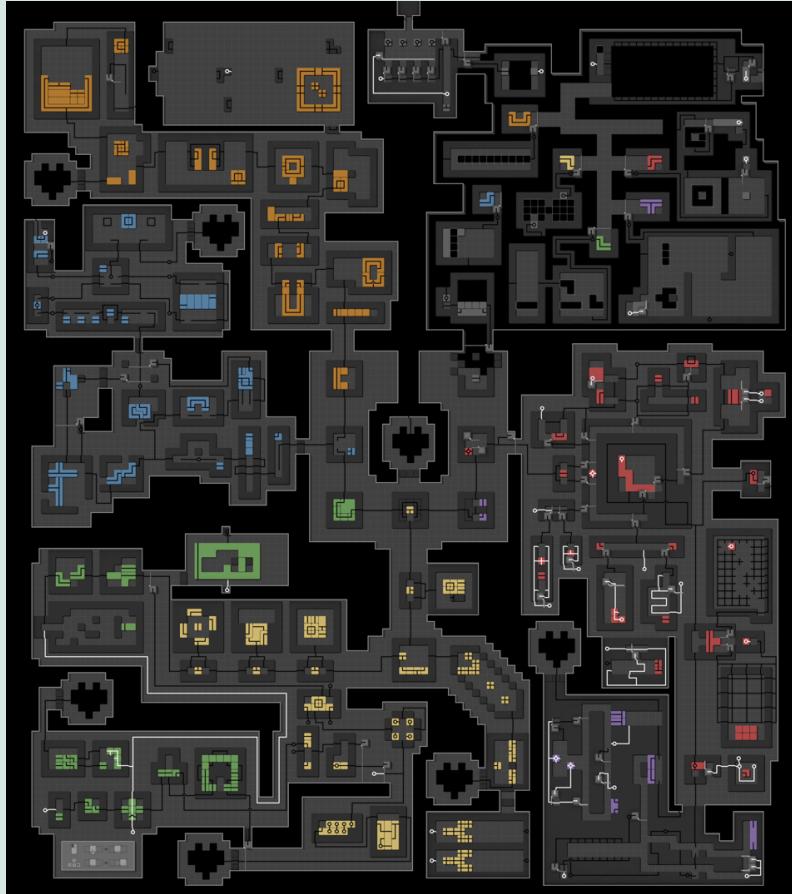


Silly reasons to not make a puzzle game

Cerise Talis
(she/they)

Background

- OPLAYER
- List of things I used to believe
- This talk will make your life harder



OPLAYER (2025)

Background

Luckily, I worked on the game long enough that I had time to come up with something better.

– Lucas Pope, *Obra Dinn Modeling Timelapse*

“Impossible to extract”

Extraction: Puzzlehunt term for *puzzle output*

- Impossible for computers, possible for players
- Post-modern \neq Stopping too soon

“Impossible to extract”



Opus Magnum (2017)



Half-Life: Alyx (2020)

“Solutions are non-unique”

- Pen-and-paper habits (forward setting)
- Boxing up ambiguities
- Make smaller puzzles

“Wouldn’t quiz the player enough”

- Making puzzles easier is the bulk of the work
- A friend wouldn’t quiz you
- You’re not obligated to grade the player



Storyteller (2023)

“Lacks a big twist”

- Quizzing the player
- Don’t undermine your game’s confidence
- You’re not obligated to gaslight the player

“No musical bird”

- Sokoban is not the lowest level your system exists in
- When you paint the bird, you begin to spite the bird
- Sokoban is a thick brush

The difficulty of notating a vocal line that preserves the integrity of spoken words is not a small one, but neither is it insurmountable... and the compensations are large.

Few orthodox musicians would call such vocal lines "musical," and Combarieu declares that the songs of birds are not "musical" either, because they are "very difficult to take down in notation."

Will some divine power please create a "musical" bird to sing the Air for G String in exact Equal Temperament for M. Combarieu?

– Harry Partch, *Genesis of a Music* (2nd ed.), 45-46

Apparatus of a Sokoban

1. Square grid
2. Player character
3. Solutions are sequences of directional inputs
4. Player pushes crates
5. Walls block player and crates
6. Multipush (or lack thereof)
7. Interactions take place in a world of physics
8. Linear, discrete time, with dead-end states
9. Undo stack management
10. Level ends immediately once solved

“Doesn’t work without words”

- Your game is not pure maths
- Subtle prerequisites
- Using natural terms → Hesitation minimized

“Doesn’t work without words”



Dr. Robotnik's Ring Racers (2024)



Vividlope (2023)

“Undo stack management too fuzzy”

Designing to reveal the nature of the undo stack. – Katelyn Δ

- You're right to be concerned with the moment-to-moment
- If your game needs an undo stack... you have options

“Undo stack management too fuzzy”



*Trifolium: The Adventures
of Gary Pretzelneck
(upcoming)*



Jack's Sokoban (2022)

“Motivated by spite”

I am surprised that among so many rare minds who would have done this much better than I, there was no one who had the patience to unravel these things and that they almost all imitated those travelers who leaving the main road to take a crossroad remain lost in the brambles and precipices.

– René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*,
as translated by John Cottingham

“Afraid of edge cases”

- What's useful to you is useful to your players
- Animations are helpful



Rivals of Aether (2017)

“Induces analysis paralysis”

- Common in boardgame design
- Overly concerned with player discomfort
- Be a friend, but don't feel like a burden

“Requires pre-existing trust”

- Right now is the first time your game could ever be made
- Be generous, be kind <3

- Impossible to extract
- Solutions are non-unique
- Wouldn't quiz the player enough
- Lacks a big twist
- No musical bird
- Doesn't work without words
- Undo stack management too fuzzy
- Induces analysis paralysis
- Motivated by spite
- Afraid of edge cases
- Requires pre-existing trust

Thanks to...

Abi

Autumn

Katelyn Δ

Seren☆

cerisetalis.com

