(Remembered) Lost Things

A hardback copy of Give Me Liberty signed by Frank Miller and Dave Gibbons, CD2 of American Breakbeat compilation, the first CD single by the More Fire Crew, three Stray Bullets comics, the contents of one hard drive, a cassette of home acoustic recordings, friends, the front brakes of my bmx, a red mobile phone, a cheap microphone, various passwords, Commando BBC Micro cassette, two plastic bullets, The Sea & Cake (S/T) CD, photographs, a variety of Magic: The Gathering cards, the sleeve of How to Say Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwyllyllantysiliogogogoch 7”, Match Day II Spectrum cassette, jobs, four rechargeable batteries, an electric shaver power cable, money, a floppy disk with a homemade brown parcel tape label, a hi-fi remote control, family, Rampage Spectrum cassette, the egg-timer and/or dice for various board games and, record 2 of the Shaft soundtrack by Isaac Hayes.

If anybody reading this has found or 'acquired' any of the above, then I would dearly love to hear from them, and maybe get them back. E-mail kenj@pinderkaas.com.

Thanks to Pete for modelling and Katy for camerawork.
When the video object first arrived in Flash, I must confess I had a few nigglng worries. I was pleased and excited of course, but I couldn’t help wondering if Flash was about to enter a bloated period where every SWF on the net would contain a couple of MB worth of video? I had nightmares of the first CD games, where developers suddenly realized that even though their new game took up the equivalent of 40 floppies, there were still 600 MB free on their shiny disk. What did they do with all of this space? Fill it with an hour’s worth of bad, slow-loading video of course. Ah, those were the days!

To my surprise though, this hasn’t been the case at all – quite the opposite in fact. On my travels around the net, I’ve seen very little interesting work done with video. Of course, a few innovators have done some amazing work, but the average Flash user doesn’t seem that bothered by the new avenues available to him. So, high ideals in hand, I thought I’d set out to see what this new video object could do.

**Evolving ideas**

Things often come a long way from where they started. In fact, the experiment we’re going to look at in this chapter began life as an idea for a video game – something like Mortal Kombat or Toonstruck. Admittedly, I much preferred Street Fighter 2’s kinetic cartoon style to Mortal Kombat’s digitized fighters, but the idea was there. I thought about taking that digitized ethic, and putting it into a platform game. Maybe against photographed obstacles such as evil dogs that chase you, or maybe against traditional vector backgrounds to give it that ‘Tron’ feel.

Then I got to thinking about how this might realistically be achieved. I’d originally thought of having the whole character as one object, and filming different movement states, for example walking, running, and jumping.

Next, I thought that rather than filming a whole new body animation for each action, I might be able to film separate limbs, and then link them together with ActionScript to create the actions.

After pondering this for a while, I decided to take a step back, and that it would be easier to film complete single limb actions than to try and smoothly construct them from smaller parts that would probably never quite fit together anyway. After thinking of a few possible actions that would suit this method, it occurred to me that rather than a platform game, I could create some kind of hybrid beat-em-up / RPG. Different actions could have different attributes – a fast, but light rabbit-punch animation, a slow, but heavy haymaker, a high-blocking arm, a fast-walking, but weak leg, and so on. Each fighter would be constructed using a number of limbs, and then set against each other. The victor could then claim one of the loser’s limbs as his own at the end of the match.

That sounded like great fun, but it also sounded like a logistical nightmare. Fighting games live or die by their collision detection, and Flash isn’t renowned for its speed or accuracy in that department. I loved the idea of being able to drag animations onto a character though, kind of like a video dress-up doll. I also liked the idea of having multiple limbs all moving at once in different directions, making an insane Swiss army knife man.

That then was the idea: to film a number of limb movements, bring them into Flash, and mask them somehow. These animations could then be positioned on a body and displayed. I also had in the back of my mind that if this proof-of-concept worked, then I could always save the finished creature I’d built, and bring it into my still-evolving beat-em-up.

So, it’s now a dress-up doll with a difference: rather than trying out new outfits on a static body, you can try new limbs instead. Drag limb animations out of a standard interface, and drop them into position on the body. Rotate them into the arrangement you desire, or drop the ones you don’t like and watch them fall away.

When you’re happy with your creation, hit the Display button to see it in all its glory against the background of your choice. If it’s still not to your liking, then switch back to edit mode and carry on working. When everything’s as good as it’s going to be, hit the SAVE button and record your simulacrum in a text file ready to share with your friends.