

Are FPS game developers overlooking something?

Posted by Killer at GoQuake.com – Sunday, 14 August 2005

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A post which postulates that game environments, storyline, and characters need to be advanced as much as technology; and that shelved and abandoned game concepts, coupled with new technology and expanded ideas, can be reinvigorated successfully and done so expeditiously and economically.

I just read an interesting post at [PlanetPhillip](#). In it Phillip opines "One of the areas that I feel has been neglected in Single Player modding is Usable Items. I want modders to create new and interesting items to [be] use[d] specifically within Single Player games. It sounds great in theory but unfortunately it is a lot harder to do in practice. The main problem lies in creating something that continues and complements the existing weaponry and other concepts without making the game too easy". The post also references a [prior article](#) concerning the development of a mod which would utilize a mini helicopter that is equipped with a camera for reconnaissance.

I have commented at Phillip's site before but this comment is a bit too lengthy, and not quite on point, so I will post it here instead.

There's a First Person Shooter ((FPS) 1st and 3rd person views) that was released in 1996 called Eradicator. It was distributed by Accolade, and had about 30 levels playable via one of four characters, each with different skills, strengths, etc. The game was essentially panned for the graphics (320×240), the difficult jumping skills and the tough puzzles. Only Half-Life seems to come close in requiring good jumping and puzzle solving skills. But I found a number of interesting things in Eradicator, that I have not seen fully duplicated/enhanced in other FPSs.

First, in order to solve about a fifth of the levels you had to control (at specific points/events) an enemy drone (there were several types; land and aerial) via a computer terminal. This allowed certain enemies to be eliminated, doors opened, security mechanisms deactivated, etc. Second, there was a mobile pipe bomb (slightly larger than the one in Duke Nukem 3D) that contained a reconnaissance camera, which was used to scout ahead, as well as, to destroy enemies/equipment that prevented you from advancing. Third, and several games have duplicated this since 2000, you could fire an RPG that had a normal mode and an alternate "smart missile" mode that you could deliver to your target ala UT2004's Redeemer. The viewing technique used in all three points was Picture-in-a-Picture (PIP) mode, whereby your immediate and remote views could be toggled (both were always visible; one being 1/4 screen sized).

There were some other minor points of interest but the point I would ultimately like to make is while innovation and conceptualization are essential, they are not the only way forward. Often, you can investigate current, shelved, and abandoned concepts that can be more fully developed, as well as, enhanced owing to state of the art technology. Spending some of your time (as a developer/modder) in this manner may yield more results than simply trying to always come up with the NBT (Newer Better Thing) as it may allow you to bring a product to market faster and

at less cost. If you don't believe me, just think about the wheel. It's a very old idea that has simply been refined and improved as technology permitted. Why hasn't it been replaced? The answer is because it's efficient, reliable, and very inexpensive compared to other technologies. In a nutshell, it just works.

Yet this "just works" concept seems to elude some developers time and time again. Every year you see FPSs released without a Co-Op mode, with no in-game saves, etc. Why? Because in pushing the envelope, they mistakenly believe that older ideas are rubbish. Show me a FPS game that was released with no in-game saves and I'll show you the patch that developer had to release to permit it. I understand, or think I do, what the developer was trying to accomplish; more realism, an emphasis on better gamesmanship, i.e., movement techniques (strafing) and weapon utilization (splash damage), instead of run-'n-gun; and ultimately a longer playing experience. This is all good and well. Please, bring in the new but don't discard the tried and true, and keep an open mind about the shelved and the abandoned. Give the player options. It's his purchase and his decision how to play.

Eradicator is by no means the only game whose concepts has languished or has not been further developed. Just consider the sheer number of FPS/hybrid shooters released annually. It would be impossible for all of them to be commercial successes even if their body of work warranted it. Therefore, there may well be a trove of workable shelved and abandoned concepts to resurrect and infuse with a new twist.

Sometimes, it takes time for a concept to be in synch with a genre's progression and get adopted. Take for example Apogee's (3D Realms) Rise of the Triads, which first introduced jump pads in December 1994. Jump pads were not seen again until Quake III (December 1999). Since then, the devices are used in several mega popular Multiplayer FPSs.

Do you think gamers care that Epic (Unreal) wasn't the first to use jump pads? Hell no. They want a fast, furious, and fun game. Gamers want new concepts just as much as developers. They also want the familiar maintained, and the almost forgotten concepts to be retooled to make the games they love offer the best fragging experience.

Everyone knows that games (all genres) are getting better, or so it has to be because the Industry is relentlessly exploiting the latest capabilities of software and hardware improvements. But are the games really getting better? They certainly look better, everything isn't linear anymore, and the AI and Physics make for some interactive realism. But are the environments believable and worthwhile? Do they make you want to explore them the way you needed to explore Black Mesa. Is the storyline believable and worthwhile? Do you know it's your destiny to defeat the Stroggs? Do you identify with the lead character until it was as if you and he had a melding of the minds? If you found yourself mouthing Duke's witticisms years after playing the game then the answer is yes. Now really, name ten games like that.

FPS advancement is based on more than technology. It's also about what compels you to leap into an alternate universe and be instantly immersed in its environment, in your mission, and in your character.