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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, a kind of “developer diary from the past.”

When the blog ended, I compiled the entries and published them as a book. The old journals seemed to resonate not only with retro-gaming fans and game developers, but with writers, artists, and creators of all stripes, some of whom weren’t born yet in 1985.

This book is not a look back. It’s what I wrote then, in present tense, weird capitalization and all. The rawness is inherent -- to “fix” a diary by revising it with hindsight would be cheating -- yet for this 30th-anniversary hardcover edition, Stripe and I thought a bit of judicious annotation might help readers who aren’t me understand what the heck I was talking about at certain moments. So we used a different color ink.

We also wanted to add illustrations. This gave me a reason to spend pleasant hours combing through the Strong Museum of Play’s digital archive of my 1980s notes,



Any time you see blue ink, it's 2019 Jordan writing. (or drawing.)



sketches, and work-in-progress floppy disks I hadn't seen in decades, seeking images to complement the journal entries. My thanks to Julia Novakovic, Andrew Borman, and Jon-Paul Dyson of the Strong's ICHEG (International Center for the History of Electronic Games); Jason Scott of the Internet Archive; website admin Bryan Seles; Olivia Chernoff and Brianna Wolfson of Stripe Press; and especially book designers Tyler Thompson and Kevin Wong, who elegantly wove a jumble of disparate visual elements and two narrative voices into a coherent whole.

As the journal pages show, even a game ostensibly made by one person is a group effort, supported by a circle that starts with friends and family and expands as the project progresses. *Prince of Persia* is remembered today because of the work, talent, and dedication of thousands of people around the world, including the teams at Broderbund, Ubisoft, Disney, and elsewhere who worked on the games, books, and movie, and an incredible community of fans and retro-gaming enthusiasts who have carried the torch to places I couldn't have imagined in 1989. You'll see some of their work in the "Legacy" chapter, which offers a glimpse of the pixelly prince's adventures in the thirty years since he jumped from the Apple II screen out into the world.

Now I'll hand the narration over to 20-year-old me. He will occasionally say things that make me cringe. I'll see you in the margins, as I follow along with my blue pen.

Jordan Mechner

Montpellier, France
September 2019

The Making of Prince of Persia:
Journals 1985–1993
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Second Edition

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MON 6 MAY (1985)

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.

I accidentally deleted fifteen pages or so of Threat, by an unfortunate coincidence the very fifteen pages or so I wanted to keep. Oh, well - I'll start over from scratch tomorrow. Look at the work I've done on it until now as practice, both in how to write and how to work. From now on, I hope, I'll be more efficient, and what I write will be better than it has been.

Got my Diner's Club Card. One more card and I'll be a fully fledged human being, able to ~~use~~ pay for things with personal checks and everything.

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

Some days, ~~some~~, when journal-writing time rolls around, the whole day seems to be a unit, to have

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.

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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

Broderbund released my first game, *Karateka*, in December of my senior year in college. Sales were slow at first, but took off in the spring.

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.

FOR WEEK ENDING MAY 11, 1985

Billboard TOP COMP

Compiled from a national sample of retail store and

	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK	WKS ON CHART	TITLE	Publisher	Rev
1	7	7		KARATEKA	Broderbund	Act
2	2	89		FLIGHT SIMULATOR II	Sublogic	Sim
3	1	20		THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY	Infocom	Adv
4	6	77		FLIGHT SIMULATOR	Microsoft	Sim
5	3	39		SARGON III	Hayden	Chr
6	12	25		KING'S QUEST	Sierra On-Line	Adv
7	8	83		EXODUS:ULTIMA III	Origins Systems Inc.	Fant

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.

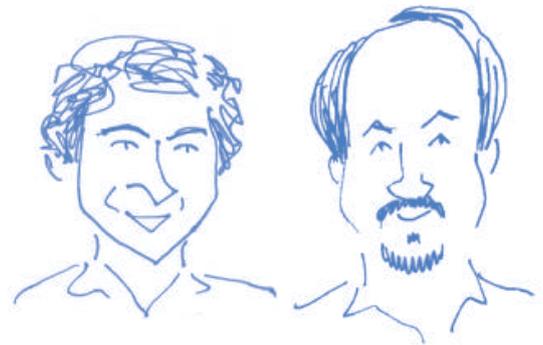
Bill suggested I ask Gary, not Ed, to pick up the tab. "If your dad ever disowns you," Bill said, "I think Gary would adopt you."

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.

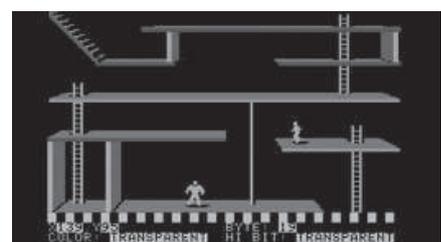
May 14, 1985

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.



Brothers Doug and Gary Carlston and their sister Cathy started Broderbund Software as a family business in 1980.

I mocked up these fake game screens using PRAX, my Apple II pixel-editing utility.



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. Two thousand 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

My cousin Aviva Ziegler lives in Sydney. She once made a documentary film about her (our) family's European Jewish roots for Australian TV.

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*.

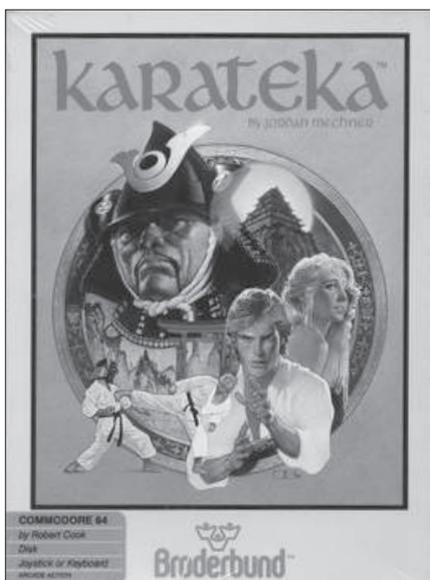
June 5, 1985

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 5. 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.

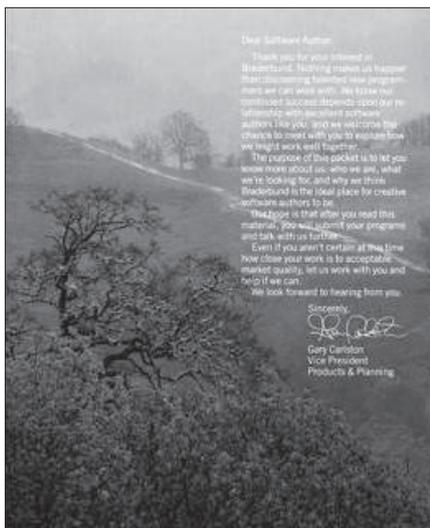


June 15, 1985

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 number two on *Billboard's* best-seller 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 screen-writing. 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

Broderbund published Robert's first game, *Gumball*, when he was 17. He did the Atari and C-64 ports of *Karateka*. Later, we worked together on *The Last Express*.



In 2017, Robert became Veda Hlubinka-Cook. She's even more brilliant, hilarious and awesome than Robert was. We've been friends for 35 years.



Gene Portwood and Lauren Elliott were Broderbund's in-house designers. They'd helped me on *Karateka*, and created the first "*Carmen Sandiego*" with Dane Bigham.



Danny's first game was Choplifter. It made him a millionaire. He was one of my first game-designer heroes. No matter how modest and normal he acted, I always felt star-struck around him.

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 story line, 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 --



Tomi Pierce co-founded educational software startup Sensei with Steve Patrick in 1984, under the wing of Doug Carlston. Their first title was "Geometry."

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 backstory 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 by 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 rearview 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



My dad composed the music for *Karateka* on a Steinway grand piano, and I transcribed it into computer language.

He's an educational psychologist/entrepreneur and a serious amateur classical pianist. This was his first composing gig.



it's convenient." How cool is that?!
(Sorry, Mom, Dad... can't make dinner.
Gotta fly out to California for the week-
end. 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.

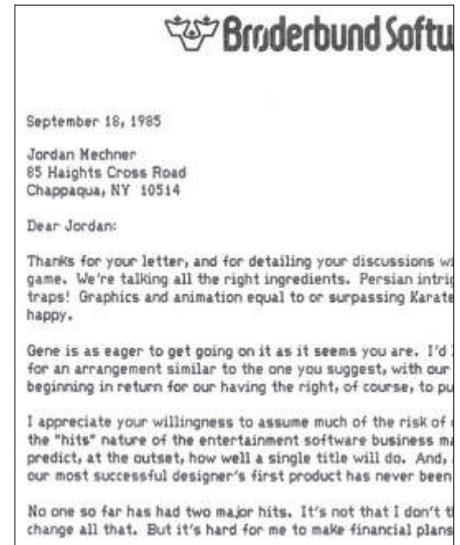
The Doubt is still there in the back of my mind. It talks to me from time to time. "Jordan!" it says. "What are you doing? You're taking a step backward. You want to be a filmmaker. It's time to move on! You brought the Apple-computer-game thread of your life to its climax a year ago. You caught the 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



My brother David (age 15 at the time) was willing to do mo-cap for free.
This was just before he got serious about becoming a Go master.



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 counteroffer?"

I wondered how you can make a counteroffer 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.

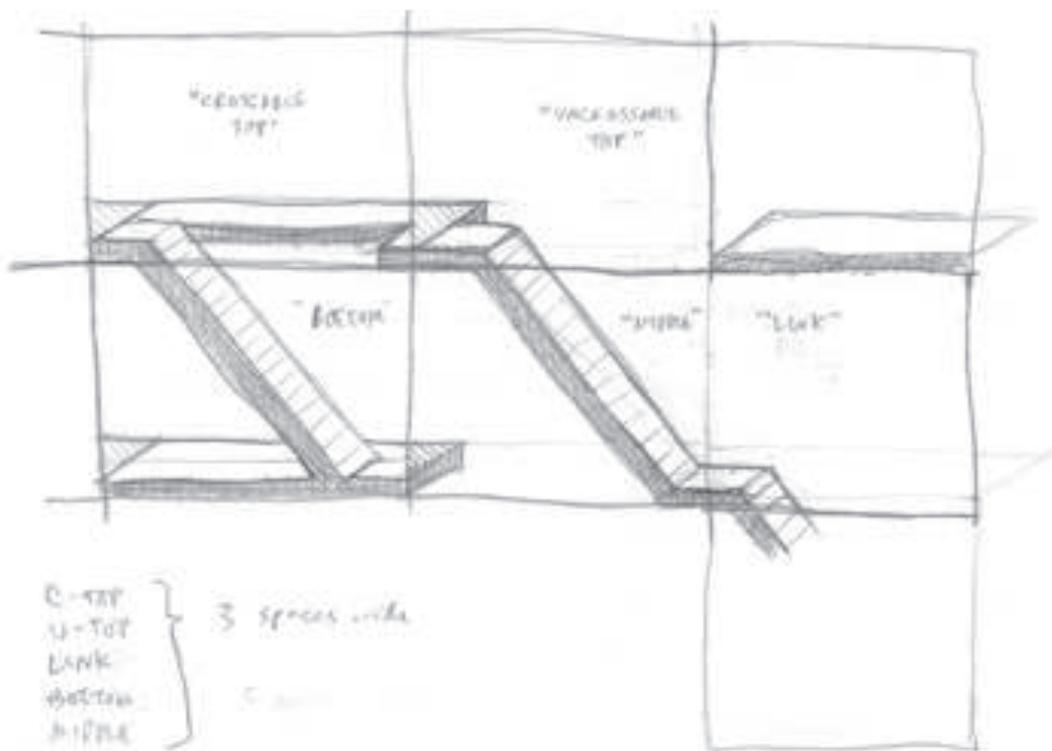
October 20, 1985

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

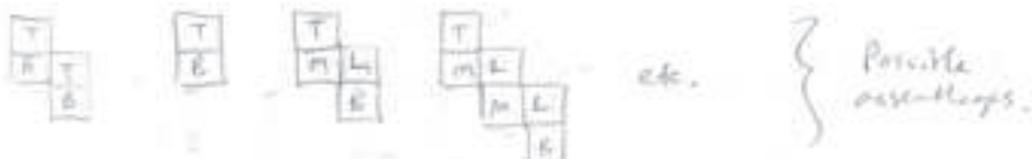
Still a great YA book.
HS author, Jean
Craighead George,
lives in Chappaqua too.



10/29/85



C-TOP
U-TOP
LINK
BOTTOM
MIDDLE } 3 species wide

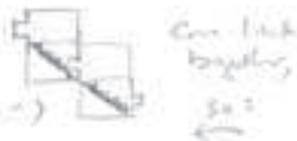


BUTLPER should be more user-friendly than this.

One row for "stairs": It's 2 stairs high, 3 species wide.



(Or with 2 rows - 1 "crosslink", 1 "vertical" -)



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?

When Doug read these journals years later, he exclaimed: "Why DID you stay with 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.

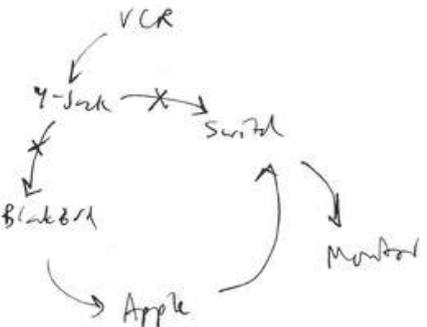


April 15, 1986

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.

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1620 ;
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1660 PRLINE .EO TEXT+6
1670 PRCHAR .EO TEXT+9
1680 SETLINE .EO TEXT+12
1690 ;
1700 ZEROBUF .EO $0F00
1710 IMADRL .EO $B000
1720 IMADRH .EO $B100
1730 TABSTART .EO $B200
1740 ;
1750 *-----*
1760 ;
1770 .DR $4000
1780 ;
1790 JMP START
1800 ;
1810 AMASKS .HS 00B1B3B7BF9FBF
1820 ;
1830 BMASKS .HS FFFFCFBF0E0C0
1840 ;
1850 SHIFTL .HS 00000000000000
1860 CARRYL .HS 00000000000000
1870 ;
1880 SHIFTH .HS 61616262636364
1890 CARRYH .HS 646566666767
1900 ;
1910 POINT .HS 81B2B4B8B9A0C0
1920 ;
1930 BUFFER .HS 0000
1940 ;
1950 ;
1960 COLORS: 0 = black2
1970 ; 1 = red
1980 ; 2 = blue
1990 ; 3 = white2
2000 ;
2010 ODDS .HS 00D5AFFF
2020 EVENS .HS 00AADS5FF
2030 ;
2040 *-----*
```

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.

To make a game back then, we also had to build the tools to make it. DRAY was my pixel-editing utility, a kind of primitive Apple II Photoshop.

I'd named the first version DRAW1, back in high school. Revisions were DRAW1, DRAW2, etc. For major updates, I incremented the final letter instead of the number. DRAY was a ground-up rewrite of its predecessor DRAX.

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.



Six years before
Disney's Aladdin.

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.

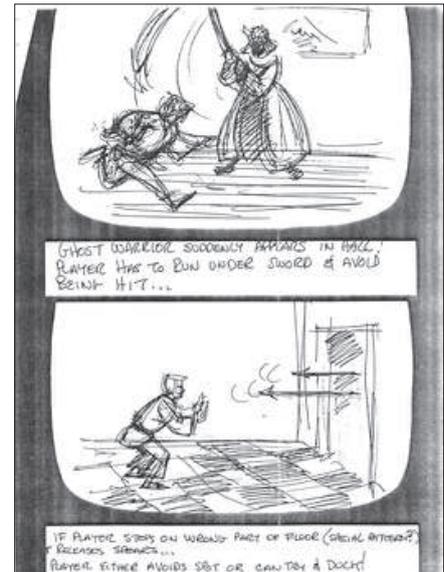
Oddly enough, this makes me more psyched to do the new game. It reminded me why I'm good at this -- of what I can do that others can't, or won't.

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 story line, 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.

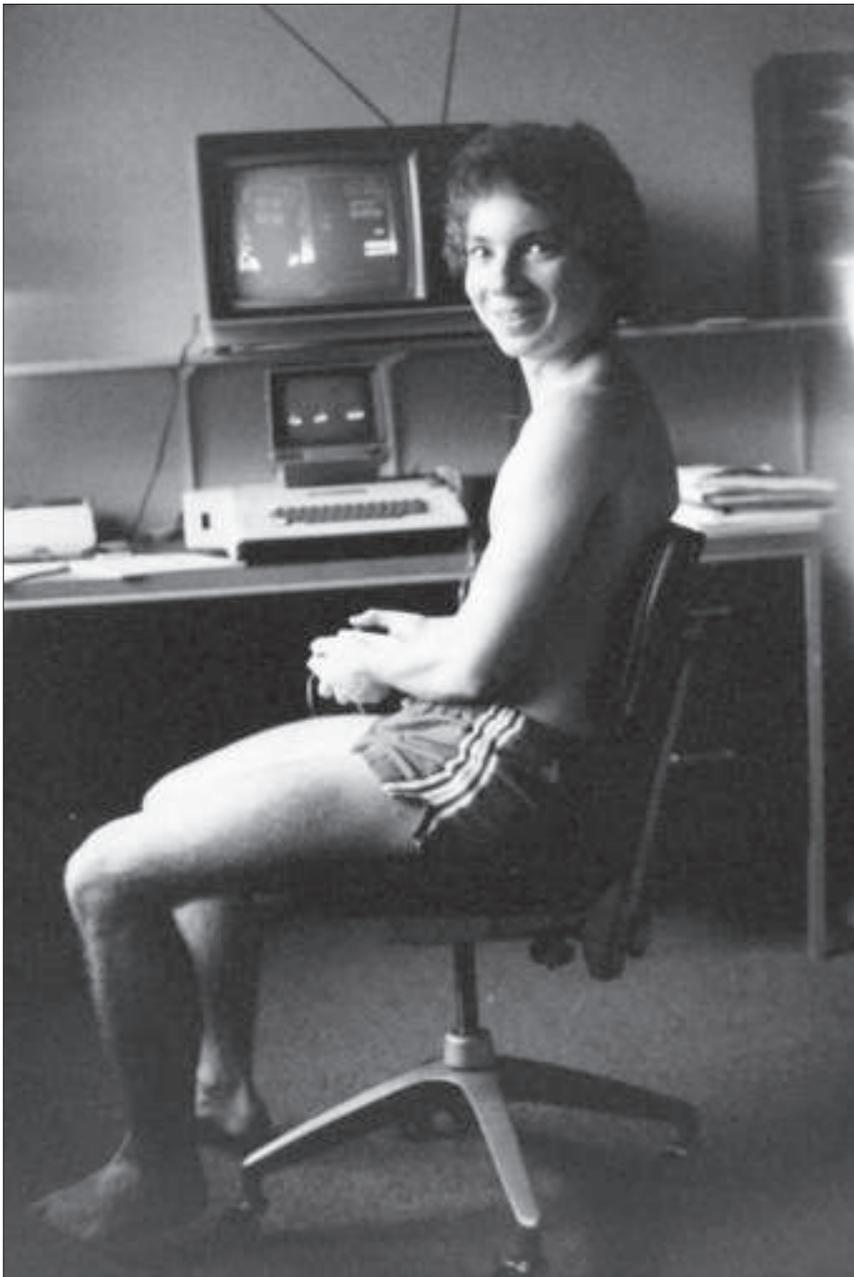
Dad advised me to hold out for 15%, the same as on *Karateka*. I'd be happy with 10%, which is what Doug Smith got on *Championship Lode Runner*. But I don't think they'll give that much.

September 3, 1986

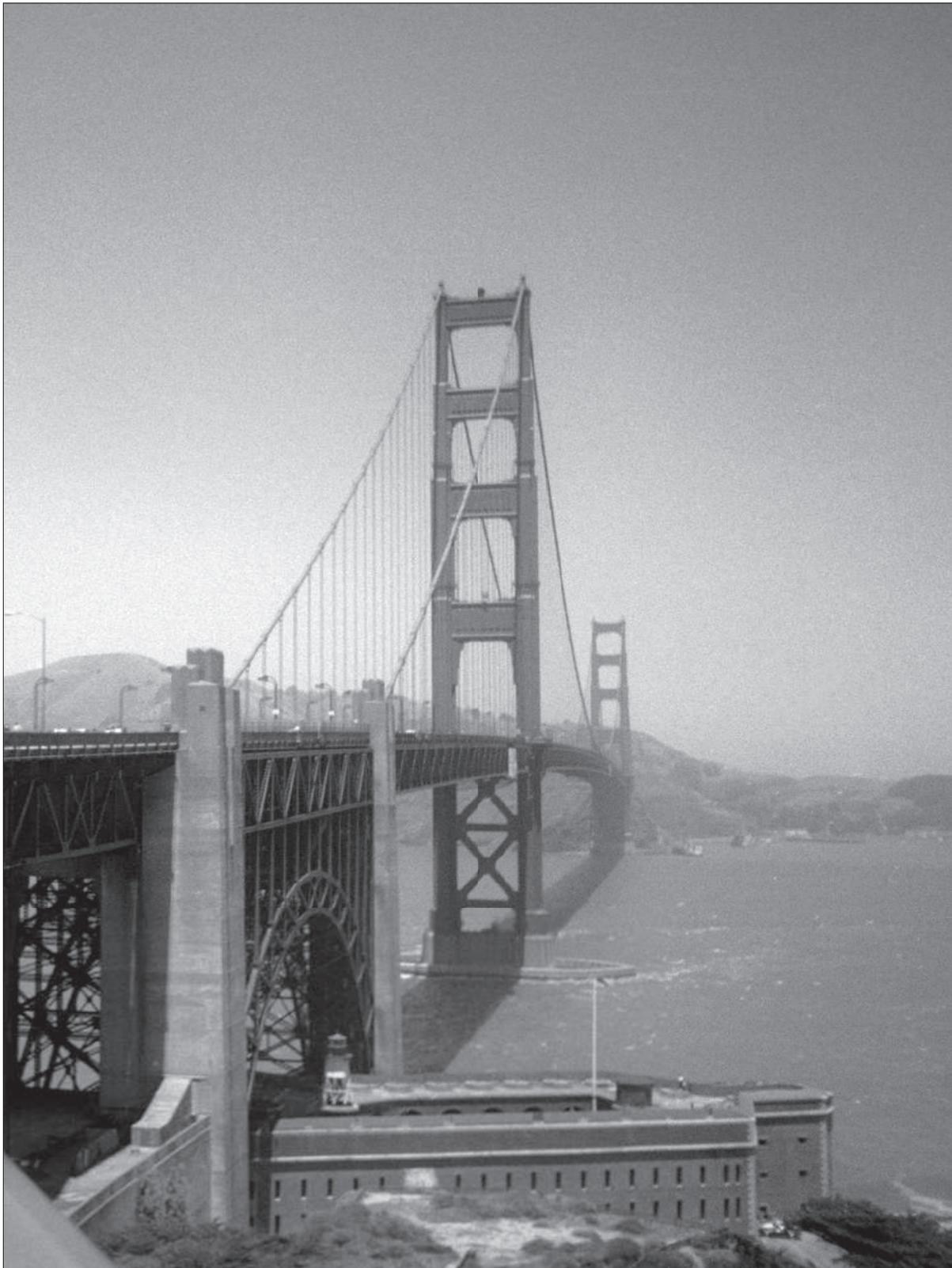
It's official -- I'm going to California. I have a plane ticket and everything.

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

My life is about to change.



BY: <u>JORDAN MECHNER</u>	TITLE: <u>BIRTHSTONE</u>
ADDRESS: <u>17 PAUL DR.</u> <u>SAN RAFAEL, CA 94903</u>	<u>(SCREENPLAY)</u>
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	BY: <u>Richard G. ...</u>



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 anymore -- I'm terrified. I'm scared shitless.

I have to rent a car. I have to drive it. On these insane 12-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 *Ballblazer*, 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 story line 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?"

The Apple II had no video input, but a UK company called Computech had made a peripheral card that could digitize one still frame at a time. I bought one.

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

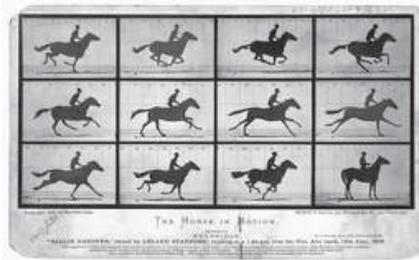
September 23, 1986

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 seven 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 PD 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 PD. 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.

PD 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

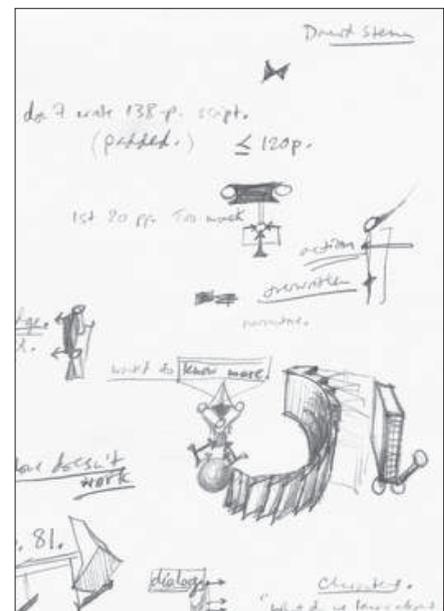
Today I moved into Ed's office. Obviously, this is a temporary arrangement; eventually some new guy will be hired to run PD and I'll get booted to some other part of the building. But while it lasts, it's great.

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 IIs 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.

David Stenn and Bruce Cohen ran the Yale undergraduate film society that my roommate Ben and I continued after they graduated. They both went on to work in Hollywood.

October 14, 1986

David Stenn read my screenplay. He said it has promise but would need at least one more rewrite to be sellable. 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?"

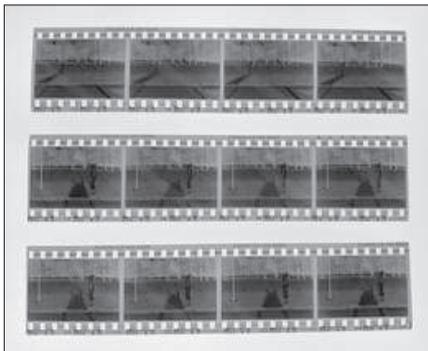
October 15, 1986

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.



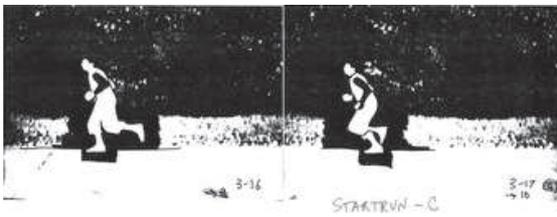
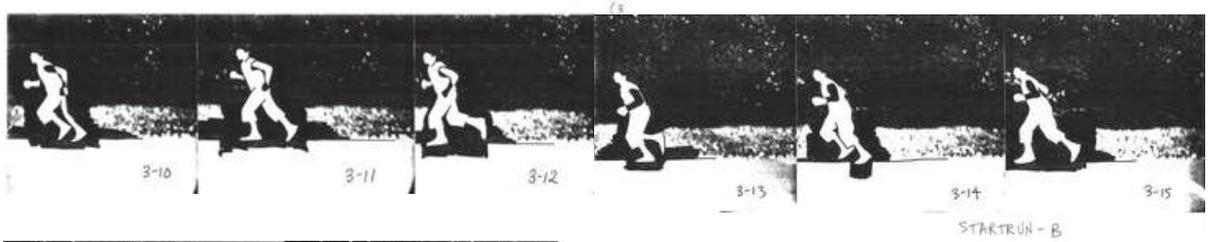
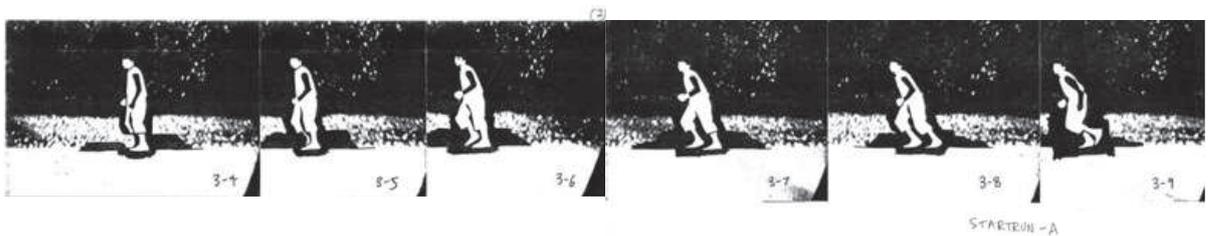
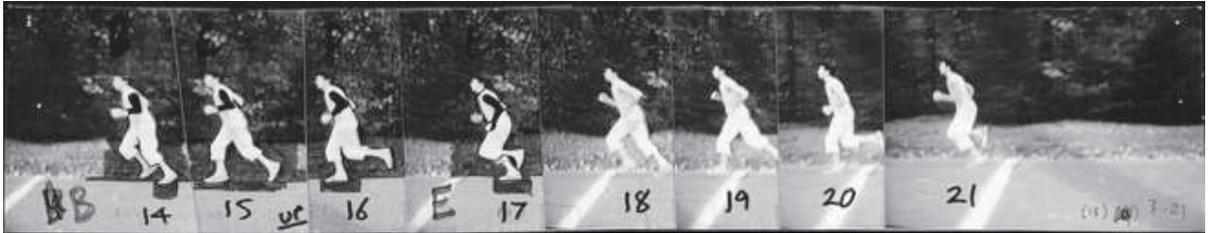
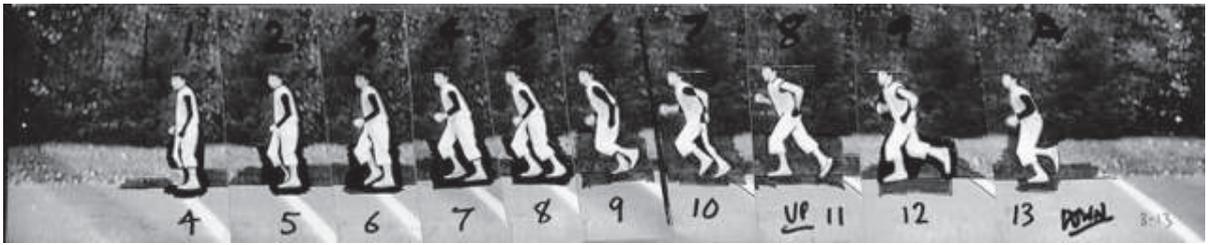
October 21, 1986

Today I wrote the first lines of code of the game.* It Begins.

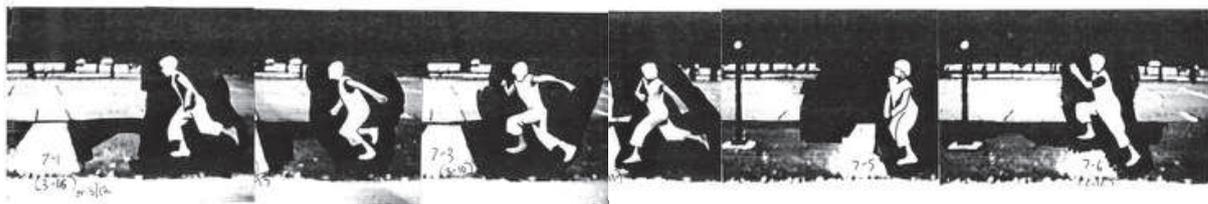
*Not counting the hi-res routines.

October 23, 1986

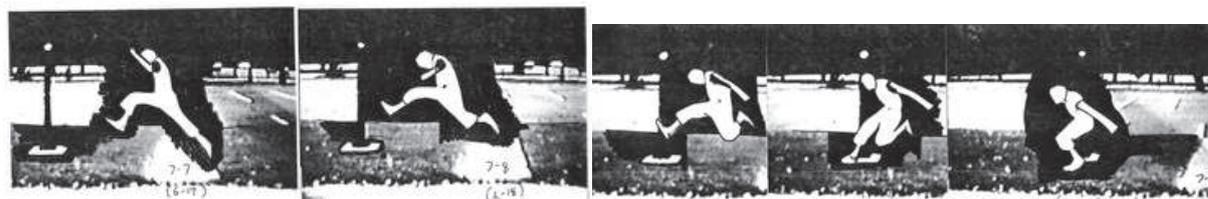
Everyone in the office has been playing a lot of *Tetris* -- a Russian submission for the IBM PC. It's a classic, like *Breakout*. But I don't think Broderbund is going to publish it. The knaves.

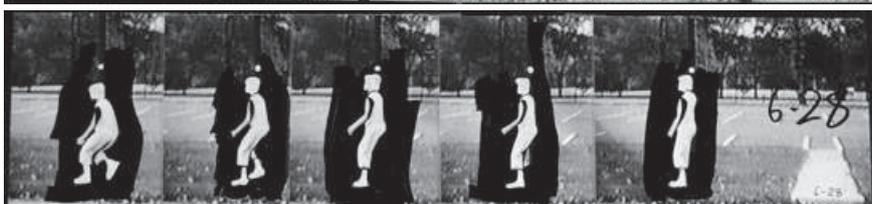
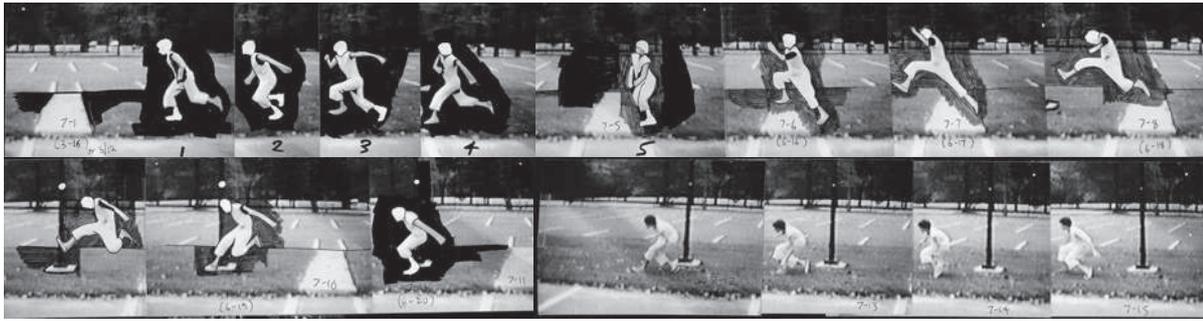


RUNJUMP - A

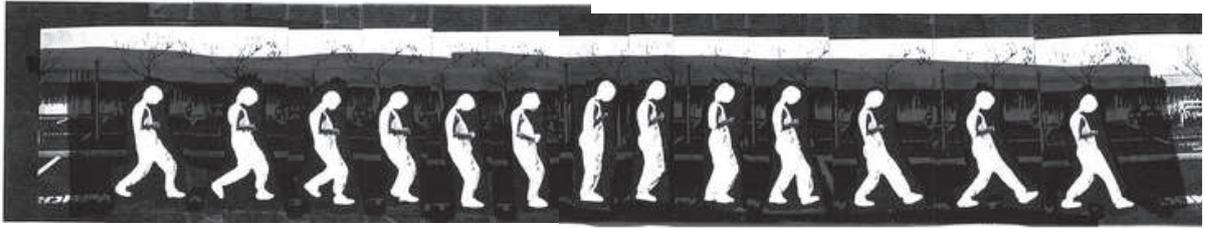


RUNJUMP - B

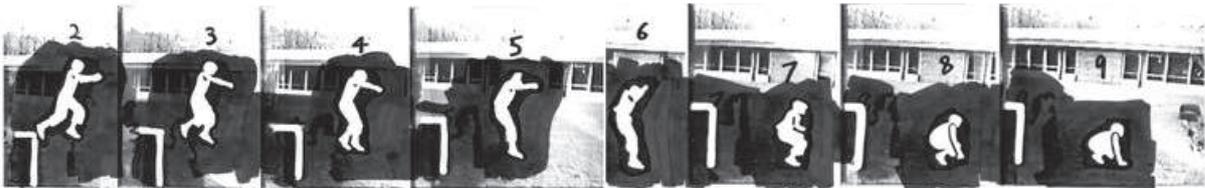




STEPFWD



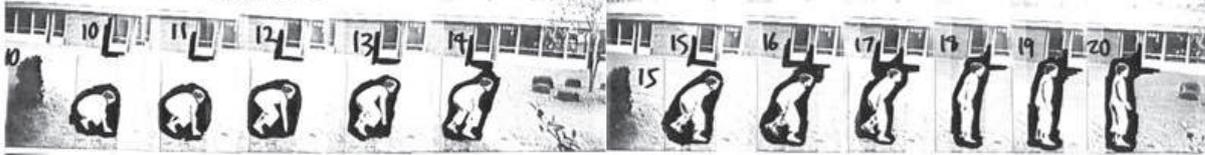
JUMPFALL - A



JUMPFALL - B



JUMPFALL - B



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

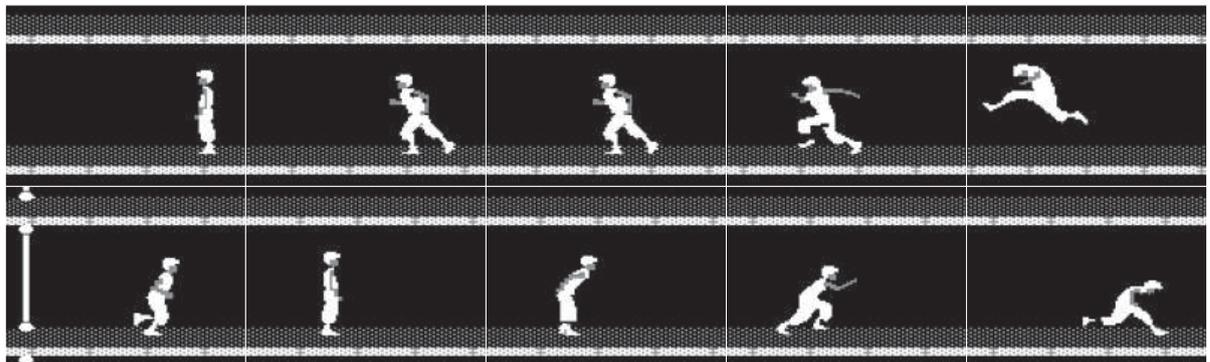
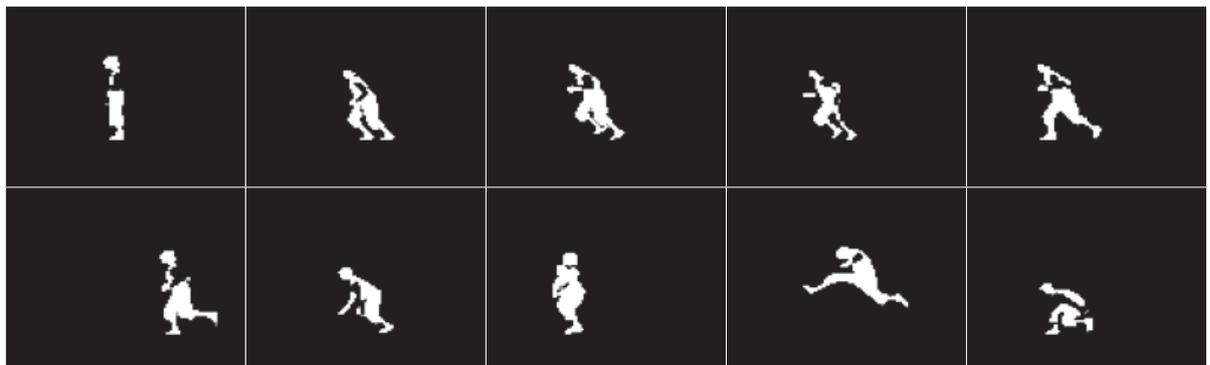
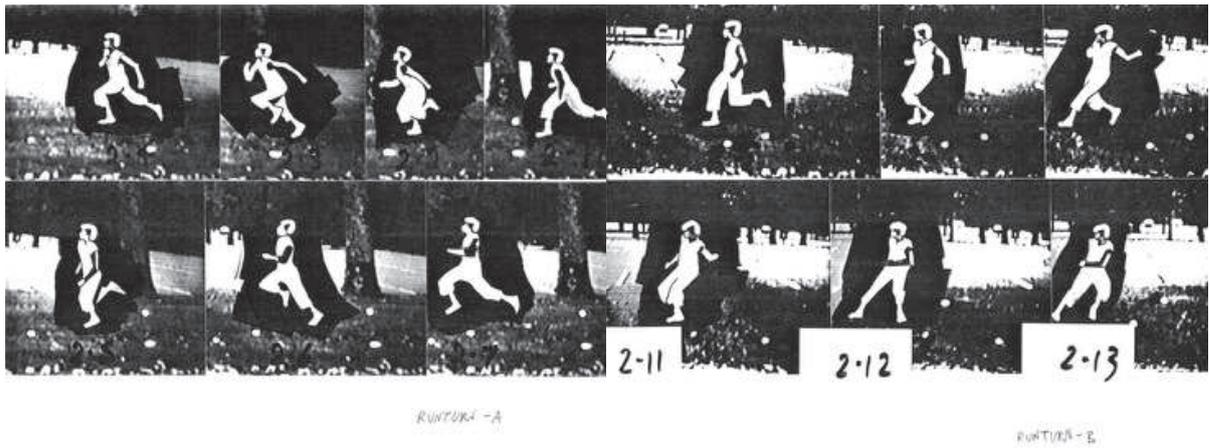
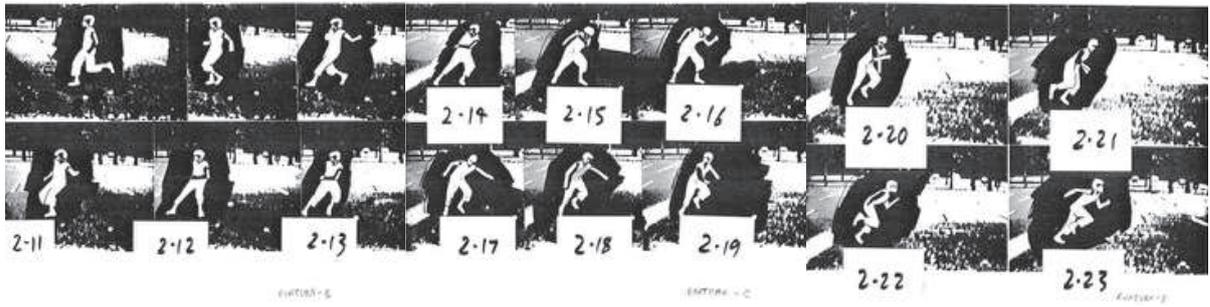
God, I miss New York.

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



Again, when Doug read this years later, he exclaimed: "WHY?!?"

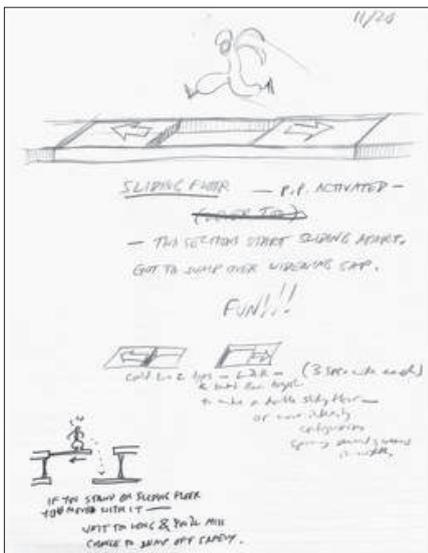
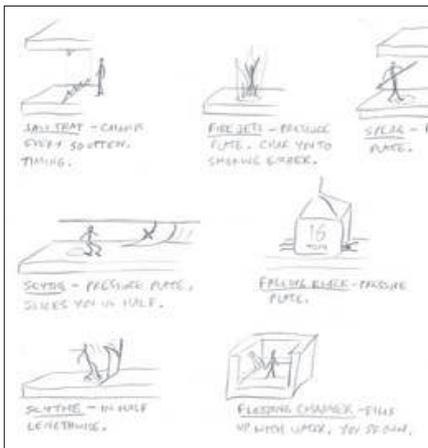
he'd charge to license his Apple music subroutine. He spent half the phone call dumping on Broderbund. I realized after I'd hung up that this was the first thing I'd done independent of Broderbund since I got here. Interestingly, it actually strengthened my confidence that Broderbund is the right place 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 1/2" x 11" 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

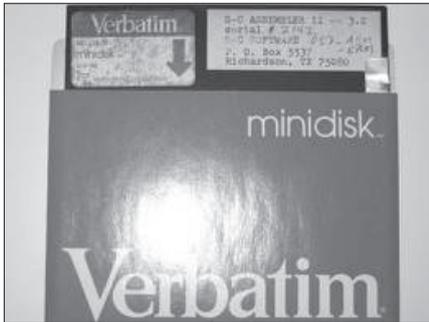
The Nintendo game machine has sold a million units in the US over Christmas. As of now, only a handful of cartridges are available. Nintendo is keeping a tight rein on new titles, presumably to avoid a flood of product like the one that sunk Atari a couple of years ago. Broderbund -- thanks to Doug's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

Karateka would be a natural, but Doug is apparently leaning toward choosing some older titles -- The 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.

Ed Hobbs' 1984 Commodore 64 puzzle-platform game "The Castles of Dr. Creep" was a major inspiration and early influence on PoP.



Corey Kosak had been programming ports for Broderbund since age 16. The royalty streams made him financially independent while still a teenager.



Roland Gustafsson did the copy protection for most of Broderbund's games, including Karateka.

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 45 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.

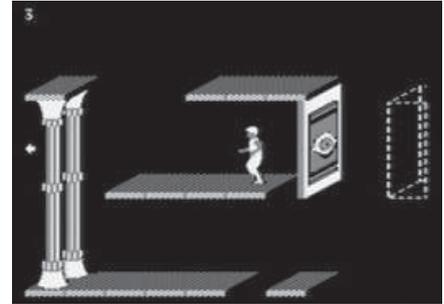
It was kind of a thrill to watch. Roland is a hacker of the old school. He's polite and unprepossessing in his dress and demeanor, careful about money and contracts. He drives a Saab with license plate SNABBIL. But under that conservative surface is a demon -- a guy who will put his day job on hold for 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 (January 27) working version. He was gratifyingly thrilled about the 3-D box with scrolling borders.



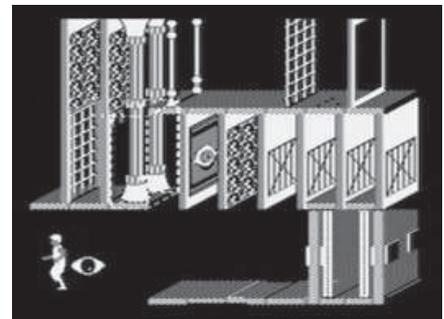
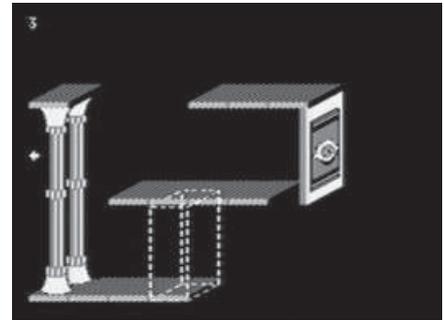
February 9, 1987

"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.

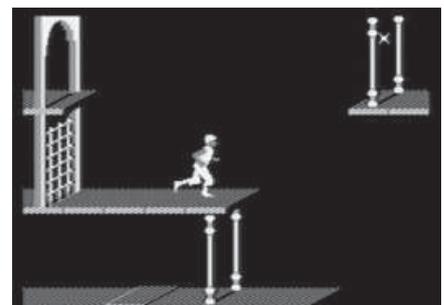
Today, for the first time, I constructed a really large level and played around in it. It was the first time this game had ever given me the feeling of space. It was kind of thrilling. I think it's going to be a winner. I'm going slowly this time, building on a solid foundation, and I think it'll pay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

I spent a lot of time on a user-friendly interface for the level editor (BUILDER). My plan was to include it with the game so players could build their own levels.





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 rat-hole 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 anymore, except for camaraderie. I could always visit if I get lonely.

My brother had indeed grown taller, as I'd feared.

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 hooky 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 in, 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."

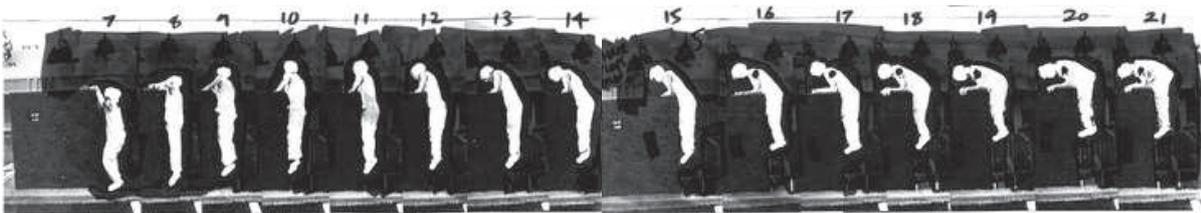
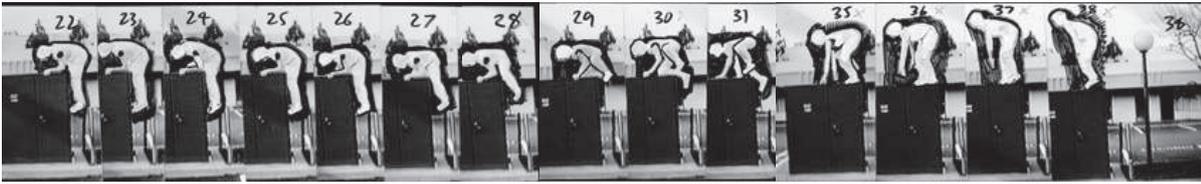
"Corey said he already asked Adaire about that and she said..."

"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."

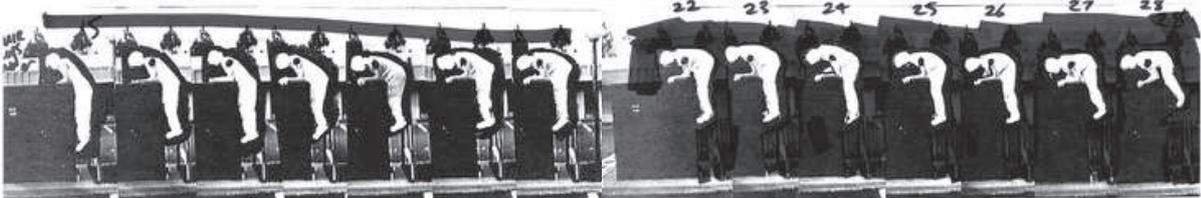
I called Corey back and told him the plan. He was terrified, but we did it that night, feeling like a pair of burglars.

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.



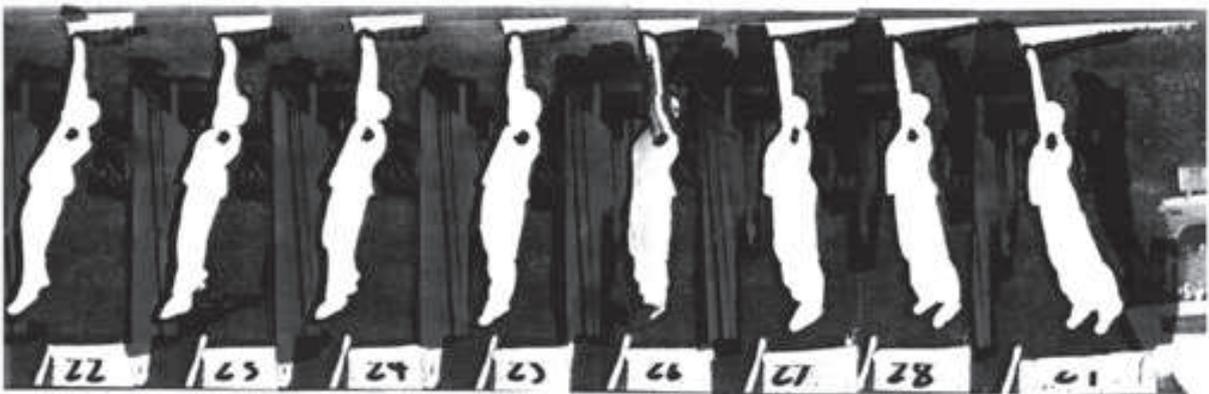
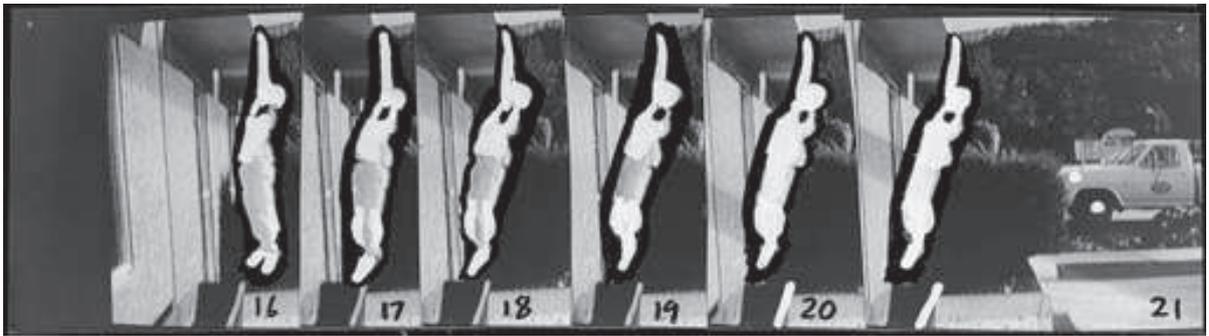
CLIMBUP - A



CLIMBUP - B



CLIMBUP - C



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