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Red and Green in *Battleblock Theater*

According to a study conducted in 2010 on emotional responses caused by color usage in video games, red inspires a “negative emotional response” (Joosten, et al. 2010). Red makes us feel bad things, so it follows that it is quick to be associated with negative things and actions. Green, being red’s complementary color, therefore is quick to be seen as the opposite of all things associated with red. *Battleblock Theater* takes advantage of this assumption and plays with it.

Color can have an important role in the tone and storytelling of a game. According to Mathieu Robillard, a developer at bishop games, “if you plan on making an immersive video game, you absolutely have to nail your color schemes” (Robillard 2016). *Battleblock Theater* developer, The Behemoth, does this by implementing a bright red and bright green color dynamic throughout their game.

Initially, colors in *Battleblock Theater* start very muted and dark until slowly a pulsating red is introduced.



Fig A: The initial muted color palette. Fig B: Red begins to take a more dominant role

Given the mysterious nature of this opening level and our emotional associations to the color red, this pulsating red glow makes players feel on edge. This feeling is validated seconds later by the full introduction of the bright red that is present throughout the course of the game. The power associated with this color is also given shown at this time, thus further validating the player's previous assumptions about the color red in this game.



Fig A: the introduction of bright red. Fig B: proving red's power through great destruction

This red is used sparingly and purposefully throughout levels. Aside from representing the great power of the hat(seen in fig A and B) red is only used to mark levels that the players can play, but have not yet completed. These uncompleted levels could be seen to represent many negative things. They are an obstacle between the player and freedom. In their most literal definition, they are a death trap obstacle course built for the player character to complete or die horribly trying.

Compared to the sparingly used bright red, bright green is everywhere in the game. While red is used to represent the evil threatening the player, green is presented as goals and achievements the player has experienced. It appears in the gems that can be collected and used to buy the player character's friend's freedom. It also appears in the glowing level exits. Green checkmarks are used to denote achievement as completed levels are marked with a green checkmark.



Fig A: Note the green gem pick up as well as the six green gems already collected(across the top of the image). Additionally bright note the green lit level exit in the bottom right of the level

Battleblock Theater further encourages this mental association of green being good and red being bad midway through the game when the backstory of the hat's evil

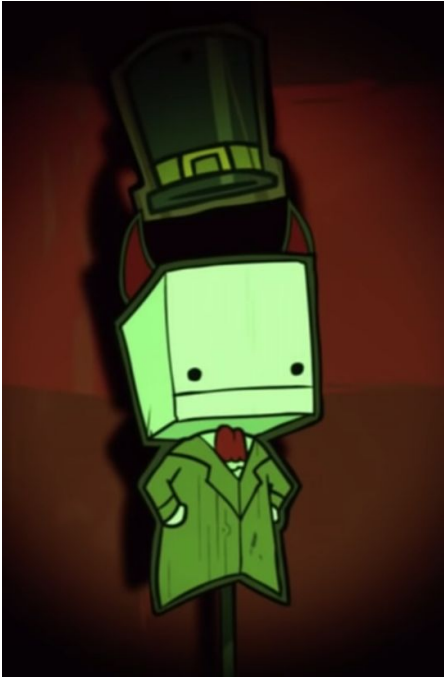
powers is discussed. During this cutscene, green is used to denote when the hat is being blessed and red is used to denote when it is being cursed.



Fig A: the hat is blessed. Fig B: the hat is cursed shortly after the blessing

Revisiting the sparing use of red versus the frequent use of green, red is given a consistent meaning through the game. It is bad, that does not change. Green, on the other hand, is used frequently and not always in ways that match the player's initial emotional response.

From the very beginning, the meaning of green gets muddled. It is used to light "scary" ghosts, though because these ghosts are meant to be part of an adventure the characters would experience together, it can be chalked up to a more happy time before they are all captured and imprisoned. There is less of an easy explanation when this color is again used to light the possessed character Hatty. Again, however, it could be a reference to a time before the player and their friend's imprisonment. That sentiment aside, the green does, in these moments, take on some of the negative qualities red seems to embody.



Left: Hatty, possessed by the evil hat, is lit in green

Right: More subtly, a ghost ship is lit in green

While these shifts in meaning are subtle throughout the game, they come together at the end when the player finally reaches the last chapter of the game. While initially, it seems to be red vs green, cats vs players, all the goals that green represents (completing levels, earning gems, etc.) are goals assigned by the enemy of the game. In the last chapter of the game, the entrance is marked by a glowing green vault door, while the chapter itself takes place inside a bright green lit room.



Left: The vault door lit in green. Right: chapter 8's main room, lit in green

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