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WSOA3003 – MDA Analysis on GWENT: The Witcher Card Game

Introduction

The aim of the analysis is to discuss the game *GWENT: The Witcher Card Game* (CD Projekt, 2016) using the MDA Framework (Hunicke, LeBlanc & Zubek, 2004), as well as discuss the elements in the game that contribute to data design and how they are implemented in the three different areas of the framework. *GWENT* is a strategy-based, card game that was initially introduced to players in *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt, 2015) and later was announced that it would be made into a standalone game by CD Projekt RED, the developers of *GWENT* and *The Witcher* Franchise ("GWENT: The Witcher Card Game", 2021).

The MDA Framework poses a way to analyse a game by looking at three different elements that make up a game. These elements are mechanics, dynamics, and aesthetics. The aim of the framework is to help the reader develop a new methodology and understanding of the iterative game design process. The framework also suggests that each of these elements are co-depending as well as heavily reliant on the player (Hunicke *et all*, 2004).

The goal of *GWENT* is to have the most amount of points by the end of a round. Each match consists of three rounds and the aim for the player is win two rounds to win the match. A round consists of players taking turn to play cards in the battlefield area, where each card has a specific value, which contributes to the players' scores, as well as another ability that either effects the opponent's or the player's cards that are in play. The round ends when the players have either passed or when they have no more cards to play (Green Cricket & Crozyr, 2018).

Mechanics

Mechanics can be defined as the various actions that the player-character can do with the help of the player's controls, which are implemented by the game's designer (Hunicke *et all*, 2004).

GWENT can be considered a card collecting game as well as a deck-building game. This means that there are elements in the game which contribute to card collection. An example of this would be that the player can earn kegs which hold different cards that the player can add to that specific deck. The elements that contribute to the deck-building mechanic is the fact that the player can manipulate their hand at the start of each round. Another mechanic that is in present in *GWENT* is the actual placement of card, meaning that the player must use card or place a card in the battlefield area for the game to continue.

In terms of data design, there are many different aspects that the player interacts with that contain different data. The main data that the player interacts with is in the hand that they are dealt in the beginning of each round. During the first round, the player is dealt ten random cards from the deck that they have chosen to play with and can redraw three times if they are playing first. If they are not playing first, the redraw amount is two. In the rounds that follow, the player is dealt three random cards, in addition to any cards that they might have kept from the previous round. The cards that are redrawn are also picked at random. This can also fall under resource control as the player has the ability to remove cards from their hand however they see fit but is still as risk of receiving the same card that had discarded as a result of the random generation.

Another piece of data that the player engages with is the values on the cards that the player uses. Most of the cards in the player's deck have certain values that could contribute to their total score, if the choose the player chooses to play them. For example, in the monster's deck, there is a card titled 'Geralt of Rivia' which has a power of 3 as well as has a special ability. The ability is that it card can be deployed to an enemy unit which has a power of nine or more and it will destroy it completely. There five different decks that the player can choose to play with, and each of the decks have different cards with abilities. Each deck contains cards with

power units and abilities, cards with power units and no abilities, cards with no power units but with abilities and cards that have healing abilities which increase the power unit of another card.

Dynamics

Dynamics can be defined as, "the run-time behaviour of the mechanics action on player inputs and each other's outputs over time." (Hunicke *et all*, 2004). This means that dynamics are a result of the mechanics as well as the player's input and the player's choices.

In *GWENT*, strategy can be considered a dynamic as the player can choose how they would like to the play each match. There are many different elements that accommodate the player's choice in gameplay. As mentioned above, there are five different decks that the player can choose before taking part in a match. These decks have different cards, which have different types of cards. There are decks that are more focussed on attack and bringing the other player's score down, whereas there are other decks that are more focussed on defending as well as increasing the player's score. This gives the player choice in what type of strategy they would like to use in the game. Once the player is dealt their hand, there is more opportunity to think about what type of strategy they want.

Another dynamic that is present in *GWENT* is passing. Passing refers to when a player skips their turn, and a player can choose when they want to pass their turn. A player can pass their turn when their score is too low, and they know that playing more cards will not improve their score. This allows for them to keep the cards they have in their hand for the next around, where they can accumulate a better score. A player can also pass a turn if their opponent has chosen to pass and they have a lower score. If the player passes as well, the player with the highest score instantly wins the round.

The only data that the player interacts with during this process, besides the data from the cards that they have in their hand, is the score that they are accumulating in the round. Based off what strategy the player chooses to use will influence the score that they accumulate in the end.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics are defined as the emotions that are evoked in a player whilst they are playing the game as well as interact with the system (Hunicke *et all*, 2004). There are two aesthetics that are prominent in *GWENT*, which include Challenge and Fellowship.

Challenge refers to game as an obstacle course (Hunicke *et all*, 2004). This suggests that the game system puts the player in different situations which are not as straight forward and encourages the player to think. This is present in *GWENT* in the fact that the player is either playing against an AI system or another player, online. The challenge comes into play because their opponents' choices in the gameplay are unpredictable and forces the player to make conscious decisions in their game.

Fellowship can be defined as game as social framework (Hunicke *et all*, 20114). This can be seen in *GWENT* as it is also a multiplayer game. This has resulted in the creation of a big community of *GWENT* players. As mentioned above, *GWENT* is a spinoff of *The Witcher* franchise meaning that there was already a big fanbase before the game had been created. Fellowship also allows the player to be challenged because players are competing against humans and not just the computer, which is a result of the system processing which deck the player has chosen before and finding an opponent that it best suited for the player.

Conclusion

GWENT: The Witcher Card Game is a game that has many elements that contribute to data design because the game is reliant on numbers, in regards to the gameplay and the end goal for the player, as well as the fact that the player's interaction with the system is processed and gives appropriate feedback to the player. Using the

MDA framework to analyse and discuss data design gives a better insight to the design process of the game and how the game processes data in order to make the player's experience easier but also challenging.

References

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