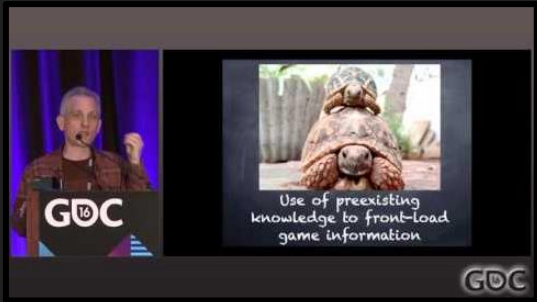


It's dangerous to design
games, take this!

A deck of many tips



Theorycrafting is fun, but when I'm the one in the audience I prefer anecdotes.



I prefer when a speaker says *“this is what I experienced, here’s what I think: take it, tweak it, love it or leave it”*.

Tip #1

Unified theories are like underpants: we all have our own and don't want to share.

Before getting into design I was a programmer.

2012



2013



2014



2015 - present

My professional design experience is with 4X games.

2015



2015



2015 - 2016



2016



2016 - 2017



2016 - present

Tip #2

Take all of this with a pinch of salt: your experience, and mileage, may vary!



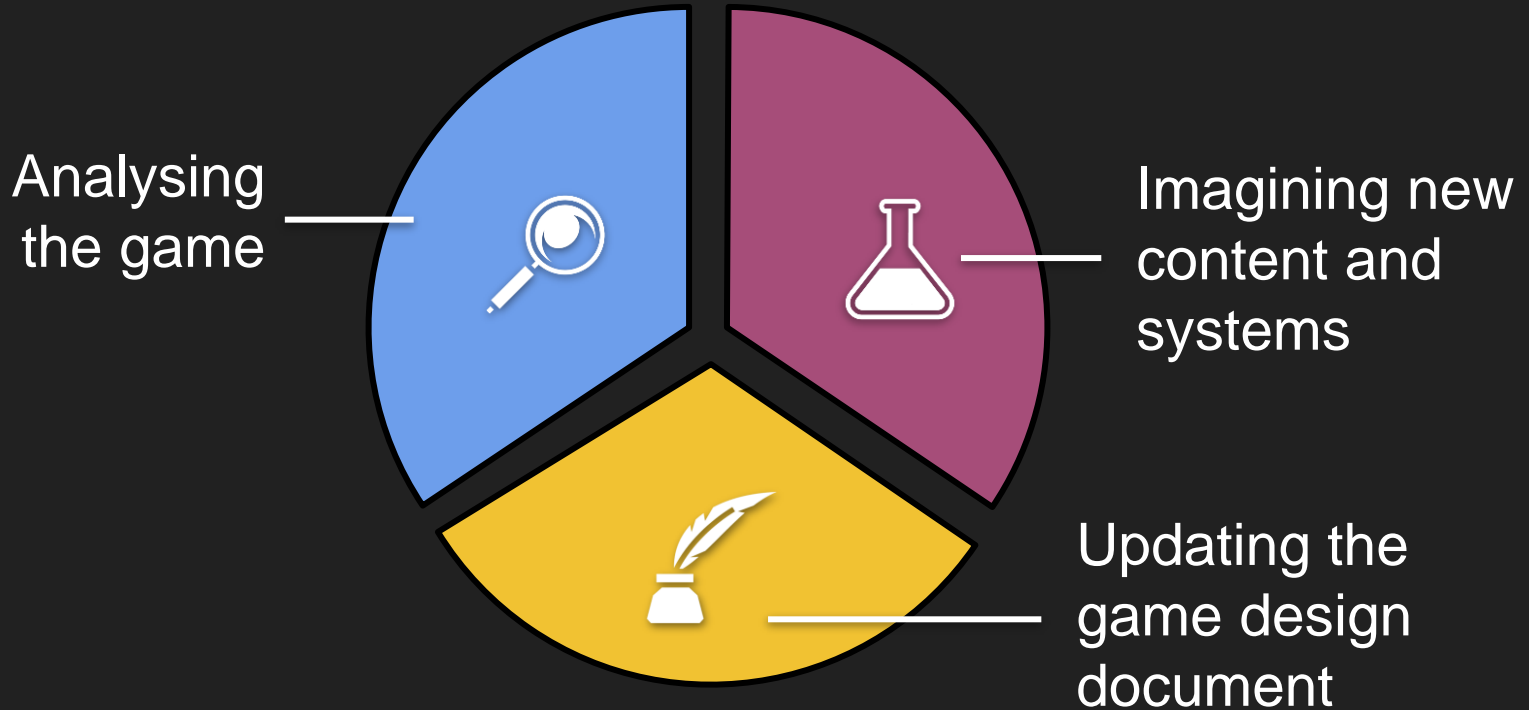
There's one thing I *can* count on: to make games you'll need food, shelter, electricity, hardware, software, etc.

You'll be answerable to whoever provides you with these things.

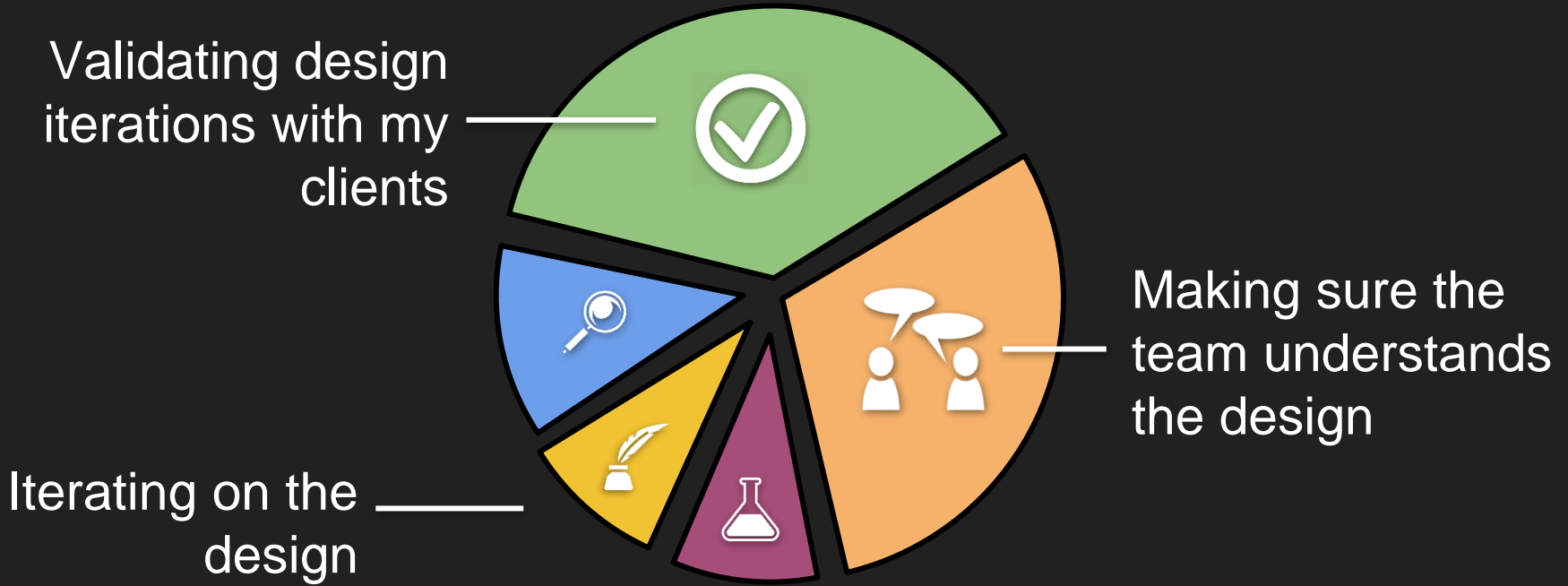
Tip #3

The only true independence is financial:
you'll probably have a client.

I used to think game design was mostly writing.



But I've tended to be a go-between, not a scribe.




Tip #4


Documentation is just a means to an end:
the true end goal is communication.

Side note: game-icons.net is your friend!

Game-icons.net [Ideas](#) [Tweets](#) [About](#)

Already 2852 free icons for your games
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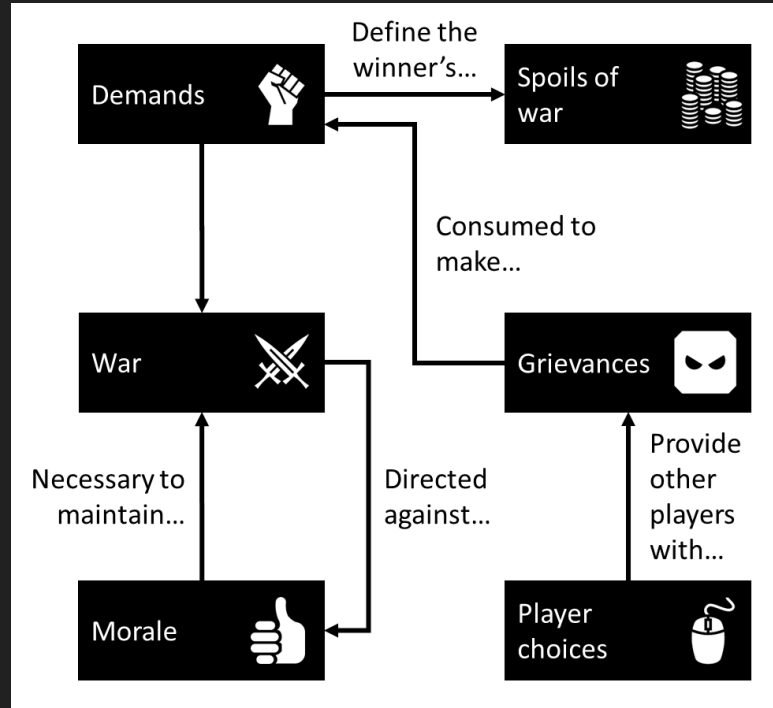
[Full preview in 1 sheet](#)

[91 tags](#)

Tip #5

Establishing a consistent pictographic language will help your ideas stick.

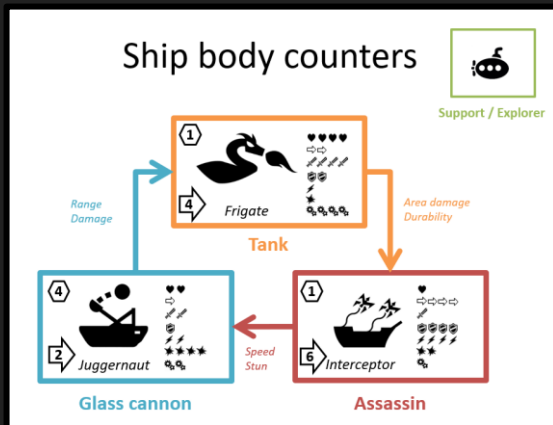
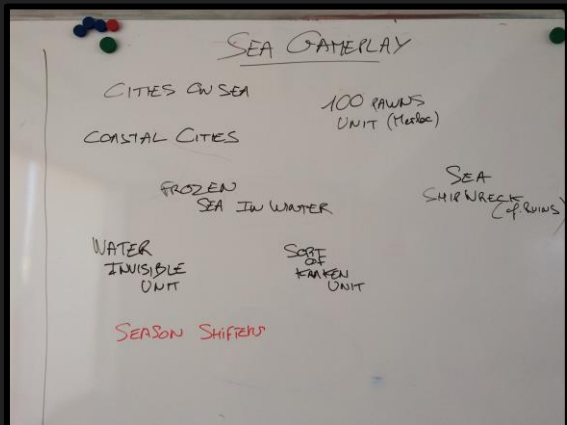
If you can't think of an evocative term and icon for your variables, it's generally a bad sign.



Tip #6

Words are stones: the ones you choose for your game concepts will ground them.

Here are some examples of Amplitude design docs.



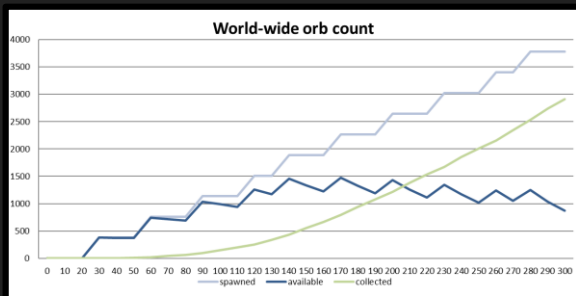
Sea Battles

Rationale

- Provide a way to fight on sea
- Use core mechanics well-known by players, but with new dedicated unit capacities and attributes, but also with sea tile effects affecting differently battles.
- Enable to fight for taking fortresses and control oceans.

Land Battle Transposed on Sea

- All the land battle system is transposed to sea, but with the following changes to be considered:
 - All armies caught in battle area, land or sea, are blocked until the battle is over (likewise land battles lock both land and sea armies).
 - Only sea armies can be involved in sea battles.
 - There is no high ground bonus.
 - Battle area excludes land tiles instead of sea tiles.
 - Ocean tiles affected by the ice-shelf count as land tiles, so should not be included in the battle area.
 - Reinforcement lands are placed on sea tiles using the same placement rules as on land (except that they accept sea tiles instead of land tiles).
 - The system of terrain battle effects is used to implement the new sea weather effects.
 - Land units participate in "embarked form" with a range 3 missile attack.
 - Their attributes are forced to their "embarked form" values by a simulation descriptor.
 - Heroes also have an "embarked form", with better attributes.
 - See "DLC 16 - Specs - Embarked Units.docx".
 - Owned fortress garrisons can come to reinforcements (like converted villages do).



DLC 16 Achievements

Description	Category	Comments	Achievement Definition	Statistic Definition
Control every Sea Fortress in the world.	Sea Fortresses	DONE	ALL_FORTRESSES	
Complete your control of an oceanic region by trading for a fortress in diplomacy.	Sea Fortresses	DONE	OCEAN_CONTROL_WITH_TRADE	
Control each of the X unique facilities across any number of playthroughs.	Sea Fortresses	DONE	ALL_UNIQUE_FACILITIES	UNIQUE_FACILITIES_OWNED
Complete 5 quests for the Fomorians in a single game.	Sea Fortresses	DONE	FOMORIAN_QUEST_COMPLETER	
Capture 50 Fomorians-controlled fortresses across any number of playthroughs.	Sea Fortresses	DONE	FOMORIAN_FORTRESS_CAPTURE	FOMORIAN_FORTRESS_CAPTURE_COUNT
Win a battle using an army containing each type of Fomorian warship.	Naval Warfare	DONE	BATTLE_FOMORIANS_VARIETY	

Tip #7

The right format for documentation is the one that best gets the message across.

Some of our “documents” are even interactive.

City	3	City	1	City	6
Mill	Mine	Militia			
When produced IF CONSCRIPTION					




Old Kingdom Cost: 2 Era II

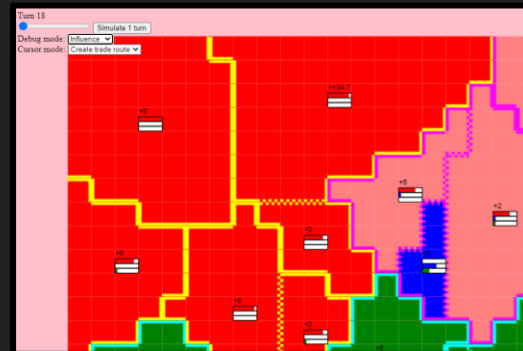
Mummification

Hieroglyphics

The Nile



Objective: spend to create 3 new in a single turn.
Reward: place 1 site for free.



Tip #8

Better to prove your idea works with a prototype than with a bunch of theory.

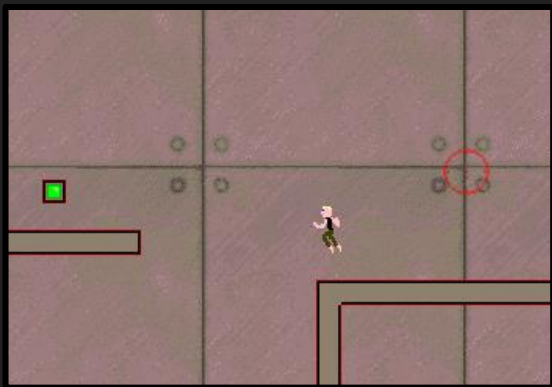


Before *Amplitude* I never really
proved anything.

When you're mainly working
for yourself, by yourself, you
need to know ***what*** you're
making and ***how***, but the ***why***
is just... intuition.

Tip #9

Accept that you too are biased, and get familiar with your personal biases.



Accepting your lack of objectivity is the first vital step towards *empathy*.

Without empathy you'll only be able to make games for *yourself*.



That's fine of course... but don't quit your day job.

Tip #10

Listen, build rapport and intuit your client's underlying desires and fears.

Empathy will help you pick your moment...



* You feel like you're going to have a bad time.

... because *context* is often as important as *content*.

Tip #11

Take the temperature, and address the elephant in the room before starting.



*“We tend to generate false dichotomies, then try to argue one point using two entirely different sets of assumptions, like two tennis players trying to win a match by **hitting beautifully executed shots from either end of separate tennis courts.**”*

-Tim Minchin

Tip #12

Start by agreeing on null hypotheses, and check in regularly once you have.



You need empathy too to put yourself in each of your players' shoes.

Different players will want different things, and what they want will change over time.

Design different habitats.

Tip #13

You're never designing just one game,
because your audience is not a monolith.

You need to remove your ego from the equation.



Ego will have you chasing wild geese for all eternity.

Tip #14

An overly defensive design is worse than one that allows the odd exploit.

TYPICAL DIFFICULTY CLASSES

Task Difficulty	DC
Very easy	5
Easy	10
Medium	15
Hard	20
Very hard	25
Nearly impossible	30

SKILLS

Strength

Athletics

Dexterity

Acrobatics

Sleight of Hand

Stealth

Intelligence

Arcana

History

Investigation

Nature

Religion

Wisdom

Animal Handling

Insight

Medicine

Perception

Survival

Charisma

Deception

Intimidation

Performance

Persuasion

You might look at system
and think *“this lacks
mathematical elegance”*.

But wanting to accurately
model reality? Wanting your
peers to think you’re smart?

That’s your ego trying to
trick you again.

Tip #15

Beautiful, clever, elegant systems aren't necessarily fun to interact with.



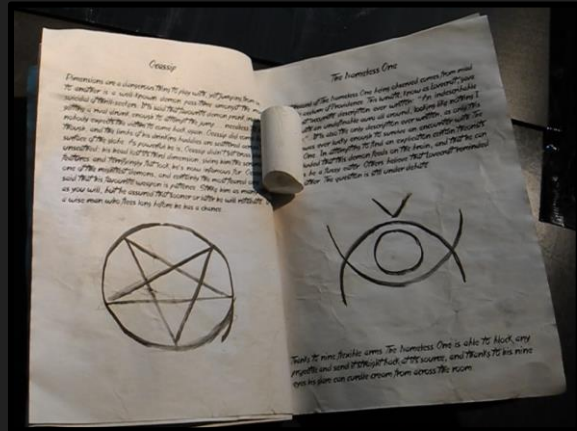
It can be helpful to take a step back from the systems and mechanics altogether.



Consider, for just a moment, the physical and emotional space in which the game will most likely be played.



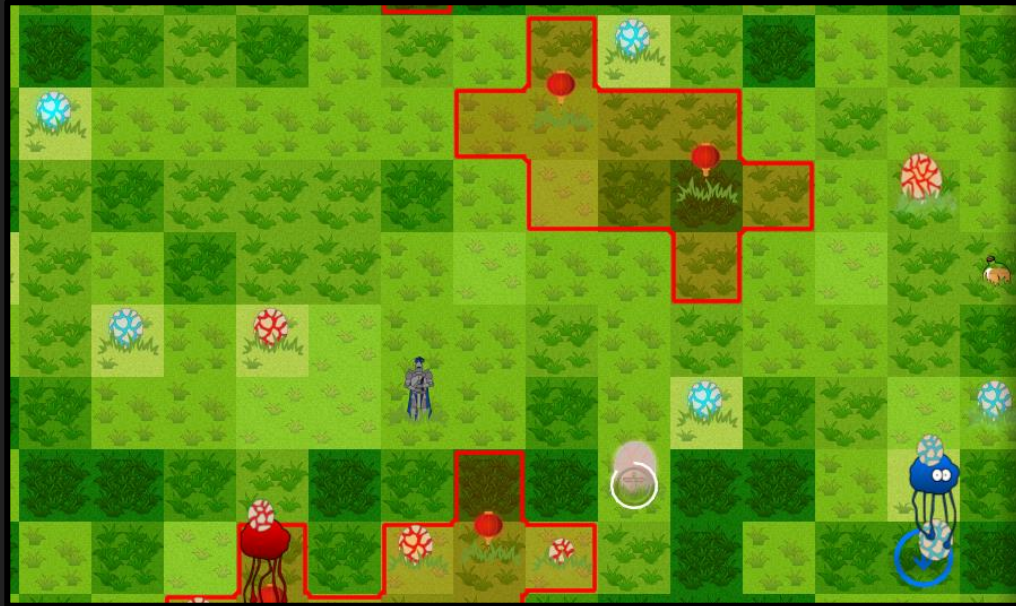
Mindset and setting are just as important as what you're... um... playing.



Tip #16

Remember that play happens in the mind,
not in the hands or on the screen.

Accepting this blurs the line between art and rules.

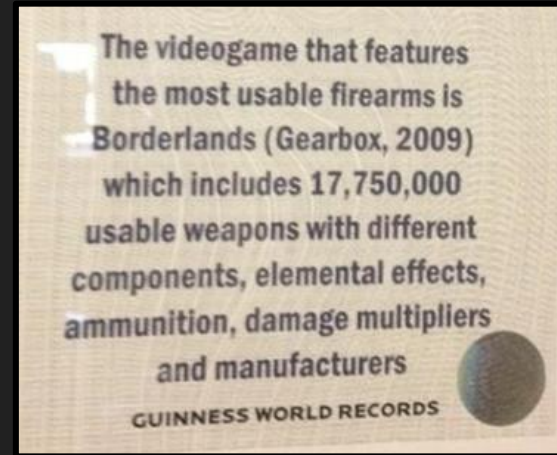


But [Brian Upton](#) explains this better than I ever could.

Tip #17

Think holistically: lore, art, music and sound are as important as mechanics.

It's all *content*, all food for players' hungry minds...



... but not all content has the same nutritional value.

Tip #18

Not all content is created equal: add things which call strategies into question.



Be careful to *question* though without *invalidating*!

New content should not entirely deprecate the mental models player have worked so hard to build.



Iterating is fun, but *revolution* is scary.

Tip #19

When making changes, bear in mind the hours players have spent theorycrafting.

Tip #20

If your talk goes over-time nobody will be able to ask you difficult questions.