

Shoot to kill

EYE OF THE MONITOR

by David "Zeb" Cook

This time, instead of engaging in one of our cheerful round robins of review with three manly (read crotchety) game designers providing insights (sniping) on the industry and each other's opinions, you've just got me. I confess, my conscience has dogged me since I let my erstwhile companions do almost all the work the first time out (back in issue #212). Therefore, I'm sparing them the burden of labor this time.

So while Ken Rolston spends the month exploring the depths of video bios, IRQs, and DMA channels in his quest to discover why his new PC is the only one on the planet that locks up after five minutes of Doom (I'm sure we'll hear more about that later!) and Paul Murphy rests his mighty and acerbic wit, I thought I'd review two games that cover that perennial favorite activity of computer games—killing things.

If you haven't noticed, most game machines have styles and themes they do particularly well. Arcade machines excel at driving fast, flying fast, and killing things. Video games are strong on the running, jumping, and killing things kind of games. Computers are good at puzzles, simulators, and killing things. Notice a pattern?

Doom II

id Software
IBM PC (3.5" disk or CD-ROM)

Back when people made paper war games (oh, they still do?) there was a simple rule about what sold: NATO, nukes, and Nazis. Stick one, two, or even all three for a real stretch, into a game and supposedly it was a sure sell. It was a simplistic rule proven by the highly accurate reason that it sounded right.

Computer games need simplistic rules, too—and the best is: guns, gore, and a 3-D scrolling engine.

You see, I've been playing *Doom II* way too much.



Doom II (id Software)

Okay, let's assume that you have lived under a rock for the last year or that you are one of the intellectual elite who is too busy reading and would never be caught anywhere near a computer monitor or a TV set. Of course, you never read game magazines, popular magazines, or most newspapers, all of which by now have written up and analyzed the *Doom* phenom. And of course, you never talk to your friends who have computers because you've noticed that they've all become zombified, twitching maniacs who debate

the merits of chain saws versus chain guns.

If you've lived the life of a troglodyte, you need an explanation of what *Doom* is all about. It's really quite simple. In *Doom*, you are a heroic soldier who wanders through mazelike corridors of a Martian base, opens doors to sealed rooms, and shoots things. Everything. If it moves, you punch, chain saw, pump lead, empty both barrels, blast, and fry it. Of course, the things you're trying to kill are bad and tough and they are also trying to rend,

shoot, and roast you, so it's all fair.

It's just not enough that you get to kill everything in sight. You also get to see the bullets hit and witness the bloody remains of your efforts—the very bloody remains. And you get to see all this first person in a 3-D world where you turn and move in any direction until you run into a wall, wade through a river of radioactive acid, or drop into a pit of lava. With music and sound effects to enhance it all, you wind up with gun-toting paranoia, which can be experienced by every human on the planet with a fast enough PC.

That's it. That's *Doom*.

And it's pretty much *Doom II*.

With *Doom* being the monster mega-hit that it is, the folks at id Software have come out with the marketer's answer to everything: If it worked once, do it again. Which is exactly what id did. *Doom II* isn't really a new game, it's more like new levels for the same game. Everything you loved or maybe hated about *Doom* is here—zombie soldiers, big pink demons, fireballing imps, gruesome deaths, the BFG-9000, and, of course, the chain saw. There's some new stuff added in the form of bigger bad guys like the Arch-Vile and the highly useful super shotgun, but the basic formula remains the same: If it moves, shoot it. True, the game is dressed up with a little bit of a story line—you're now going to Earth, where you must slaughter the possessed old tenants and the new occupants that have recently moved in from hell—but story line is not what this game was ever about. The story is just an excuse to kill things.

The network option is still there, so you can ruin job productivity for up to four people at once, either by going head-to-head or by cooperating as a team. There's the ability to play by modem, although that can be frustratingly slow. Use your modem instead to get playing tips and secret codes from a BBS.

Doom II is available as a CD-ROM, though it's obvious this is more a convenience to the publisher than any special benefit to you. Stick the disc in your CD-ROM drive, and the first thing it does is download the entire game onto your hard drive. After that, you can take the CD and hang it on your wall. Turn it shiny side out and pretend it's that platinum-record single you wrote in your spare time. The point here is, you're not getting anything special out of the CD-ROM disc, the publisher is. The disc is cheaper for them to press, which means they make more money when you buy the CD-ROM. True, there's the bonus "First episode from the original *Doom*!" but even this is marketing, trying to lure you into spending more money. Which, of course, companies want you to do.

So, is *Doom II* any good? Given the fact that it does everything *Doom* did, doesn't mess with success, and throws a few widgets into the mix, it's just what lots of *Doom* addicts want. The reasoning is



Doom II (id Software)

clear: If you liked the first one, you'll love the second.

Well, sort of. There's nothing wrong with *Doom II*. It does a wonderful job of being a replay of what everybody loved—but that's the problem. It is a sequel without surprises. Part of the thrill that made *Doom* such fun was the amazing newness of it. The 3-D, the sound, the traps, and especially the violence were thrilling and surprising. If you play *Doom II* as a sequel, you've seen it all before. The challenges are difficult and engaging, but they just don't have the same "I don't believe what I'm seeing" impact. Without something startlingly new, it's just more of the same. In a sense, the folks at id played it too safe.

There's also a caveat every buyer should know. *Doom II* requires speed—not absolutely, but the peacock looks like a turkey if your machine is too slow. The box says it can be played on a 386/33 DX, which is like saying you can sit around and watch molasses pour if you like that sort of thing. Even slower 486's may leave you wishing for more. On the other hand, blitzing through the halls using a Pentium 90 is about as fast as any player could manage.

This doesn't mean *Doom II* isn't fun, and if mindless but intense carnage is what you want, you'll get your money's worth. It's just not a must-have, keep-on-the-hard-drive-forever game. If you need to have more *Doom*, get this. If not, maybe you want to wait for the next big advance.