Riven

Riven is a puzzle adventure video game and the sequel to Myst . Developed by Cyan Worlds , it was initially published by Red Orb Entertainment , a division of Brøderbund . Riven was distributed on five compact discs and released on October 31 , 1997 , in North America ; it was later released on a single DVD @-@ ROM , with improved audio and a fourteen @-@ minute " making @-@ of " video . In addition to the PC versions , Riven has been ported to several other platforms , including the PlayStation , Sega Saturn , and iOS @-@ based devices .

The story of Riven is set immediately after the events of Myst . Having been rescued from the efforts of his sons , the main non @-@ player protagonist Atrus enlists the help of the player character to free his wife from his power @-@ hungry father , Gehn . Unlike Myst , which took place on several worlds known as Ages linked together by special books , Riven takes place almost entirely on the Age of Riven , a world slowly falling apart due to Gehn 's destructive rule .

Development of Riven began soon after Myst became a success , and spanned more than three years . In an effort to create a visual style distinct from that of Myst , director Robyn Miller and his brother , producer Rand Miller recruited former Aladdin production designer Richard Vander Wende as a co @-@ director . Brøderbund employed a US $ 10 million advertising campaign to publicize the game 's release .

Riven was praised by professional reviewers , with the magazine Salon proclaiming that the game approaches the level of art . Critics positively noted the puzzles and immersive experience of the gameplay , though publications such as Edge felt that the nature of point @-@ and @-@ click gameplay limited the title heavily . The best @-@ selling game of 1997 , Riven sold 1 @.@ 5 million copies in one year . After the game 's release , Robyn Miller left Cyan to form his own development studio , ending the professional partnership of the two brothers . Rand stayed at Cyan and continued to work on Myst @-@ related products including The Myst Reader and the real @-@ time rendered game Uru : Ages Beyond Myst . The next entry in the Myst series , Myst III : Exile , was developed by Presto Studios and published by Ubisoft .

Gameplay

Like its predecessor , Riven is a point and click adventure game played from a first @-@ person perspective . The player explores immersive environments depicted through a large series of computer generated stills using mouse clicks for movement or to manipulate objects within reach . By operating mechanical contraptions and deciphering codes and symbols discovered in the surroundings , the vaguely explained goal can eventually be reached .

To navigate the world , the player simply clicks in the direction they want to walk or turn . The mouse cursor changes in appearance , depending on its position on the screen and what it is hovering over , to show what effect clicking will have . For instance , if the player positions the cursor hand near the side of the screen , it may show a pointing finger , indicating that clicking will turn the view in that direction . The cursor also changes in context to show when players can drag or toggle switches , or when certain items can be picked up and carried . Such items can then be examined at any time , and either reveal clues to puzzles or provide information on the game 's setting and story . Like Myst , Riven has an optional method of navigation known as Zip Mode , which allows players to skip to areas already explored , but may cause them to miss important clues .

Riven has more complex and numerous puzzles than its forerunner and is set in a larger virtual world for players to explore . Whereas in Myst the objective of the game is to travel to different Ages to solve puzzles before returning to a " hub Age " , Riven 's gameplay takes place on the five islands of the Age of Riven . Much of it consists of solving puzzles to access new areas of the islands , though players are also able to explore without fulfilling objectives . The volcanic landscape depicted , with its steep cliffs and crater lakes , is bestrewn with mechanical , Victorian @-@ style artifacts such as elevators , pipes , levers and roller coaster @-@ like transports . To solve the game , players must consider the purpose and physical principles of these artifacts as well as their role in the fictional culture .

= = Plot = =

Riven 's story continues where Myst and its companion novel , The Book of Atrus , left off . The player assumes the role of the Stranger , the protagonist of the first game and friend of Atrus (Rand Miller) . Atrus knows the ancient art of creating " linking books " , specially written books that serve as portals to other worlds known as " Ages " . Atrus needs the Stranger 's help to free his wife , Catherine (Sheila Goold ; voice by Rengin Altay) , who is held hostage in her home Age of Riven , which is slowly collapsing . Her captor is Gehn (John Keston) , Atrus ' manipulative father and self @-@ declared ruler of Riven . Thirty years earlier , Atrus and Catherine trapped Gehn on Riven by removing all of the linking books that led out of the Age ; the very last book to be removed , linking to the Age of Myst , was the one they held to escape Riven . In the belief that it would be destroyed , they let the book fall into the Star Fissure , a rift leading out of the damaged Age of Riven into a mysterious , space @-@ like void . Catherine was later tricked into returning to Riven by her sons , Sirrus and Achenar , whereupon she was taken hostage by Gehn . Eventually , the player discovered the unharmed Myst book , leading to the events in Myst .

At the beginning of Riven , Atrus equips the player with a trap book ? a snare that functions as a one @-@ man prison , yet looks identical to a linking book ? and his personal diary . This diary summarizes the history of events leading to the present situation ; Atrus cannot explain in depth as he is engaged in rewriting the descriptive book of Riven , in an attempt to slow its deterioration . The player must enter the Age with no way of leaving , as Atrus cannot risk sending a real linking book to Riven until Gehn is safely imprisoned lest he use it to escape Riven . Instructing the player to capture Gehn in the trap book , find Catherine , and then signal him , Atrus holds out the link book that will transport the player to Riven .

Once there , the player explores the islands of Riven , eventually discovering Catherine 's prison . The player also travels to Tay , the Age of the Moiety (rebellious Rivenese under the leadership of Catherine who are attempting to end Gehn 's tyrannical rule) , and the " 233rd Age " , Gehn 's personal sanctuary , where the player meets Gehn himself . Gehn attempts to convince the player that his intentions to rebuild D 'ni were honorable and that he seeks atonement for his past transgressions . Because of the decay of Riven 's structure , the only way to clearly signal Atrus is to bring about a massive disturbance in the Age 's stability ? accomplished by reopening the Star Fissure , which Gehn had closed . When it opens , Atrus immediately links to Riven to investigate and meets the player at the brink of the Fissure . Depending on the player 's actions , the ending to Riven varies . In the best ending , the player tricks Gehn into the prison book and releases Catherine . Atrus and Catherine thank the Stranger before linking back to the Age of Myst . The Stranger then falls into the Star Fissure to be taken on the path back to his world . The worst ending involves neither capturing Gehn nor releasing Catherine , which allows Gehn to kill Atrus (and then the player) and escape from his imprisonment . Other endings include capturing Gehn without saving Catherine , being trapped in the prison book , or even death .

= = Development = =

Cyan began work on Riven in 1993 , immediately after Myst 's release . Before development began , when even the name of the game was undecided , the brothers Robyn and Rand Miller said they wanted a " natural flow " from the first game to the sequel . As Myst proved to be a popular and commercial success , the two developers were able to expand their four @-@ person team to a much larger crew of designers , artists , programmers , and sound designers . Development spanned more than four years , and was a much larger undertaking than for the first game ; Riven had a budget of between US $ 5 and $ 10 million , more than ten times the cost of developing Myst .

The design for Riven stemmed from a desire to create something different and more dynamic than the romantic style of Myst . At an early point , the game 's world was to be called Equiquay . The first stage of development was to create the puzzles , in an attempt to integrate them as smoothly as

possible into the areas in the game . The Millers met their co @-@ designer , Richard Vander Wende , at a demonstration of Myst for the Digital World Expo in Los Angeles . Vander Wende had previously worked for ILM , and at Disney as a designer for the animated feature Aladdin . As the third member of Riven 's conceptual team , Vander Wende ended up contributing what Robyn Miller described as an " edgier " and complementary vision , that made the game dramatically different than its predecessor .

As in Myst , the topology of the islands was originally created as grayscale images , where brightness corresponded to elevation . In Softimage , these maps were turned into the terrain models seen in the game . The large island objects were broken apart to facilitate efficient rendering , which required them to be created using polygonal geometry . All other objects were modeled using B @-@ splines and NURBS .

Many of the textures were accumulated during a three @-@ day trip to Santa Fe , New Mexico . The artists took hundreds of photos of wood , adobe , sand , stucco and other materials , which were treated in Photoshop before being mapped onto the 3D geometry . Whereas many computer @-@ generated environments of the time ended up looking smooth , like plastic , the Millers and Vander Wende developed a more gritty and weathered design , with corroded and aged elements , to imply reality . The artists considered how objects would look and function if they were real , where and how they would be worn , and created corresponding details . While bump maps were occasionally used to simulate geometry , even small details such as screws were often individually modeled .

Rendering was executed in Mental Ray , using numerous custom @-@ made shaders to produce lifelike lighting , water and landscapes . In total Riven has over three hours of video and almost five thousand images ; rendering was a major bottleneck in production despite the use of 18 dedicated workstations . Some scenes consisted of tens of thousands of individual models and textures and more than a hundred virtual light sources . Loading a single island model could take two hours . Runtime animation effects were created by Mark DeForest , to add flying insects and simple water ripples .

Riven combined the pre @-@ rendered backgrounds with live action footage , in order to increase the player 's immersion level . Riven was the first game in which any of its designers had directed live actors , and Vander Wende was apprehensive about their use . Rand Miller had to reprise his role of Atrus from Myst , even though he hated acting . All the actors were filmed with a blue screen as a backdrop , which was removed in post @-@ production by chroma key , so that the actors would blend into the virtual environment . Real world stairs , doorways and studio lights had to be meticulously positioned on the live stage to match their CG equivalents . Some sequences were seamlessly cut together with morphing , to allow for partial variations due to the nonlinearity of the gameplay .

At the time of Riven 's development , publisher Brøderbund was facing falling revenues as development costs rose . Two years into the project , Cyan still had nothing they could show them . Brøderbund 's stock dropped from $ 60 a share to $ 22 in 1996 , because of a delay in the publishing of Riven . The plan had been to ship the game in time for the 1996 holiday season ; Riven was finally published on October 29 , 1997 . Even though Riven 's sales were expected to be higher than any other game that holiday season , Brøderbund launched a $ 10 million marketing campaign and developed a retail marketing partnership with Toshiba America . Anticipation for the game was high even among non @-@ gamers , helped by web @-@ based word of mouth and well @-@ placed media coverage .

= = = Audio = = =

Robyn Miller composed Riven 's music , which was later packaged and released by Virgin Records as Riven : The Soundtrack . Miller designed the liner notes and packaging , which included English translations of the language found in the game . Whereas the music to Myst was , at first , only available by mail @-@ order from Cyan , Virgin Records had bought the rights to release it initially , prompting Miller to make sure that it could stand alone in CD form . The compact disc was released

on February 24 , 1998 , with 54 minutes of music .

Miller established three leitmotifs for the game 's three central characters , Atrus , Catherine , and Gehn . Gehn 's theme is only heard in its complete form near the end of the game , but portions of the melody can be heard throughout Riven , highlighting his control of the Age . Miller tried to let the environment dictate the resulting sound in order to make the music as immersive as possible . He blended live instrumentation with synthesizers : " By mixing and matching conventional instrumentation , you can create an odd , interesting mood , " Miller said . Ultimately , he wanted the music of Riven to reflect the game itself , which he described as having " a familiar @-@ yet @-@ strange feel to it . "

Miller described his biggest challenge in writing Riven 's music as reconciling the linear , pleasing construction of music with the nonlinearity of the gameplay . As players can freely explore all areas , Miller explained in an interview , " the music can 't say anything too specific . If it says something , if it builds in intensity and there starts to be a climax , and people are just standing in a room looking around , and they 're thinking ' What 's going on in here ? Is something about to jump out from behind me ? ' You can 't have the basic parts of music that you 'd like to have , you can 't have a basic structure . It 's all got to be just flowing , and continue to flow . " Allmusic critic Stephen Thomas Erlewine argued that the soundtrack is " appealingly atmospheric " , but " lacks definition " , and that the music loses impact when separated from the game .

= = Release = =

Being the first sequel of a game as successful as Myst , Riven was eagerly anticipated . The game sold more than 1 @.@ 5 million units within a year of its release , and was the best @-@ selling game of 1997 , despite having only been on the market for less than three months . By 2001 , over 4 @.@ 5 million units had been sold .

= = Reception = =

Riven was generally positively received by critics , with the PC version garnering an average critic score of 85 % at GameRankings .

Jeff Segstack of GameSpot gave the game high marks , explaining that it is " a leisurely paced , all @-@ encompassing , mentally challenging experience . If you enjoyed Myst , you 'll thoroughly enjoy Riven . " Computer Gaming World stated that the graphics were the best they had seen in any adventure game . Laura Miller of Salon declared that " Art [...] is what Riven approaches , " and praised the gameplay as having " a graceful elegance that reminds [her] of a masterfully constructed novel . " The game 's sound and graphics were consistently praised .

Nevertheless , several publications found fault with aspects of Riven . Computer Gaming World felt that the gameplay was too similar to the original Myst , making Riven the " same game with a new title " ; the magazine also criticized the minimal character interaction . Gaming magazine Edge felt that although Riven was a good game , the solitary atmosphere and lack of mobility was steadily becoming outdated , as games like Super Mario 64 sacrificed graphical fidelity for an increase in freedom . They stated " the question is whether Cyan can incorporate its almost Tolkien @-@ esque world @-@ building skills into a more cutting @-@ edge game vehicle next time . " Even long @-@ time players of the Myst games , such as Heidi Fournier of Adventure Gamers , felt that a few puzzles were too difficult ; Computer and Video Games , meanwhile , believed that the story clues were too symbolic and scant , which made following the plot difficult .

Despite the success of the game , the Miller brothers eventually pursued other projects . Robyn Miller said : " I think it would be a detriment to always , for the rest of our lives , be creating Myst @-@ like projects . [?] We 're going to change , evolve and grow , just like any person does in any manner . " Robyn would leave Cyan to form a new development company called Land of Point ; Vander Wende would also leave to pursue other projects . The next video game entry in the Myst franchise would be 2001 's Myst III : Exile , which was not developed by Cyan nor published by Brøderbund . Presto Studios took over development ; Ubisoft acquired Brøderbund 's entertainment

library from The Learning Company and published the Myst sequels .