

DUEL

A Digital Fiction Thriller by Kate Pullinger & Andy Campbell

DEVELOPMENT JOURNAL

 Dreaming Methods

INTRODUCTION

Andy Campbell and Kate Pullinger have both been working in the field of digital fiction for a number of years. After communicating online – Andy gave several guest lectures on an online MA programme on creative writing and new media that Kate helped set up – they met face to face for the first time in 2010.

During this meeting, they talked about the possibility of working together on a new digital fiction project. They shared ideas about creating a work that would have a broad popular appeal. They agreed that new economic models for digital fiction were beginning to emerge as multimedia-friendly devices proliferate. But, most of all, they talked about the exciting possibility of working together.

'Duel' marks their first collaboration, and this Development Journal documents their progress.

HARRIET

He's found us.

JACK

Use your phone.

HARRIET

He's found us.

1ST VISUALS

November/December 2011

Preview screen

Duel's initial image is a stock photo of a car which has toppled off-road. In the original, a man is standing beside it with a bollard. For the preview, he was removed, the contrast of the image was massively exaggerated and a demo of what the project might 'feel like' was created in Flash prior to attempting to build it in open source.

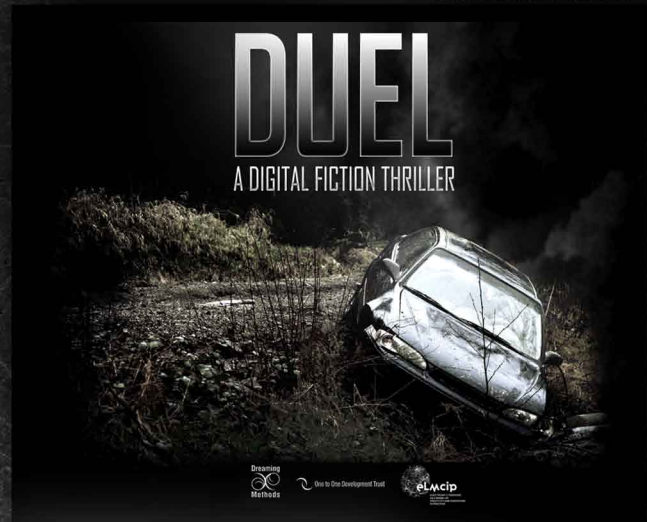
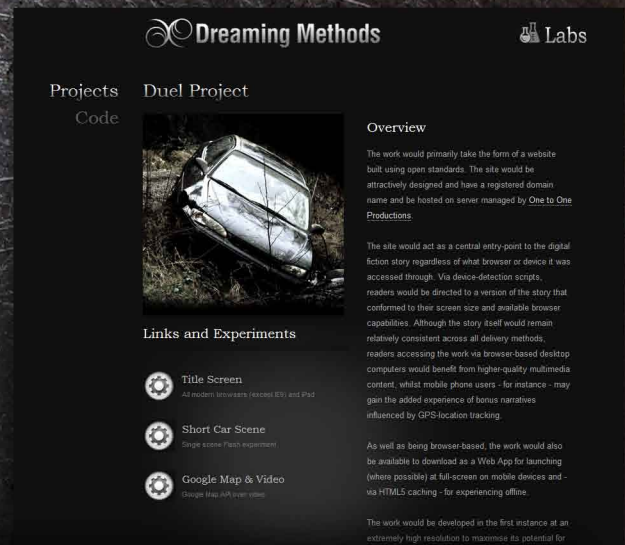
The original demos can be found at <http://labs.dreamingmethods.com/duel/>

Notes from Andy/Kate

The title 'Duel' emerged the first time Andy and Kate discussed this project. There are a number of 'duels' in the story, including those between the main characters, mother and son, Harriet and Jack, as well as between these two characters and their assailant, Mr Psycho. In the history of literature, there are a number of well-known novels and stories titled 'Duel', and, of course, Steven Spielberg's first movie shares this title.

Jack. Jack! Wake up. Sit up.
Put your seatbelt back on. ▶

The intention from the outset was to attempt to create layered 'parallax' media, a technique used in many Dreaming Methods projects. Here you can see foreground and background graphics, including text.



Original title screen established at www.digitalfiction.co.uk. This is a domain name that Dreaming Methods has owned for over 12 years.

Preview Graphics

You're swearing at me.
We're in a ditch, we're being chased,
and you're swearing at me.



BLOG

January 2012

Setting up the Blog

We have decided to create a blog for the project and post to it monthly to report on how we're getting on. We've configured some webspace and installed WordPress - and obtained a rather nice template which will suit the project quite nicely. It allows full-screen images/videos in the background.

Notes from Kate

At the same time as working on 'Duel', I'm also writing a new novel, 'Our Stuff and Our Things'. While 'Duel' is a complete digital fiction that can stand on its own, it will have a dual (ha!) function for me and my novel, in that it can also be read as a chapter of the novel: two of the main characters from 'Our Stuff and Our Things', Harriet, and her teenage son Jack, are also main characters in the novel. This is something I'm having a great time exploring and developing.

DUEL A DIGITAL FICTION THRILLER PROJECT BLOG

A Digital Fiction Thriller

January 20th, 2012 admin Uncategorized No Comments



Duel is a cross-device digital fiction thriller being developed as a collaboration between digital writer/artist Andy Campbell and digital writer/novelist Kate Pullinger. The story begins with two characters - Harriet, a mother, and Jack, her teenage son - waking up to find themselves ditched off-road on an anonymous muddy track. Thunder is rumbling distantly and it's throwing it down with rain. Headlights appear in the hazy distance - they're being chased across country by a frighteningly aggressive and relentless driver.

February 2012 update: writing process

February 24th, 2012 katepullinger Digital Fiction No Comments

Since my last post we've made some further progress on the public-facing side of this project, as well as on the work itself. Duel has been accepted to exhibit and show at the next ELO conference, Electrifying Literature: Affordances and Constraints, which will take place in the US in June 2012. Whether or not either or both Andy and I can attend will depend upon funding - we have a Grants for the Arts application in with Arts Council England and we should hear if we've been successful in April. We've also been asked to talk about Duel in Bristol in May, at an event that follows - on from

Blogroll

- Dreaming M
- Kate

DUEL A DIGITAL FICTION THRILLER PROJECT BLOG

Project Diary

Protected: Project Diary



Hi Kate: Hey. Fancy seeing you here.

I have updated the Script document to include actual video screen shots (replacing the previous 'preview' grabs). Although not final (ie, showing text/parallax), it does give a much better visual sense of the work. There are a couple of new brief new 'scenes' as mentioned.



Duel Script Chapter 1-4

I have been saving out screen shots from my work, and dropping them into Photoshop. I'm preparing this material in the same style as the rest of the project - ie, silver/grey, dark, metallic fonts and so on. The PDF below is a sample link to one of the pages I'm preparing. I'm doing these at 300 dpi (print resolution) so they may be of use to EMACP. Although I'm not fussed if they'd rather break any of this stuff down into its component parts. Not happy with the text yet.



Example Technical/Artistic Development Presentation Document

Finally here is the URL of the video footage that I am hoping to use as the 'backbone' for the first episode. This exists in After Effects as single effected shots and Premiere as an overall video edit - so I am in no way considering this to be the finished article for the video. It could be that as we progress we locate or self-produce better footage. Also, bear in mind as you watch it that (a) some parts will

Blogroll

- Dreaming Methods
- Kate Pullinger

Recent Posts

- February 2012 update: writing process
- A new digital fiction, and a new novel
- A Digital Fiction Thriller

Archives

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Administrator Login

Collaborative Script

We have evolved a way of working that sees us swapping a script back and forth containing proposed visuals, notes about the differences between device formats, and the actual dialogue/narrative of the work (written entirely by Kate). This seems to be working well as a method of seeing the project outlined as a whole - and we're using the blog to swap notes and latest versions of the script. We're up to v1.4 at the moment. Not sure what the script 2.0 will look like!

#7 - Harriet Tries to Start the Car



Video screen shot only

DESKTOP

Static shot of tire and mud track. Sound of engine trying to start. Rain super-imposed. Text possibly curved along the tires? Might be too hard to read.

TABLET

Same as desktop version if possible.

MORILE

This scene may have to be created using images on mobile - wheel and mud track separately.

Jack

Someone's found us. That's good, isn't it? [text normal]

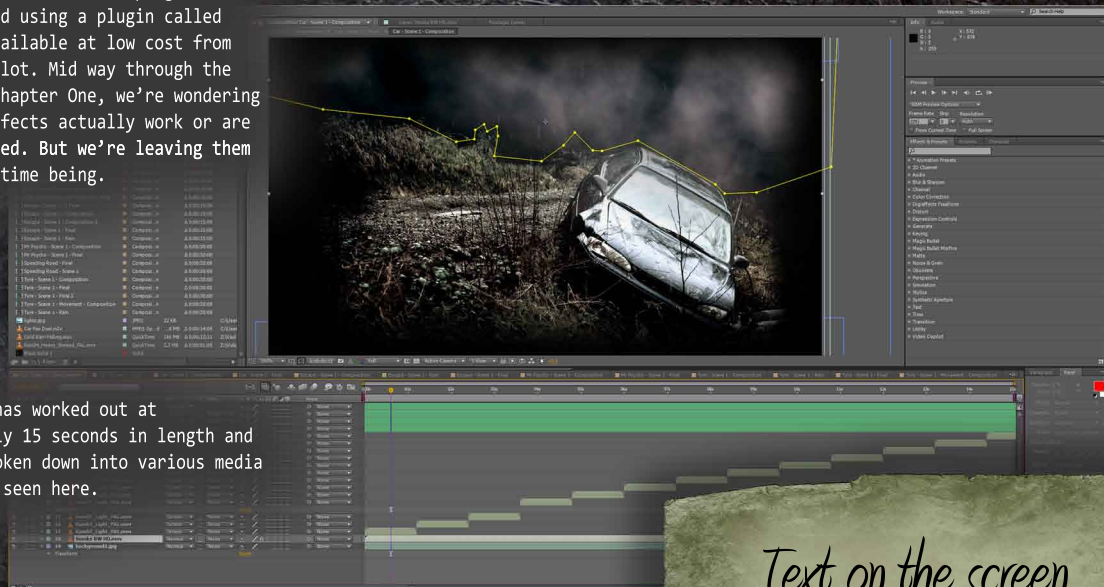
That's good, isn't it? [text curved around tyre?]

Mum?

February 2012

FX & EDITING

Distortion-like video warping effects are achieved using a plugin called 'Twitch' available at low cost from Video Co-Pilot. Mid way through the coding of Chapter One, we're wondering if these effects actually work or are really needed. But we're leaving them in for the time being.

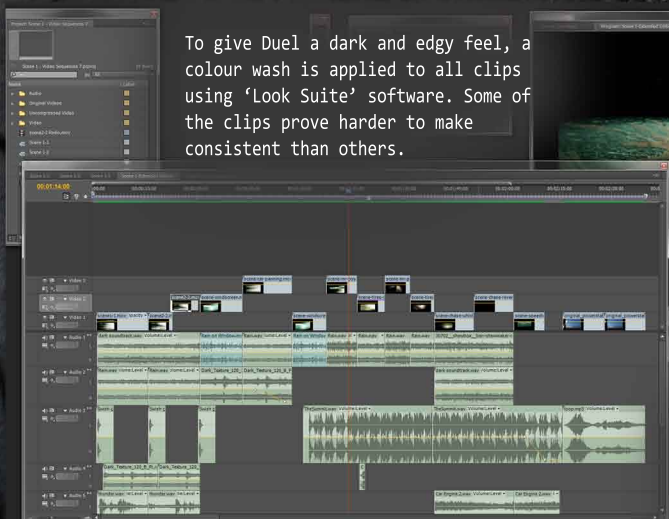


Each scene has worked out at approximately 15 seconds in length and has been broken down into various media elements as seen here.

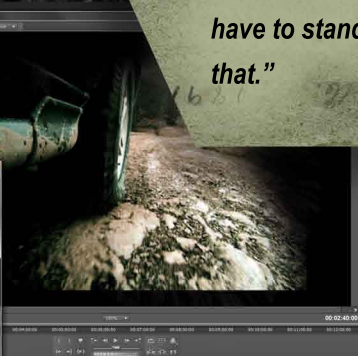
Special Effects

Each 'scene' in *Duel* Chapter One has been manipulated using After Effects CS5. Here you can see the photograph of the crashed car (which was first cropped and adjusted in Photoshop) having had a mask applied to the top half and some computer-generated 'cloud/mist' super-imposed. Rain sequences (against black but with a 'light' mode applied) has then also been super-imposed. The video sequence is finally rendered out as a Quicktime movie at 720p.

Video Editing, Audio and Timeline



To give *Duel* a dark and edgy feel, a colour wash is applied to all clips using 'Look Suite' software. Some of the clips prove harder to make consistent than others.



Here the video 'segments' are displayed at the top of the timeline and the audio at the bottom. So far '*Duel*' has over 7 layers of audio in Chapter One. Some of it seems to get distorted in the final movie export.

Text on the screen

When presenting their work to general audiences, Andy and Kate often get asked the following question: *'What makes your work different from film?'* Both writers are interested in creating new hybrid forms; for both, their primary interest in the realm of digital fiction is in using text combined other media to find new ways to tell stories. Though their work has affinities with film and literary fiction, they are also influenced by games and other transmedia projects. Kate says, *'For me, there's a whole world of potential when it comes to putting text on the screen. As far as I'm concerned, "Duel" isn't a film, it's literature.'* Andy says, *'There's often a sense of delicacy and preciousness around words that suggests they have to stand alone to have power. I don't believe that.'*

EPISODE #1

February/March 2012

Fast video compression

We decided to use Miro Video Converter for quickly compressing Duel's hefty video content. Miro is a free tool that provides drag and drop functionality for converting video clips to a number of open source formats.

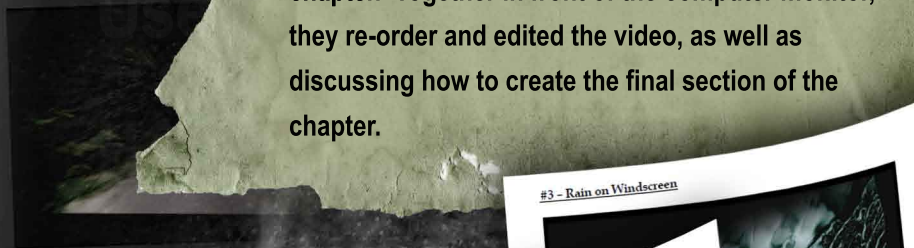
No single video format is completely cross browser compatible yet, but the HTML5 video tag allows 'fall back' to any number of alternative formats. Duel has ben encoded to MP4, OGV and WEBM to try and cover all bases.

<http://www.mirovideoconverter.com/>



Collaborative Working On-Screen

March 2012 saw Andy and Kate meeting up in person to work together on the project. During a productive session, they viewed the first three minutes of chapter one several times, and discussed changes to the video and sound effects. Andy gave Kate a tour of the backend of the project, and they looked at the complex layers of source code behind the chapter. Together in front of the computer monitor, they re-order and edited the video, as well as discussing how to create the final section of the chapter.



Video feeding into the script

We have decided to drop actual stills from the video into the script to trigger key text narratives. As the project evolves, these stills will hopefully be converted into 'actual' screenshots from each scene in the final work. The script also contains technical notes about the delivery of the work on each platform (divided into 3 - Desktop, Tablet, Phone.) It all looks very ambitious right now, but is rewarding and exciting to work on.

#3 - Rain on Windscreen

TABLET

Photo of windscreen/parallax
rainboard. Audio - muffled rain
side the car.
Larger text. Timer bar - 15
seconds

MOBILE

Photograph with parallax.*
Larger text, closer up on photo?
Sound of thunder - NO RAIN.
Timer bar - 15 seconds
*if possible!

of the one driving.

you that, you don't listen to

VISUALS AND DIALOGUE

#1 - Overview of Car Off-road

Jack Jack! Wake up. Sit up.
Put your seatbelt back on!

DESKTOP

Video/parallax with rain
Sound of thunder and rain
Timer bar - 15 seconds

TABLET

Video/parallax with rain.*
Sound of thunder and rain
Timer bar - 15 seconds
*if possible!

MOBILE

Photograph with parallax.*
Larger text, closer up on photo?
Sound of thunder - NO RAIN.
Timer bar - 15 seconds
*if possible!

April 2012

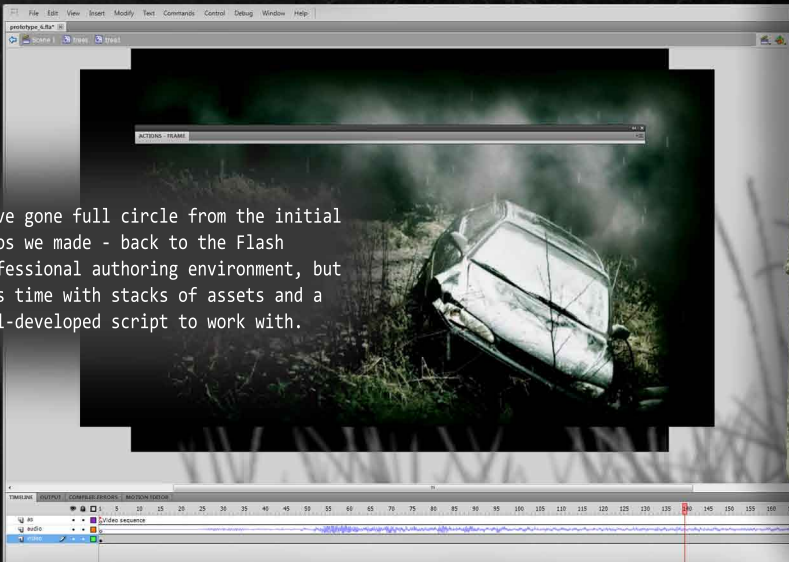
TECHNOLOGIES

Open Source At Its Limits

We've come a long way with the open source version of 'Duel' chapter one, but we're not seeing great performance results as the layers of media ramp up. Even on the most powerful desktop computer, Duel has performance issues when combining parallax with video and text. It's like HTML5 and Javascript just aren't quite capable yet. It's also painstakingly slow to work on and has synchronisation issues with the video and audio. We need to find another development solution!



Flash Strikes Back



We've gone full circle from the initial demos we made - back to the Flash Professional authoring environment, but this time with stacks of assets and a well-developed script to work with.

We've decided to take all the assets out of the open source version of Duel and put them into a Flash project in the hope of exporting it as an iOS and Android App. This means we need to use ActionScript version 3 which Andy isn't fluent with.

Working in Flash is like a breath of fresh air. The open source version has to be hand-coded; now we have timelines, visual tools and very fast compiling to see the results.

Notes from Andy

It has become clear that the sheer amount of media we're trying to combine here (even though in some ways it's not all that much compared to some games and applications!) would be better suited to a different development method. The forthcoming launch of Adobe Production Studio CS6 has prompted me to make an early, discounted upgrade to CS5.5 and opened the doors to exporting Flash projects as iOS and Android Apps via Adobe AIR. After a few weeks of scrubbing up on this, I can happily say that I've now got Duel running at quite some speed on the iPad - way beyond what we've been able to achieve so far with open source. This is very exciting and will ramp up our development process considerably.

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