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TASK: ASSIGNMENT 1

TITLE /TOPIC: MDA ANALYSIS – DATA DESIGN

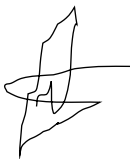
DUE DATE: 29/03/2021

CHOSEN TOPIC: GWENT: The Witcher Card Game

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After extensive reviewing of *GWENT: The Witcher Card Game*, it can be said that it is a perfect game that ties in with data design. Following the reading of Hunicke, LeBlanc, and Zubek, the *Mechanics, Dynamics, Aesthetics framework* can be used to analyse just how each component of the game works and their effects on overall functionality, specifically looking at its data design. *GWENT: The Witcher Card Game* is a 3D top-down video game creation of the company CD PROJEK RED, having been released on the 25th of October 2018. Firstly, the analysis will deconstruct how the player interacts with *GWENT*, determining the controls of the game and how it affects game state and player reaction. It is important to note how the mechanics of *GWENT* integrate into the dynamics that it produces. The controls create player behaviour, such as tactical responses against their opponent. This is done according to numerical gameplay that this analysis will further provide information and pictorial examples. Using data design as a basis of analysis, the aesthetics of the game evidently indicate this information through simplicity and appeal. It is critical for a game to have aesthetics as it provides necessary visual information to the player, however this will be expanded on further into the analysis. The focus of the analysis will begin with the Mechanics of *GWENT*.

According to Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek (2004, p. 1722), the definition of a Mechanic is “the particular components of the game, at the level of data representation and algorithms” (Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek 2004). The card game *GWENT* has multiple components that are integrated into an algorithm, such as movement, controls and the point system. To start, something as simple as the controls. From the perspective of playing on a computer, the player only needs a mouse to be able to play *GWENT*. The game is turn-based, having only two players oppose each other and take turns placing their cards on the table. A player is given the freedom of choice of any card to place down.

When a player uses their mouse to click and drag a card onto the table, this indicates their movement. Once a player has placed their card, this ends their turn and changes the game state, evidentially indicating that the game is progressing. An algorithm keeps track of the score and will determine which player will inevitably win, even before the game has fully concluded. The system will keep track of player cards and determine this. It will also keep track of the rounds, as after the third round, the game automatically will conclude a final winner and the end-game state.

To be able to win the game, the cards are ordered numerically. Each card has a number value, thus resulting in the player determining that the number represents the card’s health. A random deck will be handed to each player. When both cards are placed down on the table, a player in turn can choose to attack the other player’s card. The difference between the two cards will be the deduction of Player 1’s health points. For a visual example, if Player 1 attacks Player 2 with these cards, Player 2’s card will be eliminated because Player 1’s card value is 4. 4 is greater than 2. However, Player’s 2 card will deduct 2 points from Player 1’s card as a form of retaliation or defence when in combat.



Figure 1: Player 1's Card
(*GWENT: The Witcher Card Game*, 2018)



Figure 2: Player 2's Card
(*GWENT: The Witcher Card Game*, 2018)

With a player-versus-player system, winning more *GWENT* games will increase the ranking points of a player and the algorithm of the game will place the player against more difficult opponents with similar or higher-ranking points. Having these Mechanics in place directly will impact how the player interacts with the game, being their choices and ability to learn and manipulate its data design.

According to the *Mechanics, Dynamics, Aesthetics framework*, the Dynamics are what the mechanics impact players to do according to their behaviour during the game (Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek 2004). This is applied to *GWENT*, specifically, the freedom of choice to play any card when it is the players turn mentioned in the few paragraphs above. The player makes a calculated decision whether not to play stronger or weaker cards in the beginning. There is also a choice to swap out cards in the beginning of each round of *GWENT*, giving the player an idea of what kind of strategy they might use against their opponent.

The Mechanic of placing down a card in each turn gives the game a steady and consistent pacing. It is also important to note that each player's cards are hidden from each other, influencing and increasing the feeling of anticipation. Referring to data design, the Dynamics of Gwent according to this is the manipulation of what card values are given to each player. Not every round of *GWENT* is the same, therefore making the player improvise with what deck they have at the present time. If a player plays passively, keeping stronger cards towards the end, they can easily turn the tides in their favour of the game at a later stage. Lastly, the Aesthetics of *GWENT* tie into data design as it is critical to represent this type of data visually.

As seen in Figures 1 and 2, cards are visually represented with a piece of artwork and a clear indication of a number on the top left. When a player is about to attack their opponent, they may choose which card to attack by clicking and dragging an arrow to the selected opponent's card. An algorithm keeps track of the player turn, and is visually represented by a coin. There is an example of this in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Visual Representation of Game State
(*GWENT: The Witcher Card Game*, 2018)

When a card is attacked by an opposing player, numbers will change automatically according to the data calculations that the game makes. The game state will change accordingly, either destroying the card and removing it from the play area or depleting its health. Numbers on the sides, also seen in Figure 3 are the total points in which the player has gathered. This simplicity in displaying this information is easily readable and understood by the player.

What is also important to note is that *GWENT* is based off the Witcher series, which generates an already existing appeal for the game. Integrated in the art are aspects of the lore, including the famed Geralt of Rivea, monsters and soldiers from different realms. An existing player base playing this game will be familiar with the lore and visuals, however, does not affect gameplay if a completely new player were to join the game.

By analysing *GWENT*'s data design using the MDA Framework, the game has simple to understand mechanics that deal with a number system algorithm to operate. Playing cards in a strategic way and utilizing combat within these cards can increase the total score of a player and thus ultimately win the game. With the amount of winnings, a player gains a ranking score and competes against other players with a similar score and skillset. Numbers are used to determine turn states, combat systems and point score. Data is then collected on the player to determine their ranking. Keeping track of all these mechanics is made easy using Aesthetics. Numbers are displayed clearly on cards and on the board. When cards are attacked and there is a change in card health/defence, the game emphasizes on this with certain animations and sounds, as well as a visual change that the player can clearly see. *GWENT* is a perfect game that ties in with data design.

References

GWENT: The Witcher Card Game. 2021. *GWENT: The Witcher Card Game*. [online]
Available at: <<https://www.playgwent.com/>> [Accessed 28 March 2021].

Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M. and Zubek, R., 2004, July. MDA: A formal approach to game design and game research. In *Proceedings of the AAAI Workshop on Challenges in Game AI* (Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 1722).