

Game Informer

**Issue #274:
February 2016**

DOOM Reboot

Doom pages: front cover, page 2, 26, 28-39, & back cover.
If you like 3D Realms, then you might like pages 94 & 95 for Max Payne.

gameinformer®

THE WORLD'S #1 VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE





ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
andy@gameinformer.com

Read my column or
comment on this letter at
gameinformer.com/mag
or follow @GI_AndyMc

2015, What A Year...

Another Top 50 is under our belt. Like most years, it was a battle, and there will of course be games you think don't belong on the list, and games you love that didn't make it. That's the nature of the beast; even as the editor-in-chief, not all of my picks made the list. But the Top 50 represents the collected opinions of all the *Game Informer* editors, and hopefully helps you find games to play that you may have missed.

It was a great year in gaming, and one of most diverse. Not only did we have more choice in race and gender than I can remember (though we still have a ways to go), we had more variety in the types of games you could play. Just about every genre was represented, and every day we saw more of the genre-bending games that we as journalists have trouble classifying. A good problem to have, as it means games are growing and doing new and innovative things – blurring the lines that were established so many decades ago.

I enjoyed a wide variety of games in 2015, but found fewer titles that really hit me directly in the gut than in previous years. I enjoyed Halo 5, but the game didn't sing to me like it did to its core fans. Destiny, on the other hand, hit it out of the park for me, but I'm sure many still hate my favorite game of the year. That's how the industry works, as games become both attuned to their audiences and game developers explore the boundaries of game design. At the same time, the amount of variety available increasingly lets us find those games that scratch our own personal itches.

For example, one of my crowning achievements of 2015 was beating Bloodborne, which I simultaneously hated and loved. The game is made for a specific audience; its beginning is so poorly designed that it intentionally drives away those that don't have the heart to persevere. But if you do, it's truly a treat. Others view that opening salvo of pain to be the game's genius and what makes it stand out above the pack.

Trying to make a game as challenging as possible is a trend I also see prevalent in the indie space, which in my mind limits the reach of certain games. However, many see it as a welcome opposite to the big-budget games that offer too much hand-holding or have been homogenized by too many focus groups. I see games that are trying to appease classic gamers, but have forgotten that many of the older gamers they are appealing to don't have the twitch skills they once possessed (you can count me in that group). These games are great when they resonate with you, but we certainly have more titles that are not as easy to identify as a "must play" for everyone.

So cheers to 2015, another great year in gaming. And may 2016 continue to innovate and surprise gamers with new challenges and genre-busting treats. Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,



» 28

Doom

The game that put shooters on the map is back! We go hands-on to find out how id Software is simultaneously modernizing Doom and taking an old-school approach.

by Matt Bertz



When Non-Lethal Tactics Become More Fun Than Killing

by Tim Turi, Features Editor

Blasting my first imp to bloody bits in Doom during the early '90s helped mold me into an unapologetic gorehound. Since then, video games like Mortal Kombat X and Fallout 4 have kept up their end of the bargain to deliver violent, over-the-top kills that are often equal parts grotesque and amusing. Despite video games' penchant for brutal violence, I noticed an uncharacteristic trend in the way I played some of my favorite games this year. Non-lethality was the more fun, more beneficial way to play when given the option.

Video games offering players the choice in whether to spare or kill their enemies isn't a new concept. In games like Infamous or the first Metal Gear Solid, morality was left up to a binary, black and white decision or divorced from moment-to-moment gameplay by influencing an end-game score, respectively.

Unlike that previous trend, some of this year's best games more elegantly weaved players' agency for non-lethality into the core gameplay. For example, the 3DS game Monster Hunter 4 Ultimate is all about bashing and hacking at gigantic beasts, but players can choose to trap their prey instead of simply killing it. Deal enough damage to a raging Rathalos and it might begin to drool and limp away toward its den. A savvy hunter will know to track it down, lay a net next to where it sleeps, and then pelt it with tranquilizer bombs when it's ensnared. Successfully capturing a monster not only feels more sporting than bashing a wounded animal to death, it also earns you more resources for crafting (how our hunters acquire the monster's scales and other goodies is left up to the player's imagination).

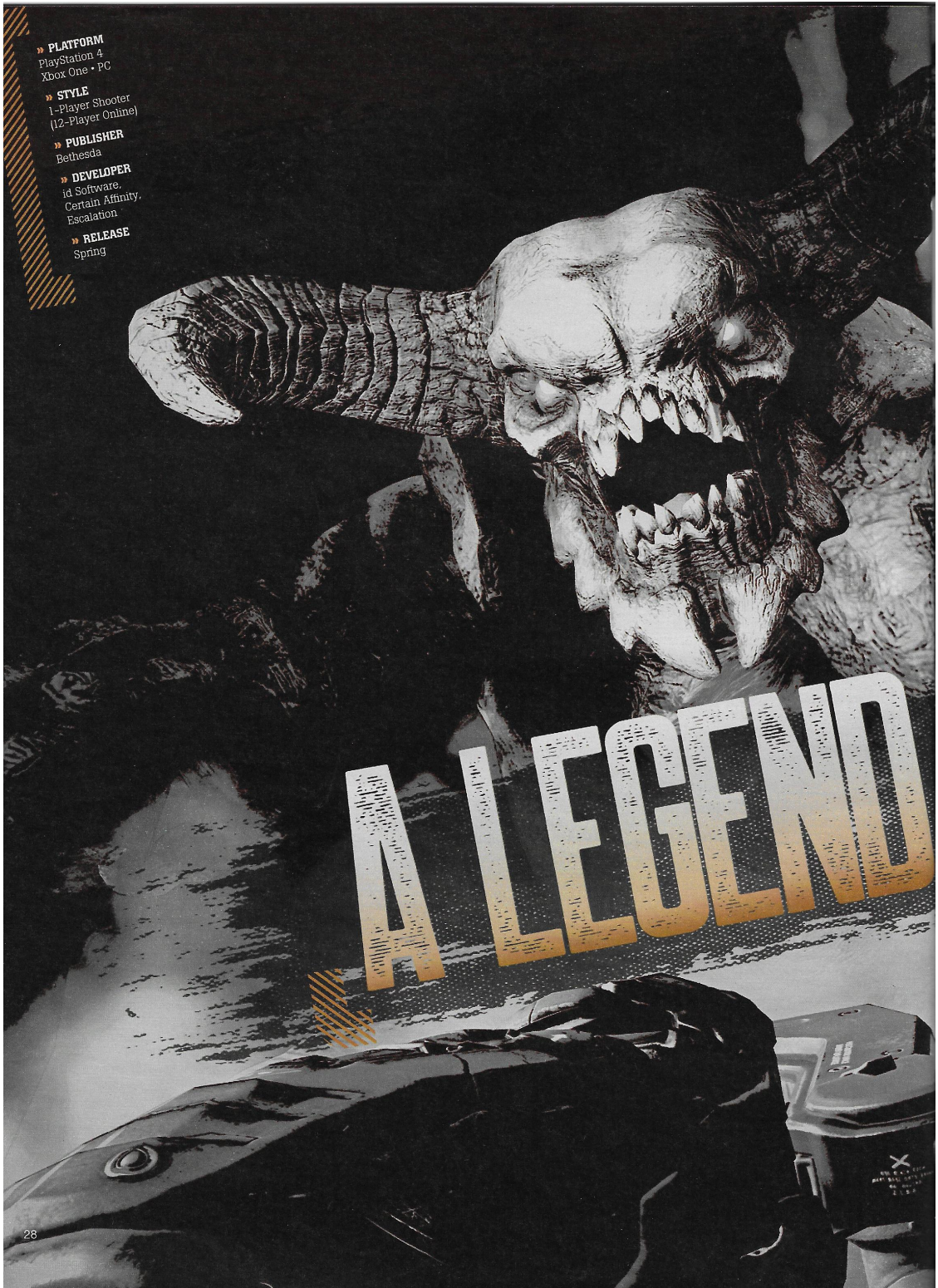
The indie hit Undertale is another game with nonviolent themes intrinsically attached to its story and gameplay. Inspired by JRPG classics like EarthBound and Chrono Trigger, the game draws on players' instinctual urge to kill every creature they encounter to earn experience and make their stats go up. Just a few kills into Undertale and I felt oddly dirty, and my gut feelings proved correct. Every encounter has a nonviolent, oftentimes ludicrous solution as well, like petting a dog warrior until he's too overcome by joy to fight. The game changes depending on whether you kill or spare more creatures, affecting how key characters interact with you, the tone of certain areas, and even the ending. To see Undertale's most complete and fascinating conclusion you need to be a pacifist. More succinctly, killing enemies in Undertale is comparatively flat-out boring.

One of this year's most popular games, Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain,

stars Big Boss as one of the most legendary soldiers who has ever lived. But instead of murdering hundreds, players are encouraged to spread his legacy and influence by capturing skilled enemies on the battlefield and sending them to your base. The gameplay loop quickly becomes identifying potentially helpful personnel, shooting them with a tranquilizer gun, and then attaching a Fulton balloon to them for exfiltration. Building up Mother Base is crucial for developing new weapons, gear upgrades, and advancing the story. I became so invested in acquiring new recruits and clearing hostile territory with balloon kidnapping that I felt guilt ridden anytime I botched a mission so irredeemably that I was forced to kill. Potential allies died because I got sloppy.

I don't want every video game to have a hippy dippy, flowers-in-gun-barrels solution to every combat encounter, but I think this year was successful in marrying gameplay agency with narrative themes. More often than not, doing the "right thing" in life is the more difficult-yet-rewarding route, and it makes sense for games to shine brightest and make it worth our while when doing so. ♦

The views and opinions expressed in this column are strictly those of the author and not necessarily those of Game Informer



» **PLATFORM**
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • PC

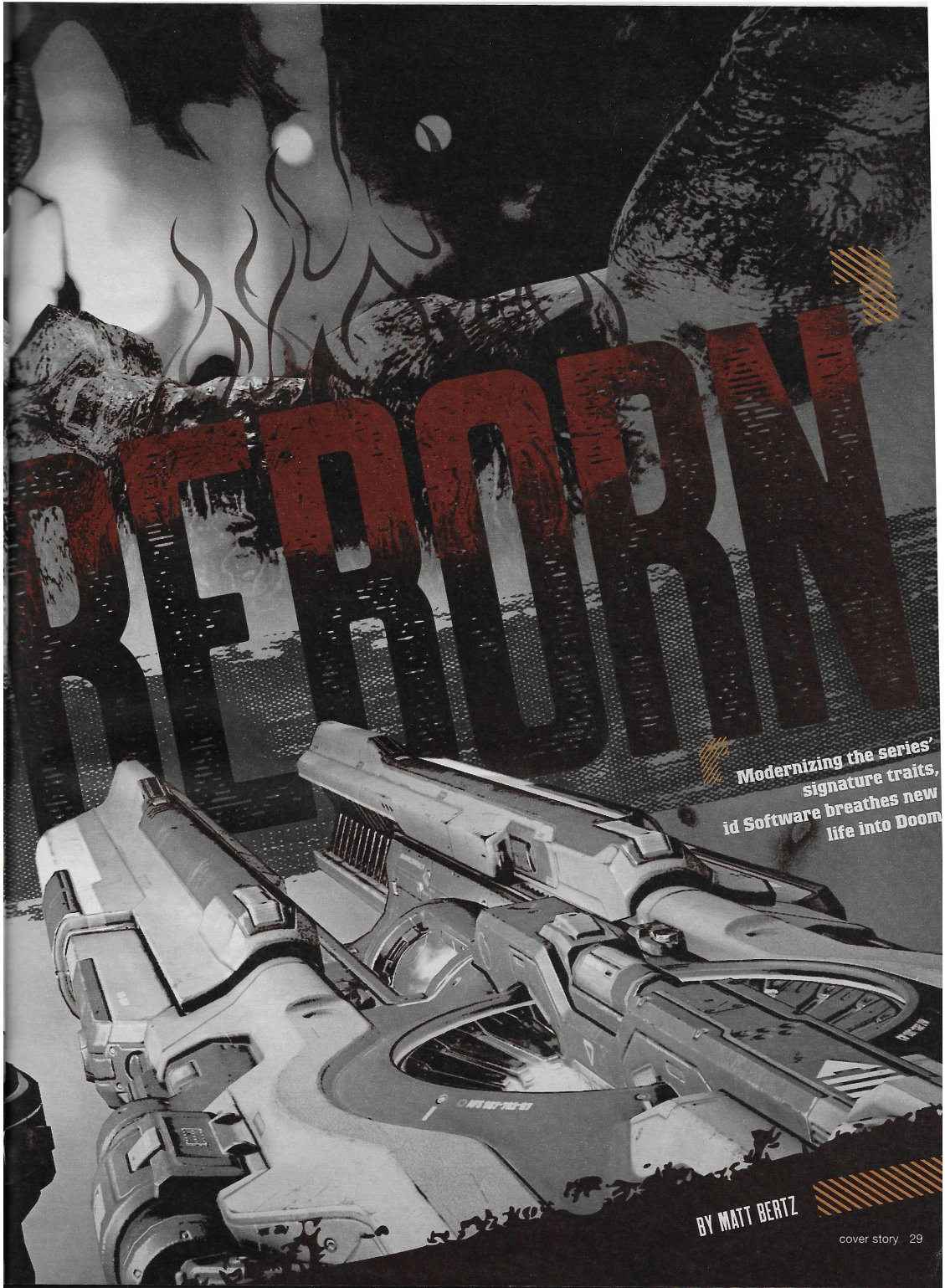
» **STYLE**
1-Player Shooter
(12-Player Online)

» **PUBLISHER**
Bethesda

» **DEVELOPER**
id Software,
Certain Affinity,
Escalation

» **RELEASE**
Spring

A LEGEND



Modernizing the series' signature traits, id Software breathes new life into Doom

BY MATT BERTZ

cover story 29

A



A decade is an eternity in technology. When *Doom 3* released in 2004, Twitter didn't exist, there were no YouTube celebrities, and Apple had yet to invent the iPhone. In the 11 years since, Activision has released 19 *Call of Duty* games, the motion-gaming fad has come and gone, and console dominance has shifted from PlayStation to Xbox and back to PlayStation again. But some things are timeless, and regardless of era, seem comfortable in their own skin. Count *Doom* among those rarities.



The first-person shooter credited for popularizing the genre, *Doom* introduced many gamers to shareware, 3D environments, modding, and multiplayer deathmatches when it released in 1993. The breakneck pace of its combat, the colorful enemies, and explosive gunplay all left an indelible impression on gamers, becoming so popular that it was estimated to be installed on more computers than the Windows 95 operating system in late 1995. Mothers and politicians raged against the ultraviolence, yet the game's allure was undeniable. But with only three numbered entries in the 22 years since its debut, it holds a unique position in the genre it started. Few first-person shooters today play like *Doom*, having grown in new directions by introducing more tactical gameplay, creating open worlds, or focusing solely on multiplayer.

As we sit down in the new Richardson, Texas headquarters of id Software, it's clear much has changed at the studio in the last 11 years as well. The fiercely independent company joined the Bethesda family in 2009. Legendary programmer John Carmack joined fellow founders John Romero, Tom Hall, and Adrian Carmack among the ranks of id alumni, leaving the studio to pursue his interest in virtual reality technology by joining Oculus.

While the founders may be gone, *Doom* still carries forward. After playing extended sessions of the rebuilt single-player and multiplayer, it's clear this game preserves all the signature elements of the original, while modernizing the long-dormant franchise with best-in-class graphics and a new user-generated content system unlike anything the studio has attempted before.

Doom is back, and after 11 years away, it looks poised to shake up the first-person shooter scene it put on the map.



Enemies try to flank and surround you, so constant movement is key to staying alive



JUMPING BACK INTO THE FRAY

When a game franchise takes this long between releases, the first question that naturally arises is, "What took so long?" With Doom, it's complicated.

In the years after Doom 3 launched to strong sales and critical acclaim, id Software began working on the follow-up while also creating a new game called Rage. Once Rage shipped in 2011, the company focus shifted back to its most renowned franchise. But development had its hiccups, and when the studio took a step back two years later, it realized the game just "wasn't Doom enough." Rather than resuscitate the project, id and Bethesda agreed to scrap it altogether and start anew.

The reboot began in earnest in 2013 with a team led by Marty Stratton, a former Activision QA tester who worked his way up to the game-director role over the course of his 16 years working with id Software. Stratton assembled a

team with a healthy mix of id veterans who have been with the studio for decades and new talent. Their first goal? Agree on a new tone.

In the early 2000s, id Software shifted the tone of its big franchises. Both Doom 3 and the Raven Software-developed 2009 Wolfenstein embraced a serious, moody aesthetic driven by atmospheric environments, leaving the comic-book sensibility and sense of humor found in the early titles by the wayside. This decision became a focal point of the reboot conversations.

"When we started talking about it we asked, 'What are we going to be inspired by?'" Stratton recalls. "Are we going to be inspired by Doom 3 and the more modern Wolfenstein games, or are we going to be inspired by Doom and Doom II? What do we feel like a new Doom should feel like and what should the attitude be? We all just kind of gravitated to that original feel."

Not only does the freewheeling combat vibe of the original play differently than Doom 3, it also feels unique in today's shooter landscape. Outside of occasional releases like Painkiller and Bulletstorm, the majority of shooters (think Call of Duty, Battlefield, Gears of War) opt for uber-serious military campaigns about saving the world from doomsday scenarios. Not this new Doom.

"Our mantra for this game is 'make it fun,'" says creative director Hugo Martin. "We try not to take ourselves too seriously. We're not a campy game, but we're not a serious space-opera game either. We're sort of in the middle."

This back-to-the-basics approach wowed fans when id took the veil off the reboot at Bethesda's E3 press conference last year. The crowd laughed delightfully at the over-the-top gore and cheered the explosive combat. The action felt completely in sync with the original, yet had a modern sheen that made Doom look new again. Leaving the impressive demo, many of the *Game Informer* staff wondered aloud if id could sustain that breakneck pace of combat over the course of an entire campaign, or if it would eventually succumb to repetition.

CRASHING THE DEMON PARTY

Visiting Doom headquarters gave us our first chance to see for ourselves if a hands-on play session could hold a candle to the riveting E3 demo. We join the iconic space marine a few beats after he awakens in a UAC bunker and realizes something is amiss. After making his way across the unforgiving Martian surface, he enters an industrial building that houses a satellite. Once he re-aligns the dish array, he hopes



to find out why the halls are flooded with demons and learn where he needs to point his rifle to stop the invasion.

My first taste of Doom combat comes with a few of the Possessed, which are shambling zombies roaming the facility that id Software has playfully dubbed as "fodder." These undead pose no real threat to the space marine in and of themselves – one shot stuns the fodder, which opens up the opportunity to off them with a weapon, or move in for one of the entertaining glory kills. The player movement is fast and the controls on the Xbox One gamepad are incredibly responsive, which makes it easy to toy with these enemies. I stun one and then push in the right analog stick to initiate a glory kill. The marine rips the arm off the zombie and beats him to death with it. The next foe meets a similar fate as I finish it off by smashing its head into a wall.

Glory kills can be performed on the more dangerous demons once they are staggered



"Once you get really good at the game, the fodder is still fun to play with because you are just playing with your food," Martin says. "We always use the 'Bruce Lee on a skateboard' analogy because it's kind of like in those martial-arts movies where he's just taking out all these fodder guys any which way he wants. That's what you feel like with the zombies; they're just like punching bags."

As I churn through ammunition taking out a roomful of enemies, I instinctually tap the X button to reload my shotgun or pistol, but this is a wasted motion. Doom sacrifices all at the altar of speed, which means FPS stand-bys like ammo reloading, cover systems, and sprinting are left by the wayside.

Coming to a computer terminal, I open up the blast shields over the condensation-covered windows to reveal the harsh environment of Mars. The UAC complex looks huge, but my gaze is pulled from this sprawling facility to a video recording from Dr. Olivia Pierce, who, based on first appearances, seems to have played a critical role in unleashing the demon presence. "My sisters and brothers, be thankful," Pierce says. "You will be the first. You will have a seat alongside them just as I will in what will become the new world they create for us. Starting now."

As I walk away from the console, Pierce continues her zealous rambling over the PA system, but my focus has returned to combat. Moving through a locker room, I find the iconic chainsaw buried in the torso of a fallen comrade. The space marine admires its satisfying hum in his hands before resuming the search for the satellite array control panel. A console in the next room triggers a visual recording, which

id calls an echo, that shows a shambling zombie making its way through a locked door. I find another way into the room by moving through the ventilation system and vaulting up to a higher level.

The space marine is faster than nearly every demon he encounters, which means movement is the key to offensive strategy as well as defense. This maxim is put to the test as I enter a room housing a gore nest, a fleshy portal that serves as a conduit for the demons to cross into the world. When I rip the heart from the portal to shut it down, all hell breaks loose. Forget the monster closets of Doom 3; this is a demon avalanche. Suddenly, I'm severely outnumbered by more possessed zombies, imps, and hell knights. When the Nine Inch Nails-inspired soundtrack kicks into high gear, that's my cue to start the bloodbath.

The studio playfully refers to these arena-style battles – which typically feature some element of verticality – as skate-parks due to the freedom of movement and opportunity for improvisation it affords the player. But as I find out in my first attempt to clear the room, if you are caught flat footed, you don't stand a chance in hell. "If you stand still, you're going to die," Martin says. "You have to move constantly. It's about running, circle strafing, jumping, and using movement as a defense. Breaking line of sight with elements in the environment. If you try to hide behind something, the enemies will find you and they will kill you."

KNOW YOUR ARSENAL

The hallmark of Doom weapon design has always been power. From the iconic shotgun to the BFG9000, these weapons get the job done. This carries forward in the new reboot.

"Doom is about fighting an onslaught of demons, which means you're often in the midst of a pretty massive fight," says game director Marty Stratton. "Having stopping power is really important and it makes it pretty fun."

To increase that stopping power, id has introduced a new weapons-mod system that gives the guns more flexibility than they've ever had. For instance, the rocket launcher has a remote detonator mod that allows you to trigger the explosion when it's most effective, and the heavy assault rifle has a barrage of micro missiles as an alternate-fire mode. Players gain access to these mods by finding delivery drones in the world, and you can hot swap them on the fly with the d-pad.

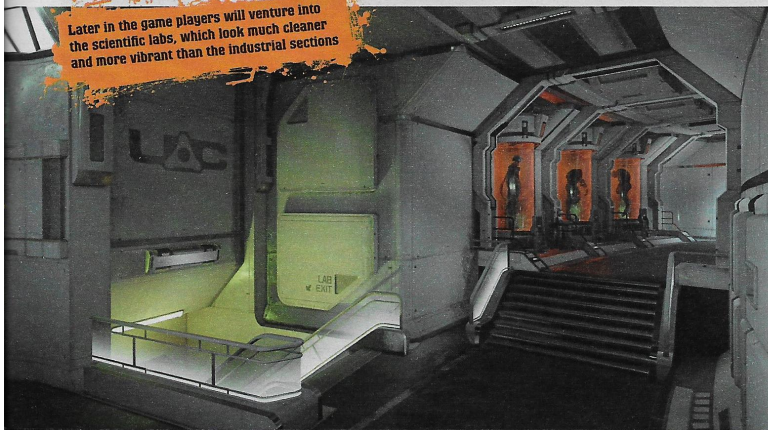
"If you've found all the mods, you can end up with a configuration that ends up with the effectiveness of 15 or so weapons – depending on what you find – all a flick or a push away," Stratton says.

Holding the right bumper on a controller brings up the weapon wheel, but once you memorize the position of a weapon on the wheel you can quickly access it by tapping the RB and flicking the right analog stick in the direction of the weapon. This makes swapping guns on the fly a seamless process.

Because the BFG and chainsaw are typically used in special circumstances, id removed them from the weapon wheel in favor of giving them their own dedicated buttons. Tapping down on the d-pad pulls up the chainsaw for a quick finisher, and when the situation gets out of control you can bring up the BFG by tapping the X button.



Later in the game players will venture into the scientific labs, which look much cleaner and more vibrant than the industrial sections





Closing these gore nests is required to clear sector lockdowns and move to new areas of the UAC facility

In my second attempt I fly around the room, embracing the art of hip fire, dodging the incoming fireballs, and vaulting up and down the platforms to isolate enemies. Explosive barrels are conveniently placed around the environment, giving players the opportunity to take down multiple enemies at once with a well-timed shot. Ammo inevitably runs low during these encounters, which necessitates the execution of glory kills or the use of the trusty chainsaw. This one-hit-kill machine runs on fuel, and the number of fuel cells you have determines which types of enemies you can use it on. One cell is all you need to slice through fodder, but bigger enemies like the mancubus require multiple cells to do the job. Getting up close and personal with the enemies to hack at them is risky, but the reward is worth it. Each enemy downed by the chainsaw bursts like a piñata with health and ammo.

PUTTING STORY IN ITS PLACE

Story has never been a cornerstone of the Doom franchise, which we all learned well with the horrible 2005 movie adaptation. The team at id Software is comfortable with narrative taking a backseat to the action, but that doesn't mean you can't piece together the mystery of what happened at this UAC facility.

"Story isn't something big in a Doom game, and we've taken that approach," says creative director Hugo Martin. "It's not what people come to Doom for; they come to kill demons and blow s--- up in amazing ways. That's really been the focus for us. That said, we've definitely infused some pretty good mystery and some fun things for players who want to find it and want to dive in and explore it a little bit."

By finding environmental clues and reading data entries, players can piece together what happened at this demon-infested UAC facility and learn more about the space marine as well.

After I'm done painting the room with demon blood, I finally get a breather. This downtime can be used to hunt for narrative clues or the various secrets hidden in each level. In classic Doom tradition, you need to find colored keycards to progress through previously closed doors. It's smart to note the location of these locked doors and backtrack once you have the required clearance to recover armor boosts, character upgrades, weapon mods, and even more advanced weapons you otherwise wouldn't receive until later in the game. When I ask Stratton if id is taking inspiration from Wolfenstein: The New Order and hiding clever nods to the classic Doom games, he coyly says, "Hmm... Interesting. We have some doozies, that's all I can say. We definitely pay our respects in many ways."

After finding a mod that gives my shotgun a grenade-like ranged attack, I move through an airlock and get my first taste of the Martian surface. Another arena battle ensues with a variety of demons, and I'm amazed at how quickly I've grown comfortable with the pace of combat. I effortlessly bound up and down the environment, stringing together glory kills and always staying one-step ahead of my enemies. The area cleared, I make my way to the satellite array controls and the demo fades to black.

Before we jump into the second playable section of Doom, Stratton and Martin take us into id's large stadium-seating theater to see combat from the perspective of a seasoned player. This demo of the Lazarus Facility takes place further



ALL GORED UP

Doom looks to match the unique melee finishers introduced in *Wolfenstein: The New Order* and raise the stakes with its impressive glory-kill system. These popcorn-horror finishers aren't just fun to watch; they yield more spoils than a typical weapons kill.

After you do enough damage to an enemy, it becomes highlighted. When in this staggered state, you have a window to move in for a glory kill. These animated execution moves are contextual, meaning you will see different finishers depending on where you target the enemy. The versatility is impressive; through our playthroughs we targeted the limbs, torso, back, and head to see unique glory kills. Some of our laugh-inducing favorites included a death-from-above attack, and ripping out a mancubus' heart and shoving it down his throat so he chokes on it.

into the game. The setting is the deepest, nastiest laboratory in the UAC encampment, where scientists and occultists were clearly experimenting with demonic powers. Demon corpses rest on lab tables and are suspended in large fluid-filled tubes. A public service announcement is blaring over the intercom system, warning that "demonic presence at unsafe levels." The clean, sparse environment stands in stark contrast to the more industrial section we played through, speaking to the variety of locations id has planned for the game.

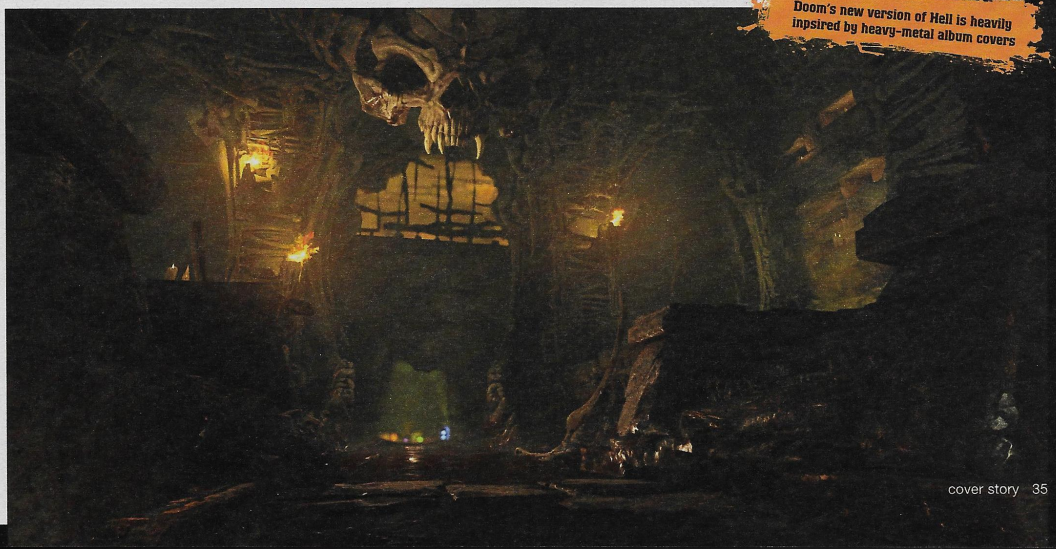
For this demo, Martin takes control of the space marine who is equipped with various upgrades focused on dexterity. These enhancements allow the player to swap weapons, mantle, and even execute glory kills more quickly. Each time Martin pulls off a finisher, he's given a temporary speed gain. This boost is stackable if you execute several glory kills in a row, making this setup seem like a great option for

speedrunners trying to cruise through the campaign in record time.

The speed of the combat during this demonstration is remarkable; it makes *Call of Duty's* combat look like a senior citizen using a walker. Martin vaults around the environment, swapping between his Swiss-army-knife collection of weapons as the situation dictates and laying waste to the sea of demons in impressive fashion.

Watching stylish runs like this brings to mind all the eye-popping combat clips I've watched from skill-oriented games like *Battlefield* or *Dishonored* over the years. The combat gives players a lot of freedom of expression, and the feats of skill you can string together makes *Doom* highly watchable. "I think this game is going to be amazing from a player's 'Xbox record that,' YouTube-posting perspective," Stratton says.

Doom's new version of Hell is heavily inspired by heavy-metal album covers





HELLBOUND FURY

Our second playable demo transports us into Hell. The rocky environments, bloody pools, and stormy skies all call to mind the original environments, but the Doom reboot introduces more elements that wouldn't feel out of place on an Iron Maiden cover.

This region of hell is called Titan's Realm, a desolate graveyard to ancient, building-sized demons. The space marine must jump down into the dusty skeleton of one of these buried titans to recover an item called The Crucible. This setting wouldn't be out of place if it were transposed to Double Fine's *Brütal Legend*.

"Rock 'n' roll was our inspiration for everything," Martin says. "There is a lot of heavy metal in our hell, and that is intentional. When you look at the original Doom, we always said it looks like the kind of stuff a 15-year-old would draw on the back of his notebook during math class. We really wanted the world to look like that - to have a certain personality that would shine through in everything we did. So we have a lot of skulls; it's kind of over the top. A little bit of Castle Grayskull in there; it's very He-Man."

I enter through the skull of the giant cyberdemon and plummet hundreds of feet to a temple-like building that houses the Crucible. My greeting party is a pair of cacodemons, one of the more advanced classic Doom enemies. To match the more formidable flying foes, I have access to nearly the full assortment of Doom weapons, including the chaingun, rocket launcher, and plasma rifle.

Hell has much more verticality than the UAC facilities, which makes me glad I now have the double-jump for traversal. Using the multiple levels is key to staying alive once the demons roll out heavy hitters like spectres, barons of hell, the revenant, lost souls, pinky, and the mancubus. Teleportals and jump pads are also conveniently placed around the arenas, affording me opportunities to flank unsuspecting enemies for a quick glory kill.

Accessing your full arsenal is key to surviving these more frenzied encounters. The plasma rifle mod that temporarily stuns an enemy is a great boon when surrounded by powerful enemies. Pulling up the weapon wheel also slows down time momentarily, which can help you get your head around the combat scenario before jumping back into the action.

Each enemy has a particular weakness you can exploit to make short work of some targets. For instance, pinky is fully armored in front, but when

it charges you can double-jump over it and unload the super shotgun on its backside.

The demo ends in a flurry of attacks from barons of hell, spectres, and a summoner. I barely escape alive, which makes me marvel at the possibility of running through this area on the infamous nightmare difficulty.

DEATHMATCH REVIVAL

Doom may have introduced players to the term deathmatch, but if you didn't play the first two entries in the mid '90s, you likely don't associate the series with multiplayer. While the early Doom games allowed players to connect with each other via a network to face off head-to-head, id's later series, *Quake*, is better known for popularizing competitive multiplayer in first-person shooters.

"When you look historically at what we've done, we haven't done an internal multiplayer game or something we created or directed from the beginning since *Quake III*," Stratton says. "Doom 3 had some multiplayer, but it wasn't as widely played. The single-player content was what we were most concerned with."

For the reboot, id is jumping back into the arena with an approach that captures what players loved about Doom I and II. The contemporary shooter landscape offers a lot of variety, from the tactical skirmishes of *Counter-Strike* to the fast-paced, close-quarters shoot-outs of *Call of Duty*. Doom eschews these modern approaches in favor of a speed-oriented skirmish style that calls to mind the arena-shooter era when *Quake* and *Unreal Tournament* ruled the day. Why go with an old-school approach that seems at best marginalized and at worst abandoned in today's market?

"It's what we like to play," Stratton says. "If you love what you're doing, you're going to do it really well."

Along with its internal development team that drives the creative decision making, id Software enlisted the help of Austin-based studio *Certain Affinity* to build this new approach to multiplayer. Having designed maps for both

INTRODUCING UPGRADES

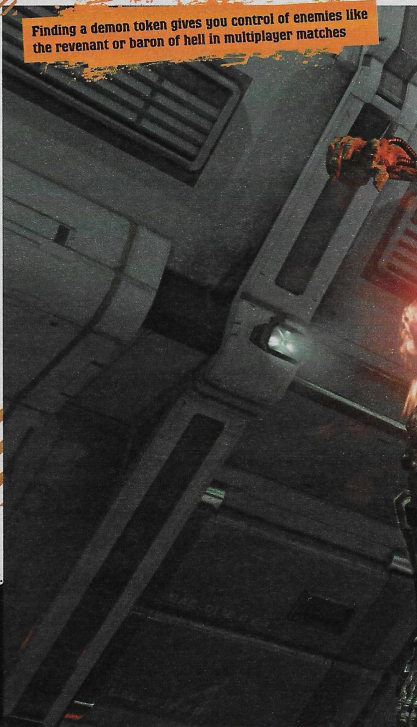
Exploring the environments in *Doom* isn't all about finding new weapons mods; players can also uncover three tiers of upgrades to improve their space marine.

If you stumble upon a white chest, grab the glowing orb contained within. These items, called argent cells, allow you to increase your armor, ammo, or health capacity.

The second type of enhancement is a performance upgrade, which improves various general capability categories like equipment effectiveness and agility. These are gained by finding enhancement tokens on fallen elite guards. The final type of upgrade is a rune, which can be combined to tailor your skills to particular play style. If you find yourself dying a lot, activate a saving throw that momentarily slows down the action when you drop under 25 percent health. If you are gunning for a speedrun, choose runes that increase your dexterity when executing glory kills or swapping weapons.

The rune system is not an RPG-style skill tree that locks you into your decisions. Instead, you can reconfigure your runes at a moment's notice to give you an advantage for the scenario at hand.

Finding a demon token gives you control of enemies like the revenant or baron of hell in multiplayer matches



Halo and Call of Duty, Certain Affinity is no stranger to the competitive shooter landscape.

As you would expect from an arena shooter, Doom multiplayer is hyperkinetic and bombastic. The six-on-six skirmishes also stand out for their time-to-death ratios. If an opponent gets the jump on you, that doesn't necessarily spell your doom, as you can take much more damage than you do in a game like Call of Duty. This is not a one-shot, you're dead experience; id wants engagements to feel more like a back-and-forth duel.

This approach shined through in our hands-on time with the multiplayer. Matches feel decidedly old-school, with quad damage and invisibility power-ups and weapons littered across the maps. Many firefights turn into dances between individual opponents as you whittle away each other's health bars. Players can also collect a power-up to assume the role of a demon – we saw the revenant and baron of hell as options in the matches we played – to chalk up some rapid kills.

The first mode we played, Warpath, has both teams vying for control of a mobile domination point that drifts around the map at a steady pace. Each player is outfitted with two weapons and a piece of equipment like a grenade, threat sensor that highlights nearby enemies through walls, or siphon grenade that sucks health from the enemies in the blast radius and gives it to you.

Before jumping into a match, the player can choose their loadout and up to four hack modules. These timer-based perks are earned through the progression system and are meant to give you a quick advantage in battle. The four available for our match were Power Seeker, which highlights the closest power-up for 120 seconds; Retribution, which highlights the location of your most recent killer for 30 seconds; Supply Timer, which shows the respawn timers for all nearby power-ups for 120

seconds; and Armor Plating, which gives you a +10 armor boost for your next life. You can choose which hack module to use before each respawn.

The majority of these hack modules are meant to emphasize your awareness of the surroundings to make you more effective. "None of these throw off the competitive balance," Stratton says. "None of these affect how powerful your gun is or anything like that."

The second multiplayer mode we played was Clan Arena, which is essentially a best-of-five team-based Last Man Standing experience. Each player only has one life, and the team that executes all of the competition first wins the round.

The multiplayer arsenal extends beyond the suite of weapons available in the single-player mode. Among the new guns we see on display during battle are a sniper-rifle like vortex rifle, a selective-fire battle rifle called the repeater, and the static cannon, a slow-firing beam rifle that gets more powerful as you run. The heavy assault rifle and lightning gun were also added to the rotation for these matches.

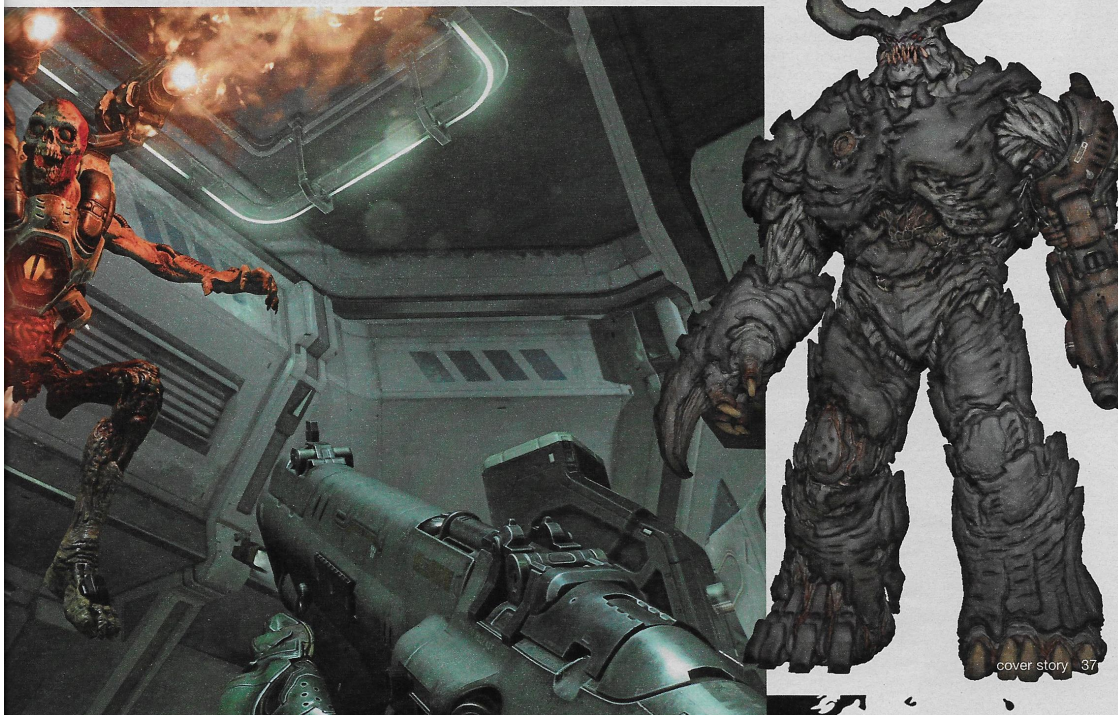
NEXT-GEN IDTECH

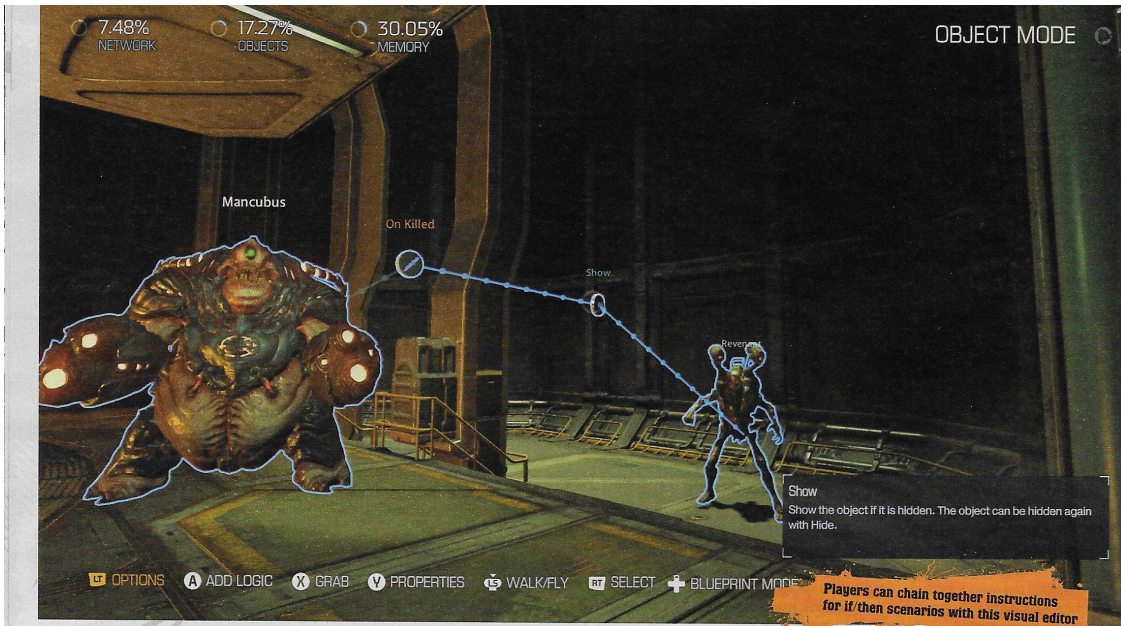
Thanks to the programming genius of John Carmack, id Software has always been synonymous with future-leaning game engines. Just because he's left to join Oculus, however, doesn't mean the tech is suddenly in peril.

For the new Doom, the programmers essentially rewrote the entire engine from a rendering perspective. The new physically based renderer ensures all the surfaces in the world react as you would expect to light and shadow, such as realistic shines off of metal or reflections in blood pools.

Game director Marty Stratton is bullish on the idTech 6 engine. "It's our strongest tech we've ever had," he says. "I'm super proud of the team. To do all that at 60 frames per second and 1080p, it's a real feather in the cap of the team here. It's something they take a huge amount of pride in. Their mantra is we want to be the best looking game on the market at 1080p and 60 frames per second."

As always, id plans to deliver sliders and multi-sampling options to the fervent PC player base to push their high-end rigs beyond these benchmarks.





IT'S A MOD WORLD

In addition to a single-player campaign and full multiplayer suite, id Software wanted to make sure the Doom reboot featured another core element that speaks to the series' legacy: modding.

The Doom franchise has a long history with the mod community; in the mid '90s, many of the best gaming experiences I had were from playing the deep collection of PWAD files you could download for Doom. These user-generated mods transported players to many familiar universes, from *The Simpsons* to *Aliens*. Even *Star Wars: Dark Forces*, one of the seminal shooters of the era, was preceded by a *Star Wars* PWAD. Lots of game developers found their way into the industry via Doom mods, but building and sharing these files was a cumbersome process.

For the Doom reboot, id wants to open the creative process up to more than just modders with advanced programming skills. "When we started with the initial concept for

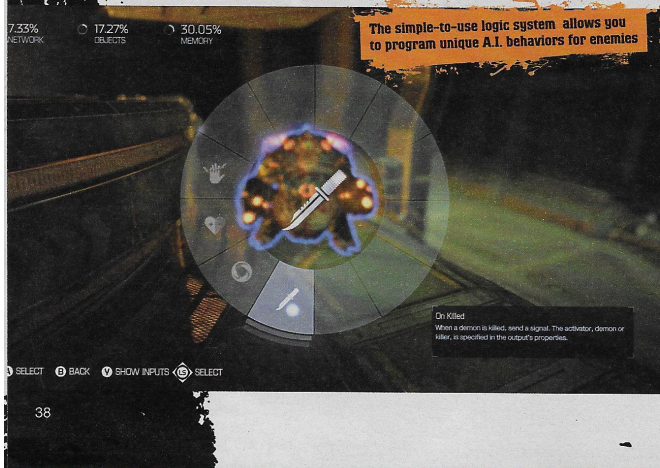
what we wanted to do with Doom, there was no doubt that we wanted to provide players with the opportunity to create their own content," Stratton says. "It is part of the heritage and legacy of not only Doom but id. We've done it for years releasing our source code, allowing people to create maps and modes, but we knew we needed to do it in a way that allowed everybody to do it and not just restrict it to people with experience or special expertise in these areas."

Enter SnapMap. This suite of creative tools essentially gives players all of the Lego pieces from the Doom campaign and arms them with a toolbox for building their own single-player missions, cooperative game modes, or multiplayer experiences. Detailed tutorials and reference maps give newcomers the foundation to begin the creative process in less than 15 minutes, and the technology is flexible enough to allow advanced creators to build rich experiences.

To develop SnapMap, id Software brought on Escalation Studios, which it had worked with previously to build the mobile title *Doom Resurrection*. Escalation proved to be a great fit because of its president, Tom Mustaine, a long-time developer who cut his teeth creating PWADs for Doom and Heretic.

"Back then, you would push up against the limits of the tech, and it was hard to find stuff," Mustaine says. "You had to log into FTP sites and all of this craziness. Now, with the technology available today, and what we are doing with SnapMap, you have the same kind of ability of creating something from nothing, but you don't need the experience of being a hardcore level designer, and read tutorials for days or weeks on end. You can build something within 10 minutes.

"You can make extraordinarily cool content, and easily make gameplay in it. Or you can dig a little deeper and make more advanced content. It's on par with actually writing code. I think [SnapMap] is the first of its kind – a full in-game tool that, regardless of the platform, you can create content and share it with your friends and publish it to the world for multiplayer, co-op, and single-player. You can also make stuff that is just fun."



The variation the studios have seen thus far when putting SnapMap in the hands of developers is impressive, from tower-defense modes and moody single-player missions to VIP escorts and racing challenges. Stratton has always worked on the production side of the equation, so given his lack of programming know-how, he considers himself a litmus test for how intuitive the creation suite is. "After 20 years in the industry, it's given me a new outlet in how I feel I can do cool things" he says.

Rather than continue to extol the virtues of SnapMap's flexibility, id drops us straight into the four-part beginners' tutorial. In a few short minutes, I build a simple monster-closet scenario where a demon spawns to attack after you press the button on a computer console. In my second project, I fill a room with demons and explosive barrels, signaling the horde to attack full bore once they spot the player. Another sequence introduces me to A.I. automation, which I use to drive several randomly spawning enemies in a corridor. From object placement to assigning logic to the various enemies, the system is easy to learn, though it definitely has an advanced layer of systems that will take time to master.

After our tour of the suite ends, we're dropped into a four-player cooperative experience built with SnapMap that pits our team against waves of increasingly difficult enemies. Between rounds, we can use the currency earned from kills to reinforce defenses and purchase new weaponry from a store we access through a portal. This feels like a fleshed-out game mode, and it was created in 12 hours.

All of the user-created content is surfaced via the SmartHub. Discovery should prove easy thanks to the various sorting categories like top rated, featured, newest, and most played. Your friends' creations are given a dedicated page as well, or you can search by name or tag to find content that doesn't rise to the surface. The studio is also curating playlists of user-created multiplayer matches for the various modes, giving players another place to find competition. Best of all, downloading these new experiences hardly takes any time at all.

"Because everybody already has all the parts and pieces, there's nothing that has to be uploaded or downloaded other than this really small instruction file," Stratton says.

WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

When a game franchise takes 11 years off, it sounds a lot of warning bells in my head. But based on my experience playing Doom, none of my initial apprehensions feel relevant. In an era where the shooter genre has morphed in so many directions, it's surprising how refreshing and unique Doom plays despite its steadfast dedication to preserving so many core elements of the original.

From my hands-on time with the single-player campaign, multiplayer, and SnapMap user-creation suite, this series looks to be heading on the right trajectory for its spring release. Like the 2014 Wolfenstein reboot, this id Software franchise looks to be poised for a major return to form, and should attract longtime fans and newcomers alike.

"It feels like we're going to be introducing a whole new generation of players to what Doom is all about," Stratton says.

We have a strong feeling they're going to like it. ♦

For more interviews, videos, and in-depth features on Doom, visit gameinformer.com/doom



The SnapMap blueprint mode makes it easy to design the layout of single-player, cooperative, or multiplayer environments



MAKING MAX PAYNE

How Hong Kong kung fu and family photo shoots built a noir thriller

By Kyle Hilliard

Max Payne was not the first game to come out of Finnish developer Remedy Entertainment, but it became the developer's first major success and set a standard and aesthetic style for the studio moving forward. Max's overwrought noir dialogue, dark tone, story focus, and third-person shooting with an unconventional hook have been translated into staples of Remedy games, even up to its upcoming Xbox One game, *Quantum Break*, which we featured on

our cover in December 2015.

Following the release of the studio's first game, *Death Rally* in 1996, Remedy threw around ideas for a follow-up covering everything from *The Legend of Zelda*-inspired fantasy to making an early prototype that used an overhead perspective starring a hard-boiled cop. The latter moved forward into production. "There was a concept called *Dark Justice*, which was a kind of near-future, drug gang-war concept," says writer Sam Lake. "I wanted a film-noir, hard-boiled feeling

to it – wanted to bring kind of a private eye type main character into it and [*Dark Justice*] became, step by step, *Max Payne*."

The game changed tremendously over the course of its development, shifting from the top-down perspective to third-person, abandoning the near-future and gang-war components, but embracing the tough-minded lead detective and the drug-focused story to eventually become *Max Payne*. Remedy was working with *3D Realms* at the time, and received permission to expand and change the game from its original pitch. "They were pushing us to be more ambitious with this," Lake says. "*Tomb Raider* was coming out with a third-person camera, and that kind of felt like, 'We can do this. Let's go in this direction.' That's how it started."

Bullet time, the game's most notable hook and the aspect separating it from competing third-person shooters, came along during this iterative process. "We were all watching a lot of Hong Kong action movies, like *John Woo* stuff, and we were saying, 'We should do something like that – all of those cool slow-mo, bullet time things. We need to find a way to bring some of that coolness into the gameplay,'" Lake says. Some early versions took bullet-time out of the hands of the player, assigning it to specific story-moments and rooms before it became a crucial aspect of the players' interaction with the gun combat.

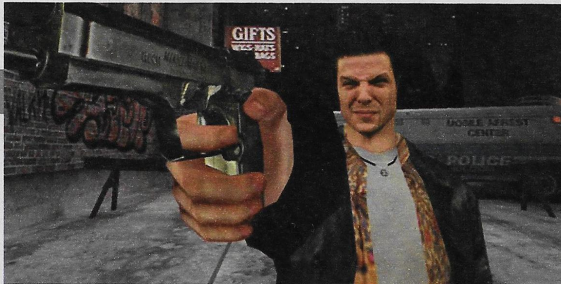
Max Payne's interstitial story moments are told through a series of comic vignettes as opposed to animated cutscenes. The initial idea was to take photos and use them as reference to create watercolor images on paper, which would then be used in the game. "It was ambitious and it



The Max Payne Grimace

Few celebrities of the video game industry are recognized primarily for what Remedy writer Sam Lake describes as a "constipated face." People ask him to make the *Max Payne* face at events, and he even poked fun at the legacy of the expression in a recent video asking Remedy fans to send in their best *Max Payne* grimace after offering a humorous walkthrough of how to do it.

The face is a result of the limited technology of the time. *Max Payne*'s face had no animation, but it did have three swappable expressions – a neutral face, a smirk, and the now famous shooting face. "The face for shooting was kind of me going like, 'Well, if I was shooting a gun and there was a bright muzzle flash, how would I...?' and then I was in front of the mirror going... [Lake laughs while making the expression] something like this." Lake says. Though players rarely saw the face while playing the game, it did make its way into nearly every published screenshot. "Because of what we were doing with the particles and we could freeze and go in slow mode – that was really, really cool – an eye-candy thing. So we wanted to show that in every shot, so Max had his shooting face on for everything."



was a cool idea to use watercolors and ink, but it was way too slow," Lake says. As the game progressed, the photographs became more integral, and the watercolor painting idea was abandoned in favor of applying watercolor filters with Photoshop.

Many of the models who made it into these comic book scenes are members of the Remedy development staff, friends and family, and most notably, Lake, who modeled for Max. It began with Lake and friends dressing up as cyber-punk soldiers for a photo-shoot to be featured in his university's role-playing association magazine. "I brought those photos to work and I was saying, 'We should do something like this — this is a way to tell a story with a graphic novel. The best I can recall, because I was posing in those

photos, everyone went, 'Okay, you are the guy then,'" Lake says.

With a budget too small to allow for professional actors, Lake found himself in the game. "Suddenly, the character started to look like me. I honestly don't know if I had known that at the time, if I would have just shrugged and said 'Okay,' I maybe would have thought about it a bit more," Lake says when remembering his initial agreement to model for Max.

Lake recruited the rest of the cast, and in some cases, pulled in literally anyone near his one-room rental apartment to be a model. "All the models in the game are from close groups of friends or relatives that I just tracked in," Lake recalls. "The janitor in that house where I was living ended up being the mob boss, my mother ended up being

the main bad guy in Nicole Horne, my dad is the shady government official Alfred Woden, and my brother was Vinny Cognitti, the mobster."

Despite the comparatively budgeted storytelling mechanics, Max Payne was a huge success, winning many game of the year awards. Game Informer gave the Xbox version a 9, and its Metacritic score reflects a similar level of positivity across the board.

The game has sold more than four million copies and cemented bullet time as a widely-used gameplay mechanic. It was one of the earliest examples of a developer treating its dialogue and story with the same level of respect as its gameplay and graphics, and assured the ongoing legacy of video gaming's slowest shooter and the studio that created him. ♦



Entering Right Behind The Matrix

The obvious assumed inspiration for Max Payne's bullet-time shooting mechanic is *The Matrix*, which released two years prior to the game in 1999, but the relationship between the film and the game are coincidental. Max Payne's bullet-time mechanics were well in development when *The Matrix* released, but Remedy saw the film's release as positive as opposed to getting beaten to the punch. "Matrix, in many ways was, I feel, a big stroke of luck for us in the sense that Hong Kong action theater, from the western perspective, was still a relatively little known, kind of a niche thing," says Max Payne writer Sam Lake. "Matrix really brought that kind of stylization and coolness in action. It was huge, and it came nicely before us, setting up a perfect launch platform for Max Payne to come out."



Issue 274 • February 2016

www.gameinformer.com