

2-1 Designing a Level

5CM503 Virtual Environment Development

Dr Patrick Merritt

Contents

- Level Design 101

Level Design:- 101

And story writing 101!

Why am I learning this...

- You may not be the one designing the levels in your game.
- If you are in AAA studios, it's most likely that someone will hand you a document and you will build the level from that.
- In an indie studio, you probably will have to at least provide some input.
- In either case you need to understand the document to be able to implement it.

The basics, what do you need to include.

- As a minimum.
 - A level name.
 - A concept.
 - A starting point.
 - A description of the challenges presented within the level.
 - The rewards given to the player.
 - An endpoint.
 - The expected path/paths through the level.
 - A timeline showing major events within the level.

A level name

- Fairly obvious and self-serving.
- Should be unique and easily identify the level and its contents.
- Should not be
 - Overly complicated.
 - Contain spoilers.

A concept

- What is the concept for this level?
- What does the player do here?
- What is the theme?
- Where do they go?
- How do they get there?
- And what do they do along the way?

Example:-

- Jeremy and the mystery of the Old West!
- Level Name:- Train Troubles!
- Our hero Jeremy, must pursue the evil Sheriff Dave the Dastardly through the train, shooting bad guys and rescuing his girlfriend Linda. Jeremy must also crack the safe, and collect the map leading to the legendary McGuffin. Finally, Jeremy engages Dave in a duel on the roof of the train.

Example:-

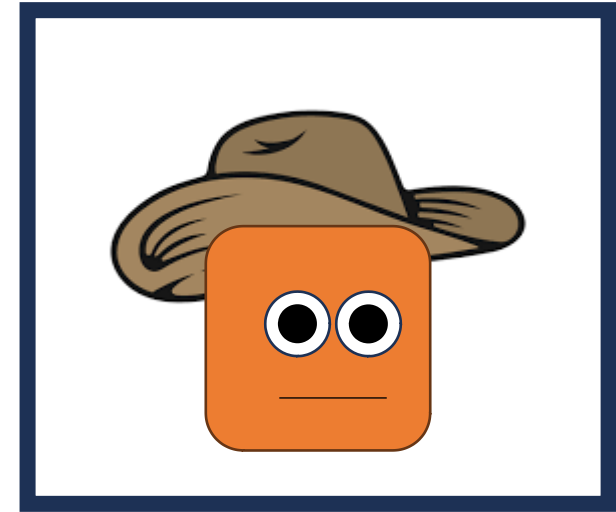
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Character profiles

- May already exist in the GDD.
- If not add them now.
- Jeremey, Dave and Linda who are they?
 - Profile the baddies too!

Example:- Jeremey

- NAME :- Jeremy the Flerb.
- AGE :- 26.
- GENDER :- Male.
- TRAITS :- Honourable, Heroic, Brave



- DESCRIPTION :- Jeremey is the hero of our story, a heroic gunslinger and excellent gunslinger. Sworn to bring down Dave the Dastardly.
- RELASIONSHIPS :- Girlfriend Jenny.

Example:-

- NAME :- SCOUT
- AGE :- 20
- GENDER :- Male
- TRAITS :- Fast, Close Quarters, Melee
- DESCRIPTION :-
- RELASIONSHIPS :-



Rules

- You *may* also want to set some rules that the character abides by.
 - Rules are never broken by the character, unless essential.
 - Jeremy never cheats.
 - Jeremy always is on the side of good.
 - Generally, once a rule is established in this way, you don't change it without major character development.
 - If the character development occurs, create a second character for post change.
 - This can help keep your characters consistent!
-



A starting point.

- Describe the entry point to the level.
- What happened immediately before this point?
 - What is your player feeling?
- What are the immediate observable surroundings?
- What information are you giving the player and how are you giving it to them?
 - How are you trying to make them feel?

Jeremy boards the train...

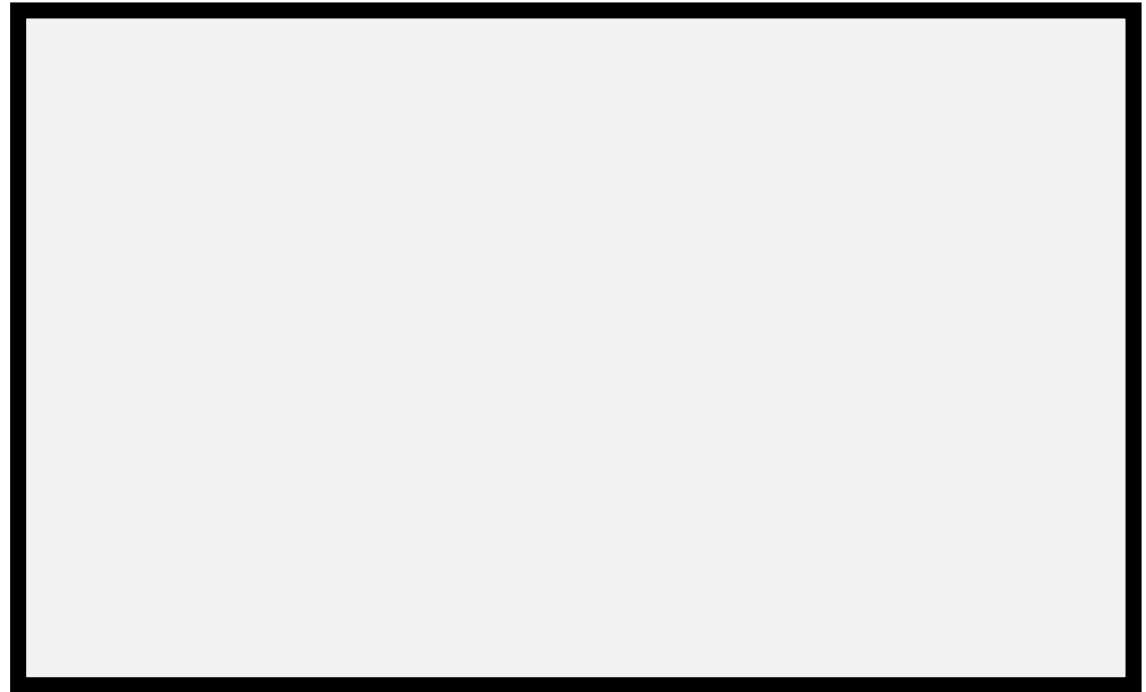
- Having previously snuck into the warehouse belonging to Dave the Dastardly, and obtained his notebook of evil schemes, he awaits his nemesis's arrival on the platform.
 - As our previous level was a stealth level we expect our players to be excited and anticipating a confrontation.
- A cut scene plays, the train is not slowing down! Someone must have tipped off Dave that we were coming, but how?
 - Our hero leaps for the train at the last moment, a QTE plays to grab onto the back of the train.
- On success, Jeremy lands in the guard carriage of the train. The guard confronts him intent on protecting his boss...
 - The player is ready for action!

Challenges

- Same sort of pattern as the start and end sections but for the key moments of gameplay in the level...
- Often accompanied by sketches of the imagined scene.
 - No you do not have to be any good at this!
 - Allow me to prove this!

Challenge one, Third class carriage

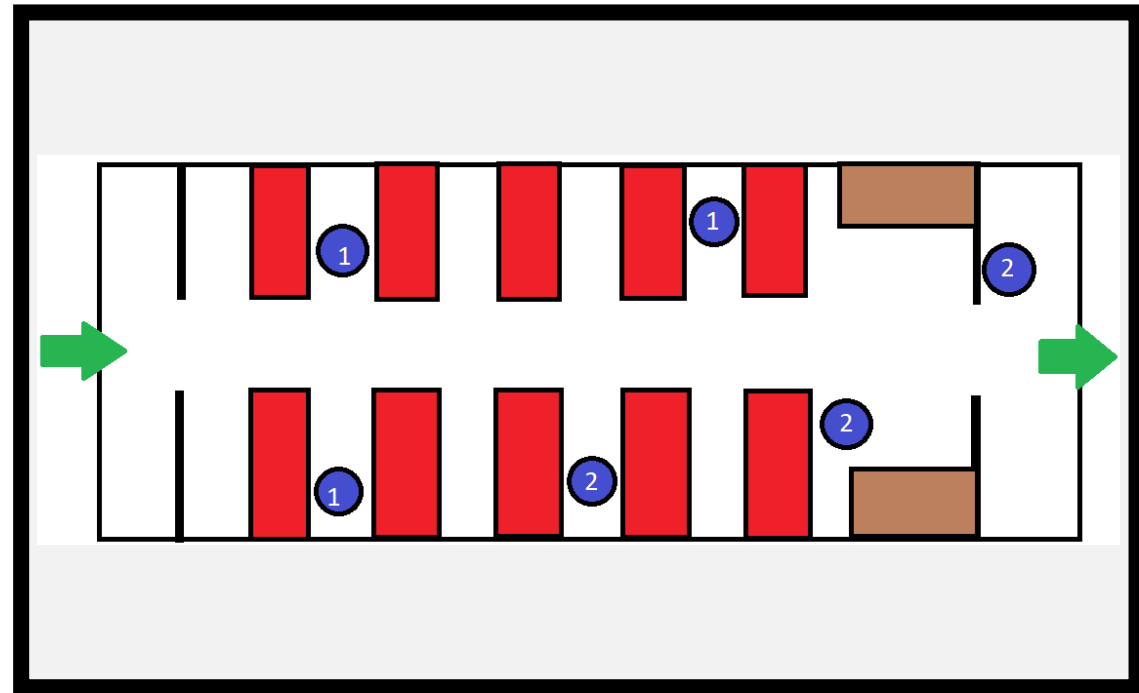
- Jeremy enters a fairly standard railway carriage from the rear, having heard the kerfuffle from taking out the guard several members of Dave's gang have taken position in the carriage and light Jeremy up as he enters the carriage.
- Rewards,
 - Progression
 - Health
 - Ammo



Challenge One, Third class carriage

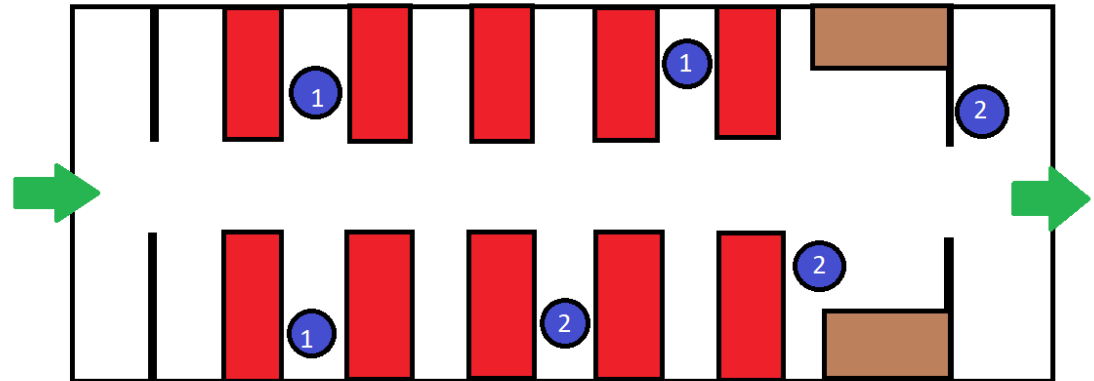
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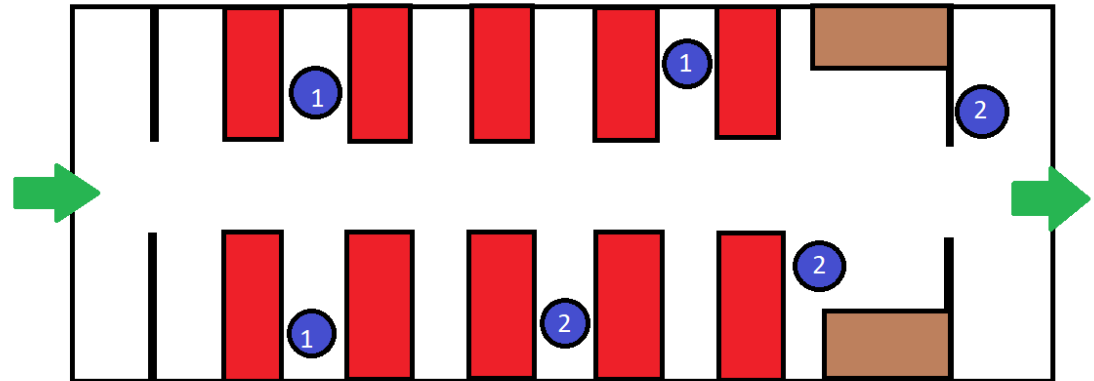
HOLD ON!

- That looks crap!

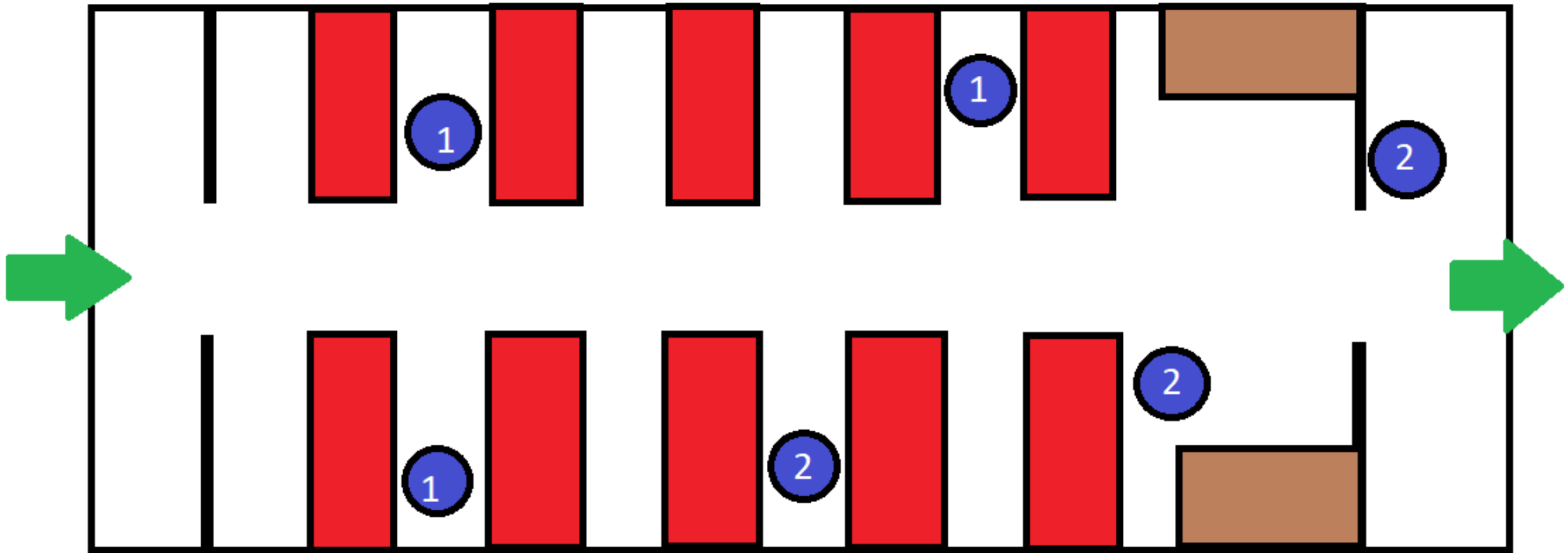


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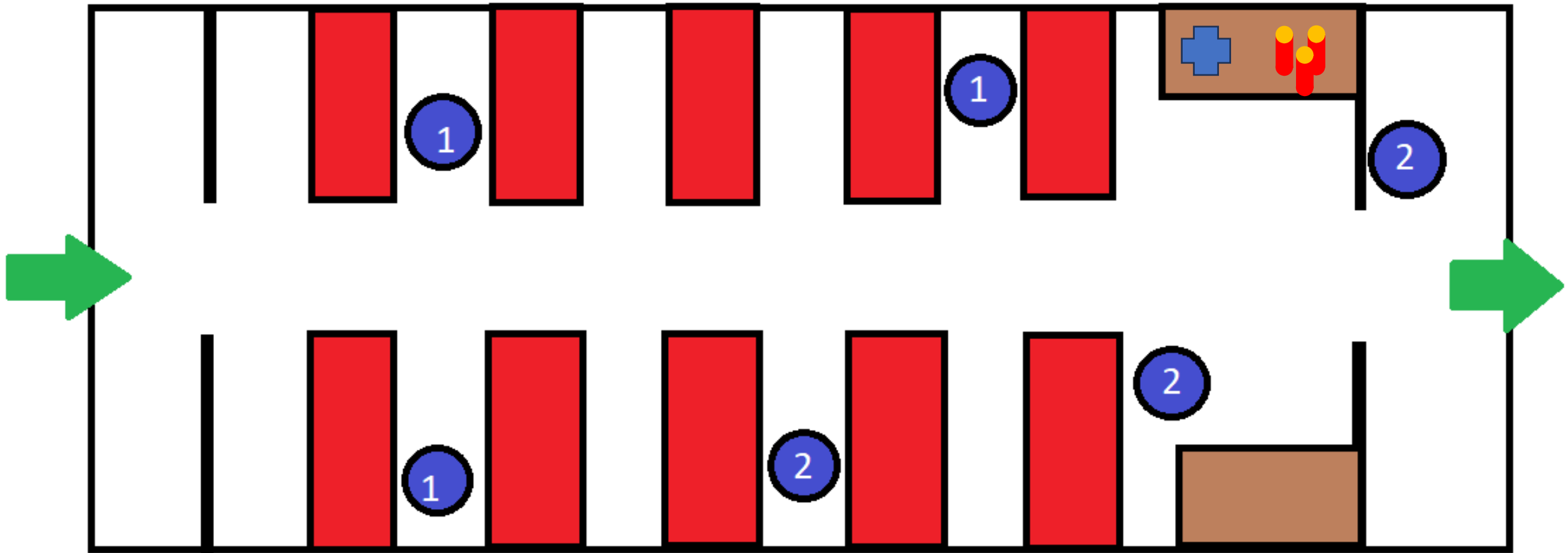
- That looks crap!
- Yes, yes it does!
 - We are not trying to make it pretty, we are trying to express an idea.
- Pretty is someone else's job.
- Information is key!



Everything here?



Missed the rewards.



Rewards...

- List of key things given to the player in the level.
- Does not include the mundane, You don't need to specify every health and ammo pickup in excruciating detail.
- But things like, the map to the McGuffin would qualify
 - No impact on the game but key to the story, we should not leave the level without it.
- New tools
 - It is key to identify when and where we give the player new tools so we know their capabilities

An end point

- How does this level end?
- What happened immediately before this point?
 - What is your player feeling?
- What are the immediate observable surroundings?
- What information are you giving the player and how are you giving it to them?
 - How are you trying to make them feel?

A twist in the tale!

- Having fought Dave the dastardly in a duel on top of the train, our hero has successfully disarmed Dave and is ready to turn him over to the law.
 - Huzzar! We win!

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 - Betrayal!

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 - Betrayal!
- We are thrown from the train and the level fades to black as we are tossed over the side.
 - Suspense! REVENGE!
 - (don't worry, we land in a haystack or something idk not writing that level)

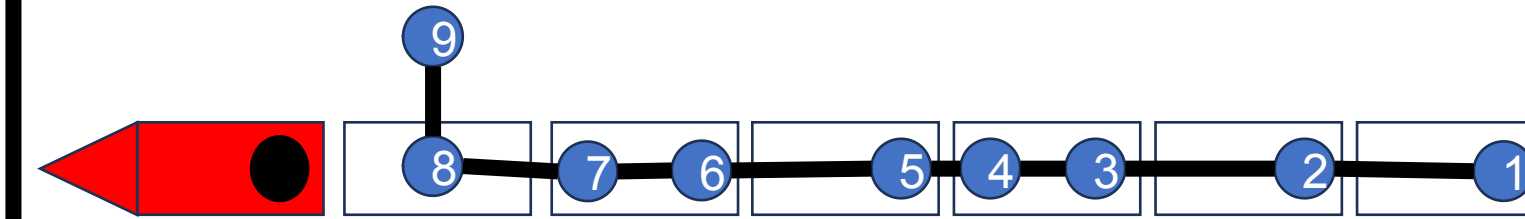
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Planning the path

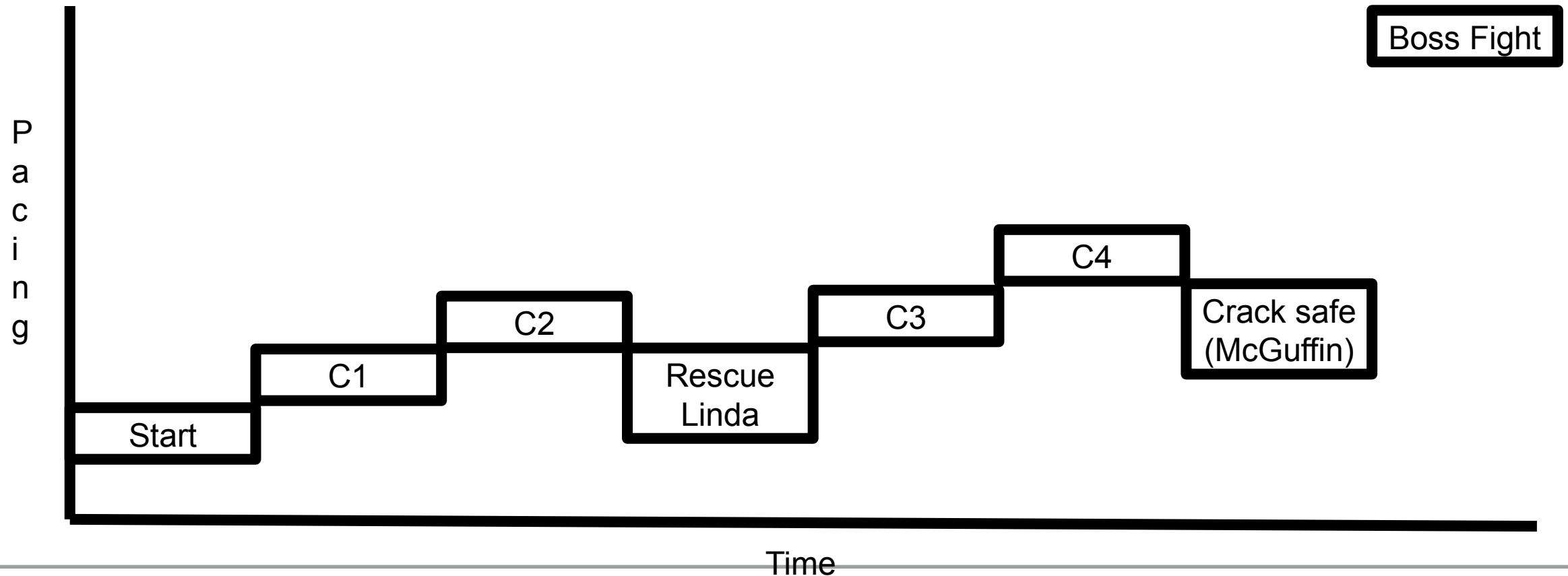
- Connect the dots,
- How to get from the start to the finish via all mandatory activities.
- Add side activities and alternate paths as necessary
- I normally do this as I do the block out.
 - (we will look at this next week)

- Start 1
- C1 2
- C2 3
- Rescue Linda 4
- C3 5
- C4 6
- Crack safe (McGuffin) 7
- Boss Fight 8
- End 9



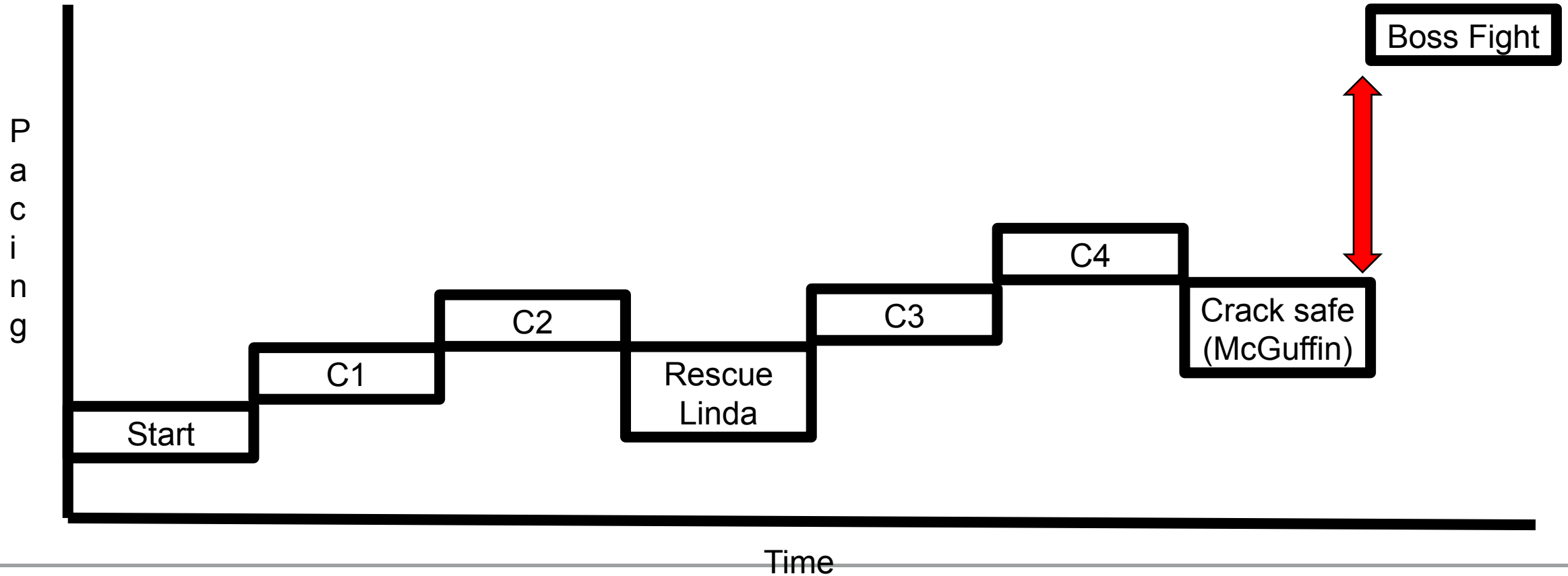
Pacing...

- Work out the pace you wish to set in your game and see if the plan you have works for that.



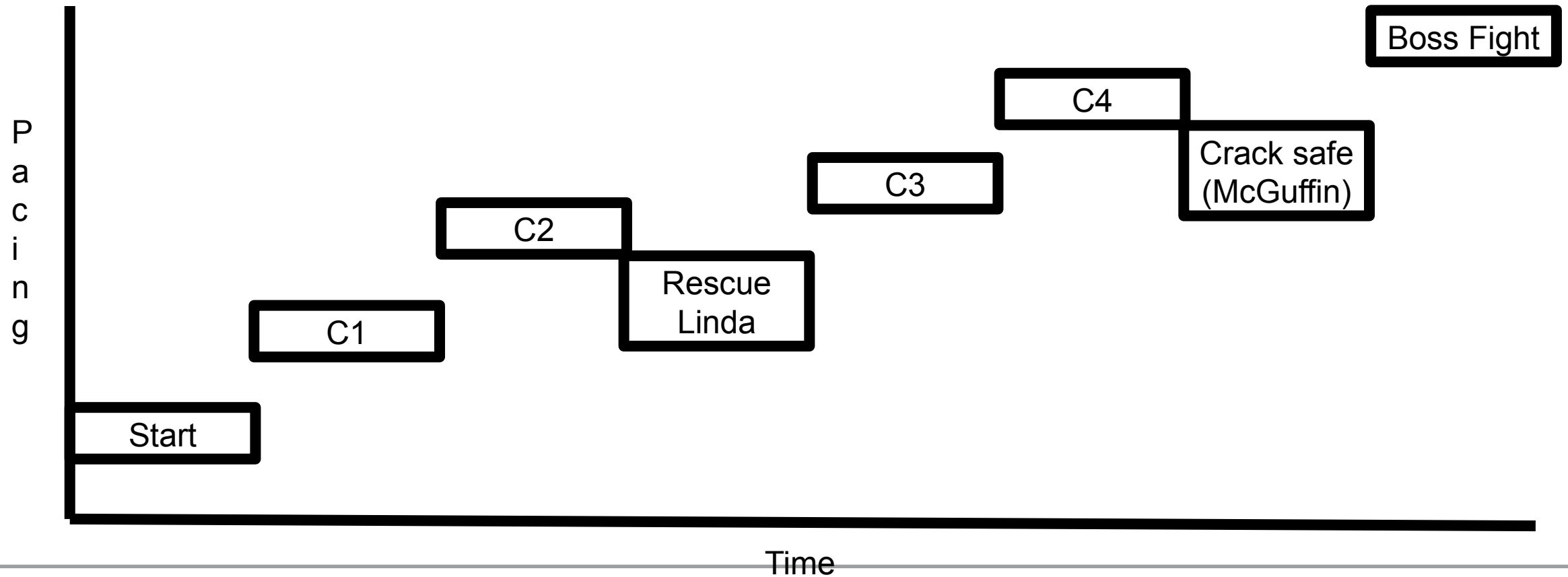
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Homework!

- Plan a level for your game.
 - If struggling take a level from an existing game and create a plan for that.
- I would anticipate your level will need 2 levels **MAX**.
 - **Most will only need one.**
- This document is needed for the CW1 assignment!
- Can be done much more professionally than my slides would make it appear!
 - <http://www.ewright.ca/uncharted-storm-the-tower.html> <-- Clicky!