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IM 450

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## UI/UX Critical Analysis of Antichamber

### Introduction

*Antichamber* is a psychological exploration game created by Alexander Bruce that uses its environment to interact with the player. The game does this by presenting puzzles that revolve around and manipulate the player's perspective. The ultimate objective of *Antichamber* is for the player to complete all of the puzzles. To do this, players must navigate through a mind-bending, interconnected map of different puzzles. In this paper, I will be analyzing the user experience (UX) and the user interface (UI) elements through *Antichamber's* main menu and gameplay experiences.

### Main Menu - UI/UX

The first item that players see when starting *Antichamber* is the simplistic, black and white main menu room. This room presentation of the main menu appears more like a virtual reality game in that the player can walk around and click on different elements within the main menu. Users walk around this room to view basic controls and settings, a wall of collected hints, an ever-updating map of the world, and a glass area that shows the exit door for when players complete the game (*see figure 1*). The player utilizes a dot on their screen to make selections. When hovering over a selection, it turns bright green. This green dot stands out against the black and white background, even though it is small. The wall of collected hints shows all of the cards that the player has come across during their experience playing the game. This wall allows the player to look back on all of their cards at once (*see figure 2*), or enlarge specific





Figure 3

There is also a wall that is titled “All You Need To Know”. This wall lists different controls, options, and an optional 90-minute timer to beat (see figure 4). Players can learn how to physically play the game here, along with being able to adjust mouse settings, music, display modes, and screen resolution. This wall is presented adequately because all of the controls are listed with graphics, which helps the user understand. Also, the user can easily tell which button is active/disabled as the active one is filled in with white. Another element that works well on this wall is the controls themselves. *Antichamber* uses very standard controls that most players are typically used to, such as W, A, S, D to walk, and spacebar to jump. The use of Esc is also a nice addition because a player can either tap it to go to the main menu or hold it anytime to leave the game. This is beneficial because it eliminates the need for a pause menu.

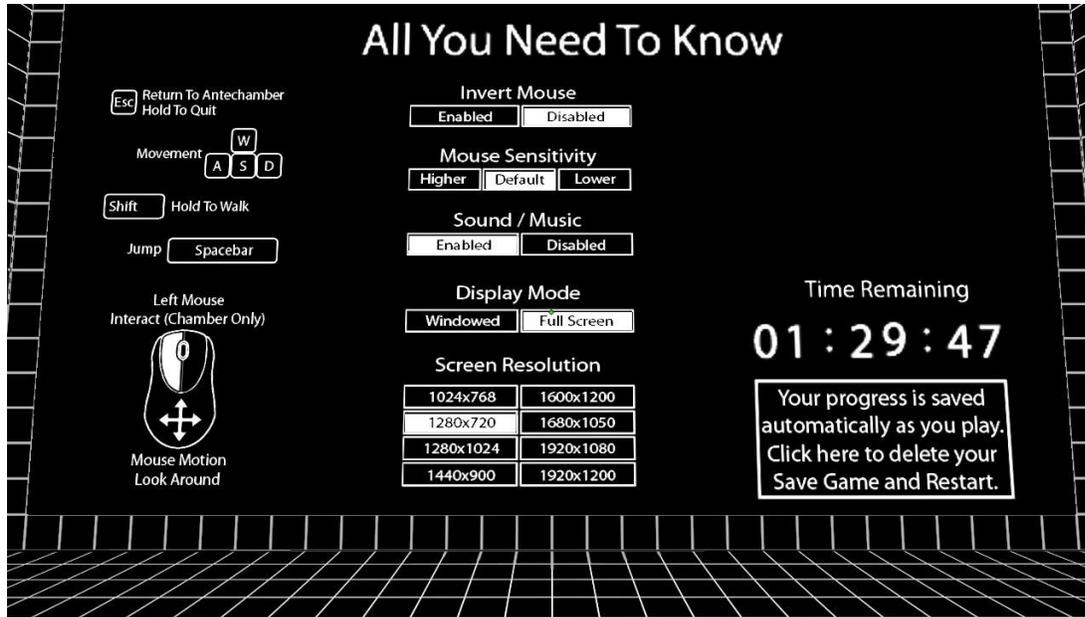


Figure 4

One of the most important UI elements in the main menu is the “Choose Your Destination” wall. This wall allows the player to view any area that they have encountered before and travel there (see figure 5). The wall shows a map with different shapes that represent different aspects of the game, such as how a circle represents a dead end and a large square represents an unfinished room (see figure 6). Once the player is aware that they can use this map to travel, it becomes essential to the game because, due to Antichamber’s tricky nature, players can get lost very easily. If this “fast travel” map was not included in the game, users would become frustrated very easily, which could cause the game not to be as successful.

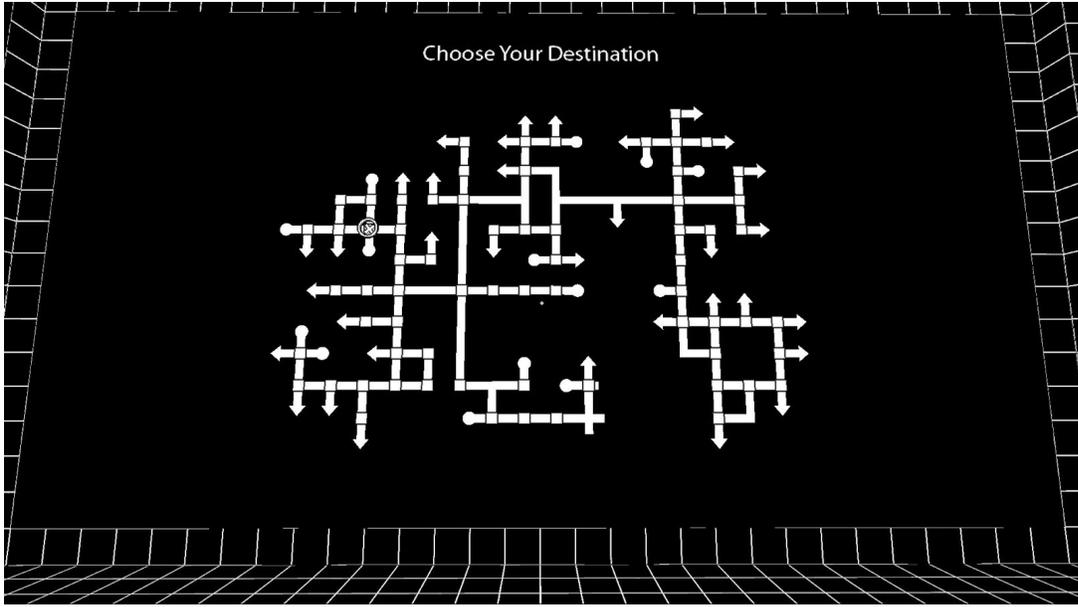


Figure 5

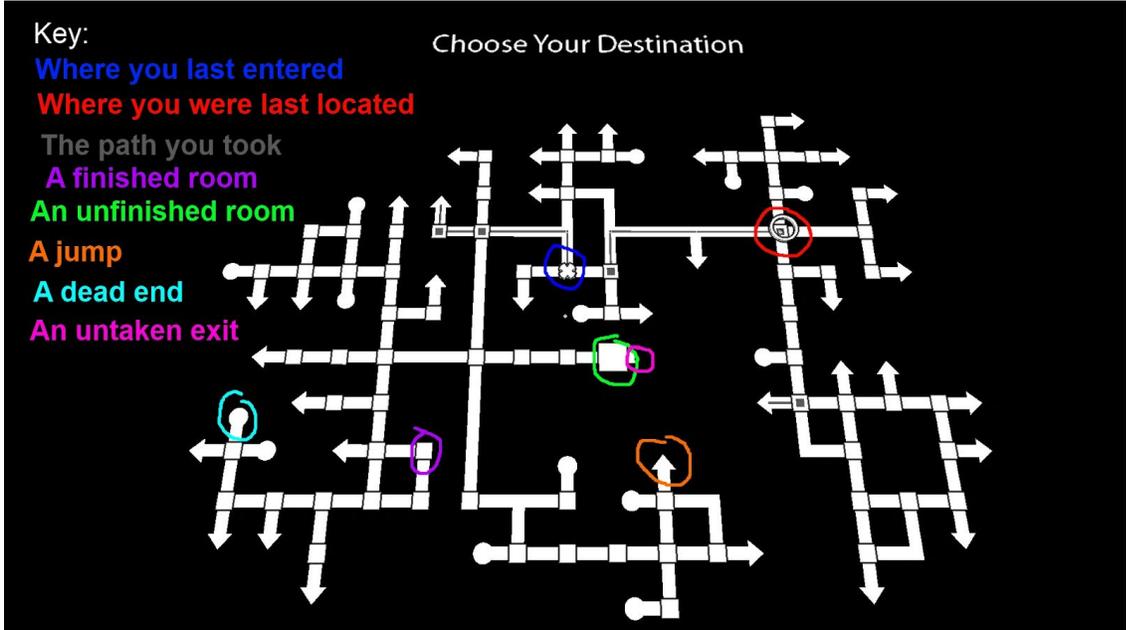


Figure 6 (Map)

Although *Antichamber*'s menu has some satisfactory UI elements, some features could've been designed better. In regards to the wall of collected hints, if a player has found a lot of cards, this wall can appear very cluttered (see *figure 2*). This could easily be fixed by putting each picture into a box in a grid-type fashion with a white outline. This would be beneficial because it keeps each image in its own area, which would make it more organized. If this were to be implemented, users could find a specific card they are looking for with ease. Also, by placing these pictures in boxes, they better resemble the cards that they are meant to represent. Another suggestion would be to implement a search feature. This would allow users to quickly search for a specific card when they can only remember part of what a hint card said. This way, users do not have to click through a bunch of cards to find the one they are looking for.

The "All You Need To Know" wall is also in need of improvement. This wall provides a simple representation of the game's controls, but it doesn't give the player the option to change their controls to better meet their preferences. This can be an issue for people with disabilities because they might not be able to play using the default controls. Simply adding the option to change how a player walks, jumps, moves, and selects could broaden the player demographic. This would also be beneficial for people who just have different control preferences when playing.

Another wall that could use more development is the "Choose Your Destination" wall. The map that is shown on this wall can prove to be very helpful when playing the game, as each shape has a different meaning, but *Antichamber* does not tell the player what the shapes represent. This is an issue because players essentially have to guess and check what the shapes mean or look online for a guide. This problem could be eliminated by simply placing a key of the map on the wall. This key could show the shape accompanied by the meaning, such

as showing a square and telling the player that it means an unfinished room (*see figure 6*). This would be very easy to represent on the wall as there is even extra space around the map (*see figure 5*).

## **Main Menu - Conclusion**

*Antichamber's* unique main menu room has some user-friendly features, but it is far from perfect. The main menu excelled in using contrast, displaying controls and settings, presenting specific cards, and through its use of the "fast travel" destination map. However, I would recommend adding outlines to the card pictures in the overall view, implementing the option to change the player's controls, and adding a key for the shapes on the destination map. If I were creating a game of this type, I would like to take the destination map from *Antichamber* because it is an essential feature of games where the player can easily get lost. However, I would add a key/guide to the map so that the player can get the full functionality without having to look online for guidance. In my main menu, I would also want to include more accessibility options such as the ability to change controls and color-blind modes.

## **Gameplay - UI/UX**

Once players look at the destination map for the first time, they are prompted with a "click here" and then a "click to travel" at the start of the map (*see figure 7 & 8*). This is designed effectively because players are drawn to this wall due to the "click here" flashing; these action lines guide the player to start the game. Once the player clicks on their destination they are then transported to *Antichamber's* mind-bending world. The beginning parts of this game are lateral

thinking puzzles, which players must solve by using an indirect or creative approach.

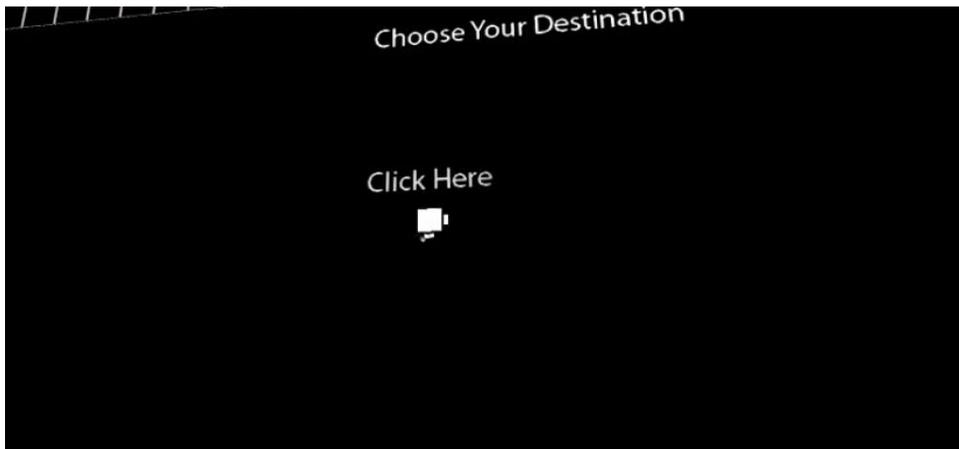


Figure 7



Figure 8

There is no formal tutorial to this game, but in a way, *Antichamber* teaches the user what type of thinking they will need for the game's puzzles. The first puzzle is an example of this indirect tutorial. The player starts the game by seeing "jump" and naturally, they jump and fall down the hole. (see figure 9). The game actually makes it impossible to jump the distance.

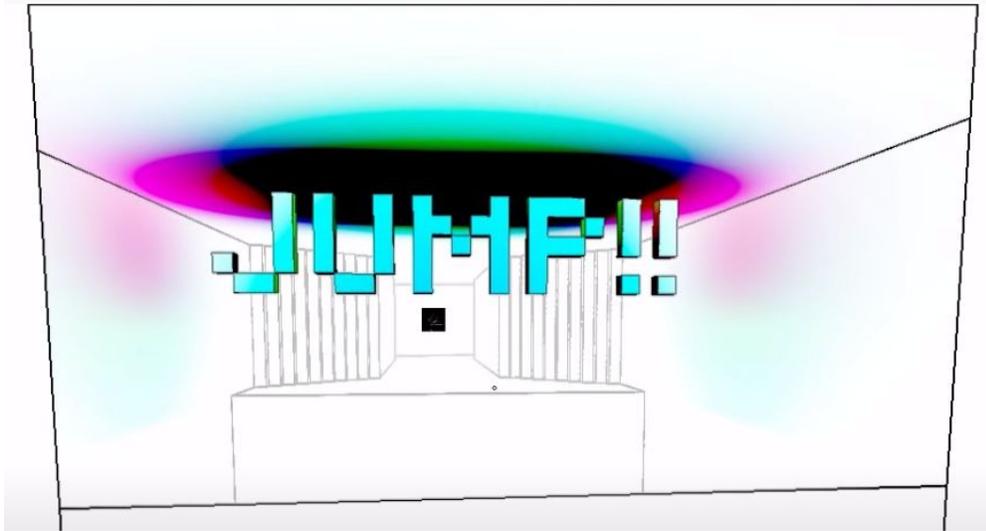


Figure 9

Players are then presented with a card on the wall that basically says that this fall is the first step to learning how to play. The player then travels down a hallway and is faced with two options of going right or left (*see figure 10*). The player can go through either, but they are always put back in front of the two choices. After a few attempts, players are forced to try the only way that they haven't tried yet, which is backward. This teaches the player that they must try the unexpected for the next puzzles. This indirect tutorial works effectively for the game because it gives the user no other option to go, but the correct one. It lets the player fail more than once to show them that lateral thinking is the only way to solve the puzzle.

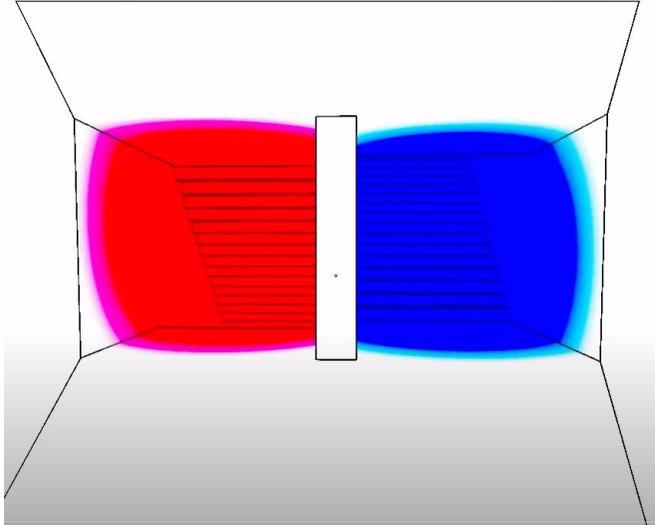


Figure 10

Throughout the game, and in this first puzzle, the player encounters black and white cards on the wall (see figure 11). These cards act as hints and general encouragement. In the same first puzzle, a card appears on the wall after the player has tried right or left. This card says “a choice may be as simple as going left or going right”; this pushes the player to try the other option. After going through both at least once, a card that says “the choice doesn’t matter if the outcome is the same”; this hints to the player that their left or right option does not matter, which causes them to find a different path. In this first puzzle, these cards also help aid the player through the indirect tutorial. There are multiple cards on the walls throughout *Antichamber* that offer hints to help the player, and once they have seen them, those cards get added to the collection in the main menu. These hints are very subtle and require some imagination to fully understand. These cards work very well for the game because they help prevent player fatigue. Without the hint cards, players would become more frustrated because there would be no form of direction when they get stuck. However, these hints could potentially make the player more frustrated if they come across one that doesn't explicitly help them.



Figure 11

The second part of the game starts when the player obtains a block gun. This gun is required for the second part of the puzzles because they can be used to place blocks to climb over obstacles, open doors, block lasers, and more. There are four types of block guns that go along with their color-coded puzzles: blue, green, yellow, and red. The gun itself works well as a dynamic UI element because it incorporates its ammo into the design. Instead of having a static user interface element that shows the player how many blocks they have left, the gun physically shows the number of blocks that are within it (see figure 12). This works adequately because it allows for more screen space to be given to the game's environment instead of a static user interface. Each block puzzle can only be completed with its color-matching block gun and players must collect ammunition throughout the map. This adds more challenge to the game because this forces players to find the other block guns or more ammo before attempting a different puzzle. This color-coding works well for people who are not color-blind.

Although *Antichamber* included some UI/UX elements that worked well in its gameplay, there are still some areas that need improvement. One area that could be improved is player fatigue. Even though there are hint cards and the option to fast travel throughout the map,

player fatigue can still be an issue for this game. This is because there is no clear way forward. As most games lead the player in the right direction, *Antichamber* makes players wander around until they find an area they can complete. This can become very frustrating for some players, especially when they become stuck on a few puzzles. This kind of frustration then causes the player to look up guides online, which disrupts the gameplay experience. To fix this, *Antichamber* could include a hint system for when players are really struggling. This system could display pop-up hints when a player has been in an area for a long time or they could even request a hint. If this were to be implemented, it could be an option to turn on in the settings so that players who want to experience the game as it was intended are not forced to receive hints.

Another element that could be better throughout the game is the use of color. The designer of *Antichamber* used very bright, bold colors, which effectively get the user's attention, but can also cause a headache. To correct this, *Antichamber* could incorporate a setting where players can dim the vibrancy of the colors in the game. However, this would still not account for people who are color-blind. The game fails to provide an option for the color-blind, which can be very problematic. One example is the block guns because they are reliant on the player seeing color. If a person has red-blind/protanopia or green-blind/deutanopia, they will not be able to tell the red gun/blocks from the yellow gun/blocks used in the game (see figure 12, 13, & 14). To combat this, *Antichamber* should include a color-blind mode and/or make the blocks different shapes. If the creator were to make the blocks different shapes, they could include the symbol of the shape on the gun and the ammo would be different shapes for each gun. This could also open up the possibility for different types of puzzles due to the new shapes. This would be extremely beneficial because, with this change, people would not need to rely on colors to be able to solve the puzzles.

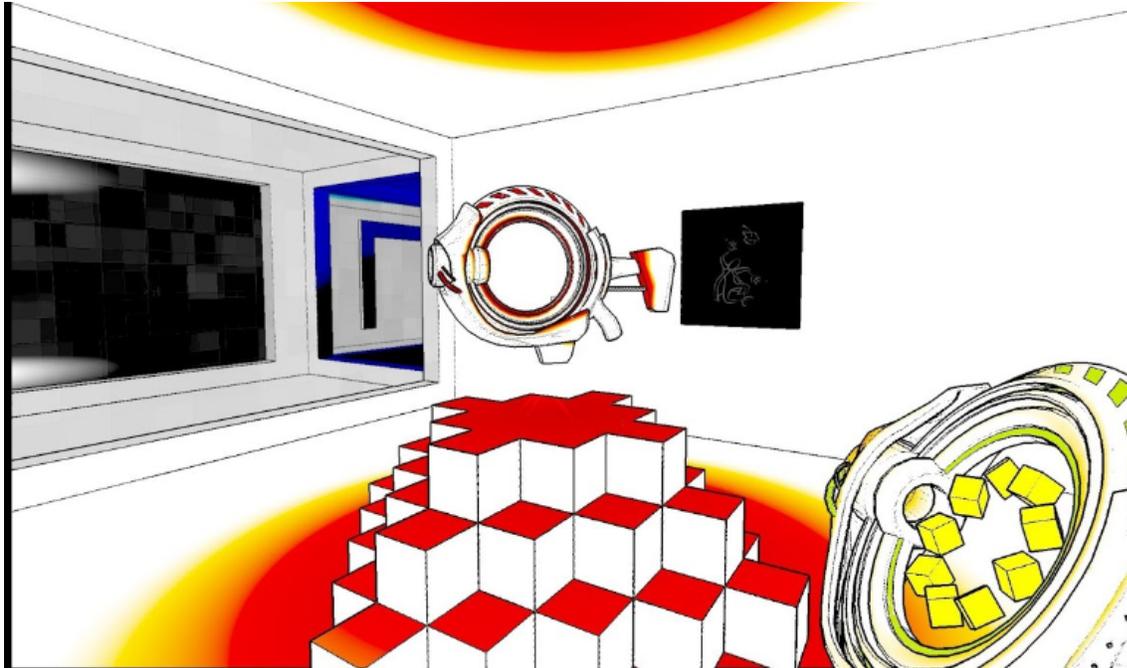


Figure 12 - Not Colorblind

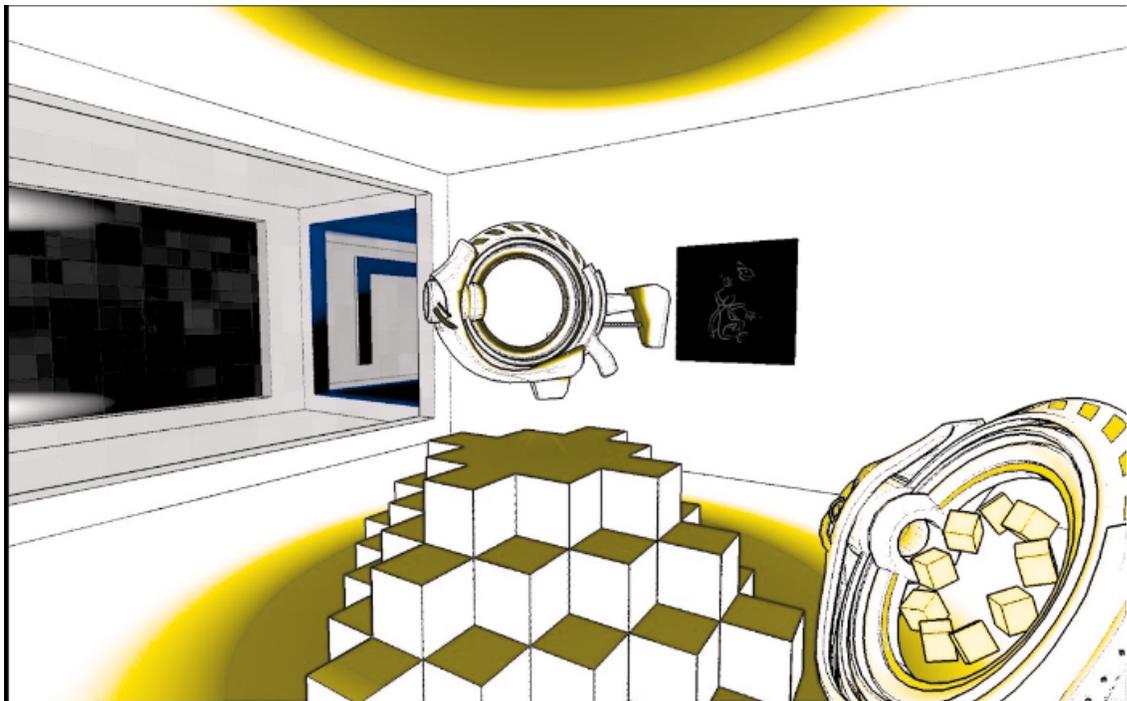


Figure 13 - Red-Blind / Protanopia (Wickline)

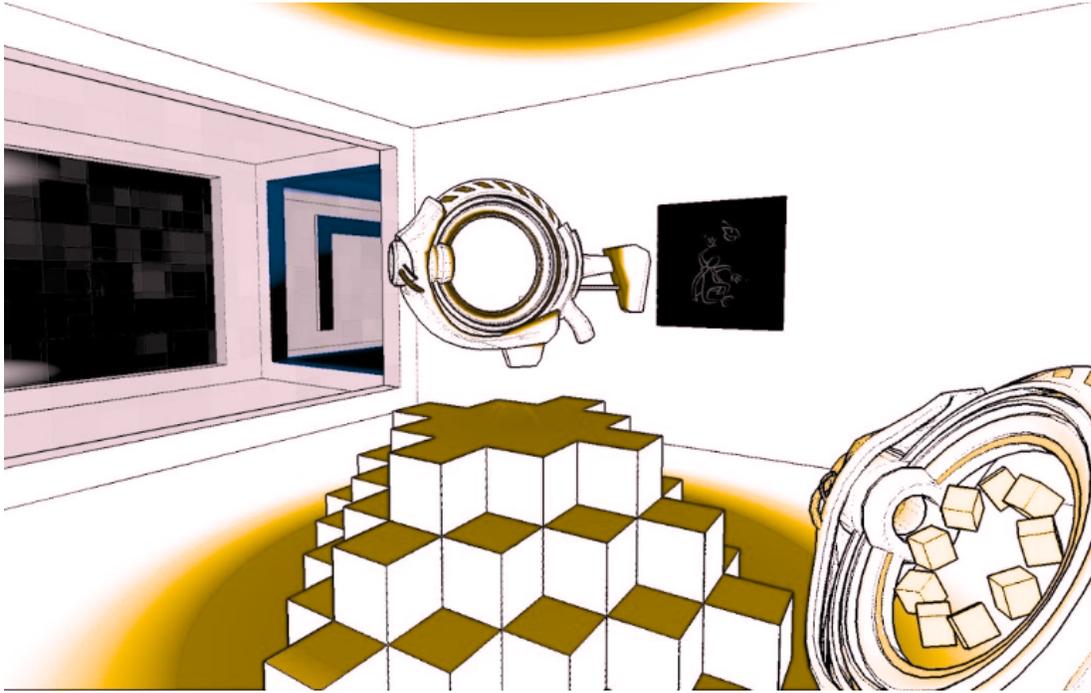


Figure 14 - Green-Blind / Deuteranopia (Wickline)

## Gameplay - Conclusion

*Antichamber's* gameplay included several effective elements in terms of indirectly teaching the player how to think when solving puzzles, the use of hint cards, and through the display of ammo in the block guns, but it fell short in other important aspects of the game. These aspects, such as color and player fatigue, can make or break a game. *Antichamber* attempted to reduce player fatigue with the destination map and through its use of hint cards, but it was not enough as a lot of players end up using online guides. This element could potentially be improved by adding the option to receive more hints. The creator also failed to design for the color-blind by creating color-specific puzzles without a non-colored indicator. To combat this issue, the creator could add different color modes, and/or make each gun have different ammo shapes with a non-colored indicator for each gun. When creating my own game of this type, I

would like to take *Antichamber's* use of how they displayed their ammo. I would want this in my game because it saves screen space. However, if I have multiple guns with different colors, I would want to change the shape of each guns' ammo to ensure people who are color-blind can actually have a chance of completing my puzzles without online help.

## **Overall - Conclusion**

All in all, the creator of *Antichamber* succeeded in creating a mind-bending and tricky puzzle game, but the UI/UX still needs a bit of work. The game's main menu had a simplistic experience featuring different walls that players can interact with. The main menu also had great contrasting black and white elements throughout and featured various action lines for the user, which helped with starting the game. However, the main menu could be improved by adding a key/guide for the shapes on the destination map, adding outlines to the pictures on the hint wall, and by implementing an option to change the user's gameplay controls. *Antichamber's* gameplay had some elements that worked well, such as its indirect tutorial for lateral thinking, the subtle hint cards, and the display of ammo in block guns for people without color-blindness. The creator could improve the gameplay experience by adding different color options for the color-blind and for people who get headaches due to the very bright colors displayed throughout the game. The gameplay could also be improved by implementing more ways to reduce player fatigue, which could be done by adding the option to receive more hints. These UI/UX issues were analyzed throughout the game in the main menu and throughout the gameplay experience as a whole.

## Works Cited

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