Meeting: Friday, November 17

On Friday, November 17th ad 4:30pm, project group seventeen met up to find out who each other was, assign roles for the project, and come to an agreement on what type of game we would want to try to create. Evan volunteered to be the designer, Ethan was the programmer, and I, DJ, became the producer. I created a GroupMe for the team so that we could all communicate quickly and keep each other updated on our progress.

During the meeting we discussed and workshopped various ideas for games. None of us really had an idea about the limitations of the Batari Basic program, but we had an understanding of what Atari games were like and went from there. I suggested a Qbert style game that was two players, each player trying to change the most floor tiles to their specific color before time ran out. Evan added that it might be interesting to have Pacman style walls to increase difficulty. We also tossed out ideas for a maze game that was two players, either timed or a simple head to head where each player tried to get to the center first. Our last idea was a mixture of pong and breakout, where hitting the tiles would create more balls.

We left the meeting with the assignment to download Batari and Stella, make sure it ran and play around a bit with the program to get a feel for the limitations. We set the date for our next meeting to be November 20th.

Meeting: Monday, November 20

At 4:30pm group seventeen met again at West Village. Evan and Ethan had both found that they had trouble with Batari, it was not allowing them to compile new files. Ethan found a version that did work and promised to put a link to it in the group chat.

We settled on the maze idea, deciding to start by making a static maze with a timer and whoever made it to the center fastest won. Well, that was the initial idea. Eventually, the idea grew into a Pacman style maze where one player was trying to get out of the maze, and the other player was trying to catch the first one. I wanted to try randomizing the maze for each level or making pseudo-random mazes that were weighted to challenge the player who was winning. Evan and Ethan thought that extra levels that were more challenging for the winner was a good idea.

Ethan also wanted to make a title screen and a game over screen, with a button that would take you back to the title screen when pressed. The planning eventually devolved into a bit of a joke, talking about the potential of creating fake three dimensional graphics in Atari.

We left the meeting with concrete goals, a task for Evan to create our mazes, and our next meeting date set for the Tuesday after Thanksgiving Break.

Meeting: Tuesday, November 28

The meetings on Tuesday, November 28th were a bit fractured. Scheduling had been an issue, so I met up with Ethan and Evan separately. I personally had issues compiling and running Ethan's code that he had written over the break, but that was easily fixed, although I did have some lingering issues actually reading the code.

Ethan had created a simple, static maze in order to test his collisions and level changes. He had sent updates in the group chat of interesting glitches he had encountered while coding, and had come a long way over the break. The two of us discussed whether to use the ball that was provided in Batari as a button for the human player to move to a different section of the maze or as a power up to give the human player a gun to stun the spider player. We both thought that, in the interest of time, the ball would be a button to move a wall for the human to leave the maze. However, we would need to consult with Evan.

Later, I had my meeting with Evan. He showed me his preliminary maze designs and we discussed potential power-ups and the constraints of Batari and the programming. I told Evan about my earlier conversation with Ethan and he agreed that the power-up might not be the best idea.

Our next meeting was set for Thursday, November 30th.

Meeting: Thursday, November 30

Our meeting on Thursday consisted primarily of looking over Ethan's code with a fine tooth comb for errors. He had made it to version seven of the game, but for some reason the game was skipping levels and going directly to the game over screen. The button to move from one screen to the title screen also was not working, but that was a relatively quick fix.

Our game, Spider, is set up such that the original level is level three. If the human player wins, the game will go to level four. If the Spider player wins, the game goes to level two. The Spider must win levels three, two, and one to win the game while the human would have to win levels three, four, and five. The game is also designed that if the Spider wins level four, then the game goes back to level three and so on.

At first, we thought that the problem with the level skipping stemmed from collision detection, as that was the Spider's win condition, and we tried to code around that, making extra variables and edge cases in order to keep from skipping a level. When that did not work, we tried replacing the characters before checking for collisions. That failed as well. The only way that we could get the game to go to the second spider level was to comment out the condition that called the game over screen.

We tried quite a few more solutions, tiny fiddling to the code in the hopes of not breaking anything else, before giving up for the time being. We decided to come back to the code with fresh eyes later.

The date for our next meeting was set as Monday, December 4th.

Meeting: Monday, December 4

This meeting was a workshop to put Evan's designs for the Pacman style mazes into the game and make sure that the game ran smoothly and didn't go over the size limit. We had some worries about ROM space, so the title screen no longer flashes multiple colors and the spider and human sprites remain black and peach every level instead of changing. We also had to edit some background colors to make the human character more visible, but that was easily done and made the whole game look better now that there was a clear delineation between the player and the background.

I was assigned the task of writing the description, more like flavor text, for the game. The text is below:

"In a future where everyone was forced to retreat underground after nuclear war ravaged the surface, a new dominant race emerged: giant, man-eating spiders. One player is the spider, and they are trying to get their next meal. The other player is the human, who is trying to escape from the spider's lair and keep from becoming its next meal. Unfortunately for the human, the spider's home is confusing and they will have to find and hit the switch to open up an escape route to leave the maze. Unfortunately for the spider, it's slow."

I think the description is reasonable for the game we created.

Ethan managed to fix the 'game over' glitch. The only real concern with the game now is that it might be unwinnable because of the mexican stand-offs that could occur because of how the screen is designed. I personally thought that added a fun personal factor to the game to see which player caves first and moves out of the other player's way. Evan and Ethan did work together to make some of the levels a bit easier for the player at a disadvantage, trying to balance the difficulty so that the game would no longer be fun to play. The other issue that players run into is finding the button because it is the same color as the wall, but that simply gives the human player a bit of challenge.

The last meeting for last minute checks and finalizing documents is set for Tuesday, December 5th.

Meeting: Tuesday, December 5th

The meeting on Tuesday was to playtest the game and make sure that the game was reasonably weighted for difficulty for each player. The different people playing gave us a good pool of data to pull from. We determined that the levels were fairly well balanced for player difficulty, taking into account the handicaps that are in place for each player in the next level if they win the previous one.

Evan, Ethan, and I confirmed that they would have everything uploaded and linked in the group chat by the end of the day and that we would individually do final checks on the game and make sure we all had all of the files necessary. In total we will have the game text file, the binary file, the design docs, and these progress reports to turn in.