Catherine Is Still in Her Cell

A Zip hotspot left on the 1997 Riven CDs lets you return after freeing her, and watch her walk past the bars

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Abstract

I found an overlooked Zip hotspot in the original 1997 Macintosh release of *Riven* that Cyan quietly removed on the 1998 DVD. After Catherine is rescued from Prison Island, the elevator up to her cell is supposed to be broken for good, yet enabling Zip Mode reveals a leftover hotspot on the broken handle that teleports you straight back up. Inside the cell, Catherine's idle timer still runs, so she walks right back into the doorway in her red dress.

To my knowledge, this post-rescue Prison Island remnant has not been documented before. *Riven*'s Zip Mode is meant to save walking across familiar rooms, never to reopen a place the story has closed behind you. When Catherine leaves Prison Island, the game swaps the elevator handle at the bottom of the shaft for a broken one so the cell stays unreachable.

In the original release, one hotspot survived that swap.

Version of the game: Riven 1.0, the original English five-CD release for Macintosh (September 1997), compared against the 1998 DVD edition (1.2). Card labels such as Prison:29 follow the Riven Graph and open that place directly.

The Elevator That Breaks and Still Runs

At the end of the corridor on Prison Island, you step into a barred elevator at Prison:29. Above your head hangs a metal loop handle. In front of you stands the three-button sound lock (Prison:31) that opens Catherine's cage.

Before Catherine is freed, pulling the handle at Prison:29 carries the elevator up the shaft to Prison:32, where Catherine speaks to you through the bars. Pulling the handle inside Prison:32 rides the elevator back down to Prison:29.

Once you enter the five watch sounds at Prison:31 and pull the release lever, the game moves to Prison:29, sets `pcage = 2`, plays the rescue cutscene, and leaves you facing away at Prison:30. Turn back around to Prison:29 and pull the handle. It rattles in place and refuses to rise.

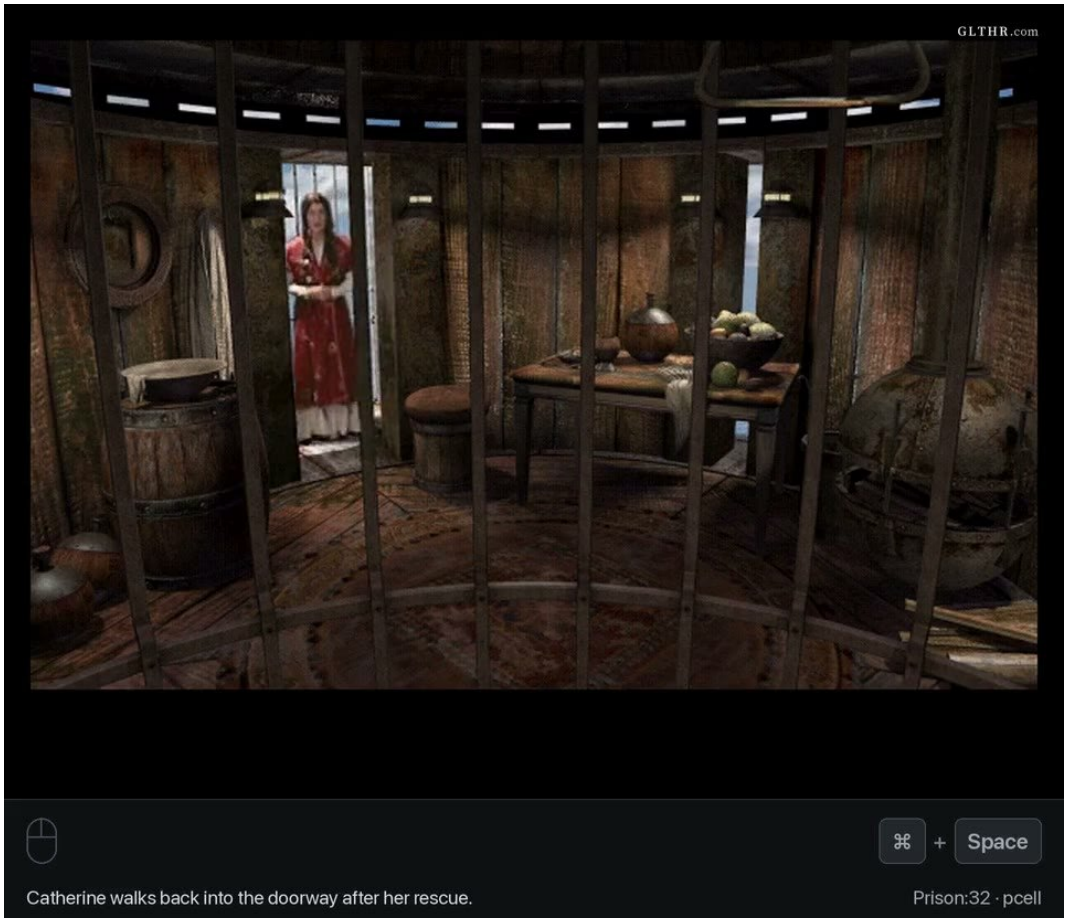
Back Into the Cell, Step by Step

1. Play normally until you reach Prison Island (Prison:43) and walk to the elevator at Prison:29.
2. **Before rescuing Catherine**, pull the handle at Prison:29 to ride up to Prison:32. Wait for Catherine's speech to finish, then pull the upper handle to ride back down. That visit registers `pcell` (Prison:32) as a known Zip destination.

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

3. Step forward to Prison:31, enter the five watch sounds from Gehn's pocket watch, and pull the release lever to free Catherine.
4. When the rescue cutscene ends at Prison:30, turn around to Prison:29.
5. Pull the elevator handle. It shakes and stays at the bottom. With Zip Mode off, clicking anywhere on the handle does the same.
6. Press Command-Space and turn **Options → Zip Mode** on.
7. Move the pointer onto the upper edge of the broken handle. The cursor turns into the yellow Zip lightning bolt.
8. Click. The view jumps straight into Prison:32. You are back inside the elevator cage at the top of the shaft.
9. Wait in the cell. Less than a minute later, Catherine walks back into the left doorway in her red dress, pauses to look through the bars, and strolls back out onto the balcony, *even though she already escaped Prison Island*. Wait longer and she keeps returning at random intervals.

Methodology: *I generated the runs by having an agent navigate with the graph of Riven that I created, so that it was effectively playing the game.*



Video: https://media.glthr.com/riven-prison-zip-remnant/riven-catherine-cell.mp4

Why It Happens

Two oversights combine to keep Catherine's cell alive after her rescue.

1. The bottom card forgets to disable its Zip hotspot

In `P_DATA.MHK` on the 1997 five-CD release, Prison:29 (`HSPT:29`) places three hotspots over the overhead handle:

Hotspot	Rectangle (card px)	Type	Toggled by `BLST`?
`HSPT 10` (`elevhandle`)	`[388, 0, 546, 56]`	Normal (`flags=0`)	Yes: enabled at `pcage = 0`, disabled at `pcage = 2`
`HSPT 12` (`broken`)	`[388, 0, 546, 56]`	Normal (`flags=0`)	Yes: disabled at `pcage = 0`, enabled at `pcage = 2`
`HSPT 14` (`ΩpcellΩ`)	`[418, 0, 526, 29]`	Zip (`flags=1`)	**Never toggled**

When Prison:29 loads after Catherine's rescue (`pcage = 2`), its `on card_load` script activates `BLST 2` (disabling `elevhandle`) and `BLST 4` (enabling `broken`):

```
switch (pcage) {
  case 2:
    activate_blst([2]);   // disables elevhandle (HSPT 10)
    activate_blst([4]);   // enables broken (HSPT 12)
    activate_mlst([4 0]);
    activate_plst([2]);
    break;
}
```

Neither `BLST` touches `HSPT 14` (`ΩpcellΩ`). Because `HSPT 14` sits above `HSPT 12` in hit-test order, its behavior follows Zip Mode alone:

- With **Zip Mode off**, the engine skips `flags=1` Zip hotspots, so clicks inside `[418, 0, 526, 29]` fall through to `HSPT 12` (`broken`) and stay on Prison:29.
- With **Zip Mode on**, once `pcell` has been visited before the rescue, `HSPT 14` catches the pointer, shows the lightning-bolt cursor (`1002`), and jumps straight to Prison:32 with no `pcage` check.

2. The cell itself never checks whether Catherine was rescued

Neither the script on Prison:32 nor the Prison stack's periodic idle timer checks `pcage`.

On `card_load`, Prison:32 switches only on `acathstate` (already `1` after your first visit) and `atrapbook`, rendering the cell (`PLST 1`) and keeping its downward `elevatorhandle` (`HSPT 8`) enabled. On `card_enter`, it resets `pcathtime = 0` and `pcathcheck = 0`. Riven's Prison stack timer then picks a random balcony movie for Catherine (`movies 5-14`, updating `acathstate` between `1` and `2`), plays it, and schedules another one up to 120 seconds later. Because the game assumed no player could return after `pcage = 2`, Catherine stays on patrol inside her cell forever.

Quietly Deleted on the 1998 DVD

Comparing `P_DATA.MHK` between the 1997 five-CD release and the 1998 DVD edition (1.2) shows that Cyan caught the leftover hotspot:

- On the **1997 CDs**, Prison:29 (RMAP `0x9de`) defines `HSPT 14` (`ΩpcellΩ`, `[418, 0, 526, 29]`).
- On the **1998 DVD**, `HSPT 14` is gone. The hotspot table for RMAP `0x9de` ends after `HSPT 12` (`broken`), removing the Zip jump from the bottom of the shaft completely.

Conclusion

The bug does not break the game or open a shortcut, and pulling the cell handle carries you straight back to the bottom of the shaft. It is a rare glimpse behind *Riven*'s curtain: the rescue script remembered to break the handle, forgot to break the Zip shortcut sitting on top of it, and left Catherine endlessly pacing a cell she had already escaped until Cyan quietly erased the shortcut on the DVD a year later. To be fair, it is a nice balcony.

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

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