
The Signs of Chaos: A Semiotic Analysis of Just Cause 3

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Abstract

This paper is my Final Draft Assignment for Cog-444, Semiotics. This paper provides a semiotic analysis of the 2015 open world action-adventure game, Just Cause 3. This paper focuses on a variety of semiotic topics related to the game, and discusses them in detail and provides needed semiotic analysis. Just Cause 3's world is somewhat of a semiosphere [[48]] of its own, and as such there are many things that can be discussed on this topic.

An important note to keep in mind when reading this paper is that this paper is only on the base game of Just Cause 3. The Sky Fortress, Mech Land Assault, and Bavarium Sea Heist downloadable expansions are not discussed in this paper nor are they considered whatsoever in the analysis of this paper.

Introduction

In this paper I will analyze the 2015 open world action-adventure game, Just Cause 3, from a semiotic [[47]] perspective. There are a wide variety of possible semiotic topics within this game that could be discussed, however I have chosen to only focus on a select group of items. Danesi's book on semiotics is used often throughout this paper when discussing semiotic topics. ((3)) There are six main sections of semiotic discussion within this paper:

The second section of this paper, titled "Welcome to Medici" provides a brief introduction to Just Cause 3. It focuses on what the game is, its setting of the fictional island of Medici, the various factions within the nation fighting for control, and provides a brief introduction to the narrative of the game. This section is primarily focused on providing context for the rest of the paper, and as such does not provide much semiotic analysis, as that is covered in later sections. ((1))

The third section of this paper, titled "The Clash of Color" focuses on the importance of color and faction symbols in Just Cause 3. In this section, a number of symbols within the game are discussed, most notably the "color code" [[2]] of the factions and their

respective flags. ((1)) The notion of markedness, especially when applied to the color red, is discussed frequently within this section ((10)). This section also touches upon the history of these colors throughout the game's development, and how they have changed. ((6)) The connotations [[6]] of these colors are also discussed, and supported through testimony by the game's art director ((8)). Also, what happens when this "color code" is broken is discussed ((4)).

The fourth section of this paper, titled "Conveying Evil" focuses on the designs of the various antagonistic factions within the game, and how the game makes them look evil. Specific focus is placed upon the importance of connotations, the use of gestures [[16]] and gesticulants [[17]], and other symbolism used in conveying evil, alongside other dialogue and texts. ((1, 2, 7, 9))

The fifth section of this paper, titled "Heat and Liberation as Codes" focuses on the Heat system in Just Cause 3, which is the code that determines how the government responds to the player's actions, and the "liberation" system in Just Cause 3 as well ((1)). This section analyses both of these codes at length, and also discusses the associated signs [[51]], specifically icons. [[20]]

The sixth section of this paper, titled "How Medici Itself Tells a Story" focuses on how the design of the world of Medici itself is used to convey meaning, specifically in regards to the history and past important events within the world ((1)). Much of this section focuses on diachronic [[11]] analysis of how various construction and destruction within the world is used to convey important events and how the world has been shaped by the two main factions, focusing on things such as the various architectural styles, graffiti, and destruction.

The seventh section of this paper, titled "The Importance of Music" focuses on how music is used within Just Cause 3 to convey meaning ((1, 5)). Connotation [[6]] is a very important notion discussed within this section, specifically in relation to a few major types of music within the game and variations within said music.

There is also an additional appendix of annotated images taken in the game to help provide additional context for the paper at the end of this document.

Welcome to Medici

This first section provides a basic introduction to Just Cause 3, the world that serves as its setting, the factions fighting for control over it, and a basic introduction to the game's story and gameplay. In this section I will provide a basic, general introduction to Just Cause 3, an introduction to its gameplay loop, an introduction to its setting of Medici, a brief overview of the factions fighting for control of the nation, and a summary of the story of the game. After reading this section, I hope that a reader will have a basic understanding of the game to give them a foundation for understanding later sections of the paper.

Just Cause 3 is an open world action-adventure game released in 2015, produced by Avalanche Studios and published by Square Enix. Just Cause 3 is available for Xbox One, Playstation 4 and Windows computers. Just Cause 3 was overall well received but there was criticism about its world not being as geographically diverse as its predecessor, Just Cause 2, and optimization problems on some platforms that hurt the gameplay. Just Cause 3 is a sequel to Just Cause 2, and was later succeeded by Just Cause 4 in 2018, which was not received well as it removed most of the beloved features of Just Cause 3 such as its liberation system and was overall seen as a low-effort "cash grab". While Just Cause 3 does provide a massive, detailed, open world, it is clearly fictionalized enough that it would be very hard for one to see it as hyperreal [[19]]. ((1))

Just Cause 3 has a wide variety of things to do within the game. The main storyline is told through a number of missions, but the bulk of the game focuses on "liberating" the country. This is done through destroying government propaganda and military infrastructure, killing important enemies such as military commanders and militia captains, and helping the rebels take over key strongholds such as military bases and town police stations. This is done with the help of a number of weapons and vehicles, alongside the protagonist, Rico Rodriguez's signature parachute and grappling hook, the latter of which allows him to easily grapple up buildings and cliffs, get onto the roofs of cars, aircraft and boats to allow him to hijack them, and he can even use this to tether objects/people together. An all-new wingsuit was added to Just Cause 3 which allows for even more exploration options. Besides completing missions and liberating settlements, the player can also engage in a number of side-missions, races, and various random events to help the citizens of Medici or just explore the massive open world. ((1))

Just Cause 3 is set in the Republic of Medici, a fictional Mediterranean island nation near France and Italy. Medici is an archipelago split into three major regions. Insula Fonte is a medium-sized region in the southeast, composed of a main island and the smaller Sirocco Islands in the south. Insula Dracon is a very mountainous archipelago in the southwest and the smallest of the three regions, being a lot more remote and poor compared to the other two regions. Lastly, Insula Striate is an extremely large island in the north that functions as the Medician “mainland” with the capital city of Citate Di Ravello in the south, and a massive wall dividing the region in two, with civilian settlements in the south, while the north was cleared of civilians by force years ago and is composed of destroyed towns, military bases, and Di Ravello’s massive Bavarium mines. Medici is a beautiful country, however General Di Ravello’s overbearing presence sours its appeal, as the towns are filled with propaganda, soldiers, and militia, the countryside is scarred by his massive military constructions, and his regime is oppressive and brutal. ((1))

Medici has been in a state of civil war for years before the events of Just Cause 3. This conflict is being fought between two major factions, Di Ravello’s government and The Rebellion, a revolutionary group with the goal to overthrow General Sebastiano Di Ravello, the de-facto head of state who overthrew the previous democratically elected government in a coup and has ruled the country with an iron fist for decades. The Rebellion is relatively disorganized and filled with those who dislike his rule, ranging from ordinary civilians, militia and military defectors, to pirates and smugglers, amongst others. Di Ravello’s government forces on the other hand are very organized, being composed of the Medici Military, which is the nation’s army, elite international mercenaries known as the Black Hand, and the Di Ravello Militia, or DRM, which were his replacement for the former police force who Di Ravello saw as an obstacle to his rule as they still believed in rule of law, while the DRM are best described as a disorganized group of armed thugs with ski masks intent on crushing anyone they view as against the government, with traditional policing duties being thoroughly neglected. ((1))

The narrative [[30]] of Just Cause 3 begins with protagonist Rico Rodriguez, a former “dictator removal specialist” for The Agency, a secret US government intelligence organization comparable to the CIA, returning to his homeland of Medici. He meets up with his longtime friend Mario Frigo, who is the leader of The Rebellion, Rico and Mario, alongside one of Di Ravello’s former Bavarium scientists Dimah Ali Umar al-Masri and the rest of The Rebellion take over the region of Insula Fonte from Di Ravello’s grasp, however Di Ravello wields the dangerous element Bavarium, comparable to an “extreme form of uranium” and fires a Bavarium based ICBM at The Rebellion as a show of force, which is only stopped by Rico at the last second. The Rebellion starts

targeting Di Ravello's Bavarium based weaponry with the help of a pair of mercenaries Annika Svensson and Teo, and eventually figure out how to disable Di Ravello's "invincible" Bavarium shielded tanks via an EMP, and survive Di Ravello's attempt to terminate them with a massive military force. Eventually, The Rebellion takes over the region of Insula Dracon and turns its attention to the Medician mainland of Insula Striate, meeting up with the returning exiled populist leader Rosa Manuela, and they turn their attention to permanently ending Di Ravello's reign and eliminating weaponized Bavarium for good. After taking Di Ravello's grandest fortress, Falco Maxime, Dimah fires the base's defenses at the main tower, which was also the main library of Di Ravello's Bavarium research, killing herself as well to eliminate "all knowledge" of Bavarium. However, during the chaos Di Ravello fled the base in his personalized Bavarium shielded advanced attack helicopter to a volcano off of the coast of Medici. Rico flies to the volcano to end Di Ravello once and for all, takes down his chopper, and Di Ravello is killed soon after, either by being shot by Rico or by committing suicide, depending on what the player chooses to do, and Medici is finally free of his tyrannical rule and can focus on rebuilding. ((1))

The Clash of Color

This section discusses the use of color throughout Just Cause 3. The color schemes of the two main factions are clearly a paradigm [[34]] and being able to differentiate them is essential to the game. In this section, the colors and flags of the two main factions are discussed, alongside the clear markedness of the color red. The importance of color for quick target recognition is also discussed. This section will finally discuss what happens when the "color code" is broken. After reading this section, one should have a good understanding of the color code of Just Cause 3 and why it is so important.

The paradigmatic nature of the colors of the government and rebel factions are essential to understanding Just Cause 3 as a whole, and a lot of attention has clearly been put into them. The basic colors are as follows: the government uses red and earth tones, while the Rebellion uses blue and yellow. This forms a sort of "color code". Red is a particularly notable color, as it is almost exclusively reserved for the government forces. No civilians can be seen wearing red outfits at all, and the rebels have their blue. ((10)) However, government troops always have some sort of red in their outfits, and important government property is painted bright red and may even have bright red lights. It is very obvious that red is clearly a "marked" color in Just Cause 3. According to the art director of Just Cause 3, Zach Schlappi, he chose these colors for the government as "grey, yellow, and red are the colors of oppression". He also noted that "While the pristine world is full of more natural colors. If you look at any picture of the

Mediterranean you see blue skies, wheat fields, and a lot of lavender. If you look at all our concept art there is a constant color theme of golden ochre versus teal blue.”. Notably, these are the exact colors used for the “good guys” of the game, The Rebellion, and it is very likely that he chose those colors for them for this very reason. ((8))

The flag of the Medician government and the flag of the Rebellion are both important symbols used throughout Just Cause 3. The flag of Medici has three stripes, red, white, and green, with three yellow stars in the middle row, somewhat reminiscent of the flag of Italy in terms of color. The flag of the Rebellion is blue, white, and yellow with a bull insignia in the middle. The role of the flag is the most important part of a town's liberation, as taking down the government flag and replacing it with the flag of The Rebellion signifies the liberation of the town. These flags are also used in a number of other places too. The Medician flag is painted into many pieces of government property, found on the uniforms of Medici Military soldiers, and painted on various Medici Air Force helicopters and planes, alongside Medici Navy warships. The flag of The Rebellion is spray painted onto many of their vehicles, and also spray painted on various buildings and locations they take over as a way of signifying their control over the area. As such, both flags are very important symbols with very clear meanings. ((1))

In a fast paced action game, quick target recognition is essential. The player does not have time to stop and think about who or what they are attacking, as if they did so they would probably be killed. As a result, a game like Just Cause 3 needs very clear symbols and colors to quickly tell the player what's what. As discussed earlier, the color red is almost exclusively reserved for enemies. This means that when the color red is seen, the player knows that they can immediately attack it as it's almost certainly an enemy. The color blue is the opposite, being an indicator of the friendly rebels. If the player sees blue, then they know that they should not attack it. An interesting side note that can be drawn from this is that the player works for The Rebellion, who prominently features a bull on their flag, and the player knows to destroy anything they see with red, which could be compared with the common belief of bulls hating the color red and wanting to attack it. All in all, the color and symbol system is essential to quick target recognition in an action game like Just Cause 3. ((1))

Just Cause 3's color schemes didn't change much during development, especially for the government, but there were still some slight changes to note. For instance, the cut police force had red and white patrol cars. The use of the color red, although uncommon for many real life police vehicles, fits in with the game's use of the color red to signify government/enemy forces. The military vehicles also had slightly cleaner and more colorful camouflage, but most notably they featured three very large

yellow stars alongside unit numbers. In the final release, the unit numbers are completely missing and the stars are now much smaller and have been changed to white. This change might have had to do with the fact that yellow is a color commonly used for The Rebellion alongside their blue. Nonetheless, this color scheme of red and earth tones for the government was clearly decided upon rather early in development and remained the same ever since. ((6))

A very clear example of what happens when this color code is broken is in the Medici Police Mod. This is a user modification that, once applied to Just Cause 3, replaces the DRM and Medici Military forces with a police force. However, this is not the same one that was cut from the game, and was instead entirely created by the creator of the modification. For some unknown reason, they made the color of the police force blue. The police uniforms are blue, the police cars are blue and white, and so on. As discussed earlier, the color blue is used in game for The Rebellion, and the government/enemy forces are instead supposed to use red. As a result, we see a major paradigmatic issue, as both friendly and enemy forces now share the exact same color and thus are very hard to differentiate, especially during fast paced combat. In sum, this provides a perfect example of why the color code is so important to maintain. ((4))

Conveying Evil

In this section the ways Just Cause 3 portrays the Medician government and its three main forces, the Di Ravello Militia, Medici Military, and the Black Hand as evil are discussed. Just Cause 3 tries to be very black and white with its portrayal of good vs. evil, and as a result the Rebellion is portrayed as always good while the government is portrayed as always evil. Just Cause 3 has clearly actively tried to portray the government forces as evil through their designs, dialogue, and actions, which are discussed in detail in this section. After reading this section, the reader should have a general idea of how the game portrays the government as evil through symbolism, gesture, and connotation, amongst other things.

The first faction to be discussed in this section is not encountered in the final game. The Medici Police Department, or “Policia” was supposed to serve as the national police force for Medici, however they were scrapped late in the game in favor of the Di Ravello Militia. Early images showed them fighting The Rebellion alongside the Medici Military. ((7)) From what we know of the police, they were clearly intended to resemble a modern European police force, with their captains bearing a striking resemblance to the uniform of the Italian Carabinieri, and they possessed modern European hatchbacks as police cars. This is likely why they were removed from the final game. Just Cause 3 is a game about overthrowing an evil dictatorship, and

overthrowing a contemporary modern European police force seemed quite out of place, as the police are typically portrayed as the “good guys”. ((1))

The Medici Police Department was replaced by the Di Ravello Militia. The DRM was likely designed to resolve this issue, as their appearance is designed to make them appear evil, perfectly fitting in with the theme of Just Cause 3. They are very clearly a last minute replacement for the police, as much of the internal source code still refers to their faction as the “police”. ((2)) Gone are the police uniforms, replaced with black ski masks with red stripes painted across them. More elite militiamen wear what was clearly at one point police riot gear, but spray painted with the DRM insignia. The police stations are in disrepair, with DRM graffiti hastily spray painted across the police signage, and disused police cruisers lie rotting away in the parking lots, covered in rust and a layer of dust. As revealed in game dialogue, General Di Ravello loathed the police department as it adhered to rule of law and due process, and so he declared them corrupt and disbanded the force and replaced them with the DRM who he considered to be “incorruptible”. However, the DRM are clearly shown to be the exact opposite, instead being a disorganized violent group of thugs feeding on the corpse of Medician law enforcement, especially evidenced by their appropriation of the police department’s stations, equipment, and weaponry for their own nefarious uses, one of the most clear symptoms [[59]] of the rotting husk of the Medician justice system. ((1))

The Black Hand are a group of elite mercenaries hired by General Di Ravello to protect his most important assets and locations. The Black Hand are the toughest enemies in the game, and are designed to be intimidating and to look evil. Their faces are completely covered by masks and visors, and their voices are concealed by electronic voice modulators, which make them sound robotic and inhuman. This is likely intentional, as by eliminating almost all of their humanity from their design, they are far more intimidating, which is justified by their combat prowess. Their language is also intimidating, threatening to “eliminate” people who they see as a potential problem, making it sound as if they see people as just things to be dealt with, which is even more intimidating when combined with their visual designs and voices. By creating this force in the way that they did, the developers contributed to the way the game portrays the government forces as evil. ((1))

The body language and movements of the DRM, Medici Military and Black Hand members are also used to portray the evil of the government. One can view their gestures and movements through the lens of kinesics. [[25]] One of the most common examples of these is when soldiers wave and points their guns at people that they don’t like, as a clear signal [[54]] for the party to move along or face the consequences. Oculistics [[32]] come into play whenever the player does anything noticeable in front of

the authorities, as they will start fixating and staring at the player until the player leaves their line of sight. Proxemics [[42]] also come into play at times, with soldiers often getting up in the faces of civilians to clearly intimidate them. Overall, the body language and gestures of the government troops are a symbol of their evil nature. ((1))

Dialogue is also used to convey the evils of the Medician government. Probably the best example of this is the propaganda van, a van with loudspeakers that drives around blasting government propaganda at all hours. Although its purpose is likely to convey what the government wants the people to think, many of the things it says instead convey the true nature of the government. For instance, one of the announcements the driver has is as follows “All cars must be moved by seven tomorrow morning in preparation for our monthly tank parade! Violating vehicles... will be crushed.” While the denotation [[9]] of this message is quite clear: vehicles must be moved by tomorrow morning or else they will be crushed, its connotation is a perfect example of how the government cares only for itself and no one else: either people do what the government wants or they suffer the consequences, the people have no choice in this matter. Another line from the van is as follows: “Random household inspections last week found several violations of Article 7, which mandates that every household contain a portrait of our beloved leader. The offenders will no longer pose a problem.” Knowing how Medici is run, it is quite likely that the “offenders” are now in prison or have been killed. The connotation of this line is exactly the same, comply or suffer the unfortunate consequences. ((1,9))

Throughout Just Cause 3, the player has to destroy “Chaos Objects”. These are pieces of government property that the player needs to destroy to destabilize their rule. Chaos objects are always painted red, and many have red lights to make them even more obvious. However, the game takes care to make sure that what the player is destroying won't hurt the civilian populace, which could make the player look like the bad guy. Therefore, Chaos Objects are usually military infrastructure like fuel tanks, communications towers, radar dishes, generators, or electrical substations, or they are government propaganda/spying devices designed to make the civilians' life worse. The game takes great care to show that what the player is destroying is the infrastructure of evil, and thus helps keep the narrative of overthrowing evil intact. ((1))

Heat and Liberation as Codes

The Heat and Liberation systems in Just Cause 3 are essential aspects of how the game is played. Notably, both are very clearly codes, with specific symbols indicating what is going on and what the player needs to do. The player must understand these codes to know how to play the game, as without this knowledge, they

are going to be lost and won't know what to do. In this section, I will discuss the codes for both the Heat and Liberation systems. By the end, the reader should understand both of these codes.

The Heat system is the code for how the Medici Military and the Di Ravello Militia respond to the player's illegal activities. In order to gain a heat level, the player must commit one of many crimes in front of a government soldier, including attacking someone, firing a weapon, hitting a government vehicle, lingering too long within a restricted area, destroying government property, amongst numerous other things. The more crimes the player commits and the more the player continues to retaliate, the heat level will increase with more dangerous enemies being sent to hunt down the player at higher levels. At the first level, the player is pursued by militia pickup trucks, military dirt bikes, and military SUVs, and if the player is near the water, small patrol boats are dispatched. The military will shoot to kill for any crime, as Just Cause 3 does not have an arrest mechanic. At the second level the militia stops appearing and armored military trucks with mounted machine guns start to appear alongside heavier patrol boats on the water. At the third level, small tanks begin to appear alongside military attack helicopters, and elite soldiers start to appear. At the fourth level, warships appear on the water, and heavier tanks begin to be dispatched. At the fifth and final level, smaller tanks and the larger patrol boats stop appearing to make more room for heavier military units, and multiple attack helicopters will appear in the skies, and almost every soldier that appears is an elite soldier. Heat levels can be cleared in a number of ways, including staying out of sight of the military for a certain duration of time, completing a settlement liberation, or killing all pursuing enemies before they can complete a reinforcements call. Finally, extremely secure locations such as military bases and police stations do not use the heat system, and instead use a separate system known as a "combat zone" which does not involve traditional reinforcements, and instead additional reinforcements are sent based on the specific location and how much damage the player has caused. ((1))

The user interface of Just Cause 3 uses a number of symbols and icons to represent [[45]] the current state of Heat that the player is in. There is a very clear color code to the heat icons as well. White is reserved for events that are "good" for the player, such as the military being forced to search for the player and clearing the heat level. Icons are used in these messages, for instance a pair of binoculars during the searching phase to symbolize, well, searching, and a thumbs up icon when heat is cleared to symbolize "all good" or something along those lines. Yellow is reserved for potential threats, such as when the player is "in view of authorities" or in a restricted area. There are also icons used for these messages, such as an eye for "in view of authorities" to represent the player being in the government's sight, or a triangle with an

exclamation point when the player is in a restricted area, with danger or restricted areas as the signified [[55]] for that symbol in real life. Finally, the color red is reserved for an active threat to the player, such as being in a “combat zone” or having a heat level. Icons are also used here, with outlines of troops with guns to symbolize a combat zone and stars being used for a heat level. The heat stars have two possible connotations, the first being the government as they resemble the stars of the Medician flag, and the second being how their quantity is used to indicate the heat level, with one star per level. ((1))

The Liberation system, as discussed earlier, is another major component of Just Cause 3’s gameplay. It is also a code, and is used to help the player take over settlements. The purpose of liberation is simple: overthrow Di Ravello’s forces from a location to put it under The Rebellion’s control. A liberation can be started at any time once you find a settlement under government control. You have a list of tasks to complete, and once they are all completed, the settlement is liberated. The vast majority of these tasks involve destroying government property, which is usually colored red and may even have red lights, as is the color code in Just Cause 3. Some of these objects include fuel tanks, communications towers, radar dishes, generators, electrical substations, propaganda billboards, propaganda speakers, propaganda vans, and even statues of General Di Ravello himself. Some destructibles may be hidden away behind blast doors, such as generators and extendable transponders, and the player must press buttons or interact with computer consoles to reveal them. Other tasks include killing certain enemies, such as patrolling militia captains in towns, or killing base commanders who are attempting to stop your attack on their base. The militia controlled police stations are also a task of their own, and the player must open jail cells to free prisoners, open security gates to allow the rebels in, and destroy enough enemy vehicles and kill enough enemies to “complete” the station. With military locations such as military bases, military outposts, and oil rigs, simply completing all of the tasks liberates the settlement, however, towns and villages require one final task to liberate the settlement, taking down the government flag and replacing it with the flag of The Rebellion. ((1))

Just like with the Heat system, the liberation system also uses the user interface to convey a code. Once you enter a government controlled settlement, then a list of items will appear on the top left side of the screen. This is the list of the tasks that you need to complete. Each item has an icon that serves as an index [[23]] to tell the player what there is left to complete, with the icon representing said task iconically. As items are completed, the icon will briefly appear in the center of the screen, but now crossed out in blue to tell the player that it is done, and it is removed from the list. There is also a Medician flag in the top left corner of the screen. The more of the tasks you complete, it

gradually gets painted over in black, and is nearly completely black by the end of a liberation. Once the liberation is completed, the flag icon is replaced with the flag of The Rebellion. ((1))

How Medici Itself Tells a Story

In this section I discuss how the design of the world of Medici itself is used to convey meaning, specifically in regards to the history and past important events within the world. Many of the aspects discussed here involve things that might seem synchronic [[60]] in nature at first, such as buildings and architecture, but in reality will be examined regarding a diachronic analysis of events in Medici's past. The goal of this section is to provide a brief overview of a handful of subjects, such as architecture, graffiti, and the natural landscape and their relations to the deeper history of Medici. After reading this section, the reader should understand how the world of Medici itself tells its story.

Medici features a number of architectural styles. It is well known for its many ancient ruins, some of which are now tourist sites, some lie abandoned and crumbling, and others have been repurposed by the government as foundations for its new military bases. Corda Dracon: Centcom is the central military command center for Insula Dracon, and a great example of this style of architecture, lampshaded in the text [[63]] of its in-game description: "Translatable literally as "Heart of the Dragon", Corda Dracon's central location and elevated vantage have long made it the key to controlling the region. The base's construction was the forerunner for the General's grand experiment of marrying classical and contemporary military installations, a theme later reproduced across Medici." Besides the many traditional classic buildings in various towns, modern residential tower blocks dominate the skylines of many settlements. These are perfect examples of modern [[28]] architecture, with their flat roofs being horribly impractical for the frequent rain Medici experiences, a complete lack of ornamentation and they feature lots of basic, boxy shapes repeated across most of the building. These buildings clash with the more attractive older buildings in many towns, and appear to be designed solely with utility in mind, very symbolic of the authoritarian regime now running the nation. There is notably no notable postmodern architecture [[39]] anywhere in Medici. ((1))

Graffiti is used by both The Rebellion and the Medician government, specifically the Di Ravello Militia. The graffiti used by the DRM isn't as prevalent as the rebel graffiti, but they both share the same purpose, symbolizing their control and rule over an area. DRM graffiti is only found on police stations, and involves spray painting over the "Policia" signs with black paint, and spray painting the letters DRM onto the Medician

flag on the tower. This graffiti has the sole purpose of serving as a sign that the DRM is in control of the town, and that the police aren't coming back as evidenced by covering up the police signage. Rebel graffiti is far more common than the DRM graffiti, and has many more uses than symbolizing control over a police station. Rebel graffiti appears on any facility that they control, be it civilian or military. It is also used as a form of protest, and is scrawled all over various buildings regardless of who owns them. Finally, it is used as a signifier [[55]] for their vehicles and to differentiate them from those owned by the government by spray painting them with blue and yellow graffiti, usually including a rough recreation of the rebel flag. ((1))

Although a lot of the destruction in Medici is caused by the player, there are also quite a lot of ruins across the nation, not just the ancient ones discussed earlier. The ancient ruins are quite similar to ancient Greek and Roman ruins, however there are many statues of bulls and women found in them, possibly symbolic of some ancient religion or mythology [[29]]. Given how the bull is a symbol in the present day as well, specifically for The Rebellion, it is quite likely that it still has some sort of importance in modern Medician tradition. There is another major set of ruins in Medici, however these once combined with the proper context [[7]] become quite disturbing. The second set of ruins is found almost exclusively in the militarized zone north of the wall in Insula Striate. These are rather recent, and are the ruins of former Medician towns. The time of their destruction can be pinpointed as rather recent, as there are destroyed power lines and illuminated billboards, alongside numerous burned out wrecks of modern vehicles. These towns were very likely destroyed by Medici's own military on orders of General Di Ravello in an event known as "The Burning of the North". It is not explicitly stated as to why these towns were razed, but some reasonable theories include clearing the land for future Bavarium mining or a violent suppression of a rebellion in the region. These destroyed villages are an extremely grim sight, and are one of the most chilling symbols [[58]] of Di Ravello's terrible rule. ((1))

The natural landscape and biosphere [[1]] of Medici itself bears very visible scars of Di Ravello's rule. The worst of these scars are found in the militarized zone north of the wall in Insula Striate, in the provinces of Montana, Rocca Blau, and Prospere, especially the latter two. These provinces are home to Di Ravello's massive Bavarium mines, critical to his endless pursuit of securing as much Bavarium as he can for his own desires. The landscape here is utterly destroyed by constant stripmining, with almost all topsoil and foliage stripped away, resembling a desert wasteland at first glance, and animals are nowhere to be seen. The near total environmental destruction of entire provinces is a terrifying testament to Di Ravello's grip on the nation. What can be found within these provinces themselves isn't much better. Massive bucket wheel excavators the size of buildings continue the destruction of the region by ripping apart

the soil, while forced laborers mine smaller rocks with pickaxes while surrounded by heavily armed soldiers and Black Hand mercenaries. The Bavarium mines are one of the most important symbols of Di Ravello's rule, with the destruction caused by his endless pursuit of Bavarium and the prisoners laboring away at gunpoint as a grim reminder of what happens to anyone who gets in his way. ((1))

The Importance of Music

There is constantly music playing in the background in Just Cause 3. However, what music is playing is not random. In fact, the specific music tracks that play are symbolic of what is going on within the game itself at that given moment. The music in Just Cause 3 uses both firstness [[14]] and secondness [[46]] to convey meaning. Three types of music will be discussed, the open world "free roam" themes, the combat themes, and finally the short music tracks used to signify important events. After reading this section, one should have an understanding of how Just Cause 3's music conveys meaning in a number of ways.

When exploring the open world, there are three main themes used. Outside of towns, the music is more relaxed, and differs based on if you are in a vehicle or not. The countryside is rather peaceful, and the music creates a peaceful feeling to compliment it, this feeling being a good example of firstness. When in a plane, helicopter, or boat however, the music shifts to a relaxed, but somewhat upbeat theme designed to convey the sense of action and adventure that exploring with those vehicles is like. Towns have two different sets of themes, depending on whether they are "oppressed" by the government or "liberated". In an oppressed town, the music is slow and somber, and the player starts to feel a feeling of dread, compounded by the droning propaganda speakers and the constant soldiers everywhere. This feeling of dread is also an example of firstness. In a liberated town, the music is relaxed and slightly more upbeat, conveying somewhat of a feeling of hope, which suits a town freed from a dictatorship quite well. ((1, 5))

When the player has heat, the music changes to a more action packed orchestral theme. These themes increase in intensity as the heat level rises, with heat 1 having the least intense music and heat 5 having an extremely intense orchestral theme that compliments the action unfolding. The volume of the music also fluctuates depending on if the player is out of sight of the military or not. If they are, then it becomes a lot quieter to convey this, and the music conveying what is going on in the game is an example of secondness. Within a combat zone, different orchestral themes are used, but they do not change unless the player leaves the zone. The combat zone theme's

volume also fluctuates depending on if the player is out of sight of the military or not. ((1, 5))

There are a few short music pieces used during military base liberations that convey meaning through secondness, as they correlate directly with events taking place. The first is a short, intimidating piece that plays when military reinforcements arrive to help the on-site troops stop you from taking the base. The tone of this piece fits the situation well, as these reinforcements can pose a serious threat, from squads of attack helicopters, tanks, paratroopers, boats, or even strikes from bomber jets. There is another, even more intimidating piece that plays when a base commander arrives on the scene. Base commanders are extremely dangerous threats as they can operate some of the most dangerous vehicles in the game, including Bavarium shielded attack helicopters and tanks. This piece also uses secondness well to convey the danger of the situation. The final of these short pieces has more positive connotations, and sounds less intimidating, and is used for when the Rebellion sends reinforcements to assist you in fighting the military. These reinforcements can be quite useful, from boats to tanks, to attack helicopters, and the nature of the piece somewhat conveys the feeling of “help has arrived”. ((1))

Conclusion

In this paper I provided a brief semiotic analysis of 2015 open world action-adventure game, Just Cause 3. Although I did not discuss every single possible semiotic aspect of the game, I chose a selection of some of the most important topics to discuss through a semiotic lens. Throughout this paper I discussed a number of topics, and this following list should provide a brief overview of some of what was discussed:

- A basic introduction to Just Cause 3 as a whole, what it is, its gameplay, its world, the important factions, and its narrative.
- The importance of symbols and color within Just Cause 3, how they've evolved over time, and it's “color code”, alongside the markedness of red and the importance of adhering to the “color code”.
- The designs of the various antagonistic factions within the game, and how the game makes them look evil, specifically focusing on the importance of connotations, the use of gestures and gesticulants, and other symbolism used in conveying evil.
- How the heat and liberation systems are codes, how they work, and how they use symbols to convey meaning.
- The design of the world of Medici itself and how it is used to convey meaning, specifically in regards to the history and past important events within the world.

- The importance of music and how music is used within Just Cause 3 to convey meaning regarding what is going on within the game through various tracks and variations within those music tracks to signify certain events.

I hope that by the end of this paper the reader has gained at least some level of understanding of the semiotics of Just Cause 3, and for those who have played the game or are interested in playing it, they can start to see the game in another light and appreciate the depth of the symbolism within the game.

Appendix: Various Image Examples ((1))



The flag of The Rebellion (left) and the flag of the Medician Government (right)



A Rebellion armored truck (left) and a Medici Military version (right). Note how the Rebel version is the same as the government version, but with the addition of their graffiti and flag to distinguish it.



Rebellion (left) and Medici Military (right) attack helicopters. Rebel aircraft are painted fully blue unlike Rebellion land/sea units. Also note the (barely visible) Medician flag on the military version.



Di Ravello Militia and Police character models. From left to right: DRM “SWAT”, DRM Captain, DRM grunt, Police SWAT (model has issues in game due to being designed for a riot shield which isn’t in the final game and thus bugs out the model), Police Captain, and Police Officer. Note how the DRM captain has armor similar to that of the Police SWAT officer.



The three Black Hand character models. Note their covered faces.



A modern style Medician residential housing block.



Older style Medician architecture, typical of many real life Mediterranean countries.



The Corda Dracon: Centcom military base, built on top of older fortress ruins.



DRM graffiti over the Medician flag on a police station tower.



DRM graffiti over the Policia sign at a police station.



The Rebellion flag spray painted over the flag at a police station, symbolizing their new ownership of the building.



A destroyed town north of the wall, as a result of "The Burning of the North".



Chaos Objects, note how they are painted red and many have bright red lights.



A large Bavarium mine in Prospero. Note the destroyed terrain from the strip mining and the large bucket wheel excavator.



Prisoners/Forced Laborers at a Bavarium mine.



The player in an oppressed town. Note the list of items needed to be completed for liberation on the left side. The player is in the view of a soldier, and as such the “In View of Authorities” icon is displayed on the bottom right.



The player has entered the restricted area of a police station, and now the “Restricted Area” icon is displayed. Note the soldiers pointing their guns at the player in a gesture to make them leave, and the handcuffed civilians.



Going further inside the police station results in the player getting a “combat zone”. You can also see a rusty police car on the right past the SUV.



The player destroys a Chaos Object in the police station, and it is displayed with a blue cross across it in the center of the screen indicating its destruction.



The player is wanted by the government and has attained the maximum heat level of 5 as indicated by the icon in the bottom right. The player has also completed a number of tasks within the town, so the list is now much shorter and the flag icon is starting to be painted over with black.



The player after having evaded a heat level. Note the “Clear” icon. This village has been liberated, as evidenced by the Rebellion flag hanging off the yellow building and the flag icon in the top left.