

MDA Analysis- GWENT: The Witcher Card Game

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Data design is used in many games, in this report we will be analysing the types of data used in “Gwent: The Witcher Card Game”. There are two types of data we will be using to analyse this game, numerical data and categorical data. These two types of data give rise to many different mechanics and in return giving players a variety of dynamics to build strategies on. Finally we will look at how the addition of these new data sets added the stand alone game has change the game play from the “The Witcher 3” GWENT. We will be discussing these mechanic and dynamics in the sections to follow.

For the purpose of this report we will be discussing the general mechanic and gameplay.

Basic Data Types Found In GWENT

Cards games such as GWENT use a data in various areas of the game. We will be looking at these forms of data both in gameplay and outside the battlefield of GWENT.

The following is some of the basic numerical and categorical data sets used in GWENT:

Numerical Data	Categorical Data
Recruitment limit & Card Recruitment points	Faction Type
Card Power Level	Card Groups
Total Power Level	Card Types
Round count and wins/losses	Leader Cards
Deck Size	Card Abilities (skill Actions)
Hand card count	Rows
Damage, boost or healing points	
Ability uses and cooldowns	
Redraw count	

Other Types of Data: These data sets will not be discussed in depth for the purpose of this report: Time, Boolean and other Numerical data sets :

Data type and set
Time: Round timers, Turn timers and battle timers.
Boolean: Round Win or lose , Battle Win or lose
Numerical: Game Win/Loss Count, Currency, Experience Points, Crown Progress, Rank Level

Mechanics and Gameplay

When these data sets work together, they create mechanics the player can use to take and make calculated actions during the battle as well as prior and post battle. Some of the basic actions are as follows: Playing cards, using card abilities, ending current turn or passing (skipping the rest of the round), using leader skills, displaying cards in hand or grave. The question is how to the data sets mentioned affect the gameplay and use of these mechanics? Throughout this section, you will see the word strategies used often, these strategies will be discussed under the dynamics section.

Starting off: When starting off players should focus on the following data sets:

1. Recruitment limit and card recruitment points

2. Deck count
3. Faction and card types
4. Leader and card abilities
5. Card groups

When building their deck, players should try to focus on cards that grant advantages to each other as well as the faction types, this makes it easier for the player to develop and use strategies that are well based around certain faction and card types. The player starts off with ten cards in their hand and are allowed two redraws before each round, after each round the player will be given three cards from their deck provided the hand count does not exceed 10. Paying attention to the number of cards in your hand is also key to creating strategies.

Playing cards: When players play cards from their hand, they should focus on five key data sets:

1. The number cards in their hand and deck.
2. The round count and wins and losses.
3. Cards power level and abilities.
4. Total power level, both theirs and the opponents.
5. Card type.

Players should then make moves based off from these key factors as it can affect current round as well as future rounds. During each turn, each player is allowed to play one card from their hand and/or use a leader's ability. Although some cards allow you to play or draw additional cards, hence focusing on the card's abilities are of key importance. Some cards also allow you to boost your current total power level or even decrease your opponents power level.

Dynamics and Strategies influenced By Data

The mechanic provided to the player are vast and thus this creates the opportunity for better strategies and dynamics. From actions such as weather effects, attacks, spying, shielding, ambushing, etc; each action can be combined using different card types and abilities, and using factions to increase the strategies effectiveness. Below we will discuss some of the dynamics and how they are used.

1. **Deck Building:** First thing you should remember about deck building is that the less the deck count is the better the probability of obtaining a card you want. This is one of the key dynamics used when building a deck. There are also different ways in which you can decrease the number of cards in the deck, such as creating a swam deck (which will be discussed under faction dynamics), having a variety of card groups also help as certain cards cannot affect certain card groups.

The next two dynamics requires the player to win the previous round and both lead to the same outcome.

2. **Baiting/ Bleeding your opponent:** This dynamic requires you to focus on the number of cards you have in your hand and deck. The player then plays low level cards in order to further decrease their opponent's deck and hand count.
3. **Dry-passing:** This method is used in other card games as well, and is the opposite of bleeding, as the player passes the round without making any plays. This strategy does come at a great risk, providing your opponent with a possible comeback.
4. **Turn Ending:** keeping track of the number of cards you have in your hand and deck is important before ending each round. It is almost never a good strategy to end a round with 8 or more cards in your hand. This is because one of the automatic mechanics of the game allows you to draw three cards from your deck each round.

Faction Dynamics

GWENT provides players to build decks around 6 factions, each housing unique cards and abilities. Hence making certain factions better when developing certain strategies. We will briefly review the factions and these strategies below:

1. **Northern Realms:** As a human based faction, it relies a lot on there numbers and their siege engines. Siege engines are good for breaking down enemy defences. Although their greatest strength relying to much on engine building can prove to be a great weakness as well.
2. **Nilfgaard:** Focusing more on soldier type units, the Nilfgaard faction makes up for what it lags in power by making use of its cunning abilities. A faction that uses spies and reveal cards, allows you to view opponent's hands. This allows you to change your strategies on the spot. Although using to much spy cards can result in you decreasing your deck at faster rate. Using this faction could also result in less proactive plays due to relying to much on opponents actions.
3. **Scoia'tael:** This faction focuses around ambush strategies, making use of tricks and traps to obtain victory. The faction makes use of many removal card types, which decrease enemy units. Although setting these strategies up when given first play can prove nearly impossible and hence not a good choice to start a round off with.
4. **Monsters:** the best strategy a monster deck can provide is overwhelming your opponent. This is done through swarming. Many of the Monster faction cards have the ability to call other cars of the same type to the field or hand. Thus by focusing of the appropriate data types (card abilities, card types and deck/ hand count) one can successfully use this dynamic to overcome opponents. Although one flaw to this is the recruitment limit, which could possible force you to use up most of your cards during a round. Other strategies would be building a deck around weather effects and card consuming.
5. **Skellige:** This factions abilities revolve around resurrection and boosts through taking damage. Building a deck around sacrificial cards and resurrection cards can help quick comebacks and turn the game completely around.
6. **The Syndicate:** I am not familiar with this faction and research has shown that it is one of the difficult factions to build a deck around and play with. Some players believe that it is still unbalance and could use some improvement. [2]

Aesthetics driven by game data and design decisions

In order to balance the game more and make it more engaging for player many design choices have change when compared to the base game. These changes include, battle setups, deck building, card types and abilities and even game art. These changes have occurred while still keeping the core mechanics of the game. We will look at how these design changes and new data sets have affected gameplay and player engagement.

1. Changing the card draw amount- In the base game players are only allowed to draw a card through special faction abilities or by winning the round. In the stand alone version this is not the case as players can now draw three cards and the beginning of each round. This increases the competitive feel of the game as it increases the chance of a comeback.
2. Changing the card types by increasing the amount of data cards can house, such as card groups, it allows players to have more choices when building their decks, giving off a sense of control.
3. Adding abilities to cards gives players more control and greater sense of agency allowing the player to have more options to build strategies around.
4. By giving cards new abilities to deal damage gives of a sense of satisfaction when destroying enemy units.

Conclusion

Overall, compared to the base game, GWENT has changed in all three areas of the MDA framework. The cards are designed to interact more with each other which also gives a better sense of game play and dynamics, rather than playing cards that just affect your score. This has made the game more engaging and brought about a certain complexity to the game. Although the introduction to these new mechanics made GWENT more difficult to completely master. In the end, it is clear that card advantage and strategy building is key to winning. As a CCG (card collecting game) the game has become a good strategy turned based game, while still keeping and improving the core mechanic of strategy development and deck building, bring about effective gameplay that everyone can enjoy.

References

- [1] GWENT: The Witcher Card Game. 2021. *GWENT: The Witcher Card Game*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.playgwent.com/en>> [Accessed 27 March 2021].
- [2] Forums - CD PROJEKT RED. 2021. *What's Your Opinion of the Syndicate Faction? [Poll]*. [online] Available at: <<https://forums.cdprojektred.com/index.php?threads/whats-your-opinion-of-the-syndicate-faction-poll.11009467/page-3>> [Accessed 27 March 2021].