Rocketeers - Justin Fan, Cameron Gagnon, Stephen Kline, Alex Wang

At the start of this sprint, we were feeling confident about the trajectory of our design. Players expressed much satisfaction with our basic mechanics and objective of the game. However, we found that many of our extraneous features, such as repairing and block swapping, were rarely utilized despite being highlighted in our tutorial. Due to this, we focused on trimming mostly unused functionality from our game, such as swapping and repairing, and also consolidated upward movement completely with the jetpack by removing the ability to jump. Our tutorial also became more effective, as we were able to narrow our control scheme down to only three buttons on the XBOX 360 controller.

After removing mechanical complexity from our game, however, it became even clearer that we were not providing a high strategic ceiling in our gameplay. For example, playtesters enjoyed being able to pilot their ships, but they also thought there was relatively little reason to do so. First of all, we removed the ability for players to walk through the enemy ship in order to make ship designs more impactful. Based off instructor feedback from our beta submission, we also introduced the ability to ram blocks into the enemy ship to deal damage. The rest of our gameplay features this sprint involved redesigning our block hierarchy. Rather than differentiating them purely by health values, blocks are now one of three kinds: normal, reflective, and explosive. Normal blocks take normal damage from lasers, but are most resistant to ramming damage. Reflector blocks take little damage from lasers and actually reflect them off the surface as enemy projectiles, but are more susceptible to ramming damage. Explosive blocks take the most damage from lasers but explode and deal damage to enemy blocks in a large area if they come in contact with the enemy ship. We hope that these three choices, along with the rock-paper-scissors dynamic that inspired their designs, inspire more planning or reactionary play during the build phase in our players.

The end result of these alterations is a dramatically faster-paced battle phase. It is clear that playtesters very much enjoy the chaos that our new features introduce, but we also realized that balance is becoming an issue in our game for the first time. The new mechanics are incredibly powerful compared to the laser pistols in our original design, and it remains to be seen whether players feel that these new blocks are excessively strong at the expense of proper strategy.

Other final touches to our game focused on clarity and guidance to our players. Having four players on one single screen interface proved to be confusing, as we received many comments along the lines of “which one am I?” or “whose team am I on?” well after the game was under way. We started by bolstering our menu system to allow players to select their team and avatar color before starting each game. In addition, we added indicators that appear along the edges of the camera view and track player location if players travel off the camera. In response to instructor feedback, players now feature large, zoom-agnostic indicators to help track their position during the expanded view of the battle phase. We improved our respawning mechanic to make it obvious that players were returning to the field of battle after falling off their ships, while also adding some strategic depth to piloting since pilots must allow their teammates to catch up with their ship in order to respawn them. Finally, the tutorial has been redesigned multiple times in order to ensure that players complete it after demonstrating (rather than just seeing) the basic mechanics of our game.