

shut up with
calm down the
squad leaders

A Theory



of Fun

• Give AT-ST's too
powerful?

• Ops mtg @ 2pm

• Doodle
more

The other day I played a typing game on popcap.com...
I got really far and did really well, and there came a
point where I got bored.



Water.
← honest.

Then I played Bookworm on the same site.
I quit when I saw that I was fighting the tide.





People are amazing pattern matching
machines.



Look at the places we can find a face

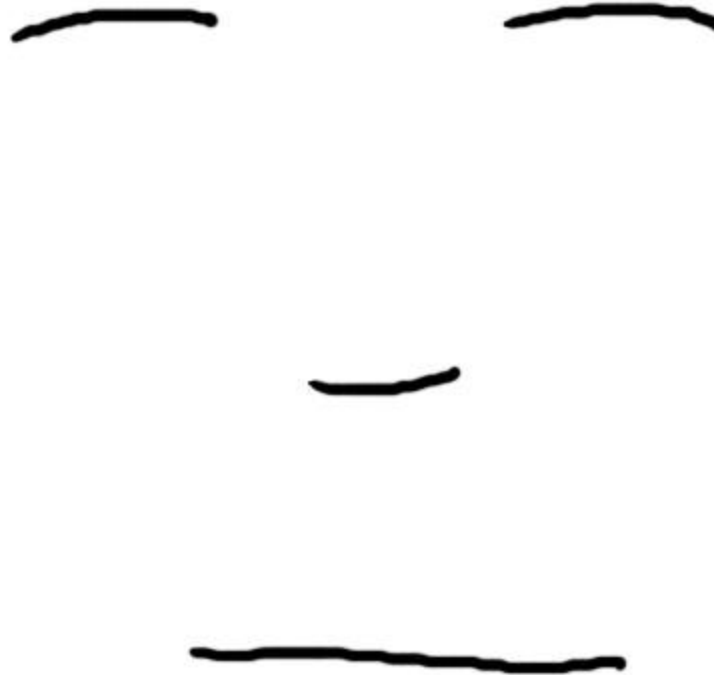
Oh, Raph's
just being
pedantic
again...

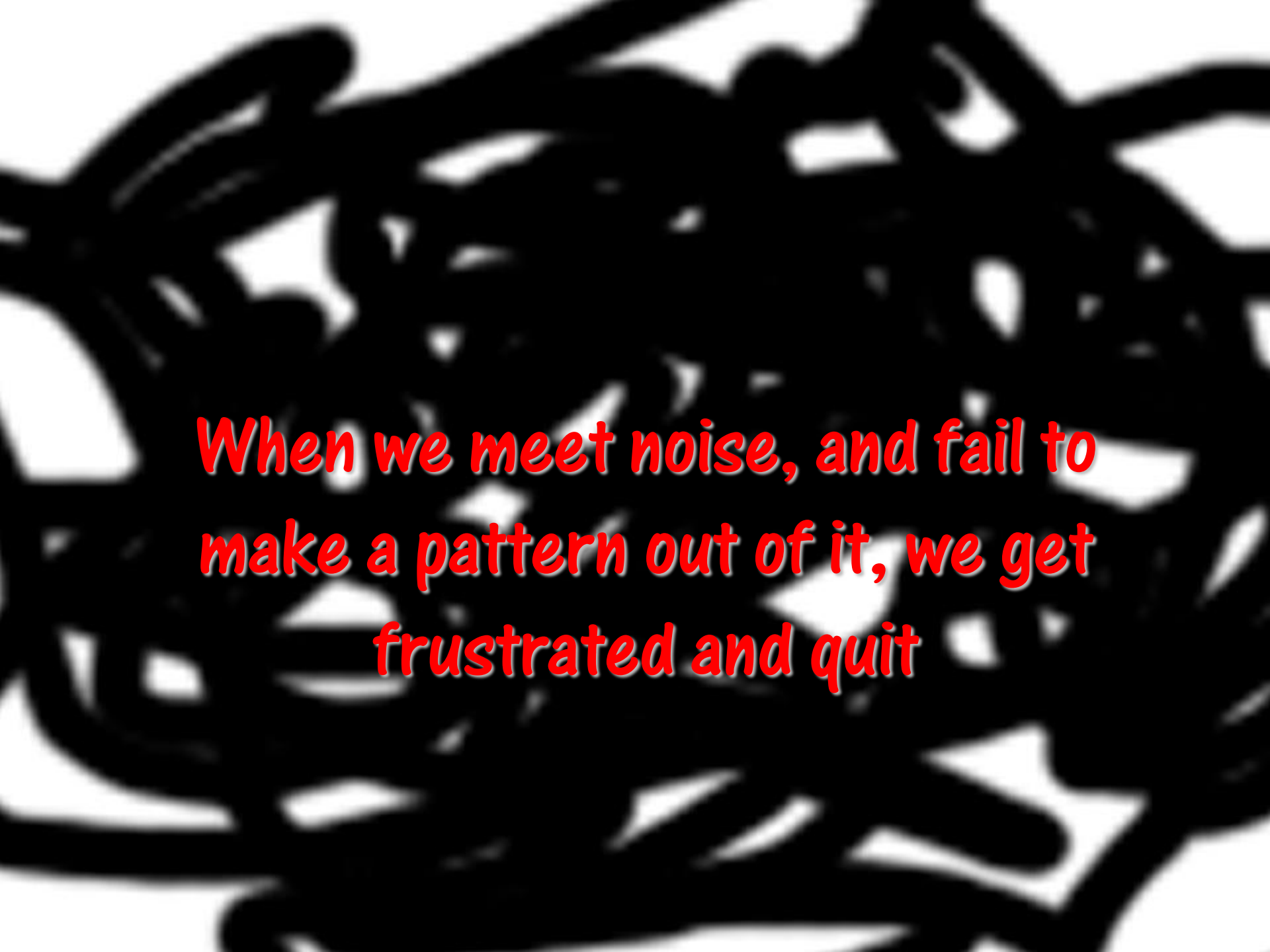


In fact, we tend to
see patterns where
there aren't any

(BLA
BLA
BLA)

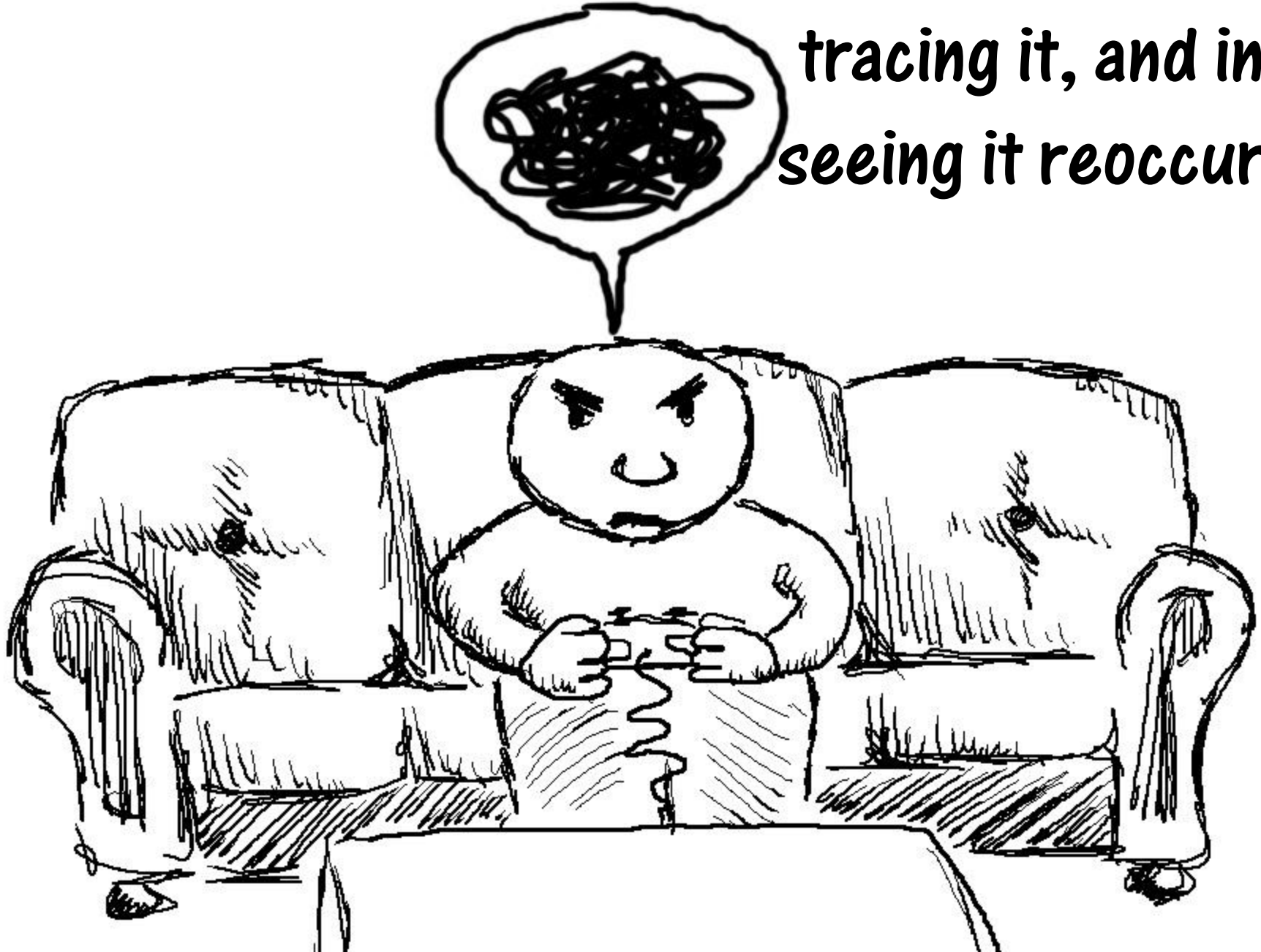
When we grasp a pattern, we usually
get bored with it and iconify it

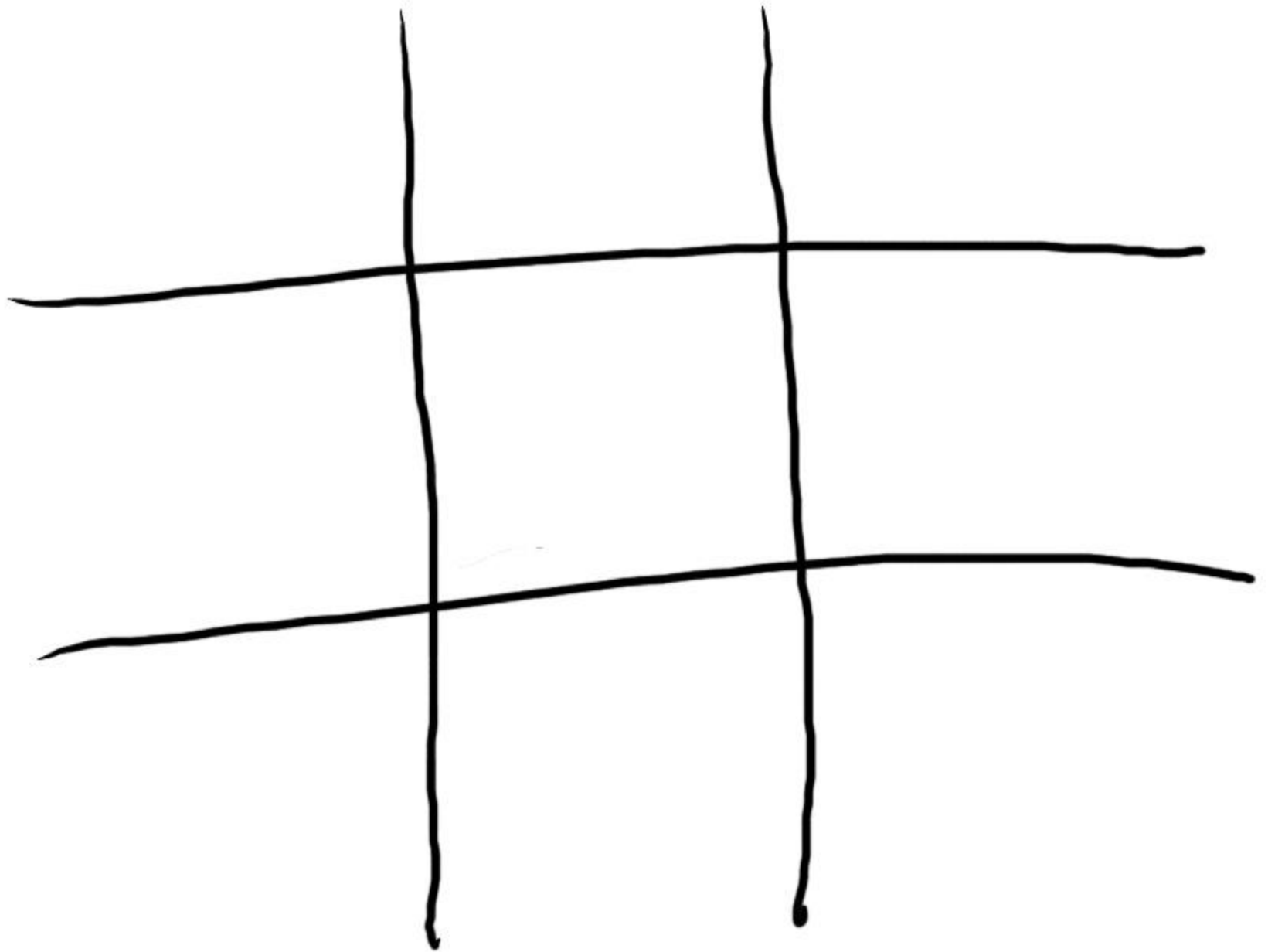




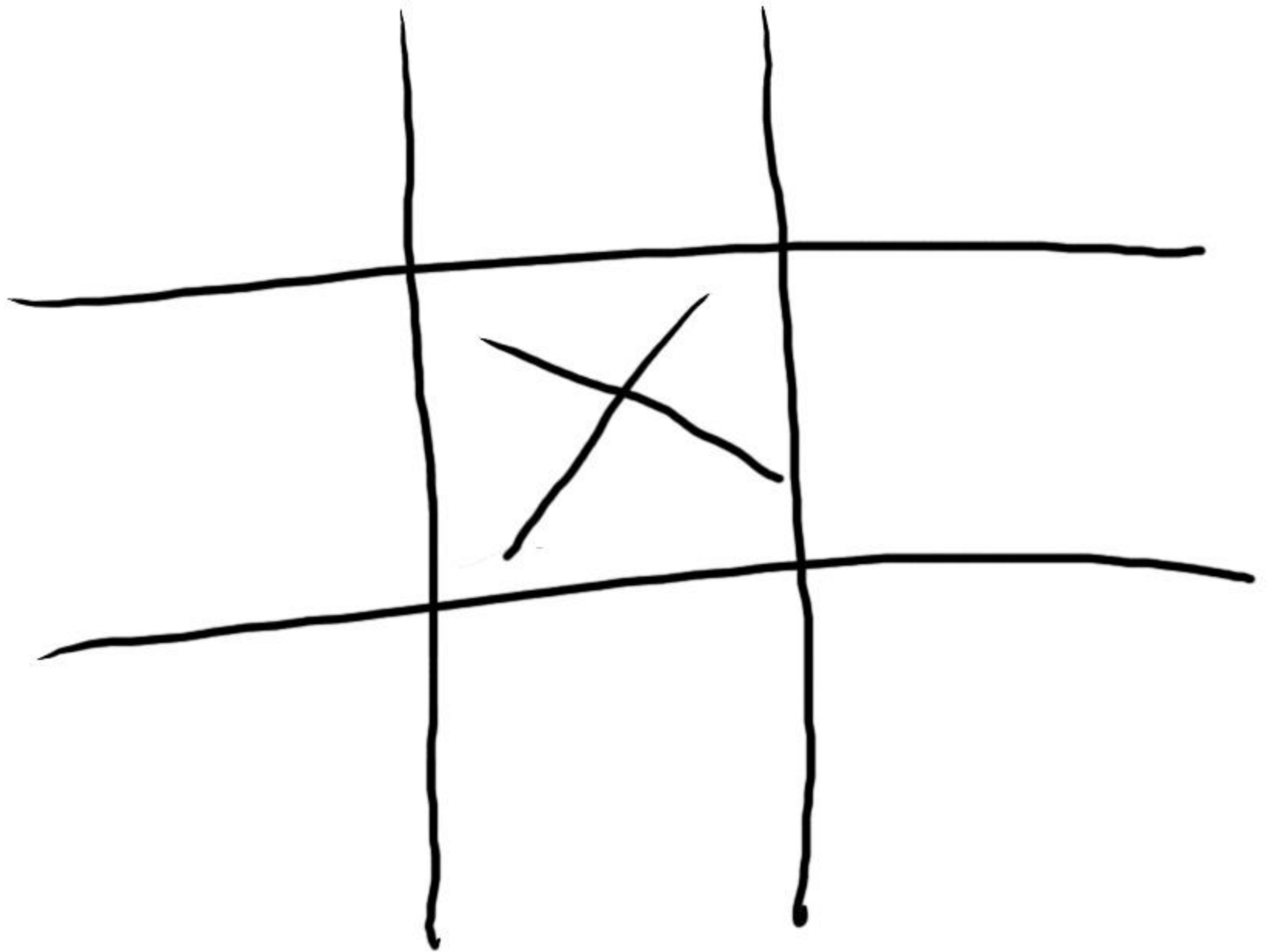
When we meet noise, and fail to
make a pattern out of it, we get
frustrated and quit

Once we see a pattern, we delight in
tracing it, and in
seeing it reoccur

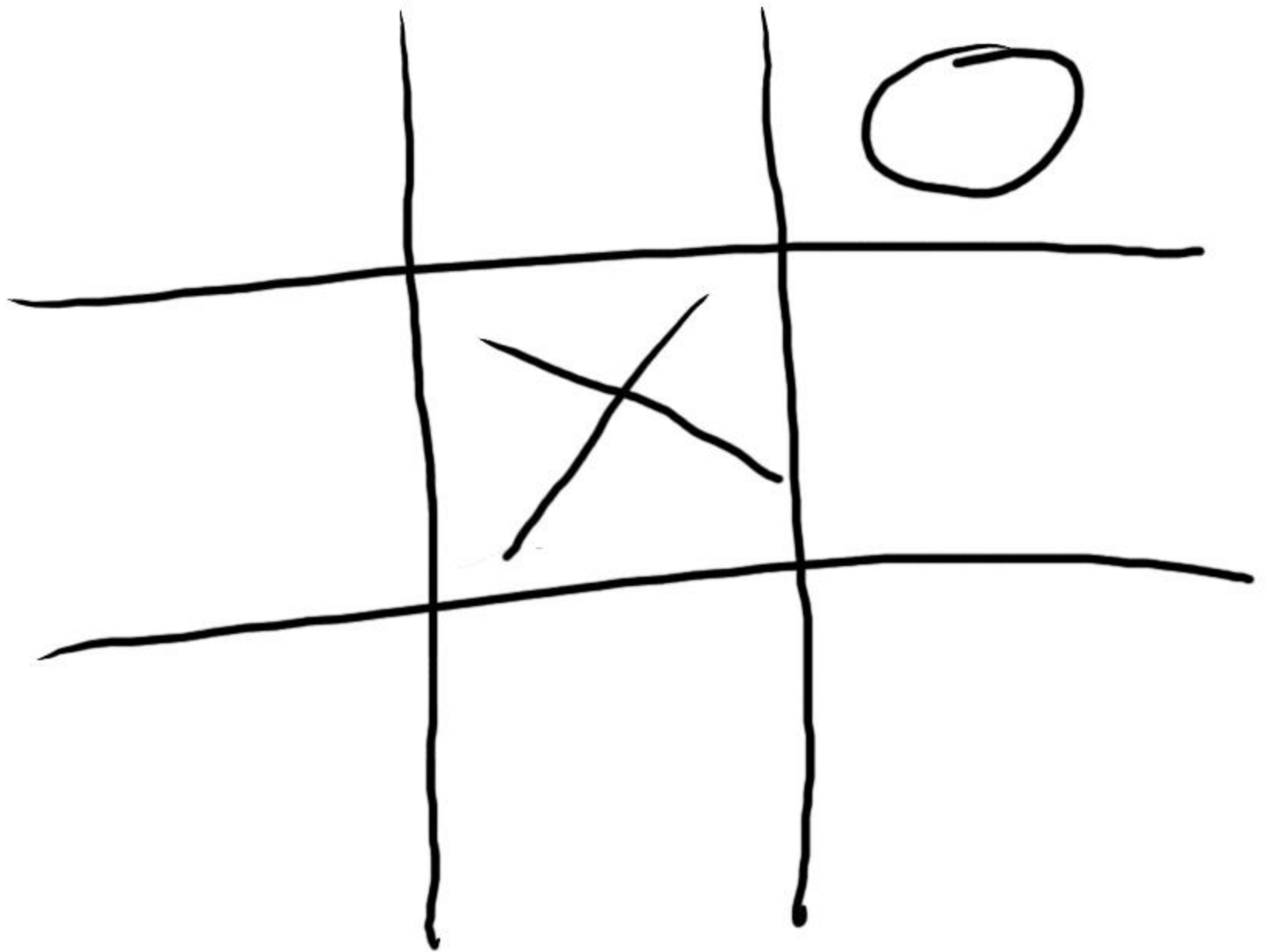




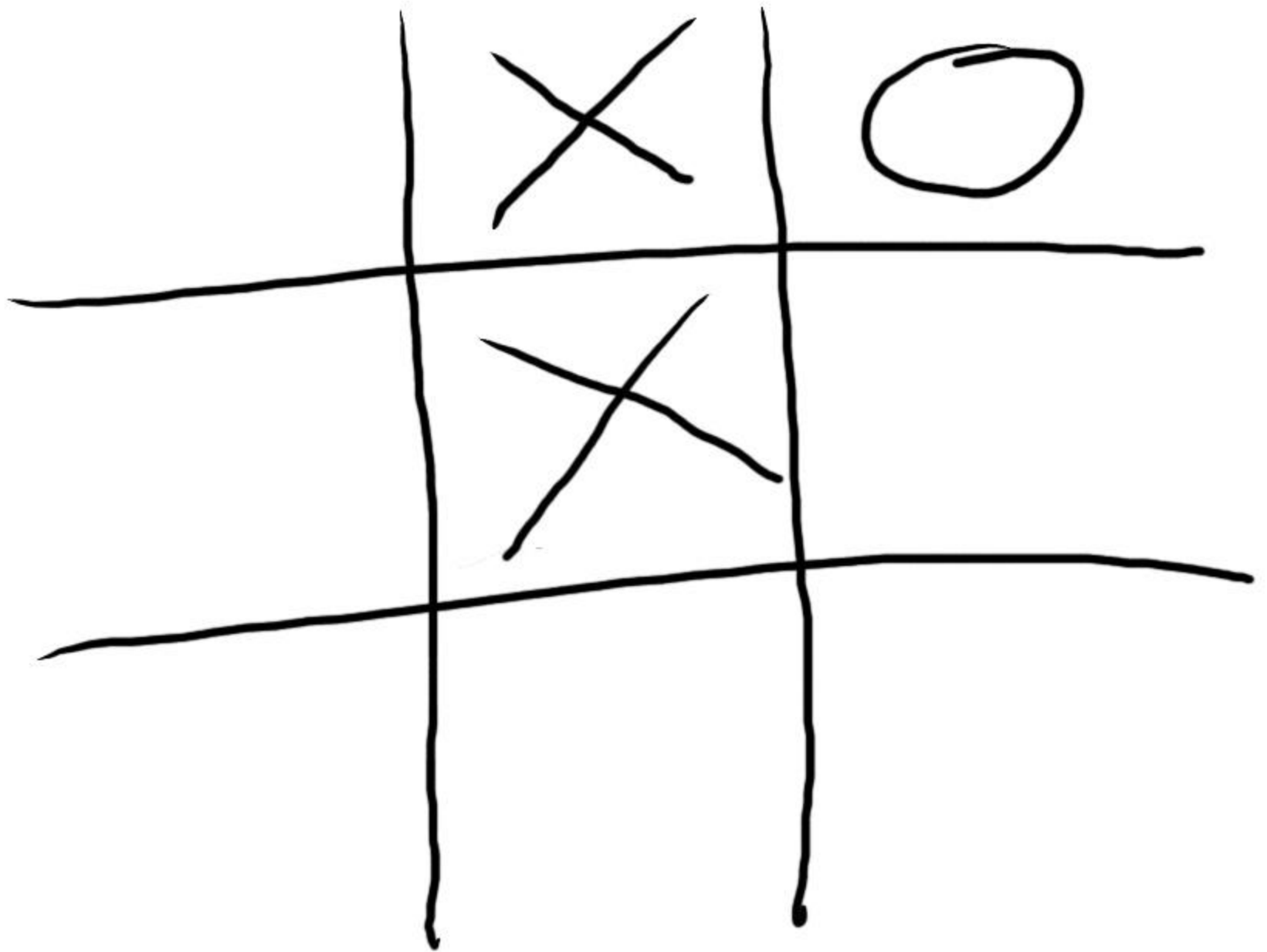
What's fun is exercising your brain



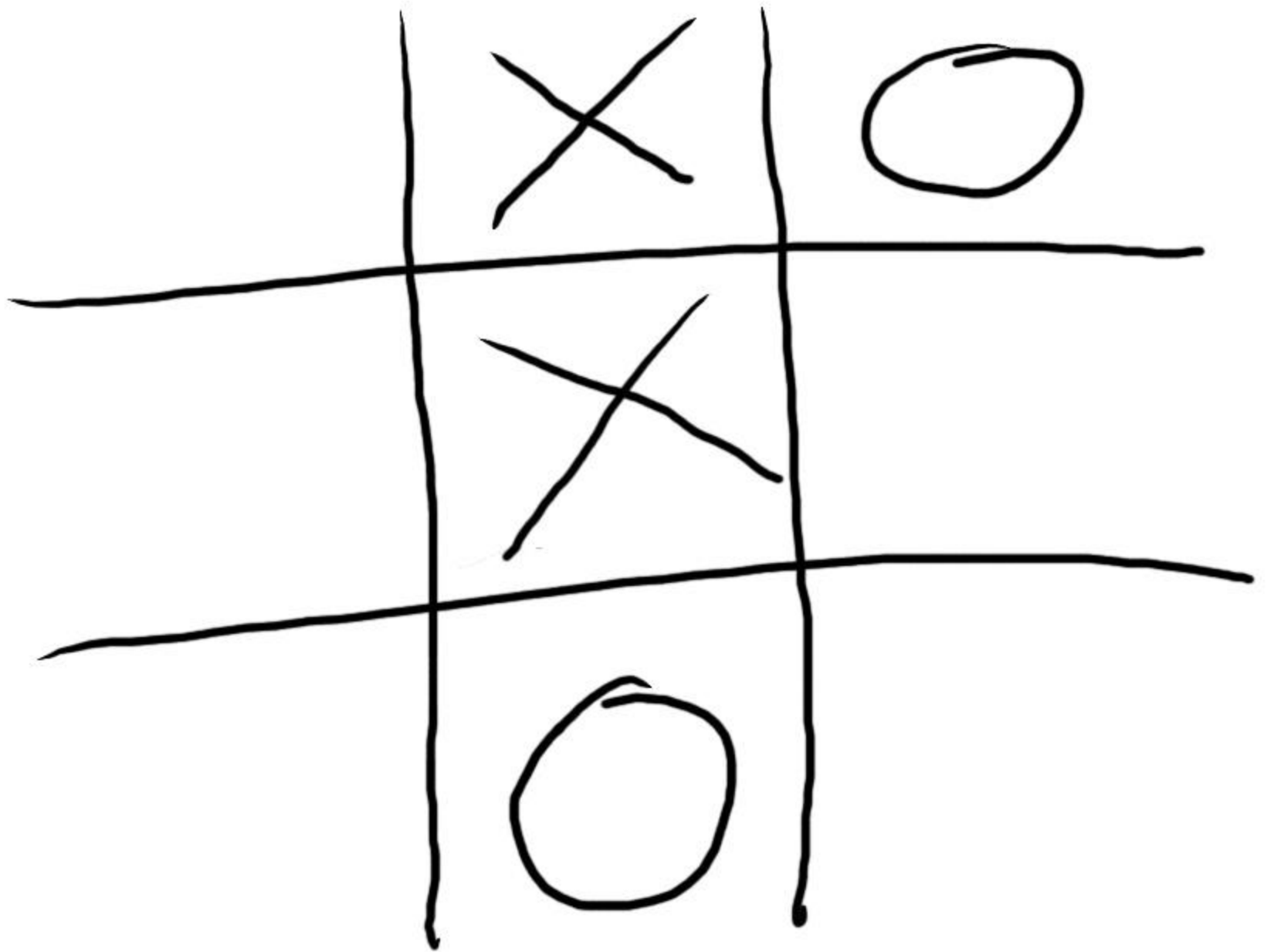
Games are puzzles



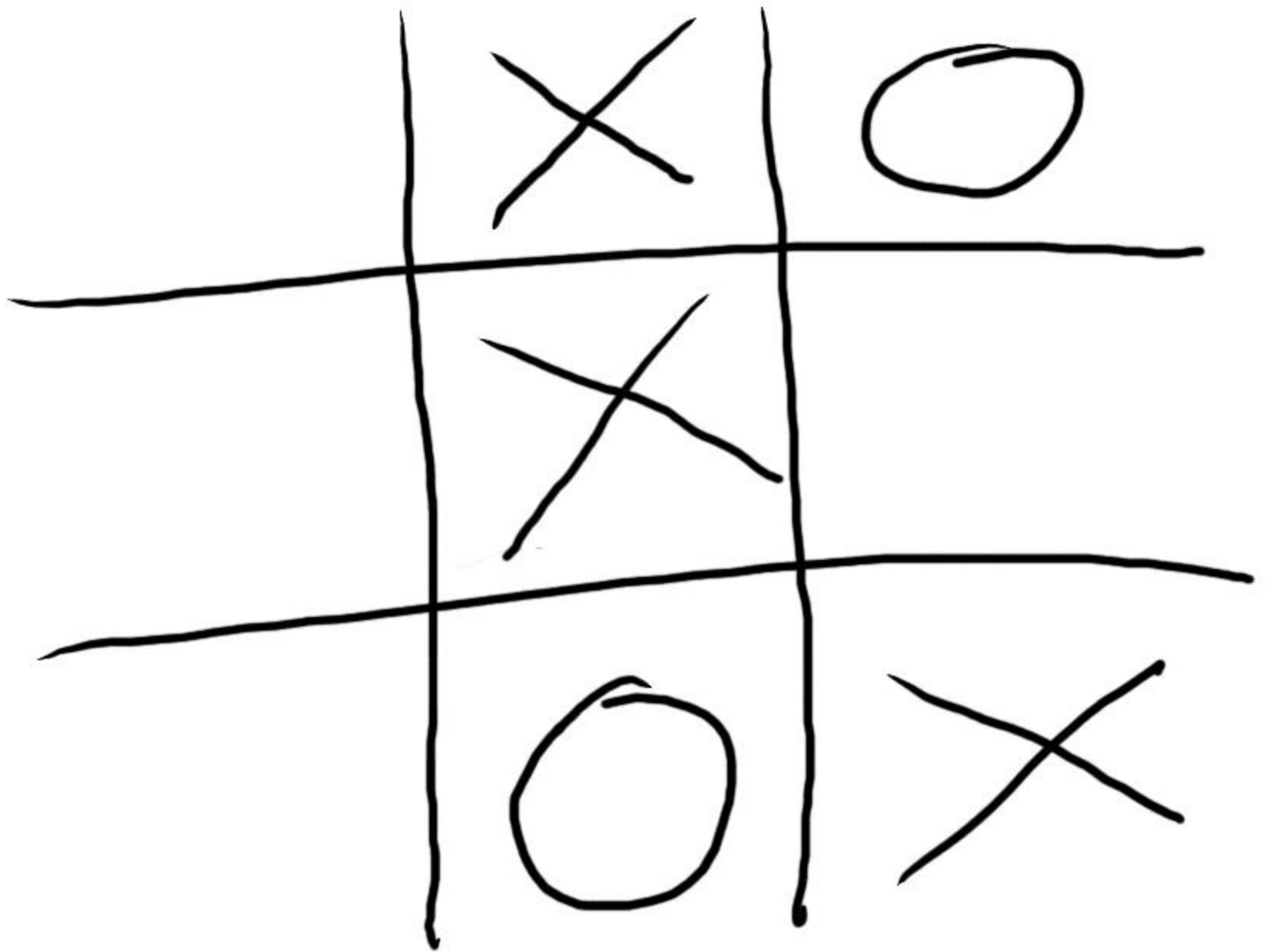
—they are about cognition,



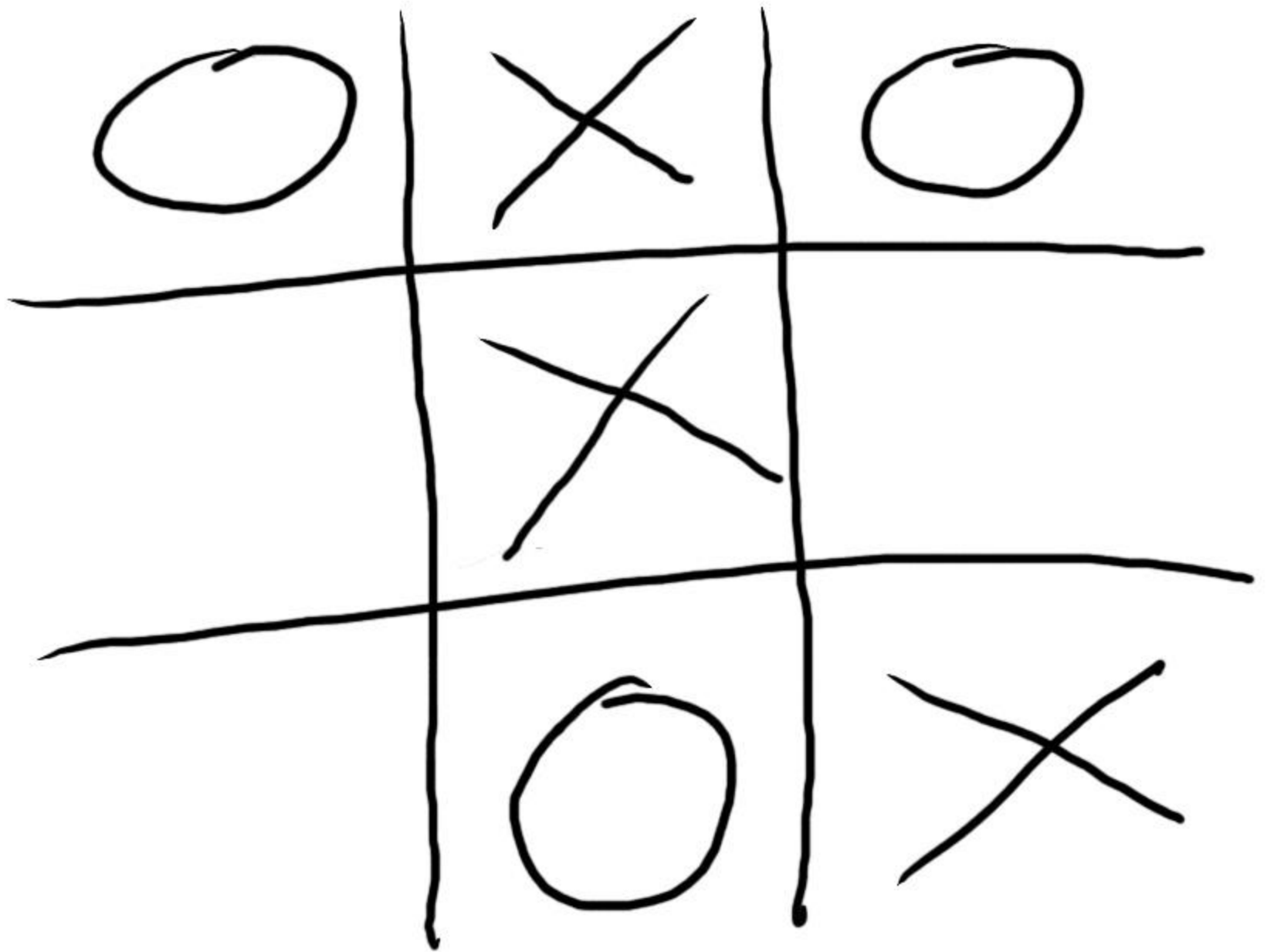
and learning to analyze patterns



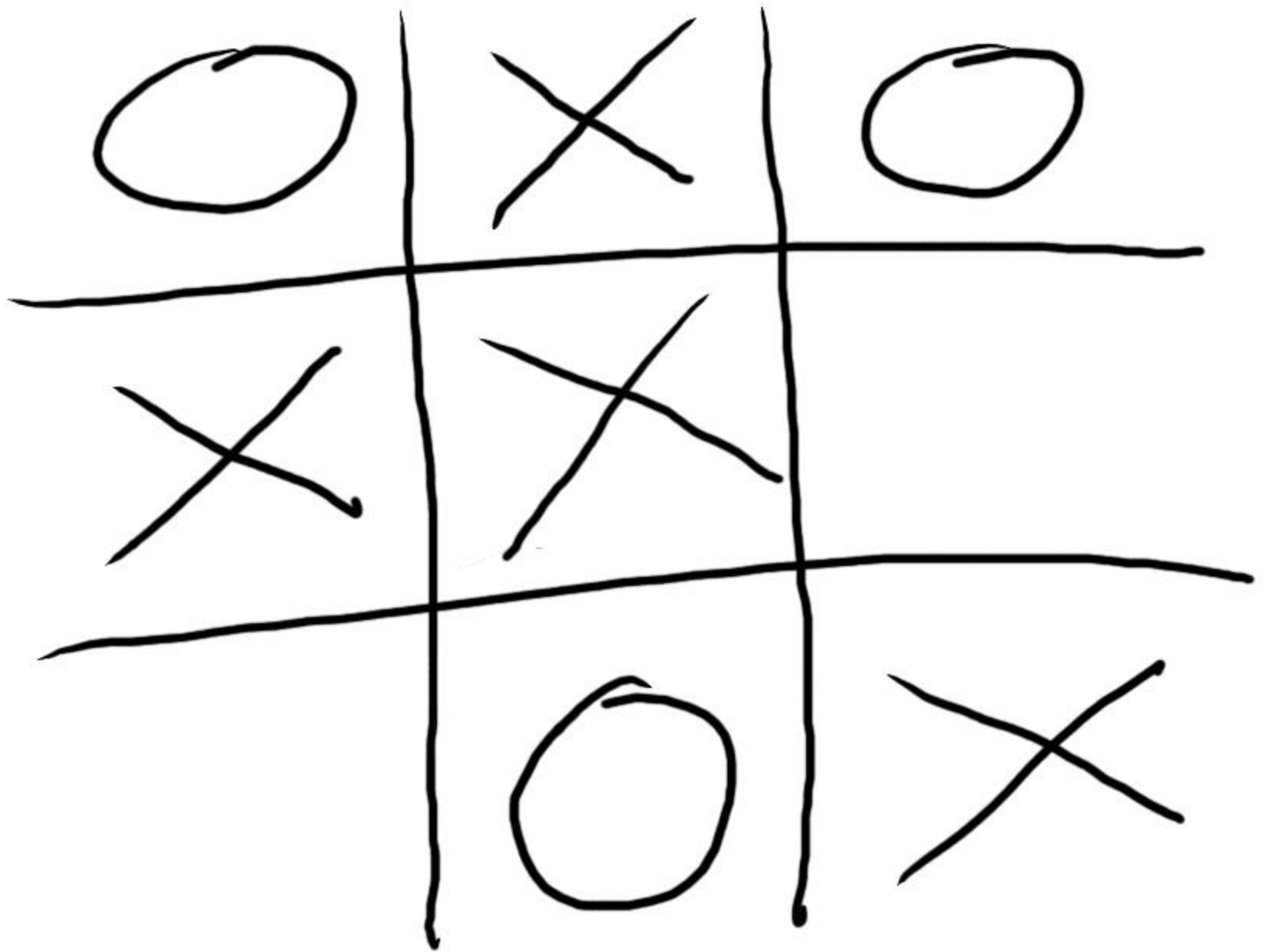
When you're playing a game,



you'll only play it



until you master the pattern



once you've mastered it

O	X	O
X	X	
	O	X

X		O
O	X	X
	X	O

O	X	
X	X	O
O		X

O	X	O
X	X	
	O	X

O	X	O
	X	X
X	O	

	O	X
X	X	
O	X	O

O	X	O
X	X	
	O	X

O		X
X	X	O
O	X	

O	X	
X	X	O
O		X

O	X	O
X	X	
	O	X

O		X
X	X	O
O	X	

	X	O
O	X	X
X		O

The game becomes **boring**.

O	X	O
X	X	
	O	X

X		O
O	X	X
	X	O

O	X	
X	X	O
O		X

O	X	O
X	X	
	O	X

O	X	O
	X	X
X	O	

	O	X
X	X	
O	X	O



O		X
X	X	O

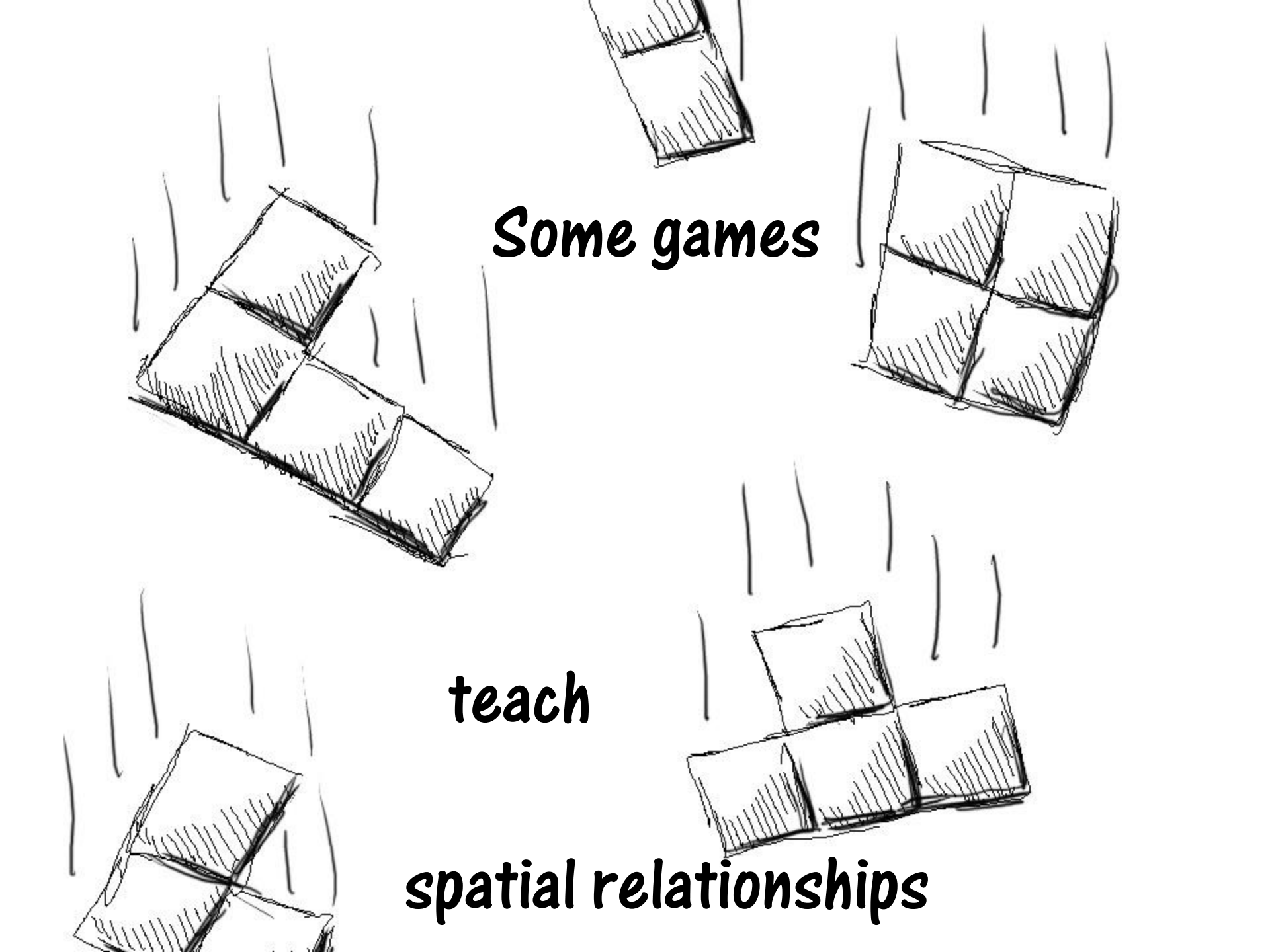
O	X	
X	X	O
O		X

O	X	O
X	X	
	O	X

O		X
X	X	O
O	X	

	X	O
O	X	X
X		O

Basically, all games are edutainment

The image features several hand-drawn sketches of geometric shapes, primarily rectangles and squares, arranged in a circular pattern around the central text. These shapes are drawn with simple black outlines and some internal hatching to suggest depth. Interspersed among these shapes are several vertical, slightly curved lines that resemble rain or falling objects. The overall style is sketchy and informal.

Some games

teach

spatial relationships

COIN
3100

0 > 61

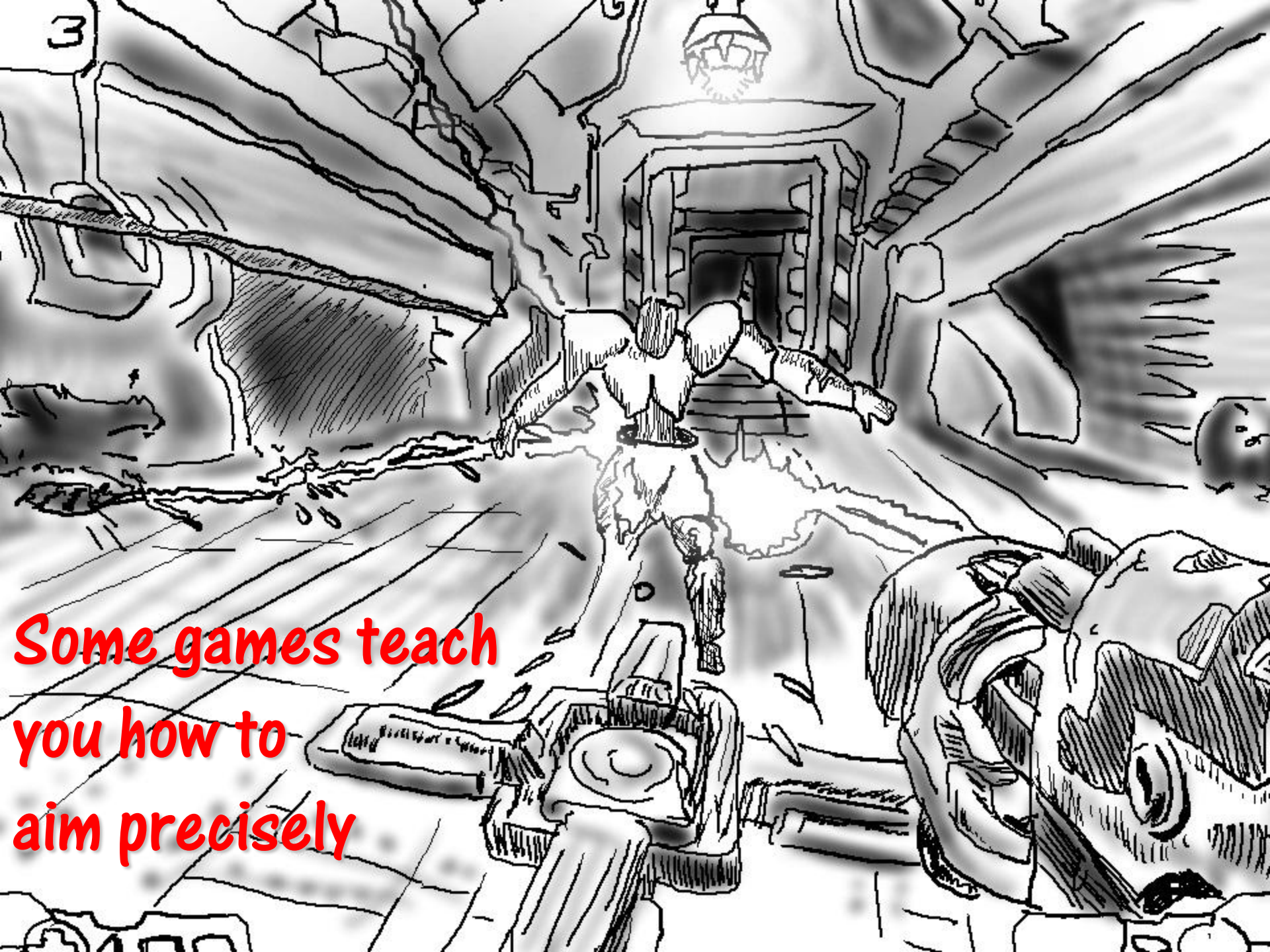
WORLD
1-2

TIME
26.1

Some games

teach you to



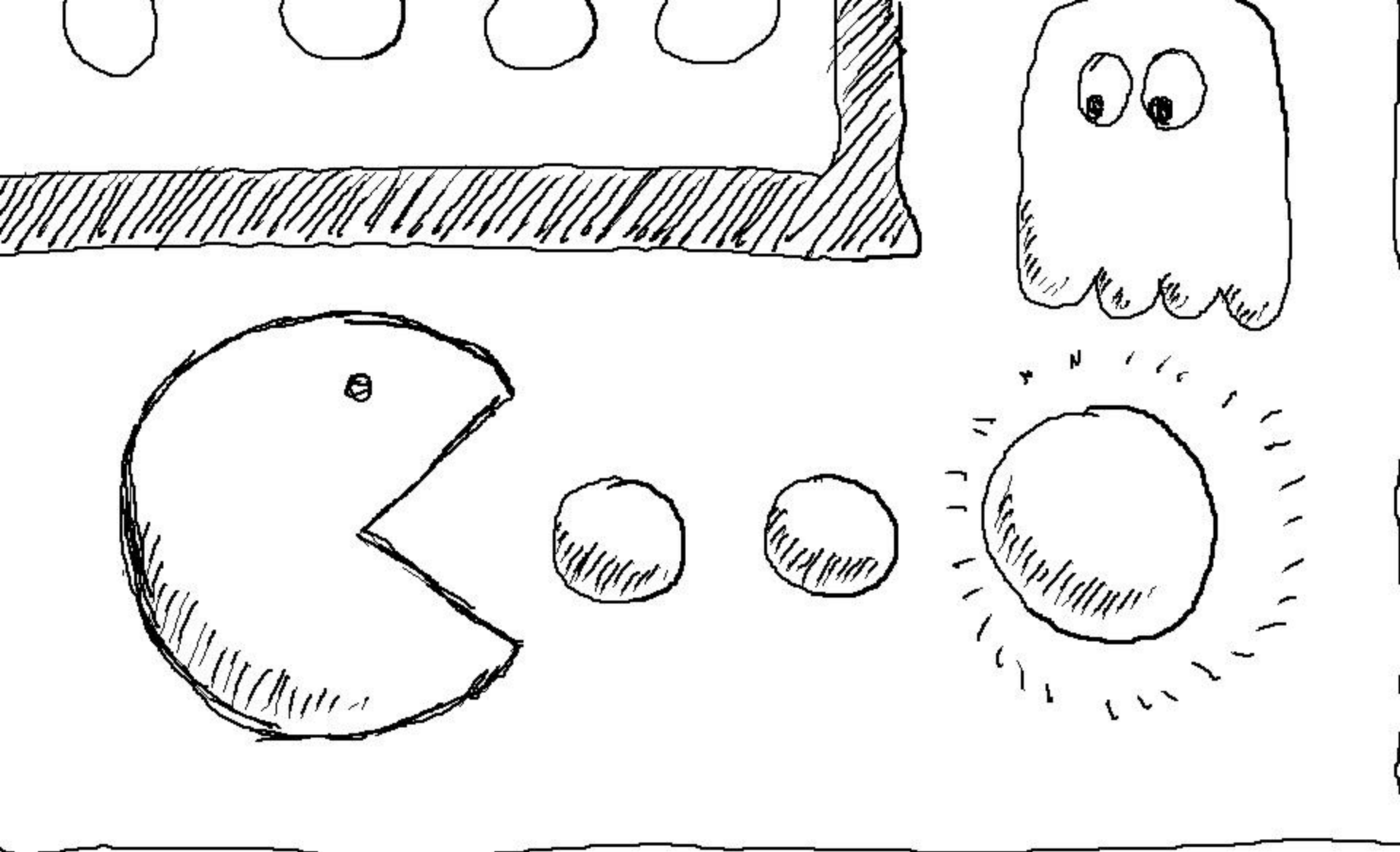


Some games teach
you how to
aim precisely

We're very good at seeing past fiction.

This is why gamers are dismissive of the ethical implications of games - They don't see "get a **blowjob from a hooker, then **run her over.**"**





They see a **power-up**.

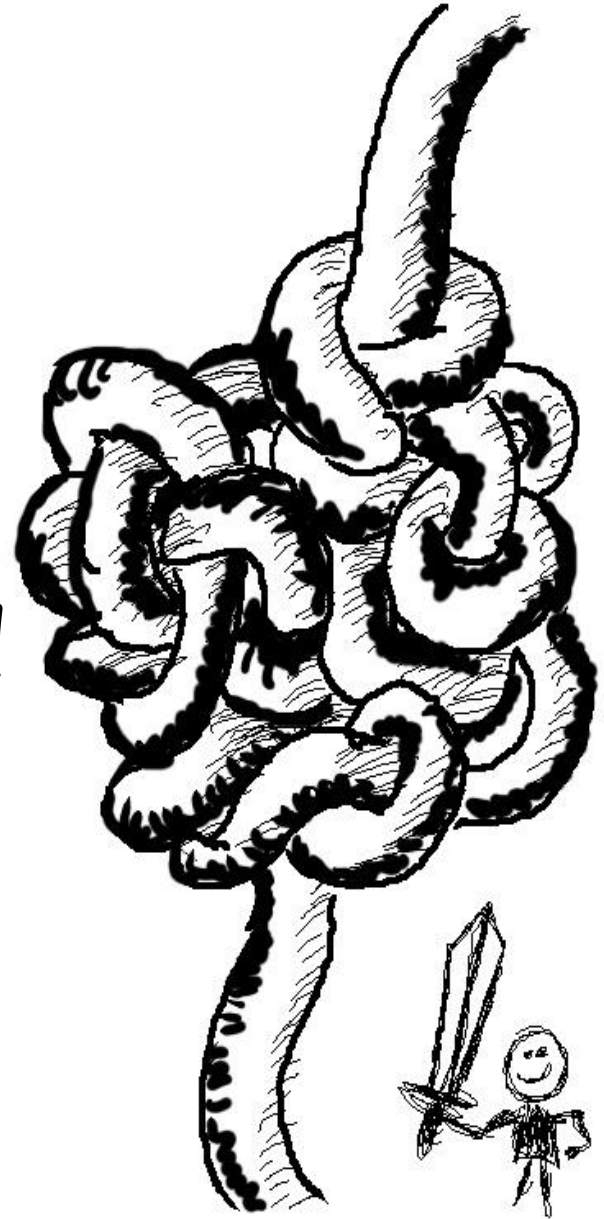
As critics of games, of
course, we can see other
patterns. 😊



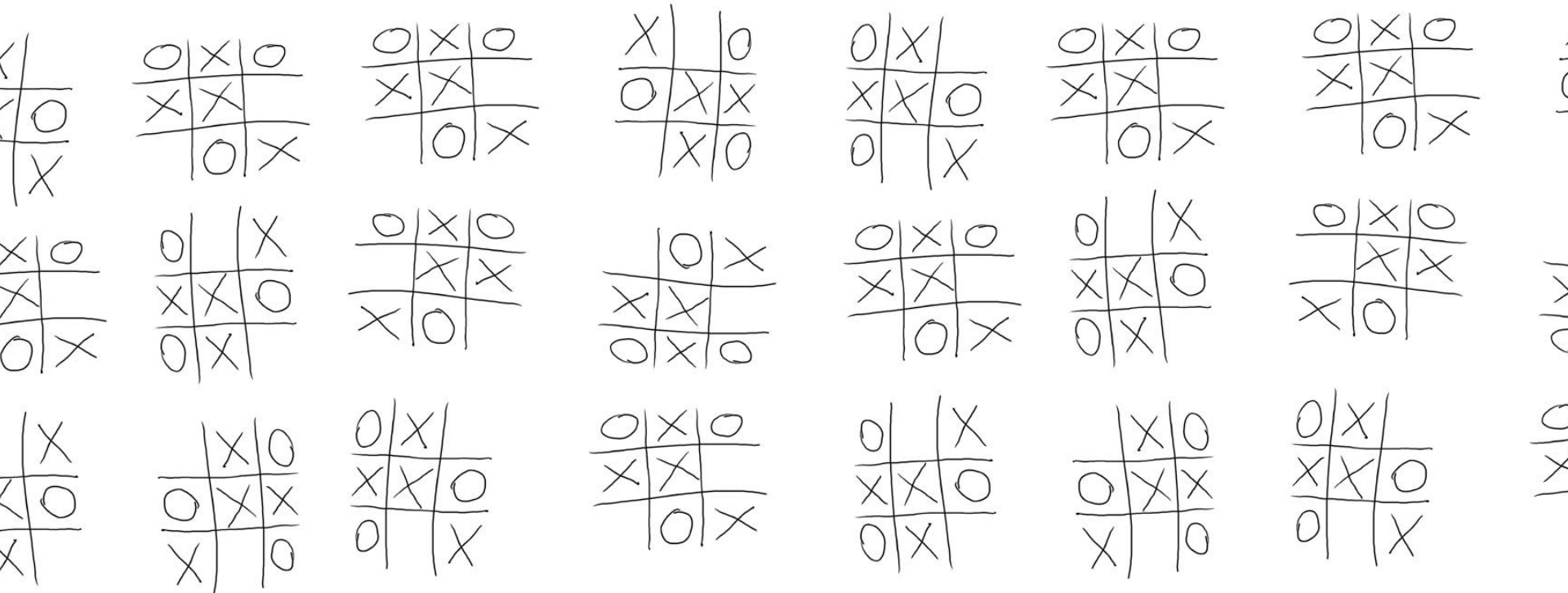
cheat! MULE grind.
macro HACK
exploit
BOTTOM
FEED

Players seeking to advance in a game
will **always** try to optimize what they are
doing.

If they are clever and see
an optimal path—an
Alexandrine solution to a
Gordian problem—they'll
do that instead of the
“intended gameplay.”

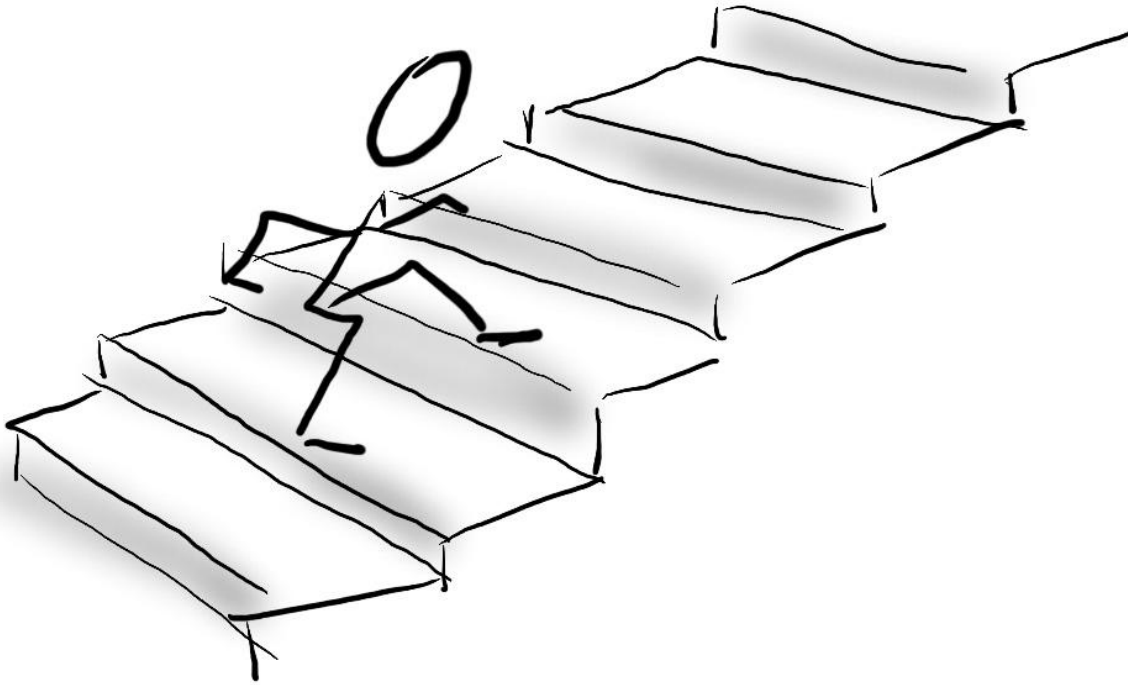


They will try to make the gameplay as predictable as possible.

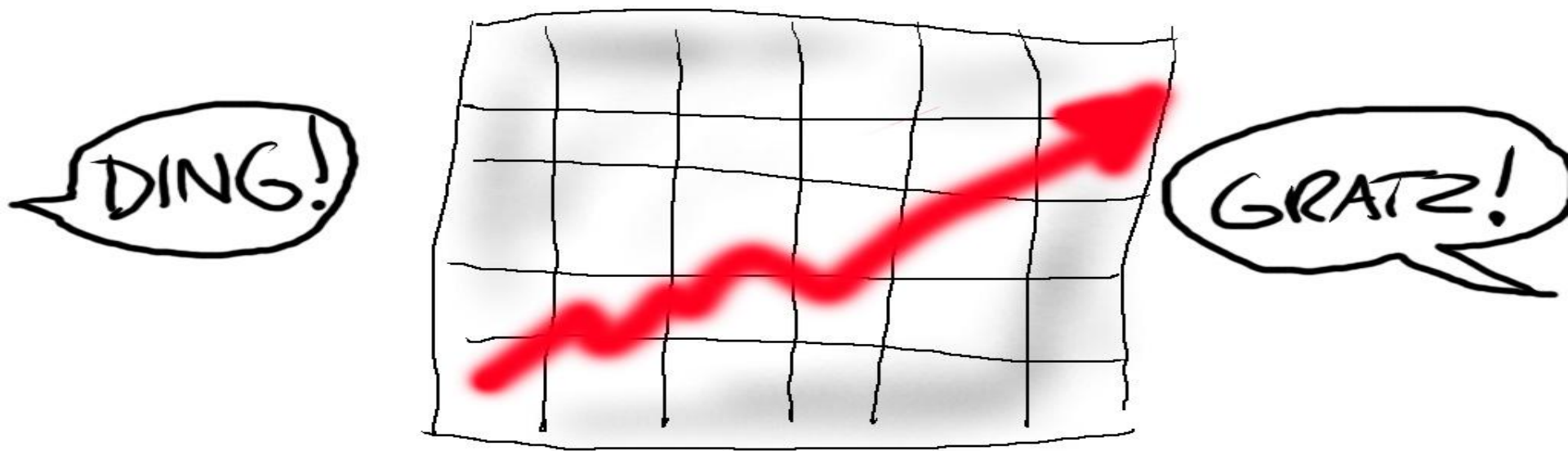


**Which then means it becomes boring,
and not fun.**

**In the real world, we call this “security”
and “steady jobs” and “sensible shoes”
and “routine.”**

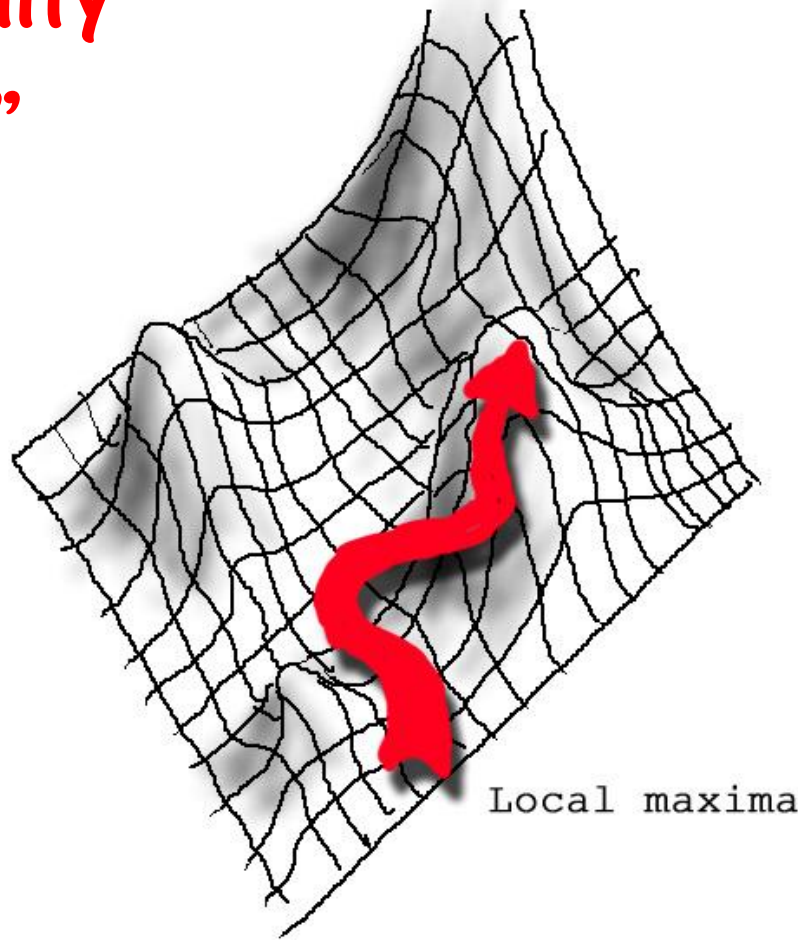


Call it a treadmill, if you want.

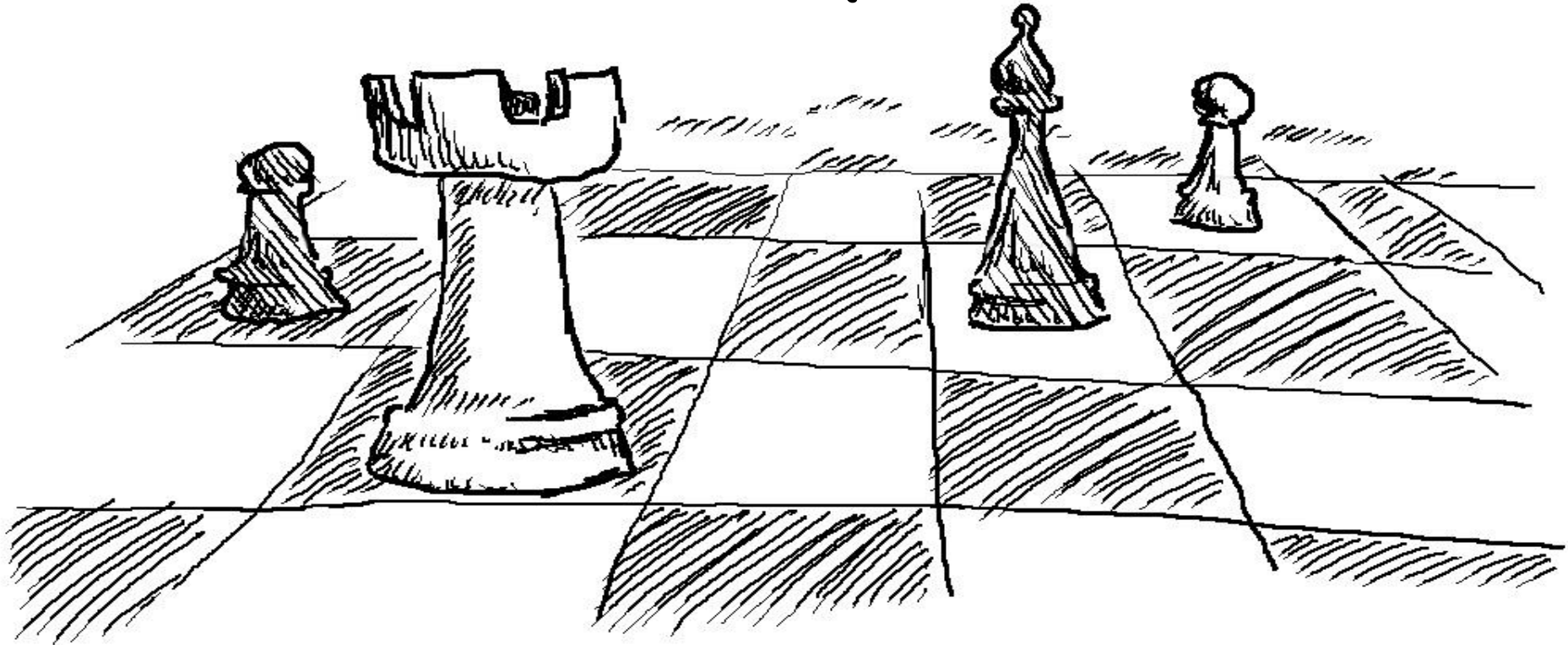


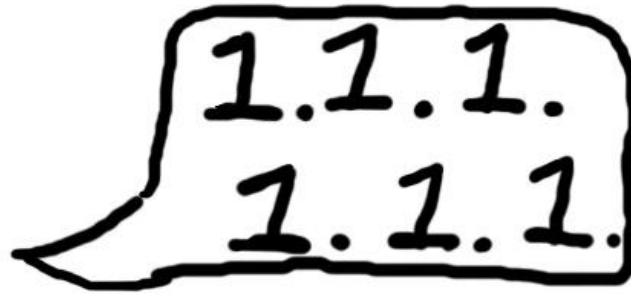
As gamemakers, **we are fighting a losing battle against the human brain**, which always fights to optimize, assembly-line, simplify, maximize ROI.

If I were Will Wright, I'd say that “Fun is the process of discovering areas in a possibility space.”

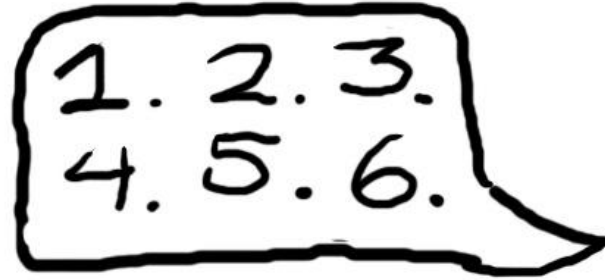


Most long-lasting games in the past
have been competitive, because they
lead to an endless supply of similar yet
subtly varied puzzles.





Instanced spaces in massively
multiplayer games are a
designer's attempt to **maintain**
control over the puzzles that
players are solving



1. 2. 3.
4. 5. 6.



Larger minimum feature sets
in online worlds are about
increasing the permutations,
the possibility space.

We talk so much about **emergent gameplay**, non-linear storytelling, or about **player-entered content**.

They're all ways of increasing the possibility space, making **self-refreshing** puzzles.

(INSERT CARTOON HERE.)

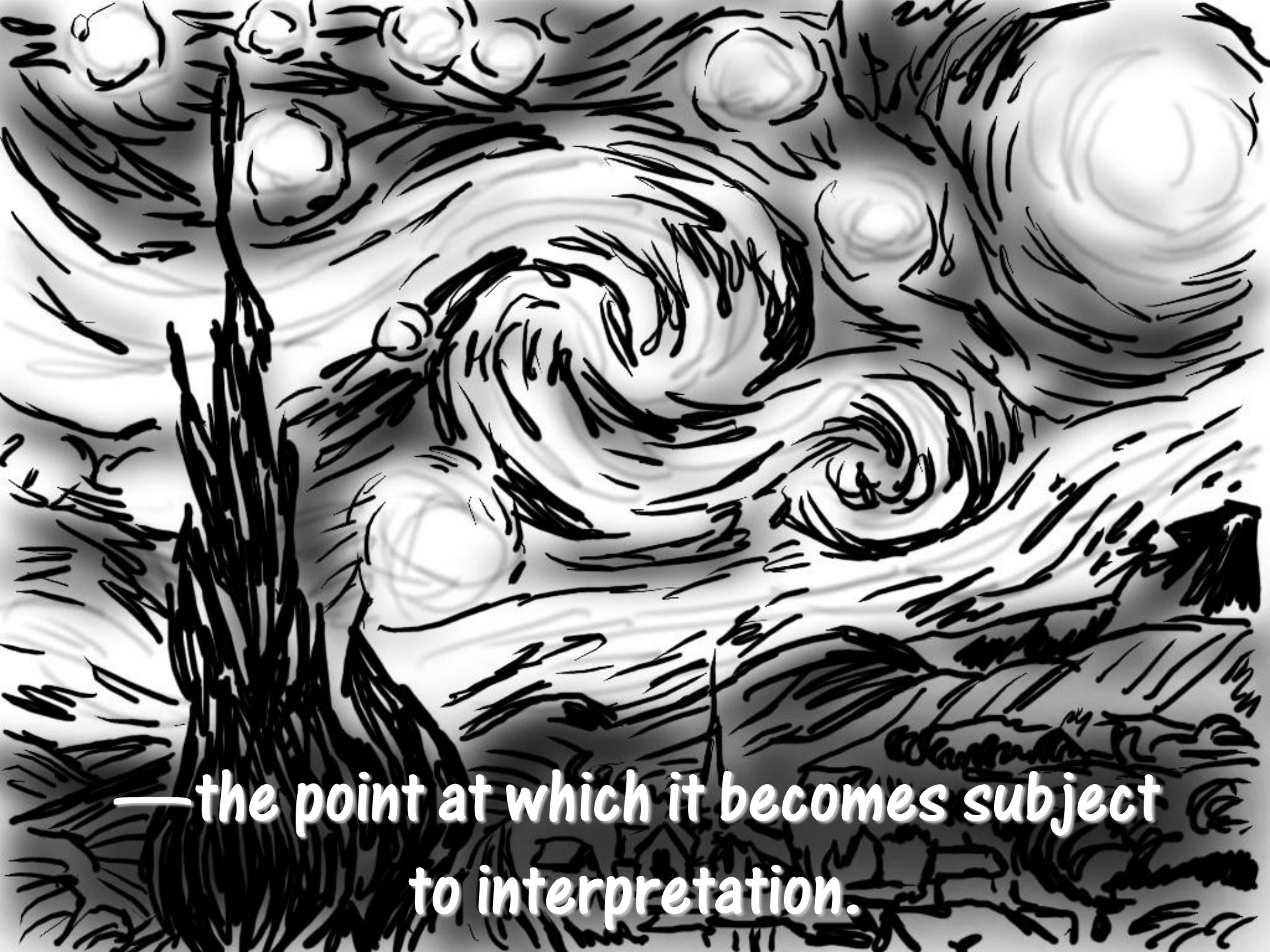
We also often discuss the desire for games to be **art**—for them to be puzzles with more than one right answer, puzzles that lend themselves to **interpretation**.

To be, or not
to be— that is
the question.

That may be the best definition of when
something

ceases to
be craft
and when it
turns into
art



A black and white abstract drawing featuring swirling, organic forms and a dense, textured background. The composition is dominated by dark, swirling lines and shapes that create a sense of movement and depth. In the lower portion, there is a large, bright, circular area that appears to be a source of light or a focal point. The overall effect is one of intense, swirling energy.

—the point at which it becomes subject
to interpretation.

**We do happen to have various puzzles
and conundra that are like this.**

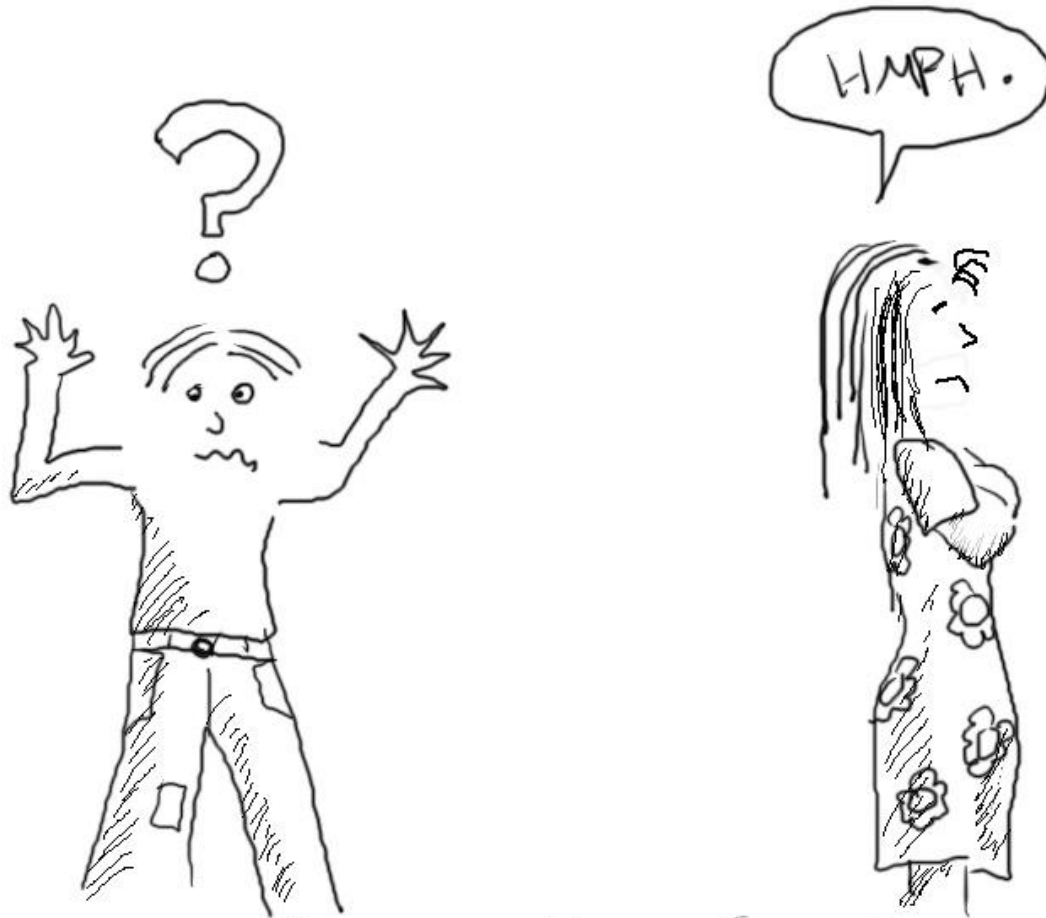
Try writing a book.

It was a dark and stormy night.

Or composing music.



Or understanding your significant other.



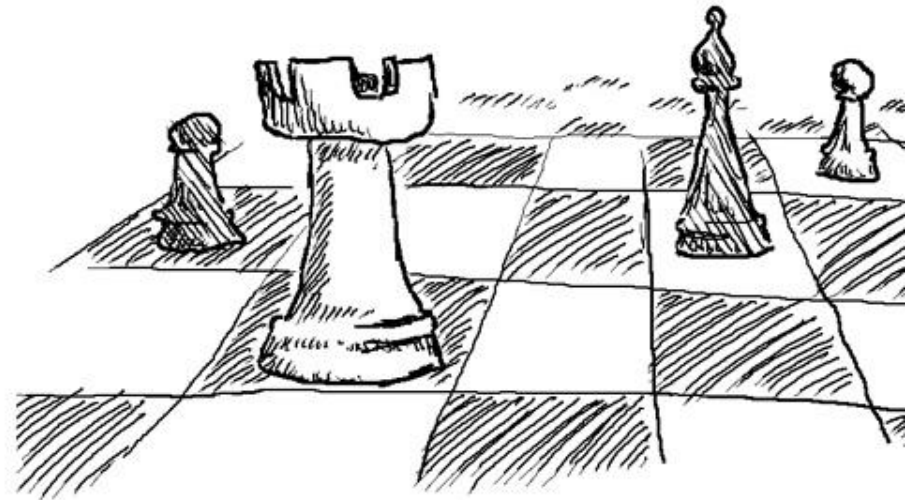
(Did you notice all of these are about communication?)

Or designing games.

The point at which our game puzzles approach the complexity of those puzzles is the point at which our art form becomes **mature**.



=



2B
||
!(2B)

The gap
between those
who want
games to
entertain and
those who want
games to be **art**

To be
or
not to
be...

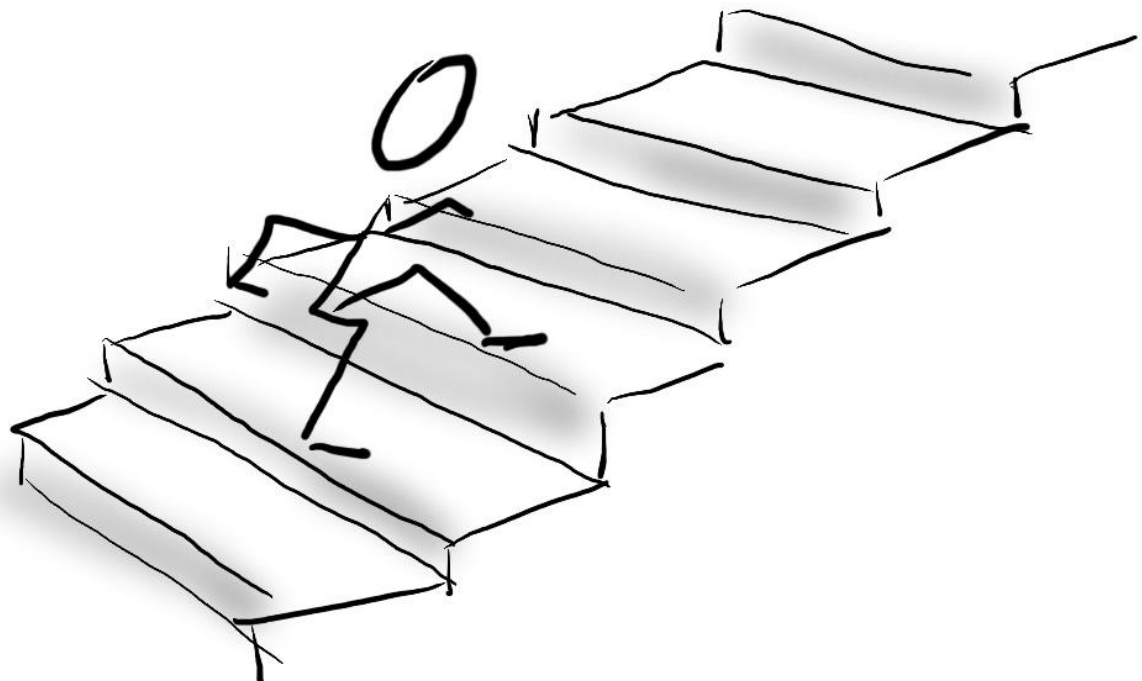
does not exist.

Because both entail posing questions—
tough ones even, ethical ones, even. And

games will never be
mature as long as the
designers create them
with complete answers
to their own puzzles in
mind.



Even then, there will a class of player who prefers the comfort of **only tackling puzzles they know how to solve.**



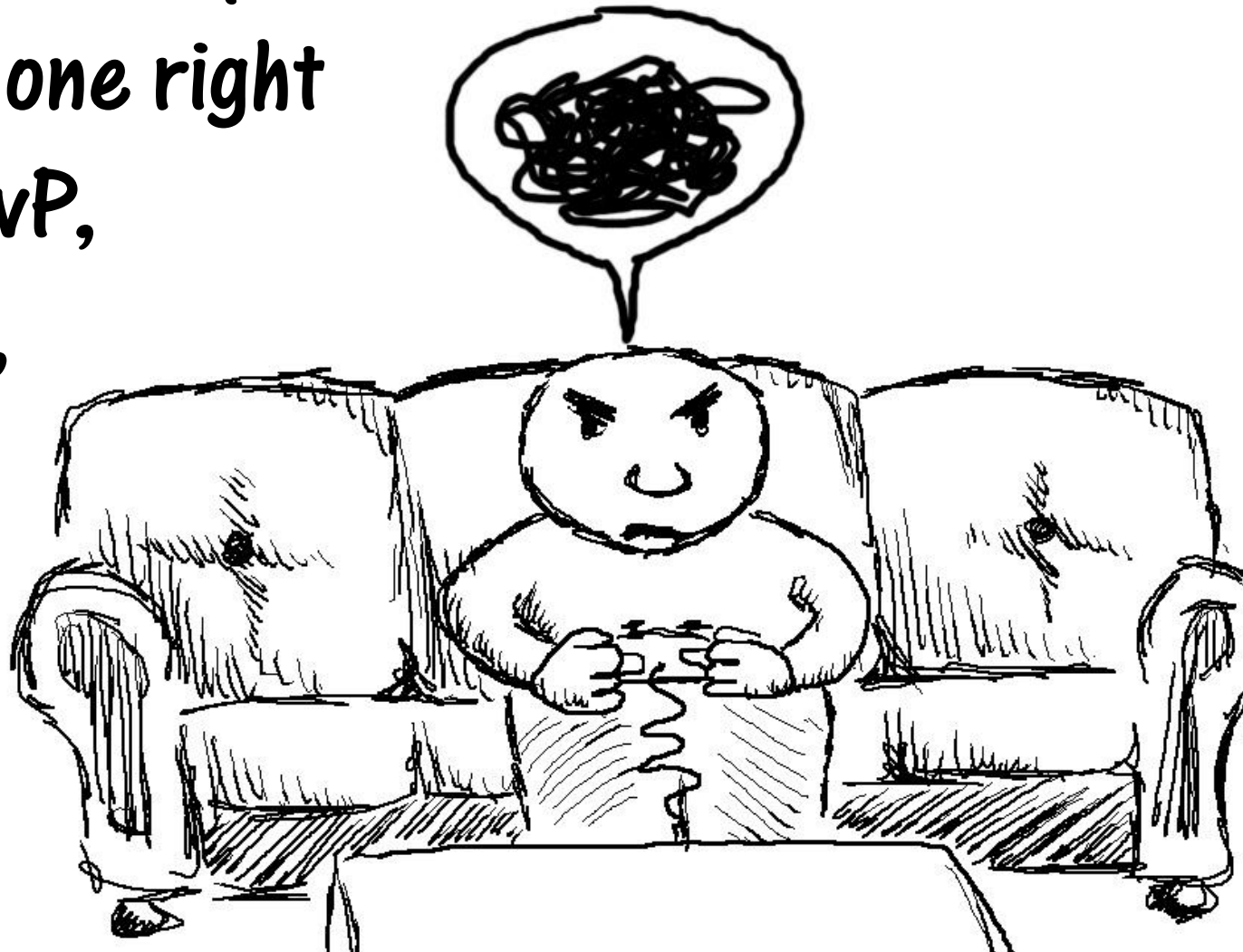
In the caveman days, the wolves got 'em.



These days, we're a bit more
tolerant—the **job market** gets them
instead.



So the challenge we all face is
to solve our own puzzles that
don't have one right
answer (PvP,
instancing,
player-
entered
content!)



Until then, all
our games
are destined
to be like tic-
tac-toe.

