

Viking game prototype

The Glorious Battle on the Road to Valhalla(GBRV) is board game designed so that there can only be one loser. Basically the game is a race. The last player who has not reached the finishing line loses. The design challenge of making a viking game can be solved in many ways. In the classic card game 'shithead' the loser is the one who cannot empty his hand. In many hidden information board games the game can end up with only having one loser, but often these games can also end up having several losers depending on how the game ends. Many examples of games with only one loser are designed as race games. In other words, the last player to fulfil some kind of goal loses. In our prototype we have not tried to challenge the classic race game approach to viking games. We try to embrace it and make it fit to the aesthetic theme of our game and vice versa. As we discover in our prototype the viking game approach poses some challenges.

The gameplay of GBRV is divided into two parts. The first being the part where you have to gather enough resources to be able to go to the 'Land of Fire'. The second part is when you have successfully migrated to 'The Land of Fire'. Here you have to die in a glorious battle and go to Valhalla. Once you are in Valhalla you have not lost the game. If the game had not been designed as a viking game the game would probably have stopped once the first player had reached Valhalla. In our game the play proceeds for the remaining players in the game. The bad thing about this design is that the first player to reach Valhalla has to wait for the other players to finish the game. We have tried in our design to account for this by making the second part of the game both a safe haven and an interactive affair to keep the players engaged in the game. The implementation is far from perfect, but the idea works well for this kind of game. We want to keep the viking game approach for reasons I will explain later, but we also want to keep the not losing players engaged until the game has found its loser.

It is a great challenge to keep the not losing player engaged in the game. To design a space where the player can operate without feeling a loss of agency and still not having him / her impact the game in a way that makes the other players feeling obscured by his / her presence. So why not just skip the viking game approach? In the case of our game only having one loser changes how you strategically play the game. If the game is played with only one winner, the natural strategy for the players will be to prey on the player with the most resources. This can create a dynamic where the game can stall because no one gets to have enough resources to reach Valhalla. The players resource distribution will most likely be very flat because no one wants to be the hunted. In the other scenario with only one loser, the players will likely be less concerned about the resource distribution and play more free and risky, simply because the risk of losing is lower. Furthermore it creates a deeper kind of gameplay where the relations between the players change throughout the game. When only two players are left in play the risk of losing is high hence the competitive feeling will rise. This makes the play experience more dynamic compared to the alternative.

The dynamic gameplay experience fits well with the viking aesthetics implemented in our prototype. In the beginning of the game we want the barbaric nature of the Vikings to flourish. The players should be encouraged to take a lot of risks and play

freely. The intended experience is to get a feeling of going berserk and fighting against all odds. Of course there has to be benefits of having more resources than your counterparts hence fighting against all odds does not grant you extra power but the viking game approach creates room for that kind of game play. As the number of players narrows in the tactic, strategic, more careful gameplay will prove to be the best way of progressing in the game. This is an important experience to have, or else the resource management system may feel as being redundant. Even though the game has a great amount of alea to it, we have tried to balance it so that you actually have an advantage if you carry more axes than your counterparts.