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There are two incredibly cool 3D games now available for the Mac: Marathon 2, and Doom II. The purpose of this article is to detemine which one is really better -- and which one is really worth buying, if there can be only one in your life. I'll try to give you all the ammo you need.

But first a little history...

The original Marathon by Bungie revolutionized 3D gaming for the Mac. It arrived around the time when everyone was still playing Wolfenstein 3D and Pathways Into Darkness.

It was instantly a hit. Almost everyone could run it, and it quickly became the only Macintosh 3D game worth dropping cash for.

But sadly -- there's always a downside -- it was still not up to the standards of the PC games available at the same time. Even so, it opened up a whole new window into Mac 3D shoot 'em ups, a portal which continues to grow today.

Now that MacDoom and MacDoom II have been released, I can surely say that both have surpassed the original Marathon in every way. No more cartoon-like Pfhor beating me down with weird-looking sticks. Now I'm faced with horrendous demons straight from Hell, all extremely disgruntled and ready to kick my rear.

However, a little friendly competition has arisen between Marathon and MacDoom. And that, my friends, is where we begin our little debate.

Enter: Marathon 2

Marathon 2 is the name of the game. It's the brand new sequel to Marathon,

and it surpasses the original in almost every way. You now have the ability to swim under liquids, such as water and lava, and have cooperative Bobplay. Remember those helpless Bobs from the first Marathon? Now they're back and packing heat. More enemies, better weapons, and beautiful textures make this a well-rounded game.

But does it equal up to Doom II? I will have to say NO, absolutely not. (And not just because I'm writing this for a Doom e-zine!!)

Now I know that the Marathon addicts are saying, "That stupid Doom bigot doesn't know what he's talking about." Let me tell you something. Before I wrote this article, I had only played the demo of Marathon 2, and I decided that it was vastly superior to Doom II. It had a wonderful layout and design, as well as great textures.

But after playing the full version, I've revised my position: Don't be fooled!

Layout and Gameplay: M2

The full game of Marathon 2 is decidedly more complex than the demo, almost to the point of annoyance. You meander around the levels slowly, trying to figure out extremely complicated puzzles.   It's not just a blast 'em-and-exit type of game; it's an explore-till-you-pass-out type of game. You could spend from six hours to two weeks on just one board, trying to get to the exit. Is it underwater? Or is it on the second floor of that building that I can't reach? The upside is that the cooperative Bobplay is wonderful. The best levels are the ones where you get to fight side by side with Bobs, and killing them is the best part. Kill one, and the others will attack you!

The other interesting thing is a good story line. (If you can force yourself to read it.) It's really too complicated to go into in the space of this article, so I'll spare you.

What about monsters? Do the Pfhor (the aliens in Marathon 2) add extra excitement to the game? Weeelllll........... not really. They're supposed to, but what M2 boils down to is puzzles, puzzles, and more puzzles.

Come on people! Are cartoon aliens supposed to be scary?

Layout and Gameplay: D2

In Doom II, you blaze through levels, clinging to your precious life by the skin of your teeth. Playing Doom II at night, full screen, and in pitch dark is not recommended for people with heart conditions.   I've had a nightmare about being stuck in a cornfield full of Demons (the ones that look like shaved dogs in Doom).

Doom II doesn't have very intricate levels, but then they are well planned out. All of them are memorable, and few are very easy to conquer. The levels focus on providing a pleasing layout, and then making the player fight to survive and kill his way to get to the next one. There's no cooperative play with other monsters in the game, but you can get monsters to fight each other, which is quite a spectacle. You must have a sharp eye and a quick trigger finger to come even close to beating this monster of a game. And it's more addicting than nicotine.

The Sounds

Even though most people wouldn't say "sounds" when asked what's one of the best parts of a 3D game, I know better. The sounds of a game greatly enhance the experience of total 3D submergence. In Doom II, you have the incredibly evil sounding breathing, screaming, and hissing of monsters and/or demons. It can be almost too realistic at times, and it adds to the richness of the game considerably.

In Marathon 2, you   have pathetic sounding baby talk from the Pfhor, and weapons that sound like they're made by a toy company. And when a Pfhor splats, it sounds eerily like a piece of paper hitting the inside of a garbage can. However, M2 does feature the really cool option of turning on ambient sounds. In ambient mode, if you happen to be outside, you might hear the wind howling in your ears. As you get farther away, you hear less and less of the wind, till it completely fades away. This is demonstrated time and time again in the game, and it's very cool.

Graphics

Both games have supurb high resolution graphics, and hundreds of textures to go along with them. The Marathon 2 textures are a bit nicer looking than Doom II's, but that's simply because Doom II is supposed to be a more "gothic" game.

One thing stands out, and that's the lighting effects. In Marathon 2,   every time it gets dark, the wall loses its resolution, and it looks really grainy. Doom II doesn't have that problem for some reason, and the lighting really sets the mood for the game.

The weapons in Doom II also look and feel superior to Marathon 2's. I don't know about you, but I'd much rather have the Plasma gun rather than the TOZT (flamethrower), or the BFG instead of the SPNKER (rocket launcher). One thing Bungie decided to wise up to was the shotgun. In Marathon 2, you can acquire and use two   WASTE-M Combat Shotguns at the same time. These babies are slick, and they are barrels of fun to use. They're the

exception to the not-so-great weapons in M2.

Deathmatch

Marathon has always been known for its excellent networking abilities, and now so is Marathon 2.

"Great!" you say. But before you network, you'll have to fork out a little bit more money to buy network serial numbers for all of the players. OK, so maybe you just want to kill your friend across the street. Too bad. M2 doesn't support modem-to-modem play.

Actually, Marathon 2 network play could have one nice feature. I'm sure you could build a swimming pool level and invite your friends to come to the netgame for a pool party. You could wade around and talk to your friends, and kill them if you got into an argument. Now THAT would be fun.

Doom II is wonderful for deathmatches. There's no need for serial numbers, and modem play is supported! I've seen videos of Marathon 2 network games, and I can tell you right now that you haven't seen nothin' till you've seen a Doom II deathmatch. It's an all out splatterhouse when someone gets fired up. Unfortunately, you can't arrange to have pool parties in this one. But plenty of gory fun awaits inside every deathmatch game.

Which to Buy?

If you have to make a choice, and you still aren't sure, I recommend Doom II. It's been the most popular PC game for almost two years now, and with the release of the Macintosh port, its finest hour has just arrived. The game is crammed full of excitement and wonder, and it will keep you from being distracted by real world problems -- namely, showing up at your job, going to the bathroom, and little things like eating and drinking.

If you loved the original Marathon, or you like spending your time exploring new worlds instead of killing their inhabitants, then Marathon 2 is the one for you. I know that plenty of you MacHeads out there enjoy solving those devilishly clever (and, in my opinion, sometimes annoying) puzzles, and I invite you to do so in the realistic 3D world of Marathon 2.

Conclusion

Both of these games are cool, and they both have their own unique qualities.

Marathon 2 has some cool things on the surface, such as the aforementioned

ability to swim under liquids, as well as the power to look up and down. But, as that old cliche goes, beauty is only skin deep. I believe that a 3D game is not a good 3D game unless it makes you start pumping that good ol' adrenaline like Doom II does.

Marathon 2 unfortunately doesn't deliver that same rush. It may sound like I'm putting down Marathon 2, but I'm really not. It's a great game, but it still doesn't equal up to father of all modern day 3D games.

ason Carter is the Webmaster of 3D Mac Games Web site and a regular contributor to MacDoom Review. He wrote the MacHexen preview in MDR#3.