

My Ideal PC First Person Shooter

A Personal View After 20 Years of Gaming

I've been playing First Person Shooters for over 20 years, now. During that time I've kept a log of the vast majority of the games I've played in the companion to this document, "A Personal History Of The First Person Shooter".

Lately, I've decided not to buy, or have bought and regretted it, a number of games. They had elements that I know would have annoyed me. Once I bought almost every major FPS on the market. I may be getting particular after 20 years but there seem to be elements creeping in, quite commonly, that I find detract from the genre. So, I thought I'd document my likes and dislikes and see if I can define my ideal PC, single player FPS.

Types of FPS

The Linear Shooter

That is, you start a level map and your overriding objective is to get to the end of it and move on to the next map. Back in the day, when exteriors were hard to model. this might be called a corridor shooter, for obvious reasons. Nowadays, you might have much larger areas to operate in but the game still takes you through from the start point to the end point. If the gaming in-between is fun, then I have no problem with this. After all, the Half-Life games are linear shooters!

The Old Skool Shooter

These are a significant subset of linear shooters. They pride themselves on harking back to the early days of the FPS. They put the emphasis on loads of enemies and loads of guns. Story is pretty irrelevant. Your job is to kill anything that moves. Some games, like Painkiller and Shadow Warrior (2013) introduce some additional game mechanics but shooting everything is the main objective. As games have become more and more complex, I find I enjoy the simplicity of this style of shooter.

The Open World Shooter

Here you get the whole game world to explore from the word go, or at least after the inevitable tutorial. These are games like Fallout 3, STALKER and Far Cry.. I like games that let you explore and make your own mistakes, providing you have a decent save system to support them (see "The Game Save System").

The Open Map Shooter

I'm thinking about games that have discrete maps but, within them, give you a myriad ways to explore them. Some people describe these as open world but I like to make the distinction. Dishonored, Deus Ex and Far Cry 1 fall into this category. Since these are some of my all-time favourite games, I clearly approve of this approach.

The Role Play Game Shooter

These are the cross-over games that have elements of both FPSs and RPGs. At the extreme end are the Fallout 3 games with the like of Borderlands and Dead Island taking a "softer" approach. I find these games less satisfying if they are too heavily driven by underlying statistics. I first came across this in Fallout 3 . I remember sticking a shotgun in an enemy's face at point blank range ... and missing!

If the developers get the gameplay right, I can enjoy all of these genres. I can't put forward a serious preference.

Missions

Old Skool

There tends to be one objective. Kill everything between you and the map exit. The modern take on old skool might give you a reason for your mass homicide, Shadow Warrior (2013) for instance, but the implementation is the same. Shoot everything.

Objective-Based

Usually found in open world/map games. You are given something to do by someone/thing in the game and it's up to you how you fulfil that objective. Although there will be some that you will have to do to take you through the campaign, there may also be objectives for "side missions", which you can choose to ignore.

Stealth

When the game insists that you must complete an objective without being discovered. When a game is designed for stealth (Deus Ex, Dishonored), such missions can be very enjoyable. However, they are sometimes thrown into other styles of game and can be frustrating without the appropriate stealth "tool kit".

Puzzle

Sometimes the game presents you with a puzzle to solve to continue. It might be cracking a code of some kind or completing a sequence of actions in the right order. If the game has a USP, that can often be involved. For instance, using the Grav Gun for a physics puzzle in Half-Life 2, manipulating time in Time Shift or altering gravity in Prey. As long as the game remembers that it's a shooter, not a puzzler, and makes the solution fairly easy to attain, that's fine.

Failable

These include:

Escort Missions. Keep a NPC alive as you go from A to B. The AI of the NPC is usually appalling and they tend to walk into bullets. What you really want to do is tell them to hide while you kill everything and then take them to their destination but that's never allowed.

Defend The Flag. Ensure that waves of enemies do not get to a specific place or thing.

Against The Clock. You must complete an objective within a specified time period.

My problem with all of these is that you have almost zero chance of completing them first time and have to repeat them until you're successful. The game designers always throw in some scripted, unexpected events. You must repeat the mission until you understand it's structure and play accordingly. I do not want to play a 2D platformer!

I only actively dislike failable missions. If a game includes stealth, then give us the game mechanics to succeed. Otherwise, I have no great preference.

The Game's Look

Graphics

By this, I mean the detail and accuracy with which the game environment can be rendered. If you get close to a surface, it still looks like that surface when you looked at it 10 metres away. This has improved amazingly over the years and you would expect any modern game to use a relatively high standard of graphics.

(Graphic) Design

This is independent of what I've called graphics. It's what the art department does to create the look of the game. Sometimes, this almost defines the game. Good examples are the "cel shading" of Borderlands or the ink & wash effect of Dishonored.

I must admit, I don't pay a great deal of attention to detailed graphics. Of course, I expect more than Doom's 2D sprites, nowadays, but it's not a game breaker. If anything, the design has more influence on me. I can still walk into Painkiller's Opera House or Cathedral, rendered by its 10 year old graphics engine, and still be amazed.

The Game Save System

Checkpoint-Only

This is an abomination that should have stayed on console games. PCs have gigabytes of disk space. What's the excuse? I really don't want to repeat 5 minutes of boring gameplay just to get to the boss who's killed me ... again. In fact, I want to save in the middle of the boss fight, if I so choose.

There are other reasons why checkpoint-only is undesirable. Manual saves allow you to "double back" and take a different route through or approach to the game. If the game is well designed, there should be lots of different ways to tackle your problem or perhaps many routes through the map or you might decide to forget you ever did that section and go and do something else altogether. With checkpoints, you are always being driven forward limiting exploration and experimentation.

That said, a well designed checkpoint system can work. If the save points are frequent and at sensible points in the action, then that's bearable.

Checkpoint + Quicksave/Quickload

I've come across this quite often of late. The checkpoint system is as above but you get a single quicksave slot to save your progress at the point of your choosing. This is better than nothing. A single quicksave is fine, after a particularly tough bit of gaming, but it still doesn't give you the freedom to organise your own progress through the game.

Manual Save

There are many forms of manual save. In general, you get a number of slots in which to store a save at whatever point in the game you like. They tend to be overwritten on a cyclical basis, losing the oldest when you save with all slots full. You also normally get a quicksave that might have a slot of its own or take up a save slot. The game may also have checkpoint saves in addition.

The best save system I have come across is for Painkiller. The start of each level is saved; you are allowed an indefinite number of manual saves; you are allowed an indefinite number of quicksaves; the game creates a checkpoint save at frequent intervals. It gives you a delete function and lets you sort things out yourself. Good Heavens! Giving

control to the player!

Without a doubt, I prefer a manual save system of some description. It's quite possible to implement, even on consoles. Even a complex game like Dishonored gave the player manual saves on all console platforms as well as PC. Of course, it means the developers have to allow for this in their level design rather than take the lazy approach of controlling the player's progress. But they'd probably have a better game at the end of it. That said, I have seen checkpoints done very well and I wouldn't necessarily reject a game purely for that reason.

Difficulty

Choice

That is, when you start out on a playthrough, you choose your preferred difficulty. This is normally some variation of Easy/Normal/Hard/Very Hard.

Variable

Some games let you change difficulty during a playthrough. This is very useful if you find a particular section or boss too hard at a difficulty that makes the rest of the game fun for you.

Progressive

When a game starts you out at the difficulty it chooses and the next highest level is made available when you complete it.

The main issue for me is if the game does not allow you to "do everything" at the difficulty of your choosing. For instance, no matter what difficulty you choose in Deus Ex:HR, you get the same chance to upgrade your various bionic implants. On the other hand, in Borderlands games, you must play at a harder level to gain skill points to reach the level cap. This was particularly problematic in Borderlands 2 where you were forced to play at "very hard". In Painkiller, certain maps only became available at harder difficulties. Since Painkiller and Borderlands 2 are my two most played games, it's clear I don't find this to be a show-stopper but it very nearly ruined BL2 for me.

Telling The Story

The Plot

If the game is well designed and fun to play then I'm not sure you need a plot at all. Let's face it, the entire plot of the daddy of them all, Doom, was "A gateway to Hell has opened up on your moon base. Sort it".

Twenty years on from Doom, we do expect some kind of story to explain our homicidal spree but that needs to be balanced with the gameplay. There have been a number of games that are more interested in telling their story than giving you a game to play. Naming a few, Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood, Metro 2033 and Bioshock: Infinite all so wanted to tell their clever stories, they completely overlooked gameplay.

I hasten to say that it is possible to tell a great story alongside equally great gameplay. The underrated Cryostasis told a story as complex as Bioshock: Infinite but I still remember the desperate dashes from heat source to heat source to try and stay alive in the freezing Arctic weather.

Cut Scenes

Originally, a nice idea to put some bones on the game's story by adding a quick bit of animation or whatever at appropriate points in the campaign. In many games, nowadays, the cut scenes seem to be more important than what the player does.

I suppose the biggest culprits here are the modern military shooters like Call of Duty or Medal of Honour. I gave up on these many years ago. The cut scenes tell the story and the game grudgingly lets you illustrate incidents from time to time. In Metro 2033 you finally get to the main station settlement. Are you allowed to explore? No. You are trapped in an interminable cut scene throughout which the only action you can take is to look around.

Of course, possibly the greatest game franchise, Half-Life, doesn't use cut scenes at all. You learn what you need to know from playing the game. Even without carefully animated cut scenes, it manages to be the most cinematic of all.

Game World Logs

By this I mean the diary entries, audio recordings, video logs et al that can be discovered in game to fill out the plot. System Shock 2 was the first game that I played that used these extensively. I say extensively. In SS2, it was a nice addendum to the action. Fast forward 14 years and we have Bioshock: Infinite in which we are inundated with the blasted things! Have them, by all means, but, like cut scenes, use them sparingly.

Over-Direction

In those games where the story must be told, rather than you being the story, the player must be kept in-line! At the mild end of over-direction is the stream of mission objectives constantly popping up in your HUD, micro managing your every move. In its worst excesses, the game might not actually let you move on until you've carried out the required action. In Bioshock: Infinite, there is an area where your guns do no damage to enemies that are in clear sight until you move to the required place to do your shooting. This makes the player's decisions irrelevant to the game.

A good story in game is a nice to have but not a necessary requirement. I thought Dishonored was a great game even though the story was clichéd and predictable. Quite frankly, I didn't care because the gameplay was so good. Cut scenes, logs and mission objectives all have their place but should take a distant back seat to the action.

Moving Around

Walking & Running

WASD + mouse. Enough said. Some games default you to running and you hit a key to move slowly. Normally, the reverse applies. Those with long memories may remember "bunny hopping". This was common in older games where a forward jump moved you further and faster than running for the same time. By timing a series of forward jumps you could move very fast. I have no problem with this. In fact, Painkiller actively encouraged it as its answer to running!

Driving and Flying

The answer's obvious. WASD + mouse. If only that was the case. For some reason, the majority of FPSs, that include driving, forget the mouse exists and leave you with just the WASD keys. More often than not, the keys are on-off switches, especially for steering. You touch A or D, to turn, and you're violently veering left or right. I am playing a shooter, not a driving game. I do not want to waste my time mastering these over-sensitive

controls. If a FPS with such an implementation requires me to drive to complete a “story mission” (i.e. to continue with the game's campaign), especially against the clock, I just stop playing.

Of course it can be done well. Dead Island has first person driving but they have made the vehicles much less sensitive to key presses. Some games take you into third person for driving. Both Borderlands and Halo do this. I don't find it breaks the immersive nature of the game and it is my preference.

I must make special mention of the NecroVisioN games. You get to drive a tank, control an alien mech suit, fly a biplane and ride a Dragon! The controls are WASD + mouse for all of them. For the tank and mech suit, you even get to choose first or third person. Swooping around on the Dragon, fighting flying demons was completely instinctive and huge fun. If a little game like this can manage it, why can't the AAA publishers?

I think my preference is pretty clear. I'm a PC gamer. I do not own a games controller. I expect everything to be not only viable but easy with mouse and keyboard.

Scenery and Interacting With It

Invisible walls

Nothing is more jarring than being stopped from going somewhere by an invisible wall. If a player is not allowed into a certain area, then a physical object in the game should make it obvious you can't go there.

Jumping and Climbing

Please give us a decent jump and let us use it in the game environment. I remember a game called Jericho. You had no jump at all and so you couldn't even get up quite low kerbs and ridges. Terrible.

Then there's the sticky problem of climbing. If scenery looks like you should be able to climb it, you should be allowed to do so. Having jumped/climbed halfway up a rock face to suddenly find you can go no further on similar terrain is just wrong. And if you jump outside the map, so what! Reload and put the vid on YouTube ! It does make the game less predictable for the designers but if I'm clever enough to get up to spot where the opposition can't get to me then good for me!

The other issue with climbing is when you come across game world objects that are too tall for your jump but you could obviously pull yourself up/over them in real life. Some games have tried to address this by letting you scramble up at specific points. However, Dishonored nailed it. If any object looked like it could be scaled, you hit a “climb” button and you would scramble up it. There were no restrictions. You could run across rooftops jumping, blinking and climbing seamlessly. Superb.

Using Cover

PC games do not need automatic cover systems. Mouse and keyboard give the necessary control to use cover through normal movement. What you do need is the ability to peek out. I've seen console solutions where you pull out into third person so you can see around you. Worse still, is when the game “pulls” your character into cover whether you want to or not! PC gamers have lots of keys to assign. Just give us “lean left” and “lean right”.

I want the scenery to be an intrinsic part of the game. The scenery should always live up

to its appearance. I want to jump over obstacles. I want to climb anything that looks climbable. I want to take cover behind anything that looks solid enough. Developers are too worried about the player “breaking” the game. If we try hard enough, let us do it. It's worth it for the freedom it gives us.

Carrying Stuff

The Small Arsenal Approach

Some games let you carry more weapons than the average military base! Old Skool games usually take this approach. I seem to remember Unreal let you carry 12 different weapons and a good supply of ammo to feed them. Sometimes the game tries to justify it. In the Star Trek: Elite Force games, your weapons were digitised using the same technology as transporters. In fact, it doesn't matter. It's an accepted FPS mechanic and great fun. It never did Half-Life any harm!

The Backpack Inventory Approach

In this method, you are allowed to carry a fixed weight or volume of items and are allowed to manage them through some kind of inventory system. Deus Ex worked on the volume of the item, giving you a graphical representation of your “backpack” and let you shuffle items around to make room for your new sniper rifle or whatever. Fallout 3 did it by weight, just giving you a list of what you're carrying with the weight of each item.

The Realistic Approach

Much beloved of modern military shooters. You get to carry 2 or 3 guns, a small amount of ammo and a few grenades. This makes you think carefully about your weapon choice and makes you preserve ammo.

I have no problem with any of these. However, I do ask for consistency. The sadly awful Duke Nukem Forever gave you two weapons and put you in a classic old skool shooter environment! Bioshock: Infinite went for a realistic approach giving you only two weapons but then let you carry loads of ammo for each of the weapons you might be carrying! Far Cry 3 supposedly had an inventory system but weapons didn't count towards it! You could carry loads of playing cards, gambling chips and Heaven knows what else but not tuck a handgun in your belt or carry one, single dollar bill above what your wallet would hold. I don't think so.

Fire Fights

Arena

Beloved of old skool shooters. For whatever reason you are trapped in an area with a bunch of enemies and you have to kill them all before a way out becomes available. Old skool shooters don't make any bones about it. Doors slam shut behind you and away you go. However, most shooters have an arena fight or two in there somewhere. That's fine but it must be kept consistent within the game and its environment.

Here are some examples of Arena fight fails from different games.

Bioshock: Infinite has you break the padlock on a door to enter. Once you walk in, it somehow locks behind you and you're in an arena situation.

I'm not sure what kind of shooter Duke Nukem Forever was but I do remember walking into an area through an open archway. I was attacked, went to double back and the devs had blocked the apparently open arch with an *invisible wall*.

Hard Reset was a valiant but flawed attempt at a modern old skool shooter. OK. I expected arena fights. However, they would stop you being able to jump or climb the scenery once the fight started but you could do it again when it was finished. Not acceptable even in a game like this.

Cover

When you have a bunch of enemies you have to go through to continue but are in an area allowing you to move relatively freely and shoot from cover. The F.E.A.R. Games are the best example of this. Again, I only ask for consistency. Let me double back (i.e. run away!) if I want to. If I find a safe spot to fight from, then I should be allowed to use it.

Open World

Or open map. It's when you have the freedom to choose how you want to take on a group of enemies. For instance, a Far Cry game might let you skirt around an enemy encampment with a sniper rifle or sneak into the camp taking enemies down silently or just pile your car into the middle of the action and start shooting.

I can enjoy all of these. Again I ask for consistency in the game environment. If I'm playing an open world game but find myself dropped into a pit with sheer walls, then I know it's an arena and that's fair enough. If I'm in a cover fire fight and suddenly can't get back through a door that opened previously, that's not on.

Health, Armour & Shields

Pick-Ups

You replenish your health or armour by things you find as you play. In the early shooters these were just lying around. Later they were put in logical places in the game world. So you might find armour in a barracks, for instance.

Regenerating

This is when health and/or shields regenerate over time, if you keep out of the firing line. The Crysis nanosuit is a good example of this approach.

Special Skill

When you have some kind of innate ability or device that will improve your health/shields. For instance, character mods in the Borderlands games.

Hybrid

Some games use a mixture of these. Shadow Warrior (2013) gave you an ability to heal yourself partially but you needed a pick-up to regain full health. Wolfenstein: New Order had partial regenerating health but, again, you needed a pick-up to top you up completely.

There is a purist school of thought that says pick-ups are the "proper" solution. I disagree. I'll happily work with any of these. It's the implementation that is important. Whichever you choose, you want to make sure that the player isn't permanently on the edge of death but, on the other hand, isn't constantly brimming with health and shields so the game is no challenge.

Weapons

It's impossible to categorise all the weapon types that have cropped up in FPSs over the years. Everything from a realistic AK47 in STALKER to a gun that fires 4' wooden stakes

in Painkiller! I have never had a problem with any weapon set in any game in over 20 years. The game designers would have to fail horribly to come up with guns that I couldn't use. As long as they make sense in the game world, no matter how fantastical, that's good enough for me.

Skills, Special Abilities and Super Powers

Like Weapons, there are too many of these to list or categorise. They range from the slo-mo of Point Man in F.E.A.R. to the Demi-Godlike powers you can achieve towards the end of a Fallout game. I'm a sucker for a "gimmick", as I like to call them. I like my shooters with a good dollop of fantasy (in the broadest sense). The (pseudo) realism of something like Far Cry 2 is fine but I'd rather be steering sniper bullets in Singularity.

Other Stuff

Quick Time Events

Why would I want to play a game of "Simon Says" in the middle of a shooter? They may be easier to carry out on a console controller but they still jar. On PC, they make even less sense. The keys you are told to press have often been rebound and don't correspond to those displayed. I have a programmable gaming keypad and so I rarely know the actual symbol of the keys I'm using.

Worse still, QTEs are usually insta-death events. They are nearly always unexpected and it's pure luck whether you survive first time or not. If the game wants to surprise you, it should allow you to get out of trouble in the context of the game. Has a crevasse suddenly opened up beneath you? Then make the sides climbable and use the jump key. Something horrible jumped on your face? Then use the melee key to get it off.

Worst of all is when QTEs are used as the climax of the game. Both Metro: 2033 and Crysis 2 ended on a series of QTE's. What does that make you feel you've achieved? I didn't get Crysis 3 because I found it also ended on QTEs. I'm not going to buy a game that disappoints me after 20 or 30 hours of play.

Achievements

Lets distinguish between the two kinds. There are achievements that give you things to help in the game and those that ... don't. I better give examples. If you meet the "card conditions" (i.e. achievements) for a level in Painkiller, you get a Black Tarot Card that you can use to give you a power-up in the game. That's useful. In Bound in Blood and Riddick, hitting certain achievements lets you see game concept art, which is completely useless. Even worse are Steam achievements, and their ilk, the point of which only seems to be to give you bragging rights over your friends. Not that they're worth bragging about.

I can only be bothered if I get an in-game advantage. To illustrate this, I have played thousands of hours of Borderlands 2 and have no idea whether or not I have found all the hidden Vault symbols. And don't care.

If achievements contribute to gameplay, I'm all for them. If not, I can happily ignore them but it's a shame the developers couldn't have spent their time on something more useful.

Bugs

For all sorts of reasons, but usually time & money, some games are released with bugs. If they are minor (NecroVisioN got one or two of the voice clips wrong) I can live with that. If they seriously interfere with gameplay, they can be show-stoppers. I stopped playing STALKER: Clear Sky. It took five patches before I tried again.

It seems less of a problem nowadays but that might be because of the ease of delivery of patches through Steam or its equivalent.

You've probably gathered that I seriously dislike QTEs. There would have to be a major mitigating factor, in a game that used them, to make me buy it. A bugged game will stop me playing if it's bad enough. Achievements don't bother me, as I just ignore them!

Gameplay

The most important aspect of a game and I have no idea what I like! Seriously, a game may qualify as perfect, judged by all the preferences I've expressed here, and still be boring as heck. On the other hand, a game like Bulletstorm tests many of my preferences to their limits but the glorious gameplay just sweeps you along. Of course, in the latter case, the game may be playable but, if it conformed to my other preferences, it could be even better.

Conclusion

There are a few game mechanics that would make me think twice about buying a game. Compulsory driving missions with awful first person controls. An inadequate save system. Compulsory failable missions. Cut scenes that play the game for you. And, of course, QTEs!

Otherwise, I only ask for two things. Freedom to explore and consistency within the context of the game.

The former, doesn't mean I'm only interested in open world games. Some of the the best exploration is in old skool, linear games that still give you clever ways to reach secrets and the like. In an open world game you should be allowed to go anywhere and if you die because of your choices, so be it.

As for consistency, I don't mind if the game lets me carry an infeasible number of weapons. However, if it makes a claim to realism, I should be able to choose what I carry. If I'm playing Serious Sam, of course I'll end up locked in an arena with no way out. In a realistic world, if I could open a door a few minutes ago, I should be able to open it now.

My other preferences will be added into the mix when I'm deciding about a game but aren't "showstoppers".

Perfect, And Not So Perfect, Games

So, what games tick all the right boxes? More interestingly, what games have I enjoyed that don't!

Please read my section on "Gameplay". There are games that win through purely on their gameplay. In fact, I happily accept there are all-time, great games that do not match all my preferences. However, I won't rate these as "perfect" because I think they could have been even better.

At this point, I think I must exclude the early FPSs. Wolfenstein 3D, Doom, even up to Quake, and their ilk. They were so simple, it was hard to go wrong. They would rate as perfect but their gameplay is so basic by modern standards it's not fair to include them here.

My Perfect Games

These are the games that I love and get everything right.

Duke Nukem 3D. Having just said I have to exclude all the old games, this is the exception that proves the rule. DN3D got everything right. Fun weapons, secrets to find and few restrictions on movement. I remember jetpacking to one obscure area and the dev's had actually written "What are you doing here?" on a wall! So many modern games could still learn from this old classic.

Half-Life. The greatest linear shooter ever. Its ability to tell its story without cut scenes is a lesson few games have learned.

Deus Ex. Jostling with Half-Life as my best game of all time. Like Half-Life, playing the game tells the story not its few cut scenes. And that story is yet to be surpassed for complexity and emotional involvement. Much better than the overbaked nonsense of Bioshock 1 and Infinite. Your ability to tackle situations in multiple ways has been equalled but not surpassed.

NecroVisioN. Odd that a minor game like this should be in such hallowed company. I don't delude myself that it's as clever as others here but, surprisingly, it meets every criteria within the remit of an old-skool shooter. Having written this document, I now realise why I liked this game so much.

Bioshock 2. I know nobody else liked it but I accepted it as a pure FPS ignoring the "baggage" of the first game. Once you play it as a pure shooter, it has all the boxes ticked.

Dishonored. The true successor to Deus Ex for pure gameplay. It may even give you more ways to tackle situations than Deus Ex. It just falls short of bettering it because of the weak story but, ignoring that (and I do), it got everything else right.

Favourite Games That are Almost Perfect

Here are the games that I have loved playing but could be even better.

NOLF 1 & 2. Only ruined by compulsory, dodgy driving missions.

Far Cry 1 & 2. Magnificent games but the driving was unbearable. The only redeeming feature was that it was not compulsory but walking everywhere was a chore.

Painkiller. I had to drop it out of the "Perfect" category with extreme reluctance. However, some maps and game mechanics were only available in the harder difficulty levels. So you couldn't play all the game offers at the difficulty of your choice. And, sadly, that's a fail.

Half-Life 2. I freely accept that this is one of the greatest games of all time. However, for me, it would have been an even better game without the driving and escort missions.

S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Loved it but it was so buggy, even after patches, it made it inconsistent.

Fallout 3. The RPG emphasis on stats detracted from it as a shooter.

Borderlands. I know that they had to impose that save system for it to work in co-op but for single player, I would have loved quick save. You can't reach the level max without playing on harder difficulties. It may be the best driving in a FPS but that Mad Mel arena shouldn't have been compulsory!

Bulletstorm. This is the perfect example of how great gameplay can overcome all my other preferences. It has too many "fails" to mention but the minute I leash an enemy in the air, blast away his armour and shoot him in the rear end with a flare gun, all is forgiven!

Dead Island. It has the same save limitations as Borderlands but its real problem is the horrible controls lifted from the console versions.

Deus Ex:HR. Almost perfect except for the jarringly inconsistent "arena" boss fights.

Borderlands 2. The same save problem as the original plus a selection of failable

missions, thankfully not compulsory.

Shadow Warrior (2013). A great modern implementation of an old-skool shooter ruined by clumsy controls carried over from the console version.

Epic Fails (games I gave up on)

Blood 2. Buggy as heck and completely unbalanced gameplay. Unplayable.

RAGE. Advertised as a FPS but thought it it was a driving game. The driving was horrible and I gave up at the first compulsory driving mission.

Far Cry 3. Got the balance between realism and game mechanics completely wrong plus the driving was as bad as all the other FC games but this time it was compulsory. I mean, is it reasonable to have to go and kill a selection of animals to just to carry a few more dollars?!

Rise of the Triad (2013). A throwback to the early FPSs but then failed to give you a fun selection of weapons or a decent save system. On the third occasion the game decided to stop me from quicksaving, just to make sure I had to repeat that hard bit over & over again, I gave up.

Wolfenstein: New Order. It wants to be a film. The cutscenes were endless. I found a compilation on YouTube and it was 2½ hours long. That's longer than most feature films. In-between the cutscenes, the set pieces gave you little option for tactics – scenery unclimbable, doors locking behind you, invisible walls etc. It did offer stealth options but the fun of stealth is to explore and learn the best approach. Without a manual save system, failure took you back to the beginning of the section from whence you had to do it all ... over ... again!