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COURSE CODE: WSOA3003A

ESSAY TOPIC: MDA Analysis on Gwent's Data Design

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Date: 26 March 2021



Screenshot of the start up scene in Gwent (Lee and Redesiuk, 2018)

The Mechanics, Dynamics and Aesthetics (MDA) framework (Hunicke, LeBlanc, Zubek, 2004) is a formal development framework which analyses systems such as games to help developers design and understand systems according to the three main aspects of a system, it's systematic rules, reactions and aesthetic feeling of the system.

The MDA framework can be used to analyse *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game* (Lee and Redesiuk, 2018) as a whole because the game follows the mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics categories like many other games do. However, we will also be using the MDA framework to understand what, why and how *Gwent* designs and manipulates data within the game's system. *Gwent*, like most turn based combat games use data particularly to initialise progression through the game, between two participants in the game, whether one of the participants is a player or Non-Playable Character (NPC).

To reiterate, *Gwent* is a turn-based combat deck building game, with each game taking three rounds. Each player, or NPC, must play a single card, from a deck of 25 cards, per turn. Each deck belongs to a faction that offers different play styles and therefore, holds different ranges of data for the system to work with. The goal of the game is to win two out of three rounds, using the cards special abilities to gain points. A player wins a round by gaining more points on board than their opponent, which can be accomplished by having cards with the most points on the board during that round. Card advantage is often what wins the game in *Gwent* due to the individuality of each card being able to do something completely different to other cards in a deck.

Gwent's online community allows the players to participate with the game further than just the goals of the game, rather players can compete amongst each other for awards and mastery statuses (see **figure 1**) from the game which in turn encourages players to engage more with the system and allowing the data the system contains to broaden with each player. This broadening of game data is important for the purpose of widening a systems abilities to process data and provide data in return, increasing both the popularity of the game and the players interest to keep engaging with the core mechanics of the game.

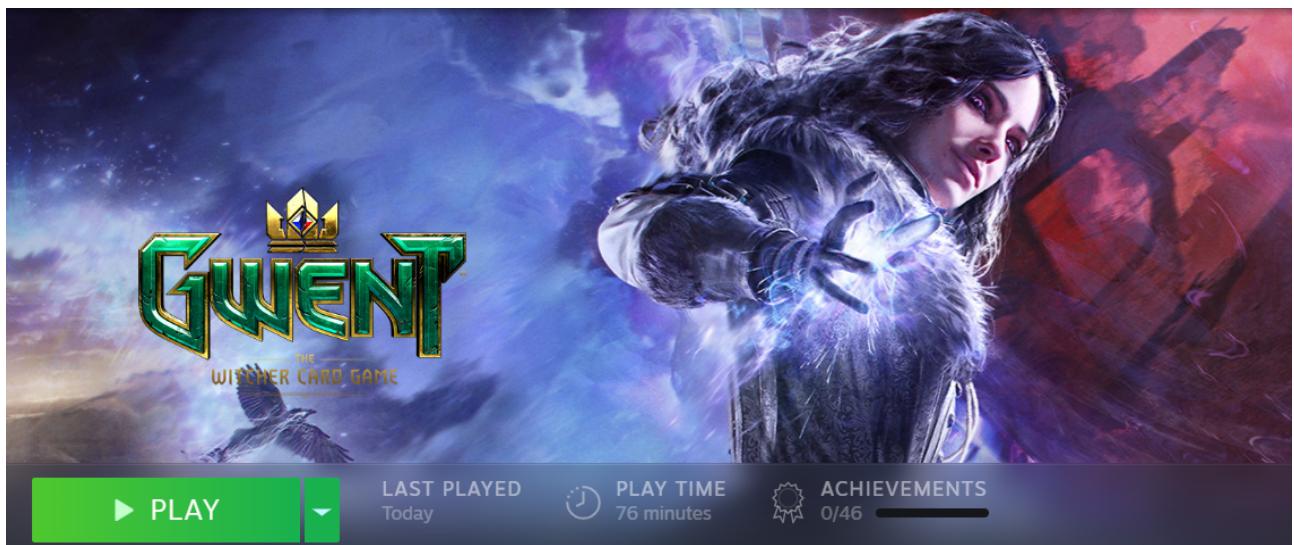


Figure 1 shows a screenshot of the online acknowledgment a player can get for completing challenges and gaining achievement (Lee and Redesiuk, 2018)

The mechanics data of the game is the data that makes the mechanics of the game. A game's mechanics are the rules and data regulations that are stated through techniques like dialogue, sound and essentially data in some way. In *Gwent*, the core mechanic is the deck building. This means that the players are primarily required to use the cards, and their individual abilities, in their decks to win the round with the most points. Each card has a point score, some of the cards have abilities, while all of the cards have a brief description of the figure on the card (see **figure 2**). Cards lose points against cards with the description or ability to attack cards with certain points or certain cards in general. For example, the A card had the ability to destroy a beast with no exceptions or rebuttals to the card, so even though its point score was below that of the beast card's score, the beast card was still destroyed. The winner of the round is the player with the most points, but the winner of the game is the player who won two rounds out of three.

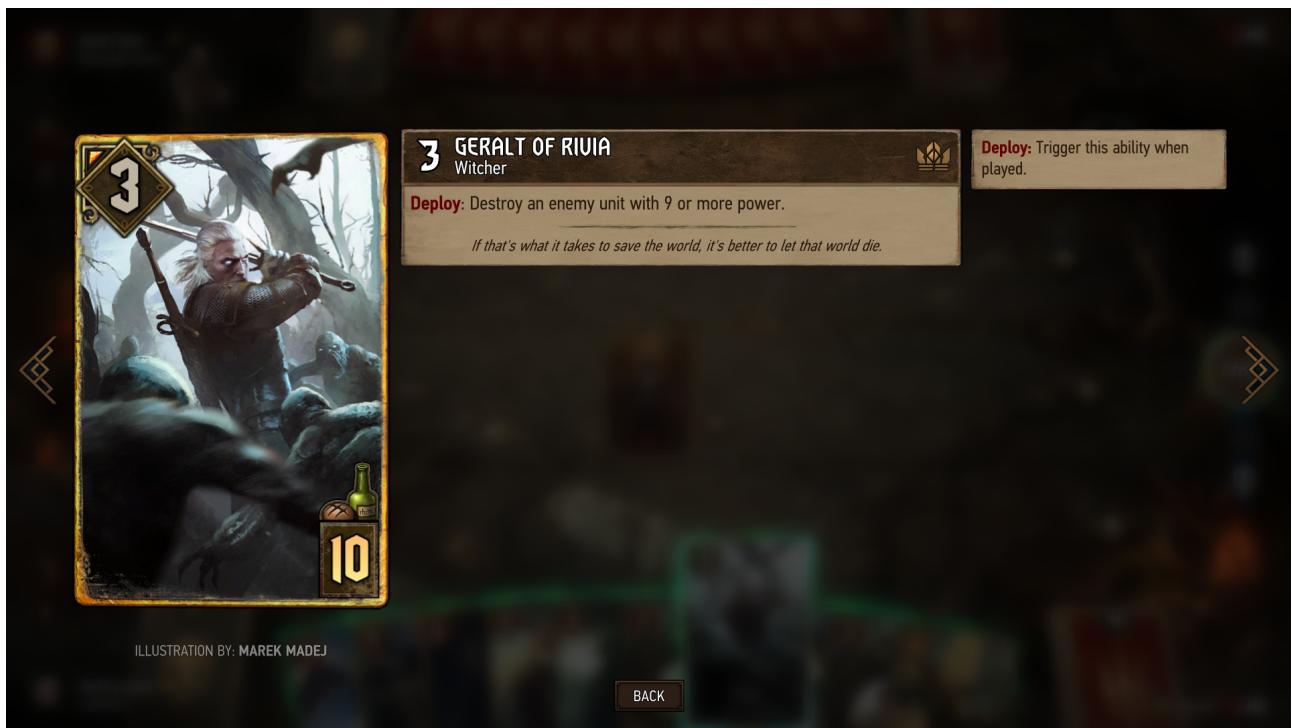


Figure 2 shows a screenshot of a card in *Gwent* called the 'Geralt of Rivia' which is a Witcher card that has a point score of 3, an ability that destroys an opponents card if the cards point score is 9 or above, and is triggered as the card is deployed (Lee and Redesiuk, 2018)

The elements of data mentioned above is the game's mechanical data, revolving around the main theme of deck building, which interacts with other means of data in the game and eventually helps the player evolve while the game progresses due to data manipulation between the player and the system.

Furthermore, the game's controls, goals, and general system of the game are explicitly displayed through dynamics and user interface focused representations throughout the game, such as that the player knows from the opening scene of what platform this game works best on or which controls on game devices will be used most often by the game (see **figure 3**). This provides the

player with a feeling of recognition, because the player is being granted mechanical, dynamical and aesthetically designed data that is easy for them to understand in order to predict what game they will be interacting with and therefore what to expect from the system.

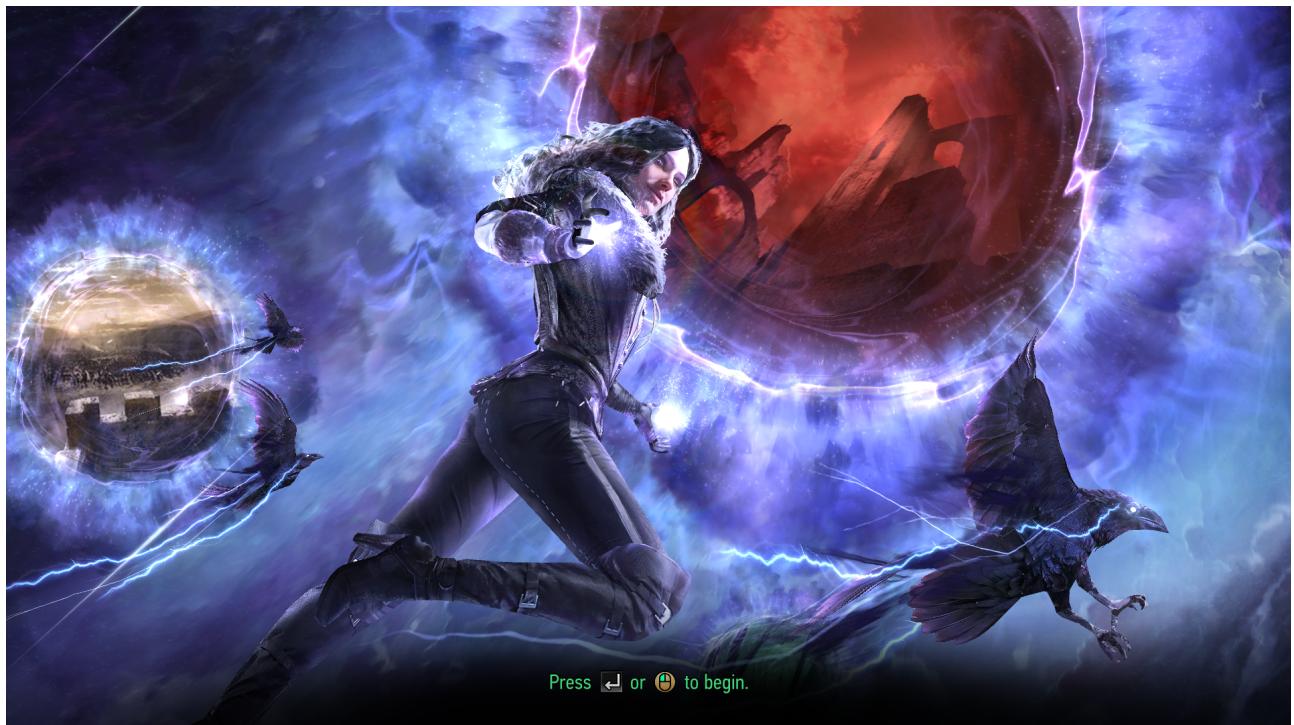


Figure 3 shows the first scene of *Gwent* where the player understand that this is a computer game that works with the simple clicking of a mouse, which is the main interactive communicative device used by the system (Lee and Redesiuk, 2018)

The understanding of how to communicate and interact with the systems mechanic data is the first part out of three to fully engaging with the data design of a system such as the *Gwent* card game. The second part of engagement with the game system's data is the immersion of the player with the dynamic data of the system. The dynamics of a game, from a game designers perspective, is not just the game's systematical reactions to the player interacting with the game mechanics, but is also every aspect of the game which displays the games patterns. Patterns being the data defined by the game to help the players evolve with the game as they progress and interact with the mechanics of the game. This can range from the over arching mechanical theme of the game, such as *Gwent*'s theme being a deck building game that collaborates the dynamics of collection and construction and therefore evolves the player as they progressively collect and construct better decks to use and win with in the game, to the individual *Gwent* card abilities which are the dynamics that players are most aware of.

The reason why it is important for game designers to not only think of dynamics through the players sight because not all learners are driven by the same aspects of game data. The game designers therefore have to design the game dynamic data in order to tailor the game mechanics and address the individual motivations of players.

This, in turn brings attention to the aesthetics of the game, such as how the game dynamics according to the players rather than the designers are sometimes disregarded by designers. The game aesthetics however, revolve entirely around the view of the player. The aesthetics data of a game should urge the players to want to interact with the game, such as that colour schemes are complementary to the mechanical theme of the game, that the feedback of the game is appropriate and not too overwhelming with misconceptualised dynamics or effects. Mastery, The aesthetics data in *Gwent* is supposed to challenge the players to try master the mechanics of the game, and the game does indeed succeed in doing this as the game features several modes of gameplay which is made available to the player only after they have won a certain amount of games and reached a certain rank in the system. *Gwent* online community also influences players to want to compete against other players, and the system itself, in order to raise their ranks.

Throughout the game, the player is required to interact with the three data designed aspects in order to understand the patterns of the game and evolve with it. Furthermore, the player is required to use their mouse to interact with the combat data of the system as well as the mechanical data allowing players do specific actions such as pass a round in a game. For instance, the player is given the chance to use their mouse to click on the ‘passing’ mechanic in a round (see **figure 4 and 5**). This allows the player, or gives the player’s opponent the chance, to save energy and cards for a round where their chances of winning are greater, if they feel like the opponents point score for that round are too high or if they feel like their scores are high enough and they want the opponent to end the round as well. However, when a round is passed, all the cards on the board will be destroyed and both players point scores will reset back to 0. The game requires players to understand that if a player has passed a round in the game, it is hinting to the player that the opponent has surrendered that round to them to do what they like, either to keep earning points to get their points higher than the opposing player’s or accept that the player recognises that their opponents score is greater than theirs and they would like to surrender that round to them. If the player, who didn’t pass the round, does not realise this and continues to place cards down and earn points well above what they need to to win the round, they essentially have wasted those cards and prevented themselves from gaining the points earned with those cards in another round and winning the game.

The above situation collaborates all three data designed parts of *Gwent*’s system, the mechanical data of providing the player with the action of passing a round would be given to the players for strategic purposes, but also given to them for aesthetic purposes. If the player loses their ambition to master the game or win a round because of the over powering points of the opposing player, then they essentially lose their interest in the game which would lead to a failure to design appropriate aesthetic data for the game. Furthermore, the above scenario primarily depends on the players understanding of the dynamic data of what happens when interacting with the ‘pass’ mechanic.

This manner of thought is how game developers use the MDA framework to design games which contain thoughtfully setup data manipulation in order to make the game expressively player engaging.

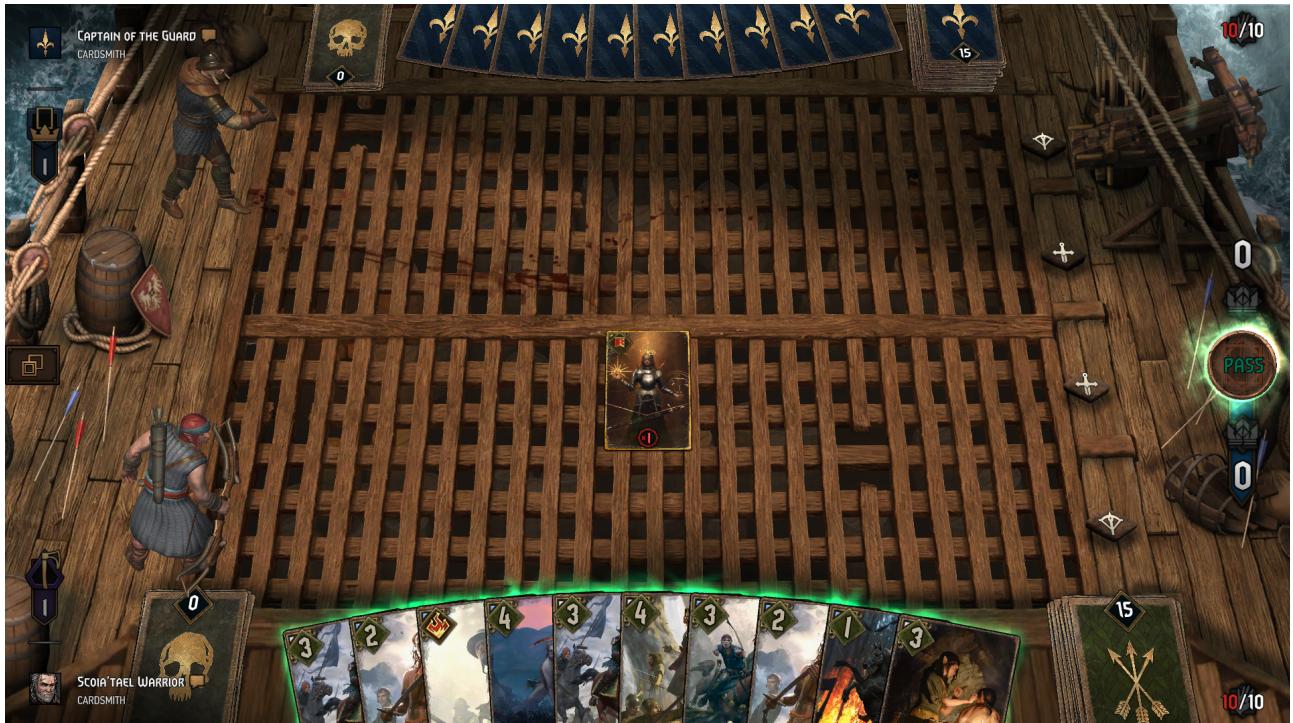


Figure 4 this screenshot shows the gameplay of *Gwent*'s passing mechanic that needs to be held down (the yellow light needs to go around the circular image, to the right of the screen, entirely) for a certain time before the mechanic is registered, to prevent the player from interacting with such an influential mechanic accidentally (Lee and Redesiuk, 2018)

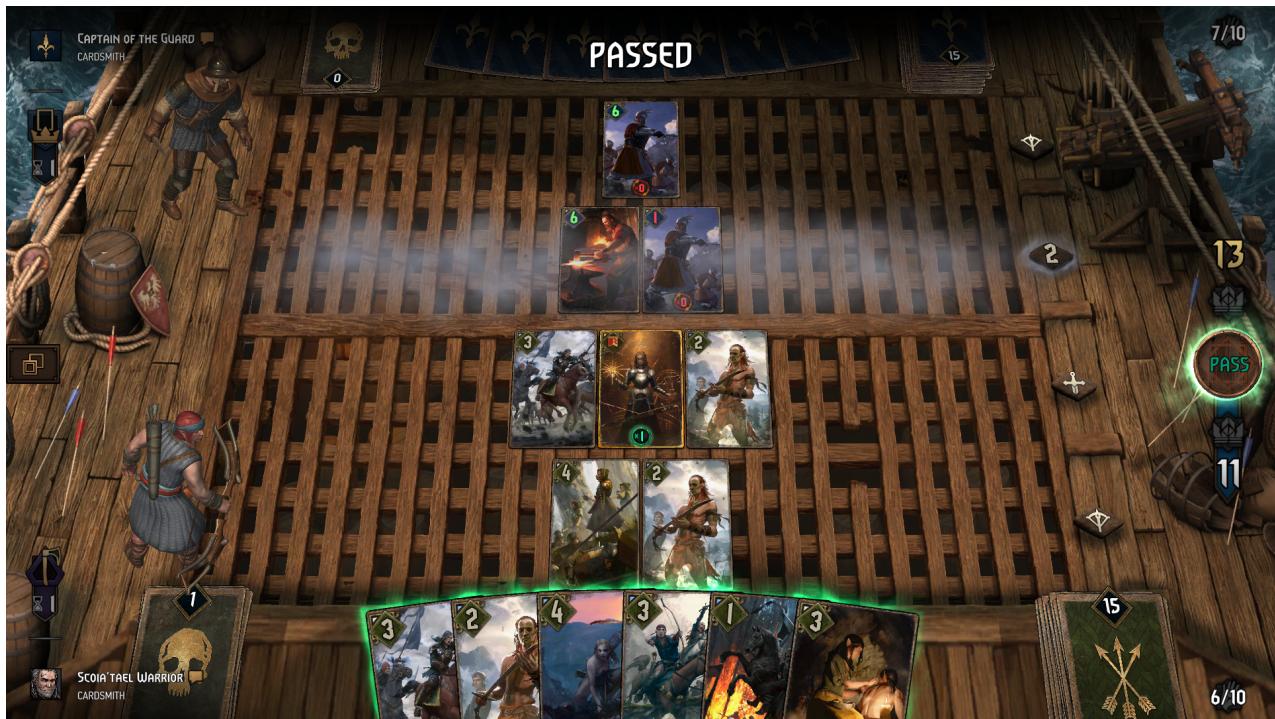


Figure 5 this screenshot shows the gameplay of *Gwent's* passing mechanic being instated by the players opponent (Lee and Redesiuk, 2018)

Reference List

- Lee, B & Redesiuk, K. (Microsoft Windows 23 October 2018, PlayStation 4, Xbox One 4 December 2018, iOS 29 October 2019, Android 24 March 2020.) *Gwent: The Witcher Card Game*. [Online]. Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, iOS, Android. Place of Publication: CD Projekt.
- Hunicke, R & Leblanc, M & Zubek, R. (2004). *MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research*. 1-5. AAAI Workshop. Available from URL: <https://www.aaai.org/Papers/Workshops/2004/WS-04-04/WS04-04-001.pdf>