

UFG GOES HANDS ON WITH DOOM (BETA)!

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I am a fan of video game Betas. Taking the time to make sure all systems are a go before launching a multiplayer-focused title is a smart course of action. Most publishers today use this tool as just another pre-order bonus though. Limiting the number of participants to those who bought something makes the betas seem like sneak peaks of the finished project or glorified demo. I mean, do they really aide in identifying glitches or balancing the competitive side of things? Well, if you're speaking about the recent Doom Beta, the answer is yes...

I know, I know. Access to this beta was certainly limited (an open beta is quickly approaching) where most of the codes given out were to those who purchased a copy of Wolfenstein: The New Order. That said, what I got from my time in-game was that id Software is looking for feedback. A vast improvement over the Alpha – to which I can't directly speak about because of an NDA – wasn't the only indication. There seemed to be tweaks and fixes happening during the beta weekend. So much so that there's no point mentioning the bugs because they were all nixed before the Beta ended*. It's encouraging to know the developers aren't relying on a "Day One" patch to address problematic areas.



Since there is nothing truly broken to report, I can focus more on the competitive gameplay. The Beta introduced two modes (Team Deathmatch and Warpath) out of the six coming with the full release. Team Deathmatch consists of two teams battling it out until one of them hits a preset kill score or until the designated time runs out. Outside of the setting and some unique aspects found in Doom, it's the mode every competitive shooter has. Warpath on the other hand, is a special take on King-of-the-Hill. Normally, this type of mode would feature a capture zone that teams would fight to control. Capturing it for one's team would require players to stand in a specific area until a bar/icon filled with their team's color. Once that happens, that team would collect points for a limited time before the zone either moved or it was stolen by the other team. In Warpath, the same thing is true except the capture zone never sits in one place. It's constantly moving around the map along a marked pathway, forcing players to chase it as they contend with their rivals.

Just changing this basic feature dramatically altered how I approached this mode. I mean, how do you defend an area that is always moving? What happens when it moves across a deadly level hazard? Then there is the fact that a Demon Rune is always located at the other side of the map, moving in sync with the capture zone. This rune allows the bearer to transform into one of the demons from the main game. In the Beta's case, the jetpack wearing Revenant that decimates foes with its dual missile launchers was the only choice. Still, it was able to clear out the capture zone in seconds. These are just some of the things that need to be pondered before developing a good strategy.



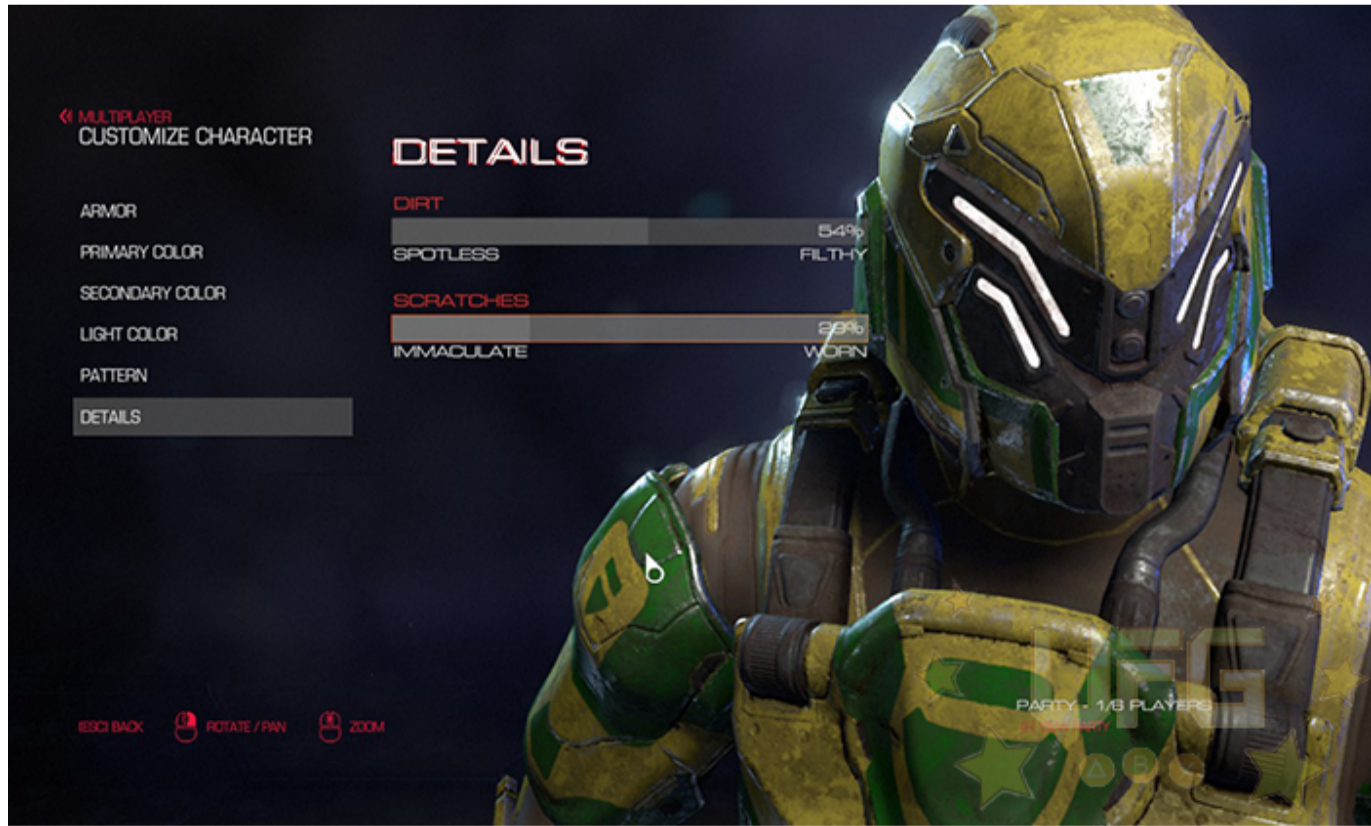
Two map options were available for play with each mode, Heatwave and Infernal. Heatwave is an industrial UAC (Union Aerospace Corporation) facility that's been remodeled to include teleporters and bounce pads. Long halls open up to circular rooms, with vent like corridors placed in select locations encouraging surprise attacks. Infernal is pretty much a fiery underworld, sporting interior and exterior locations adorned with giant skulls and lava. Floating platforms play host to power ups, odd protrusions or mounds are positioned for quick getaways (via double jumps) and a rickety bridge offers safe-ish travel across a large chasm. Infernal is more interesting than Heatwave given its otherworldly appearance. Both of them were great at facilitating the fast paced action that is multiplayer Doom.

What I liked the most about Doom was that it felt like classic shooters, but with modern elements. Health packs and armor shards are in, regenerating health is out. The shooting is twitch based and brutal. One wrong move and you'll be painting the walls in crimson. Powerful weapons and power ups are placed in dangerous and highly trafficked areas; like on a platform floating above a lava pit in the middle of a room. Long cool downs keep them from dominating a match, though they are able to keep the numbers close. Picking up the demon rune, for instance, wasn't a sure win because the monsters aren't super difficult to take down. But they will offer a fast way to catch up in kills if your team is behind in a deathmatch.



The more modern elements come in the form of loadouts, Glory Kills, and customization options. If you saw Bethesda's E3 presser last year, then you aware of how crazy Doom's Glory Kills are. Once a player is at low health, hitting them with a melee attack will cause you to assassinate them in the most brutal of ways. I'm talking sweeping them off their feet before landing a haymaker that removes their head, spinning the rest of their body off into the distance. A different "finisher" animates depending on what body part is targeted when attacking. They all result in a bloody mess.

Before going into a match, you'll be able to comprise a loadout. Your selected gear will consist of two weapons, an active item (grenades, a personal teleporter, etc.) and three hack modules which are all picked before a match. Used as a way to promote your play style, no one loadout configuration is better than any other. Picking a personal teleporter and the Super Shotgun make sense; it's possible to throw down the teleporter while being chased, warp behind your opponent once they've passed its location, and then surprise them with a devastating blast in the back. The hack modules are the most unique aspects of a loadout. Similar to the card system in Titanfall, these modules offer a slight edge upon respawn. Some might give you more life or armor while others will let you see the cooldowns on powerful weapons so you can better position yourself for their return. Only one can be activated at a time and they all are limited, expiring over the course of a match. The last modern feature is the ability to customize just about everything aesthetically. Your armor type, its colors, the colors of your weapons, – there are a decent amount of options. You can even pick how aged something looks. Once you pick a celebration emote, you're off to the races.



So far, I've enjoyed my time playing Doom. I'm sure others will too once the open Beta starts on April 15th. My only concern is the weapon balancing. While I expected some weapons to be more powerful than others, some of them seem a little too weak. The heavy assault rifle doesn't seem to fit with all of the one-shot weapons available; it can take a long time to kill someone who, by comparison, could kill you in seconds using the shotgun or rocket launcher. And even though I was able to get kills with the Lightning Gun, most of the time it proved to be a useless addition to any loadout. id needs to take a long look at the weapons currently available, unless they want Doom to be a shotgun and rocket affair. That would decidedly take away some of the excitement and experimentation that comes with picking what to use at any given moment.

**Of course, it's possible that not all of the glitches and bugs were fixed before the beta ended. I surly couldn't have experienced every single issue that was fixed that to be the case. Still, what I did notice in game and via the forums (when I last checked) was that most of the known issues were patched out. Does this mean that Doom is 100% bug free? Nope. It just means that there was nothing for me to report.*

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