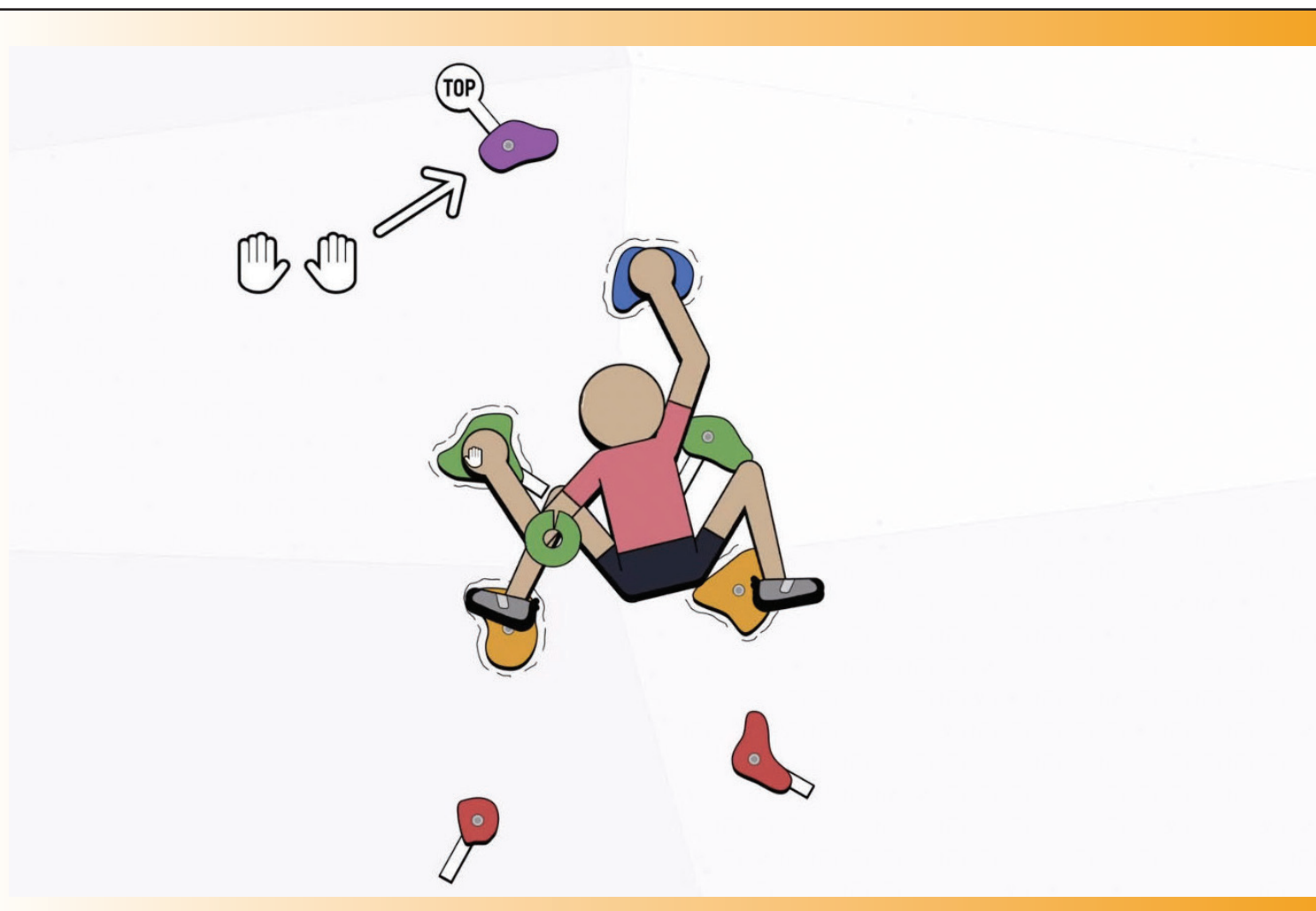
Daily

LIFE

The Indie Itch: 4 deceptively simple free games to keep your brain active



Gameplay from "Klifur" by Torfi. This physics-based game was created to challenge players to climb a boulder and control the limbs of their character.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @TORFIAS ON INSTAGRAM

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Exams got you down? Just barely holding on until Thanksgiving break? There are plenty of ways to keep those neurons firing other than scrolling or studying until you can't think, and you can find them right here. Welcome back to The Indie Itch, the biweekly column where I give readers my suggestions for free games on itch.io, ranging anywhere from cozy games to roguelikes, puzzles, RPGs and anything else you can think of. This week, my attention was caught by some cute and basic looking games that I thought might be relaxing. I was very wrong in this thought process. The puzzles and gameplay you'll find in this list are sure to make you think, all in your browser for zero dollars. If you're not looking for a challenge, you can find some more relaxing recommendations in The Indie Itch collection here: https://itch.io/c/8241825/the-indie-itch.

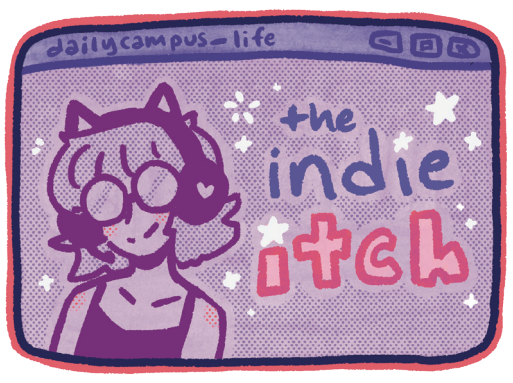
"SPLOOB" by mors and Catonator seemed simple enough. Made for Falling Block Jam 2026, it's got a goofy name, squishy little shape characters and a funny tutorial. The goal is to pile up three different types of jelly shapes in a Tetris-like fashion, and get ones of the same color to touch both walls of the play field in a continuous line. Once you do that, you get a ton of points and make room in the space, because the second a shape gets above the top line, it's all over. The more points you get, the faster the shapes start to drop. There aren't really any levels, just endless and timed difficulty challenges. The way the jelly shapes move and interact with each other in the space adds so many variables, and you very quickly find yourself getting invested in these little jiggly shapes. And if this doesn't sound exciting, stop reading and go play "SPLOOB" for yourself to understand.

Next, "Klifur" by Torfi is another physics-based game, this time with actual levels. I have yet to beat this game, not because I can't, but because I willfully gave up to go play more "SPLOOB." In all seriousness, I thought this game was going to be a lot easier than it is. In "Klifur," you control the limbs of a little bouldering guy. Each level presents you with a different climbing layout, and it's your job to get the character to grab the last hold at the top. All you have to do is click on one of his hands or feet to drag it to a new hold. However, smaller holds can only have one appendage attached at a time, while larger ones can have two. You can also have a hand or foot hang loose as a strategy, but if you accidentally click the opposite hand/foot, the little guy falls and the level restarts. It doesn't sound like a hard game, but the physics make for some odd hurdles and force you to be very specific in your limb placements. To be honest, I think real-life bouldering is easier than some of the levels in this game.

The most frustrating game on this list is "Cell Machine" by Sam Hogan. When I say that it's frustrating, I don't mean it's a bad game, but I do mean that it made me feel a little stupid. Yet I found myself continuing to try after failing again and again just to get that feeling of happiness when it finally did click. The tutorial of this game gives you some very simple rules: Destroy the red cells by pushing your cells into them and place cells in the play area. There are also different types of cells with their own functions. Once you get through that, the difficulty drastically increases. The point is to trigger chain reactions with the movements of each cell, but it can be quite hard to wrap your head around that; or maybe it's a me problem.

Lastly, we have "My Keyboard is Full of Ants!" by plasmastarfish, which is exactly what it sounds like. There's one simple game mode and one goal: Squish all of the ants in your keyboard. The ants hide under specific keys, so all you have to do is type words using those letters and they're gone. If you missed an ant in the last word, everything will be okay. You just have to type a new word using the letter the ant moved to, or else it will escape. And I'm sure you're asking, where do the ants go? Moving on, there are different buffs you can choose from between rounds and new, stronger types of ants appear in your keyboard as you progress. It definitely starts out being easy, but soon the ants begin to overrun the keyboard, and you might have to break out a dictionary to tackle all of them. That's all there is to it; I'd avoid this title if you feel particularly friendly towards ants.

As always, if ripping your hair out at puzzles and crushing ants isn't your speed, there are thousands of other completely free games on itch.io you can play right now. There's nothing wrong with taking a break from studying to play some indie games, so keep an eye out for the last Indie Itch of the semester as finals season approaches.



LOGO BY COLBI LORANGER, ASSOCIATE ARTIST EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS



Gameplay from "SPLOOB" by mors and Catonator. The game was made for Falling Block Jam 2026.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @CATONATOR.NET ON X