Behind the Ages: Myst (1993)

What a click still triggers, thirty years later

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Abstract

I uncovered hidden buttons and broken controls in the original Macintosh *Myst*: two buttons that open HyperCard’s message box, a telescope error, an extra plate that jams the fireplace, and a light that locks a door again. Each section explains how to try these findings in the game. This article contains spoilers.

The Myst Graph maps the links between the game’s views. Here, I look inside the cards themselves for traces of development that still react to a click: hidden buttons, broken controls and a forgotten reset switch. I checked each finding in the files and in the running game, then compared it with published accounts, crediting earlier work where a finding builds on it.

The original Myst, for the Macintosh, is a set of HyperCard stacks, and every button of every card can carry a script.[1] The first three sections concern features specific to this version: the Windows version and the later editions run on other engines, which have no HyperCard and no message box.

Card labels such as Myst:8336 have a thick underline, in the color of their Age and open that place in the graph browser of the original Macintosh CD-ROM release (1993). The card IDs are those of its six HyperCard stacks, all dated July 1993.

Two Invisible Buttons That Open HyperCard’s Message Box

How to reach them.

1. Start a new game. On the first view, the dock (Myst:8336), without moving, click the patch of empty sky to the right of the hill with the gears.
2. In the generator room under the brick building, press the first and third switches of the left column and the third and fourth of the right column: 59 volts. Walk to the spaceship, click its door, go in, turn right, walk to the keyboard (Myst:56157), and click the strip of floor under its left end, just left of the keyboard’s foot.

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Interactive figures, animations and videos of the web page are shown here as still images or addresses.

[1] Andrew Plotkin has made the scripts of the 1993 stacks available as plain text in mystextract since May 2025. They include the button scripts discussed below. He wrote it after the first articles of the Myst Graph: “I didn’t want to build a graph; he already did that. I just wanted to browse the HyperTalk scripts.”

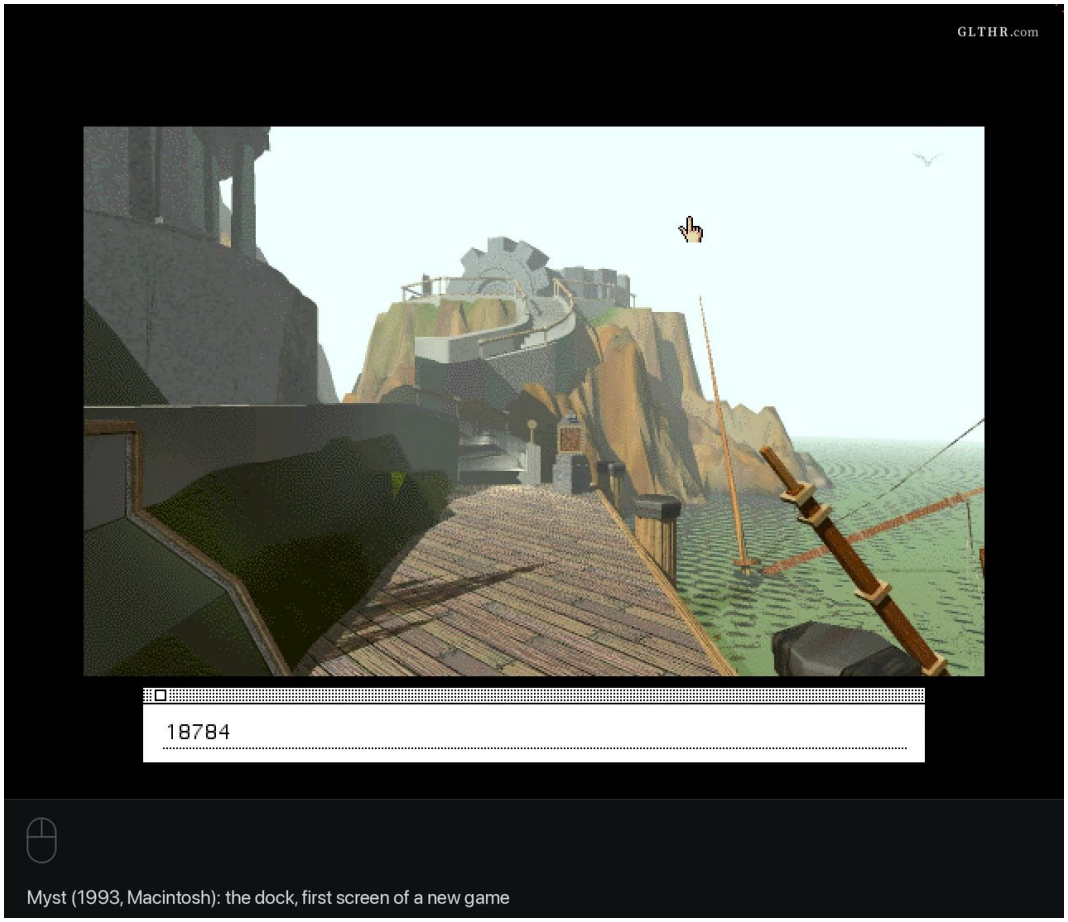


The first button: the patch of sky on the dock.

About a second after the click, a small white window appears below the picture with a number in it. This is HyperCard's message box, where developers type commands and read results. Myst keeps it hidden. This button, named `tester`, brings it out.



The message box, with a number that changes at every click.



Video: https://media.glthr.com/myst-behind-the-ages/myst-dock-tester.mp4

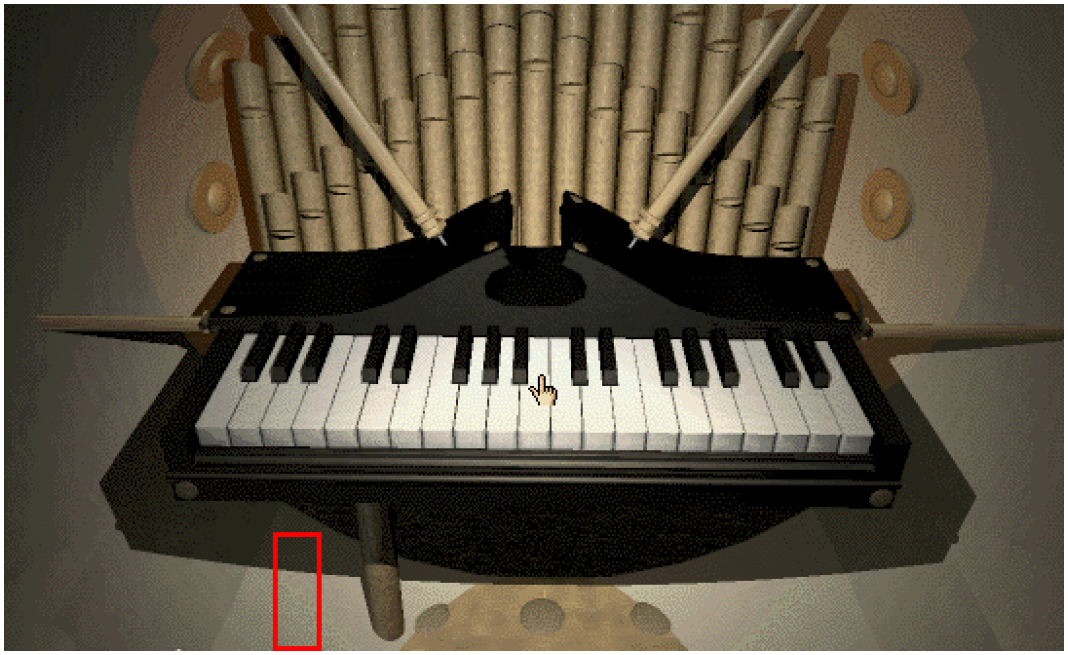
The script explains the number. It builds a string of 300 random characters, notes the time, adds up the codes of the characters, and writes two things:

```
put the ticks - starttime
wait 5
put chksum
```

In HyperCard, `put` without a destination writes to the message box, and writing to a hidden message box shows it. The first number is the time taken by the addition, in sixtieths of a second. It appears for just a twelfth of a second, too briefly to read. The second number stays on screen: the sum of 300 character codes between 1 and 125, usually about 19,000.

This looks like a speed test, placed on the first card the player sees in a new game. The game's launcher times three empty loops in the same way, under a comment that reads `CHECK MACHINE SPEED`. Neither timing is used elsewhere. The sum is named `chksum`, like the checksum that protects saved games. The button may also have been used to measure the cost of calculating a checksum.

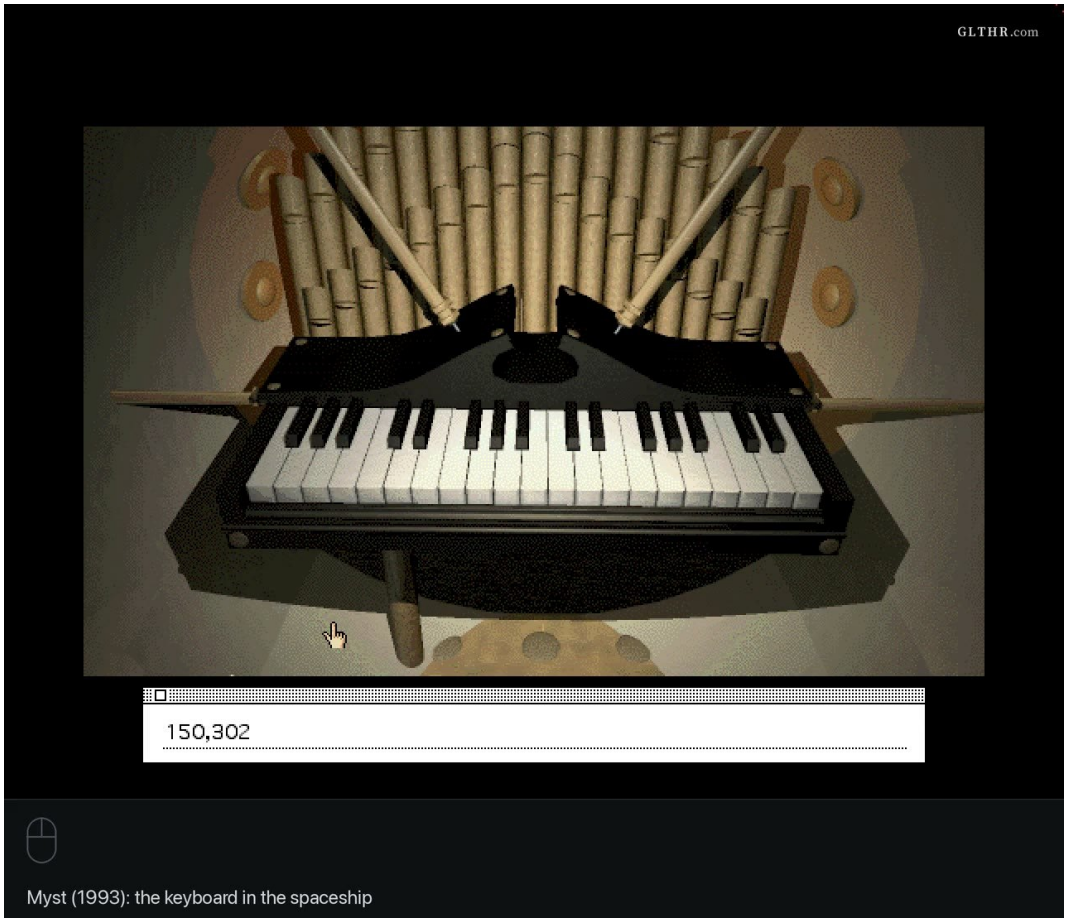
The second button, on the spaceship's floor, is named `m2`. Its whole script is `put the loc of me`, and the message box shows `150,302`: the position of the button itself.



The second button: the strip of floor under the keyboard.



A button that says where it is.



Video: https://media.glthr.com/myst-behind-the-ages/myst-spaceship-m2.mp4

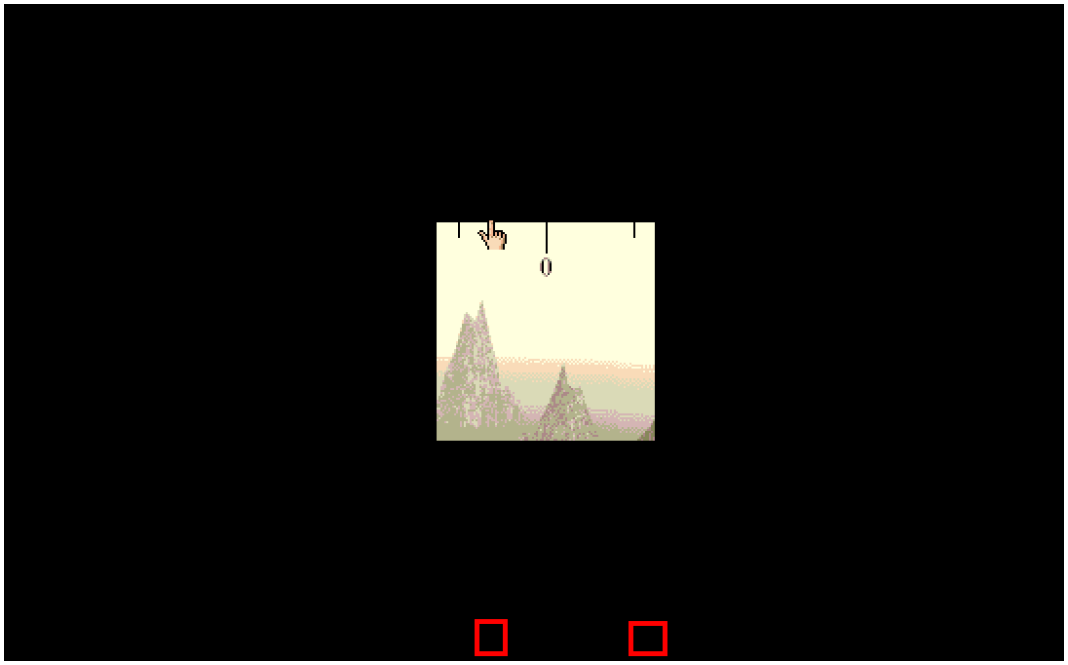
This button looks like a positioning tool. HyperCard does not display a button's center as it is dragged, but Myst needs coordinates to draw the pictures of pressed keys. Dragging this button over a key and clicking it would provide those coordinates. Its rectangle extends two pixels below the card, as if it had been pushed out of the way when the work was done.

You can type into the message box once it is open, but pressing Return does not run a command.

An Error Through the Telescope of Stoneship

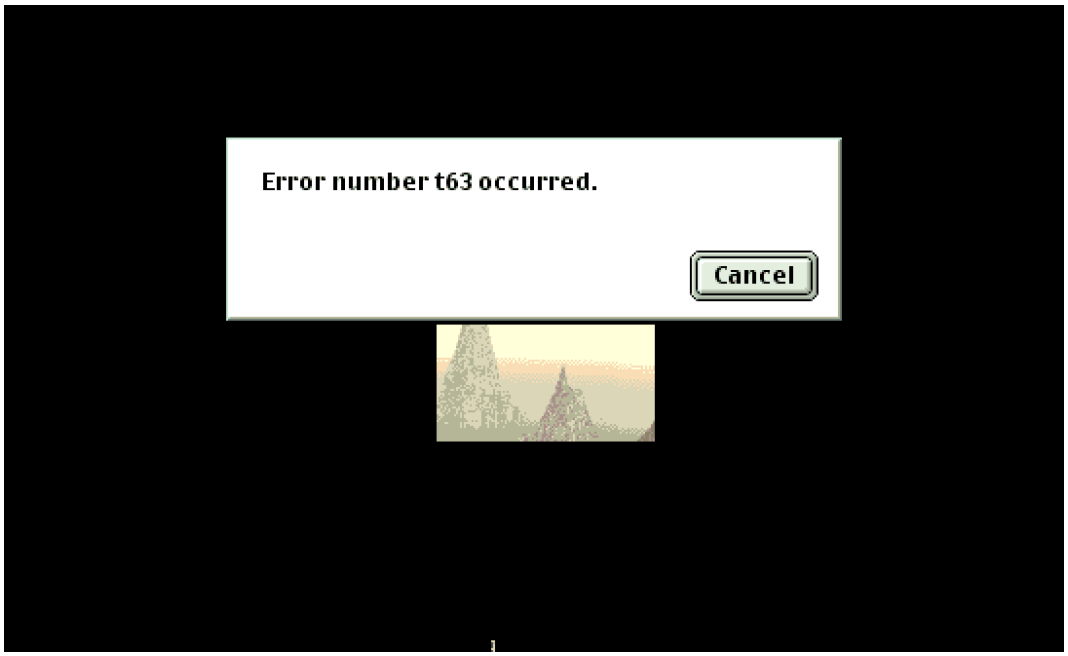
How to reach it.

1. Raise the sunken ship at the dock (light the leaf, snake and insect pillars around the pool), open the book in its cabin, and link to Stoneship.
2. Walk along the deck and up the wooden walkway to the telescope, and click its eyepiece (Stoneship Age:57878).
3. In the black view, click the very bottom edge of the picture, a little left or right of the middle.

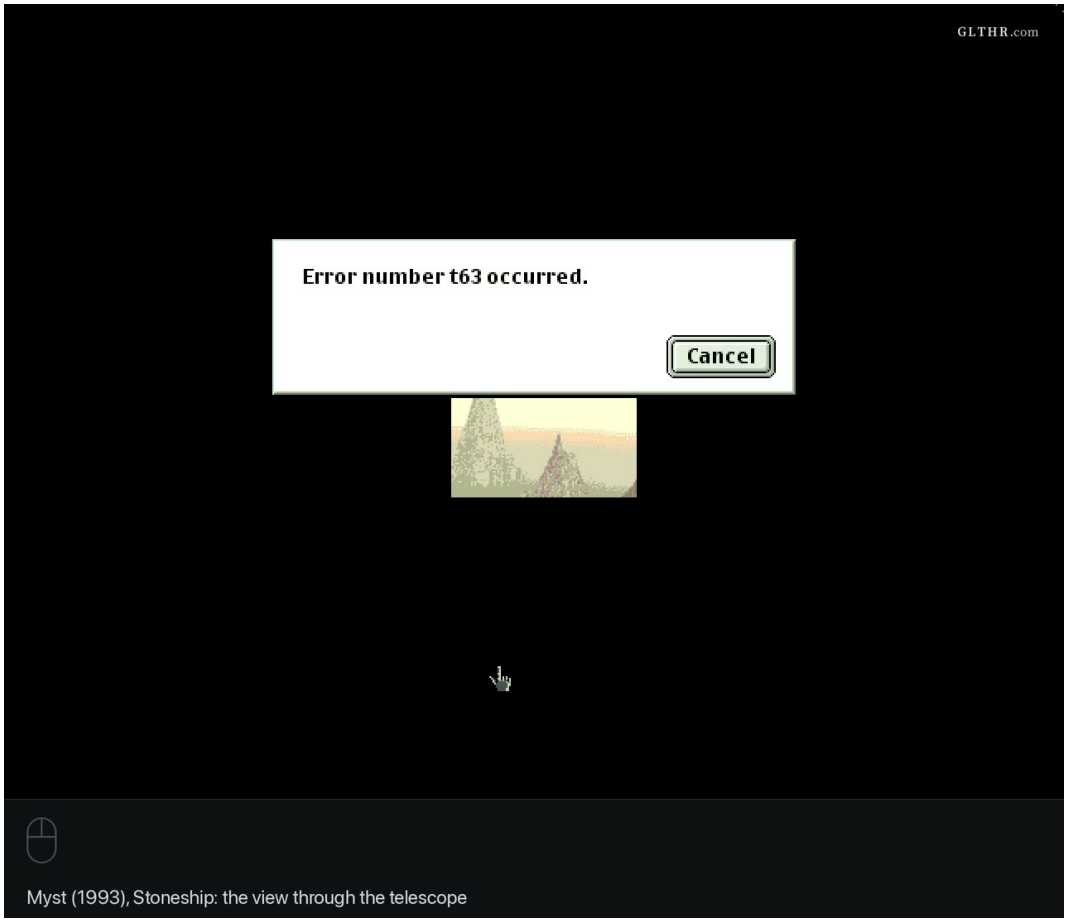


The two buttons, outlined slightly larger than they are.

A dialog box appears: “Error number t63 occurred.” Its only button, Cancel, closes it. The player can then continue playing, still looking through the telescope.



HyperCard’s answer to a command that nothing understands, without its words.



Video: https://media.glthr.com/myst-behind-the-ages/myst-telescope-error.mp4

Both buttons call a routine named `scrollTelescope`, one to turn the view to the left and one to the right. The routine is still in the script of the card, but its first line is commented out, so HyperCard no longer finds it. In a stock HyperCard, message 63 of the list of script errors is `Can't understand "^0".`, here `scrollTelescope`. The HyperCard inside Myst keeps 12 of the 155 texts of that list and has blanked the others, so its dialog falls back on the number alone. Even the error message has become a puzzle.

The player normally turns the telescope by dragging the picture. These unused buttons preserve a different control scheme: holding one accelerates the turn up to a limit, and releasing it lets the view coast to a stop. No controls are drawn at their positions. Both lie over plain black areas of the picture. The tower of Selenitic (Selenitic Age:26154) had the same pair, and kept it: there the buttons still turn the heading, and a second copy of the old routine, which nothing reaches, sits in its script.



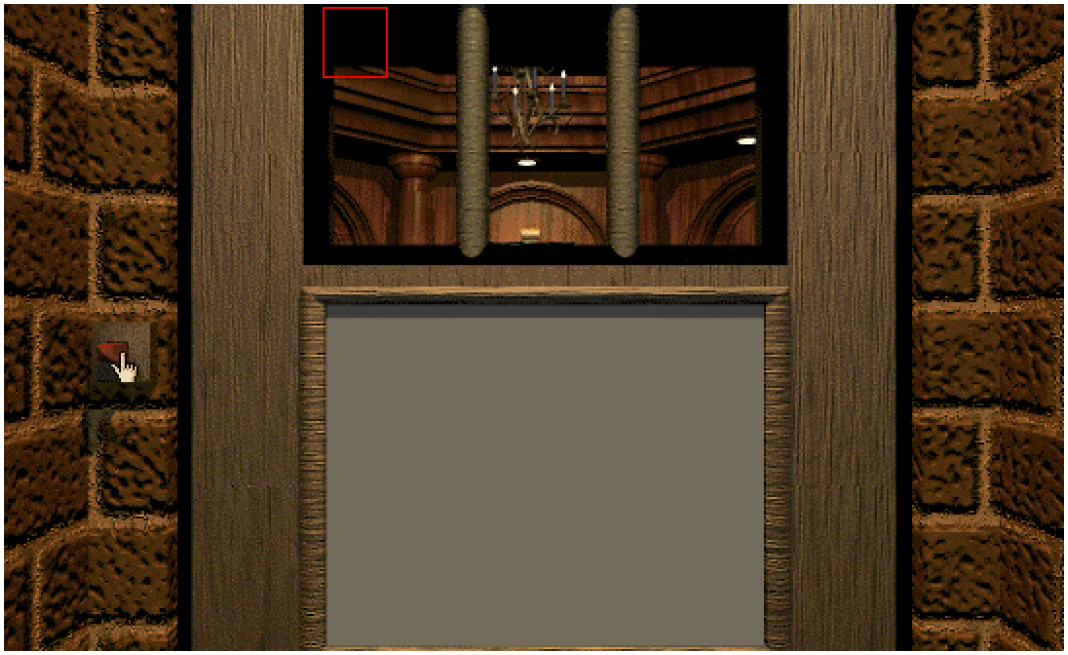
The tower's control panel, as the game's files store it: the two keys turn the heading.

A Forty-Ninth Plate That Jams the Fireplace

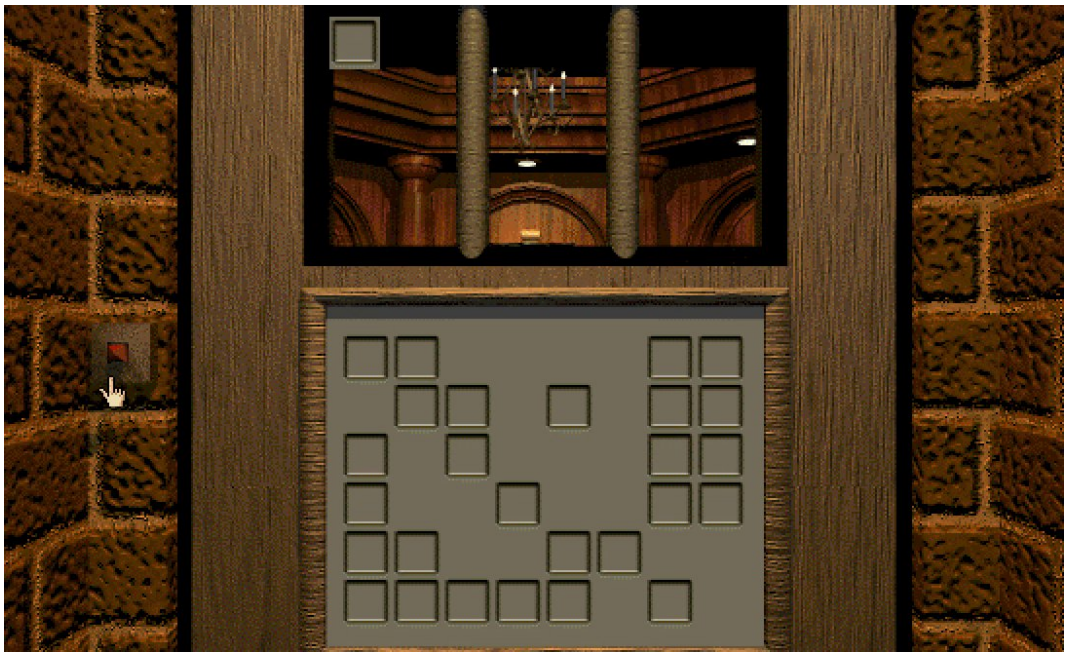
How to reach it.

1. In the library, step into the fireplace and press the red button on its left wall: the door closes (Myst:63906).
2. Enter the pattern of the book on the panel.[2] Row by row, the pressed plates are: 1, 2, 7, 8; 2, 3, 5, 7, 8; 1, 3, 7, 8; 1, 4, 7, 8; 1, 2, 5, 6; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7.
3. Click the top left corner of the dark opening above the panel. A pressed plate appears out of nowhere.
4. Press the red button.

[2]The script also accepts a second pattern, of 17 plates (row by row: 1, 3, 6, 7; 2, 8; 4, 5, 6, 7; 3; 1, 2, 5, 7, 8; 4), an oversight that Jeff Barbi presented at Mysterium 2024 and that the speedrunners of the HyperCard version use (TASVideos). The forty-ninth plate jams the fireplace with that pattern too.



The corner to click, above the panel.

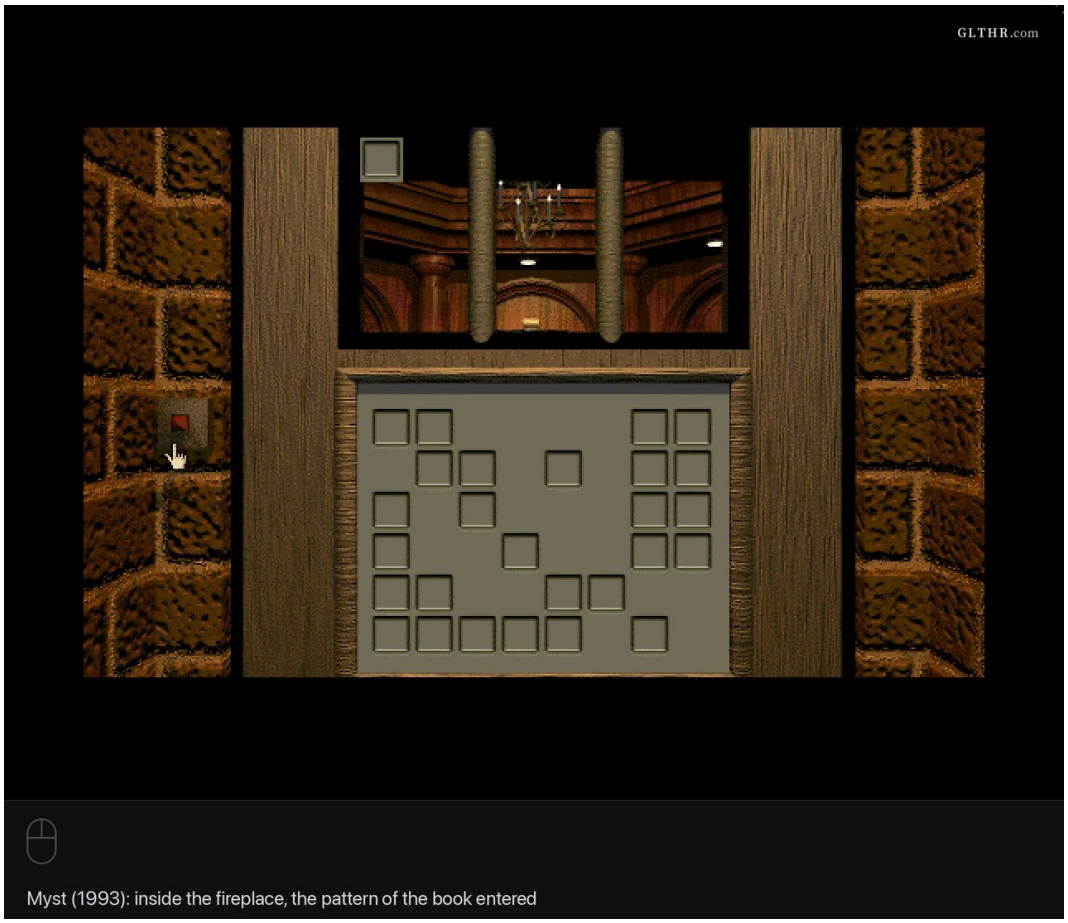


The pattern of the book on the panel, and one plate too many at the top left.

Instead of turning toward the hidden shelf, the fireplace stops on an error: “Error number t53 occurred.”



The right pattern, one click on the corner, and the red button.



Video: https://media.glthr.com/myst-behind-the-ages/myst-fireplace-book.mp4

The corner holds an extra button named `marker`, which uses the same script as the 48 puzzle plates. A plate stores its state in its name, so clicking this extra button

renames it. The pattern check still reads only the 48 puzzle plates and accepts the correct combination. But the routine that turns the fireplace then looks for the button named `marker` to position its animation. No button has that name any more. In a stock HyperCard, message 53 is `There is no ^0 ^1 named "^2".`

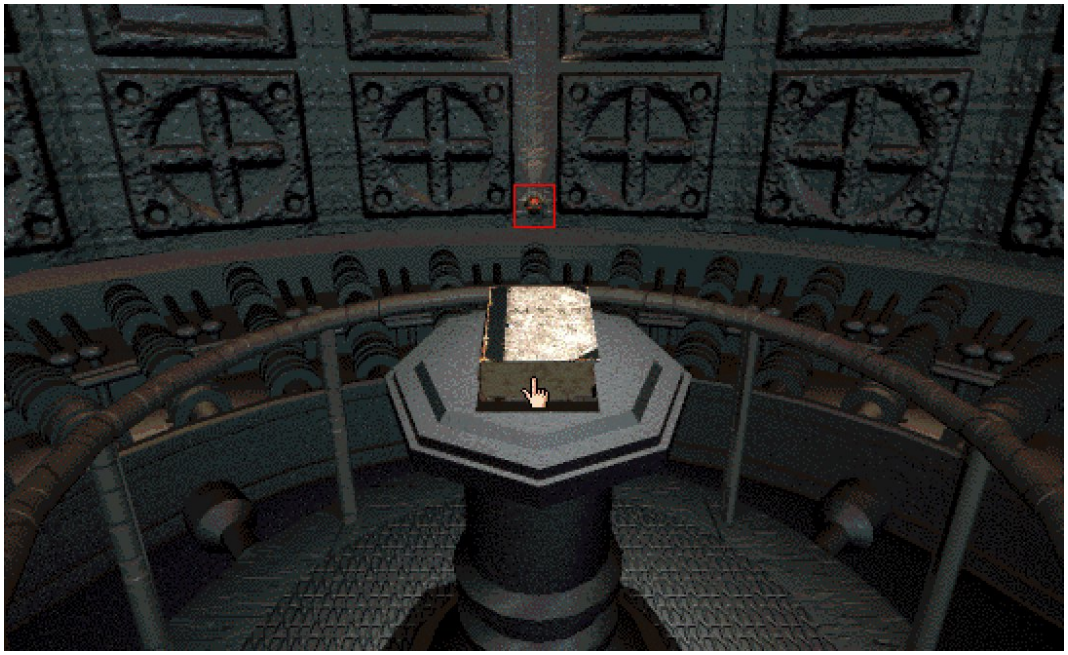
The error persists. Cancel closes the dialog and leaves the panel blank, but pressing the red button brings the error back. To get out, change one of the puzzle plates so the pattern is wrong, then press the red button to open the door. Leaving the fireplace restores the marker. Without the click in the corner, the correct pattern turns the fireplace as it should.

A Red Light That Locks a Door Again

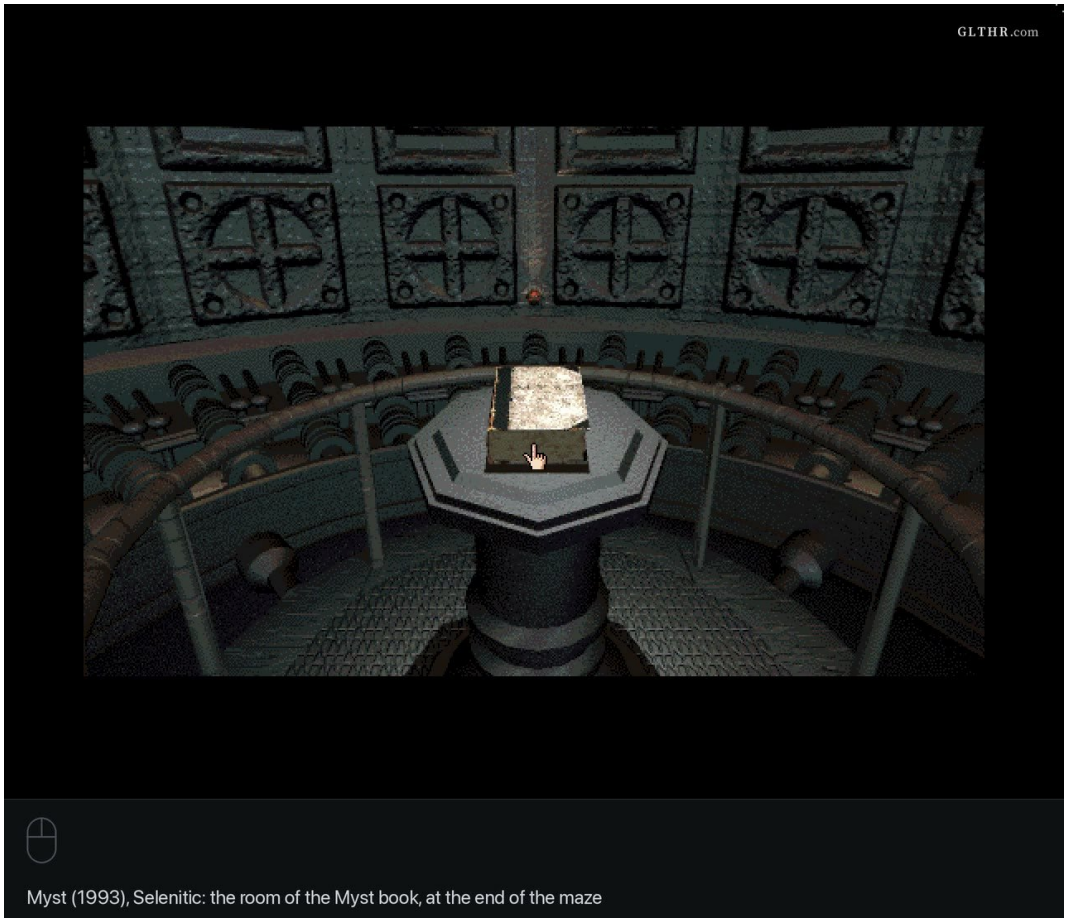
How to reach it.

1. In Selenitic, open the door of the Mazerunner with its five sliders, and ride the Mazerunner to the end of the maze.
2. Leave by the back of the cabin and walk to the Myst book (Selenitic Age:59522).
3. Click the small red light in the wall above the book.
4. Ride back to the start and look at the door's sliders (Selenitic Age:7990).

> **The route through the maze**
>
> From the start: FORWARD; FORWARD; left twice, FORWARD; right twice, FORWARD; right twice, FORWARD; FORWARD; right twice, FORWARD; FORWARD; right twice, FORWARD; right, FORWARD; right, FORWARD; right, FORWARD; right twice, FORWARD; left, FORWARD; right, FORWARD. Each arrow turns the cabin an eighth of a turn; the tunnels turn it too, so the compass of the cabin shows north, north, west, north, east, east, south, south, west, south-west, west, north-west, north-east, north and south-east along the way. At the end, BACKTRACK fifteen times brings the cabin back to the start.

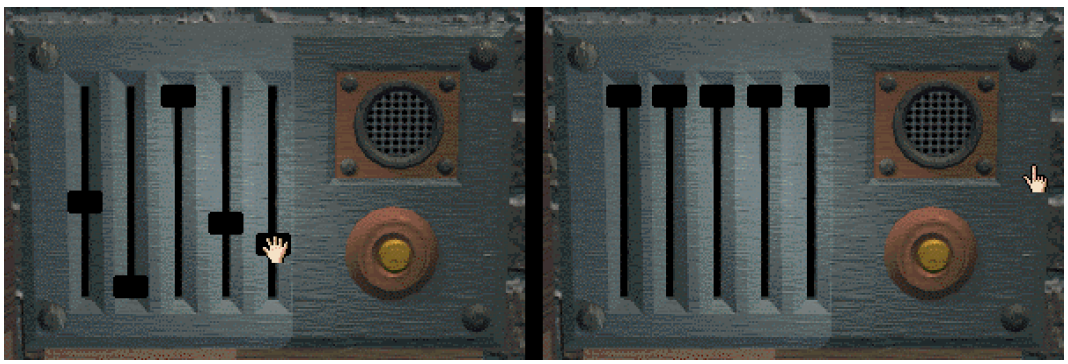


The red light, above the Myst book.



Video: https://media.glthr.com/myst-behind-the-ages/myst-selenitic-light.mp4

Nothing moves in the room. The light's script plays two short sounds that no other script in the game uses. Its effect is at the other end of the maze: it resets the door's five sliders to their starting positions, locking the door again. If a player clicks the light and voluntarily backtracks fifteen times through the maze to check the door, Myst rewards the diligence by locking it again.



The lock of the Mazerunner's door. Left: the combination, as I had left it. Right: the same panel after the click on the red light and the ride back.

The light's handler is the only active script in the Age that resets the door's combination; opening the door and stepping into the hut without clicking the light

leaves the sliders untouched. The light is visible in the picture, but the files do not explain why it lets the player lock the door again.

Conclusion

The released Myst still carries traces of its makers' workbench: a button to time the computer, another to report its position, disabled telescope controls, a fireplace marker that behaves like a puzzle plate, and a light that resets a door. More than thirty years later, a player can still reach them with a few clicks, making Myst the first of several studios' workbenches left inside the series, alongside Riven's contradictions and Exile's hidden developer mode.

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Your questions and leads are welcome: myst@glthr.com

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