28 May

Funky Monkey – An Unfinished Amiga Game

I thought I would collect together all the material I had relating to the first real video game I ever worked on. (A complete history of my game dev career can be found here, in case you are interested at all.)

The Beginning

During 1991 I was playing in a local band with some friends from college. The bass player in this band, Jim, was on a YTS placement at Images Software, in Fareham. One day, whilst collecting Jim for a rehearsal, I saw what went on inside. A dozen or so artists and programmers making 8 and 16 bit computer games.

The artists were all using DPaint on Commodore Amiga 500s. I commented to one that I used Art Director on my Atari ST to make graphics and animations (being a musician I ended up with an ST due to the inclusion of MIDI ports). I think someone mentioned this to Karl (Jeffrey, the founder of Images) and he asked if I might be able to help on a game he was developing.

Monkey Business

In April 1991 I signed an agreement to complete the graphics for a game already under development. The game was being developed by DC Software (I don't recall the name of the programmer). I spent several weeks, maybe even months, drawing sprites for this version of the game. All I have to show now are three printouts of game mockups and a few animated sprites. I did suggest changing the name of the game from Monkey Business to Funky Monkey.
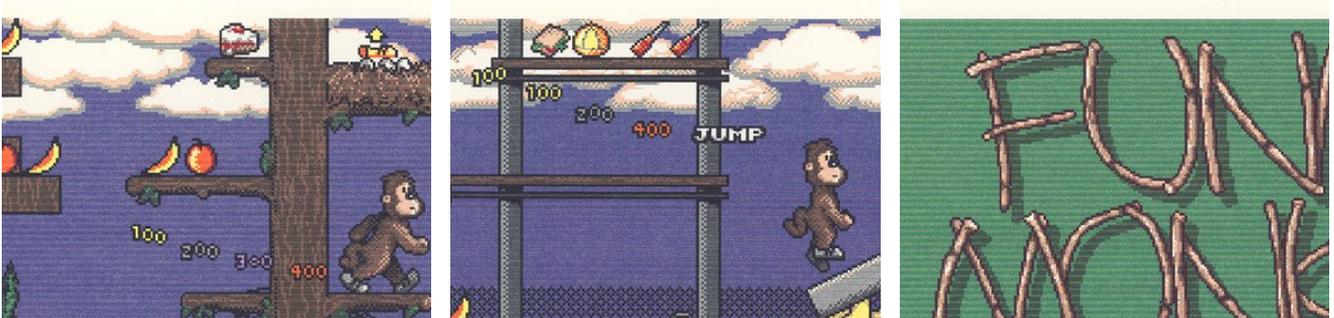
Funky Monkey

By the start of 1992 the development of Monkey Business had stalled completely. I can't remember why. I was asked to redesign the character and see if there was anything that could be salvaged. I was pleased because the original idea was far too pedestrian and it had a very old school, 8-bit vibe. By now games like Sonic, which launched on the Mega Drive during 1991, showed what could be achieved with platform games.
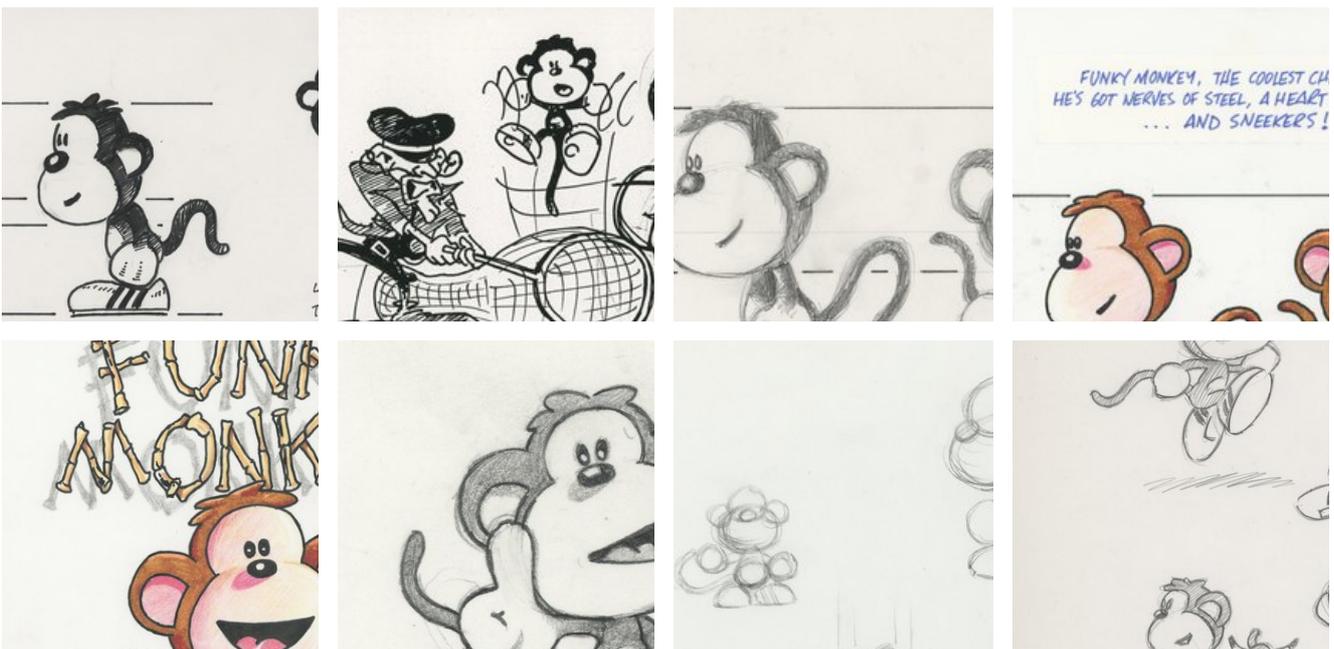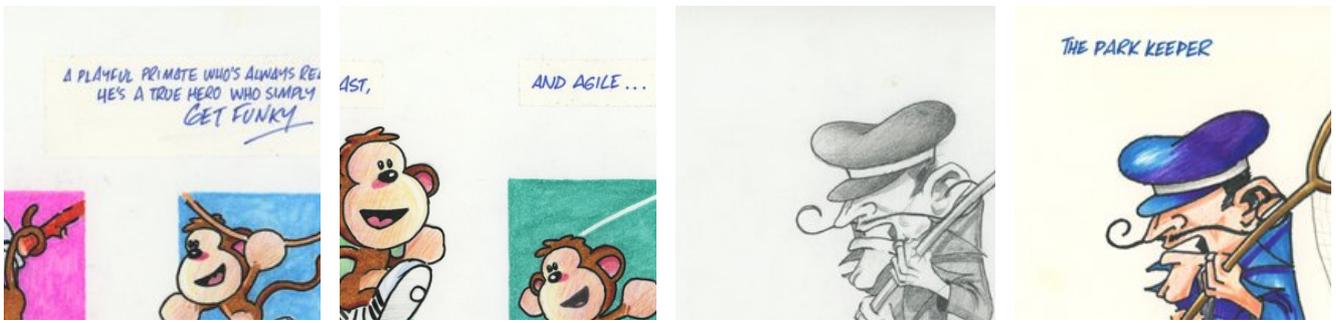
Most of the images above were used in my initial proposal document, which I still have. I scanned the five pages of copy - which are quite painful to read. This is probably my first ever proposal document and I was barely into my twenties when I wrote it. Later, when we were developing mobile games for Nokia and Vodafone, writing proposals would become a major part of my job.
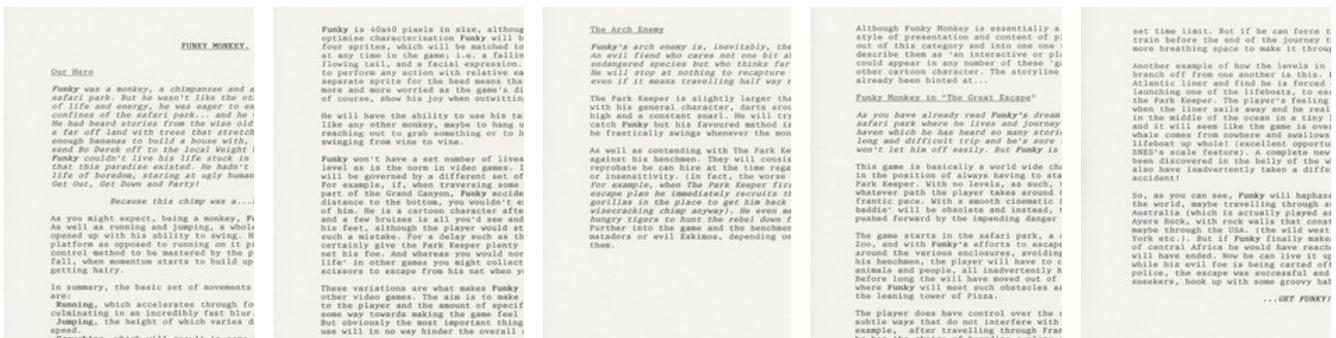

I also have some legal documents - the Contract of work for Monkey Business (I was getting paid £117 per week!), the Memorandum of Agreement for Funky Monkey and Confidentiality agreements covering Atari, Nintendo and Sega.

Development

Very little remains of the actual product. I do have some bitmap art left over from the Monkey Business incarnation. I also have a printout of a an almost complete sprite sheet for Funky. He is missing his mouth and tail (these were going to be added later. And there are a few actions not shown (spinning around on a branch). I have no idea why I animated him running towards the screen.

The background of this title image was me trying to implement a new technique for complex, shaded pixel art. This is mainly due to me being colour-blind. I'm not entirely sure it was successful (the lettering needs to be bolder for sure).

I would draw the pattern in several different brightnesses. Then I would create tiling dither patterns (inspired by the letratone that I used to use in my first job in a graphic design studio). I would then use the dither patterns as masks to blend one shade of the background into another. It would create a complex pattern of colours that I would never be able to draw manually, but which did give the effect of light glows etc.

Amiga Demo

During a visit to the RMC Cave in May of 2022 I risked trying a 30 year old Amiga disc in Neil's Amiga 600. After a very long loading wait, the old demo sprang into life. It was very strange seeing the little monkey jumping around again after all this time. I did grab a flickery video using my iPhone on a tripod, but there's not a

lot to see really. I really wish I could remember the name of the coder who was responsible for this demo.

A VERY early demo of the first game I properly worked on - Funky Monkey

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A couple of weeks later I visited my friends at Bitmap Bureau, and thanks to Mike, Matt and Lee (who brought his Amiga 500 in to work) we managed to grab a clean video of the demo. The plan was always to add his tail and mouth later. We even liked the idea of generating his tail algorithmically, which would have been nice.

Funky Monkey Prototype 1992

In February 1993 I was offered a job at SCi's new studio in Southampton and development on Funky Monkey ceased.

Music

I created a couple of music tracks to go along with the game. These weren't in-game music, as such, but more like a marketing tool. They also helped me try to get across how I thought the whole game world would feel.

The first is a kind of theme tune for the character. I was still writing music with Mark, who I had been in a band with since college. We got some lyrics together and we adapted a song that we used to play called Strip Show. That song was heavily inspired by Chameleon by Herbie Hancock - although I didn't know this at the time. I suspect the band's bass player, Jim, knew the riff and had been playing it at rehearsals one day.

Funky Monkey Theme
Glenn Broadway and Mark Poingdestre

The second piece is just instrumental. The idea was that Funky was a cheery little chimp without much worry, and this tune was trying to emphasise that. I think I may have sampled a rubber band twang for one of the instruments.

These were produced entirely using a [Roland W30 workstation](), [Steinberg Pro 24]() on an Atari ST and a [Tascam 488 portastudio]() - the latter being used to add the vocals.

In Conclusion

So that's that. I think it would have been a tall order realising the game that was in my head, but even a run of the mill platformer would, I think, have been fun. The demo felt good and it had hardly been refined at all at that stage.

I wonder how many other unfinished computer games there are sitting on old floppy disks around the country?

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Grzegorz 2 weeks ago · 0 Likes

Awesome article. Back then in 1993 didn't You think about completing that game? Or was it hard because other parties got right to that title? Would it

be possible to finish that game but for modern consoles?

Glenn Broadway A week ago · 0 Likes

Thanks! I was full steam ahead on to the next project with a different studio (one of the first CD ROM games). I'm not really sure about rights - in fact I'm not entirely sure why the Amiga game stalled. Would I like to return to it all these years later - TBH I'm just not into platform games these days. Although I am experimenting in PICO-8 at the moment.

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