

Above the Downtrodden

Half-Life 2



Figure 1: Above the Downtrodden Perspective Drawing – Back Lot Area B in Foreground

SinglePlayer Level Design Document

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QUICK SUMMARY

In *Above the Downtrodden*, Gordon Freeman has just escaped the Combine raid on Black Mesa East and must find a way from the street level of zombie infested Ravenholm back lot to a barricaded upper story apartment with a radio. Finding a fenced-in and zombie infested back lot behind the apartment, Gordon must fight headcrabs, zombies and fast zombies, to access a series of zip-line paths strung between fortified tree-houses that lead to the balcony of the upper story apartment. This is a puzzle-based level with some fast combat.

GAMEPLAY

Above the Downtrodden is a short level that re-introduces the player to the survivalist horror town of Ravenholm using scripted events and puzzle solving interspersed with straightforward combat. The main goal of the player in this level is to access a supply cache and radio located in a second story apartment that is barricaded from above. The player must explore the nearby area to locate a path to the apartment. There are 5 (five) main objectives in the level including killing assorted enemies that block access to the apartment, and solving simple puzzles.

The first objective is to find access to supplies above the zombie infested streets of Ravenholm. Getting the first objective is relatively simple – the player simply needs to investigate the alley and adjacent building to discover the barricaded top story apartment. Simple headcrab encounters keep this first objective simple, but demonstrate the survivalist horror theme of the level.

The second objective is to search for a way to the second story apartment through the back alley. A fast zombie attack at the entrance to the back lot increases the pace of the game by introducing an element of danger and confirming that the player is moving in the right direction. Additional standard zombies are present in the back lot, but are locked behind a chain link fence. Activating a fire trap destroys these relatively harmless zombies and provides a clear path to the walkways.

The third objective adds verticality to the level where the player must jump over a series of thematic obstacles (crates, barrels, etc) to reach an elevated walkway above the back lot. Headcrabs hidden in the obstacles provide a simple combat diversion while the player attempts to reach the tree fort zipline that leads to the barricaded apartment.

The fourth objective is to travel between the back lot tree forts to reach the barricaded apartment. During travel between the first and second tree fort, a group of Fast Zombies enter the back lot and climb the trees to attack the player. Without falling off, the player must destroy the Fast Zombies and then continue to the apartment balcony.

The final objective is to destroy a lurking Normal Zombie in the barricaded apartment and retrieve the supplies. The sense of danger that was alleviated after killing the Fast Zombies in the tree forts is briefly encouraged with the scripted sound of additional Fast Zombies screaming in the distance, then the level ends with the player moving off towards the next portion of the “We don’t go to Ravenholm” level. This level provides a re-introduction to the survivalist horror and puzzle solving required in the town of Ravenholm, while also giving the player an opportunity to use zip lines and do combat in tree forts.

Objective Summary

- Discover the barricaded apartment and radio
 - Search for an alternate route to the apartment/discover the back lot
 - Destroy Fast Zombie in Alley
- Destroy the Zombies to access the back lot
 - Cross the drainage ditch to access the shack/fire trap
 - Activate the fire trap to destroy Zombies
- Cross the back lot and access the walkway/crates
 - Jump onto crates to access ladder
 - Avoid headcrabs
 - Access Zipline 1 from walkway
- Travel between Treefort 1 Zipline to Treefort 2
 - Destroy Fast Zombies climbing Treeforts
- Access upper story apartment
 - Destroy lurking zombie
 - Use radio
 - Player dies if they reach 0 (zero) health

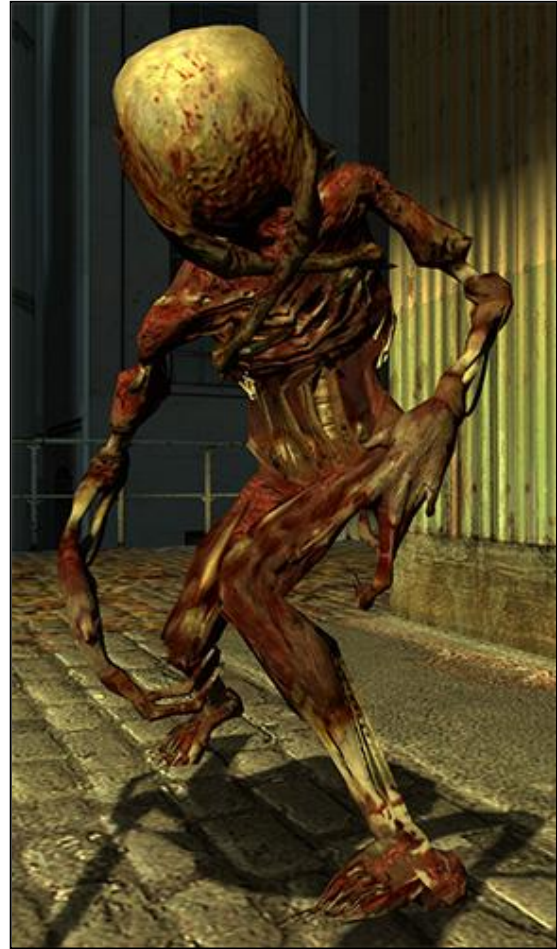


Figure 2: Fast Zombie Reference

OVERVIEW

Campaign

- Name: “Above the Downtrodden”
- Level Position in Campaign: *Alternate Path within Ravenholm*
 - Player has successfully escaped from the Combine raid on Black Mesa East and is escaping through Ravenholm. The first chapter of Ravenholm has introduced players to Ravenholm traps and enemies, and this level provides the player with an alternate path to Father Grigori’s church.
 - Player meets the last remaining survivor of Ravenholm, Father Grigori, and continues within the normal Halflife 2 game storyline.

Mission Location

- Theme: Survivalist horror with traps, zip lines and tree fort combat
- Mood: eerie and desolate with danger lurking in the distance
- Setting: a small corner of Ravenholm mining community
- Time: night time with spotlights, burning barrels and street lamps
- Season: late summer with leafless trees
- Weather: clear

Mission Difficulty

The difficulty of this mission uses a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the easiest and 5 being the hardest:

- Start: 2/5
- Middle: 4/5
- End: 3/5

Mission Metrics

- Play Time: approx. 5 minutes
- Physical Length: 4500 Hammer units
- Physical Area: 2000 x 3000 Hammer units
- Max New Characters: None
- Max Visual Themes: Ravenholm
 - Interior House
 - Exterior Alley
 - Exterior Back Lot



Figure 3: Burning Barrel Reference

Level Details

LEVEL ATMOSPHERE/MOOD

The atmosphere of this level includes the eerie survivalist horror feelings of a once thriving community that has fallen prey to the undead hordes of headcrab infested zombies. The buildings and environment have fallen into disrepair, and the remains of victims of headcrab and zombie attacks are littered throughout the level. The lighting is dark, with occasional bright points of light where streetlamps and burning barrels illuminate the nearby architecture and landscape. Sounds of zombies and the occasional human scream imply that there may be other survivors in this downtrodden area.

The nearby back lot is infested with zombified humans, and their moans and staggering movements help to convey the hopelessness of this forsaken mining community. As the player explores the level, sound cues of distant Fast Zombies foreshadow attack when the player accesses the Zipline that crosses the level. Once the player has reached the final area of this zone, the desolation of the level is further stressed when the fortified apartment reveals that its occupant also fell prey to the headcrab infestation and that no place in Ravenholm is truly safe from the Zombie invasion.

STORY

Gordon Freeman has just escaped the Combine raid on Black Mesa East and has been forced to travel through the abandoned and zombie infested mining town of Ravenholm. After initially discovering the dilapidated remains of both town and townsfolk, Gordon has found an alternate route through the town on his way to the Mines.

The roads are swarming with Zombies, and headcrabs lurk in the darkness. After narrowly escaping a street littered with Combine headcrab shells, Gordon has found passage through an alley near a barricaded apartment building. Searching inside the apartment he finds a Shotgun and ammunition, and a lurking headcrab. Acting under the assumption that additional supplies may be stored in the barricaded apartment above, Gordon sets out to find a route to the upstairs area. Using the alley, Gordon finds a back lot that is home to a large group of normal zombies. Using a propane tank located near a shack across the lot, Gordon sets fire to the zombie hordes and can make his way across the lot to a series of stacked crates and a raised platform. Additional ammunition is also located at this area to help him destroy any Zombies that survived the fire trap.

From the platform, Gordon finds additional ammunition and health pickups, and also gains access to the zipline that leads between two fortified treeforts above the back lot. Exploring the far end of the walkway, Gordon can also release a ramp that gives easy access to the walkway from the ground level. Once Gordon has used the Zipline, a group of 3 Fast Zombies spawn and converge on his location. Gordon has the option to defend himself from the treeforts, but the Fast Zombies can climb the trees and attack from different directions.



Figure 4: Zombie Fire Trap Reference

After Gordon has destroyed the Fast Zombies, he can use the ziplines to access the exterior balcony of the barricaded apartment. After the danger of the previous encounter, and the difficulty of entering the apartment, Gordon may feel safe in his destination. A nearby Normal Zombie corpse animates as he nears the end of the level, and Fast Zombie screams sound in the background. Gordon must destroy the Normal Zombie, pick up supplies located in the apartment, and leave the apartment through a connecting door to the next building. The level ends with an implied feeling of imminent danger, and Gordon continues through the town of Ravenholm to the mines.



Figure 5: Back Lot Reference

Introduction

- Gordon escapes from the Combine raid on Black Mesa East
- Gordon discovers Ravenholm and begins to make his way through the town

In-Game

- Gordon discovers the Alley
- Gordon explores the lower story of the barricaded apartment and received Shotgun and Shells
- Gordon exits the Alley to Back Lot and fights Fast Zombie 1
- Gordon discovers Fire Trap, avoids headcrab
- Gordon Kills Normal Zombies and accesses Raised Platform, avoids headcrabs
- Gordon finds Health Pickup, Ammunition, and drop ramp shortcut
- Gordon uses Zipline to Treefort 1
- Gordon Fights Fast Zombies 2, 3 and 4
- Gordon Destroys Fast Zombies and arrives at Upstairs Barricaded Apartment
- Gordon fights Normal Zombie 2

Extro

- Level Ends at doorway to adjacent building

“60 seconds of gameplay”

Gordon Freeman has entered the Back Lot and discovered that the far corner is swarming with Zombies. After taking a slight detour to explore the nearby area, discovering a health pickup and a headcrab or two, he cautiously approaches a ramshackle shed that is near the fenced zombie hordes.

The shack features a propane tank and assorted industrial implements – and a lurking headcrab! After destroying the headcrab, Gordon examines the propane tank and realizes that it can be turned into a fire trap to destroy the Zombies.

As the Zombies slowly shuffle their way towards Gordon and crowd against the rickety dividing fence, Gordon slowly turns the wheel on the propane tank, releasing the gas into the surrounding area. Stepping well back from the tank and taking careful aim with a gun, Gordon lets loose one loud shot:

“BOOM!”

The propane responds in kind:

“KABOOM!”

The propane gas that has filled the area explodes with great force, immediately destroying several zombies and setting fire to others. The few remaining zombies still persistently try to grab Gordon through the fence, but a few carefully aimed shots of the shotgun make swift work of the survivors.

Gordon quickly opens the ramshackle gate that was precariously holding the now dead zombies at bay, and he moves into the previously zombie occupied area of the back lot, continuing his pursuit of an alternate route to the barricaded apartment.



Figure 6: Figure 6: Zombies caught in Fire Trap Reference

Major Areas/Visual Themes

The following are descriptions and visual representations of the major areas and visual themes for this level:

Ravenholm Alley

Text Description:

The alley is enclosed by tall brick walls of the surrounding buildings. Faint light emanates from a nearby streetlight, and an external light leads the player to an open doorway in one of the buildings. Anti-Combine graffiti decorates the walls, and litter and signs of human resistance to the zombies is present on the walls and ground. The alley is dark, and the player is lead forward by use of light. The path behind the player is blocked by a gate that has assumedly been closed and locked by the player when they entered the area.

Visual References

- Terrain/Vegetation – A back alley littered with graffiti and signs of zombie combat
- Models/Architecture – Brick buildings and gated archways
- Textures/Lighting – Street lamps and subdued external lighting
- Characters/Vehicles – Fast Zombie (Trigger at Exit Point)



Figure 7: Subdued Lighting Reference



Figure 8: Alley Reference



Figure 9: Zombie Remains Alley Reference

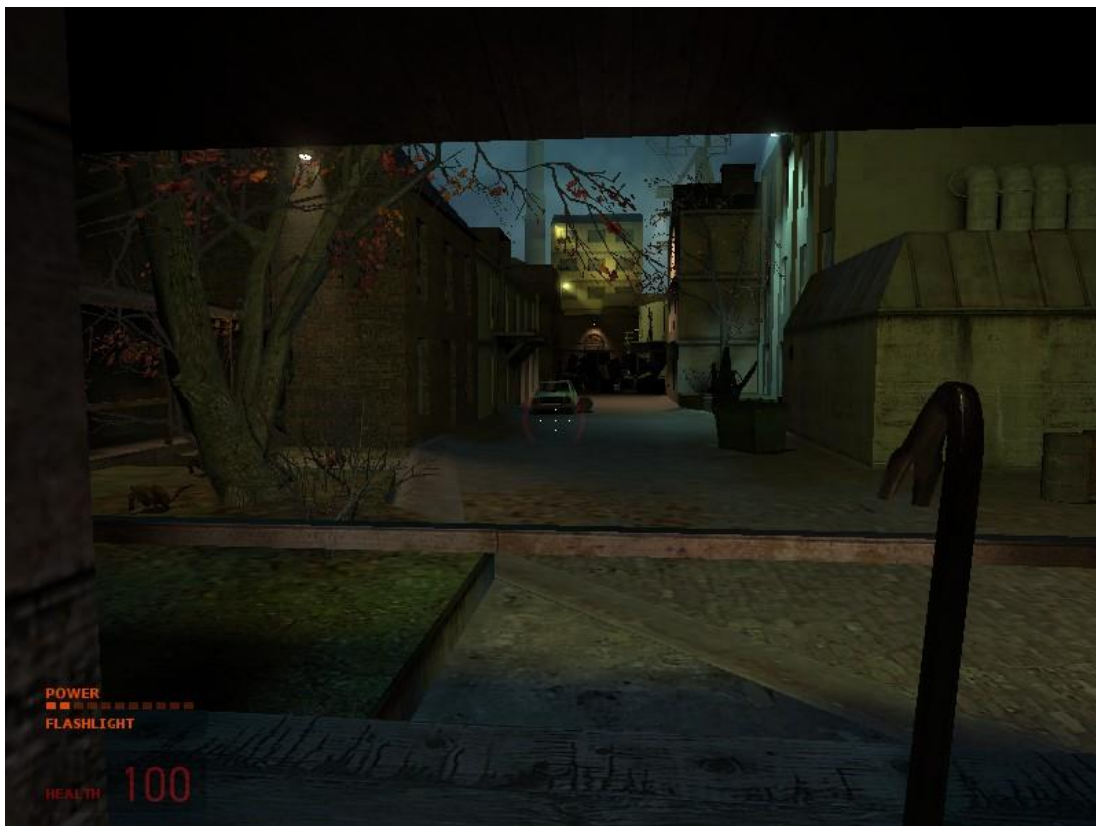


Figure 10: Ravenholm Alley Reference

Ravenholm Barricaded Apartment

Text Description:

This abandoned apartment is located in the heavily zombie infested town of Ravenholm. Area architecture includes heavy use of wood and metal and an industrial feeling for the living spaces. This apartment appears abandoned downstairs, but the upstairs may contain survivors. Rubble and debris litter the floor, and subdued light filters in through the dirty and occasionally broken window. The feeling of desolation that permeates Ravenholm is quite apparent in this building, as the empty interior represents the empty and depressing exterior.



Figure 11: View from Apartment Reference

Visual References

- Terrain/Vegetation - None
- Models/Architecture – Couch, Table, Stove, Bed, Miscellaneous Debris
- Textures/Lighting – Dark and subdued through broken and dirty windows
- Characters/Vehicles: Headcrab (downstairs) and Normal Slumped Zombie (Upstairs)



Figure 12: Upstairs Apartment Reference



Figure 14: Apartment Interior Reference



Figure 13: Apartment Interior Reference

Ravenholm Back Lot

Text Description:

This industrial themed back lot contains assorted storage units, shipping crates and barrels, and is separated into 2 (two) distinct sections (Back Lot A and Back Lot B). Back Lot A is relatively open and provides a long view of the entire area. Back Lot B contains a shack with a Propane Tank and a fenced area that houses numerous Normal Zombies. The design and textures of the buildings surrounding the Back Lot reflect the industrial mining town architecture of Ravenholm. The lighting is subdued with muted moonlight, the occasional street lamp, and building lamp, and burning barrels placed intermittently across the area. In addition, the tree forts in the middle of the area are clearly illuminated by burning barrels to draw the player's attention to their importance in the level.



Figure 15: Ravenholm Architectural Reference

Visual References

- Terrain/Vegetation – Slight uphill slope with occasional bushes and tall leafless trees with tree forts and a connecting zip line
- Models/Architecture – Industrial Mining Theme
- Textures/Lighting – The lighting is dark with muted moonlight, street lamps and burning barrels
- Characters/Vehicles – Headcrabs, Normal Zombies and Fast Zombies



Figure 16: Ravenholm Architectural Reference



Figure 18: Fire Trap Reference



Figure 17: Ravenholm Open Space Reference



Figure 20: Ravenholm Architecture Reference



Figure 19: Back Lot Reference



Figure 21: Ramp & Shack Reference



Figure 22: Ramp and Fence Reference



Figure 24: Fortified Tree Fort Reference



Figure 23: Tree House Reference



Figure 25: Urban Zipline Reference



Figure 26: Barricaded Apartment Reference

LEVEL OBJECTIVES

- Primary: Find a route to the barricaded upstairs apartment
- Secondary: Destroy enemy Zombies
- Bonus: N/A
- Hidden: N/A

CHALLENGE

HIGHLIGHTS

Combat

- Destroy Headcrab in First Story of Apartment
- Destroy Fast Zombie at end of Alley
- Destroy Normal Zombies not killed by Fire Trap
- Destroy Headcrabs at Boxes/Walkway
- Destroy Fast Zombies in Treefort
- Destroy Normal Zombie in Second Story of Apartment

Stealth

- N/A

Puzzles

- Fire Trap puzzle to kill normal Zombies in Back Lot A
- Zip Line use from tree to tree

Conversation

- N/A

Boss Battles

- N/A

WOW MOMENTS

There are approximately 4 (four) “wow” moments in this level. Two are combat related, one is visual, and the last assumes a visceral excited reaction:

- Attacked by Fast Zombie (Combat - Alley):
- Zombies Covering Back Lot (Visual - Back Lot A):
- Use Zipline (Visceral - Back Lot B):
- Fight Fast Zombies (Combat - Back Lot A):



Figure 27: Tree Fort Reference

Actors

Player

- Model(s): Gordon Freeman
- Inventory: suit, crowbar, magnum (18 rounds), shotgun (12 rounds)
- Start Location: alley in Ravenholm, near barricaded apartment
- Motives/Objectives: access the barricaded second story apartment

Key Actors

Headcrabs

- Model(s): standard headcrab
- Inventory: none
- Motives/Objectives: attack the player
- Starting Location: ground floor apartment, back lot shed, back lot crate storage area

Zombies

- Model(s): standard zombie
- Inventory: none
- Motives/Objectives: attack the player
- Starting Location: ground floor apartment, back lot shed, back lot crate storage area

Fast Zombies

- Model(s): fast zombie
- Inventory: none
- Motives/Objectives: attack the player
- Starting Location: entrance to back lot, far end of back lot

Supporting Actors

There are no supporting actors in this level.



Figure 28: Standard Headcrab



Figure 29: Standard Zombie

User Interface

The following section includes an overview of pre-game, in-game, post-game and HUD information:

Pre-Game Information

- Text: An Alternate Route through Ravenholm

In-Game Information

- Beginning Text: Could there be supplies in one of these buildings?
- Middle A Text: Perhaps there is a way to kill all of those Zombies together...
- Middle B Text: Now to find a way up to those treeforts!
- End Text: That was exciting! Now, to find another way to Alex...

Post Game Information

- Text: Now that you have found supplies, you should search for another way to meet Alex

HUD Elements

- Normal Elements Used
 - Health
 - Shield
 - Ammunition
 - Weapon (Selection)
 - Objective Updates (text)
- Special Elements Required
 - N/A



Figure 30: Shotgun Reference

GAMEPLAY DETAILS

Level Progression Chart

<i>Above the Downtrodden</i>				
Level Progression Chart				
Time (min)	0	:20	:40	:60 1:00
Terrain/Objective	Start	Explore Apartment Ground Floor	Alley	Backlot Area A
Opponents	None	Hidden Headcrab	Fast Zombie	Slow Zombies
Challenges		Find Way to Upstairs Apartment		Solve Fire Trap Puzzle
Wow Moments			Kill Fast Zombie	Zombies covering Back Lot
New Skills/Weapons				Shotgun
Time (min)	1:20	1:40	2:00	2:20 2:40
Terrain/Objective	Backlot Area A	Backlot Area B		Walkway Ziplines/Treeforts
Opponents	Slow Zombies	Slow Zombies and Headcrabs		Headcrabs Fast Zombies
Challenges		Solve Jumping Puzzle to access Walkway		3 Fast Zombies
Wow Moments				Use Zipline
New Skills/Weapons				
Time (min)	3:00	3:20	3:40	4:00 4:20
Terrain/Objective	Zipline/Treeforts		Apartment	Exit Apartment
Opponents	Fast Zombies		Slow Zombie	None
Challenges	3 Opponents on Treefort Platform			
Wow Moments	Fight Fast Zombies			
New Skills/Weapons				

Gameplay Mechanics

Prerequisite Skills:

- Crowbar Usage
- Open Doors (Gate to Backlot Area B)
- Activating Fire Traps (Propane Tanks)
- Activating Levers (Walkway Shortcut)

Skills Learned

- Activate Zipline

Overhead Level Map

The following is a general overview map of the entire level:

Key

-

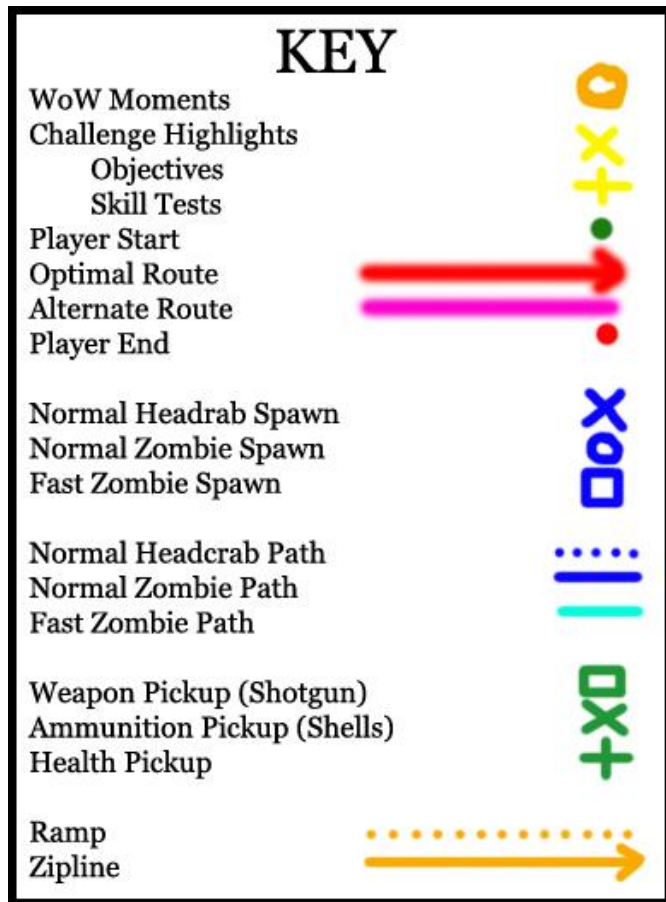


Figure 31: Key for all Maps

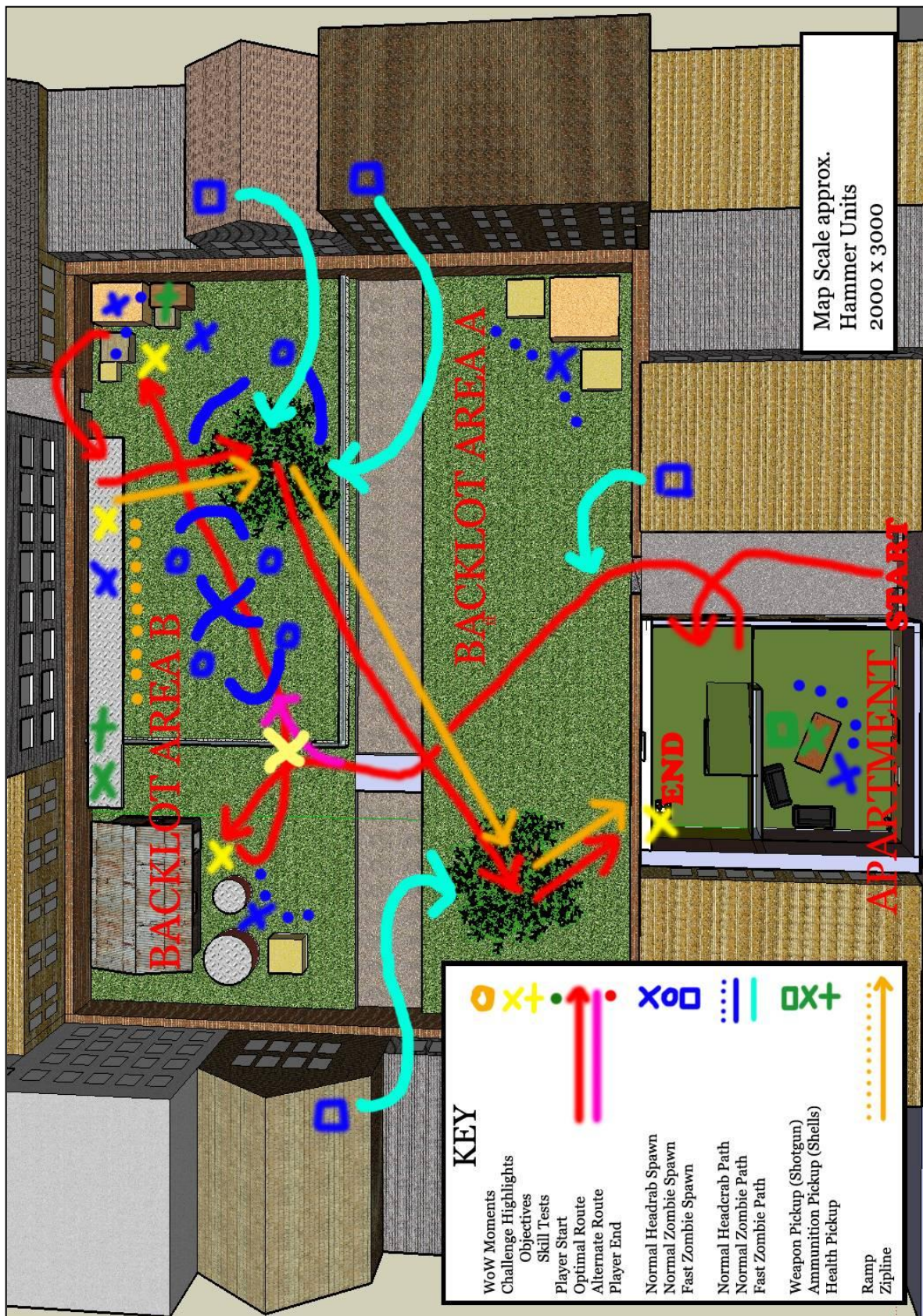


Figure 32: General Map Overview

Detailed Map Descriptions

Area 1– Ground Floor, Barricaded Apartment Map

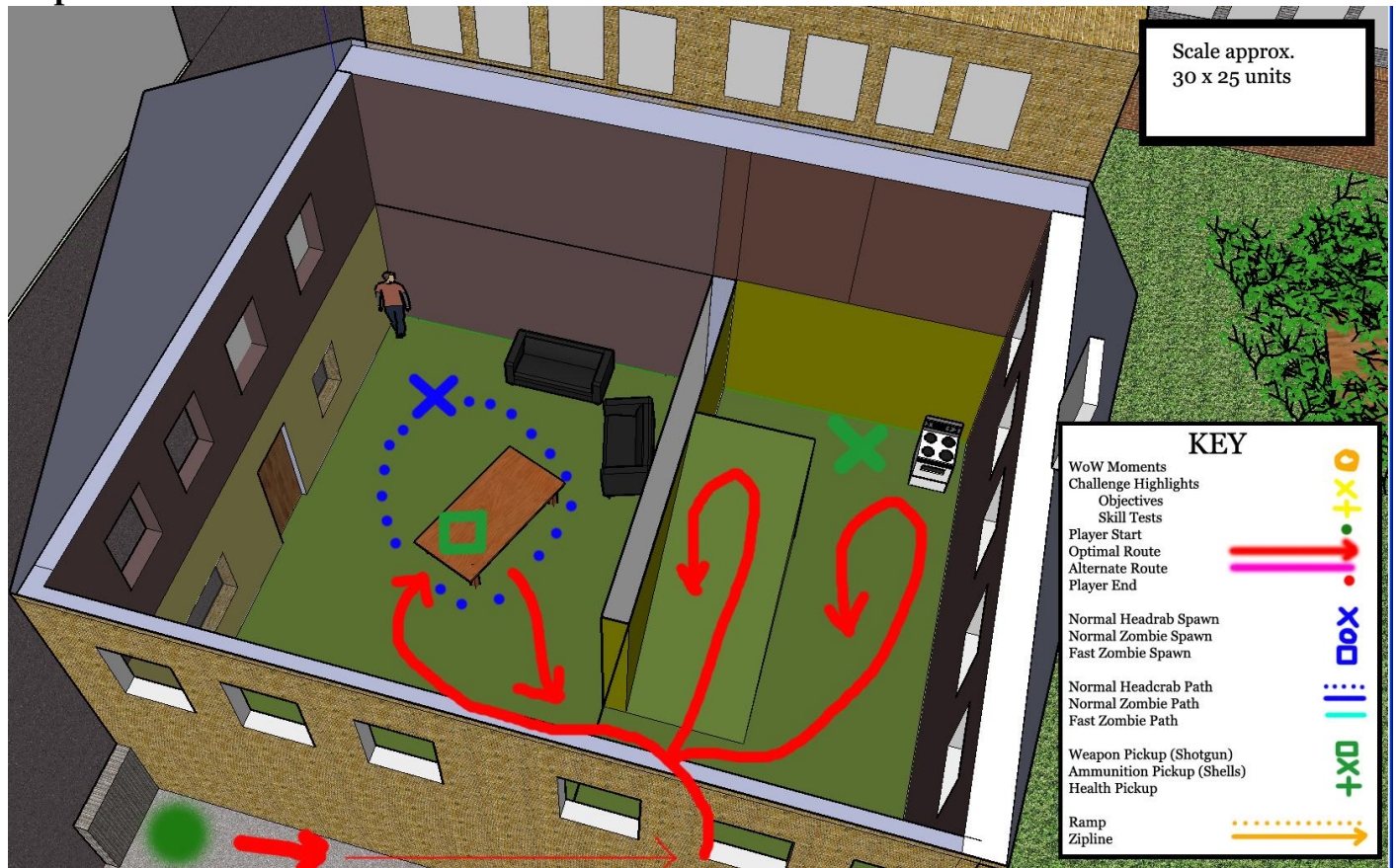


Figure 33: Ground Floor of Barricaded Apartment, Detailed Paths & Pickups

Gameplay

- Player Starts with Crowbar and Magnum Revolver with 6 rounds
- Player Discovers Apartment (open door, obvious path)
 - Shotgun Pickup on Living Room Table (for first combat encounter)
 - Shotgun Shell Pickup in Kitchen (12 rounds)
 - Path to Upstairs Blocked (Text prompt for upstairs access objective)
 - Headcrab spawns at Shotgun pickup (simple combat scenario) Dialog

Dialog

- Text Update:
"Could there be supplies in one of these buildings?"

Visual Reference



Figure 34: Barricaded Apartment Reference

Area 2 – Alley to Backlot Map

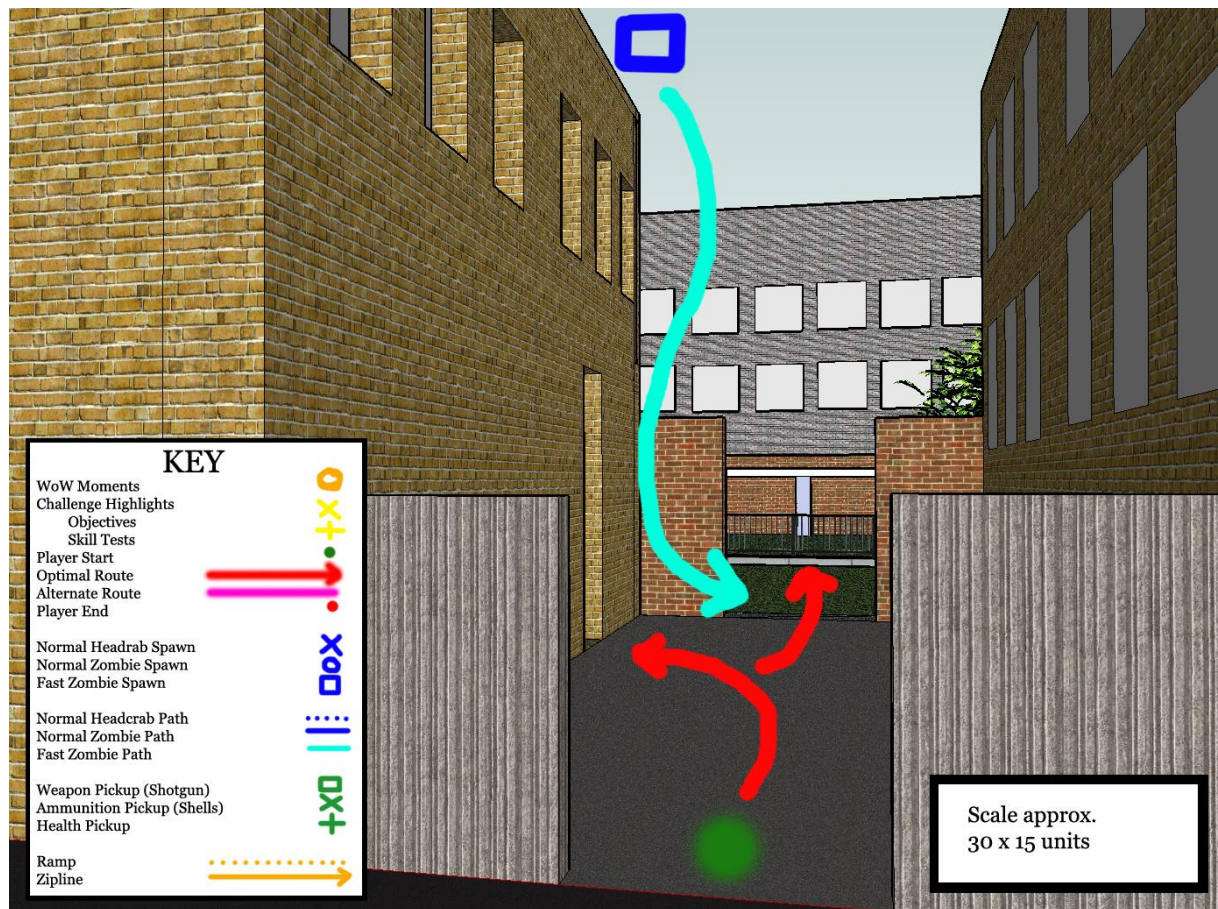


Figure 35: Back Alley with Start, Apartment Entrance, and Back Lot Entrance

Gameplay

- Player Starts with Crowbar and Magnum Revolver with 6 rounds
- Player Discovers Apartment (open door, obvious path)
- After exploring Apartment, Player moves down Alley towards Back Lot
- At Back Lot Entrance (simple gate), Enemy Fast Zombie Spawns on roof and attacks player
- Player must destroy Fast Zombie before moving into Back Lot

Dialog

- None

Visual Reference



Figure 36: Alley Reference

Area 3 – Back Lot Area A

Map

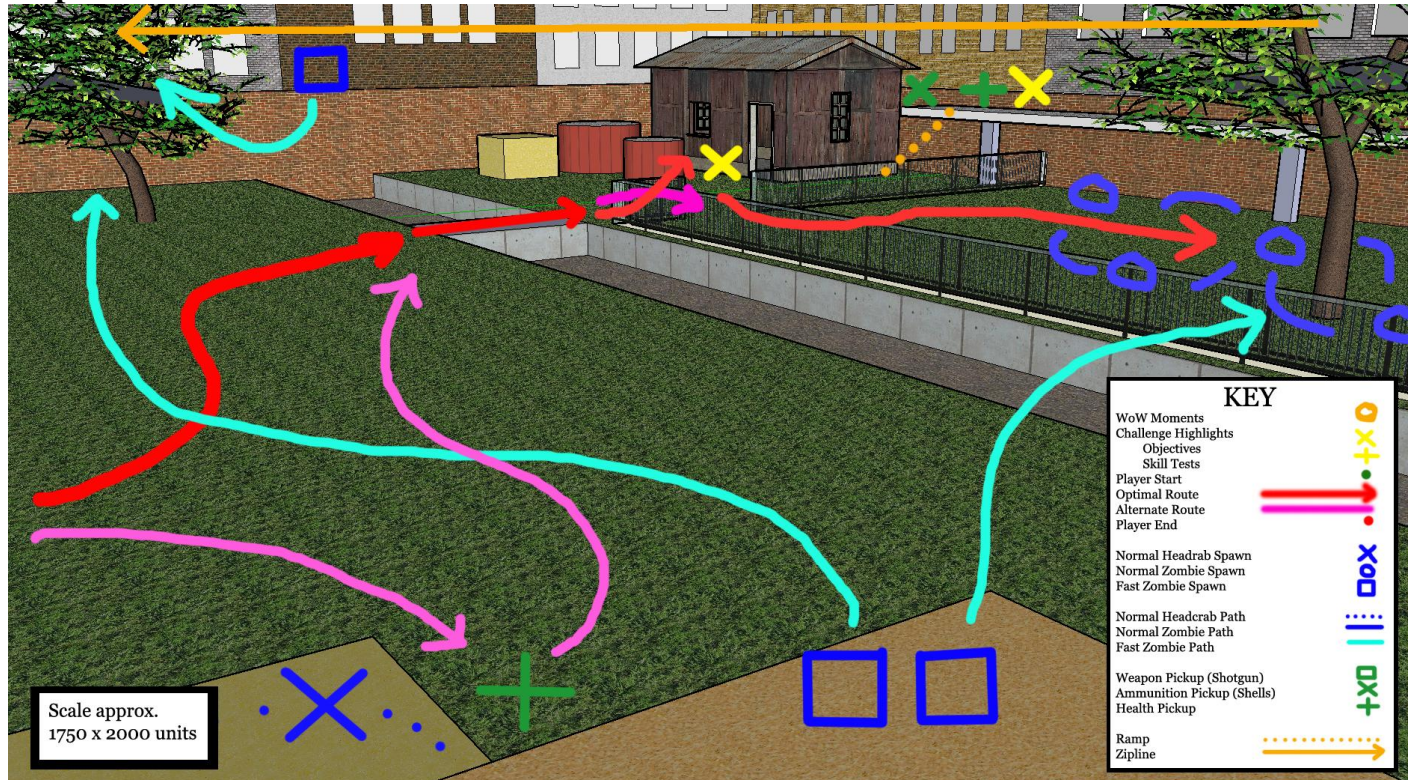


Figure 37: Back Lot Perspective of Area A with Pickups, Objectives, and some elements from Back Lot Area B

Gameplay

- Player enters Back Lot Area A (“wow” moment seeing Zombies, Treeforts and Ziplines)
- Alternate Path to Health Pickup and Headcrabs
- Main Path Propane Tanks/Shack
 - Ammunition Pickup
 - Activate Fire Trap (destroys Normal Zombies in Back Lot Area 2)
 - Open Back Lot Area 2 Gate

Dialog

- Objective Text Update: “Perhaps there is a way to kill all of those Zombies together...”

Visual Reference



Figure 38: Ramp & Shack Reference

Area 3 – Back Lot Area B

Map

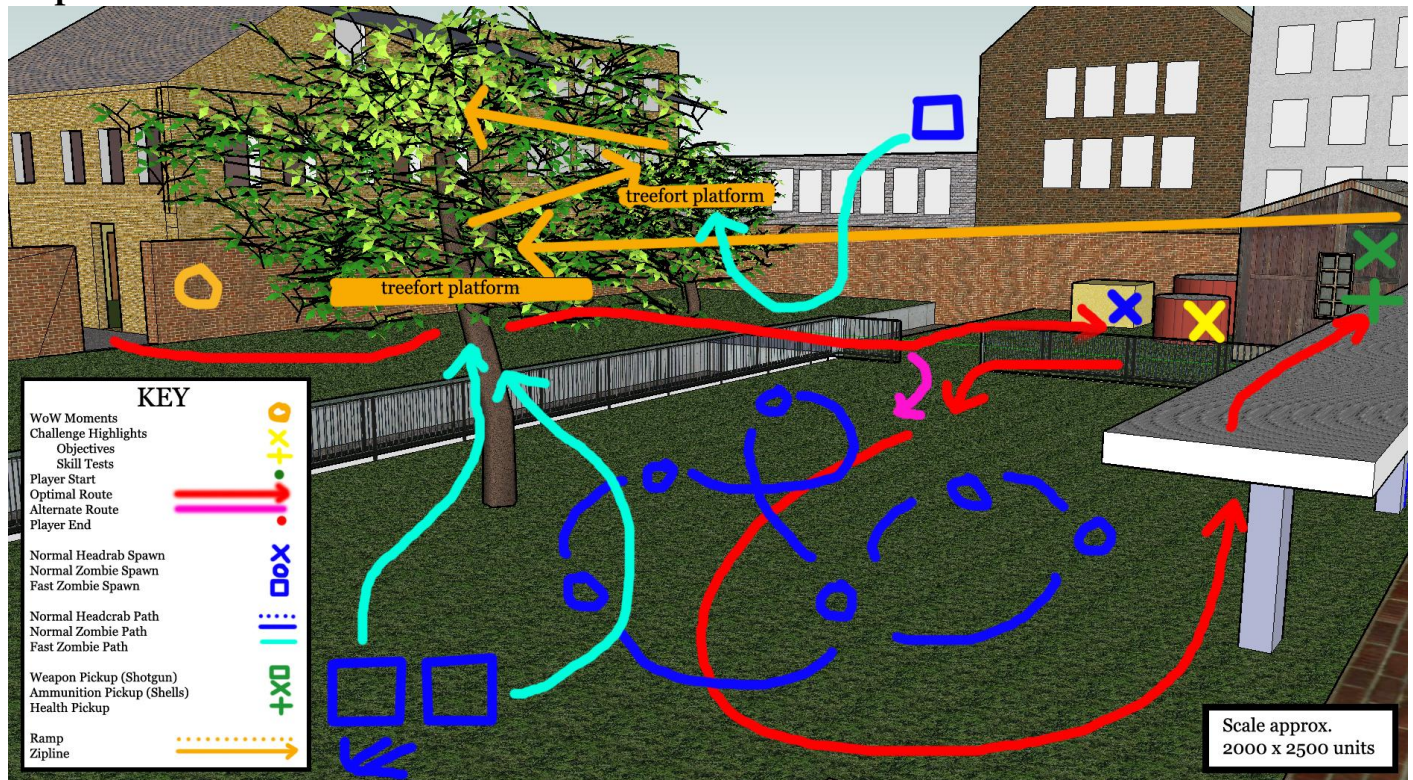


Figure 39: Back Lot Perspective of Area B with Pickups, Objectives and some elements from Back Lot Area A

Gameplay

- Player Enters Backlot Area B
 - Player destroys any remaining Normal Zombies
 - Jumping Puzzle to Access Platform
 - Headcrabs hidden in Boxes at Jumping Puzzle
 - Player Lowers Ramp to Platform, Ammunition Pickup, Health Pickup
 - Zipline Accessible from Platform
- Player Uses Zipline
 - Fast Zombies spawn and converge on Treeforts
 - Player Kills Fast Zombies, then continues along Ziplines



Figure 40: Fortified Tree Fort Reference

Dialog

- Objective Text Update: “Now to find a way up to those treeforts!”

Visual Reference

Area 4 – Second Floor, Barricaded Apartment Map

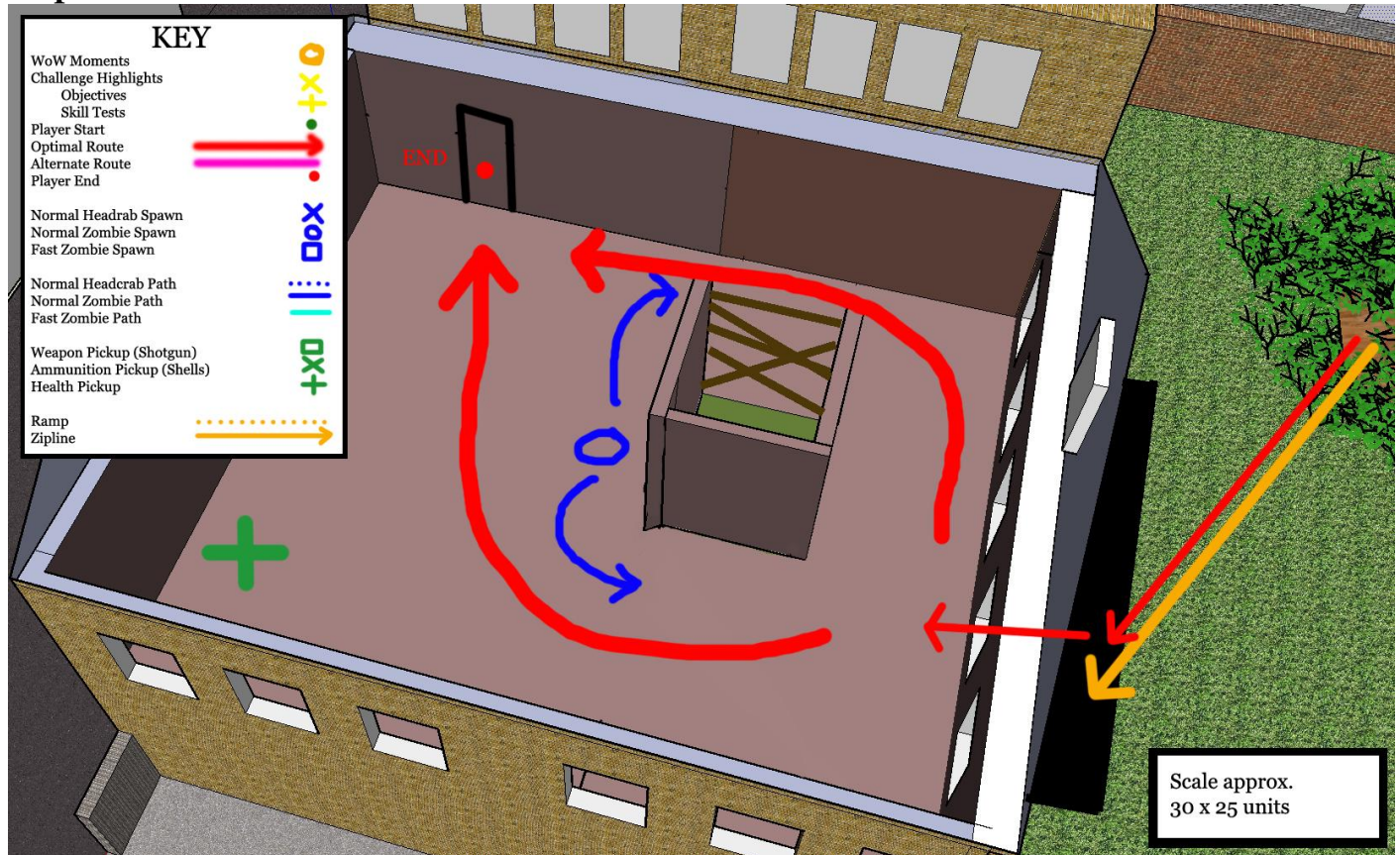


Figure 41: Perspective of Upstairs Barricaded Apartment with Pickups, Enemy and Level End

Gameplay

- Player Accesses Barricaded Apartment Balcony
 - Enters Building through window
 - Discovers Normal Zombie (Headcrab victim)
 - Receives Health Pickup
 - Leaves Apartment through door to adjacent Apartment
- Level Ends

Dialog

- Objective Update: *"That was exciting! Now, to find another way to Alex..."*

Visual Reference



Figure 42: Upstairs Apartment Reference