

WSOA3003A Assignment 1: Data Design & Game Analysis

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Gwent: The Witcher Card Game (CD Projekt, 2018) is a digital collectible card game developed and published by CD Projekt. This game will be analysed using the MDA framework (Hunicke et al., 2004) in relation to the game's data design.

Gwent is a turn-based combat card game in which the players take turns placing a card on the board from their deck of cards. Each card has a certain ability and a certain amount of "Power Points" on the card. The ability of the card varies from card to card; however, the overall intent of each card's ability is to either increase the player's number of "Power Points" or decrease their opponents number of "Power Points".

During a game of *Gwent*, a game consists of three rounds, in which the player must win two of the rounds to win the game. To win a round, the player must draft their cards from their deck and place them on the board in order to gain more "Power Points" than their enemy. Whoever has the higher amount of "Power Points" by the end of the round wins. A round is ended when either both players choose to pass their turns and proceed to the next round or when both players run out of cards from their deck.

Before the turn-based combat portion of the game begins, the first mechanic introduced to the player is the card drafting mechanic. The player drafts 25 cards into their deck from their card collection. Collecting cards is achieved through either crafting a certain card or purchasing a pack of cards. Card collection achieves a "Collection" dynamic (Boller, 2013) as the player can set and achieve personal goals of acquiring certain cards. The total power of the cards drafted cannot exceed the player's recruitment cap stat. This stat cap was put in place as a possible result of data design, to ensure that both players are roughly equally matched in power when they play the game. This was done so that players could not simply use only their most powerful cards in the game, which would disadvantage a player who only has weak cards. Therefore, the game focuses more on the strategy of card placement and card abilities instead of card power. However, *Gwent* is not solely strategy based as it introduces a level of chance in its card drafting mechanic. The cards out of the 25 that can be drawn from a deck at the start of a round are randomised, therefore players need to adapt their strategy

based on the cards in they have in-hand. To mitigate the potential frustration of having an undesirable card in a hand in a round, the game allows the player to redraw 2 other cards from their deck. However, this redrawn card is also random, as this creates a risk versus reward dynamic in the game, as the player needs to decide whether to redraw an unfavourable card at the risk of getting an even more unfavourable card.

During the turn-based combat portion of *Gwent*, the player must analyse the data of their cards and decks to determine the best combinations of cards and strategies to win the game, as different cards perform better or differently when played in different rows (i.e. the melee row and the ranged row) or alongside certain cards to trigger different abilities. For example, when the “Prince Stennis” card is deployed in the melee row, it increases another card’s “Power Points” by 4 points, but when it is deployed in the range row it increases four other cards’ “Power Points” by 1.

Depending on the deck the player builds and what faction the player chooses, the player’s interaction with the game’s systems and their playstyle will differ depending on their cards and faction abilities, in relation to their opponent’s deck, faction and choices. The player’s interaction between cards, systems, and opponents, which results in the player either winning or losing the game creates, a “Race to the Finish” dynamic (Boller, 2013) as the player must utilise these interactions to compete against their opponent so that they are first to gain more “Power Points”.

In relation to the game’s aesthetics, *Gwent*’s aesthetics can be grouped under “Challenge” and “Fantasy” (Hunicke et al., 2004). Because *Gwent* is tied into the larger franchise of *The Witcher*, the player can immerse themselves further in the fantasy world of *The Witcher*, through learning about various characters, items and lore in *Gwent*. *Gwent* also has a “Challenge” aesthetic as the game encourages the player to challenge themselves and urges the player to learn and master the game’s mechanics and develop optimal decks and strategies to overcome their opponent.

Gwent displays effective data design through its in-depth and intricate mechanics that interlink the game’s various systems, which achieves effective dynamics and overarching aesthetics that the player can experience while in-game.

Bibliography

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