

# Game Design

7

Level Design

# Level?

- Depends on your perspective[1]
  - an environment or location where game play occurs
  - to break up physical space based on a specific gameplay experience
  - a unit of counting the player's progression
  - the rank of a player

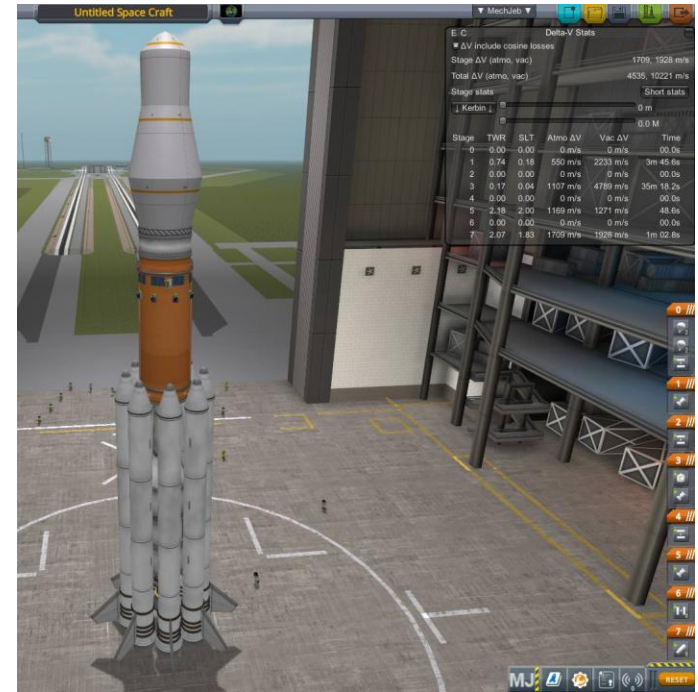
# Level?



# Maybe Another Name?

- Levels could be:
  - Rounds
  - Waves
  - Stages
  - Acts/ chapters
  - Maps
  - Worlds

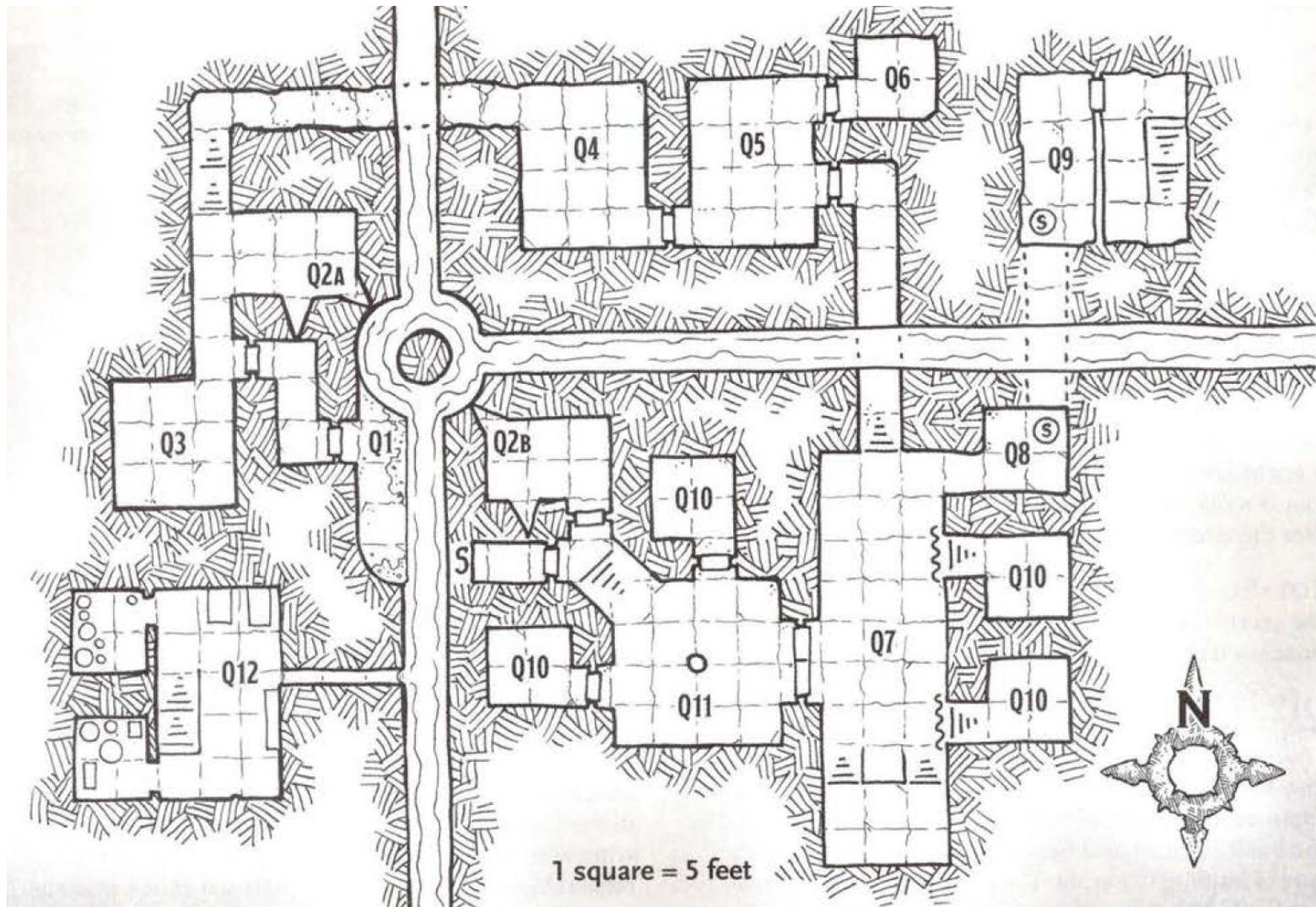
# Waves, worlds, acts, stages, etc.



# Why Level?

- Dungeons and Dragons
  - Levels (floors) in a dungeon
- Early on, players referred to levels as worlds (Fire world, Ice world, Underground world, etc.)

# Xanathar's Guild Hideout [2]



# Starting a Level

- Know the context of your game
  - Levels should support your telling of the story
  - Levels live in your game world
- Choose a theme for your level
  - As in space, dungeon, fire, etc.
- Choose a place for your level
  - A top down map of the game helps

# Starting a Level

- Choose a good name
  - Names should set the mood and expectations
- Choose a goal
  - escape or survive, explore, educate, moral, etc. [1]
- Choose the layout
  - Linear –built to help players reach the goal
  - Open space – encourages exploration

# Create a Map

- All good levels need a map
  - Top down or side on
- Map contents
  - Player starting position
  - Enemy positions
  - Doors
  - Traps and puzzles
  - Landmarks
  - Treasure and power ups

# Make It Interesting!

- Alternate means of travel/ skills used
  - Walking is not a game [1]
- Add side passages and secrets
  - Every path should be rewarding in some way

# But Not Confusing!

- Multiple paths lead to decisions
  - Breadcrumbs guide the player to the goal
  - Landmarks for navigation
- Choice is usually stressful

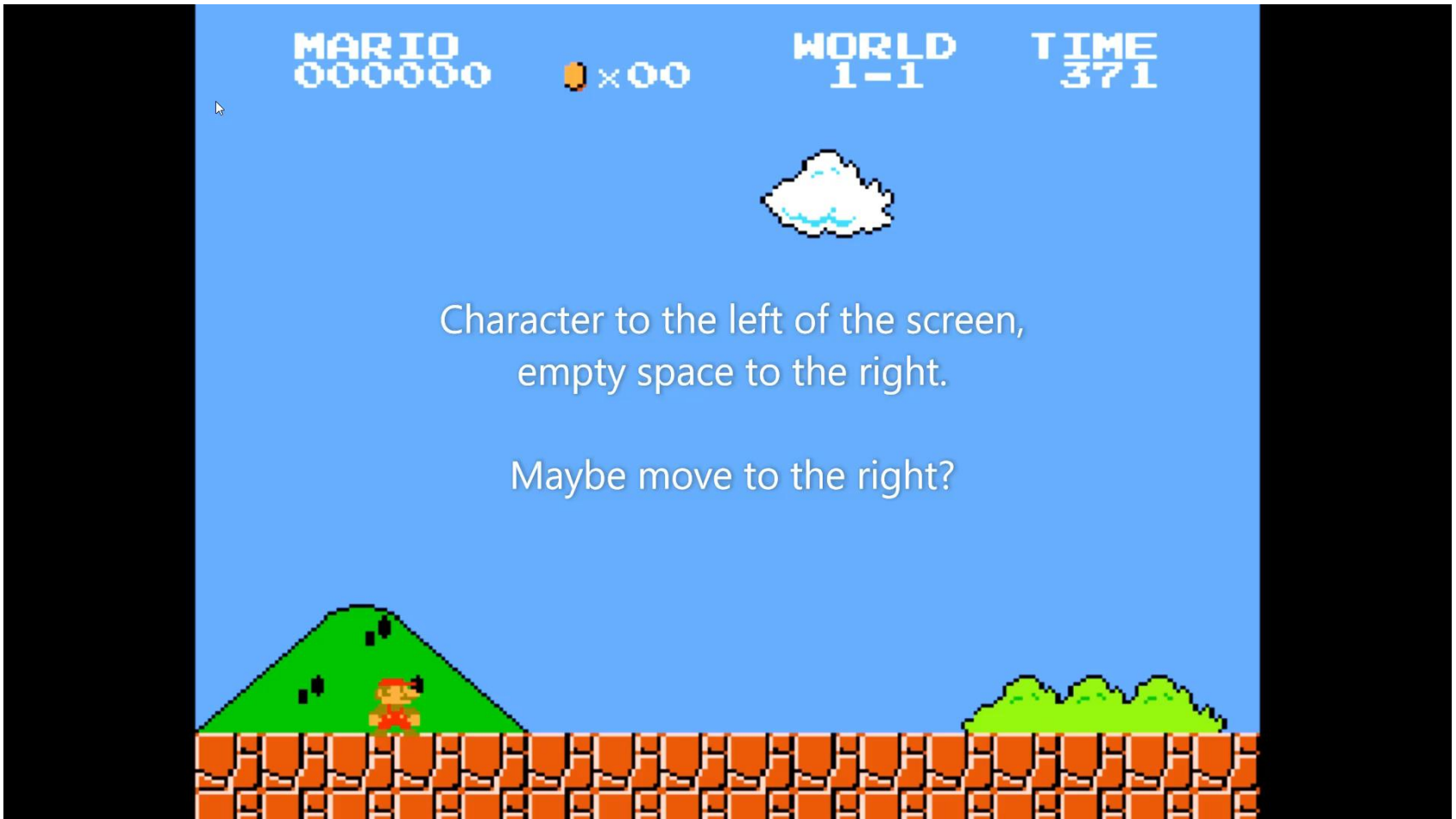
# Pacing

- Alternate the type of encounters
  - Big moments and smaller ones
- Also, you can alternate by means of player emotion

# Case Study 1 – Action Games

- Super Mario Bros. (1985, NES), World 1-1
  - How to do a tutorial level without tutorial behavior

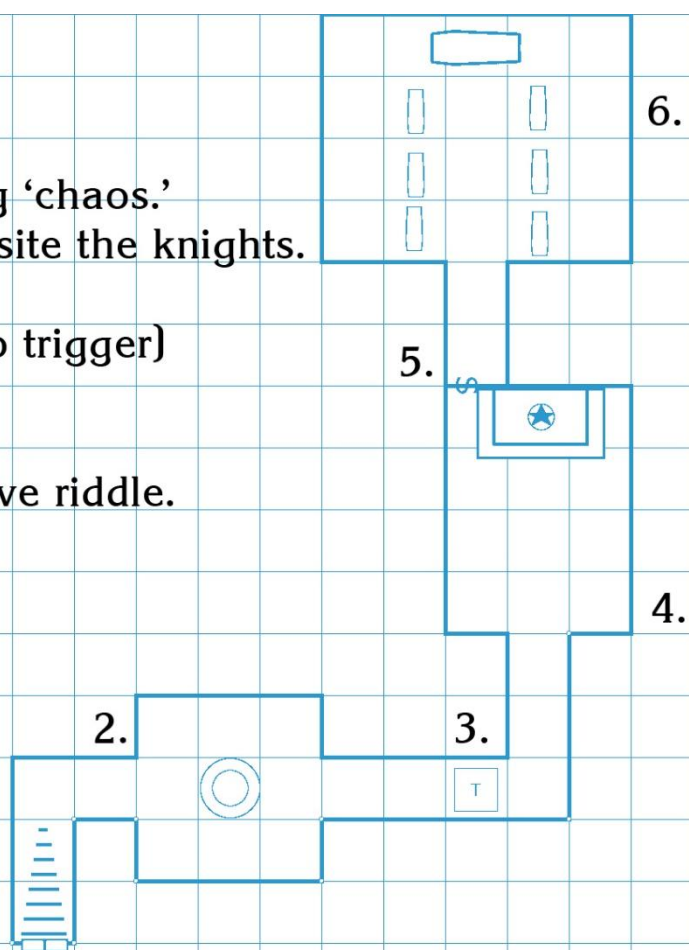
# Case Study 1



# Case Study 2 – RPGs

- Each room is an encounter
  - Combat component
  - Narrative component
  - Puzzle component
  - Reward component
- Good rooms should have at least 3 of the 4 (to some extent)
- Getting to the level is important

1. Entrance. Goblin lookouts
2. Offering room. Brazier for sacrifice.  
Goblin bivouac.  
Bas relief on walls of knights fighting 'chaos.'  
The oath is written on the wall opposite the knights.
3. Pressure plate w/scythe trap.  
(goblins and halflings are too light to trigger)
4. Bugbear boss w/goblin buddies.  
Statue of Sextus Varnus w/riddle.
5. Secret door, a thief can open. Or solve riddle.
6. Hidden Room. Undead!  
Skeletons? Ghouls!  
Treasure: magic sword.



Goblin patrol comes by every 4 hours.  
If the players wait and watch, they see them. Otherwise, Ambush!

### Ambush!

If the players fail to detect the patrol, the goblins ambush the players while they're fighting in Room Three.

1.

### Riddle

"If you are to keep this,  
you must first give it to me."

Oath of the Delian Order  
"I, Sextus Varius, swear the  
Delian Oath. To serve law,  
battle chaos, and strive to keep  
the Delian lore secret.

# Welcome to Summoner's Rift!



# Welcome to Summoner's Rift! (2014)



# Welcome to Summoner's Rift! (2024)



# Case Study 3 - MOBA

- LoL – Summoner's Rift
  - 2 **teams**
  - 5 **heroes** per team
  - 3 **lanes**
    - 3 **towers** on each lane
  - **Jungle** camps
  - **Player** roles derived from map design
  - 3 (or 4, or 2) epic monsters in the river

# Welcome to the Twisted Treeline!



# Welcome to the Twisted Treeline!



# Twisted Treeline

- LoL – Twisted Treeline
  - 2 **teams**
  - 3 **heroes** per team
  - 2 **lanes**
    - 3 turrets per lane
  - 2 **altars** located on both sides of the jungle (extra speed and health regen)
  - **Ghost Relic**, (health pick-up) in the center of the battlefield
  - **Jungle** camps
  - 1 epic monster on the top of the top lane - **Vilemaw**.

# Welcome to Summoner's Rift!



# Bibliography

1. Rogers, S. - Level Up! The Guide to Great Video Game Design, Wiley Publishing 2014
2. Waterdeep: Dragon Heist, Wizards RPG Team, Wizards of the Coast