A moment lost in time.

A tranquil and aesthetically pleasing search for a long lost memory.

A game design document by Michał Budzyński & Stanisław Małolepszy. Written in August 2017 in Warsaw for piesku.com.

Overview

A moment lost in time is an exploration game with an element of a geometry puzzle. The goal of the game is to memorize and then find a shot of a landscape taken from a random place.

The game offers a slowly-paced gameplay combined with minimalist and aesthetically pleasing visuals and simple ambient sounds. It evokes a sense of wandering and longing. The art direction is abstract and figurative: as if it was a dream.

Name

The name *A moment lost in time* is a reference to the famous monologue from the movie Blade Runner (1982). In the film, the dying replicant Roy Batty makes the following speech to Deckard moments after saving him from falling off a tall building.

> I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost, in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.

The name, together with the art and the sound design, suggests a nostalgic setting, or perhaps a limbo state of the main character.

Story

The main character has a vague memory of a place which they set out to find in a series of abstract dreams.

The story is never fully revealed and as such much of it is left for the user to interpret.

Level Design

Levels are procedurally generated using primitive 3D shapes: cubes, cylinders and pyramids. Levels are based on a huge solid plane on which shapes are placed in random locations, scales and Z-rotations.

The scale of shapes should correspond to real-life buildings:

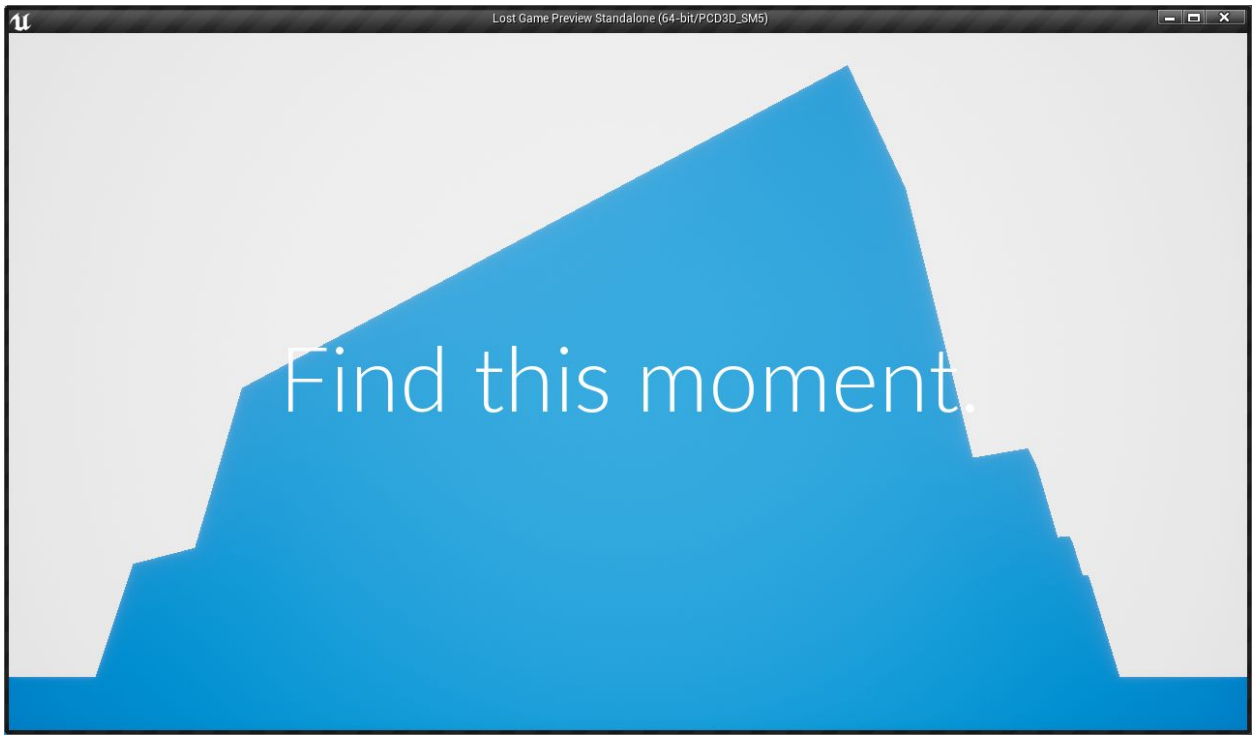
- X dimension: 10-100 m,
- Y dimension: 10-30 m,
- Z dimension: 4-50 m.

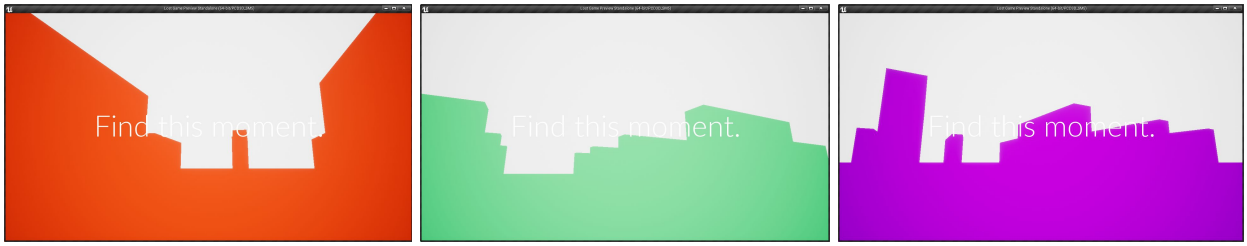
Some shapes may be duplicated and placed on a grid to simulate larger building complexes.

Levels are enclosed in a solid near-white skybox with no sun nor atmospheric fog.

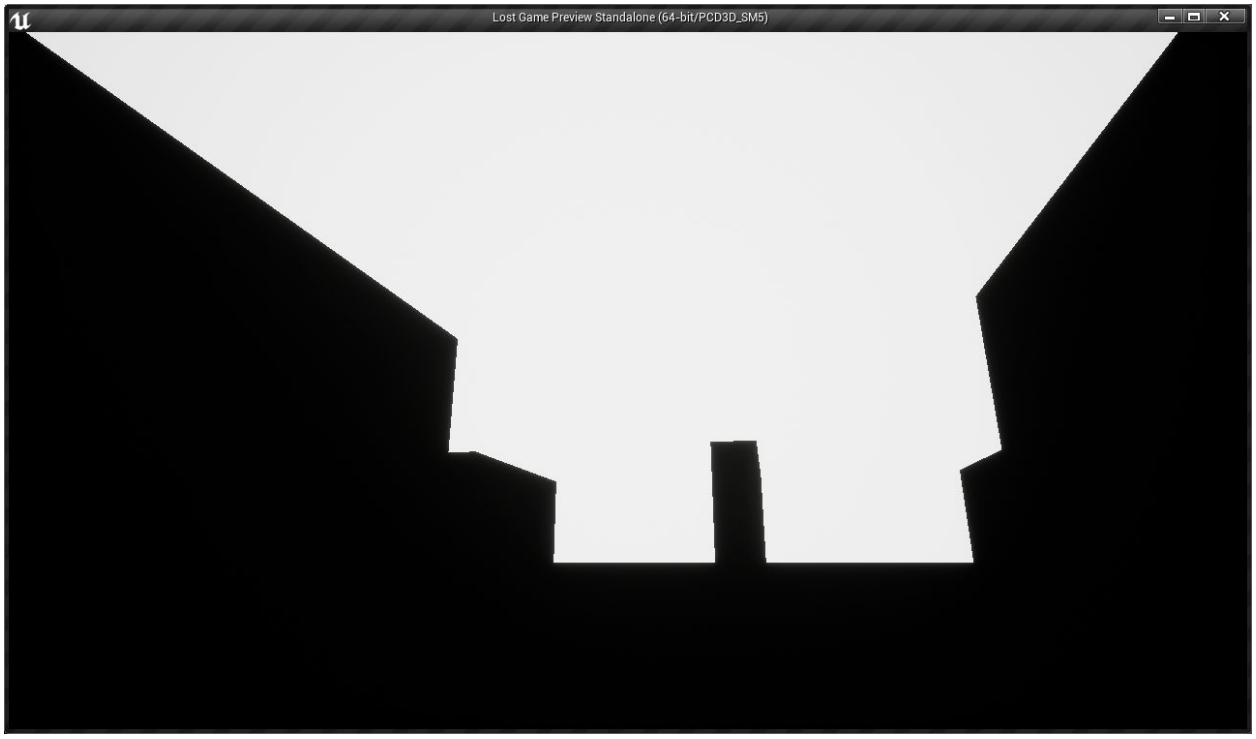
Gameplay

In each level the player is shown an abstract snapshot of the level's landscape taken from a random position. The snapshot is flat (no lighting and no shadows) and colored in a single solid bright color. It can be understood as a vague memory of a certain location. The player has to memorize the snapshot as they set out to find the exact location from which it was taken.





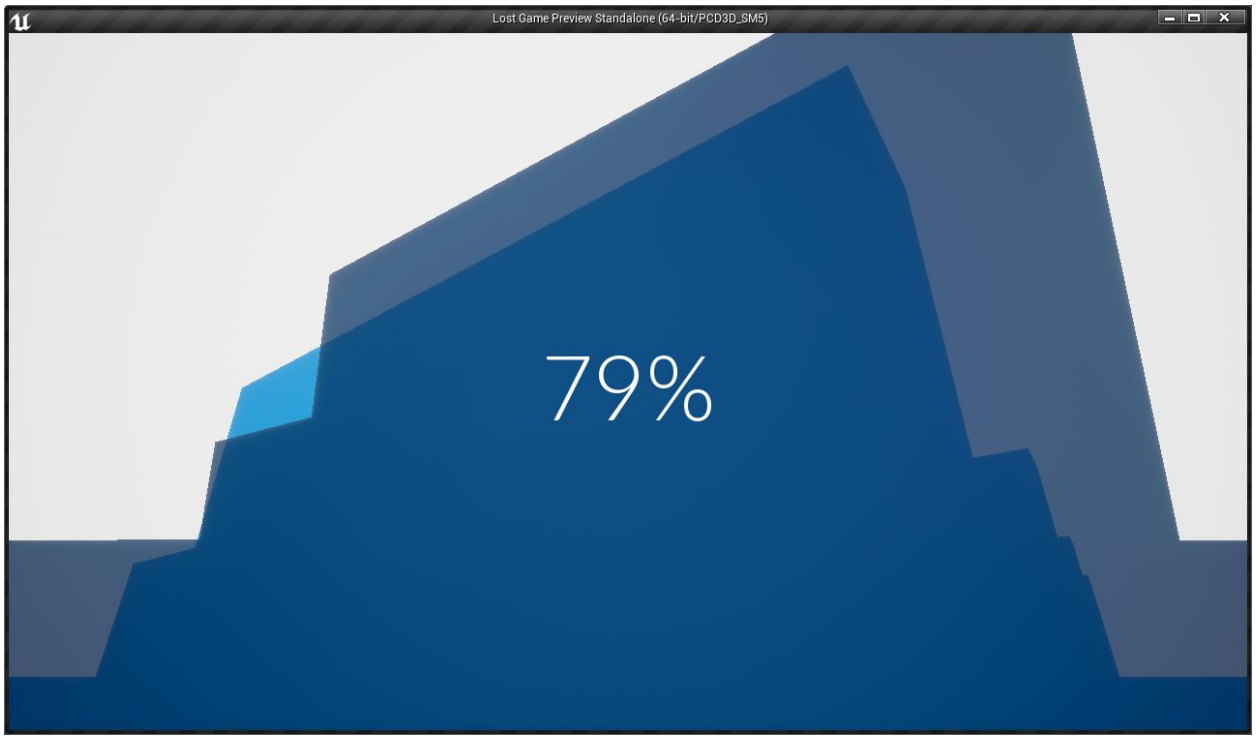
When the gameplay starts, the level is all black. The player starts in a random position at least some distance from the target.



The closer the player gets to the origin of the snapshot, the brighter the landscape becomes. The hue of the landscape is the hue of the snapshot which hints to the user that she's on the right path. The saturation can at most reach 50% of the target color.

When the user thinks they have found the spot from which the snapshot was taken, they press the left mouse button as a means to validate the current frame against the target snapshot.

A validation algorithm calculates the accuracy of the frame and awards the user a score. The score screen shows the offset by displaying a translucent image of the user-saved frame overlaid on top of the target snapshot.

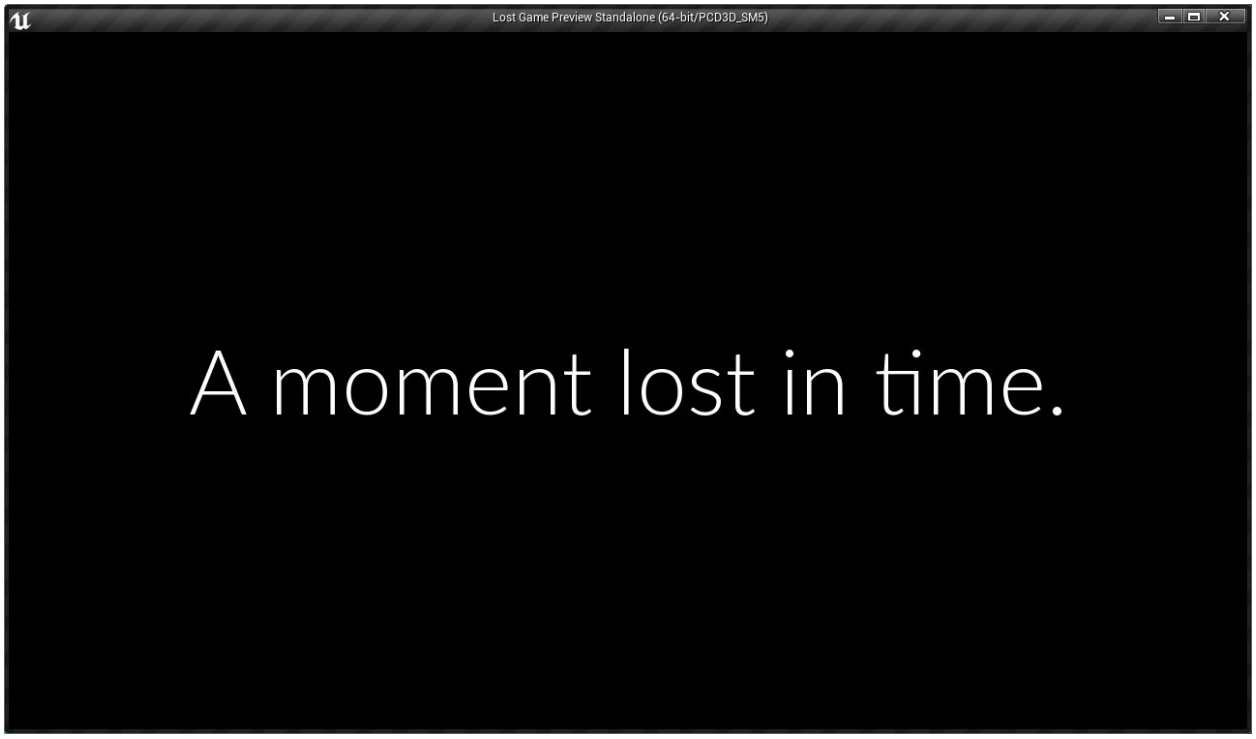


Art

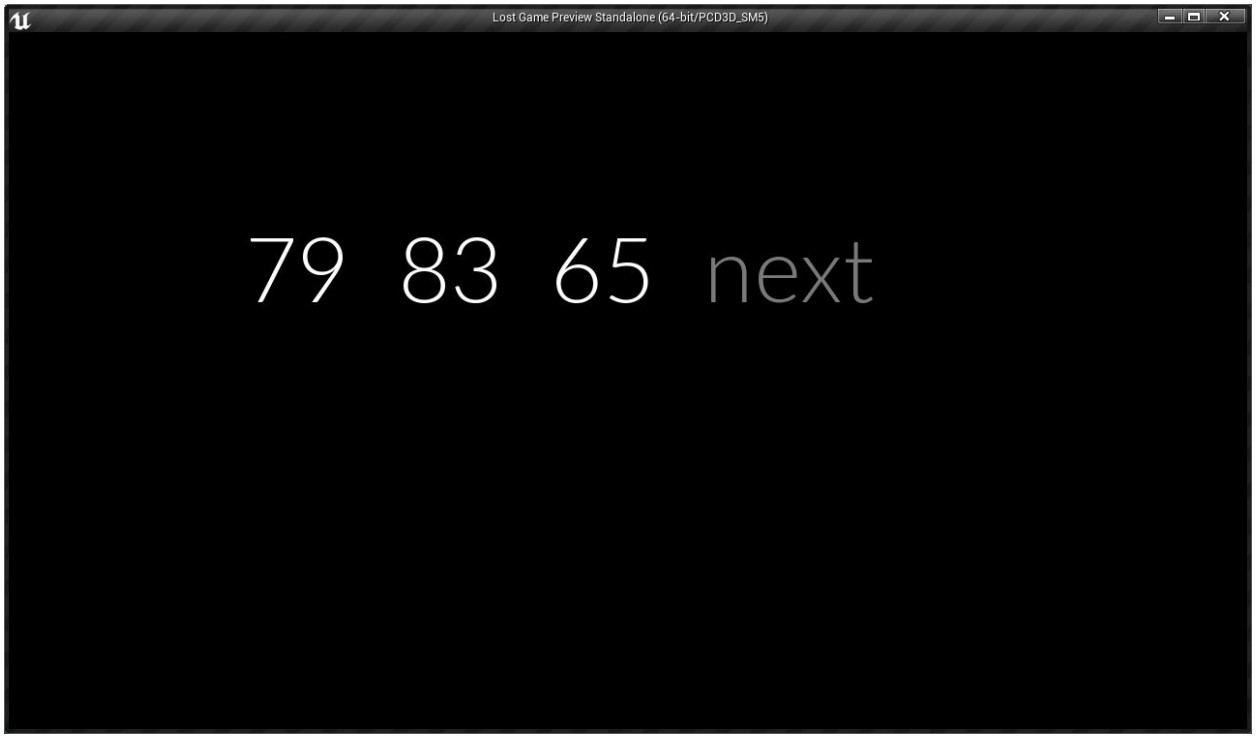
The game features minimalist abstract art. The 3D world is represented flat: without lighting or shadows, with all materials being 100% unlit. The player develops the sense of depth thanks to the perspective and movement.

The true spatial design of the level is never revealed to the player.

The UI is also minimalist and flat, with big white letters set in Lato Light. All messages appearing on the screen are proper sentences: they use sentence case and end with a period.

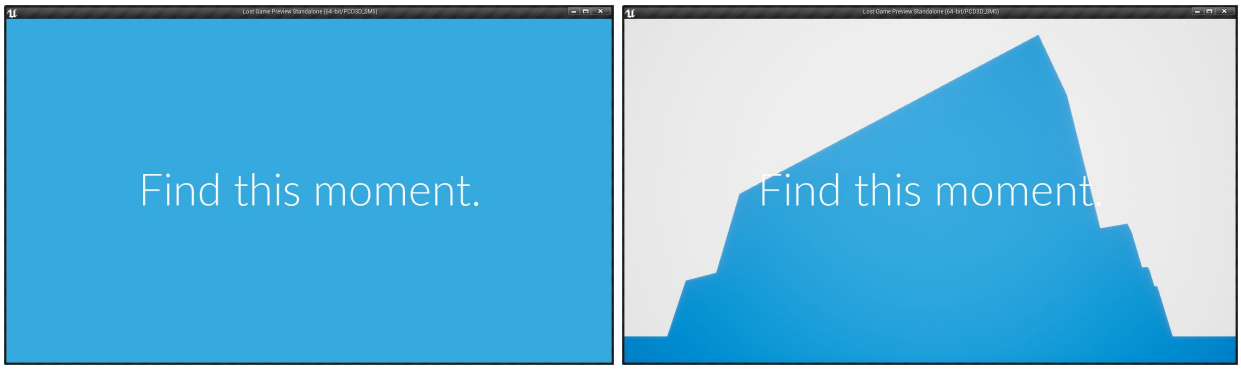


The level selection consists of a simple list of scores achieved on already played levels. The levels are generated from a fixed seed; it's possible to go back to any of the visited ones and try to improve the score. Advancing to a new level is only possible if the previous scores are high enough. The threshold increases with the level number.



The transitions between screens and scenes are fade-in and fade-out, with the background colors dissolving into each other. See the Windows 8 Welcome Screen for a good example of this.

Dissolve transitions can serve as a narration vehicle: in the following scene, the full-screen background fades out to reveal the shape of the same color.



The dreamy landscape which the user wanders about is sometimes brought to life by a flock of birds which takes off of the ground. The birds are also flat and all black; they cannot be seen while on the ground.

Sound and Music

The music is procedurally generated using sounds from one of the minor scales. Ambient and unobtrusive it evokes the image of falling drops. See the reference.

Game Controls

The game is played from the first-person perspective with WASD movement and mouse freelook.

Supported Platforms

The game is a submission for the js13kgames jam. The theme of the jam is *Lost*. The jam imposes a strict size limitation: the entire game must be at most 13,312 bytes in size after ZIP compression.

Due to the size limitations the game cannot include external resources like fonts. The UI fonts will need to be defined with fallbacks: Lato Light, Roboto Light, Helvetica Light, Open Sans Light, Arial, sans-serif.

The game will be written in JavaScript and launched in a browser via an index.html file. It will support Firefox 55+ and Chrome 60+.

The game will use a custom-built 3D renderer and a custom game engine. The renderer is capable of rendering basic materials without any shadows.