Trapped in Myst

A trap in the 1993 original that leaves the player stuck forever between two floors

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Abstract

I uncovered a trap in the original Macintosh *Myst* that can leave the player stuck between two floors. With the boiler's valve at one exact setting, the player can stop the giant tree's elevator just above the room under the island and climb in. Once inside, no click, key or amount of waiting moves it again, and the only way out is New Game or Restore Game.

To my knowledge, the trap described here is a new finding. Myst is known for leaving its player alone: no enemy, no timer, nothing that kills. Its bad endings are deliberate. Hand a brother his last page, and the player is left in his prison book. Link to D'ni without the white page, and the player is left there with Atrus. In each case, a final scene makes it clear that the game is over.

The question here is different: can a player, by playing normally, reach a place from which the game cannot go on, without anything on the screen saying that it is over? In the original Macintosh release, yes.

Version of the game: Myst, original Macintosh CD-ROM release (1993). The card IDs are those of its six HyperCard stacks, all dated July 1993.

The Tree and Its Elevator

Near the log cabin on Myst Island stands a giant tree with an elevator inside it. The cabin's boiler drives the lift. Light the pilot light and turn the big red wheel to open the valve, and the tree rises. Close the valve, and it sinks back. When the elevator's door is level with the ground, the player can step in and ride down to a room under the island, where the linking book to the Channelwood Age waits. That room has a red wheel of its own, which controls the same valve as the one in the cabin.

The tree has 13 positions, from the room under the island (step 1) to the top of its rise (step 13). The elevator's door is at ground level at step 5. The valve ranges from 0 to 25, with 12 as its neutral setting. The farther the valve is turned from 12, the faster the tree moves. At 11, it goes down one step every 28 seconds. With the valve fully closed, it drops a step every few seconds. **At exactly 12, the tree does not move at all.**

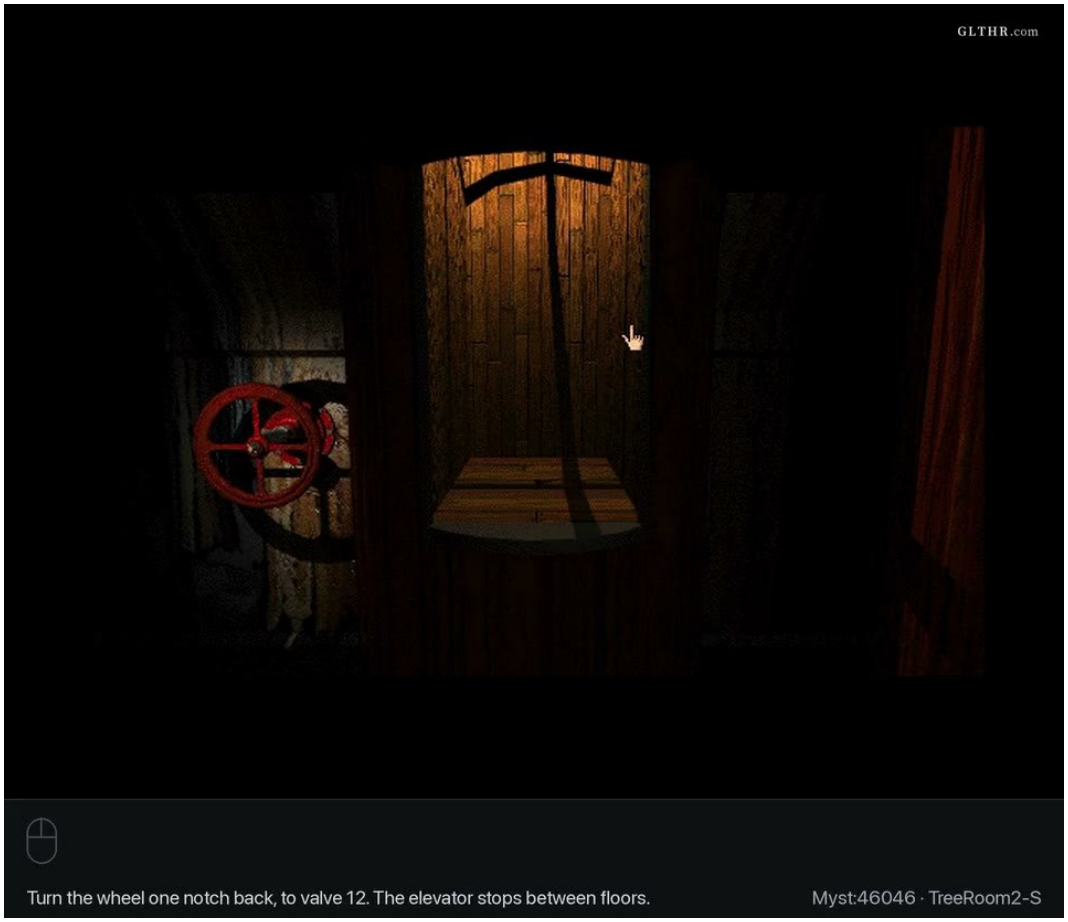
The Trap, Step by Step

1. In a new game, go to the log cabin. Open the safe (7-2-4), take a match, strike it on the box, and light the pilot light under the boiler.

Cite as: Guillaume Lethuillier, "Trapped in Myst", glthr.com, November 21, 2026. https://glthr.com/trapped-in-myst
Interactive figures, animations and videos of the web page are shown here as still images or addresses.

2. Press and hold the right side of the red wheel until it stops turning. The valve is now fully open, at 25. Wait for the tree to reach the top: you hear it rise for less than a minute.
3. Turn the wheel back 14 notches, counting the notches as it turns. The valve is now at 11, and the tree sinks slowly, one step every 28 seconds.
4. Walk to the tree. When the elevator's door reaches the ground, step in and ride down to the room under the island. Step out at the bottom and turn around to face the elevator. The room's red wheel is on the left.
5. Use the right half of that wheel to turn it up 2 notches. The valve is now at 13. About half a minute later, the elevator starts to rise, both audibly and visibly.
6. When its floor reaches chest height, turn the wheel back 1 notch. The valve is back at 12, and the elevator stops.
7. Click the elevator to climb in.

From inside, the player looks out at the rock wall of the shaft, with the room just below. The doorway leads nowhere. The elevator's button and the keys do nothing. Nothing moves, however long you wait. I clicked every pixel I could reach and tried every key on the keyboard. The elevator remained unimpressed. The only way out is the menu bar (Command-Space): New Game or Restore Game.



Video: https://media.glthr.com/trapped-in-myst/myst-tree-trap.mp4

Why It Happens

The original Myst is a set of HyperCard stacks, whose cards and buttons can carry scripts. Three scripts, each sensible on its own, combine to create the trap.

The first controls the tree's movement while the player is on Myst Island. The island's script moves the tree upward when the valve is above 12 and downward when it is below 12. At 12, it leaves the tree where it is (just as the library ceiling shortcut does):

```
if CabinValve ≠ 12 then
if (item 1 of MY_TreeGate < 13 and CabinValve > 12) or ¬
(item 1 of MY_TreeGate > 1 and CabinValve < 12) then
```

The second is the way into the elevator from the room under the island, Myst:46046. The game shows this view when the player turns to face the elevator while it is at the bottom. It remains on screen while the player stands there, even after the elevator starts to rise, and clicking it still enters the lift. That is why step 7 works with the elevator halfway up.

The third is the inside of the elevator, Myst:45039. Its doorway leads out only at step 1 (into the room under the island) and at steps 5 and 6 (onto the ground):

```
if Level = 1 then
go to card id 45222
...
else
if Level = 5 or Level = 6 then
go to card id 32403
```

Its button sends the elevator down only from above step 5, and a way to look down the shaft appears only above step 6. At steps 2, 3 and 4, none of these actions is available. Only the valve can move the lift, and both wheels that control it are outside. With the valve at 12, the player is stuck between floors for the rest of the game.

Which Versions

I tested the trap in the original Macintosh release, version 1.0 (July 1993).

Walkthroughs and forums tell of players who missed the elevator or left it stranded at the top of the tree, and of realMyst players stuck in other elevators. In those cases, turning a wheel brings it back. I found no earlier description of the trap described here.

Conclusion

Myst still has no way to die. But one turn of a wheel at the right moment buries the player alive in the tree, without a final scene to announce it. The view stays still, and only the menu offers a way out.

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

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