

FINAL EDITION

Polishing the Product

At Softs, we showed a rough version of the intro scene, which shows an alien mothership being struck by a comet, forcing the aliens to evacuate the ship and navigate to nearby worlds. The rough intro had a solid narrative and was well-received at Softs, but visually it hadn't yet received the bells and whistles that would help sell it dramatically. The pacing of certain moments was also too slow to get the dramatic impact that we desired. With better timing and finished art, we now have a final intro that looks great.

In our Nov. 19th playtest, we had a few kids complete the game, but there was no end game sequence. By Softs, we had a temporary ending. After Softs, we made efforts towards making a full-fledged ending scene that gives the kids a sense of accomplishment. The damaged mothership lies broken, floating in space. A new mothership appears and hovers above the worlds. The aliens then leave each planet and board the new mothership, safe and sound, happy to be rescued.

We've also done several small bits of polish for our in-game experience as well. These include one more environment (a cityscape), different colors of aliens (to add variety and make it clear that you aren't rescuing the same alien repeatedly), minor tweaks to the user interface art, a loading indicator, a splash screen, more varied music, and some additional sound effects.

Final Playtest

On Thursday, we returned to the Children's School for our final playtest of the semester. Our focus for this playtest was to test our introduction and our new mini-game instructions. We tested with seven kids--4 boys and 3 girls--all about 5 years old. After showing each child the intro, we asked him or her to describe what he or she saw so we could test it for comprehensibility. We discovered that the crash land sequence goes a little fast, so we rendered that part to go less abruptly and we added a close-up of the alien and his spaceship to reinforce the nature of the problem.

The mini-game instructions worked well, with the only weakness being that the bouncing arrows seemed interactive and made the kids want to click those rather than the towers. We decided that there was no reason why the game couldn't allow a click on either the tower itself or on the arrow above it, since either indicates the same choice of a tower.



Looking Forward

The ENGAGE project will continue on past this semester with a new team working on more games for kids. A new game might tackle an entirely new topic or an aspect of structure building that we were unable to cover this semester. HCII has also discussed with us ways that a future team might build on top of our current game. Some ideas that have been brought to the table are collaborative elements, more stability tests (wind gusts, ice storms, meteors, etc), or a deconstruction game akin to Jenga: the player is tasked with removing blocks from a provided structure that will not cause it to topple. Whatever happens next semester, we learned a lot and hope our experience will be a great help for future teams at the ETC and HCII to go on to create engaging and enriching game experiences.



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