

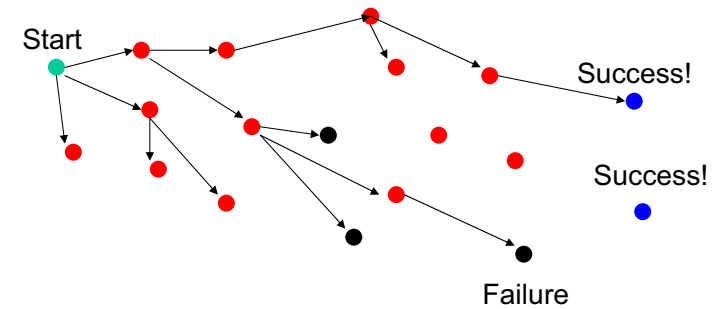
# Topic 11

## Recursive Backtracking

"In ancient times, before computers were invented, alchemists studied the mystical properties of numbers. Lacking computers, they had to rely on dragons to do their work for them. The dragons were clever beasts, but also lazy and bad-tempered. The worst ones would sometimes burn their keeper to a crisp with a single fiery belch. But most dragons were merely uncooperative, as violence required too much energy. This is the story of how Martin, an alchemist's apprentice, discovered recursion by outsmarting a lazy dragon."

- David S. Touretzky, *Common Lisp: A Gentle Introduction to Symbolic Computation*

## Backtracking



Problem space consists of states (nodes) and actions (paths that lead to new states). When in a node can only see paths to connected nodes

If a node only leads to failure go back to its "parent" node. Try other alternatives. If these all lead to failure then more backtracking may be necessary.

## A More Concrete Example

- ▶ Sudoku
- ▶ 9 by 9 matrix with some numbers filled in
- ▶ all numbers must be between 1 and 9
- ▶ Goal: Each row, each column, and each mini matrix must contain the numbers between 1 and 9 once each
  - no duplicates in rows, columns, or mini matrices

5	3			7				
6			1	9	5			
	9	8						6
8				6				3
4			8		3			1
7				2				6
	6					2	8	
			4	1	9			5
				8			7	9

## Solving Sudoku – Brute Force

- ▶ A brute force algorithm is a simple but general approach
- ▶ Try all combinations until you find one that works
- ▶ This approach isn't clever, but computers are fast
- ▶ Then try and improve on the brute force results

5	3			7				
6			1	9	5			
	9	8						6
8				6				3
4			8		3			1
7				2				6
	6					2	8	
			4	1	9			5
				8			7	9

# Solving Sudoku

## Brute force Sudoku Solution

- if not open cells, solved
- scan cells from left to right, top to bottom for first open cell
- When an open cell is found start cycling through digits 1 to 9.
- When a digit is placed check that the set up is legal
- now solve the board

5	3	1		7				
6			1	9	5			
	9	8					6	
8			6					3
4			8	3				1
7			2					6
	6					2	8	
			4	1	9			5
				8			7	9

# Solving Sudoku – Later Steps

5	3	1		7				
6			1	9	5			
	9	8					6	
8			6					3
4			8	3				1
7			2					6
	6					2	8	
			4	1	9			5
				8			7	9

5	3	1	2	7	4	8		
6			1	9	5			
	9	8					6	
8			6					3
4			8	3				1
7			2					6
	6					2	8	
			4	1	9			5
				8			7	9

5	3	1	2	7	4	8	9	
6			1	9	5			
	9	8					6	
8			6					3
4			8	3				1
7			2					6
	6					2	8	
			4	1	9			5
				8			7	9

uh oh!

# Sudoku – A Dead End

## We have reached a dead end in our search

5	3	1	2	7	4	8	9	
6			1	9	5			
	9	8					6	
8			6					3
4			8	3				1
7			2					6
	6					2	8	
			4	1	9			5
				8			7	9

- ▶ With the current set up none of the nine digits work in the top right corner

# Backing Up

- ▶ When the search reaches a dead end in ***backs up*** to the previous cell it was trying to fill and goes onto to the next digit
- ▶ We would back up to the cell with a 9 and that turns out to be a dead end as well so we back up again
  - so the algorithm needs to remember what digit to try next
- ▶ Now in the cell with the 8. We try and 9 and move forward again.

5	3	1	2	7	4	8	9	
6			1	9	5			
	9	8					6	
8			6					3
4			8	3				1
7			2					6
	6					2	8	
			4	1	9			5
				8			7	9

5	3	1	2	7	4	9		
6			1	9	5			
	9	8					6	
8			6					3
4			8	3				1
7			2					6
	6					2	8	
			4	1	9			5
				8			7	9

## Characteristics of Brute Force and Backtracking

- ▶ Brute force algorithms are slow
- ▶ They don't employ a lot of logic
  - For example we know a 6 can't go in the last 3 columns of the first row, but the brute force algorithm will plow ahead anyway
- ▶ But, brute force algorithms are fairly easy to implement as a first pass solution
  - backtracking is a form of a brute force algorithm

## Key Insights

- ▶ After trying placing a digit in a cell we want to solve the new sudoku board
  - Isn't that a smaller (or simpler version) of the same problem we started with?!?!?!?
- ▶ After placing a number in a cell we need to remember the next number to try in case things don't work out.
- ▶ We need to know if things worked out (found a solution) or they didn't, and if they didn't try the next number
- ▶ If we try all numbers and none of them work in our cell we need to *report back* that things didn't work

## Recursive Backtracking

- ▶ Problems such as Sudoku can be solved using recursive backtracking
- ▶ recursive because later versions of the problem are just slightly simpler versions of the original
- ▶ backtracking because we may have to try different alternatives

## Recursive Backtracking

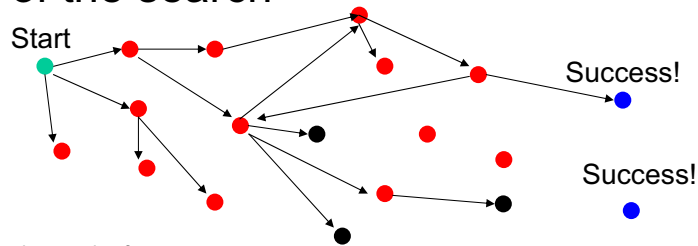
Pseudo code for recursive backtracking algorithms

If at a solution, report success  
for( every possible choice from current state / node)  
    Make that choice and take one step along path  
    Use recursion to solve the problem for the new node / state  
    If the recursive call succeeds, report the success to the next high level  
    Back out of the current choice to restore the state at the beginning of the loop.

Report failure

# Goals of Backtracking

- ▶ Possible goals
  - Find a path to success
  - Find all paths to success
  - Find the best path to success
- ▶ Not all problems are exactly alike, and finding one success node may not be the end of the search

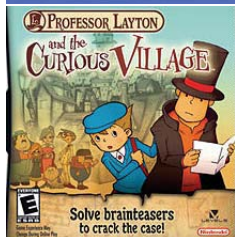
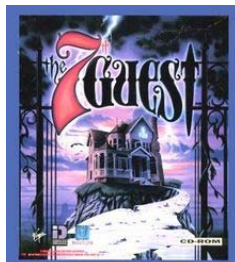
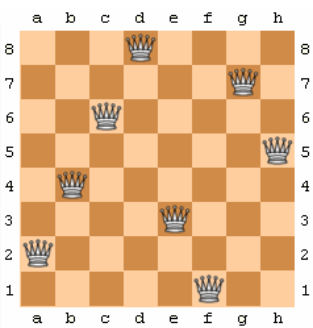
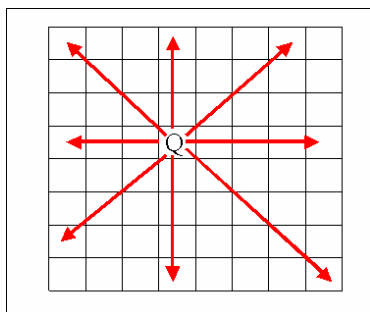


# The 8 Queens Problem



# The 8 Queens Problem

- ▶ A classic chess puzzle
  - Place 8 queen pieces on a chess board so that none of them can attack one another



# The N Queens Problem

- ▶ Place N Queens on an N by N chessboard so that none of them can attack each other
- ▶ Number of possible placements?
- ▶ In 8 x 8

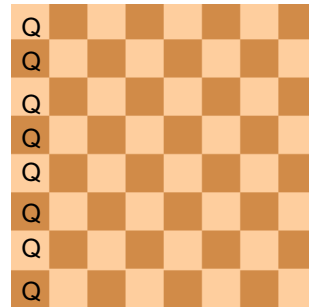
$64 \cdot 63 \cdot 62 \cdot 61 \cdot 60 \cdot 58 \cdot 59 \cdot 57 = 4,426,165,368$   
roughly four and a half billion possible set ups

n choose k  $\binom{n}{k} = \frac{n \cdot (n-1) \cdot \dots \cdot (n-k+1)}{k \cdot (k-1) \cdot \dots \cdot 1} = \frac{n!}{k!(n-k)!}$  if  $0 \leq k \leq n$  (1)

- How many ways can you choose k things from a set of n items?
- In this case there are 64 squares and we want to choose 8 of them to put queens on

## Reducing the Search Space

- ▶ The previous calculation includes set ups like this one



- ▶ Includes lots of set ups with multiple queens in the same column
- ▶ How many queens can there be in one column?
- ▶ Number of set ups  
 $8 * 8 * 8 * 8 * 8 * 8 * 8 * 8 = 16,777,216$
- ▶ We have reduced search space by two orders of magnitude by applying some logic

## A Solution to 8 Queens

- ▶ If number of queens is fixed and I realize there can't be more than one queen per column I can iterate through the rows for each column

```
for(int c0 = 0; c0 < 8; c0++){
    board[c0][0] = 'q';
    for(int c1 = 0; c1 < 8; c1++){
        board[c1][1] = 'q';
        for(int c2 = 0; c2 < 8; c2++){
            board[c2][2] = 'q';
            // a little later
            for(int c7 = 0; c7 < 8; c7++){
                board[c7][7] = 'q';
                if( queensAreSafe(board) )
                    printSolution(board);
                board[c7][7] = ' '; //pick up queen
            }
            board[c6][6] = ' '; // pick up queen
        }
    }
}
```

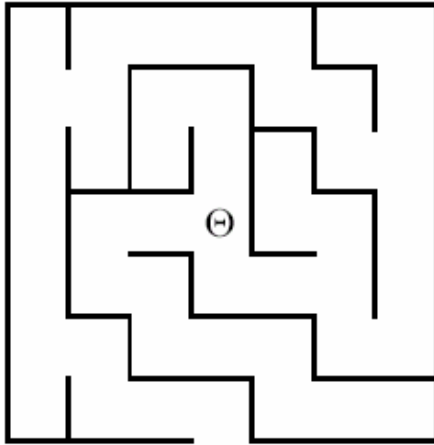
## N Queens

- ▶ The *problem* with N queens is you don't know how many for loops to write.
- ▶ Do the problem recursively
- ▶ Write recursive code with class and demo
  - show backtracking with breakpoint and debugging option

## Recursive Backtracking

- ▶ You must practice!!!
- ▶ Learn to recognize problems that fit the pattern
- ▶ Is a *kickoff* method needed?
- ▶ All solutions or a solution?
- ▶ Reporting results and acting on results

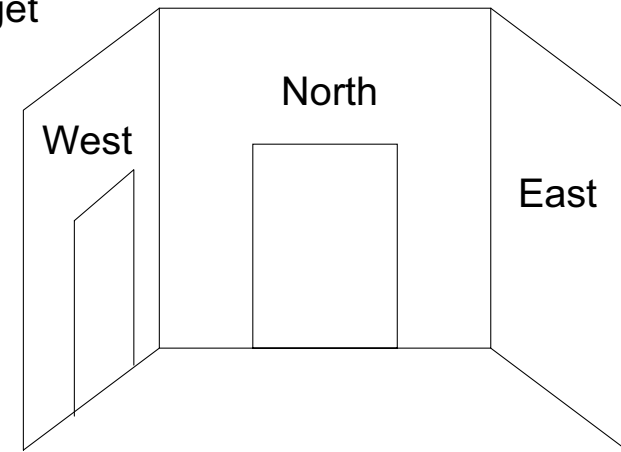
## Another Backtracking Problem A Simple Maze



Search maze until way out is found. If no way out possible report that.

## The Local View

Which way do I go to get out?

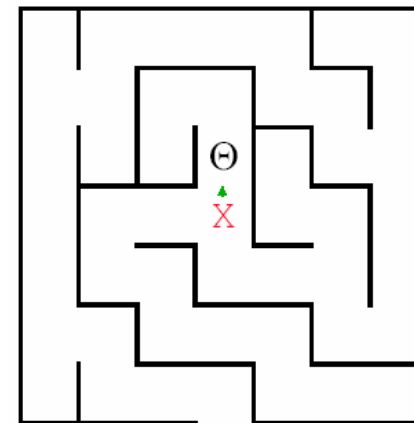


Behind me, to the South is a door leading South

## Modified Backtracking Algorithm for Maze

- ▶ If the current square is outside, return TRUE to indicate that a solution has been found.
- If the current square is marked, return FALSE to indicate that this path has been tried.
- Mark the current square.
- for (each of the four compass directions)
  - { if ( this direction is not blocked by a wall )
    - { Move one step in the indicated direction from the current square.
    - Try to solve the maze from there by making a recursive call.
    - If this call shows the maze to be solvable, return TRUE to indicate that fact.
- }
- Unmark the current square.
- Return FALSE to indicate that none of the four directions led to a solution.

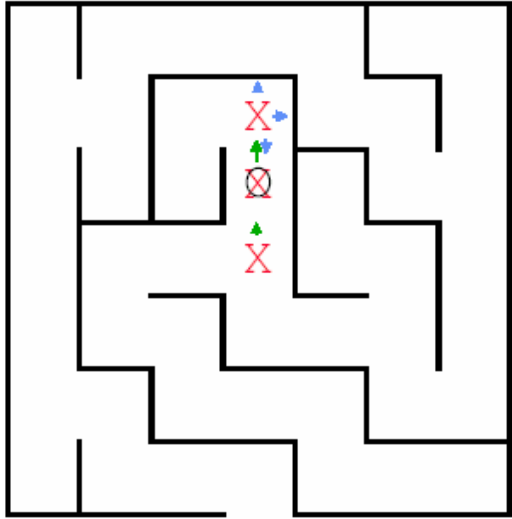
## Backtracking in Action



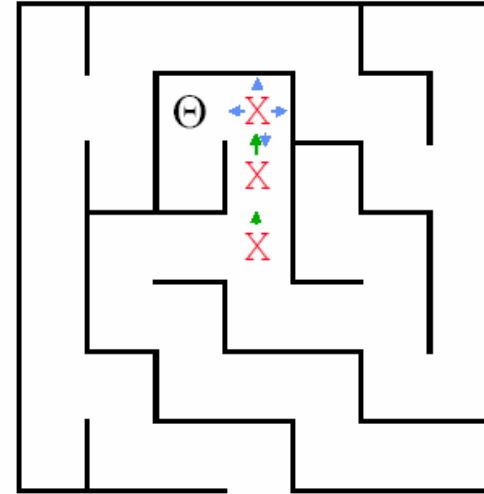
The crucial part of the algorithm is the for loop that takes us through the alternatives from the current square. Here we have moved to the North.

```
for (dir = North; dir <= West; dir++)
{
    if (!WallExists(pt, dir))
        {if (SolveMaze(AdjacentPoint(pt, dir)))
            return(TRUE);
        }
}
```

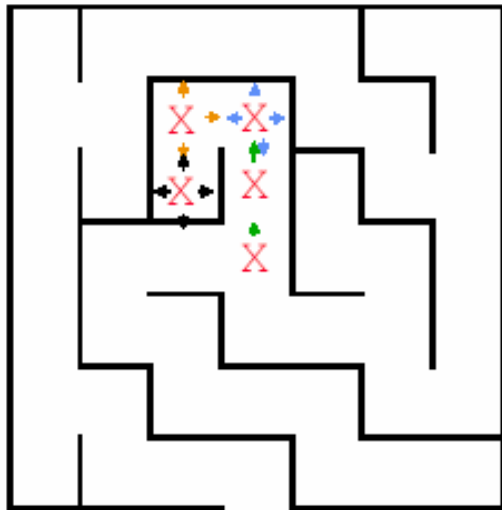
# Backtracking in Action



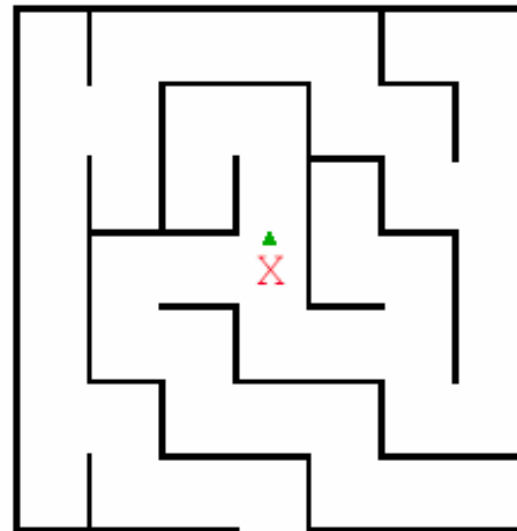
Here we have moved North again, but there is a wall to the North . East is also blocked, so we try South. That call discovers that the square is marked, so it just returns.



So the next move we can make is West.  
Where is this leading?



This path reaches a dead end.  
Time to backtrack!  
Remember the program stack!



The recursive calls end and return until we find ourselves back here.



## The CD problem

- ▶ We want to put songs on a Compact Disc. 650MB CD and a bunch of songs of various sizes.

If there are no more songs to consider return result

```
else{
  Consider the next song in the list.
  Try not adding it to the CD so far and use recursion to evaluate best
  without it.
  Try adding it to the CD, and use recursion to evaluate best with it
  Whichever is better is returned as absolute best from here
}
```

## Another Backtracking Problem

- ▶ Airlines give out frequent flier miles as a way to get people to always fly on their airline.
- ▶ Airlines also have partner airlines. Assume if you have miles on one airline you can redeem those miles on any of its partners.
- ▶ Further assume if you can redeem miles on a partner airline you can redeem miles on any of its partners and so forth...
  - Airlines don't usually allow this sort of thing.
- ▶ Given a list of airlines and each airlines partners determine if it is possible to redeem miles on a given airline A on another airline B.

## Airline List – Part 1

- ▶ Delta
  - partners: Air Canada, Aero Mexico, OceanAir
- ▶ United
  - partners: Aria, Lufthansa, OceanAir, Quantas, British Airways
- ▶ Northwest
  - partners: Air Alaska, BMI, Avolar, EVA Air
- ▶ Canjet
  - partners: Girjet
- ▶ Air Canda
  - partners: Areo Mexico, Delta, Air Alaska
- ▶ Aero Mexico
  - partners: Delta, Air Canda, British Airways

## Airline List - Part 2

- ▶ Ocean Air
  - partners: Delta, United, Quantas, Avolar
- ▶ AlohaAir
  - partners: Quantas
- ▶ Aria
  - partners: United, Lufthansa
- ▶ Lufthansa
  - partners: United, Aria, EVA Air
- ▶ Quantas
  - partners: United, OceanAir, AlohaAir
- ▶ BMI
  - partners: Northwest, Avolar
- ▶ Maxair
  - partners: Southwest, Girjet

## Airline List - Part 3

- ▶ **Girjet**
  - partners: Southwest, Canjet, Maxair
- ▶ **British Airways**
  - partners: United, Aero Mexico
- ▶ **Air Alaska**
  - partners: Northwest, Air Canada
- ▶ **Avolar**
  - partners: Northwest, Ocean Air, BMI
- ▶ **EVA Air**
  - partners: Northwest, Luftansa
- ▶ **Southwest**
  - partners: Girjet, Maxair

## Problem Example

- ▶ If I have miles on Northwest can I redeem them on Aria?
- ▶ Partial graph:

