

# Black & White

*A labyrinthine polychrome world*

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You are the protagonist in a world divided into factions of faith and power. Unlike most games, the player will not be able to pick which cult she is born into. The general idea is that in this world the circumstances of your birth are likely to determine your options, belief system, and cohort. The player's decisions in interactions with people in and out of her faction will dictate her narrative. Different events, dialogues, and characters will arise as a result of this. The world is divided into five groups: *RED*, *BLUE*, *YELLOW*, *GREEN*, & *BROWN* - those who do not belong to any of these groups are outcasts and referred to as *GRAY*, those without color. The game will underline the theme of unity vs. discord and will emphasize the triviality of over-analyzing the differences in our belief systems. The game aims to serve as an allegory for religious conflict and class discrimination.

To make poignant the permanence of the player's actions, the plot will branch off based on the user's decisions, actions, and thoughts in different contexts. To make poignant the importance of the player's circumstances, we omit the option for the player to start a new game at any arbitrary point in time. The player may want to do this because of unsatisfactory predetermined circumstances/settings and/or poor decisions. The option to begin anew will be given on completion of the game, where then the player can explore different routes and circumstances. If the player chooses a particular end decision and route, she will not be given the option to begin anew unless she chooses to sell her soul. If the player chooses this route, a BLACK mark is made across all iterations of play that affects the player's gameplay. This structure suggests themes of reincarnation and severity of one's decisions and thus places an even greater burden on the player's actions. *Red* is the violent oppressive regime - they rely on military power and believe in "power, justice, & victory." *Green* is the faction that generally controls the world's resources through money and labor. Their motto is "achieve, control, & dominate." *Blue* is a revolution-seeking pacifist faction. Their motto is "change, equality, unity." *Yellow* is a sedentary pacifist faction. Their motto is "peace & prosperity from patience." *Brown* is a poor pacifist faction. Their motto is "blood, sweat, & grit."

A question arises about the wayward limitations of the game such as restricting the player from creating a new file until completion of the game. Because the story is defined loosely and there are not discrete good and bad outcomes, the game allows for an experience that is neither entirely positive or negative - an experience where you don't get the opportunity to start over if you feel like you made a mistake much alike real life. Moreover, there is a niche of gamers who actively support limiting features like this and believe that a highly penalized and stringent system is more conducive towards critical decision making and understanding of the game and its implications.

The groups are divided based on dominance and values, and each group has unique inherent powers and abilities (such as being more militant, more resourceful, or more cunning). The general economy of the game is two-fold: the oppressor vs. the oppressed. The oppressor is by default RED and GREEN, and the oppressed consist of the BLUE, YELLOW, and BROWN. However, this will not necessarily reflect the actions and philosophies of individual colors that belong to a certain faction. By and large, the player may encounter friends from different factions as well as enemies in the same faction, making it continually morally difficult, confusing, and real the decisions the player may have to make.

While intuition tells us that graphically this world must be familiar to our own and realistic to a higher degree...the game will be visually simple in order to streamline the intricate philosophies

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and shift the focus unto the themes to be conveyed. Colors and textures are unadorned in a 3D environment and music will be similarly minimalist (however with diverse enough timbre and richness to be able to adequately evoke emotion, something that is still integral to this game) in order to juxtapose the heavier narrative themes and abstracts. The soundtrack will be diverse in order to be balanced with the variety of emotions and ambiances of the game. Music will differ between towns, character interactions, and important scenes.

A key feature to this game will be the belief score system. The player will have a five-way score grid that is affected by the player's actions and *affinity* towards a particular faction. If no faction is preferred and if a player's actions are neutral, then the player's belief system will be GRAY. It is possible to achieve a high balance in score, in which the player's affinity will be WHITE. This score, referred to as the player's *affinity*, determines key events and the overall progression of the game and will ultimately decide the player's final outcome.

The player doesn't have the liberty to customize her protagonist the way she likes so the attributes of the protagonist are largely determined by the player's actions. The player will have abilities and methods of resolution that are dictated by her affinity, which is itself dictated by the actions of the player and her consequences. The player will also have health, money, and an inventory of items to supplement her affinity and skill-set. The skill-set is the same across all factions - examples include *{persuasion, charisma, intelligence, strength, etc.}*. The rates at which these develop as the player levels up is dependent on her affinity. All these character specs will be accessible through a toggleable menu.

The game is a role-playing game characterized by the player's interactions with NPC's, various quests, fulfillment of those quests and lack thereof - all traits of a conventional RPG. Many RPG's give you a way to fight enemies - the system however typically stays constant throughout the entire game with the experience growing more exciting as you acquire new equipment and grow stronger. The game will however provide a unique system dependent on the player's affinity. For example, red's conflict resolution may be a traditional turn-based battle system. Green's method may be a special card game (gambling), etc. As a result the player may suffer a variety of consequences ranging from death to loss of money in addition to unfavorable affinity change in the negative outcome of a conflict situation.

The world consists of your faction's domain and everybody else's. The player should feel pressured into an "us. vs. them" mentality from the beginning. The player will be guided through the basic mechanics of the game by her mother in her born faction until she decides to explore the world a little more after which her family will disappear in a tragic faction conflict. The protagonist's then goal is to unravel more about the relationships between the unique factions of the world in order to explain why this happened and for the sake of her own sanity (and because she has no home to return to).

The characters can be divided into NPC's, enemies, and "friends" who may serve as your party members. These characters are typically predetermined in an RPG, but in our game almost every NPC will be a prospect for a "friend," depending on the level of interaction and affinity. They may however leave you if you drastically change affinity or based on the rest of your party members. The player has the freedom to play the game without any friends or with a full cast of friends. One benefit to going solo is more efficient play and focus on self - the tradeoff being slower affinity development and select situations that would be tougher playing solo. The player may also have access to scenes and events they never would if they didn't have certain friends at the right time! Your enemies may come in different shapes and sizes, but they are almost always antagonizing you for your allegiance to a faction they don't actively agree with. The important enemies vary from faction leaders and officials to hometown nobodies. The player should choose wisely to engage them or not and their actions afterward. This makes choosing your friends and your enemies an integral part of the game where it is normally predetermined in most conventional RPG's.

As the player progresses throughout the game she will level up and develop her skill-set and make more friends along the way. There are key interactions throughout her story - with whom they happen depends on the player's affinity at that time (as well as the constitution of her party

at the time). The consequences of these interactions and subsequent events will permanently affect the storyline regardless of changes in the player's affinity. Battles and puzzles will get gradually tougher as the player levels up while quests become increasingly more difficult to fulfill with bigger rewards. The final interaction is a confrontation with a particular faction leader and will be dialogue intensive. Most outcomes result in the death of the protagonist as she challenges the current world order, rejecting the disparate dogma dividing the world from peace and unity. Other outcomes like the *Black* ending result, in which the protagonist becomes twisted and deranged by her apathy and hopelessness and commits to causing harm to others indiscriminately, result in permanent markers across all new game files. There will be positive tradeoffs to pursuing this route too since we want to encourage the player to explore as many narratives as possible and examine the world through various lenses.

The player will gradually grasp the allegorical themes of discrimination, class privilege, politics, oppression, and injustice. Many would think that because the game divides characters into classes that there may be a clear moral advantage to some more than others, but this is not true; no faction is inherently good or bad. In fact, the game will involve the player in instances of morally good and bad examples of characters per faction. The game's unique aspects of restricting the RPG canonical "new game" feature and continuity across different playthroughs should encourage the player to stick with it and relish the experience rather than optimize play. For this genre of RPG, lessons and morals conveyed are incredibly important as well as the emotional impact of the narrative. Its goal is to enthrall the player in a highly involved narrative where every decision matters from various vantage points. It is a game that will be stimulating to the visceral and will have you questioning your own values and morality.