

To Quake, or not to Quake?

A Demon from the Quake demo

By Jason Carter

wcarter@mindspring.com

<http://www.mindspring.com/~wcarter/3dMacGames.html>

After months of gripes, sweat, and tears, id Software finally released a deathmatch "test" version (available for the PC only) of their upcoming 3D game, Quake. If you believe the hype, this is the game that's going to rip the 3D gaming industry apart with its ground-breaking new graphics engine. The one question I'm here to answer is, "Has it lived up to the build up that it's been given?"

As of right now, that answer is no.

IRC, AND THREE NIGHTS OF HELL

Sunday, February 18: id told the public that the final "test" of Quake would finish at 8:00 p.m. More than four hundred people manage to hop onto IRC and shove their way into the #Quake chat area. Apparently, everyone expects the public release demo just after eight o'clock (OK, I thought so, too). It's a madhouse. You can barely make out a sentence, because the text is scrolling so damn fast. The atmosphere is so tense you can almost touch it. The closest approximation to it is Christmas: Everyone is waiting for a really big gift. Only they wait to find out that what they want isn't under the tree...

That's right, it never hit.

Friday, February 24: John Romero, as well as a few other id guys log into #Quake. After they torment the IRCers for awhile, Romero finally spills his

guts. The test version of Quake will be out sometime Saturday night, the 25th. (There's a log of this chat floating around the net somewhere, but it's basically a lot of people responding with stuff like "Spooooooooooggggge" and "Yessssss!")

Saturday, February 25: The night of Quake. The frenzy starts around five o'clock, and continues growing until about 10. There are more than eight hundred users on #Quake that night, all waiting for their long overdue and much deserved present. Yeah, I'm there, too. I have no idea if we broke the record for the number of users in one chat room, but it's more people than I ever expect to see again in my lifetime. When Romero shouts "IT'S ALIVE," people went wild. Many of them logged off, while others keep trying to confirm the statement. "Are you for real?" "Is Quake really out?" I manage to log into ftp.cdrom.com and snatch it before it becomes really crowded.

Yes, it was a joyous night, and one that I'll most likely remember for a lifetime.

Now, here are my thoughts and observations.

It's....Quake! Or is it?

First off, the test released by id is by no means what the final version of Quake will contain. They've already stated that this version is not even an alpha, meaning that in all likelihood, the engine will be improved twofold before the final release. In fact, the test release was not even of the game itself, but simply of the engine capabilities.

So what's in this "test" version?

Actually, not much at all. The test version includes three demo maps, as well as six not so hot weapons: the shotgun, super shotgun, nailgun, chain nailgun, grenade launcher, and a rocket launcher. Sure they sound great, but all are 3D polygons and not texture-mapped at all. (Put simply, they suck.) One would expect that in the final version they'll be texture-mapped and much more interesting. Two more weapons are planned, including the lightning gun and the chain lightning gun.

What about those incredible monsters we've all been hearing about?

Well, id didn't include them in any of the maps. However, some industrious hacker has managed to get into the hex files, and change around a bit of code, so that users of the Quake test are now allowed not only to see, but to fight all the monsters that are currently in the game.

Now that was something impressive.

Polygon monsters?

3D rendered models are the way to go in shoot'em ups. They look absolutely mind blowing. No more sprites with limited angles of view. Now we have full 360 degree rotational models that we can blast away at.

So far, there's a Demon, which is an awesome souped up version of the original Demon from Doom. It's huge (about twice your character's size), and it leaps toward you and attempts to gore you with blood red horns.

There's also an Ogre, which drags a heavy chainsaw around the floor, and swings it at your detachable head:

nd there's a Soldier, who runs at you, and slices at your gut with a razor sharp sword. Then there's a Wizard, who fires powerful energy balls (like Cacodemon blasts), and a deadly Pirannah, which swims around and tries to "get some meat" off your bones.

I've heard that there are a few other monsters in a new hack, but I unfortunately haven't been able to try it out yet. Put simply, the monsters that are in Quake at this time are stunning, and I can't wait for the full version.

What's the engine like?

The Quake engine as it is now is quite impressive, although it doesn't set any new standards. Rooms over rooms, swimming (much more realistic and "wavy" than it is in Marathon 2) and physics are much better than what's in most games of this genre.

In physics, for example, the wizard throws the Cacodemon blast at you. When it hits, you're thrown up into the air, and depending how hard the blow was, maybe even across the room! No bloody smears on the wall at impact though, which was one of id's descriptions of deathmatch. To be truthful, there are not very many extra's in Quake right now. However, there are a few cool things that have been added in. The skies, for instance, are realistically multi-layered, and present a type of "dome" effect, all while using some incredible scrolling. The teleporters also give a false sense of depth, like looking into a swirling pond. Your character is able to look ALL the way up, just as you would be able to in real life, as well as all the way down. This makes doing simple things interesting, such as diving into swirling brown water from a high bridge, while looking straight down.

What a rush.

The architecture is very impressive, as you have probably seen from the screenshots. Slanted and overhanging walls, plus a wealth of detail in room structure provide a fairly realistic world. You might enter a corridor and say, "This is pretty bland.", and then glance up at the ceiling and follow up with a "Damn, that's cool!" All of this is great, of course. However, as of this moment, Quake doesn't have the right "feel."

This is where it get kind of hard to explain. Doom and Doom II have a good feel. Marathon and Wolfenstein 3D have one, too. Quake simply doesn't have one right now. It's like watching a neat 3D program, but not really "being there." Interacting, but not feeling like you are really involved. I suspect that this will be improved before the final version, but as of now -- a big "no."

What's I suspect is going to make Quake a success is customizibility. You'll be able to change anything and everything in Quake. The code, the physics, the graphics: You can modify it to your heart's desire. You want a Role Playing Game? Just add a few graphics, and modify the code so that characters can talk. Even using Quake as a design tool, to escort people through 3D architectural renderings, wouldn't be too far off key. [Just don't frag your prospective clients.--Ed.] Maybe I'll even be able to create that 3D game I've always wanted.....

One final plus is that Quake is limited only by hardware. That is to say, if you have a fast Power Mac, you'll be able to set the game speeds to whatever your system can handle. If you get an upgrade, then you'll be able to set your speeds up even more. That way, as newer and faster computers come out, Quake will run with as much or as little improvement as you can handle.

Conclusion

Right now, Quake's just not that hot. No, it doesn't make Doom look like pong, and I can't say it even surpasses it yet. I do believe Quake, as it exists now, is a very early version of the engine of the future though. It's certainly not my dream game, and nothing in it propels it into blockbuster status, but all that could change.

Doom came out of nowhere and derailed the gaming industry as we once knew it, forcing companies to make bigger, better, and faster games. Quake just might do the same.

ason Carter is the Webmaster of 3D Mac Games Web site and a regular contributor to MacDoom Review. He wrote the Ultimate Doom review in MDR#5, and previewed MacHexen in MDR#3.