First Person Perspective Game

A feature common of many games is the First Person Perspective. While this is a game feature used to put the player into the game, it has also become a defining characteristic of some game types. Initially, the First Person Perspective (FPP) was used in combat-based games. Early games that used this combat game feature were the Doom games and Castle Wolfenstein games from ID software. The player perspective in the game was that of the game character. As the game character moves through the game the player only sees what the game character sees.

A wide variety of games use the FPP and use it for a variety of purposes. In terms of Game Design we can look at some general features of games using the FPP feature and then look at specific game genres that used this feature.

General FPP Design Considerations

One of the defining features of FPP games is that the player is put into the game through the eyes of the game character. As the player moves their character their view changes focus. Many FPP games allow the player to look down and see their hands/legs/body. The purpose is to give the game player a more immediate experience when playing the game.

Several design issues that are found with FPP games. These include:

- Supporting player immersion through the FPP
- Player character identification
- Focusing player attention through the FPP
- NPC interactions

FPP games are designed to put the player into the game by having the game camera showing the player what the game character sees. This basic feature of FPP games must be supported by having the player control the game character camera. The problem with using the camera alone is that people don’t just use their eyes to process information. In many cases sound plays an important element in focusing player information. Games that use the FPP must also use sound resources to ensure that the player can get enough information. For example, in a stealth combat situation the game might add the sound of enemies talking or walking around so the player knows where they are without seeing them through the FPP camera. This supporting of player immersion can be done by adding sound, voices, music, shadows, and other elements.

Another problem with FPP player design is that the game character is inhabited by the player and does not have an external identity. With most FPP games the game character is meant to be the player. This is why most FPP games don’t allow the player to speak. Putting the player into the game character would be spoiled if the character could speak. This would destroy the players illusion about participating in the game. Having an anonymous player character can make the game narrative more difficult since the player character is more of an observer than a participant in the game story.

Recently, there have been several games that attempt to use the FPP mechanic but also define the game character that the player will be inhabiting. These games include either cut-scenes in which the game character is shown (Wolfenstein the New Order) and the player character interacts with other NPC, or in a game like Bioshock Infinite where the game character is never seen in a cut-scene (and briefly in a reflection in the water) but can speak and has a very clearly defined personality. Both games try to bring the player into the game by giving them the perspective of the game character but also have the player understand and appreciate the motivations of the character they are inhabiting. Rather than have the player define their game character, the game sets up various methods of explaining to the player who they are playing and why they are reacting in the way they are.

These kinds of FPP games with a defined character change the experience that the player is having because the game is now defining their character and they are not. Many FPP role playing games typically don’t use this kind of character definition and leave it up to the player to create their own game character. Skyrim (played in First Person mode) and Fallout 3 and 4 are good examples. The player gets to select their character’s race, sex, and other features when they are asked to define their own character at the beginning of the game. While the player may never see their own character
(unless they switch into third-person mode) they are allowed to create their own character. This gives the player a much more complete investment in their character so they are motivated to level their character up, complete quests, and basically take care of their game character.

Another game design issue with FPP games is how to focus the players attention in order to move the game forward. Since the player has complete movement of the camera, they may be looking in the wrong direction when the designer wants them to look in another direction. There may be an exit that they need to take or a character they need to interact with in order to move the game forward. If the game designer takes away control from the player and forces their camera to focus on a particular location, then players become upset because their control of the character is being taken away from them. The designer needs to find other ways to focus the players attention on what the designer needs.

One way is by using game graphics. Important elements could be outlined or glowing and the player could be taught to recognize such graphic features. The game environment could be created so there are few ways to go and the player is placed in a narrow area. Another way is to use sound to attract the players attention or on-screen arrows or a mini-map. In these cases, good level design becomes a necessity to control the players progress through the game. Good logical level design would allow the player to move through an area, complete the mission, and feel that everything was their own choice. Doom and Wolfenstein are good examples of games with excellent level design.

Interaction with Non-Player Characters (NPC) is another challenge for games with the FPP mechanic. As with other design issues the players attention needs to be focused on the NPC in order for some kind of interaction to happen. This could be done with visual or sound ques or by having the NPC stand in front of the player. Once the dialog session starts the player could be given options to choose from on the screen. With FPP games that have a more narrative structure the other NPCs must motivate the player to engage in behavior. For example, in Bioshock Infinite the player’s character, Booker, rescues a girl. During the rescue they are attacked and the building in which they are trying to escape is being destroyed. The girl, Elizabeth, runs ahead of the player and tries to get the player character to follow. While the player has the ability to stop and go the other direction, the game narrative motivates the player to follow Elizabeth and escape.

Summary

Elements to evaluate for most First Person Perspective games include:

- How immersive is the First Person Perspective? Does the design of the game respect this player perspective by using sound and environment to make the player feel they are in the game?
- How does the game deal with player character identification? Does the game let the player “inhabit” and define their own character in the game? Does the game give the player a pre-defined character? How does the game define the game character if the player is not allowed to define their own character?
- How does the game focus the players attention? Does the player still feel that they are control of their game character when the focus mechanic is used?
- How does the player interact with NPC’s? Does the player feel that these NPCs are having an actual interaction with the player?

First Person Combat Games

One of the common FPP game types are First Person Shooter games. These games use the FPP but are focused on combat. Examples are Call of Duty, Black Ops, Doom, and other games that have a primary game mechanic of ranged or melee combat. This kind of game FPP combat can be found in other kinds of games, but may not be the primary game mechanic.

First Person Shooter (FPS) games typically have all the general issues of FPP games, but since these kinds of games are focused on combat they have some additional issues when played with the First Person Perspective. These issues include:
• Combat mechanics, enemy AI, and Time To Kill mechanics
• Weapon selection and usage
• Cover and combat pacing
• Resource and Health Management

When a player engages in combat a number of game mechanics come into play. These include how enemies behave, the hit box on the enemy, and the time to kill (TTK). Combat games include some level of game AI (artificial intelligence – not really) that defines how enemy NPCs react to combat. These game mechanics can make the game more or less difficult and can be adjusted on the fly if needed.

Enemies in FPS games are programmed to behave in specific ways. Having enemies react to combat in a believable way can make a FPS game interesting and challenging. For example, some of the behaviors of enemies could be:

• When the player gets within a specified distance then react and start moving towards the player
• When the player gets within the line of sight of an enemy start moving towards the player
• When the enemy is triggered by the player get behind cover and shoot from behind cover.
• When the enemy is triggered, if there is no cover, retreat and then seek cover or charge the player.
• When the enemy is triggered, retreat to cover and shoot from cover and seek to flank the player.
• When squads of enemies are triggered then work in concert with part of the squad firing from cover while the rest attempt to flank or rush the player.

These enemy behaviors range from simple to complex and can make an encounter simple or challenging. Creating enemy behavior can be complex and some of the best FPS games are not necessarily modern. One of the best combat FPS games is F.E.A.R., which was released in 2005.

Another element in FPS games is the randomization of enemies and enemy behavior. Games that reset the player at a save point when the player dies must deal with enemy randomization. For example, in order for the player to learn how to get through a section after dying, games will repeat the placement and behavior of enemies so the player knows what to expect. There can be some randomization but there must be enough consistency so that the player can progress by learning. However, if enemies are placed and behave in exactly the same way then the player may start getting bored with the game. Designers should find a balance between complete randomization and predictable enemies.

Along with enemy behavior another design feature of FPS games is the “hit box”. This is the area on the enemy NPCs that will cause damage to the NPC. In order to make the game realistic, especially with ranged (gun) weapons, the aiming and hit-box mechanic should be precise. Players quickly become frustrated if their aiming does not match the hit box on the opponents. Most FPS games use the convention that the enemy has some hit spot that either quickly kills or does a lot of damage (for example, a head shot).

Along with behavior and game combat mechanics the game designer should understand the kinds of enemies that the player will face. Repeating the same kinds of enemies over and over quickly get boring. However, using enemies that the player is not prepared to face makes the player frustrated. Many FPS games include a range of different enemies that match the available kinds of weapons and that have different levels of TTK stats. For example, if a player gains a new type of weapon that is necessary to defeat a particular kind of enemy, the game should use that enemy so the player learns how to use the weapon.

Many FPS games allow the player to carry multiple weapons. The usable weapon can be swapped for a carried weapon with minimal controls. This makes weapon swapping easy during combat and allows the designer to create weapons that can be used in strategic ways. For example, in Borderlands and Borderlands 2 there are four weapon slots and several general kinds of weapons including Sniper Rifles, Pistols, Assault Rifles, Shotguns, SMG’s, Heavy Weapons, and Special Weapons. These many kinds of weapons each had their own features and capabilities. While the player can hold a number of weapons they could only have four weapons on the quick-swap menu. Creating a variety of weapons with
different capabilities allows the player to define their own gameplay style (ranged with sniper rifles or close-in with shotguns and pistols).

Along with weapon types many FPS games include a reload game mechanic. This means that when the gun runs out of bullets or charges the player must use a command to reload. This entails stopping play and reloading, which could be a strategic decision based on how long the reload takes. Another weapon feature that the designer could use to affect gameplay is weapon recoil. This is where the weapon moves when fired. This would then affect weapon aiming.

The kinds and behavior of weapons in FPS games could be used to change how the player experiences the game. Another way to change the player experience of the game is controlling the combat gameplay through level design, a cover system, and other elements that can change how the player experiences combat. For example, an FPS game that includes elements of stealth will include more cover that a game that wants the player to engage in direct combat. The Cover system is how and when the game provides areas that the player can hide during combat to avoid getting killed. These cover areas are part of level design and allow the player to make strategic decisions about moving through an area.

A decision the game designer needs to make is combat pacing. This means how the player will engage in combat, how fast they must respond to enemies, how much cover is available, and a number of other elements. Different FPS games have different kinds of combat pacing. For example, the Metro and Wolfenstein games include stealth options so the placing of enemies and the various paths through the levels will include cover and areas that support stealth. These kinds of games rely more on strategy than fast combat reactions.

Resource and Health Management are also elements of FPS game design. These are important in FPS games because combat includes using resources (ammo and weapons) and using Health. Player health is used to measure combat progress. As the player character gets damaged their health is reduced. When the health reaches zero then the player dies and is respawned back to a checkpoint. Some games use a second-wind mechanic that, when health reaches zero, allows the player to have one more try to defeat an enemy (Borderlands/2). Recharging health during combat can be done by either finding additional health in the environment or having health automatically recharge. Automatic health recharging is not as often done as using health resources. Unless health is part of the game combat (such as Doom) then the player will have to stop and either recharge or find health.

Other resource management options are locating ammo for the weapons. Like health, there are a variety of ways to handle resources such as ammo. These include locating ammo in the area (Call of Duty), getting ammo from a killed enemy (Doom), or picking up a new gun without reloading (Halo). How ammo resources are managed in an FPS game can affect combat gameplay.

Summary

Elements to evaluate on a First Person Shooter game include:

- How does the game play? What kind of combat does the game present to the player? Can the player use cover and stealth to control the pace of combat?
- How do enemies react to the player? Are enemies predictable in their behavior during combat? Are there a variety of enemies? When the player respawns do the enemies behave in a predictable or unpredictable manner?
• What kind of game levels are used? Do the levels provide multiple paths through the level or is there a single way to proceed through a level? How much cover are there in levels and how does this cover affect the game combat play?
• What kind of weapons does the game allow the player to carry? Are their limits to the number and type of weapons the player can carry? How does the choice of weapons affect the way that the game can be played? Are weapons customizable? Do weapons degrade with use?
• How does the player manage health and other resources? Is health a resource that must be collected or is it auto generated? How easy or hard is health to acquire? How easy or hard is it to acquire other resources?

First Person Horror Games

The FPP is often used in horror games. One of the reasons is that the game experience of most horror games is to immerse the player in the game and make them feel they are in the environment. The FPP is good at making the player feel that they are experiencing the horror elements of the game.

Many first person horror games rely on environmental elements to communicate the horror elements to the player. Putting the player in a vulnerable situation where stealth is preferable to combat, a good FPP horror game can give the player the experience of anxiety, dread, and horror. Examples of such games are Alien Isolation, Amnesia, Resident Evil 7, and Outlast. Many FPP horror games rely on stealth horror where the player must avoid confrontations rather than using a FPS mode.

In Alien Isolation the game environment and game mechanics heighten these experiences by using a point-save mechanic, good environmental effects (graphics and sound), and a real-time decoding mechanic where the player must solve a simple puzzle to get through a door all the time racing against the possibility that the Alien will kill them. In Outlast the player is unarmed and must avoid enemies in constrained places. In Amnesia the player has a hiding mechanic allowing them to hide in cabinets.

Many of the FPP games rely on a set of similar features to affect the player. These include:

• Limited spaces and corridor-like levels. By constraining the viewpoint of the player these games can rely on sounds and jump-scares more effectively.
• Hiding or stealth mechanics that allows the player to sneak or observe from hidden locations. This allows the game to heighten the experience by showing the player horror elements without directly confronting the player.
• Limited self-defense abilities. These games normally make the player feel helpless by not giving the player few if any self-defense tools.
• Extensive environmental or found narrative tools. To enhance a feeling of horror these kinds of games will include many environmental and “found” narrative elements so the player can discover some of the background information enhancing the horror elements.
• Some kind of quest-based or narrative-based goal that motivates the player to move through the game environment. This is done so the player is “forced” to experience the game environment.

In terms of game design elements, the game designer of a FPP horror game should consider the following:

• The game should be designed for the FPP camera. This means that enemies can approach from behind but should allow the player to run or hide. The player view should be limited in some situations but always allow the player to view part of the scene.
• Puzzles should be designed to support the player experience and not just for the sake of puzzles. For example, making the player solve multiple puzzles to get resources or escape would force the player to explore the area and not just hide in one place.
• The enemies behavior should be random enough to cause player anxiety but predictable enough so that the player can learn from failures.
• Jump scares should be minimized and should not be too predictable otherwise the player will get bored. The player can be put into situations where they expect a jump-scare but don’t get it and other situation when they do get a scare.

Summary:

Things to evaluate in FPP Horror Games

• How does the game control player movement and exploration through environmental design? Is the game world enclosed or open?
• How are the puzzles in the game part of the gameplay and horror elements? What purpose do the puzzles serve?
• Are the enemies and enemy encounters random or are they predictable? How does this affect the game horror experience?
• How is the game narrative introduced in the game? Does the game narrative enhance the game horror elements?
• What kinds of weapons or means of self-defense is the player given? Are these effective and how to they enhance the horror elements of the game?
• How does the player run from or avoid enemy encounters? How does such game mechanics enhance the horror experience?
• When are jump-scares used in the game? How effective are these and how are they used (or not used) to enhance the horror experience?

First Person Exploration Games

The FPP is also used for First Person exploration games. These kinds of games are also called “walking around” games because the primary game mechanic is exploring environments and solving puzzles. Examples of such games include What Remains of Edith Finch, Gone Home, Everybody’s Gone to Rapture, Firewatch, and Dear Ester. These games use the FPP but don’t have combat as one of the game mechanics. While some FPP Horror games may not have combat, the player experience for these kinds of games is primarily puzzle solving and exploration. Players don’t worry about health or stamina and rather just explore.

In Firewatch, the player character (who is defined during initial scenes in the game) is manning a fire watch tower. He is also engaged in solving mysteries in his area of the woods. This is done by gathering clues uncovered by exploring the area. In What Remains of Edith Finch the player is trying to discover her family history by gathering information in an around her family home.

Many of these FPP Exploration Games use the first person perspective in order to bring the player into the game and give a sense of agency to the player. These games are designed so the player must actively uncover information by exploring their environment. As with the general FPP design criteria, the game designer for these kinds of games must:

• Integrate the game narrative with the player’s exploration tasks and clue gathering.
• Create areas that make it easy for the player to see clues and provide visual ques so the player’s camera will focus on necessary information.
• Adjust the narrative structure so the player can complete the story in a random order or block areas to explore until previous clues or areas have already been explored.
• Create a puzzle solving mechanic that works in the FPP environment so the player feels part of solving the puzzles.
• Create a way to present and summarize the clues that are collected so the player has a way to organize the clue elements as part of the game.
In terms of game design the game designer needs to consider the following:

- How to introduce the player to game narrative and the mechanics of exploring and crafting solving puzzles
- How to distribute puzzles and found game narrative elements so the player will be motivated to explore the environment
- What order the game narrative elements need to be found in order to present a coherent narrative to the player when they complete the game and how much of the narrative to present at a time.
- How to maintain the player experience (interest in discovering the narrative or in solving puzzles).
- How to direct the player to specific areas in order for the player to “discover” items or puzzles.
- How to construct the environment so as to provide a logical path for the player to follow but at the same time not forcing the player.

Summary

Things to evaluate in FPP Exploration Games

- How does the game initially present the game narrative so the player understands why they are exploring the area?
- How does the game structure the environment so the player can explore and gather clues?
- How are puzzles distributed in the game and how do they relate to game environment and the game narrative?
- What motivates players to explore new areas and to solve puzzles?
- If puzzles are solved by exploring and gathering clues, how does the game help the player organize such clues?
- What visual or environmental cues does the game use to direct the players viewpoint to specific areas or items in the environment?

First Person Survival Games

First person survival games have recently become a specialized element in the FPP gameplay area. These are games that use the FPP but with a primary game mechanic of resource management, exploration, crafting, and ensuring the player “survives”. Such games include No Man’s Sky, Subnautica, ARK, and Minecraft. These games, like the other FPP games, put the player into the game by using the FPP mechanic. Players will typically explore, gather resources, construct tools and other items, and use strategy to ensure some kind of survival. Unlike exploration games these kinds of games allow the player to lose and gain health because the purpose of the game is for the player to survive.

In order for the game to be fun for the player these kinds of games will have some of the following features:

- Explore the area and collect resources.
- A management system for existing resources
- A crafting system that allows resources to be used to build items
- A progress meter (health, etc) that shows the player their current status relative to surviving.
- A system whereby the player must make choices in terms of collecting and carrying resources and creating items.
- A strategic balancing of available resources so the player must explore different areas to collect what they need.

In terms of game design some of the considerations of the game designer include:

- Defining some general game criteria for successfully surviving (food, water, etc) and some way to communicate these levels to the player.
- Identifying resources the player needs for basic survival and those the player needs for long-term survival (crafting). The game designer should also assign some kind of rarity value to resources.
- Design a series of strategic decisions the player must make in terms of balancing exploration with resource collection with resource usage.
• Design an environment that both encourages exploration and distributes common and rare resources in a strategic way.
• Create a crafting system and a set of upgrades that the player can use for short-term and long-term survival.
• Create a resource management system so the player can manage the resources they are collecting.
• Engage the player with some non-resource collecting activities that vary the gameplay

Summary:

Things to evaluate in FPP Survival games

• How does the game initially present the game environment to the player so they understand how to explore?
• How does the game initially put the player into a Survival mindset so the player is motivated to start exploring and getting resources?
• How does the game present the player with short-term vs long-term survival goals?
• What kind of resource management system does the game have, does it provide enough information, and is it easy to use?
• What kind of crafting system does the game have and is it easy to use?