

# PUZZLED

A history of jigsaw puzzles  
and expert tips to get them solved

Dan Seed & Graeme Seed

Puzzled by Dan Seed & Graeme Seed

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*For Ruby, and Noah, and the children of  
our family yet to come - to your delight and  
curiosity for years ahead.*



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# Introduction

Hello reader!

I hope in the following pages, you will be informed and entertained. This is certainly not a complete, nor the most comprehensive, history of jigsaw puzzles - there are a number of exhaustively detailed histories of manufacturers and puzzle houses around the world.

What I hope to capture in this book is something different to simply being a list of dates and places. History is most fascinating when the stories come alive with interesting people, weird and wonderful anecdotes, unusual historical ephemera, and any number of artefacts that provide a glimpse into the past.

I asked Cassie Byrnes, a dear friend, amazing historian, and supporter of the funding campaign to publish this book, what it is that makes history come alive. She told me, "history is an ever-changing conceptual framework. The past directly informs the present. It's not just dates and facts, it's about how people actually experienced the past". Through the narratives in this book, I want moments in history to truly come alive. To take the jigsaw puzzle and situate it within eras of social and political change. To texture the 'dates and facts' version of history. To weave the development of an unassuming pastime through stories that you cannot wait to relay to a friend.

I do not want to spoil those stories to come, but I hope for you to read it in this spirit. The spirit of the discovery of the weird, where cultural artefacts are truly a product of their time.

The book is structured with my chapters charting moments in the history of the jigsaw puzzle, interspersed with my dad's expert tips to completing jigsaw puzzles with maximum enjoyment and minimal frustration.

I want to also say thank you to the incredible people who made this project possible as part of a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign. How this book came to be will emerge as you read, but I originally only ever intended to print one copy for my dad. On a whim, I started a Kickstarter to pay for setting up the printing costs and registering an ISBN, and then I started receiving purchases from around the world.

I do sincerely hope you enjoy this book, and if you do, please feel free to share it with friends. Writing it has been an absolute blast and has reinforced my philosophy to devote time to creative projects simply because you love it – and if others come along for the ride, all the better. If you do enjoy it, please get in touch via my website - [janusian.com.au](http://janusian.com.au) - to let me know. If you didn't - well that's ok, but you probably don't need to let me know.

While all effort has been taken to correct any errors herein, should there be lasting imperfections, I trust you will treat this copy as a collectible, rather than an anomaly.

Happy puzzling!

### **Jigsaw Puzzle**

My father always let me do the sky.  
All blue and blue-white pieces  
fell to my lot  
and so were carried to my corner.  
Mother liked leaf and landscape,  
but my father  
chose scattered body pieces,  
head and figure:  
the poor dismembered fragments of Osiris.  
I see my father's long and bony finger,  
my mother's jet-black hair, while I  
above their labours potter with my sky.

W. HART-SMITH

THE BULLETIN, v.85, NO.4373 (14 DEC. 1963).

# The Temptation of St Anthony

The history of the jigsaw puzzle is somewhat of a puzzle itself – a metaphor I swear only to use once in the ensuing pages and one with which we have now discarded on page one. For you see, there is the “big picture” history, with a chronology of names and places and abridged versions of how the first puzzles came to be, and then there are the component parts of the picture – the tiny snippets of a story unremarkable on their own, but each worthy of close, and careful, and individual inspection.

The tenuous threads upon which I have gently tugged reveal a complex tapestry of social class, pedagogical practice, engineering, childhood development, and creative arts. In the pages following, I present a somewhat linear narrative of this history, along with some interesting – and oft bizarre – non sequuntur emerging from the hours spent rifling through library and museum archives.

There is a poem by Australian poet, William Hart-Smith. Published in *The Bulletin* in 1963, “Jigsaw Puzzle” sits on the page below the more expansive and outward-looking “The Astrologers”, and above the blunt and pragmatic “Warning to Idealists” – both also works of Hart-Smith. The poem captures, in just twelve lines, the simple delight of completing a puzzle. The division of labour into the sky, “leaf and landscape”, and “scattered body pieces, head and figure” – a technique of separation immediately familiar to seasoned puzzlers. It starts with the line, “My father always let me do the sky”.

There was a wonderful synchronicity between the poem, the creative process and practical mechanics of completing a jigsaw, and my motivations for this book - I embarked on this history merely as a gift for my dad.

I should explain.

Before I had reached double digits, I had become somewhat familiar with the work of Netherlandish painter, Hieronymus Bosch. In particular, I had studied, in close and careful detail, *The Temptation of St Anthony*. Painted sometime around 1501, Bosch’s triptych typifies the work of Early Netherlandish painters - fantastical religious iconography,

close detail to light, shadow, and texture, and expressive verisimilitude. Despite the scale and complexity of this work – it measures more than two metres wide, over a metre high, with remarkably complex images across three panels on the front side – and the many hours I have stared at it, I struggle to describe it to someone as an adult. The only descriptors that come to mind are “brown”, “drab”, “bleak”, “end of days”.

I have reproduced Bosch’s work here for you – it has long passed into the public domain. Indeed, Bosch himself painted several different versions of the story, of which it appears the triptych reproduced here was the sole survivor in a complete form.

The story of St Anthony has been captured by a number of noteworthy artists in a wide array of renderings. *The Torment of St Anthony* is the earliest known work of Michelangelo, created when he was 13 years old. A 1650 painting by Flemish artist Joos van Craesbeeck draws clear inspiration from Bosch, depicting a hyper-realistic depiction of a human head washed ashore, split open at the forehead. Demons and creatures and other animals are piling into the open mouth, while others peer out from the observation deck that is the open skull. One does not need a degree in psychology or art history to see the symbolism of St Anthony’s psychological torment present in the image.

Salvador Dalí’s version was produced in 1946, as an entry in a contest to have a painting of *The Temptation of St Anthony* featured in the film *The Private Affairs of Bel Ami*, for which he was awarded a \$500 runner-up prize. The winning entry painted by German artist, Max Ernst, is the only nine seconds of colour in an otherwise black and white film. A review of the film by Bosley Crowther in *The New York Times* was scathing – of the film and Ernst’s work –

*Ann Dvorak, Angela Lansbury, Katherine Emery—the whole lot of them are as utterly artificial as the obvious paint-and-pasteboard sets. Blame the whole mess on Albert Lewin, who not only directed but wrote the screen play — and who presumably was responsible for sticking into the film a close-up in color of a painting which is downright nauseous. It is called The Temptation of St. Anthony but it looks like a bad boiled lobster — June 16, 1947*

If for nothing else, at least Ernst was awarded \$2500 – an expensive “boiled lobster”, even by today’s standards.



In fact, the three Bosch panels shown are just the interior of the work – the left and right panels fold closed over the centre, with further oil paintings on the exterior of the oak panel shutters. The additional two scenes are drawn from events during Christ’s Passion – the final period of Jesus’ life, starting from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, through the Last Supper, the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, his crucifixion at Golgotha, and his resurrection. Painted in grisaille – works created entirely in monochromatic shades of grey – the left shutter depicts the Arrest of Christ, and the right, Christ Carrying the Cross. While marginally less fantastical than the interior, the same medieval tone remains. When all is said and done, the emotional, psychological, and theological torment of this particular St Anthony – there are quite a number – is quite obvious, irrespective of which particular artwork you use as a measure.

This would, at first glance, seem a strange artistic addition to a middle-class farming household in northern New South Wales. But it was not an artwork of choice – it was one by default. The work I had so carefully studied was not, unsurprisingly, an original Bosch – the original hangs on the walls of the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon – but a jigsaw puzzle, comprising 12,000 individual pieces, mounted on chipboard, covered in lacquer, and mounted in the family pool room. It took pride of place in my childhood home, peering out over a ramshackle pool table with fading felt (since replaced with a solid wood, competition-sized snooker table), and intricately patterned, but equally brown, floor tiles laid with the construction of the house in the 1980s. I’m not entirely sure this is what Darryl Kerrigan meant when he spoke of reverence for the institution of the Pool Room in middle-class Australian homes.

The puzzle was released by well-known jigsaw manufacturer, Ravensburger, in 1983, and is now listed as rare across many corners of the internet. It was the first to be manufactured with 12,000 pieces and the largest fine art jigsaw for a long time – it measured at the same dimensions as the original artwork. It came boxed with an informational booklet and a large poster, and the box weighed nearly 8 kilograms, (or 17 lbs). The story goes, therefore, that when dad went looking for a challenge – *the* challenge – it was not with interior decoration in mind. It was simply that he only had one particular jigsaw from which to choose.



RAVENSBURGER'S *THE TEMPTATION OF ST ANTHONY* JIGSAW PUZZLE CAME WITH AN INFORMATIONAL BOOKLET AND A LARGE POSTER OF THE ARTWORK.

THE 12,000 PIECE PUZZLE VERSION OF BOSCH' WORK I HAD STUDIED SO CLOSELY THROUGHOUT MY CHILDHOOD.



Another artwork, *Children's Games*, painted by Pieter Bruegel the Elder in 1560, is a interesting addition here also, both for its link to Bosch's piece and jigsaw puzzles. Painted in the Dutch and Flemish Renaissance, Bruegel's work was inspired by the Early Netherlandish style of Bosch and others. *Children's Games* depicts more than 200 children in an expansive town square, a wide street drawing the viewer's eye to the rural background. The children in the image are playing at least 80 different games, which scholars have spent many years identifying and debating. There are the games which last even today – playing with dolls, climbing a fence, playing marbles, rolling a hoop, building sandcastles, and catching insects with a net. There are those which may have changed or adapted over time – playing morra (similar to Rock, Paper, Scissors), knucklebones, tiddlywinks, and lighting a bonfire. And then there are ... well, then there are the others – playing the scourge (violent whipping), 'stirring excrements with a stick', shouting into a barrel from a hole, mumblety-peg (requiring participants to throw a knife as far as they can into the ground, the other player then having to remove it with their teeth), running the gauntlet (running between two rows of people as they strike and attack you), and if you look under the left arch of the building in the middleground, a child urinating, (described as "technically not a game, but practiced quite often").

Similar to Bosch's artwork, the vast, complex, and frenetic detail in *Children's Games* makes it a remarkable and fascinating image. Like *The Temptation of St Anthony*, the totality of the piece is almost separate from the discrete mini-artworks within. It's quite the treasure hunt and has proved to be quite an artefact for social scientists understanding the societal landscape of the era. One popular (but debated) interpretation of the piece states that it uses the children playing, (with no adult oversight, and absorbed only in their own particular game), as a metaphor for the foolishness of adults occupying themselves in selfish activities. An opposing interpretation posits it is a reflection of the importance of play in childhood development, free from the worldly pressures of adulthood.

The relationship between *Children's Games* and the world of jigsaw puzzling is much the same as our Bosch work. In 1978, Ravensburger manufactured a puzzle of the work, the first company to do so. The choice of image is hardly surprising in the context of jigsaw puzzles.



*CHILDREN'S GAMES*, PAINTED BY PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER IN 1560,  
FEATURES MORE THAN 200 CHILDREN ENGAGED IN 80-PLUS GAMES.

The intricate details of the original make for an entertaining construction of the puzzle, where just a couple of pieces may construct the image of one of the 80-plus games, and the list can be checked off as one slowly builds the image. Now considered very rare, the 3000-piece puzzle measured 121cm x 80cm.

\* \* \*

Throughout my childhood, dad completed hundreds of jigsaws. There were those of stunning photography of wildlife and nature, scenes of nondescript European gardens, cute domestic animals sitting in wheelbarrows or pull-along wagons, and of course, the gimmicks – the three dimensional White House, the close-up image of nothing but thousands of popcorn kernels or coffee beans, circular puzzles, ones with just a single colour across several thousand pieces, and those without any edge pieces within which to confine the challenge. Each would be carefully constructed on a piece of corrugated cardboard and then stacked atop the one preceding it beneath the table tennis table. The pool table became the site of construction, while the table tennis table was the final resting place. Desiring a game of either required a delicate process of rearranging, somewhat like gallery curators of objets d'art constructed from expensive cardboard.

Very few were ever displayed or mounted and even fewer were ever deconstructed. For a time, some of the smaller ones – probably 20 or 30 – were laminated and hung around the walls of the same room. They came down for a new paint job at some point, and never reascended.

Just a couple of weeks shy of his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, dad rang me with a request to help buy a new jigsaw online. Apprehensively, he mentioned the price. Just shy of \$1000... on sale. This puzzle was not another nondescript European garden.

Coming in at a whopping 40,320 pieces (weighing nearly 20 kilograms) and nearly 7 metres wide, it was, for a period, the largest jigsaw ever created. Much like the Bosch work before it, there was no choice with the image. It was, again, one of a kind. Also created by Ravensburger, this latest puzzle is titled *10 Classic Memorable Moments*. It shows the ten most popular Disney films, including Snow White from 1937, Bambi from 1942, The Jungle Book from 1967, and The Lion King from 1994. Split across ten panels (and ten bags of 4032 pieces each), the overall image is bright and colourful and, with some young nieces

and nephews (and grandchildren for dad) in the family, it will be an absolute delight to see finished.

I have no doubt the children of the family will draw as many hours of curious examination – if not the appreciation for Early Netherlandish religious iconography – that I myself drew from Bosch.

Dad proudly showed off the mammoth parcel when it arrived with the postman. Across the years, he had compiled a list of tips and tricks to completing jigsaw puzzles – methods that would allow the puzzler to derive a pleasurable, rather than painstaking, challenge. I told him to send them through for me to read, expecting a few handwritten notes. What I received was a 25-plus page spreadsheet, with extraordinary specificity and detail. I could not bear to see these go unread, if for no other reason than knowing that one of the things that makes a hobby so captivating, is to be able to share it with others.

And so, in the pages to follow, I document some of the history of these curious cardboard compositions, while reproducing these expert tips so you too, can experience these moments of joy.



## Graeme's tips: Introduction

When you first open your puzzle box, you become the usher in the grandstand at Saturday's football game. Your job is to direct everybody to their correct seat. The local authorities have purchased a new ticketing system. To ensure nobody can steal another's ticket and get in for free, upon purchase of your ticket, it includes a picture of yourself. Today is the first day the new system has been used.

There has been a glitch in the new system; the tickets all have the patron's picture on them, but the seat numbers haven't printed out. You have a copy of the seating plans with everyone's photo and seat number, so as each person presents themselves to you, you have to work out from their picture where they are to be seated.

Some are easy. The lady and her daughter with pink hair dressed in fluorescent green track suits obviously sit on the end of Row K. Others are harder. Here is a fellow with a beard and baseball cap - there are lots of them. And worse still, a whole bunch of people have worn their team's colours.

If you don't get everyone in the right place, there will be trouble. You tell the couple who paid to be in the front row, to sit up the back next to the toilets. Or you try and put the young man and his girlfriend on opposite sides of the aisle. Or worse still, you try and direct the two mates who came for a few beers and a day out, into the non-alcohol section!

Sometimes your job will be easy, but there will be frustrating times too. But you can be sure that when you have everyone seated and enjoying the game, you will be satisfied with your day's work.