content Ricardo Sanchez , " One of the reasons [GameTap was] so attracted to Uru Live is that it had this persistent group that kept it alive during the dark days of its absence . " While Cyan devoted its time to Myst Online , it promised not to shut down Until Uru in the meantime , although it would offer no new authentication keys . GameTap released Myst Online in February 2007 . A Macintosh version , using the Cider translation layer engine so that Intel @-@ processor Macs did not need a Windows installation to run the game , was released in March . At the time , Myst Online was the only Mac @-@ compatible game on GameTap . New content for the game was released in the form of online " episodes " , adding new Ages , puzzles , and plot continuation with each episode . For business reasons GameTap announced in February 2008 that the game would go offline in April ; Cyan reacquired the rights to the game and announced that it would give the Myst Online source code and tools to the fans , making the game an open source project . In 2010 , Cyan Worlds released the game free of charge , under the name MO : ULagain . It is currently hosted on Cyan @-@ maintained servers .

In 2011 , Cyan Worlds and OpenUru.org announced the release of Myst Online 's client and 3ds Max plugin under the GNU GPL v3 license .

= = Reception = =

Initial reception to Uru was generally positive , but less so than previous games in the series . The game has average critic scores of 79 / 100 and 76 @.@ 19 % from aggregate web sites Metacritic and Game Rankings , respectively . Though Uru was a departure from previous Myst titles , the differences were usually praised . Game Informer 's Lisa Mason said Uru " successfully updated " the adventure game genre . The visuals and music were highly praised , and GameZone called the world of the D ? ni beautifully rendered and brilliantly designed . Newspapers appreciated the contrast Uru offered from violence @-@ filled contemporary games .

Reception to the game 's third @-@ person controls and the addition of instant failures by falling were not well received . Denise Cook of Computer Gaming World called the third person option " choked " and " quirky " . While Cook appreciated the added depth and immersion provided by the real @-@ time rendering , she found incidents such as slipping off rocks , falling into lava , and plummeting into canyons irksome additions to the previously stress @-@ free Myst formula . GameSpy 's Carla Harker found several puzzles highly difficult solely due to the poorly implemented control scheme which " never becomes intuitive " . Computer Gaming World 's Robert Coffey and Cook considered the plot of the single @-@ player release minimal and forgettable .

A major critic complaint about Uru was that the game did not ship with the multiplayer component . GameSpot 's Andrew Park questioned why the game shipped with the multiplayer element open only for select players when the component had previously been beta @-@ tested . GameSpy was disappointed that the feature advertised on the box and in the game manual was not available in the product . Reviewer Bob Mandel found that the most disappointing part of the dropped multiplayer game was that " as you progress through the game , a number of tantalizing clues emerge of places you can go and activities you can undertake only through the promised online mode . "

Uru 's sales were considered disappointing , whereas the first three Myst games had sold more than 12 million units collectively before Uru 's release . Time magazine pointed to the game 's relative failure as evidence the franchise had lost its touch , a notion the developers of Myst IV : Revelation sought to dispel . Uru 's poor sales were also considered a factor in financially burdening Cyan , contributing to the company 's near @-@ closure in 2005 . The title 's original graphics and story nevertheless attracted a cult following .