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MYST III

by Dan Brill

N A D I A N S

In another time and place, ten years after the events of Riven...Atrus and his wife Catherine—whose cryptic notes led gamers through the mysterious worlds of Myst and Riven—have moved away from Myst island to a new home, called Tomahna. With hopes of establishing a new, more peaceful life together, they have welcomed an addition to the family in the form of baby daughter Yeeshia. But the tranquility of their quiet existence is about to be shattered by the appearance of an evil character from the past—a villain who now seeks revenge for the destruction of his home world by Atrus' sons, Sirrus and Achenar...

I L E



With its surreal scenery and complex plot, *Myst* set a new standard for computer adventure games when it was released in 1993. Following the huge success of both *Myst* and its sequel, *Riven*, Mattel Interactive is set to release the third installment in the series, *Myst III: Exile*, which promises to be even more compelling than its predecessors.

For gamers who will follow the twists and turns of *Myst III*, it should be another obsessive and immersive experience: five new worlds to explore, the disturbing spectre of a thoroughly evil new character played by Academy Award nominee Brad Dourif (best remembered for his role in the Oscar-winning film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*)—and arguably the most lavish graphics seen in any game on the market.

The original *Myst* as well as *Riven* were both created by Cyan, Inc. (www.cyan.com) of Spokane,

(left) Toronto's **PHIL SAUNDERS** (foreground), Presto Studios' creative director, watches the action as *Exile* director **JOHN SANBORN** (rear) prepares a set for the cameras. (right) Montreal-born *Exile* technical director and Presto president **MICHEL KRIVALANI** (centre) discusses a scene with crew members.



Presto's PHIL SAUNDERS works on sketches for *Myst III*.

Washington. But when planning for the third disc began in 1999, Mattel sought proposals from other developers, finally awarding the job to Presto Studios of San Diego, California (www.presto.com), which had produced such titles as *The Journeyman Project* series, *Star Trek: Hidden Evil*, and Stephen King's *F13*.

What set the mood in previous *Myst* games was the stunning graphics. The important responsibility for conceiving *Exile*'s other-worldly scenes and settings was entrusted to Presto creative director and Toronto native Phil Saunders, a graduate in Industrial Design from the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD). Saunders' first job as a conceptual designer for a Toronto special effects house led to a lengthy relationship with entertainment company SimEx Digital for whom he produced designs for several motion simulator rides. He also spent over four years designing cars for Nissan Design International in San Diego before joining Presto in 1992.

Saunders' creative vision on Presto's *Journeyman Project* series culminated in several awards for the studio. For the past year he has been harnessing the talents of its team of artists to meet Presto's most challenging assignment to date: building the fantastical worlds of *Myst III: Exile*.

The creation of 3D imaginary worlds is a monumental undertaking. The development of the story (written by Presto's Mary DeMarle, herself a dedicated *Myst* fan since the first installment), environment designs and puzzle designs took over nine months to complete. Graphics, sound and

video required fifteen months to execute. Twenty computer artists were engaged in generating the final artwork; an estimated 50,000 person-hours was invested in the production of the disc, which incorporates over 150,000 individually rendered frames. Most of the artwork in *Myst III* was created on the PC platform using Autodesk's *3D Studio Max*. The results are nothing less than breathtaking.

But the real magic of *Myst* is in the seamless integration of live action and characters with the imagery created by the Presto artists. In addition to the villainous Dourif, *Myst III* will see Rand Miller reprising his role as Atrus and Maria Galante as his wife Catherine, with Audrey Uhler (seven month old daughter of *Exile* producer Greg Uhler) filling the part

of daughter Yeesha. Director John Sanborn used standard blue screen techniques to shoot the scenes over a six-day schedule.

Technical direction for video compositing fell to Presto president Michel Kripalani, who was born and raised in Montreal (and who presumably benefited from the influence of his uncle, Henri Bergeron, the well-known Quebec television and radio personality). Once the scenes were shot, Kripalani edited and combined the real life images with the 3D backgrounds on (not surprisingly) a Mac, using *Final Cut Pro* and Discreet's *Combustion*. Most of the programming for *Exile* was also performed on Macs.

Canadian influence in *Myst III* doesn't end with creative direction and technical direction. A vital component in the CD's





promotion is its website, developed and managed by webmaster Gordon Currie, president of Eldoren Consulting, who works from his virtual home office in Dawson Creek, British Columbia (population 10,000). Currie's association with *Myst* began in 1995 when he and associate Doug McBride (now a graphic designer at Cyan) started the RivenGuild website (www.rivenguild.com), easily the most popular site online for dedicated fans of the game.

Currie is perfectly comfortable working from his headquarters located sixteen hours (by car) north of the Canada-U.S. border. Through Internet and telephone connections, he manages to direct the members of a creative team that is scattered all over the globe, as well as maintain a dialogue with legions of *Myst* affi-

cionados in 53 countries.

As gamers begin trying to unravel the mysteries of *Exile* in a few months and swarm to the official website for clues, what they'll be enjoying will be, in large part, the fruits of Canadian graphic imagination and technical know-how.

Myst III: Exile will be released in the spring of 2001, priced at US\$44.99. System requirements for Macintosh users are OS 7.5 or higher, a PowerPC 200 MHz computer with 16-bit color monitor, 150 MB available hard disk space, and 32 MB RAM; for PC, Windows 95 or 98, 300 MHz Pentium MMX or faster with 16-bit color monitor, 150 MB available hard disk space, and 32 MB RAM.

For previews and updated information, visit www.myst3.com. ■

(top to bottom) A background is created in **3D STUDIO MAX**; actors perform a scene against a blue screen background; the edited scene is merged with the background using **DISCREET COMBUSTION** and **APPLE'S FINAL CUT PRO**.