ALFRED'S WYKE

A GAME OF BUILDING AND DESTRUCTION

ABOUT ME

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I'm an abstract board game inventor living in Dorset. I look forward to hearing what you think of 'Alfred's Wyke'. Leave a message by clicking 'Comments' or email me at alfredswyke@googlemail.com

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NOTATION

STRATEGY: FIRST THOUGHTS

SUNDAY, AUGUST 10, 2008

ALFRED'S WYKE

A GAME FOR TWO PLAYERS

BY

ANDREW PERKIS

Situated next to a lagoon in Southern England, the village of Wyke Regis is now absorbed into the town of Weymouth. One meaning of the Old English word wic, from which the name Wyke is derived is "row of houses", another is "dairy farm".

When King Alfred was Lord of the Manor of the Saxon village of Wyke, sporadic Viking raids still occurred. Older, flimsier houses, thus damaged, could well have been abandoned; meanwhile, more substantial homes were being built.

THE GAME: INTRODUCTION

Alfred's Wyke is a game for two players - one player being the Builder (Saxon); the other being the Destroyer (Viking). The only essential equipment (other than pen and paper to make a chart) is approximately 75 undifferentiated tiles. Word game tiles are ideal. Use them upside down if you think the letters will distract you.

The tiles represent building blocks. One player adds tiles to buildings while the other removes them. Their respective purposes are to build, and to destroy, "houses". Once a house has been fully built (and claimed by the Builder) or completely destroyed (and claimed by the Destroyer) there is no further play on the plot on which it stands - or has fallen.

Note: it is also possible to play the game with only paper and pencil, as explained below.

SETTING UP

Set up the tiles in 4 x 4 plots as shown in Figure 1. Four tiles, each representing the lower floor of a 2 x 2 x 2 -tile house, are placed in each location, with the exception of two opposite-corner plots that are composed of three tiles each. Once the layout is complete, a dozen or so additional tiles will be more than enough for play.

Figure 1
Setting up

Figure 2
1-1-1-1-1 ·····
2-1-1 ··········
2-2 ··············
3-1 ············
4 ················
D
B
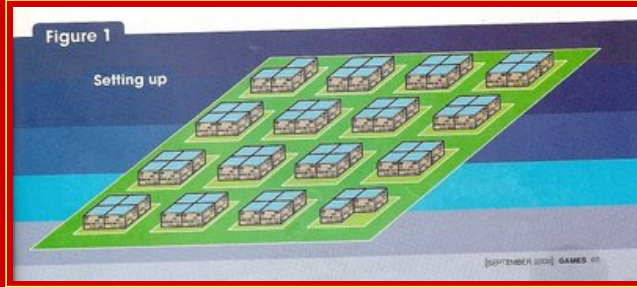
Next, write up the chart as in Figure 2, showing the types of moved available. Each player will need a distinctive marker that can be placed beside their move choice on each turn of play. If tiles from a word game are used, then a "B" tile and a "D" tile can represent the Builder and the Destroyer.
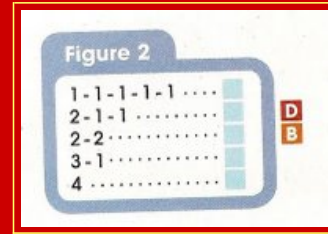
PLAY

The building player moves first. Thereafter, players move alternately. (There is no passing.)

The first move on the chart, 1-1-1-1-1, means that the Builder can add one tile to each of five chosen plots (provided, of course, that the plot's house has been neither fully built nor destroyed). For the Destroyer, this move choice enables one tile to be taken from each of the buildings on any five plots. Other move types are similar; e.g., the 3-1 choice for the Destroyer enables three tiles to be taken from one plot and one from another. Moves must always be played in full (with one exception; see ENDGAME).

At the start of play, the builder may choose any of the five types of move and must then put the "B" marker next to the option chosen. The Destroyer may now play any type of move except for this, and places the "D" marker next to that move type. This leaves three remaining types of move available to the Builder, who must move the "B" marker to whichever is chosen. After both players have placed their first moves, only three types of move - those not next to either player's marker - will ever be available to a player on his or her turn of play.

MORE ABOUT HOW PLOTS ARE DECIDED

As mentioned above, a plot is won by the Builder if a 2x2x2 house is completed on it, and by the destroyer if all the tiles are removed. There is nothing to stop a player from winning more than one plot on a single turn. In order to complete or demolish a house, the exact number of tiles must be added or taken. So, for example, if there were two tiles on a plot, and a move option that included a 2 was not available to the destroying player

on that turn of play, then he would not be permitted to win the plot by using a 4 move or the 3 component of a 3-1 move.

No further play occurs on a plot that one of the players has won, and you may wish to underline this by placing markers on these plots. One option would be to place a yellow pieces on a completed house (to represent a thatched roof) and a red piece on a level plot (to represent a burnt-down house).

OBJECT

The players each strive to the first to achieve one of the following winning conditions. (These can be thought of as a sufficient display of destructive or constructive power.)

A positional win occurs when a player has won four plots that form either:

(i) a row of houses (four in a row, either diagonal or orthogonal)

(ii) a farmstead (a 2 x 2 square of contiguous plots)

A numerical win is achieved when a player has won either :

(i) four or more plots than the other player

(ii) a total of any seven plots.

ENDGAME

Occasionally a position arises in which both players have won six plots but neither has achieved a winning position. This leaves only four plots in play. The outcome will be decided by the next plot to be won. In this situation (and in no other) the 1-1-1-1-1 move can be played as 1-1-1-1.

PAPER-PENCIL-VERSION

If tiles are not available, the game can be played with paper and pencil by drawing a large 4x4 grid and writing in each square the number of tiles (initially "4" in each square except for the two corner 3's). Each turn, a player crosses out the numbers in the plots where he or she is adding or removing tiles and rewrites the new tile totals.

A NOTE ON PLAY

At the start of the game there will be instant opportunities for both players to win plots by using the 4 move. Doing this indiscriminately, however, is likely to be counterproductive. It is better to focus on winning - or defending - key plots (at the outset, the four central ones) and to build influence where it matters as the game progresses.

It is not advisable to let your opponent play too many more 1-1-1-1-1 moves than you do. This type of move may often have a less dramatic

moves than you do. This type of move may often have a less dramatic impact on play than other moves, but, because one more tile is involved, it can give the player who uses it more a significant cumulative advantage.
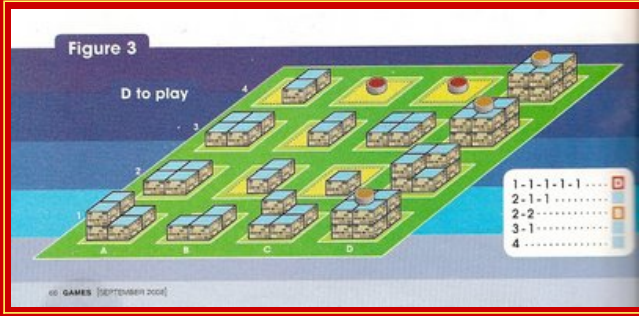
Figure 3

The move system in Alfred's Wyke allows moves that blend attack and defense in a unique way. Figure 3 shows a typical example. D must defend against B's adding a tile to d2, winning that plot - and, with it, the game (by completing a row of houses). D, however, can defend d2 and simultaneously set up two counter-threats, by playing 2-1-1-, taking two tiles from b3 (winning that plot), and taking one each from b1 and d2.

Figure 4

Figure 4 shows the new situation. D is now threatening to win either playing 4 at c3 (completing a 2x2 farmstead) or 2-2 (which will become available after the Builder plays) at b1 and b2 (completing a row). There are several ways for B to defend - perhaps you can spot them? But D now has at least equal chances. In the short term, both players can defend against each other's threats, but D will have the better chances if threats such as this can be repeated several times over. A player with such an initiative needs to make fewer forced moves that the opponent, and thus has more freedom to set up new threats elsewhere until answering them all becomes impossible. Even so, there's never room for complacency - one little slip can be enough to throw away the advantage.

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Diagrams courtesy of   GAMES MAGAZINE

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POSTED BY ANDREW PERKIS AT 6:46 AM

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2 COMMENTS:

🅱 Suburban said...

Do draws ever happen?

OCTOBER 12, 2008 9:20 AM

🅱 Andrew Perkis said...

All end games I've come across so far have been such that one of the players has a forced
win.By "endgame" I mean when players are tying 6-6. Of course, when you include the move-types available at the point when this situation arises, then there are rather a lot of endgames. My intuition is that they can all be won- but if someone discovers one where best play leads to repeating positions, then let me know!
AP

OCTOBER 12, 2008 9:30 AM

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