02 When demos go mobile by Ghandy and Axel

Ghandy, Axel, Wed 05 Mar 2008

When demos go mobile
by Ghandy of Moods Plateau and Axel of Brainstorm

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Andreas Gustafsson also goes by the name of Shadow (or sdw in short) of Noice.

He got interested in the scene when he was twelve and got a Commodore 64. The now-31-year-old man from Sweden is totally aware of the fact that the only reason he still has time for the demoscene is because he has neither a girlfriend nor kids.

C64 demo from Andreas Gustafsson s time in Triad

"It is almost impossible to make sure that something runs exactly without having that particular phone"

At first he was mostly interested in the crack-intros, but later also discovered demos. "I wanted to be able to code such stuff myself," says Gustafsson, who likes to watch movies and play basketball in his spare time. "So I learned Assembler and was active on the C64 scene (back then under the handle Mega-Master), first in a group called Demons, then in Triad." Finally he joined Noice and at the same time changed his handle to Shadow. During the nineties he moved to Amiga, then to the PC, but lately he thinks that the amount of work involved in creating a quality PC demo had been becoming too much, so he started looking around for other, more limited platforms to make use of his "oldschool coding skills". So he started creating demos for platforms like the TI-83 calculator, and

then also for cellphones. To Gustafsson, the main appeal of these platforms is that they still are more about the code, and not so much about the other content (graphics/textures/3d models/design) and writing tools, exporters etc. which seems to be the path PC demos are taking.

4th Dimension (4k J2ME)

There haven't been so many demos on mobiles, but there have been some good ones made on the S60 platform, for example by Matt Current. "Also worth mentioning is gforce 2001 by Pygmy projects which was a pioneering effort in this area, even if the Nokia Communicator phone it runs on is more like a small handheld computer than a phone," Gustafsson says.

POC4k (4k J2ME)

"My demos are made with in J2ME, because it has a much larger user base (pretty much ALL new cellphones support J2ME in some form) than the Symbian OS which is required if you want to write in C. Well, I guess there is a third option, the Windows Mobile stuff; but I don't know much about that, and I don't think the user base is anywhere near Symbian for example."

Two By Two (TI83 demo)

"The problem with J2ME is that every manufacturer seems to follow Sun's specification very loosely. It has improved over time though, but still, devices can behave very differently. For example, when you start to play some music, depending on the phone, the time it takes for it to actually start playing can be off by a second, which makes timing things difficult."

Uncharted Territory (C64DTV)

"It is almost impossible to make sure that something runs exactly without having that particular phone, so you end up coding something that 'should' look about the same on all phones, but in reality it won't," Gustafsson adds. "It's just the way the J2ME world is."

"The main appeal of these platforms is that they still are

about the code."

To some extent, the scene on mobiles hasn't really taken off. But with the maturing of the J2ME platform we are seeing now, there is potential; only time will tell if teams actually will start shifting their time to phones. After all, there are already quite a number of platforms to create demos for.

Gustafsson doesn't seem to run out of ideas either. "I just released a demo for the C64DTV, and I might do more releases on that. I also recently bought a PSP that I'm messing around with a bit. There might be some demo for that too. Of course I am also considering doing more mobile phone stuff." Seems like there's plenty to do, then.

Photo of Andreas Gustafsson

All of his knowhow currently is also put to good use, as Gustafsson has created his own little hobby-label named SDW Developments. Under that name, he develops some commercial games. So, chances are that you'll come across Gustafsson again on your phone, or on some other platform.