

UFG GOES HANDS ON WITH QUAKE CHAMPIONS!

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I can't remember the last time I played a Quake title. Assuming it was Quake III: Arena – Enemy Territory doesn't count – it had to be about fifteen years ago, give or take. I remember it fondly though. Bounding around corners, strafing to dodge incoming rockets, returning fire with the railgun. All the while the announcer is calling out the action; an exploding skull by way of a flying projectile was often accompanied by a disembodied voice saying "Headshot!" Good times. This nostalgia is what got me excited about Bethesda and id's announcement of Quake Champions during last year's [E3 press conference](#). I mean, given how awesome Doom turned out, I just knew we were witnessing a resurgence of classic first person shooters...

My excitement diminished a bit after learning that id was going the free-to-play route. Still, I wanted to jump into the twitch-based shooter. If only to test my reflexes against others online. So, when Bethesda sent over the code, I quickly booted up the launcher and installed the game. From there I proceeded to queue up a match using the only available champion, Ranger – the main character from the long forgotten single player campaign. The other champions must be unlocked using real or in-game currency (more on that later). Once the match started, I fell into a familiar groove of grabbing the nearest rocket launcher and stacking up on armor boosts. Constantly moving, turning occasionally to see if anyone was tailing me, I made my way around the outer portion of the map. This made it easy to spot enemies while becoming accustomed with the environment; a well-placed rocket or two would turn anyone I saw into a red mist. Things were going well to say the least.



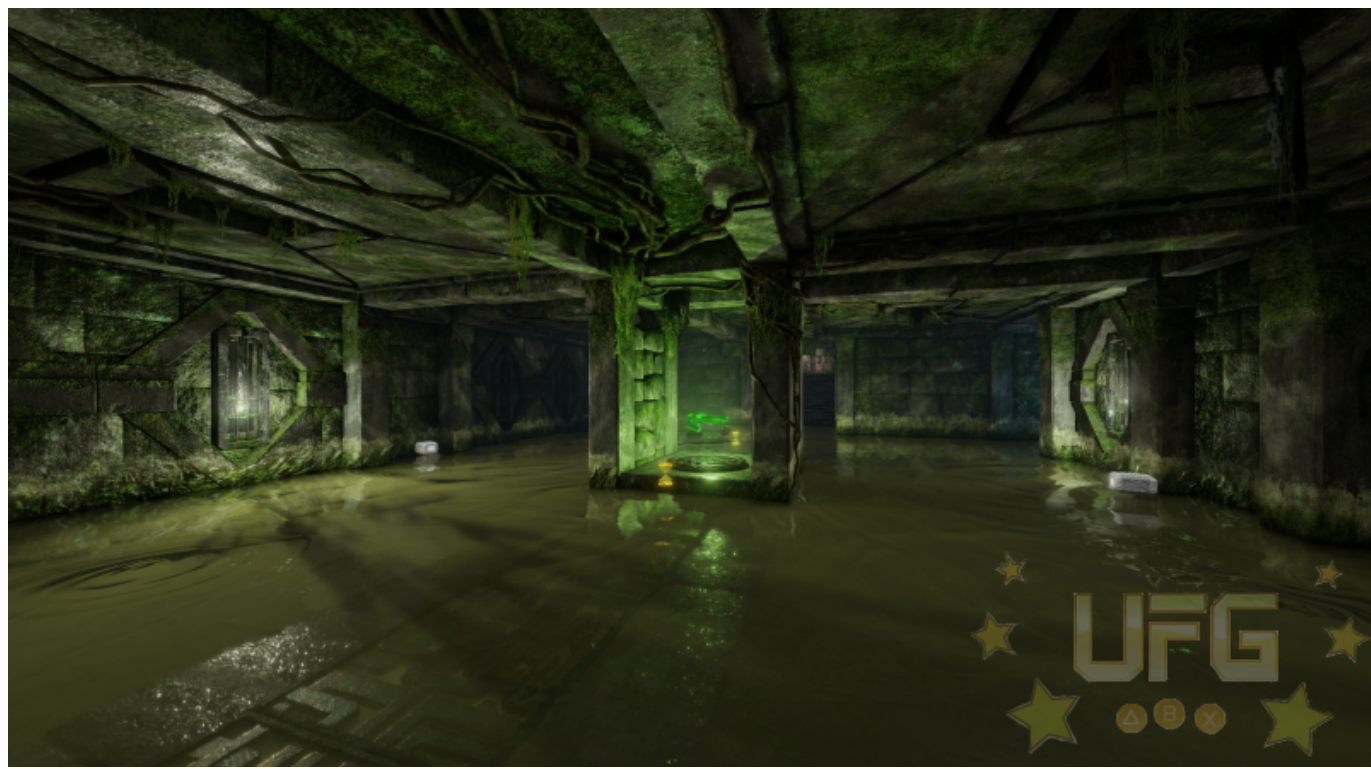
That is until a player instantly appeared in front of me with a railgun. Apparently, the champion they were using could go invisible, allowing them to wait until I got in close before taking my head off. I knew that each champion had their own unique abilities, I just didn't expect that to happen. That's when I noticed that my active ability was available (a special icon was glowing at the bottom of my screen). Hitting F would allow me to throw out the Dire Orb – an item Ranger acquired after defeating the All-Mother at the end of the first game. Enemies will take damage if they are hit by it or are near it when it explodes; it's like a cosmic grenade. Hitting F a second time before it explodes teleports me to the orb's location, a great way to reach platforms before my rivals.

Though the Dire Orb proved to be useful, it didn't propel me to the top of the scoreboard. One of the things I worried about was how impactful these new abilities would be. Especially, considering only one champion is made available from the start; all you need is one powerful, high priced character to really throw off the balance. Over the course a few matches though, I found that these special abilities only really impacted a fight or two. Take Clutch, the Automaton. His active ability is a barrier that allows him to deflect all incoming damage as well as enemies from passing through it (he body blocks them). The only time he is vulnerable is when the barrier is deactivated temporarily, allowing him to shoot a weapon before going back up. So unless his opponent's timing is spot on or they attack him from behind, he's winning a shootout. At the same time, his large frame makes him a large, slow moving target. It's easy to evade him until his barrier goes down before returning to finish the fight. And, seeing as how all of the active abilities have a decent cooldown period, Clutch's effectiveness when it comes to mitigating damage is always kept to a minimum. Basically, the real thing to focus on is the moment to moment shooting. The active abilities are really only there to spice things up a bit.



That said, there are also passive abilities. These traits, I feel, impact the gameplay more. Some champions are faster than others, have more or less health, some can even wall jump – there are aspects of each character that makes them a good or bad choice depending on how you play. Being able to aim trumps all of that of course. Still, a good player will be better when using a champion that caters to his or her playstyle. This is why I'm not a fan of the shop. I understand that the game is going to be free-to-play (for the most part) but it doesn't help the community to give players an advantage, no matter how small. This isn't a MOBA and death comes quicker in Quake than in most first-person shooters. Learning why you died in a specific encounter is tough enough without having all of these extra "stats" to worry about. Like, did they outlive me because their character's base health is higher than mine or because they had a stronger weapon? Did they activate an active ability? All I know is that one second, I was there and the next my body parts were all over the place. This sort of thing doesn't leave me much room for improvement. At least, when it comes to going beyond my base twitch shooter skills of course.

What's interesting about this set up is that Quake Champions will be available for purchase. Meaning, you could outright buy the game and unlock all of the characters right away. It's also possible to buy each character separately, though with the shop not being fully functional as of this preview, I can't say if they'll be offered at a reasonable price. Lastly, characters can be rented using an in-game currency, called Favor, earned by playing matches and/or completing daily and weekly objectives (getting a select number of headshots, winning certain match types, etc.). Having three ways to unlock characters is smart. It's good for consumers because we can pick and choose how we want to proceed and it's good for id because it generally points towards people making a purchase. Favor can't be used to buy anything but loot crates and backpacks, with the best of those requiring real money; you know, if you want more cosmetic items and such.



Going back to the gameplay, the fast-paced shooting is as entertaining as it's ever been. Some of that has to do with how smooth the game runs. id has worked hard on making sure the framerate stays above or around 60fps regardless of what's going on onscreen. It's also due to the fact that the shooting hasn't evolved too much. What I mean is, the tricks of the trade still apply. Rocket jumping, strafing, hoarding powerups...it's all here. The maps are pretty decent too. Open areas flow into choke points, resulting in crazy skirmishes while strategically placed portals and bounce pads help players move quickly from one end of the map to the other. The only real complaint I had was in the unbalanced weapons. Similar to Doom, there are few that are vastly superior to everything else; namely the rocket launcher, railgun, and lightning gun. Right below that is probably the shotgun. The two machine guns are both garbage – even with the quad damage powerup it can be hard to get kills – with the nailgun being slightly better.

I understand why the first three I mentioned are considered the best but they shouldn't outclass the rest by so much. Yes, a rocket to the face is much more damaging than a shotgun to the torso. But I shouldn't be able to drop multiple attackers with my lightning gun if they are all hitting me with machine guns. Extra health or not, it feels unfair at that point. It would be different if the rocket launcher and railgun were a hard to get items. Given their fast respawn rate and placement on the map, they are easy to scoop up while running around.



All and all, I think Quake Champions is shaping up nicely. I have a few reservations about the free-to-play model, though the different in-game purchasing options help to alleviate that. The weapon and skill balancing is something that can be addressed in later patches if the community deems them unworthy. Aside from those things, the combat is fast and fierce, as it should be. I only got to play on a few maps, though the ones I played on were great. Team Deathmatch and Deathmatch are still fan favorites. I do see fans and eSport players jumping into the Duel mode though. This mode puts players against each other in 1v1 matches. The catch is that each player has a team of three champions that are swapped out as they die. Whoever defeats all three of their rival's champions wins the round. Best two out of three wins the match. Personally, I found it a little on the boring side given how large the maps are. That said, I'm sure some will get a kick out of it come open beta.

Quake Champions is currently in closed beta. A large-scale tech test (or open beta) will be launching on May 12th to May 21st. I'd recommend [signing up](#). At the very least, you can see how you stack up against other players online. And who knows, you may come away a fan!

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