Introduction to Game Design (2024-2025) - Finn Clewes, Leon Wallis

VIKING VILLAGES: GAME DESIGN DOCUMENT

Grow humble settlements into legendary towns: A city builder for ages 16+
Link to GitHub Portfolio: https://20110648.github.io/intro2gamedesign/index.html

ARTWORK GENERATED USING DALLE-3

CONTENTS

THE GAME

"Viking Villages" is an immersive city-builder game set in the mythical Nordic world. The game combines strategic construction, resource management, and dynamic diplomacy. Players take on the role of a chieftain tasked with transforming a fledgling Viking settlement into a thriving city-state while navigating natural challenges, rival clans, and the wrath of the gods. The game's standout features include a Viking-themed progression system, an engaging advisor mechanic, and branching narratives that provide players with meaningful choices impacting their story and gameplay outcomes.

GAME SUMMARY

"Viking Villages" blends the classic appeal of city-building games like *SimCity*, *Cities: Skylines*, and *Anno* with unique Norse mythology elements. Players develop infrastructure, manage finances, and leverage natural resources while engaging in both peaceful trade and violent raids. As the settlement advances through eras, players unlock new buildings and technology, making strategic decisions that influence alliances and rivalries with other clans. The branching narratives ensure high replayability, offering varied outcomes based on player choices.

Key selling points include:

- **Authentic Viking Experience:** Norse mythology-based elements and natural disasters tied to divine interventions.

- **Dynamic Diplomacy:** Relationships with neighboring chieftains shift based on trade and raid decisions.

- **Era-Based Progression:** Unlock buildings and technology as your settlement levels up.

- **Advisor System:** Each advisor provides specialized guidance, reflecting their area of expertise.

Planned as a digital release on platforms like Steam and Epic Games Store, "Viking Villages" aims to capture fans of strategy and Norse mythology with its rich gameplay and narrative depth.

GAME STORY

The story begins in a harsh and untamed land where myths and legends still roam. Players assume the role of a chieftain leading their Viking clan, striving to establish a new settlement amidst unforgiving conditions. The journey is fraught with challenges:

- **Natural Dangers:** The wild, icy landscape presents constant threats, from harsh winters to barren resources.

- **Rival Clans:** Sigvarr, the ambitious leader of the Isvarg Clan, challenges your claim to the land.

- **Divine Wrath:** The gods' favor must be earned, or disasters such as storms and droughts may decimate your settlement.

As the village grows, the chieftain must balance diplomacy, raids, and economic management while navigating critical story decisions, including reclaiming stolen relics and addressing alliances with rival clans. The narrative culminates in high-stakes confrontations, where trust, strategy, and the gods' favor determine the fate of the settlement.

CHARACTERS

PROTAGONIST: THE CHIEFTAIN (PLAYER-DEFINED)

- **Role:** Leader of the Viking settlement.

- **Motivations:** To establish a thriving city-state that endures through time and earns a place in the sagas.

- **Characteristics:** Determined, adaptable, and respected, with their personality shaped by player decisions.

- **Customization:** Players name their chieftain and make choices that influence their leadership style.

ANTAGONIST: SIGVARR

- **Role:** Leader of the rival Isvarg Clan.

- **Motivations:** To dominate the region and secure control over Norrvik's resources.

- **Characteristics:** Brutal, cunning, and fiercely loyal to his own people.

- **Appearance:** Towering with fiery red hair, clad in scarred armor, and a helm fashioned from a bear skull.

ADVISORS: THE TRUSTED COUNCIL

Each advisor provides specialized guidance in their domain, reflecting their personality and priorities:

- **Kari, the Planner:** A calm and detail-oriented architect focusing on infrastructure.

- **Ronald, the Raider:** A hot-headed warrior advocating aggressive tactics.

- **Solveig, the Keeper:** A pragmatic financier ensuring economic stability.

- **Harald, the Steward:** A practical manager of utilities like food and water.

- **Astrid, the Shield:** A disciplined peacekeeper maintaining order.

- **Bjorn, the Healer:** A nurturing figure who oversees health and education.

- **Revna, the Navigator:** An adventurous strategist optimizing transportation and trade.

- **Frey, the Gothi:** A spiritual guide balancing progress with respect for the gods and nature.

GAMEPLAY OVERVIEW

"Viking Villages" offers an engaging mix of strategy, city-building, and narrative-driven gameplay. Players start with a small settlement surrounded by dense forests, icy fjords, and scattered resources. Early gameplay focuses on survival: gathering wood, stone, and food to construct basic shelters and maintain the settlement through the harsh winters.

As the game progresses, players unlock more advanced buildings and technologies, moving from rudimentary huts to grand longhouses and from dirt paths to cobblestone streets. The game features a unique blend of diplomacy and conflict. Players can establish trade routes with neighboring clans, fostering peaceful alliances, or raid rivals for resources, risking retaliation and political fallout.

The village evolves through different eras, and with each advancement, players face new challenges and opportunities. The branching narrative system ensures that every decision matters, from handling disputes among villagers to responding to rival threats. The integration of advisors offers tailored suggestions for each dilemma, creating a personalized leadership experience.

GAMEPLAY EXPERIENCE

"Viking Villages" is designed to immerse players in the role of a Viking leader, balancing practical challenges with the mythological ambiance of the Norse world. The game evokes a sense of progression and achievement as the settlement grows, transforming from a fragile village into a thriving city-state.

The player's journey is shaped by meaningful choices. The branching narratives encourage experimentation, as every decision carries weight and consequences. This ensures that no two playthroughs are the same, whether the player opts for peaceful diplomacy or a warlike path of conquest. Advisors contribute to this dynamic, sometimes disagreeing with one another, forcing players to weigh their guidance carefully.

The game's visual and audio design enhances the Viking atmosphere, with richly detailed landscapes, authentic Norse architecture, and a stirring soundtrack that evokes the grandeur and peril of the age. Dynamic weather and day-night cycles further immerse players in the world, reinforcing the constant interplay between natural beauty and danger.

Would you like me to proceed with the next sections or refine anything here?

MECHANICS AND MODES

The core mechanics of "Viking Villages" revolve around strategic city-building, resource management, and engaging with a living narrative. Players begin with a simple Viking settlement and expand it by constructing roads, longhouses, and resource production buildings using materials such as wood, stone, and precious metals. As their settlement grows, they must manage food supplies, maintain infrastructure, and address the villagers' needs to keep morale high.

The game introduces an advisor system where different characters provide advice on critical issues, often with conflicting viewpoints. For example, during a food shortage, Harald, the Steward, may suggest rationing supplies, while Bjorn, the Healer, advocates prioritizing health and wellbeing.

Diplomacy and raids are central to the gameplay. Players can trade with neighboring clans to acquire rare resources or technologies, or choose to raid their settlements for immediate rewards, at the cost of damaging relations.

The game is designed as a single-player experience with a progression system that allows the settlement to advance through distinct Viking eras, unlocking new technology and building options. Future plans may include cooperative or competitive multiplayer modes, enhancing the game's scope.

ENEMIES AND BOSSES

The primary antagonist in "Viking Villages" is Sigvarr, the leader of the rival Isvarg Clan. His ambitions clash directly with the player's goals, and he serves as both a narrative and gameplay challenge. Sigvarr's actions dynamically affect the game world, including launching raids on the player's settlement, attempting to manipulate alliances, and claiming territorial dominance.

Other enemies include rival chieftains and environmental challenges. The wild Nordic terrain is home to natural predators and mythical beasts inspired by Norse mythology. These creatures occasionally threaten the village, forcing players to allocate resources for defense.

Boss-like encounters occur during key story events. For instance, a confrontation with Sigvarr might involve strategic battles, requiring players to prepare their forces while maintaining village stability. These encounters test the player's ability to balance economic growth and military might.

The gods themselves play a subtle antagonistic role. Their favor must be earned through offerings and actions aligned with Norse values. Ignoring divine expectations can lead to disasters like storms or droughts, adding an unpredictable element to gameplay.

PLANNED EXPANSIONS AND BONUS MATERIAL

The developers of "Viking Villages" plan to expand the game with additional content post-launch. Future expansions could introduce new regions, each with unique challenges, resources, and narratives. A coastal expansion, for example, might focus on naval exploration and trade, while a mountain-themed pack could emphasize mining and resource extraction.

DLC (Downloadable Content) is planned to enhance the game experience with new advisors, buildings, and storylines. For instance, one DLC might explore mythical elements more deeply, incorporating legendary Norse creatures as allies or adversaries. Another expansion could introduce advanced technologies, pushing the settlement into the early medieval period.

Cosmetic upgrades, such as customizable longhouse designs or unique Viking ship styles, will also be available. Seasonal events, tied to Viking festivals like Yule, can provide limited-time challenges and rewards, encouraging player engagement throughout the year.

The game's potential for multiplayer expansion includes cooperative village building or competitive raids between players. These additions will enrich the experience for fans of both strategic and narrative-driven gameplay.

BUILD TO SCALE

"Viking Villages" was designed to scale both in gameplay depth and in the literal sense of city expansion. As players progress, their small village grows into a big Viking city. This requires them to manage more and more complex systems like advanced infrastructure, trade networks, and larger populations. This physical scaling reflects the core of a city-building game, where settlements expand in size and complexity as the player unlocks new buildings and technologies.

Additionally, the game's design supports scalability through downloadable content (DLCs). Future expansions can introduce new regions, mechanics, and storylines, allowing players to explore fresh challenges while keeping the core experience dynamic and exciting.

APPENDIX: PLAYTESTS

The playtest session for the "Viking Villages" prototype was conducted on December 5, 2024, at 3 PM in room IT120 on the Campus. A physical, paper-based prototype was used, featuring a printout of the first map in the game, "Fjord of Beginnings", printed and laminated advisor-, event- and story cards, dice, as well as physical objects to represent resources.

Due to Leon leaving Ireland early and there being fewer people on campus due to online lectures, conducting an in-person playtest session presented a challenge. However, one participant, Ryan, did engage with the game during a session and provided feedback through a questionnaire.
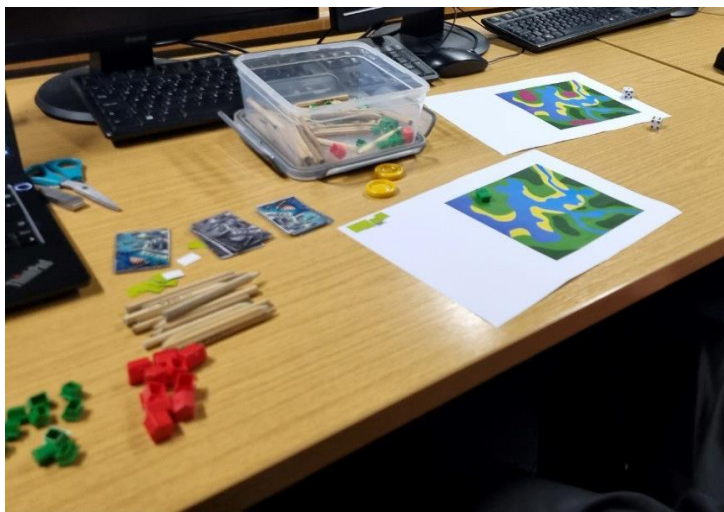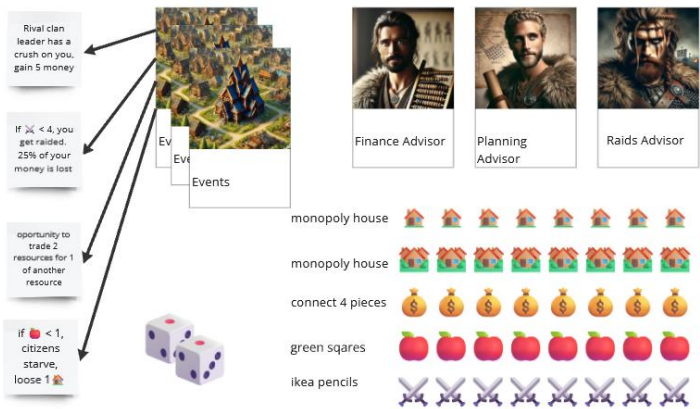

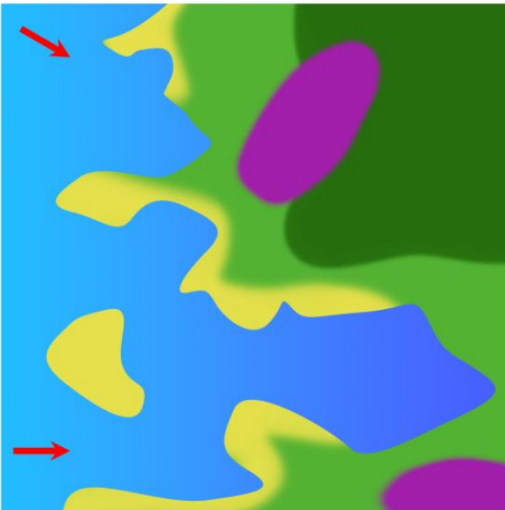*Figure 2: The Paper-Based Protoype*

Figure 1: A card is drawn

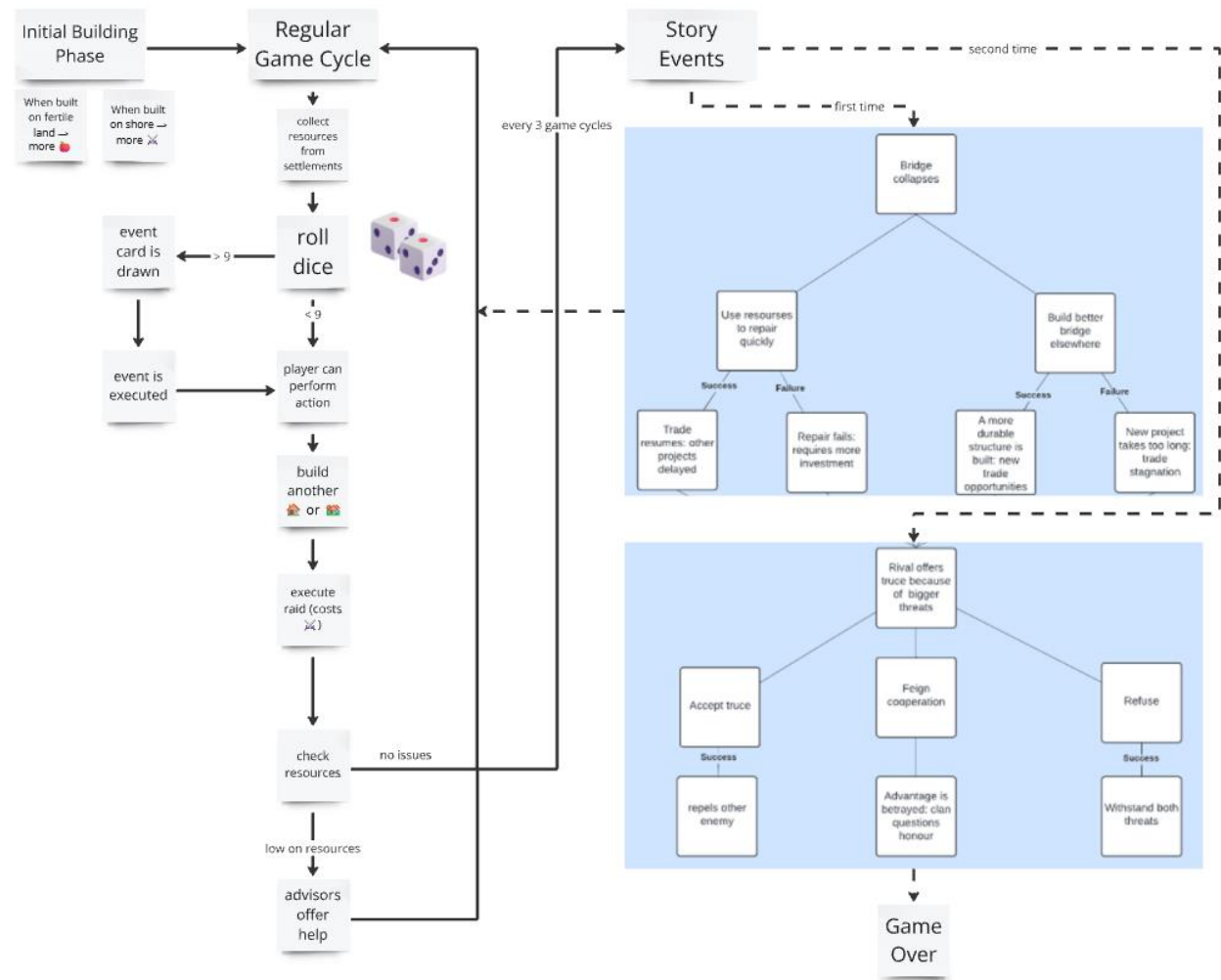*Figure 3: Playtest Session in Progress*

THE PROTOTYPE IN DETAIL

Cards and other Elements

Rival clan leader has a crush on you, gain 5 money

If ⚔ < 4, you get raided. 25% of your money is lost

opportunity to trade 2 resources for 1 of another resource

if 🍎 < 1, citizens starve, loose 1 🏠

Events

Finance Advisor

Planning Advisor

Raids Advisor

monopoly house 🏘️🏘️🏘️🏘️🏘️🏘️🏘️
monopoly house 🏠🏠🏠🏠🏠🏠🏠
connect 4 pieces 💰💰💰💰💰💰💰
green sqares 🍎🍎🍎🍎🍎🍎🍎
ikea pencils ⚔️⚔️⚔️⚔️⚔️⚔️⚔️

Map (Fjord of Beginnings)

PLAYTEST SCRIPT

Initial Building Phase
- When built on fertile land → more 🍎
- When built on shore → more ⚔

Regular Game Cycle
- collect resources from settlements
- roll dice
  - > 9 → event card is drawn → event is executed
  - < 9 → player can perform action
- build another 🏠 or 🏘️
- execute raid (costs ⚔)
- check resources
  - no issues
  - low on resources → advisors offer help

Story Events
- every 3 game cycles
- first time / second time

Bridge collapses
- Use resources to repair quickly
  - Success: Trade resumes: other projects delayed
  - Failure: Repair fails: requires more investment
- Build better bridge elsewhere
  - Success: A more durable structure is built: new trade opportunities
  - Failure: New project takes too long: trade stagnation

Rival offers truce because of bigger threats
- Accept truce
  - Success: repels other enemy
- Feign cooperation
  - Advantage is betrayed: clan questions honour
- Refuse
  - Success: Withstand both threats

Game Over

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PARTICIPANTS FEEDBACK

A Google Form was used to collect Feedback after the Playtest Session. The questions and the answers of the participant were as follows:

Question	Answer
Timestamp	05.12.2024 15:37
What is your name?	Ryan
Do you play city builders?	No
Do you play card games	No
What was your goal in the game?	to get money
What strategies (if any) did you use?	forward thinking and peaceful
How did you feel at the conclusion of the game	Bored
Was the game easy to understand?	6/10
Did you understand what events were taking place?	Yes
Could you identify when a turn ended?	Yes
Do you feel the events made sense?	Yes
Could you identify what resources you had and how many you had at all times?	Yes
How would you describe the difficulty	3/10
Did you enjoy playing the game	6/10
Is there anything you would do to improve this questionnaire?	more questions about difficulty and balancing
Is there anything you would do to improve the game?	the difficulty and the balancing. bigger scope, more events

FAMILIARITY WITH SIMILAR GAMES

Ryan indicated that he does not typically play city builders or card games. This may have influenced his experience and perception of the game mechanics.

GOAL AND STRATEGY

Ryan identified his goal as "to get money" and employed "forward-thinking and peaceful" strategies. This suggests an understanding of basic gameplay goals and mechanics.

ENGAGEMENT AND ENJOYMENT

At the conclusion of the game, Ryan reported feeling "bored" and rated their enjoyment level as a 6 out of 10. While the game captured some interest, there is room to increase player engagement.

CLARITY AND UNDERSTANDING

Ryan found the game moderately easy to understand, rating it a 6 out of 10 for clarity.

He understood the events and when turns ended, indicating that the event system and turn structure were clear.

Resource tracking was effective, as Ryan always knew what resources they had and in what quantities.

DIFFICULTY

Ryan described the game difficulty as a 3 out of 10, suggesting it was quite easy.

IMPROVEMENTS SUGGESTED

Ryan suggested improving difficulty balancing, expanding the game's scope, and incorporating more events to enhance variety and replayability.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS AND POSSIBLE FUTURE CHANGES

The playtest session revealed several key insights about the game. In terms of engagement and enjoyment, the participant found the game somewhat lacking in dynamic elements, which led to feelings of boredom. To address this, the game, or more specifically the prototype, could benefit from introducing new mechanics or expanding the variety of events to keep players engaged throughout the experience.

The game's difficulty and balancing presented some issues. The participant found the game too boring and noted that certain aspects, such as resource generation and event impacts, could be better balanced. Adjusting these elements and refining the progression system would create a more enjoyable and fair challenge for players.

The event system was well-received, with the participant indicating that the events were clear and logical. However, the range of events was too limited. Adding more events with deeper narrative or mechanical complexity could further enrich the experience.

Regarding the scope of the game, the participant suggested that it felt limited. They expressed a desire for additional layers of gameplay. These could be more advanced technology, complex diplomacy, or more detailed scenarios. These weren't in the prototype because it would have made it too complex for the paper-based medium.

Interestingly, despite having no prior experience with city builders or card games, the participant understood the mechanics and goals of the game. This highlights its accessibility for newcomers.

To improve the game, several steps can be taken. First, the event system should be expanded with more variety and meaningful outcomes to increase replayability. Second, the game's difficulty and balance need to be refined, ensuring a smoother and fairer experience. Third, the overall scope of the game could be broadened by adding deeper mechanics like long-term goals or evolving challenges. Lastly, elements such as narrative twists or competitive interactions could enhance player engagement.

The questionnaire used in the playtest could also be improved by including more detailed questions about the pacing, resource balance, and the player's satisfaction with specific game mechanics. This would provide more comprehensive feedback for future iterations. By addressing these areas, the game has the potential to become a more engaging and well-rounded game that appeals to a wider audience.