



Jordan Mechner

The Making of
PRINCE OF PERSIA
Journals 1985-1993



Introduction

I started keeping a journal in college, and kept it up for several years afterward. During those years I created my first games, *Karateka* and *Prince of Persia*, on an Apple II computer.

It was the start of a journey that would see my shape-shifting prince transform into a modern video game hero, LEGO minifigure, and even Jake Gyllenhaal in a summer blockbuster movie. But in 1985, he existed only as a few scribbles on a yellow-lined pad. In my old journals I recorded his birth pangs.

Rereading these notebooks twenty years later, reliving the creative, technical and personal struggles that brought the prince into being, I thought others might find them of interest. So I began posting daily entries on my website at jordanmechner.com, as a “developer diary from the past.”

The response has been more than I hoped for. The old journals seem to resonate not only with game developers, but with writers, artists and creators of all stripes, some of whom weren’t born yet in 1985.

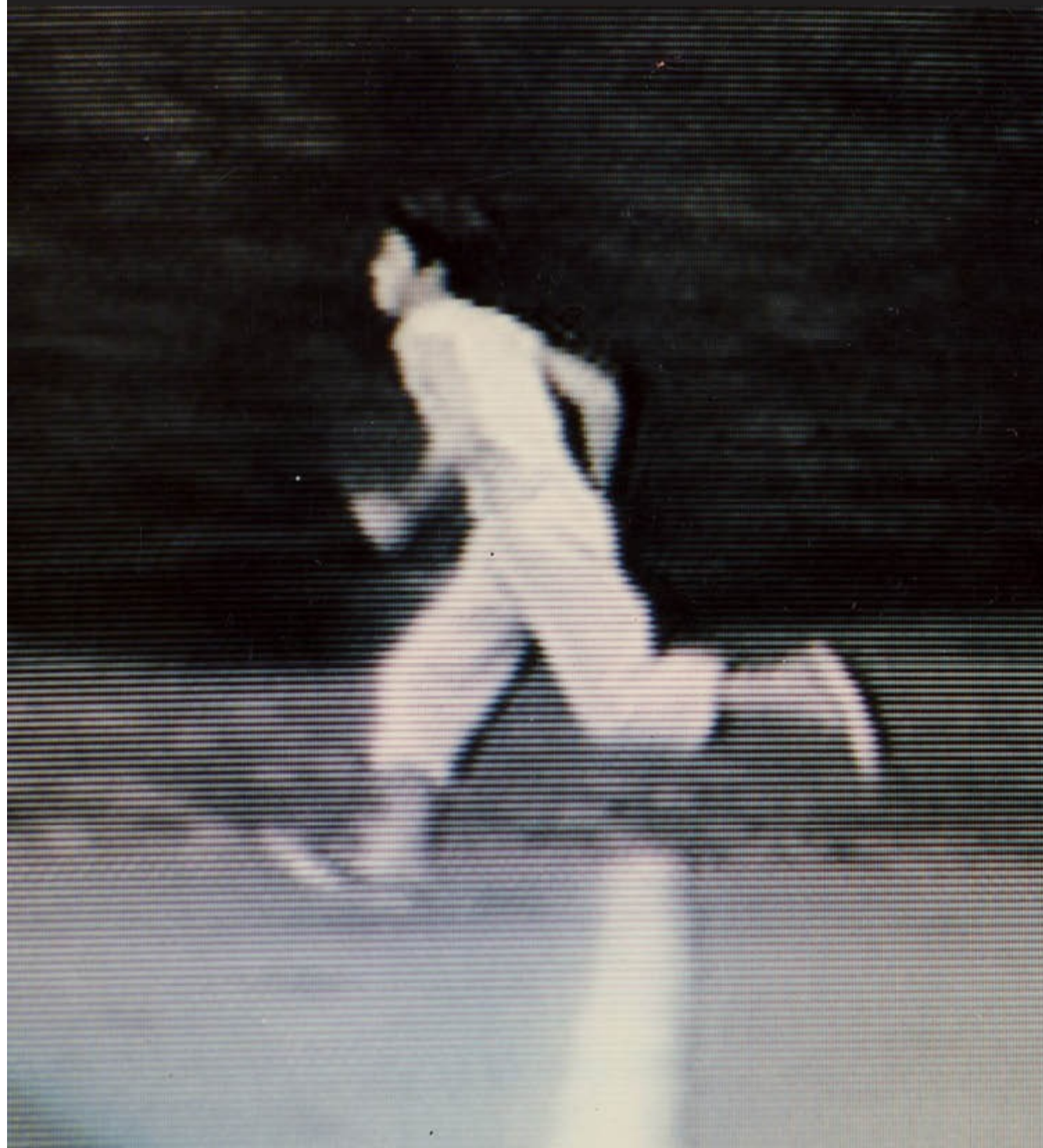
Here it is — the first “Making of” *Prince of Persia*. I hope you enjoy it.

Note: In the interest of accurately portraying the ups and downs of this period of my life, over twenty years ago, I’ve resisted the temptation to edit out statements that today I find embarrassing, cringe-inducing, or flat-out wrong. Please understand that the journal entries reflect my state of mind when I wrote them, not what I think now.

Jordan Mechner

PART 1: APPLE II

"Do I Really Want to Make Another Game?"



“Do I Really Want to Make Another Game?”

MAY 6, 1985

[*New Haven*] Picked up my Mac from Technical Services; they'd run it for a few hours without crashing, so they just packed it back up again. On the way back I bought a surge suppressor at the Coop. Hope that takes care of the problem.

Wrote my two-page Psych paper. Now there's just one lone Music exam between me and the rest of my life. I practiced by trying to transcribe the beginning of *Raiders*. It's hard, even with Music Shop to test my work out on.

Dad called. *Billboard's* top-ranked program for this week is, indeed, *Karateka*. That's Step Two in my convincing myself of this. Step Three will be when I see it for myself.

MAY 7, 1985

I'm done.

I'm done with *Yale*.

The music exam was pretty tough — I blew the dictations — but, hey, I did my best. I might get a B in the course. After the exam I spoke to Dwight and Tom, in a whisper because a lot of people were still writing. They wanted to know what I'd be doing next year.

“Write computer games,” I whispered.

I bought *Billboard*. *Karateka* is indeed number one. Me and Madonna. Yow.

MAY 10, 1985

Dinner with Bill Holt at Whistler's. He brought me up to date on what everybody at Broderbund is doing. He also asked me about my summer plans. I said I was thinking about doing another game. He said Gary would love to have me back.

So, I figure I'll fly up there around the middle of July, stay with somebody for a while, see if I can get a new project lined up. I'll call Gary on Monday and tell him.

Note: *call* — not write. *Gary* — not Ed. Writing to Ed hasn't worked for me too well in the past. He's a Busy Man. I have a feeling they don't use letters much out there, anyway.

Bill suggested I ask Gary, not Ed, to pick up the tab. “If your dad ever disowns you,” Bill said, “I think Gary would adopt you.”

I'm psyched to Return to Marin.

Lunch with Jeff Kleeman. Afterwards, he came over and I recorded the score to *Vertigo* for him. I'll look him up in L.A. this summer. Also, jogging this morning, I ran into Mike Saltzman and Eve Maremont.

MAY 14, 1985

Stopping by the post office after jogging, I found the letter from Ed I've been waiting for for nearly two months. I was amazed at how happy it made me. It didn't say much — basically, just “sure, come on out” — but it lifted a weight off my chest, one I hadn't even realized I was carrying. I *am* going out there in July. And I'm seriously looking forward to it.

The issue of who pays hasn't yet been addressed, but I think they'll probably agree to pay for my ticket. If not (don't tell them this), I'll go anyway.

Dad had a useful insight on my upcoming negotiations with Broderbund. My position should be: I don't need an advance, or a salary, or a guarantee that they'll publish the program when it's finished. I'll take all the risk. I just want the highest royalty rate I can get. And the pressure to negotiate the contract should come from them, not from me.

MAY 17, 1985

Breakfast at Naples with Dwight Andrews. We talked about computer music.

A pleasant surprise: Got my first royalty check for *Karateka*, for \$2,117. 2,000 units sold in April. The advance is now paid off.

MAY 24, 1985

The Baccalaureate address was pretty good. Giamatti always brings a lump to my throat when he does his routine about a liberal arts education and learning for learning's sake.

The Class Day exercises boasted a very funny routine by a pair of senior stand-up comics, and a good speech by Paul Tsongas. The thrust of it was that one should maintain perspective as one strives to Get Ahead in life; material gains are empty; nobody wishes on their deathbed that they had spent more time on their business.

Friday must have been ninety degrees, but like a fool I wore a jacket and tie under the heavy black gown. Boy, was I sweating. The procession to Old Campus was a very big deal; we took a rather circuitous route through the New Haven Green, where we stopped and waited in a long line while the band and the President's party paraded by. We doffed our caps to Giamatti as he passed. Ward, Larry, and Dominic whistled Elgar and Sousa marches to keep from getting bored. Larry had fun with the parasol he'd brought along.

Our parents snapped picture after picture as we passed. We smiled and basked and kept moving. It all seemed unreal. Filled with an ocean of chairs, packed with people, approached by an unusual route through gates that had always been locked, the Old Campus felt like no place I'd ever been.

Once we got in our seats, we were graduated almost before we knew it. A hymn, a prayer, and then, suddenly, one-thousand-some-odd "IN NUMBER," we were graduated "as designated by the Dean." And it was over.

JUNE 4, 1985

[*New York*] I turned 21 today.

Irv Bauer dropped by. We chatted for a couple of minutes. He congratulated me on being a boy wonder and asked me what I had in the works. I told him I was writing a screenplay.

"It's a hard business," he said. Then he said: "I'm going to give you a gift." He thereupon recommended James Agee's two books *On Film*. I thanked him profusely. I guess I'm supposed to buy the books myself.

I saw Aviva off (to Australia via LaGuardia) and went to see *Jules and Jim*.

JUNE 5, 1985

A cold, drizzling day. I was a little grouchy, I guess because I'm feeling confused and indecisive about my future. Kay from Broderbund called and told me it'll be OK for me to stay at Dane's place. I booked a flight to L.A. and S.F. on July 5th. So everything's set. Except -

Do I really want to write another game? Can I do that and write screenplays at the same time? *Can* I write screenplays at all?

I played the *Gremlins* soundtrack to evoke last summer and get me psyched about movies. It worked. Tomorrow I'll write something.

The Commodore version of *Karateka* must be out, because I got a copy in the mail. Shrink-packed and everything.

JUNE 15, 1985

Chris Columbus must be a happy guy. Steven Spielberg latched onto him and now Chris is cranking out fun movies one after another. I loved *Gremlins*. I liked *Goonies*. A lot.

I'm glad I'm going to San Rafael in two weeks. I think I'm going stir crazy. My social life here is zilch. I never do anything. I'm turning into a lump.

I'm not crazy about the prospect of sitting down to write another video game and getting up a year later. But it *would* be good for me to live in Marin and work at Broderbund. Meet new people. My own place, my own car. Get around. Yup — I'm set on that.

JULY 4, 1985

[*L.A.*] Staying with Robert Cook in Huntington Beach. Beach party last night with his family and about 500 other people. We talked about computer games, movies, and our future.

Today we drove into Westwood and saw *St. Elmo's Fire*. The first movie I've ever seen about people my age, i.e., just out of college. Usually it's either the summer after high school, or freshman year in college. It's refreshing to see these actors who've been playing 17-year-olds for the past five years get a chance to act their age.

Karateka is #2 on Billboard's bestseller list.

JULY 5, 1985

Robert is all psyched up to do a new game now. My presence seems to have that effect on him. Me, I've been having serious doubts about doing another computer game.

On the one hand, if I live at home for much longer I'll go stir-crazy. What I need is a place to go. Friends. Work. Moving to Marin and doing another game for Broderbund would give me that.

But it would take time away from screenwriting. In the time it'll take me to do a new game, I could write three screenplays. And... the games business is drying up. *Karateka* may make me as little as \$75,000 all told, and it's at the top of the charts. There's no guarantee the new game will be as successful. Or that there will even *be* a computer games market a couple of years from now.

JULY 10, 1985

[*San Rafael*] It was fun walking into the Broderbund offices and seeing everybody. Had lunch with Gene Portwood and spent a couple of hours sitting around his office with Lauren Elliott and Gary Carlston, talking about ideas for my new game. David Snider showed me the Amiga — wow! — and Chris Jochumson showed me *Mac Print Shop*.

Broderbund's doing well. *Print Shop* is doing *insanely* well. I'm almost convinced I want to move out here and do another game.

After I write my first screenplay.

JULY 16, 1985

Danny Gorlin took me to his house to show me *Airheart*, which, a year later, is now double hi-res. He asked for feedback.

It had the same problem it did the last time I saw it. Small detailed objects against a black background. It *should* be cosmic, mind-boggling; people should look at it and say "I can't believe I'm seeing this on an Apple II." But the truth is, right now, it doesn't look especially impressive.

I said: "You've gone the honest, hard-to-program, hard-to-represent route at every step. You need to put in some cheap effects so people will notice the expensive ones." I offered a bunch of suggestions. He was listening, but I could tell he really wanted to believe it was almost there and he could be finished in a month.

Danny's sunk a lot of time and money into this. I'm worried. Technically, it's a wonder, but the universe he's chosen to represent with this awesome piece of programming is so exotic that I'm afraid people won't respond to it. It's what Gene Portwood calls "an effect in search of a game."

JULY 17, 1985

Gene and I came up with a setting for the new game before lunch. Ali Baba; Sinbad. It's versatile, familiar, visually distinctive, and — in the video game field — hasn't been done to death.

Robert, Tomi, Steve and I had dinner at Acapulco. The waitress wouldn't believe I was 21, because my New York learner's permit didn't have a photo on it. "You could have written this yourself," she said. So Steve ordered a Margarita, then pushed it across the table to me. I was on my third sip when the manager came by and whisked it away from me with a curt "Thank you." He was so steamed, even after that, he had to come back to the table and give us a lecture.

What gets me is that they charged us for the drink.

JULY 18, 1985

Driving me to the airport, Tomi said:

"I think you should pursue screenwriting. Go for it."

I was surprised and asked her why. She said that Broderbund is a really nice, warm, friendly place to work, but

for programmers it's actually not that great a deal. The older ones, like Chris and David, are starting to get scared, because programming's the only marketable skill they have, and it's a young man's game. The new crop of kids coming up are willing to work harder and cheaper, and don't have girlfriends or families yet to cut into their working hours. And nobody knows how long the games market will be around, or what it'll be like next year.

I never would have thought of it quite like that.

AUGUST 28, 1985

[*Chappaqua*] One of those rainy late-summer days. Woke up at 11:30, drove Mom into town and back.

Finished that letter to Ed Bernstein at Broderbund. I needed to come up with some kind of storyline, so I just wrote something off the top of my head. I sealed the letter and mailed it.

Then a strange thing happened. I started getting images in my head of the characters: The Sultan. The Princess. The Boy. I saw the scenes in my mind as if it were a Disney movie. So I wrote up a scenario — churned it out in an hour. It came out pretty well, I think. It's just similar enough to *Karateka*, but more plausible, more intricate, and most important, more humorous. Gene will love it. Maybe the back story could even be written up and illustrated, like a comic book, and published with the game.

My night thoughts lately have been along the lines of: "Do I have it in me to do another computer game? Is this what I want to do? *Can* I do it? What if the code-writing part of my brain has atrophied? Will I fail ignominiously? Should I just turn to screenwriting full-time?"

Today made me feel better.

AUGUST 30, 1985

Another good day on the game. (Screenplay? What screenplay?) I'm getting to the point where I want to rush out and buy a video camera, a VCR and a digitizer and get to work.

Atari *Karateka* arrived FedEx. It looks great, sounds awful. Dad and I spent the day troubleshooting the music. It should be OK, but nowhere near Commodore quality.

I'm unutterably happy that I'm getting psyched up for this new game. It fills me with joy and confidence in the future.

Then again, maybe *feeling* good doesn't necessarily mean that what I *write* is good. Maybe the best stuff is produced out of blackest despair. Or maybe not.

SEPTEMBER 24, 1985

I passed my driving test, despite hitting the curb while parallel parking, failing to check the rear-view mirror, stopping at a green light, and having trouble getting the key out of the ignition. So now I've got a driver's license. Scary, isn't it?

Got a letter from Ed. He waxed enthusiastic about the new game and proposed they fly me out to discuss terms "as soon as it's convenient." How cool is that?! (Sorry, Mom, Dad... can't make dinner. Gotta fly out to California for the weekend. Business. You know how it is.)

SEPTEMBER 25, 1985

The Diners Club VCR and video camera arrived. It's scary to have \$2,500 worth of equipment I don't own and can't afford. David and I (mostly David) spent the day fooling around with it. It's a fantastic piece of technology, but I'll breathe easier when it's out of the house.

I feel so dishonest.

OCTOBER 2, 1985

Last night I was kept awake by anxiety about the new game. All the *detail* I'm gonna have to put in... it just seems so daunting. How did I do it for *Karateka*? I can't remember. I'm not sure I can do it again.

The Doubt is still there in the back of my mind. It talks to me from time to time. "Jordan!" it says. "What are you doing? You're taking a step backward. You want to be a filmmaker. It's time to move on! You brought the Apple-computer-game thread of your life to its climax a year ago. You caught the industry just before it started to die, before you started to lose interest in games yourself. Now you want to do 'just one more game'... why? Timidity!

Fear of breaking loose! You'll waste a year, man! If you're going to try for Hollywood, *now is the time!*"

"Shut up," I say, and Doubt grumbles and crawls, for the moment, back into its hole.

OCTOBER 17, 1985

I ought to videotape David this weekend, because I have to return the camera by Tuesday. Problems with using David as a model: By the time I figure out what additional footage I need, he'll be 3,000 miles away (and probably several inches taller).

Ed Bernstein called back. "I get the feeling I'm supposed to make you an offer," he said. "Why don't you make me a counter-offer?"

I wondered how you can make a counter-offer when there's been no offer to begin with. But I said: "No advance, no salary, and a 20% royalty. That would be my ideal."

He came right back with: "My ideal would be no advance, no salary, and a 15% royalty."

I hate negotiating with people I like. My impulse is to be nice. I don't want them to think I'm greedy. On the other hand, I want as much money as I can get.

This morning I sat in the sun and reread *My Side of the Mountain*. It got me thinking about how far removed from nature my life is. Staring at a computer screen all day. Fast food, fluorescent lights. I'm only 21; my eyes should be bluish-white, instead they're bloodshot.

The yen to wander is still in me. It's not dead. Thanks, Jean George.

OCTOBER 20, 1985

Videotaped David running and jumping in the Reader's Digest parking lot. It'll do for a start.

Negotiating



Negotiating

OCTOBER 23, 1985

Ed said there was no way he could go above 15%. I said OK. I'll draft a contract and send it.

MARCH 13, 1986

I have to get out of here. This isn't even half a life. It's like living under house arrest. Moving to California is no longer a career move, it's an escape hatch.

MARCH 20, 1986

This negotiation with Broderbund has dragged on so long and gotten so frustrating, it's pretty much cured me of any lingering sentimental feelings of being part of the "Broderbund family." I still feel affection for Doug and Gary, but the reality is, it's a corporation. To the people I'm actually dealing with, it's just business.

Mom just showed me an article in *Venture* magazine about how Electronic Arts gave Timothy Leary a \$100,000 advance for his new game. Why am I still talking to Broderbund?

MARCH 28, 1986

Bill McDonagh called to tell me that *Karateka* has sold a quarter of a million units in its first month of release in Japan.

APRIL 15, 1986

Got a new contract draft from Broderbund. They're still offering \$0 advance, but I think it'll be OK.

APRIL 29, 1986

The digitizer arrived. I fired it up and quickly determined that the tape I shot in October is useless.

Basically, the digitizer recognizes two shades: black and white. The background needs to be dark enough to be perceived as black even when the brightness is turned up high enough to make David's arms and face and feet visible.

Second, it can't reduce or enlarge.

Maybe if I paint his skin white and give him a white turban and shoot it against a black wall?

I still think this can work. The key is not to clean up the frames too much. The figure will be tiny and messy and look like crap... but I have faith that, when the frames are run in sequence at 15 fps, it'll create an illusion of life that's more amazing than anything that's ever been seen on an Apple II screen. The little guy will be wiggling and jittering like a Ralph Bakshi rotoscope job... but he'll be alive. He'll be this little shimmering beacon of life in the static Apple-graphics Persian world I'll build for him to run around in.

APRIL 30, 1986

Spent the day getting DRAY to pack and unpack, load and save. Another couple of days and it'll be doing everything DRAX should've done all along.

This is the utility I should have had for *Karateka*. It seems like a lot of work now, but it'll pay for itself many times over when it comes time to cut out all those frames and put them in order.

MAY 17, 1986

I think the best way to do the digitizing for the game may be to shoot it in Super 8, put it on the Moviola, then train the video camera on the screen and feed it directly into the digitizer. That'd result in a cleaner picture, eliminate the freeze-frame noise. Also, I could manipulate image size by zooming in and out.

One disadvantage is the hassle of getting Super 8 film developed. And I'd need a movie camera as well as a video camera.

How's this: Buy a video camera now, shoot on video the best I can, digitize it - noise and all - and use it as a dry run placeholder, while I program the rest of the game. Then shoot the final stuff on Super 8 once I have a clearer idea of what I need.

JULY 7, 1986

Got a call from Ed Badasov at Broderbund.

"I understand you want to come out here," he said.

I explained: "I figure it'll take me a year to do the game, so what I'd like to do is relocate to the Bay Area. If I could stay with someone for the first couple of weeks until I find an apartment, that'd be a big help."

He asked if the project was a sequel to *Karateka*. When I told him it wasn't, his enthusiasm dimmed noticeably. I felt like I was talking to a studio executive.

JULY 25, 1986

Moving 3,000 miles away on the strength of nothing more than a vague idea – "an Arabian Nights-type-game" – feels kind of scary, and appealing.

JULY 31, 1986

Just looked at the "final" version of PC *Karateka*. It seemed OK, I guessed, except for overall sluggishness, frequent disk accesses, and a few minor graphics glitches. Then I booted up the Apple version to compare... and it was so smooth, it made me want to cry.

The PC version is maybe 50% of what it should be. I can't even tell these guys what to fix... it's a million little things, and they're just not up to the hassle. That kind of attention to detail is why the Apple version took me two years. This version is probably the best I'll ever get out of them.

Oddly enough, this makes me more psyched to do the new game. It reminded me why I'm good at this – of what I can do that others can't, or won't.

AUGUST 1, 1986

Ed sent sketches of someone's ideas for *Karateka II* – Gene's, presumably. I wasn't too enthused at first, but now it occurs to me there is a way that this could work.

If I get actively involved in the game design – make up a storyline, draw up sketches, brainstorm with Gene, etc. – and stay on in a kind of supervisory capacity, while turning the programming over to Steve Ohmert – that'll let me keep some control over the project's development, and also justify asking for a higher royalty rate than if I weren't involved at all.

It makes sense. They can't very well turn me down – I own the copyright to *Karateka*, so there's no sequel unless I agree to it.

AUGUST 2, 1986

I told Ed Badasov I'd like to design *Karateka II* for them. He said:

"We already have two designers, Gene and Lauren. We don't need a third. After all, designing it is something that, basically, anyone can do."

As for royalty, he offered 3% — one-fifth of the original rate — and seemed to think that is basically a gift and they are doing me a huge favor.

He went so far as to point out that they could release *Karateka II* under a different title and pay me nothing, and word would get around that it was in fact an unofficial sequel to *Karateka*, so they'd still benefit from *Karateka's* success without having to pay me a royalty.

I'm proud of myself for not having lost my temper.

Dad advised me to hold out for 15%, the same as on *Karateka*. I'd be happy with 10%, which is what Doug Smith got on *Championship Lode Runner*. But I don't think they'll give that much.

SEPTEMBER 3, 1986

It's official – I'm going to California. I have a plane ticket and everything.

"Actually," Ed said, "I was expecting you today."

My life is about to change.

California



STANDING (2-SPACE) JUMP
(actually covers you 3 spaces)



RUNNING (3-SPACE) JUMP

~~for 1st go you need 7 spaces~~

Need 3 spaces
for run start.

California

SEPTEMBER 10, 1986

[*San Francisco*] "I thought you were the pizza man," Tomi said when she opened the door to the Baker Street apartment and saw me there at the top of the steep steps with my two bags.

Now I'm reclining in luxury in one of their new armchairs, listening to Maurizio Pollini play Chopin preludes on their new CD player. There's a stunning view of San Francisco Bay out the windows that makes my stomach contract every time I look at it.

Did I mention that I'm scared? Getting a ride to work this morning with Tomi, pulling into the Broderbund parking lot – that was scary.

Now that the day's over and it's clear that I had nothing to be scared of, I'm not scared any more – I'm terrified. I'm scared shitless.

I have to rent a car. I have to drive it. On these insane twelve-lane racetracks they call freeways. I have to find an apartment and rent it. I have to *move in*. I have to *buy* a car. I have to buy insurance. I've never done *any* of this stuff before... and now I have to do it all at once.

And on top of this – or rather, at the bottom of it – I have to make a computer game.

It's gonna be fun.

SEPTEMBER 11, 1986

Visited Danny Gorlin. He's sunk more money into developing the development system to end all development systems. Saw the final version of *Airheart*. It's got some staggering special effects and it's no fun at all to play.

Danny thinks spending a million bucks on a development system will give him an edge. He might be right. But the best Apple games have been developed on a plain Apple II with two disk drives. Lucasfilm spent a million bucks to make *Rescue on Fractalus* and *Ball Blazer*, and those games aren't significantly better than, or different from, the competition. The real strides forward – *Raster Blaster*, *Choplifter*, (what the hell) *Karateka* – were the work of solo programmers with no special resources.

Maybe Danny is leading game design into the 21st century. Maybe he's just flushing money down the toilet.

I'll stick with my Apple II.

SEPTEMBER 11, 1986

Met with Gene, Lauren, and Ed Badasov and showed them my *Baghdad* ideas. (Ed B. made up the working title *Prince of Persia*.) The storyline didn't impress them much, but I think they saw promise in it.

It doesn't really matter a whole lot what they think – I'm the one that has to do it – but it sure as hell wouldn't hurt to have them enthusiastic. In a few months I should have something to thrill them.

I'm starting to get psyched to write this game. Slowly.

SEPTEMBER 12, 1986

Apartment hunting with Steve Patrick. We checked out one place with a pink carpet, dusty chandeliers, and an old-lady landlord who said she doesn't like renting to kids. "They make a lot of noise," she said. "They invite their friends over."

"Not me," I said. "I just got off the plane from New York. I don't have any friends."

"Oh, you will," she said, ominously, sounding like Yoda in *Empire*. "You will."

Steve and Tomi told me I can stay with them until they kick me out.

"You should live in the Marina district," Doug advised. "You'd meet a lot of... (pause)... yuppies."

SEPTEMBER 18, 1986

Looked at a house in Mill Valley, on a shady road winding through the redwoods. When I rang the doorbell the lady peered around me and said, "Is your mother down there?"

She spent fifteen minutes showing me the house, but I don't think I ever quite convinced her I was serious.

SEPTEMBER 23, 1986

Spent much of today working on the logistical problem of how to get the footage from a VHS tape into the computer. I finally (tentatively) settled on photographing the frames one by one with a regular 35mm camera, getting prints made, then (after retouching as needed) digitizing the prints with a regular Sony video camera. It sounds like a pain but I think it's the best way.

SEPTEMBER 25, 1986

Another solid workday. Today I stayed till around 7 and got DRAY pretty much finished. I tested it out by digitizing a page out of Muybridge. It'll do what I need it to do. It could use another day of work. Actually, I could keep working on it for a month, if I didn't have so much else to do.

SEPTEMBER 26, 1986

Ed Bernstein called his last P.D. meeting this afternoon. He's leaving to head up Broderbund's fledgling board games division. DOUG HIMSELF will be taking over as acting head of P.D. He'll be taking my desk, the better to stay in touch with the people. So I'll be moving into Ed's office. Life is strange.

P.D. is throwing Ed a goodbye party. "Better the devil we know than the deep blue sea," Steve said.

At lunch, Doug said: "You seem to have a very strong entrepreneurial bent." I was surprised, and said something about how I'd probably inherited it from my father.

Coming out here was definitely the right thing to do. In Chappaqua, I was in a rut. Now, I'm in the thick of it. It's great.

SEPTEMBER 27, 1986

I have a car.

SEPTEMBER 28, 1986

I have an apartment.

SEPTEMBER 29, 1986

Today I moved into Ed's office. Obviously, this is a temporary arrangement; eventually some new guy will be hired to run P.D. and I'll get booted to some other part of the building. But while it lasts, it's great.

Besides vast amounts of space, a couple of armchairs for visitors, my own phone, and a door that I can close, the office has the most important thing of all - *equipment*. A printer. An amber screen. An Apple IIc. It didn't occur to me until I was actually confronted with two Apple II's on my desk and I had to figure out what to do with the extra one - but it's perfect. Now I can run programs without destroying the source code in memory. It's...(gulp)... a development system.

OCTOBER 14, 1986

David Stenn read my screenplay. He said it has promise but would need at least one more rewrite to be saleable. Perhaps sensing my disappointment, he said: "Look, it's great for a first script - it really is. I wouldn't show you my first screenplay. You obviously have talent, you should stick with it."

He was more impressed with the reviews of *Karateka* I'd sent him. "You're in the right business," he said. "What do you want to get into this one for?"

OCTOBER 15, 1986

Bought a camera at Whole Earth. It was more expensive than I'd anticipated — \$250 with the lens - but it's a good camera, and I imagine I'll find some use for it even after the game's done.

I shot my first roll of film (David turning around) and had it developed at the local one-hour photo stop. I think this will work. The real problem, obviously, will be going from a sheaf of snapshots to the 280 x 192 Apple screen, and the loss of accuracy entailed therein. It almost makes me want to do it in double hi-res.

OCTOBER 19, 1986

Shot four more rolls of film: David running and jumping in the Reader's Digest parking lot. One year ago

tomorrow. Red and orange leaves... God, I'm homesick.

OCTOBER 21, 1986

Today I wrote the first lines of code of the game (not counting the hi-res routines). It Begins.

OCTOBER 23, 1986

Everyone in the office has been playing a lot of *Tetris* – a Russian submission for the IBM PC. It's a classic, like Breakout. But I don't think Broderbund is going to publish it. The knaves.

OCTOBER 25, 1986

Yesterday I implemented the running animation. Next I'll do the jumping... then the stopping... then the "jumping from a stopped position"... oh boy, this is great!

I restrained myself from taking all my work papers home with me yesterday... and I'm restraining myself from going to work today. There must be Balance.

OCTOBER 31, 1986

Ed was pretty thrilled with the rough running and jumping animation, now under joystick control. So was Tomi. Lauren, Doug and Gary didn't act all excited, but I think they were secretly impressed.

I love the quality of the just-digitized roughs, but I'm having trouble preserving that fluidity and realism when I clean it up and stylize the figures. This is going to be a problem.

I beat out Ed and Steve for the #1 spot on the *Tetris* high-score list.

The Mets won the World Series.

NOVEMBER 9, 1986

God, I miss New York.

Fifth Avenue... Christmas shoppers... rich ladies in furs laden with shopping bags and kids... crisp cold autumn air... the smell of burnt pretzels... St. Peter's... the steel drum players wearing woolen gloves with cut-off fingers, breath condensing on the air...

I'm looking out the window at the San Francisco skyline across the bay dotted with white sails. It looks unreal. Like some kind of paradise.

NOVEMBER 10, 1986

Called Kyle Freeman in L.A. (he's at Electronic Arts now) and asked him what he'd charge to license his Apple music subroutine. He spent half the phone call dumping on Broderbund. I realized after I'd hung up that this was the first thing I'd done independent of Broderbund since I got here. Interestingly, it actually strengthened my confidence that Broderbund is the right place for me. It reminded me that I *am* independent.

NOVEMBER 18, 1986

Digitized the running skidding turn-around that was so amusing on videotape. It looks OK. I'll need to redo the straight running, but I think everything else will work as it stands.

About half the animations are in now. Next step will be getting the character to interact with the environment (climbing a rope ladder, pulling a lever, etc.)

At this juncture I think I'll redirect my attention to the game design.

DECEMBER 2, 1986

Spent most of the day trying to figure out the velocity of a falling human being as a function of time. Enlisted practically everyone at Broderbund at one point or another. They all seemed to find this a more interesting problem than whatever they were working on.

DECEMBER 24, 1986

Home for the holidays. It's good to be back. Not much has changed except that David has taken over my room. We played a game of go. He's seven stones stronger.

Pizza at Mario's with David and his friend Andy. We pumped about six bucks into a three-player game called *Gauntlet*, which has pretty good graphics and a great appetite for quarters.

People tend to be pretty bowled over by the animation test I've been showing them. "Don't you realize what you're looking at?" Jon Menell said. "*This is the light bulb.*"

JANUARY 11, 1987

Macworld Expo '86 was pretty slick. The coolest thing there was the Radius 8 ½" x 11" tall screen.

Dad called all excited because David did well in the *dan* tournament. I hadn't stopped to think about it until now, but the speed of his rise has been really startling. From total beginner to shodan in nine months. If he keeps this up another year or two, he could be one of the best non-Asian go players in the history of the world.

That's something.

JANUARY 22, 1987

The Nintendo game machine has sold a million units in the U.S. over Christmas. As of now, only a handful of cartridges are available. Nintendo is keeping a tight rein on new titles, presumably to avoid a flood of product like the one that sunk Atari a couple of years ago. Broderbund — thanks to Doug's Japan connections — has three of the coveted slots.

Karateka would be a natural, but Doug is apparently leaning toward choosing some older titles — *Castles of Dr. Creep* or *Spelunker* or *Raid on Bungeling Bay* or even *Choplifter* — instead.

I talked to Ed and Alan with great passion, trying to convince them. This is the first time in my life I've had to lobby so hard for something I desperately wanted, and it's exquisitely frustrating. It's so painful wanting something from someone, being reduced to wishing and hoping they'll give it to me. I hate it.

If I'm going to be a screenwriter someday, guess I better get used to it.

JANUARY 23, 1987

Progress on *Prince of Persia* has slowed to a snail's crawl. I've been drifting in to work around eleven or twelve, and between that, the Butchery and the Sport Court, my workday is about forty-five minutes long. Ed and Gene and Lauren keep checking in to see what new and exciting stuff I've got up on the screen, and they go away disappointed.

Instead, I've been spending my time playing with my new Mac, Radius screen, and Scriptor screenplay formatting software. Shiny new toys.

JANUARY 26, 1987

Got up early for a change and put in a full day's work on the game.

Corey talked me into switching assemblers, operating systems, and disk media (from DOS 3.3, S-C Assembler, and 5 1/4" floppies to ProDos, Merlin, and SCSI hard drive). The change should take about a week, but I think it'll pay for itself in the end.

JANUARY 29, 1987

Roland spent the whole morning helping me switch over to Merlin and ProDOS.

It was kind of a thrill to watch. Roland is a hacker of the old school. He's polite and unprepossessing in his dress and demeanor, careful about money and contracts. He drives a Saab with license plate SNABBIL. But under that conservative surface is a demon — a guy who will put his day job on hold for 72 hours and sit down and reverse-engineer an Apple II conversion of Tetris, just for the pleasure of it.

Watching him do what he did for me today, I felt a little of the old joy come flooding back. I'd almost forgotten the most basic thing: programming is fun. I've grown middle-aged these past couple of years. Roland is 23 but he's still young at heart.

JANUARY 31, 1987

Got to Broderbund around 8:30 and put in another solid eight hours. Converted BUILDER over to Merlin/Pro, but it's not working. Give me another day or two to get all the bugs out.

Showed Ed the latest (Jan. 27) working version. He was gratifyingly thrilled about the 3-D box with scrolling borders.

FEBRUARY 9, 1987

"When do you think you'll be finished with your game?" Lauren asked me on the way back from the Butchery.

"I'm shooting for August," I said.

We agreed the important thing is to make it as good as possible, and that a few months earlier or later wouldn't really make much difference.

Today, for the first time, I constructed a really large level and played around in it. It was the first time this game had ever given me the feeling of *space*. It was kind of thrilling. I think it's going to be a winner. I'm going slowly this time, building on a solid foundation, and I think it'll pay off big.

FEBRUARY 14, 1987

It's great having David here. All the stuff I'd gotten jaded about suddenly seems cool when seen through my little brother's eyes. Like having a car, being able to drive anywhere I want, a place of my own, a key to Broderbund, free video games in the lunchroom... stuff like that. I'll miss him when he's gone.

FEBRUARY 16, 1987

Rented a camcorder and spent the afternoon in and around Broderbund, shooting more footage of David for the game. There were lots of people there even though it was a holiday.

MARCH 5, 1987

The powers that be at Broderbund have decreed that Sensei (Tomi, Steve, Loring, Eric, Mike, and Robert S.), David Snider, Corey and I are all to be packed off from our present comfortable offices to a rathole on the second floor of 47 Paul. Tomi, Corey and I went there yesterday to check the place out. I'm seriously considering working from home.

The vibe at work has been kind of odd lately anyway. Doug is wrapped up in taking the company public, and the new people he's hiring have no interest in games - or in software, for that matter. There's really no reason for me to go into the office any more, except for cameraderie. I could always visit if I get lonely.

MARCH 8, 1987

"This is a BAD day for you not to be at Broderbund, believe me. 'Bye."

Not the message you want to find on your answering machine when you get home at 5 p.m. after having taken the day off to play hookey and explore Mt. Tam.

I called Corey back. He told me we'd been evicted from our office and our stuff transferred to the dingy, unpainted, windowless attic of 47 Paul Drive. Corey was at the bottom of the deepest depression I'd ever seen him, and was ready to move back home.

Tomi had a plan. "You've got to get the small room," she said. "It's got windows and ventilation. It'll be much better."

"Corey said he already asked Adaire about that and she said..."

"Possession is nine-tenths of the law. If I were you, I'd go into work early tomorrow morning and move both your desks and all your stuff into that room."

I called Corey back and told him the plan. He was terrified, but we did it that night, feeling like a pair of burglars.

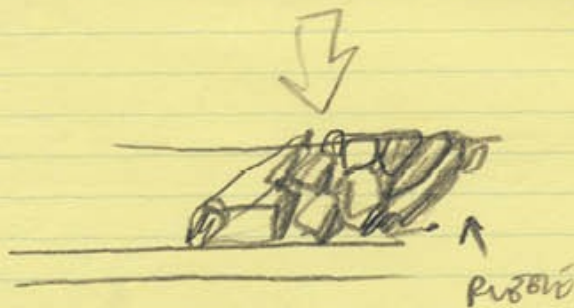
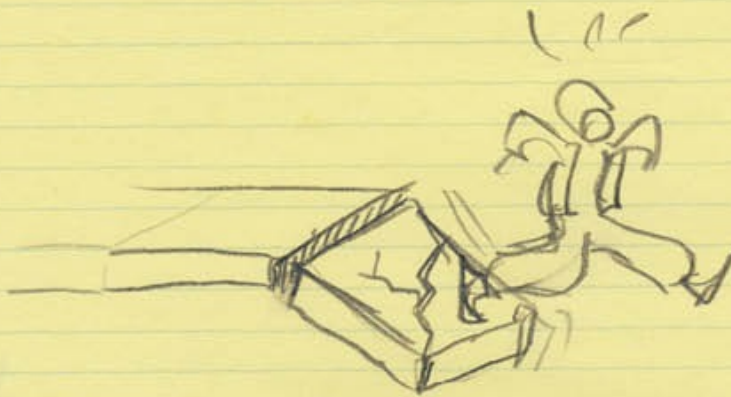
MARCH 9, 1987

I arrived at work to find Adaire furious. It seems they'd been planning to paint the room that day, and Corey and I, by moving in our furniture, had made it impossible for the painters to work. So we moved it all into the middle of the room and threw a tarp over it. We had to buy the tarp ourselves at the local hardware store, because the painters didn't have one.

The Attic

CRUMBLING BLOCK —

YOU STEP ON IT,
IT BREAKS OFF
& CRUMBLES.
(MOMENTS LATER)

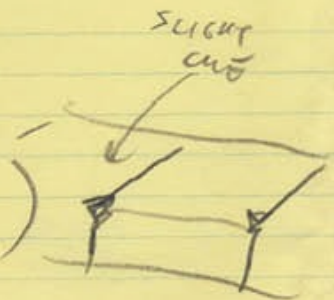


LOOKS LIKE
ANY OTHER
BLOCK*, BUT
MAY NOT HAVE
SUPPORTS OR POSTS
(IN FACT, ONLY
SPACE & FLOORBOARD)
UNDERNEATH.

ONLY USED ONCE.

YOU CAN USE IT TO PASS, OR TO
BREAK A FALL, BUT ONLY ONCE.

(WHEN YOU LAND ON IT,
A HORRIBLE CRACKING SOUND * (OR SHOULD IT?)
BEGINS. SIGNAL:



The Attic

APRIL 1, 1987

In the past three weeks I've put in the equivalent of maybe one full eight-hour day on Baghdad. I'm starting to feel guilty about it.

My reluctance to actually sit down in the new office and work on the damn game is so strong, I've been procrastinating by doing everything else under the sun I've been putting off since 1986. Even my taxes.

APRIL 2, 1987

It's probably a good thing I didn't get into work until three, because sometime early this morning they had a little accident at the Fairchild plant next door to Broderbund and spilled some hydrochloric acid. They evacuated the whole industrial park for a few hours. They were going to shut down the freeway, but luckily the wind was blowing in the other direction - ours. My lungs actually do feel kind of irritated.

APRIL 23, 1987

Sensei moved in yesterday. Six desks: Eric, Loring, Tomi, Steve, Mike and Ty now occupy the big outer room. Overnight, the place has been transformed from an attic into an office. Seeing it gave me this incredible urge to tidy up the small room - the one Corey, Cathryn Mataga and I share - but I stifled it. Instead, I put in my first real day of work in weeks, and maybe my second since Corey and I got kicked out of our old office.

MAY 3, 1987

I'm back in work mode. Whatever the reasons, the long dry spell that began with Corey's and my exile to the attic ended the day Sensei moved in with us. I got a hell of a lot done this week, and I'm actually starting to look forward to arriving at work every morning, sitting down at the Apple to make things happen.

MAY 4, 1987

BIG NEWS. Virginia Girtlian of Leading Artists called to say she loved my script. She's given it to her boss Jim Berkus to read and will get back to me in the next couple of days.

MAY 5, 1987

Jim and Virginia called back the next morning. He'd read *Birthstone*, loved it and asked if I have other movie ideas and if I am available for rewrite work?

So I'm flying to L.A. on Monday for a meeting with Leading Artists. This is ridiculous, dreams-come-true stuff. If I saw it in a movie I would never buy it.

MAY 11, 1987

Sat in a big room with leather couches with Virginia, two of the partners (Jim Berkus and Gary Cosay), and another agent, Anne Dollard.

("They're just guys," Tomi coached me before I flew down. "Pretend you're going into a meeting with Doug and Gene Portwood.")

They all listened in attentive silence while I pitched my high-school-narc script idea. Finally Jim Berkus broke in, gently. "That's a good idea," he said. "But..."

Whereupon they all informed me that there are about three feature films involving undercover cops in high school already in development. Plus a TV series called *21 Jump Street*, which I would have known if I ever watched TV, or looked at a TV Guide. I felt like an idiot. Awkward moment. The meeting broke up soon after.

They still want to take me on as a client, though.

"Try to think of some other movie ideas," Virginia suggested. She gave me about nine scripts to take home, Xerox and send back to her. Screenplays of films actually in production. She also let me pore through her "red book" for a couple of hours while she went to lunch with a guy from UA. It was terrifically exciting.

The "red book" contained a capsule description of every feature film currently in development anywhere, with notations like "Status: Needs Director" or "Needs Major Star" or "Needs Script." The descriptions were "Like *Alien* underwater" or "Remake of *The Hit* only funnier." Bizarre.

MAY 22, 1987

Virginia called me at work to say that Curtis Hanson (writer/director of *The Bedroom Window*) had read the script and wants to talk to me about it. I called him at home.

"I've been reading a lot of thrillers lately," he said, "obviously, because of *Bedroom Window*. Most of them are boring and bad. Yours was interesting and unusual. I had some ideas on how you might improve it." We talked for an hour.

□ □ □

Don Daglow, who just came over from Electronic Arts, wants Broderbund to do *Karateka II*. We sat in his office and chatted while Ed Badasov sat there, eyes darting nervously back and forth between us. Don offered a 3% royalty. They both wanted me to say yes. I didn't.

JUNE 10, 1987

I told Virginia my Anasazi and secret-society movie ideas. I think she was sort of bemused that they were so incomplete. She said a 14-year-old lead is a hard sell, and anything to do with Indians is a hard sell.

"I have faith that you'll work these into something good," she said. "But it would be good if you could do that within the next week or so."

JUNE 22, 1987

I finished the rewrite and sent it to Virginia and Curtis Hanson this morning.

Virginia says she showed the first draft to a lot of people and everybody is all excited. "The word 'genius' has been thrown around," she said. (In what context, I wonder: "Who's the GENIUS who made me waste my time reading this #\$\$@#! crap?!?")

But the big news is that Larry Turman, big-name producer (*The Graduate*; more recently, *Short Circuit*) wants to make *Birthstone*. We talked for about an hour Saturday about the changes he'd like to see. He's going to Europe for three weeks. I told him I'd do another rewrite while he's away, then we can talk when he gets back.

Virginia apologized for not getting me any money to do the rewrites.

I told her not to worry, I don't feel like I'm being exploited. "The way I see it, I'm getting the benefit of these guys' talent and experience for free. And even if nothing happens, I end up with a better script for my trouble."

There was a long pause, then she said: "I think you're going to do very well here."

JULY 1, 1987

Curtis Hanson called back. He liked the rewrite and wants to "attach himself" to the project.

JULY 8, 1987

I told Virginia I'm no good at "pitching" and would rather write the secret-society idea as a "spec" screenplay. She said that in that case, it might be a good idea for me to go into these meetings and talk about kinds of movies I like, "so you don't appear tongue-tied."

Oliver North is testifying on TV as a sort of running background to everything.

(Game? What game?)

JULY 9, 1987

Working at home is not working out. I need to find a way to start splitting my time between screenwriting and the game. It would be ideal if I could finish the game, achieve some kind of closure on that, before I move to L.A. and devote myself 100% to screenwriting.

JULY 29, 1987

A day of meetings set up by Virginia. One was with Hal Lieberman at Disney. Just being on the Disney lot was quite a thrill.

AUGUST 25, 1987

Gary Cosay called to tell me that Virginia is leaving the agency. I need to sit down and think about this.

Had lunch Tuesday with Ed Badasov. I told him I'll be done with the screenplay rewrite in a month, then we can sit down and work out a new timetable for *Prince of Persia*.

Ed tried to talk me into staying with video games as a career. He said I have an extraordinary talent and ability, possessed by only a few people, to actually conceive, design and execute a game all by myself. I felt like he was talking about somebody else. All I could do was stare at him and nod politely.

I have no idea what will happen now with *Prince of Persia*. Maybe I can hire someone else to finish it? Or sell it to Broderbund as it stands, as a work-in-progress? I can't think about it. I'll think about it a month from now.

SEPTEMBER 4, 1987

Gary Cosay encouraged me to write my secret society script on spec, if I have the inclination and the financial freedom to do so.

"You're in a good position right now," he said, "in that Larry Turman is waiting for a script from you that stands a very good chance of going. If this movie gets made, whatever you write next will automatically have a lot of interest, and potentially be worth a lot of money."

He also said: "If you write a couple more scripts on spec, and if they're good, you'll be in a position to do more than just write. You're carving out a road for yourself. You can drive your car down it any time you want."

I want *Birthstone* to get made so bad... I can't let myself think about it.

SEPTEMBER 21, 1987

Lunch at the Skywalker Ranch with Mary Ann Braubach and Steve Arnold. GEORGE LUCAS HIMSELF came over and sat down and Steve introduced us. I just had to enter this momentous event in the record, for the sake of my 18-year-old self.

Steve Arnold, for some reason, is dying to hire me. For what, I have no idea. He asked me what I know about interactive video. I said: absolutely nothing. He said if I don't want a job, he'd be willing to hire me as a consultant or as a freelancer - basically, on whatever basis I want.

Oh well, enough excitement. Back to work.

SEPTEMBER 24, 1987

Virginia said Gary is "sweet" and "one of the best minds in the agency business in Hollywood," but he can be easily talked in and out of things, and he doesn't like to fight, so it'll always be Jim who calls the shots. She thinks Jim will probably try to frustrate Larry off the project so he can replace him with one of his "boys' club" buddies.

My new agent will be Toby Jaffe.

OCTOBER 1, 1987

Gary loved the rewrite. Larry's response was more mixed. Curtis said straight out he was disappointed.

OCTOBER 5, 1987

Don Daglow said: "When are you going to leave F. Scott Fitzgerald emulation mode and finish *Prince of Persia* so we can publish it?" whereupon Gary [Carlston] said: "I take a more low-key approach, based on the possibility that F. Scott Fitzgerald mode might actually *work out*."

Broderbund is really hurting for games. Last night Gary and Doug and Bill McDonagh were talking about third-quarter sales. Doug turned to me and asked "Can you have it ready by tomorrow?"

OCTOBER 19, 1987

Larry Turman called. "You did really good work - I think it's the absolute best yet." He still has a few suggestions, but he wants to go ahead with this version. He asked one curious question: "Is Leading Artists your official agent - have you signed contracts with them?" I told him I had.

"Congratulations," he said. "We'll go out into the world!"

The stock market crashed. A 500-point drop in one day.

OCTOBER 20, 1987

Larry called me to find out what's going on. He hasn't heard from my agents or anyone and is getting antsy. Is Curtis in or out? I didn't know what to tell him.

OCTOBER 30, 1987

Curtis is out. No hard feelings.

NOVEMBER 17, 1987

My long-postponed lunch with Ed Badasov. I levelled with him. I told him everything that's been happening with the screenplay, and (Tomi's suggestion) asked for his advice.

Ed thought about it gravely, admitted he could see my dilemma. We left it that I'll try coming in a few days a week and see how much I can get done.

Basically, I've done no work on *POP* for six months.

NOVEMBER 18, 1987

The Yale Alumni Magazine came in today's mail. The Class of '85 notes had an entire paragraph about Yalies in film. David Kipen is living in L.A., writing a screenplay about Yale "the themes of which are suicide and murder"; Mandy Silver is going to USC film school; David Lee is shooting a movie in New York; Bob Simonds is doing deals in Hollywood. These are my classmates - how come I'm not with them? What am I doing in an industrial park in Northern California hanging out with people in their thirties?

OK. I'm calm now. Whew.

NOVEMBER 20, 1987

Yesterday I went in to work for the first time since I can't remember when. I booted up the game and looked at it. It was deeply depressing.

"Think of the game as an old car you're fixing up in your spare time," Tomi suggested, urging me to resume work on it. This old car has an engine block that's rusted solid. I can't even think about how much work lies ahead.

NOVEMBER 24, 1987

John Avildsen read the script and declined. Larry is still waiting to hear from John Boorman, Michael Apted, Michael Ritchie, and Peter Yates; but something tells me he's pinning his hopes on dark horse Thomas Carter, director of the Miami Vice season pilot, and doesn't really expect any of these big names to say yes. It all feels pretty remote to me now.

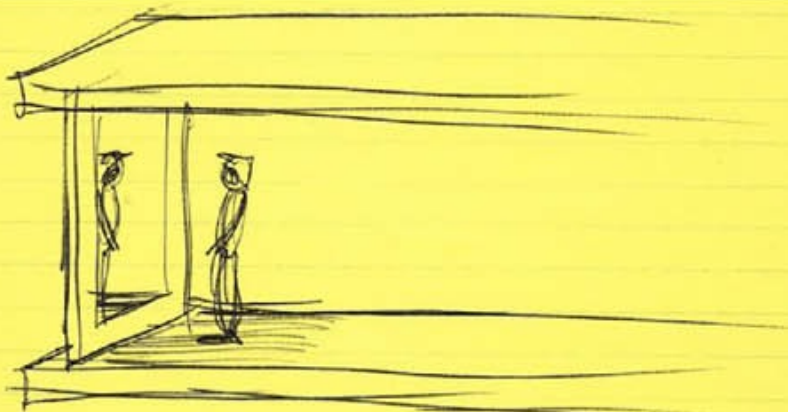
JANUARY 7, 1988

On impulse, more to escape cabin fever than anything else, I drove into Broderbund and actually put in a full day of work, oiling the gears that have rusted in place inside my head. I was startled to realize that the most recent code printouts in my folder are dated March 26, 1987.

In essence, I stopped working on the game the day I got the call from Virginia Giritlian... *eight months ago*.

What the hell have I been doing for eight months?

Restarting



ON FIFTH LEVEL
(OR THEREABOUTS)
YOU FIND — A MIRROR

YOU BUMP INTO IT JUST LIKE A LAMB —
IT SEEMS THERE'S NO WAY TO GET THRU

BUT — BACK UP & TAKE A RUNNING JUMP —
YOU JUMP RIGHT THRU MIRROR —
MIRROR FRAGMENTS
& YOUR SHADOW SELF SPLITS OFF
& RUNS AWAY.



(MIRROR IS BROKEN NOW)
~~NO WAY TO GET BACK~~

ON THE NEXT LEVEL (& PERIODICALLY
— THEREAFTER —)

SHADOW MAN REAPPEARS
TO CHASE YOU.

INTELLIGENT... DEADLY... UNKILLABLE

Restarting

JANUARY 12, 1988

I'm back in work mode.

For a solid week now I've been going into Broderbund in the mornings and coming home late at night, happy and tired. It's hard to overstate the transformation this has wrought in my attitude toward life, the universe and everything. A week ago, I'd pretty much given up on the game. I only had to take the final step – a formality, really – of informing Ed that the project was dead.

Now Ed's overjoyed; at dinner last night he was grinning from ear to ear; even Robert Cook is impressed with my renewed dedication. People at Broderbund have been greeting me enthusiastically and asking "Where have you been?" and when I tell them about Hollywood, they get all excited.

A week ago, I was an aspiring screenwriter. Now, I'm a working computer game designer with an ace up my sleeve.

It's daunting to contemplate the vast amount of work that lies ahead – it'll be six months before the game is close to code-ready – but I'm getting excited.

JANUARY 13, 1988

My agent, Toby Jaffe, called me at work and asked: "So, how's the screenplay going? Writing away?"

"Yup," I said (recompiling a source file as we talked).

JANUARY 21, 1988

Two more turndowns, from Michael Apted and Bob Swaim. Swaim told Larry he enjoyed the script, would have jumped at it had it come along before his last movie, but he's now looking for a love story.

These phone calls from Larry are my only link to the movie industry, to L.A., to that whole set of aspirations. Sometimes it's hard to remember that the script exists, that I wrote it, that dozens of Xerox copies of it are circulating and getting read by people. It doesn't seem real.

FEBRUARY 4, 1988

Prince of Persia is looking good. The kid now runs, jumps, swings and falls like a pro. When he steps on the pressure plates the gates go up and down the way they're supposed to. The project's back on track.

The only problem is I've been working such long hours, I can't remember the last time I did anything fun outside work, or even went to the movies. My budding screenwriting career is a distant memory.

Dr. S says my mono is getting better, but I shouldn't be discouraged if it's another six months before I'm 100%. And in the meantime, I should take care to avoid getting overtired or chilled. Six months!

FEBRUARY 28, 1988

I shipped Mom my 512K Mac. She upgraded it to a Plus and now she's happily learning how to use it.

Dad wants me to move out of San Francisco. He's worried about earthquakes.

MARCH 1, 1988

MGM passed. Michael Crichton passed. On deck: Roger Spottiswoode, Henry Winkler, John Boorman.

MARCH 25, 1988

Larry called to say Peter Yates has passed. Now that all the top guys have said no, we go down a notch. Andy (*Bad Dreams*) Fleming's agent, Eric Rosenberg, liked the script and wants to meet me.

"The top guys were all very positive," Larry said. "Keep your spirits up."

APRIL 21, 1988

My Apple II hard drive arrived today – about a year after I got Ed to agree to order me one – and with some help from Robert I got my entire development system converted over. It'll save me endless hassles. It's the most exciting hardware event in years.

MAY 31, 1988

Janice Kim gave me some advice: "You should just let go. Take a trip where you don't have your return ticket booked ahead of time."

I agreed, but explained that I needed to conquer the world first.

She said: "You'll still be saying that when you're 60."

Janice was fascinated by the way things seem to work out for me. "I mean, if I thought of writing a computer game, I'd just assume it would be terrible and nobody would want to buy it, so I wouldn't do it."

I pointed out that at 18, she's the first woman go professional in the U.S.; but she didn't seem to feel that was much to write home about.

David is going to Japan for the next two or three years or however long it takes him to turn pro.

JUNE 8, 1988

SHADOW MAN. Credit Tomi with this one.

I was explaining to her why there are no enemies in *Prince of Persia*. The animations for the player's character are so elaborate, there's not enough memory left to add another character.

"Why not use the same animations for your enemies, the way you did in *Karateka*?"

"Wouldn't work so well this time. This character is designed to look cute. He has a very specific personality in the way he runs and moves. The enemies would have to be cute too."

"Can't you just change the face, or the costume?"

"Not possible. If I change *anything*, it's a whole new set of shapes. There's just no memory."

She wouldn't give up. "Couldn't you make him a different color – say, black?"

I started to explain: "This is the Apple II..." and then it hit me: What if I exclusive-OR each frame with itself, bit-shifted one pixel over? I visualized a ghostly, shimmering outline-figure, black, with white face and arms, running and leaping, pursuing you. I described it to Tomi.

"Shadow Man!" she exclaimed.

□ □ □

Tomi, Robert, and Eric all huddled around my screen while I paged through my source code.

Me: "Uh, you don't actually have to watch me do this. It might take a while."

Eric: "No, we want to. It's a test."

In about two minutes I had Shadow Man up and running. He looked *great*. It was as if he'd always existed. Everybody was wowed. How could I have ever contemplated the game without him?

Robert suggested that Shadow Man could come into being when you run through a mirror. You leap *through* the mirror; simultaneously your evil shadow self leaps out the way you came, and slinks off into the darkness. For the rest of the game he's lurking in the shadows, dogging your steps... until the end, when you don the magic amulet and become powerful enough to reabsorb him into yourself, thus gaining the strength you need to defeat the Grand Vizier.

"You'll sell a billion copies," Tomi predicted. "All I want is a Honda Legend. Coupe. Silver."

JULY 11, 1988

Doug told Tomi that the Apple IIe market has started its long downward spiral. If I expect to make any money off *POP*, I'd better get cracking.

My *Karateka* royalty stream has dwindled to a trickle. At this point, I'm living on savings. I made an Excel spreadsheet to track the number of months I have left.

Larry told me he's feeling disheartened. We've been turned down by several of the smaller studios, who failed to evince even the level of interest shown by MGM and United Artists.

Virginia's lost her job because of the strike.

JULY 18, 1988

Been putting in full days on *Prince of Persia*: 40 hours last week. It's starting to show visible progress.

AUGUST 5, 1988

Yesterday was an unusually productive day. Robert put fire extinguishers into his game (*D/Generation*), I put falling floors into mine.

A Fish Called Wanda: hilarious.

AUGUST 14, 1988

[*In Paris*] Brought Mom, David, Janice and Emily along to a dinner party at Larry Turman's - actually, the Paris pied-a-terre of his friend Larry Gordon, three blocks from the Eiffel Tower. Mom liked the Turmans a lot; she had a great time. Afterwards, Larry's sons Peter and Andrew and their friends came to the St. Eustache with us and we stayed out past midnight playing go.

AUGUST 24, 1988

[*San Rafael*] Rented a camera, shot some footage of Robert and me swordfighting.

Doug came by and I showed him the game. "Better finish it while there's still an Apple II market out there," he said.

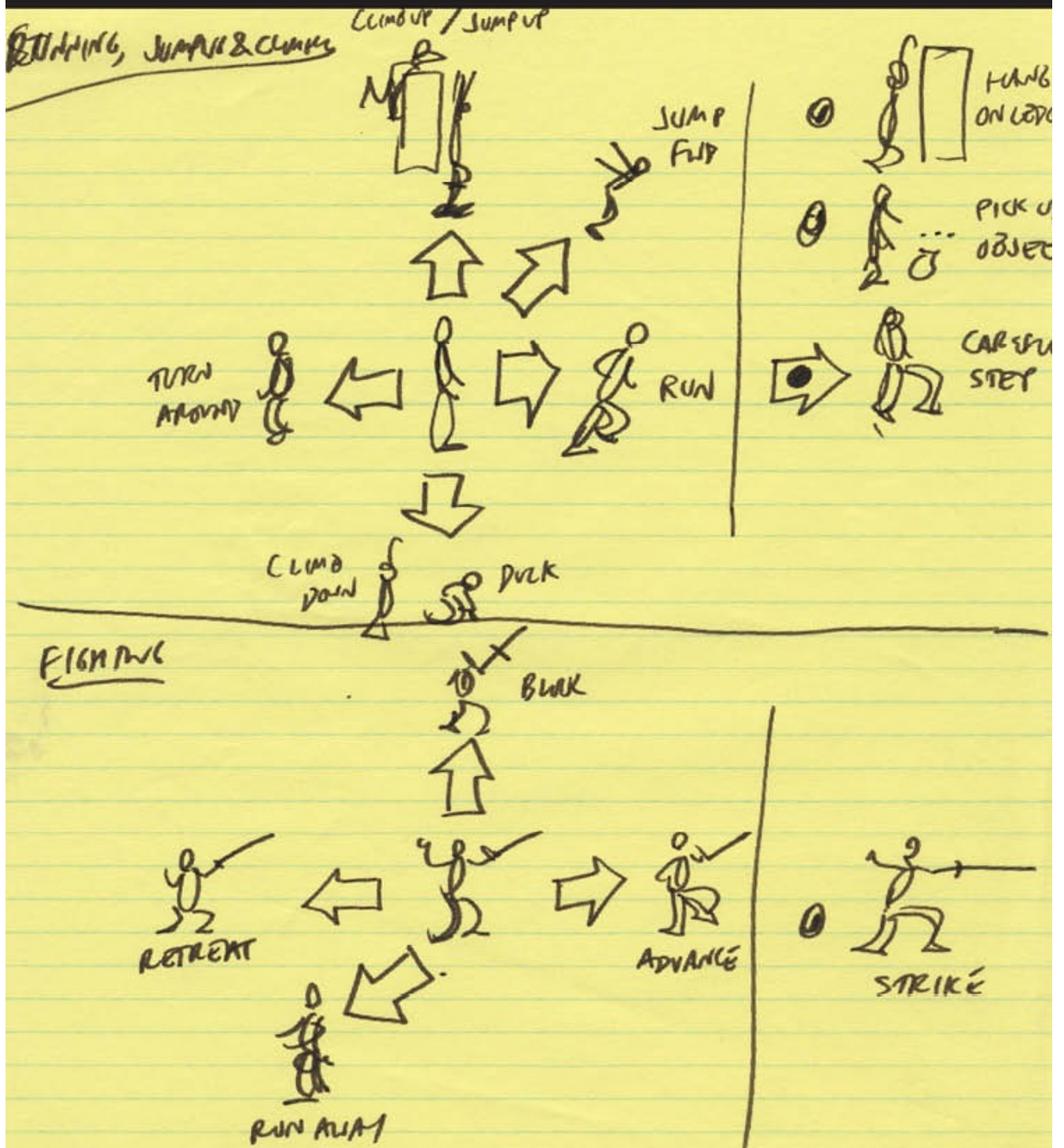
AUGUST 28, 1988

Worked hard on *POP* all week, even Saturday. It's scut work, cleaning up and rethinking the graphics and masking routines that were supposedly finished months ago, but it has to be done, and now I'm finally building up a good head of steam.

The videotaping with Robert came to an undignified halt when the battery pack in the rented camera abruptly died. At the time, I was hanging off the edge of a bus shelter at the North San Pedro Road freeway exit, hoping the cops wouldn't show up, and realizing that hauling oneself up onto a ledge from a dead hang is harder than I'd thought.

We'll try again next week.

The Crucible



The Crucible

AUGUST 29, 1988

I gotta finish this damn computer game.

God, I'm restless; I want everything to start happening now. I want to fast-forward through the next five months of grueling work and just be there.

I have no excuse for slacking off. As Adam Derman once told me in a letter (about *Karateka*): "You dumb shit. You've dug your way deep into an active gold mine and are holding off from digging the last two feet because you're too dumb to appreciate what you've got and too lazy to finish what you've started."

SEPTEMBER 7, 1988

Ed Badasov is no longer my product manager. He's been replaced by Brian Eheler. Brian has been lobbying both me and Ed for some time to get *Prince of Persia*, and finally prevailed. It's fine with me. Better than fine.

SEPTEMBER 24, 1988

Brian Eheler and I had our big meeting yesterday. He took out his notebook and asked me so many questions about *Prince of Persia* - How many disks? How much memory? What kind of documentation? - that by the end of it, I was all jazzed up and adrenalized.

It made me feel like the project is *real*, that it's really going to ship in four or five months, and I'd better get cracking. I promised Brian I'd have a preliminary version ready for QA in eight weeks - the first concrete promise I've made to anyone. Usually I just say something like "It should be ready by January... 1999. Ha ha."

The meeting erased any doubts I might have had about Brian's effectiveness as a product manager. This is what I needed all along: someone to push me. He blows Ed out of the water. Anyway, I'm revved up to work on *POP*.

OCTOBER 5, 1988

Had lunch with Don Daglow, head of Broderbund's Entertainment Group. Don got his B.A. in playwriting, so he was interested in hearing about the screenwriting stuff. He's eager to publish *Prince of Persia* and would like to start on an MS-DOS conversion as soon as possible.

OCTOBER 9, 1988

Tomi and Doug got to be present at the historic unveiling of Steve Jobs' new computer, the "Next," at the San Francisco Symphony.

OCTOBER 13, 1988

Larry Turman informed my agents that he's throwing in the towel on *Birthstone*.

OCTOBER 20, 1988

Deep in programming mode. Nine hours today trying to integrate the new game code with the old builder code I haven't touched in six months. It's like going in with a wrecking ball and bashing the building to the ground, then saying "Now, can we use any of these timbers? Oh, here's a nice chair we can save! Let's put it over here!" A nightmare.

OCTOBER 23, 1988

Drove to Broderbund early in the morning, let myself into the building and worked for ten hours straight. Like in the old days. I'm starting to see code patterns floating in my brain as I drift off to sleep at night... and, disturbingly, when I wake up in the morning.

The game and the editor are now integrated on a single disk. Very slick.

Five months of this and I really *will* be done by March.

NOVEMBER 11, 1988

"I like games where you can shoot things. Your game has no rewards except getting to the next level. It's all survival and no triumph." -Tomi

She's right about *POP*. It's empty and lifeless. I don't know if even the shadow man and swordfighting will change that.

On the other hand, I put in a new door which looks pretty good.

Oh, God. I want this game to be a hit. Like *Karateka*.

Maybe this whole modular-design approach is wrong. Maybe the thing to do is put in a whole bunch of hard-wired enemies, one after another, and forget the whole free-floating, random-access, 24-screens-per-level idea.

24 screens, if they're linked sequentially, could give a playing experience as satisfying as a whole level of *Karateka*. But they should be in the form of obstacles to be overcome one after another. For example:

- A chasm that has to be jumped
- A gate that has to be raised
- A guard that has to be killed

The way it is now, you're plunged into a huge arena with no overall idea of what you're trying to accomplish except "get out." It's too perplexing, especially at first.

Maybe after the first 10 or 15 levels, I could start introducing some real Lode Runner/Dr. Creep "puzzle" type game play. But in the beginning, it should be pretty much left-to-right (like *Karateka*) with a little bit of up-and-down. So the player can get his bearings.

YEAH!

NOVEMBER 12, 1988

Still not enough.

What's the point in running, running to get to the exit, if all it gets you is more of the same?

The princess waiting at the end is a reward only in the *story*. We need rewards in the *game* - like beating a guard in *Karateka*. What makes a game fun? Tension/release, tension/release. *Prince of Persia* has neither. It's like going on a 25-mile hike. Every now and then, you get to step over a log or cross a stream. Big deal.

Running, jumping, and climbing, no matter how beautifully animated, hold your attention for maybe the first three screens. Then you start to wonder: when is something going to *happen*? Like: a guard to fight. An airplane to shoot down. Something.

There need to be sub-goals. Places where you can say: "Whew! Did it! That was a tough one!...What's next?"

Like:

- clearing a screen in *Asteroids* or *Pac-Man*
- beating a guard in *Karateka*
- solving a level in Lode Runner

Right now, solving a level in *Prince of Persia* has none of the feeling of accomplishment of any of these. It's more like "Oh... so that's the end. Oh."

What elements do All of the Above share?

1. You can tell at any moment, by glancing at the screen, how close you are to finishing, how much is left.
2. There are *setbacks* and *successes* on the road to ultimate success. You get a smaller version of the "Whew! Did it!" when, say, you clear a difficult area (*Pac-Man*), or drive a guard back with a series of blows (*Karateka*), or retrieve a hard-to-get sack (*Lode Runner*). Conversely, you get the "Oh, *shit*..." reaction when you accidentally split up a bunch of bigger asteroids into more smaller, faster ones; or when you finish a pattern and see that you've missed one dot; etc. Some setbacks are fatal, some are just irritating. But when they happen, you feel they're your own fault.
3. You can hold off on the next task, waiting for the right moment, before saying "OK... *Now*" and going for it... plunging into a period of higher tension, higher chance of either a setback or success.

Persia has none of these features at present.

If the sub-goal is "solving the level," you need a *consistent visual indicator* of how close you are. You don't just

stumble onto the exit and say “Oh—guess I’m done.” Or stumble onto a sack of gold and say “Oh—here’s another one.” That’s why collect-the-dots games like *Lode Runner* and *Pac-Man* always show the entire screen at once. That’s key.

But *POP* doesn’t show the entire screen at once. That’s a problem.

NOVEMBER 13, 1988

How can I be so up on screenplay story structure, and so blind when it comes to my own game?

A story doesn’t move forward until a character wants something. So – a game doesn’t move forward until the *player* wants something. Five seconds after you press start, you’d better know the answer to the question: “What do I want to happen?”

There always has to be a *range* of possible outcomes, some better than others, so you’re constantly thinking: “Good... Bad... Terrible.” Every event has to move you closer or further away from your goal, or it’s not an event, it’s just window dressing.

The overall goal of *POP* is to get the girl. But that’s not a strong enough magnet to pull the player through all that distance. It needs sub-goals.

Beating a guard in *Karateka* buys you *time* to gain *distance*. You want to get closer to the palace because the princess is there; every guard you beat brings you closer. It’s simple, but it works. In psychological terms, it even follows the classic addictive pattern of diminishing rewards: each subsequent guard is harder to kill, and gives you a smaller reward for your pains, until you reach the intermediate goal (the end of the level), at which point there’s a bigger reward, and things get easier again... for a while.

Getting through a dungeon in *Prince of Persia* doesn’t give that satisfying feeling of getting closer to the goal. Partly because it all looks pretty much the same. That, I can fix.

But there’s another key element in story structure that also applies to games, and is missing from this one: The Opponent. Someone competing for the same goal as the hero, or trying to stop him from attaining it. The more human, the better. (The days of Asteroids and Pinball are over.)

In this case (we’re short on time, so let’s use the opponent we’ve already got), it’s Shadow Man.

Some games boast a whole series of different opponents. (According to Truby, this is characteristic of Myth, and it weakens the story.) We’ll make the shadow man your opponent for the entire game. You’re competing for hit points. Each blow you deal him weakens him. Each power dot you eat makes you stronger. But if he gets there first and he eats it, he gets stronger. So when you face each other with crossed swords, the balance of power is not predetermined (as in *Karateka*), but is the result of your own actions thus far in the game.

It links the combat with the running-around. It’s brilliant. I love it!

(Forget the boring damn keys.)

NOVEMBER 14, 1988

Spent the morning talking to Eric about the game. Conclusion: My next step should be to implement the fighting. Until I do, it’s too difficult to imagine in the abstract what the game will feel like to play.

NOVEMBER 17, 1988

Showed *POP* to the Tribunal – Gary, Gene, Brian, Sophie K. (of Marketing), and Ann Kronen.

Ann and Sophie, who hadn’t seen it before, gasped over the animation. Gene grudgingly admitted it might be pretty good, “if it ever becomes a game.” Gary liked the puzzle angle, didn’t mind the two disks, liked the level editor, didn’t think it needed all that much combat, thought it had big conversion and coin-op potential and I shouldn’t limit it on account of the Apple II’s shortcomings.

I’ve got to learn to get more pumped up for these things. I was so blasé, I really brought the energy down in the room. I think they’d have been more excited if I hadn’t been there to demo it.

NOVEMBER 18, 1988

A glorious day. Freezing cold, but maybe that was part of it. The air was so clean, the sky so blue; I felt happy for no reason at all. I drove 80 on the freeway blasting Talking Heads all the way home.

Today definitely marked the close of a week of anguish over my game. It's gonna be great. I put in a set of chomping jaws that added some much-needed real-time danger to the action. That was easy. The big step will be the swordfighting with the guards, but it'll be worth it.

If only the Apple II weren't a dying format. Better get cracking pronto on the MS-DOS conversion.

October royalty check for *Karateka* was \$166.

NOVEMBER 20, 1988

Worked all day again, made great strides. I put in a strength meter and made it work. I also put in footsteps, and improved the chomping jaws.

But the real breakthrough this week was invisible: I moved a bunch of stuff around so the main game code can use the auxiliary language card. Basically, I've just freed up an extra 12K. That gives me some breathing room I'll sorely need if I'm going to put in all this swordfighting.

It was a good weekend.

NOVEMBER 21, 1988

Put in burning torches, and bricks in the background. It's totally changed the look of the game. Robert was impressed.

I'm very happy with how things are going. With combat, this will be one of the greatest games of all time.

DECEMBER 1, 1988

I've been thinking more and more that I need some kind of major life change. I've never felt so restless. Maybe after *POP* ships I should enroll in the directing program at AFI, or USC.

DECEMBER 2, 1988

Doug wandered into my office today and I gave him the joystick to play with. He was impressed. When he left he said: "I feel like I've had an adventure." I told him I'd have a version in a couple of months that would really be playable. He said: "Seems to me it's pretty close."

Also spent a couple of hours with Lauren E., and some good ideas came out of that.

I realized that the 50-level, Lode Runner approach is all wrong. What made *Karateka* so compelling is that it's easy. You boot it up and pick up the joystick and it's obvious what you have to do. You're there, the guard's there, he's in your way. The goal - the bad guy and the princess - is somewhere off to your right, and every step brings you closer. It's mindless, repetitive - and addictive.

Prince of Persia, with all its elaborate complexity, stretches that thread past the breaking point. The world is so big that the player is lost and confused.

So here's the new idea: Ten levels. Easy levels. About the same difficulty and amount of game play as *Karateka*. You start in the dungeon; you end with the princess.

But that's not the end. The princess gets taken away from you again and you have to go through another, more challenging castle - four castles in all, ten levels each - to win the game and get her for good. Castle four is where we'll put the really tough levels - for fanatics only, like the last 50 levels of Lode Runner.

At the beginning of the game, story is everything. By the end, it's practically nothing. The experience distills into pure game play.

So there it is: Slap a story frame on it. Add combat. Design ten easy levels. That's *Prince of Persia*. The rest is a bonus.

I'm starting to think there's no reason to include the level editor with the disk. In a way, it cheapens it.

The real trick will be designing those first ten levels. Finding the right balance of action, strategy, and adventure. That will make the difference between an OK game and a great one. I could slap together ten levels in a day... but it should take weeks. Weeks of watching beginners play, and revising, and finding new beginners to test it out on.

But first: Combat.

DECEMBER 3, 1988

Rented a bunch of swashbuckling movies and took them to Robert's new apartment to study the swashbuckling. Of course we ended up watching *Captain Blood* straight through. We were both amazed by how good it was. I can't remember when I've seen a movie with such a well-constructed plot. Why don't they write screenplays like that any more?

Then we spent a couple of hours at Broderbund, working out the logic and joystick interface for the swordfighting in *POP*. This must be the tenth time I've torn it all down and come up with a new way to do it. I hope it'll be the last.

DECEMBER 5, 1988

Doug told Tomi my game is going to be a smash hit.

Spent much of today on hands and knees, poring with Eric over three dozen snapshots spread out on the office floor, trying to deconstruct Basil Rathbone and Errol Flynn's climactic duel in *Robin Hood*. We really busted our brains.

As a result, my conception now is totally different from what it was yesterday, or Sunday. It'll all be worth it. This is going to be the greatest game of all time.

I just got off the phone (at 1 a.m.) with Lawrence Payne of Compu-Tech Systems in London, who make the digitizer that so inconveniently stopped working a few months ago. It's 9 a.m. in London. He gave me his home number so Russ and I can call him tomorrow morning and he can help us try to fix it.

But really, what I need to do is rent a video camera and find two people to re-enact the moves of Guy of Gisbourne and Robin of Locksley for digital posterity. I want to have it up on the screen *now*. When I'm pumped up like this, I can hardly sleep at night.

DECEMBER 8, 1988

Russ and I "fixed" the digitizer (it was in the wrong slot) and changed my life. In the past week, swordfighting has gone from a vague notion of something I'd have to put in the game someday, to reality. The little guy now thrusts and lunges. Everyone who's seen it is thrilled. The amount of painstaking work still ahead of me is too huge to contemplate, but it's paying off more dramatically than anything I've done in months. This is going to be a good game.

DECEMBER 15, 1988

I came up with an idea for Robert's game. The goal is to rescue people who are trapped in the building; you disinfect the rooms and make it safe for them to escape.

Robert, for his part, came up with a good idea for me - solid blocks to fill up the empty spaces. It's totally changed the look of the game. Now, it really feels like a dungeon.

JANUARY 3, 1989

Been playing Super Mario 2. First time in ages I've been addicted to an arcade game. Several points worth noting:

- It took me hours of play to get through the first area; but having done it once, I can now zip through it reliably in minutes.
- I'm building up a repertoire of skills.
- There are certain things that it pays to do in the first area - like boost your life meter from 2 to 3 to 4, and collect an extra life - but you can also keep playing forever in the same area, if you like, without achieving anything.

New Year's Resolution: Finish *Prince of Persia*. (Ship by June 30, 1989.)

JANUARY 17, 1989

Been working hard on *POP* (48 hours last week) and it's really looking good. The swordfighting is starting to take shape, and it not only looks terrific, it's actually fun. It blows *Karateka* out of the water. It'll become the centerpiece of the entire game. Tomi was right all along. ("Combat! Combat! Combat!")

JANUARY 30, 1989

[In L.A.] Lunch with Larry Turman. He was in a good mood, but it sounds like being a film producer has been frustrating for him lately. He asked me if I was still with Leading Artists. I wonder if they've dumped me and I just don't know it?

Dinner with Virginia. "You've changed!" she said immediately. "It's like you've grown up!"

I mentioned that Leading Artists hasn't contacted me about renewing our representation agreement. She said that's probably their way of tactfully waiting to see if I write anything new.

She still loves *Birthstone*. "Are you kidding?" she said. "It was, what, two years ago? And I still remember the plot in, like, this incredible detail. It's a great script. I can't believe it hasn't gotten made."

FEBRUARY 6, 1989

Worked from home today. I did a lot of work, actually. I finished the CWP ("Creative Work Plan") and documentation they've been asking for, and I think I finally licked the problem of the prologue. I described it to Tomi over the phone and she loved it.

Also, I wrote up a schedule that has me giving a preliminary playable version to QA on April 15. The game should be done around Memorial Day - in time for CES - and ship shortly thereafter.

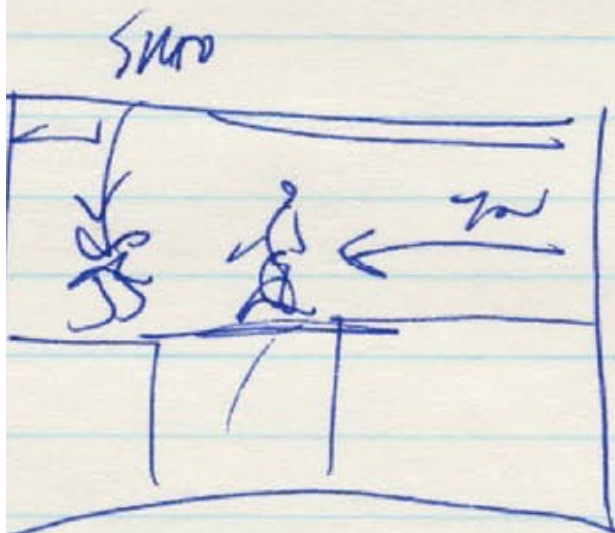
Forget screenwriting. *This* is my project. For the next four months, I'm going to focus on *POP* full time.

Home Stretch

low round — see portion spring — L edge

By now you know what it means — you've
^{don't} done every level, & you recognize the red sparkles
 you're happy —

So you climb up, play to ~~get~~ get your arms
 but before you can get there, SHAD
 & drags it down — this stage
 the ms off — you're left with
 only 3 units of strength



~~At~~ A screen or to
 you reach the
 SHADMAN d
 & ~~has got~~
 & down to

Home Stretch

FEBRUARY 7, 1989

Brian was thrilled with the CWP. He couldn't believe that I'd done it and now he doesn't have to. "I want you to know," he said, "that this is absolutely unprecedented."

The plan: Beta version by April 15. Show it at CES the first week in June. Ship by June 30.

It'll sell for \$35-40 and be a one-disk product. Brian didn't put up a struggle when I told him I was ditching the level editor. He agreed, and even persuaded me to limit the game to one scenario rather than four. "People expect to get a certain amount of value for their money," he said. "Why give them more?"

Reducing it to one castle will save me weeks of work – at *least*. The more I think about it, the more I like it. I'd been worried that including really hard puzzles in the basic game would render it unwinnable for the majority of players. But, as Brian pointed out, if players get frustrated they can always call Tech Support for hints.

FEBRUARY 13, 1989

Spent the day fine-tuning the swordfighting. It's tons better now. I've simplified the controls so blocking is now automatic with retreating, rather than a separate action. It's finally starting to get that back-and-forth feeling of a real Hollywood sword fight. It's gonna be great.

FEBRUARY 16, 1989

A lot of heavy work, most of it invisible, but which will make it much easier for me to implement the enemy guards in their flowing robes and turbans.

FEBRUARY 21, 1989

Worked all day long finding and fixing bugs in the collision detection. It was like swatting flies.

Came up with a bunch of really slick ideas for the shadow man and how to use him.

FEBRUARY 22, 1989

Another productive day. Got rid of a couple of nasty collision detection bugs that had the characters occasionally falling through solid blocks (plenty more where those came from), and simplified the controls so that you no longer need to hold the button down to climb up onto a ledge. It's a big improvement – it makes the controls much less daunting at first.

FEBRUARY 28, 1989

Tomi may move to Paris to run Broderbund France. Her maybe-future colleagues, Dominique and Veronique (whom she calls "the puppies") stopped by this morning and I gave them a demo of *POP*. They flipped. They love it. They want to sell it in France. I told them how valuable Tomi's input has been on the game design (can't hurt, if she's going to be their boss).

In the afternoon, I demoed the game for Gary and Dianne Drosnes, who is in charge of acquisitions and licensing.

MARCH 3, 1989

Doug told Tomi that *POP* is the only product Broderbund has in the works that he thinks will be a hit. "It's been four years since we had a hit," he said.

Joe from Tech Support cornered me and talked for ten minutes about how my game is "setting a new standard."

All I have to do is finish it.

MARCH 20, 1989

I called up Avril Harrison, highly recommended graphic artist, to ask if she could do a title screen for *POP*. She'll come by tomorrow morning to see the game and show me her samples. She charges \$30 an hour.

Last night I went to Tower Records and bought a bunch of the stuff George's friend Erik recommended – Lloyd Cole, Grace Jones, Tom Waits. Blew \$100 in thirty minutes.

Avril Harrison is a bargain.

Started working on the title and demo sequence for *POP*... double hi-res unpack routines... according to schedule. I'm a little nervous to be forging ahead like this, considering the millions of bugs I'm leaving behind (for now), but if I don't plunge into it, it'll never get done.

MARCH 21, 1989

Hired the lovely and talented Avril Harrison to do a IIGS title screen for *POP*. She's Scottish. And married.

The title and demo sequence is taking shape. It's a lot of logistical hassles with disk access and memory management. Robert lent me his double hi-res unpack routines. Another few days and all the major pieces will be in place.

I'm obsessed with this Tom Waits album (Big Time).

MARCH 23, 1989

Sophie K. is going to be my marketing manager. That sucks. I want it to be Latricia.

MARCH 24, 1989

All day alone at the office. The game now fits on a single two-sided disk and seems to be working pretty well. Now I'm home on my Mac, working on the story line and opening sequence.

The game is definitely entering a new phase. The serene, solitary part of it (two and a half years) is ending and all kinds of other people are getting into the act. My job now is not just trying to make a fun game, but getting people excited about it, and, to a degree, orchestrating their efforts, without stepping on their toes or impinging on their territory. The world has left me alone for two and a half years, and now it's bursting in.

I'm not ready. There's so much work still to do.

MARCH 25, 1989

Doug told Tomi he'll talk to Latricia and discuss with her "which products are important and which she should be focusing her efforts on (!)"

MARCH 27, 1989

Broderbund's sales are way down. It's an industry-wide slump. Nobody knows why it's happening, or how long it will last.

Doug is convinced *Prince of Persia* will be a major hit. He urged me to get going on the MS-DOS conversion immediately.

Today I put in a self-running demo, and made the guards slightly less dumb, so they can pursue you onto the next screen.

I'll be so depressed if this game isn't a hit. Doug's right: unless there's an MS-DOS version out pretty close on the heels of the Apple version, it'll be another *Wings of Fury*. "Huh," the dealers will say. "I thought this one was gonna be really hot - but look, it's not selling all that well."

I've gotta find an MS-DOS programmer - soon. I'll call Doug Greene tomorrow. Again.

MARCH 28, 1989

Stayed at the office till 7:30, then came back after dinner and worked on Level 1 till midnight. I'm burned out.

My most concrete achievement today was to print out the entire source code - all 1,000 pages of it.

Doug Greene is reluctant to take on the MS-DOS port (despite my subtle, repeated mention of the words "BIG HIT" and "ROYALTY"), but he recommended his friend Jim St. Louis, an "old-time hacker" who's worked for Atari and Lucasfilm.

Avril gave me a picture. It's really quite beautiful; it's got that magical Arabian Nights storybook feel to it. Ed Badasov, Brian and Greg Hammond all flipped over it. It'll lose a lot in the transition from super hi-res to double hi-res, but I can use the original in the MS-DOS and Amiga versions. It took her 29 hours: \$1,015.

Spend the next couple of weeks getting what I have cleaned up, fine-tuned, and bug-free, before I start adding new features (the opening sequence animation, the stair-climbing, the white mouse, etc.)

My mind is spinning ahead to completion... packaging... conversions... sequels... It's incredibly distracting.

Focus. *Finish*.

MARCH 30, 1989

Brian showed the game to the Star Chamber (aka Publishing Committee) – Gary, Bill, Harry, Ann Kronen, Ed Badasov, Richard Whittaker, Cathy, Dianne Drosnes, and Ed Auer (Doug, traveling in Japan, having already voted “yes”). He told me it “passed with flying colors.” So, green light to go ahead with packaging, scheduling, etc.

Doug talked to Bill and Bill talked to Latricia about the marketing situation. Latricia said she just wants to give Sophie a chance to handle a new project. Doug said firmly: “This is not an appropriate project for that. We’re counting on this to be our next big hit. It’s the only product we have in development that’s going to be a hit. We want to give it the biggest push we can.” (I got all this second hand, of course.)

So now Latricia’s going to oversee it and Sophie, basically, will do the gruntwork. Whew.

They’re desperate for an MS-DOS version. Jim St. Louis wants to do it, with a friend of his, Josh Scholar. I just don’t know if these guys are technically up to par.

APRIL 2, 1989

Tomi advised me not to sign a contract with anyone but Doug Greene. Let him subcontract to these other guys. If he balks at that, I should take that as a sign.

I’m seeing them all tomorrow at Doug’s place, two hours north of Broderbund.

APRIL 3, 1989

A gorgeous spring day. I drove like a maniac on narrow, winding country roads to Cazadero for the big meet with Doug Greene, Jim St. Louis, Josh Scholar, and Mike Larnar.

I showed them *POP* and we went for a walk around Doug’s property, had a beer and smoked a joint (probably grown by one of his neighbors), broke out the yellow pads and discussed the technical challenges of the MS-DOS conversion while Doug’s wife cooked dinner.

After dinner Doug said he’d been chewing all day on the idea of subcontracting to the other guys and he just didn’t think he could do it. “See, if I took this on, I’d be putting my name on the line. I’ve done lots of conversions for Broderbund and I haven’t messed up once. And that’s an important thing to me. Now I’ve got this business thing taking up 80-90% of my time, and I just don’t know if I could handle the pressure of taking on a project this size.”

I said that in that case, I’d have to reconsider. There was a silence. “Whew! Doug said. “I didn’t realize it had come down to that.”

Doug drove the others down to their car (parked, like mine, at the stream that blocked Doug’s driveway and which only Doug’s Volkswagen bus could cross) while I stayed behind. After Doug came back, he and his wife and I sat and talked some more. He’s confident in Jim, but admitted he has his doubts about Josh and Mike.

We chatted for an hour about peripherally related topics. Broderbund, corporate America, the rat race, capitalism, freedom. I was seducing him. At the critical psychological moment, I remarked:

“You know, all my clipping is done on the byte boundaries.”

There was a pause.

“Well, *that* was a nice thing to say!” Doug exclaimed. He started stroking his beard and asking more questions. “Huh. This is starting to sound not so bad.” In the end he said he’d sleep on it.

APRIL 4, 1989

Doug and Jim will do the port. Yeah! We spent the day hammering out a deal. Ended up at 7.5% royalty, to drop to 5% after 67,500 units, and \$35,000 in advances.

First *POP* packaging meeting with the marketing department. I’ve never heard so many bad ideas proposed in such a short time (“We could package a bag of popcorn with the sneak previews!”) At least everyone was enthusiastic. Brian thought it had gone well.

APRIL 7, 1989

Doug Greene called me to say he'd woken up with the night sweats and paced until dawn and finally came to the conclusion that he can't do it after all. I talked him down and offered a six-week trial period, at the end of which he can decide whether or not to take on the whole job. That, he agreed to.

Shit. I've spent all week on this, and now all I've got is a "maybe." I need to find a backup.

APRIL 11, 1989

Packaging meeting #2 with Sophie and Brian. Latricia wasn't there. Sophie was extremely nice to me. Nevertheless, she's an idiot.

Worked on the in-game cosmetics. Tomi advised me to keep it strong and simple. The Byzantine latticework and intricate patterns should be inset, as part of doors and windows and so on. Good advice.

APRIL 12, 1989

The game is coming together. I spent an hour at QA today watching them play it. They've been developing levels and playtesting them on their own time, just for the fun of it. That's a good sign.

Everyone says *POP* will be a huge hit. *Everyone*. I can't walk from one building to the next without someone stopping me to tell me how great it is. This product has both grass-roots and top-down support.

All I have to do is finish it.

The urge to go to my Mac and work on the new screenplay is overpowering.

(Patience... just a few more months... Hang on to that urge. You'll need it. Put it away somewhere where it'll be safe. You'll have the whole rest of your life to pursue your screenwriting and directing dreams... after you finish the game.)

APRIL 14, 1989

Robert got into Yale!

APRIL 22, 1989

By the time *POP* ships I'll have been out here three years. Two years of actually working on the game, plus six months working on screenplay stuff and another six months screwing around and traveling and so forth in between.

APRIL 24, 1989

Dropped in on QA. Will and Randy showed me some of the levels they've worked up for *Prince of Persia*. It was a strange feeling, picking up the joystick and finding myself in a world I didn't create. For the first time, I caught a glimpse of what this game must seem like to everyone else.

Met with Brian and Bill McDonagh to ask for an advance to pay for the IBM conversion. I don't think there'll be any problem.

Reality Check

4/13/89

- When you get seen,
guard turns to face you ~~down south~~.
(Exception: If you ~~do~~ enter on type, he won't turn
until you make a sound or trigger sound. Key is to
sound effects?)
- When guard sees you, he ~~does not~~ ~~go~~ ~~up~~ ~~to~~ ~~500~~ ~~feet~~
He remains on guard until you're dead or out of sight.



- When you're flying w/ guard
& you knock him back off edge
& he looks below (a 1 story fall will kill him),
he backs up to give you room to jump down after him.



- When you're flying w/ guard
& he knows you back off edge
& you land below (1 story w/ wings),
he jumps down after you.

Every Alert is for you only.
Guards have their own logic. He stays on side even

Reality Check

APRIL 25, 1989

Paul Dushkind showed me his sketches for the package design. I wasn't blown away. So, when I got home I made a few of my own. Now I have a problem; namely, how do I show them to Paul without making him feel threatened?

It's not that I insist on doing everything my own way. I'm always hoping someone else will come up with something better than I would have done myself. But when they don't...?

APRIL 26, 1989

I didn't have the nerve to show Paul my sketches, so I showed them to Robert. "They're a lot better than Paul's," he said. Uh oh.

Doug Greene spent yesterday over at Jim's, setting up to get started on the IBM version. They're coming to Broderbund on Monday. Doug's really pumped up. I'd like to have a really hot demo to show them, to maintain their current level of enthusiasm.

It's a strange feeling - all this machinery is being set in motion without me. People are going off and doing things on their own. It's exciting.

APRIL 28, 1989

Dr. Ward said I should rest as much as possible, so I stayed home and built a really boffo level. Named it BACH cause that's who I was listening to.

APRIL 29, 1989

Stayed home again and listened to opera and built game levels. I'm fed up with being home.

MAY 1, 1989

Doug and Jim came by. Amazingly, IBM *POP* is really happening.

Impromptu meeting with the art dept. to go over Paul's sketches. David K. is my nemesis. It's Brian and me against the world.

MAY 2, 1989

Today when Brian started to give me a hard time about paying for Jim and Doug's equipment (a mouse and a couple of joysticks - maybe \$150 worth of stuff), I did something almost unprecedented in our relationship: I argued back. To my surprise, Brian not only caved, but ended up practically apologizing.

It made me realize how much I usually avoid confrontation. Conflict always gives me the anxious feeling that I need to say something to defuse the situation and restore goodwill, even if it's at my own expense. Today, I realized the formidable power of acting tough. Not only did I get my way, I actually gained goodwill points, because I made Brian feel bad for having upset me. There's a lesson in that. I need to develop the ability to stand my ground.

The biggest conflict I see looming is with David K, who's bent on doing something stupid with the box design, and who likes sleazy-looking princesses with pouty lower lips (like the *Karateka* box) whereas Brian and I prefer a more cool, chaste brand of ingenue, as exemplified by the poster of Diane Lane in Robert's and my office. (During our meeting with Nancy and Paul, Brian got excited and pointed to the poster: "Like her!" he exclaimed.)

Alan Weiss dropped by to show me the new hand-held Nintendo "Game Boy" (a play, I guess, on Sony "Walkman.") They're licensing a version of *Karateka* for it.

Tomi says that since Dominique came back raving about *POP*, the programmers in France have been trying to adopt my animation techniques, but that they don't have it quite right yet.

MAY 6, 1989

Robert's friend Jim came by the office with his three sons. Ages 3, 5 and 7, blond kids with runny noses and an insatiable lust for computer games.

I gave them the joystick and watched them spend a good half-hour trying to get through Level 1. It was

instructive. Chris — the oldest, an extremely sweet-natured and gracious kid — was generous about sharing with his brother Stu, who insisted on repeating the first three screens himself every time, then handing the joystick to Chris when he got to “the sharp part,” as he put it.

“It’s so *lifelike*,” Chris marveled. I asked him if it was too hard. (This was after they’d died on the spikes about 50 times in the first half-hour.) He said “No, it’s just about right. But it’s challenging.”

The whole thing was very encouraging. For one thing, they liked it. I don’t mean they said they liked it; I mean they *played* it. These guys are my target audience. After watching them I’m more certain than ever that this game will be a hit.

The other thing is, I liked *them*. Lately I’d been starting to feel jaded about this whole enterprise – “Oh well, it’s just a computer game” – but watching Chris and Stu, I realized: These guys love games. They love games the way I loved movies in college. Even more, because they’re not interested in girls yet. Computer games are like the air they breathe. If I can make one that they can get excited about, that’s a real accomplishment. That’s something I can be proud of.

So I worked till ten with renewed enthusiasm.

The game is really turning out well, by the way. When you’re fighting a guard, forcing him back toward a ledge, and the spikes spring out below, and you’re down to your last unit of strength, and you push him off the edge – it’s incredibly thrilling. It’s like an Indiana Jones movie. There’s no other game that even remotely approaches this. If there’s any games market left by this Christmas, this one should corner it. (He said modestly.)

MAY 7, 1989

CGDC (Computer Game Developers Conference) in Sunnyvale. Robert and Doug and I skipped out early and went to Great America. We rode the Demon and the Grizzly and Loggers Run.

MAY 9, 1989

Spent the day hard-wiring the shadow man into the level I built yesterday. It’s kind of a letdown. For over a year now, the shadow man has been this awesome idea that everyone gets all excited about when they hear it. Now, it’s just... what it is. The unlimited potential has been replaced by the concrete reality of what I programmed today.

This time, there’ll be no time for me to tear it all down and reprogram it five more times, to try to more fully realize the dream. The hundreds of thousands of kids who I hope will play this game will encounter the shadow man just as I programmed him today. I hope he blows them away. I’m too close to it to be able to tell. If not, well, I blew it.

MAY 10, 1989

Paul showed us nine color comps for the *Prince of Persia* box. “Us” was David, Nancy, Sophie, Diane Rapley (head of marketing), Brian, and me. In the end everyone agreed on #5. I had the feeling that if I hadn’t been there, they might well have picked #6, which showed a bunch of guys with swords bursting out of a paper movie poster.

MAY 11, 1989

Everyone is being nice to me because they think my game is going to be a hit.

MAY 15, 1989

Mo, Larry and Sebastian were very impressed by the game. Mo especially liked the new additions – the Fat Guard, who I put in today, and the blood smear on the slicer.

Got a check for \$9,000 from Bandai for Nintendo Game Boy *Karateka*. Snatched from the jaws of bankruptcy once again. My checking account, previously parched and gasping for funds, is now overflowing.

Brian and I sat at the Mac working on the game documentation (which I promised Nancy for tomorrow).

MAY 17, 1989

Made a disk to give to Doug tomorrow (Brian’s advice – actually something I should have done a long time ago). I made one for Gary too.

Nobody thinks we'll make this August 29 ship date. I keep telling Brian: "We'll make it! We'll make it!" And I don't even know if I believe it. But I've got to try.

Microsoft Word 4 arrived via Fed Express. I booted it up and it crashed immediately.

Added a balcony window that looks out onto a starry night. It really helps define the palace section as a different place. Someday I'll make the stars flicker.

The game is taking shape by leaps and bounds, but unfixed bugs are piling up behind me.

MAY 18, 1989

Gave Doug his disk.

Worked all day on level design and background graphics.

Everybody's gone away.

Just me and Domino's now.

I should go running except... I'm so hungry I'd probably faint.

MAY 19, 1989

After happy hour Doug and Mary and Gary and Nancy left for the invitation-only sneak preview of *Indiana Jones* at the Skywalker Ranch. Lucky bastards.

I went home and watched an incredibly depressing TV movie starring Ben Kingsley as Shostakovich.

*Someone's killed the General
Sheep, their shepherd gone
If only we Russian people had one neck!*

MAY 20, 1989

"I can't believe you watched that Shostakovich program," Claire said. "It was supposed to be incredibly depressing! You're probably the only person in America who watched it."

MAY 22, 1989

Talked to Doug Greene and Jim St. Louis. Work is proceeding on IBM *POP*, although not as quickly as Doug had hoped.

Brian says we'll be doing a 3.5" disk version after all. That means we can put in some IIGS-specific stuff like Avril's title screen.

MAY 23, 1989

14 days to beta.

Things are getting more frenzied. I put in twelve hours today and got a fair amount done (added two new potions and a whole new level), but it definitely wasn't one-fourteenth of the work that's left before beta. I'll just have to work twice as fast, or something.

Brian handed me the Larry McDermott draft of the box copy. It wasn't very good. He asked if I could "rewrite it" (i.e., write it) - another little task to fill in the cracks.

I can't even *think* about all the work I've postponed until after the beta version - princess and vizier animations, title screen music - and six weeks to do it all.

(How complete was *Karateka* two months before *its* QA signoff? I can't remember.)

One thing's for sure: This is no time to come up with new bright ideas. I'll put in the little white mouse because I said I would, and because I'll never hear the end of it from Tomi if I don't (remember the leopard in *Karateka*?), but all other nifty additions go straight to the bottom of the list.

By June 6, I want things firmly under control. Levels 1 through 8 should be completely playable, with all features implemented, and as bug-free as I can manage. The things that are missing should be clearly defined, with a beginning and an end and no hidden ramifications in other areas. The palace and dungeon background graphics

should be in their final form (although last-minute tweaking of the images themselves is, of course, allowed). Michael C. should have done his thing, and I should have it on videotape. (I'm hoping to shoot it Thursday.)

Aiiiiii.....

MAY 24, 1989

Put in the skeleton-coming-to-life animation (under Eric's supervision).

Packaging meeting. Things are proceeding with agonizing slowness.

MAY 25, 1989

Robert's game passed the Star Chamber. I met him in the parking lot at 9:30 this morning as I was arriving and he was leaving after spending the whole night getting the disk ready for the presentation. That's a great piece of news, just great.

Going-away picnic for Cathy Carlston at the Marin Civic Center duck pond. Flipped disc with Brian and Rob. Said goodbye to Cathy.

MAY 26, 1989

Yesterday I showed Paul the skeleton. He was thrilled (it was his idea) and has been going around telling everyone about it. It's paid off more than I could have imagined, in terms of boosting his enthusiasm about the whole project. Just goes to show you.

People in PD, art and marketing are starting to treat me differently. Brian is delighted and amused by the amount of work I take upon myself. (When I told Sophie today I'd like to take the box copy home and "play with it" over the weekend, Brian laughed out loud. "Sure," he said. "I'd like to have you 'play' with something I wrote.")

Brian's away all next week for CES and is leaving a lot of things in my hands - the final box copy, getting a beta version to QA, possibly the selection of the artist to do the box. I don't know if it means anything, but I noticed that in the latest schedule Nancy made up, the blank for "Product Manager" now reads "Brian Eheler/Jordan Mechner."

So I'm not just a programmer any more.

The bad part of all this, though, is that I only have about three hours a day to actually *work* on the damn thing.

MAY 31, 1989

Spent the morning rewriting the box copy. That's a load off my mind, for the moment.

More problems with the IBM conversion. Jim just isn't putting in the hours. He's getting muscled by Atari to keep putting more last-minute fixes into his other, supposedly finished project, and Doug Greene is getting pissed at him.

I called Jim and told him he'd have to choose between Atari's project and mine. A difficult conversation. I'm not used to being the one who lays down the law. I gave him a couple of days to think it over.

Tomi is back! I showed her the game. She was duly impressed, especially by the palace background graphics, the fighting skeleton, and the upside-down and weightless potions.

Stayed till 11 pm with Robert, designing levels.

JUNE 3, 1989

All hell is breaking loose in China.

Meanwhile, I rented a camcorder and spent the morning videotaping Michael J. Coffey at his apartment. I think I got everything I need. Can't wait to digitize it.

JUNE 4, 1989

It's my birthday. I'm 25 years old.

Put in the potion-drinking animation. It looks really good but takes up more memory than I'd expected, which is a problem.

Sometimes I feel like I must be no fun at all. Bored and boring. Burnt out and empty inside. Not depressed - just tired.

Maybe I'm just working too hard.

Beta

PRINCE OF PERSIA Game Plan
May 23, 1989

Priority 1 (for beta version)

When you get pushed back by guard into wall or gate, you bump off safely (guard too)

When you knock guard off edge, he backs up so you can jump down after him

Make sure timer survives save & reload game

CD BUG--you fall thru solid block

CD BUG--you fall 2+ stories or onto spikes & survive (bump + softland)

Guard should always fall forward when he follows you off ledge, backward when he is backed off

Make it easier to pick up flask

Make it easier to climb stairs

When you medland on loose floor & it falls out from below you, you should fall too even though Action = 5

Your logic makes you go en garde when guard is just o.s.

If engaged guard is just o.s. and you move up very close to him, he should back up a little & let the fight move to the next screen

Flasks should sparkle (color indicates contents)

BUG in guard position memory logic--sometimes he reappears en garde w/o sword

Animation for being felled by a sword blow (dropdead) - player & guard

Better "dead" shape that looks good facing both ways & doesn't spill over block edges

Animation for drawing your sword & going en garde

Distinction (for CheckAlert purposes) between sides of slicer needs to be more accurate

FRAMEADV needs to distinguish when you're just to R of gate but still on gate block

CD bug when you start up level for first time

Add new images (S, f, 1b) to BGTAB.DUN1

Animation for climb stairs

Joystick routines: make sure clear flags are working correctly (esp. in crouch & hop forward)

Push jstk straight down to drop your guard, down & back to run away (& change documentation!!)

Guards give you a moment's grace when you drop your guard (but no more)

Design & build level 3 (skeleton)

Hard-wire skeleton's behavior on level 3

Design & build level 4 (1st palace level)

Design & build level 5 (mirror level)

Hard-wire shadowman behavior in mirror level 5

End of mirror level: you drop into level 6

Make sure levels 1-8 are in place; test for guard difficulty & general game flow

Level 13 (fight w/Vizier) treated as part of level 12 (if you die, you're returned to beginning of level 12)

Game ends when time runs out

Fix bugs

Priority 2 (preferably in time for beta version)

When guard stabs you at ledge, you fall to your death

Animation for sheathing your sword & standing up

Animation for guard standing alert & turning w/sword

Speed equalizer routine for Hc + HGS

Animation for hard land (should bounce a little)

Character image set for Grand Vizier

Beta

JUNE 5, 1989

The new animations I shot with Mike are going in very quickly. Already the “potion drinking,” “unsheathing your sword,” and “collapsing” are up and running.

The only big ones left are:

- climb stairs
- pick up sword and hold it up
- sheathe sword
- “alert turn” for guard
- “collapse” for guard

I think I can squeeze it all into the available memory, except for “climb stairs”; that one might need a disk access. I could live with that.

My major achievement today, though, was to completely redesign the first two levels to make them more fun to play. There’s more freedom now, more exploration, more rewards. The previous versions were rather humorless – you go from A to B to C and if you mess up, you die.

Level 3 is still pretty punishing and bleak. I don’t know quite what to do about it. I guess I’ll hand it in to QA like this and see what they think.

Level 4 is pretty good.

Level 5 is nonexistent.

Levels 6, 7, and 8 are pretty good, although they need work.

I guess tomorrow I’d better come up with a Level 5. Then my “beta version” will at least have the first two-thirds of the game.

There’s no getting around it. To achieve the reasonably complete, reasonably bug-free beta version I’d hoped to deliver tomorrow will take me another solid week’s work.

Should I ask QA to hold off for a couple of days (how humiliating!) or just turn in what I’ve got and then give them an updated version a week from now?

JUNE 6, 1989

“B-Day”

An extremely productive twelve-hour day. I fixed lots of bugs, designed a brand-new level (5), and hard-wired the shadow man to steal your potions. Another couple of hours to make sure it all fits together smoothly, and I think I’ve got a beta version.

One day late.

Boy, will Brian be impressed.

In the middle of it all Doug Greene called to say he thinks he’ll probably pull out of the project at the end of the trial period.

I’ve pretty much had it with Doug and Jim. They’re good programmers, but enough is enough. I should have listened to Doug when he said no in the first place, instead of working so hard to change his mind.

I went and talked to Glenn for an hour about Alick D. Glenn says he’s a good programmer, but the bad blood between him and Broderbund could be a problem.

I need to teach the little animated character not to draw his sword when the other little animated character who’s trying to kill him is on the other side of a pair of snapping steel jaws.

JUNE 7, 1989

Incredibly, I turned the game in to QA today. Now the real fun begins. Six weeks to finish the whole thing.

The Apple market is dying. It's definitely affected the level of enthusiasm for *Prince of Persia* within the company. No matter how hard I try to convince people that there's going to be an IBM version, they're behaving as if there isn't one. I found out today from Nancy and David that Latricia/Sophie balked at spending \$5,500 for the box art. After making the rounds and lobbying everyone, I think they'll OK it, but the whole thing was a really disturbing vote of no-confidence in *POP*.

Kevin in QA gave me more of the same. When I told him I hoped to ship August 29, he shook his head gravely and said he's been mandated to put two men full-time on *Carmen Sandiego 4* and two on some other product, which leaves no one to test the beta version of *POP* I handed in today.

It pisses me off.

I shouldn't be surprised. When has Broderbund ever thrown its weight behind a game? *Choplifter*, *Lode Runner*, *Karateka* all made it on their own, on the strength of good reviews and word-of-mouth.

There's no one looking out for me, no one to go to bat for *POP*. Brian is out of town, Sophie is an idiot, and Latricia - despite Doug's instructions to the contrary - is leaving everything up to Sophie.

I should probably be putting more energy into trying to cultivate these people and work up some enthusiasm for my project; but what with having to actually design and program it (not to mention documentation, box copy, IBM conversion, etc), I just can't spare the time.

Meanwhile, the IBM conversion, which I need so desperately, has fallen victim to Doug Greene's angst.

Oh well, it's a cold cruel world out there. If I'm going to be a movie director someday I'd better learn to deal with it.

JUNE 8, 1989

I don't think I have it in me to write and direct films. Where is the strength going to come from to persevere, to fight all those battles, when even this current situation with Broderbund - near-ideal as it is - is burning me out? Have I ever had what it takes? Am I losing it? Give me a signal; show me a sign. Where's the meaning in all this? Nobody cares about the fucking game, not even me. Why am I doing this?

If *POP* is a hit and the royalties start flowing again and my bank account swells and the fan mail rolls in, will my spirits also soar? What if it's a dud - if the Apple market is truly dead and the IBM version is delayed and Nintendo doesn't pan out - will it break my heart? All that wasted work. What will I do next? Will I deal with failure as well as I dealt with success?

Robert's going off to Yale

Corey's gone off to Harvard

Doug's going to cash out

What happens to me when this part of the story is over?

Got to have faith. Faith in my game. Faith in myself. Lighten up. Nobody wants to be around someone who's stressed out and in the dumps. Got to rise to the occasion. Charm everyone around me with my youthful enthusiasm, unshakeable optimism, etc.

These are 2:30 am thoughts. I know I'll feel cheerful and serene in the morning if I can just get to sleep. Just shut down my mind and make it through the night.

You can't talk in your sleep if you can't sleep.

Oh God, I see why people take sleeping pills.

JUNE 9, 1989

In the morning I put in the stair-climbing, and in the evening, the sword-sheathing.

In between I wandered the halls of Broderbund in search of human interaction, dropped a disk off on Doug's desk, and ended up demoing the entire first six levels for a group that started out as just Ed Badasov and Sophie

K, and expanded to include Rob, Greg Hammond, Henry, and Tom Marcus, about ten people in all. They were *wowed*. The whole room gasped in unison whenever the little guy had an especially close call. They groaned as one when he bit the dust. They were thrilled by the skeleton and the potions and the swordfighting and the shadow man. Basically, it all works. Hardly one of the touches I'd put in went unappreciated. It was a real vindication of all that effort.

Even Sophie, who knows nothing about games, got excited. She kept saying "This is the first game I've seen that I can really get into!" She made a point of telling me, not once but twice, that she's given Nancy the go-ahead to hire the "expensive" \$5,500 box artist. "It's going to be a great package," she said.

Here I was afraid I'd alienated Sophie by strong-arming her over the phone yesterday about the box art, and today she's practically fawning in an effort to make sure I'm pleased. It's true: People like you better if you stand up for yourself. There's no percentage in being self-effacing and making them think they can walk all over you.

Good (anyway, better) news from Jim St. Louis. He *is* working, and he says Doug has cheered up somewhat. God, I hope it works out.

Talked to Roland too and got him all fired up to do the Mac version. Only trouble is, he's locked into *Print Shop Companion* at least until August.

Despair has been banished.

JUNE 10, 1989

Accomplished relatively little today - just cleaned up a few animations and diddled around. Sent out new packets to Doug, Jim, and just-hired artist Robert F. Showed the game to Lauren Elliott. I'd better work this weekend.

JUNE 20, 1989

Took Lance to lunch and tried to woo him out into the world of independent programmers. He was tantalized (and totally gung-ho about *POP* - he thinks he could do it in four months, working in his spare time), but I don't think he'd seriously consider forsaking the security of his salaried position.

Promised Brian screen shots by next Tuesday. The photo shoot is set up for 2 pm Wednesday.

JUNE 11, 1989

Spent this sunny Saturday alone in the office listening to *Götterdämmerung* and trying to draw a decent room for the princess to live in. On my way out, I swung by 77 Mark to see if anyone was there. Found Doug playing solitaire on his Mac II. He invited me on a river rafting trip on the Salmon River in Idaho at the end of July. I said yes. I ought to be done with the game by then. If not, five days off should do me good.

Could it be that I have a mild manic-depressive affective disorder? Last week I was depressed. Now I'm bouncing off the walls. It's a desperate, manic kind of energy, and I can't say I'm *happy*, but I will say this: The colors seem brighter. The air seems cleaner. The sun is warmer, the rain is wetter, the mist is mistier. The stacks of plates on the Nautilus machines go up and down easier and I can feel my blood pumping with every heartbeat. I don't know why, or how long this will last, but I like it a whole lot better than going through the day half-asleep.

JUNE 12, 1989

Did some fine-tuning on the guards' swordfighting program and related issues. Wrote a letter to Dad all about the music for *POP*.

JUNE 13, 1989

Eleven hours at the office. I put in comic-book-style impact stars like the ones in *Karateka*. It helps a lot. It only took three hours. A very good thing to have done.

I'm worried about Jim. I'm starting to wonder if this wasn't a big mistake. He *acts* like a good, old-school programmer, but the further along we get, the more it seems like he's doing all these things for the first time.

Brian strongly advised me not to hire Alick, but said it was up to me.

I signed on for this river trip to Idaho. It's expensive. The other three people going with Doug are Robert Garriott (president of Origin Systems), Ken Wasch (pres. of the SPA), and Laurent Weill (pres. of Loricel). As an act of self-definition, this trip terrifies me. It's the sort of trip that Ed Bernstein and Steve Patrick would go on. I'm 10-20 years younger than these guys and my personal fortune is comparatively miniscule, but sooner or later I've

got to stop presenting myself to the world as a meek and nerdy kid.

Everyone has their own particular form of self-destruction. Mine, I'm starting to think, is standing outside myself, watching myself live my life, turning my face so as to give the cameras a better angle, and thus missing the whole thing.

JUNE 14, 1989

Greg Hammond has been playing *POP* and is just so excited. It's incredibly gratifying. I dropped by QA and watched Randy and Will playing it. Yup - it definitely works. I'm not crazy. The only questions are (1) will I finish on time and (2) will there be an Apple market left and (3) can we get the conversions out fast enough?

JUNE 15, 1989

Roland's going to start coming into the office on Thursdays and Fridays. With Robert gone, I really appreciated the companionship.

JUNE 16, 1989

Everyone at Broderbund is being nice to me. They think my game is hot. Bill McDonagh told me *POP* is going to be a #2 testing priority ("Don't worry, they go way lower than 2," he added dryly). I asked him what I needed to do to make it a #1. He said: "Get the IBM conversion done!" Ha ha.

Brian, however, said that the QA guys told him: "We don't care what priority this is - in *our* book it's a #1." They've been playing it after hours and on their lunch breaks.

JUNE 19, 1989

We're dead with Doug and Jim. I need to find a new IBM programmer fast. And I'm out three thousand bucks.

I've talked to Alick, and half-seriously to Lance (who is a salaried employee of Broderbund). Also considering a couple of conversion houses, like Don Daglow's; but as The Connelley Group proved on IBM *Karateka*, the comfort of having an organization is largely illusory. It still comes down to one programmer in the end.

I stopped off in Mill Valley on my way home and had a Bordenave Burger at Phyllis's. There was a smell of honeysuckle, or something, in the air that broke my heart, it was so beautiful.

Had lunch with Tom Marcus today. I'm trying to grow up.

It Takes a Village

F G . ⁴ ~~D~~ D#

⁴ D .

3 F# 3 G .
do

A# D G

me so do .

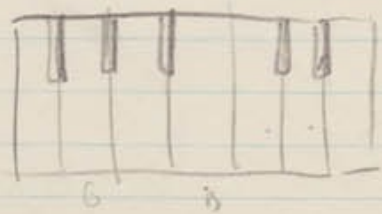
B^b G
4th

A# D#
G A B^b C D E F# G
A re me fa so la ti do

Am: A B C# D E

C D E E G

Handwritten musical notation for a piano accompaniment, featuring a treble and bass staff. The melody in the treble staff includes a triplet of eighth notes and a sixteenth-note figure. The bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes. The notation is enclosed in a large hand-drawn box.



- C D#
- C D#
- C D#
- C D#
- C D#
- C D
- G# E
- G# C
- G# D

- G# E
- G# D
- G# C
- G# C
- G E
- G D

It Takes a Villiage

JUNE 22, 1989

Went to Las Parrillas in San Rafael for Diana Slade's goodbye dinner with a dozen other Broderbund receptionists past and present, who all seemed to be about 21. Brian, Peter LaDeau, Matt Siegel and I were the only guys in a sea of Kerris and Kristys.

Afterwards we all went next door to George's and Brian gave me a serious talking-to about the IBM conversion. He said that Bill McD, after consultation with Gary and Doug, is planning to make me an offer to do IBM *POP* as an in-house conversion - ideally, by Lance - at a "reasonable royalty" that "takes everyone's interests into account." Meaning they'd go up from the contractual 6%. This is good news. It means they're as anxious to get the IBM conversion going as I am. As Brian said: "You have to shit or get off the pot."

I've been sitting on this pot for months now, doing a lot of groaning and pushing, and I have absolutely nothing to show for it. And I'm out \$3,250.

JUNE 23, 1989

Doug came up to me at Happy Hour and said cheerfully: "Hoist on your own petard!" Four years ago, I asked for - and got - the contractual right of first refusal to do my own conversions. They don't give programmers that right any more, and my flailing about with Doug Greene and Jim St. Louis has just proved why.

I understood what Doug was saying. They're going to make me an offer, and I should accept it.

JUNE 24, 1989

Peter LaDeau rescued me from the office ("Come on, man, what are you *doing* here?") and brought me to Brian's house and then to the Gemini Party in Corte Madera. My third night in a row partying with my product manager.

Everybody is convinced *POP* is going to be a megahit. "It's another *Choplifter*!" said Chris Jochumson. Of course, nobody knows anything, but it's still heartening.

JUNE 25, 1989

I'm supposed to have three screen shots ready by Wednesday. To say after two and a half years: "This is it - this is what the game looks like, it's never going to get any better - you can go ahead and photograph it and put it on the box." This terrifies me.

I'm waiting for Doug or Bill or Gary to call and make me the offer I can't refuse. Will it be 7%? 8%? 10%? I wish they'd surprise me and offer 10%. But knowing how tight they are with money, I'm expecting between 6 and 7%.

Each royalty point could be worth as much as \$10-15,000. So the stakes are quite high. I should drive as hard a bargain as I can.

On the other hand, I'm doing this for love too, not just money.

JUNE 26, 1989

Got a call from Brian inviting me to meet with him and Bill tomorrow afternoon. Guess this is it.

I passed through the programmers' area this morning and was nearly swamped by praise, some of it tinged with envy. "I hear *Prince of Persia*'s going to be a megahit," said Glenn. "I guess lightning does strike twice."

"I hope you've begun your training," Doug remarked at Gary's birthday party Thursday. "Heavy weights... endurance... holding your breath for two minutes underwater. Remember, this rafting trip is less than six weeks away."

JUNE 27, 1989

Bill surprised me. He offered 8%, to go up to 10% after 30,000 units have been sold. It's such a fair offer, it practically restored my faith in Broderbund singlehandedly. It's not definite that Lance will be the one to do the conversion, but it seems pretty likely.

I'm happy.

Box sketch came in today. Total nightmare. Not the sketch, but the process of dealing with Paul and others to agree on what to tell the artist. Paul has zero interpersonal skills.

Another nightmare is the box copy. The art department's new draft sucks. I asked Brian if he could throw a fit and insist they use my draft? He seemed willing to try.

In the 15 minutes of the day that weren't spent in negotiations of one kind or another, I did manage to get three screens ready for the photo shoot tomorrow.

JUNE 29, 1989

Yesterday was hectic. Robert Florczak delivered a revised box art sketch. Rob Martyn and I spent half an hour at the Mac rewriting the back-of-box copy while Brian sat behind us and dryly interjected: "Five minutes... ten minutes... Can we print it?... Are we done yet?"

The moment it came out of the LaserWriter, Brian wrote the date and time on it and it disappeared into his folder. When he brought it to Nancy, she was too exhausted to argue. "You've worn us down," she said.

Now Latricia is complaining because the girl in the picture has breasts and the guy is grasping her wrist. At this point, I'm counting on Brian to steamroll over any and all objections put forward by Marketing, Art, Sales, and anyfuckingone else.

Roland and I spent the morning trying to put *POP* on a 3.5" disk, but for some reason we couldn't get it to work. We'll try again next week.

Spent the night fixing bugs, backing up, making disks, etc. in preparation for my early-morning departure. I haven't gotten up at 6:30 AM in ages. Now I'm on the plane to New York, toting an Apple IIc in my carry-on, along with about eight pounds of CDs I grabbed off my shelf at the last minute (*Scheherezade*, *Walküre*, *Götterdämmerung*, *Aida*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, Ella Fitzgerald singing "Night in Tunisia," and anything else that seemed like it might be useful).

I promised Brian a final version by July 26, a month from now. I showed him the schedule I'd made up. He read it through carefully, then looked at me with that amused smile that could mean anything. Brian and I have an understanding. Only, I'm not sure what it is.

Rob is a great guy. It was fun working together on the box copy under the gun like that. This project is still 90% solitary work, but I've really come to treasure that remaining (and increasing) percentage of human bonding.

The flip side of that is the incredible frustration of dealing with people like Latricia, who seem put on this earth just to make life miserable. ("It's like we're all playing in a sandbox and she comes over and wrecks our sand castle," I told Brian when he informed me of her latest Anti-Bondage campaign. "Why does she do it? Because it's there!") But the flip side of the flip side is the bond of "us against the world," which makes it all worth it.

Whatever instinct made me want to become a movie director was right. *This* is life the way it should be lived. Holing up alone in a room with my muse is half a life at best. Maybe some people are cut out for it, but I now realize that I'm not one of them. I'm having too much fun. My interpersonal skills still aren't up to the level of my solitary work habits - I've got years of nerd-dom to make up for - but I like this road I'm on.

JUNE 30, 1989

[*Chappaqua*] Took the 1:08 train into the city with Emily and bought a CD player at Harvey's on 45th Street (the Chinese salesman was impressed that I was buying it for my dad). Spent the evening showing Dad the game and listening to "Persian" music for inspiration. Dad was really impressed by the game, and even more by the CD player.

Dad is in a bad state because of his business worries and the stress between him and Mom. I think the best way to cheer him up is to concentrate on making this music happen.

"It's a big job," Dad said. "What if we can't get it all done in three days?"

I said: "Then we have to scale it down to a size that we *can* do in three days."

Robert called to say Lance had come into the office looking for me, looking glum. He's just gotten a really high salary offer from some company in Mountain View, which Broderbund probably won't be able to compete with. If Lance quits and takes this other job, he won't be able to do *POP*, and there's no one else at Broderbund who's available that I'd trust to do it.

I could call Brian/Bill on Monday and tell them I won't sign anything until I know who they're going to give the

job to... but I don't want to look like I'm the gun Lance is holding to their heads in order to get a raise. It's tricky.

JULY 1, 1989

God, this music-making is grueling.

The Apple II is a piece of shit. Kyle's sound routines are a piece of shit. His user interface is a piece of shit. The music we play on the CD player for inspiration sounds fucking awesome. Maurice Jarre's rousing overture to *Lawrence of Arabia* – amazing. Then when we try to recapture some of that drive and ferocity on the Apple II, it sounds like a bunch of frogs' croaking being drowned out by the crinkling of cellophane wrappers. It's depressing.

Even so, today we managed to come up with a Princess theme and a Vizier theme that aren't too bad. Also a heartbeat-like "hourglass" theme that interweaves nicely with the Princess theme, and a "staircase" theme with a nice Eastern twist to it. But if you step back and give it a fresh hearing, it still sounds like shit.

The part I'm most worried about is the opening titles. 30 whole seconds to fill, and so far we've got nothing. And tomorrow is our last full day – I'm leaving on the 5pm flight Monday.

It's great to be in New York in the summertime during such beautiful weather, but we've hardly left the apartment. I'm serious, this is *depressing*.

JULY 2, 1989

I've never seen Dad so tired and fragile. It's terrible how this last year of KVC/Atlantic has aged him. Sometimes, when he gets excited about a new musical idea, his old energy shines out briefly; but in repose, the exhaustion shows in his face and in the way he sits.

This weekend of music-making has been a good change of pace for him, but he's worried about my imminent departure (I already changed my ticket to give us an extra day). I know he's afraid of not finishing in time, of letting me down. So in a way, I've added to his burdens. And me – maniacal *auteur* taking precedence over dutiful son – I'm pushing him as hard as he can take, hoping that my tireless cheerfulness will somehow cheer him up.

(They're taking out a second mortgage on the *house*!)

JULY 3, 1989

I think we're over the hump. Nearly all the music is done, and it's fine – better than I'd hoped for, once I got over the initial disappointment of remembering what a piece of shit this machine is. There's an opening-titles crescendo that's genuinely thrilling. (Or at least, Dad and I have talked ourselves into believing it is – remember, this is an Apple II.)

Robert had better be blown away. The sad thing is, probably very few other people at Broderbund will be – they're used to Mac and Amiga and Atari ST music. Oh well. Somewhere, *someone* must appreciate this.

I'll miss the San Francisco 4th of July fireworks, but it was worth it.

JULY 5, 1989

[*Back in SF*] Fixed that eerie bug in the music routines. It was Roland who came up with the answer – I'd relocated Kyle's sound routines so that the page boundaries fell in different places and subtly changed the timing. I never would have thought of that. Anyway, the music's in now, mostly, and it's gotten a great response so far (from Brian, Greg and Robert).

Bill offered 9% at 50,000 units, 10% at 100,000. I plan to counter-offer 10% at 30,000 units. The difference isn't worth blowing the deal for, but it's not chicken feed either.

It's still not clear whether Lance will stay on at Broderbund to do the conversion.

JULY 6, 1989

This music is *great*. It's terrific. It's everything I'd hoped for. It gives the game a whole new dimension. I'm incredibly thrilled, actually.

Brian suggested a candidate of his own to do the Princess shoot – Peter LaDeau's 18-year-old daughter Tina – and I agreed. The problem with Alison was, I couldn't think of who to have her embrace. She might feel awkward

about me asking her to throw herself into the arms of a total stranger. This way, it's all within the family (so to speak).

Brian and Peter enjoyed the pastrami I brought back from the Carnegie Deli.

Dad is in a tough spot. The *Prince of Persia* music is practically the only bright spot in his life right now. I'm glad he did such a good job. *We* did.

JULY 7, 1989

Worked all day. By happy hour I was so burned out, I was dead on my feet and could hardly keep up a conversation. Then I went to the gym and worked out really hard in the heat. Then I went to Japantown and sat at a table by myself and slurped up a bowl of udon.

Now I'm all charged up again and rarin' to go. Except... everybody's gone. That's OK. Maybe I'll clean up the apartment. I feel the need to do something to restore my self-image as a human being (as opposed to a brain, a set of fingers, and the parts necessary to keep them the right distance off the ground to operate the computer).

Robert's gone to LA for the weekend. He said Corey said Tomi seems lonely and doesn't know many people in Paris.

JULY 10, 1989

I seem to be in a slump... I'm putting in the hours, but nothing gets done. Then again, the stuff I'm working on is the kind you need to chew on for a while. Level design is a creative process, like screenwriting: you can't just sit down and put in ten hours at a stretch, you need time in between to let your ideas work themselves out.

I have a feeling I'm on the verge of a breakthrough, and one of these days I'll hit a roll and get more done than in the three days preceding.

Eric came in today and I showed him the game. "There's nothing more for me to do," he declared. "It's all fixed."

Brian reported that the guys from Egghead said it was the best animation they'd ever seen.

I've talked to Dad almost every day since New York. He's writing an "epilogue" track that he says will last about 45 seconds. I could use it.

Slowly but surely, the end of the game is falling into place: Tower, Shadowman, Vizier, Princess. I think it'll work. It's all in the pacing.

JULY 11, 1989

Put in the shadowman merging, which looks pretty cool. I think I've cracked the design of that level, finally, after two days (hell, three *months*) of struggling and feeling dissatisfied. Tomorrow I'll work out the details.

Lance said: "I'll *do* it! Quit worryin'!"

JULY 12, 1989

Designed most of Level 12. At this rate it'll take another whole day to finish it.

Digitized the *POP* logo and put it in. Ten minutes to do, four hours to set up.

Michelle's going to get started converting Avril's title screen to double hi-res. I'm grateful; that'll save me a day or two, and maybe she'll do a better job than I could.

I thought of a way to do the prologue screens that will save time - just typeset 'em on the LaserWriter, then digitize the whole thing. Brilliant, eh?

Assuming Michelle comes through, the whole job (credits, title, prologue, epilogue) shouldn't take me more than a day. Not even.

Which leaves... let's see now... four days to get the Complete Beta Version into QA. Assume half of tomorrow and half of Friday will be taken up with the princess shoot and various issues relating to packaging, documentation and IBM *POP*. That leaves three days to:

- finish Level 12 - hard-wire shadowman's attack, dungeon falling apart, etc. (1 day)

- put in something for Level 11 - if possible, use Greg's idea of killing a guard and a skeleton arising in its place (1 day)
- fix a few bugs just to show I haven't been ignoring their bug reports completely

Then it's Monday - breathe a huge sigh of relief - and get back to work quick because it's only 9 days left till Idaho!

If I'm smart I'll spend those nine days fixing bugs, visiting QA, and in general making a big push to get all the hard, complicated stuff out of the way before I take off for seven days. The alternative would be to get the opening sequence up and running (with newly digitized Tina) and title cards finalized, so that I can give Brian something that *looks* polished to "wow" everyone before I leave. But that, I think, would be the wrong choice.

JULY 13, 1989

A productive morning. Fixed some long-standing bugs.

Lance will do it. Thank God. He and Robert and I went out for burgers at Frank's Country Garden to seal the pact. I'll meet with Bill on Monday and work out the remaining deal points.

Film shoot tomorrow morning. I'm actually nervous at the prospect of having to direct a beautiful 18-year-old girl I've never met before. I'm *definitely* not ready to direct a feature film. When this is over, top priority (besides screenwriting) will be to shoot some short no-budget student films.

JULY 14, 1989

Shot Tina LaDeau this morning. Man, she is a fox. Brian couldn't stop blushing when I had her embrace him (through six or seven takes). I took them out to lunch afterwards.

Went out for burgers and milkshakes with Ed and Rob and their programmers, Brian "Playmaker Football" Brinkman from New Orleans, and Carlo "Jeanne D'Arc" from France.

JULY 16, 1989

Eleven hours at the office on a Sunday, making this my first recorded 72-hour week.

Dinner with Ed, Robert, and Brian Brinkman.

JULY 17, 1989

Got that disk into QA.

Doug's back from Japan and France. He said everyone there is really pumped up about my game.

The box illustration is finished. The good news is, it's beautiful. Brian and I were thrilled. The bad news is, they've sent it back to the illustrator to "make some changes." It seems Sophie was offended by the lady's breasts.

I've never seen Brian so mad. Robert said he'd never seen *me* so mad.

It's water under the bridge now - I don't want to raise my blood pressure by thinking about it. I just hope Florczak hardly touches the illustration. It was perfect the way it was.

Met with Bill, worked out the last details of the deal. IBM *POP* is a go.

JULY 19, 1989

Working 12- and 13-hour days: fixing bugs, preparing stuff for Lance, restaging the climactic battle with the Vizier to make it feel more climactic; and, as of today, digitizing Tina. The princess now turns, with her dark hair flipping as she spins around. Tomorrow I'll make her take a step backwards, and maybe lounge about a bit. It's a drag, having to spend hours reviewing video footage of this girl in slo-mo and frame-advance, but these are the sacrifices I have to make to get this game done.

Denis Friedman came into Brian's office and expressed a desire (on behalf of Broderbund France) to do one of the *POP* conversions: Atari, Amstrad or Amiga.

Brian Brinkman leaves for New Orleans tomorrow morning. In this past week of working late I've come to feel a certain bond with him. (When I left at 11 pm, he and Rob and Carlo were still at it.)

Seven days left.

I broke the news to Brian that I wasn't going to be able to finish the game by Wednesday. "That's OK," he said. "You're still pretty much on schedule, right?" Bill didn't take it so well.

I promised to get the princess animations in, and fix at least a couple of the major bugs, before I leave. I'd also like to jazz up some of the levels with more potions, shortcuts, cul-de-sacs, secret compartments, etc., and digitize at least rough versions of the opening prologue and epilogue, so that it'll really be a complete game. Then I won't have to put in any major features after I get back. (Except the little white mouse.)

I keep waking up at 7 am, no matter how late I go to sleep.

Finishing

4

5

6

7

8



Finishing

JULY 20, 1989

Michelle delivered the cleaned-up double hi-res title screen to Brian today. I plugged it in and redid the opening credits to match. It looks pretty darn good. I'd like to make the stars twinkle, but that'll have to wait.

Met with Lance early this morning and got him started on the background graphics. By five o'clock he was already pretty far along. He's jazzed. I'm jazzed. This is going to be a great conversion.

Alan Weiss dropped by to talk about Nintendo Game Boy *Karateka*.

Strange incident with Lee McDougall. He showed up with his assistant around five and started emptying out Loring's and Eric's desks. What the ?!? Robert and Brian and I were in the back room and didn't know what to do. Finally I called Tom Marcus, since he's Lee's boss. Of course Tom didn't know anything about it. I put him on the phone with Lee. So the homestead was saved from the cattle barons yet again... for the moment.

I'm feeling quite optimistic. All I have to do is work like a demon for the next six days and not get sick, and by the time I leave for Idaho, the game should be pretty close to finished.

Sleep. Got to get some sleep.

JULY 21, 1989

The Broderbund Picnic. Everyone knows I'm going on this trip next week and was eager to contribute horror stories of river rafting mishap and misery.

Doug told me that if I don't finish the game by Wednesday, he's going to be in trouble with Bill. "Hurry up," he urged me. "My reputation's on the line."

It took me all day, but I think I finally came up with an acceptable princess model in single hi-res. Not as cute as Tina, but cute enough.

JULY 22, 1989

The entire opening sequence is in place. The sand flows, the stars twinkle, the princess does her thing. Only the Grand Vizier is missing. If I can keep up this momentum till Wednesday, I'll be in good shape.

JULY 23, 1989

After lunch I started to feel so run down, I was afraid I was coming down with a virus. But after a Snickers bar, two aspirin and a gallon of water, well-being returned. Thank God. I can't afford to get sick now.

Got some stuff done today, but not as much as I needed to. No matter. It's going well.

Big relief to finally have the princess and the title sequence in place. I keep forgetting no one has seen this stuff yet. It'll blow them away. It totally transforms the game. It was worth spending all that time on.

JULY 24, 1989

Fourteen hours at the office. The last two were the most productive.

Two more days to fix as many bugs as I can.

Lance is puttering away on the IBM conversion.

JULY 25, 1989

Quit early today, eight o'clock. I actually got quite a bit done. Crossed half a dozen bugs off my list, and spent some time with Lance. The version I leave for QA tomorrow won't be perfect, but it'll be the cleanest yet, and substantially complete. Two weeks of good work after I get back should do it.

I'm seriously psyched for this river trip. It sort of crept up on me. For weeks I didn't think about it at all, then I was wishing I hadn't gotten myself into it in the first place, then I was just resigned to it. I didn't realize how much I needed a vacation until just now. I took a real look at the pictures in the brochure for the first time... and now I'm yearning to go. I can't wait.

Saw the retouched box illustration, finally. The triumph of Sophie K. There's some kind of bright green garment

now covering up the exposed skin. It looks like someone painted it on in a hurry, which he probably did. Oh well. There are battles you win and battles you lose, and in the big picture, this one is pretty meaningless. Still, it pisses me off. It was better before.

Now that the packaging is safely completed (or almost), it might be a worthwhile political endeavor to try once again to switch marketing managers – to the equally evil, but more competent, Latricia T.

Who cares. We'll sell a million of 'em anyway, despite marketing's obstructive incompetence. All I should be worrying about is finishing it and making it good.

Virginia Giritlian called. She's got a new boss, Jim Alex, and wants to try to set up *In the Dark* with him as producer. I said sure.

Virginia is really a sweetheart. Every time she gets a new job she tries to sell my script all over again. And she's not even my agent any more. "It's the script that never died, for me," she said. But I push this out of my mind, to concentrate on the tasks at hand.

Brian wants to set up a Mac version. I wish Roland could do it. The truth is, Mac is the conversion that's closest to my heart. It's the one that would allow me to play my own game at home. And Mom. And Ben. And most everyone else I know outside the computer games industry. But officially, Mac has a 5% share of the games market, or something like that.

JULY 26, 1989

Left a stack of disks three inches high on my desk for Brian. Eleven for sales, three for QA, plus seven more. Hope they work.

I played the whole game straight through for the first time ever, start to finish, cheat keys turned off. Made it with seconds to spare (my hour ran out while I was fighting the Grand Vizier).

You know what? It was *fun*!

There's a level of tension generated when you know you can't cheat, which is completely absent from the normal playtesting I do. By the time that final battle rolled around, I had a solid hour invested, and damned if I was going to lose!

Still a few bugs – two weeks of work, like I said – but it's a *game*, and a damn good one. I'm content. I'm ready to go river rafting.

The package mechanical looks good. I asked Brian to tell them to make my name bigger.

Should I bring this notebook on the river trip? It might be good to have. Other people bring cameras. So why not bring the book?

Then again, this is a *vacation*. This journal is like a tether. It keeps bringing me back to myself. And letting other people see me writing in it, I've come to feel, is kind of rude. It shuts them out. It undermines the bonding process that's part of the reason to go on a trip like this one.

I'll leave the notebook home. Instead, I'll just pay attention.

AUGUST 2, 1989

Back from six and a half days out of time.

Doug drops me off at my front door. I let myself in and take a twenty-minute shower as hot as I can stand. Inventory my collection of scrapes and bruises. Healing nicely, as far as I can tell. Very tan in the face and arms and legs. Six days' beard growth. Lingering nausea from the choppy flight back in a five-seater from Salmon to Boise with forest fires raging below. Sand washed out of my hair; teeth brushed, nails cleaned, and I'm back.

I could have stayed in SF and kept working and the week would have flashed by like any other week. Instead, I went to another planet and it didn't cost me anything but a chunk of money out of the bank and seven days out of the calendar.

Note to self: If you ever get half a chance to do something like this again, do it. Do it at the drop of a hat.

AUGUST 4, 1989

Brian's on vacation.

More controversy over the package design: Dianne Drosnes saw it and threw a fit. So Bill McDonagh put it on hold until Doug got back.

Doug glanced at it first thing yesterday morning and said: "Looks fine." Today a bunch of irate women put a message on the LAN to Doug, Bill, and Ed Auer complaining that it's sexist and offensive.

Doug wrote a two-page response to cool them down. It looks like we're in business again, though this cost us a week. The whole thing is ridiculous. There's nothing wrong with the package design.

Tech Support is crazy about the game. Everyone thinks it'll be a megahit. I keep getting asked if I'm going to do a sequel. The first one isn't even done yet.

David is back from Japan.

AUGUST 5, 1989

Got an idea for *POP 2*. A ripoff of *Ladyhawke*.

That's how you know the end is in sight, when you start thinking about the sequel.

AUGUST 7, 1989

Finally got down to work and fixed a couple of long-standing bugs. What I need to do is keep this up for a few more days.

Got a speeding ticket on the way home. I was so clearly guilty, I didn't even try to plead with the officer. One of these days I'll get one ticket too many and my insurance will go up to \$3,000 a year.

Robert's MG has broken down. With only three weeks left to finish his game, he just said "I don't have time for this," and left it at his mom's house in LA. Now he's riding his bike to work.

To meet my own deadline, allowing one week for copy protection, I need QA to sign off on the game within the next ten days. If I fix all the bugs by the end of this week, that leaves me a few days to fiddle with it and put in stuff like the mouse. (There has to be a mouse - I promised Tomi.)

AUGUST 8, 1989

Woke up in the middle of the night and didn't know why I was awake. It was a quarter past one, just an hour after I'd fallen asleep. Half a minute later, the bed began to shake. The room was shaking. I lay there half asleep as the shaking went on and on, and suddenly the adrenaline hit and I was scared shitless. I realized the building could fall down and I could die.

Later I found out it had only lasted 30 seconds. It felt like longer.

5.2. Epicenter, San Jose. Five percent chance this is just a precursor to a bigger quake within the next few days.

An encouraging day. Cathy (Brown) saw the game for the first time in months and was as thrilled as I could hope for. Oliver delivered a bug report that was reassuringly thin.

I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. This game is going to be a hit. All I have to do is finish it.

Weird weather. Lightning storms, flash floods, forest fires all over the West, and now this quake. It's like signs from God. But what does it mean?

Why do I feel so sad tonight?

AUGUST 9, 1989

Slowly but steadily, I'm fixing bugs. The only *new* things left to do are the Vizier walking, the Princess embracing, and... the mouse.

AUGUST 10, 1989

A *very* productive day. Fixed a few of the very nastiest bugs I'd been dreading facing for months. Now, suddenly, it seems very close to finished.

Saw the sell sheet mechanical. Pretty exciting.

Met Andrew Pedersen, clean-cut young marketing guy just hired a couple of weeks ago. I like him.

AUGUST 13, 1989

Today I finally put in the mouse. I'm glad I did. It'll probably take another full day to get it perfect, but it's worth it. People are going to love it. Tomi will be thrilled.

AUGUST 14, 1989

Brian is back from vacation.

Put in the last two princess animations today ("Embrace" and "Send"). Only Jaffar, the Grand Vizier, remains.

Oh, and I talked to George. Good things are happening. His *Texasville* documentary is shooting in two weeks. He wants me to visit him in Texas once it starts.

Virginia called to say she is trying to set up *In the Dark* for \$3 million with her new boss, James Alex. She's all excited.

AUGUST 16, 1989

Full lunar eclipse.

A productive day. Put a disk into QA. Got the Vizier footage I'd shot with Robert over the weekend developed, and put in the Vizier walking. It looks OK. A relief, actually. That was the last thing I'd been wondering if it would be good enough. From now on it's all downhill. Finishing what I've started, cleaning up, fine-tuning.

(Keeping my fingers crossed. No sinister new bugs, please. No disk crashes or corrupted data. Just another seven days of clean work, and a QA signoff at the end of it. Please, no nasty surprises.)

Robert is in deep panic about finishing his game. He did, however, put in a hilarious decapitation sequence this afternoon, in which the C-Generation knocks off your head and it bounces around the room while you stand there, convulsing and headless.

I called Tomi in Paris and told her about the climactic battle with Shadow Man. She was thrilled.

Thank God for this game. It's the only area in my life where I feel sure that my efforts are doing good, not harm. It's good, and it's *mine*, and thousands of people are going to be glad it exists. How many things can you say that about?

AUGUST 19, 1989

Today was brutal. It was just me in the empty building, Saturday from 9 am to 8 pm. Didn't talk to a soul all day, except Peter LaDeau and a pal of his, briefly.

I must have spent six hours fiddling with those Vizier arm-raising shapes. It was a big mistake thinking I could shoot it without a cape and draw the cape in later. I'd forgotten what a slow and tedious process hand animation is, and how hard it is to get decent results. But it turned out OK, considering.

The main thing is, it's *done*. The opening scene with the Vizier and the princess is over. *Finito*. Now all that's left is details. Text. Fiddling. I could putter about for days; but whatever changes I want to make, I'd better make before 8 am Monday.

After months of restraint, I'm starting to let myself get excited. This game is hot. It's going to go over very, very well. If I'm wrong about that, then I don't know anything and I should get into a different line of work. The only questions in my mind are:

1. how much of an Apple II market is left? And
2. will we be able to get the IBM version out fast enough to cash in?

It's a great game. It's the best I can do. After three years of work, I've reached the point of diminishing returns. If I had to make it better, I don't know where I'd start. I've given it everything I have. All I can do now is let it go, and hope for the best.

And help Lance get the IBM version done.

And make sure that Mac, Atari and Amiga versions get under way.

And Nintendo, for whatever my efforts are worth.

There's still a whole page of things to fix. And another round of QA testing. And copy protection. It ain't over yet.

But it sure is getting close.

AUGUST 20, 1989

A full working Sunday, but I didn't quite finish everything. The creative part is done. What remains now is technical stuff, housecleaning, including the tedious task of cleaning up two more double hi-res digitized text screens. (I got the first one done today.) I'll try to get the disks into QA before 4 pm tomorrow.

Tomorrow I'll play the game all the way through a couple of times on the IIC, looking for bugs and trying to get a feel for the whole thing.

AUGUST 21, 1989

sigh I left work today, tired and burnt out, hoping the disk I was carrying would be The One. I went home, booted it up, and...

Those weird bugs are back. The ones that only show up the very first time you boot the disk, and only on certain machines, and then only sometimes. Obviously there are some zero-page locations that aren't getting initialized. It looks like \$06 (opacity) is one of them. That carries a sinister echo of the bizarre bug that's been keeping the 3.5" version from running. In that case, after hours of confusion, Roland and I finally tracked it down to that same location, \$06, which contained (I seem to remember) a 42. When I get in tomorrow I'm going to go over that code with a magnifying glass.

Shit.

AUGUST 22, 1989

The disks are in QA. All of 'em.

Brian is thrilled. He immediately started hitting me up about doing a sequel.

For Brian, it's done; but secretly, I'm still surreptitiously fixing tiny little bugs that no one will notice. I'll slip the fixes in when we do the copy protection, Roland and I will test the hell out of it, and nobody will know the difference.

Tina came in today and I showed her her screen debut. I think she was kind of starstruck by the idea that it was *her* up there.

It was Robert's first time meeting Tina face to face (not counting the virtual meeting I'd staged onscreen). After she'd left, we just sat there looking at each other, until Robert said with a sigh:

"It's just the ephemeral beauty of an 18-year-old."

I said: "Yes, but she's 18 years old *now*."

There was nothing more to say.

Should I start on a sequel? I could whip it out in five or six months this time, with Lance doing the IBM programming concurrently. I could even write a screenplay on the side... split my time, 50-50. (Uh... sound familiar?)

I don't have time to think about this. I've still got (officially nonexistent) bugs to fix. Tomorrow Roland and I start on copy protection.

Ship It!



~~PRINCESS~~ PRINCESS IN KIL-RES ROOM
VIZIER WALKS — PUES DOWN
MORRIS, WALKS
SHE CRIES

Ship It!

AUGUST 27, 1989

Roland and I stayed till midnight at the office both Friday and Saturday. We've been having a blast putting weird stuff into the copy-protection. Taking us back to our hacker roots. Today I'm going to stay home and test the hell out of it on my IIC to make sure none of what we've done interferes with anything.

QA signed off on the demo disk Friday, but it'll be a fight to get Them to let us sneak it by the 12th.

AUGUST 28, 1989

Struck up a conversation with Peter Blacksborg, whom I'd seen around but never talked to, outside the Art Dept., where he was making signs with directions to his upcoming wedding. Out of the blue he suggested dinner.

Smart, nice guy, and pleased to discover a fellow smart person. He gave me some helpful advice about Broderbund. He'd heard the story of Brian yelling at Leslie in the scheduling meeting, and suggested I try to avoid identifying myself too strongly with Brian. "Be nice to Leslie. Maybe she'll think 'Well, Jordan's a nice guy, even though his product manager is an S.O.B., so let's try to get his project signed off.'"

His comment forced me into awareness that Brian's temper may be doing me more harm than good, and that I should take care to build relationships with other people at Broderbund too. Like Latricia and Sophie. And Bill. And Kevin and Leslie.

As far as I'm concerned, *POP* is ready to go out to HLS for evals. If QA comes to the same conclusion within the next couple of days, everything is beautiful (as Brian would say).

But until I've talked to Bill tomorrow and gotten his word, I'm not counting on it.

It was good spending the evening with Peter Blacksborg. It got my mind off *POP* and onto new things. Made me realize how much I've damped down my curiosity about the world, these last few months, in the interest of efficiency. It's time to start rekindling it... looking for new people, places, friends. I shouldn't just rush on to the next project with tunnel vision. I should relax, take a look around.

AUGUST 29, 1989

Oh, Lord.

At 10 pm tonight, I was happy. QA signed off on *POP* today. Brian talked to Bill, Bill talked to Leslie, and we actually got it out a day ahead of schedule. Everyone was ecstatic. Congratulations from all sides. I went to the gym, left phone messages with some friends, cooked up some spaghetti. Everything was beautiful. I was thinking I'd take the day off work tomorrow.

Then I decided to boot up the game on my IIC and play it through one last time, just for the hell of it.

It's that God-cursed IIC VBLANK routine Roland and I stuck in at the last minute. It works, but it screws up the joystick. I'd checked it on the IIC downstairs, but like an idiot, I'd only checked it in keyboard mode.

There's no way around it. I've got to tell Kevin and Brian, and send new disks down to HLS to replace the ones we sent today. It'll be anticlimactic and embarrassing, and Brian, Bill and I will lose face. The only redeeming factors are (1) it was me who found it, and (2) it's something I can easily fix.

Shit. Oh well. It could have been worse.

I got paid for *POP* today. The \$4,000 "development fee" Ed Bernstein agreed to four years ago in lieu of an advance. Good thing, too. My bank account's been running pretty low.

Alan Weiss is all excited about doing *POP* as a Nintendo title. Henry Yamamoto is interested too. This may actually happen.

Hell. I wish I'd never messed with that VBLANK stuff.

AUGUST 30, 1989

Drove into work early this morning and fixed the game. Brian was a little bummed, and Kevin was kind of a pain in the ass about it, but it got fixed. We won't lose more than a day. Maybe not even that.

My first day off in ages. Corey came into the city and we went to see *sex, lies and videotape*. Pretty unusual movie. I'm impressed, actually. The heart it revealed wasn't one of the biggest and warmest I've ever encountered, but it *was* revealed, which is more than you can say for most movies, especially first movies by 26-year-olds.

AUGUST 31, 1989

Robert just called from a pay phone on Elm St. He's At Yale. In New Haven. Wow... For some reason that phone call drove it home. I wish I were just starting Yale. Or even better, that we were both starting Yale together.

It was *eight years ago* that I did what Robert's doing. Makes me feel old.

SEPTEMBER 5, 1989

A good day's work with Roland. The 3.5" version is done – thank God. Now it's really over.

The *POP* documentation is in, looks great. David K. gave me a box flat to take home. Eval disks are back from HLS. All the pieces are coming together.

Tony Trono said while cutting my hair: "Listen, the most important thing is that you have a good time. You're only young once! In five years you'll be 30. That's the time of life when you stop asking a lot of questions and start to accept certain things and not try to change them. For now – have some fun! This time of your life will never come again."

This from a man who's all of 33. But he's right. I've somehow gotten into the habit of worrying, in every situation: What's the right thing to do? What's the *best* thing? What could go wrong here, how can I avoid it going wrong? Fuck that! I've been working my butt off all year. If I don't reap some of the rewards now, when will I?

I'm ready to enter my grasshopper phase. Someone please tell me how to do that?

SEPTEMBER 6, 1989

Oliver found a bug in *POP*. I'm bummed – it was one I'd fixed once, too, and it somehow got undone. But it's shippable, even with the bug, so that's probably what they'll decide to do. Shit.

For kicks, I reread the last version of *In the Dark*. You know what? It isn't bad. A year and half of writing, and 45 minutes to read it. I don't feel much urge to rewrite it – it'll never be great – but it's a valid document of my first attempt at a screenplay. The next one will be better.

SEPTEMBER 7, 1989

Got a letter from Robert. Boy, it makes me wistful. I wish I were just starting Yale. Here I am full of this feeling of impending change, of being young and on the brink of some thrilling new adventure... and I have nothing planned.

They signed off *POP* today. Brian invited the boys from QA to his office backyard for root beer and champagne. Bill was there too. It really is over.

Brian gave me the pitch again about doing a sequel. I know it's a great opportunity to make some fast bucks for a few months' work, but, jeez... I don't care about that. I want something new and exciting and momentous to happen.

Maybe all I need is a vacation.

Maybe it's partly the weather. It feels like fall. Smells like fall. Makes me feel like classes should be starting.

I just want everything to change. Now. Is that too much to ask?

SEPTEMBER 8, 1989

Brian took me into the warehouse and showed me the cartons of *POP* boxes and manuals. He let me steal half a dozen to take home.

SEPTEMBER 11, 1989

Virginia called with an offer from James Alex to option *In the Dark* for 18 months against a purchase price of \$40,000.

The price is ignominiously low – I think it’s even below Guild minimum – but more important, who is this guy? And where is his funding coming from?

I didn’t like it when Virginia said “Just trust me.” And “You owe me.” I *do* owe her, but I hated like hell to hear her *say* it.

SEPTEMBER 12, 1989

Gary Cosay never heard of James Alex. He offered to advise me as a favor, but he won’t be officially representing me.

Brian got a call from Henry Yamamoto, who wants all Japanese rights for *POP*, including Nintendo (!) It would be better for me financially if Broderbund USA does the Nintendo version, but this is a good development because it’ll create urgency for Alan to get the ball rolling. Kind of like a bidding war.

SEPTEMBER 13, 1989

Found out from Virginia that the mysterious “brothers” backing James Alex are Jack and Bob Abramoff, Orthodox Jews who’ve made three films in Lesotho (independent monarchy landlocked by South Africa), including *Red Scorpion*, and are looking for their fourth. They’re talking about making *In the Dark* for \$7 million.

Brian is happy as a clam. Alan’s going to make an offer on Nintendo *POP* this week. Denis wants Broderbund France to start on the Atari *and* Amiga conversions right away. Henry is eager to get going. Applefest is next weekend.

Everything is beautiful...

SEPTEMBER 28, 1989

Home from Paris.

POP snuck on the 19th as scheduled. Everyone says it was a big hit at Applefest – they sold out of all 84 copies they brought. (Couldn’t they have brought a few more??) The release has been postponed until Oct. 3 in order to allow a full 2-week sneak.

Lance is making great strides on the IBM version. Broderbund France wants to do Amiga, Atari and Amstrad versions. Henry and Alan are hot to trot. Things are looking good.

Doug told Tomi: “Jordan’s financial problems are over.”

I signed the *In the Dark* option and sent it off. It’s only \$1,500, but it’s kind of thrilling – the first time I’ve been paid for writing fiction. I guess this makes me a professional writer. Virginia says Mary (*Pet Sematary*) Lambert is interested in directing, Paramount is considering picking it up for distribution (a “negative pickup”), and Jack and Jim want to start shooting before Christmas.

There were three Broderbund Sneak Preview boxes waiting for me when I got back. (I’m still on their VIP list, so I get a copy of every new release.) One of them was *Prince of Persia*. That was actually a bigger thrill than anything else.

OCTOBER 2, 1989

Played *Prince of Persia*. It felt strange and unfamiliar. And great. Just three weeks’ distance, but what a difference it makes.

OCTOBER 8, 1989

Adam Derman is dead. A couple of weeks ago he went to the doctor because he’d been having headaches, and they found out his whole body was riddled with cancer. It was too late to do anything. He was 23.

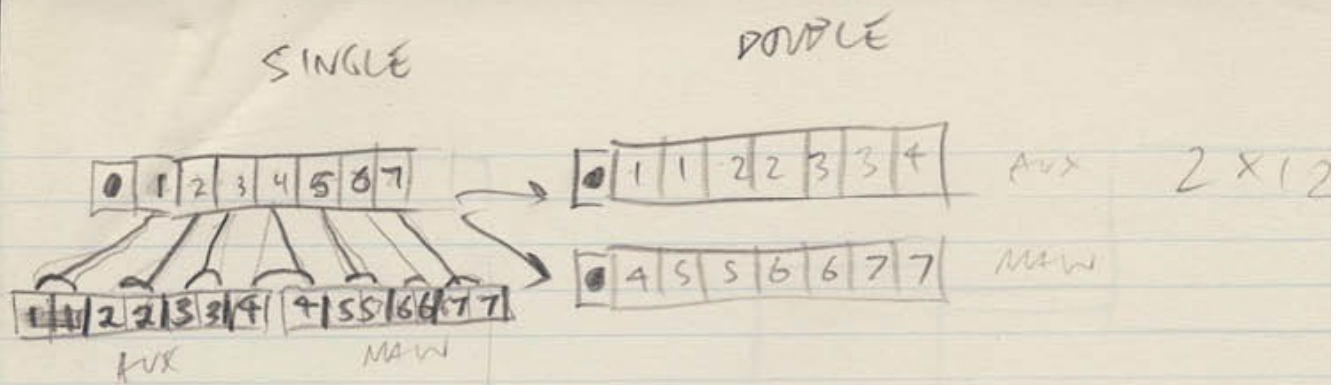
OCTOBER 13, 1989

A Broderbund day. Finally got that source code documentation finished, sent it off to Japan and France.

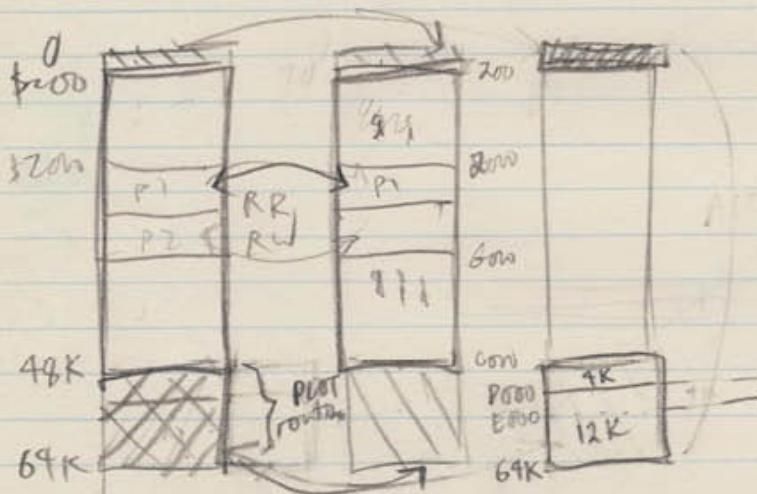
Met with Scott and Dane and Nicki to talk about Mac *POP*. They asked for 7% royalty. That seems fair.

**PART 2:
FROM FLOP
TO MEGAHIT**

An Uneasy Quiet



MAINMEM AUXMEM ALTZOR86



AUX

LDA

TAX

EDA

EDY

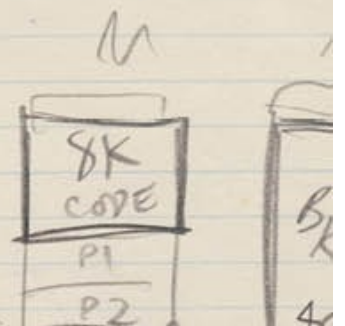
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An Uneasy Quiet

OCTOBER 18, 1989

Ten minutes before three a.m. I woke up and lay in bed, foggy and apprehensive. Waiting for the shaking to start.

Then it shook – or rolled, or rumbled – and I lay there with my heart racing, not sure if I’d dreamt it. I got up and turned on the TV and waited for them to say something about an earthquake, and when they didn’t I went back to bed.

I couldn’t get back to sleep. Fifteen minutes later, the next one hit. That one gave the building a good shake. Now I’m sitting out here in the living room in front of the TV, listening to the audio from KCBS and the calls coming in to confirm the times and magnitudes: 4.2 at 2:53, 5.0 at 3:14.

The weirdest thing is the way you feel them before they hit. It’s like when you’ve been on a boat all day, and you go to sleep that night and as you’re drifting off you feel the pitching and rolling just as if you were still on the water.

□ □ □

The big one hit yesterday, just after 5 pm. I was home, at my Mac. When the shaking started I got up and stood in the doorway until the CD I’d been listening to (*¡Oye Listen! Compacto Caliente*) started to skip. The power went out. The SPA *Karateka* plaque fell. The bookcases moved away from the wall. CDs cascaded onto the floor. Car alarms and other alarms started going off down in the street. I couldn’t believe it when I heard later on the radio that it had only lasted 15 seconds.

It stopped and I stood there dazed. The window opposite mine went up and the building manager’s face peered out. We looked at each other until he went away. There was smoke and sirens and people were pouring out into the streets. I felt an overwhelming urge to get outside. As I passed the hall table I stepped around Tomi’s huge mirror, lying shattered on the floor. I hadn’t heard it fall.

I took the stairs down. Huge cracks had appeared in all the walls, including over my doorway, and there was plaster on the carpet.

Downstairs, I met the manager and two girls I’d never seen before. The tall blond one (from 201) put her hand on my shoulder and said “Are you OK? You look terrible!” Soon there was a little group gathered in front of the building. In ten minutes I’d met more of my neighbors than in fifteen months of living here.

The blond girl had a Walkman and passed on information as it came in. We didn’t know how bad it was or when it had struck. For all we knew, LA had been leveled and we’d just felt the tail end of it. The numbers started coming in: 5.5, 5.6, 5.9. The baseball game was called. The traffic flow picked up – back to normal rush hour. The car alarms and smoke alarms stopped and everything was quiet. Only there was this strange dark cloud on the horizon over Oakland.

I went upstairs and checked the damage. The phone and power were still out. I rejoined the people outside. Bob (the manager) and Larry (the owner) were making a quick inspection of the building. I wondered where Tomi was. She’d been supposed to meet Rob Finkelstein in Menlo Park to watch the game on TV. I looked around and there she was, coming down the sidewalk. I’d never been so happy to see someone.

We sat in her car and listened to the radio. When we heard that some buildings had fallen down south of Market, and a 50-foot section of the Bay Bridge had collapsed, it finally started to sink in that we were in the middle of a major event. By now they were calling it 6.9 or 7.0.

I took Tomi upstairs and showed her the damage. She was impressed. It seemed like it would be a good idea to get out of the city, but the radio was telling everyone to stay put, and the prospect of getting stuck in a mass exodus of bumper-to-bumper traffic was not appealing. In the end we decided to risk it. I felt very disloyal, walking out the front door past my fellow neighbors with a suitcase. “Gettin’ out of town, huh?” said Larry the building owner, with the contempt of a true San Franciscan. “Smart.”

That drive was scary. All the signal lights were out, and rush-hour traffic through the Presidio was heavier than usual. I didn’t know if Tomi had gone ahead or was waiting behind; I cursed myself for having let us get separated. It seemed like a real possibility that traffic would grind to a complete halt (was the bridge even open?) and we’d have to abandon our cars. If that happened, we’d never find each other. As I came over the hill I saw fires burning in the Marina.

Then, with relief, I saw Tomi had pulled over on Lyon St. Once we got on the Golden Gate Bridge it was smooth sailing. We went to her house in Mill Valley and sat watching the TV news coverage as the incredible footage started coming in. Me with a growing sense of loss at having left the city, wishing I'd stayed to be part of it. But it was good to have power and food. We went to the movies, in the earthquake-proof Sequoia Twin.

OCTOBER 19, 1989

Back in the city. Took a walk down to the Marina to see the burned-out buildings and make sure Larry Hing's was still standing. (It was.) The power was still out in places, and a lot of streets were closed off, but by and large it looked like people were going about their lives as usual.

The extent of the damage in my building: no hot water, no elevator, no lights in the lobby or stairwell, and the fire escape is sealed off as a "Restricted Zone."

NOVEMBER 20, 1989

NYU film school application arrived. I've started to fill it out. How terrifying.

Robert is in town. We drove to Berkeley for dinner. (Crossed the Bay Bridge for the first time since the quake.) He's euphoric at having escaped the industrial park and started a new life at Yale. That's part of why I'm so eager to go to NYU.

NOVEMBER 21, 1989

Virginia called to give me the post-mortem on *In the Dark*. She is no longer involved. She says James Alex is crazy and self-destructive and they could have made this movie, but he blew it by getting involved with the Abramoff brothers, and so on.

NOVEMBER 28, 1989

George called and asked if I wanted to fly out and drive from Texas to L.A. with him this weekend. I said sure, why not. It'll get me out of the house, and give me the chance to check out some film schools.

NOVEMBER 30, 1989

[*Texas*] Sitting on the curb outside exit C-2 on the upper level of Dallas Fort Worth airport. My plane got in at three, I missed the 3:30 bus, and the next one doesn't leave till 5:30. It's a two-hour bus ride and I'm not even sure of being met at the end of it. I have no way of contacting George. His phone has been disconnected, and who knows if he'll get any of the messages I've left at the Texasville inn. In other words: a typical George situation.

DECEMBER 1, 1989

Spent the day with George and Cindy getting the last few shots for George's documentary. Rusty Lindeman, celebrated wildcatter and first citizen of Wichita Falls (and the model for Jeff Bridges' character in the movie), and his daughter took us out to lunch.

Rusty said: "I've never paid rent or made a payment on a house. Never in my life." As in, why pay good money to live in someone else's house when there's so much land around and you can build one yourself? He gave me a toothbrush. "The dentist gives me one ever' time I see him, and they just keep on building up in the glove compartment of my pickup."

DECEMBER 2, 1989

[*Albuquerque*] Freezing my butt off in the McDonald's parking lot, waiting for Janice Kim to show up. She works nights at Video World down the block. We're going to have a cup of coffee and then hit the road again.

George wants to drive straight through the night. I think he's crazy. We've been on the road since 8 this morning and he's snoring within 30 seconds every time he closes his eyes. If he falls asleep at the wheel we will both die.

DECEMBER 3, 1989

[*Pasadena*] Yes, you read it right. Despite all my resistance, George wore me down and we drove straight through the night. We took turns napping in the passenger seat, stopping only once (I pulled over to the side of the road 100 miles from LA, just before sunrise, and slept for an hour). We pulled up in front of the Castle Green Apts. at 8 a.m., 24 hours and two time zones after we left Archer City.

DECEMBER 4, 1989

With George in L.A. Checked out AFI. I'll still apply, but I'm pretty sure I'd rather go to NYU. I didn't get a sense

of the excitement or community of a large university. It was just a beautiful bunch of buildings in the Hollywood hills, next to a Catholic girls' school. When class is over you go to the parking lot and get in your car and drive to the Hamburger Hamlet, or home, or something.

DECEMBER 12, 1989

[Back in SF] A great review in *Computer Gaming World*, by Charles Ardai. He called *POP* "the *Star Wars* of its field." I'm quoting it heavily in my resumé. Also got a plug in Bob Schwabach's syndicated column, which should help Christmas sales.

Alan Weiss, back from Japan, says Tosei is eager to do the Game Boy conversion but is waffling on Nintendo. We discussed the possibility of doing Sega and NEC versions instead. It's a tough sell. In any case, Game Boy looks like it's happening, which is great news. They can't start till March, but they hope to finish by June.

Danny Gorlin has offered to do the Amiga conversion.

JANUARY 10, 1990

Larry Turman agreed to write me a recommendation for NYU. He thinks NYU and USC are the best schools. His son Andrew just started at USC.

Prince of Persia won "Game of the Year" from *Computer Entertainer* magazine, according to Brian.

JANUARY 11, 1990

Made a six-minute demo tape of *POP* on the Broderbund video editing console, to submit to film schools. It took me six hours.

Late dinner with Roland at Marin Joe's. We stayed past midnight discussing our past and future in the industry. I proposed that when he's done with *Print Shop Companion*, we start a software company together. I'll design the games (starting with *POP 2*) and he can program them.

The truth is, I *like* going into the office every week. I'd go crazy if I had to sit at home all the time. Anyway, it's another gumball in the gumball machine of life.

I pitched Bill McDonagh on Amiga *POP*. I asked for \$20,000 advances, to pass on to Danny Gorlin.

"Can we collateralize it against your other royalties?" he asked. I said sure, why not. He beamed like a kid: "What a guy! Even I can't think of a reason to say no to that."

JANUARY 16, 1990

Stopped by Broderbund to pick up my December royalty check: \$4,000.

Scott and Nicki came by. They're already six weeks behind on the Mac conversion. I broke it to Nicki that her graphics weren't good enough and we'd have to get someone else. She was crushed. It was *terrible*. I've never felt so awful.

JANUARY 21, 1990

Idea for *POP 2*: Shadow Man! I even drew up a sketch for the package front. It shows the Shadow Man standing alone on a craggy cliff, backlit by the full moon. It's bold, as sequels go. But will it play in Persia?

JANUARY 25, 1990

A week of Broderbund days. Monday I signed the Amiga contract with Danny Gorlin and had lunch with Ed Bernstein. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday I spent sitting at an IBM screen pushing pixels in an attempt to get Jim St. Louis's EGA versions of my original Apple character animations to look decent.

Jim's work is dismayingly bad. I'm not sure he's saved us any time at all. I've got no choice but to redo it. What at first seemed like a fun thing to do for a couple of days has turned into a massive project. Three days, and I'm burnt out and not even half finished.

Brian and Lance are thrilled to have me coming in every day, even though it's for a bad reason. The first day, I worked in Lance's room, the last two in Brian's. Brian in particular is happy as a clam. We just got another rave review (*Nibble* magazine), the customer response cards are uniformly "Excellent," the IBM version is starting to come together... and now that he's got me under his wing, he's confident everything will go smoothly.

Dad delivered his new music, which he and Tom Rettig are both pleased with. (Dad: "This is the first music I've written that I've really liked." Tom: "This is the most exciting project I've ever worked on.") Even Lance likes it.

Doug brought Ken and Roberta Williams by today and I showed them IBM *Prince*. (Ken: "Great animation.") Doug then explained that he was losing me to the movies, and that in an effort to forestall this he'd written me a bad recommendation for NYU.

Alan Weiss has been removed from the job, putting *Prince's* future on NES and Game Boy temporarily in doubt. Dianne Drosnes is taking over licensing. Tomi and I have already talked to her. A Nintendo license might mean an advance of \$150,000, and again that much in royalties... enough to pay for three years of film school... so it's worth politicking for.

Getting *Prince* onto as many different formats as possible (maximizing my future income stream) is all very well, but what's really grabbing my attention these days is the potential for something bigger. Dad's suggestion that I make a franchise out of *Prince* sequels, Doug's offer that I captain a new graphic-adventure line for Broderbund, and my own idea of starting a company with Tomi, Roland, or Lance, are all sort of churning around in the back of my mind; I'm just waiting for them to coalesce into some really irresistible form.

JANUARY 26, 1990

The character animations for IBM *Prince* are a big job. I've put in thirty hours this week and I'm barely halfway through. It turns out that what I'm doing is not, as billed, a "polish" of Jim St. Louis's work, but a complete overhaul. In some cases I've even had to go back to the Apple originals.

I hope Jim doesn't notice that all his work has been redone when he sees the published product. I actually feel worse about the possibility that his feelings will be hurt than I do about having wasted time and money paying for work I'm now having to redo myself.

It's all coming together. Sound effects, music, graphics. Tom Rettig, Dad, and Leila have outdone themselves; they've given this project the best work they're capable of, and more of their time than Brian or I had a right to expect.

This is going to be the definitive version of *Prince of Persia*. With VGA and sound card, on a fast machine, it'll blow the Apple away. (In contrast, none of the *Karateka* conversions was as good as the Apple original.) If it makes its new April release date, it'll be shown at Computerfest in May. I hope so. God, I hope it's as big a hit as it deserves to be.

Everything *seems* to be going right. The Apple version hasn't received any marketing push as of yet (and is selling a lackluster 500 or so units a month, as against 1,500 for a normal *Carmen Sandiego* title), but the reviews have been glowing enough to hold everyone's attention. Everything depends on how the IBM version sells. (IBM *Carmen* is selling 5,000 units a month.)

In three months we should have some idea. The waiting is driving me crazy.

This isn't such a bad business to be in. Now that I'm going to leave, I'm starting to miss it. It's *more* fun now that I'm not programming by myself. I think it would be fun to start a software company to make games, or educational games.

But how can I do that while enrolled as a full-time graduate student at NYU? To try to do both at the same time would be folly. I don't want to short-shrift NYU the way I short-shrifted Yale.

I don't want to spend another three years moving pixels around, even though it would be fun. I want to make *movies*.

I'm so confused.

JANUARY 31, 1990

Another Broderbund week. I'm so tired of coloring in these frames, I see paint in front of my eyes when I fall asleep at night. But it's worth it. Two weeks of back-aching work, away from the new screenplay, is a reasonable price to pay for an IBM version as spectacular as this one is turning out to be - especially since the same graphics will be used in the Amiga, Atari ST, and CPC versions.

And it is spectacular. It fulfills all my hopes of what a VGA version might look like. With its 3-D shaded backgrounds and cleanly drawn animated characters, it looks like a Disney film. I think when people see it with

the new characters, they'll flip out. John Baker stopped by Lance's desk on his way out, and was stunned by the opening sequence with the new music. "That is *hot!*" he said, a most un-Baker-like utterance.

Politically, the situation couldn't be better. IBM *Prince of Persia* is being touted as a test case, an example of what the Broderbund in-house machine can do. If it hits, it'll be a vindication of all John Baker's efforts during his tenure at Broderbund to develop an effective system to run PD.

The truth is, in this case the "system" benefited from a lot of unofficial work by the original author - if I'd spent the past seven months off in Europe and Dad hadn't done new music, it would have gotten done just as fast but it wouldn't have been as good - but that's irrelevant. It's better for it to be viewed as an in-house triumph rather than mine. That perception will help ensure that it gets a fair shake in QA, marketing, promotion and sales.

FEBRUARY 2, 1990

Another lackluster month for Apple *POP* sales: 600-odd units. This in a month when *Karateka* sold 200, *Wings of Fury* 400, and *Ancient Art of War* 700 - in short, it's selling no better than the old, established, dying Apple II games that came out a few years ago.

In the same month, the Apple version of *Where in Time is Carmen Sandiego?* sold 15,000 units.

It's frustrating. The reviews all say it's the greatest Apple game in the history of the world. Where are the 15,000 Apple owners who bought *Carmen Time* this month? Do they read those magazines? Do they even know this game exists?

Patience, Mechner. It took seven months after release for *Karateka* to have its first big month (June 1985, 12,000 units). *POP* has only had four.

(But *POP* sold in at 3,000 units. This means the stores haven't been reordering. Why not? I can't shake this fear that something terrible is happening -- that it's going to die.)

Relax. The IBM version is on its way. What happens with the Apple II version won't matter so much.

God, I want this game to be a hit so badly. It's the best game I know how to make. As far as I can see, I've done everything right. If it doesn't become a hit, I don't want to be in this business any more.

At least I've applied to NYU. But if *POP* isn't a hit, how am I going to pay for it? \$13,000 bucks a year! And the cost of living in the city...

The IBM version isn't going to ship till *April*. Three months. I've got to get my mind off this somehow.

Like, by finishing my next screenplay.

By the time *Deathbounce* died, I'd already forgotten it. Four months after *Karateka* shipped, when it was looking like a dud, I felt only mild disappointment - I was concentrating on my schoolwork.

If *Prince of Persia* fails, it's going to take the heart right out of me.

I want to travel to foreign countries. Someplace exotic and romantic that's completely different from the USA. India maybe. China. Russia. If I don't do it now I'll never be able to do it again - not the way you travel when you're young: looking for answers in everything, hoping to fall in love.

FEBRUARY 5, 1990

Another day at Broderbund. Today I didn't even get to work on the graphics. All I did was meet with people: Henry Yamamoto (NEC 9801 version, looking good after three months' work; possibly other Japanese versions); Dianne Drosnes (game machine licensing); Roland (3.5" Apple II version; we fixed the bug that was causing all the trouble); and, of course, Tom, Lance, and Leila.

The IBM version impresses everyone who sees it. I'm feeling very confident.

I also talked to Jim Alex. He told me that I was going to be a hot property very soon and he wants to make my next script as well. That he had a first-look deal with Paramount, but that he left the lot because it was too much trouble to find parking, and is now close to making a deal with not just one but two other studios, MGM and Universal. He said: "I promise you this movie will get made." At around this point it dawned on me that I was talking to a man on the verge of a complete psychological breakdown. It's not only that I don't believe him, it's that it's logically impossible for all of his statements to be true simultaneously.

Meanwhile, Larry Turman sent me a copy of the recommendation he wrote me for NYU. Warm and glowing. Now *there* is a producer, and a gentleman. He may not be riding a hot streak at the moment, but I'd work with him again in a second if the chance presented itself. The more experiences I have, the more I realize that working with people you like and respect is more important than anything else.

FEBRUARY 8, 1990

Got a call from Jack Abramoff, Jim Alex's backer on *In the Dark*. He asked if I could write a synopsis of the story for him. He also asked if I had any casting suggestions for the lead teenage girl role. He seemed like a nice guy, even though everything I've heard is to the contrary. He told me he'd made *Red Scorpion*.

"I'll have to rent it," I said.

He laughed. "Don't bother. Unless you're a Rambo freak."

VGA IBM *POP* went into QA on Tuesday.

"It's Dying Out There"

POO ON BIKES



“It’s Dying Out There”

FEBRUARY 22, 1990

Dianne Drosnes hailed me in the parking lot and told me she was following up on *POP* and, in addition to Nintendo and Game Boy, would try to license it for a coin-op.

FEBRUARY 23, 1990

Broderbund ten-year anniversary party.

MARCH 5, 1990

Today was a glorious summer day. I got to Broderbund in time to go with Brian, Rob, Dane and Ed to China Camp for a picnic by the bay.

Saw the new NEC 9801 *Prince* from Japan. It’s beautiful. It blew me away. What a great feeling. As Lance said: “It’s like seeing the movie version of a book you wrote.”

Doug came in all excited about making *Prince of Persia* Roland MT-32 compatible. Nice thought, but it would mean slipping the release date. We talked him out of it, but just barely.

Apple *Prince* sold fewer than 150 units last month. It’s dying out there. This is unbelievable. Laurie reported to me a remark made by Latricia T., Marketing Manager: “It’s only an arcade game, and arcade games don’t sell.”

Time for me to take Latricia to lunch.

If only there were some way of harnessing Doug’s enthusiasm and putting it to use.

What I need is simple: (1) A marketing push for the IBM version. (2) Licensing to game machines.

Latricia and Dianne, respectively, hold my fate in their hands. And neither of them knows anything about computer games, or has any idea what makes this one special.

MARCH 6, 1990

Drove to Forest Knolls where Danny Gorlin lives. He showed me his setup. We had lunch in Fairfax. It was a nostalgic day, recalling everything the software business once meant to me, and I’d write a lot more about it, if I weren’t going to Cuba.

MARCH 7, 1990

Roland came over for breakfast and we installed an extra 1 MB in my Mac. Roland tested it out by creating an 8,000-page document in MS Word.

MARCH 9, 1990

Lunch with Latricia, Sophie and Jessica. Latricia didn’t seem to want to talk about *Prince of Persia*, so we talked about my Hollywood adventures instead. It’s true what Laurie said: Latricia *doesn’t* like this game. Even Sophie and Jessica are enthusiastic, but to Latricia, it’s an arcade game, and “arcade games don’t sell.”

A really good review by the Game Wardens.

The 3.5” version of Apple *POP* finally signed out of QA today.

The IBM version is down to the last few bugs, and O God, it’s a thing of beauty. Playing it is a pleasure, even for me. It’s the most beautiful game I’ve ever seen. And I’m not the only one who’s saying that. If this version doesn’t sell 100,000 copies, there is no justice in the world.

Dianne stopped by and told me she was submitting it to Konami. Thank God she’s in there trying. I hope they sell a few before the bottom drops out of the cartridge business.

The tension is just about unbearable. This game *should* be a major hit. It should sell 250,000 copies. In the best case, if it gets licensed to game machines and coin-ops, I could end up making over a million bucks. Alternatively, everything could just... fizzle.

I won’t really know till May. Two more months.

NYU called to say they never got Doug's letter of recommendation. I had to call and ask him to write a new one. I think it annoyed him. He's also probably annoyed about the Roland MT-32 fiasco, where he tried to do me a favor and thanks in part to my lack of enthusiasm, it blew up in his face.

MARCH 27, 1990

Got a \$2,000 check from James Alex, renewing the option on *In the Dark*.

IBM *POP* signoff looks imminent. I invited Lance, Leila, Brian, Tom and Oliver to dinner Friday to celebrate.

MARCH 29, 1990

All versions of IBM *POP* have signed out. Hooray! On the horizon: Amiga and Mac. I'm worried about Scott. It's almost April and I still haven't seen an alpha version.

MARCH 30, 1990

Prince of Persia IBM celebratory dinner at Butler's. Lance, Leila, Brian, Ollie, Tom and me. It was a lot of fun. I paid. They were grateful. It was a good thing to do.

At the company meeting they unveiled the promotional campaign for *Wolf Pack*. Brian and I are seething with jealousy. It makes me sick to think that *Prince of Persia* hasn't received even a tiny fraction of the attention (or money) they're lavishing on this product.

Latricia T., once again you stand between me and perfect happiness!

Brian, John Baker, Tom and Leila would love to have *POP 2* as an in-house project. If I'm going to be off at school, it would be a comfort to have it sheltered under Broderbund's wing.

APRIL 3, 1990

A perfect spring day. I drove out to Danny's to see Amiga *Prince*. He's on schedule! Brian is still maddeningly skeptical. Danny must really have traumatized everyone on *Typhoon Thompson* to engender such distrust.

A great piece of news: Tandy's decided to stock *Prince of Persia*. They chose it over *Wolf Pack* - HAH! Take that, Latricia! (Steve Dunphy wrote in his memo to Brian: "Even though Latricia came with me, they decided to order 11,000 units. Imagine how many they would have ordered if I'd gone alone.")

As Brian pointed out, on the strength of this one order, IBM *POP* has already outsold the Apple version 2:1.

MAY 25, 1990

Lunch with Lance today, and a meeting with Ann Kronen about *Prince 2*. She's not willing to commit to a sequel until *Prince* proves itself in the IBM marketplace - i.e., until its trajectory makes it clear that it will sell at least 100,000 units.

I reminded her that I'm going to NYU in the fall, so if I don't do it this summer, I won't be free to start until next June at the earliest. This left her unmoved.

Lance, meanwhile, assured me that he'll do it... in his spare time if necessary.

Everyone is unhappy. Product managers are leaving in droves. Broderbund is going down the sink. Doug is travelling.

Prince just got a rave review from the largest entertainment magazine in France, *Tilt* ("the great Jordan Mechner, author of the unforgettable *Karateka*"... gotta love the French), which nobody at Broderbund will even bother to have translated to find out what it says. Tomi had to translate it for me.

It also got a good response at a "focus group" test Don Panek and Alan Weiss ran at the Northgate mall yesterday afternoon. I dropped in and watched the kids play it through a one-way mirror. All the kids said that if it were available on Nintendo, it would be one of the top two or three cartridges on their shopping lists.

But I'm more worried than ever that despite the incredibly enthusiastic reactions from the few people who've seen it, this game will sink without a splash. People at Broderbund don't know what they've got. And I don't see what more I can do that I haven't already done.

I sure hope NYU lets me in. I don't want to spend another minute here.

MAY 31, 1990

Dinner at Royal Thai with Tomi and the French interviewers from *Tilt* who interviewed me the other day - Dany Boolauck (the most famous computer journalist in Europe, according to Dominique) and Jean-Michel Blottiere. It was a lot of fun. We stayed late drinking beer and talking about the software industry, Europe and America. It's been a long time since I met two such enthusiastic and interesting new people. It was a pleasure.

JUNE 2, 1990

Those bastards! They turned me down! NYU said No!

Ann Norton thinks what probably happened is that since my application wasn't complete till several months after the deadline (because Adaire lost Doug's first letter of recommendation instead of mailing it), they'd already filled all their slots. This might actually be true.

Shit. Now what do I do?

JUNE 7, 1990

I moved out of the attic at 47 Paul. There was a full moon in a bright blue sky with clouds drifting past it. I felt like I was saying goodbye to Broderbund.

It was melancholy, being there at night with an empty desk and all those ghosts. Tomi was there too, sifting through the wreckage of Sensei. I called Robert in L.A. to ask him what I should do with his stuff, and we fell to reminiscing. It wasn't such a bad year-and-a-half. Actually, I remember it quite warmly. But thank God it's over.

Driving away, I felt strangely light, as if throwing away all those papers had set me free. I felt ready for the next thing, and oddly happy. I told Tomi this and she said: "I guess you're more optimistic because you're younger. Or, I don't know, maybe it's your basic personality."

I'm never going to have an office at Broderbund again. It was fun but now it's done.

JUNE 11, 1990

I sent Prof. Charles Milne at NYU a Fed Ex box containing a sheaf of game reviews, copies of *POP* and *Karateka*, and a letter begging him to let me in.

Spent Friday at Broderbund. The conversions are moving ahead (Danny is at beta, Scott is at alpha). Francesca and Jessica reported from CES that all kinds of reviewers and journalists came up to them, unsolicited, and praised *Prince* to the skies. But IBM *Prince* still isn't selling. The reasons most often cited are: (1) it's a conversion (the Apple original having done virtually nothing, the IBM version is left to twist in the wind), and (2) the box stinks (it's an old-fashioned flip-top, and stores don't like those).

Maybe word of mouth and favorable reviews will rescue it in time for Christmas. But I'm worried.

Prince's chances of becoming a hit and my chances of getting into NYU both seem a lot slimmer than they did a month ago.

JUNE 18, 1990

Meeting with Don and Alan to renegotiate the royalty terms for Nintendo and GameBoy *Prince*. Ed Bernstein was absent, even though he'd asked for the meeting, so all Don and Alan could say was that they'd talk to Ed and get back to me.

In a nutshell: My contract (negotiated in 1986 with then-director-of-product-development Ed Bernstein) gives me 10%. Now they want to add a clause allowing them to deduct the cost of goods, which would effectively bring the royalty rate down to 5%. If I don't agree, Broderbund probably won't do Nintendo versions. So I'll probably end up having to swallow it.

JUNE 20, 1990

Just found out something interesting from Alan Weiss. He says SunSoft is interested in licensing *Prince* for up to four formats (NES, GameBoy, and in Japan NEC and Genesis). But they've been told to wait while Broderbund New Ventures considers doing it themselves.

This puts things in a new light. If you look at the bottom line (as opposed to what strategically benefits New Ventures), both Broderbund and I would actually make out better if they take the SunSoft deal.

In a continuing effort to gather meaningless statistics about my own life, I figured out that I've spent about 3,800 hours, or the equivalent of two years' honest work, on *Prince of Persia* over the past four years.

JULY 3, 1990

Prince sold 500 units last month on the IBM, 38 on the Apple. That's about as dead as can be.

JULY 6, 1990

Charles Milne called to say this year's NYU class is overfull and there is nothing he could do for me even if he wanted to. So that's that.

JULY 15, 1990

Broderbund Picnic Friday. Corey showed up for it. Six years since my first one.

Robert submitted *D-Generation* to both Broderbund and EA. EA called him almost immediately and said it was "really hot." Way to go 'Bert!

It's agonizing watching *Prince* fight for life.

I can't walk through the halls at Broderbund without getting congratulated by people from QA and Tech Support I've never met before, telling me what a great game it is. Denis Friedman says it's getting great press in France. I even got a call at home from some kids in Columbus, Ohio, who were stuck on level 12. But when are stores going to start stocking it? When are people going to start *buying* it? AAARGHH!

I don't care if *Prince* does die. I'll bounce back. Sure, I could use the money, and it would be nice to be vindicated for the last four years of work; but I'm young. Most people my age have no savings at all and have never had a success like *Karateka* - or even *In the Dark*, such as it was. And some of *them* are going to become successful screenwriters and directors. So I have just as good a chance as they do. *sigh*

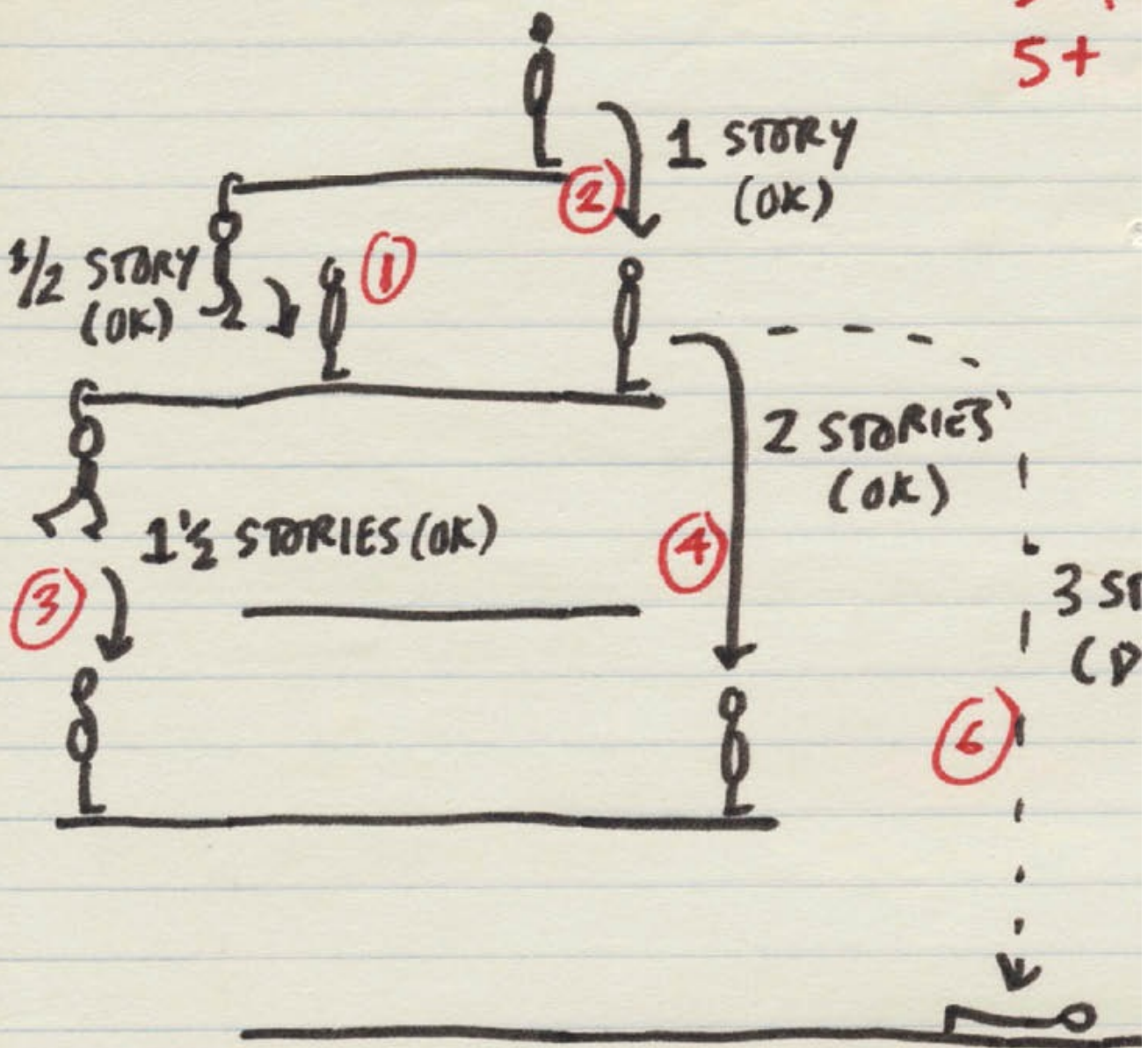
Failure really does weigh on the heart. Even the *shadow* of failure weighs, a little bit.

I hadn't realized how spoiled I was by *Karateka's* success. If I'm going to survive as a filmmaker over the long haul, I'd better learn to deal with failure a lot better than this. Maybe I need to care less about commercial success and concentrate more on fulfilling my own artistic goals. Spending a year hanging out with impoverished intellectuals in NY might be a good thing.

Clinging to Life

DISTANCE

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Clinging to Life

JULY 18, 1990

Dinner with Tomi and Florence in Mill Valley. Florence thinks *Prince* is going to be a big hit in Europe. And some rather startling news (from Doug): NEC *Prince* has already shipped 10,000 units in Japan. Could that be?? It's only sold 7,000 units each on Apple and IBM in the U.S. to date.

JULY 20, 1990

After Spanish class I drove to Forest Knolls to see Danny, who's just about finished with Amiga *Prince*. Then, back at Broderbund, sat around Brian's office for a companionable three hours drinking champagne and beer with a group that eventually dwindled to Brian, Rob, Lance and myself.

"I'm tired of hearing about the good old days of Broderbund," Rob said, when we went out for Mexican food. "I think of the 'good old days' as when Robert was here." It was just how *I* felt.

A new review came out in *PC Resource* magazine that calls *Prince* "one of the three or four best PC games ever."

Meanwhile, the new Broderbund entertainment catalog relegates it to half a page towards the back, between *Centauri Alliance* and *Joan of Arc*.

I've got to start learning deep-breathing meditation exercises, or something.

Karateka was a gift from the gods, a windfall. Without it, I couldn't have done any of this. I'd have had to get a job like everyone else I know. The question that nags at me is: have I made good use of this opportunity? Or have I blown it?

I feel like if *Prince* fails, I'll be a failure.

No point looking back. What can I do *now*? I can do what I can to help speed the Mac version of *Prince*, and try to encourage Broderbund to:

- license it for Nintendo and GameBoy
- bundle it with SoundBlaster
- change the packaging
- advertise it

and, in general, try to galvanize the powers-that-be into giving it the attention and promotion it deserves.

JULY 21, 1990

Pink Floyd is tearing down the wall in Berlin. I want to be there.

Basically, I want to be young and European. Or even young and Central American.

JULY 27, 1990

Since its release in Sept. 1989, *Prince* has sold 9,741 units. In the same period, *Karateka* - a five-year-old game - sold 9,645 units. That's pretty sad.

More irritating facts:

- I walked into Wherehouse Records the other day and they'd never heard of *Prince of Persia*. *Wings of Fury* they had, *Wolf Pack* they had, but not *Prince*.
- Ten months after its release, *Prince* has yet to be licensed to Nintendo, Game Boy, or any other game machine. In short, we've missed a year. If it gets licensed now, it'll be as a Christmas 1991 title. This delay is solely attributable to Broderbund's waffling.
- The other day at the PD25 Xerox machine, I happened to see the tossed-out first page of a letter to *U.S. News and World Report*, presumably from someone in marketing or PR, saying "Enclosed is some information about Broderbund's new games..." and listing four or five, including *Wolf Pack*, but not mentioning *Prince*. I learned this out of turn, so I can't very well complain, but this says a lot.
- *Prince* gets only half a page in the new entertainment catalog, sandwiched between acknowledged duds.

Encouraging facts:

- Reviews are uniformly raves.
- Tandy has ordered 12,500 units.
- SoundBlaster is interested in bundling *Prince* with its sound cards.
- Tomi and Florence reported that Egghead Software was sold out of *Prince*, and that the salesman said: "It's moving."
- NEC pre-orders of 8,000 units in Japan.

I've decided to move to NY anyway. I don't need NYU. I can spend all my money and go into debt making a couple of crappy short films all by myself without their help.

Matthew Patrick's *Graffiti* was awesome. It sustains my faith in the short film as a worthwhile medium. It was better than most of the features that came out of Hollywood this summer.

JULY 28, 1990

Robert called yesterday. He's being courted by two publishers and has just sent *D-Gen* off to a third. (Broderbund turned it down, in the person of Ann Kronen, who proclaimed sweetly: "We don't do action games any more." Ha ha.) Good for Robert.

I can't help wishing I'd had the good luck to have *Prince* rejected by Broderbund so I could have taken it to a publisher who might have actually marketed it... No, I'm not that cynical. Yet.

Broderbund has done two conversions, IBM and NEC, better than I had a right to expect. And EA probably would not have offered me an 8% royalty on the IBM version. If *Prince* takes off now, I'll have no cause for complaint.

But these last four months have made me bitter.

JULY 31, 1990

NEC *POP* sales are up to 9,000.

Latricia is pursuing the SoundBlaster bundling opportunity. She's hoping to get \$8/unit.

Sophie has put in a request for advertising funds.

IBM *POP* sold 1,350 units in July - four digits!

Henry says there's a lot of interest in Japan in doing a sequel.

Tom Marcus says the Japan sales have raised interest in licensing. He's already gotten a call from Dianne Drosnes (who's now at Sega).

Maybe there's hope.

AUGUST 3, 1990

Brian showed me a LAN message from a sales rep saying "*Prince* is the hottest thing in Phoenix! *Prince of Persia* fever is spreading! Do we have any more games coming up by Jordan Mechner?"

Also got a fan letter from Malaysia.

Please God, maybe it'll be a hit after all.

AUGUST 6, 1990

Scott came in with the new version of Mac *Prince*. We're not going to make Christmas, but at least it showed some tangible improvement. We decided to use the NEC graphics.

Lunch with Doug. He was sorry about the letter of recommendation, and that *Prince* isn't doing better. I told him it wasn't his fault. He's excited for me that I'm going off to make films in New York.

AUGUST 7, 1990

Latricia's resigned as director of marketing. I learned this at lunch today with her and Sophie. The instant she said it, I felt a sudden flow of good will toward her for whom my heart had hitherto held only hatred, and for the rest of the lunch I was cheerful and charming.

It's true her departure will leave a void in marketing that will probably mean that nothing gets done for the next

six months; but still, better incompetence than malevolence.

A two-page spread on *Prince* in *PC Computer Gamer's Strategy Magazine*. Sophie and I read it together. It was a rave. It was also one of the most thoughtful reviews I'd read. It was clear the writer had played the game all the way through. He appreciated the things most reviewers tend to overlook in favor of the great graphics. Maybe this will inspire Sophie to do some marketing.

AUGUST 8, 1990

A pleasant lunch with Ed Bernstein.

AUGUST 10, 1990

Went to lunch with Robert and Presage - Dane, Scott, Steve Ohmert, Ed and Chris - in Richmond. Got Scott all jazzed up about Mac *Prince*.

AUGUST 24, 1990

[Back from New York] My first day back and I'm already desperate to get out of here.

Checking in with Broderbund was, as usual, infuriating. Another great review. A bunch of fan mail. And the chilling news that one major chain, Electronics Boutique, has recalled the title due to lack of sales. ("It's a great game, but the box was horrible," explained the saleswoman in the mall.) I don't know how much more of this I can take before I throw a fit in Doug's office.

AUGUST 31, 1990

Another pleasant lunch with Ed Bernstein. I cheered him up about his career prospects.

Virgin Mastertronic wants to license *Prince* for NES and GameBoy in the U.S. Virgin's not a big force in the Nintendo market, but that's still the best news I've heard in a long while. Both Alan and Ed Bernstein have pledged their assistance. This time, I'm not going to sit by and let the deal fall apart through lack of (Broderbund) interest as happened with SunSoft six months ago. I need the money!

Broderbund's also had an offer from Japan - two offers, actually - for the Sega rights there. Things are finally starting to look up.

Also, the Tandy order shipped: 12,000 units, doubling in one stroke the IBM sales to date.

The bad news: It's true. EB has de-listed and recalled *Prince* in all formats.

SEPTEMBER 20, 1990

I'm writing this, believe it or not, in the cab of a Ryder rent-a-truck going 65 mph down I-80, driven by Roland Gustafsson. We've just crossed into Nebraska and are determined to make Omaha tonight.

Back up a few days...

I caught Doug before I left and expressed my concerns about *Prince's* marketing. He was surprisingly sympathetic. Before I'd even had a chance to complain much, he agreed with everything, and right then and there put out a message to Sophie K. on E-mail suggesting that they redo *Prince* as a candy box. "I can't really lean on her any harder than that," he said apologetically. "I'm sorry - I feel so powerless."

I dropped by Sophie's office too, and expressed some of the same concerns I'd expressed to Doug. She was infuriatingly unsympathetic. She was happy to chit-chat about my trip to New York, my life there, etc., but when it came to *Prince* - forget it. I left her office with steam coming out of my ears and my face hardened into a pleasant smile.

She didn't even have the decency to commiserate, to say "Gee, it's too bad this game isn't selling better." She as much as told me that 1,000 units a month is all this product *deserves* to be selling. And this is the product's *marketing manager* speaking.

After that I had an even more upsetting meeting with Brian, of all people. He told me that Ann had offered to pay \$2,500 of the (estimated \$15,000) cost of the Mac *POP* graphics, not a penny more, and I'd have to pay the rest out of my pocket. I gave him all the arguments as to why Broderbund should pay half the cost, at least. We argued for a while and then he said, in the heat of argument: "We just can't justify spending that much money on a product that we don't even know for sure there's going to be a market for."

I almost blew up, but then I saw the expression on Brian's face looked so miserable, I couldn't bear to continue. I knew he was just repeating what Ann had told him. *Prince* has no better champion than Brian. He's been fighting for a year. He's powerless, that's all.

So we agreed to continue the discussion later, and I went to lunch with Rob. My last Broderbund lunch.

Today, from a pay phone at a Wyoming truck stop, I got Ann to agree to pay a third of the graphics cost and Presage to agree to pay a third. My share will be deducted from my royalties (cross-collateralized, at Ann's insistence). Fine, as long as it gets done. I just hope Leila can do it all without me there to guide her, and without going over budget.

Brian says they're desperate for *Prince* in Europe. Domark showed it unofficially at CES in England and it made quite a stir. I hope they can get their respective acts together and release it sometime soon. It's already been pirated on the Amiga.

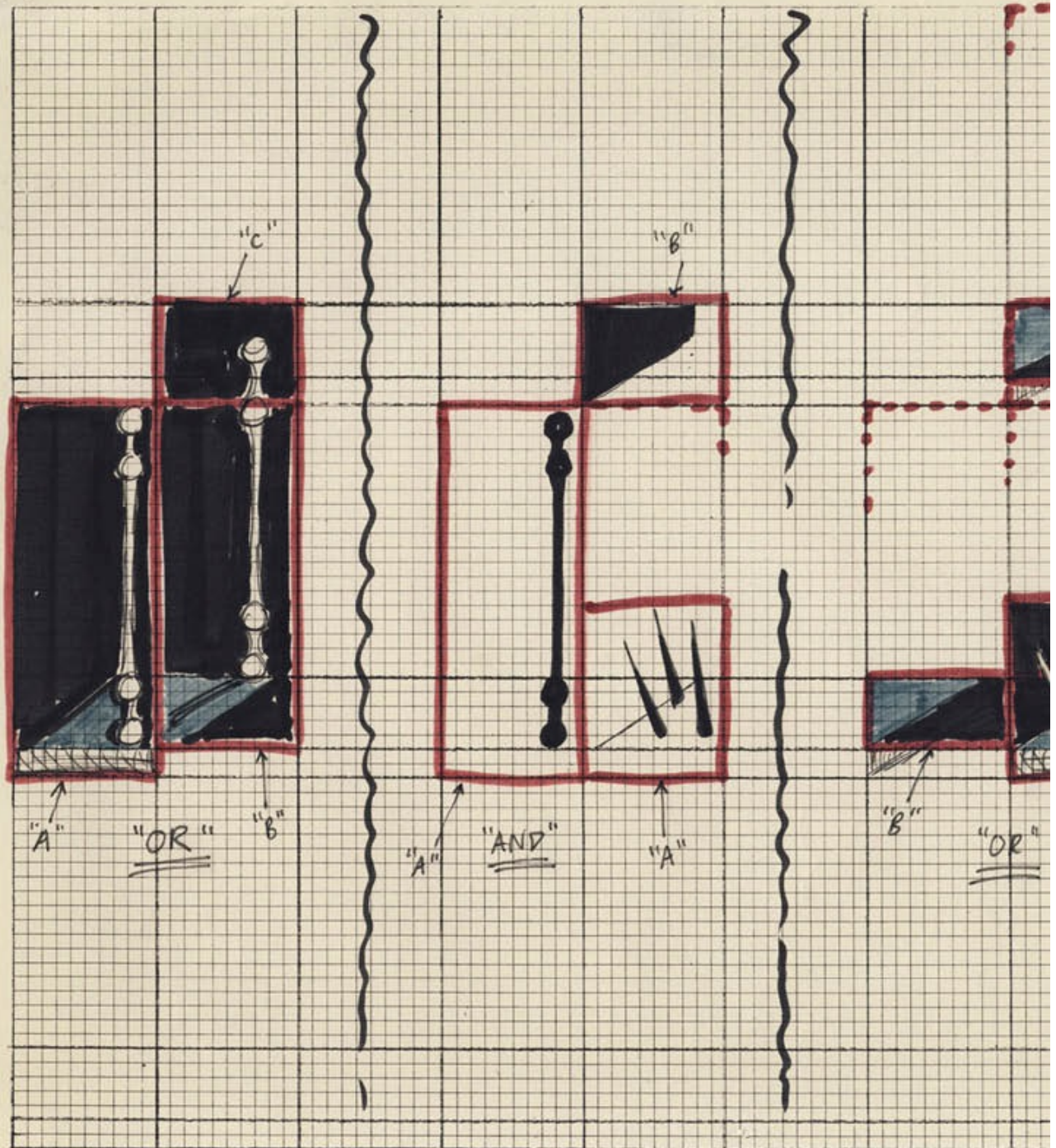
SEPTEMBER 21, 1990

Brian said: "You know what? Sophie walked into my office this morning and said 'What would you think about reprinting the *Prince* box as a candy box?' Of course, I said 'Why yes, I think it's a fine idea!' I've only been *begging* her to make it a candy box for the past twelve months. Something must have happened to make her change her mind. Maybe because Latricia left, now she's finally starting to make decisions on her own."

"Maybe," I agreed.

I guess Doug still has a little bit of pull around Broderbund.

New York



New York

SEPTEMBER 23, 1990

We did it. Thanks to Robert and Roland, I'm in my new apartment, surrounded by all my stuff. It's like a dream – to be in New York City, and to be home, at the same time. The city is lying out there waiting to be conquered. I'm so happy to be here.

I'd write more, but I have to get up at 4:30 am to report to Kevin's for the first day of shooting. I'd feel better about it if I weren't already about 19 hours short on sleep and every muscle in my body weren't already sore.

SEPTEMBER 25, 1990

First day of shooting. After this past week, I suppose it's only fitting that my job as "production coordinator" should turn out to consist largely of carrying boxes and equipment up and down stairs, loading and unloading vans and trucks, and driving them around the city in heavy traffic. Such is fate.

It'll be character-building. One week of this, I can handle. And if my goal was to meet NYU film students, I'm certainly meeting a lot of them.

My boss is Deborah, Kevin's girlfriend and production manager. Then there's Rick (assistant director), Nick (D.P.), Steve (assistant camera), Rob (gaffer), Paul (gaffer and Kevin's roommate), Mark (sound), and Marcy (boom). And the actors.

Man, it's different, having a boss. Deborah is the type who makes sure you're sorry for every little error. The others I got along with better, although Mark and Marcy (the sound team) do seem to spend a lot of time bickering. In the van on the way home, Rob asked me if I had any short screenplays for him to direct.

Two days of rest at this point would do wonders. Unfortunately, that's not in the cards. My alarm is set for 4:20 am to drive back to Brooklyn.

I can't even think about the big issues, like that I've just moved to a new city and am sharing an apartment with my brother. I just don't have the mental energy right now.

Virginia wrote to say she's getting married.

SEPTEMBER 26, 1990

16-hour day, most of it spent driving around in the van. To wit: pick up dogs and trainers and bring them to set; drive to ambulance rental place and take Polaroids of ambulances for Kevin; drive to midtown Manhattan to pick up insurance certificates; drive back to Garfield Place, make pot of coffee, bring it to set. I spent at least two hours stopped in traffic in the rain on Broadway and on Flatbush.

Today was frustrating, but I have to remind myself why I'm here: To (1) help Kevin by making his shoot go smoothly any way I can, (2) earn my entree into this NYU-film community, (3) learn something about student filmmaking. So there's no point resenting Deborah for, say, sending me on a wild-goose chase to Manhattan during rush hour when a simple phone call would have determined that the trip was unnecessary, or for keeping me so busy with errands that I hardly get to spend any time on set. It's all part of my education. Like boot camp.

David read *Bird of Paradise* and pronounced it much improved. I should show it to Kevin when the shoot is over. And Cindy. And Irv. It would be good to get some professional opinions beyond friends and family.

SEPTEMBER 27, 1990

Really enjoyed today. I got to spend the whole morning on set in Prospect Park. I decided to shadow Rob, the sound man. I asked him a few questions and he was happy to explain everything and even let me listen through the headphones. I bet I could learn to do sound pretty quickly. (Maybe I could do sound on Rob's thesis film when he shoots it next June?)

I'm finally starting to learn my way around Brooklyn. The filmmaking aspects of this job aside, it's a great way to get to know a new city fast. I've lost my fear of driving in New York. After these three days, nothing can faze me.

I can't believe it's been only three days. It seems like a whole epoch in my life.

I need sleep.

SEPTEMBER 29, 1990

Yesterday I left the set early (2 pm) to take care of some of personal stuff like: opening a bank account, getting renter's insurance, touching base with Broderbund, etc. I did it all in a single afternoon. Thanks to this film shoot, I've reached new heights of efficiency in my own affairs.

Today we shot interiors at Garfield, and I picked up the first dailies at Precision on 9th and 45th. We watched them in Kevin's living room. They looked great.

Yesterday Deborah gave me a blistering lecture: "Why does everything seem to be so *confused* with you?" It's true; having spent the past several days as a gofer, I now have a much clearer idea of what skill set and personality would make the best fucking gofer in the world, and I'm not it. Listening to Deborah lay into me, it occurred to me that she's not the greatest production manager in the world, either, and needs all the help she can get. Once I took that attitude, things started to get better right away. I think we're on the road to a passable working relationship.

Rob Sherwin gave me his treatment to read.

Three hours of sleep coming up. I can't wait.

OCTOBER 1, 1990

Yesterday we shot in the subway.

Today was Steadicam day. I made my screen debut as Bart's friend who comes to pick him up. I got to wear a suit and tie.

Tomorrow is my last official day. Deborah is begging me to stay on.

OCTOBER 3, 1990

Spent my day off setting up my bedroom and office, buying household items, etc. It felt strange not being on the shoot. I guess I really should stick it out until the end. It's only one more week.

Deborah had this to say about NYU: "They say it's a three-year program, but it really takes five years. You can expect to spend \$2,000 on your first-year film, \$10,000 second year, and \$20,000 third year. Add that to three years' tuition, and you've spent a hundred thousand dollars. What I would do, if you have the wherewithal - I mean, three years and \$100,000 - is spend those three years working for free on every film shoot you can. At the end of it, you'll know how a film gets made; everybody will owe you favors, so you'll have a crew; the equipment rental places and the labs will know you, so they might give you a deal too. Take the \$100,000 and make a feature! Then you'll *be* a filmmaker." She sighed and said: "But no one ever does that. They come around like you're doing, and ask a lot of questions, and I tell them what I just told you, and then they go off and enroll in the program."

OCTOBER 4, 1990

Ambulance/extras day. It rained. I'm definitely coming down with a virus.

I promised to work tomorrow (half day) and Tuesday and Wednesday. Deborah was thrilled.

OCTOBER 6, 1990

The phone man came yesterday and changed my life. Three weeks of calling people from pay phones, and I'd almost forgotten what it's like to have a phone in the house. Any time I feel like talking to someone, I can just pick up the phone and call. Wow. An amazing luxury.

Talked to Roland, Ann Norton, Robert, Brian, and, this morning, Tomi. I also bought a modem and hooked into Broderbund's QuickMail system.

What will I do when this shoot is over? Put a final polish on *Bird of Paradise*, of course, and send it off. Start thinking about ideas for short films. Start working on the *Prince 2* design. The Mac *Prince* graphics. And maybe, just for fun, rent a 16mm camera and shoot a roll of film...

OCTOBER 8, 1990

An expensive day. Acquired a CD player (\$270) and a Mac color card and monitor (\$1,000). But it had to be done.

Robert read *Bird of Paradise* and really liked it. It was very gratifying.

Tom Marcus called to bring me up to date on Nintendo licensing. They've been stalling Virgin in hopes that a major Japanese player will make an offer. Hope they don't lose the whole thing.

OCTOBER 10, 1990

Shoot's over. Mark Netter was hilarious during dailies, doing ad-lib voice-overs that had us on the floor. The wrap was quite emotional, actually. Rode home with Mark, Nick Sigman and Jenniphyr Goodman. "I'm gonna get so depressed," Mark said. "Post-partum depression." He and Nick tried to cheer themselves up by blasting Rockabilly Classics.

Finally met the elusive Jackie Garry, who everyone has been telling me is from my hometown. To my relief, she'd hated high school. "Couldn't wait to get out of there," she said. Saved me from a round of whatever-happened-to.

OCTOBER 11, 1990

Two DHL packages arrived this morning, one containing a spanking-new color monitor, the other one from Brian containing Studio 8 and Macromind Director. I downloaded Leila's latest graphics via QuickMail (90 minutes for 6 screens). Happily, they look good.

NOVEMBER 16, 1990

I'd forgotten how gloriously warm and sunny New York can sometimes be for a few days in late fall, just when you're getting resigned to winter.

Asbury Film Festival. The best were "Balance" from Germany and "Lunch Date" by a Columbia film student.

A lady named Claire Edgeley called me from Domark (UK) to say how excited they all are about *Prince* and to request publicity materials. We set up an appointment for a phone interview with a British journalist on Tuesday. Exciting!

NOVEMBER 19, 1990

David and I spent the day fooling around with the new video camera. It's an amazing piece of engineering. I hadn't realized the technology had come so far. Compared to the VHS camcorders I used for *Prince of Persia*, it's utterly tiny, and delivers a warmer and more consistent color image than I'd thought possible without special lighting. Could definitely shoot a movie with this... If only it were possible to edit it!

NOVEMBER 26, 1990

Larry Turman called to tell me his thoughts on *Bird of Paradise*. "You're a good writer," he said. "I thought so before and I think so now. What a damned unusual story you've written! Where inarnation did you come up with that?"

He doesn't want to produce it. "Don't ask me why. There's nothing I can really point at and criticize. It's all of a piece; it hangs together... Why do I want to produce one movie and not the other? I don't know. It's like picking out a tie. It's so damned hard to get a picture made, as you know at one remove from *In the Dark*. Maybe my head liked it a little better than my heart."

He said he'd give it to his partner to read, and also offered to put me in touch with some agents if it doesn't work out with the ones I sent it to. What a guy! He didn't have to be that nice to me.

NOVEMBER 28, 1990

Good news from Broderbund on two fronts. It looks like the sequel is going to happen. And, the Virgin Mastertronic deal has been signed! They hope to have both Nintendo and GameBoy cartridges out by Christmas '91. Maybe I'll make out OK after all.

DECEMBER 12, 1990

Brian sent me an Amiga computer so I could look at what the competition is doing. I went out and bought *Shadow of the Beast II* and played it for a good four hours, most of that time spent waiting for it to load. Nice parallax scrolling, atmospheric music, and a smashing opening sequence that makes me ashamed of every review that ever called *Prince* "cinematic" (because what *Prince* is, really, is theatrical). *Beast II* is also insanely difficult, and the 45 seconds it takes to restart every time you die makes it infuriating to play. Yet it's the #1 Amiga game right now. Maybe it's the adventure element that people find appealing. If there were some way to get that into *Prince 2*...

DECEMBER 13, 1990

Deep in game design mode. Tomi offered some good ideas, and I went out and bought *1001 Nights* and played *Beast II* some more and *Prince* all the way through (finished with 28 minutes left!), but I'm still basically at a loss.

Goddamn computer games. I'm torn between never wanting to see another one, and wishing I were back in California starting my own development team so I could take two years and create something that would blow *Beast II* out of the water.

No... the way I'm doing it is right. In two years there'll be computers with CD-ROM and the need for live-action footage. By then I'll have made some movies, and know my way around a film set. I'll be in a perfect position to raise some capital and put together a really hot development team to launch a new line of interactive CD-ROM games. If Doug's still running Broderbund, he'd back me in a second. They all would. I'll be an irresistible combination of new kid on the block and old familiar face.

So I'm doing all the right things. *sigh...*

DECEMBER 20, 1990

Jim Alex called from LA to say he's got someone who wants to do *In the Dark* as a TV Movie-of-the-Week. Will wonders never cease.

Brian says there's a store in Alabama that has *Prince* stocked 45 deep. It's their top-selling entertainment title, surpassing *King's Quest V* and everything else. Wow. Why Alabama?

JANUARY 19, 1991

I gave Kevin Burget a copy of *Prince of Persia* to play at the office and he's really into it. It's impressed him deeply. Some of the people in his office had already heard of it. Very gratifying.

JANUARY 23, 1991

I did read most of the *1001 Nights* and I did spend a couple of hours doodling on the *POP 2* game design, but have nothing concrete to show for it.

Sequel



SAMPLE CAVERNS SCREEN



Sequel

JANUARY 24, 1991

[*San Francisco*] Man, it's great to be back. When I got into my rented car and hit Highway 280, I laughed out loud, I was so thrilled. The trees, the colors, the quality of the sunlight... San Francisco is the most beautiful city on the planet. It's a wonderfully reassuring feeling to return and realize that my old life is still here, waiting for me, if I want it.

The good news is, they're truly hot to do *POP 2*. Over lunch at Gulf of Siam with Brian and Alan Weiss, Ann Kronen covered her entire placemat with ball-point notations. She was in her most no-nonsense mode, like a businesswoman in a TV commercial, leaning forward and saying things like "Brian, that's your department." Doug must have lit a fire under her in this morning's priority meeting. Since she'd responded to all my previous *Prince 2* proposals (the first in May '90) with a batting of eyelashes and a "Let's wait and see" smile, I found today's encounter immensely gratifying. Best of all, it looks like Lance is back in the running to get this assignment.

Toward the end of lunch, I decided there would never be a better moment, and brought up the royalty rate. Brian, bless his heart, stepped right in with the 8% figure. Ann took it with a brave blink. Brian went right on and said: "Doug waffled at first on the 8%, but because of the success of *Prince 1* in Europe and Japan, and the strength of Jordan's name, and in view of the contribution he's going to make on the sequel, he finally said it was OK." The way Brian presented it, Ann had no choice but to agree. I asked for 8% and, amazingly, that's what I'm getting. Victory is sweet.

Before I left, I dropped by Doug's office. Kazue was there, and Jeannine Cook, and Doug's parents. Doug's father told a story about someone's grandchildren shouting "Who's for *POP*?" as they ran downstairs, and he didn't know what it stood for."

"I thought it stood for 'point-of-purchase,'" I said.

Doug laughed. "Not any more."

Paid a visit to Presage in El Cerrito. It looks like Scott's finally getting close to finished. My visit seemed to cheer everyone up. Funny how you can motivate someone to work harder just by showing up.

JANUARY 28, 1991

Eight exhausting hours of meetings at Broderbund, pushing *Prince 2* on all fronts. But it's easy, with the wind at my back. The powers-that-be have given this project the coveted "Group 1 Priority" and suddenly no one can say no to me.

I don't understand why they think this can be a Christmas 1991 release. There's no such thing as a six-month development cycle. If even one thing goes wrong, we'll miss Christmas. And something *always* goes wrong. I won't even be here to run the project; I live 3,000 miles away now. Why is everyone - including me - pretending that this schedule is realistic? This is the kind of thinking that went into the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Anyway, I'm dutifully assembling the players one by one, proceeding just as if this weren't insane.

FEBRUARY 2, 1991

Brian said that after talking among themselves, they are now leaning toward making *Prince 2* a real splashy showcase for multiplane scrolling, CD-I upward compatibility, etc., with a "cinematic" opening sequence to rival *Wing Commander* and *King's Quest V*. This would mean it would be a "right-after-Christmas" release. Sensing Doug's hand in this, I of course agreed.

I'm in George Hickenlooper's apartment in Pasadena. He's playing *Prince of Persia* on his monochrome LCD laptop.

FEBRUARY 11, 1991

[*Back in NY*] I called Ken Sherman and told him I want him to represent me as a screenwriter. He was glad.

Prince appeared in the #10 slot on the Egghead bestseller list for Sept.-Oct. That was a surprise. Could it be that this game is going to be a hit after all?

Domark signed a licensing deal to do an 8-bit Sega version for Europe.

Brian sent me a copy of a two-page spread ad in *Login* for the new 68000 version: "Finally, *Prince of Persia* comes to the 68000 computer," with a picture of the *Prince* jumping from one computer screen to another. Two pages! Very cool.

A letter from Fumiko Feingold, asking me to sign a get-well card to her nephew in Japan, who's a *Karateka* and *POP* fan and was thrilled to read in *Login* that I live in Chappaqua.

Laid out like that, it sounds quite wonderful, doesn't it?

FEBRUARY 19, 1991

Watched the rushes in class today. Ours came out pretty well. When it was over, people clapped and someone shouted "Good photography!" I wouldn't say ours was the best, but it was probably the most consistent, considering that we stuck to our allotted three rolls of film (few other groups did) and shot only one take of most setups. Some of our shots were even aesthetically pleasing, in a mild way. I'm not about to start calling myself a D.P., but at least I didn't fuck up. I'm more than happy.

It's a magical thing, to see someone or something you've photographed projected upon that screen in front of an audience. Somehow, what appears is *more* than what you recorded; it has a reality of its own. My mind is starting to churn looking for things to shoot. I wish I had an Arri S right here so I could load it.

January royalty check came in at \$56,000. I'm still in a daze. That's the whole next year paid for right there. I guess now I can stop worrying about money.

I wonder where it came from. Nintendo? Sega? Japan? The royalty statement doesn't say.

FEBRUARY 28, 1991

The ground war is over. We lost 26 people, or something like that. Pretty amazing. I thought it would be a long drawn-out bloodbath that would sap our spirit and divide the country.

Bush was right and I was wrong. What disturbs me, though, is the dissociation between his real thinking and planning, and the words he uses to justify his actions to the public. It's the CIA mentality: As long as what we're doing is right, we can take whatever official line is necessary to make it happen.

I had an argument with Dad about this last night. Me, while I can admire Bush's diplomatic skill, his strategy and tactics (I'm almost certain he deliberately suckered Saddam into invading Kuwait so that we'd have a pretext for destroying him), I don't like being lied to like a child on national television. We're old enough to fight for our country, but not to be told why we're fighting?

Brian's eager for me to get cracking on *Prince 2*.

MARCH 4, 1991

Alan Weiss and Brian both called to encourage me to hurry up and send them a spectacular game design bible for *Prince 2*. Doug's back from his travels and it seems Sony wants to do a CD-ROM version of *Prince 2*, and fast! I'd better get moving.

Instead, my head is full of 16mm filmmaking equipment, Thierry Pathé, Vorkapich, Robert McKee.

I should go visit Robert in New Haven and look at some games on his computer. That'll help get me in the right frame of mind.

MARCH 11, 1991

Arrived in New Haven Saturday night. Robert and Oscar and I went to Est! Est! Est! for calzones. Looks like our trip to Honduras this summer is on.

Spent most of Sunday brainstorming with Robert. Came up with some good ideas for *Prince 2* and *D-Gen*. We looked at *King's Quest V* and *Wing Commander* to see if the opening sequences are as spectacular as everyone says. Technically, they are, but artistically they leave a lot to be desired.

There's no doubt in my mind I could do better for *Prince 2* - if I were on site. As it is, all I can do is storyboard a sequence and mail it off to California and hope for the best. I'm less than sanguine about Broderbund's ability to push the envelope on something like this with their present staff and corporate structure. The job requires a tyrant, and Broderbund has none.

Got to keep things in perspective. After two days with Robert, my temptation is to forget everything else and try - again - to create the greatest game of all time. But the reality is, after this Friday, I won't have much time to work on it.

Prince 2 doesn't have to be groundbreaking. It just has to be acceptable, and get done on time. If I aim too high, it could easily suck up another year of my life, and my development as a screenwriter/filmmaker/human being would be the only casualty. I've got to remember that, and resist my tendency to expand it into some grandiose, technically ambitious folly.

What everybody expects is *Prince 1* in new clothes, with a flashy front end and a few new twists. That's what the job calls for. That's what I should deliver.

MARCH 12, 1991

Spent most of two days with Tomi, hammering out the story line for *Prince 2*. We're both rather grumpy, but it is getting done, and I must say, it's much better than it was a few days ago.

Prince of Persia 2: Revenge of Jaffar.

Broderbund and Sierra are merging.

MARCH 14, 1991

Met storyboard artist Karl Shefelman this morning. It turned out I knew him already, from Kevin's film shoot. If I use anybody I'll use him.

A pleasant dinner at John's Pizza with Mark Netter. He found me a 19th century edition of Lane's *Arabian Nights* for \$25. Beautiful. He hung out here for an hour playing *Prince* on the Mac and another hour after dinner talking about movies. A much-needed break.

Tomorrow, McKee's screenwriting class begins.

MARCH 15, 1991

McKee's course is good, really good. It's also full of cool-looking women. I wish I had the guts to actually talk to some of them instead of just wondering who they are.

APRIL 2, 1991

We finished shooting 6 pm Monday. I dropped the film off at TVC/Precision and went to Phebe's to get drunk. George, Bernard, Casey and John were already well on their way when I arrived; Toby and the rest came later.

Watched the dailies today for the first time, along with the whole class. I was nervous - I'd checked my math and realized I'd underexposed some of the outdoor shots nearly a full stop - but to my relief it all came out fine.

I've got light-years to travel, technically and aesthetically, before I could call myself a cinematographer, let alone a good one; and quite probably I won't travel much further down this particular road. But I chose the stock, set the lights and camera position for each shot, operated the camera, even loaded and unloaded the magazine and other AC duties, on a five-day shoot for a 16mm color sync sound film... and I didn't fuck up. Considering that six months ago, I had only the vaguest and most general idea of what goes on a film set, this is an achievement I should be proud of.

Now begins the editing.

APRIL 16, 1991

Spent the day hot-splicing. I got pretty proficient at it. We're done, basically. Tomorrow morning we'll check all the splices, run it through the synchronizer, line up the optical track, and send it to the lab.

APRIL 20, 1991

On Friday, Thierry gave a great lecture on the business end of production (line producing). Afterward I went downtown to MacGovern's Bar on Spring St. to meet Patrick and his actor from *Alice*, George, his friend Catherine, John Bruno, and Bernard. We spent a while chatting with some pretty college girls from Connecticut until their boyfriends showed up, which sort of put a damper on things.

A movie crew was shooting around the corner. It must have been the last union shoot in New York. It was some low-budget movie about "a Harvard graduate" who falls in love with "a down-to-earth girl who frequents discos."

This was explained to us by the female lead – Hallie I think her name was. She was friendly to me and Bernard although she was freezing her butt off in that short dress.

Then we all went uptown to “Name That Joint” on E 92nd St, where Toby, Casey and John P. were extremely happy to see us. Next was the Outback, a couple of doors down (too noisy and too many guys), then we took a cab across the park to the best joint of all, John Bruno’s hangout, The Dive Bar. When it closed we went to 57th St. where Patrick thought there was an after-hours speakeasy, but we couldn’t find it, so we had breakfast at a diner instead. I got home around 6 am and slept till noon.

I’m so glad I came to New York.

APRIL 23, 1991

Last day of class. They screened our answer prints. Ours looked pretty damn good, compared to most of them. I’m relieved. For my first (and probably last) outing as D.P., it’s not too bad.

Thierry wound things up with an inspiring go-out-into-the-world pep talk. “The next time I see you, I hope it’s on a film set.” We all applauded as he left the room. If I ever get a chance – if I get interviewed by *Premiere* magazine or whatever – I’m going to plug this program shamelessly.

Mark Netter told me at dinner that Dick Ross hated Nick’s film, called it garbage, and gave it a daytime slot in the festival. That made me angry. Can you imagine Thierry Pathé calling one of his students’ films “garbage”? I’m glad I didn’t go to Tisch.

MAY 7, 1991

I so definitely did the right thing by coming to New York, it makes me shudder to think that I might have stayed in California. This is *exactly*, exactly what I was missing.

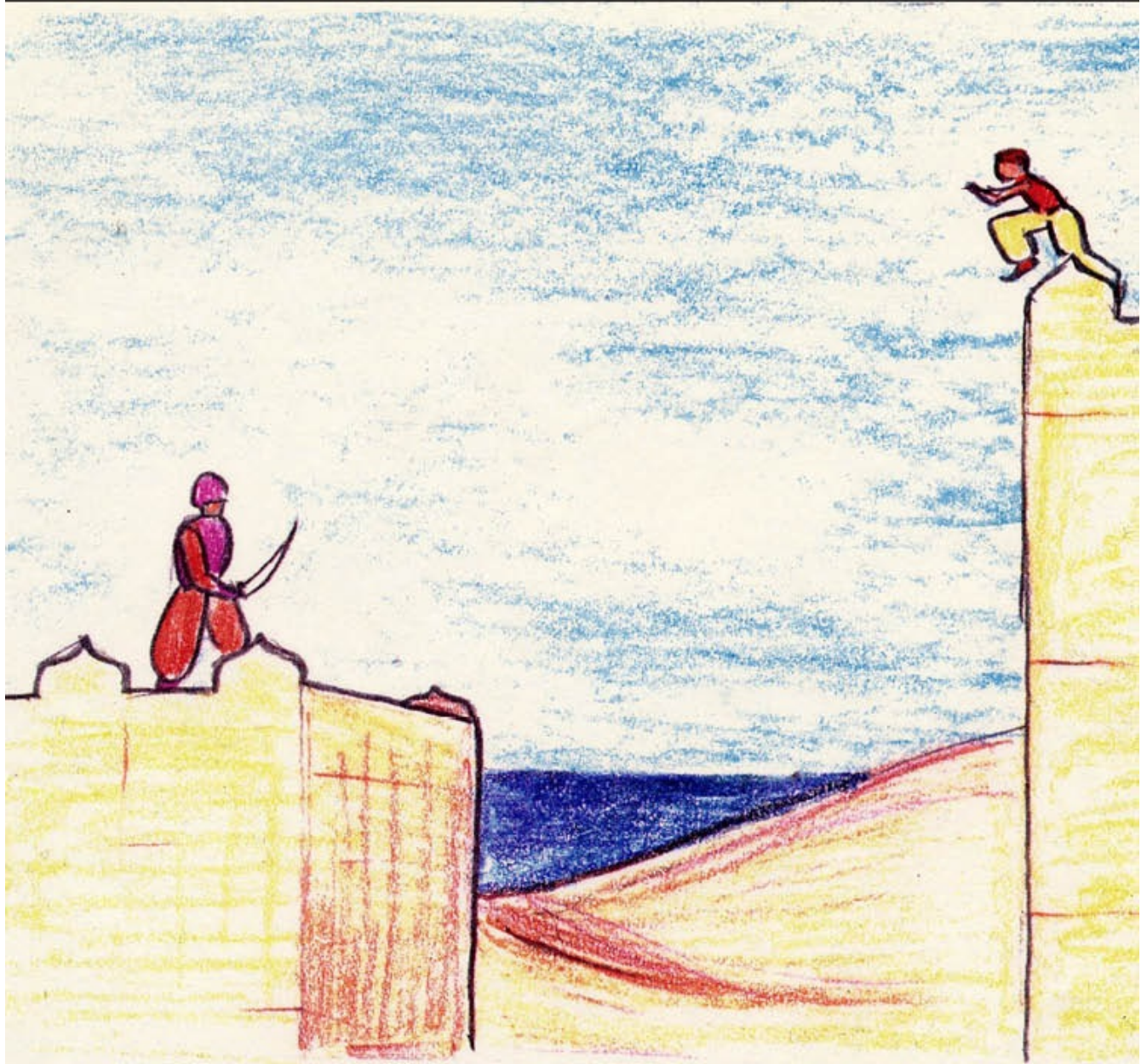
I’ve only been here seven months, and already I feel like I’m part of a network of people that keep meeting and crossing and cropping up in different combinations. That I can link Patrick Ladislav to Kevin Burget and Mark Netter; that Patrick and I can go to a lecture and find Mark already there and all go out for dinner together and then find John Bruno in the bar across the street; that Karl Shefelman is doing my storyboards for *Prince 2* and sharing an editing space with Kevin; that I run into someone I know almost every time I step outside – these things fill me with a deep and primitive satisfaction.

In San Francisco I felt like I was in danger of falling off the edge of the world. Here, I feel like I’m part of something that’s strong enough to hold me in place. Each new link I forge makes my world stronger and more real, and as the net grows, the possibilities multiply.

Worked on the *Prince 2* “bible” (and Mac *Prince 1*) most of the day. I hope I can get Brian something he can use by Thursday, before I leave for Cannes – but I doubt it. I’ll just have to make up for lost time with some fierce activity when I get back from Europe.

I’ve really been short-shrifting Broderbund and *Prince of Persia* since coming to New York. I should be careful not to blow it entirely. It’s not just my living, it’s my reputation, portfolio, creative fulfillment, everything. The only thing it isn’t is film.

Foreign Lands



LEVEL 1 SAMPLE SCREEN.

Foreign Lands

MAY 18, 1991

[France] Party at a castle about 10 minutes' drive from Cannes. There was a room full of laser light and smoke and I spent about an hour dancing.

Who should be there but Thierry Pathé, in his tuxedo and walking with that dapper, light-footed stagger. Thierry is the greatest guy on the face of the earth. He was happy to see me and Patrick – and surprised; this was an invitation-only bash – and dragged his producer over to talk to us. She was amused and impressed that we'd penetrated the ramparts of the castle on our first Cannes. "You'll go far," she predicted. She asked if we'd be coming back next year. I said I didn't think I'd come back until I had a picture here.

"See you around the castle," Thierry said when we parted – several steps up, subtextually, from his parting line when we ran into him a few days ago on the American Pavilion, "See you on the Croisette," and beautifully reinforcing Patrick's metaphor of Cannes as a royal court.

MAY 25, 1991

Wir sitzen in einem Gasthof in Pöcking, das kleine Dorf in dem Leni Riefenstahl wohnt, wartende auf dem gesprochene Stunde.

This town is bleak. Maybe it's the weather (unseasonably cold and gray) and maybe it's that we're about to visit the director of *Triumph of the Will*, but it feels like the Nazi seizure of power happened yesterday.

Riefenstahl nixed the camera at the last minute, so we're going in with only a pocket tape recorder. Too bad. I'd have loved to shoot it in 16mm.

MAY 28, 1991

The weather's been spectacular since we arrived in Paris. George and Patrick and I had lunch in a brasserie near his mother's apartment in the 9th Arr. and then I went to see Dany Boolauck.

Spent the whole afternoon with Dany, from 3 pm to 11 pm. He introduced me to the staff of *Joystick* (the #2 games magazine in France, which Dany and his partner are determined to make #1), then drove me back to his apartment in the 20th Arr. to interview me. I met his girlfriend Natalie and their 8-month-old daughter Kim.

Then Dany took me to Cité des Sciences, which is kind of a hulking, larger-scale Exploratorium, to see the Omnimax show. We picked up his friend, an attaché de presse from London – Christine, I think – and Dany took us to dinner at a place called Chez Pierre, by the Fontaine-something (it had a cupid with a trident). A great meal. I shudder to think what it must have cost.

Dany was appalled at the poor marketing of *Prince*; he feels it could have – and should have – been a huge hit. It was Dany who pushed for *Prince* to win the Tilt d'Or. He wants to do an exclusive "work-in-progress" article on *Prince 2*. He's setting aside six pages for it in the next issue of *Joystick*. The fact that he would consider such an article a journalistic coup is, in itself, flattering. He and Christine agreed that I was the only remaining game designer in the U.S. doing interesting and original work, which is a ridiculous statement, but it didn't hurt my feelings to hear them say it.

After dinner I joined Patrick and George and Patrick's friend Jerome from Morocco at a bar called Le Violon Dingue. We ended up drinking vodka at an English pub. "Paris isn't what it used to be," Patrick lamented. "These places are full of French people."

Rome is a great city; Berlin is an exciting place these days, the gateway to Eastern Europe; even Vienna is jumping since the Wall fell. Paris is... Paris.

There are good reasons to live almost anywhere. To live in Paris you don't need one.

MAY 29, 1991

I'm too old for this. I don't smoke, I don't smoke dope, I don't drink coffee, and last night I did all three, and washed it down with half a bottle of vodka and who knows what else, and watched the sun come up. Now I'm paying for it, and this airplane turbulence isn't helping.

It was a great, wonderful trip. It was more than I'd hoped for. We didn't climb the wall into Pere Lachaise and drink a bottle of wine at Jim Morrison's grave, but I did get to practice my German, even learned some French and Italian. I got to spend time with George and Patrick – who's become one of my best friends in a remarkably

short time – and made a few new ones: Greg, Jerome, maybe Anne, maybe Tomek, Jan and Artur. I got to visit two giants of the cinema, Vittorio Storaro and Leni Riefenstahl, and was given a really privileged look at their (very different) lives. I visited three countries (Italy, Germany and Switzerland) for the first time. There was Laura. There was Cannes. I'm beat now, and ready to appreciate the restfulness of a couple of weeks in New York City.

JUNE 15, 1991

[*Back in NY*] Spent the day working on *Prince 2* – first honest day's work in weeks. I've really got to hustle if I'm going to have something ready by the time I leave for Maine.

JUNE 27, 1991

[*San Rafael*] End of my second day at Broderbund. It's going well.

I'm very popular all of a sudden. It's like the return of the prodigal son. I carry about me the whiff of foreign places. Cannes, Greenwich Village, it's all very glamorous.

Prince of Persia is suddenly popular, too. The old marketing department is gone and has been replaced by a new marketing department that thinks *Prince* got a raw deal and deserves to be repackaged and given the royal rollout for the Mac version. Amazing. I keep waiting for someone to pinch me and wake me up.

The Game Boy version is close to finished; the Super FamiCom version is going to be awesome; *Prince* has won a zillion awards in Europe and Japan; it's nothing but good news on all fronts. Knock on wood – hope it lasts!

As for *Prince 2*, we've got a programmer (Jeff Charvat); we've got the attention of the sound and music department (Tom), who has hand-picked a composer (Jonelle); of the graphics department (Michelle and Leila), who have chosen a couple of artists (Daniel and Marcelle); and of the sales and marketing departments, who are waiting and eager to sell and market it as soon as it's done. And, oh yeah, design services are eager to do the package design.

It really is a different world, doing a sequel. All the people who were no help at all on the original are now overflowing with enthusiasm, because it's familiar, it's a proven quantity. Broderbund is a company that was born to do sequels. They're even good at it.

I have no illusions – it's still the same company that almost buried *Prince 1* – it's just that now, I'm on the other side of the river. And loving it.

I foresee some arm-wrestling over budget and resources, but so far, Broderbund is giving it the best they have. And the reason is, truly, because of grass-roots enthusiasm for *Prince of Persia* that's seeped up through the company from the bottom (tech support, QA, field reps) and through P.D., because of people taking the game home and playing it and watching their kids play it; and because of the good working relationships I established with Lance, Leila and Tom on IBM *Prince 1*.

Lance, Leila and Tom have now all been promoted to the point where they're no longer actually doing programming, graphics and sound, but supervising their respective departments; they remember *Prince* as a high point of their creative careers, something they did their best work on and got recognition and satisfaction from, and they're excited at the prospect of revisiting it. I'm bragging, but so what – I'm proud of *Prince*, but more than that, I'm proud of having pulled together such a good and enthusiastic team. If I can do this, I can direct a feature.

Brian and I took Leila to dinner at an expensive French restaurant that used to be a brick kiln. I blew a hundred and fifty bucks, but it was worth it. Leila deserves to have something nice done for her after all the work she did on the Mac *Prince* graphics – which Scott has yet to get running properly.

That's the one fly in the ointment: Mac *Prince* is still far from finished. It's way, way behind schedule. It's my fault for not riding Scott harder, or for picking someone who would have done it faster.

The good news is, Scott's taken so long that Apple has come out with a new computer (the LC) in the meantime and has sold a lot of them. As a result, the Mac market has now grown to the point where the sales department actually *wants* this version. So, Broderbund is going ahead and doing a new set of graphics for the LC version (i.e., small-screen but in color), and they're paying for it themselves. A nice vote of confidence. A bit late, but nice.

JULY 3, 1991

It looks like we've got our budget. With Leila out of town, nobody had any idea what the *Prince 2* graphics were

going to cost - Ed Badasov estimated \$17,000 - so I made my own estimate: \$126,000. Brian gasped; Ed gasped; but, incredibly, Doug approved it. It's the most graphics-intensive project in Broderbund's history.

Dinner at Doug's. We bought a steak, grilled it, and ate it out on the deck while getting devoured by mosquitoes. Then we sat in the living room and discussed the movie business and the software business, whether or not they're converging, and whether there is really any overlap between the skill set required to be a filmmaker and that required to be a game designer. It occurred to me that, as of now, I'm one of the few people to have attained a reasonable proficiency at both.

JULY 15, 1991

[Back in NY] In the week since I left, Broderbund has once again been completely reorganized. John Baker now heads the entertainment group and Tom Marcus has been taken off licensing duty. And a horrifying piece of news: Perry Babb, *Prince's* new marketing manager, who took Brian and me on a store check, has been diagnosed with terminal cancer of the esophagus. He's going to die. Brian is pretty distressed. His own father died of brain cancer just last year.

JULY 16, 1991

Mark Abrams came and hung out for the day. He played *Prince* for hours, dungeon-mastered David and Liz, and tossed off ideas for *Prince 2* like a Roman candle. Strange to see him after ten years. Strange, especially, to watch him play *Prince*, and realize we'd come full circle since high school.

JULY 18, 1991

Mark Abrams is so eager to help with *Prince 2*, I've hired him as a consultant and research assistant. It's good for me to have someone to bounce ideas off of, and an experienced dungeonmaster to boot. (I wonder if he might be able to design levels, later on?)

Got another \$30 grand in royalties this month, thanks to HudsonSoft in Japan. I'm rakin' it in.

JULY 23, 1991

A DHL package arrived from Brian containing lots of fun items: NCS's new storyline for Super FamiCom *Prince*; the new LC graphics for Mac *Prince* (beautiful); a sneak preview in a Japanese game players' magazine of the upcoming Super FamiCom game *Nosferatu*, a blatant ripoff of *Prince* (NCS and Henry are foaming at the mouth about it and considering whether to sue); and, most satisfying of all, a letter from a fan in Saudi Arabia, suitable for framing. If I ever find myself stranded in Riyadh, I won't have to sleep on the street.

JULY 25, 1991

Today I wrote letters. Literally. That's all I did. One to Lobna, and then, prompted by Brian, a three-page beauty to Scott, which I fired off Fed Ex.

JULY 29, 1991

Working hard, making good progress on *Prince 2*.

Mark Netter came by. He was thrilled that I'd liked his second-year film. He said everyone at NYU had slammed it. Figures.

JULY 30, 1991

Sent out the first third of the *Prince 2* bible Fed Ex, then dashed uptown for dinner with Grandpa, Mom and Dad, Dave and Liz. Then came back here and sat up three more hours laboring over the new "Princess's Discovery" storyboards for Karl. I re-did it about five times, editing on paper. The sequence got progressively tighter and shorter and simpler and better. I enjoyed that.

First ideas are never the best. Even when you think they are, later on it turns out you can improve it.

Finally, I'm getting excited about this game.

I'd forgotten how much I enjoy drawing. Especially quick, comic-book style drawing. I wish I were better at it.

AUGUST 2, 1991

Spent the day studying Spanish verbs and working up a *Prince 3* storyline. Yes, *Prince 3* - I know I'm getting close to wrapping something up when I find myself thinking about the sequel. I've got some *great* ideas for

Prince 3. The Princess and the mouse. It'll be a milestone in computer gaming, a classic, a megahit. If only I ever get to do it.

Bought my plane tickets.

AUGUST 3, 1991

Spent two hours on the phone with Robert, playing around with what little Spanish we possess. He's really nervous about this upcoming trip. It's touching.

AUGUST 4, 1991

Mark Abrams drove down and we spent the day brainstorming about the *Prince* Saga (Parts 1 through 4).

In the morning on our way to MacDougal St. we ran into Sandra Levinson. She was with a beautiful Cuban woman whom she introduced as "the wife of Aléa." Would that be Tomás Gutiérrez Aléa, the director of *Memories of Underdevelopment*? Wow! Sandra introduced me as the author of a screenplay about Cuba she was halfway through reading which was "very good." O happy day!

Day before yesterday, Ken Sherman called to say that Herman Rush had offered \$70,000 to do *In the Dark* as a TV movie but balked at \$250,000 for a feature. Ken wanted to know if he should hold out for the full deal. For some reason, I can't work up any excitement about seeing *In the Dark* get produced now. To get *Bird of Paradise* made, though, I'd give... well, don't ask me what I'd give!

By this point, Ken must be wondering whether I'm really serious about screenwriting or if I'm just a dilettante who's never going to leave the computer game business.

AUGUST 5, 1991

Finished reading *El Principito* on the subway. Great book.

It's incredible, but my Spanish is improving noticeably from one day to the next, just from hitting the books. I turned on Telemundo CNN News tonight and found myself understanding entire sentences. It's as if studying Spanish for a couple of hours each day has set in motion some mystic process by which I learn the language faster than I'm actually studying it. Like *Christine*.

AUGUST 7, 1991

Proved to myself I haven't forgotten what a *real* day's work is like. I took an hour for lunch and an hour for dinner (falafel at Mamoun's, pasta at Lucca's, strolling in the Village in the glorious weather, looking at the glorious long-legged girls) and spent the rest of the day inside, seated at the computer. Burned through pretty much the whole game design, revising and improving. Wish I had a few more days to keep going. That's the way it always is. There's something in me that won't let me work on this project *until* I'm down to the wire.

Spoke to Brian and Scott. Miraculously, the Mac version [of *Prince 1*] has taken a turn for the better. It seems that letter I wrote has (belatedly) lit a fire under everyone at Presage, and now they've got Scott working nights and weekends. Maybe we actually *will* make Christmas.

Brian described the new box to me.

This *Prince 2* is going to be great, if it comes out anything like the way I've designed it. If only I lived in SF, I could make sure it was done right. But I've got to keep my priorities straight. What's more important - *Prince 2*, or screenwriting and travelling to foreign countries?

Oh, well. After I send off the *Prince 2* bible tomorrow, I'm free!

AUGUST 9, 1991

I'm just beginning to realize that three days is not, in fact, a whole lot of time to pack up my worldly goods.

This is more difficult than a normal packing job because I've got to think: What will I need in Central America? In California? I have to ask myself about every item: "Can I live for a year or two without this (book, videotape, whatever)?"

There's actually a kind of pleasure in the thought of going a year without my journals, photo albums, TV, stereo, music, computer games, car, all that crap. It strips me down to my bare humanity.

AUGUST 11, 1991

Stopped by the Center to see Sandra Levinson. She'd finished *Bird of Paradise* and liked it so much she couldn't stop talking about it. I gave her two more copies, one to give to Aléa and one to a New York producer friend of hers who's looking for a property for Aléa to direct. I encouraged her as much as I could without actually begging.

Two other interesting developments from that meeting. One, she offered me the use of her apartment in Havana after she leaves on the 29th. Two, she advised me that I do qualify to visit Cuba under the Treasury Dept. regulations. All I need to do is book a seat on a charter flight through Marazúl.

Feeling like a fool, I said: "But they denied permission to Sydney Pollack and Francis Coppola..."

"That's because they're Sydney Pollack and Francis Coppola! *You*, my dear, are a documentary filmmaker, and you can prove it."

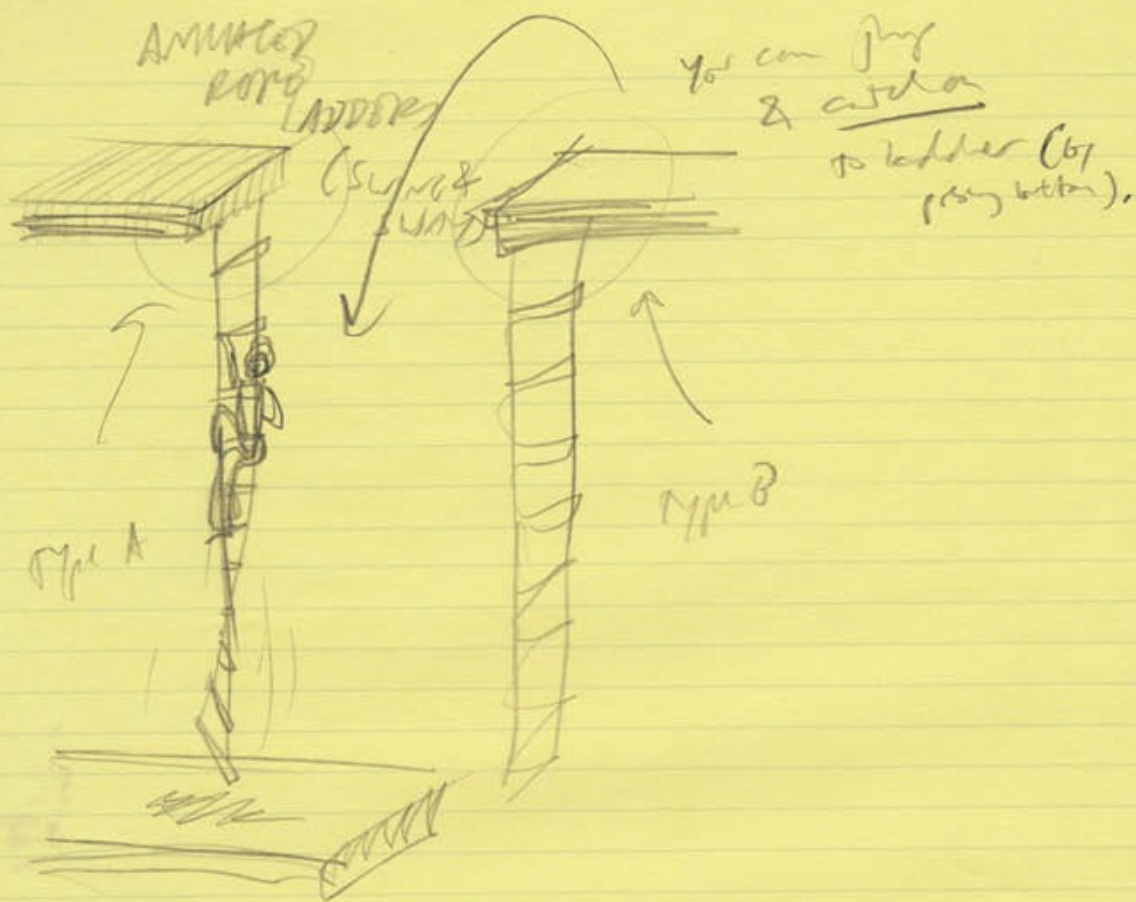
AUGUST 14, 1991

[Chappaqua] It's done. With the help of Kevin Burget, David and Liz, Mom and her new tenant Stanley, and two Israeli movers from Shleppers, what's left of my worldly goods is now boxed and stacked to the ceiling in what was once my bedroom.

Now I'm alone, doing laundry and rearranging boxes, and periodically getting blindsided by teenage flashbacks. Even writing in this journal - in this house, on a day like this - is a conditioned stimulus. It sweeps me, mentally and emotionally, right back to the summers of '85 and '86, when I was fresh out of college and *Prince of Persia* was just an idea.

I have no home now. Just a plane ticket.

Lost in Translation



Lost in Translation

SEPTEMBER 16, 1991

[*Back from Honduras and Cuba*] Went to Gideon Brower's apartment to sit in on a reading of his new screenplay, *Thebes*. Kevin and Jane were among the readers. Seeing him brought back fond memories of the night of George's screening, when Lobna was here and we all went to a bar on 7th Ave. I liked Gideon. I'm glad to see he's got talent.

Gideon's reading made me want to live in New York again. Also it made me want to have written another screenplay. To have a new 120-page manuscript, suitable for Xeroxing, begging to be bought.

Five months ago all I wanted was to make films – to write them, shoot them, direct them – to become a success as fast as possible. I was so ambitious I couldn't fall asleep at night. Now I seem to be following a different path. Travelling, learning languages, conducting courtships like some 19th-century gentleman who doesn't have to work for a living and has nothing to occupy him except his own *Bildung*. It's all very well as long as I keep writing... but what have I written lately?

SEPTEMBER 20, 1991

[*San Rafael*] Nonstop meetings every day since I arrived, with different groupings of people. Even lunch is a meeting. It's exhausting, and exhilarating. To be acting, to have a purpose, feels wonderful after a month of tourism.

Prince 2 is happening. I'm relieved... guardedly optimistic, anyway.

I'd been afraid I'd arrive to find the project scuttled, or at least that I'd have to fight tooth and nail to keep it afloat; but although I'd heard rumblings to the effect that the Powers that Be (John Baker and Michelle) were shocked and dismayed by the project's size, all they've done is, quite reasonably, express concern that it not grow out of control, and entreat me to get as specific as I can, in the two weeks I'm here, about what graphics work will be required.

For now, it's all going (seemingly) smoothly... a lot of work, taking the storyboards and spec'ing out how much graphics will be required to implement them. As to the actual content – what will be on the screen and how it should look – everyone is deferring to me the way a film crew defers to the director. Somehow, I've acquired that magic quality, credibility.

As long as they continue to trust me and believe in me, this job is a dream. If they ever start to doubt me, it could become a nightmare.

Mac *Prince* has been pushed back to January, which isn't as good as shipping in October, but, after two years in the netherworld of "almost done," will come as an enormous relief.

Dinner last night in SF with Tomi's new collaborator, Bill Purdy of Purdy and Young, the job shop she's contracted out the Authorware accounting program to. They are, in fact, purdy and young.

SEPTEMBER 21, 1991

[*L.A.*] Met with Ken Sherman. It was sort of discouraging. He'll keep sending out *Bird of Paradise*, but after eleven rejections, it's clear he's lost faith and isn't expecting much. I told him the Hawaii story and the *Golden Bowl*-in-Prague story. He didn't seem too excited about either of them.

SEPTEMBER 23, 1991

I've been doing so much flying lately, it's become automatic... I looked out the window just now and saw with a shock that we were 40,000 feet up. I'd been writing in my notebook and hadn't noticed the takeoff.

I don't think I want to live in L.A. It's sort of exciting to be around the trappings of the movie business – agents and studios and so on – but it's a thrill best experienced, I think, by the occasional visitor. As long as I'm making enough from the computer games to live wherever I want and write screenplays, why not take advantage of it?

SEPTEMBER 24, 1991

[*San Rafael*] Dinner last night at the Hunan. There was a full moon and we walked to the restaurant from Kelly and Ann's apartment by Coit Tower. The night was clear and the moon was shining on the water under the bridge. It took my breath away. San Francisco on certain days has that special, piercing beauty that's almost painful, because it arouses a hunger it can never satisfy. You know that even if you live with that beauty, see it

every day, wake up to it every morning, get as close as it is physically possible to get, you still can't possess it, and its distance from you will make your heart ache.

Prince 2 is coming together, slowly.

Today Brian showed me the alpha version of Nintendo *Prince*. Nothing cheers me up like seeing *Prince* on a new machine.

SEPTEMBER 26, 1991

Robert Cook's in town. Software Toolworks flew him out for two days to chain him to a computer for the final playtesting and debugging of *D-Gen*. I'm writing this in Robert's sumptuous suite at the newly constructed Embassy Suites Hotel (which, as I recall, was marshland the last time I was here).

Spent the morning at Broderbund and the afternoon at Presage, sitting at Scott's elbow, tweaking the character animations frame by frame, pixel by pixel, like in the old days. We're still not done. I'm going back tomorrow for more.

Everyone's happy to see me, now that I don't live here any more.

SEPTEMBER 27, 1991

Scott's leaving tomorrow for the national sky-diving championships in Arizona, so today had to be our last day pushing pixels. Fortunately, it's looking pretty good. Barring further mishaps, Mac *POP* should ship in January as planned.

SEPTEMBER 29, 1991

Tomi called her mom in Colorado who called cousin Midori in Salamanca who said they'd be delighted to have me and classes start on October 14. Yow! That's in two weeks!

OCTOBER 13, 1991

[*Salamanca*] Said goodbye to Patrick at two a.m. last night, in Paris, outside the Moroccan restaurant across the bridge where I'd spent three hours in a fog of cigarette smoke and animated conversation, drinking mint tea and trying to look as if I had any idea what anyone was saying. Said goodbye to Lobna this morning, on the sidewalk in front of her apartment in the 17th, in yet another scene that made me feel like I was living in a French movie. One short plane flight and one three-and-a-half-hour bus ride later, and here I am in a rented room in Señora Francisca Mesonero's apartment on Calle Petunias in Salamanca, Spain, about to start a new life as a starving student. Class starts at 8:45 tomorrow morning.

Two weeks ago, Salamanca was a name on a map. I just can't get over the way you can decide to do something and then the next thing you know, it's really happening.

JANUARY 24, 1992

[*San Rafael*] *Prince 2* is in good shape. The artists were thrilled to meet me after slaving away for three months. Daniel is off the project. The current team consists of Steve, Scott and Nicole.

Today I screened the 1940 *Thief of Baghdad* for them. They're jazzed. In the art department, at least, *Prince 2* is the "cool" project to be on. Meetings with Leila and Brian have been productive. We all seem to be in sync and happy.

Scott said: "For three months everybody's been saying 'Jordan this' and 'Jordan that' and 'When Jordan gets back.' I thought you'd be much older. When I saw you, I thought: 'My gosh, he's just a baby!'"

When I arrived, the mood was a bit nervous because Brian and Leila felt that John (Baker, head of E² which means entertainment and education) had doubts about the project and would probably cut our budget severely. It turned out he hadn't seen any of the work the artists had done. I took him upstairs and had the artists show him what they were working on. That, plus I've been making a point of trying to include him in things and keep him informed so he feels like he's a part of it. I really didn't do all that much, but it seems to have turned John around 180 degrees. Today he told me that he's bagged all the other entertainment products they had in development and is putting everything behind *Prince 2*. He wants it to be an example of the "New Broderbund" (whatever that is). Fine with me.

John is still nervous about the cost of the project, which he says is the biggest Broderbund has ever done. He wants to lower the licensing royalty rate so he's covered in case it's not a megahit. We're discussing it.

Broderbund stock went out at \$10 (after a split) and has gone to \$25, making overnight millionaires of quite a few people. The company has been moved to a new building on Redwood Blvd. Very slick. Glass and elevators and chrome, and everything in the official Broderbund typeface. The front desk receptionist is even cute; I don't know if that's a coincidence or if it's part of the new corporate image.

IBM and Mac *Prince* are going out February in the new box. I've spent a certain amount of time shmoozing with the fresh-faced marketing people who have been assigned to *Prince*. They seem inclined to promote the product, as opposed to burying it, which represents a considerable improvement in marketing strategy.

Feyna says Game Boy *Prince* should be on the shelves this week.

Saw a prototype of the 8-bit Nintendo version. It's OK, nothing spectacular.

JANUARY 30, 1992

Nearing the end of my second week. It's been a good trip. The *Prince 2* Team (Leila, Scott, Steve, Nicole and Maureen on graphics; Tom, Michael and Jonelle on sound, Jeff programming, Brian producing) is more jazzed than ever. The Powers That Be (Doug and John) look favorably upon the enterprise and seem inclined to let us do it our way without interference despite the fact that it's the costliest entertainment product in Broderbund's history. Not only that, but John actually signed the contract!

Meanwhile, *Prince 1* is chugging along. The IBM release/Mac release is getting a goodly share of marketing attention. They're even doing a promotional video! (Today after work Dexter and I went down to Mill Valley to retape the swordfighting scenes. When they couldn't get the camera to work, we went across the road and had a beer while they figured it out.)

Licensing activity continues. For the first time, Steve and Feyna seem to be on top of things, rather than buried underneath them. The Game Boy version arrived yesterday and got everyone all excited. 8-bit Nintendo and Sega Master versions are close to shipping, so they say. Some more new deals have been signed including Sega Game Gear.

So, it looks like I'll be able to continue the "expatriate writer" life a while longer.

All I need is a story worth writing.

FEBRUARY 1, 1992

Saw *La double vie de Veronique* with Tomi. She said: "It just proves that if you're a good-looking French girl, you can get away with just about anything."

Yesterday was my last day at Broderbund. I said goodbye to everyone. It's actually not such a bad thing, taking off for months at a time: They spend so much time saying "If only Jordan were here!" they're starting to idealize me in my absence.

The artists all want to please me... it's like I'm their dad. I don't know how that happened, but it's great. I guess that makes Brian the mom?

Rob Martyn showed me Living Books. It's awesome. If Disney had any sense they'd do a deal with Broderbund. A Living Book of *The Little Mermaid* would sell fifty trillion copies. Disney doesn't see it - they're years behind the times and don't know it. Rob called Disney "the China of educational software" - the sleeping giant.

Dinner with Rob and Tomi at Jennie Low's. It occurred to me that the three of us, sitting at that table, were ideally qualified to go off and start a multimedia software company. With Living Books, the Sensei product line, and *Prince of Persia* to our names, we should have no problem raising a couple million bucks startup money.

Tomi, for one, would love to do it. Rob I think would be reluctant to take the risk. Me, I have other plans... although what they are, I have no idea.

FEBRUARY 4, 1992

Visiting George in L.A. has got me thinking seriously about moving there and spending the next couple of years writing and trying to get a picture made.

I suspect that for me, another six months abroad will go a long way. I mean, I'm enjoying learning how to be a bum, but it's not really my nature. I'm happiest when I'm in the midst of things - struggling, forging alliances and overcoming problems and, dammit, *making* something. That's why I've been coming up with all these crazy

ideas lately, like shooting a documentary in Cuba or Madrid.

Seeing George made me realize I want to be making mainstream, American, theatrical features. I've been dreaming about it for years, but pursuing it only in fits and starts, and from afar, while I spend the rest of my time circling around it... *preparing* myself, for Christ's sake, as if I weren't yet worthy to try to breach the ramparts, or something.

I don't regret any of the things I've done in the meantime – *Prince*, *Prince 2*, New York, Salamanca – but now I'm asking myself: What, exactly, am I waiting for? I *know* what I want to do with my life. Why not just do it?

Ken set up a meeting for me at Leonard Nimoy's company. The guy I met with, Bill Blum, liked *Bird of Paradise*, but is leaving to start his own production company. He said he wants to keep me in mind for the future. All basically meaningless, but considering it was my first movie-biz meeting since 1988 and *In the Dark*, I'm not complaining.

FEBRUARY 6, 1992

[In NY] I've got that dizzy disoriented feeling of having jumped too many time zones in too short a time. It's like seeing the last five years of my life in fast-forward: San Francisco, L.A., Chappaqua, uptown, downtown. Connections to all these places still intact, I drift freely among them. But there's no place I really belong.

Talked to Robert for an hour last night. Half-playfully, we agreed to start a software company when he graduates in 1993. I told him I was thinking of moving to L.A. It sounded good... but today, walking in the Village, the urge seized me to move back here instead. New York is part of me; it will always be *the* city. When I'm here I feel real, I feel alive, I feel horny. How can I live anywhere else?

FEBRUARY 12, 1992

No wonder I have this nagging sense of meaninglessness: I'm not writing. I've been noodling around with this ghost story, but it's not enough. I was built to work every day, not just now and then.

Stopped by NYU to visit Thierry. I don't know what I'd been expecting, but it didn't happen. He didn't light up and say "What the fuck are you doing, what happened to you after Cannes? You wrote a feature, you got an agent, good for you, I always knew you had it in you!" Instead, we just chatted cordially for a few minutes and I left wondering what I'd been hoping from the encounter.

Maureen said kindly: "You have that look like you've come back to visit your old high school, hoping to recapture the feelings you had there." She was right, of course. How pathetic. You can't go back.

Mark Netter invited me to come visit him in the Alps. He's in Albertville doing sound for CBS. He's considering moving to L.A. Maybe we should get a place together. It'd be good to have a roommate, especially a film-happy one.

FEBRUARY 14, 1992

Brian sent me a nice thick packet of foreign reviews of *Prince* – always a pleasure – and a new disk of *Prince 2* graphics from Leila. Drove to Mt. Kisco with Mom and Emily to look at them, in a computer graphics shop that charges \$20 for 15 minutes (a far cry from the 60 cents they charge in Salamanca). By an ironic twist of fate, it's located where the Electric Playhouse used to stand.

I should write my memoirs... starting at age 15 when I got my first Apple II, up through the publication of *Prince*, the game that marked the end of the Apple II era. It's a good story, and it's a piece of history that's really mine: I was there. Don't know who'd want to read it, though. Besides, I hate people who write their memoirs when they're young. It's so egotistical.

Whenever I get elegaic about my past like this, it's usually a sign that some big change is about to happen.

Here I am, as free as it's possible for anyone to be – free to travel, work, fall in love – and I'm holding back, like I'm waiting for my life to start. This *is* my life. It's not a preparation for anything – it's the thing itself. I have got to remember that.

FEBRUARY 16, 1992

Sandra Levinson said Aléa liked *Bird of Paradise*, said it was well written, but didn't think it was a feature – maybe a TV movie. She offered to put it into Paul Mazursky's hands, although we both agreed that was a long shot.

I told her about my idea to shoot a documentary in Cuba. I wrote up a proposal so she can get started trying to get me a visa.

FEBRUARY 17, 1992

Kevin's right. I really should make a short film or two before I go after my first big-time feature job. I'd learn an incredible lot by directing a short, and I could still go to L.A. afterwards.

Mark Netter called from Albertville, France, to invite me to go skiing the 26th and 27th. I'm tempted.

FEBRUARY 19, 1992

[Writing in Spanish] I'm above the clouds. Called Tomi from Washington airport. I still don't know what I'm going to do, but I don't care any more. There's no point worrying about my career, or about money. What I want is adventure. Whatever comes next, I'm ready for it. From now on I won't worry about anything.

Paris



Put down your sword

SWAN down like his sword to kill you —
hesitates — puts down his sword

You still there body at each other.

Take 2 steps forward — ~~you go out of the~~
toward stream,

He happens, you're playing before or
They you stay play & return to you
You still

- Put yourself down to lower your sword.
2 hold. 2 down (2 times)

- ~~If you~~ You'll stay off guard, far guard, until he starts to strike
then you'll go back on guard

Paris

FEBRUARY 21, 1992

[Writing in Spanish] It's a big city, Madrid.

When I arrived a thick snow was falling. I checked into a pension close to the Puerta del Sol, took a shower to forget the planes and buses and the lost night, got dressed as if I'd just woken up, and spent the day at the Prado. At the end of the day I called the only person I knew in Madrid: Ricardo from NYU.

We met for drinks. I hadn't really known Ricardo in New York, but after an hour, he invited me to stay at his house, and to join him and his crew in the south on a documentary they're shooting for Spanish TV. So, pretty much everything I'd hoped for.

Yet somehow, after a night of drinking and carousing with Ricardo and his friends, the whole plan of moving to Madrid no longer seemed like so much fun. It's not Madrid's fault. I think I'm just burnt out on traveling. Arriving in yet another new city where I don't know anybody and have no reason to be here, this time, didn't feel like the right kind of adventure. It just made me feel tired. Or then again, maybe I just stayed at that nightclub too long.

I called Mark Netter in Albertville and said: "Let's go skiing!" Bought a train ticket to Paris.

FEBRUARY 24, 1992

[Paris] Shared an overnight sleeper with two Spaniards and an Argentine. When I returned from the cafeteria car, the beds were made and the old man was telling stories about his experiences in the Civil War and in Matthesen concentration camp. A moving train at night is an incredible place to hear stories. Like a campfire. I hardly slept.

Spent the day with Patrick. Now I'm waiting for Lobna's 5 pm phone call.

When the train pulled into Paris Austerlitz station this morning, I was so happy to arrive, to be here. The atmosphere of the city engulfed me; I suddenly knew that this was where I belonged. Don't know why, can't explain it, but Paris holds more drama for me than Salamanca or Madrid ever did. I want to stay a while. I want to live here a little.

The immediate problem will be finding an apartment. Patrick is already on the case.

5:05 pm Yeah! She just called. Here goes nothing...

FEBRUARY 26, 1992

Survived a very sporty first day of skiing here at Valmorel with Mark Netter and his mother's hairdresser Jean-Claude, who grew up skiing here before they put in the lifts in the '70s. Jean-Claude and his friend Bud from Albany have been skiing every day for weeks. He said: "We have been here so long, we are starting to miss our wives."

They took us down the hard intermediate slopes. Jean-Claude is at least 50 but he can ski circles around any of us. I'm in pain. Nothing like skiing to make you realize how out of shape you are.

MARCH 1, 1992

[Paris] Another glorious day. Yesterday was like spring, the first nice day of the year, and everybody was out and about. Patrick and I sat on the wall overlooking the Seine around the corner from his apartment, drinking coffee and going through apartment listings.

Patrick's life is so idyllically Parisian I can hardly stand it. Every five minutes something happens that's like a scene from a French movie, all perfectly framed and lit and everything. He stops a girl in the street and she gives him a light; or he slams on the brakes and jumps out to check out a big rusty sheet of metal that someone left propped up on the sidewalk that he thinks might make a perfect tabletop. And there's the Seine in the background, or an old man with a cane, or a troop of schoolgirls or something, just to remove any doubt of where you are. I love this city.

Called Tomi from a phone booth. It was good to hear her voice. "Ah yes, Paris," she sighed. "Of course, it's a heartless and materialistic society, but it takes you a while to realize that because it's so beautiful." She was deeply envious that I'm moving here.

I told her Patrick's suggestion that I buy an apartment instead of renting one. She just laughed.

Florence made Moroccan soup for dinner and we watched *West Side Story* on TV dubbed into French.

MARCH 3, 1992

My first night in 1 rue du Four, Paris VI. What a glorious feeling, after six months of living out of a suitcase, to be someplace I can call home. Patrick has been at my side every step of the way. It was his phone, his car, his French that saw me through. He's been taking care of me in the best way. I think this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

I'm in Paris. I'm here. *I live* here. Wow.

MARCH 9, 1992

The plumber came and fixed the toilet. The first time I'd used it, the contents that I flushed came back up through the shower drain - not a pretty sight. It turned out he'd actually warned me *not* to use the toilet, because it was missing a part that he'd forgotten to bring with him, but not understanding French I'd somehow failed to pick up on this minor detail. How embarrassing. Anyway, now it works, supposedly.

Also, today the phone started working. It was quite a thrill.

A DHL package arrived from Broderbund. DHL and AT&T are my only link to the world I've left behind.

I need a girlfriend.

I need to learn French.

I need to start writing something.

Other than that, things are just fine. Phone works. Toilet works. No complaints.

I've been playing this Gainsbourg record over and over, the one Florence gave me. Black trombone.

I can't wait for my Outbound power supply to arrive from the US so I can start using my computer. (That's my excuse.)

MARCH 13, 1992

Friday the 13th! Dangerous!! Great potential for good and for evil. Have to walk carefully.

Packet of mail arrived from NY containing among other things a letter from Ben Normark. I wrote him one back. Oh, and a \$79,000 check from Broderbund.

MARCH 16, 1992

Went to Activision to see the Super Nintendo version of *Prince*. Wow! It was like a brand new game. For the first time I felt firsthand what it's really like to play *Prince of Persia*, when you're not the author and don't already know by rote what's lurking around every corner.

Lunch with Dominique. His boss and another guy pressed me really hard - they're eager to acquire the U.S. and European rights to Super NES *Prince* and they hoped I could help swing their case with Broderbund. They said they'd guarantee 150,000 units. Not Bad!

Jamil called to say: "Where were you Saturday night? It was great... I got home six pm Sunday."

Went for a drink with Patrick.

"When you go back to the U.S.," he said, "you're gonna be happy. It may take a while. It may take six months. You'll be speaking the good French, you'll know all the names of the streets and where is the Louvre exactly, and you're gonna be really happy to leave."

MARCH 23, 1992

Dinner at Denis and Dominique Friedman's. Great meal. Had a good time. Erin, Laurent Weill, and Florence were there too. Denis me cayó mejor aquí en Francia que en California.

MARCH 26, 1992

Visited Dany Boolauck at *Tilt*. He invited me to his place for dinner, his mom cooked a spicy Indian curry, and we sat up till midnight talking. Dany's life is like a Somerset Maugham story. He invited me to be on his TV show in April along with Richard Garriott.

MARCH 27, 1992

Got a letter from Ken Sherman. He said subtlety doesn't sell these days and I'd have a better chance if I wrote a high-concept sexy cartoon like *Basic Instinct* (which I haven't seen). Hell, if *that's* true, why don't I just stick to video games? Anyway, it was a nice letter.

I'm back to working on the girl-in-the-apartment screenplay. Can't get too excited about it. I'm in a foul mood. Spleen. When the sky comes down on you like a saucer.

It's been raining all day.

MARCH 29, 1992

Saw *Bugsy*. I feel better now. All I really need is to be working on something, and my existential problems will clear up - I know that. I *should* know it...

Maybe I should rent an IBM system, so I can work on *Prince 2* level design from here. Lord knows I've got enough time on my hands.

MARCH 30, 1992

It costs \$800/month to rent an IBM system here. My apartment rent is only \$650.

I spoke to Leila and Brian at length. They want me out there. The pressure is on to make the January release, and it looks like some heavy graphics cuts are going to be needed. So I stayed up until three last night making them. I'm actually quite happy with the results. I kick and scream, but the fact is, I *like* economy of means. A game that looks like they threw everything but the kitchen sink at it is somehow inelegant.

It was good to work on *Prince 2* for a bit. Made me feel useful.

I promised Brian I'll spend three weeks in California in June, before I go to Cuba to shoot the movie.

MARCH 31, 1992

Sometimes I wish I could cut loose from all this stuff - the computer games, the wanting to be a filmmaker, the endless self-promotion. I'm so bored with my arsenal.

I wish I could be like Patrick just for a little while... so that people would come to me just because I'm cool and it makes them feel more alive just to be with me, and not because of anything I've done, or might accomplish in the future.

I wish I had nothing to lose.

APRIL 5, 1992

Sandra Levinson called! The ICAIC guy she wants to hook me up with is here in Paris.

Alea is dying of lung cancer. Sandra is trying to raise the money to get him to NY for radiation therapy at Sloane-Kettering. They need \$35-40,000.

APRIL 8, 1992

Not one but three DHL packages arrived today - a batch of mail from Mom, a packet of fun stuff from Brian, and five copies of Mac *Prince* in the new odd-shaped candy box, which - I have to say - looks great, absolutely great. I'm impressed.

It's sort of cheering to get all this stuff in the mail that's slickly packaged and brightly colored and aesthetically appealing and full of your name and hyperbole about how great you are. Makes a guy feel more confident about facing the world.

At the same time, though, it feels sort of lonely, because I don't really have anyone to share it with.

I called Patrick. He's been having problems with his mother and brother. I asked if there was anything I could do.

He said: "Do you have a ticket to the planet Mars?"

APRIL 16, 1992

Met with Pepé Horta from ICAIC. He was sympathetic and helpful. If the government doesn't fall between now and July, I think I'm in business.

Patrick has been falling in love with his downstairs neighbor.

My stuff arrived from Salamanca. Got my books, my music, my clothes. I'm whole again.

Taped the *Tilt* interview today with Jean-Michel Blottiere. Richard Garriott is on his way back to London and Austin, Texas. He was envious as hell that I'm staying in Paris.

APRIL 20, 1992

The first really nice day. About time! It's been a long winter.

Now it's 6:30 and I'm waiting for Broderbund to call. The big *Prince 2* meeting is today and I'm supposed to "sit in" by phone.

Patrick left a message: "Hope you're fine... me, I'm just fucking happy."

I called Tomi. I needed to talk to somebody who loved me. She said Florence told her I'm learning French like there's no tomorrow and that Sallie told her I'm living a life right out of Henry James.

"You have a dream life," she said. "You're travelling, you have friends. What exactly is the problem?"

MAY 1, 1992

I'm behaving like someone who's convinced they're going to die young. Like these three months in Paris are months I've stolen, and it could end at any moment.

MAY 3, 1992

About sixteen people have told me I'm "timid." Even Jamil, the other night, remarked: "When you first came, you were very quiet. Now you're starting to relax more. I can see the difference."

What the fuck is that? I'm *not* timid. Why do I come across that way?

I should make up a little litany to repeat to myself every time I find myself at a party among strangers or meeting people for the first time: "I don't have to prove anything. I don't have to impress anybody. These people are as bored with the usual formulas as I am. All they want is a human connection, to snap them out of themselves. They want to laugh and have a good time and *feel* something, for God's sake, the same as I do."

Another thing: When I run across a girl I really like (that rarest and most wondrous of occurrences), don't rush things! Just behave as if I'm enjoying her company and it makes me happy to be with her, but it's as if we met by chance and there's no real expectation that we'll ever run into each other again. *Listen*, be relaxed and friendly and not, for God's sake, *needy*... I'm just moving through the world, always vaguely hoping to come across a kindred spirit, but not really expecting anything. In a word: Be generous!

MAY 8, 1992

Dinner with Patrick in a little Russian restaurant on the left bank that has 65 different kinds of vodka. Patrick and the owner got into a long conversation which, thanks to some miracle wreaked by the vodka, I was actually able to follow. Arthur H. comes there a lot.

"OK," Patrick said. "You want me to tell you your life story? I'm drunk enough for it."

He said: "You'll become a director and a producer and all the things you want to be, but you won't be a star. You'll never be a guy like Coppola who takes the spotlight, who climbs the steps of Cannes with a crowd watching him and says 'This is me, I did this. I'm a genius.' You'll be the guy in the shadows. The people who know you and work with you will respect you, but it won't make you happy, because what you really want is to beat this shyness that's in you. You want to be the cool guy, the hot dude who has the spotlight and who everybody gathers around. But this shyness you have will prevent you. Every time you have a chance to be the center of attention, you'll deflect it. You'll say 'Oh, this wasn't really my success, I'm just a little guy.'"

We got back to 8 rue Boutarel at two in the morning. Sandrine was waiting. She jumped into Patrick's arms like a

cat.

Where in the World?



Where in the World?

MAY 15, 1992

[*San Rafael*] It's been a good week, *Prince*-wise. The Mac version has shipped and, though it's still early to tell, has all the earmarks of becoming a major hit... 16-bit Nintendo version has been approved and is slated to ship in Japan in July... Konami will distribute it in Europe and North America.

As for *Prince 2* (the reason I'm here), it's a good thing I came when I did. The artists were spinning their wheels mired in confusion and were grateful for my arrival. Once again, I've scaled back the graphics load. It didn't bother me this time. Enough months have passed and I feel distant enough from the project to make the cuts detachedly. The reductions are fairly drastic, but I think there'll still be enough left to wow 'em when the product ships.

The pressure to make cuts, to bring it in on schedule and under budget, is coming from a nervous John Baker, who's getting pressure from above, of course, from Doug. But when I stopped by Doug's office to say hello, he said: "Don't compromise on quality. Don't let them pressure you. What do you care if it ships in January? If they try to rush you, just give 'em a Gallic shrug."

I've scheduled my next visit for early to mid-July. Right before Cuba.

It's fun to breeze into town like this for a week, save the day, and leave again before I've worn out my welcome. It's also highly efficient.

Doug was recently the subject of a *Forbes* spread entitled "Who in the World is Doug Carlston?"

Tina LaDeau came into the office looking for her dad. She's 21 now. Wow. She could make anybody forget anything.

I called Patrick and read him the French translation of the Mac *Prince* manual. He confirmed my suspicion that it was not a great translation. We wrote a new version. That is, Patrick did, and I typed it. Hope they use it.

MAY 18, 1992

I had lunch with Doug. He suggested making *Prince of Persia* into a feature film. He thought we could raise a lot of the money from licensees. In a year or two, it just might be within the realm of possibility.

MAY 20, 1992

Yesterday was my last day at the 'Bund. It looks like the project is back on track. It's a good thing I made this trip.

MAY 28, 1992

[*Paris*] Today I met my next-door editing neighbors at FEMIS. They were tickled to make my acquaintance. I guess they don't meet a lot of Americans. Anyway, I showed them *BNUPS*. They treated it so seriously, it was hilarious. The guy was impressed with my "unique" vision of Paris. The girl liked my "vision" of artistic creation: "So simple... so masculine, yet sensitive." She asked me what it meant. Ah, French students.

Honestly, up to that point, I'd been feeling like walking away from the whole thing and never showing it to anybody.

Brian and Jeff just called. I miss Broderbund. I miss *Prince 2*. Why am I in Paris making a dumb student film, instead of in Novato where the action is? Nobody's ever going to write me a letter from Saudi Arabia saying how much they loved *BNUPS*.

What am I looking for, anyway? I didn't find it in New York or California or Spain or Paris, so now I'm going to look for it in Cuba... and I still don't know what it is, or where all this is leading.

I invited 30 people for Friday night. Hope they'll all fit in my apartment.

JUNE 5, 1992

I read Patrick the pulp serial I'd written for my French class to practice the various grammatical constructions we're studying. He laughed out loud, multiple times. "You got a great sense of humor, man," he said. "How come it doesn't show up in your screenplays?"

JUNE 14, 1992

Had coffee with Sophie on rue de Buci, then we went to Les Halles where she helped me pick out a bunch of French music CDs. Mac *Prince* was in stock, stacked 15 deep.

JUNE 18, 1992

My neighbor, the pretty black girl from Madagascar, said: "Hey, I saw you on TV!"

The guy she lives with is a games fiend. They invited me in to see their PC computer. I signed a copy of *Prince* for them. Life is good.

JUNE 23, 1992

Finished moving my worldly goods, European division, into my new studio at around four o'clock in the morning. Now I'm leaving Paris yet again, on three hours of sleep and nothing but coffee in my stomach.

The (almost) four months I lived at 1 rue du Four, I felt like a visitor to Paris. I knew the clock was ticking, that I only had the apartment until the end of summer and I had to make the most of it. Now, I feel like I have a home.

8 rue Boutarel isn't going away. The rent is so low – \$4,000 a year – that barring complete financial ruin, it's hard to imagine I'll ever be forced to give it up. Unlike New York, unlike San Francisco, it's not connected to a job or a girlfriend or any other part of my life that might change. It's a retreat, a little square of earth I can always return to. I'm so happy to have it. And the best part is, Patrick and Sandrine are my neighbors. I hope they stay together. I hope they never leave.

JUNE 28, 1992

[*San Rafael*] *Prince 2* is looking good. It feels cool, being the young game designer who lives in Paris and breezes into town for the week to look in on the project that's going to keep him rich for a few more years. I like the nuts-and-bolts aspects of working on this project, too. I hate to admit it, but it's more fun than 16mm student filmmaking.

So, why don't I do more of it? A question I'm beginning to ask seriously. As in, why don't I come back in (say) December, rent a one-bedroom in North Beach or south of Market, pitch a new project to Broderbund, and live half the year here and half in Paris?

In May 1993 Robert will be out of school... he'd join me and Tomi in a flash. It's something to think about.

Ken Goldstein (Yale '84) is working for Broderbund. Man, was I surprised to see him. Small world. I took him to dinner at Royal Thai.

JUNE 30, 1992

Lunch with Doug. He wants to do *POP: The Movie*. He thinks he can raise \$4 million from the licensees (Konami, etc.), then get the rest the usual way. \$20 million budget, smart screenplay, him as exec producer, me as director. Release the movie (and the novelization) to coincide with *Prince 4*... which, given 18-month development cycles, I figure should be either summer or Christmas '96.

Four years ago, I was in the midst of Apple II *Prince* and had just finished the last rewrite of *In the Dark*. I was 24.

Time is going fast.

JULY 9, 1992

Here I am again at the airport. Seems like that's the only time I ever get to write any more.

My last day at Broderbund was predictably frenetic. I was the last to leave at 8 pm, right after Scott. Tom Rettig brought in his favorite narrator, a guy named Mark, and we recorded the narration in under two hours. Nicole read the Princess. The Queen's still a problem; we may need to bring in a real actress.

It's coming together quite nicely. I don't regret the time I'm spending on it; I'm enjoying it and also I'm learning a lot. In fact, I'd say I'm learning as much about directing on this project as I have on any film I've worked on.

I'm starting to think this computer-games racket is not only more fun than filmmaking but even, in some ways, cooler.

JULY 13, 1992

[In NY] Lunch with David at the Olive Tree. He thinks I should go to San Francisco and make computer games. "Who cares about movies?" he said.

Broderbund sent me a new 486.

Spoke to Brian. P.D. has been completely reorganized. Harry Wilker's in charge of the whole thing now and reports directly to Ed Auer. Yikes. These are dangerous times we live in.

Getting this visa has been an odyssey. Pepe Horta says it's all set, but I called the Cuban Interests Section in Washington and they don't have it. I've been trying to send a fax to ICAIC, but the circuits are always busy. I made a plane reservation anyway for Wednesday the 22nd, on the 8:30 am charter from Miami.

I want to make a 7-10 minute film, with little or no dialogue, that paints a portrait of Havana in this poignant moment of transition. A way of life that most Americans have never seen and never understood is about to disappear, or at least undergo some sort of drastic change, and I want to get it on film.

JULY 16, 1992

Mark Netter is psyched to write *Prince: The Movie* with me. He also wants to move to L.A.

Robert wants me to hire him to design *Prince 2* levels. It's an idea.

JULY 20, 1992

Mark Abrams dropped by and I showed him *Prince 2*. Stayed up till the small hours shooting the bull with him and Linda: true love vs. romantic love and all that. Hours I should've spent on *Prince 2* level design, but what the hell.

I fly tomorrow and I have not yet begun to pack. Down-to-the-wire me.

I guess the next time I write, it'll be in a different notebook, and I'll be in Havana.

Night Train to Berlin



Learn to recognize the BOOSTER POTION!

Level:		Max strength
1	X only	3
2	✓ (only)	4
3	✓ (like)	5
4	X	5
5	✓ (only)	6
6	(J. S. M. M.)	3
7	X	3
8	✓	4
9	X	4
10	✓	5
11	X	5
12	✓	6

Shadow appears ~~at~~ on 1st level — (12?)
 He has 6 units of strength now, just like you.

Night Train to Berlin

SEPTEMBER 14, 1992

[*San Rafael*] First day back at the 'Bund.

The artists were happy to see me. They've done a lot of work since the last time I was here – most of it good, fortunately. It's all starting to come together. We're slated to ship in April. Seven months away. Seems like a lot of time, but...

Prince 1 is selling 7500 units a month now. Everybody's thrilled.

SEPTEMBER 16, 1992

Lunch with Harry Wilker, who's just been promoted to head up product development (P² and E²) and thus is now John Baker's boss. He hates games, but it's too late for him to do anything about *Prince 2* except clench his teeth and pray. He's nervous about how much it's costing. I don't think I reassured him.

They all want me to come back in November. January will be too late. I hate to leave Paris again so soon... and as usual, I'll have to buy my own ticket... but there's a lot at stake, so I guess I'll just have to do it.

Not that anybody except me cares or is keeping track, but this month my *Prince* earnings to date surpassed *Karateka's*. Figuring in piracy, there's maybe a million people out there who've played *Prince*. Maybe two million. That boggles my mind.

SEPTEMBER 17, 1992

Demoed *Prince 2* for Doug and John Baker. Lunch with Ken Goldstein.

An actress named Sarah came in to read for the Queen. I sat in to direct her. It's fascinating how actors love being directed. This woman started out very cool and contemptuous of the whole thing, and by the end, she was just glowing.

Got down to making some levels, finally. Met with the artists (one by one) and with Jonelle, who played me the music she's been composing. It's not bad; it sounds like Indian restaurant music. Had fun speaking Spanish to Marcela. I have a good time at Broderbund these days.

SEPTEMBER 18, 1992

Leila *begged* me to come back in mid-October instead of November. "By November all the graphics will be *done*," she said. Doe eyes.

SEPTEMBER 23, 1992

My last two days at Broderbund were insanely hectic and rushed, but we got the most important things done. At 5 pm on the last day I sat down with Nicole and we went through the opening sequence that she'd got running for the first time in 8-bit PC-size graphics. It was like cutting a film. She manned the keyboard, I gave directions, and in the space of a hour we completely recut the sequence. Without having to create any new graphics or record any new dialog, we made it work better than it ever had. It looks like it was always meant to be that way. An editing miracle. We were both thrilled.

Ken Goldstein has been promoted to associate producer. He's second-in-command to John Baker and is supervising all entertainment product development.

SEPTEMBER 24, 1992

[*Paris, rue Boutarel*] It's been drizzling all day. The kind of day that makes it hard to remember the sun ever shines here.

Spent the afternoon with Aarón. We dove right in, talking about the film and listening to the music tapes. He's eager to get started. First priority is to arrange a screening of the rushes for tomorrow.

Bought a monitor for my computer, carried it back here, and promptly blew out the power in my apartment. Luckily, Bernard's band was playing that night at the Texas Blues restaurant, and his drummer was able to explain to me how I should connect the computer so this wouldn't happen.

SEPTEMBER 27, 1992

Showed Aarón and Patrick and Sandrine the *Prince 2* editor. They were duly impressed.

Sandrine was feeling down, so Patrick and I brought a bottle of wine and three glasses to where she was sitting alone by the Seine writing a letter. She cheered up slightly, and we drank the bottle as the sun set behind Notre Dame. "We're like characters in a Jim Jarmusch movie," Patrick said.

OCTOBER 9, 1992

It's my one-year anniversary since I came to Paris. I realized this when I went to the United office to try to change the date of my still-unused return ticket and was told that, sorry, the ticket is only good for one year. I'll have to leave tomorrow morning or not at all.

OCTOBER 15, 1992

I bought a ticket for San Francisco for next Thursday.

"What are you doing in France?" Patrick said. "Go to San Francisco! Finish the game! They need you. Stay for a couple of months. Nothing's going to happen here. We won't forget you."

OCTOBER 18, 1992

Spent the whole day at rue Boutarel making Level 3, "First Cavern Level." I'm quite pleased with it. Some nifty little puzzles, not too hard, not tedious either.

OCTOBER 19, 1992

Stayed up till 5 am last night making Level 6, "First Ruin Level." A good day's work.

OCTOBER 22, 1992

Edited at Atria until eleven o'clock last night, when Patrick came and rescued me. I had a fax to send to Brian before midnight. Where can you go to send a fax in Paris in the middle of the night? Answer: back on the Ile, at the hotel on the corner of rue Boutarel. The night clerk sent the five pages to San Francisco and only charged me the France Telecom charges. The Ile St-Louis really is a special island within Paris, a world unto itself.

OCTOBER 25, 1992

[*San Rafael*] "I was taking the night train to Berlin..."

Thus begins the *noir* eve-of-WWI adventure Tomi and I are cooking up. Now, finally, I'm excited.

Ken expects me to come in as an author-for-hire, *Prince 2* style, to build Broderbund an adventure game system. But I have a different idea.

An independent development group. Tomi and me and Robert, maybe Corey, maybe Glenn Axworthy, and a couple of artists, in an office in San Francisco. Two years, \$500K, and we could develop an awesome adventure game for Broderbund to publish.

Best of all, we'd be building a company—an asset that, years down the line, could actually be sold for real money. Better than royalties.

Prince 2 is coming along nicely. No worries.

OCTOBER 30, 1992

Here I am again in that state of international limbo, an airport. I've got a 486 computer and a new leather jacket to prove I was here.

It was a fun week. It's really satisfying watching *Prince 2* come together. The last few days have been somewhat marred by controversy over the subtitle. I got Brian and Bruce and the whole art department excited about "The Shadow and the Flame," we were all ready to go ahead, and then Ken Goldstein shot it down. Now, thanks to Ken, everybody is all agitated about it.

Prince of Persia 2: The Shadow and the Flame

Prince of Persia 2: City of the Dead

Prince of Persia 2: The City of Souls

I'm so burned out now, I don't even care which one they use.

Pitched the train story to Ken. He said: "Do you really need a partner? Can't you write it yourself?" For some reason the mention of Tomi got him all riled up. (As Brian said afterwards, "I thought he was going to blow a gasket.")

Also pitched the company idea to Robert and Corey. This could really happen. (Gulp!)

NOVEMBER 1, 1992

[Paris] A last look at the film, a last chance to make sweeping architectural changes, and now it's done. Aarón will implement the few minor cuts we discussed today, and by tomorrow afternoon we should be image-locked. Tuesday he'll work on sound and get ready for the mix, which could be as early as Thursday.

It's got a new title: "Waiting for Dark" (or maybe "Waiting for Night"): *Esperando la noche*. Havana 1992.

I like this film. Aarón says he does too. I don't care if anybody else does. Lie.

Cast my vote for Clinton.

NOVEMBER 5, 1992

I couldn't get Sophie or Anna or Frédérique to go to the Tilt d'Or awards with me, so I went alone. As if that weren't bad enough, I won another Tilt d'Or (this time for *Mac Prince*) and had to get up on the podium and accept the award and say a few words into the mike. Saying it in French was the easy part; the hard part was keeping my leg from shaking - I was as nervous as I've ever been in my life. I thought I'd outgrown stage fright, but guess not. It's going to be on TV, so I hope I didn't make a total fool of myself.

Met some new people, including Frederick Raynal, author of *Alone in the Dark*; Eric Chahi, author of *Out of This World* (aka *Another World*); and Paul Cuisset, Eric's successor at Delphine Software, who's responsible for their new game *Flashback*. Eric's left Delphine and is very upset about *Flashback* — not only because they stole his "look and feel" but because they've used it (he feels) to rip off *Prince of Persia*, which offends his sense of ethics.

Dany's left *Tilt*. He's in Thailand now trying to win over the parents of his Thai bride-to-be. When he gets back he's going to work for — you guessed it — Delphine.

Dany's successor is Guillaume, the guy who invited me to the awards ceremony. He's brought on board as a fledgling staff member his boyhood pal Julien, who is a nice guy and gave me a lift home.

Julien said: "Of all the people who accepted awards tonight, you were the best, but you were the most modest." The whole night was that way, with people coming up and saying staggeringly nice things to me. According to them, I'm one of the three best-known game authors in France, the other two being Eric Chahi and Frederick Raynal; and they were both so star-struck to meet *me*, I hardly knew what to say. Everyone here remembers *Karateka*. It's really surprising.

Aarón and I finished cutting the film. (That is, I left Aarón at Atria, still working at 7pm, while I went to the *Tilt* awards.) We mix tomorrow morning at 9 am.

NOVEMBER 6, 1992

Mixed from 9:30 to 2:00 but the nice young girl mixer only charged us for three hours. We went back to Atria and packed up our stuff and out of there. Finished.

Anabel at Atria saw me on TV last night.

Enlisted Patrick in the "Train to Berlin" adventure game concept. We agreed that the chapeau is essential.

NOVEMBER 13, 1992

Stayed up till 4 am last night working on the interface for the train adventure game while Sandrine read comic books and Patrick played *Sherlock Holmes*.

Oh, and yesterday I had lunch with Delphine Software. All of it. They were like a litter of puppies and Paul and his wife/assistant were the mom and dad. They showed me their new game-in-progress *Flashback*, had me autograph a copy of *Prince of Persia*, and took me to lunch. *Flashback* rips off *Prince* shamelessly, but it isn't bad.

I've got a half a mind to steal their vector-graphics system for the train game. Why not; they ripped it off from Eric Chahi. But I've got this obsessive need to be original, so I probably won't.

NOVEMBER 17, 1992

I'm tired of being a foreigner. I'm tired of people asking me where I come from and what I'm doing here, and making little jokes about me being an American and when I do something normal they say "Aha, he's becoming a real Parisian." I know they don't mean any harm, but I'm tired of it.

Oh hell, might as well admit it, it's the same thing (only different) when I go to the U.S. I've chosen a life that's so different from everybody else's that it cuts me off from them. Practically everybody I know treats me like a guest celebrity. Of course it's my own fault. I feel so damn alone sometimes, I feel like I could just float away into the stratosphere and everybody would stand there looking up at me and not one would haul me back down to earth. No ropes.

NOVEMBER 18, 1992

Spent the day with Patrick doing research for the train game. There was a metro strike, it was raining, traffic was jammed all through Paris.

Over coffee at Chatelet I brought Patrick up to date on my latest romantic travails. He said: "There's something I don't understand. Here you are, you've got this great life, you're so free, and yet you act so conservative. You act like you and Sophie work in the same job and you don't want to have any bad feelings in the office. What are you trying to protect? Why not just act like a child? Napoleon, Charles de Gaulle, they all acted like children. They saw something and they wanted it. You're like that when you talk about your computer games. You have a dream and you're going to make it happen. Children are tyrants, they don't care who they hurt to get what they want. Why are you such an adult when it comes to love?"

NOVEMBER 19, 1992

Big day. Plumber came and installed a kitchenette. Cooked my first dinner for Patrick and Yo. Box of pasta, bottle of wine, open the windows to clear out the smoke.

NOVEMBER 23, 1992

Over dinner with Anna I sawed a piece off my steak and somehow caused French fries to explode across the restaurant. "Oops," I said.

"I love it when you do maladroitness. I don't like people who are too perfect."

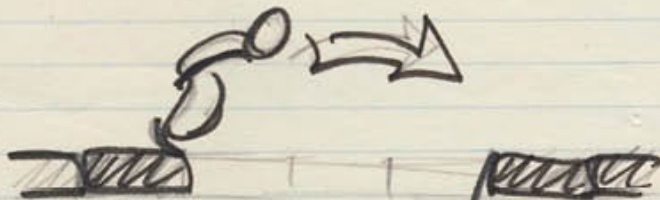
I cheerfully assured her that she would not have that problem with me.

She showed me how to hold a fork the right way.

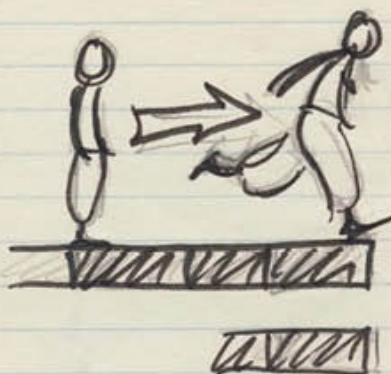
San Francisco

2/3/88
4/20/88

JUMPS



3-SPACE STANDING JUMP
YOU CAN GRAB ONTO EDGE

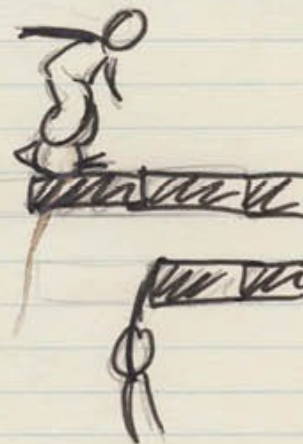


RUNNING JUMP WITH 3-SPACE
RUNNING START



YOU CAN JUST MAKE
A 3-SPACE JUMP

(A)
(B)



YOU CAN GRAB ONTO EDGE
ON A 4-SPACE JUMP
BUT YOU NEED A 3-
SPACE

A 5-SPACE JUMP IS IMPOSSIBLE.

FOR JUMPING START:
3-SPACE START IS OK;
5-SPACE JUMP IS IMPOSSIBLE.

San Francisco

NOVEMBER 30, 1992

[NY] Been here a week. Robert flew in from L.A., I picked him up at the airport (and drove him to a restaurant in Brighton Beach where Emily and her friends Marina and Alex awaited us... but that's another story and, anyway, I now suspect that that entire restaurant was a hallucination).

The next morning I showed him all the work I'd done on *Train*. He liked it, but said that if he's going to go back to making computer games, he'd have to be in charge of his own project, not just carry out mine. Makes sense. Corey or Roland would be a more natural choice, because they have no aspirations as game designers themselves.

Now, finally, it's clear to me that I should just go ahead and start the project on my own. If it takes \$20,000 or \$50,000 of my own money, fine. Then, when it's time to bring on a programmer, I can offer a royalty of 5% or 7%, and still be left with enough to justify either publishing through Broderbund or starting an affiliated label, and retain ownership. Gulp.

DECEMBER 1, 1992

Morris Silver came over and we plotted my destiny. He advised me to start an S corporation to bear the development costs of *Train*. Fun and games.

We had lunch at the little French café on the corner, the one run by the grey-bearded Tunisian. Morris intuited that my globe-hopping lifestyle is making me lonely, and predicted that I would find happiness in San Francisco.

DECEMBER 3, 1992

I need a name for the S corporation. Wagon-Lit Productions? Night Train Productions?

Doug has scheduled a meeting of the Broderbund "storytelling/adventure committee task force" and wants me to come in and pitch *Train*.

What do I want from Broderbund, anyway? A development deal like *Prince 2*? Broderbund programmers, Broderbund artists, Broderbund schedules and Broderbund bureaucracy, me coming in every day to beg, plead and cajole the project toward completion? All for an 8% royalty, and when it's done they own the code, the system, everything?

If I spent an extra \$200,000 and got someone like Roland to program it for a 7% royalty, I could do it my way, and end up owning the damn thing myself.

I don't want to out-Sierra Sierra. Sierra to me means big, expensive, ugly, unwieldy productions with mediocre graphics, mediocre stories, and some fine stuff that you have to wade through the whole mess to get to. Electronic Arts put their heads together and came out with *Sherlock Holmes*, which is pretty much the same thing. I could help Broderbund do the same thing yet again, with slightly better graphics and a better story, and they'd probably do just as well with it as Electronic Arts has with *Sherlock Holmes*.

But I want to do something different. A game that'll be smaller than a Sierra game but on a completely different level in terms of the quality of the graphics and story, and with a sense of style and economy that'll make the whole thing come together and work even for people who don't like adventure games. It'll be to adventure games what *Prince of Persia* was to running-jumping games. That's not something you can do by making a committee and throwing money at it. It's something that can only be done by one author with a clear vision of the product who can supervise it at all levels: programming, story, graphics, sound, music, everything. It's a work of art, and it'll only be as good as the artist who makes it.

What to do, what to do?

DECEMBER 4, 1992

Called Roland. He's the first person I'll see Monday eve when I get in. I tried to get him excited about the adventure game.

"The best thing you said was that you don't like adventure games, and you want to do an adventure game," he said. He's intrigued, but I think it'll take more than that to get him to commit.

DECEMBER 8, 1992

[SF] Doug and Tomi arm-wrestled over which of them would get to have dinner with me and Margo to talk about adventure game plans, but they couldn't agree, so Margo and I ended up having dinner alone, which was a waste of time, of course.

I told Margo what I want to do and explained my reservations about the Storytelling Committee. She said she hopes Doug will talk me into coming on board, but she understood my side of it, I think, better than her job allows her to admit.

(Rehearsing what to say to Doug)

"I'm sure this Storytelling Committee would be fun and all... but here's another idea: I'm really excited about this train game. I've played all the other adventure games out there and I think here's a chance to make something that will blow them all away - not just in terms of story, although that's a big part of it, but also in the graphic look, sound, music, interface, the way it all fits together - the whole package. I'm talking about a game that will really be a work of art. The *first* adventure game to have a story and graphics that can stand on their own merits, not just by adventure-game standards.

"And I'm thinking beyond just this one game. The train game will take maybe two years to develop, and if it's the hit I think it will be, there'll be a major opportunity to follow it up with other games with the same interface, the same special 'look and feel.' I want this to be a whole *line* of games. I've been working on this for weeks and I'm so convinced it's worth it, that I'd be ready to go out and do it on my own as an independent project, if I need to.

"Look, I've spent the last two years traveling and making movies, and learning a lot, but basically goofing off. I wouldn't mind really throwing myself into something for a change. I'd like to *risk* something. So emotionally, I'm up for it. I've already started looking for an apartment in the city. I want to do this game.

"My original plan was to turn *Prince of Persia* into a franchise so I could live off the royalties and write screenplays and make movies. I've *done* that. I know if I went to L.A. now, I could get into that business. But I've changed my mind, because now that I've seen the movie business, I think this is actually more interesting. There's a lot of people out there making movies. But if I don't do this adventure game, *no one will*. It's a chance to change the course of a whole new art form.

"I don't even *like* adventure games. But I'm going to like this one. This will be the first adventure game since Scott Adams that I'll actually *like*."

I can write these things. But can I *say* them? To Doug, in his office, with Margo there and both of them looking at me?

DECEMBER 10, 1992

Dinner with Doug last night. I said basically what I'd planned. So, that's that. The Committee will go on without me.

Doug wasn't mad. He understood, even said he might want to invest if it weren't for his divorce situation. So... I'm on my own. Gulp.

Spent today apartment-hunting on Telegraph Hill. Found one for \$850 that's got a garage and the right kind of faded San Francisco charm. Conveniently (*too* conveniently?), it's half a block away from Tomi and Pete's office at 725 Greenwich. I'm pretty sure I'm going to take it.

I'm beginning a new life. It hardly seems to register.

DECEMBER 12, 1992

Tomi and Pete and I came up with a name: Smoking Car Productions. They're eager for me to move into their office. Tomi and I spent the afternoon working on the train game.

Now I'm listening to the Gainsbourg album I bought last night, and killing time until the Broderbund Christmas party.

DECEMBER 13, 1992

Had a surprisingly good time at the Broderbund Christmas party. Michael Baisuck and I had a drunken man-to-man in the parking lot after they kicked us out. "You know why I hate you?" he said. "It's so goddamned easy for you. You're rich, you're creative, you're good-looking, you speak five fucking languages, you can dance, and you're not arrogant! If I had your life, I'd be having such a good time... But you don't even seem to be enjoying

it!" He proceeded to give me some good advice about how to spend my money while I'm still young enough to enjoy it. Like, buy a vintage '58 Corvette convertible instead of an anonymous current-year Japanese car.

It's only what Patrick's been telling me all along. There's this thing inside me that makes me hold back. That dry adult whisper that counsels prudence, caution, thrift... Why? I'm fighting it on the big stuff, but on the small stuff, it's winning.

So I bought Mom a really nice sweater for Christmas, and I'm flying to LA on the spur of the moment to hang out with George.

And maybe, just maybe, the next time I see the girl of my dreams at a crosswalk in North Beach, I'll have the balls to say hello before she crosses the street.

DECEMBER 15, 1992

My last two days at Broderbund were even more jam-packed than usual. Brian got back from vacation and we put *Prince 2* into QA. (It was the day of Brian's twelve-year anniversary.) Now that it's approaching completion, a lot of upper-management types want copies to take home to play over Christmas.

Prince 2 is going boringly smoothly. Everybody wants it to succeed, the work is going well, and it's even on schedule. Hardly the stuff of drama.

Tomi is proving her worth as collaborator on the train game. We argue a lot, but what we end up with is really good. This story's going to be better than any movie screenplay I've written.

I rented the Greenwich St. apartment. Tomi made me a set of keys for the office. It'll all be waiting for me when I get back in January.

I went down and saw Roland and showed him *Prince 2*. He was impressed. But, he's not ready to commit to the train game. I think he's scared it will turn into a huge project that will consume years of his life and drive him mad. Also, he's just started on *KidCuts* and it's not the right psychological moment to think of the next project. I haven't given up on him, but I do need to start thinking about who else I might get to do it if Roland doesn't.

I'm really enjoying the research for the train game. So far I've read *The Birds Fall Down* by Rebecca West and I'm in the middle of *The Proud Tower* by Barbara Tuchman. It's great to have an excuse to learn all this fascinating stuff. I have the greatest job in the world.

*"...Unknown Spears
Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes,
And then the clash of fallen horsemen and the cries
Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears."
- Yeats, 1895*

DECEMBER 20, 1992

"When a great war or great revolution breaks out it is because a great people, a great race, needs to break out, because it has had enough, particularly of peace. It always means that a great mass feels and experiences a violent need, a mysterious need for a great movement... a sudden need for glory, for war, for history, which causes an explosion, an eruption..." - Charles Peguy, 1910

"Without a country you are the bastards of humanity." - Mazzini

DECEMBER 21, 1992

[Chappaqua] A day of cheerful pattering about amongst my stuff. Tallied up twelve months' worth of credit-card statements, that sort of thing.

I've got so much money it hardly seems real. It's so much more than I need. The awful thing is, now that I have it, I feel the urge to *keep* it.

It's good that I'm doing this train game. I should spend the money and not worry about it. The conservative impulse, at this point, is not my friend. If I'm not prepared to roll the dice now, when I'm young and on top of the world and the cash is rolling in, when will I ever be?

I know myself well enough to know that whatever happens, it won't be my excesses I'll regret, it'll be the things I held myself back from doing. In all my life I've never yet given a present so lavish, or made a gesture so expansive, or indulged a pleasure so recklessly that I regretted it later. Whereas there are so many things I look

back on now and think: That was one of the high points, that moment will never come again, *why did I hold back?*

I know it's possible to err in the other direction too, to screw up your life by not thinking of the future. I just don't think I'm nearly there yet...

JANUARY 7, 1993

[SF] Brian came by at four and we got caught up on the last few weeks. It turned out I'd been invited to the MacUser awards as a last-minute replacement for John Baker. So we changed into our suits and ties in the office, and I sped us to the Galleria in my rented toy car (a blue Mazda Miata) just in time for the 7 o'clock dinner.

Man, that was a posh affair. Beat the Tilt d'Or all hollow, budget-wise. Oh, and I won the Eddy. That is, *Prince* did, and I got to accept the award and make a speech. Brian was thrilled. Susan Lee-Merrow got blasted on white wine and fell asleep in her chair. I was glad I went.

The next morning I picked up the keys and let myself into my new apartment. An auspicious start to my new life in SF.

JANUARY 10, 1993

Consumer Entertainment Show in Las Vegas was a hallucinatory experience. Three nights at the Excalibur. Have a royal day.

My roommate was an unhappy Ken Goldstein, having girlfriend trouble. I shared the Broderbund booth with Christa Beeson (demoing *Carmen Space*), Jessica, and Kathleen, and demoed *Prince 2* for about a million journalists. Appointments every half hour. They flipped out, mostly. I think it'll be a hit.

Saw Dany Boolauck (working for Delphine now), Jean-Michel Blottiere, Richard Garriott (very cool, very much the mogul), Gary Kasparov (I shook his hand! He doesn't like video games, thinks they're destructive and harmful to children), Muhammad Ali (signing autographs), Kyle Freeman, Fredrick Raynal (from Infogrames), Ron Martinez, John Kavanagh and Dominic from Domark (they loved *Prince 2*), Arnie Katz, and lots of other computer-magazine journalists, some of whom were fans from way back and were thrilled to meet me. One even brought along his copies of *Prince 1* for me to autograph.

Met Brad Dourif, who was Piter de Vries in *Dune* and Billy Bibbit in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. He got all excited when I offered to send him a copy of *Prince*. He gave me his home address and secret unlisted number. "Come hang out with us when you come to LA." I asked him if he'd consider acting in a computer game. He said: "Sure!"

Had fun cruising the floor with Mike Estigoy, trying to talk to girls. I was doing my best to flirt with Lori from US Gold San Francisco when, in a miracle of perfect timing, an Italian guy named Pietro came up to us and said "Are you *the* Jordan Mechner? The *famous* Jordan Mechner? Or are you just some guy named Jordan Mechner?" When we got it straight, he practically fell to his knees and embraced me, he was so excited. It didn't do me any good with Lori, though.

All in all, CES was a blast. It was, like, my first taste of public life.

Postscript

Designating a particular moment as the end of the story is basically arbitrary, because life just keeps going on... but a book has to end somewhere, and January 1993 seems like as good a point as any to close the “Making of *Prince of Persia*” journals.

From here on, my journals are increasingly taken up with the saga of Smoking Car Productions and *The Last Express*. Which is a good story too, but for another time.

I couldn’t have known then that a decade later, I would get the opportunity to team up with Ubisoft, Jerry Bruckheimer, Walt Disney Pictures, First Second Books, and an amazing roster of creative talent to “port” *Prince of Persia* to platforms far beyond the Apple II, and fulfill many of my childhood dreams in the process.

It’s been 25 years. The pixelly prince is still running and jumping.

Los Angeles
October 2011

Post-Postscript

Hi, this is Jordan again. Thanks for reading this ebook edition of the *Making of Prince of Persia Journals*. I hope you've enjoyed it.

Unlike the *Prince of Persia* video games, this book doesn't have a publisher or a marketing campaign behind it. Though its subject may be of interest only to a fairly small number of people in the world, I'd still love for as many of them as possible to discover it. This can only happen through the efforts of readers like you. So if you liked it -- please tell a friend! Tweet it, share it on facebook, post a review on amazon.com.

One last note: For the convenience of readers, I've chosen not to encumber this ebook with any sort of copy-protection or DRM. If you read it but didn't purchase it—and especially if you enjoyed it!—I'd very much appreciate it if you'd go to www.jordanmechner.com/ebook and legitimize this copy now. It's cheap, it's easy, and will help fund the cost of running the website and creating future ebooks.

As always, I welcome your comments at jordanmechner.com and [@jmechner](https://twitter.com/jmechner).

Many thanks for your time and support!

Jordan Mechner

About the Author

Jordan Mechner is a game designer, screenwriter, filmmaker, and graphic novelist. He created *Prince of Persia*, *Karateka*, and *The Last Express*.

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