

Action Games Roundup

Ziff-Davis Interactive

The Quick and The Dead

By Russ Lockwood

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There are only two types of action game players: the quick and the dead. That doesn't mean such games are devoid of brainpower prerequisites--just that the key to victory lies in rapid reflexes, not intense analysis. Most action games grab their inspiration from either coin-operated arcade games or cartridge games for Nintendo, Sega, or other home systems. Yet the very best of these games go beyond simple imitation: They take full advantage of the capabilities of the PC, stretching graphics, animation, and music to create pure bedlam on your screen. Moreover, with the proper modem or network connection, you can even challenge friends and co-workers to risk digital life and limb.

[Descent](#)

[DOOM](#)

[Rise of the Triad](#)

[Heretic](#)

[One Must Fall: 2097](#)

With this in mind, we've gathered the five top shareware action games. They all run from DOS, take up megabytes of space on your hard drive, and require a hefty amount of RAM on your system. A faster system means better performance. These games offer considerable challenge, feature amazing graphics, provide exceptional replay value, and would be worthy additions to your games collection. They are the most discussed, most appreciated, and most played of all shareware games.

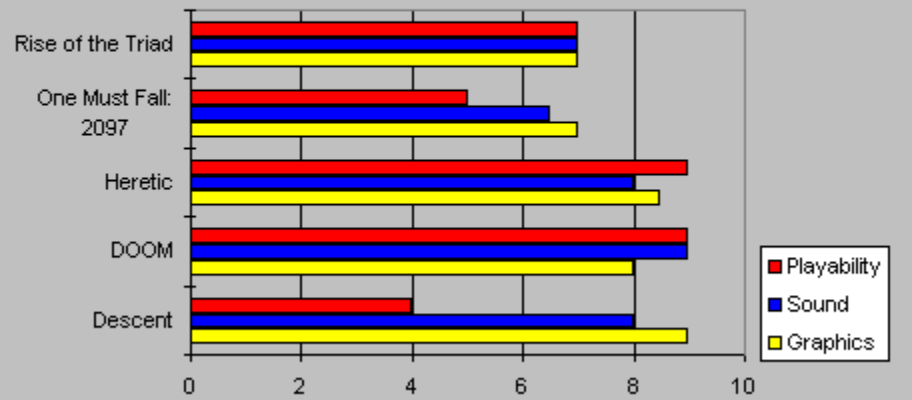
After you finish reading this, be sure to check out the two comparison charts, "[Roundup](#)" and the soon-to-be-infamous "[Carnage Factor](#)."

Action Games Roundup

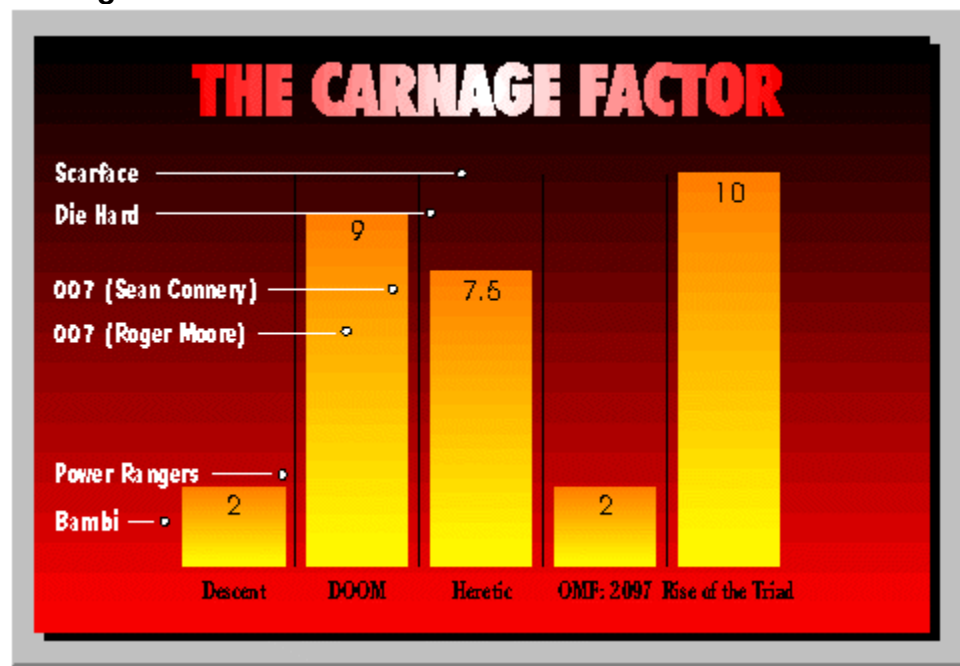
Roundup

ACTION GAMES

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Carnage Factor



DESCENT

(Search for DSCENT.ZIP in Library 3, Action Games, PBS Arcade forum.)



Interplay's Descent sends you into sci-fi mines in search of hostages and robots. This 3-D shoot-'em-up offers true wraparound reality, so you twist (pitch and yaw) in any direction as tunnels spiral up and down in all directions--some even double back underneath you. Great graphics, fierce fighting, and considerable chair gyrations make it exciting and aerobic.

You're in the cockpit of the Pyro-GX space fighter, a compact cocoon of destruction sporting the latest in life-threatening lasers and missiles. As a freelance flyer for Post Terran Minerals Corporation, you're called in to crush a robot rebellion in the deep-space mines--just the type of corporate crisis that requires an overqualified, Type A, terminator personality like yourself.

Traveling around in three dimensions poses a whole new set of problems. As corridors branch, twist, and drop you into polyhedron rooms, it's very easy to get disoriented. Add in wild whirls and perilous pirouettes as you shoot your way out of numerous ambushes, and you'll soon be adding your own vocals to the technobeat music.

The graphics offer brilliant futuristic tunnels and rooms. The robots use polygon technology, overlaid with vibrant digitized explosions when you destroy them. You can shoot out computerized wall panels, which both satisfies destructive lust and acts as a trail of bread crumbs in case you get lost.

The game's map is a 3-D wireframe drawing that you can rotate in any direction. That truly takes time to comprehend--and you'll zoom and rotate extensively to figure out your location and heading.

As you try to fulfill your mission, you'll come across secret doors, color-coded keys for locked doors, invisibility devices (cloaking technology), bigger and badder weaponry, and refills for ammo (power crystals) and health (shields and hull integrity). Registration provides 30 additional levels, deadlier robot enemies, meaner weaponry, and network and modem multiplayer modes.

DOOM

(Search for DOOM.ZIP in Library 3, Action Games, PBS Arcade forum.)



Id Software's DOOM is THE three-dimensional, in-er-face, tour de force of mayhem and mutants in a spaceport of the future. Fast scrolling graphics, mind-altering mazes, and a blastomatic pace will keep you glued to the carnage for hours.

There's not much of a plot to DOOM. From the moment you start in the hangar, your mission is simple: search and destroy. Either kill the demons and mutated guards or be killed by them. Better still, you start with a miserable pistol, no armor, and no idea how to make it through buildings such as the nuclear plant, toxic refinery, and command center. Not to worry, though: You'll find plenty of armor and weaponry laying about, not to mention medical kits, healing potions, and the all-important access keys. The bad guys are so sloppy!

Your first-person perspective shows your hands holding a pistol, shotgun, chaingun, or other weapon. When firing, you need only line up the enemy on the horizontal plain--whether they're above or below you makes little difference. For example, shooting at a guard directly in front of you is no more difficult than taking aim at a mutant on a balcony, even though the two are at different heights on the screen.

DOOM doesn't carry a movie-style rating, but you should consider it on par with PG-13 films. When you fire at a demon, the body rips open as the slugs hit, then the corpse falls to the ground. Compared to "Rambo" or "Pulp Fiction," it's pretty tame, but "The Little Mermaid" it's not.

With the action so fast and furious, the controls are pleasantly simple. Use the cursor keys to move around, the Ctrl key for firing, and the space bar to activate gizmos or open doors. The numeric keys let you change weapons, and the function keys let you quick-save and restore games. All in all, DOOM's keyboard interface is a slick one.

DOOM offers five degrees of difficulty. (The middle one--Hurt Me Plenty--is the default, but until you get used to the decor whizzing by at high speed, take it down a notch.) Registration provides additional levels, weapons, and monsters, plus the ability to run user-created levels (known in the shareware world as "WADs"), thus extending the game's play value.

HERETIC

(Search for HERETC.ZIP in Library 3, Action Games, PBS Arcade forum.)



Raven Software's Heretic offers the sword-and-sorcery version of DOOM, with wizards, golems, axe-wielding warriors, and spells aplenty. There's no real swordplay (sorry, you Conan wannabes out there), but the cartographic puzzles will amaze and entrance you.

Since Heretic uses the same 3-D engine as DOOM, expect the same speedy graphics response when walking or running through the corridors. The graphics tend to be drab at the start: Stone walls tend to lull you into distraction. Yet as you work your way through this opening nine-level episode, City of the Damned, color seeps onto your screen. Included are massive wooden beams, polished marble pedestals, Tudor-styled houses, and the most radiant texture ever: stained glass windows.

As in DOOM, you'll find crushing ceilings, death pits, and other damage-causing locations, but give Raven credit for creating other terrain effects. Some waterways now contain currents that will sweep you downstream. One pond mimicks swirling winds that move you like a drunken sailor. If something falls into the water, you see splashes. You can pivot your view (and firing arc) 45 degrees up and down--something to keep in mind when firing up at balconies or down stairways. These touches make Heretic more graphically impressive than DOOM.

The monsters come in a variety of magical flavors, and you can almost pick out their DOOM equivalents. The bright-red winged demons sure act like the flaming skulls. The axe-tossing warriors sure seem like Hell Barons; they're not as tough, but they're quicker. Pale-yellow golems, like DOOM's pink demons, try to pound you into putty. Yet a one-for-one substitution oversimplifies Heretic's ingenuity. Some flying demons burp fireballs like imps, and a golem occasionally transforms into an electric yellow creature firing blazing skulls.

Heretic offers five levels of difficulty, and registration expands the game to a full 27 levels.

ONE MUST FALL: 2097

(Search for OMF.ZIP in Library 3, Action Games, PBS Arcade forum.)



Of the five, Epic's One Must Fall: 2097 comes closest to typical arcade action. This sideways-view robot kung-fu game pits two combatants in an arena where only one may survive standing. Punches, kicks, and a variety of "special" combinations make this a visually active and exciting game fit for the fastest fingers.

In the future, what we know as kickboxing is all the rage. However, instead of fragile humans entering the ring, human-controlled robots engage in mortal metal combat in the caged arena. You'll encounter a variety of heroes and villains as you fight your way to the top of the standings.

One Must Fall: 2097 contains one-shot matches as well as a tournament mode. The one-shot matches let you get a handle on the three different types of robots you may pilot and their special abilities. The tournament mode lets you create your own personality and customize a robot in your quest to be champion. Every win provides prize money to repair damage and upgrade your systems. Of the two scenarios, the tournament mode is superior since you have a stake in winning and losing.

Split-second timing is needed to land kicks and punches. Of note are the "special" moves, like flying backkicks and judo throws that are sometimes unstoppable and oftentimes more lethal than the "normal" attacks. However, these special moves are generated by certain key combinations not stated in the shareware help, which almost forces you to register to get the strategy guide--a somewhat sneaky ploy. Your computer opponents have access to the special moves right off the bat, but when you see them in action, you're even more intrigued.

Two players may share the keyboard to play against each other--no need for modem hookups or a network. Controls are limited to cursor keys for movement and one key each for kick and punch. In tournament mode, you can increase your experience, which allows you to kick and punch faster and with more power.

Upon registration, you get additional robots, characters, and capabilities, including the aforementioned special attacks.

RISE OF THE TRIAD

(Search for ROTT.ZIP in Library 3, Action Games, PBS Arcade forum.)



Apogee's Rise of the Triad ups the violence ante a bit with explicit 3-D carnage. The attention to visual detail is evident: Magical devices twirl and radiate, gunfire shatters glass windows, bullets pockmark the walls, and mini-trampolines bounce you over obstacles. Dizzying graphics, devious traps, dogged opponents, and diabolical puzzles may make this game too intense for optimal mental health.

As a lone scout for the high-risk United Nations Taskforce, you are on a recon mission to find (and presumably exterminate) a cult leader who threatens to kill millions of people. In order to succeed, you have to get past his Nazi-like minions and figure out some of the architectural enigmas. His fortress is beautifully rendered in multicolored 3-D splendor, and this game's special-effects trickery gets two thumbs-up. For example, circular stairsteps hover above the floor with no visible means of support, yet you can move over, under, and around them. Some lift and fall like an elevator, while others float about the buildings acting like an anti-gravity ferry.

You start with a pistol, but quickly expand your armament to include submachine guns, bazookas, heat-seeking missiles (!), and other weaponry. The bigger the weapon, the more graphic the on-screen carnage. Shoot an evil soldier with a pistol and you'll see a little blood, maybe even cause him to grab a shoulder in pain. Shoot him with the heat-seeking missile and you will obliterate him--but not before various body parts fly off in a variety of directions. No doubt such dismemberment will please many users, but more than a few are likely to cringe.

You'll pick up goodies such as food, gas masks, and armor, grab ankh medallions, and search for keys, switches, and hidden passageways. A multitude of circular trampolines catapults you skyward. Walk onto it and you bounce up and forward. Run onto it and you bounce forward even farther. Since the fortress is atop a cliff, it's possible to bounce right over the wall to your demise.

In modem/network play, you and your opponents can choose from several James Bond-ian characters. Registration gains you 30 levels, more weaponry, and adds four other characters, each with special abilities. A CD-ROM version and a network site license are available.

