Escape Room: Expectation, discoverability and spoilers

Introduction (description of game and concept):

This synopsis investigates spoilers of different kinds, as found in many different forms of modern media. Since the program we will be making contains surprises, twists, and deceptive hints, the following description will most likely end up revealing - or *spoiling* - various parts of the program that would be more enjoyable to discover on the user's own terms - **like in any other media!**

Description of program:

You are placed into a room where you must explore the environment to find hints and clues in order to escape. The only way out is through a locked door. You may find a container that needs a passcode to open, or a lock that needs a key. If you search hard enough, you can figure out passcodes, open all the locks, find hidden items, and ultimately free yourself. Be aware, you only have a few minutes to find the key and escape.

This program aims to set up a correlation between the notion of fun and the idea of spoilers in media. We all know that sinking feeling when someone ruins a TV or video game moment for us. However, spoilers can occasionally help set expectations for the content you will be interacting with. With this project, we will investigate the line between the two, and look into spoilers in conjunction with the fun found in figuring out riddles and solving problems.

Technical Idea (use of different kinds of syntaxes, libraries and equipment):

Before we begin our coding process, it would be wise to plan out the technical aspects of the program and test them early. To fail fast and often is the most efficient way to spend our ressources, as the fails become more critical the later they show up.

In our final project, we want to engage with management of huge amounts of data in the format of JSON. We will import many self-taken pictures (4 pictures per room to form 360 degrees). These pictures will illustrate what actions might be possible to interact with inside a room. Each object that the player is able to interact with will have its own picture as well. When the player interacts with that object, that picture will be shown. When the player has explored a room,they have the possibility of going into another room. This is repeated until the user finds the key. When the key has been found, the player is able to exit the main door, hence the game has been completed.

We want to create a main menu that gives the player the possibility of starting the game. On the main menu, there's a title, possibly "Escape the Room" and a subtitle, possibly "The key is in the kitchen". There is in fact a key, there is a kitchen, and the key is actually located in the kitchen, however it is not the one that can be used to unlock the main door. The idea here is to make the player believe they have been given the solution immediately upon starting the game.

Concerning the organization of the program, perhaps multiple .js files would be a way to distinguish the rooms from one another. And then we would have a main .js file to connect all the smaller .js pieces. We could also create several HTML files linking one image to each. However, this is seen as a last resort if our other plans go wrong.

We plan to make use of the p5.play library as it gives the opportunity to create sprites. These manage 2D visual objects and feature animation support, collision, mouse and keyboard interactions, et al.. This way, we don't have to define the shapes in terms of coordinates for each single interactable object.

We will be using quite a lot of conditional statements along with boolean expressions to control the different types of events through the game. E.g you shouldn't be able to unlock the door without achieving the key first - simple as that. A way of doing this could be by making a variable with its value set to false by default, and then to change the value to true when the key is found. Then an interaction could be added at the door with a corresponding if-statement to check if the key is found.

Conceptional Idea

Merriam-Webster defines a *spoiler* as someone or something that *spoils*; this referring to the act of damaging, destroying, or ruining something. In relation to modern society's context of the word, a spoiler is something that ruins an experience instead of a an object. Those who feel the consequences of these spoilers are individuals who are lacking specific information that has not yet been revealed to them in context of the media they are interacting with. A good example would be one of the most well-known spoilers of all time; the reveal of Darth Vader being Luke's father in the movie *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). This can, undoubtedly, be considered a spoiler for anyone who has not seen the movies, and the reveal of this fact outside of the context of the story can seriously diminish the enjoyment of the whole franchise.

With the Internet being the massive database of information that it is, spoilers have become a thing that is very hard to avoid. Many online forums, blogs, and websites issue '*spoiler warnings*' on their content to warn people that they will potentially be privy to information outside of the context the original creators intended when they created the media discussed. This includes online threads discussing new movie releases or the latest episode of a TV-show.

People take great care to warn each other about spoilers, especially on the Internet. Part of the reason for this is that the enjoyment of the product, in the context it was meant to be experienced in, far outweighs the need for gathering and acquiring new information about the media. This can be compared to the concept of riddles and puzzles. If faced with a riddle, the whole point of it is to figure out how to solve it. It would be extremely unsatisfactory if someone burst in and gave you the answer as you were sitting there trying to figure out the solution yourself. The riddle, and any enjoyment one could glean from it, has been spoiled by the reveal of the information that was supposed to be the reward for piecing the problem together. It is the same when watching a movie or television series. If someone chose to reveal who the murderer was before a first time viewer even realised a crime had taken place, the viewer would then have been robbed of the chance to piece the mystery together themselves and the satisfaction gained from doing so. Goriunova describes *"humor here is indicative of the pleasure of breakthrough, of thought experimentation, of unconstrained and purposeless but intense and curious and materially specific enquiry"* (Goriunova 2). It is not the act of knowing, but instead the act of figuring out the problem that is the real fun. It is all about the journey, not the destination.

However, spoilers can sometimes act as a good thing. Summaries of various kinds of entertainment help set an expectation for what can be expected to happen. In Agatha

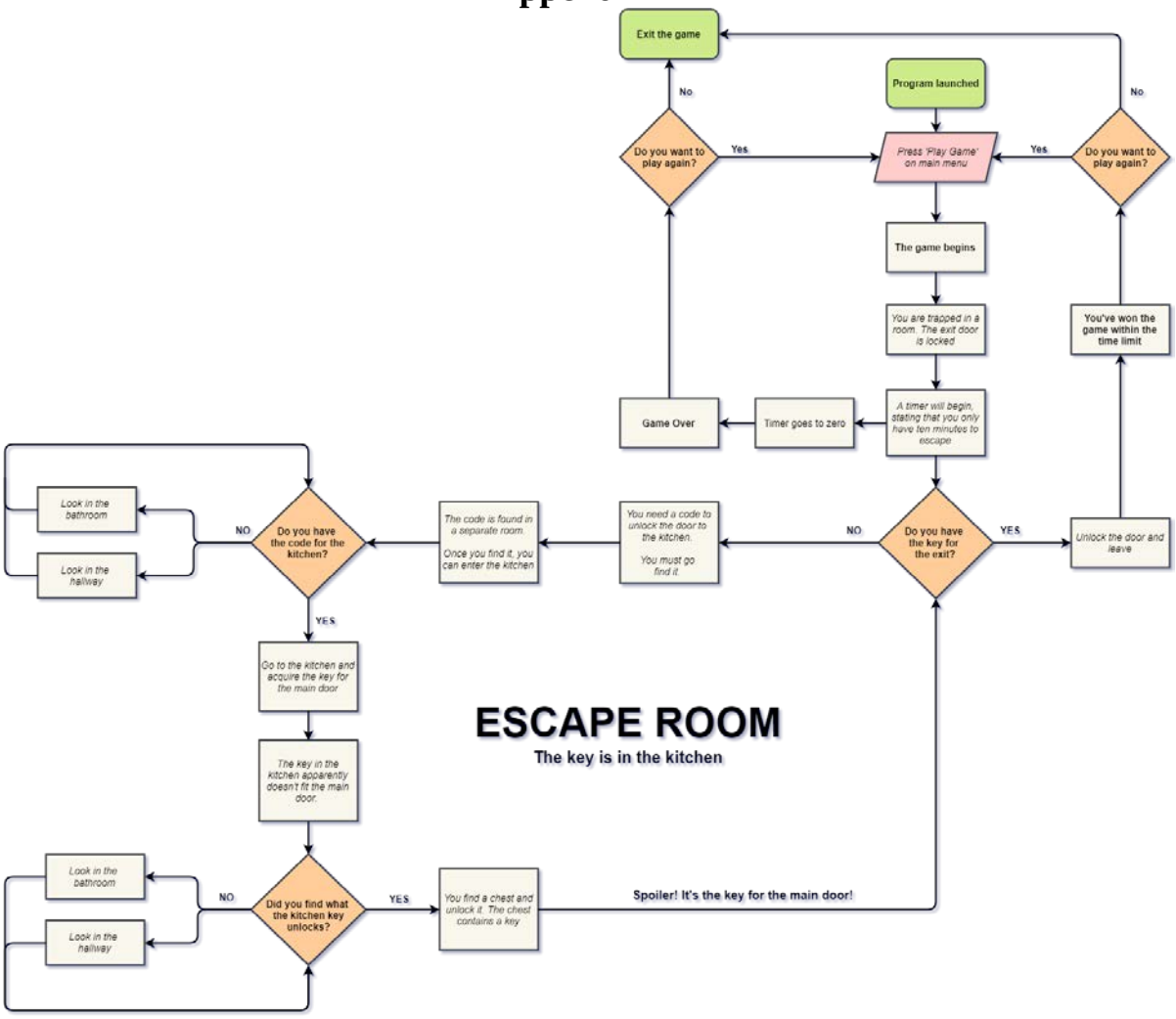
Christie's novel, *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), a lot of information is given to the reader just from the title alone, such as the nature of the crime committed and the location where the story will take place. These kinds of reveals can help set an appropriate expectation about the content of the media that is about to be studied, and can help with filtering out topics and subjects that an individual might prefer to avoid. Certain Internet forums issue what is called '*trigger warnings*' on published works of, especially, art and literature. This serves as a warning that there may be sensitive subjects within the given content that some people might want to avoid. This is technically a spoiler, as it gives information about something out of context of the user's ability to gain that information themselves, but in many cases it is a welcome one, as it allows people to filter out content they deem unsavory or disturbing.

In *Escape Room* this mindset of spoilers is applied to the controls and pacing of a videogame. Just based on the title alone, most people will have a good idea of how the program is going to work, even if they haven't experienced an escape room firsthand, and is as such already a little spoiled in regards to what the program itself will contain and how its controls will function. Escape rooms generally tend to involve "*a team of people [who sign] up to be locked in a room, and must find clues and solve puzzles to complete a given mission and find the key to escape*" (Contrera). *Escape Room* will investigate the potential frustrations felt when a game, whose main purpose is to find clues and solve riddles, gives you the solution up front with little to no input from the user. The feeling of pointlessness at being faced with a riddle you are given no time or option to solve will take the user away from the feeling of fun, as described earlier by Goriunova. However, the program fools the user. It merely acts as if it is giving you the answers, where in reality it is guiding them along a path where they will have to explore their surroundings to find the exit. The program can therefore be seen as a confidence trickster trying to break with the issue of spoilers. Thus, the opening is going to make the user believe the solution has already been given to them, when, in reality, they are only just getting started.

References:

- Goriunova, Oga. *Fun and Software: Exploring Pleasure, Paradox and Pain in Computing*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. 1-19.
- Contrera, Jessica. *It's no puzzle why 'escape room' adventures are so popular.* January 16, 2015. The Washington Post. Visited April 18, 2018: 2 PM https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/its-no-puzzle-why-escape-room-adventures-are-so-popular/2015/01/16/938370de-9b4f-11e4-96cc-e858eba91ced_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9b594c63aef2

Appendix A


Exit the game
Program launched
No
No
Do you want to play again?
Yes
Press 'Play Game' on main menu
Yes
Do you want to play again?
The game begins
You are trapped in a room. The exit door is locked
You've won the game within the time limit
A timer will begin, stating that you only have ten minutes to escape
Game Over
Timer goes to zero
Look in the bathroom
Look in the hallway
NO
Do you have the code for the kitchen?
The code is found in a separate room.
Once you find it, you can enter the kitchen
You need a code to unlock the door to the kitchen.
You must go find it
NO
Do you have the key for the exit?
YES
Unlock the door and leave
YES
Go to the kitchen and acquire the key for the main door
ESCAPE ROOM
The key is in the kitchen
The key in the kitchen apparently doesn't fit the main door.
Look in the bathroom
Look in the hallway
NO
Did you find what the kitchen key unlocks?
YES
You find a chest and unlock it. The chest contains a key
Spoiler! It's the key for the main door!