visfutures

AGE 8+
1-X PLAYERS

Welcome to Vis Futures! ... where YOU have a say in how people use data in the Future!

WHAT IS IT?

Vis Futures is a card-based sketching game where players think critically (and playfully) about the future of data and visualization.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Players deal a set of cards that hint at a possible future, and a possible dataset in that future. Players then use those prompts to imagine and sketch new visualization designs and imagine ways that future people from a particular audience might encounter, interact with, or utilize data (quirks and all). At the end of each round, players share their visualizations, discuss, and vote on which scenarios and visualizations are the most creative!

WHY FUTURING FOR VISUALIZATION?

Our goal is to include more people (including visualization students, researchers, and practitioners, as well as clients and collaborators) in discussions of critical data issues that have implications for the future of data, visualization, and technology. This game encourages players to engage in future-forward design thinking, examining the increasingly complex implications of our relationships with data and technology, and considering how, where, and why visual representations of data might play a role. It can be pretty fun too!

To download printable cards and other materials go to:
https://dataexperience.cpsc.ucalgary.ca/visfutures/

CREATING THE GAME

We created the Vis Futures cards to help encourage visualization researchers, students, and practitioners to engage in more exploratory future-oriented design and reflection. Our initial designs emerged from the VisFutures Workshop at VIS 2020 (organized by Charles Perin, Sheelagh Carpendale, Katherine Currier, Lora Oehlberg, and Wesley Willett) where a group of 30+ visualization researchers gathered to collectively generate and experiment with new ideas for cards.

Based on the community's suggestions, Charles Perin, Andrea Castañeda Bueno, and Kuan-Cheng Lai at the University of Victoria developed an initial online prototype of the game. Petra Isenberg at Inria explored new rule sets across multiple deployments in information visualization courses and group workshops at Université Paris-Saclay. Finally, Mackenzie Dalton and Wesley Willett at the University of Calgary (with help from Lora Oehlberg) designed the physical card deck, while play-testing and and solidifying alternative rule sets.

INSPIRED BY

In creating the game, we drew inspiration from examples that span design, visualization, and HCI, including...

Design

- *The Situation Lab*'s The Thing From The Future, an imagination game in which players collaborate and compete to imagine objects from various futures.
- *Wired Magazine*'s long-running Found: Artifacts from the Future series which humorously extrapolated tech trends and contemporary anxieties through images of future detritus and everyday objects.

Visualization

- Visualizations created as part of the Death of the Desktop Workshop at IEEE VIS (2013).
- *Roberts and colleagues'* Five Design Sheet method for structuring visualization design.
- *He and Adar*'s VizItCards a card-based workshop for encouraging design practice and reinforcing concepts in graduate infovis courses.
- *PolicyViz*'s Graphic Continuum Flash Cards and Match It Game which encourage playful familiarization with common visualization idioms.

HCI

- The Building Utopia Toolkit, an Afrofuturist speculative design kit which uses playful card-driven exercises to explore future community outcomes
- *Ivanov and colleagues'* One Week in the Future workbook provides a framework for more structured mid-fidelity futuring sprints.

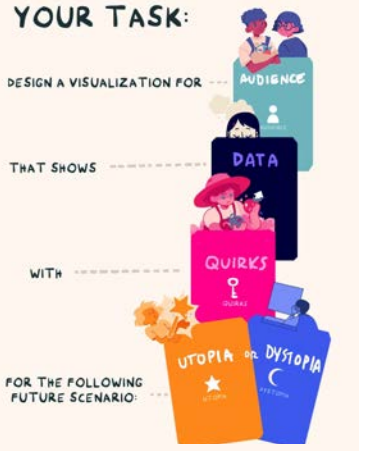
IN THIS KIT YOU'LL FIND...

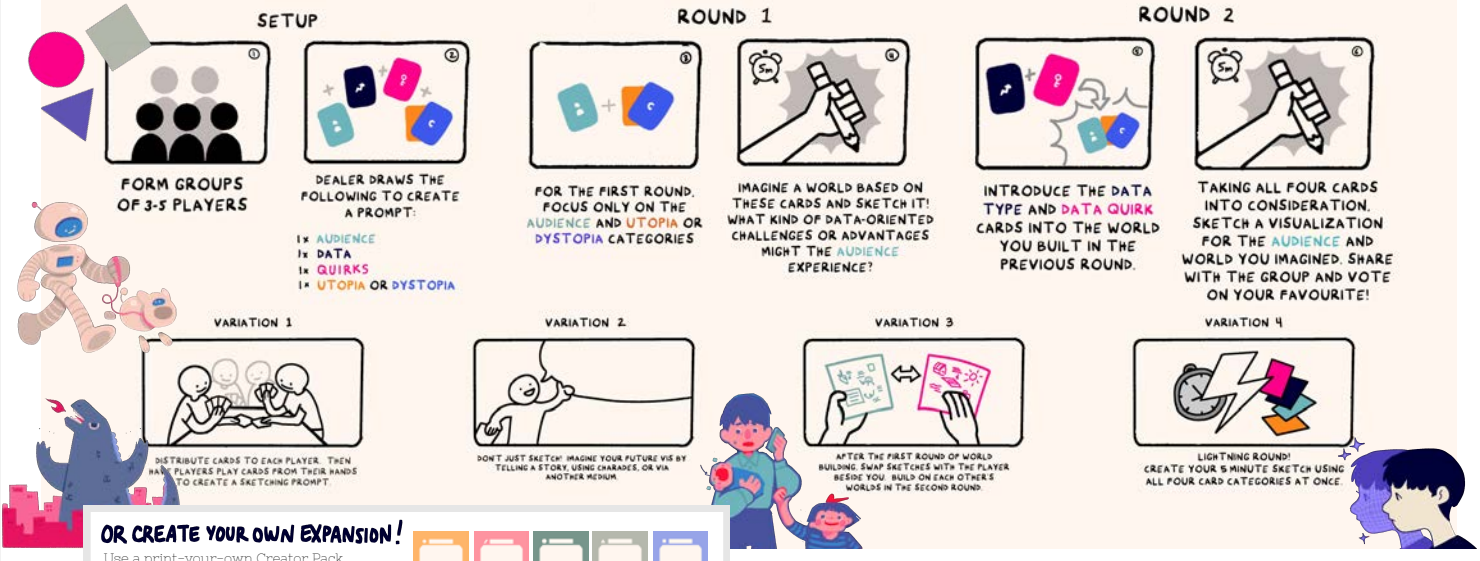
These Instructions
10 Audience Cards (2 wild)
10 Data Cards (2 wild)
10 Quirk Cards (2 wild)
5 Utopia Cards (2 wild)
5 Dystopia Cards (2 wild)

YOU'LL ALSO WANT...

Something to draw on!
Something to draw with!
A Timer?!

how to play:





OR CREATE YOUR OWN EXPANSION!

Use a print-your-own Creator Pack to add your own decks tailored to the specific futures or data you're most interested in!

REFLECTIONS

Based on our play-tests with multiple different iterations of the cards across various contexts (classes, workshops, informal meetings, etc.) and multiple types of participants (students, researchers, enthusiasts), as well as both online and in-person, a few themes emerged:

- **Specifying goals and visualization genres**: To encourage more general ideation the base deck does not include cards that clearly specify specific visualization goals or genres, forcing players to make decisions about these as part of the process. Creating dedicated card types with more concrete goals, tasks, or visualization types could help players skip this (sometimes challenging) decision step and focus on more nuanced visualization choices.
- **Timing**: Many board games include time restrictions to engage and challenge players. In our experience a 5 minute time restriction works well for experienced sketchers. However, students in our intro to visualization classes often needed more time. In almost all settings, 5 minute discussion rounds feel short, as players often have lots to share and discuss. If running the activity in a short time window, a visible timer or hourglass can help.
- **Single vs. multi-round variants**: Early versions of the game involved dealing and sketching with all four cards in a single "lightning" round. However new players often found this overwhelming. In addition to the 2-round version suggested in our current instructions, we have also had success with other multi-round variants, including revealing cards one-at-a-time over four rounds or letting players discard/redraw cards to create more focused prompts.
- **Create-your-own cards**: The base deck encourages ideation across a wide range of different audiences, futures, and data. However, customizable DIY decks (above) can focus thinking around a particular set of domain-specific challenges or technologies, leading to more specialized thinking and designs.
- **Revising ideas**: When particularly interesting or inspiring ideas emerge, we've often found it useful to introduce "build-on" rounds, where players play multiple rounds with the same cards, or selectively swap out just one or two cards to elaborate or explore adjacent concepts.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

Charles Perin
University of Victoria

Mackenzie Hisako Dalton
Lora Oehlberg
Wesley Willett
University of Calgary

Sheelagh Carpendale
Simon Fraser University

Petra Isenberg
Université Paris-Saclay, CNRS, Inria, LISN

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