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## DOOM

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## SCARYDARKFAST

### *The Legacy of DOOM*

The demons have not gone far, as it turns out. The bottom line is that games are evolving more rapidly than any other medium on the planet right now. However, if FPS games have, in many aspects, gone beyond the template *DOOM* established, it doesn't mean they owe that game any less of a debt. *DOOM*'s contribution to gaming cannot be limited to the idea of a nucleating game, even though the argument that it spawned a genre is very strong. As I hope I've made clear in this book, *DOOM*'s legacy operates along so many fronts simultaneously that its creation of an experiential template for not just first- but third-person shooters is only one of its facets, only one of its achievements.

*DOOM* brought binary space partitions to games, a seismic step forward in rendering speed, ushering in console and arcade-style play on PCs. It broke new ground with the conceptual compromising of traditional virtual reality to achieve speed and fluidity. It sat at the center of the creation of both the online multiplayer *and* player-generated content worlds. It was perhaps the pinnacle of the shareware/retail distribution model and stands as one of independent game development's towering achievements. It heralded giants of game design and technology into the medium and remains a profound vision of what games do better than anything else: fusing technological advance with creative vision. It is an exceptional case study of fine detail—weapons balancing, level flow, audio design and placement—operating seamlessly with core vision. This vision, this art direction, was darker, faster, more urgent, and more frightening than pretty much any-

thing that had gone before, and yet the game kept that edge of humor that is lacking from the overwhelming majority of modern FPS games. It took play seriously, but it never overstepped its arcade roots.

Then we have the design, on multiple levels. The fusion of science fiction with supernatural horror was nothing new, of course, but it was certainly novel applied in gaming. Adrian Carmack and Kevin Cloud may just be responsible for creating an entire gaming aesthetic, and that's a huge achievement, on a par with the game's technological breakthroughs. Coupled with the inherently immersive qualities of first-person gameplay, *DOOM* pitched players into the dark, where the experience was never diluted by having to engage with complex gameplay or controls. As Romero says, "Sometimes simple is great" (JR).

*DOOM* is a profoundly lean, economical piece of game design, honed and distilled down to a fine edge. This is fundamentally anchored in the marriage of engine and gameplay design: the design is built to optimize the engine's capabilities, and the engine was built to do just what the design required. It may sound trite or simplistic but *DOOM*'s lesson for any aspiring game developer is the importance of bedrock over blue sky, of doing the basics brilliantly. It boils back down to Kevin Cloud's comment quoted earlier: "Fundamentally, if in a shooter, running and shooting isn't fun, then you're screwed" (KC).

*DOOM* was hugely ambitious, but what is really telling about its early development is how much was removed from the game to refine the experience. If it didn't work 100 percent, it didn't go in. Despite Romero claiming id "got super lucky" when they "super nailed" the balance of the game, and despite knowing just how fast the thing was put together, the id development team demonstrated a singular vision and obsessive drive toward this pure arcade form, reinvented in a 3D PC game that resulted in this beautifully balanced experience. If, as Willits argues, we should be careful not to overassign a grand plan to the development experience, the fact that many of these decisions were made on an instinctive level should be taken as further proof of the talents of those responsible. At the same time, however, *DOOM* didn't come out of nowhere, and both Hall and Carmack point to the flow-through of ideas from *Hovortank 3D* onward, which, in Carmack's words, "allowed us to have already figured out what the important things were" (JC). Hall expands on that.

[We] tried making every kind of game there was. It allowed us to boil down some great stuff. We made a bunch of games before getting to-

gether, a bunch of small games together, then formed id. That much practice out of the public eye is sort of the way the Beatles did it. Not that we planned that—just worked out that way! (THa)

Certainly, the *DOOM* phenomenon was partially a cultural thing: the Apogee model created a snowballing cult of PC gamers online just ready for a game like *DOOM* to slot into things, and the multiplayer modes of *DOOM* absolutely delivered what they were waiting for. Equally, the fact that the members of the id team were so open in terms of relating to their audience and in allowing the community unprecedented access to their build tools, essentially kick-starting the whole user-generated content scene in games, was fundamental to the creation of a whole subculture around the game. Although somewhat outside the scope of this book, even if you ignore the game, the technology, the art, and the design, *DOOM* is still an important cultural artifact, in terms of its phenomenal visibility and impact. But it's the game's legacy we're after here, and if this cannot be limited to nucleating a genre, then, equally, we need to recognize that it did just that very thing. Both John Carmack and John Romero are clear on this. In Romero's words, "Here it is, the FPS. *DOOM* really created the genre" (JR). Carmack is predictably measured.

It's a stable genre now. Just like forever after we will have driving games and fighting games, there will be first-person shooters forever. Instigating a genre like that is a good thing. I'm proud of that. (JC)

Whichever way you want to look at it, despite Carmack's insistence that if id Software hadn't done it, someone else would, the FPS genre may not have got off the ground at all or may have taken a wildly different direction without *DOOM*. As I've argued in the last chapter, that's not to underplay the role of the first-person RPG or to fail to recognize the evolution since, but there's no avoiding the fact that *DOOM* was the powder keg. If it was a product of many converging historical forces, it still outstrips the argument that it was an inevitable product of the time, by doing so many *new* things so well: mods, shareware, art direction, tech, experimental design. It's also really important to remember that *DOOM* tapped into deep, underlying principles of imagination and play. Kevin Cloud sums this up exceptionally well.

From my perspective, almost every truly popular game derives itself from something kids have been doing or playing forever. So whether

you're building something, racing something, blowing something up, these are things that kids do, . . . get a stick, dress up, playing a knight in shining armor. These are all things that we do, and they evolve into these new forms. They find their way into these new forms of entertainment. People want to play the hero. They like the idea of being that guy who is taking on the bad guys—with a kick-ass arsenal—and being able to do it. And to have that kind of feel and connection, that visceral feel, the design is more impacting physical things—sweaty palms, jumping back in your chair—rather than just cognitive stuff. FPS—that's what they do really well. And *DOOM* just hit it. (KC)

Like John Carmack famously said, “You can dress it up in many ways, but the game still comes down to go here, touch this, go there, fight, et cetera” (JC). *DOOM* is a work of profound importance in the history of games not because of one thing it did right but because of many—some groundbreaking, some incremental. At root, this is a game that is based around simple things executed brilliantly, and that's not to infer in any way that simple things are easy to do. This book has, I hope, captured the spirit of the game and made the case (if making it were really necessary) that *DOOM* represents the very best of the core qualities that make games so exciting and important. It's savage, funny, violent, smart, dumb, simple, and complex. It's scarydarkfast. And if you don't believe me, I've got a fistful of vertebrae and a headful of mad, and I'm willing to argue it out on a death-match server of your choice. Because that's just the way we roll here. See you in Hell.