



Cinematic Game Design II



Storytelling

Richard Rouse III and Marty Stoltz
Game Developer's Conference, 2007





Introductions

Richard Rouse III

Director of Game Design, Midway

*The Suffering, The Suffering: Ties That Bind,
Drakan: The Ancients' Gates, Odyssey,
Game Design: Theory & Practice*

Marty Stoltz

Studio Cinematic Director, Midway Chicago

*Stranglehold, The Suffering: Ties That Bind,
Mortal Kombat: Armageddon/Deception/ShaoLin Monks,
Psi-Ops, Sanitarium*



What is a “Cinematic” Game?

- Often misused term
- Our definition for Cinematic Game Design:
 - Draw from cinema’s 100-year-old library of techniques
 - Integrate these devices into gameplay
 - Not just “Hollywood envy”
 - Expands our medium



Last Year: **Cinematic Game Design** *The First*

1. Rim Lighting
2. Camera Following Character
3. Slow Motion
4. Subjective P.O.V.
5. Parallel Editing
6. Split Screen
7. Building Tension
8. Emotional Setup
9. (Mis)Leading the Audience

(Slides available – link at end of presentation)

This Year: Storytelling

- Nine new techniques
- Not just for cut-scenes, but in-game storytelling
- Integrate the story into the core experience
- Game storytelling is less about **plot** and more about **character** and **tone** – these techniques work accordingly



Technique #1: Exaggerated Camera Angles

- Angles have a psychological effect on the viewer
- Near/far relationships of characters and objects is important
- Framing showcases elements in scene
- Example from:

Touch of Evil



Exaggerated Camera Angles: Gameplay Application

- Get away from stiff follow-camera
- Provide a compelling composition while leaving the player in control
- Don't be afraid to change the camera based on different situations
- Convey information about your character
- Example from:

Shadow of the Colossus








Technique #2: Voice Over Narration

- Originally, film narration was for communicating plot
- Was a “cheap” way of telling a story
- Modern uses add layers of meaning to a scene
- Example from:

Fight Club



Voice Over Narration: Gameplay Application

- Different than “Earpiece Chatter”
- Great for pointing out crucial details or restating objectives, also good for adding meaning
- Can be connective if used during both cut-scenes and gameplay
- Can be distancing: narrator knows more than the player, story feels pre-determined
- Example from:

Max Payne 2



Technique #3: Image Juxtaposition

- First example from:
“Kuleshov Experiment”



Technique #3: Image Juxtaposition

- Specific psychological impact of a close up on a face preceding or following another image
- Placing images next to each other in quick edits changes the meaning of those images
- Built on the artificial landscape and mental map
- Second example from:

The Godfather

Image Juxtaposition: Gameplay Application

- Tricky to use in games
- Be careful not to disrupt play
- Can significantly effect player's emotions and set tone
- Example from:

The Suffering: Ties that Bind



Technique #4: Audio Juxtaposition

- Use of audio that isn't directly connected to visuals
- Communicate information on multiple levels
- Can change the tone of the scene
- Example from:

M*A*S*H



Audio Juxtaposition: Gameplay Application

- Use real environmental sounds: radios, PAs, overheard conversations
- Perfect for overlaying on exploration
- Good for establishing tone and backstory
- Example from:

Grand Theft Auto III




Technique #5: Visualized Thoughts

- Unique to film in the way it breaks reality
- Plays off the Kuleshov Experiment
- Filmic version of the “inner voice”
- Examples from:

A Clockwork Orange

and

Snatch



Visualized Thoughts: Gameplay Application

- Not often done in games
- Good way to insert a non-interactive sequence that doesn't take players too far out
- Less is more
- Good for introducing a character
- Example from:

**Call of Cthulhu:
Dark Corners of the Earth**



Technique #6: Altered Reality

- Mixing of the real world and the dream world
- Confuse the audience at first, clarity comes later
- Sometimes audio is real while visuals are fake
- Visual elements from the real world intrude on the dream world
- Example from:

The Manchurian Candidate



Altered Reality

- More stylized/modern take
- Use reality break to trigger dream sequence
- Audio stays "real" while world is imagined
- Example from:

The Life & Death of Peter Sellers



Altered Reality: Gameplay Application

- Underused in games, though has been done well
- Start with something close to reality
- Gameplay dream sequences can be even more like a real dream
- Make the dream interactive – changes based on where the player looks, forces them to repeat actions, etc.
- Example from:

The Last Express

Technique #7: Misdirection

- Tell the audience that everything is OK then surprise them with an event
- Dull the audience's emotional barrier
- Involves some slight of hand
- Example from:

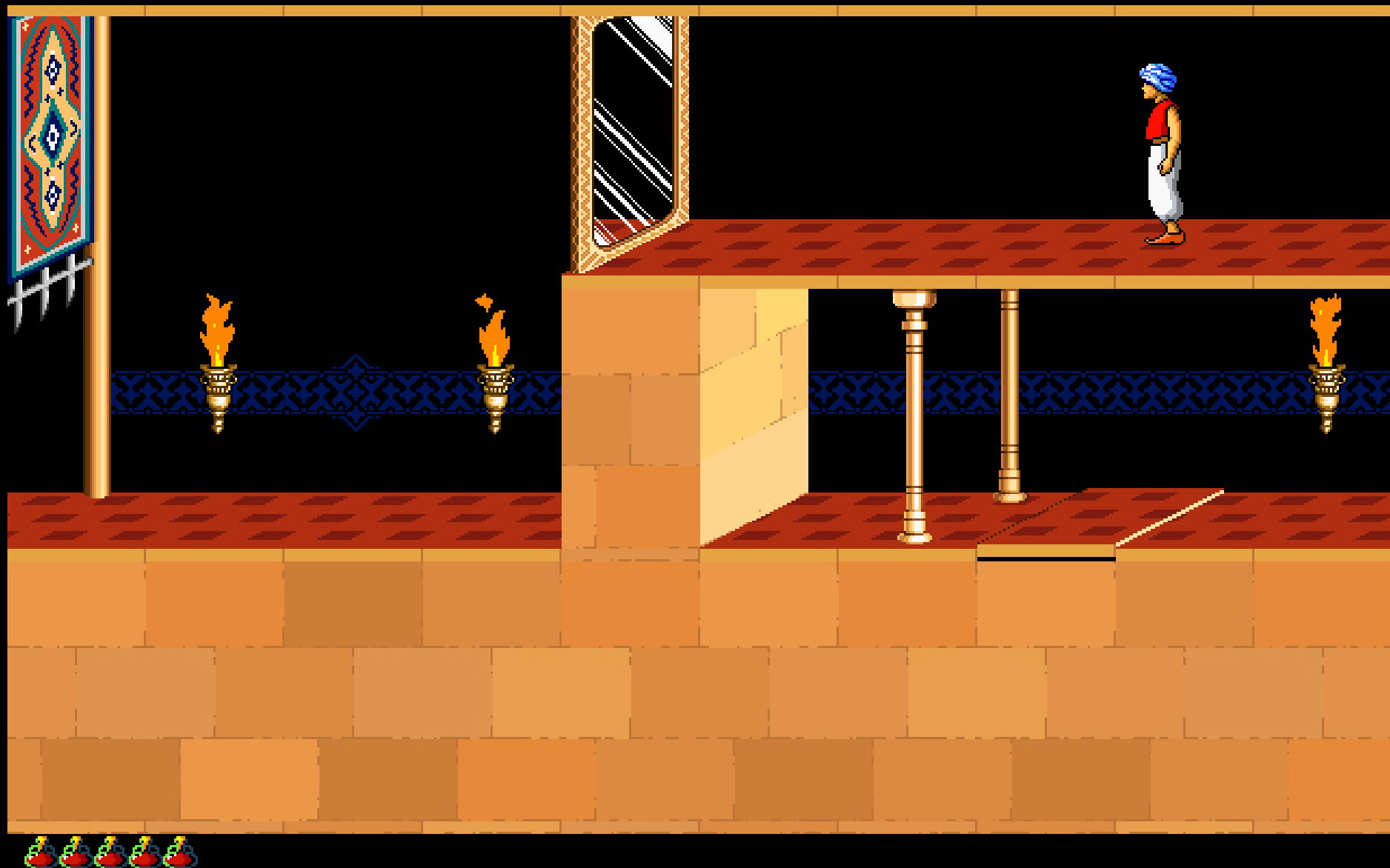
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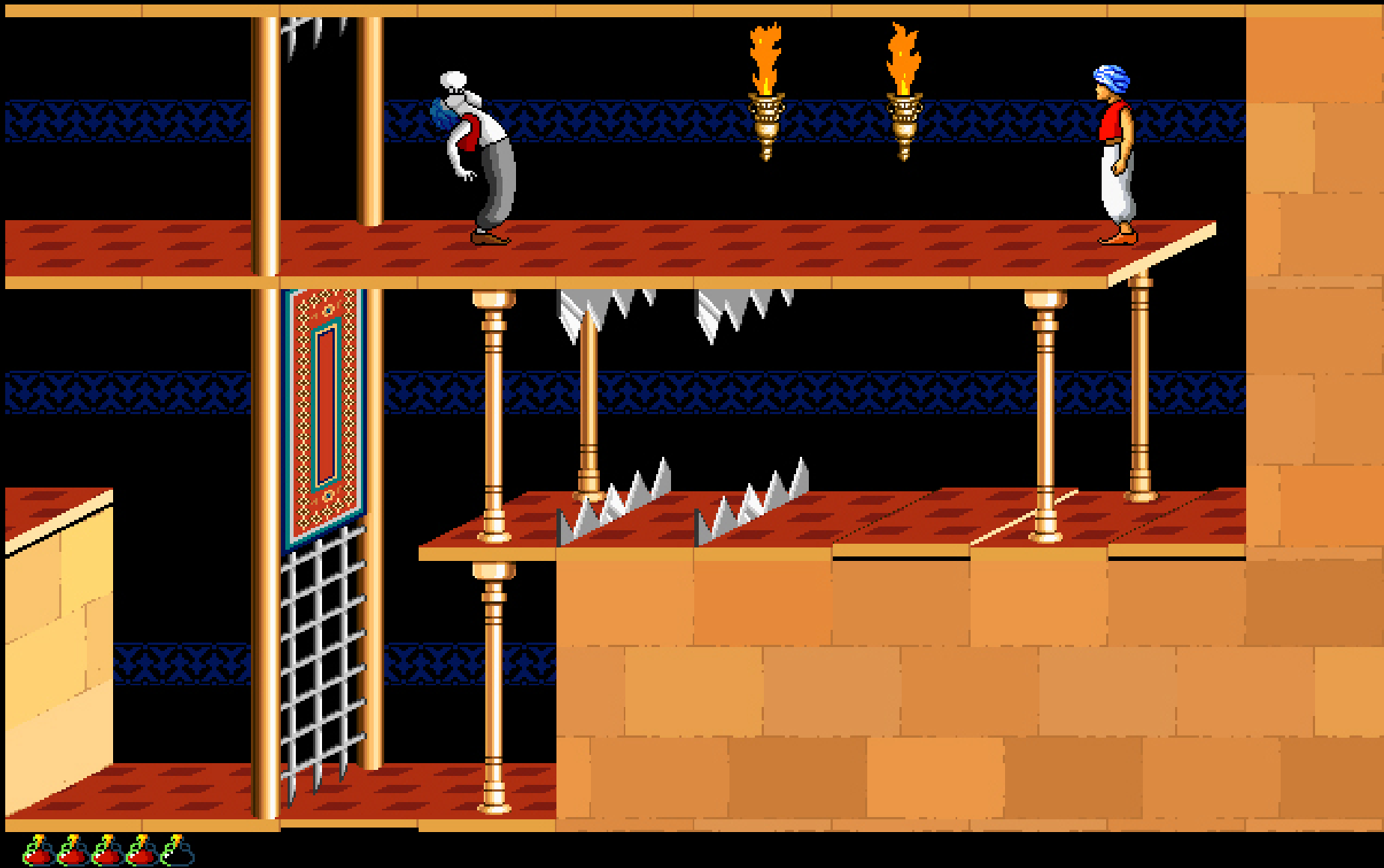
Misdirection: Gameplay Application

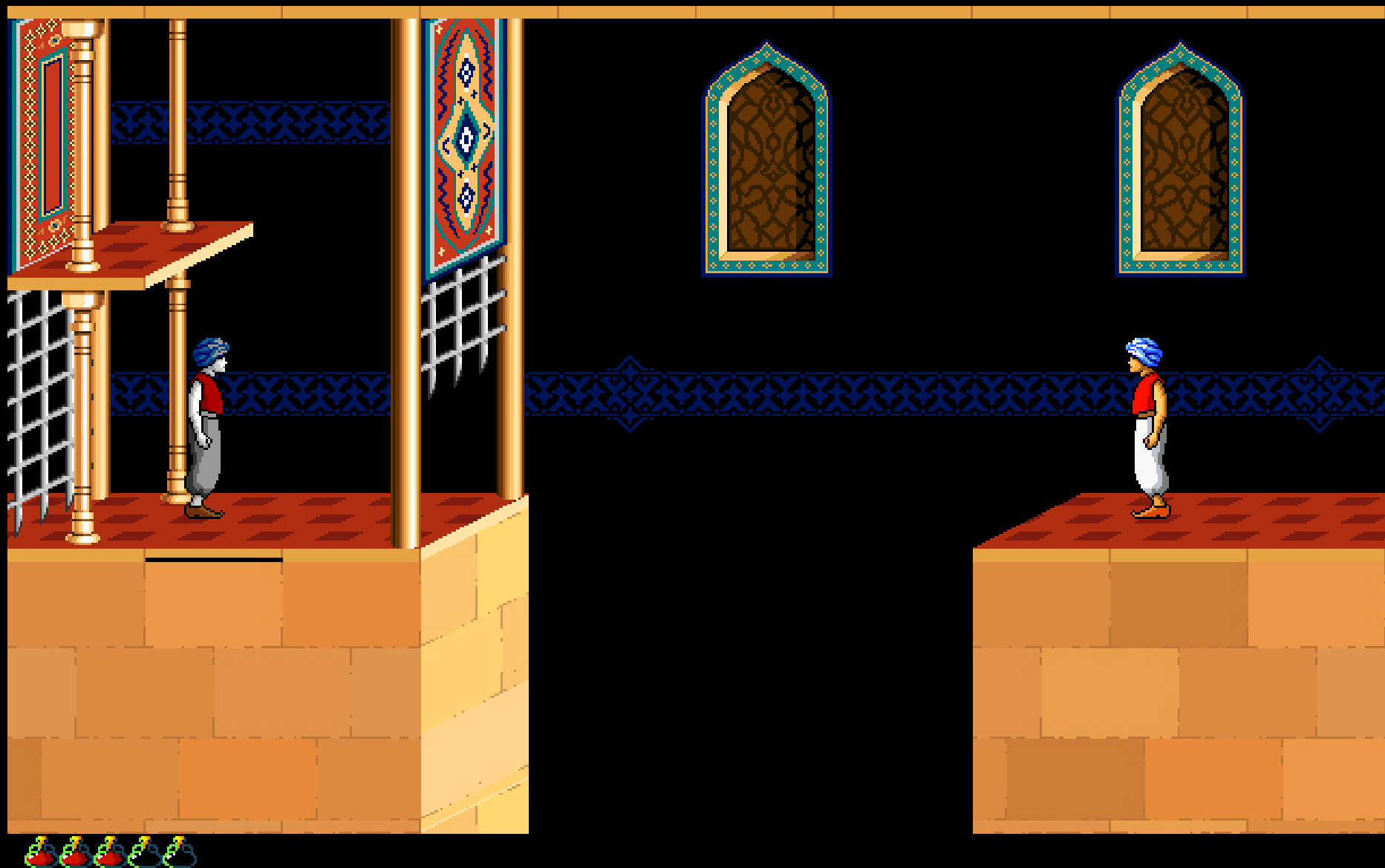
- Get the audience used to certain game mechanics and situations
- Then introduce a new situation which looks the same but acts differently
- Make it logical: avoid the “cheap shot”
- Example from:

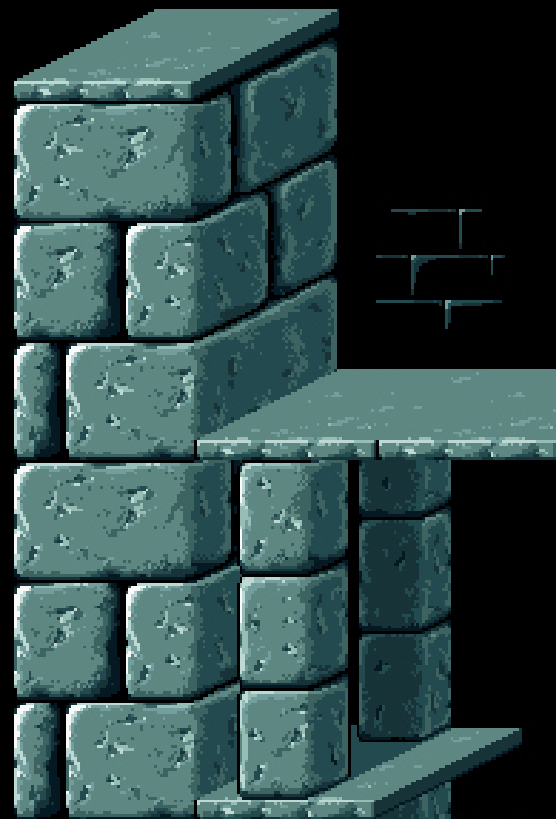
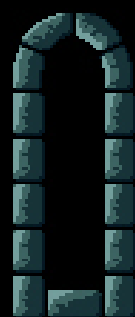
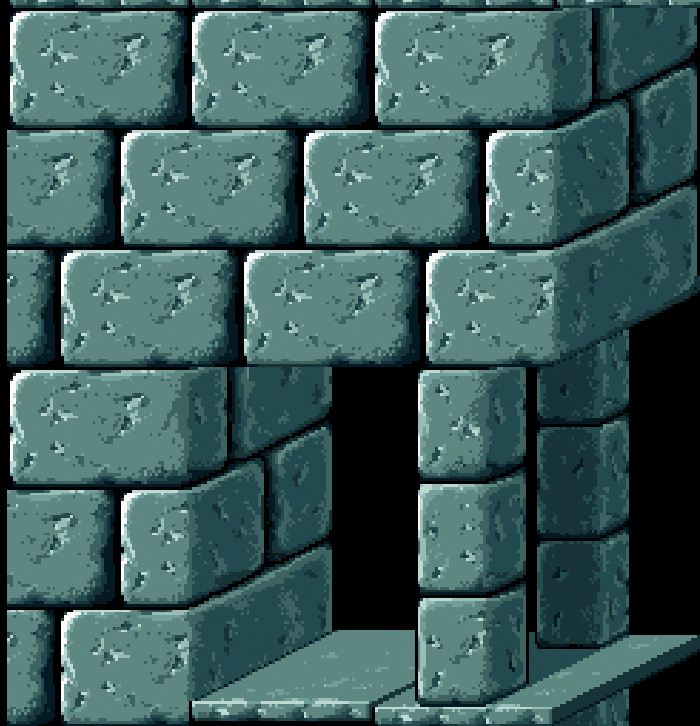
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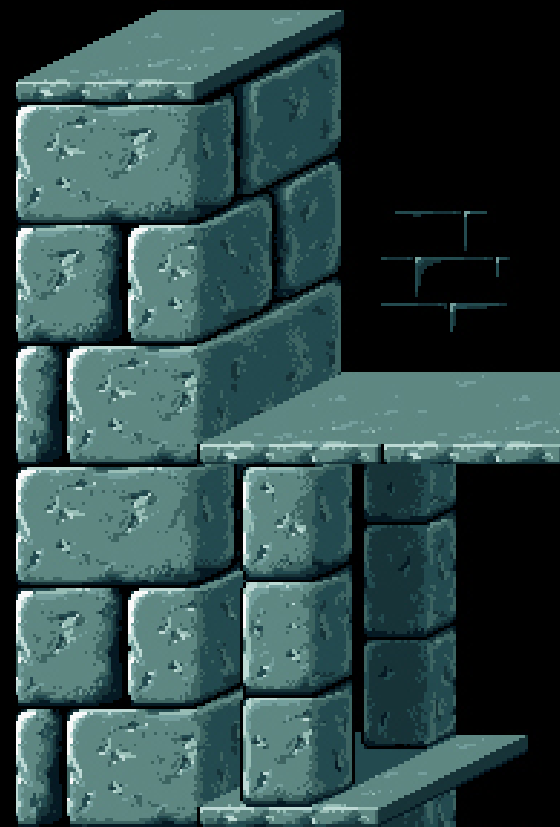
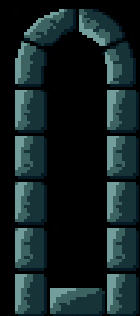
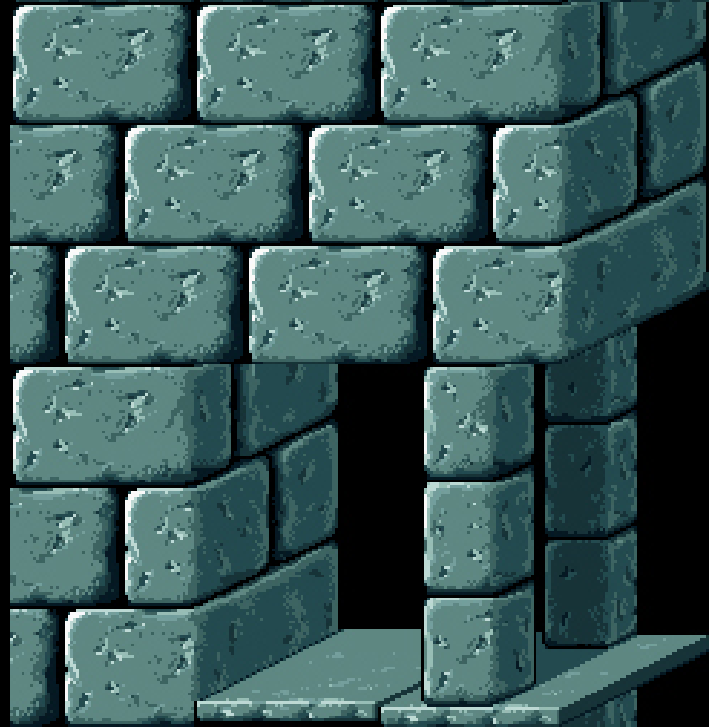


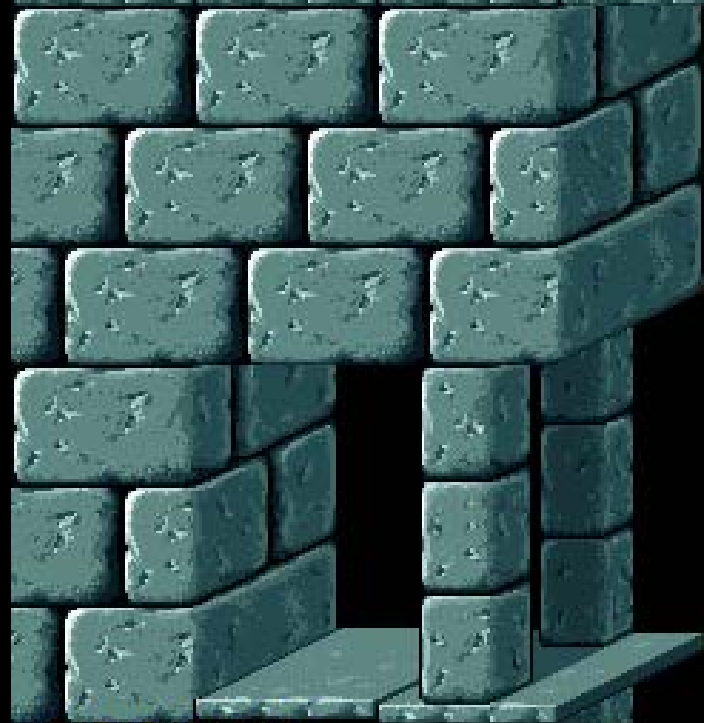


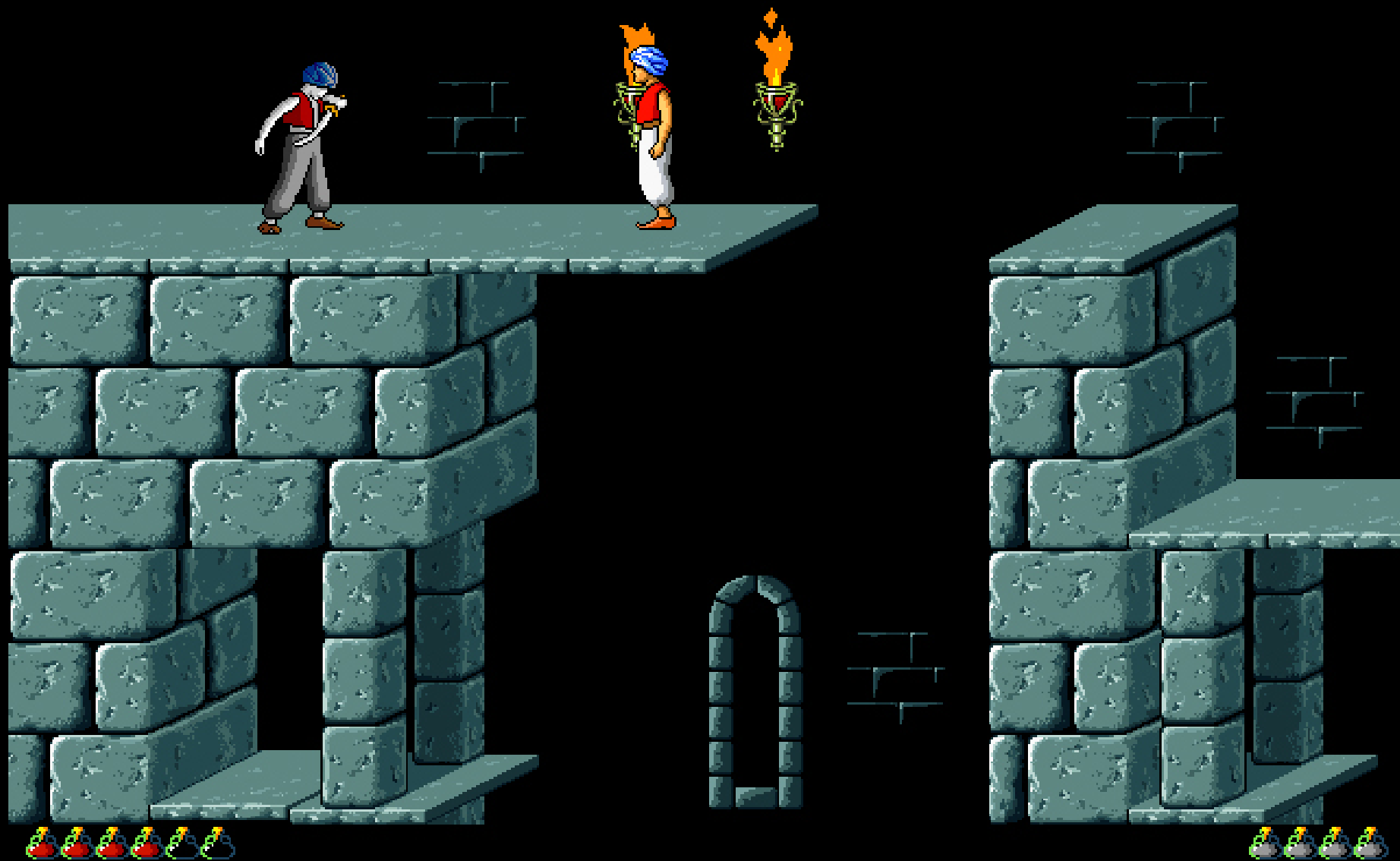


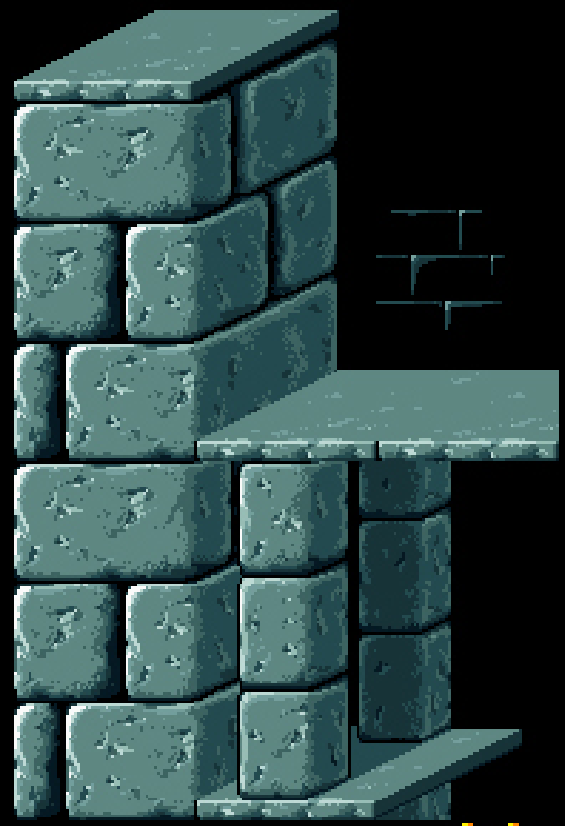
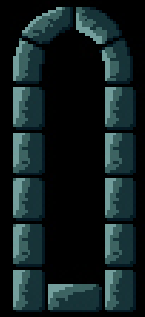
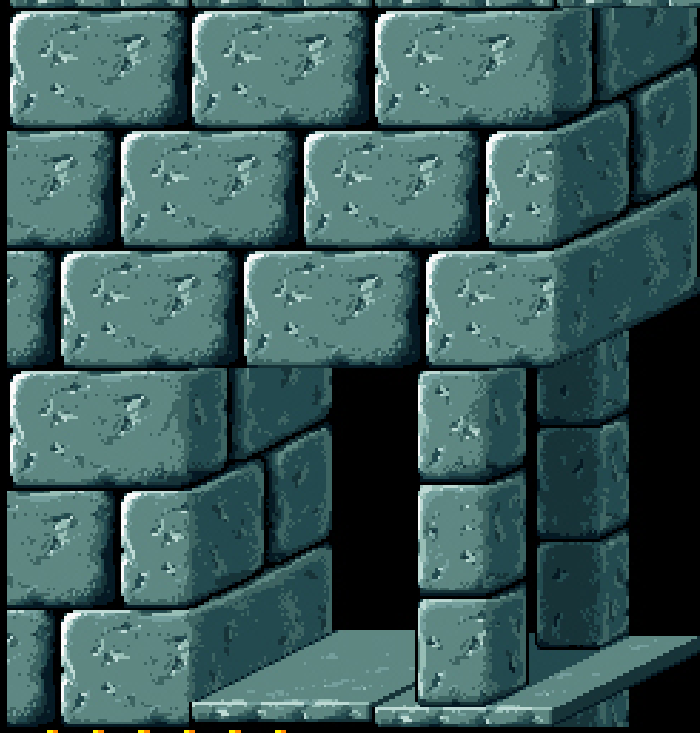
















Technique #8: Picture within Picture

- Mini-story that happens in the background of a scene
- Can be used to juxtapose two narratives or themes
- Example from:

Citizen Kane



Picture within Picture: Gameplay Application

- Depending on a game's camera & perspective, differently techniques apply
- Careful placement makes scenes non-disruptive but also likely to be seen
- Example from:

Another World / Out of this World

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Visual Storytelling: Gameplay Application

- Player should learn about the fiction through play
- Every element is important: art, animation, voice, audio, etc
- Repetition of key details is necessary
- Example from:

Half Life 2



Nine Cinematic Storytelling Techniques

1. Exaggerated Camera Angles
2. Voice Over Narration
3. Image Juxtaposition
4. Audio Juxtaposition
5. Visualized Thoughts
6. Altered Reality
7. Misdirection
8. Picture within Picture
9. Visual Storytelling

Questions?

- Contact:

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- Final slides (+ last year's slides) available at:
<http://www.paranoidproductions.com/>