Six weeks have passed since the last paper I wrote on out Cube War game, and three weeks remain until the end of the semester. We still don’t have a final title for our game yet, but it will surely be something space related. A lot of the main technical elements are done, however, I wouldn’t say we have a user friendly demo currently in place at the moment. That being said, it is time for me to share my thoughts on the project through the perspective of six lenses again.

The first lens I focused on was The Lens of Flow. The main goal of each player in the game is to knock the other players “king” cube off the playing field by flick their own cubes. Currently our game lacks a built in description of the rules, so this goal, while recognized by the code, is not properly presented to the players. Even with the built in description, however, there is a good chance players could become distracted by other elements in the game. While testing some of our fail-safe measures via stacking cubes during the setup phase of the game, I found continuing to stack them even after the test was complete. This raises a few questions. What is to stop one player from goofing around too much in the setup phase? How do we stop them from trying to mess up the other player’s cube formation? Will this problem carry over to the battle phase? The solution to the second is question is a feature we were already planning on implementing but haven’t yet: setup boundaries for each player. The playing field of the game in divided in half, each side belonging to one player. Each player is only allowed to place cubes on their side of the field. By setting up either boundary variables or a boundary box collider, we can make sure of this. One think I will keep in mind though, is to keep track of this even after a cube has been placed, since there is a chance they could end up on the other side via a collapsed cube tower. The first solution that comes to mind for the two other questions would be a time limit. By placing a time limits on the players during each turn, we could keep one player from stalling the other. A time limit for the entire game may also be useful, but should playtest more before deciding on that.

The next ties into the former. The Lens of Head and Hands questions the balance of intellectual challenge and relaxing fun in a game. On a scale of 1 to 10 (from “physical” to “mental”) I would say our game is a 5. While there is strategy to this game, a major appeal of the game is simply watching the physics of the cubes in action. If this game were on the market, I could imagine this element being advertised. However, the setup interface, camera control, and flicking commands in the game allow enough freedom for strategic play. The more you understand how this cubes are launched, the more precise your actions can be. The new player could simply bounce and stack cubes around and be just fine, but more experienced ones would probably develop interesting cube formations and strategies. Thus, I would say this game is “middle-of-the-road” in terms of this lens.

Now to focus on The Lens of Virtual Interface. During setup, the players need to know several things: whose turn it is, how many points they have left to spend on cubes, what cubes they can choose from, what can those cubes do, and when they have tried to place a cube in an invalid spot. Currently, we do have an interface in place that does most of that. Aside from some cleaning up, the main thing it needs are sprites for the cube menu and popup display to tell the player when they cannot do/have to do something (like “you cannot place a cube on the opponent’s side” or “you must place a king”). During the battle phase, there is not much information the player needs to know. However, I think it might be useful if we had the descriptions of each cube type popup when a player hovers over a cube. It can be easy to forget special abilities from time to time, so being able to just look at the ones in play quick would be helpful. Also, we may want to display the button commands during gameplay. First time players and those who don’t play often could use help knowing what does what.

With interface on mind, I also used The Lens of Transparency. I feel the both interfaces for the setup and battle phase allow for enough freedom. All a player needs to place a cube is select the cube on the menu and it will be spawned on the screen for them to place with the click of a mouse button. Again, the sprites are not in place yet, but once they are in it will be pretty straight forward. The cubes can also be raised and lowered, so if players wish to stack them, they can. The battle phase is a bit more complex, but hopefully easy to get a grasp of. It is a two click system; the player clicks on the cube they want to launch, set the power and direction by moving the mouse, the click again to launch it. The power and direction is represented by a colored line and dot that changes from green to red to indicate the power. Like cube placement, the line can be moved up and down to change the point of “impact” and can be tilted to change the direction of the force as well. Also, the camera can be freely moved around the entire game playing field. As I mentioned earlier though, players will probably need some sort of display telling them what each key does. I’m positive they will get used to it over time and take advantage the freedom in place, but we should add this feature just in case.

After thinking about the interface, I decided to look at the game through The Lens of the Eight Filters. The first filter asks if the game “feels right”. Not yet, but it is getting there. With most of the technical elements in place, we mainly just need to put in and polish the aesthetic elements. On that note, the fifth filter asks if the game can be built, which is a yes. The second filter questions the demographic for the game. I would imagine people from age 8-26 playing the game. Most people past that point might not be attracted to the game. Third, is it well designed? Possibly. We sadly haven’t had too much time to play test, so while the math behind each cubes stats may be sound, it hasn’t been quite put to practice yet. This also means that the answer to the eighth filter is “TBD”. The fourth filters asks if the game is novel. Since this is a recreation of a game, the answer is “not completely”. However, the added freedom from the digital interface adds to the overall gameplay, so in a way, it is novel. Next, the sixth filter asks if the game will be profitable. I couldn’t imagine this game breaking 100,000 by any means. For what it is though, I could imagine it doing decently one the market. Finally, the seventh filter questions our social and community goals. We don’t really have any major goals like that. The main thing I want players to gain from this game is a fun experience to share with friends.

After thinking about all that, I finally decided to focus on the more personal Lens of Passion. To be honest, Cube Quest was not the game I initially wanted to replicate. Originally, I wanted to remake “Kill Doctor Lucky”, I game that, while I have never played, as caught my interest from time to time. Ultimately, the group decided on Cube Quest. I wasn’t very passionate about the project at first, and my interest would wane from time to time. Now that the game is close to being in (what I would consider) and alpha state, I would say that I have become more passionate about the project. Not the most passionate I’ve been, mind you, but still passionate.

After looking through these lenses, I see that my team still has a good amount of work to get done. With only 3 weeks left, it will be tough, but hopefully, we will get this game completed a satisfying point.