Astrolympics: A Reflection

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Introduction

Exploring new technologies and innovation is a continuous journey in Digital Media. As a third-year student who aims to specialize in this area, I embarked on a new project, a Virtual reality (VR) game titled 'Astrolympics' - a collaborative effort of a team of five members, which includes three designers, one technical expert and myself as the Project Manager. This essay reflects on my journey through this project, giving a detailed project overview, explaining the concept behind Astrolympics and its target audience, the use of media and technologies, the production plan, my responsibilities as a project manager, and my personal contributions to the project. We will conclude with an overall reflection of my experience.

Project Overview

Astrolympics is a VR game where players engage in an arcade-style game of throwing objects into floating containers to stop Earth from being destroyed. The game takes place in a stadium filled with aliens floating in space. The game's core mechanics involve grabbing, aiming, and throwing balls into a 'container' to score enough points before the timer runs out. If they fail to do so, they lose a part of Earth until there is nothing left, resulting in a 'Game Over.' If the player succeeds, they will move on to the next round, which gets progressively difficult.

The game is intended to be comical, colorful, and humorous, as shown by the advertisement billboards around the stadium, the cartoonish alien audience, or the opening scene, a blatant parody (or even rip-off) of the opening crawl of Star Wars Episode IV (Lucas, 1977).

The target audience for the game is ages 13+, appealing to all genders and designed for enthusiasts of casual arcade-style experiences and games. The 13+ recommendation aligns with industry standards and consensus, as Rakver (2022) reported.

Use of Media and Technologies

In the development of Astrolympics, Unity (2024), a cross-platform game engine and VR technology facilitated by the Meta Quest 2 (2022), were instrumental. Unity's versatility allowed us to create the base of our game. VR technology provided an immersive gaming environment, transporting players into the intergalactic stadium. The VR Lab on campus offered our team a conducive work environment.

Figma (2024) was used to create all essential documents related to the project, such as the Game Design Document (GDD), pitch presentation, and production plan. It also acted as a space for us to collaborate and bring ideas together for brainstorming. Trello (Atlassian, 2024) facilitated task management, while Whatsapp (2024) and Discord (2024) ensured proper team communication.

Sketchfab was used to locate assets, while Blender was used to modify them to suit our game's environment. (Sketchfab Inc., 2024)(Blender Foundation, 2024). Video and sprite assets required for the project were created using Adobe Premiere Pro, After Effects, and Photoshop (Adobe Systems, 2024).

AI tools such as ChatPGT, Gemini, and Microsoft's Copilot aided in C# code creation and fixing, showcasing AI's potential in game development (Open AI, 2024)(Google Inc.)(Microsoft Corporation, 2024).

Each technology and media played a crucial role in facilitating project management and team collaboration and enhancing the design and functionality of the game.

Production Plan

As the team's project manager, it was my responsibility to ensure that the entire project ran smoothly with structured tasks and timelines. The production plan was therefore created, ensuring that all goals were Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.

The production process of Astrolympics was divided based on 'Sprint'. Each sprint represents 2-3 weeks. Sprints #1 and #2 had the team working on pre-production and creating the GDD. Sprint #3 began the project's Development phase, including Prototyping, Developing, Testing, Iteration, and Deployment. Below is a timeline for the project, with the deliverables for each sprint (refer to Fig 1.0 below).

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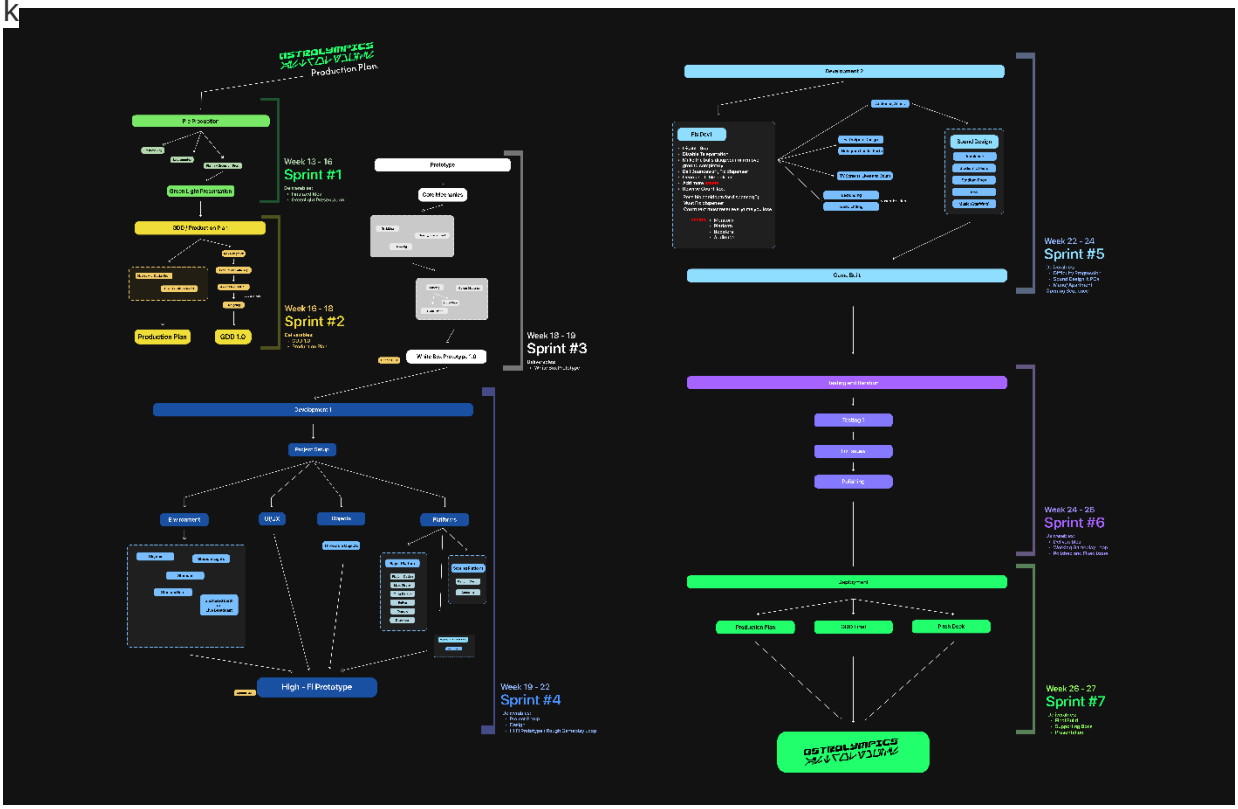
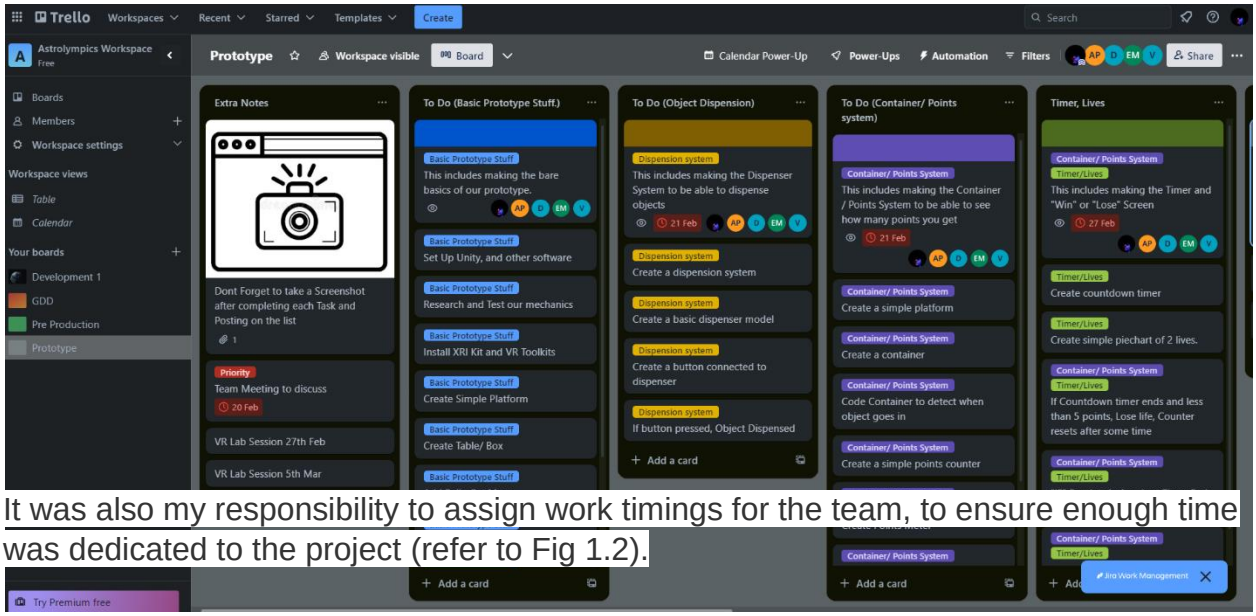


Once the production plan was formed, Trello was used to create and delegate tasks to the team members (refer to Fig 1.1).



It was also my responsibility to assign work timings for the team, to ensure enough time was dedicated to the project (refer to Fig 1.2).

This experience taught me how to divide and delegate tasks effectively to my team members, ensuring that the workload was spread equally.

Team Management and Role Reassignment

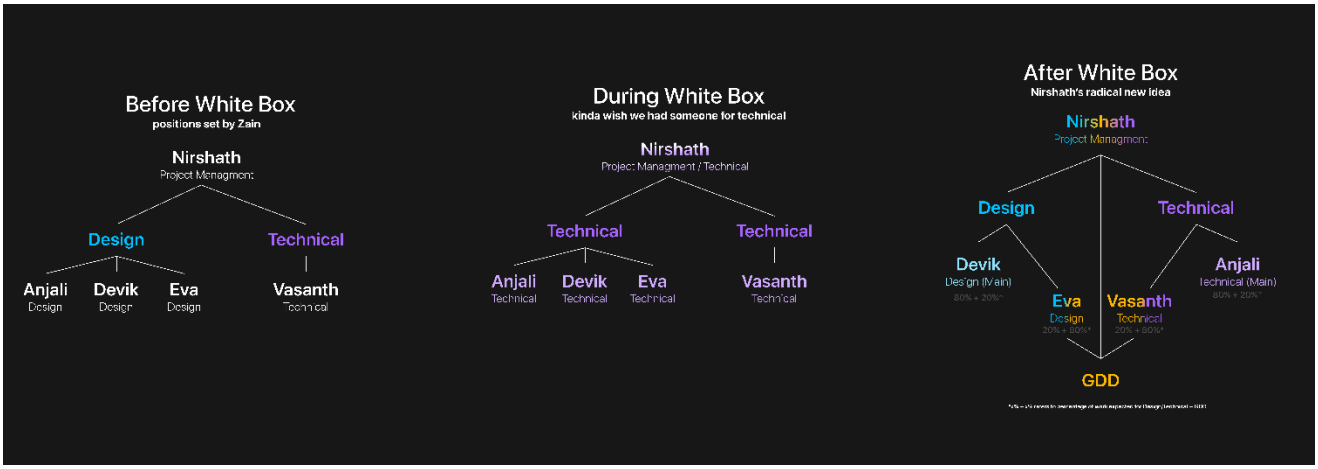
As the project manager, my role included a wide range of tasks aimed at ensuring the smooth execution of our project. The production plan I created outlined specific dates and deliverables for each sprint and served as a road map for the team, providing clear direction and helping us stay on track.

Throughout the project, I ensured that our deadlines were met while also filling out project reports for each sprint, detailing the tasks each team member performed and the hours spent on them.

One of my key responsibilities was ensuring that our team had a comfortable work environment to increase productivity and collaboration. This involved booking the on-campus VR Lab and making reservations for classrooms to work in.

I also provided feedback for every task completed and stated any changes that needed to be made.

Midway through the project, after the prototyping phase, I observed and evaluated the performance and capabilities of all team members and made the decision to reassign roles (refer to Fig 1.3).



This new team structure proved to be more effective and suited the project's requirements better.

Reflecting on my role as a Project Manager, I realize the importance of adaptability, effective communication, and strategic planning in managing a team and leading a project to success.

Personal Contribution

Beyond my managerial role, I contributed significantly to the project, being deeply involved with the team at every stage, guiding the game's workings and feedback, and facilitating discussions.

From the technical aspect, I helped create crucial components and scripts required for the game's functionality during the early prototyping stages, such as the 'Count Text' feature and the timer.

In terms of design, I implemented a rocket booster asset into the game, which was integrated into other game assets, and ensured that all other assets met our quality standards. I also contributed to the design and structure of the GDD and created 'Posters' to be used as parody advertisements in the game's environment to add a layer of world-building. Furthermore, I created the 'lives' sprites (Holograms of Earth in different stages of destruction) and video assets for the game, such as the game's intro, a parody of the iconic 'Star Wars: Episode IV' crawl.

I also took the initiative to set up the entire project during VR Lab sessions, ensuring that the project ran smoothly on Unity and Oculus Metaquest 2. I also took on the responsibility of testing the game on VR, allowing me to identify necessary changes and improvements. Finally, I assisted with making the video presentation of the game by filming and editing it.

Conclusion

Reflecting on this project, I have gained invaluable insights into team management, innovative technologies, and the multifaceted nature of game development. This experience has enriched my understanding of Digital Media and fostered my growth as a Project Manager.

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