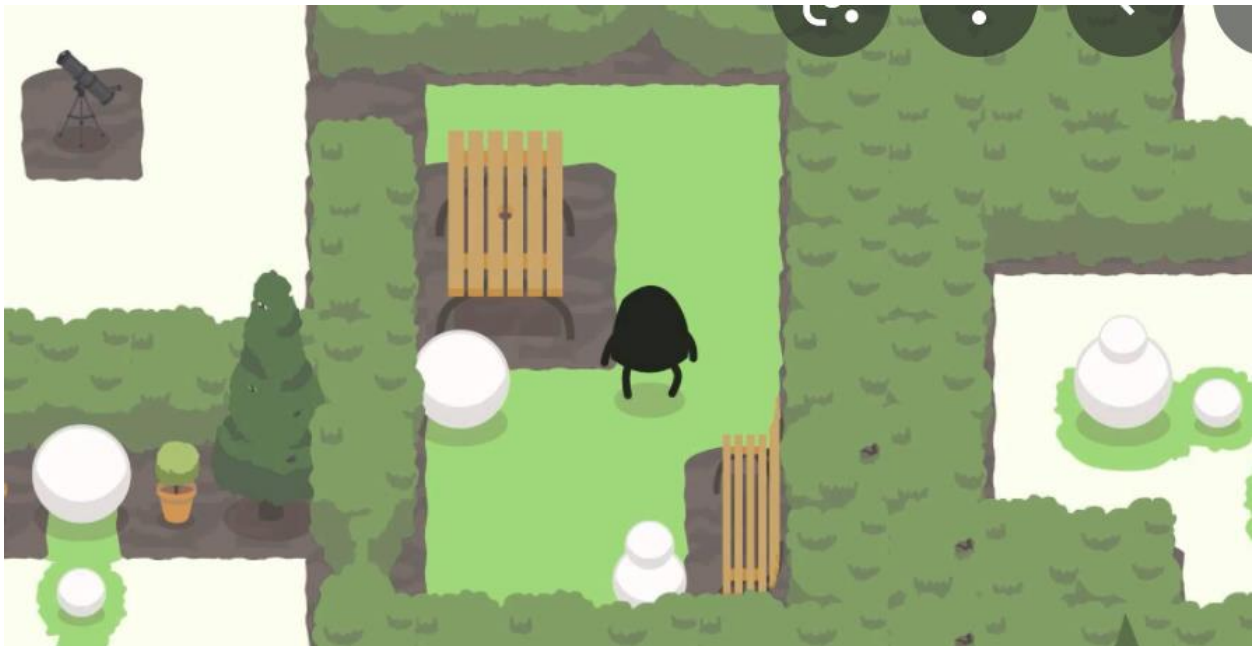


## Chapter 1 Reading Response

I used to think that puzzle games were a waste of time. If you're going to work your brain anyway, why play a game? Why not read a book? Solve some math problems? Practice technique on an instrument? However, as my exposure to puzzle games grew, I started to realize that perhaps puzzle games were the only medium through which a designer could convey a particular sense of play, thoughtfulness, and beauty in an interactive and functional format. Indeed, it seems that puzzle games perfectly capture the essence of Principle 1.7 in chapter 1 of *Artful Design*: design is an articulation of preference. We prefer to solve problems with aesthetic solutions, and the constraints around these problems and solutions are completely controlled by the game designer.

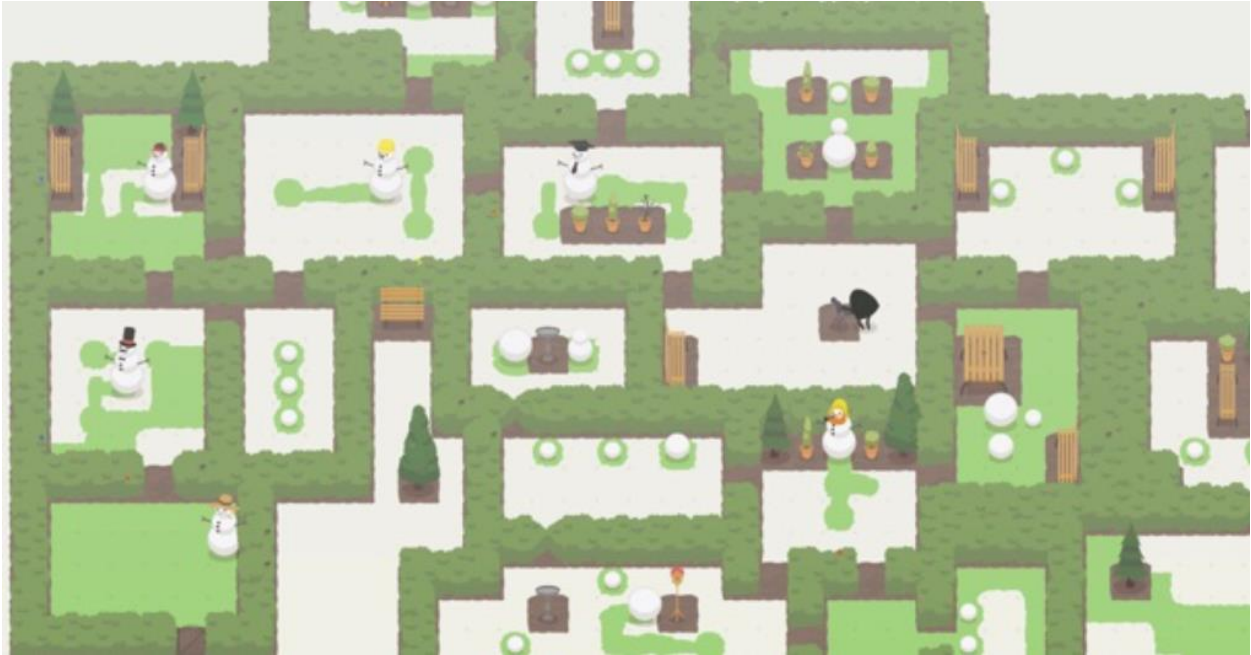
Take, for instance, a game called *A Good Snowman is Hard to Build*. (Spoilers below!)



You are a cute, faceless anthropomorphic blob whose only purpose is to roll snowballs on top of each other to construct snowpeople (who are bestowed accessories and names upon completion). The controls are simple and the interface is intuitive.

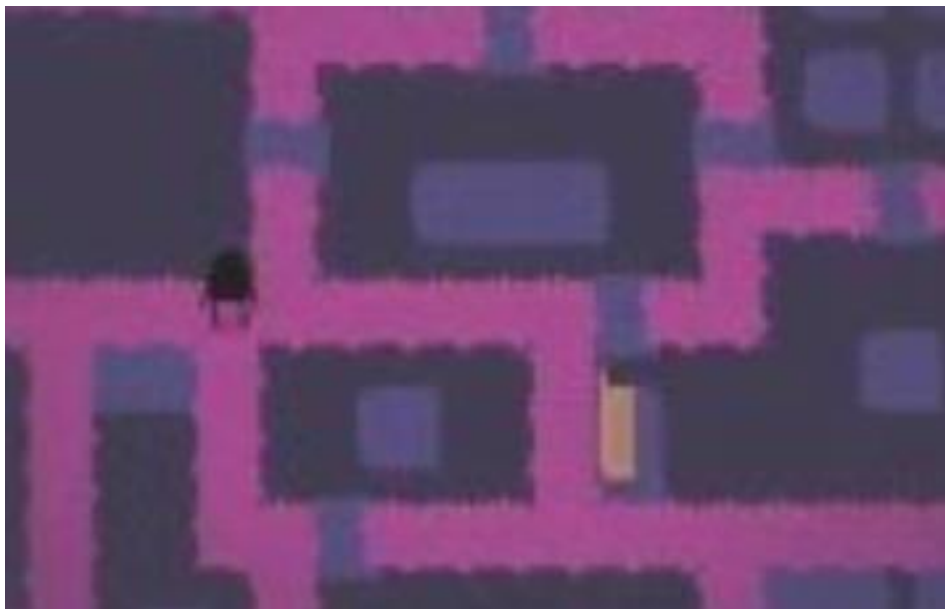


Already, the pragmatic problem as described on page 38 has been introduced. The sense of completion from finishing a snowperson is inherently satisfying and feels purposeful. The aesthetic of the game appeals to the inner child of any human who has ever played in the snow. As shown below, the landscape is massive and the task is daunting at first, but the serenity and simplicity of the surroundings assuages any sense of distress or apprehension in the player.



As the game progresses and the player's skill develops, they start to realize that there are multiple solutions to each mini-puzzle. The game never explicitly addresses this and the player actually can complete the entire landscape, never knowing that there is in fact significance to the solution they choose. After completion of the above landscape, the game gives you nothing. No feel-good credits scene, no cutesy animation with all the snowpeople. Nothing.

Until, of course, you try to leave from the entrance through which you entered the landscape (on the bottom left). Then, you are mysteriously transported into this mirror world.



All of a sudden, the familiar and serene landscape from before has been flipped and tinted an ominous red. There are snowballs here, but most of them are in the wrong place and you can't seem to build very many snowpeople.

Eventually, you figure out that the locations of the mirror world snowballs are precisely the spots where the snowpeople in the real world are constructed. Finally, as meta-principle 1.4 on page 33 describes, the precision naturally afforded by your solutions is addressed. And of course it is this way! Of course it should matter which solution you pick, because “design is both precise and tacit... present but invisible”! The developers did not make a mistake in allowing multiple solutions. This sense of purpose, this sense of inevitability, is one of the best glimpses of the sublime I've had in a video game. My delayed awe at the realization of synergy between the real and mirror worlds and simultaneous fear of the designer's foresight and scope conveyed “the immensity of everything and [my] part in it, however minuscule” (as described on page 50). In addressing the need for clarity and cohesion, the game designers of *A Good Snowman is Hard to Build* perfectly embodied Principle 1.17: design should (and did) understand me. The mirror to life, in an almost literal sense, made me feel, and feel human, about the simplistic act of building from snow. At the end of the day, I had to redo almost every single snowperson from the real world in order to line up the mirror world snowballs properly, but the sheer aesthetic principle behind my actions was more than sufficient as a driving force.

Needless to say, I no longer think puzzle games are a waste of time.