Insight into Arena Shooters and their mechanics

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Many people can look back through recent history and find many different games that have helped to define the direction of game development. Mario, Legend of Zelda, Doom, Call of Duty, Halo are a few titles I can think of myself. But when it comes to the lineage of first person shooters alone we can find that it starts with the now subgenre of arena shooters. While not as popular as the overarching fps genre today it was once the defining playstyle for fps gamers. This genre sports simplistic mechanics and a high skill ceiling that promotes a highly competitive environment. To narrow this analysis further we are going to look at the arena fps Unreal Tournament 99. I believe UT99 stood out amongst the other arena shooters of its time as it modified the ongoing shooter formula. That is to say that Unreal Tournament 99 had alternative fire modes for each of their weapons, effectively doubling the amount of weapons in the game. Not only did this pique my curiosity as not many modern fps have guns with alternate fire modes as one of its mainstay mechanics, but UT99 did it so well for its time I am surprised that alternate fire modes did not become a part of more games from that point onward.

Let's start with defining what makes an arena shooter. While researching different AFPS’s I had the question looming in the back of my mind “what is an arena shooter?” I am too young to know the answer off the top of my head as I have grown up after the release of Halo. From watching a selection of different videos on the type of gameplay different shooters have I can conclude a few defining features that keep AFPS as its own sub genre as compared to more modern FPS’s. This is what I could find: PvP focused, a higher base movement speed, no restriction on the amount of weapons the player character can carry, no reloading of weapons, health does not regenerate but can go over a stable max value, all players start with the same loadout, weapons ammo and power-ups can be found in the map, and smaller close quarters maps.

From the weapons model to the dynamic moving parts when firing, the sounds each weapon makes when shooting and the unique particle effects each gun makes as its “bullet” travels through the space you can tell that a tremendous amount of time was put into designing each of the ten weapons in Unreal Tournament 99 to make them not only unique but feel good to shoot. The models of each weapon are all interesting to look at while the dynamic sections of each weapon helps to make the gun feel alive as you hold it and add more power behind each shot. Sounds made by each weapon help you as a player determine what the enemies arsenal is before you even see the weapon yourself while the bullet particle trails give you the visual spectacle you need to either engage the enemy in futuristic glory or turn tail and run. All of these come together to make an arsenal of weapons that are memorable and interesting to use.

Two mechanics that stand out to me in UT99 are the alternate fire modes as previously mentioned as well as the intractable level design. Looking at the alternate fire modes I think they were implemented well and as such I would not change anything about them. If I were to recreate them myself I would do it either in the same method as UT99 in that you press either the left or right mouse to shoot (I presume as I have never played it before) or have a charged and uncharged fire in that you press left mouse for the basic attack or hold left mouse for the secondary attack. Another method would be to change fire modes on a key press but both the second and third idea remove the ability to do use both fire modes at once. So having the primary and secondary fire modes attached to mouse left and right respectively makes the most sense. In terms of level design intractability the only thing I would change is to make each object look more intractable and not just a set piece. Watching gameplay I am having a hard time knowing what is a moving platform and what is a floorboard. Designing a moving platform I would have a trigger collider over the platform that activates when the player is inside.

Works Cited

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