

They're Going to Hell for This One!

The Bad Boys at ID Software Take Their 3-D Engine to New Depths

by Chris Lombardi

Sneak Previews are not designed to be reviews. They are feature articles based on "works in progress" that CGW's editors have deemed worthy of early coverage. These articles are not intended to provide the final word on a product, since we expect to publish appropriate review coverage when the game is finished.

This summer marks one year since Id Software dropped unsuspecting gamers into a stunningly realistic Nazi stronghold in *Wolfenstein 3-D*. With its blazing 3-D scrolling and its simple, though extremely intense game play, *Wolfie* quickly became the cat's caterwaul in action games. The Texas-based team of software



upstarts that brought us this gaming "experience" hasn't been sitting on their C compilers this past year. They've been very busy. So busy, they've probably yet to hang all of their awards on the wall.

We don't know what nasty sludge is seeping into the Texas water table, but whatever it is has given these boys some strange visions, and what's worse, the programming sorcery to carry it out. *Doom* is the name of their next creation, and unbelievable graphics technology is their game. *Doom* is, not too surprisingly, another 3-D action game based on Id's award winning game engine. But what is surprising is how far they've taken this new incarnation beyond *Wolfenstein*. *Doom* is not the typical

next generation technology jump. It's a high-altitude, wind-aided, Carl Lewis of a leap ahead.

Gamers who choose to accept this new mission will find themselves in the skull of a space marine, the likes of which we saw die *en masse* in the film *Aliens*. In fact, the script of this game could be transformed into *Aliens* with a simple Search-and-Replace and a slight twist of setting. There you'll stand, playing cards with three other space station Rent-A-Marines, popping powdered donuts and jawing about the red light delights to be found planet-side, when the alert klaxon sounds. But it's not another genetically engineered gerbil loose on aisle 12 — there's real trouble about, and that straight flush you were just dealt is shot to Hell.

Strutting out into the hallway with well-armed cocksureness, you see a sight that makes you regret that your combat briefs are airtight. It's a muscular, horny, pizza-nightmare of a demon with a soul eatin' grin. Yes, he wants your immortal being, and, no, he's not beyond using gross surgical means to get it. If the trigger finger is fast enough, you'll live to shoot another, and your multi-level quest to find the source of these soul snatchers will have begun. Off you go, four better-armed, though less lyrically endowed

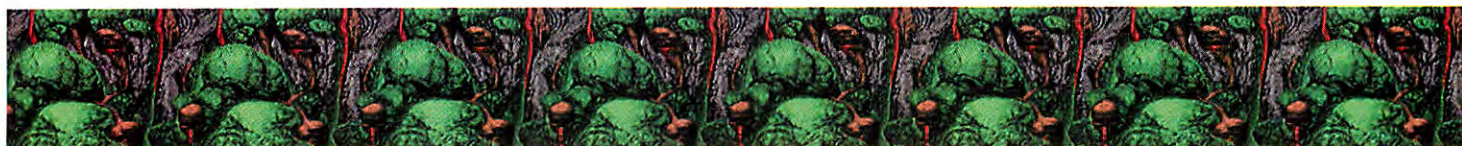
Dantes on a circle by circle descent to God-knows-where.

Wolfie players who ventured solo into Hitler's den may now enlist help in *Doom*. *Doom* is (God help us) multiplayer. Those fortunate enough to have access to a network will be able to hunt by fours. Those of lesser fortune, though blessed with modem



and a friend, will be able to hook up remotely. The rest of us can play with ourselves; a state of affairs to which we computer gamers are well accustomed.

As mentioned, *Doom* is a great improvement over *Wolfie*. One glance at a scrolling screen is enough to prove it. Whereas *Wolfie* had nicely textured walls with bit-mapped adornments, *Doom* has opulently textured walls with bit-mapped adornments. Whereas *Wolfie* has bare ceilings and floors, *Doom* has carpet, tile, ceiling panels and light fixtures. There are immense computer banks with rows of important looking lights, and monitors displaying bit-mapped planets and space station maps. There is furniture: tables, chairs, counters and crates — there are even cards on the table for the poker game mentioned earlier. Gamers will also be able to put their own touch on the surrounding, as one's bullets will pock-mark the walls, which will bear those territorial markings for the rest of the game. If the environment of *Wolfie* "put you there,"



then *Doom* will pick you up, hurl you in, close the door, and turn the key.

Ever wonder how the Nazis kept their fortress so well lit in *Wolfie*? Well we hadn't either, but now that we've seen *Doom* the question does come to mind. One of the more impressive features of the graphics is the addition of light, or rather, the removal



of it. There are gorgeous lighting effects in *Doom*; long shadows stretching from doorways, overhead beams casting patterns on the floor, flickering fluorescent bulbs as irritating as in life, and caverns so black you can't see your pistol muzzle in front of your face. If you thought bumping into a Nazi henchman in a suffocating maze was unnerving, try knocking head-long into Satan's soul steward in a darkened alley.

Another major shift from *Wolfie* to *Doom* is in the lay of the land. The *Doom* room architecture now includes non-orthogonal walls — a college boy's way of saying that they are not restricted to right angles. In addition, there are now variable ceiling heights and multiple levels within a level, as one might find in an *Ultima Underworld*. In *Doom* there are curving and descending hallways, stairs to upper and lower areas, recessed "conversation pits," and elevated platforms. The effects they've created with these new tools are enough to



cook a gamer's circuits. At one point, you can climb to an upper level and look out across a vast area of virtual space with all sorts of graphic monkey-business going on down below. It's the computer game equivalent of one's first Grand Canyon vista.

The Id 3-D system has changed very little in the actual mechanics of the game. Keyboard users will still have the Alt, Cntl, and arrow keys as their best friends, and the number keys will still cycle through the ridiculous stockpile of weapons that one keeps on their person. The weapons still suggestively protrude from the bottom of the screen, and they still animate in visceral pulses of power, though they do wild new things. There's an animated, thrusting double-bayonet that reaches out into the screen, as well as a shotgun that one's bit-mapped arm will pull back and cock after every blast. There are other, more twisted armaments to be found and fired, though we'll save some surprises for later. One new and welcome interface addition is an automap feature that will keep track of the sights seen and the places yet uncovered. This will be an essential part of a *Doom* session, as the non-orthogonal floor plans are disorienting and labyrinthine.

Again as in *Wolfie*, the primary directive is to scavenge the floors for ammo, health rejuvenators and treasures, while fighting back hordes of baddies that lurk in every dark corner. Those who wished for a bit more interactivity in the world of *Wolfie* will be satisfied — a bit. There are switches on the walls that can be flipped to interesting effect. Walls will move, platforms will rise from the floor or descend from the ceiling. There's even a room in which bits of the floor pulse up and down like pistons, making for a seasick trip across the hall. Id hopes to make some of the computer terminals interactive, though they hadn't implemented that in their latest working version. Basically, as the mechanics go, *Doom* is the same "hitch up yer jockstrap" shoot-n-scrounge as *Wolfie*, though on a completely different planet.

The question that comes to



mind these days when discussing a game of such graphic intensity is the computer horsepower required to play it. In its current state, enjoying the full experience of *Doom* will probably take a muscular 386 machine; however, there will be options to resize the graphic window and switch off some of the graphic detail so that lower-end gamers will be able to play at a decent clip. Increased realism has its costs, though realism of the *Doom* kind may make it worthwhile.

August looks to be the month in which gamers will be Doomed to wander shadowy halls rife with Satan's spawn. Like *Wolfie*, *Doom* will be distributed through shareware channels and direct from Id. The first episode (one level) will be freeware and will offer frugal graphics compared to the rest of the game. However, in the registered version, Id won't hold back. Who knows to what depths Id will go to bring this virtual experience to a bullet-casing littered end? One just can't be sure of such things with these Id guys. There's only one thing we can be sure of — we'll have one Hell of a time. **CGW**

