BattleBlock Theater Level Post Mortem

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Youtube Link: https://youtu.be/56SGP6zGU-A

Design Choices

I decided that I wanted the level to be somewhat challenging for people who have some experience playing BattleBlock Theater. I wanted to make the level fairly straightforward regarding how to progress. As a result, I designed the level so that it is obvious to the player where they need to go next. I chose to focus on using a lot of fire blocks and lasers because those are often used throughout the beginning of the game. Anyone who has at least played through the first ten levels of BBT would have an understanding of how they work, while those who have not played BBT before can learn how they work as they play through the level.

I laid out the level so that the player rests between some of the sections. After finishing the climbing puzzle and taking the time to figure out the bridge puzzle, for example, players are met with a mindless and fairly simple mob arena. The same can be said for the first two sections of the level with teaching the player how to utilize fire blocks and then immediately giving the player a pair of enemies to fight with minimal difficulty and simple platforming. Even these 'rest' sections, however, introduce new blocks that the player will interact with later on in the level.

I made sure that the strawberries were specifically placed in places where the player was forced to interact with something. With this in mind, I can force the player to learn something new. For example, the first strawberry is right above a pair of bomb blocks (0:30). The player has to stand on top of the bomb blocks in order to get the strawberry. Even if the player has never played BBT before, they will learn that the bomb blocks will explode when they are touched.

Part of my design for this level was also to teach the player with small 'troll' elements. The ice floor in the first section and the first set of slime walls in the climbing section are examples of this. I use the difficulty of being able to utilize them to encourage the player to use the fire blocks in those sections instead.

Implementation

My use of the ice blocks (0:14) was to make the player think that they could use them to run past the lasers. When this does not work, you'll see that the fire block is the only option as it propels the player far enough and quickly enough to outrun the lasers (0:20).

In the next section, the player can see that the cloud blocks can be stood on top of when they see that one of the enemy cats is standing on the second cloud platform before they even try to stand on the first one (0:25).

With the large gap between the walls in the climbing section and the fire blocks propelling the player upward, it gives players an idea of what they can use to climb up to the top (0:35). In an attempt to add another example of how the fire blocks can be utilized, I made it so there are two sets of slime walls in this section. The first set of walls is very challenging to climb up especially with the spike blocks right above it. The fire blocks on the ground, however, launch the player up high enough so they can, and should, skip the first set entirely (0:51).

The bridge puzzle was what I deemed to require the most thinking when I designed the level (1:03). With a long line of lasers, but no fire block to get to the other side, I wanted to challenge the player's ability to think about how they can get past this section. The cloud block in this section also shows that there is something the player can jump up to. After jumping on said cloud block, the camera shows that there is a button with the same marking as the block below a boulder, as well as another strawberry (1:07). Even if the player doesn't realize that the button block and the block below the boulder are connected in some way, I made sure the strawberry would give enough incentive for the player to go there regardless.

After the bridge puzzle is another mob arena utilizing cloud blocks and the previously seen spike blocks (1:32). While the player could just take the time to fight the mobs, I added the spike blocks to suggest that if the spikes could kill the player, they might be able to kill the mobs around them. I also made sure the player had to fight the mobs by having one of them hold the last required strawberry.

Within the second mob arena, I hid a set of fake blocks that the player needs to use to access the secret section. I made sure the fake blocks are not the same color as most of the blocks within the mob arena so that it was fairly obvious to players who really looked for the secret area (1:46).

The final section was in a way a review of most of the special blocks used throughout the level (2:05). With what the player has seen and done throughout the level, this dropdown puzzle should be fairly easy. The slime blocks used in the climbing puzzle lets the players know that they can use the ones in this section to slowly descend from the wall, but not for long. The fire blocks and lasers at the end of the puzzle should give a sense of reminder to the player of how they cleared the very first puzzle (2:07).

Feedback

A majority of the feedback I got from my playtests told me that the climbing puzzle was the most difficult section with my initial placement of the slime and spike blocks. I rectified this by increasing the number of slime blocks that were together at once, and only one spike block per section of spike blocks. I also made the climbing a bit easier by not having spike blocks right below the fire blocks at the top of this section. This way the only set of spikes that the player should really be dealing with are the ones below the second set of slime walls.

One interesting piece of feedback that I received was that it was possible to skip the bridge puzzle entirely with enough platforming ability. The player could drop down from the cloud block and grab the strawberry, then jump up to the next section and reach the checkpoint before the lasers fired. After some testing, I realized that this was absolutely possible, especially with the right timing. Looking at this section, I realized that I needed to place the strawberry somewhere else so that the player can't just skip the whole puzzle. As I mentioned in the implementations section, I placed the strawberry right above the button block (1:07). This way, the player ends up doing half the puzzle anyway if they want to get the strawberry. This, however, was only part of the problem. The second problem was being able to reach the end without even using the bridge at all. I solved this problem by making the hole of lasers deep enough that the player can't jump up from the bottom, making the gap between the bridge block and the next platform longer, and by providing bomb blocks to wall off the next platform. By

making the gap wider and implementing the bomb block wall, the player would not be able to reach the end without a laser being fired at them.