Blender Foundations
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Howdy folks. This book is your guide to learning Blender 2.6. It assumes no previous knowledge of Blender, although old Blender users will find a lot to learn here too. Some beginner texts are dressed-up reference manuals, while some try to teach everything and end up teaching nothing. This book will teach you how to use Blender 2.6, and to actually use it well.

Being an artist consists of having a certain set of skills, having a point of view, and making choices. On the skill side, you must be familiar with your tools. And before that, you need to simply know what tools are available, and what they can do. On the other side, creating art with those tools is a series of choices, informed by observation and experience. You’ll have to supply the observations—your unique viewpoint and way of processing the world—but hopefully this book will let you make use of some of my own experience to give your own a head start. Blender is a complex application with thousands of controls, properties, and ways of working. Not all of them are useful. In fact, when you are learning the basics of the medium, it turns out that trying to learn too much esoteric stuff can hurt you.

This isn’t to say that what you can create with the basic tools can’t be pleasing or even art. It can. Think of it this way. Ninety-five percent of the time in 3D, the set of tools you’ll learn here will satisfy your needs. The other 5% of the time, well … once you get good, the rest of the tools will actually be much easier to learn and apply because you have the fundamentals down. Build a strong foundation, and you will be ahead of the many others who started putting stakes in the ground wherever their fancy led them.

If you’re new to computer graphics (CG) and 3D in general, Chapter 1 gives you a good overview of the whole process. If you’re coming from another 3D application or even a previous version of Blender, Chapters 2 and 3 will help you to find your way through Blender’s interface. In Chapter 4, we begin a project that lasts throughout the rest of the book. A room is modeled, lighted, and surfaced. A character is created and animated. Some special effects are added. Finally, the whole thing is rendered and built into
an animation file. With the techniques in this book, you will be able to fully build, light, surface, and animate a scene in Blender 2.6.

My hope is that you’ll build the scene along with me as you work through the book. There’s a lot more in there than just “click here” and “set this control to 0.5.” It’s important that you understand both sides of the artistic equation: Here are your tools, and this is how you decide when to use them. However, if there is a particular topic that you can’t wait to touch, the Web Bucket (site) for this book contains versions of the project file at all stages of production. Even if you think you know it all though, you might want to at least read through those sections you think you can skip.

The website http://www.blenderfoundations.com contains not only these project files organized by chapter, but all of the screenshots from the examples, additional screenshots from complex tutorials, and all of the videos mentioned throughout the book. You will also find material and updates for information in the book that has been passed by because of Blender’s amazing development speed.

Finally, a small note about Blender itself. How can it be free? I am often asked. My answer is always that it’s free to you. Dozens of people have donated tens of thousands of hours to developing this fantastic software. An increasing number of people have had the opportunity to actually make a living working on it as well, due to the donations and support of an even greater pool of individuals from around the world. If you end up loving this software as much as I do, you could do worse than to head over to http://www.blender.org and see what they’re working on. Buy something from the store. Make them happy.

As always, I love hearing from people who were helped by my books. If you’ve done something great (or even if it’s just “better than you thought you could do”), and you think that the basics you picked up here helped you in some way, drop me a line at animation@harkyman.com. I’d love to hear from you.