The Rise and Fall of *Prince of Persia*
Administrivia

- Noah is still away and I don’t have an ETA on when he gets back.

- Your multi-game analysis essays are for **this week**
  - Questions?
Not Fresh Prince of Persia
Not Movie *Prince of Persia*
Prince of Persia: Sands of Time
Prince of Persia: Sands of Time

- Today we’re talking about *Prince of Persia: Sands of Time*
  - And a little bit about *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within*
    - And maybe a tiny aside about *Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones*
      - But definitely not the other ones!

- Released November 2003 on Xbox, PS2 and GameCube
- Developed by Ubisoft
- Important note: The **only** 3D Prince of Persia game designed by Jordan Mechner

- SPOILERS AHEAD – I’m probably going to ruin the game for you. Is everyone OK with this?
Gameplay in 3D

- To talk about PoP: SoT is to talk about 3D Gameplay

- Mario 64 is not Super Mario World 2.

- For the same reasons, PoP: SoT had to be designed from the ground up.
Let’s YouTube

- Unsurprisingly, YouTube can be a great place to research games.
- Just type “[game name] gameplay” and you’ll usually find something.
- Here’s a “prince of persia sands of time gameplay” search I ran earlier…

- We’re going to talk about forgiveness in game mechanics. Jumping is forgiving. The Sands of Time are forgiving.
  - This is what many developers got wrong in the jump to 3D from the unforgiving 2D gameplay they were used to.
Narrative

- Here’s where we start seeing some real genius.
- Remember I told you about Mechner?
- Mechner always wanted to work in movies, that’s why the original Prince of Persia focused so heavily on cinematic qualities (Source: Edge Magazine)
- Mechner drove narrative as a core element of *PoP: SoT*, but the story supports the gameplay, it doesn’t drive it.
  - His order of priorities: gameplay > story > characters. (Source: Second Person, Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin)

- The game weaves narrative not just in-between the game, but as a core element of the game itself!
  - See also: Tim Schafer (Day of the Tentacle, Grim Fandango, Psychonauts)
Narrative

- **Shameless theft**: Borrowing from Noah’s book
  - Expressive Processing: Pre-order today!

- **The plot:**
  - Prince storms castle for treasure
  - Finds Sands of Time. Awesome!
  - Releases Sands of Time from the hourglass with the dagger, turns everyone into sand people. Less Awesome!
  - He meets Farah, who says the dagger can undo what has happened…
  - …but an evil Vizier has moved the hourglass to the top of a tower.

- **Notice how efficient this is.**
  - There was originally a far more complex story and nine characters.
Narrative

- The plot:
  - Prince storms castle for treasure
    - This means the castle is ruined and thus *challenging*.
  - Finds Sands of Time. Awesome!
  - Releases Sands of Time from the hourglass with the dagger, turns everyone into sand people. Less Awesome!
    - This provides a reason as to why the player doesn’t talk to people all the time, and why he kills everyone he meets instead.
  - He meets Farah, who says the dagger can undo what has happened…
  - …but an evil Vizier has moved the hourglass to the top of a tower.
    - This provides the *motivation* of the game.

- The plot has been refined to core elements that explain gameplay mechanics. It focuses on what this game wants to do well, and provides explanations for what it can’t.
The setup:
- The Prince is telling a story and the game occurs in the past-tense.
  - Every time you die, he’ll say something like “Oh no, that isn’t how it went.”
  - Pausing results in the Prince saying “Shall I go on with my story?”

The sands:
- The sand save points foreshadow game events, to let the player know what it is they are supposed to do, without telling them through dialogs or HUD elements.
- This was also used to scare the player!
Narrative

- Not only was the narrative cleverly applied to the medium (take that Scandinavian Ludologists!), it was mature as well.
- The story was the stuff of Arabian fantasy, and it was held through until the end.
- The tit-for-tat between The Prince and Farah was beautifully crafted, layered on top of the gameplay.
Dialogue was triggered at certain points, some event driven.

- Used to inform the player of what to do next:
  - “And there it lay, just out of reach: The Dagger of Time. There was a treasure I could carry with pride as a trophy of our victory. If only I could get there…”
  - Farah: “Why didn’t you open the gate?” “Hey, open the gate!”

- Used to tell the player that something wasn’t possible yet:
  - “Try as I might, I could not break that crumbling stone wall.”

Sometimes the dialogue was just for flavor.

- Played back to the gameplay. Farah would sometimes say “I feel like we’ve done this before” when you rewound time.
- Don’t underestimate the power of this for immersion’s sake.
My favorite scene

- This is a **really big spoiler**.

- Look away now!
Farah – The first popular strong female?
What went wrong with Warrior Within?
What went wrong with Warrior Within?

- Ubisoft said they were looking for a “wider audience” for the game.

It got focus-grouped to death

(but that’s a fact of being in a money-making industry, so I don’t blame them)
Why should we care about PoP: SoT?

- *Prince of Persia: Sands of Time* is my favorite game. Ever.
- It blended clever, mature narrative with educated interface and game design elements.

- It was *liberating*.
  - Liberating to feel in control of a character through 3D space (now try *Mirror’s Edge*).
  - Liberating to be shown that we really can tell adult, mature stories in a “normal” game.
Thanks!

- Thanks for listening!
- I’m sorry I ruined the game for you now.
- Any questions?