Staging the player

The Level is designed to be reminiscent of an old roman coliseum. It has an oval shape that forces the players to take one path to get to the flag but then allows them many paths when escaping with the flag. The level has three main floors that the player can navigate to get to the flag and then escape with it. The first floor is where most of the fighting takes place. It has health and armor upgrades that allow players to fight even longer, and also forces players to run through the first floor if they ever need to replenish their health or armor. The majority of the first floor is also covered in a thick fog that creates a really chaotic battle. There also two shock rifles right near a jump pad that leads to sniper nests above. The second floor consists of and H shaped structure in the middle of the map as well as a path that goes around the side of the map. The central platform is right in the center of the main combat area and has the only rocket launcher spawn on the map. This becomes a major focal point for players because controlling the rocket launcher gives said team a lot of control of the map. The two platforms that go around the edge on the second floor have support pillars for the third floor that also give the player a good amount of cover as they run along the path. This path also leads the player to a midgame upgrade that doubles their damage. The third floor is just two platforms that go around the edge of the map. These platforms are raised enough that they give players some protection from enemy players on the first floor but it is completely open to attacks form anyone on the second or third floor. The third floor has two sniping posts for sniping enemies on lower floors. These sniper nests have easy jump pad access from six points on the map which makes it easy for players to jump up to avoid enemies below, take out enemy snipers, or stop the people who are running the flag at on that floor. The third floor also has two sniping posts for sniping enemies on lower floors. This floor is also prime flag running area because players tend not to congregate along this path but it is risky because it is also the most exposed place on the map.

The coliseum look of the stage is supposed to remind the player of old roman gladiator matches where the contestants would fight to the death. Even though the stage draws from the past I used lighting to make the level feel futuristic. The use of color also directs the player, as the player starts from their home base which is their teams color. As the player leaves their base they will enter a part of the area that is of the enemies color. This is to make them feel immediately on edge and as if they could be attack by the enemy team from anywhere. As the player goes into the center of the level the lighting turns purple which is a neutral color between the red and blue sides. As the player reaches the enemies base the lighting once again changes to match the attacking players color. This makes the defending team's base stand out in comparison and easily directs the player where to go.

The fog on the first floor is very important for staging the player. The fog makes the first floor very claustrophobic because it significantly reduces the player's sight. I was able to use lights to make the player feel like they could see further than they really could by creating silhouettes of players running through the fog. The lights can also throw shadows which can be used confuse players and helps create the chaos that happens in the center. The fog also gives the players on the first floor Protection from snipers above because they are harder to see. To try and mitigate navigation confusion in the fog there are multiple paths of pickups that not only guide the player also also allows them to gain health and ammo along the way.

Stress and tension

My level has a fair amount of stress and tension due to its size and player count. This makes the game very fast paced because there is very little down time between player encounters. When players die there is also very little down time before they are back into the battle. This lack of down time keeps players on edge and doesn't punish them for dying. The number of shock rifles and rocket launchers pickup factories is small compared to the number of players that are on the map which makes these

weapons very important to collect. Once the player has one of the more powerful weapons they will find that managing ammo is very important. There are no ammo pickups for the shock rifle or rocket launcher on the level so they have to wait for the guns to re spawn before they can get more ammo.

The fog also adds a lot of tension for the player because it easily conveys that there are a lot of enemies running around without showing the player exactly where the enemies are. Taking away the players ability to know exactly what is in front of them is something that doesn't happen often in multiplayer maps at this scale. The paths that the player can take are straight with little to no cover so it makes it easy for them blindly shoot at their enemies and get kills. Other player will be able to track the shots taken at them through the fog so that they can tell where the enemy was, the player can then use this information to estimate where the enemy is going so that they can make more accurate shots. This act of blindly firing builds tension because they don't know if they hit the enemy and if they encounter the enemy they were shooting at they won't know how much health it will have. This player could be a shot away from death, or they could be completely unharmed.

Teaching the player

The player is taught some path to take through pickups that are placed around the map. These paths are placed throughout the fog because when I play tested the level I found that the human players avoided the fog and instead took the second and third floor paths to get to the flag. The pick-up paths I placed in the final version of the level now serve multiple purposes, they lead the player through the level, they reward the player for taking risks, and they allow the player to get used to the fog so they can begin to use it to their advantage for combat. Once this was implemented human players began to venture into the fog more to collect items and guns so that they could survive longer in fights against bots.

Following the plan

I did not follow my plan at all for this level. It started out as two fort areas that were connected by a couple of bridges. As I was testing the initial set up of the level I found that I wanted a central battle area. The level then started to organically evolve into the final layout of the level. After I had a basic idea of the layout that I was going for I started to work on just one quarter of the level so I could focus on making the geometry as detailed and interesting as I could. From this point on the majority of the level was born out of experimenting different parts of UDK. I very quickly became interested in how lighting and interacted with fog.

As I worked on this level I decided I wanted to try and do something with my level that I hadn't seen done before. This is the point where I completely abandoned my original plan, which had been iteration on a level design that I had really enjoyed from another game. Once I started getting the hang of UDK though I started wanting to branch out and make my level truly unique. This is where the fog and lighting comes in. I wanted to make my level feel very tense to the player and I found one interesting way to do that was by using fog. I haven't see fog used this way in multiplayer maps before and having something to compare my level to was very refreshing. After a while I began to get an idea in my head of what I wanted the level to look like and it was just a matter of messing with different actors until I found a way to make what I wanted.

Changes and iterations

This level changed a lot as I was making it. The level was originally going to be two bridges that the players would fight over. The bridge part of the level became the second and third floor of my final map. I then started messing around with the central area; this section didn't experience that much in the way of iteration because I got the geometry for the central platform right the first time. A lot of iteration happened with the items and guns with my map. Originally I thought I was going to have to

encourage the player to explore the multiple floors of the level, but after testing the game I found that the exact opposite happened. The human players always seemed to use the second and third floors to sneak past the bots that would be fighting on the first floor. Because of this I moved the majority of the items to the first floor to force the players to take a risk to get guns, ammo, health, and armor. This made the level much faster paced and helped distribute foot traffic. The lighting also went through several different iterations as I tried to figure out how to use the lights to guide the player though the level.