

Marathon VS. Doom

The Final Word.

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Now that the two best first-person action games ever are both on the Mac, the stage is set for a head-to-head confrontation. Who is better, and how? DOOM II has been in the top-selling PC games list for nearly two years now. Marathon is the latest game from Bungie Software, maker of the classic Pathways Into Darkness. Marathon and Doom are very similar in the way they look and work, but they are different in important ways. Read this, and choose for yourself...

*Bungie has announced Marathon 2: Durandal, the sequel to Marathon. It will add several features missing in Marathon. If a feature is marked with an asterisk, it will be available in Marathon 2 soon. You can download an *11 MB* demo of Marathon 2 at: <ftp.bungie.com> right now.

Monsters:

Marathon:

Eleven, available in up to 4 colors each. (Fighter, Trooper, Hunter, Enforcer, Wasp, Hound,

Compiler, Bob, Defense Drone, Hulk, Juggernaut) All monsters are basically the same: they walk/fly, they see you, they shoot something at you. They also have a "stationary" image, so they don't "walk in place" like in Doom.

Unique monsters: Defense Drones, who fight on your side, and Bobs- innocent civilians who run around in panic.

Doom:

Seventeen, all very different. (Zombie man, Shotgun guy, Heavy Weapon Dude, Imp, Lost Soul, Demon, Spectre, Cacodemon, Pain Elemental, Revenant, ManCubus, Arachnotron, Hell Knight, Baron of Hell, Arch-Vile, The Spider Mastermind, The Cyberdemon)

These monsters have more variety. They have more capabilities than in Marathon, such as "intelligent" projectiles- the Pain Elemental. Unique monsters: The Arch-Vile, who can resurrect dead monsters around him.

Comments:

The artist of Marathon said that the monsters were designed to look very

realistic. And they are. Doom's monsters seem designed to provide the most gameplay excitement, reality be damned.

Weapons:

Marathon: Seven- fist, pistol, fusion pistol, M-75, SPNKR, TOZT-25, and the alien weapon.

The biggest advantage Marathon has in this category is second-trigger capability: Each weapon can have more than one type of ammo, and fire more than one type of projectile. The M-75 also fires grenades, and the fusion pistol has an "overload" mode that brings the number of weapons up to nine. It also has a flame thrower- nothing can top running through corridors incinerating your friends and enemies! Fire is cool!

Doom: Nine- fist, chainsaw, pistol, shotgun*, double-barreled shotgun, chaingun, rocket launcher, plasma rifle, BFG 9000 Doom's arsenal contains the "classic" BFG 9000. What does BFG stand for? Hint: The first and last words are Big and Gun. Now what F-words do you know?...

Comments:

Once again, Marathon goes for realism, Doom goes for action. Marathon's nice touches include weapon recoil, actual reloading of new ammo clips, and the ability to use two pistols simultaneously. Doom's double barreled shotgun is probably the best all-around weapon in both games.

Plot:

Marathon:

You are a security officer on the interstellar colony ship Marathon, orbiting Tau Ceti. You are in a shuttle doing some routine maintenance work when the computer goes HAL 9000 on you and the Marathon is attacked by aliens. Now you must save the Marathon, the colony on the planet below you, and the rest of Earth from the assault. Not bad, but a few too many cliches.

Doom:

You are "the toughest space marine ever to suck vacuum", stationed on Mars. You are sent to investigate a distress call on the moon of Deimos, where a large coporation has been performing experiments in teleportation. You wait in reserve as your friends enter and are slaughtered. Now it's your turn. Allow me to be frank: This plot is just an excuse for a slugfest.

Comments:

Both games have the same elements in them: You, alone, must save yourself and the rest of humanity from a lot of monsters. Marathon's story is more developed, with more real characters and unexpected twisted in the middle of the game.

Graphics:

Both games use basically the same graphics engine technology, so they look and feel very similar. Where the difference comes is in the skills of the artists and the ingenuity of the level designers. Since the two games have so much in common, I'll just tell you the nice touches.

Marathon:

Marathon's primary advantage is the ability to "look" up and down. This way, you can shoot monsters above and below you. Marathon also has many complex effects, like pulsing lights, and moving walls and floors. Marathon also supports an HMD for virtual-reality gameplay.

Doom:

Doom's primary advantage is support of background pictures*. You can actually see menacing clouds or burning cities, instead of monotonous stars. Doom also supports transparent textures*, like bars of a cage- see through, shoot through, but not walk through.

Comments:

I prefer Marathon's texture collection and lighting effects, but Doom gives a better sensation of "being there".

Sound and Music:

Marathon:

Dozens of sounds range from realistic to otherworldly. You've got gunshots, zaps and explosions, panicked shouting, and whining ricochets. Marathon also supports panning stereo sound, so if a monster is on your left, his shots sound from the left and move to the right as you move. Sounds also fade as a monster gets father away. (There is an updater on AOL that gives Doom this capability, but it does not work too well.) Marathon's music is nothing to write home about, there are around 12 mildly annoying New Age-ish tracks that repeat every few levels.

Doom:

Grunts and moans, bangs and booms, roars and splats, they're all here. Doom's sound effects are well-matched to whatever event they accompany. The music is great- dozens of rock/pop tracks accompany every level, and sometimes in between.

Comments:

Doom's weapons have great sound effects- check out the rockets!- but they tend to repeat, and you get an unwarranted feeling of "Ha! Gotcha!" whenever you recognize a recycled sound. Marathon's sounds really improve

the gameplay, especially when the Bobs scream "They're everywhere!" just before they are smashed by a monster.

Adventure/Puzzles:

Marathon:

Marathon is a much more "brainy" game than Doom. Some levels are real teasers that will take you weeks to solve. Marathon can place levels in a vacuum, so that certain weapons do not work, and you need oxygen to survive. One unique feature of Marathon is the AI terminal, a computer in the wall that you can "jack" into and retrieve messages. These terminals inform you about each level, give you background history on the world of Marathon, and reprimand you for not completing a mission.

Doom:

Doom was not designed to test wits, it was designed to test trigger-fingers. Still, it has its share of mazes and mysterious switches. Doom also supports keycards*, which unlock doors. Where Doom really goes wild is secrets: you can find nearly anything on a level if you know where to look, and there are even two secret levels.

Arcade/Action:

Marathon: As above, Marathon is more brainy than Doom. The monsters are less gory than Doom's, and when there is a lot of blood it is yellow or blue, but not the kind of gratuitous gore you get in Doom. Still, you have a rocket launcher that can really send corpses flying.

Doom:

If you want blood, get this game. Almost anything causes major bleeding in the world of Doom. Monsters fall down in puddles of blood. Monsters burble intestines as they deflate. The rocket launcher literally blows them apart, with fragments of flesh flying everywhere.

Comments:

Doom is for people with itchy trigger fingers, but Marathon is for a well-balanced person who wants some thinking in with the carnage- brains and brawn, that sort of thing.

Network play:

Marathon:

Marathon can run over AppleTalk, LocalTalk, or Ethernet, but the feature most players will notice is the lack of direct modem connection. Marathon will run under ARA, but it is very sluggish, from what I have heard. Marathon has several maps dedicated to net play, but does not support cooperative

networking*. One of Marathon's advantages is a real-time microphone that allows you to speak to other people in a game. Also, Marathon has a game recorder that plays back "movies" of earlier games.

Doom:

Doom can run over almost any network, with AppleTalk, MacIPX, and direct modem connection supported. It supports up to four players for Deathmatch (kill each other) and Cooperative (help each other beat the game) play. It can also support mixed games- Doom-Mac against Doom-PC.

Expandability/Customization:

Marathon:

Marathon's pieces are spread throughout up to five separate files, so there is no one program that does it all for Marathon. The Physics Model Editor allows shuffling of graphics and sounds and so on. Map editors allow you to make your own levels, if you can figure out their interfaces and keep Marathon from crashing.

Doom:

Doom has been around long enough to generate a huge shareware following, with many editors on many networks. Doom uses a single file, called a WAD file, to store all game data, so most shareware programs are integrated packages that can edit anything, almost. The disadvantage is that none of these editors are on the Mac. Doom-Mac supports the thousands of PC WAD files available on CompuServe etc. directly, assuming you can get them onto a Mac.

Special features: What does one do that the other doesn't?

Marathon:

- The ability to look up and down.
- Second trigger: see "weapons"
- The motion tracker: a radar display that follows moving objects. -Shrapnel: a dying monster explodes and causes damage. -Low grav: Marathon can manipulate its own environment. -AI terminals: see "Adventure/Puzzles"
- The ability to flash the screen many different colors. -Monsters that "defect" and fight the other monsters -Vacuum: see "Adventure/Puzzles"

Doom:

- Monsters that shoot other monsters at you. -Teleporters that can transport monsters. -Semitransparent textures: see "Graphics" -Background pictures
- Keycards
- Exploding barrels of toxic waste

- Direct modem network play.
- Cooperative network play

Marathon 2: Coming soon!

- The ability to "swim" under water and lava. -Teleporting weapons and ammunition
- AI terminals now support graphics.
- Cooperative network play
- A shotgun!

Which one?

Now you've seen what each game can do, what the other game, can do, what each game can't do, what each game can do and the other can't, and so on. It's time for you to make a decision: Which is better, Doom or Marathon?

--Mark O====--***