

SUPERHOT game analysis

Introduction

On the 25th of February 2016, the world was introduced to a strong competitor in the FPS scene. SUPERHOT [1] is a methodical puzzle-based FPS [2] where “time moves only when you move” [3]. SUPERHOT is unique compared to other video games in the same genre, implementing the use of time manipulation as its key gameplay feature. This forced the player to think outside of the box, relying on critical thinking in moments where defeat seemed closer than success. This unbiased review will break down and evaluate all the elements that make this game the hit that it is, evenly weighing up all its strong and weak points accordingly.

Intended demographic

SUPERHOT is rated PEGI 12, being deemed suitable for children aged 12 and over. This rating allows for the games contents to include mild swearing, sexual innuendo and non-realistic violence towards human like characters. This rating was determined by the Games Rating Authority, who are responsible for administering the age ratings for video games across the UK [4]. The GRA specifically officiate the age ratings for games rated 12, 16, and 18.

“Video games that show violence of a slightly more graphic nature towards fantasy characters or non-realistic violence towards human-like characters would fall in this age category. Sexual innuendo or sexual posturing can be present, while any bad language in this category must be mild” [5].

All these features are included within the game, with some present far more than others. The non-realistic violence is present throughout the entire game, due to the genre of game. The gunplay in the game is tailored to meet the rating of the game; as when the enemies are shot at and the bullet connects with the model, they essentially explode into pieces. This is the necessary substitute to eliminate the realistic gunplay higher rated games use. An example of this is Call of Duty, which is rated a PEGI 18 due to the far more extreme levels of violence and realism presented. The measures taken to ensure the violence is suitable for a PEGI 12 is well thought out, as it does not affect the gameplay at all and opens the game to an even wider audience compared to it having a higher PEGI rating.



[1] Gunplay physics

Despite the PEGI 12 rating allowing for the use of mild language, there is no use of profanity present in SUPERHOT. This is going to be naturally discouraged as there is no physical dialogue, only occasional text conversations between the player and characters in the game which mainly discuss the game inside of the game.

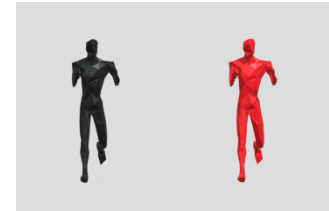
Sexual innuendo is not officially present in the game but is used as a subtle joke in the form of an easter egg. This easter egg is present in the art files on the menu screen, and once the user has gone through enough files, they will find a .txt file titled “porn.txt” with the contents “What are you looking for here? :>” [1].



[1] Hidden .txt file easter egg

Visual Style

The visual style of SUPERHOT possesses a simple yet effective appearance, using a restricted colour palette of red, white and black. The first component of the visuals are the opponents and the player model. In terms of design, both have the same model but with differentiated colour schemes. The opposition all share the same model but coloured red, while the user's model is coloured black. This supports my claim of the visual style being simple yet effective as only two models needed to be designed for the entire game- the gameplay would remain just as efficient as it would've with multiple models. The colour choice for the enemy models was selected by the game's artists with profound effect; as in colour psychology, “red provokes the strongest emotions of any colour” [7]. The colour red in colour psychology is typically associated with danger, evil and in most cases urgency. So, by selecting this colour for the enemies, it will play further into the player's colour association. When they see the enemy, they will instantly think danger and begin to shoot at them, eliminating any potential confusion as to who the player is supposed to shoot at. The weapons in the game follow this principle, as all available weapons are the same shade of black. Just like the oppositions association with red, this simple colour choice will allow for the player to locate potential weapons with ease. This restricted colour palette may have been chosen due to the intense critical thinking the game possesses; by simplifying what the player needs to locate it will allow for the player to instead focus on how they'll win.



[6] SUPERHOT character models

In SUPERHOT, the level design is improvised to bring out the key qualities of the game. For example, every environment used for each level is light grey in colour. This choice is deliberate as the restricted use of colour enhances visual clarity, allowing for the player to immediately distinguish threats within the environment. The level layout in each level is designed to force the player to utilise the key tool in the game- time moves when you move. This is achieved with a minimalistic layout consisting of very few places to take cover. The further the player progresses, the more blind spots that are present, requiring quick assessments of enemy positions and weapon availability.



[1] SUPERHOT Map

Audio and its impact on the player

Throughout the duration of the main story there is no official music played, despite this, the use of audio plays a huge role in the player's gameplay experience. The only noise present during gameplay is only what goes on around the player; gunshots, glass breaking, and even the player's movement. This keeps the player focused, increasing the tension in each level. Upon completion of each level your replay is played back to you in normal time, and the words "Super...Hot...Super...Hot" are repeated [8]. In the report referenced [8] the reviewer described this as "a little bit annoying and repetitive". I agree with this sentiment as it feels overused due to the number of levels present in the game. This may diminish the player's experience as this could become irritating, which may lead to the player skipping their replay opposed to enjoying it.

Once the player finishes the game, the end credits roll. This is the only time during the game that music is played. The song played is Psy Pawłowa, performed by Polish rock band Republika [9]. From my perspective the song choice for this game was exceptionally chosen. Despite the use of music not fitting the tone of the gameplay, I feel that its use would be better suited during the replay of each level. As fast paced music and fast paced gun play work well alongside one another. This concept is supported with external research [10], showing how beneficial the use of music is in creating a successful video game.

"A well-crafted soundtrack can elevate a simple game into an unforgettable interactive experience, solidifying its place in gaming history" [10].

An example of a game that's mixed the perfect balance of critical thinking and an immersive soundtrack is Metal Gear Rising Revengeance, in the video referenced [11] this balance is displayed effectively, and SUPERHOT would benefit introducing a feature like this in its replays.

Game Structure

SUPERHOT is a level-based video game consisting of 32 levels in the main story. The difficulty of the game increases as the player progresses through the story, by introducing factors that require for the player to plan their attack with deeper thought. These factors include increasing enemy spawn points, decreasing cover to hide behind, and increasing the number of enemies with firearms opposed to melee weapons. If the player takes a single hit they are defeated and go to a game over screen, then the level restarts. For players to avoid defeat, they are required to make a crucial decision as to how they intent to defeat the opposition. This fundamental area of SUPERHOT supports the concept of Game Theory, which is the study of how a person's decisions impact the outcome of different scenarios [12]. This is done by having the player stop and consider the potential outcome of each scenario that might occur. As if the player was to blindly enter each scenario, the odds of success are slim, compared to thinking about potential outcomes before attempting which would greatly increase the chance of success.

Replay Value

Once the player successfully finishes the final level of SUPERHOT, “Endless” mode is unlocked. This provides the player with nine arenas, all with 4 levels that each have a different condition. For example, the first arena is “Lab” and consists of 4 modes; “LAB#18.lvl” which is an endless arena with no means of winning, “#18-RACE.lvl” which requires the player to score 20 kills as fast as possible [1], “#18_TIME.lvl” which gives the player a 20 second time limit to complete the level, and “#18_REAL.lvl” which instead gives a 60 second time limit to complete. To unlock each map, the player must achieve a specific number of kills. Under the “GAMES” tab, there are also two minigames for the player to try; “treedude.exe” and “shrl.exe”. “treedude.exe” is a 2D climber game which gets faster the further the player progresses. While “shrl.exe” is essentially a parody game as no official game is present, only a parody of the messages you first see in the main story [13].



[1] Screenshot of SUPERHOT's endless mode menu

SUPERHOT's “Challenges” mode provides the player with new ways of enjoying the original story. Introducing 13 unique challenges which completely alter the gameplay of the story, significantly increasing the games difficulty. An example of one of these challenges is “KATANAONLY”, which is also known as “NINJA CHALLENGE”. This mode alters the gameplay mechanics by only allowing the player to use the katana, while taking away gameplay mechanics in the process. For instance, the ability to punch, shoot, throw and pickup items are removed. Only mechanics that effect the katana are left in the game such as picking up and throwing only the katana. Despite all these factors to increase the difficulty, the player is granted increased movement speed for the duration of the challenge to make the challenge possible to complete. From my own experience, I feel that these challenges provide an engaging yet testing way to enjoy SUPERHOT, as each new challenge is unique.



[1] Screenshot of SUPERHOT's challenges mode menu

Positive and negative aspects

Upon completion of the game, the player is provided with numerous ways to enjoy the story again with a new gameplay experience. This is further supported with the game's endless mode, providing the player with new challenges to complete. But despite these positives I believe that the plot of the game is quite cheesy, making hard to feel immersed by the story being told. Upon carrying out research to see what other players thought of the game, I found that many people are addressing the same issue. IGN described the games story as “an annoyingly corny roadblock in between the enjoyable gameplay” [14], which is a statement I strongly agree with. I feel that a more

encapsulating story alongside the already perfect gameplay would make SUPERHOT an outstanding game.

Conclusion

SUPERHOT is a well-adapted simply designed game, well suited for its intended demographic, requiring critical thinking to progress the game's story and anticipate how each scenario will resolve. The game provides varied replayability, incorporating minimalistic audio to add the already present tension. Despite this, the game's narrative lacks an engaging story and diminishes stronger aspects of the gameplay. The implementation of time manipulation makes the experience unique, introducing the perfect blend of an FPS and puzzle genre. After reviewing the games mechanics, I can say that the game is enjoyable to play. In spite of the poorly written plot, I would recommend the game to others as the gameplay outweighs the negative aspects.

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