

INTRODUCTION



Myst (1993) and *Riven: The Sequel to Myst* (1997) are landmark video games not only within the genre of adventure games but within video game history as well. Not only was *Myst* for almost a decade the best-selling video game of all time, but it helped to introduce CD-ROM-based gaming and encouraged the sales of CD-ROM drives so that people could play it. It raised the bar for graphics, world-building, and immersive gameplay, and these aspects would be advanced even further with *Riven* four years later. *Myst* had some of the best computer-generated imagery to be found in games of its day (which were considered to be photorealistic at the time, though the meaning of the term has changed as graphics have grown more sophisticated), and location-based ambience that gradually changed as one moved from place to place. The world of *Myst* was large enough to make exploration one of the game's main goals, and was the only goal until the game's embedded narrative unfolded enough to suggest other objectives for players to attempt. The rich graphics, sound, integrated detail, sense of a three-dimensional geography, and sense of place that each location was able to invoke combined to provide an immersive gameplay experience unlike any other that players had previously encountered. The unhurried, contemplative pace, and the fact you could not be killed in the game, kept players from leaving the world for hours at a time, as they sought, bit by bit, to uncover the hidden secrets and storylines in the messages left behind and the clues in the world's details that slowly came together as the solutions to puzzles and a tale of events. Often, puzzle-solving success opened up new areas of inquiry, both narratively and geographically, as new Ages became accessible for the player to travel to. And *Riven* continued all of these trends, as well as extending the storylines begun in *Myst*, expanding to five CD-

ROMs, compared to the single one on which *Myst* was stored. *Riven*'s world and its design and puzzles were even more integrated with its storyline than *Myst*'s were, and were even more difficult, and enigmatic, as a result.

In an industry known for games centered around shooting, fighting, racing, conflict, and high-speed action, *Myst* and *Riven* stood out as something new and different, games in which contemplation was valued and mood and atmosphere were important, evoking subtler emotions than most games were capable of doing. Despite this difference, both games were highly successful and proved to be crossover games, appealing to women as well as men, and audiences of a variety of ages from children to the elderly. CD-ROMs were clearly becoming the medium for games, displacing cartridges and diskettes, and game worlds would have to grow to keep up with players' expectations. A few years later, massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) would begin to appear, with large, explorable worlds far more enormous than those of CD-ROM-based games. *Myst* and *Riven* had set new standards and raised expectations, and the adventure genre, and video games in general, would never be the same.