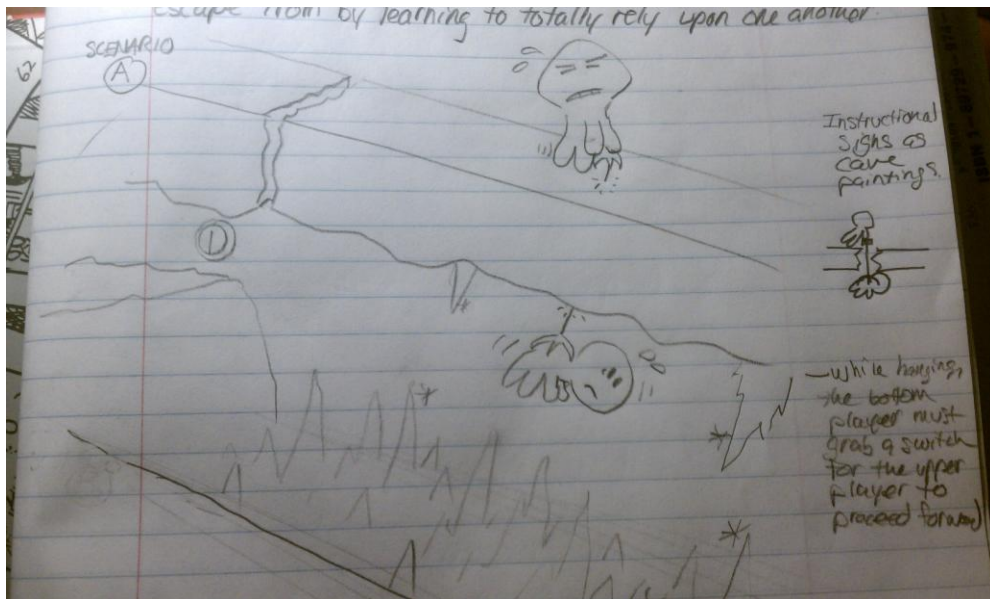


The Cave

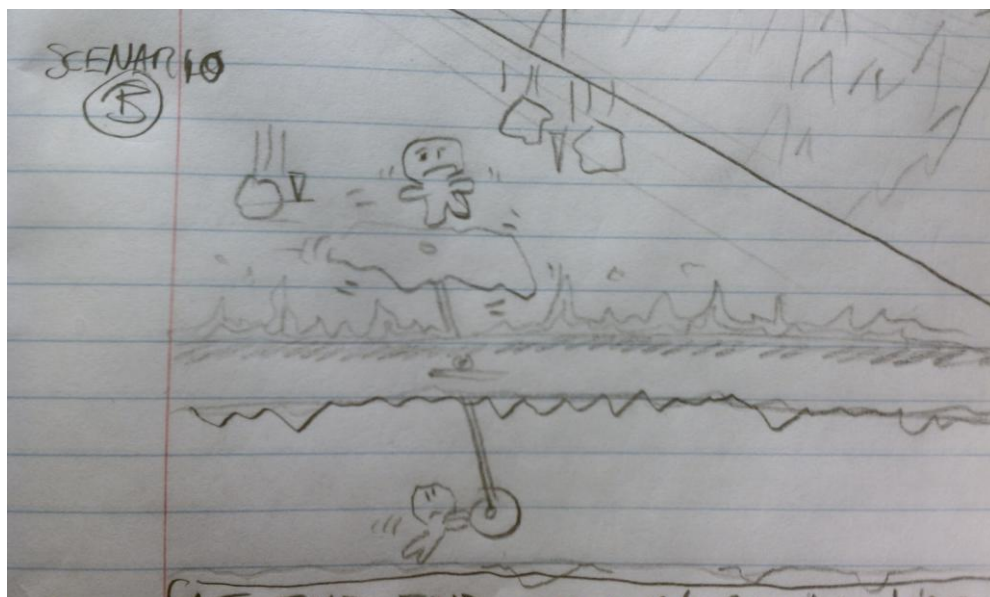
A LittleBigPlanet 2 level by John Pray
ENGL425

Unfortunately, the resources for video capture were not available. Below are screenshots and excerpts from the game's dialog script, with some explanation. The in-game screenshot capture tool does not capture dialog; any dialog examples have been taken with a camera or appear in the captions. A look at some behind-the-scenes workings follows.

This experimental level attempts to make a cooperative story-driven experience, not goal-driven and with multiple possible outcomes. Great lengths were gone to to ensure that the facial expressions of the player characters could be changed depending on the context (by the game, not the player) and so that the players could have constant dialog throughout the level (also set by the creator, to be triggered depending on where the players go and what they do).



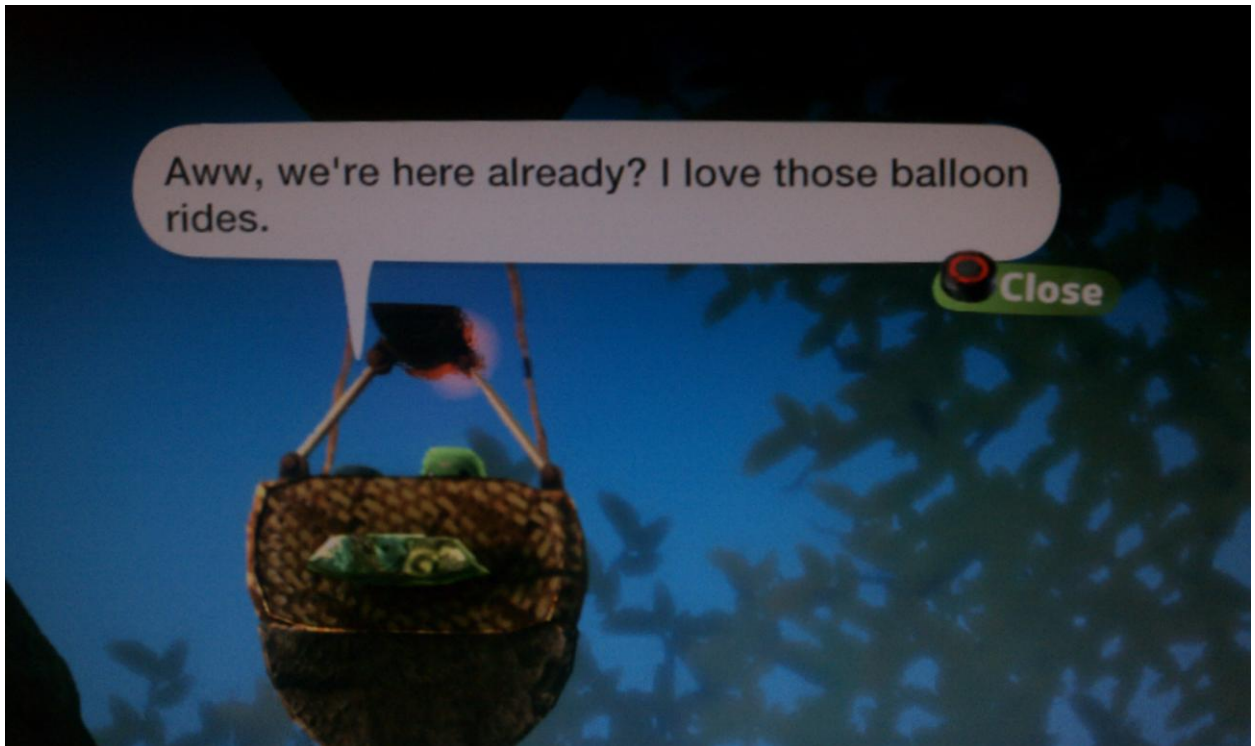
Concept Art



Concept Art



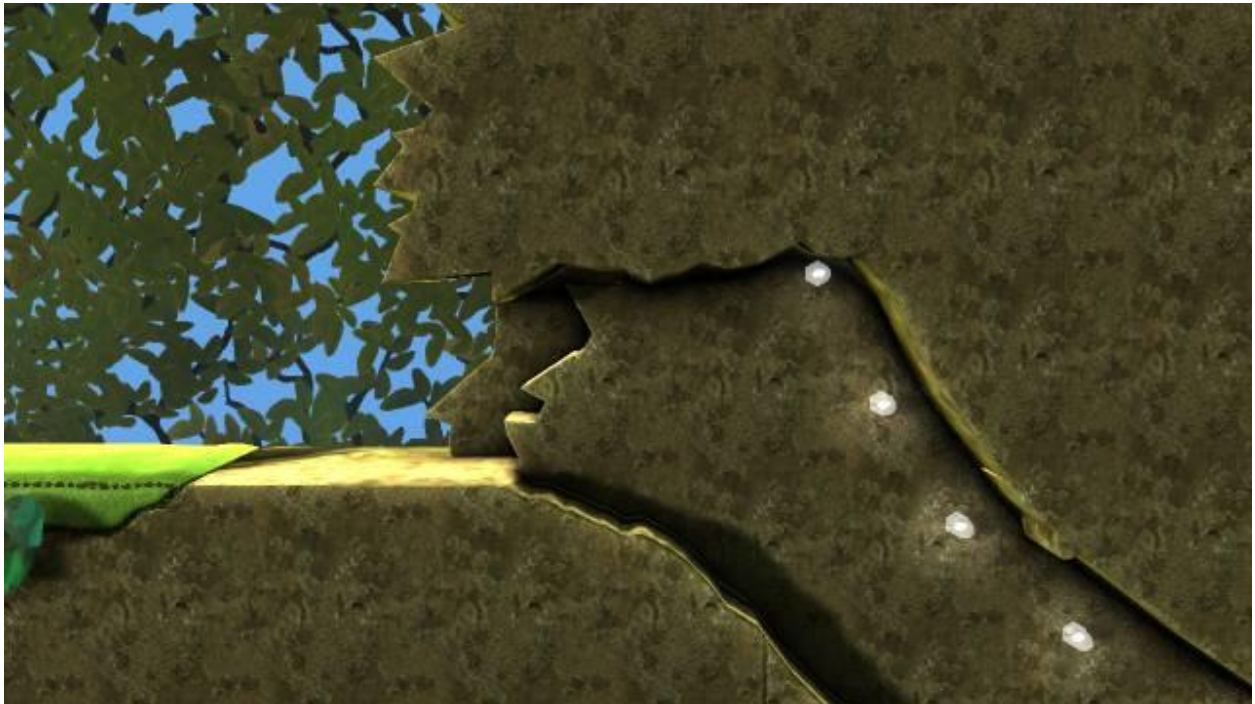
The game starts. "The green one" and "the blue one" (controlled by players 1 and 2 respectively) descend in their hot air balloon. The music is relaxing.



Landing. Dialog is done with text in speech bubbles for the two player characters.



Walking from the balloon. Green, Blue, a sign, and a trash bin. The cave is up ahead!
Green: "This must be it! I've been looking forward to this all week."
Blue: "What a nerd!"



Entrance to the cave. The music changes to a quieter piece.



It's full of cave paintings!
Blue: "Hey, it looks like us!"



Elevator to the lower level.



Blue: "Rhino!"

Green: "Reminds me James and the Giant Peach. A rhino killed his parents, you know."



Blue: "AHH! SPIDERS!"

Green: "Relax, kid! They're just more paintings. Though I'll admit that they're getting creepier..."

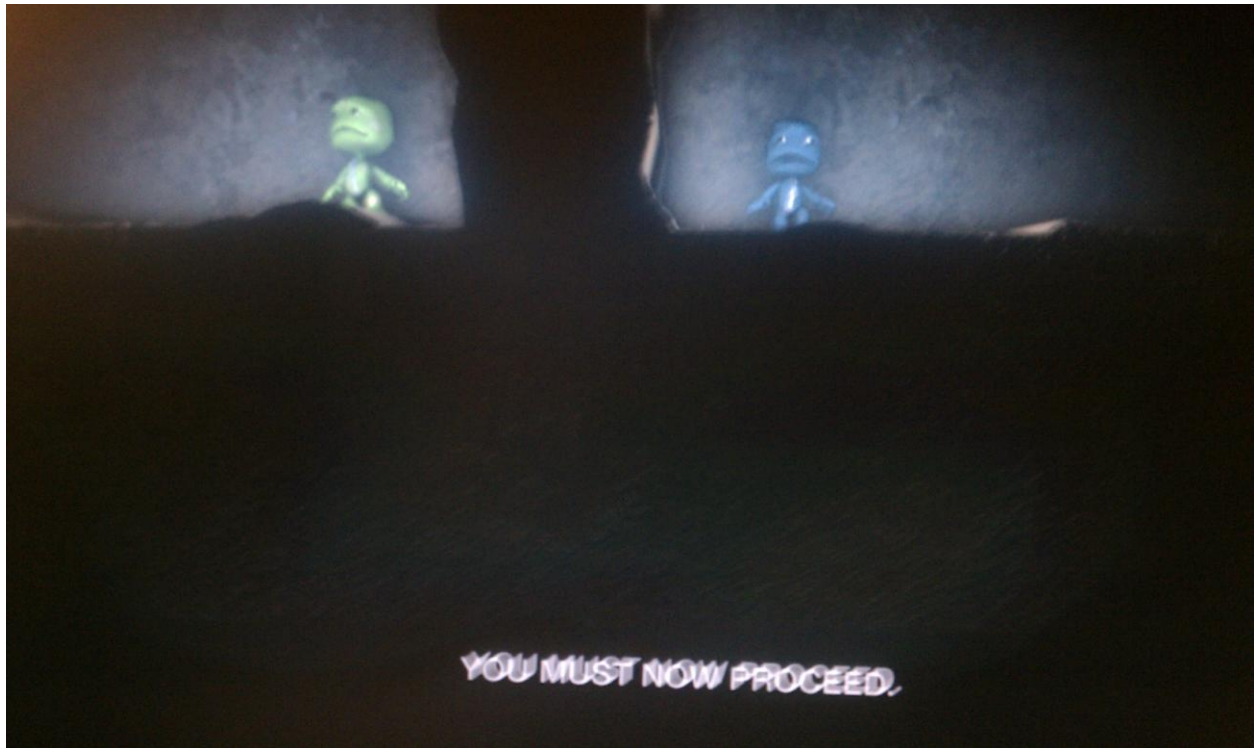
At this point, the players have a game-changing decision to make. Blue get scared and wants to go back. Green wants to continue. If they go back, they can go all the way back, up the elevator, and up in the balloon, bickering the whole way. If they continue into the cave, they soon fall through the floor and can't go back.



The floor dramatically falls away, accompanied by loud rumbles and dramatic music. The lights fade away as the Blue and Green fall for what seems like forever.



The lights fade back up. Green and Blue are separated by a solid wall.



A disembodied voice speaks. A subtitles-like effect and capital letters are used to imply that the voice is loud and seems to be coming from everywhere.

B: "I'm alive!" G: "Kid, is that you?" B: "It's me I hear you! We're alive!"

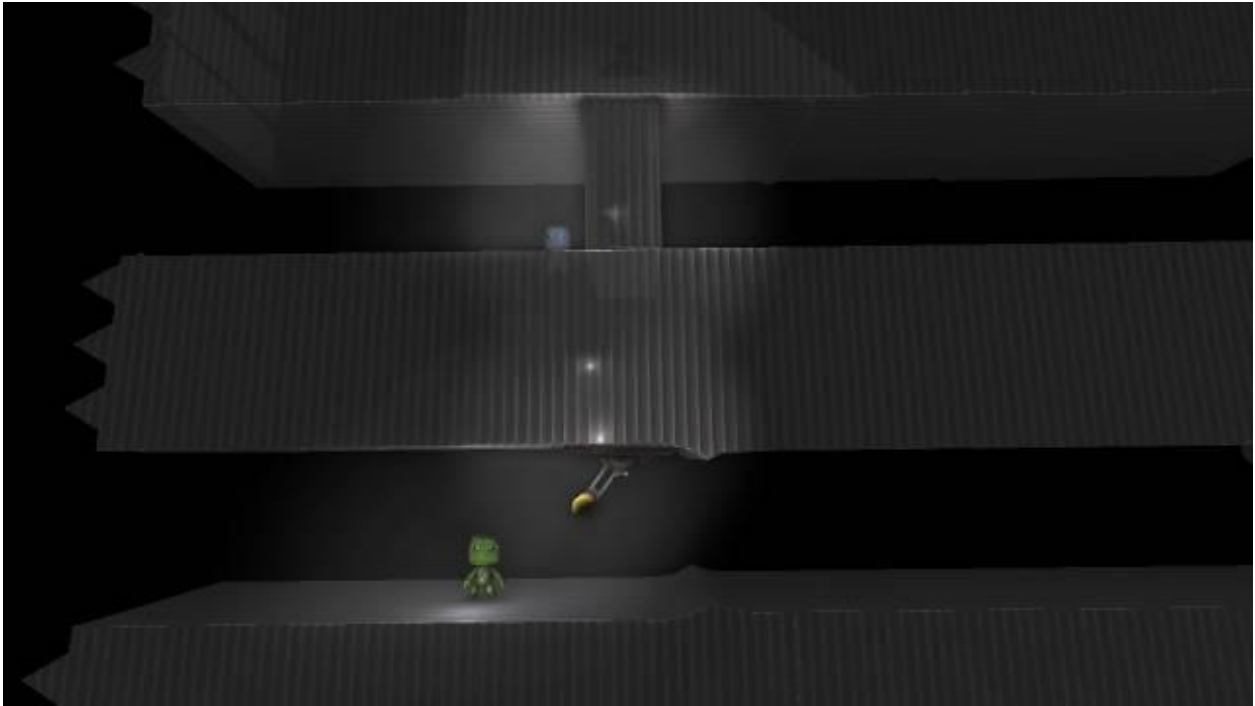
Voice: "YOU HAVE CHOSEN YOUR PATH."

G: "What the...?"

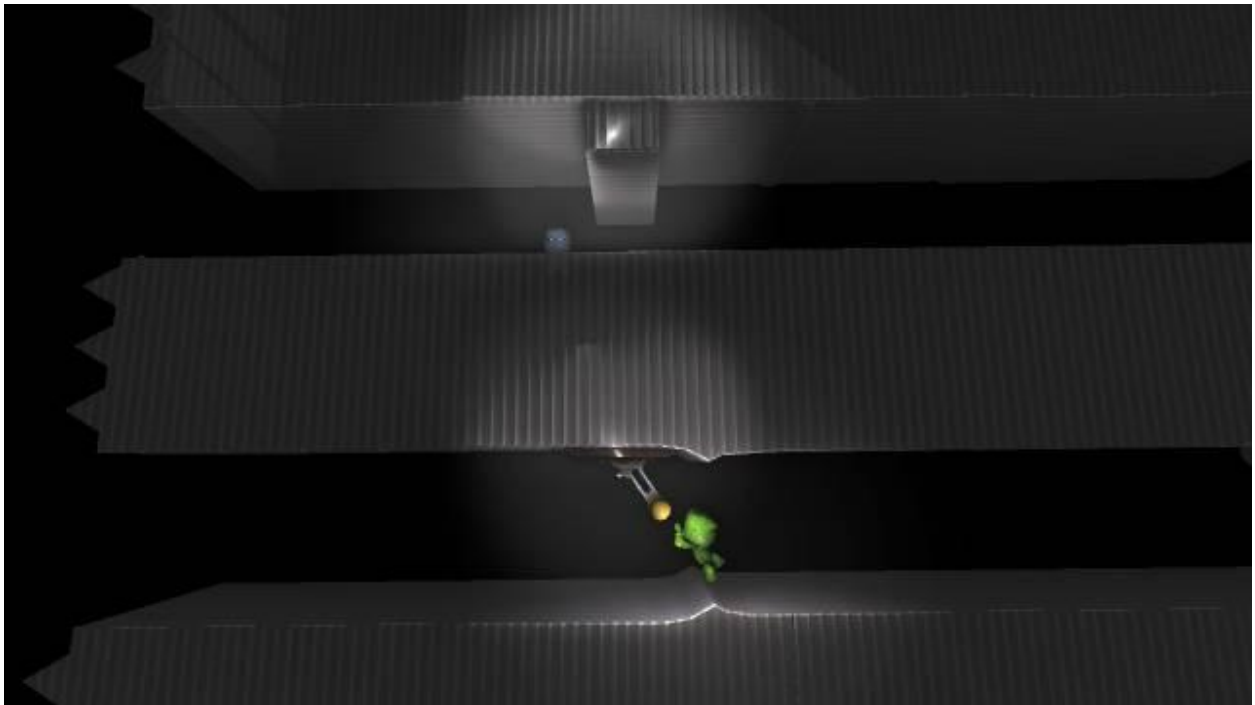
Voice: "YOU MUST NOW PROCEED."

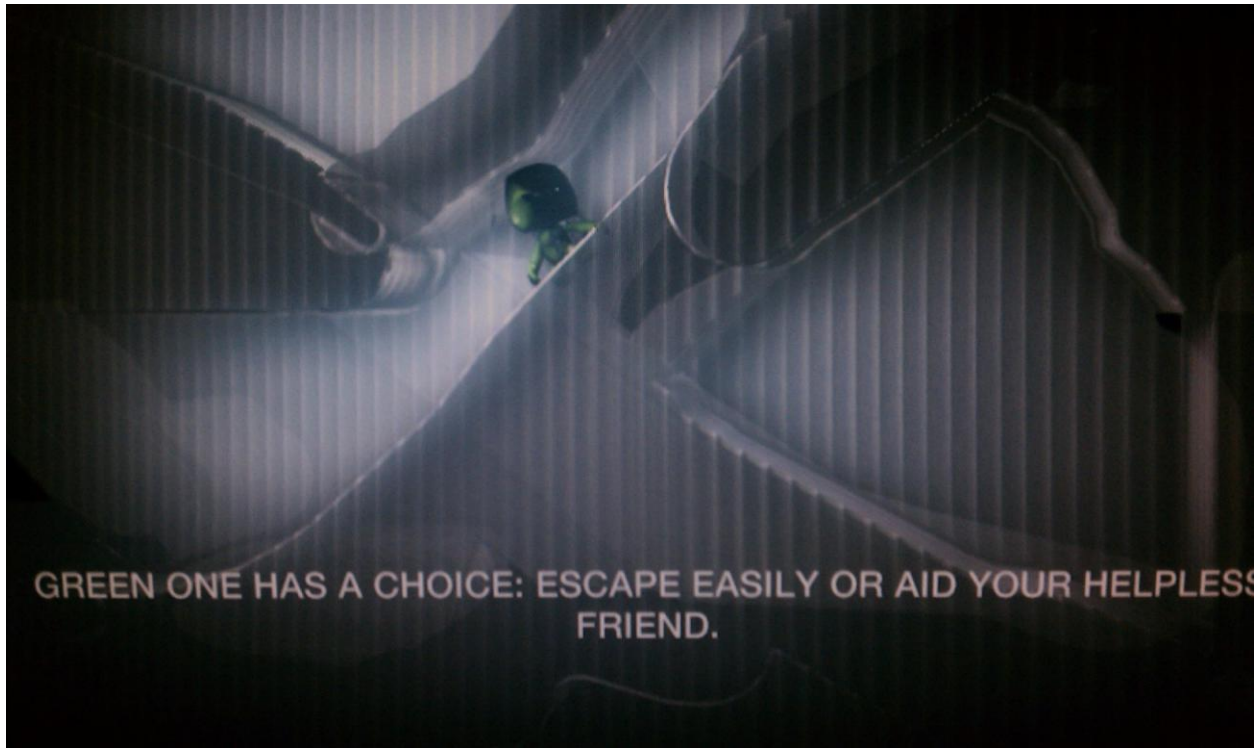
B: "I...I'm scared!" G: "Me too, buddy. But let's just try to get out of here."





In their separate tunnels (now made out of some kind of white plastic material, as Blue comments, instead of stone), Blue encounters a door and Green a switch. Green must pull the switch if Blue is to proceed. *Note: From here on out, Green always has the choice of simply walking on and leaving Blue behind, while Blue is totally dependent upon Green to get him past the obstacles in his tunnel.*



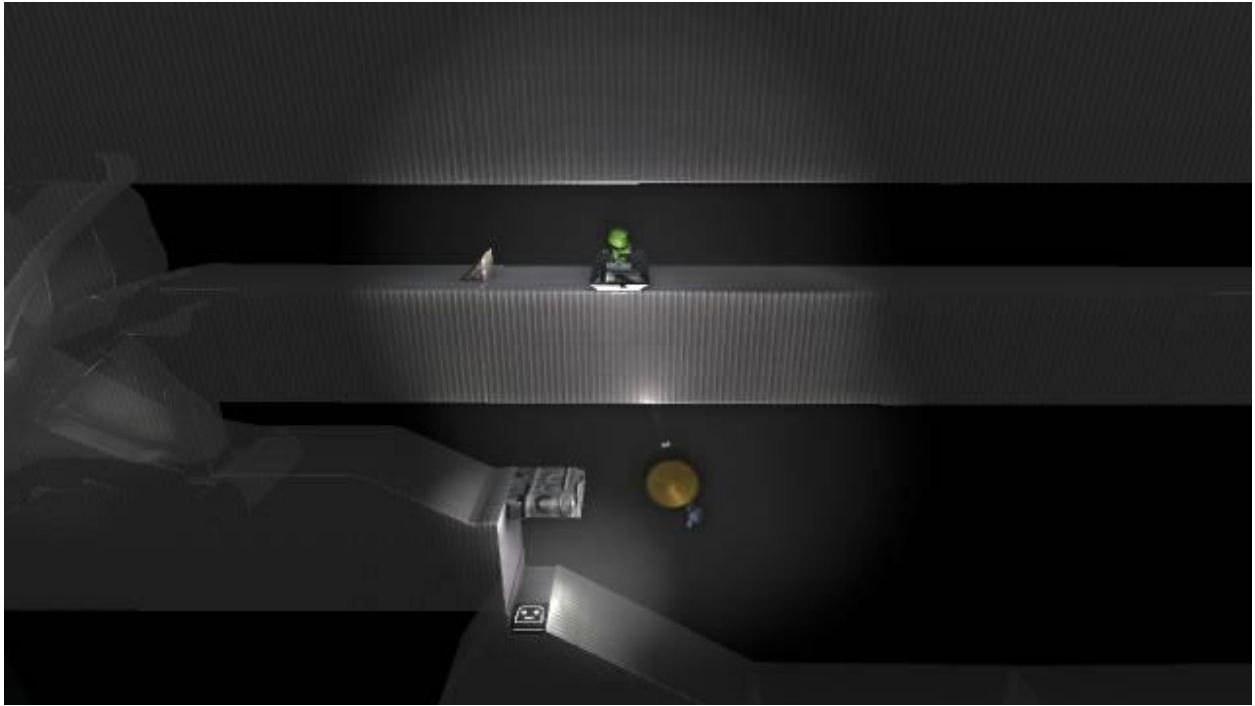


The Voice makes sure the players and the player characters are aware of this. Green's response: "What IS this...?!"

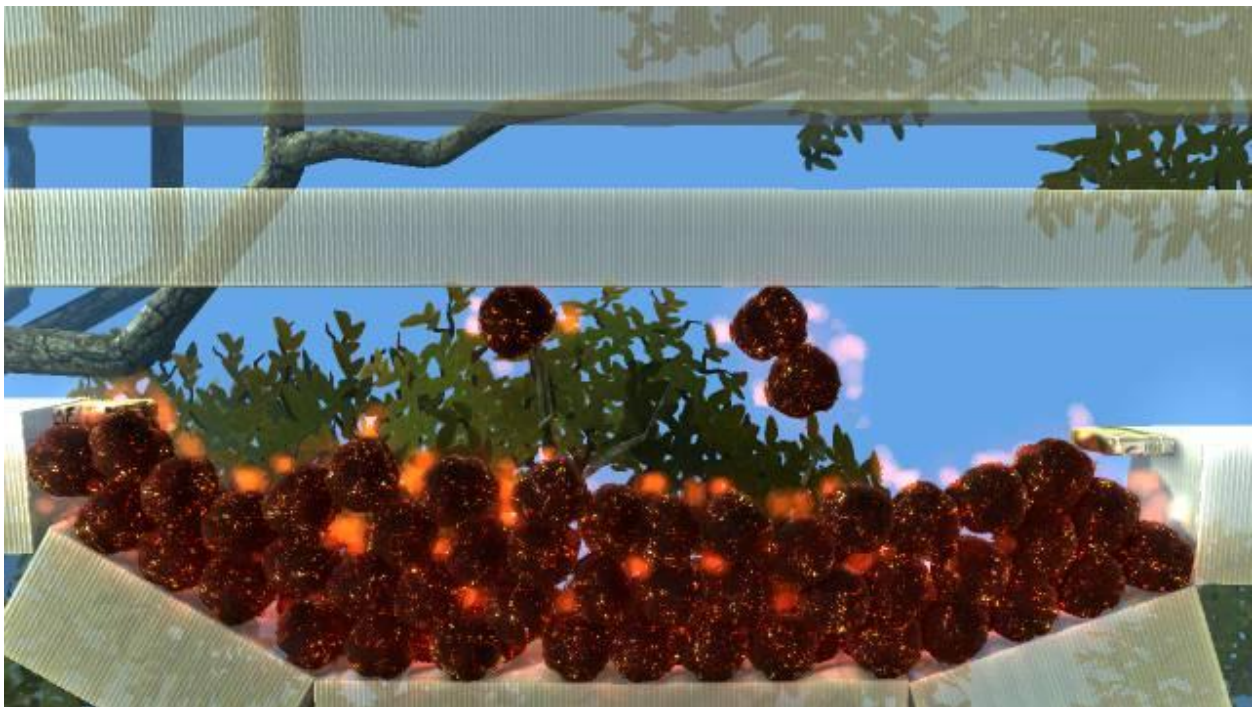
Green soon comes upon a machine which he can get into a control. It can slowly move to the left and right, and the player can also control the length of the chain attached to it, with the grabbable ball on the end down in Blue's tunnel.

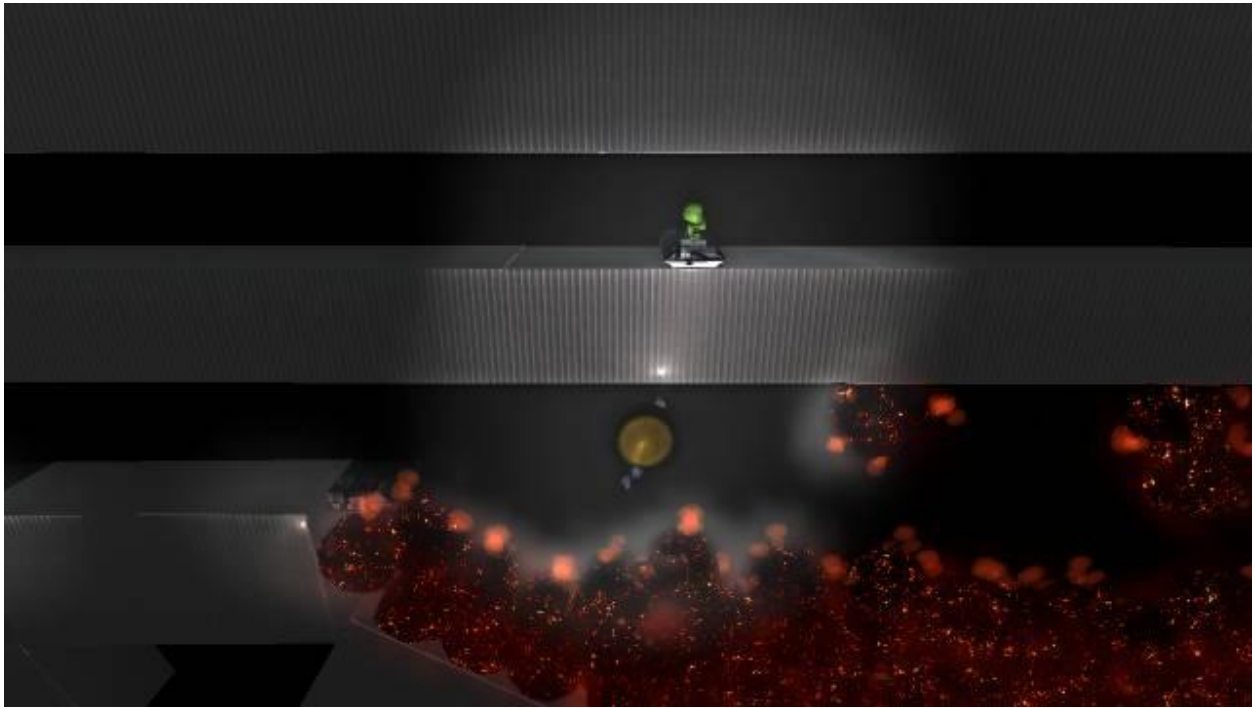
To get across the pit, Blue must hang onto the ball while Green directs it across with his vehicle.



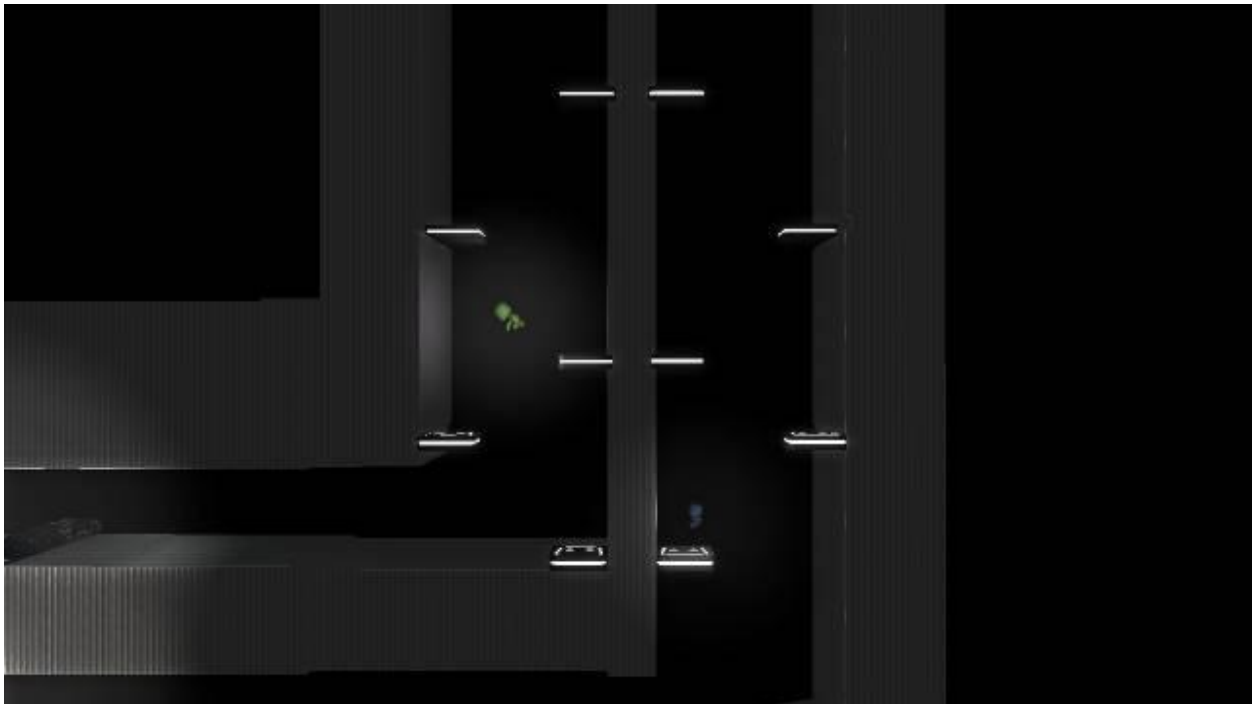


The first pit is empty. If Blue falls in, he can get back up for another try (Green willing) using the bounce pad at the left side of the pit. The second pit, however, is filled with deadly burning coals. Blue won't survive more than one brush with one of these, so Green must be very careful in how he positions the vehicle and Blue's grabbable ball. If Blue falls to his death, the game ends. If Green just leaves him behind alive, he can escape on his own. Green must decide whether the risk is worth it. The Voice warns them: "BEWARE, BLUE ONE: FROM HERE ON, THERE ARE NO SECOND CHANCES. DO YOU REALLY TRUST YOUR COMPANION?"





After the fire pit, the tunnels turn upwards and bounce pads let the players climb upwards. If Green has come this far alone, the camera will still pull back to show Blue's empty tunnel as green ascends, making the absence remembered.





At the top of the tunnel, the characters have reached the end of their trials! After both levels are pulled (which can be done by only one player if necessary), the elevator slowly ascends and the screen fades to white.

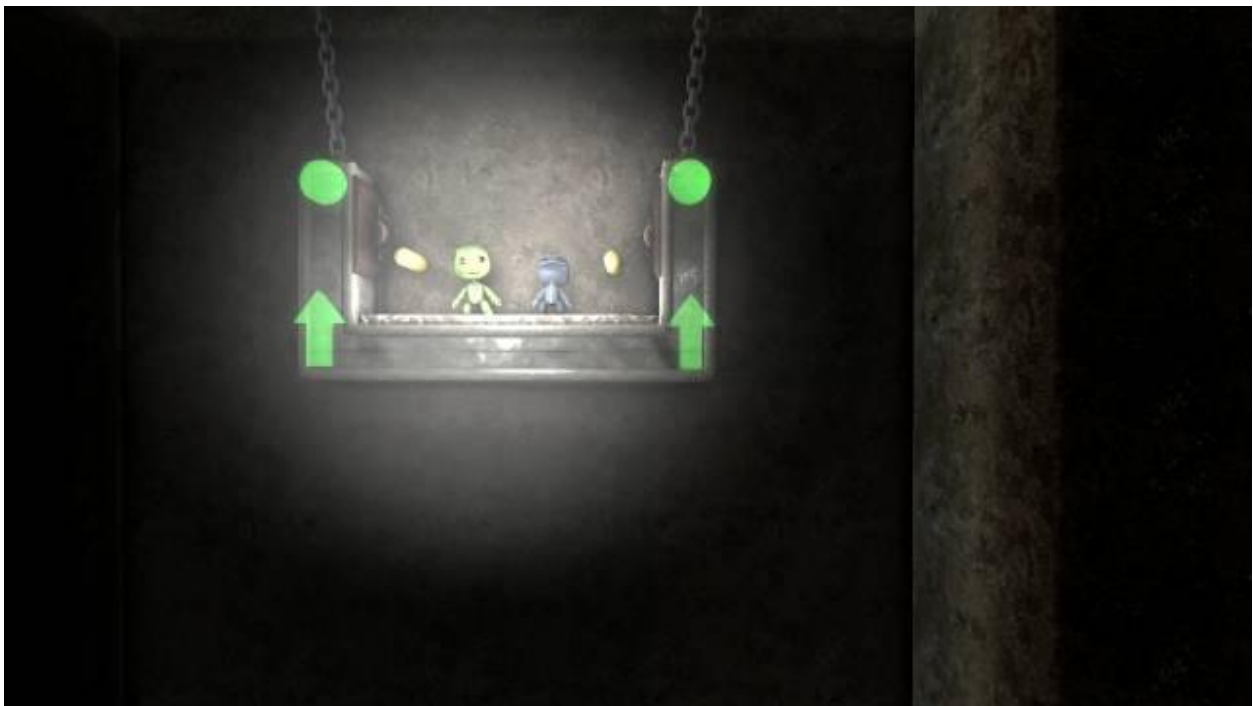
If both players have made it, they both smile and congratulate each other on their escape.

Voice: "TWO ENTER; TWO DEPART. FAREWELL."

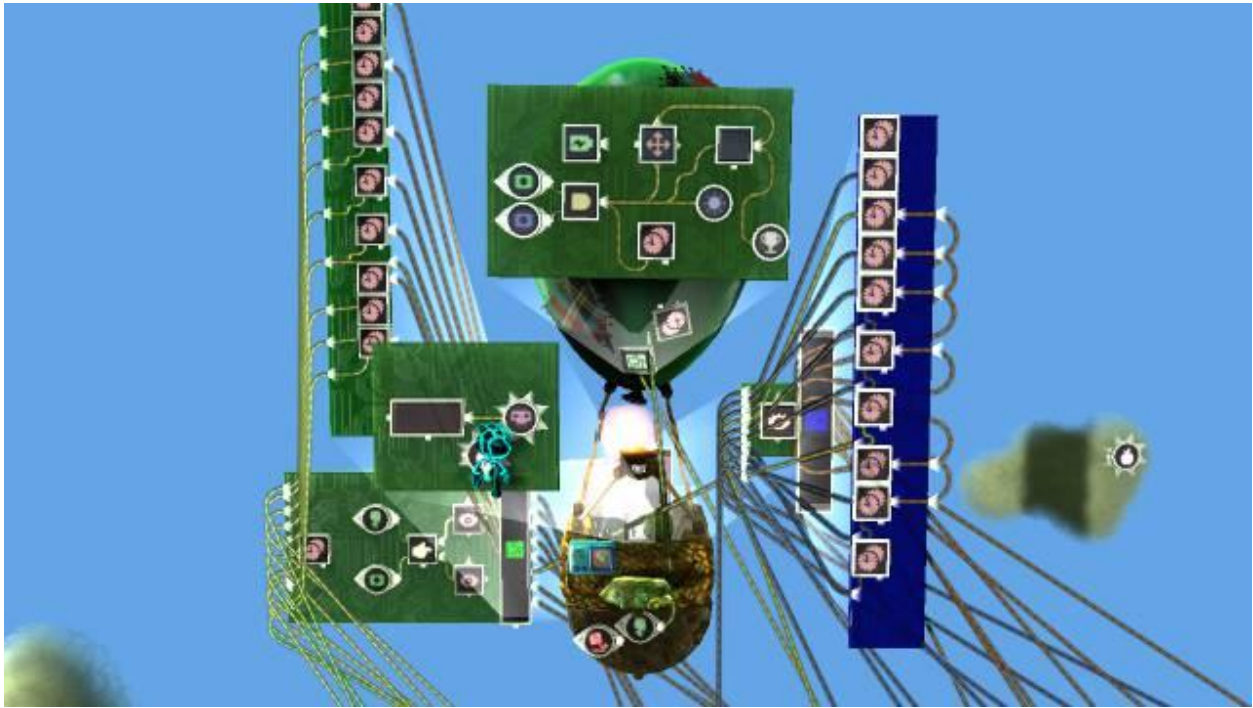
If only Green is present, he frowns as he ascends alone.

Voice: "TWO ENTER; ONE DEPARTS. GOOD LUCK..."

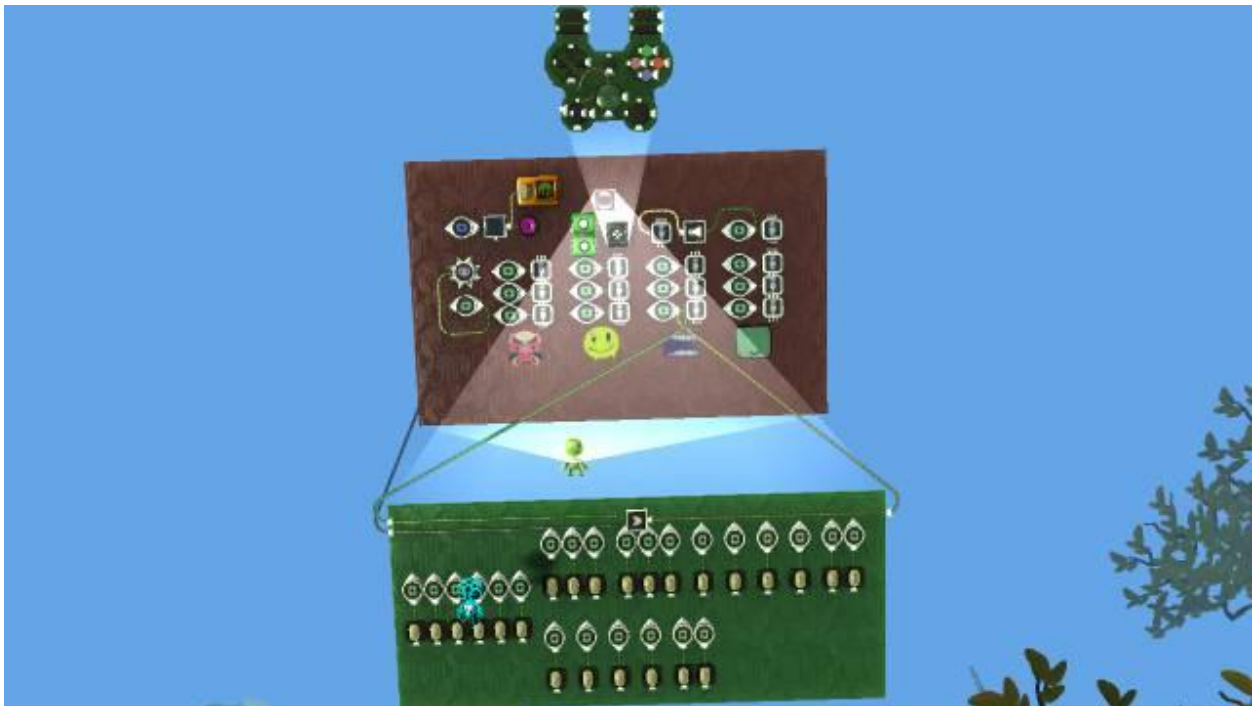
Green: "I...I'll be back for you, kid. I swear..."



What the Voice means by wishing luck and whether Green ever will ever actually return are open to the players' interpretations.

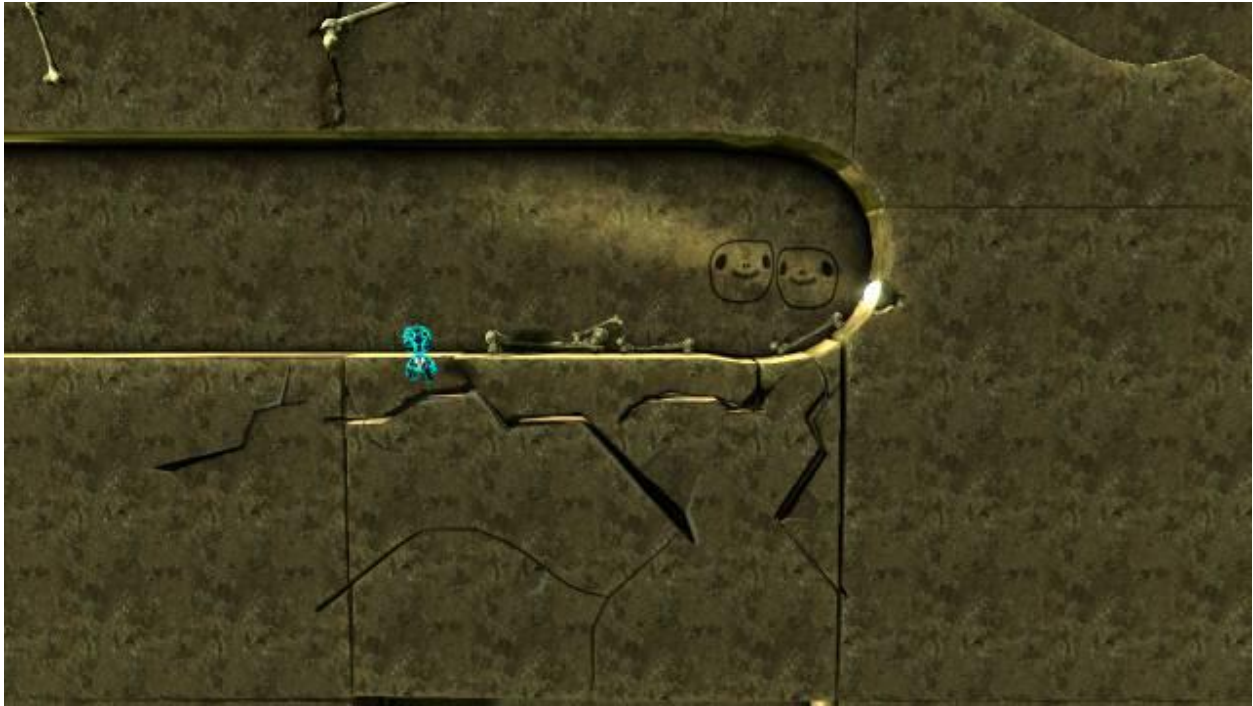


Some of the logic at the beginning of the level. What looks like a mess is actually much easier to work with than actual programming code would be. Functions implemented here include (1) Controlling the provided player characters instead of the normal LittleBigPlanet Sackboys; (2) Timing the dialog, which must follow the characters around to have the speech bubbles point to them; (3) Making the balloon fly away and the game end if the players give up and return to it



Player character logic. The red square contains some general logic, like controls and how to handle the other player's death (with a tragic scream). Most of it are what makes it possible for the creator to make the character's facial expression change on demand. Normally in LittleBigPlanet, the player can change their character's facial expression at any time. With this implementation, the game controls the expression, not the player. The theory is that seeing their character's mood change will in turn affect the player's mood.

The green board contains every line of dialog for Green, with the triggers for them.



The floor which dramatically falls away when both characters come and stand on it.



Same scene, but with parts showing. The red board can be read like a timeline from left to right. The blue and green chips are character dialog as they yell about what to do. The batteries destroy bits of the floor one by one, while the black circular speakers make deep rumbling noises to signify trouble.

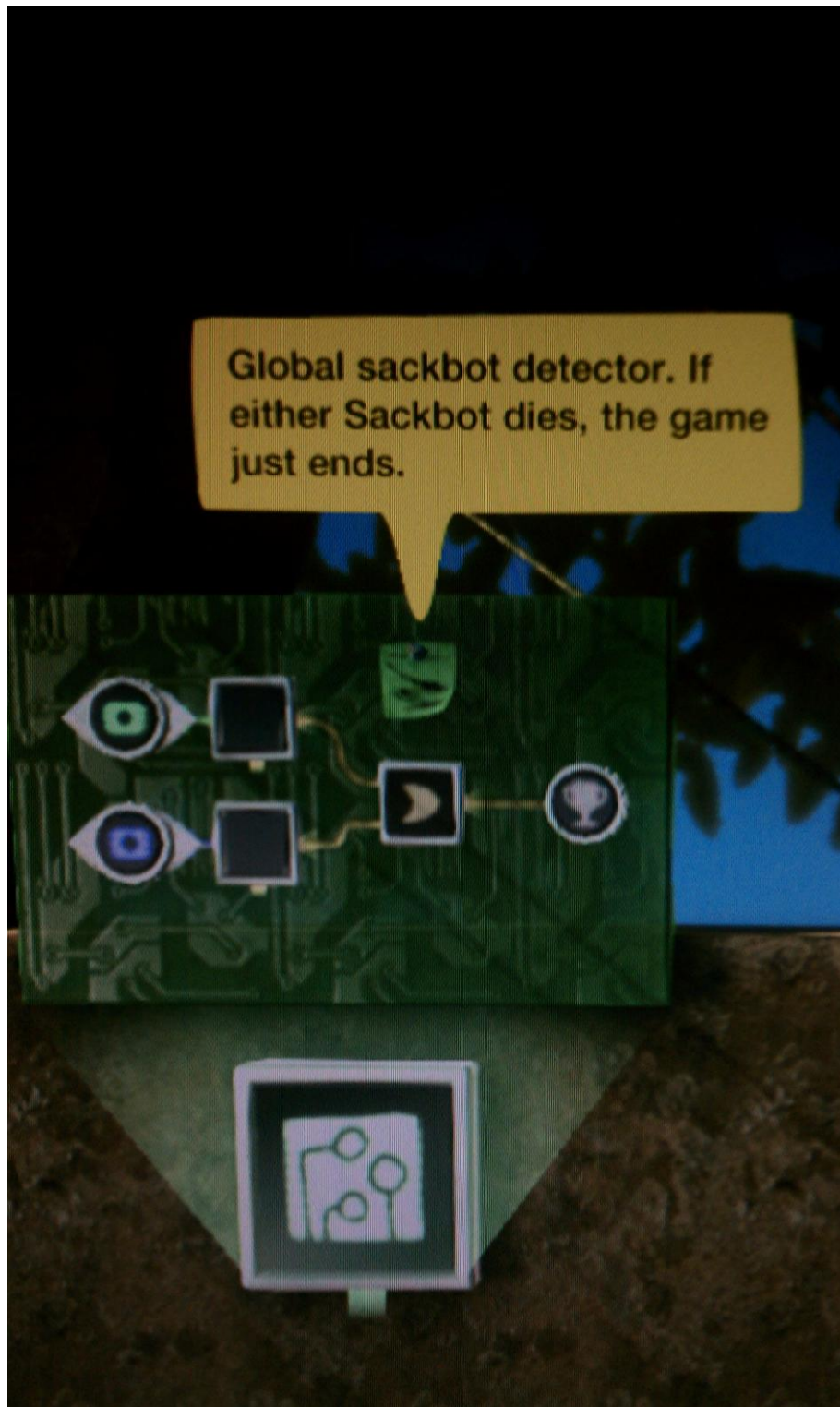


The safe first part of the cave, with paintings and elevator. (Actual in-game lighting is much darker.)



Workings of the elevator. A simple piston moves it up and down—but only after both players step on it for the first time. It also makes sounds like old, rusty machinery as it works.

The other bits of logic help to indicate when lines of dialog should be spoken.



A specific bit of logic, with a note! The green and blue sensors watch the entire level. If either character ever dies (for example, if Blue falls in the fire pit and is incinerated), the game will end after a few seconds (to give the other character time to scream) and prompt the players to retry the level or quit. This is one of the four possible endings (the other three being (1) the player characters get scared, leave the cave, and fly away in their balloon; (2) both player characters make it through the cave to the elevator at the end; and (3) Green leaves Blue behind alive but helpless and leaves alone on the elevator at the end, “vowing” to return someday and rescue his companion.)

Reflection

I understand now one of the reasons that video games as a medium has not been very explored yet: making a game is hard work. Getting every detail just right, tracking down why things aren't working as you intended, planning the things out in the first place, and doing every mundane task to implement what you want to implement are time consuming and sometimes downright monotonous. Unlike writing or film, a game has a lot of "moving parts" exactly because of its interactive/variable nature. Those parts move much less predictably for the developer; it's the developer's job to wrangle them into a meaningful experience for the player.

My goals with this game were pretty ambitious. I wanted to use mechanics that don't come "built-in" to *LittleBigPlanet 2's* tools, so to speak. So I had to rig them much closer to scratch than I would have if I had just gone with a simple fun or challenging platforming level. But, like I told a friend looking over my shoulder, my intention with this game was not to provide a gameplay challenge. It was to provide a *philosophical* challenge. And so I let the two players make some choices, give those choices different outcomes, and leave some things, like the motivations of the characters, the identity of the Voice, and the backstory of the Lost/Portal-esque "trials", purposefully ambiguous. It's up to the player to think about these things, and if I make the player *think*, not just about the events of the game but what they mean in a greater context, then I've done my job.