



by Chris Lombardi

**D**OOM, DOOM, DOOM, DOOM. WHEN SUNG TO THE TUNE OF BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH, THE SOUND can be music to many gamers' ears. To others, it can irk like an advertising jingle that refuses to leave the brain. Whether sweet or sour, there's little doubt that the DOOM tune is one of the most oft-hummed ditties of '94.

Like any extremely popular phenomenon, DOOM has garnered no small number of detractors. Beyond those who complain that it's too violent for society's good, people criticize DOOM for being overly-simplistic in gameplay, for being essentially a 90s version of Pac-Man. **id Software's** level designer Sandy Peterson freely admits that DOOM is little more than a souped up version of Whack-a-Mole, the arcade attraction in which rodents pop out of holes and the player whacks 'em down with a mallet as fast as they spring back.

To most DOOM fans, the response to these criticisms is "What's your point?!" If I might presume to translate, they're saying, "Yes, DOOM is simplistic in the nuts and bolts of its gameplay...but it's one hell of an *experience!*" DOOM's beauty is not in rich character interaction, resource

management, or realistic physical modeling; DOOM's beauty is in the frantic action and sinister atmosphere of its world. The gritty, gory, graphics, the lighting effects, the sounds all combine to create an atmosphere that can actually elicit fear, or at least a few startled jumps of surprise. Think about it: a game that elicits an emotional response (albeit a low level, base-of-the-brain response). When was the last time you were brought to tears by the sad song of an NPC in a role-playing game? (Even an NPC voice-acted by a well-paid Hollywood star?) Were you ever truly hurt when a leader broke a truce and back-stabbed you in *CIVILIZATION*? (Even if it was Abraham Lincoln?) Have you

ever given an adrenaline-fueled war cry as you moved your stack of 8-6-6 Panzers against a well-defended Russian hex?

I know most of us don't play computer games to be emotionally moved (probably because we've been conditioned to think that games aren't capable of it). But when a rare game comes along that can move us—be it to tears or to terror—it's no surprise when gamers go friggin' bananas.

So we had DOOM, a game that occasionally startled us and enabled us to safely vent repressed violent urges. Now, as of October 10th, we have DOOM 2, which is more—much, much more—of the same. More Doom, more gloom, more room in which to kill or be killed. DOOM II, a set of 30 new levels,

#### DOOM II

**Price:** \$59.95

**System**

**Requirements:**

IBM compatible

386 or better,

4 MB RAM

(486 with 8MB

RAM strongly

recommended),

VGA graphics,

CD-ROM;

supports most major sound cards; floppy

disk version is also available. CD version

includes shareware version of the original DOOM.

**# of Players:** 1-4 (modem and network play)

**Protection:** None

**Designers:** id Software

**Publisher:** GT Interactive

New York, NY

(800) 362-9400





new monsters, new wall textures, and new music has been released as a retail product by id via **GT Interactive**.

Now, before we get into details, we should probably clear up some misconceptions that have been bandied about in Doomish conversations. From what I've heard through the ether, some people may be disappointed with DOOM II. The hype surrounding the game may have built it up to be more than it actually is. DOOM II is not the next action game revolution; it is not a brand new engine that will startle players with its innovations; it is not what DOOM was to WOLFENSTEIN 3D. It is simply more DOOM. The innovations are being saved for id's next project—the mysterious **QUAKE**. What can you expect from DOOM II? New creatures to battle, one new weapon (the double barrel, double your death-dealing pleasure shotgun), some extremely devious level layouts, and slightly higher system requirements.

The background story of DOOM II begins when.... Nah, let's not bother. id Software didn't waste much time writing a story, so I'm not going to waste ink on the flimsy piece of work they did create. Know this: you are still a space marine, there are still legions of hell spawn to slaughter, and rather than battling through a military base and a demonic fortress, you'll be battling through a military base, an urban cityscape, and a demonic, trans-dimensional something or other.

As for the design of the levels, here is where id spent some time. Level designers Sandy Peterson and John Romero were just warming up when they designed the levels of the original DOOM. In DOOM II, they pull out the stops and every trick in the book. There are more cleverly hidden and fiendishly devised traps in the 30 levels of DOOM II than a ream of Hollywood contracts. When you flip a switch at the end of a dead-end hallway and hear a door open behind you, you can bet your brimstone-baked bottom that a Baron of Hell will be smiling at you when you turn around. When you see a fabulous weapon sitting out in the open air, begging you to snatch it up, you can be as sure as Satan's suntan that it's NOT going to be that easy. When you see a level composed of razor-thin, elevated walkways bordered by that noxious green goo, you'll have a few choice words to scream in the direction of id Software's Texas office. Is it frustrating? Yes. Do I keep replaying the levels until I get them

right? Yes. Why? Dunno. That's a question for greater minds than mine.

The wizards of id have also spent some time devising new creatures—new moles to whack. The starting line-up for the evil team includes the assortment from the original game—imps, mutant soldiers, shotgun sergeants, those pink things that like to gnaw on your shoes, cacodemons, Barons of Hell, and Mastermind Spiders—all in large quantities. New to the scene are some inventive creations. Among these is a chaingun bearing soldier whose cranium does an interesting dance when ruptured. There's a baby spider—Son of Mastermind Spider—who spits a flurry of green plasma globules when provoked (or even when not). There's an obese fellow who fires erratic puffs of flame. There's a skeleton who launches small flaming asteroids that can track you around corners (he also swings a mean left hook). And finally, there's a sorcerer who not only conjures hellfire from the ground, turning the slow-foot into Kentucky Fried, but who can also raise fallen baddies from the dead as fast as you can knock them down.

As I've said, all of these creatures come in hordes; it's not uncommon to have 25 or more creatures on your tail at one time. One particular level comes to mind, a level that begins in an octagonal room with eight doors. The level is a bit like a nightmarish version of Let's Make a Deal: You pick a door and see what you've won, although none of the doors have a new car or a washer and dryer behind them. Instead, you've got a choice between a dozen Barons and a Cyberdemon, a herd of Demons, a battalion of imps, etc—all a pretty raw deal. Open one door and you've got quite a firefight; open two at once and you've got Armageddon. The upshot of the sheer number of creatures, aside from bursts of sheer panic, is that your silicon has to work harder to keep up, and so the system requirements for a full screen, full graphic detail DOOM session have crept up. Whereas owners of very fast 386s and low-end 486s could get a halfway decent frame rate out of DOOM, they won't with the sequel. I tested the game on several machines, starting with a Pentium 66 and working down. When I reached a 486-33 with 4MBs of RAM, I found the minimum for a full screen good time; any lower and you begin dragging pixels through the molasses.

If you've got the hardware, then you've got a good time coming in DOOM II. The

## SCENES FROM A MAULING

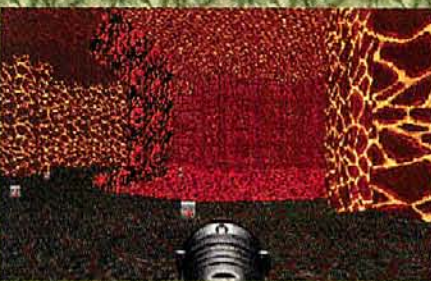
SCREEN SHOT



**A CARNAGE LINE** Here they come—a platoon of damned dogs looking for a fresh chew-toy.



**GIVE ME YOUR BEST!** Sluggin' it out with Skeletor in the basement of Hell.



**WOW!** Sometimes you've just got to take time to smell the brimstone.



**MARINE FLAMBÉ** It's game over for our hero. This sorcerer has got him cornered and is putting the final touches on a HellFire spell.



# SCREEN SHOT



**THE BIG BOYS** It's a nice day for a tango with twelve, two-ton trucks.

music of Bobby Prince has the same style and pacing as before, alternating between hard-edged guitar riffs and the quiet, atmospheric sounds of a haunted, New Age relaxation tape. The graphics are familiar, but there are some stunning surprises in store in the later levels. And, again, the level designs are expansive, intricate and fiendish. Some are almost like adventure game puzzles, where you'll spend many a minute staring at the automap wondering just how in Hell you

can reach that visible, though inaccessible, BFG. And let's not forget the element that truly lit the fires of gamers—multiplayer play. (If you are a DOOM fan and have not tried a multiplayer game—do so. You're missing out on half the fun.) The difficulty of the levels very much lends itself to cooperative ex-

ploration. Not only can you use the extra firepower in handling Hell's overpopulation problem, but it's nice to have more than one head working on some of the puzzle problems you'll face.

As far as DeathMatch goes, the CGW Doom Association (the Hell's Rangers) has yet to find a DOOM 2 level to match the balance and elegance of Episode 1, Level 5 of the original game, but that may be for lack of trying; we've been busy enough playing tag-team wrestling

with a Cyberdemon.

The conclusion for fans of DOOM is, of course, yes, by all means—the next time you're traipsing through the aisle of your computer store, put a little Hell in your hand basket. If you know what to expect from DOOM 2, which I hope you do by now, you won't be disappointed. By the time you've battled your way through DOOM 2's levels and met the ultimate incarnation of Evil at the end, you'll have sucked out the essence of the DOOM experience, swirled it around in your mouth, gargled and spit. If you are like me, you will feel a bit wrung out, spent, satisfied, and ready to leave the corridors of DOOM behind you and move on. Next stop, QUAKE. ☹

## EDITORS SPEAK

### DOOM II

**RATING** ★★★★★ 1/2

**PROS** More, more, more of what you came to DOOM for.

**CONS** Higher system requirements may keep some gamers locked out of the experience.

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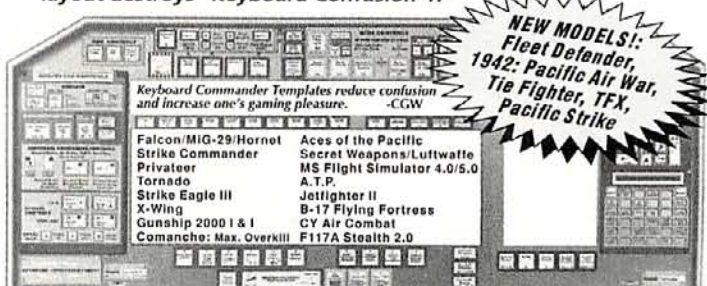
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