

Design of “Winter War”

Battleblock Theater Level Design Project

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Video Link: <https://youtu.be/qP-9WNAZH78>

Level Map Overview



Level Map Marked With Beats



Main Beats

START



The first things that the player sees upon starting the level is ice all over the floor, and a background of a blue sky with large snow particles. The level is also mostly made up of white blocks. This conveys that ice blocks will feature heavily in this level, and makes the level feel cold from the get-go. The player is also offered a choice from the very start - do they continue to the left, or do they move down the tube of slime?

Beat 1

This beat is best divided into two sections, the area above (1a) and the area below (1b).

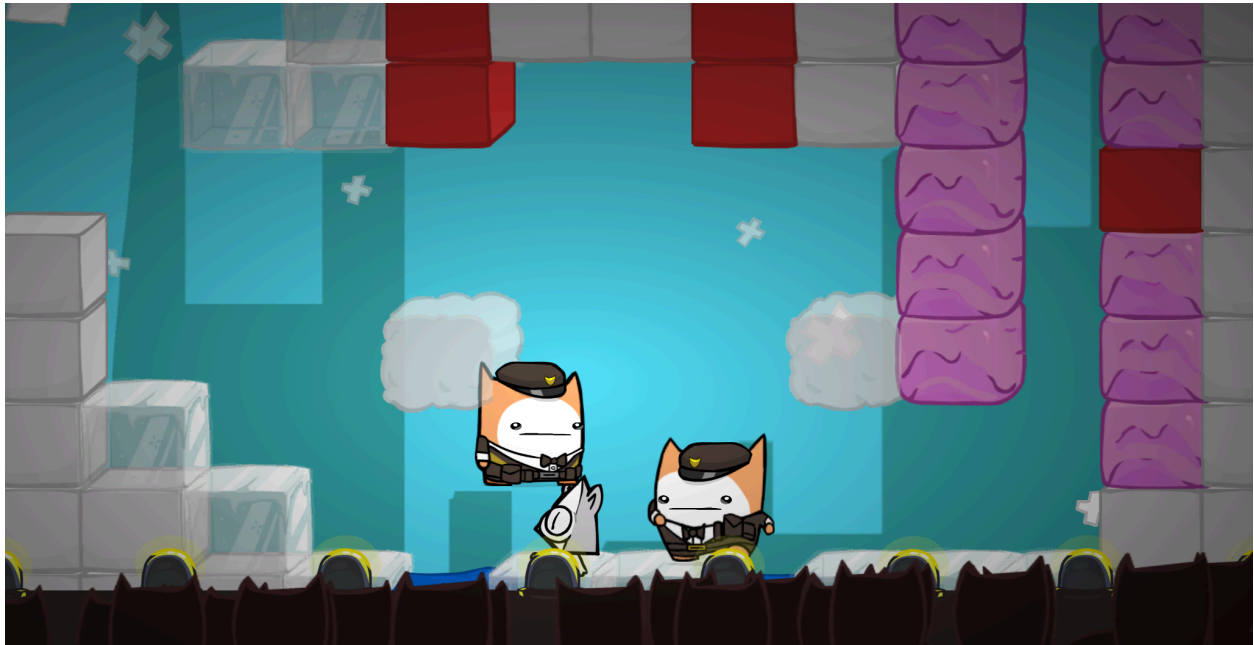
Area 1a



- From the start, the player is very likely to run straight to the left and into area 1a. Here, the pole sticking down from above funnels the player into walking along the surface with the red and white blocks. From there, the player is likely to walk over one of the red blocks, which will reveal what they really are: Fake blocks!
- After walking over the red blocks, the player falls down through the fake red blocks, into the area 1b.
- Having the players fall through the red blocks teaches the players that red blocks usually mean that some blocks in the area are actually fake!
- These blocks were changed from white to red in the final version For two reasons:
 - One, because in playtests, players often did not realize that the presence of red blocks meant that there was something of interest in the area; Often, they mean that there are secret fake blocks in the area.
 - In the previous version, there was nothing telling the player explicitly that this was a trap! If the player is particularly careful or sharp, they might identify these as fake blocks and jump over them.
- There is also a strawberry positioned in the upper left corner of the area, which acts as a carrot-on-a-stick for the player. The player is lured in by the strawberry, making it more likely that they fall through the fake red blocks. The player is able to easily go back to collect the strawberry afterwards.

- A cat guard was removed from this area for the final version of the level. This was because of playtests which showed that the combination of fake block trap and cat guard would result in the player getting ganged up on by three cat guards at the same time, as the cat guard from the area above would move to the area below once the player fell through the fake blocks.

Area 1b



- While the player will often fall through the red fake blocks, this doesn't usually result in any death for the player. Instead, they will just have to fight two cat guards, which start positioned on two cloud blocks.
 - This teaches the player that they should expect some traps in this level; but, this first trap doesn't result in any significant consequences yet!
- There are two small blocks of water in this section. They pose some danger to the player, since the player can get pushed around by the cats, and the icy surfaces make it much more likely that they are pushed into the water. However, the bodies of water are so small that they are hard to get pushed into. They are also a fun environmental hazard to throw the cats into!
 - This was changed from being one bigger two-block body of water into two separate 1-block bodies, because the larger body of water was more punishing for the player, and the goal here is to not punish the player too much for falling for the fake block trap. They are also like this to make it so that the fan from Beat a doesn't blow the player into the water, but rather serves as a neat speedrunning trick!

Beat 2



- In playtesting for this beat, the player will often first try to jump over the spike block in the middle. They soon realize that this isn't an option, which causes them to look around for other options, and spot the ladder going along the top. Most players at this point don't actually know that they can climb on the ladders upside-down, but they usually give it a try at this point when they can't see any other options, which teaches them a neat mechanic!
 - The spike block here was colored red after some playtests, to make the spikes stand out more, and show that it's a particularly dangerous location. Again - the red shows it's an area of interest!
 - The sign also helps to signal to players the presence of the spikes; And, it will teach them the significance of the sign, which will appear again in a later beat and may help signal the danger of spikes to the player!
- The player can also attempt to grab the pie by doing a difficult jump off the ladder, though the pie can also be accessed another way through a tunnel of fake blocks.

Beat 3

This beat is best divided into two sections; One area that corresponds to the two wall jumps the player must perform (3a). And a second area that corresponds to the moving block puzzle (3b).

Area 3a



- In this beat, after the player completes a jump off of the slime blocks onto some cloud platforms, they must bounce off of a magma block in the wall onto an ice platform; However, this ice platform is a trap, and will often result in the player sliding into spikes on the first try.
 - This trap location was a difficult one to balance. In playtesting, it was always a fun, “Oh, haha, I should have been paying more attention!” moment for the player on the first time a player is caught by it. However, the length of the ice path has been extended to allow for more time for the player to react in order to avoid this trap, as it becomes an annoying moment if the player is caught by it repeatedly. A sign was also introduced, which indicates to observant players that they should watch for spikes on this ice path.
 - The spike that the player is likely to hit was also recolored from white to red, to make the spike contrast better so that it is easier to spot.

Area 3b



- This area changed from being a simple jump between two moving platforms, to being a small puzzle using an under-looked mechanic of the moving platforms. With a small amount of experimentation, players will find out that the moving blocks will switch directions if they hit the player's body. They can use this to get the moving blocks out of order, and create a viable path to the top. This challenge teaches the player an interesting new mechanic.

Beat 4



- This is the most challenging beat of the level, acting as a “finale.” This is a large area reflecting a battlefield, where enemies throw balls down from above, causing explosions when hitting the explosive blocks, and potentially knocking the player into water or lasers.
 - This area underwent multiple iterations, with a lot of changes made to find a good balance between challenging and frustrating gameplay. The player is meant to build up a bit of frustration against the cats that attack from above, but the pattern in which the balls are thrown down have been made more predictable to allow the player to learn which path they should be taking after a couple of deaths. The checkpoint is also at the very start of this section, to make it quick and easy to retry.

Beat 5



- In this beat, the player gets to move across the top of the level over the enemies that had attacked them in the previous beat. They are then confronted with a big, red, obvious button.



- This part of the level also went through several iterations. It was originally laid out in a manner that had cats standing on several different levels of clouds, which the player could jump between to attack the cats. However, in playtests, most players decided to just walk past all of the cats, deciding that it wasn't worth the effort to attack them since they weren't able to fight the player.
- This area was replaced with a straight path that leads to a big, red, comedically obvious button. The player can take a good guess at what the button will do to the cats, since it's placed right on top of a blocked-off laser. The player can now choose to take revenge on

the cats by pressing the button, or jump over it and continue on if they want to take the path of peace.

Side & Traversal Beats

Beat a



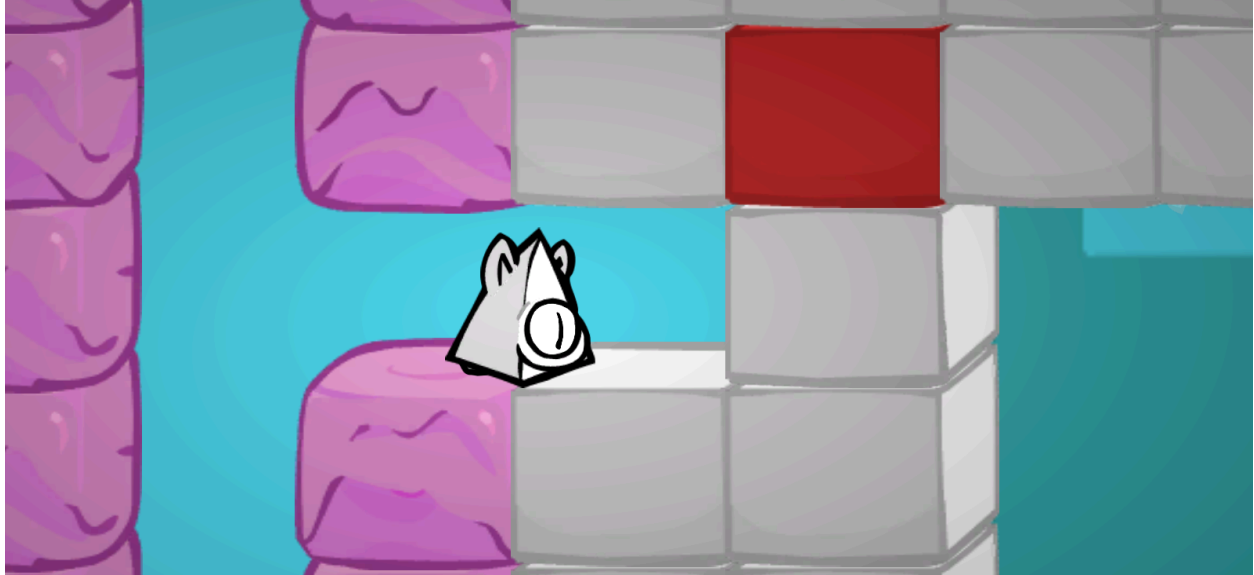
- This side beat rewards the player for exploration with a strawberry, and serves as another introduction to the red blocks in this level. I have found in my playtests that the player will often find the “exit” from beat a first, and try to grab the strawberry by moving against the fan first, as shown in the picture below.



- They will soon realize that they cannot move up far enough against the fan to touch the strawberry, without getting blown back. However, the player does note the presence of

the red block along this bottom “exit,” and they will often look for the “entrance” to this area by climbing back up the slime blocks.

- When searching around the slime blocks, they will notice the gap with the red block, and rightfully realize that this is also a secret entrance. This helps to solidify the connection between red blocks, and areas of interest.



- The fan at the bottom pushes the player into the strawberry and out through the exit, over the two gaps of water and across to the opposite side of beat 1, which gives the player an extra reward in the form of a fun bit of traversal.

Beat b



- Here, the player can attempt to enter into the small area with the pie by doing a difficult jump off of a ladder from Beat 2.
- The player can also enter the area by using the tunnel along the left, which is marked by a red block. This can also be used as a shortcut into the middle of Beat 3, as an extra reward for performing the difficult jump off of the ladder.

Beat c



- This is simply a fun little “Bouncy Castle” area, which can be entered and exited through some exploding blocks.
- This area serves as another small reward for exploring the level.
- I have tried different versions of this “bouncy castle” area in previous iterations of the level, but this version seems to be the one that players find the most entertaining. Previous versions had too little headspace, or too much area to explore where the bouncy castle would get monotonous (where they could go both all the way to the left and all the way to the right).

Beat d



- This strawberry acts as a fun secondary objective in Beat 4. All playtests have noted that they love the automatic movement in this little side-objective, where after descending into the tunnel a fan will slide them across the ice, having them collect the strawberry, and then push them onto a magma block which will launch them back onto the battlefield.

Beat e



- This is a fun little traversal beat. As the player drops into this safe space, it is likely that they will drop onto the launch pad, which will launch them straight through the teleporter and out into Beat 5.

Beat f



- In this area, the player is rewarded with a couple of fun little traversal methods; If they stand on the first launch pad, they will get flung into an assortment of magma blocks and launch pads that will have them land just above the exit. Alternatively, if they find the fake blocks that drop them into the area below, they will get slid along some ice and onto a magma block that places them right next to the exit (and lets them collect the last strawberry!)