



The first 105 levels of Candy Crush Saga, taken apart

How King teaches, paces and tags its opening levels, read from the public record, then tested: two levels rebuilt in my own match-3's rules and played thousands of times by bots, one of them redesigned, and the lessons turned on my own level pack.

105

levels, 7 full episodes and 10 levels of the 8th

25

tagged Hard, Super Hard or Nightmare in game

12

blockers and features introduced

2

levels rebuilt and measured, 1 redesigned

Why Candy Crush

I wanted a level teardown built on real boards, not on impressions. Royal Match's levels aren't documented publicly, and a teardown from memory can't be checked. Candy Crush's fan wiki documents every level: moves, goals, colours, blockers, the in-game difficulty tag, a community rating, the board, and the level's history of changes. That makes every claim here checkable.

What I found

1. **Tags are pacing, not just difficulty.** Tagged levels per episode grow 1, 2, 2, 4, 4, 5, 5, and 6 of 7 episode finales are tagged.
2. **The tag and the community disagree** on 25 of 105 levels: the tag follows live data, the rating a player's memory.
3. **Colour count outweighs board shape.** In the rebuilds, one more colour cost more than 15 extra moves gave back.
4. **Losses collect in one-way cells**, not at the level's showcase blocker. Removing them was worth nine moves.

Method and sources

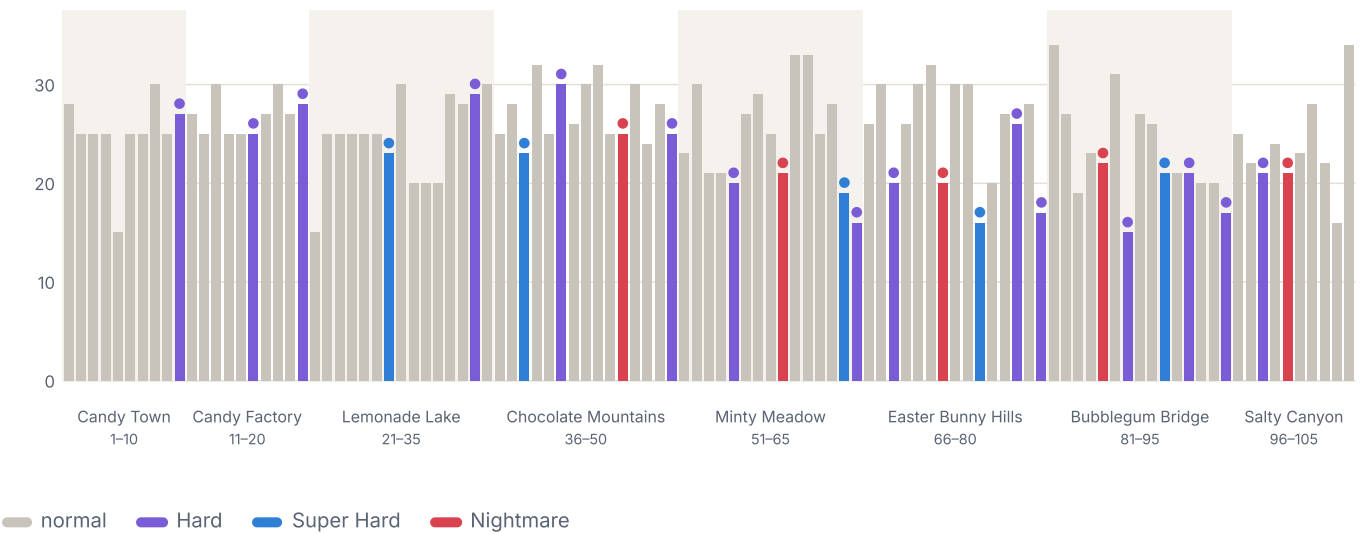
- **Level data:** the Candy Crush Saga Wiki (candycrush.fandom.com, CC-BY-SA), levels 1–105, read on 17 October 2026: moves, goals, colours, blockers, the in-game tag (the wiki's skull categories) and the community rating. The table ships with this sample's sources.
- **Boards:** transcribed by me from the wiki's screenshots for the two rebuilt levels.
- **Rebuilds:** played in Arcana Match's rules (my game) by a goal-focused bot (1,000 games) and a random bot (500). Candy Crush's own specials, spawns and cannons are not modelled, so the numbers compare levels with each other; they are not Candy Crush's win rates.
- **Not used:** any King data. The wiki's tags change roughly weekly; this is one snapshot.
- **Rights:** Candy Crush Saga is King's; this is an independent study.

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Moves hold, tags rise, episodes end on a test

Each bar is a level's move budget, coloured by its in-game tag. Moves drift down slowly; the real ramp is how often a level is tagged.



EPISODE	LEVELS	TAGS	TAGGED LEVELS	AVG MOVES
Candy Town	1-10	1	10	25.0
Candy Factory	11-20	2	16, 20	26.9
Lemonade Lake	21-35	2	27, 34	24.6
Chocolate Mountains	36-50	4	38, 41, 46, 50	27.2
Minty Meadow	51-65	4	55, 59, 64, 65	24.7
Easter Bunny Hills	66-80	5	68, 72, 75, 78, 80	25.2
Bubblegum Bridge	81-95	5	85, 87, 90, 92, 95	22.9

What the pattern says

- **Tags ramp, moves barely do.** The average budget stays between 23 and 27 moves across seven episodes, while tagged levels grow from 1 in ten to 5 in fifteen. Difficulty comes from what a move has to do, not how many there are.
- **Finale**s are tests. 6 of 7 episodes end on a tagged level; Lemonade Lake puts its test one level early (34).
- **Tags sit late.** 15 of 23 tags in episodes 1-7 fall in an episode's second half: an episode opens gently with its new idea, then tests it.
- **The Nightmare moves forward.** The first Nightmare of episodes 4-8 sits at position 11 of 15, 9 of 15, 7 of 15, 5 of 15, 5 of 15: each episode's hardest test arrives a little earlier than the last.
- **Colour count barely varies:** 64 levels use four colours, 38 five and 3 three; none of the first 105 uses six.

One new thing at a time, then a test

The opening teaches the specials and their combos before any blocker gets hard, then adds a new blocker or feature every few levels, almost always on an untagged level.

Tutorial levels (the wiki's notes)

LEVEL	TEACHES
2	striped candies
3	wrapped candies
4	colour bomb
17	colour bomb + wrapped combo
19	colour bomb + striped combo
21	ingredients
23	striped + striped combo
65	coconut wheel

Specials before blockers. Levels 2–4 each teach one special candy; 17, 19 and 23 teach combos. By level 23 the player has every special and three combos; what follows is mostly about where to use them. Only two of the twelve introductions land on a tagged level (liquorice swirls at 55, the coconut wheel at the finale, 65).

First appearance of each blocker and feature

LEVEL	FIRST SEEN
2	frosting
5	jellies
11	bubblegum pops
25	icon bugs
29	marmalade
36	gumball machines
43	jelly fish
52	liquorice locks
53	teleporters
55	liquorice swirls
61	unsettled candies
65	coconut wheels

The goal types rotate



Levels 1–105 left to right. The goal type changes from one level to the next 83 times in 104; it never repeats more than three times in a row after the four-level opening. A player tired of digging for jelly gets an order or a drop next. Ingredients arrive with an episode's opener (21, Lemonade Lake).

The tag knows something the players don't remember

Each level carries two difficulty labels: the tag King puts on the map, and the rating the wiki's community gives it. They disagree on 25 of 105 levels.

IN-GAME TAG ↓ / COMMUNITY RATING →	VERY EASY	EASY	SOMEWHAT EASY	MEDIUM	SOMEWHAT HARD	HARD	EXTREMELY HARD
NO TAG	47	15	8	7	1	1	
HARD	4	3	4	4			
SUPER HARD	2	1	1				1
NIGHTMARE			1		1	3	

Shaded: 16 tagged levels the community rates easy, 9 untagged levels it rates Medium or harder.

Why they differ

- **The tag is live.** The wiki notes the tag list is updated roughly weekly: it moves with how players do now.
- **The rating is a memory.** Many ratings date from an earlier version of a level; Candy Crush's first 200 levels were mass redesigned, and boosters help today's players.
- **The tag is also a role.** Level 75 is Super Hard but rated Very easy; level 10, the very first finale, is Hard but rated Very easy. A tag sets expectations and pacing (a finale should feel like one), not only a win rate.

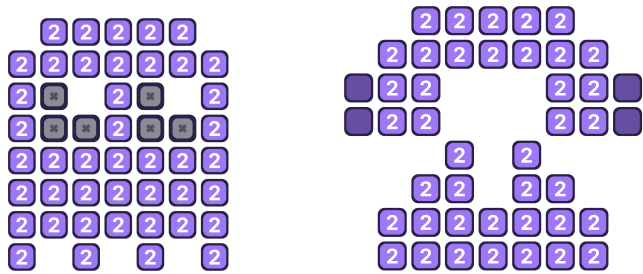
For a designer: label difficulty from live data, and treat the label as a promise: a tagged level that plays easy wastes the moment, an untagged wall feels unfair.

Level 65: one slot, many levels

Level 65 was the last level at Candy Crush's launch and, by the wiki's account, the most notorious: 52 moves for 65 double jellies, a wall that many players quit at. It went through three nerfs and four buffs over the Flash and mobile versions, and King once celebrated the 54 million players who beat it. In the mass redesign it became a gentle 16-move order level that teaches the coconut wheel, still tagged Hard as the episode's finale. Its slot kept its role (the end of an episode, a test) while its content was replaced: the role is the design, the board is a tool.

Level 46 is a Nightmare. Level 66 is nothing. Why?

Both are jelly levels in neighbouring episodes with almost the same budget. I rebuilt them in Arcana Match's rules: jelly as veils, double jelly as double veils, frosting as Stone Seals with the same three layers and the jelly kept under them.

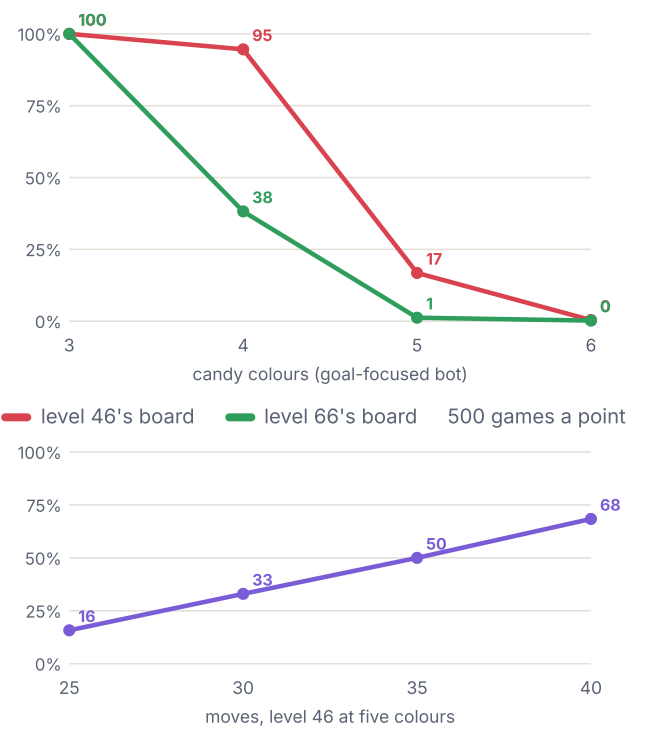


Purple: jelly (2 = double jelly). Grey: three-layered frosting with double jelly under it. Gaps: not part of the board. Transcribed from the wiki's screenshots.

	LEVEL 46	LEVEL 66
In-game tag / rating	Nightmare / Hard	none / Very easy
Jelly layers · cells	98 · 49	84 · 44
Goal-focused bot wins	93%	100%
Random bot wins	15%	71%
Moves left on a win	10.2	16.7

The goal-focused bot can't see the Nightmare (it wins 93%), but **the random bot can**: 15% against 71%. Level 46 punishes play without a plan; level 66 forgives it. A Nightmare tag measured on real players fits that: real players sit somewhere between the two bots.

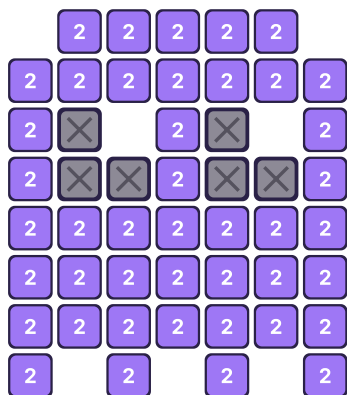
One colour against fifteen moves



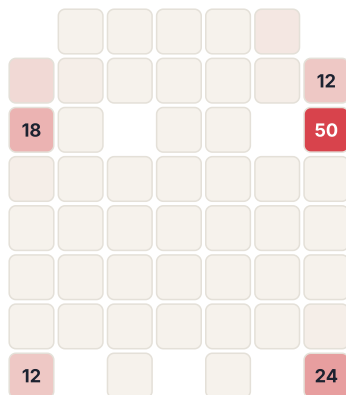
Colours decide more than the board. Give level 46's board one more colour and the goal-focused bot falls from 95% to 17%; fifteen extra moves only bring it back to 68%. And level 66's board is the *harder* one at equal colours (38% against 95% at four): it is easy only because it deals three.

Losses collect in the cells that only line up one way

A fail map: in what share of lost games each cell still held jelly or frosting when the moves ran out (goal-focused bot, 74 losses in 1,000 games).



The board



The fail map (% of losses)

Almost every lost game ends one or two jelly layers short (100% of losses are near misses, 1.5 layers short on average): the classic "so close" loss that sells five more moves.

The losses sit in five cells: row 3 col 7 (50%), row 8 col 7 (24%), row 3 col 1 (18%), row 8 col 1 (12%), row 2 col 7 (12%). Each one has a hole, a seal or the board's edge on two sides, so it can only be matched along one line.

The frosting is never the fail point: no lost game ended with frosting or the jelly under it left. It sits in the middle, where cascades land, and breaks on its own. The level's signature blocker isn't what beats players.

One-way cells

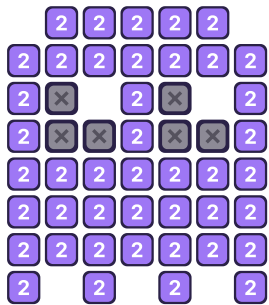
A cell with a hole, a blocker or the board's edge on two sides can only take part in matches along one line, and cascades rarely reach it. Every rebuild variant I tried moved the losses to whichever cells were one-way: fill the bottom row's holes and the losses move up to row 3's edge.

Why it matters

A player can't see a one-way cell. They see a board that was going well and a last jelly in a corner that never lined up. That loss reads as luck, not as a mistake to fix next time, and it is invisible to the designer too unless the losses are mapped.

Keep the Nightmare, lose the coin flip

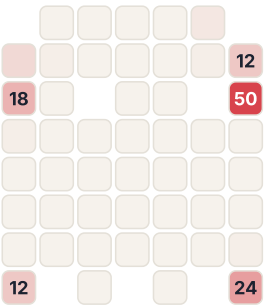
The goal: the same difficulty, but losses a player can read. I removed the one-way cells (filled the two holes in row 3 and the three in the bottom row) and took the difficulty back through the move budget, which the player can see.



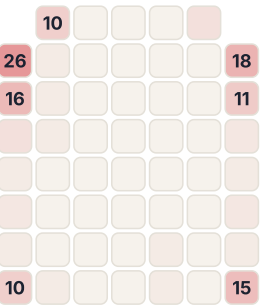
Level 46 as it ships (rebuilt)



Redesign: no one-way cells



Fail map before



Fail map after (16 moves)

	AS IT SHIPS · 25 MOVES	REDESIGN · 25 MOVES	REDESIGN · 16 MOVES
Goal-focused bot wins	93%	100%	94%
Random bot wins	15%	49%	14%
Losses that are near misses	100%	–	100%
Worst single cell in the fail map	50% of losses	–	26% of losses

The proposal

- **Fill the five holes inside the board** (two in row 3, three in the bottom row): no cell is one-way except the two under the missing top corners.
- **Cut the budget from 25 to 16 moves.** The one-way cells were worth about nine moves: at 16 the redesign plays like the original at 25 for both bots.
- **Keep the frosting with jelly under it** in the middle: it is the episode's lesson and stays part of the goal.

The trade-off, honestly

The losses spread out (the worst cell drops from 50% to 26%) and a tight budget is visible on the HUD from the first move. But the original's edge losses, always one or two jellies short, are an excellent moment to sell five more moves. King may well keep them on purpose; I'd A/B test the redesign on retention at the level (players who quit within a day of failing it) against extra-move purchases.

What I took back to The Tower

The teardown gave me two new tools for Arcana Match (colour count per level, and seals with layers and jelly under them) and one new check, the fail map. I ran the check on my own twelve-level pack.

#	LEVEL	DESIGNED FAIL POINT (BEFORE THE AUDIT)	FAIL MAP: TOP CELLS	
1	The Courtyard	Only a very unlucky board.	tile goal only	n/a
2	The Split Keep	Cups, the big goal: the wall halves every Cups cascade. I first expected Swords, the smaller goal, to be the fail point; the data showed the wall hurts the larger goal most.	tile goal only	n/a
3	Veiled Floor	The last veils in the bottom corners.	r8c1 52%, r8c8 35%	matches
4	The Gatehouse	Two or three veils left under an unbroken seal.	r4c1 45%, r4c7 27%	matches
5	Market Day	Rare: the two suits not appearing together.	tile goal only	n/a
6	Chained Battlements	One chain left on the top row.	r1c8 56%, r1c1 48%	matches
7	The Stair	A double veil left on the top step.	r5c8 39%, r4c1 29%	fixed
8	The Vault	Veil layers left in the vault's lower corners.	r6c7 38%, r6c2 33%	matches
9	Open Sky	Rare.	tile goal only	n/a
10	Crossed Chains	An arm's chain left because the middle was more tempting.	r7c5 38%, r4c2 35%	matches
11	Siege Lines	Usually the veils, because they are last in reach.	r6c2 30%, r6c8 26%	matches
12	The Tower Falls	Veils left at the base.	r9c6 38%, r9c2 37%	matches

One note was wrong. The Stair said its losses come from "a double veil on the top step". The top step holds 7% of losses; the outer steps, one-way cells at the board's edge, hold 39% and 29%. The note dated from the first draft, before its double veils became single. It now follows the data, and the audit is logged in the pack.

Changes I'm making

- **Every level gets a fail map** in its review; a designed fail point that the map doesn't show is a bug in the notes.
- **Tag the spikes.** The Gatehouse, the Vault and the finale should say "Hard" before the first move, as Candy Crush does, so the loss lands as the level's fault.

Rules I'm keeping

- **Colour count is the first dial, moves the fine one.** One colour moved the rebuilds more than fifteen moves.
- **Place the fail point on purpose.** If a one-way cell is the hardest place, make it the blocker the level is about.
- **Teach tools before obstacles.** Candy Crush hands over every special by level 23 and only then makes blockers hard.
- **Tags follow players, roles follow design.** Measure the tag live; keep the role (a finale is a test) whatever the board.

Limits The bots aren't players, Arcana's rules aren't Candy Crush's, and two rebuilds are a case study, not a model of King's tuning. The wiki is a community record and one day's snapshot.