**GROUP PROJECT, GROUP 3**

**DATE: 27 November 2018**

**TIME: 14:45 – 15:20**

**ATTENDEES** Tom Gibbs, Henry Crofts | Rob Kurta

**LOCATION:** A207

**Minute Taker: Tom Gibbs**

***Meeting requested by team to receive management feedback and tutor opinion of current milestone goals and how appropriate they are for the game’s design***

**Meeting:**

All team present.

Team began by recapping design of project for Rob, before discussing game mechanics in greater detail.

Robs feedback:

* **Beware of user input becoming too complicated if stress is coming from time pressure.**

Team appreciate how this would interfere with what is the essence of the player experience, though were able to explain that at its most complex, the game features only one stick for movement input, one button for action input and the directional pad for item selection. Ron agreed this control scheme is not complicated.

* **Need to plan how new mechanics are introduced and telegraphed to players.**

This will be key in keeping players actively engaged and preventing players from immediately moving on from our game. Rob has said previously, and reminded the team again today, the option of partially introducing mechanics at the games start is an option to avoid overwhelming or boring players with multiple steps.

This could be applicable to the games main ‘cannon’ mechanics, which require many steps from start until ready to fire.

* **Do not want to irritate players**

Rob made this point with regard to potentially getting too carried away later in development and continually adding mechanics – though this made the team consider one design choice that is loosely related. Team discussed the UI hold menu, which in the current design is only displayed when players are within a short distance of the hold. The retrievable items are put on a cooldown once selected and the team now believe that player irritation may be cause if they can no longer see the countdown, assume it has ended, but find it is still unavailable when they approach the hold again.

The team agree this is likely something that will be proven through playtesting, but now the team has a heightened awareness, the team can attempt alternate designs to avoid the issue altogether.

* **Think of possible risk/reward strategies (e.g. it may prove sub-optimal to assign one player to constantly bail out water)**

Rob explained that having ‘linked’ activities can increase diversity of play and open up alternate strategies. Used the example of deck repair and bailing of water: initially bailing could be more beneficial, but as game progresses its use decreases in value and repairing becomes optimal. This would prevent a player from bailing for the entire game.

Team explained that they have already attempted to design gameplay which offers this (bailing is beneficial at start, decreases as damage compounds in later game – repairing becomes more optimal but this is restricted by a resource recharge time, so that use of both is encouraged simultaneously – adding to game pressure).

Rob agrees this could be effective, but only playtesting will confirm.

* **As game designers you should always encourage sub-optimal behaviour. A good way to achieve this is to reward players with items that are less useful than they appear.**

For the scope of the group project module, the team will not be including ‘upgrades’ within the range of possible unlocks, only cosmetic items.

Team have considered altering effectiveness of items throughout the level, but feel that this will only confuse or anger players and destroy any ability players have to form strategies together.

This advice may be more applicable when including unlockable with static (if the project is continued after university), where the team will apply the advice.

* **Players do not like blind decisions, give players agency.**

Smart depth, provide players different options. Only timing and order should be random to allow players to work together to overcome hazards.

* **When the team begins playtesting, we should be looking for different player behaviours/strategies during gameplay. We should be iterating to achieve varied strategies and avoid ‘guaranteed win’ strategies.**

Team agree that once at the playtesting stage, results will be the greatest influencer of how the gameplay is adapted. If multiple testers over different session are demonstrating repeat behaviour the reason for these common strategies will need to be identified and game balances adjusted to prevent dominant options. Having single activities which enable easy victory will eliminate any sense of game pressure which is the key area player emotions are derived from in the game.

* **You need to consider how many players the game is for as a base-line design choice (e.g. it is for 2 players – but 3 or 4 can play with the experience being an altered ‘2-player’ experience)**

Rob explained the design risks associated with designing a multiplayer game, when the full (or primarily designed for) number of players are not available to play – and how (in)correct balancing can break the balance of the game.

Team explained that we will be writing a brief algorithm to determine the amount of current players, which will be used to define the max/min amount of tasks the players will encounter and how frequently new tasks will be generated.

The team understand that this may not be an effective solution, and will use playtesting to identify issues.

* ***Team discussed playtesting timeline with Rob, advising that the team are focusing on getting functionality in over the next few sprints. Team asked whether we should be playtesting the mechanics we currently have implemented.***

**Rob advised we avoid this. That playtesting before a tutorial is essentially worthless. The immediate interactions players have with games is the most crucial period and if not well designed players will become disinterested and quit.**

Team understand the advice given and will not begin playtesting until mechanics and corresponding tutorial content has been included.

* **Rob also warned about playtesting when the team are already aware of bugs. Rob explained bugs can interfere with the elements being play tested and taint results to the point where they are irrelevant.**

For the same reason as above, if there are any issues that interfere substantially with gameplay, playtesting will be postponed until issues are resolved.

* **Rob said after mechanic functionality is included, team should focus on the tutorial, focused on initially introducing the main mechanics and allowing players to enter the learn practice master loop.**

Players understanding the introduction of mechanics is crucial to their ability to succeed, cooperate and enjoy the game. While significant time will be spent on balancing the late-game experience, the primary focus of playtesting will be used to influence delivery of mechanics.

* **When we move to playtesting the game itself, we should always be playtesting with an aim. You will of course notice other elements, but begin a session with a goal (e.g. we are testing the ‘people fun’ – see how players interact during gameplay).**
* **Manic communication comes from a sweet spot. If slightly over the top, players will fight to win, if they think winning is impossible, they will give up and quit the game.**

Team appreciate this and will aim for a balance that leaves players on a fine line between surviving and loosing.

* **Player excitement is heightened when players believe they can recover from a weak position. Players should believe they can always recover.**

Design and generation of hazards must keep players under constant pressure, while affording them opportunities to recover from a precarious point if they communicate effectively.