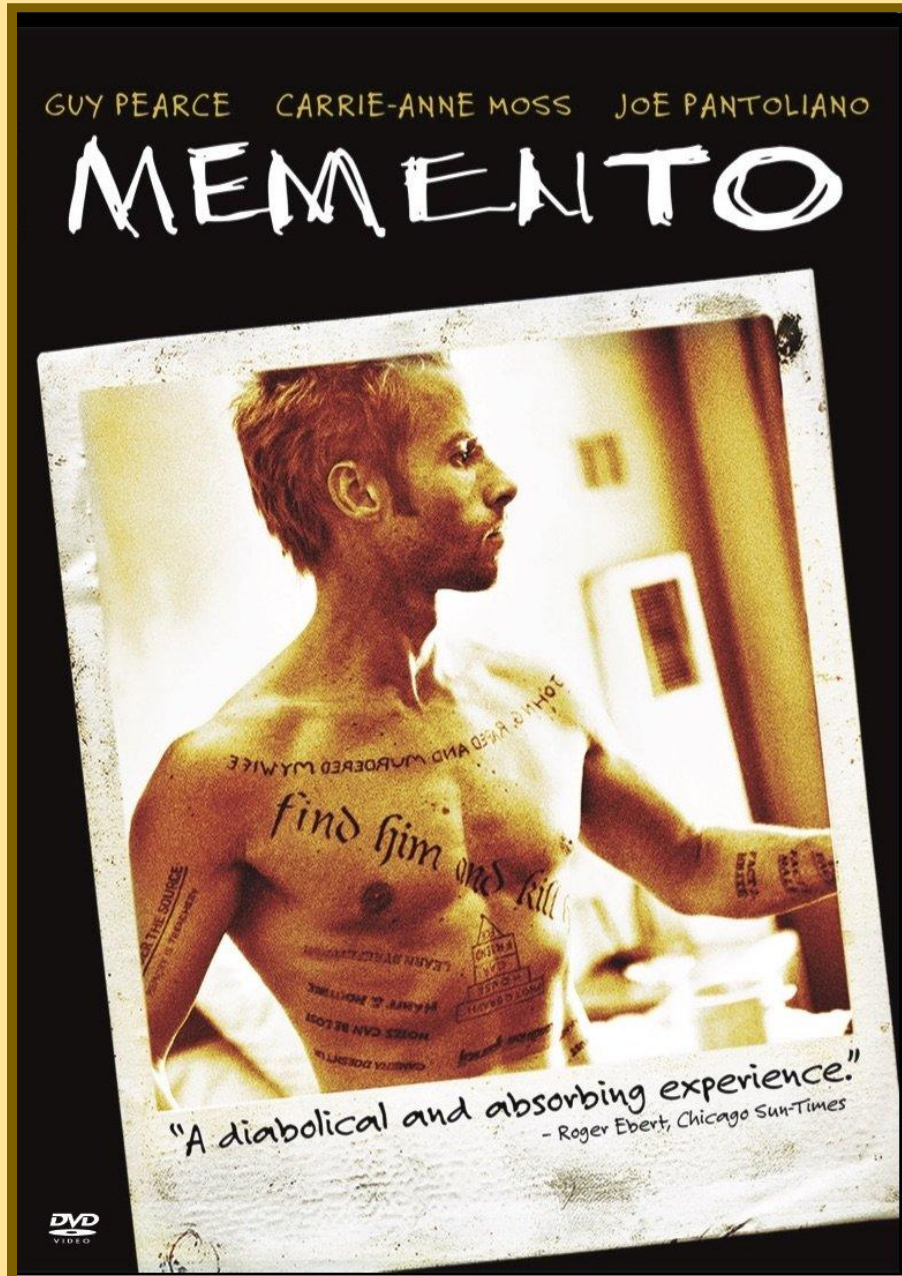# LOST MEMORY

A Game By Yuyao Wu and Cara Outar

Introduction:

The Film:

Our game, *Lost Memory*, is based on the American neo-noir mystery film *Memento*, released in 2000 by writer and director Christopher Nolan. Throughout *Memento*, we follow Leonard Shelby, an anterograde amnesiac whose last concrete memory is that of his wife getting murdered. With his short-term memory resetting every fifteen minutes, he has nothing to trust but the polaroids in his pocket and the tattoos across his body; attempting to discern truth from lie, he sets out for vengeance against his late wife's murderer, the perpetrator of his accident, in a neverending quest to fulfill his purpose. *Memento*, as one of the earlier titles in Nolan's filmography, brings up heavy-hitting questions of identity and self-preservation; do our memories make us who we are? And if that's true, what happens when we forget them?

The What:

Lost Memory is a third-person detective RPG that exists as a retelling of *Memento*'s primary themes, with an emphasis on its world-building, character and clue interaction, and tile-matching mechanics. In it, you will follow the journey of an amnesiac private investigator, James Shelby, acting as both James himself, and as an outside force under your own volition. Called upon to solve a disappearance case, you will work alongside James to discover the truth behind the victim's whereabouts, while grappling with a fragmented short-term memory; every thirty minutes, James will find himself in a different place with only his notes - written by you - to keep him grounded. With a narrative that comes together piece-by-piece, our game mirrors the thrilling nature of Nolan's films where answers come together gradually; sure to pull in the Nolan fanbase and fans of investigative psychological thrillers, we think this game will have promise across multiple audiences. For our revenue model, we plan to go the digital release route, with copies available to purchase on Steam and the PlayStation network. After assessing the success of the game post-release, we will discern whether or not to expand into physical distribution.

The Why:

Translating this into game form provides a unique challenge; while retrograde amnesia can be a frequent plot device across media, anterograde amnesia isn't as readily depicted. Because of this, we think its portrayal in game format can help to put a unique spin on the typical "detective simulator." Just as Nolan asks the audience of his films to dig deeper, we wish for the player to think beyond the surface level of what they see in order to discover the truth of the events at hand. Our emphasis on time and the pulling/pushing of different locations lend itself to the unshaky nature of what Leonard Shelby experiences in the film; without full context, can the player learn what, or who, they can and cannot trust?

Moods of the Film:

The eight moods that we believe encapsulate the film *Memento* are as follows: **Cerebral, Complex, Gritty, Mysterious, Introspective, Intense, Exploratory,** and **Turbulent.** In our game, we'd like to put emphasis on the **introspective**, **exploratory**, and **cerebral** aspects of the film; using anterograde amnesia as the driving force behind the game's mechanics and putting limits on both the player's and the character's understanding of the events around them will help to hone in on the psychological nature of the game. Through an in-game timer, we will have the detective be whisked away to a new location, where both he and the player will need to discern its relevance to the case. As clues come together in a suspicious manner, pointing towards the detective's own involvement, the player will be prompted to look inwards at James' character and discern whether or not he is a reliable source of information himself.

The World:

Themes:

The themes of our game revolve around the distortion of memories, manipulation, and the sense of self; in the original IP, Leonard Shelby's final memory of his wife is one that he cannot shake no matter how hard he tries. This lasting memory is what incites his purpose, driving him forward towards vengeance; though he cannot know who his present self is, he can remember who he was in the past, and the life he once lived. Holding onto that is what keeps him going, just like with our main character, James Shelby, a veteran of the force whose calling has always been for investigation. Even with his condition and the scrutiny of his ability to perform as a detective, he keeps up his work as a private investigator. It is his purpose, his life's ambition, and he'll be damned if his condition gets in the way of that.

Main Characters:

The Detective James Shelby

You are James Shelby, a hardened investigator in your mid forties, worn down over the years by the crimes you've witnessed. Years ago, when a runaway suspect left you reeling with head trauma and chronic memory problems, you were advised to give up the force. What good can a detective with no short-term memory do? Despite this, you hang on to the only life you remember; known around San Fernando Valley as the "broken-minded investigator," you work alone now, keeping your badge in your pocket and your services open to any who need your help. A meticulous note-taker, you pride yourself on your attention to detail. It is, after all, the only way you remember.

Though you perform actions as James, he is not a complete self-insert character; maintaining a sense of autonomy through his past and personality, he will comment on the case's progression and his gradual skepticism of his own self. Though he enters the case as assured and confident in his capabilities, his conviction and sense of justice will be tested.
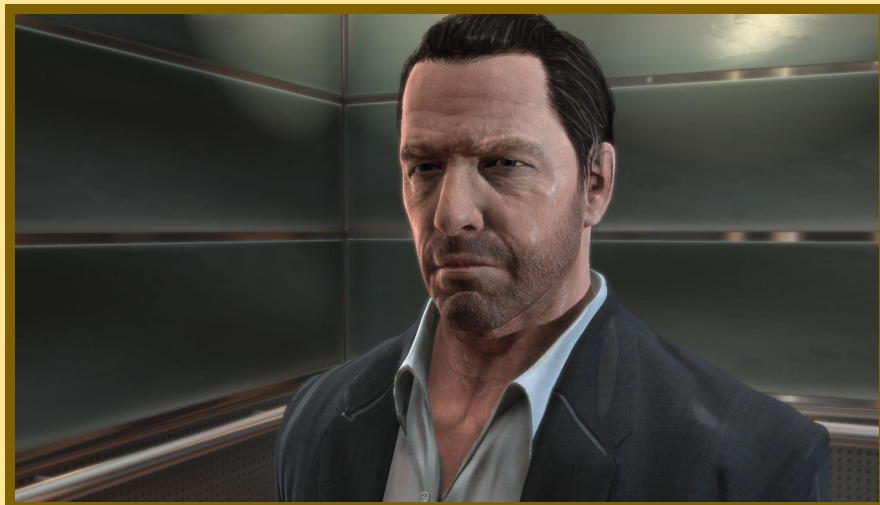
Appearance wise, James Shelby bears a likeness to Max Payne of Rockstar's Max Payne 3.

The Missing Person Cassandra Lewis

A young woman in her mid twenties. Short in stature, with long, dark hair and an olive complexion. At the start of *Lost Memory*, it'll have been a week since she's been missing. Serving as the catalyst for the game's events, your job is to locate her whereabouts.

The Caller Daniel Lewis

A long time resident of San Fernando Valley and husband of Cassandra Lewis. It is he who calls upon your help to find his missing wife. For someone whose spouse has been missing for a week, you note that his mannerisms are oddly calm and collected; perhaps he's just trying to maintain his composure.

Daniel doesn't exactly have much money to spot you for the case, but you don't mind. It's not like you'll remember anyways.

The Old Friend Shaun Briggs

Your longest friend, a previous veteran of the force and your old detective buddy. He's since retired, but still checks up on you every now and then to make sure

you're doing alright. He's surprised to hear you've been asked to follow a case; it's been a while since your last one...

Settings:

The overall setting of *Lost Memory* takes place in early 2000's California, mirroring the San Fernando Valley that the film was shot in: palm trees dotted along concrete vistas, diners and bars packed with the usual patrons.

James will be booted from location to location based on an in-game timer set at thirty minutes, representative of his short-term memory resetting. Though you as the player will have prior knowledge of the scene before, James will not; James will only retain the information on the notes you have written down, while the both of you will need to piece together what brought you to your current location, and what clues might be awaiting.

Characters of relevance, beyond our main cast, will appear in each location whom you can question.

The inn location from Memento, with a similar architectural layout and grittiness that will be present in the settings of our game.

Scenes:

Detective's Office

Neat and minimalistic. Though the office is small, it doesn't feel cluttered; everything is housed in its proper place.

It is here where we can get a rundown of James Shelby through internal dialogue; he relays to the player his unique position as a private investigator afflicted with anterograde amnesia.

House of the Caller, Daniel Lewis

A quaint home in the suburbs of San Fernando Valley; its neighbourhood is where the middle-class settle down to raise their children.

The house of the caller, Daniel Lewis, who has tasked you with solving the disappearance of his spouse. Here is where James will begin his investigation, gathering information on the disappearance victim.

Mel's Diner

A nostalgic place; stained glass lights dangle over booths with leather seating. Laminate countertops house half-used condiment bottles and packets of sugar for coffee.

According to Daniel, one of the last places Cassandra visited before she went missing. Mel's is the go-to restaurant for those in the area; its cheap eats and homely environment keep a steady supply of regulars. Here, you can question the staff and patrons who would have seen Cassandra before her disappearance.

Wash n' Clean Laundromat

Its decor leaves a lot to be desired, its white walls now yellow in age. Rows of washers rattle in defiance, ready to break down at a moment's notice.

A laundromat where Cassandra's best friend Amelia works. She relays her concerns about Cassandra's withdrawnness in the days prior to her disappearance.

Local Police Station

Palm trees are dotted along the outskirts of the building, with the building's tiled roof reminiscent of old Spanish architecture. Inside, the place has much less character. Old wooden desks and grey filing cabinets intersperse with officers who look perpetually tired of their job.

Your old stomping grounds, where you and Shaun Briggs meet up to discuss the case. The other officers get a kick out of your forgetfulness.

The Sparrow

An old bar thick with the smell of booze. Its patrons crowd around without any care of personal space.

You've been told that Cassandra was not a drinker; still, someone reported her presence at The Sparrow shortly before her disappearance.

???

An abandoned lot on the outskirts of the valley. It reeks of danger.

The final location of your investigation, where the truth will be revealed.

Art Style:

During the exploration phase, *Lost Memory* will have a similar set-up to *Disco Elysium*; with an isometric view of each setting, the player will be able to walk around and explore the area for clues and relevant NPCs.

In terms of its colour palette and aesthetics, the game will pay homage to *Memento's* neo-noir themings through its emphasis on light and shadow. Settings will be shaded in tones of black, white, and grey, while light sources, relevant objects, and people of importance will retain a yellow hue reminiscent of the film's poster (showcased on page one). A sample of this artistic style can be seen in the following image of the game *Calvino Noir*.

Plot Arcs:

Lost Memory begins with James Shelby in his office, recounting his past and his condition to the player through internal dialogue. As he finishes, the phone rings. From here, we transition to the house of the caller, Daniel Lewis, a man who details the disappearance of his wife, Cassandra, and pleads for your help in finding her. After being introduced to the case, the player, as James, will use the remaining time to question Daniel for more information and explore the house for clues. Following this, James will continue to investigate pertinent locations throughout San Fernando Valley, discovering their relevance to the case while he builds a file of notes to help aid in solving the mystery. Once he gets through a few locations, however, he and the player will begin to notice some inconsistencies; for starters, someone claims that they saw Cassandra and James together on the night before the disappearance, and upon checking his files on previous cases, it seems that pages are missing as well…

At the end of the game, it will be discovered that Cassandra wasn't just missing, but dead. The player, as the note-taker for James, can choose multiple pathways that will dictate the detective's fate.

- If, based on the evidence they found, they believe that James is guilty of the murder:

    - They can write down notes that will convince him of his involvement in the next memory reset, making it so that he surrenders himself to the police.

    - Or, they can omit this discovery from the notes entirely, and write down that Shelby should dismiss the case for his own sake without giving any further details.

(Below options available only if specific evidence has been acquired)

- If, based on the evidence they found, they believe that James is *not* guilty of the murder:

- They can follow the trail of these clues to the primary suspect and engage in direct confrontation.

- Or, if they choose to trust him, they can first consult with Shaun Briggs (old detective friend) to go over the details.

The true timeline of events are as follows: Daniel Lewis enlisted James' help on the case in order to frame him. In reality, Cassandra was killed by his hands after she discovered his involvement in a local drug operation in the valley. When Cassandra (wary of going to the police due to her speculation of corruption) met with James to look into her husband's crimes, Daniel followed her; having knocked James unconscious and ripped pages from his notebook, he left with Cassandra while James' memory reset. Unaware of what happened, James, once conscious, attributed his headache to alcohol and continued home like nothing happened.

Knowledgeable of his condition, Daniel enlisted the help of others in his drug operation to mislead the detective into thinking he himself committed the murder. Though some, like Cassandra's friend Amelia, were truly innocent, other NPCs will have been in on the act, manipulating James along his search through different locations. If enough evidence was gathered to make James pick up on the manipulation, then the player may choose either the route of direct confrontation *or* consultation with Shaun Briggs first. If direct confrontation is chosen, James will be shot and killed by Daniel and his gang after being told the truth. If James has consulted with Shaun first, he will receive back-up and the gang will be put in jail after their confession.

Gameplay:

Scene Investigation - This will require the player to move throughout the bounds of the location and interact with certain items that they believe could be pertinent to the case. Interactable objects will be highlighted in yellow, and will include both items and NPCs.

Communication - As James, you will interact and communicate with NPCs throughout each location, gathering information on the disappearance victim. Some choices will be available for the player to select, which may result in branching dialogue; in a similar vein to the character interaction in *Fallout: New Vegas*, certain notes that the player has recorded on clues will act as "skill checks" to unlock questions and answers that can be used to gather more intel.
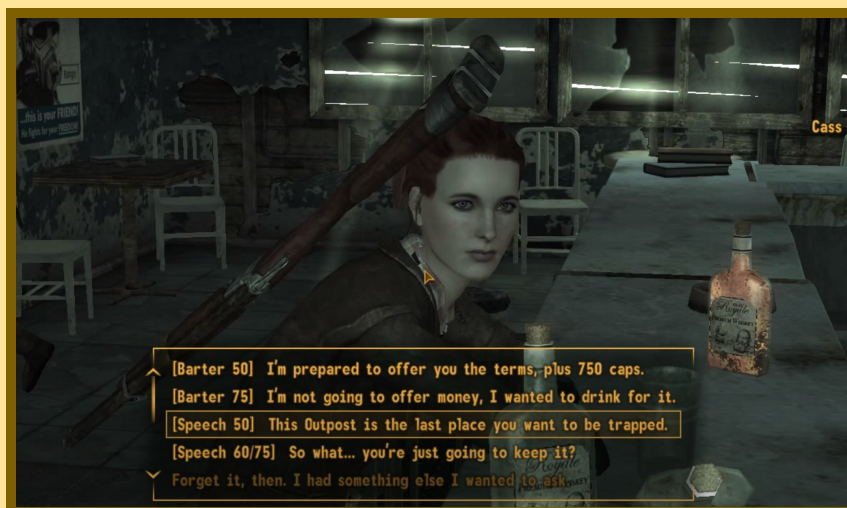
Timer - As one of the most important mechanics of the game, the timer will serve as a direct representation of James' waning short-term memory. During exploration sequences, a thirty-minute timer will count down; thirty minutes in real life will equal thirty minutes in game. When the timer reaches zero, James will be taken to a new location and lose his memory. You as the player must rely on note-taking throughout the investigation in order for James to retain his information and bearings on the case. (Note: if the player feels they have exhausted all options in a location before the timer has finished, they may choose a "wait" option that speeds up time.)

At the end of each location, you will write down notes (see section on note-taking) based on what you have observed; though there is no limit as to how many notes you can write down, an excess of ten notes per scene will incur a time penalty for the next location. For each extra note, an additional thirty seconds will be deducted from the next location's timer to account for the additional time James requires to review his information.

As you progress through more locations and gain more information, the time James will need to review his notes at the beginning of each cycle will increase, regardless of how many extra notes you have. For example, the player may be given twenty-eight minutes total to explore their second location, but only twenty-six minutes for their third, to account for the increase in information that James must review about the case. Thus, the amount of time the player has to explore a scene will be less forgiving as the game goes on.

Location Change - At the end of each thirty-minute timer, Shelby will find himself in a brand new location. He will review his notes on the case off-screen, where the timer will be deducted based on the amount of information he must review. With whatever time is left remaining, the player will engage in scene investigation. If the player wishes to review any notes *during* investigation, they may do so without penalty; in this instance, the player's actions are not reflective of James'.

Polaroid Matching - As James, you will take photos of the objects and people you investigate; these polaroids will be automatically generated upon interaction. At the end of each timed section, a "Concentration" tile-matching minigame will ensue, with the player having to match pairs of identical polaroids together. (Note: This minigame will be prompted after the timer concludes, taking place before the note-taking sequence. A timer will not be active during this sequence.)

Note-taking - At the end of the polaroid-matching sequence, the player will select keywords based on the location they just finished exploring, connecting them with pre-designed modifiers such as "Don't", "?", and "Need to check later" in order to make notes. The player will have the option to combine relevant information in order to reduce the amount of notes taken down. When they are booted to the following location, these notes will be what James uses as a frame of reference for the state of the case. (Note: this sequence will not be timed.)

Story Moment:

Sample Character Interaction:

James Shelby walks into The Sparrow, recoiling at the scent of booze and sweat. He holds his breath and pushes through a crowd of people to make his way towards the bartender. Before he gets there, a man to his left catches his eye. The stranger glances towards James then averts his eyes quickly. Have they met somewhere before…? He decides to approach.

"Name's Shelby. I'm a private detective working a missing person's case. Tell me, do you know who this woman is?"

James pulls out a picture of Cassandra, one that Daniel lent him at the beginning of the case.

"Ah, I know you. You're that guy with the memory thing, huh? Must be a hard life."

Player choice here:

>"I get by just fine."

>"If it is, it doesn't matter much. Don't remember anything after the accident anyway."

>"Life's hard for everyone, isn't it?"

Choice selection ends.

The man gives different responses based on the dialogue the player has chosen.

As he does, James smells whisky on his breath and cigarettes on his clothes. Must be a hard life for this guy, too.

"So, do you know her?"

"I've seen her around. She's Dan's wife, right?"

"You know Daniel?"

"Eh, we talk from time to time. So what happened to his girl?"

"She's been missing for the past week. Anything you know could be helpful."

"Sorry, can't offer much. Last time I saw her was when the two of you were here."

"...What?"

"Yeah, sometime last week. Thought it was odd she was with another guy, but–" He shrugs. "Hey, it's none of my business."

James flips through his notebook; no mention of this.

The conversation continues; James takes down the man's name and snaps a photo of him.

After the scene investigation of the bar has concluded (the timer has reached zero), the "Concentration" polaroid-matching game will begin. One of the polaroid pairs to match will be the picture of the man James has conversed with. Once the player matches them together, James' inner dialogue will be prompted.

"Was I really seen with Cassandra? Why would we have been together? None of the files back in the office mention her, but what motive does this guy have to lie? Something isn't right here..."