The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim Quest Design

Level Design Documentation

Written By Kay Johnston

Contents

PROJECT GOALS & INITIAL CONCEPT

Project Goals

- Design a quest that is both fun and stays true to the lore of The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim.

- Design a level that appears within Skyrim but adds new locations and characters that the player can interact with.

- Create a multi-structured quest that has the player preforming multiple tasks to progress and finish the quest.

- Create 3 Different areas that all tie into the quest's narrative

- Design & Blockout a believable Skyrim level for a quest.

- Prototype fun gameplay so the player can play and get a look at what playing the quest would be like.

Initial Concept

- The quest will take place in Saranhold hold located In the southeast of Skyrim.

- The quest takes place 100 years after The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim main questline.

- Skyrim is now under Thalmor control after they launched an attack on Skyrim shortly after the conclusion of the civil war.

- The player will play as a young Nord farmer called Isteim. Whose home was recently attacked by Mercenaries.

- Saranhold has recently been struggling with these Mercenary raids with the Jarl providing no solution to the issue.

- Most of Skyrim Jarls are Thalmor puppets or so frightened of Thalmor intervention that they openly ignore issues within there hold.

- Isteim will take on the task himself and embark on a journey to wipe out the bandits and stop their raids on Saranhold.

RESEARCH & REFERENCE GATHERING

Skyrim Holds Breakdown

Skyrim consists of nine holds these are Whiterun Hold, The Rift, Falkreath Hold, Haafingar, Eastmarch, Hjaalmarch, The Reach, The Pale and Winterhold. Every hold features a major city that the player can visit throughout the game these are

- Whiterun Hold: Whiterun
- The Rift: Riften
- Falkreath Hold: Falkreath
- Haafingar: Solitude
- Eastmarch: Windhelm
- Hjaalmarch: Morthal
- The Reach: Markarth
- The Pale: Dawnstar
- Winterhold: Winterhold

The quest that I'm designing for the project will feature a new hold called Saranhold which is located in south east Skyrim just North of Riften.
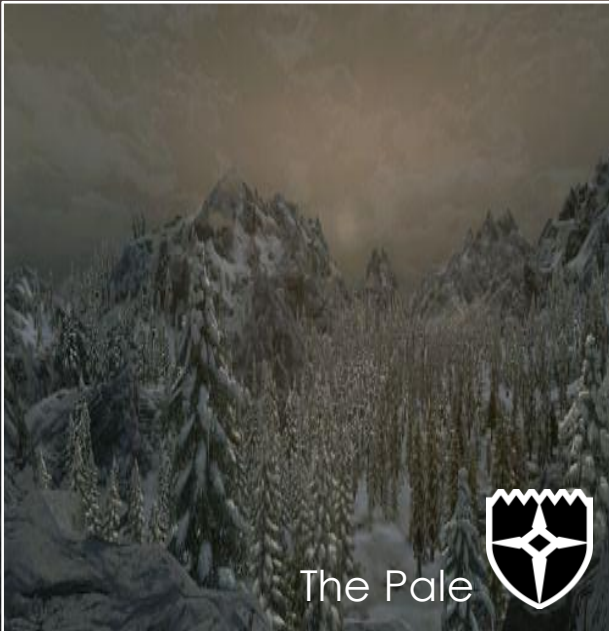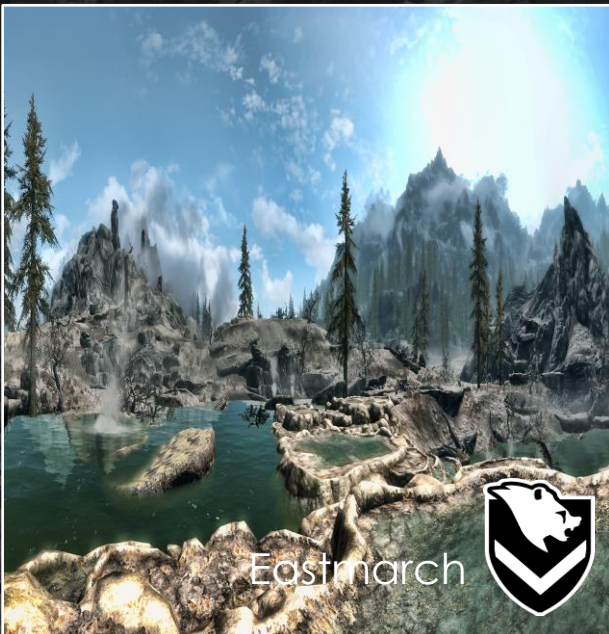
Whiterun Hold

Falkreath Hold

Haafingar

The Pale

Hjaalmarch

Winterhold

The Reach

Eastmarch

Level Reference Document (LRD)

While creating this level design document (LDD) I've also been working on a reference document that I can use while working on the game in the engine.

I have gathered reference on absolutely everything I plan to implement within my work when it comes to the different stage of my production pipeline this includes things such as

- Different terrain types both within Skyrim & the real-world

- Different cities and towns in Skyrim to get references for the different architecture styles, building placement, town layouts

- Interior reference for NPC locations such as general store's, alchemist's, inns, and jarls longhouse

- Quest reference for quest locations within the game. mercenary keeps, bandit camps, homesteads & farms

Important Notes

- Skyrim features lots of mountainous regions. My level should feature a large terrain with plenty of foliage

- Roads and pathways are also very common. My level should feature pathing, so the player has an idea where to travel to on the quest. I should also include waypoints/signs that point the player in the right direction

- Skyrim also has plenty of streams and rivers that flow through the land. I should include some within my level as well as bridges to cross between them.

- I should include more smaller waypoints throughout my level to reward players for exploring and add more to my overall project

SETTING THE SCENE FOR MY LEVEL

Skyrim Holds & How Saranhold Fits In?

- Skyrim's holds are all extremely different when it comes to scenery. While Whiterun hold features clear skies and open fields, The Reach features rocky terrain and mountain ranges and Winterhold is a barren winter land in a seemingly constant snowstorm.

- The hold that my quest will take place in is called Saranhold and is in southeast Skyrim. The southeast of Skyrim where Saranhold will be located is an open area with wild tress and lots of wildlife just north of a mountain range that hides behind The Rift. Over the years since the civil war The Rift became smaller as Saranhold grew.

- Due to the openness of the land and the health of the soil Saranhold attracts a lot of farmers and has a great economy from sales of livestock and food.

- Due to Saranhold's location it shares similar scenery to The Rift and it's surrounding areas. So, The Rift will be the focus when trying to visualize Saranhold.

Quest Narrative

You play as Isteim a local Saranhold farmer who lives a normal day to day life farming his land and selling crops and his livestock in Saranhold's town. Saranhold has been struggling with a lot of mercenary raids and one day after selling some crops in town Isteim returns home to find his house has been raided.

Enraged Isteim heads back into town to confront the jarl about the attack on his farm. Isteim asks the jarl to send soldiers to take care of the mercenaries attacking the town. However, the jarl refuses due to the mercenaries being employed by the Thalmor he doesn't want to risk Thalmor punishment.

After the jarls cowardice Isteim decides to take up arms and handle the mercenaries himself. If successful, he will free Saranhold from there raids and the town may flourish once again.

Below I have linked some of my narrative development work

Saranhold Key Locations

With the quest that I'm designing the player will visit three core locations as part of the quest. These locations are vital story locations so they will be much more visible and easier to navigate than other POI locations that may feature in the level.

The three core locations of my level are

- Isteim's Farm (Protagonist Home & Player Start Location)

- Saranhold (Town) (Main Populated Area Of The Level)

- Mercenaries Keep (Penultimate Quest Location Features Large Combat Encounter)

These locations will feature in the order they are listed as the player competes the quest. The quests narrative will take you do each locations. Sometimes returning to them to complete certain tasks.
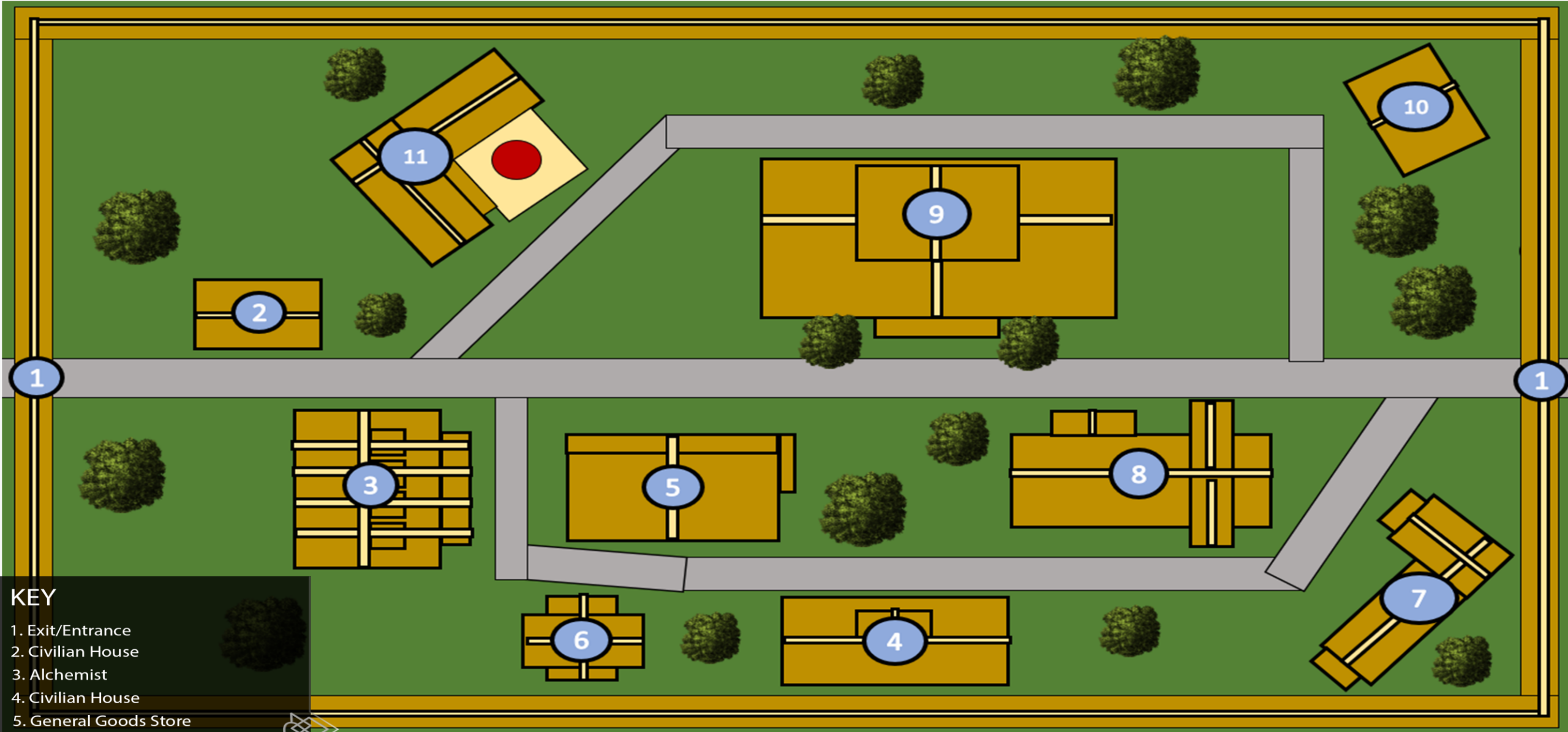
The next slides feature my top down 2D layout designs of these three core quest locations
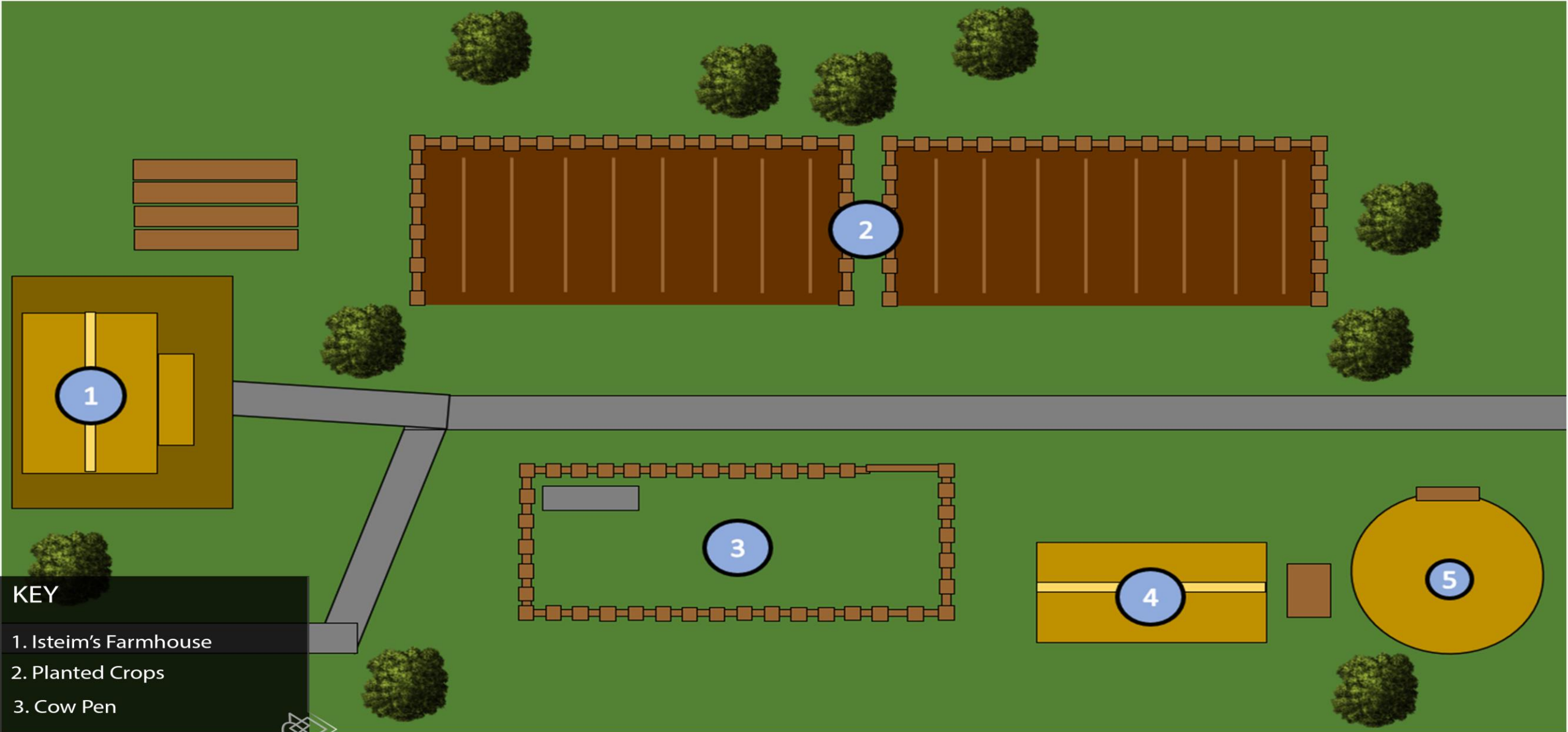
KEY

1. Isteim's Farmhouse

2. Planted Crops

3. Cow Pen

4. Stables

5. Wheat Mill

Isteim's Farm Top-Down 2D Layout

KEY

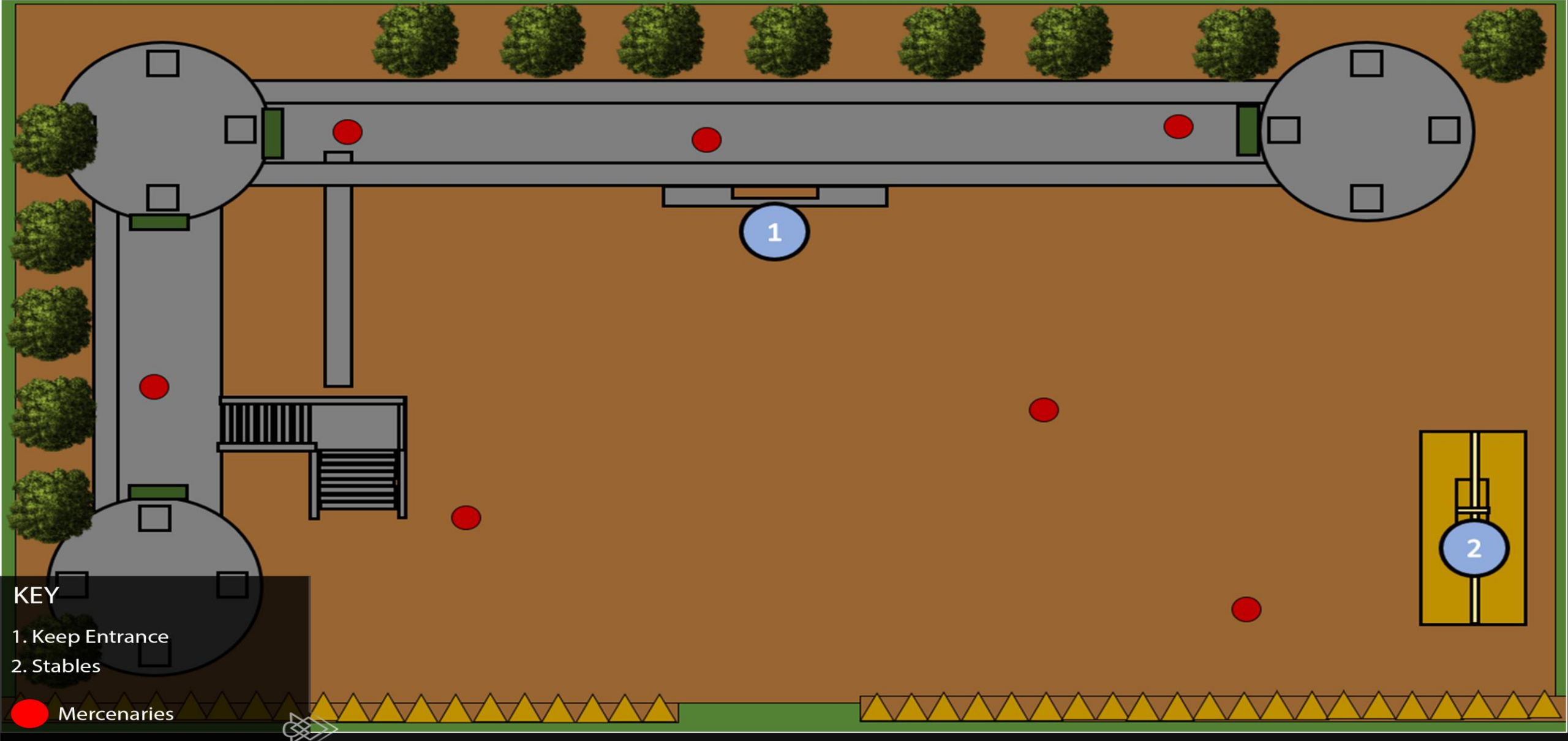1. Exit/Entrance
2. Civilian House
3. Alchemist
4. Civilian House
5. General Goods Store
6. Civilian House
7. Civilian House
8. Inn
9. Jarls Longhouse
10. Civilian House
11. Blacksmith

Saranhold Top-Down 2D Layout

KEY

1. Keep Entrance
2. Stables

● Mercenaries

Mercenary Keep Exterior Top-Down 2D Layout

KEY

Entrance/Exit

Locked Door

Unlocked Door

Button/Lever

● Mercenaries

Ⓛ Mercenary Leader

Mercenary Keep Interior Top-Down 2D Layout

PLANNING QUEST GAMEPLAY

Gameplay Pillars

Exploration
The level will feature plenty of POI to promote exploration and travelling of the path and exploring. Each POI will link into the narrative of the level and tell story's through the environment.

World Interaction
My level will feature lots of NPC some which you can interact with on the quest. I want to really hone in on level immersion and having it feel like a lived in world. I plan to have NPC Guards On Patrol, People working in stores, Blacksmiths, Jarl etc.

Combat
The level will feature a few potential combat encounters but the level will main focus on the large one at the end of the level. My game will feature simple combat so the player can engage with these encounters

NPC Types
(In Engine Key)

Blue: Player Character
The player character will be represented in blue. This will represent Isteim the main protagonist of the quest.

Green: NPC Characters
NPC characters will be green. This will include random NPCS in the world as well as characters you can communicate with such as the Jarl, Blacksmith and Inn keep.

Yellow: Guards
Skyrim is very well known for its guards and there actions and dialogue in game. I play to highlight the guards and give them patrol patterns in game to add more life to Saranhold.

Red: Enemy Characters
Enemy Characters that are hostile to the player will be highlighted in red. This includes the mercenaries as well as another hostile enemies at POIS

Gameplay Flowchart

This gameplay flowchart showcase how the quest will progress as the player plays through. The quest feature some side objectives and optional dialogue options to help further immerse the player in the quests narrative.

Due to the main town Saranhold being one of the key locations in my level I really wanted to make it a key component of the quest which has the player returning to preform tasks or have conversations with NPC Characters.

This is the base for the quest currently. I may make further changes as I develop it with engine. I want to consistently iterate on the best design

Flowchart: https://www.figma.com/file/i3sizHkE1a7TQz3OyIFVnD/Upskill%3A-LDD-Gameplay-Flowchart?node-id=0%3A1
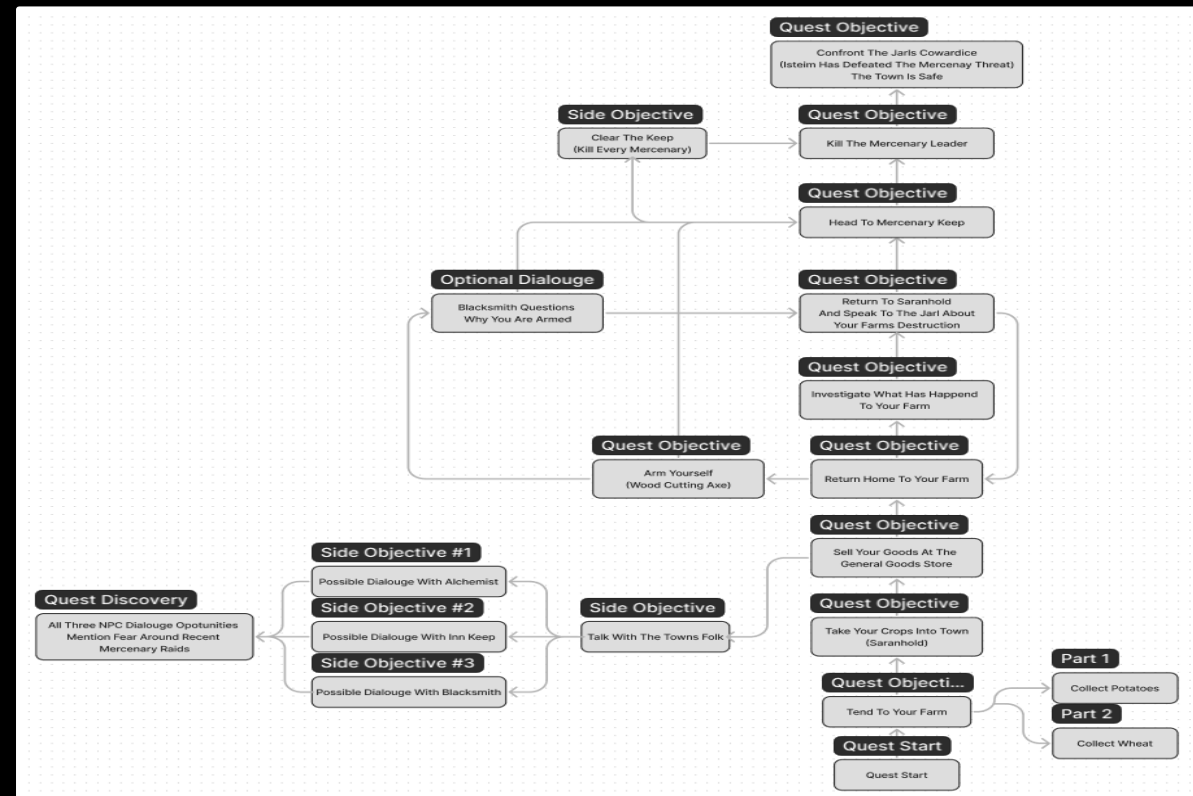
Gameplay Breakdown & Visualization

The gameplay breakdown showcase the timeline of my quest using visuals so its much clearer. This format allows me to further breakdown the quest asking questions such as

Where is this taking place?

Is this part of the Questline or a Side Objective?

What is the quest objective currently?

I can also come back to this chart we creating when level within the engine and use it as a guide so that the level stick to this plan the whole way through.

Gameplay Breakdown:
https://www.figma.com/file/fi0iAnccPCd7MG22fBSghY/Upskill%3A-Gameplay-Breakdown-%26-Visualization?node-id=0%3A1