

REVIEW

Doom II

Doom II



PHOTOS: Garry Hunter



David McCandless is not a happy FragMaster™. At last the year's most awaited sequel, *Doom II*, has arrived and... and... and... read on...

LET'S GET this over with... *Doom II: Hell On Earth* is: a) Not *Quake* – the mythical next game/epic from ID studios which is set to be as advanced as *Doom* was to *Wolfenstein* and will make *Doom* look like plasticine with its looking up and down, grenade throwing, climbing inside vehicles, over bridges and that.

So, the sequel to the much played game of the year (or thus far in human history, depending on how you took to it) is more of:

b) An add-on.

c) An upgrade

Not dissimilar, you could say, to:

d) *Spear Of Destiny* to *Wolfenstein*

e) Haitian Scenery Disks for *Flight Sim 5*

f) An expensive "speech pack" for an Origin game and quite similar, bar a few new bits, to:

g) the old *Doom*

The Old Doom

The old *Doom*, aaaah, (soft focus), what a game... what a game... aah, the times we had. For those who haven't experienced *Doom* yet (and I can't believe there is a single PC person on this planet who hasn't yet run screaming from a room full of barons or fallen headlong into a tidal wave of cacodemons) the idea is very uncomplicated. You, a tough space marine, are sent on a secret mission to Mars, where various bio-mechanical/black magic type experiments have resulted in the accidental opening of a portal to Hell. Thousands of evil little demons have poured through said portal, murdered the staff of the research base, and then reanimated them as gun-toting zombies. With just the aid of some choice hardware – chainsaw, rocket launcher, shotgun and plasma gun – you have to penetrate 27 sprawling, labyrinthine levels solving minor puzzles, engaging in cataclysmic fire fights, leaping from parapets, drowning in radioactive slime, being blown up by barrels, fireballs, plasma, your own rockets, and somebody else's rockets. It's all good harmful fun. And, at the end of all this fun, you saved Mars from a fate worse than eternal death, only to bring the hordes of Hell hurtling towards Earth as you returned home.

This is where *Doom II* picks up the 'story'. Earth has been invaded by demons, who have spawned some new offspring, destroyed most of the world's population, and brought their own arcane style of architecture to our beautiful cities. The game, then, is much the same as the first. You, hardened marine, must penetrate 32 sprawling, labyrinth levels, solving minor puzzles, engaging in cataclysmic fire fights... and so on and so on. The main differences are new wall textures, a new weapon, six new monsties, and the difficulty level.

Doom II is pitched at experienced *Doom* pros. The kind of person, not a million miles away from this word processor, who has really played *Doom*. I mean, truly, sadly, deeply played *Doom*, until they dreamt about it, and couldn't go into the Underground without a shotgun. The kind of person who would watch *Terminator 2* and comment to his friends, when Arnie picks up the gaitling gun, that he'd "been there, done that". The kind of person who through



NEW DOOM-O-SCOPE

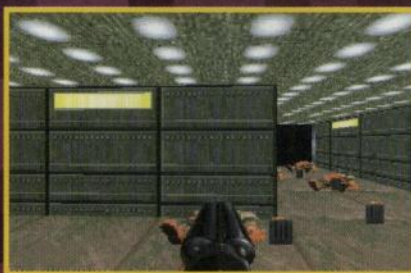
AESTHETIC DIFFERENCES

When you start playing *Doom*, if you're were an addict of the original (and let's face it, how could you fail not to be?), you'll soon notice subtle differences in the texture and graphics as well as a new look weapon...



THE TITLE SCREEN

The first difference, of course, is the title screen. It's not quite as well drawn as the first, but it pretty much sums up all you need to know about *Doom II* (i.e. "you are going to get killed. Horribly").



THE LOOK

The look of *Doom II* has changed slightly. Some wall textures are the same (you'll recognise the concrete walls and floors) but most have changed into "real life" textures such as red brick, cobbled stone and book cases.



THE SKY

The sky, too, has changed. The first few levels have a smoggy, smokey brown sky – a good excuse for a series of very dark levels. The middle section uses a burning city backdrop and then it's your atypical mountain vista with blood red skin for sky in the final levels.

MONSTERS MENAGERIE

The main innovation in *Doom II* are the new "things". Alongside our existing ugly zombies and tomato monsters, a new breed of "scaries" have appeared. Lethal little buggers they are to. Check them out.



PAIN ELEMENTAL

The new cacodemons look like little babies. They open their mouths and fire... nothing. Until you notice the large amount of lost souls appearing. Yeah, the baby cacos shoot those goddamn skulls all over the place and, worse still, turn into three lost souls when they die.



ARACHNOTRONS

Baby spider monsters – what a pain these guys are. Half the size of their fathers, they move faster and fire deadly plasma balls. Their imposing and never-ending fire power will send the most arch of FragMasters™ (bar myself of course) scurrying for cover.



REVENANTS

These are weird and tall. If they're far away, they fire small homing fireballs with the impact power of a glancing rocket blast. If they're up close, they start punching you (bizarre). Continuous plasma bolts will shut their spooky, little skeletal mouths up.

TRICKS 'N' TRAPS

The name of this level does not bode well, but any self-respecting WadEmperor™, DoomKing™, or Baron Bane™ would not be deluded by the calm serenity of its entry hall (fig 1). Eight doors await your perusal and beyond them, we anticipate, there are many tricks and traps (I'm clever like that).

The first peril is a wall of demons (fig 2) thrashing, nay straining, against each other in a disconcerting attempt to get at you. This seems to be the unsubtle vogue in *Doom II* – lots of monsters, all in a massive lump, waiting for you to trigger their release so they can eat you. Hah. Let them eat rocket.

The next room, a pleasantly thin corridor, holds a deadly trap. A baron appears when you grab the chainsaw and promptly teleports behind you, giving you exactly 0.1 picoseconds to turn and destroy before being frazzled. Hah. But if you're as quick as I was, four good direct hits should flatten him (fig 3).

The next room is a great room. Sneak in, quietly, biding your time (any DeathMatch player knows the wisdom of this). Plant yourself behind the wall of barons and just watch the show as Rocket Launcher Hands kills every last one of them (fig 4). Hah. Then you just have to pick up the supercharge and murder any stragglers. And a final point: all ye hordes of hell beware! This is what happens when a mass of imps try to sneak up on a DoomKing (fig 5). Nobody messes with us.

FIG 1



FIG 2



FIG 3



FIG 4



FIG 5





NINJA SHOTGUN

The only new weapon in *Doom II* is the ninja shotgun. A true double-barrel sawn-off, using two shells to tear the face off all nearby monsties. It's useful when faced with hordes of monsties but takes an age to reload which can be dangerous when you're being swamped.



DOORS AND LIFTS

Doors and lifts now move a lot faster. Like the doors on the Death Star, these portals open more or less instantly, giving you less time to react and less time to back out of them in a hurry. The lifts, too, swoosh down in a split second, usually ridden by half-a-million imps.



MANCUBUS

Fat, ugly and very deadly, the ManCubus moves slowly but shoots fast. Two fast big fireballs at oblique angles to be exact. They're tough and annoyingly accurate when shooting – a couple of good rockets will sort them out. Just. What the barons were in *Doom I*.



ARCHVILE

Last but by no means least is the ArchVile: he who waits for you in later levels. Not only does he leap gaps and jump around like a gazelle. Not only does the boy target you with deadly yellow fire. But, he also resurrects almost all the dead monsters in a reasonable radius.

down-to-midnight deathmatch-a-thons is now probably divorced, excommunicated from his family, on the run from the Mob, and an outcast to his friends – all except that grizzled bunch of three coffee-swilling "Doom chums". Those special kinds of friends who you thought were alright, who shook you by the hand, bought you a pint, and lent you money when you were down on your luck. Your real friends who gave you a shoulder to cry on and support when you needed it. And then what did they do when you played network *Doom*? They WAITED in the BLOODY ROCKET LAUNCHER ROOM on EVERY single level WITHOUT FAIL and BLASTED you OVER and OVER again. I mean, I ask you, IS THAT SKILL? HUH? IS THAT SKILL? Or is that, maybe, possibly, talentless little cowards hiding in a hole? Yellow bellied toe-rags skulking in their little, tiny "dens"? Huh? HUH?

Ahem.

As you can see, *Doom* can have a rather profound impact on one's life. Adrenaline, testosterone, endomorphines, lymphocytes – every little chemical reactant in your body attuned to the wall of gore and mayhem in front of your eyes.

Doom II will force you to re-evaluate your tolerance levels. This is much harder. The levels have changed in tact. Instead of gradually ascending in difficulty, ushering you gradually into the *Doom* ethos, *Doom II*'s initial levels set the pace for the rest of the game. The first three levels are of the bearable Shores Of Hell style difficulty, and then level four cracks open your jaw and shoves a shotgun down your vacant gullet. Level five snaps your knee like a dry twig and breaks a crowbar over the back of your neck. Level six tears your arms off and force feeds you them while you watch. And level seven ties your trunk to the floor and tickles the soles of your feet with blades of grass.

Great expectations

Each wad is staged to play on your expectations. Switches, which look like they'll activate the trap door to the left, actually open the cavern of cacodemons behind. A crushy ceiling which couldn't possible get you, splits into four before you can escape, and waffles you on the spot. Walls drop in ambush everywhere and, once they've dropped and released a cascade of nasties, the wall behind the wall that

dropped, drops, unleashing another wave of repellent little hungries. The new monsters are scary little peckers, again playing on the complacency of arch DoomKings. Those baby spiders don't look so tough – arrrrghhhh! Those fat plasma men are pretty difficult to miss – yeeaaaaaaghh! Those chaingun sergeants will drop with one shotgun – bleurraghahahaggg! It's tough out there.

But, overall, and I'm going to drop a small fragmentation bombshell with nails inside here, *Doom II* is a very disappointing sequel. You see, something happened in those long months between *Dooms*. DEU and a host of *Doom* level editors appeared on bulletin boards and coverdisks. Of the hundreds of new

THE WOLFENSTEIN LEVEL

FIG 6

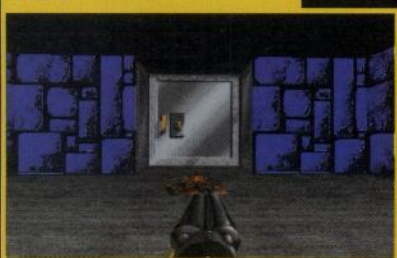


FIG 8

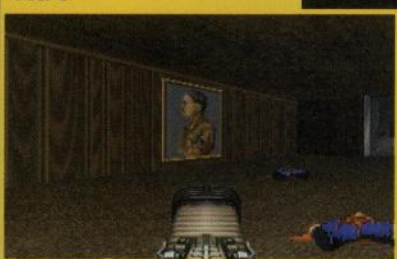


The *Wolfenstein* secret level (accessed from level 16) is probably *Doom II*'s nicest touch. This level recreates sections of old *Wolfy*'s first level exactly (fig 6). Right down to the chaingun-wielding sergeants, disturbingly shouting "Mein Lieben" when

FIG 7



FIG 9



they die (fig 7). Instead of the politically incorrect alsatians which were massacred in *Wolfenstein*, we have some *Doom*-style MP-friendly pink demons (fig 8). Strangely, Hitler's still on the walls (fig 9). Cor, eh? ID – they take no prisoners.

IN PERSPECTIVE

Well, since *Doom* shook the world, a few pretenders have launched their stake in the 3D shoot 'em up market. *Corridor 7* used the now antiquated *Wolfenstein* engine and suffered accordingly. *Terminator*, *Rampage* and *In Extremis* unfortunately materialised at the same time as *Doom* and suffered accordingly. Only *System Shock*, Origin's latest masterpiece, which combines elements of *Doom* and role-playing for a fully rounded gaming experience, comes close to *Doom*'s mastery of the 3D engine.

Doom I & II

Corridor 7

Terminator Rampage

In Extremis

System Shock

FIG 10



FIG 11



FIG 12

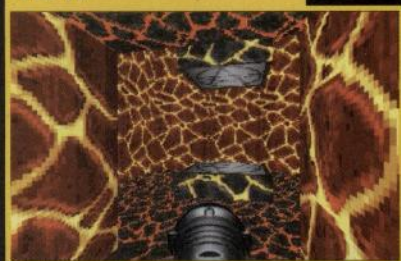


FIG 13



SUBURBS

The Suburbs is a typical *Doom II* level – scary multi-levelled city and streets style layout coupled with well-placed and out of sight snipers (fig 10). There are bags of

traps too. The “streets” are littered with troopers and sergeants. This level is all about leaps of faith (fig 11) and exploring strange teleparty rooms with weird textures (fig 12). The last section, leading to a special exit, is no walk-over either, it being a horribly complex spiral made of shoot-through walls (fig 13). Yeaarrghhh.

(Right) Chunkier than their shotgun-wielding cousins, the new chaingun sergeants should be avoided. They have the tendency of sitting way off in the distance and just piling you with bullets. The best policy is to burst them with a shotgun (they do, they actually pop into gory body-parts) or coax them into an “argument” with some nearby troopers.



levels designed, some were crap, some were outstandingly brilliant, better than the originals. Some had new graphics, some had new sounds. Meanwhile, more and more people were experiencing network, serial, and modem multiplayer. They'd realised the staying power of *Doom* was not in massive WADs and new monsters, but in engaging your friends in virtual combat, and using the old cerebellum as well as the steaming maw of a rocket launcher.

And now, *Doom II*'s revolutionary new features have come a little bit too late. Sure, as a stand-alone game for someone who's never played the original, *Doom II* is a sound investment – an excellent adventure into Hell. For DeathMatch players, *Doom II* offers the new negative frags for suicide Deathmatch rules – a welcome addition for those BASTARDS who top themselves the moment they lose a single percent of health. And of course the mighty ninja shotgun adds a certain novelty to Deathmatch play. The new sound effects are outstandingly good. The new monsters and amusing *Wolfenstein* secret levels add incentive for *Doom* vets, but overall, speaking as a gnarled old pro myself, I wanted more. I wanted more new weapons. I wanted new features, new puzzles maybe, new programming – more than just a few faster doors and lifts. It's your choice ultimately. But I think you're going to be disappointed. ☹

And finally... a big thanks to the chaps at the Tottenham Court Road Computer Exchange for the loan of their tomato monster. You can contact them if you want to buy, swap or sell on (071) 636 2666.



(Above) Whichever route you choose to take, life's a breeze for a DoomKing.

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SCORE

Disappointing for *Doom* pros. Not enough new stuff and few levels which can't be beaten on the amateur scene.

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SCORE

A welcome addendum to *Doom* for virgins and those who've missed the extra levels. New monsters, new thrills and a new gun, but slightly too hard and inaccessible for newcomers.

Minimum Memory: 4Mb
(8Mb recommended)

Minimum Processor: 386 DX (486 recommended)

Hard Disk Space Required: 16Mb

Graphics Modes Supported: VGA

Sound Cards Supported: Sound Blaster and Compatibles, AWE32, UltraSound, Thunderboard, Sound Canvas and General Midi.

Controls: Joystick, Keyboard, Mouse

Price: Tba Release Date: October

Publisher: Virgin Interactive Tel: 081 960 2255

