GDC

Free to Play Summit: The Game Designer's Notebook

Valentina Tamer
Narrative Designer, Ubisoft

UBISOFT
GDC
ENDLESS STORIES
PERMANENT & TEMPORARY NARRATIVE IN F2P LIVE GAMES
July, 2021

VAL TAMER

NARRATIVE DESIGNER & WRITER

2015

Game Design
B.Sc.

DAEDALIC ENTERTAINMENT

2012
2016 - 2018

Asst. Creative Lead
& Narrative Designer

King

2018 - 2020

Studio Narrative Designer
& Game Designer

UBISOFT

Since Nov 2020

[TBA]

Narrative Designer

OVERVIEW

PART 1

OTHER MEDIA

PART 2

VIDEOGAMES

PART 3

EXAMPLES

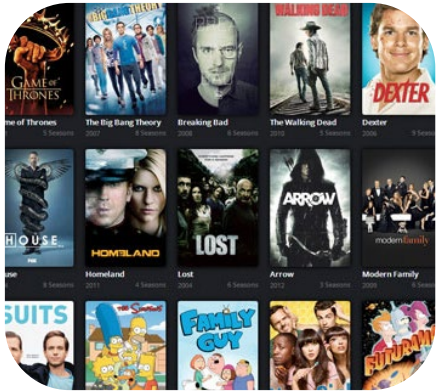
PART 1

OTHER MEDIA

HOW TO TELL STORIES THAT NEVER END?

OTHER MEDIA

Comics & Serials

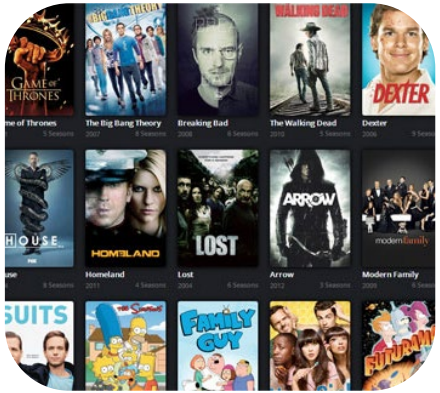


TV Shows

Tabletop RPG

Sports

OTHER MEDIA

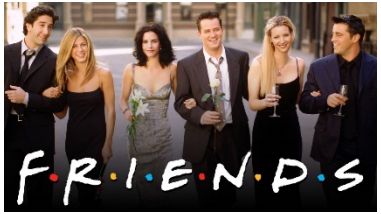


Shared Elements:

- Worldbuilding & Core Cast that inspire many stories
- Repeating story structure
- Regular scheduled releases
- Sequence of arcs
- Separation into small arcs (episodes, matches, sessions, etc)

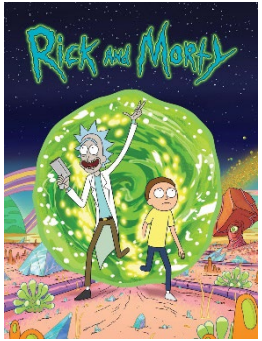
WHAT WE CAN „STEAL“ FROM TV SHOWS

TV SHOW STRUCTURES



Episodic Series A

- Episodic Reset
- No growth – characters stay (mostly) the same



Episodic Series B

- Episodic Reset
- No growth – characters stay (mostly) the same
- Situations reveal new sides of characters & dynamics between characters

Anthology

- Self-contained stories
- New characters, self-contained growth

Sequential Series / Serial

- Sequential Narrative
- Character growth

PART 2

VIDEO GAMES

Videogames

Single-Player AAA Games

- Longer play sessions
  (couch gaming)
- Completable
- Bingeable
- [Note: Many AAA games offer live support during the first year now!]

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Inspiration:

à Movies, TV Series

Videogames

Single-Player AAA Games

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- [Note: Many AAA games offer live support during the first year now!]

(Mobile) Live Games

- Shorter play sessions (commute /break gaming)
- Always more content
- Habitual

Inspiration:

à Movies, TV Series

Videogames

Single-Player AAA Games

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Inspiration:

à Movies, TV Series

(Mobile) Live Games

- Shorter play sessions (commute /break gaming)
- Always more content
- Habitual

Inspiration:

→ TV Series, Sports, Events

GAME SYSTEMS

GAME SYSTEMS

1. Emergent & Procedural Stories

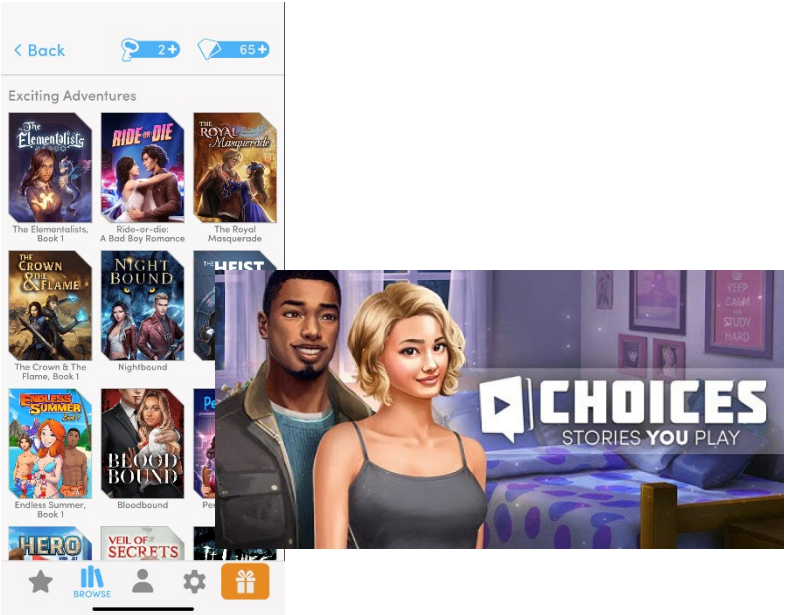
GAME SYSTEMS

1. Emergent & Procedural Stories

2. Player-Generated Content

PERMANENT EXPANSIONS

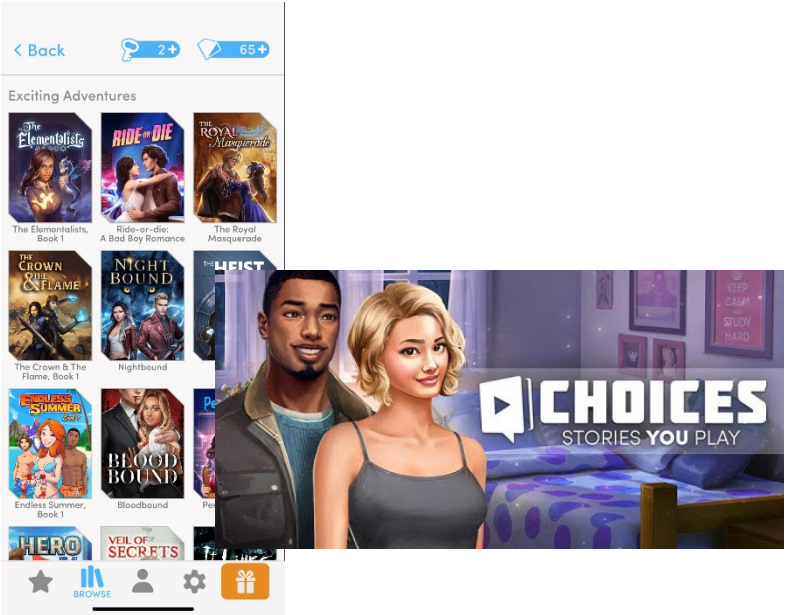
3. Updates



Choices: Stories You Play, Pixelberry, 2016

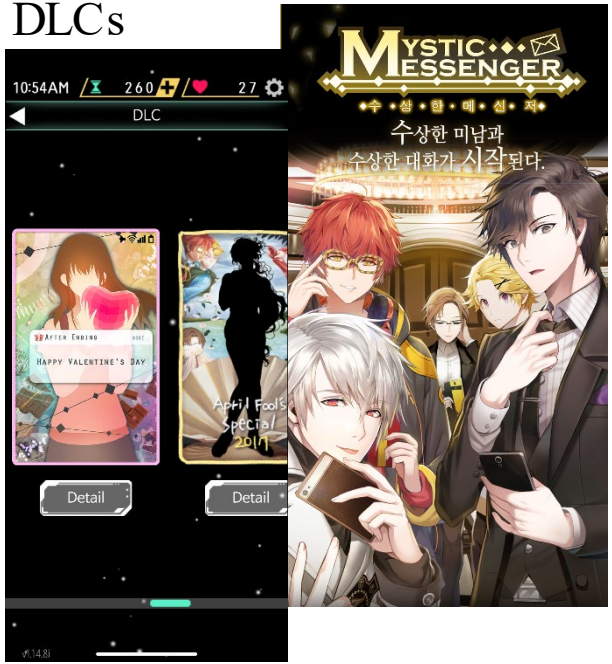
PERMANENT EXPANSIONS

3. Updates



Choices: Stories You Play, Pixelberry, 2016

4. DLCs



Mystic Messenger, Cheritz, 2016

TEMPORARY CONTENT

5. Seasonal Content

BanG Dream: Girls Band Party, Craft Egg, 2017

TEMPORARY CONTENT

5. Seasonal Content

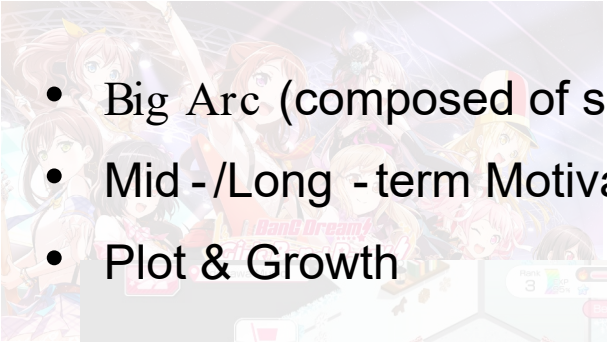
BanG Dream: Girls Band Party, Craft Egg, 2017

6. Live events

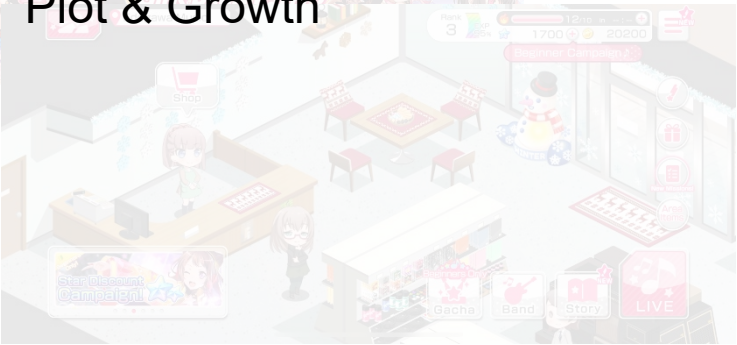
Fortnite, Epic Games, 2017

TEMPORARY CONTENT

5. Seasonal Content

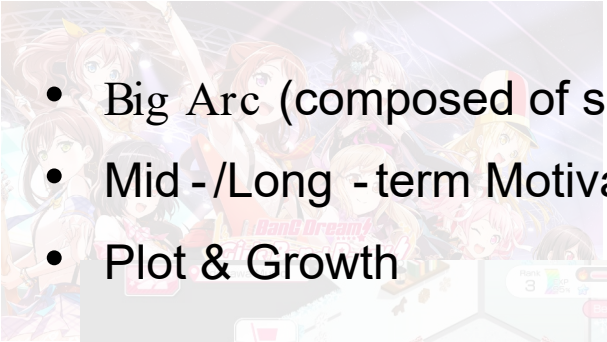


- Big Arc (composed of small arcs)
- Mid-/Long-term Motivation
- Plot & Growth



TEMPORARY CONTENT

5. Seasonal Content



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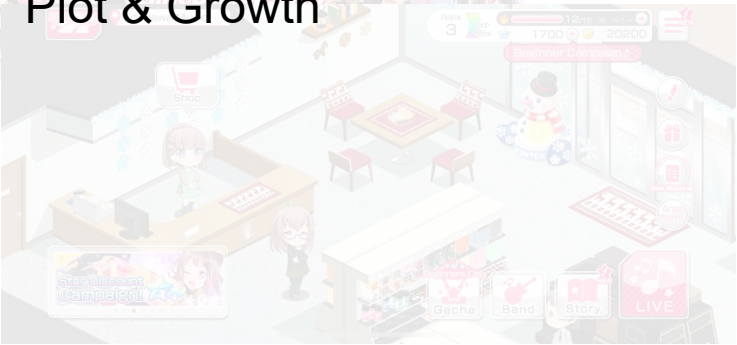
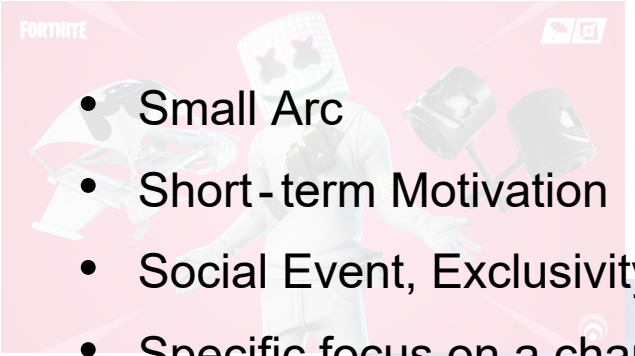
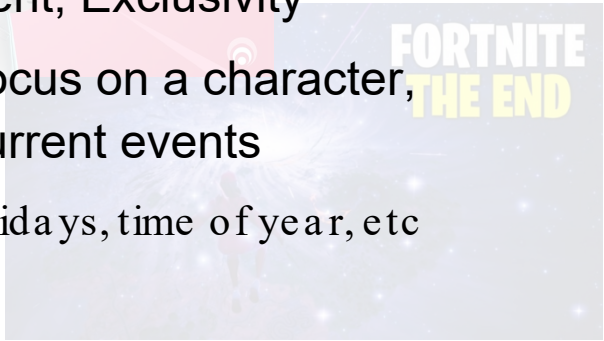


6. Live events



- Small Arc
- Short-term Motivation
- Social Event, Exclusivity
- Specific focus on a character, topic or current events
  - → Holidays, time of year, etc



CHOOSE A UNIQUE MIX THAT FITS YOUR GAME!

REMEMBER:
NARRATIVE DESIGN IS MORE THAN PLOT + TEXT!

A LIVE GAME SEASON

PERMANENT

PERMANENT CONTENT

ONBOARDING
PERMANENT UPDATES + DLCS

USUALLY 2+ MONTHS

PREVIOUS SEASON

SEASONAL CONTENT

NEXT SEASON

TEMPORARY CONTENT
BIG ARC SEPARATED INTO SMALL ARCS
„TV SEASON“

USUALLY ANYTHING FROM HOURS TO A WEEK

PREVIOUS SEASON

LIVE EVENT | LIVE EVENT | LIVE EVENT

NEXT SEASON

SUPER-SHORT TEMPORARY CONTENT
SELF-CONTAINED SMALL ARC
„SOCIAL EVENT“

PART 3

EXAMPLES

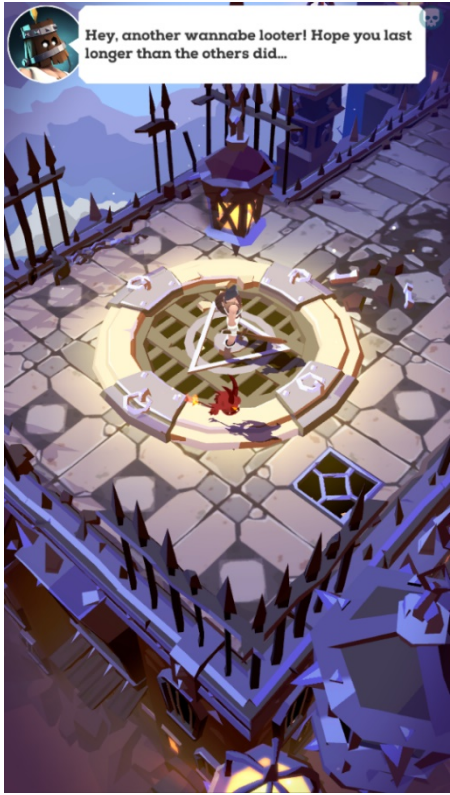
MIGHTY
QUEST

MIGHTY QUEST FOR EPIC LOOT

- Ubisoft Paris Mobile
- 2019-today (mobile version)
- Action Roleplay Game

- Dungeon Crawling
  + RPG Elements
  + Dialogues

Intro



Tutorial

MIGHTY QUEST STRUCTURE

1. Main Story Progression
2. Live Events - Crossovers
3. Live Events – Topical (seasons, holidays, etc)

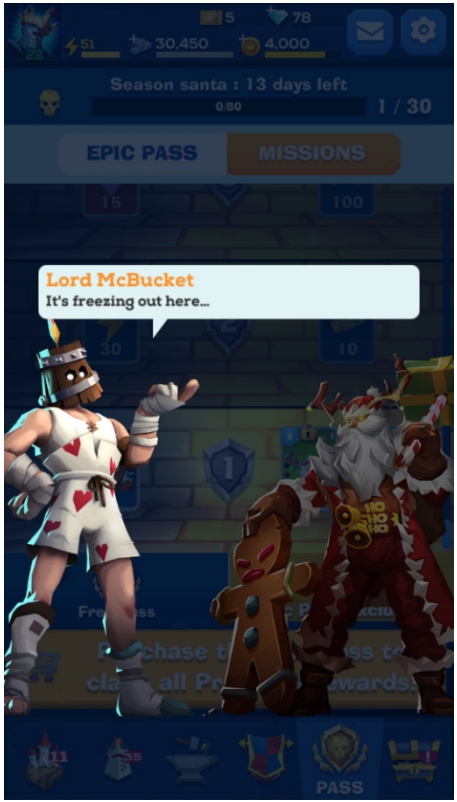
MAIN STORY:

- Short dialogues unlocked by linear level-progression (12 acts)

LIVE EVENTS:

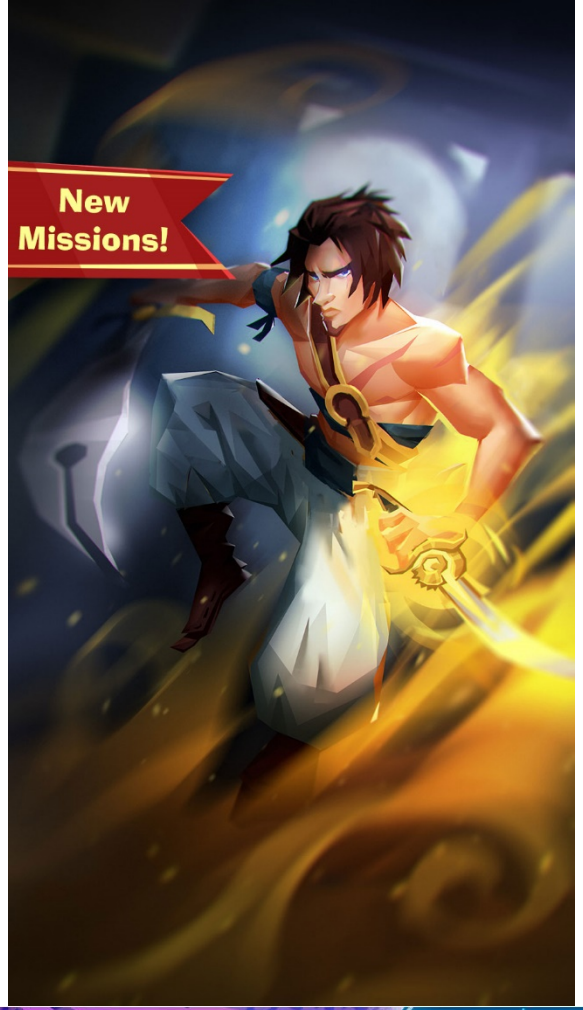
- Dialogues with a thematic character to give context for time-limited loot (gear + blessings), self-contained short stories

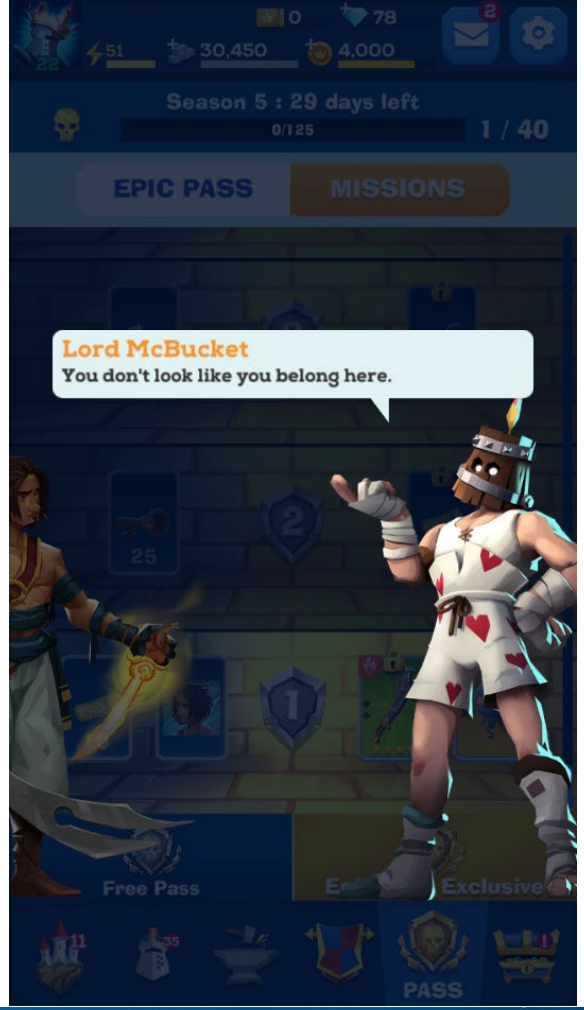
Level/ Story Progression

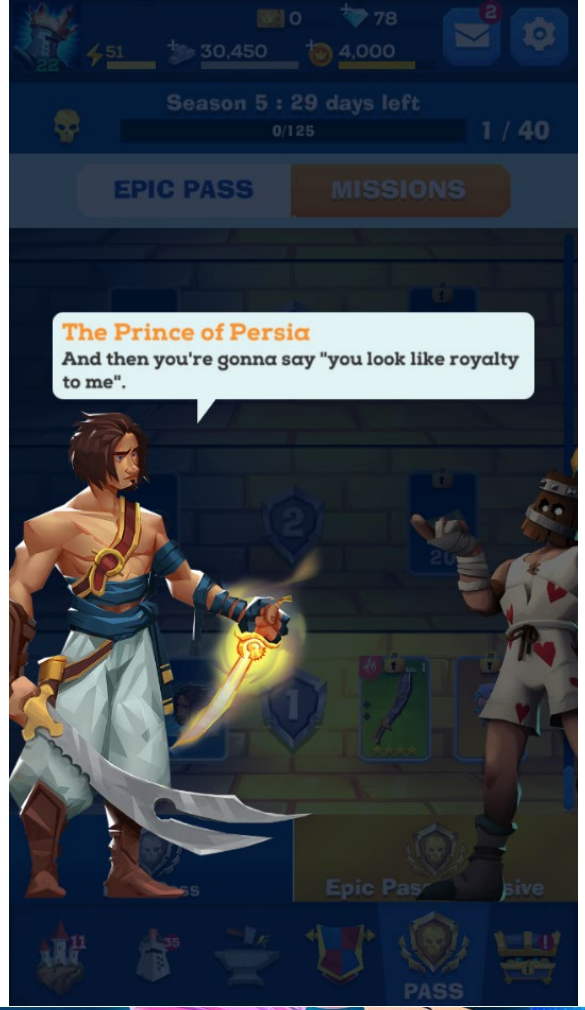


Event Dialogue

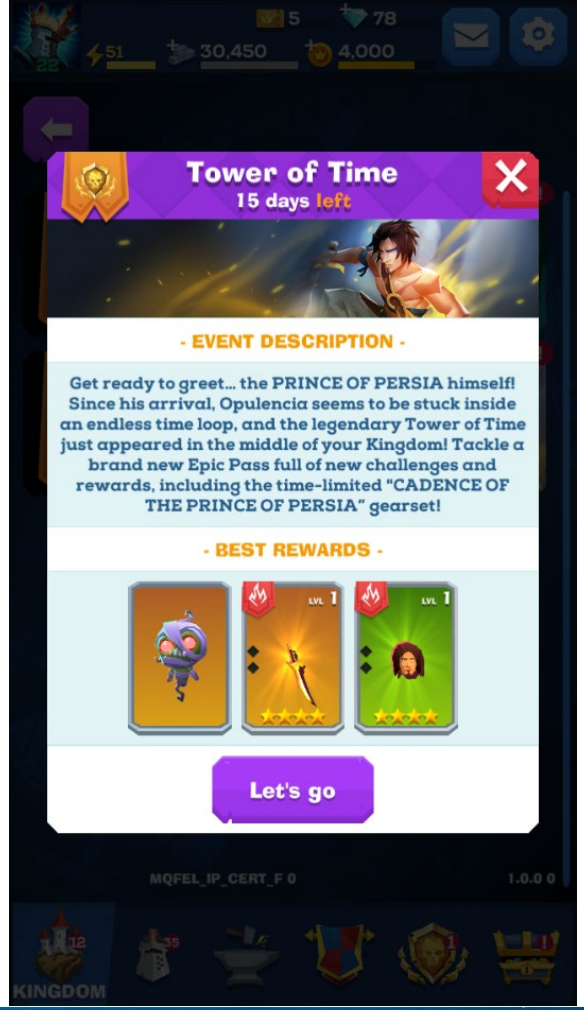
MIGHTY QUEST
X
PRINCE OF PERSIA

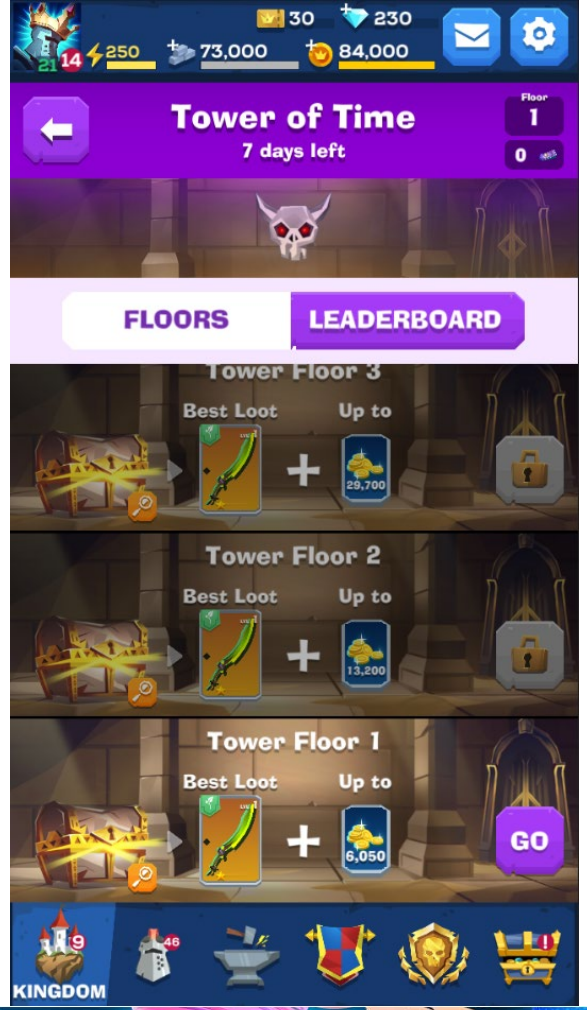

New Missions!

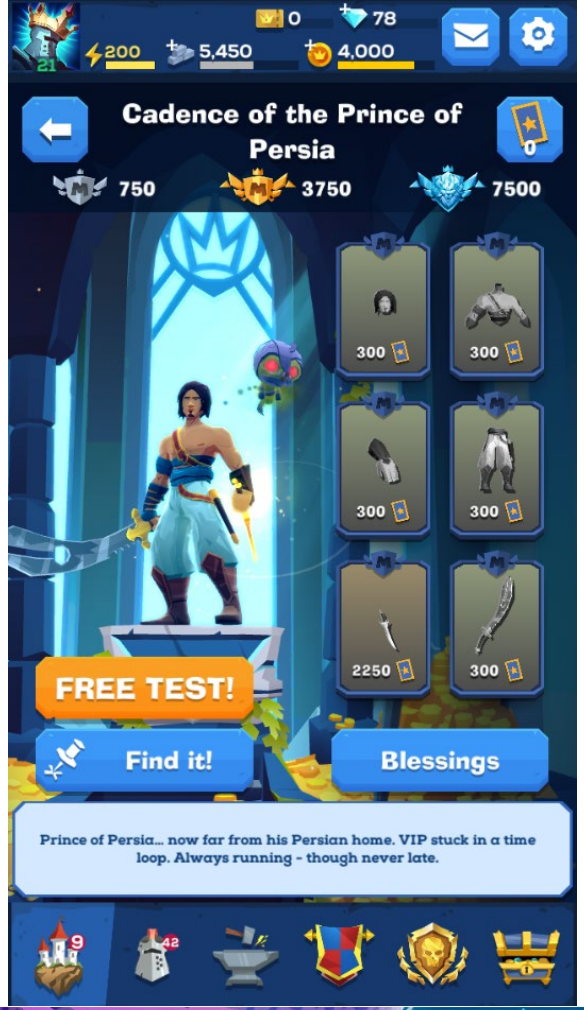

0
78
51
30,450
4,000
Season 5 : 29 days left
0/125
1 / 40
EPIC PASS
MISSIONS
Lord McBucket
You don't look like you belong here.
Free Pass
Exclusive
PASS


0
78
51
30,450
4,000
Season 5 : 29 days left
0/125
1 / 40
EPIC PASS
MISSIONS
The Prince of Persia
And then you're gonna say "you look like royalty to me".
PASS

Looter#6806
0
83
210
8,000
4,211
Tower of Time
Kill FALLEN CHAMPIONS to loot Tower of Time Tickets!
GO
KINGDOM


5
78
51
30,450
4,000
Tower of Time
15 days left
- EVENT DESCRIPTION -
Get ready to greet... the PRINCE OF PERSIA himself! Since his arrival, Opulencia seems to be stuck inside an endless time loop, and the legendary Tower of Time just appeared in the middle of your Kingdom! Tackle a brand new Epic Pass full of new challenges and rewards, including the time-limited "CADENCE OF THE PRINCE OF PERSIA" gearset!
- BEST REWARDS -
LVL 1
LVL 1
Let's go
MQFEL_IP_CERT_F 0
1.0.0 0
KINGDOM


30
230
250
73,000
84,000
Tower of Time
7 days left
Floor
1
0
FLOORS
LEADERBOARD
Tower Floor 3
Best Loot
Up to
29,700
Tower Floor 2
Best Loot
Up to
13,200
Tower Floor 1
Best Loot
Up to
6,050
GO
KINGDOM


0
78
200
5,450
4,000
Cadence of the Prince of Persia
750
3750
7500
300
300
300
300
2250
300
FREE TEST!
Find it!
Blessings
Prince of Persia... now far from his Persian home. VIP stuck in a time loop. Always running - though never late.

Blessings
SLOW CRASH (2 ITEMS)
Enemies hit by your skill Meteor have their damages reduced by -40% and their movement speed reduced by -60% for 4 sec.
FAST IMPACT (5 ITEMS)
Each hit landed with your skill Meteor increases your movement speed by 10% and your damages by 15% for 4 sec. This effect can stack up to 5 times.
DIVINE REWIND (EPIC)
On non-lethal damage taken, 30% chances to regain the health lost.
OK

5
78
51
30,450
4,000
Season 5 : 27 days left
0/125
1 / 40
EPIC PASS
MISSIONS
Week 1
Week 2
Week 3
Week 4
Gather 500,000 Stones so I can have a roof above my head tonight. It might seem like a lot, but I am royalty after all.
0/500k
110
As a prince, I only want the best in terms of gear. Try promoting one from 3 to 4 Stars.
0/1
110
Your kingdom seems a little untenanted. Build at least 5 buildings and go through a castle to spread the news.
0/1
140
Do not let anything get in your way! Destroy 80 obstacles in the castles.
0/80
140
Wielding weapons barehanded is perhaps a bit dangerous. Let's loot some gauntlets.
0/20
140
Use your combining tools 3 times, perhaps you'll find something useful to fix this broken time loop.
0/3
140
Reach floor 1 now!
PASS

OTHER EXAMPLES

(Craft Egg, 2016)

Seasonal Map Changes

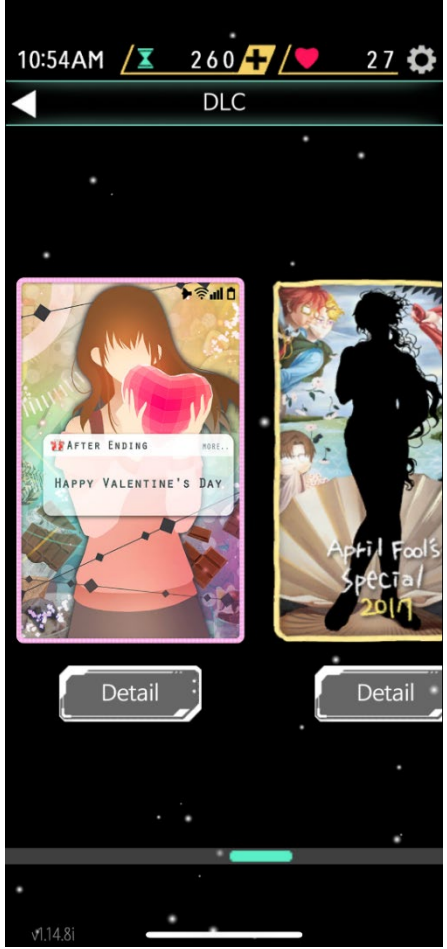
Seasonal Conversations

Live Events

(Cheritz, 2015)

Seasonal Title Image

Seasonal Chat



DLC

DLC

FINAL PART

FINAL TAKEAWAYS

FINAL TAKEAWAYS

- Mix permanent content & temporary content to suit YOUR game
- Structure for YOUR target audience / platform:
  Sequence of Arcs < Big Arc < Small Arc < Play Session
- TV shows & other media as inspiration
- Narrative Design ≠ Only Plot & Text
- Use narrative to strengthen game features, events & rewards

THANK YOU