

Level Design (continued... The Specifics)

What makes a good level fun and challenging and worth revisiting?

Lighting and Camera

Camera Angle and Perspective (wide or telescopic focus)

Clutter and/or contextual clues (obstructions and pathways)

Depth of space (dimensionality)

Hidden and revealed areas incrementally (with lighting and shadows)

Using lighting as a flashlight carried by character

Level Complexity and Simplicity

Picking things up = reward

Divvy it up! Have many Small things to pick up and fewer Big Rewards rather than just a few big things

Sound

When you pick an item up

When you open doors

When you move

When you sit still (background music)

Where else?

When can you use silence

Volume control (getting closer to something foreboding or further away) or when striking a compromise between background music, voices and other audio effects

Maps - Where you are, where you are going, where you have been

Top / down plan map you can call up to check your position

Progress (you are here) moving point to plot position and direction

Action maps

Very simple and straight forward linear almost

Adventure maps

Broken down into clusters with usually 1 path to next cluster. The more complex the cluster the larger the world seems

Side-scroller or Mario like maps

movement up and down side to side must seem interesting and as if you are going

somewhere even if you can't branch out to the 3d space.

The World Outside (creating depth)

Remember use pictures of the outside world as perceived through windows to make the world seem more than the level you are in (windows, space, etc. should be animated slightly in the background to make it have depth)

Background Activity

have things happening in the background to make your foreground seem not so flat. Make sure any background animation is smaller and more discreet than foreground action! They shouldn't challenge each other!

Challenges (enemies, traps, puzzles, locks, hidden objects, etc.) and Rewards (pick up objects, health, power-ups etc.)

Makes sure they match the user's expectation of the environment

Make sure there are enough of them (test it on other people)

How long does one wander in a level AFTER they kill monsters and get rewards before being able to exit? Is this frustrating, is it expected by the user? Hidden exit? Does it make sense in the context of the game?

Randomness of enemy placement, rewards, etc. whenever you reenter a level

Story Structure and Level Map are related!

The flow of the game is dependant on the level and how the character moves through the space (outdoors, architecture, rooms, whatever). For action games that are fast paced, create rooms that have nice simple flow (Circular) for adventure and strategic games create levels that address exploration and discovery.

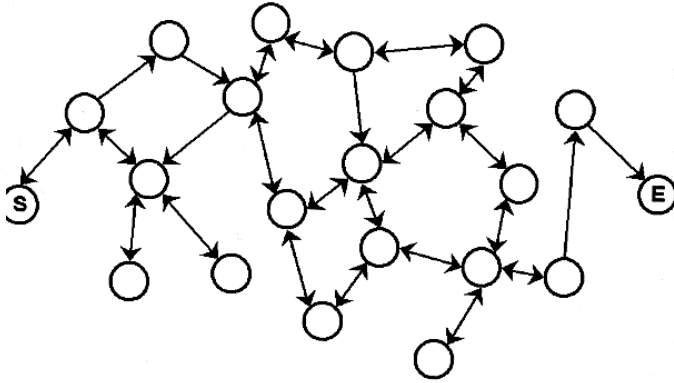


Figure 15.6 The structure of early adventure games. Each circle represents a room. S is the starting room, and E is the end.

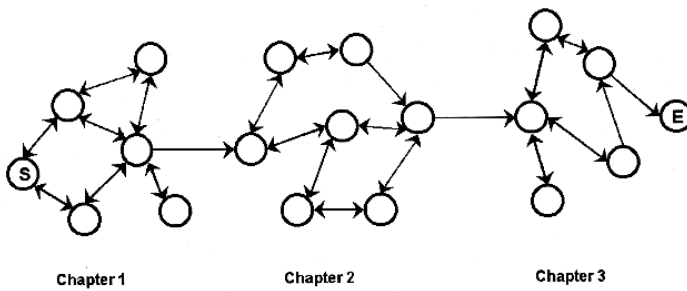


Figure 15.7 The structure of story-driven adventure games.

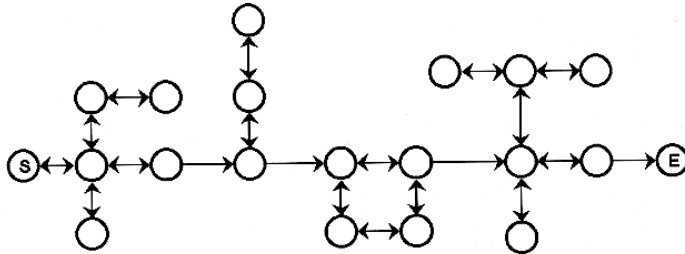
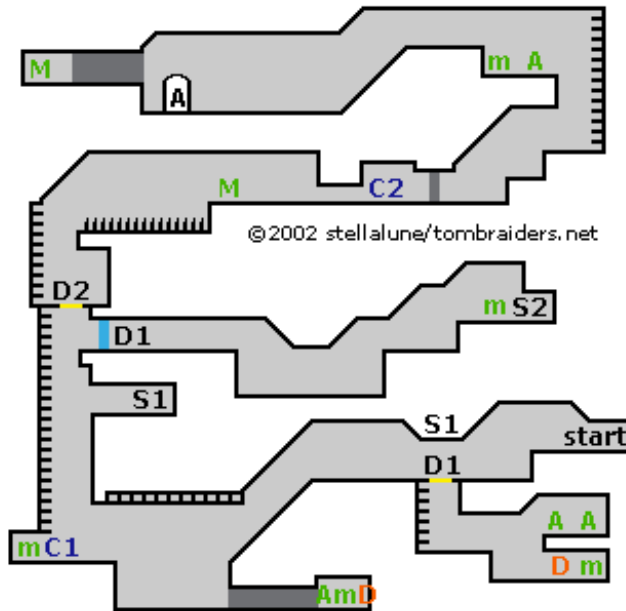


Figure 15.8 The structure of action-adventure games.
story structure and general map for different genres of games

Example Level Maps!

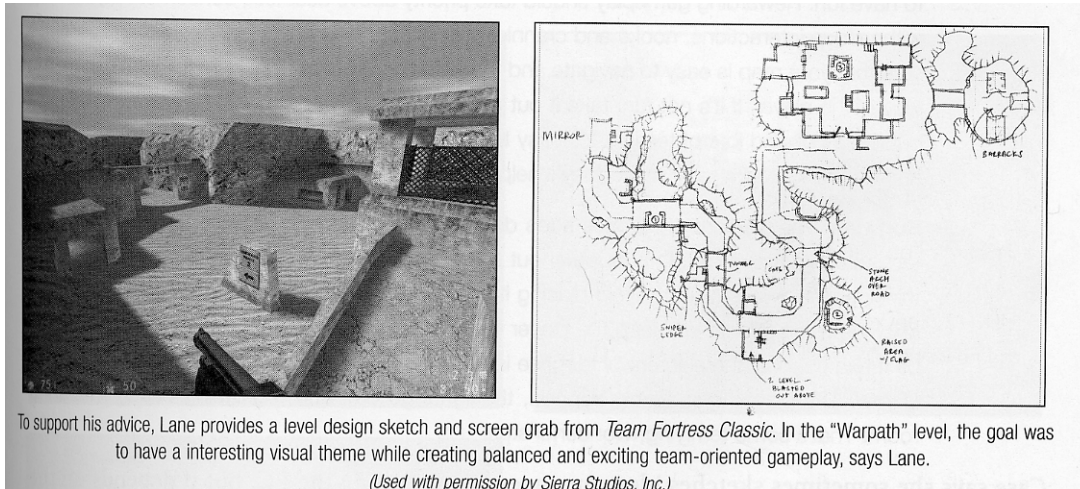
You should be able to imagine the flow in each of the above charts. Notice the main different between the straightforwardness of the action-adventure and the text based games especially.

Tomb Raider GBC - Royal Tombs B - Map 1



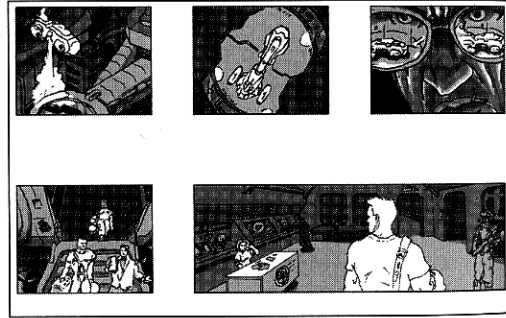
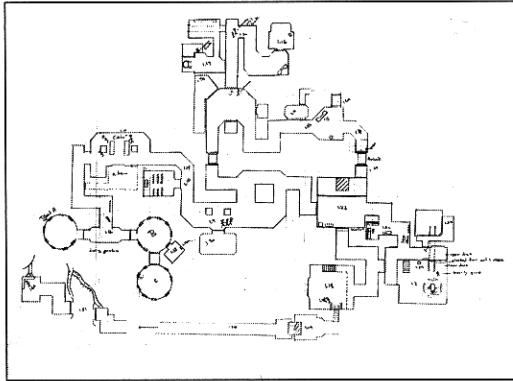
side scroller level map for tomb raider on gameboy advanced

For side scrollers you have to make it interesting from a single side perspective. Up and down movements and backgrounds moving to reveal more tunnels/halls/exits/stairs is the most familiar way it is done. Mario is the inspiration to this genre.



Warpath

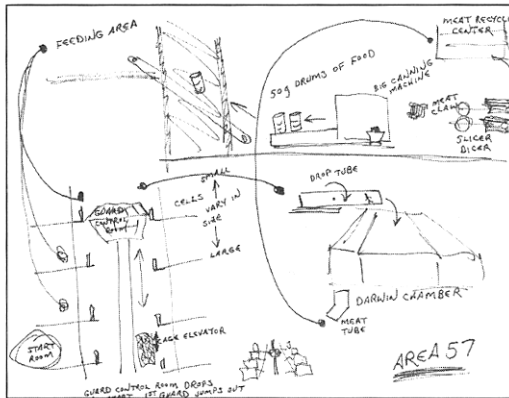
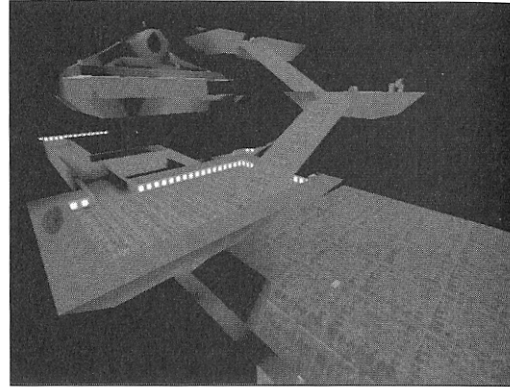
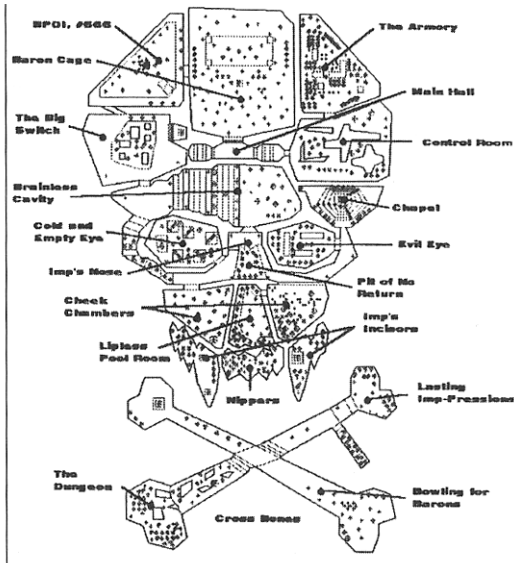
Level design should also have different heights to its design so the player can climb up and down and view over a balcony or up into a tower; this works as a teaser...a room might be difficult to find but the player sees it from a low or high vantage point. It's the finding it that becomes the mini mission.



Tim Willits' hand-drawn sketches of a *DOOM III* storyline and overhead map for the game. He comments, "I create a simple 2D sketch of a map before I start work in the editor." (Images from *DOOM III* © 2002 Id Software, Inc. All rights reserved. Used under license. *DOOM*, *DOOM III*, and the Id Software name are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Id Software, Inc. in the United States and/or other countries.)
(Used with permission by Activision, Inc.)

Doom

Notice that everything in the level above is circular in formation with a center that expands outwardly into smaller and differently sized and shaped rooms. Rooms that are different in size, shape and appearance will help the player remember where they are and how to navigate quickly in an action game. Action games are fast paced and little details are tossed for greater maneuverability and speed and FLOW...



Check out this collection of behind-the-scenes images from the Levelord's work: hand-drawn sketches for a skull level in *DOOM* (back in 1994); a deathmatch level in *Quake: Scourge of Armagon*; plus a design sketch and snapshot from the game *Sin*. The image of the bookshelf is from a deathmatch level in *Sin* called "Spry," which places the player in a reading room as the size of a rat. "I believe this was the first professional micro-level, which is now semi-popular," adds Gray.

(Used with permission by Richard Gray.)

Doom sketches

Let your ideas inspire you; even if the player does not realize that the level is in the shape of a skull it makes it more appealing for the artist to continue working on the level inspired creatively!