

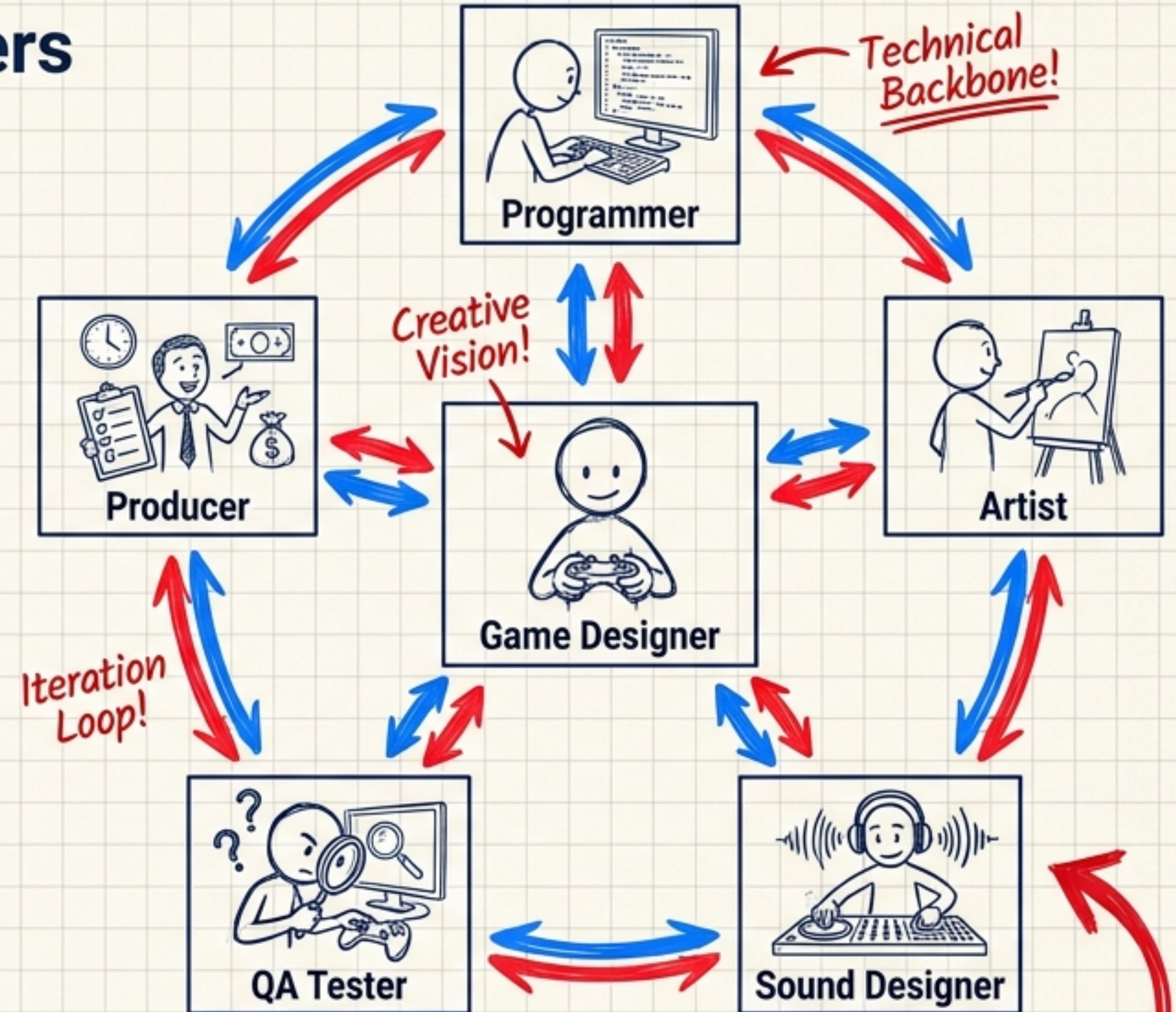
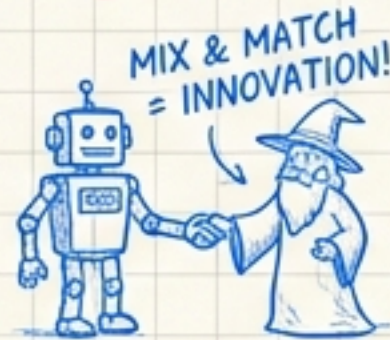
The Anatomy of a Game & Its Makers

Big Idea: A video game is fundamentally an activity with rules and a victory condition, brought to life by a diverse ecosystem of specialized talent.

Core Concept!

Key Design Pillars

- **The Prime Directive:** Your game's core objective must be as simple and communicable as a 1950s board game.
- **Cross-Pollinate Genres:** Game genres are fluid; the most innovative titles often mix and match mechanics from disparate categories to create a new Gestalt.
- **The Development Ecosystem:** Great design requires understanding the distinct roles of the Programmer, Artist, Producer, Tester, and Sound Designer. You are not an island.



“The Rogers Rule:

“It takes all kinds of people to make video games. The majority of gameplay design works by each game building upon its predecessor.””

Cultivating and Filtering Concepts

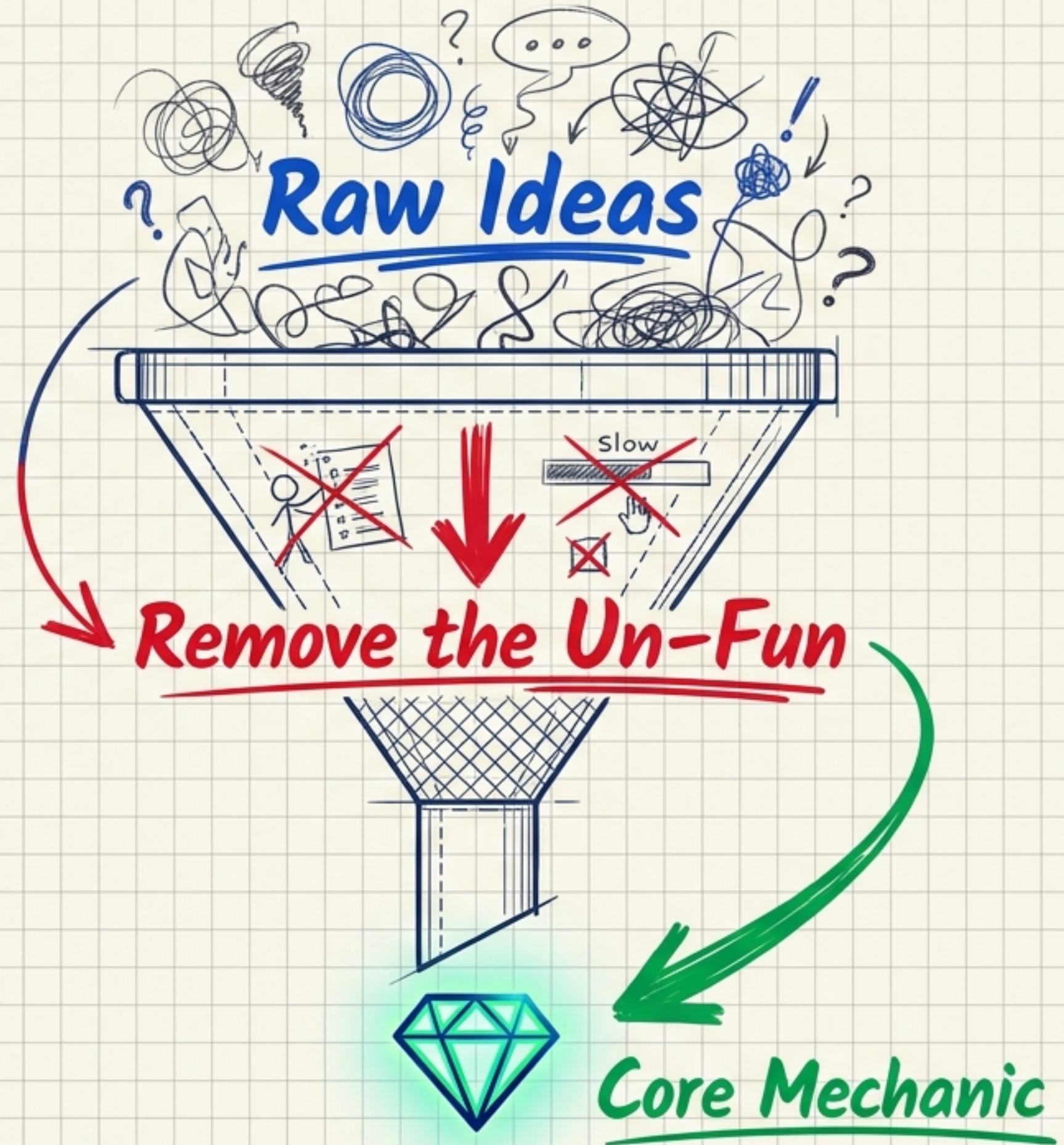
Big Idea: Ideas are cheap and plentiful; it is the ruthless curation and execution of those ideas that creates a fun game.

Key Design Pillars

- **Subtraction of Un-Fun:** Start with a fun idea, and systematically identify and remove the un-fun elements. What remains is your core loop.
- **Play Bad Games:** You learn more about game design by analyzing a bad game and fixing its mechanics than by solely playing masterpieces.
- **Don't Be Precious:** Never cling to an idea just because you created it. If a mechanic doesn't serve the game, throw it out.

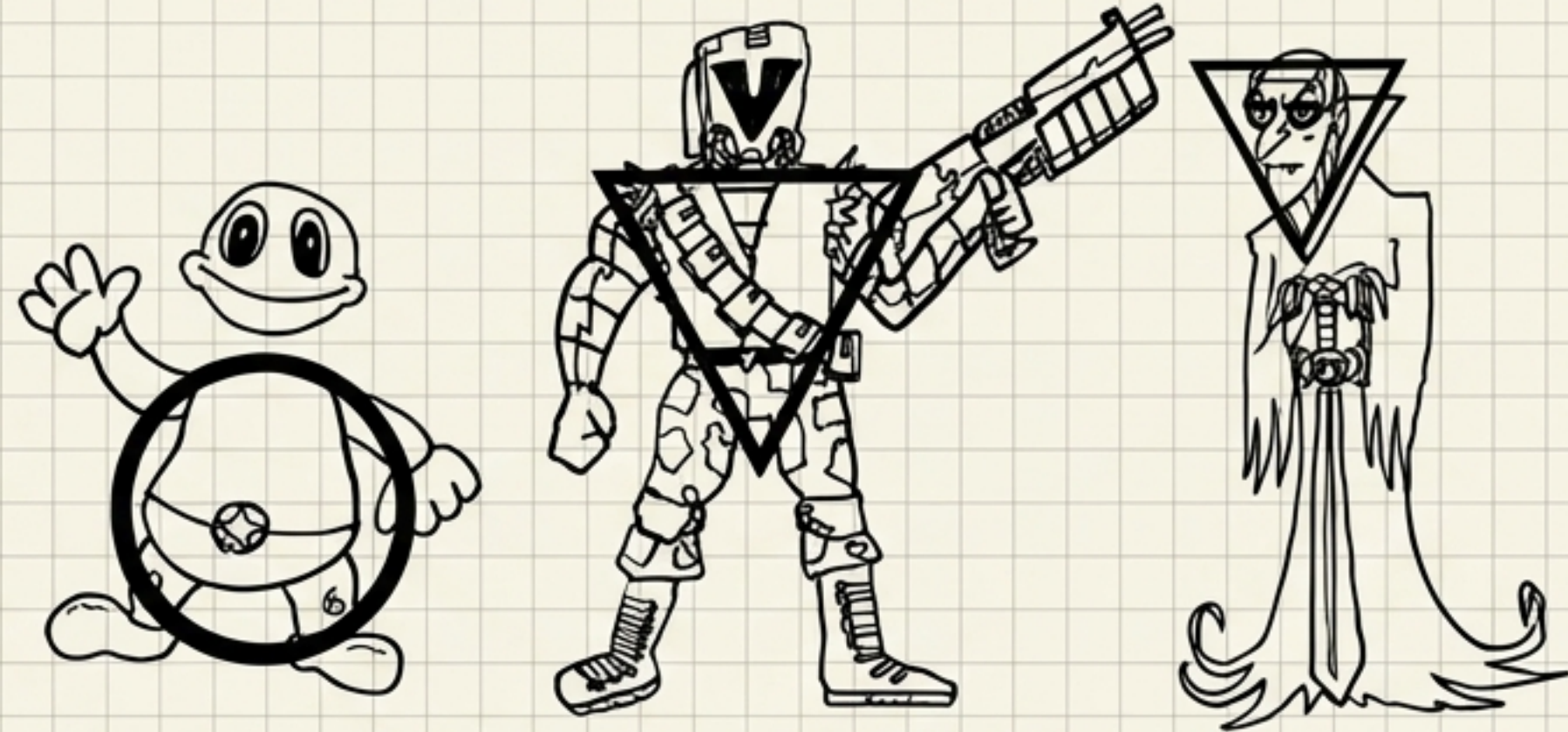
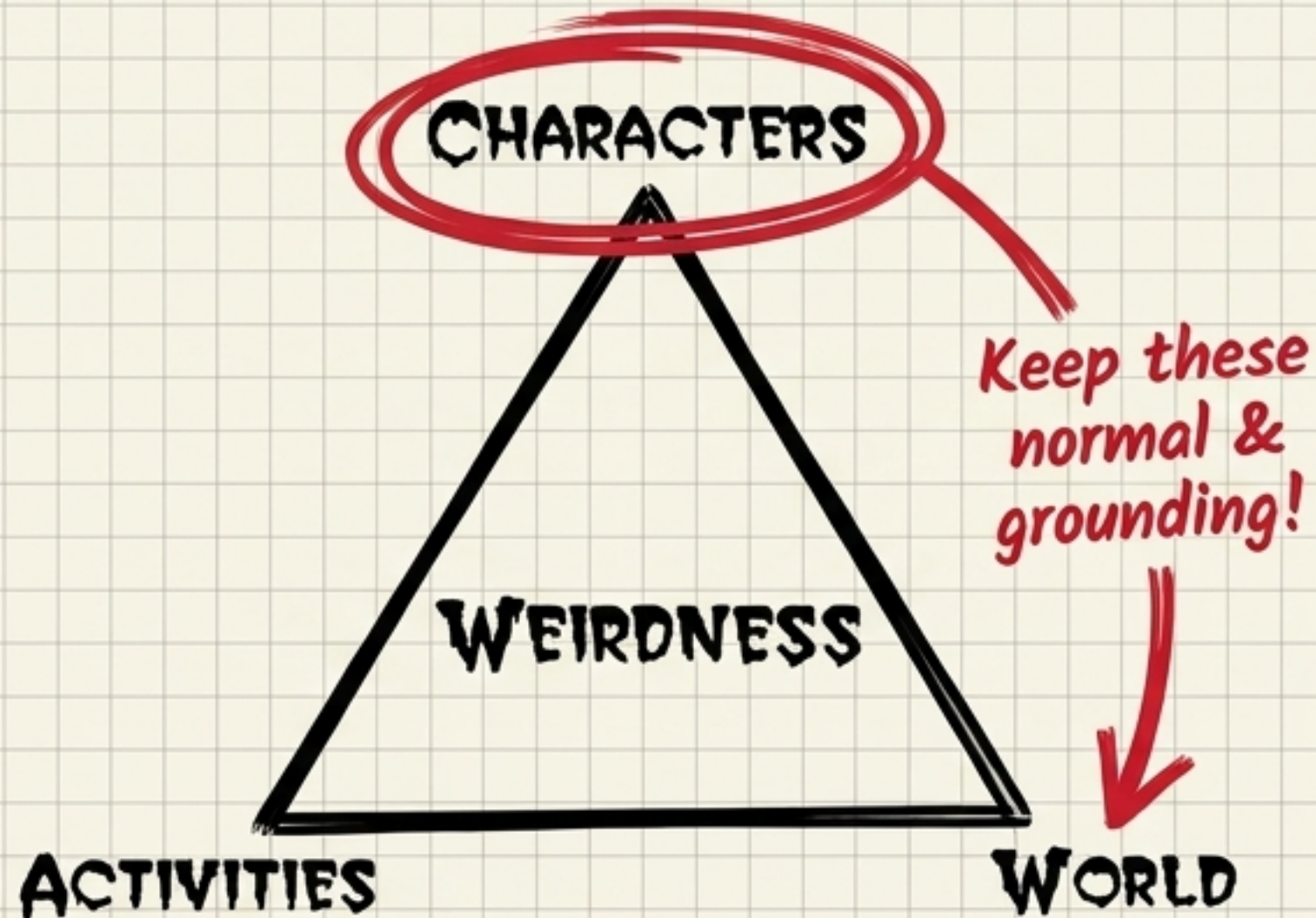
The Rogers Rule:

If you think something is innovative, it just means you haven't been paying attention.



The Triangle of Weirdness

Big Idea: To maintain player immersion, a game's narrative elements must balance the bizarre with the relatable.



Visual Personality & Silhouettes

Key Design Pillars

- **The Triangle of Weirdness:** Balance your game across three points. Only one of these should be profoundly weird; the others must ground the player.
- **Visual Personality:** Use core shapes to communicate character traits instantly (Circles = friendly; Squares = strong; Triangles = dynamic or sinister).
- **Character Silhouettes:** A strong silhouette instantly identifies friend from foe.

The Rogers Rule:

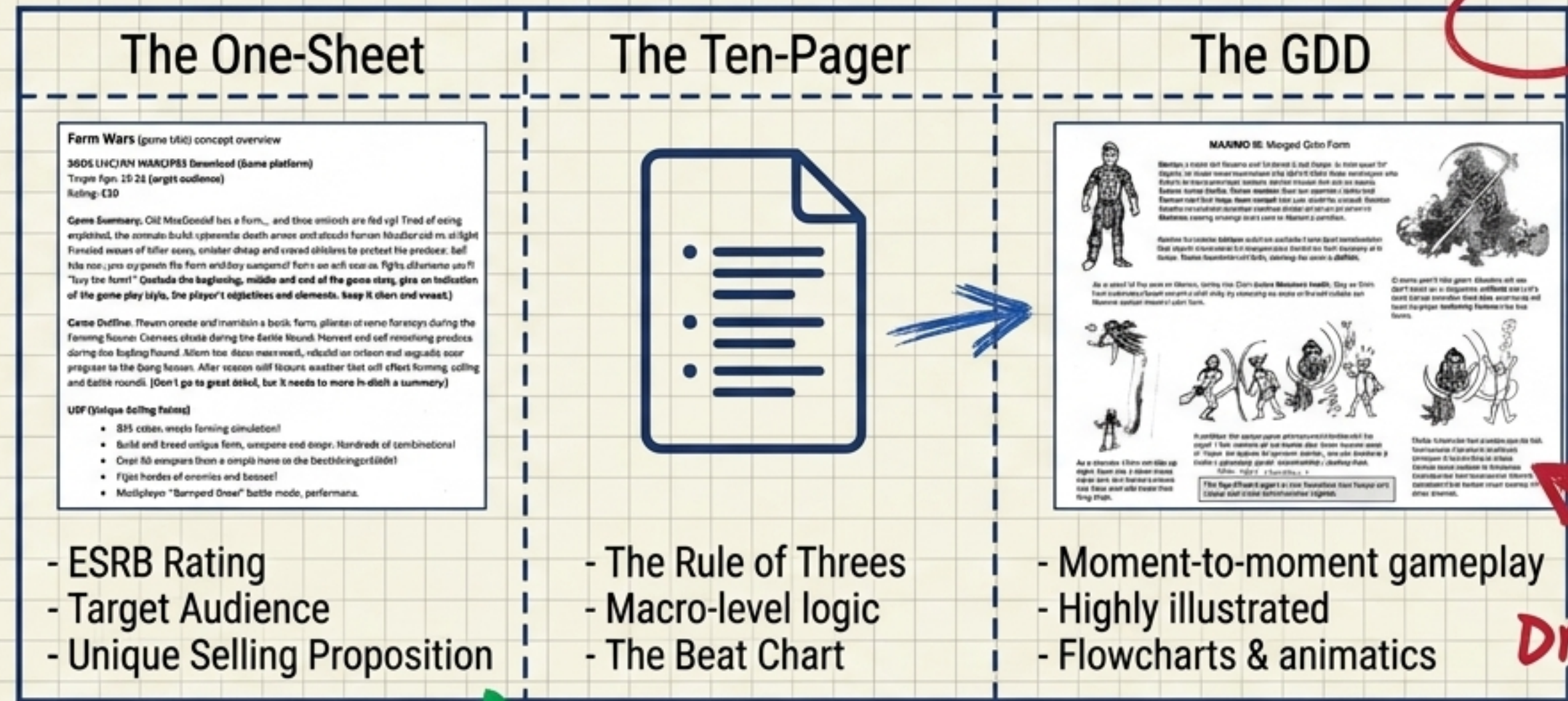
If you make the characters, the world, AND the activities all weird, you risk alienating the player entirely.

Structuring the Game Design Document

Big Idea: No one wants to read a massive text wall; game design documents must be highly visual, tiered communication tools.

Key Design Pillars

- **The Rule of Threes:** Humans process information best in threes.
- **Visual Communication:** A stick figure conveying a mechanic is infinitely better than a dense paragraph.
- **The Beat Chart:** Use a single-page spreadsheet tracking the entire span of the game to compare pacing and flow.



Keep it simple!

The Rogers Rule:

No one on your team wants to read your design. You must find the most engaging, visual way to communicate your ideas so they are easily grokked.

Character & Metrics

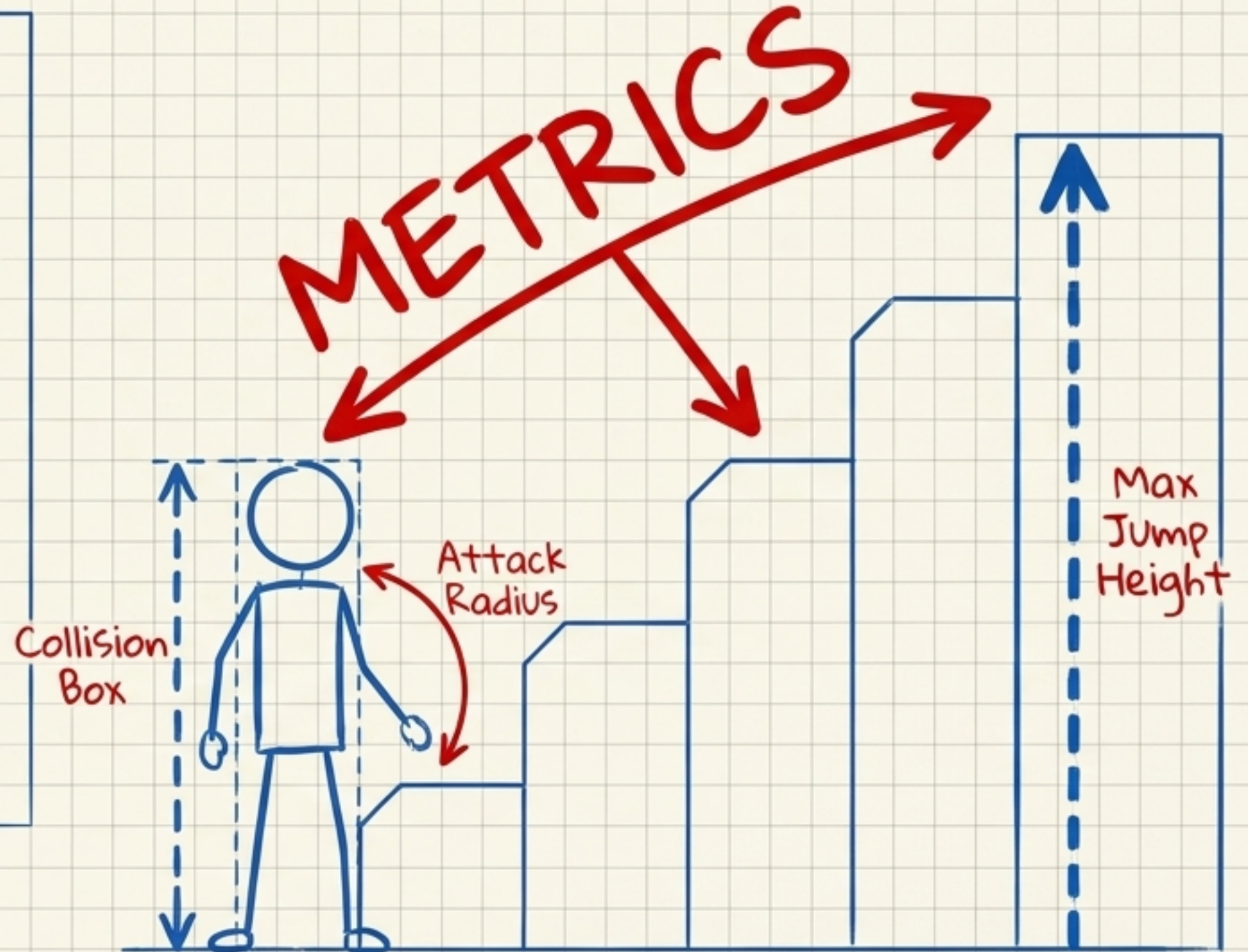
Big Idea: Form follows function: the player character's physical proportions dictate the metrics for the entire game world.

Key Design Pillars

- **Establish Metrics:** How high the character jumps, their reach, and their speed define the scale of every staircase, enemy, and gap in the game.
- **Walking is NOT Gameplay:** Traveling long distances without meaningful interaction, hazard, or challenge is dead air.
- **Visual Status Indicators:** Use the character's body (posture, armor damage, animations) to communicate health and status rather than relying solely on UI.

The Rogers Rule:

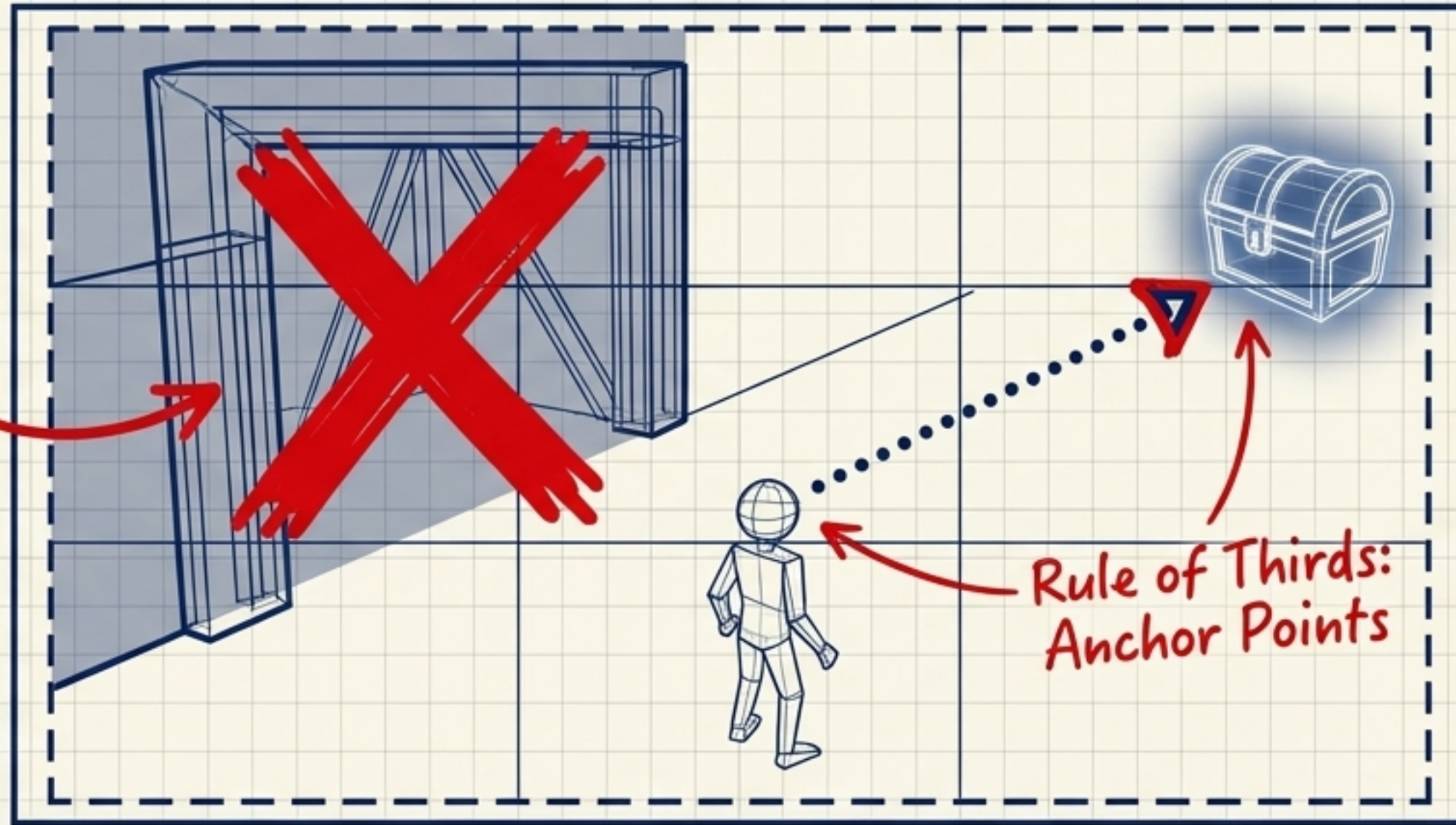
Form Follows Function. Always design the character's actions and personality to determine their appearance, not the other way around.



Controlling the Camera

Big Idea: A bad camera breaks the game; the camera must relentlessly focus on the objective and never lose sight of the player.

*Danger Zone:
Camera Flip!*



Key Design Pillars:

Stay Out of Corners: Use blocking geometry (rubble, bushes) to keep players and AI out of tight 90-degree corners.

The Rule of Thirds: Place the item of focus a third of the way up or across the screen, not dead center.

Crossing the Line: Never arbitrarily flip the camera's axis 180 degrees; it disorients the player.

X-Ray/Ghosting: If a player goes behind geometry, instantly render a silhouette or make the wall transparent.

The Rogers Rule:

Always point the camera to the objective, and never let the character get out of the camera's sight.

Intuitive Controls

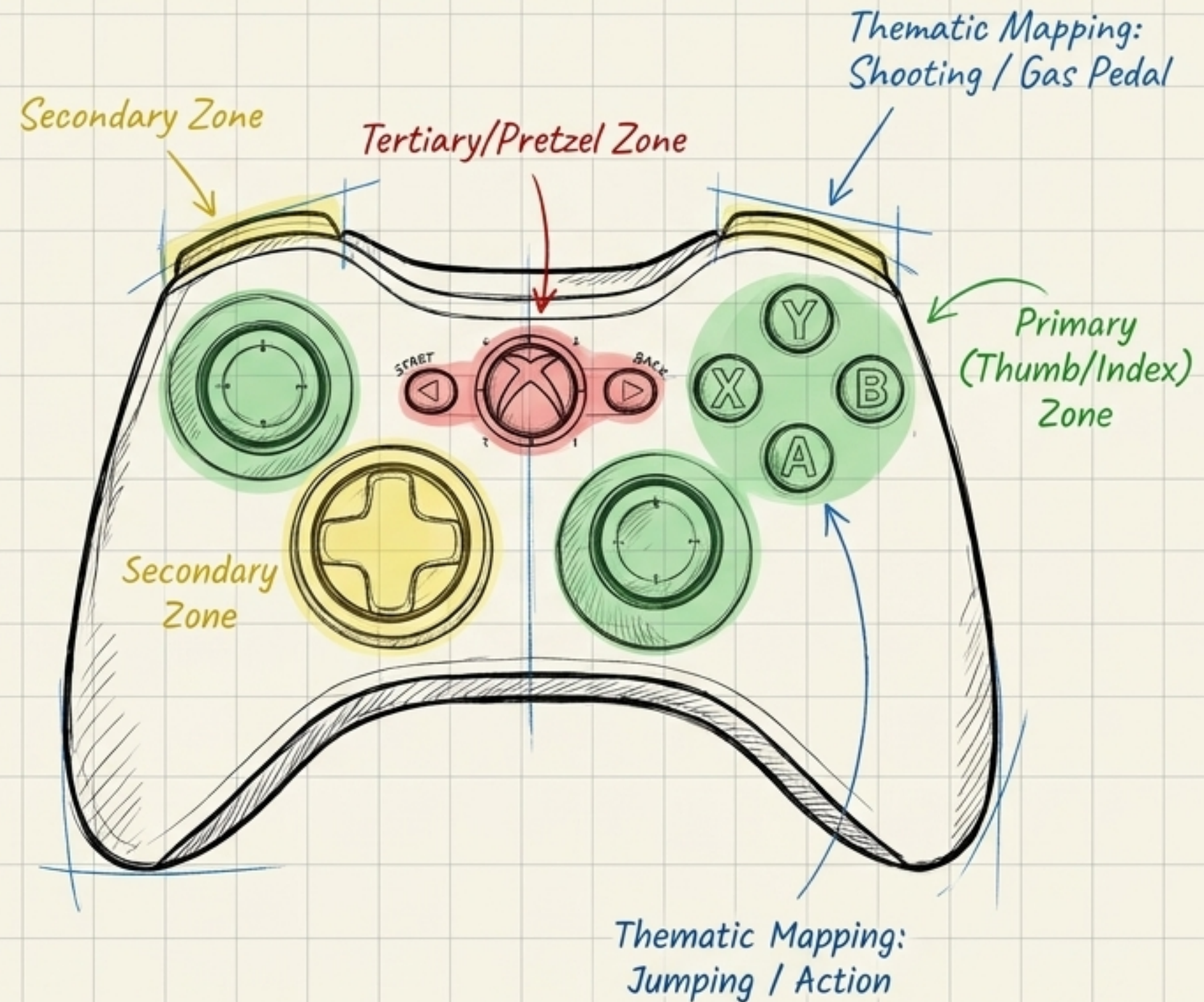
Big Idea: Controls must be ergonomically sound, instantaneous, and thematic—eliminating any barrier between the player's intent and the screen.

Key Design Pillars:

- **Flex-O-Fingering:** Design control schemes around human ergonomics. Do not force players to contort their hands into pretzels.
- **Instantaneous Action:** As the button is pressed, the action must happen. Beware of animation latency.
- **Thematic Mapping:** Assign controls logically based on real-world actions.
- **Relative Controls:** Decide early between Camera-relative vs. Character-relative movement and stick to it.

The Rogers Rule:

Consider emulating control schemes of other games in the same genre. Familiarity relieves confusion.



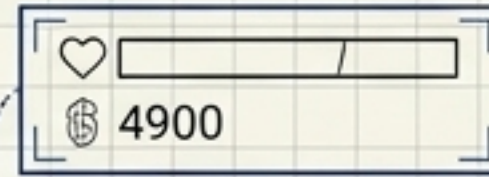
HUD and Icon Design

Big Idea: The Heads-Up Display must deliver critical data efficiently without breaking cinematic immersion or cluttering the screen.

Key Design Pillars

- **The Clean Screen:** Auto-hide HUD elements when inactive. Bring them back instantly upon taking damage.
- **Safe Frame Proximity:** Keep icons and meters away from the absolute edges of the screen to prevent clipping.
- **Context-Sensitive Prompts:** Use singular buttons for multiple actions depending on proximity (e.g., 'A' to talk, 'A' to open chest).
- **Rule of Three Presses:** A player should never have to press a button more than three times to access critical menus.

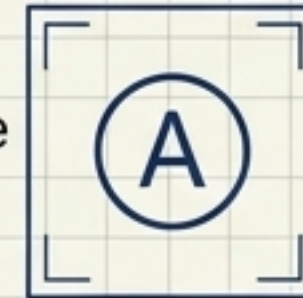
Health Bar / Score (Auto-hides)



TV Safe Frame



Context-Sensitive Prompt



Radar/Map

The Rogers Rule: Don't leave creating icons to the programmers. They only care about functionality, not design. Make fonts readable, not fancy.

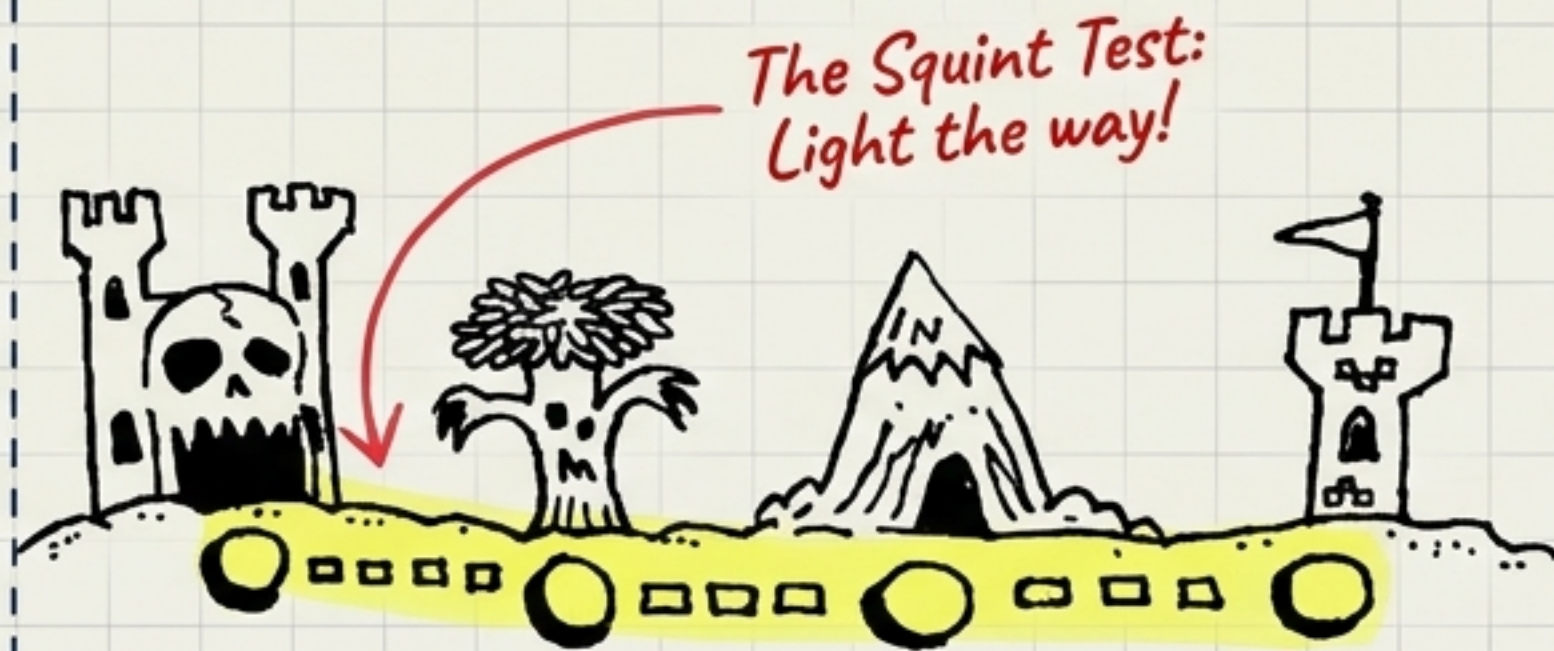
Architecture & Flow

Big Idea: Great level design unconsciously guides the player to their objective using lighting, architecture, and rewards.

Key Design Pillars:

- **The Squint Test:** Squint at your level. The brightest/most distinct path should intuitively lead the player to the main objective.
- **Alley vs. Island:** Alleys funnel players through tight experiences; Islands offer open-ended exploration.
- **Gray Boxing:** Always prototype levels with untextured blocks to test flow before investing in final art.
- **The Mexican Pizza Technique:** Re-use and re-combine existing game assets in novel ways to create distinct new themes.

The Alley (Linear / Choke Points)



The Island (Hub-and-Spoke)

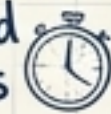


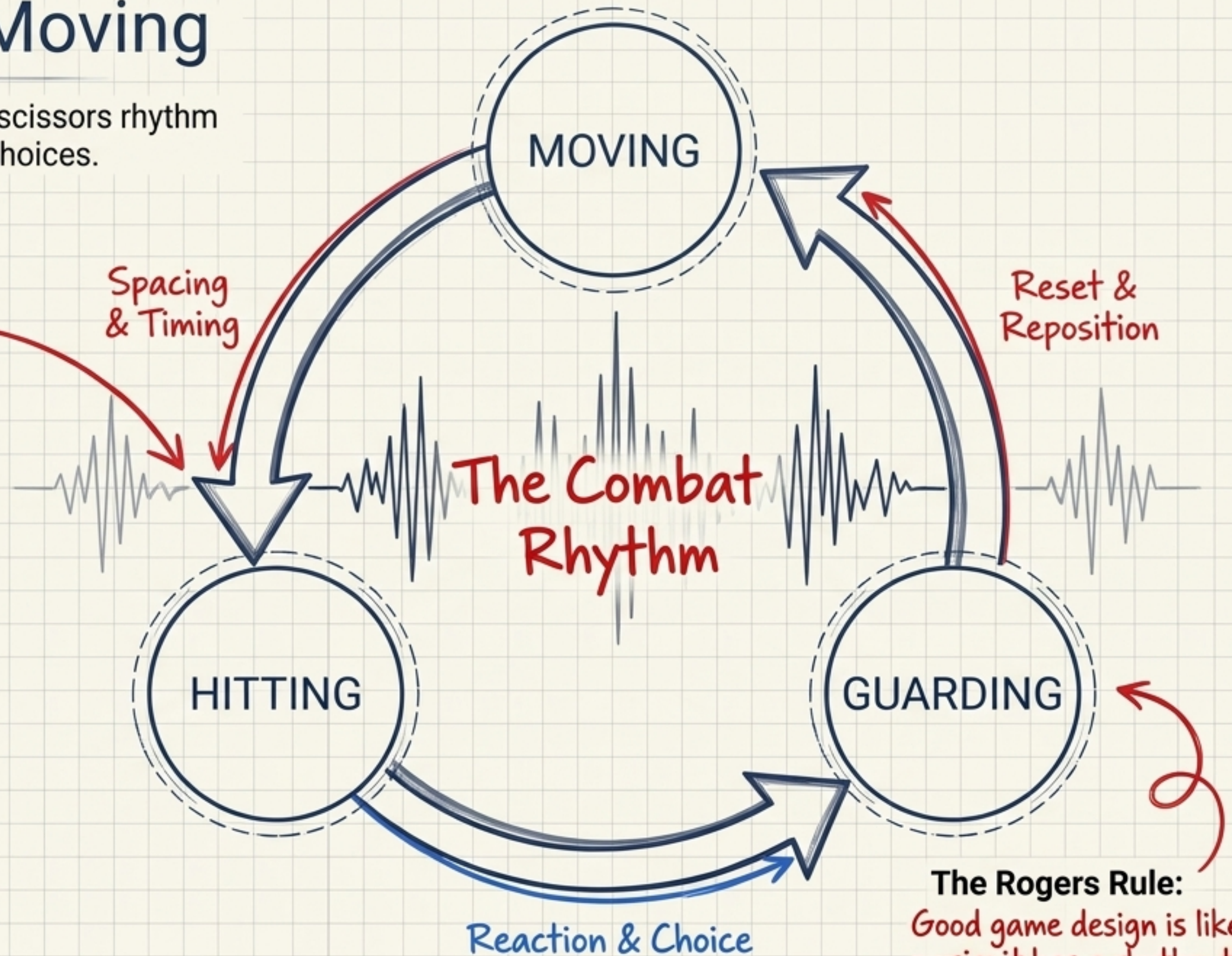
The Rogers Rule: *Every finger of your map should have a reward at the end, even if it's just a trashcan. If it looks like the player can go there, they should.*

Guarding, Hitting, Moving

Big Idea: Dynamic combat is a rock-paper-scissors rhythm game built on spacing, timing, and player choices.

Key Design Pillars:

- **The Combat Trifecta:** Every action falls into moving, guarding, or hitting. Combat encounters must force players to constantly switch between these states.
 - **Anticipation and Telegraphing:** Enemies must visually and audibly signal their attacks before they happen, allowing the player fair time to react. 
 - **State of the Art Bang Bang:** Balance the Run and Gun feel. Weapons need distinct firing rates, reload times, and impact feedback.  
 - **Death as a Tool:** Make player death a learning experience, not just a punishment. 
- Distinct Impact!
- Reload Times
- Learn & Retry



The Rogers Rule:
Good game design is like music: it has a rhythm that the player can feel.

Enemy and Boss Design

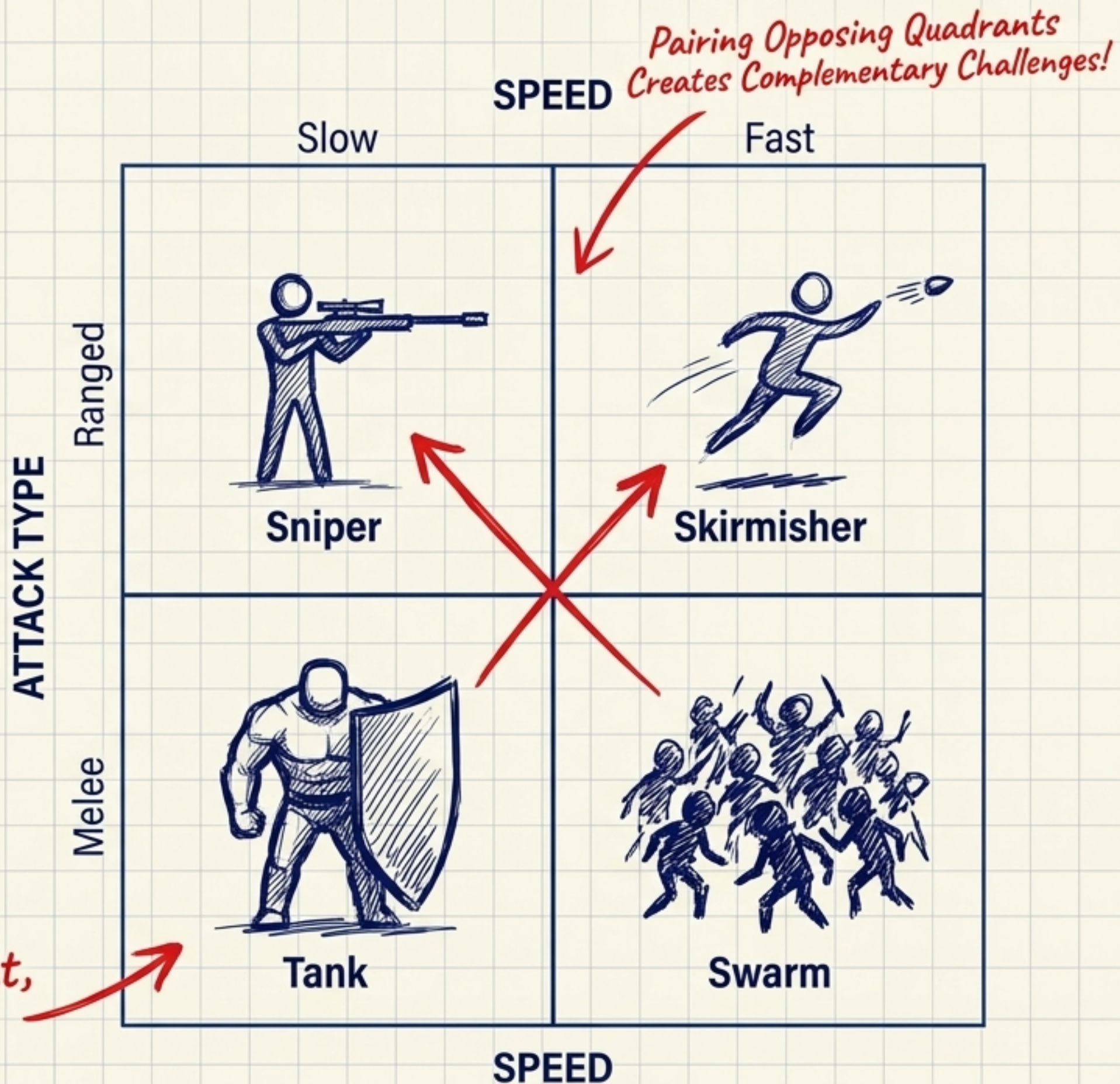
Big Idea: Enemies exist to make the player feel powerful; they must be designed to complement each other and challenge specific player mechanics.

Key Design Pillars:

- **Complementary Design:** Mix enemy types in encounters to force the player to prioritize targets.
- **Dynamic Difficulty:** Secretly adjust enemy health or aggression based on player performance to keep them in the flow state.
- **Scale vs. Camera:** For massive boss fights, ensure the camera can frame both the boss's telegraphs and the player's immediate hazards simultaneously.
- **The Killing Blow:** The player must always deliver the final hit to a boss, never a cutscene or NPC.

The Rogers Rule:

Enemies are meant to be fought, not avoided. You always want the player to hate the enemy.

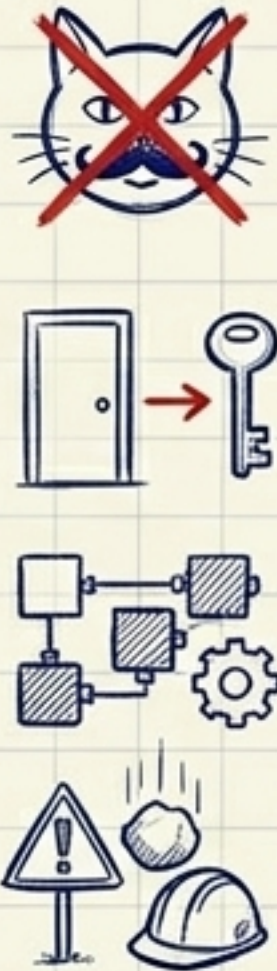


The Nuts and Bolts

Big Idea: Puzzles and mechanics must rely on logic, knowledge, or skill—never arbitrary guesswork.

Key Design Pillars:

- **No Cat Mustaches:** Avoid cryptic, illogical puzzle solutions that make sense only to the designer. Puzzles have right answers based on established rules.
- **Show Door, Then Key:** Always show the player the locked door/obstacle before they find the key. This provides context and motivation for the hunt.
- **Modular Pieces:** Keep puzzle elements simple and modular. Use a few mechanics combined in escalating complexity.
- **No Rocks on Heads:** Be strictly fair when punishing the player. Hazards must be foreshadowed.



The Rogers Rule:

A puzzle is a challenge that has a right answer. If it relies on random chance or blind guessing, it is broken.

Correct Logic Flow!

Progression & Difficulty

Big Idea:

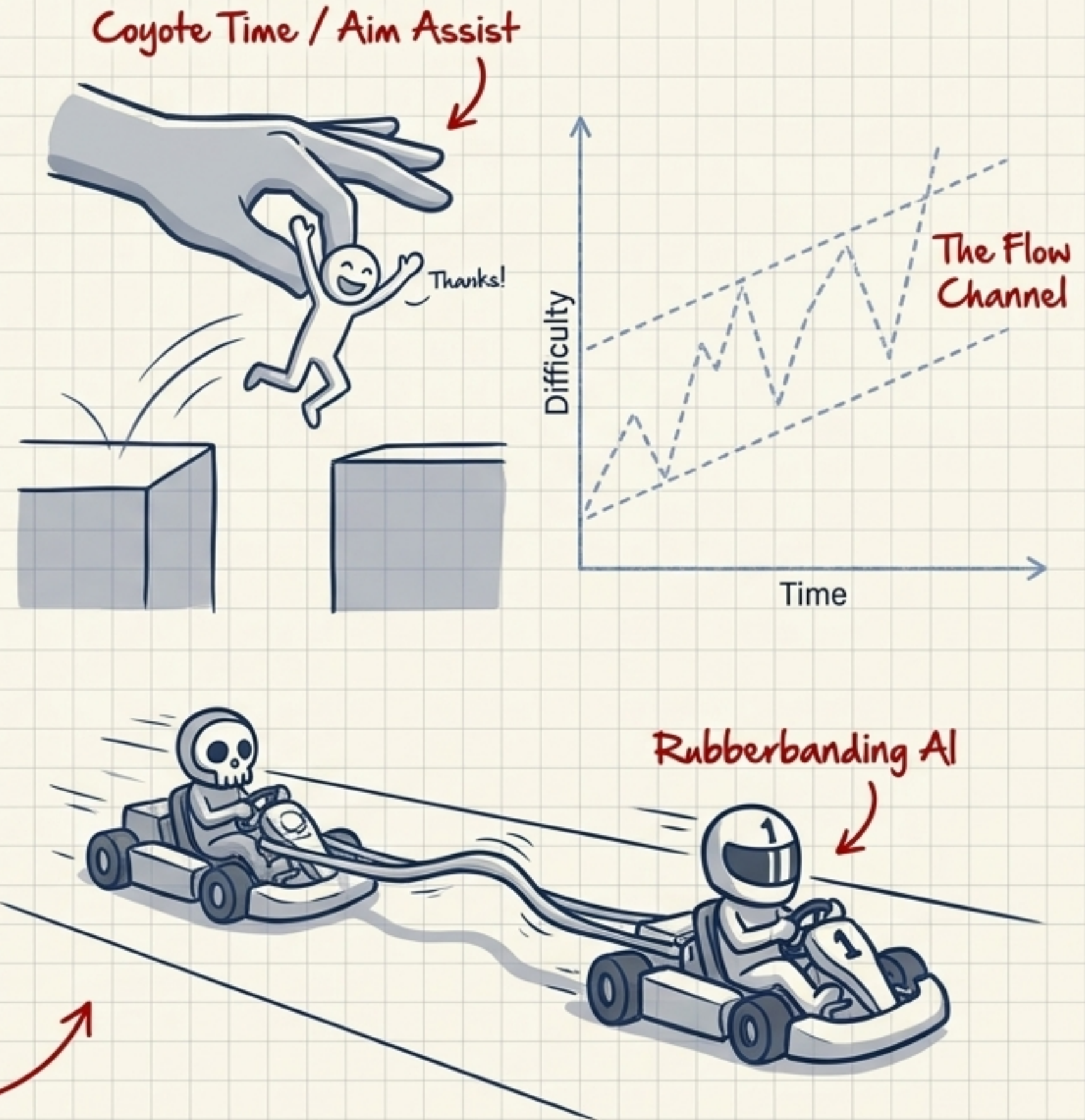
The designer's job is to secretly enable the player's success while making the player believe they achieved it solely on their own skill.

Key Design Pillars:

- **Love Thy Player:** Use subtle systems like "coyote time" (allowing a jump a split-second after leaving a ledge), aim assist, and generous checkpoints.
- **Rubberbanding:** In racing/progression, carefully balance rubberbanding so the AI remains competitive without feeling cheap or impossible to beat.
- **Trim the Fat:** If a level feels too long, too hard, or boring after you've played it 1,000 times, cut it. Consolidate to only the most exciting moments.

The Rogers Rule:

The game designer should be the gentle hand on the rear of the player, pushing them ever upwards.



Meaningful Play & Presentation

Big Idea: Cinematics should seamlessly bridge the formal game system and player experience, driving the story without stripping agency.



Key Design Pillars:

- **Make it Skippable:** Never force a player to watch a cutscene, especially before a difficult boss fight where they might die and respawn.
- **Show, Don't Tell:** Use in-engine visuals, environmental storytelling, and gameplay to reveal clues that would otherwise require a massive lore dump.
- **Iterative Design:** Playtest continuously. The play of a game will always surprise its creators; prototypes beat paper designs every time.

The Rogers Rule:

Creating great game experiences requires understanding how a game's formal system transforms into an experiential one. Give the player meaningful choices.

Shipping and Sequels

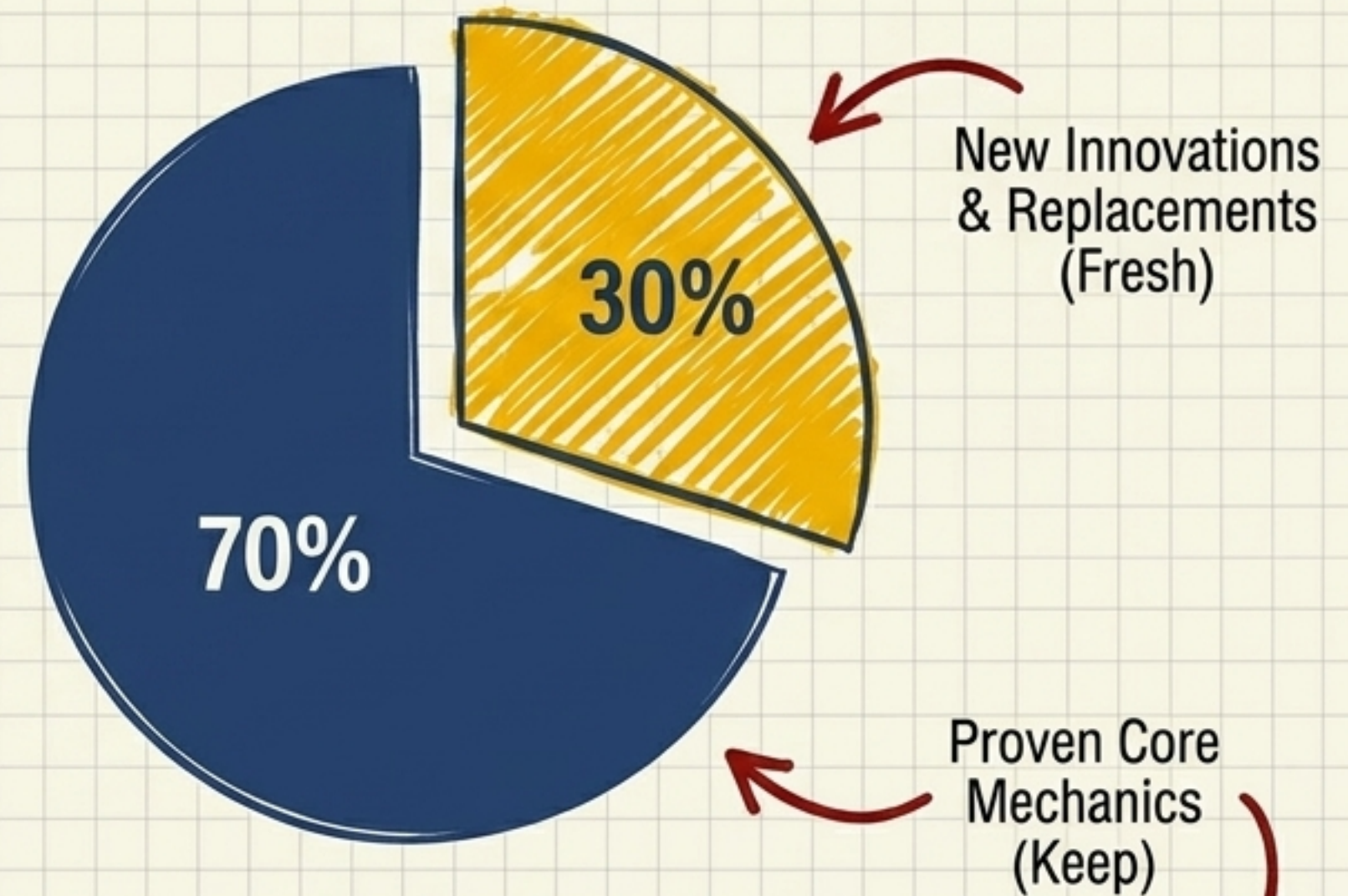
Big Idea:

Game design doesn't end in the engine; you must successfully pitch the vision, survive production, and analyze the game objectively.

Key Design Pillars:

- **Remove Designer Blinders:** You will lose perspective on your own game. Rely on focus groups and the 10,000 foot view of fresh players to find what is truly fun.
- **The 30/70 Rule for Sequels:** Keep 70% of what worked brilliantly in the first game; throw out the 30% that didn't work and replace it.
- **Pitching Hierarchy:** The ultimate pitch order: A playable Demo > A full GDD > A Pitch Presentation > A Pitch Outline.
- **Kill Your Darlings:** If a system is breaking the game late in production, throw it out. Save the best discarded ideas for the sequel.

30/70 Rule for Sequels



The Rogers Rule:

Don't rely on emergent gameplay to make your game fun. All good design is preplanned.