3.2 The Quests

The Quests section contains the "story" of Gamestar Mechanic. Cast as a young aspiring game designer, the player is pulled into an exciting tale of adventure and discovery.

In the Quests, mechanics learn about different Sprites and their behavior, and upon finishing each game, they are awarded Sprites to use in their Toolbox.

3.2.1 Episodes and Missions

A **Quest** is divided into **Episodes**. Each episode covers a lesson in game design, taught over a number of Missions, in one of three types: Play, Repair, and Build.

This sequence shows the player an element of game design in action, then asks them to fix a game and finally lets them build a game around that topic.

An episode begins and ends with a comic that sets the scene.

STORY MISSIONS

Play Missions require the user to successfully complete the play of a pre-designed game by accomplishing the set objectives. Play Missions usually serve to introduce users to the behavior of Sprites.

Repair Missions present the user with a game that is in some way broken and cannot be successfully played. The user must deduce what is broken about the game and use the Gamestar Mechanic console to place or remove objects. A set of requirements will be presented that the repaired game must include, such as "Place 10 enemies." The mission is completed when the player has successfully played and accomplished the objectives of the repaired game.

Build Missions present the user with a blank slate to build a new game on. A set of requirements will be presented that the game must include, such as "Place 10 enemies. " The mission is completed when the player has successfully played and accomplished the objectives of their created game.

BONUS MISSIONS & REWARDS

Bonus Missions are either Play Missions, Repair Missions or Build Missions and do not need to be completed to continue in the Quest.

After each mission, story or bonus, is completed, the player is rewarded with sprites and other **rewards** such as backgrounds and music to use in their Toolbox.
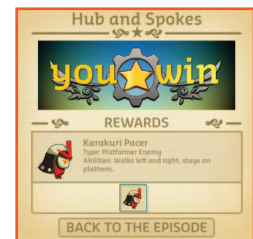
3.3 Workshop

The **Workshop** is where players design games with their Toolbox and Sprites. Each player starts with a default set of Sprites and earns more as he/she advances through the Quest. Players also have Template Games that include sets of Sprites that come with the Templates.
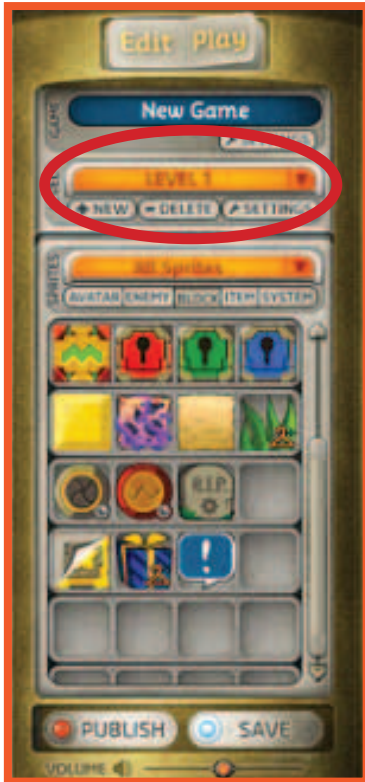

3.3.1 Toolbox

The **Toolbox** is the free-form game creation area of Gamestar Mechanic, where users can build new games from scratch. The Toolbox has four components: **Game Grid**, **Sprite Tray**, **Tools**, and **Settings**.

3.3.2 Game Grid

The Game Grid is the work area where players create their own games.

10

3.3.3 Sprite Tray

There are two main sections in the Sprite Tray:

At the top of the Sprite Tray, **Levels** in the current game are displayed. The player can move freely between levels to edit them. Clicking and dragging the level name to a new position within the window allows players to reorder the levels in their game.

The Sprite Tray also contains all of the player's **Sprites**.

Sprites are the essential building blocks of Gamestar Mechanic games. As players proceed through the Quests (in-game curriculum), they are awarded new Sprites to use in their games. Once a player has earned a Sprite, it can be used an unlimited number of times.

Earned sprites appear in their Work Area inventory. The more advanced a player is, the more Sprites they will have to build games with.

Toolbox

11

Edit/Play Toggle
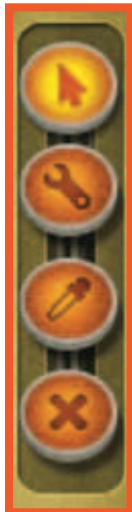

Editor Tools

3.3.4 Edit/Play Toggle

The **Edit/Play Toggle** switch at the top of the Sprite Tray controls the behavior of the console.

In **Edit mode**, the game is not "playing"—everything stands still.

In **Play mode**, the mechanic can test that their game is working as intended.

We recommend encouraging designers to test their games frequently.

3.3.5 Tools

When the **Arrow** button is selected, designers can drag Sprites out of their Inventory to the grid, as well as pick up and drop sprites that have been placed.

The **Wrench** button allows designers to change the parameters of the Sprites they have placed. Each Sprite has an individual set of parameters that govern its behavior. These parameters include things like movement speed, damage, point value, etc.

The **Eyedropper** button allows designers to copy Sprites that are placed on the grid. This is especially useful when the designer has changed the parameters of the Sprite with the Wrench tool, because using the Eyedropper will create a clone of the Sprite with the changed parameters. This makes it easy to duplicate customized Sprites.

The **X** button allows designers to delete Sprites placed on the playfield. This action is permanent.

3.3.6 Level Settings

Every game is composed of one or more Levels. A level is a self-contained unit of gameplay with a defined goal. Think of this window as defining the "world" that the game takes place in. The Level Settings are used to control the overall qualities of the game space, including the perspective of the camera and the size of the level.

Users can choose and adjust a variety of parameters that define this space. The first three fields in the Level Settings window allow the user to create a name for the level, write text that is displayed when a player begins playing the level, and write text that is displayed when players complete it.
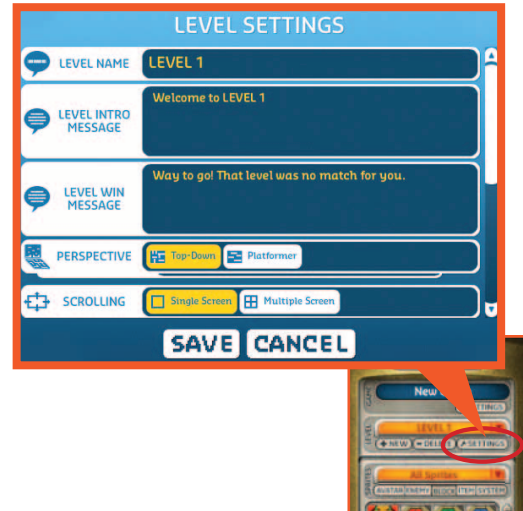
The **Perspective** of a Level indicates whether the Player is viewing the play field from either a "top-down" or "platformer" perspective. In the **platformer** perspective, the player controls an avatar that jumps from platform to platform. In **top-down** perspective, the player controls an avatar seen from above, which can move in all four directions.

Choosing "platformer" perspective opens up a **Gravity** submenu. Gravity determines the amount of downward force placed on moving Sprites in the game. Increasing the gravity increases the speed at which objects fall, decreasing it allows avatar sprites to jump higher and fly.

Single Screen means the game is restricted to the size of one visible game screen— a 16 x 12 grid of Sprites. We recommend starting out with this setting, as it can help focus new game designers.

Choosing single screen opens up a **Wraparound** submenu. Wraparound means that when the player leaves one edge of the playfield, her avatar will reappear at the opposite edge.

Multiple Screen means the game screen will move with the player, revealing previously unseen areas as they move towards the edges. Choosing Multiple Screen opens up a submenu that lets users determine the total size of the playing field, up to a grid of 10 screens wide by 10 screens tall.

Edge Bounding determines how the edges of the playfield behave. Some edges can stop the player's motion or allow the player to pass freely. In platformer perspective, if the player falls off of the edge of the screen, they will automatically lose the game.

Background and **Music** let the user choose from background art and musical themes (or silence) that will play during the level. Players start with a few of these and earn more throughout the Quests. To see where in the Quests the backgrounds and music are earned, go to the Quest Guide:
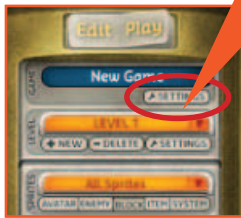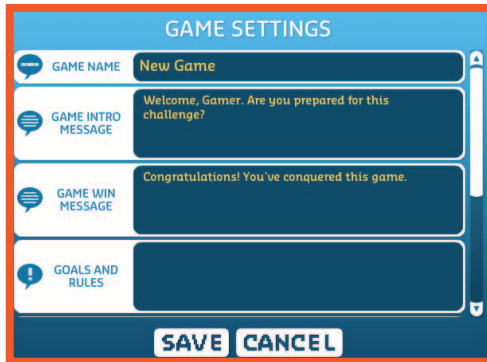
http://tinyurl.com/gsmlg-intro-questguide

3.3.7 Game Settings

Designers use **Game Settings** to write the text that players will see. This includes: the **Game Name**; the **Game Intro** text which appears when the game is first opened; the **Game Win Message** that appears at the end of a game.

There are two other settings here which are good for teaching writing skills. The "**Goals and Rules**" is a text area where players can write what their game is about, and it is good for communicating the metaphor of a creative game.

The "**Tips and Tricks**" is a good place for designers to think about what their players need to know, and to practice didactic writing skills.

3.4 Game Alley

Once games are published, they appear in **Game Alley** for other Mechanics and visitors to the site to play.

At the top of the Game Alley screen is the "**Featured Challenge**," which spotlights a design challenge that designers can take to demonstrate their design skills within a carefully chosen set of design goals.
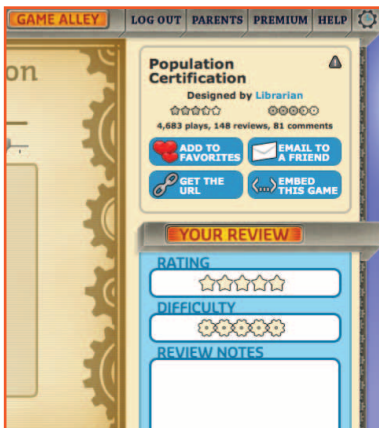
The **Search Bar** lets players look for games by title or by user name. The screen also displays **categories** of games such as "Featured", "Popular" or "New".

The **Channels** are curated collections of games around the theme.

3.4.1 Viewing a Game in Game Alley

Game Alley is also where players can **review** or **comment** on each other's games and provide helpful critical feedback as part of the iterative design process. These reviews have both **Ratings** and simple **Review Headings** to guide feedback.

Players can share a game by **linking** the game, **emailing** it, **embedding** it in another website, or marking it as a favorite. **Sharing** a game will make that game available even to people who are not logged in to Gamestar Mechanic. Players can show their games to their parents and friends, even if they don't have Gamestar Mechanic accounts.

⚠ Reviews and comments are **moderated**. Kids will inevitably make inappropriate comments on each other's games.

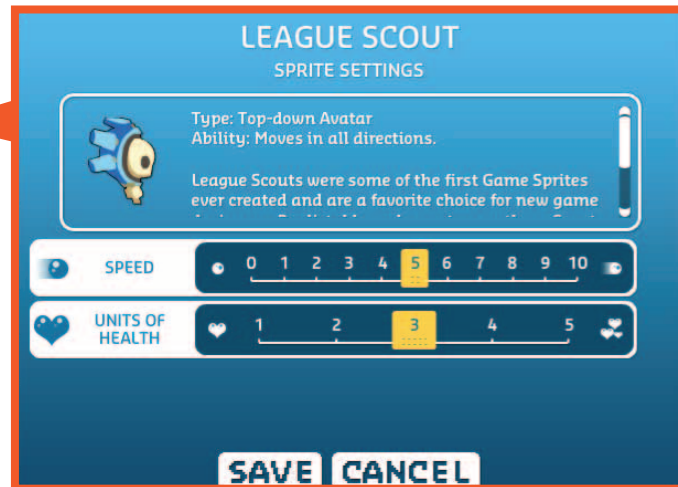The **flag button** will allow you to report unacceptable comments to us.

3.5 Sprites

Sprites are the components that you can place on the work area. Use the wrench tool to change the settings of a sprite: **speed**, **health**, **movement patterns**, etc.

Sprites are divided into five basic groups:

Avatar Sprites are the objects in the game that are under direct control by the player. Only one Avatar may be placed in the playing area at a time. When the game is played, the arrow keys on the keyboard and the Space bar control the Avatar. Left-handed students can use the WASD keys to control Avatars as well.

Enemy Sprites are objects that exist to hinder the player's progress by causing damage to the Avatar. Enemies come in a variety of types, and each one has a number of settings that determine its behavior.

Block Sprites are used for creating the environment of games. They do not move once they are placed in the playing area. Most blocks are used to create terrain for the player to explore—mazes to sneak through, plat-forms to jump on, and obstacles to hide behind.

Item Sprites are objects that the Avatar can collect and is rewarded by. They can modify the behavior of the Avatar by granting it new abilities, as well as modifying System sprites. For instance, when you pick up the time bonus you will earn extra time to complete the level.

System Sprites control aspects of the game, including monitoring the winning conditions for each Level. They are not physical objects in the Play Area, but rather sit above the game space and monitor what is go-ing on inside, providing feedback to players on their play. For example, the point counter keeps track of the player's collected points.

16