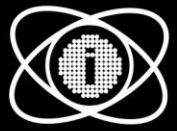


INDEPENDENT GAMES SUMMIT

Designing Asymmetric Gameplay for *Keep Talking and Nobody Explodes*

Ben Kane
Steel Crate Games

GDC GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE March 14–18, 2016 · Expo: March 16–18, 2016 #GDC16

UBM

January 2014

KEEP TALKING
and NOBODY EXPLODES

Oculus
NYC

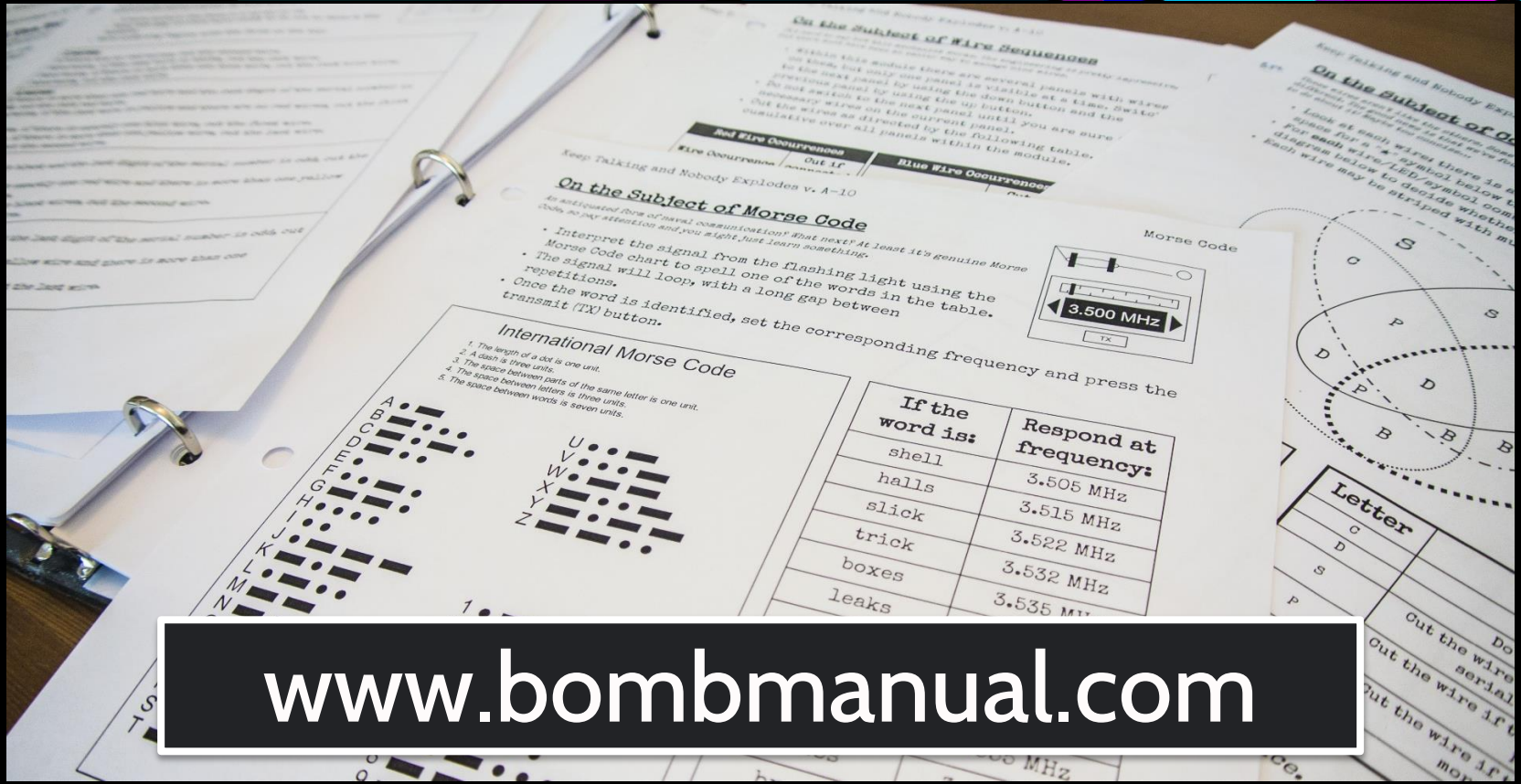
2:16 / 5:45
Keep Talking and Nobody Explodes. Co-op Oculus Rift + Razer Hydra Game
Keep Talking and Nobody Explodes
Subscribe 760
246,824
Add to
Share
More
2,033
65

246,824
2,033
65

Catch-up

- Gear VR: June 2015
- PC: October 2015
- Total units: >200k

2
1342
3.505 MHz
TX
MENU



www.bombmanual.com

REDS
FAME MARIO

This Talk

1. Discovering the game
2. Designing with focus

Discovering the Game

No Arcades

You are alone in a room with a bomb.

Only your friends know how to defuse it.

www.keeptalkinggame.com

hello@keeptalkinggame.com

@KeepTalkingGame

KeepTalkingGame

Defuser:

_____

Experts:

_____

_____

_____

Notes:

☐ First Time

☐ Free Play

Time: _____

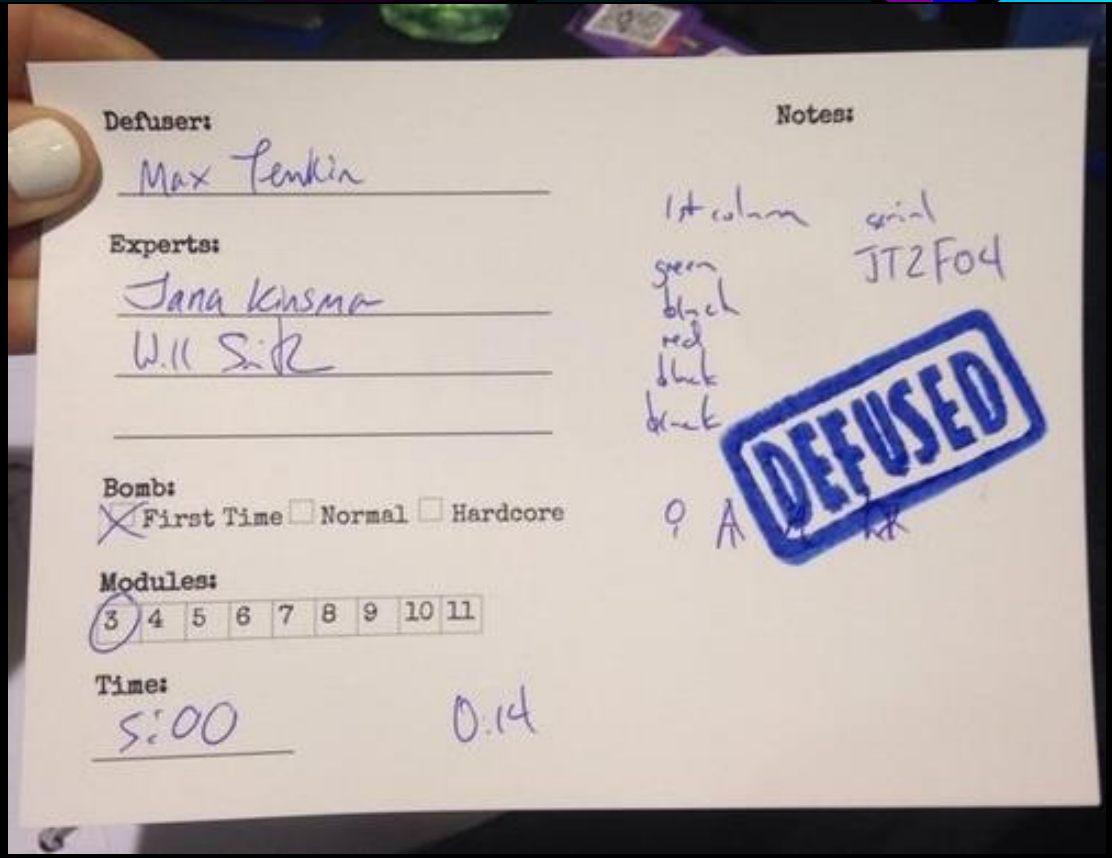
Modules:

3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11

☐ Needy Modules ☐ Hardcore

☐ Other:

Remaining Time: _____


Defuser:
Max Tenkin
Experts:
Jana Kinsma
Will Sink
Bomb:
First Time
Normal
Hardcore
Modules:
3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
Time:
5:00
0:14
Notes:
1st column serial
JT2F04
green
black
red
black
black
DEFUSED

Who's Playing

- Early adopters
- Kids
- Parents
- "I don't play video games"

Not Making a Bomb Game

DEFUSE A BOMB IN VR
WITH YOUR FRIENDS!
www.keeptalkinggame.com

Finding Our Focus

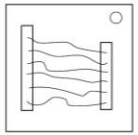
Foster Interesting Communication

How The Manual Works

- Based on the state of the bomb, isolate the solution
- “If there is exactly one red wire, cut the first wire”

Keep Talking and Nobody Explodes v. 1 — Wires

On the Subject of Wires



Wires are the lifeblood of electronics! Wait, no, electricity is the lifeblood. Wires are more like the arteries. The veins? No matter...

- A wire module can have 3–6 wires on it.
- Only the one correct wire needs to be cut to disarm the module.
- Wire ordering begins with the first on the top.

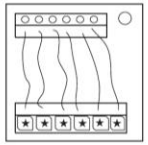
3 wires:
If there are no red wires, cut the second wire.
Otherwise, if the last wire is white, cut the last wire.
Otherwise, if there is more than one blue wire, cut the last blue wire.
Otherwise, cut the last wire.

4 wires:
If there is more than one red wire and the last digit of the serial number is odd, cut the last red wire.
Otherwise, if the last wire is yellow and there are no red wires, cut the first wire.
Otherwise, if there is exactly one blue wire, cut the first wire.
Otherwise, if there is more than one yellow wire, cut the last wire.
Otherwise, cut the second wire.

5 wires:
If the last wire is black and the last digit of the serial number is odd, cut the fourth wire.
Otherwise, if there is exactly one red wire and there is more than one yellow wire, cut the first wire.
Otherwise, if there are no black wires, cut the second wire.
Otherwise, cut the first wire.

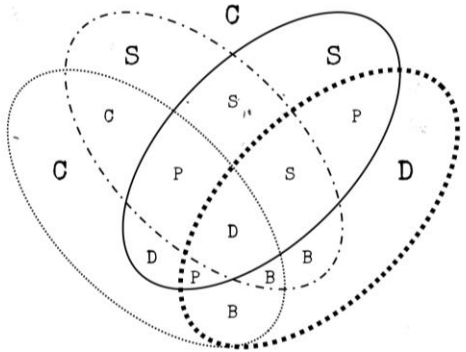
6 wires:
If there are no yellow wires and the last digit of the serial number is odd, cut the third wire.
Otherwise, if there is exactly one yellow wire and there is more than one white wire, cut the fourth wire.
Otherwise, if there are no red wires, cut the last wire.
Otherwise, cut the fourth wire.

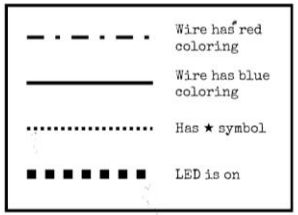
On the Subject of Complicated Wires



These wires aren't like the others. Some have stripes! That makes them completely different. The good news is that we've found a concise set of instructions on what to do about it! Maybe too concise...

- Look at each wire: there is an LED above the wire and a space for a "★" symbol below the wire.
- For **each** wire/LED/symbol combination, use the Venn diagram below to decide whether or not to cut the wire.
- Each wire may be striped with multiple colors.

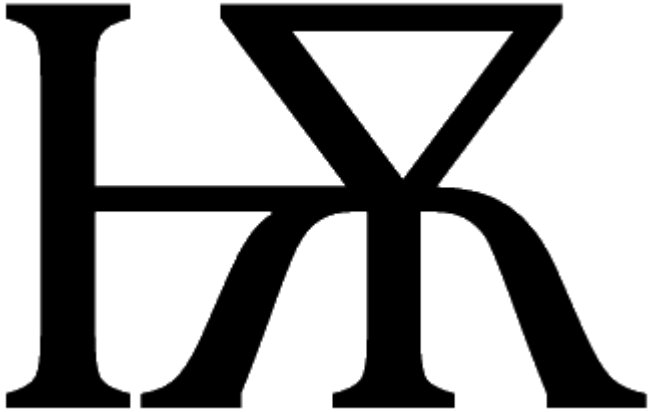




Letter	Instruction
C	Cut the wire
D	Do not cut the wire
S	Cut the wire if the last digit of the serial number is even
P	Cut the wire if the bomb has a parallel port
B	Cut the wire if the bomb has two or more batteries

What are players bad at talking about?

- Visual stimulation
- Unfamiliar symbols
- Multi-tasking



Then add stress!

SNOOZE
12:00

Pacing System

- Calculate a rough “score”
- Distract if needed
- Encourage last second saves

Music

- 30 second loops of increasing intensity
- Maximum pressure at T-30

What Hinders Interesting Communication?

- Ensure conversation is about player strategy, not designer intent
- Failure must be the result of avoidable mistake

KEEP TALKING and NOBODY EXPLODES

BOMB DEFUSAL MANUAL

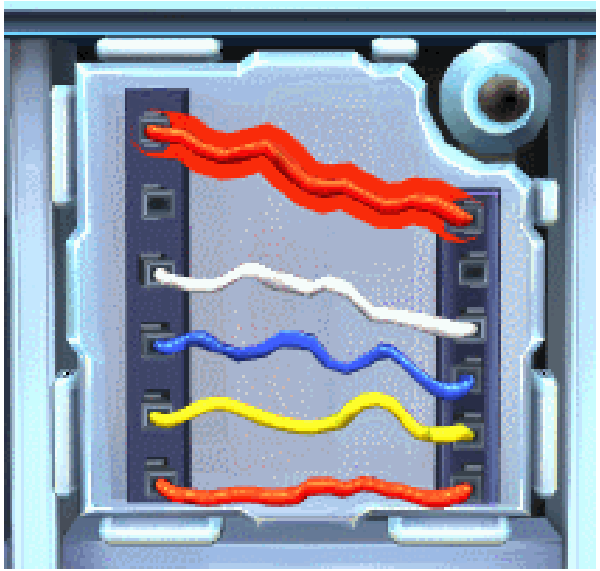
Version 1

Verification Code: 241

Revision 3

Simple Interactions

- Hard decisions
- Easy input



Unambiguous Rules

- Guessing is always bad
  - Wrong: cheated!
  - Right: unsatisfied!

SERIAL #
5S5Y26

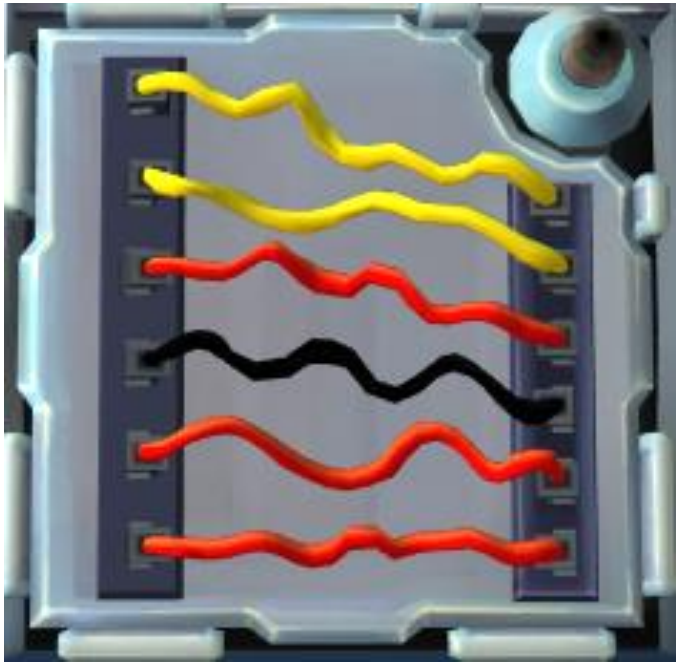
SERIAL #
0 0

SERIAL #
GDC0

Parity of zero

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Zero is an even number. In other wor



"Cut the second wire"

Enabling Player Trust

- Mistakes will happen
- How can we be confident in the rules?

Constructing the Rules

- Game generates rule data
- Game executes rules
- Manual is generated from the same rule data

Rule Generation: Property

- Fact about the state of the bomb/puzzle
- Evaluates to true/false
- “there is exactly one red wire”

Solution

- Unique index expected
- “Cut the first wire”
- “Press the button with the same label as in Stage 2”

Rule

- 1 or more Properties plus a Solution
- “If there is more than one Black wire and the serial number contains a vowel, cut the first Black wire”

Rule Set:

- Precedence list of rules
- Cover all possible bomb states
- “Otherwise” case keeps it reasonable

What about being static?

- Static now
- Wasn't during development
- Might not be in future

- Manual is half the game
- Development effort reflected that

Recap

- Demoing allowed us to discover the game
- Focus on desired experience to guide decisions

Still Discovering

- Wider range of applications
- Competitive aspects

@benkane

www.keeptalkinggame.com