

Rocket Cow

Side-Scrolling Astronaut Cow — Interactive Revealer / Faux-Skill Promo

“Your mission, should you choose to accept it: fly your cow through space, collect space junk, and reach the station.”

GAME TYPE	ENGINE	PRIMARY ROLE
Interactive Revealer / Faux-Skill	Cocos - Casino Kiosk & Mobile	Game Designer / UX Lead / GDD Author

OVERVIEW

Rocket Cow is a side-scrolling space adventure promo in which an astronaut cow launches from a lunar landscape, boosts upward through a scrolling alien world, collects floating space junk, and races toward a finish-line space station, all while the player taps BOOST to keep them airborne. The game was developed in Cocos for casino kiosk and mobile delivery. It began as a crypto-crash mechanism concept, evolved through a full cross-functional design review, and was ultimately refined into an interactive revealer that preserved the visual excitement of the original concept while working cleanly within the team's server-driven prize architecture.

THE DESIGN PROBLEM

The project originated from a crypto-crash game reference; a stock-market-style mechanic where the player watches a rising value and must 'cash out' before a crash wipes their prize. I presented this as the primary concept alongside a scaled-down interactive revealer alternative, specifically because a major industry event (G2E) was approaching and the timeline required a buildable solution.

The core tension: the crash mechanic required mid-session server calls and multi-prize landmark logic that would introduce skill-game compliance risk. The team needed a design that felt like a crash game to play, but resolved cleanly as a single server call with no mid-game outcome branching.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL REVIEW PROCESS

I walked the full team (engineering, production, compliance, and UX) through both concepts in a live session, fielding real-time design critique. Key issues surfaced and resolved in review:

- Compliance risk: visible prize landmarks could constitute a skill game — resolved by removing landmark prizes entirely, awarding a single prize at the finish line only

- Server architecture: multiple mid-game server calls rejected. The final design uses a single participate call before gameplay begins, all outcomes are pre-determined
- Forced lose problem: if a pre-determined loss collided with a 'safe' landing attempt, the UX broke. This was resolved by designing the Tractor Beam as the loss delivery mechanism (server-known loss outcome pulls the cow down before the finish line)
- Win protection: if pre-determined win hits an obstacle, cow gets an invincibility bubble or obstacle deflects. This keeps collision gameplay fun without compromising outcome
- Instant Collect button: added as a hyperspace-style skip. For pre-determined loss players who tap, the cow is hyperspaced in front of a the tractor beam; win players safely warp to the station

FINAL MECHANIC: WHAT WAS BUILT

The shipped mechanic is a side-scrolling interactive revealer using Cocos physics. The player taps BOOST to keep the astronaut cow airborne as the world scrolls rightward. Obstacles (space junk including asteroids, pitchforks, scarecrows, bales of hay) appear throughout the environment. A horizontal progress bar tracks position from START to FINISH. Collected junk and avoided obstacles both contribute to a visible SCORE counter. The Milk meter on the left provides thematic feedback. A finish-line space station receives the cow on win outcomes.

UI ELEMENT	FUNCTION
SCORE counter	Accumulates as junk is collected / obstacles passed; cosmetic, no PAR impact
START → FINISH progress bar	Horizontal journey indicator; creates finish-line tension without prize landmarks
MILK meter (left rail)	Depletes as cow flies; thematic fuel/time indicator tied to session length
BOOST button	Tap to pulse jetpack; keeps cow aloft, drives the side-scroll
INSTANT COLLECT button	Skip-to-end hyperspace; outcome-routing handles win/lose regardless of when tapped
Tractor Beam	Server-side loss delivery mechanism. fires and captures cow if pre-determined lose

CHARACTER & VISUAL DESIGN

The astronaut cow wears a full space suit with a jetpack/rocket pack. This was a deliberate choice over riding a rocket, preserving the absurdist charm of a cow in a spacesuit rather than leaning on generic rocket imagery. The character reads clearly at all target screen sizes: large helmet, expressive face visible through visor, distinctive silhouette. The alien landscape (yellow-green sky, rocky terrain, floating debris) was styled to evoke classic arcade side-scrollers like Defender; a reference that shaped the entire spatial layout. Obstacle design draws on farm-meets-space humor: pitchforks, scarecrows in spacesuits, hay bales, a cow-tipping tile card. Win state delivers the cow to an alien space station with a MISSION ACCOMPLISHED screen. A tractor (driven by a purple alien) anchors the loss zone.

HUMOR AS DESIGN MATERIAL

I advocated throughout the review for investing in comedic lose states, not as consolation prizes, but as active retention tools. The milk spill / steamed latte lose screen ('It's Latte Time') and the 'Dairy Disaster' title treatment were engineered to produce a laugh rather than a grimace. The position: a patron who laughs at a loss is a patron who replays. This philosophy informed the lose-state animation spec and was accepted by the team as a design principle for the game and as a model for future promotional titles.

REUSE ARCHITECTURE & DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY

Production lead Daniel Adriver framed the goal explicitly: build foundational components that can be iterated across multiple future games rather than rebuilding from scratch. The Rocket Cow physics model (rigid body, moon gravity, Cocos collision components) was scoped as a reusable base. The BPM-style tap manager was identified as an extension of existing rapid-tap infrastructure. I structured the GDD to reflect this: the interactive revealer is the MVP, with the crash mechanism documented as a follow-on once server-driven prize distribution for mid-game branching is solved.

KEY OUTCOMES & DESIGN WINS

- ❖ Two distinct game designs presented and reviewed live (crash mechanism and interactive revealer) both fully documented
- ❖ All compliance and server-architecture blockers for the crash mechanism surfaced, documented, and resolved or deferred appropriately
- ❖ Final mechanic; the interactive revealer was approved for build, with all edge cases (forced win, forced lose, instant collect routing) specified
- ❖ Single server call architecture confirmed: participate fires once before gameplay; all animation is post-outcome storytelling
- ❖ Tractor Beam established as the canonical loss delivery mechanism; elegant, thematic, and technically clean
- ❖ Humor-as-retention principle accepted by the team; lose screens treated with full animation investment
- ❖ Component architecture scoped for reuse across future faux-skill and interactive revealer promo titles
- ❖ Game shipped to G2E timeline with astronaut cow, side-scroll physics, obstacle set, BOOST + INSTANT COLLECT controls, and win/lose state animations fully built