**A Prehistoric Scene of Mars in WebGL**

Final Report for CS39440 Major Project

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19th April 2017

Version 1.0 (Draft)

This report is submitted as partial fulfilment of a BSc degree in  
Computer Science (G400)

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**Declaration of originality**

I confirm that:

* This submission is my own work, except where clearly indicated.
* I understand that there are severe penalties for Unacceptable Academic Practice, which can lead to loss of marks or even the withholding of a degree.
* I have read the regulations on Unacceptable Academic Practice from the University’s Academic Quality and Records Office (AQRO) and the relevant sections of the current Student Handbook of the Department of Computer Science.
* In submitting this work I understand and agree to abide by the University’s regulations governing these issues.

Name: Samuel Snowball

Date: 19/04/2017

**Consent to share this work**

By including my name below, I hereby agree to this dissertation being made available to other students and academic staff of the Aberystwyth Computer Science Department.

Name: Samuel Snowball

Date: 19/04/2017

**Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to…

I’d like to thank…

**Abstract**

// My motivation for the project is… or was?

// Am I writing it as if I’m going to do it, or it’s been done?

// I have developed this using….. I am going to be developing this using…?

// Should I use I? or not

// Will, or has

A prehistoric scene of Mars created in WebGL (Web Graphics Library), GLSL (OpenGL Shading Language) and JavaScript. The scene allows users to roam around and explore Mars as it existed in its Noachian period, around 4 billion years ago.

The original aim of this project was to create an interactive Mars mission control game, where the user would roam around Mars as a rover completing various tasks. The project direction changed after the mid project demonstration, it became clear I did not enjoy creating the game aspects, so decided to just focus on the graphics instead.

My motivation for the project was to learn how computer graphics works. At the start of this project I had next to no experience with GLSL and no experience with WebGL. Learning these new languages whilst going along was challenging, however my desire to learn outweighed the problems I encountered.

Programming in WebGL will help me gain an understanding of what’s actually going on at the low level, to get graphics to display on the screen. Learning WebGL is useful due to its flexibility running on various different operating systems, rather than an alternative like Direct3D, which only runs on Windows.

I haven’t been able to find a similar project built like this before. NASA has published a 2D Mars rover game, but mine will be quite different. This is mainly due to it being in 3D and the low level languages used.

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# Background, Analysis & Process

This section should discuss your preparation for the project, including background reading, your analysis of the problem and the process or method you have followed to help structure your work. It is likely that you will reuse part of your outline project specification, but at this point in the project you should have more to talk about.

## Background

What was your background preparation for the project? What similar systems did you assess? What was your motivation and interest in this project?

My interest in the project begun when I saw it involved creating a game. Making games was something I had some experience in so I was immediately drawn to it. I had also just finished the Advanced Computer Graphics module. This definitely improved my knowledge of graphics and maths, which would be essential to complete the project.

I was interested in low level graphics before the project came out, and gained some experience in OpenGL (Open Graphics Library) over Christmas. I knew regardless of if I got this project, developing low level graphics was a skill I wanted to have. Luckily I got this project and with my basic knowledge of OpenGL, I was confident to start.

My first task was seeing what other similar projects had been developed. The only project related to Mars I could find was from NASA, who had developed a Mars rover game. But there wasn’t anything I could learn from this as it had obviously built very quickly, being 2D and lacking game playability.

I did however find a 3D game which was built in C++ and OpenGL. It used low level graphics programming, had available source code and good game playability.

## Analysis

Taking into account the problem and what you learned from the background work, what was your analysis of the problem? How did your analysis help to decompose the problem into the main tasks that you would undertake? Were there alternative approaches? Why did you choose one approach compared to the alternatives?

There should be a clear statement of the objectives of the work, which you will evaluate at the end of the work.

In most cases, the agreed objectives or requirements will be the result of a compromise between what would ideally have been produced and what was felt to be possible in the time available. A discussion of the process of arriving at the final list is usually appropriate.

As mentioned in the lectures, think about possible security issues for the project topic. Whilst these might not be relevant for all projects, do consider if there are relevant for your project. Where there are relevant security issues, discuss how they will this affect the work that you are doing. Carry forward this discussion into relevant areas for design, implementation and testing.

// This isn’t really true as I applied to do the project in OpenGL in the first place

I knew I had a variety of options to develop the game. Game engines, libraries and raw graphics libraries where all available to me. However I knew I wanted to develop the project in a low level library, therefore something like a game engine was not realistic.

Using a game engine like Unity or Unreal would have created a very realistic looking scene, however they hide the complex details of how the graphics actually get rendered. They are also very time consuming to learn, and might take too long to then complete the project afterwards.

As this was a relatively small project, rather than an AAA sized game, the overhead of having an engine was not worth it. With a game engine there is also less flexibility, you can’t fix bugs or render more efficiently, unless it’s open source.

Another option was to use a mid-weight game library. I had experience with a 3D JavaScript library, three.js. This library uses WebGL at its back end. However with using this, I would not have learnt much whilst building the project as I already had a lot of experience with the library. Also, I would not have gained an understanding of how graphics work as it’s done for you behind the scenes.

A low level option was to use OpenGL. I had some experience using OpenGL, but it would have meant I had to use a base language of C++, which I wasn’t confident in. I had heard of WebGL but had no experience using it. After researching into WebGL more, I realized this would be a better fit. I would be programming the base code in JavaScript, which I was confident with, rather than C++. I knew I would struggle with the graphics aspect alone, and if I were to also struggle with the base language, then the project would be a disaster.

Hence the final languages I decided on where: WebGL GLSL and JavaScript.

All WebGL allows you to do is draw triangles on the screen. Apart from that, it’s up to you as to what you do with it. There’s no premade 3D scene where you can drag and drop objects with nice textures and lighting, it is extremely lightweight and from scratch.

Although WebGL is low level, it does have several benefits over alternative approaches. Since WebGL runs within a browser, it requires much less resources to run, compared to something like a game engine. These heavy engines can take up 8GB of memory and require a 2 hour installation. Scenes in game engines also have expensive loading times but with WebGL, everything runs extremely fast. This is due to it having minimal features.

There are no: physics, event handling, sound, helpful error messages, loading/saving or fast rendering efficiency that comes with using WebGL as it is. However for me, these are not disadvantages. Instead, these are rewarding tasks that I can implement.

Webgl advantages: less requirements to run, no huge installation,

Webgl not properly documented, few tutorials for advanced features, no tools to help debug

Analysis:

Why webgl/js over c++/opengl

Vulkan

Direct 3d

Advantages of webgl and my approach:

Analysis of the problem, it was pretty much up to me. So originally I knew I needed a 3D scene to move around in, then it was just about adding in features, terrain and rocks mainly.

Looking at images of Mars,

Finding libraries to help with matrix math + tutorials, books, papers

As I wanted to do it in a low level library, this ruled out all game engines etc

Mentions the main task, so talk about product backlog

## Process

You need to describe briefly the life cycle model or research method that you used. You do not need to write about all of the different process models that you are aware of. Focus on the process model that you have used. It is possible that you needed to adapt an existing process model to suit your project; clearly identify what you used and how you adapted it for your needs.

Used scrum because:

Had good understanding of it through the agile module

little experience with language, allows to focus on important tasks first, docuemtation can wait until I have something to document, heavily reducing risk of not delivering – if I was really struggling I could just decide to use a library I was familiar with

Scrum very adaptable, even halfway through the project I could easily change direction

Pirortize to-do list into tasks, product backlog, sprint backlog

Sprint plan, retrospective,

Throughout the project constantly learning and implementing

-it wasn’t even possible to do a big up front design, as I had no idea what I was doing

Responding to change important, learn technique, go implement it

Week long sprints, sprint plan, daily plan, release after each version

Git version control

Link the github somewhere?

# Design

You should concentrate on the more important aspects of the design. It is essential that an overview is presented before going into detail. As well as describing the design adopted it must also explain what other designs were considered and why they were rejected.

The design should describe what you expected to do, and might also explain areas that you had to revise after some investigation.

Typically, for an object-oriented design, the discussion will focus on the choice of objects and classes and the allocation of methods to classes. The use made of reusable components should be described and their source referenced. Particularly important decisions concerning data structures usually affect the architecture of a system and so should be described here.

How much material you include on detailed design and implementation will depend very much on the nature of the project. It should not be padded out. Think about the significant aspects of your system. For example, describe the design of the user interface if it is a critical aspect of your system, or provide detail about methods and data structures that are not trivial. Do not spend time on long lists of trivial items and repetitive descriptions. If in doubt about what is appropriate, speak to your supervisor.

You should also identify any support tools that you used. You should discuss your choice of implementation tools - programming language, compilers, database management system, program development environment, etc.

Some example sub-sections may be as follows, but the specific sections are for you to define.

// UI screenshots, standard setup() and render()

// Worked out main components, terrain, rockGenerator,

// thinking about terrain, existing heightmaps over perlin noise, just loading an obj no skill

## Overall Architecture

## Detailed Design

### Even More Detail

## User Interface Design

## Other Relevant Sections

# Implementation

The implementation should look at any issues you encountered as you tried to implement your design. During the work, you might have found that elements of your design were unnecessary or overly complex; perhaps third party libraries were available that simplified some of the functions that you intended to implement. If things were easier in some areas, then how did you adapt your project to take account of your findings?

It is more likely that things were more complex than you first thought. In particular, were there any problems or difficulties that you found during implementation that you had to address? Did such problems simply delay you or were they more significant?

You can conclude this section by reviewing the end of the implementation stage against the planned requirements.

// Show initial screenshot, in 1st week,

// quickyl

# Testing

Detailed descriptions of every test case are definitely not what is required here. What is important is to show that you adopted a sensible strategy that was, in principle, capable of testing the system adequately even if you did not have the time to test the system fully.

Provide information in the body of your report and the appendix to explain the testing that has been performed. How does this testing address the requirements and design for the project?

How comprehensive is the testing within the constraints of the project? Are you testing the normal working behaviour? Are you testing the exceptional behaviour, e.g. error conditions? Are you testing security issues if they are relevant for your project?

Have you tested your system on “real users”? For example, if your system is supposed to solve a problem for a business, then it would be appropriate to present your approach to involve the users in the testing process and to record the results that you obtained. Depending on the level of detail, it is likely that you would put any detailed results in an appendix.

The following sections indicate some areas you might include. Other sections may be more appropriate to your project.

## Overall Approach to Testing

## Automated Testing

### Unit Tests

### User Interface Testing

### Stress Testing

### Other Types of Testing

## Integration Testing

## User Testing

# Critical Evaluation

Examiners expect to find in your dissertation a section addressing such questions as:

* Were the requirements correctly identified?
* Were the design decisions correct?
* Could a more suitable set of tools have been chosen?
* How well did the software meet the needs of those who were expecting to use it?
* How well were any other project aims achieved?
* If you were starting again, what would you do differently?

Other questions can be addressed as appropriate for a project.

Such material is regarded as an important part of the dissertation; it should demonstrate that you are capable not only of carrying out a piece of work but also of thinking critically about how you did it and how you might have done it better. This is seen as an important part of an honours degree.

There will be good things and room for improvement with any project. As you write this section, identify and discuss the parts of the work that went well and also consider ways in which the work could be improved.

In the latter stages of the module, we will discuss the evaluation. That will probably be around week 9, although that differs each year.

# Appendices

The appendices are for additional content that is useful to support the discussion in the report. It is material that is not necessarily needed in the body of the report, but its inclusion in the appendices makes it easy to access.

For example, if you have developed a Design Specification document as part of a plan-driven approach for the project, then it would be appropriate to include that document as an appendix. In the body of your report you would highlight the most interesting aspects of the design, referring your reader to the full specification for further detail.

If you have taken an agile approach to developing the project, then you may be less likely to have developed a full requirements specification. Perhaps you use stories to keep track of the functionality and the ’future conversations’. It might not be relevant to include all of those in the body of your report. Instead, you might include those in an appendix.

There is a balance to be struck between what is relevant to include in the body of your report and whether additional supporting evidence is appropriate in the appendices. Speak to your supervisor or the module coordinator if you have questions about this.

* 1. Third-Party Code and Libraries

If you have made use of any third party code or software libraries, i.e. any code that you have not designed and written yourself, then you must include this appendix.

As has been said in lectures, it is acceptable and likely that you will make use of third-party code and software libraries. If third party code or libraries are used, your work will build on that to produce notable new work. The key requirement is that we understand what is your original work and what work is based on that of other people.

Therefore, you need to clearly state what you have used and where the original material can be found. Also, if you have made any changes to the original versions, you must explain what you have changed.

As an example, you might include a definition such as:

**Apache POI library** – The project has been used to read and write Microsoft Excel files (XLS) as part of the interaction with the client’s existing system for processing data. Version 3.10-FINAL was used. The library is open source and it is available from the Apache Software Foundation [5]. The library is released using the Apache License [6]. This library was used without modification.

* 1. Ethics Submission

This appendix includes a copy of the ethics submission for the project. After you have completed your Ethics submission, you will receive a PDF with a summary of the comments. That document should be embedded in this report, either as images, an embedded PDF or as copied text. The content should also include the Ethics Application Number that you receive.

* 1. Code Samples

This is an example appendix. Include as many appendices as you need. The appendices do not count towards the overall word count for the report.

For some projects, it might be relevant to include some code extracts in an appendix. You are not expected to put all of your code here - the correct place for all of your code is in the technical submission that is made in addition to the Final Report. However, if there are some notable aspects of the code that you discuss, including that in an appendix might be useful to make it easier for your readers to access.

As a general guide, if you are discussing short extracts of code then you are advised to include such code in the body of the report. If there is a longer extract that is relevant, then you might include it as shown in the following section.

Only include code in the appendix if that code is discussed and referred to in the body of the report.

Random Number Generator

The Bayes Durham Shuffle ensures that the pseudo random numbers used in the simulation are further shuffled, ensuring minimal correlation between subsequent random outputs.

// Some example code here…

# Annotated Bibliography

This final section should list all relevant resources that you have consulted in researching your project. Each reference should also include a brief annotation.

1. Sylvia Duckworth. A picture of a kitten at Hellifield Peel. <http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/640959>, 2007. Copyright Sylvia Duckworth and licensed for reuse under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic Licence. Accessed August 2011.  
     
   This is my annotation. I should add in a description here.
2. Mark Neal, Jan Feyereisl, Rosario Rascunà, and Xiaolei Wang. Don’t touch me, I’m fine: Robot autonomy using an artificial innate immune system. In *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Artificial Immune Systems*, pages 349–361. Springer, 2006.   
     
   This paper…
3. W.H. Press et al. *Numerical recipes in C*. Cambridge University Press Cambridge, 1992.  
     
   This is my annotation. I can add in comments that are in **bold** and *italics*and then further content.
4. Various. Fail blog. <http://www.failblog.org/>, August 2011. Accessed August 2011.  
     
   This is my annotation. I should add in a description here.
5. Apache Software Foundation (2014) “*Apache POI - the Java API for Microsoft Documents*” (Online) Available at: <http://poi.apache.org> Accessed: 14th March 2014.
6. Apache Software Foundation (2004) “Apache License, Version 2.0” (Online) Available at: <http://www.apache.org/licenses/LICENSE-2.0> Accessed: 14th March 2014.