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Doom II: Hell On Earth

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Virgin
Developer:	Id Software
Price:	£50
Size:	5 disks
Release:	October 10

Just nine months after *Doom: Evil Unleashed* erupted onto the PC with its explosive mix of gunplay, gore and strategy, id Software have returned to the fray with a follow-up that promises even more refined blasting action. Although id released the first game on a 'try before you buy' basis – the initial episode was available free but subsequent ones had to be paid for – *Doom II: Hell On Earth* has been placed on a more conventional commercial footing, with id obviously assuming that *Doom*'s reputation ensures sales of the sequel.

In the initial stages of *Doom II*, it's hard to avoid the suspicion that you've booted up its predecessor by mistake: the backgrounds are the same, the monsters are familiar, and the gameplay is apparently unchanged. As you get further into the game, though, *Doom II* begins to reveal its unique attraction.

One of the main attractions of *Doom* was its stunning graphics. Not only does *Doom II* clip along faster than any other game on the market, but the variety of the visuals has been dramatically increased. With the benefit of hindsight, you realise how much of *Doom* consisted of monotonous brown walls. Now there's a much greater range of textures, including brickwork, wood panelling, rough-hewn granite and stone slabs.

More importantly, id have made subtle but significant alterations to the gameplay. The shift of emphasis away from utter carnage and towards problem solving that began in the last few levels of *Doom* has been continued in *Doom II*. Switches are scattered liberally throughout the game; the right combinations

The lethal Cyberdaemon boss from the original game makes several appearances in the sequel. Six or seven shots from the BFG are needed to stop him, and your life expectancy at this range is short. This new fiend (inset) only needs a line of sight to turn you into a human candle

Monsters

Doom II boasts six new enemies. The fiend (top left) sets fire to you from a distance. The fat man (top middle) is equipped with twin fireballs. The skeletons (above) throw fireballs which follow you around corners. The spider (top right) posesses plasma weapons. The sergeants (above right) are weak but their guns have a long range. The Cacodaemon (inset) launches flaming skulls and explodes when he dies

have to be activated to open doors and trigger various other events. Even ostensibly simple rooms often require strategic decisions to be made. Although the pleasure of slaughtering your enemies never wears off, it's unquestionably more satisfying to have to think as well as use your reflexes.

It's this depth that makes *Doom II* more satisfying to play than any other game in its genre. *Alien Vs Predator* (see page 78), *Terminator Rampage* and *Monster Manor* all suffer from shallow gameplay that soon becomes tiresome. In *Doom II*, however, there's always something to be achieved, whether it's finding a keycard to allow you access to a new section of the level, getting hold of a health top-up or a more powerful weapon, or just figuring out a way of dispatching that particularly bothersome monster before he kills you (again).

But although *Doom II* does require a fair degree of logical thought, the strategy involved is never so tortuous that it detracts from the game's playability. Even if the same level has been testing your capabilities for an hour, you know that the solution to your problems lies in

front of you, and it's just a question of working it out. It's an article of faith in *Doom II* that it's always you at fault, not the game.

As you explore *Doom II*, it becomes apparent how much more complex the level architecture is compared to the first game. The corridors and rooms are as labyrinthine as ever, but numerous lifts, flights of steps and darkened pits give the game a much greater vertical dimension. In the open-air stages, for example, you find yourself battling through castles several storeys high – as well as roaming around at ground level, avoiding gunfire from snipers taking potshots from vantage points high above you.

Doom II also boasts a huge number of secret areas. Some are relatively obvious, while others take a while to figure out. The further you get into the game, the more cunningly hidden they are, but they're never so obscure that you give up looking. And they're rewarding when you find them: one of the best-concealed consists of two Nazi-ridden levels of id's *Wolfenstein 3D*, the precursor to *Doom*.

Id have deliberately increased the challenge in *Doom II* (if you can't take the heat, they

Multiplayer

Leaping out behind your best friend and turning them into dead meat with a well-aimed shotgun blast is what multiplayer gaming is all about. In recognition of the network game's contribution to *Doom*'s success, *Id* have enhanced both the death-match and co-operative modes in *Doom II*. From the DOS prompt, monsters can be turned off, sped up by three times or made to respawn every eight seconds. Your own speed can be increased by up to 250%, although other players are informed if you take advantage of this option. For the seriously vain (or bloodthirsty), matches can be recorded and played back at a later date. However, if you haven't got access to an IPX network you'll just have to dream.

As in the first game, your enemies fight each other in *Doom II*, which makes your life slightly easier

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Gore

Doom II **is not for the faint-hearted: scenes like these make it one of the goriest games on the PC, but also one of the most atmospheric**

rather unsympathetically recommend that you put in some practice on the first game). Even on the lowest of the five difficulty levels there are numerous enemies to contend with, and on the hardest one (apart from the unplayable 'Nightmare' level) the hordes of rampaging foes make for a frantic blast. The monsters are generally faster and more intelligent than they were in the original game, and it's now only the lowliest humans who blunder round corners into your ambushes. id have made one concession to frailer gamers, though: whereas the three sections that constituted *Doom* were completely separate, which meant that you had to start each one with the rather ineffectual default weapon, the 30 levels in *Doom II* are continuous, so you can build up your arsenal with impunity.

At a time when the minimum machine specification for PC games is rising faster than the price of high-end machines is falling, it's refreshing to see that *Doom II* runs acceptably on a relatively lowly 486 – although there is noticeable slowdown on some of the more highly populated levels later on in the game, even on a 66MHz DX2 system.

The music, week and beepy in *Doom*, remains uninspiring in the sequel, but the sound effects are consistently excellent. Play

Cloven-hooved daemons melt after you ignite a room full of barrels (top). A splintered skull signifies the end of this fat man (above)

the game on an Ultrasound-equipped machine, turn the music off and the sound effects up to full volume, and you're in for a treat.

Doom II's biggest drawback is its price. £50 is a lot to pay for any PC game, but it seems positively extortionate when you consider that thousands of excellent extra levels can be obtained free from various bulletin boards (id's authoring software is available to any amateur level designer) and all you're really paying for is the game engine.

But that shouldn't be allowed to detract from *Doom II*'s achievement. Id have managed to improve what was already arguably the most playable game on the PC, and in the process have set new standards to which other PC games will aspire.

Leaving this room alive requires both skill and strategy (top). This skull marks the level exit (above)

Edge rating: **Nine** out of **ten**