

The Mechanics, Dynamics and Aesthetics of Gwent

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1 Introduction

This report intends to discuss and analyse the digital card game using by applying the mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics (MDA) framework. The Gwent version that is available as part of the Witcher 3: The wild hunt will be the iteration discussed. This paper will first discuss the dominant game mechanics and resulting dynamics and conclude with the overall Aesthetics which are evoked.

2 Mechanics and Dynamics

The main data mechanic in Gwent that everything else is built around is the vitality that is allocated to each player. Every card has a vitality value indicated which is added to the player's total vitality when entering the field. The winner of each round is determined by the player who has the highest vitality which is then reduced back to 0 for the following round. Players are only allocated 10 random cards from their deck at the beginning of the game and can only gain more cards by employing other mechanics available through specific cards or faction mechanics. Players choose when to stop playing cards by passing for the round which removes the player's further input from the given round. This system creates great value within the each card available to each player as having more cards than your opponent is particularly advantageous. Players will often forfeit the opening round as a sacrifice to have a card advantage over the opposition in the following round. This creates a risk versus reward type dynamic every time a card is played. Players must determine whether a card is worth playing at a particular point in the game cycle.

Individual cards within the game of Gwent introduce secondary mechanics into the game that influence the game state. Perhaps the most influential mechanic being that of cards that have the spy mechanic. Spy cards are placed on the opponents battle field and contribute towards the opposition vitality but allow the player to draw 2 extra cards from their deck. This creates an immediate card advantage for the player at the cost of losing ground with regards to vitality in that particular round. If used correctly, spy cards are perhaps the most overpowered mechanic in the whole game as the value of the card advantage can often times far outweigh the trade off. A common strategy that can be particularly effective if the player is dealt a few spy cards in the opening hand is to play all of them in the first round and pass without playing any other cards. Unless the opponent is able to counter these cards with spy cards of their own, the player will go into the next round with a significant card advantage. The ability to draw more cards from the deck also has the chance of drawing more powerful cards that the player may not have had to

use otherwise. This mechanic throws the game into a state of in-balance unless countered and it's effects have been reduced in other iterations of the game.

Each player places one card, each turn upon a 'battlefield' which is broken up into 3 lanes on either side. Every vitality card has a designated lane that they are to be played on. Many of the games secondary mechanics involve affecting adjacent cards that are in the same lane. The dominant lane mechanic being that of weather cards which reduce each card in a specific lane's vitality to 1 on both sides of the field. Which lane is affected depends on the specific special card is played. Each card only affects one lane with the exception of 'Skellige storm' card which affects both the second and third lanes. These cards can be countered by a single 'clear skies' card which removes any weather conditions on the field. Weather cards allow the player choke out an opposition that plays many cards on the battlefield with the trade off of also being limited to playing cards in the affected lanes. Players who use decks of the 'Monsters' faction are particularly affected as they largely include cards that summon duplicate cards to the same row in order to build up a high vitality.

3 Resulting Aesthetics and Conclusion

The overarching aesthetic that is created by the mechanics and dynamics in Gwent is that of challenge in devising a winning strategy using the randomly assigned cards. Players need to become acutely familiar with their cards in order to master the game. The concept of risk versus reward is also a prevalent aesthetic as each player's strategy relies on choosing the correct moments to play their card which are in limited supply. Players may opt to sacrifice the first round to the opponent in order save what they have for the late game. The game becomes rewarding when the player is able to successfully use the card mechanics together to achieve victory.

The game, being somewhat unbalanced in the instance of spy strategies, allows the dominance of the rounds to move like a pendulum. This is chaotic but enjoyable and fits well into the larger game of the Witcher 3 . It invokes secondary aesthetics of unpredictability and even further challenge. Many other card games available opt for more complicated gameplay mechanics which are more balanced but Gwent ensures a level of easy to learn but not that easy to master that is missed by more competitive card games.