Finishing the Balance Toy

This week our first order of business was to get our prototype from Quarters onto the iPhone and working with the accelerometer. The separate iPhone gold spike that we did last week was a big help in making this a smooth and quick process. It was a delight to feel the tilt of the iPhone controlling Seven on the snowball.

We also completed the balancing mechanic we had begun with the Quarters prototype by making Seven tend to roll off the snowball when going up or down slopes. While the rolling of our snowball is currently controlled by Unity's physics engine, we needed more control over Seven's behavior so we've created our own system that rotates him around the snowball as a substitute for the role that gravity would play. Eventually, when animations are in place, this rotating system will give him the illusion of intelligence as he fights against gravity and tries not to fall off. Tilting the iPhone in the right direction creates a counteracting rotation and helps Seven maintain his balance.

After some tuning of parameters like snowball speed and the falling threshold, we had a sufficiently complete toy that we could hold our first playtest. Although there is not much of a true game yet, observing people's reactions to the toy is important as we contemplate the game's basic control scheme and the new game mechanics that we will be building soon.

First Internal Playtest

Now that we have a prototype off the ground, our team's plan for the rest of the semester is to have one playtest each week, alternating between internal playtests with other ETC students and external playtests with groups outside the ETC. Frequent playtests will allow us to track the effectiveness of our design choices as we continue to build new features and iterate on existing ones.

We had our first internal playtest this Thursday afternoon in order to do some preliminary testing of our balance toy. From this playtest we found that people need a clearer understanding of how tilting against the slope keeps you balanced. While most everyone was eventually able to balance successfully, they often did this by looking at our temporary green and red bars which show the ideal center point and the falling threshold, rather than by looking at the slopes themselves. We were also encouraged to make the game faster and more exaggerated so that we can get more of a wild, comic feeling when attempting to stay balanced.

We asked people to suggest additional mechanics without telling them what we currently have planned so that we could see if any fresh ideas arose. Among the suggestions were a wider variety of terrain with rollercoaster-like variations in speed, the ability to make either Seven or the snowball itself jump, to have the snowball change size, and to run into or pick up obstacles. Some of these suggestions mimicked our original plans, which is a good sign, but we also picked up many intriguing new ideas such as icy surfaces, ramps, and cliffs, some of which we may implement as we start building the game beyond the toy.







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