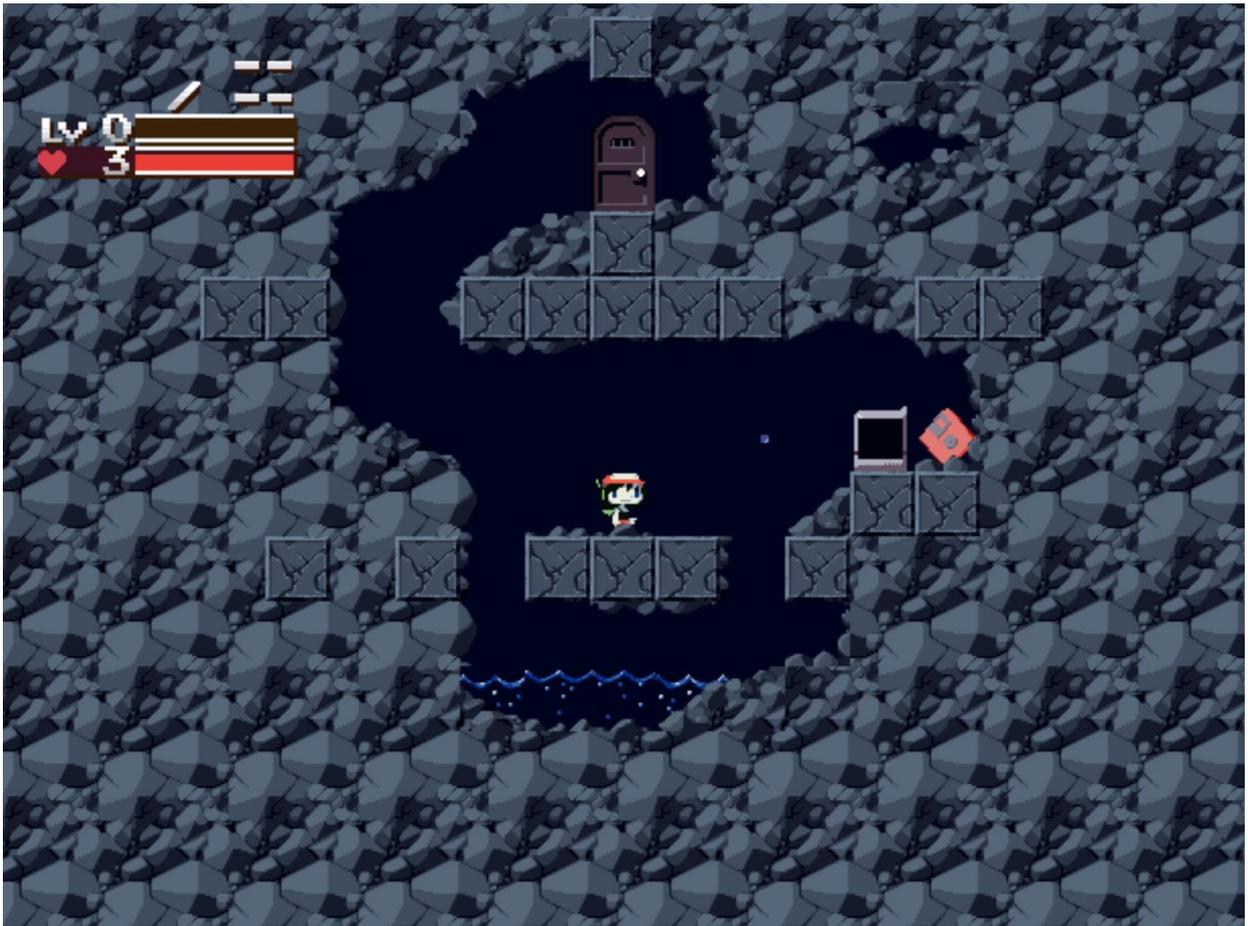


## Chapter 6 Reading Response

As a person who plays a lot of video games, I found this chapter to be a great opportunity to reflect on the games I like and why I like them. This serves at least two purposes: one, I get a better sense of the games I'd like to design, and two, I get a better sense of the games I'd like to play next. When I compose music, I aim to compose things I would want to listen to, and I imagine my process for designing games would be similar. Thus, I will aim to break down a game I deeply care about in this reading response.

Cave Story is one of my favorite games of all time, and I'd like to give a breakdown of it using page 313 of *Artful Design*. The game plops you down in the middle of this first cave with no instructions on any of the mechanics. A slightly anachronistic floppy disk reads as a place to



save, while the heart box reads as a place to heal. Already, the game appeals to the aesthetics of fantasy and discovery from Principle 6.4; the player has no choice but to explore the keyboard to find the controls (arrow keys and Z/X) and then explore the world with that resulting knowledge. The controls are extremely tight, adding to the sensation aspect, and the difficulty of the platforming in the subsequent areas (plus the fact that you are [temporarily] unarmed) provides the obstacles to overcome.

As the game progresses (I will avoid spoilers), the narrative unfolds in a fairly surface-level manner. Once escaping the first cave (with a gun!), you are dropped into a village of rabbits (called Mimigas) and become absorbed into their village drama. Despite becoming attached to



the cute little robot character that you are, you actually never find out the robot's name. This is, to me, both a subversion and embodiment of principle 6.5; though our main character doesn't

have a name that humanizes them, it makes perfect sense. It's a robot. And yet, being nameless gives us the flexibility to see ourselves in those shoes and is in fact more conducive to projecting our own emotions and actions onto this mechanical vessel.

My favorite thing about the game is that though you unravel a sinister plot about a magical crown that has fallen into the wrong hands, the true ending is never explicitly mentioned; one could beat the whole game without realizing that if your character makes the right series of complex decisions in the middle to the end of the game, you will unlock an ending with incredible plot development to answer any questions you may have had. Indeed, there are only 2 hints that anything is amiss in the regular ending, one being a character in the credits that you don't actually meet normally. The designer of this game clearly meant for this to be a hidden gem within the game's structure, and this is an aesthetic of the game that I am not sure fits cleanly into any of the categories provided. Yes, one could discover this, but the sense of awe I felt when I investigated the game further is unmatched in most other games I have played thus far.

Another awe-inspiring element of the game is that it was actually made entirely by one person over the course of 5 years (released in 2004, and to this day, completely for free). The developer, Daisuke Amaya, actually had no formal background in music, art, game design, or writing, and most impressively to me, he even wrote the software to compose the music (which still comprises one of my favorite soundtracks ever). This is another aspect of the aesthetic of the game; it becomes that much better when you realize just how much effort and passion have been imbued into every nuance of the story, dynamics, and atmosphere.

Cave Story is certainly not a polished, refined, AAA release, but just one person alone has managed to craft an experience that has touched the hearts of so many, so deeply. Perhaps

the lack of formal training even contributed to this phenomenon: Amaya had no choice but to speak directly from his heart when designing this experience. He had no other tools to rely on, and yet this allowed him to design exactly the game he wanted to design, with no other influences to guide (or corrupt) his aesthetic North Star.

What does this mean for 256A? I don't know...