An Unkind Person: An (Updated) Analysis of Team Plasma Boss Colress

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Summary

This is a greatly updated, improved version of an essay I wrote about Colress's characterization, design, motivations, relationships, and actions. It also discusses fans' portrayals of him. This essay now includes analysis of Colress's role in USUM!

After writing him in a few fanfictions, I’ve become very interested in the character of Team Plasma Boss Colress. For many reasons, first and foremost the fan response to him, I believe Colress deserves a second look. Please note that I appreciate Colress’s character greatly despite what I will discuss in this work—I simply think that a new interpretation of him needs to be offered. I hope that this piece sparks a new kind of interest in this character!

One more note before I begin: I’ll be discussing fan-created content in this piece. However, I will be speaking in general terms and not pointing to specific works by individuals. If you want to see examples of the trends I will be talking out, they shouldn’t be hard to find.

WHO IS COLRESS?

Colress was introduced in Pokémon Black 2 and Pokémon White 2. In those games, he is the second boss of Team Plasma. At some point before the games’ narrative, he was appointed the boss of the team by Plasma Leader Ghetsis. Because he gives the protagonist of Pokémon Sun and Moon and Pokémon Ultra Sun and Ultra Moon the Genesect Drives, and because he decides to dock the Plasma Frigate near the P2 Laboratory after the end of Pokémon Black 2 and White 2, he
may have worked on the creation of Genesect as well. As part of his position as boss, Colress pilots the Plasma Frigate and researches the potential power of Kyurem.

The player first encounters Colress in the Castelia Sewers after a battle with two Team Plasma Grunts. Colress comes out of the shadows and expresses interest in the protagonist's abilities as a pokémon trainer. When Colress is next seen in Castelia City proper, he introduces himself and asks to see the player's pokémon. He appears impressed by the way the player can bring out the potential of pokémon—the topic of Colress's research as a scientist.

Colress is then fought on Route 4, where he first shows the player how his Colress Machine can re-energize pokémon. He uses this device to get a blockade of Crustle to leave the area. Colress gives the player a Protein after his defeat.

He is encountered several more times throughout the game, and he is focused on the techniques of the protagonist. He also informs the player of a second group of Crustle blocking the way in Seaside Cave—a blockade that lies right before the Plasma Frigate.

Colress is also responsible for freezing Opelucid City so that Team Plasma could steal the DNA Splicers. While some fans believe that Colress was forced by Ghetsis to do this, or that Zinzolin or someone else controlled the ship during this instance, the fact that the Frigate's controls are in Colress's room and that Zinzolin and the Shadow Triad were already occupied with stealing the DNA Splicers, it seems highly likely that Colress was in-charge at this time. There is no evidence anywhere that Ghetsis made him do this, either.

When the player reaches Colress's room on the Frigate for the first time, he seems elated and battles the protagonist eagerly. After being defeated, he instructs the protagonist to fight Ghetsis and says that whoever wins that battle will determine which hypothesis of his will be confirmed. He also says this outcome will decide his actions from that point on.

After the end of the main game, Colress can be fought on the Plasma Frigate once per day. In Pokémon X and Y, Colress is mentioned briefly, and in Pokémon Sun and Moon, Colress makes an appearance but seems to mainly be a cameo. He gives either Sun or Moon a TM and the Genesect Drives and can be battled at the Battle Tree. In Pokémon Ultra Sun and Ultra Moon, his role is greatly expanded, and I will discuss his actions in those games later on. The subject of his research remains the same in all these games.

SO WHY WRITE ABOUT ALL OF THIS?

I would consider myself to be a fan of Colress. At the moment, he may be my second-favorite evil team boss from the series. However, when I look at fan-created content surrounding this character, I feel surprised and disappointed. It seems that the majority of fans miss important facets of his character. USUM's release seems to have made this issue more extreme.

The three most common portrayals of Colress I see in content are Colress as a now-redeemed, nice person, Colress as an unwitting victim, and Colress as a truly neutral, unbiased scientist. I strongly disagree with all three of these interpretations. I will begin my rebuttal with a section about the meaning of and intentions behind Colress's actions.

COLRESS AND MANIPULATION
In *Pokémon Black 2 and White 2*, when Colress meets the protagonist for the first time, he comes out of the shadows from deep in the Castelia Sewers. This is a menacing image and is a good introduction for his character. When he meets the protagonist again in the city itself, his interest implies that he was choosing to observe the player character. He asks for the cooperation of Rosa/Nate in his study of the potential of pokémon without giving her/him the option of refusal.

When he is encountered again on Route 4, he demonstrates the Colress Machine which he will give to the player later on. It is heavily implied that he made his grunts set up these roadblocks intentionally to lead the player character to the Plasma Frigate—that way, Nate/Rosa could be tested against Team Plasma as a whole for Colress's own agenda. Thus, he was leading the protagonist into serious danger. After being defeated on Route 4, Colress's gift of the Protein acts as a positive reinforcement, making it even more difficult for the protagonist (who is a child) to refuse.

When Colress is encountered on the Plasma Frigate and all doubt is removed about him being a part of Team Plasma, he minimizes his involvement by saying, "I was asked by an acquaintance to help with his research." As we learn from Ghetsis later on, Colress was in fact the boss of Team Plasma this entire time, meaning Colress is still keeping important information from the player. Colress then says he wouldn't care if pokémon suffer or if the entire world was destroyed in the name of scientific progress. Even after being defeated, he is pleased. Why? Because leading the player character against Ghetsis was what Colress wanted the entire time—he was using him/her as a test subject without informing him/her of this fact and without letting him/her say, "no."

In the post-game, Colress gives the player a Master Ball. He claims he does this because the protagonist will put it to better use than Ghetsis would have, but is this his true intention? Consider that he has been using the protagonist throughout the entire game. It seems that he is simply testing a hypothesis yet again. And of course, the Master Ball was stolen from Ghetsis. Isn't it rather hypocritical that Colress approves of hurting beings in the name of becoming powerful, and that he used both the player and his entire team, and yet is claiming to value trust above all else? He never apologizes or expresses regret for his manipulative behavior at any point, nor does he attempt to make up for freezing Opelucid City (which is civil terrorism). In addition, from the second rematch with Colress, he will be rather pushy when asking Nate/Rosa to battle: "Even the same Pokémon can exhibit different strengths depending on the Trainer! It's so interesting! Very, very interesting! Well now! Give me but a moment of your time!" If the player refuses, he will shame them for not cooperating, leading to the line quoted in the title of this essay, which is, “And I went to all the trouble to come here, too... You're an unkind person.”

Colress giving out the Genesect Drives to Sun/Moon could also be seen as part of his manipulation and testing of others. Also, he could be trying to get rid of evidence that could incriminate him.

Because Colress does not let the subjects of his experiments refuse to participate, and because he doesn’t care whether or not beings suffer due to his attempts to bring out the potential of pokémon, Colress is biased. His bias is toward himself, and his every action is self-serving. His treatment of his subjects, particularly his manipulation of his human subjects, would be shameful for any ethical researcher. In fact, the way in which he forces Nate/Rosa to be his object of study and then rewards his/her obedience is exactly what scientists who test human subjects are instructed to never do. In terms of his morality, he is also not “neutral”—while in certain systems of belief, selfish actions might be deemed neither bad nor good, Colress goes beyond small-scale deeds. He actively gets other beings get hurt and never shows regret or apologizes afterward. Even though he states at the end of *BW2* that believing in pokémon will make them bring out their power, he never expresses actual care for anyone, including pokémon. And while he also disbands Neo Team
Plasma, he never cared for leading that team in the first place. To continue his research freely, he had to disband Neo Team Plasma anyway. His later actions in *USUM* also do not back up his words, as I will later explain.

Now, certain actions Colress took throughout these games have been justified by fans—fans often claim that Colress was a victim of Ghetsis and was simply forced to do such things, that he never truly wanted to behave this way. However, I disagree. This leads into the next section.

**COLRESS AND GHETSIS**

I have scoured *Pokémon Black 2 and White 2* and I could find no evidence that Ghetsis abused Colress at any point before or during the narrative. My best guess is that fans assumed that because Ghetsis abuses certain people, he abused Colress, but this doesn’t make sense. Ghetsis’s abuse of others is strategic—he abuses his children he groomed, the populace as a whole that he wanted to rule, and anyone else Team Plasma injured. But Ghetsis didn’t abuse everyone he knew (such as the Seven Sages), so it doesn’t logically follow that he would have abused Colress. He had no reason to—in fact, he had reason to believe that Colress would willingly lead Team Plasma in exchange for the opportunity to research Kyurem, so it would not have made sense for Ghetsis to have abused him. In fact, because Colress has a color-based name just like the Sages, I would think that he held a position similar to theirs before being appointed boss by Ghetsis. Ghetsis is also not stupid—he must know that hurting someone would make them dislike him, so his confusion at Colress’s meddling in his plan in *USUM* further suggests that no abuse took place. The Ghetsis from the other world shown in that game was successful in his plan, and his words suggest he murdered or usurped his son, N, but apparently he did not do the same to his world’s Colress.

Rather than an abuser, I would say that Ghetsis was a sort of benefactor to Colress if anything—he granted Colress resources. While he clearly had expectations for Colress in his role as boss, there doesn’t seem to be any evidence that he was oppressing him. In fact, there is in-game evidence that conflicts with such an interpretation—Ghetsis generally abused other characters by stripping away their control. If he was doing something similar to Colress, why was Colress able to freely roam Unova and plot against Team Plasma so easily? And why would the actual controls for the Plasma Frigate be in Colress’s room? In addition, even after Ghetsis watched Colress betray him and send the player to fight him, Ghetsis did not send the Shadow Triad to punish Colress or throw him out (see the scene where the protagonist first sees Ghetsis in *BW2*). Instead, Ghetsis is angry at Colress and insulds him, but chooses to leave Colress at the controls of the Frigate! We know he normally has no qualms with kicking people off the Frigate because the Shadow Triad does this to Hugh and Nate/Rosa earlier, but Ghetsis didn’t do this to Colress. Also, I often see fans claim that Ghetsis was the only person Colress could obtain funding from in order to conduct his research, and that Ghetsis used money as leverage over him. However, that’s simply inaccurate. Colress in *BW2* says:

“I was asked by an acquaintance to help with his research. What I desire is to bring out the entirety in Pokémon potential! If I can accomplish that, I don’t care what it takes! If it means the strength must be brought out by the interactions between Pokémon and Trainers, then so be it! If it means you have to use a merciless approach, like Team Plasma’s, and force out all of the Pokémon’s power, then so be it! And yes, if the entire world is destroyed as a result, then so be it…”

It is heavily implied that Colress became Team Plasma’s boss in exchange for the opportunity to study Kyurem, not because Ghetsis was paying him. After all, if Colress desperately needed
money in order to study pokémon’s potential, why would he be satisfied conducting research alone in other games with seemingly no funding coming from others? He wasn’t paid by the Ultra Recon Squad in USUM, for instance. He built their machine because it was “interesting.”

Rather than Ghetsis abusing Colress, I instead see evidence that Colress was the one manipulating him and breaking his trust. For his own selfish agenda, Colress sabotaged Ghetsis and Team Plasma over and over while Ghetsis was in a weakened state. This behavior was not justifiable simply because Ghetsis is a terrible person—Colress was not attempting to heroically put a stop to his evil plans. Instead, he was manipulating everyone around him for his own gain, and Colress chose to wait to do this until he was in a position of power over Ghetsis. Perhaps fans don’t notice that Colress did this to Ghetsis because Ghetsis has relatively little reaction to the betrayal, but that doesn’t mean this didn’t take place.

When I have seen Colress hurting Ghetsis depicted in fan-created content, it is almost always shown as physical violence or sexual assault. Neither of these actions accurately characterize what Colress inflicts on Ghetsis, pokémon, and other characters. In fact, those actions also don’t characterize the kind of abuse Ghetsis inflicted on others. Both Colress and Ghetsis mainly abuse people through manipulation (the only exceptions to this are Colress freezing Opelucid City, Ghetsis attempting to incapacitate Nate/Rosa, and Ghetsis threatening Lillie’s life). In cases in which Ghetsis directly, physically attacks someone, it is when he is close to failure and is very stressed. When Colress freezes Opelucid City, there was a distance between his body and the people he was attacking.

This leads into my next point—I don’t understand the difference in fan reactions to Colress and Ghetsis. While Ghetsis does have a few fans, it is generally agreed upon that he is a terrible, probably irredeemable person. Many fans express the desire to kill or otherwise hurt Ghetsis. However, Colress has a huge fanbase who views him as a dorky, friendly, kind person. I don’t understand this discrepancy because I would argue that Ghetsis and Colress are extremely similar, and that for nearly every action Ghetsis executed, there is a comparable action Colress executed. Ghetsis abuses his three children by manipulating them and impressing dogma upon them, Colress uses Nate/Rosa and lies to him/her for his own gain. Ghetsis lies to the public about Team Plasma to try and make people release their pokémon, Colress lies to the protagonist and to his entire team to better use Nate/Rosa as a test subject. Ghetsis has the Shadow Triad give the Timespace Orbs to Hilbert/Hilda in BW2 (probably to use him/her), Colress gives Nate/Rosa a Master Ball and gives Moon/Sun the Genesect Drives. Ghetsis tries to incapacitate or kill Rosa/Nate by having Kyurem freeze her/him, Colress freezes all of Opelucid City and is the person in charge of making Kyurem suffer in the name of progress in the first place. I could go on and on.

Not only are the actions they chose to take similar, but their visual designs are nearly identical in structure. Colress and Ghetsis are parallel inversions of each other—they are designed to be deeply similar in motivation and the structure of their character, yet appear to be opposites on the surface, just as Reshiram and Zekrom are clearly meant to contrast each other while they both serve a very similar role and design. When analyzed beyond their surface appearances, Ghetsis and Colress do the same.
Ghetsis and Colress have color schemes that are dark grey and light grey respectively. The details on their clothing make use of split complementary colors (yellow and blue) which also serve as colors often used to visually represent lightning (appropriate for the bosses of Team Plasma). One of their most striking visual features, the forelocks of their hair, have two prong-like locks. Their hairstyles also represent their signature pokémon—Colress’s forelock is styled to look similar to Klinklang’s largest gear, and Ghetsis’s three forelocks represents Hydreigon’s three heads. There are so many little details shared between these characters that it would take up a long time to count all the parallel inversions—a few include their eyewear, the detailing on their hair, and their gloves. Note that Colress’s outfit in SM and USUM looks even more similar to Ghetsis’s outfit, especially in the areas of the collar and sleeves.

My guess is that creating these two to be parallel inversions was a way to have them fit the theme of duality. Just as there is always a bit of yin in yang and yang in yin in Taoism, these two appear to be opposing but also share deep connections. In this way, Colress and Ghetsis contrast with the Heroes of Truth and Ideals from the backstory of Unova and serve as villains of truth and ideals. Their visual designs even have similarities to those of Black and White Kyurem. Even further highlighting their similarity in villainy, they have rooms of opposite sides of Kyurem’s chamber in the Plasma Frigate, Ghetsis’s room full of monitors that display security camera footage, Colress’s room with the actual controls of the ship—their controlling and manipulative natures are highlighted in different ways.

Because of these similarities, I find it strange that Colress is mostly loved and Ghetsis is mostly hated by fans. In fact, since at least Ghetsis had a mental breakdown and became unable to do “anything anymore” while Colress faced no consequences for any of his evil acts, I would have expected Colress to be hated even more than Ghetsis! Relevant to this argument is that I could not find any evidence that Colress feels regret for his evil acts, yet another trait he shares with Ghetsis.

ULTRA SUN AND ULTRA MOON
As of USUM, I’ve noticed many people saying that Colress has been confirmed to be completely redeemed—that he is now a hero. Many fans have referred to him as variations of “a good boy” or “the best boy,” and have written that he hates Ghetsis and saves Sun/Moon and Lillie out of the goodness of his heart and a disdain for Ghetsis’s terrible, abusive behavior. They often praise Colress’s “savage” “revenge” against Ghetsis, and I’ve noticed a few users say they were unimpressed by Colress in the past but love him now. While I have seen fans who do not agree with these interpretations, they generally argue that Colress’s actions in USUM stem from his own selfish interests, but that this makes him an amoral and neutral character, not an immoral villain. However, I believe all of these interpretations are missing key elements of the narrative and his character.

When the player first encounters Colress, he is found staying at the Tide Song Hotel. He alternates between talking and shouting about the potential of Z-Power while staring off his hotel room’s balcony. He does not see Sun/Moon even when interacted with. He is next encountered on Route 4, and the player sees him discussing something with the Ultra Recon Squad. The dialogue with Colress proceeds as it does in SM, but this time he mentions receiving a request from “oddly-dressed strangers.” At this point, he does not elaborate. Colress is then mentioned indirectly by a Breeder at Paniola Ranch, who mentions she can find out how many times pokémon you’ve battled have called for help using a “mysterious machine” given to her by “an enigmatic man.”

While he is not encountered in-person at the Aether Paradise, after Lillie is kidnapped by Team Skull, the Ultra Recon Squad are encountered there and provide more information about what Colress has done. They explain that they plan to send Lusamine through an Ultra Wormhole with a device made by Colress (though for some reason, only Dulse and Zossie name Colress as the inventor although it was created by him in both versions) that she will then use to put Necrozma back under the Ultra Recon Squad’s control after she defeats it. However, Lusamine simply steals the machine. After Lusamine and Guzma leave, the Ultra Recon Squad expresses disgust because they realize that Lusamine is planning to control Necrozma for her own selfish reasons.

After Necrozma is captured by the player in Mount Lanakila, Colress finally appears again. He praises the protagonist and gives them the N-Solarizer and N-Lunarizer, and he explains that these were what he created upon the Ultra Recon Squad’s request. He mentions that he improved the devices by letting them enable Necrozma to fuse with Solgaleo or Lunala.

In a scene during the end credits, Colress is seen at the conservation area of Aether Paradise talking to the Ultra Recon Squad with an Aether Employee and Scientist behind him. Colress notices that Faba is taking the elevator to a lower floor, and Colress looks suspicious of him. This moment foreshadows the RR Episode.

During the RR Episode, Colress discretely follows Sun/Moon and Lillie using an invisibility device after Wicke informs him that they may need assistance, and Colress sends Rainbow Rocket’s leaders back to their own worlds as the player defeats each of them. Colress doesn’t reveal himself until Ghetsis is defeated in battle—Ghetsis threatens to murder Lillie if the protagonist won’t throw away his/her Poke Balls, and Colress appears behind Ghetsis and saves Lillie by turning the two of them invisible. Colress sends Ghetsis back to his home dimension after a confrontation. Once the Aether Paradise returns to normal, Colress compliments Sun/Moon and leaves while saying he knows what he wants to research next. If the player returns to the Tide Song Hotel, Colress will once again be shouting on the balcony, this time wondering about Necrozma’s motivations for granting Alola’s pokémon auras. Other than giving Moon/Sun the Genesect Drives and appearing a Battle Tree, two moments also in SM, these are all of Colress’s depicted actions in USUM.
The first detail I would like to point out is that Colress agreeing to build a machine that will forcibly control a pokémon simply because the request was “interesting” strongly suggests that his view of the bonds between pokémon and humans has not significantly changed—once again, he seems to be focused on power and control in addition to research and study. His building the device seems especially bad when one considers that Necrozma was abused in the past, to the point it literally broke. The Ultra Recon Squad say they won’t treat Necrozma as poorly as their ancestors did and seem to know that the past abuse was wrong, but their desire to control Necrozma is still portrayed in-game as a mistake despite their intentions. Fans often claim Colress already learned his lesson by USUM. If that were true, why did he accept the request?

The detail of the machine that counts the number of times a pokémon calls for help is also rather disturbing. Colress continues to study subjects using methods that are questionably ethical while also making other people do his work for him, just as in BW2. This is another sign he has not truly changed for the better.

This evidence is further compounded by Colress adding to the machine behind the Ultra Recon Squad’s back. He alters it so that it no longer simply controls Necrozma, but allows it to fuse with Lunala or Solgaleo. He was likely inspired by the DNA Splicers, because after he gives the Sun/Moon the two devices, he says “I happen to know quite a bit about Pokémon fusion myself... But that is a different tale.” As we know, the fusion Ghetsis forces on either Reshiram or Zekrom was not a positive one, so the fact that Colress has this in-mind is not promising. Colress also says, “You must be a formidable Trainer indeed if you are able to get Necrozma as one of your allies. Good! And this is from me!” and “Ah yes. I have heard in fact that you first met Lunala—no, its pre-evolved Cosmog upon Mahalo Trail. I believe that a Trainer like you will be able to use both Alola’s Legendary Pokémon and the fearsome power of Necrozma properly!” Colress is thus still focusing on power above all everything else and is flattering people into doing what he wants.

None of this is even accounting for the fact he betrayed the Ultra Recon Squad without their knowledge for his own selfish interests. In fact, if Lusamine was able to use Colress’s machine on Necrozma in Ultra Space before it repelled her and Guzma, Colress may be the entire reason Nebby was absorbed and abducted at all. His actions may have resulted in Nebby and Necrozma being put it terrible pain, and Colress did not care at all. Now, there is the possibility that Lusamine wasn’t able to use the machine on Necrozma. But the fact that Colress specifically says, “Yes, in short, it makes it possible for Necrozma to fuse with the Legendary Pokémon Solgaleo!” could indicate that Necrozma cannot fuse with the legendary pokémon normally. Even if Lusamine didn’t have the opportunity to use the machine she stole and Necrozma is able to fuse on its own, the fact that Colress decided to create something that could force this fusion without the consent of both pokémon is also a sign that he has not been “redeemed.” The Pokedex entries on Dusk Mane and Dawn Wings Necrozma clearly show why not having consent could make this terrible (in addition to how painful it was at the climax of USUM):

"This is its form while it is devouring the light of Solgaleo. It pounces on foes and then slashes them with the claws on its four limbs and back. This is Necrozma’s form while it’s absorbing the power of Solgaleo, making it extremely ferocious and impossible to control.

Lunala no longer has a will of its own. Now under the control of Necrozma, it continuously expels all of its energy. This is its form while it’s devouring the light of Lunala. It grasps foes in its giant claws and rips them apart with brute force."

Contrast Colress’s behavior with Lillie’s decision to have Sun/Moon train Nebby so it can be with Necrozma in order to ease Necrozma’s pain. Lillie says she “thought a lot about it,” and Nebby is in agreement with her (Nebby can’t speak human languages, but it’s the one who begins the battle
and it makes its cries while Lillie speaks, so it is indicating its consent). Colress doesn’t appear to care about anything beyond the power that would be unleashed with the fusion—he didn’t value the feelings of the pokémon involved despite having seen the exact type of thing before in BW2.

The difference between who Colress is in private and his public persona also suggests a fixation on strength. His exact words before the player defeats the Elite Four are:

“This is excellent! Exciting, even! Alola is proving to be just full of surprises! If a Trainer trusts his or her Pokémon, even in the most extreme of situations, the Pokémon inevitably respond by unleashing their full power! Just like that Trainer I once met... There was only one answer I could reach. And in Alola, that answer takes the form of Z-Moves! I can now see with my own eyes the invisible power between Trainers and Pokémon... Z-Moves give it form! The Z-Power Ring and Z-Crystals... Their unknown energy will open doors to new worlds!”

Colress mentions “trust” here, but as I have previously-explained, these words have to be taken with a grain of salt. He says he values “trust” but doesn’t in practice—he’s still betraying people’s trust and doesn’t care about permission, suffering, or consent. It is also worth noting that Colress shouts all of this dialogue except for the line about trust, suggesting it is power that truly excites him. It is also interesting that Colress yells his dialogue when he’s alone and monologues this way, so wrapped-up in himself that he doesn’t see the player character—this demonstrates his two-faced nature, as he portrays himself as a very calm, almost gentle-looking person in public. He also always keeps himself closed-off in terms of his body language, putting distance between himself and whoever he’s talking to by typing on his suit’s screens. These two points combined suggests he is hiding his true self from others. His actions give that prospect a sinister edge.

In addition, the composition of Colress’s pokémon team in the Battle Tree further suggests that Colress still uses abusive methods. First of all, Colress has adds new pokémon to his team in this game—Alolan Muk, Porygon2, and Porygon-Z. He can also now Mega Evolve his Metagross. Porygon2 and Porygon-Z could be references to Colress’s eccentricity and his role in USUM, in which he studies phenomena involving different dimensions. Alolan Muk suggests the clash between Colress’s gentle persona and his manic, unethical side: “While it’s unexpectedly quiet and friendly, if it’s not fed any trash for a while, it will smash its Trainer’s furnishings and eat up the fragments.” Mega Metagross is when things become very interesting. SM and USUM introduced brand-new Dex entries for Mega Evolutions, and here is some of Meta Metagross’s data: “Mega Evolution stimulated its brain. It emerged as a ruthless Pokémon that will clutch at any means of ensuring its victories. Its intellect surpasses its previous level, resulting in battles so cruel, they’ll make you want to cover your eyes. When it knows it can’t win, it digs the claws on its legs into its opponent and starts the countdown to a big explosion.” I believe this pokémon speaks to Colress’s penchant for betrayal and torture in the name of his goals. Colress also has the tendency to make his Metagross spam the move Explosion. Players who scout Colress at the Battle Tree complain about his doing this in Multi Battles. This move is yet another indication that Colress finds abusing his pokémon and hurting his teammates acceptable despite his words about “trust.” It is worth noting that Explosion in the move with the highest base power. It is also worth noting that in the Battle Tree, Colress owns a Klinklang who is a Toxic-staller. It knows Protect and Toxic, and holds a Leftovers. Ghetsis is well-known for using a Cofagrigus with the same set. AI, the choice of pokémon, and the choice of moves have all been relevant to the character of antagonists before (see Ghetsis’s second Hydreigon using Frustration or the connection between Lusamine’s pokémon and her motivations).

Finally, there is Colress during the RR Episode. First, I would like to say that Colress using an invisibility device to follow Lillie and Sun/Moon in secret makes sense as a strategy to avoid detection, but that paired with Colress observing and manipulating Nate/Rosa throughout BW2 and his character introduction being him watching a child in a shadowy sewer it is a creepy image.
Then, of course, there is the scene between Colress and the Ghetsis from the other world. As previously-mentioned, fans tend to portray this as an act of brilliant revenge against Ghetsis after he cruelly abused others. I’ve also seen people commend Colress and say that his shouting that he hates Ghetsis is proof that he’s developed as a character and is now good, and claim that Colress saving children is evidence that he doesn’t stand for child abuse or the abuse of anyone else. Fans often refer to Colress as versions of a “good boy” or the “best boy” for this action. There are a few fans who’ve said that Colress isn’t a hero for his actions here, but those fans also take Colress’s words at face value. However, I believe this scene deserves a more in-depth look. There are many details I view as key that I have not seen discussed, or that seem to be very rarely discussed.

Colress has no logical reason to reveal himself to Ghetsis. The fact that he makes himself visible behind Ghetsis’s back and speaks to him, then turns himself and Lillie invisible as soon as Ghetsis turns around before revealing himself fully shows that Colress is intentionally toying with him. Colress’s body language throughout the scene is also incredibly nonchalant, which also suggests this—even as he shouts, “I simply despise you, Ghetsis. That's enough reason for me!” he has a dull smile and half-lidded eyes as usual. Not only does Colress yell far more frequently to himself in his hotel room than he yells at Ghetsis, he also changes facial expressions in other situations when he does not with Ghetsis. Colress looks down and grins smugly when he commands his Pokémon to use a move in the Battle Tree, and he has a look of dull surprise on his face if he is defeated at that facility. If this moment with Ghetsis is a brutal revenge, wouldn’t it make more sense for Colress to be grinning instead of smiling calmly? Instead, Colress’s dull smile throughout the scene and his closed eyes when he says “Oh, please…” suggest that he is amused, not vengeful or fearful.

Also, all Colress does to this Ghetsis in this scene is yell at him and send him back to his own world—the world in which that Ghetsis succeeded. This is not the “savage” “takedown” that many fans make it out to be. Ghetsis does react extremely negatively to this, but he was already stressed after losing both the battle with the player and the opportunity to rule every world. Colress chose the least destructive option in dealing with him. In addition, while this detail is only visible for a split-second in the English version of the game due to differing text placement in the word balloons, Ghetsis doesn’t seem to be angry when he first realizes who Colress is. He only becomes angry when he realizes Colress is trying to get in his way. His initial reaction suggests that he might be amused by Colress’s presence as Colress seems to be by his.

And while this cannot be fully proven, I do not believe that Colress saved Lillie and Moon/Sun and removed Ghetsis from their dimension truly because he was being compassionate. While Colress implies that he was simply answering Wicke’s call or acting out of hatred for Ghetsis, there are hints that neither of these are the true reason. After Colress sends Ghetsis away, he says, “I would like to study this castle, however, so I leave the rest to you two!” If spoken to again afterward, he will continue by saying, “The vortex of power somehow...summoned the evil leaders, such as Ghetsis, from their worlds! It’s all very interesting... Ah, I mean, quite a pain. I could put this power to much better use!” Colress is fascinated by the phenomena and wanted to hide that fact, but cannot fully contain himself. At the end of the RR Episode, as Colress leaves, he says, “As for me... I have decided on the next theme of my research!” If the player visits him in his hotel room after all of this, he will say, “I must know... Why did Necrozma give its light energy to the Pokémon of Alola in the form of auras?! As Z-Power?! Hmm... If I want to find out more about moves, I suppose I should ask Professor Kukui, or even the Masked Royal! Maybe I’ll go battle them!” Colress’s fixation on power regardless of ethical boundaries is demonstrated yet again in these lines, and to me they suggest that his true reason for infiltrating the castle was research. The fact that he showed interest in what was happening at the Aether Paradise during the end credits sequence is also evidence for this interpretation. As for his reasons for saving Moon/Sun and
Lillie, either he did it to maintain his image, or—more likely—he needed the player character to be able to defeat Giovanni so that he could fully catalogue the phenomena. While Colress does say he could put the power behind the castle to “much better use,” that does not necessarily mean a helpful or compassionate use. His intentions are particularly questionable after what he did to Nebby, Necrozma, and the Ultra Recon Squad.

The question then becomes, why does Colress say he hates Ghetsis if it seems so unlikely that it’s due to Ghetsis being an abuser or Ghetsis forcing Colress to do things against his will, especially considering how many similarities there are between them? It wasn’t clear to me from BW2, but after seeing Colress in USUM and watching him interacting with a Ghetsis, I think the answer is far more apparent. First and foremost, it is important to remember Colress’s audience, tone, and body language. In BW2, he tells Nate/Rosa, “Still, I'm glad you won. For one thing, I detested Ghetsis from the start!” In this statement, Colress is portraying himself as having had no choice but to work with someone he despised in order to discover the truth about pokémon, which means he is trying to distance himself from his actions. However, considering everything else that has been discussed in this paper, this is another example of Colress’s manipulation. Also, considering Colress’s previously-stated desire to test Nate/Rosa and Ghetsis by pitting them against each other, how do we know that Colress wouldn’t have said something similar to Ghetsis had he won instead? That seems likely due to Colress’s other actions. In addition, Colress is speaking rather lightly considering his words, which is similar to his laid-back attitude and calm smile when he’s shouting at Ghetsis in USUM. Considering this in addition to everything else regarding Colress’s and Ghetsis’s interactions that has been discussed in this paper, their relationship seems more akin to a rivalry. Something I have not seen talked about very often is what Colress says in USUM after he sends Ghetsis away: “I simply adjusted his dimensional ‘channel,’ if you will, and sent him back to his original world! But Ghetsis is a man with power to match his ambition! He is not someone to be taken lightly. I can only hope that the taste of defeat will keep that Ghetsis out of trouble in his world…” This is an interesting comment because Colress appeared to take Ghetsis pretty lightly right before this! The phrasing and timing of this dialogue (Colress waits until Ghetsis is gone to say this) suggests that Colress has some form of respect for Ghetsis. Colress also refers to Rainbow Rocket as “…evil leaders, such as Ghetsis,” and he names Ghetsis several times in quick succession, further indicating an association between himself and Ghetsis.

On Ghetsis’s part, in addition to his leaving Colress in control of the Frigate despite Colress’s actions and Ghetsis’s reaction to Colress in USUM, there are several other signs that Ghetsis respects Colress in return. Most obviously, Ghetsis wouldn’t allow just anyone to be the boss and have so much control of the team. Colress was able to perform his own actions—there is no indication that he was being carefully controlled or was intended to be a figurehead like N. And in BW, Ghetsis mentions that he is “fond of intelligent people.” He says this to Burgh, a character who opposes Team Plasma. It seems Ghetsis will openly berate Colress when Colress does something treacherous and recognizes that their goals are often opposed, but continues to feel some form of respect for Colress anyway. Ghetsis is probably able to feel that way because he himself is a villainous master manipulator.

In summary, Colress and Ghetsis seem to go out of their way to avoid harming each other, behave as if they are amused by each other, are willing to work on the same side despite being aware of each other’s goals, are strikingly similar, and appear to have some respect for each other. It is convenient for Colress to claim he hates Ghetsis in front of the people he is manipulating, but his other actions conflict with this claim. In reality, they appear to behave more like somewhat-playful rivals.

AMORAL, IMMORAL, OR MORALLY GREY?
I’ve noticed several Colress fans who claim that the anime, manga, and *Generations* portrays of Colress are off-the-mark and portray him as immoral, whereas in the games, he is amoral. People also often say that Colress is not a villain because he is amoral and not immoral. While I agree that there are big differences in each version of the character (such as anime and manga Colress emoting far more openly than game Colress), I don’t think the idea that Colress is a villain or immoral should be discarded so quickly.

Even with the base assumption that such labels are fixed (which they are not), we have to decide whether we’re referring to Colress’s actions or intentions when we think about these labels. In terms of his intentions, they are always entirely self-serving. He talks about conducting research being his goal, but as I’ve already established, he seems inordinately focused on power and manipulation in particular, causing him to come across as powerhungry. What determines whether his intentions are amoral or immoral comes down to the question, does Colress have a conception of right and wrong, then willingly choose to do wrong? I would say it could be interpreted either way, or potentially as somewhere in between. Colress uses words such as: trust, bond, just, love, ideal, merciless, and force—all words with implied meanings relating to helping or hurting others. At the PWT, he says, “The latent power of Pokémon… What is the best way to bring it out? If possible, I want it to be the trust between Trainers and their Pokémon, just as it has always been.” All of this would imply that Colress knows right from wrong and then continues to intentionally hurt others for his selfish purposes—he would be immoral in his intentions. And while Colress feels no guilt, that does not mean he is amoral—many immoral villains act without guilt. The problem is, Colress is a liar, and the majority of his words are meant to manipulate others. His actions suggest that he may only understand right and wrong on an abstract level, or that he may only understand society’s view of morality but have no moral compass himself. If this is the case and we cannot trust what he says, he would be amoral in his intentions. Either interpretation is valid, or Colress’s intent could be somewhere in-between. However, I would argue that what Colress certainly isn’t is morally grey. His actions can easily be categorized, and his agenda never changes. There are also no outside pressures—Colress doesn’t seem to have been trained to think the way he does, nor is it his duty. As I’ve explained, scientists are told to never be like him. For characters who are truly morally grey, see the Ultra Recon Squad—whenever you try to categorize them as good or evil, some conflicting detail appears. They genuinely want to protect Alola and restore their home, but they’re willing to forcibly control Necrozma, an abused Pokémon, to do so. However, then they say they know their ancestors hurt it and that they don’t want to do the same thing—that they want to help Necrozma, but then they’re willing to get help from a villain like Lusamine and they want a device that will make Necrozma unable to resist, even though they’ve already imprisoned it. However, they know no other way to treat other creatures due to their history and the fact that they are aliens... but then they call out Lusamine for being selfish and don't approve of her behavior. Yet they are still are betrayed by Colress due to their naivety and they eventually resolve to try to learn the ways of the human world.

As for Colress’s actions, they are more clear-cut. Colress’s actions often hurt others, and when they help others, they are primarily self-serving. In addition, his helpful actions do not in any way heal the damage he has done and are always manipulative. Now, selfish actions on a small-scale could perhaps be called neutral and thus amoral, but Colress is not taking the last cookie in the cookie jar despite knowing that someone else wants it. He is committing civil terrorism and putting Pokémon in terrible pain. Selfishness on that scale cannot be called neutral from a moral standpoint. I would say that Colress’s actions are immoral—none of them fall outside moral sensibility.

It is worth noting that Colress’s name is derived from the word “colorless,” but that this does not mean that Colress is a definitively “neutral” character in terms of the morality of his intentions or
actions. His name could indicate his position relative to the Seven Sages, as I’ve mentioned before, and the first two characters of his Japanese name (アクロマ or Achroma, from “achromatic”) when pronounced, sound exactly like the Japanese word for “evil.” This suggests that he is particularly willing to take an evil approach. An achromatic lens will separate light into its component colors, which could reference Team Plasma’s goal of separating people and pokémon. “Achromatic” as a biological reference could relate to Colress’s fixation and attachment to a single goal as well. Also, アクロマ is in katakana—if his name is spelled in commonly-used kanji instead, it can be written as 悪路魔, which would mean "evil way of the demon" when translated.

Now, fans may argue that they’re calling Colress a neutral character in the sense that he is neutral in terms of RPG character alignment. I’ve seen Colress labeled a Chaotic Neutral many times. Of course, character alignments are often contentious and absolutely do not fully define a person or character. But even in this system, I don’t think Colress is a Chaotic Neutral character—I think he much more closely matches a Neutral Evil one. Colress is always out for himself above all else and seems to have a lack of empathy and respect for others. He also does not oppose tradition, nor does he resent authority—he will follow an authority when it suits his agenda. It may initially seem that Colress values freedom, but his goals are fixed. As I’ve explained, he has one great fixation that he always wants to explore. When Colress sides with good characters, it is only ever for his own purposes, and he often does it to maintain his image in order to make things easier for himself. In addition, easydamus’s description of Neutral Evil vs. Lawful Evil perfectly describes the conflict between Colress and Ghetsis (while Ghetsis edges more toward Chaotic Evil when he is distressed, in general he has a terrible, warped code of conduct that he follows and a connection to dogma):

“Neutral Evil vs. Lawful Evil

Conflicts between lawful evil and neutral evil characters will deal with the question of loyalty. The neutral evil character's loyalty is to himself and those who aid him currently. He will not go out of his way to help another, unless he needs that individual's help in the future. The lawful evil character recognizes the need for comrades and will help those that he considers allies, even at some personal risk and cost. Whoever a lawful evil character calls an ally can expect loyalty and aid, unless he fails to support the aims of the group or organization. Woe to the person who betrays the group! The lawful evil character will not be forgiving and will seek to cause injury or kill the offender, whatever is appropriate for their crime. The neutral evil character will also make an example of those who cross him, there is no question. The difference between the neutral evil character and lawful evil character is that the neutral evil character will betray an ally for gain when the ally has done him no wrong, whereas the lawful evil character will only betray a former ally who has proven himself unworthy or if that ally betrays the group.”

TVTropes also explains that such characters “can also switch to the good guy's side for a while, if it's better for them at the moment,” and the page describes one variety of Neutral Evil character that fits Colress to a T (emphasis mine):

“Type 1 characters are amoral and commit evil for self-serving, but not necessarily malicious purposes. They tend to be in it for money and power but (generally) eschew motives like revenge or sadism, viewing them as barbaric or simply unprofessional, if they regard them at all; that does not mean they'll always, or ever, stop their bosses, partners or lackeys from indulging in such behavior, though, and they are usually prepared to Kick the Dog or perform Cold-Blooded Torture as a means to an end. Perhaps they are a Punch-Clock Villain, or maybe they believe there is Better Living Through Evil, or perhaps they are Blessed with Suck and their talents happen to lend themselves to evil (like, say, a talent for professional hits). Essentially, this is anyone who would be a True Neutral if not for the lack of conscience or empathy, or their practice of putting either aside to further their own ends. A type 1 will either not understand the difference between right and
wrong, or understand but choose wrong anyway, perhaps justifying it with Necessarily Evil, or perhaps simply not viewing the whole Good and Evil thing to be of any special importance in the first place. On the other end of the scale, this can ramp up to Scary Dogmatic Aliens or Eldritch Abominations and anyone else operating on Blue and Orange Morality or Above Good and Evil, but who are just culpable enough to still qualify as evil."

Of note is the fact that a type character listed on TVTropes as often being neutral evil are "Mad Scientists that turn into Evilitationary Biologists and/or do things all For Science!" which also perfectly describes Colress.

CLOSING

Based on what I’ve said in this essay, it may seem like I hate Colress. In one sense that’s probably true, but I love him as a villain. The way fans seem to ignore his villainy means that he was incredibly successful in his manipulation of everyone, both intrinsically and extrinsically, and I wanted to analyze his methods and character after seeing that success. The way USUM highlighted his mania and lust for power made me especially excited to discuss him, especially after I saw many conflicting reactions to his role in-game. I hope that my words here will help more people see through his constant lies, because I wish to see more work that focuses on his villainy.

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