

MANUSCRIPT FOUND IN A POOL OF BLOOD

I've run out of ammo. Nothing much left between me and Them but this fire door, and I'm not sure how well it's reinforced. I suppose if I have to, I can make some kind of weapon out of this old typewriter I found stashed under burned-out keyboards, broken monitors and prototype VR goggles. Decidedly low-tech, a typewriter, but maybe I can sharpen the keys and make a handful of tiny knives out of them, Freddie Krueger-style. And the case on this thing is pretty heavy—I could maybe crack open a green, misshapen skull with it. But I'd rather use it to describe what happened—what I think happened—at the headquarters of id Software.

That's where I am right now. Holed up in a room with a bunch of old, broken computer equipment and boxes crammed with papers and photographs. Yesterday, when things didn't seem quite so desperate, when I still had half a case of Snapple and a few bags of crispy pork rinds to hold me over while I waited for the Mesquite SWAT team to come in after me, I took a look through those boxes, searching for answers. Found fan mail, old receipts, photographs....An archaeologist digging through the history of id, trying to make sense of it all. Hoping that somewhere in all that junk I could find an explanation for the horrors that have erupted here in the last few days.

Maybe I can leave some kind of record for the world. I've come to accept that the SWAT team will probably never arrive. I doubt they made it across the parking lot.

That makes me the last person to enter the building alive.

I have a feeling I won't be leaving it that way.

So how did it all begin?
Where? When? And why?

Did they know, in the beginning, what lay ahead of them? Did that evil genius, John Carmack, suspect when he switched on his first computer—a Vic 20—that he was about to destroy the boundaries that protected the waking world? Did he mean to let our nightmares loose on Earth?

Hard to believe it. The early games seemed so innocent.

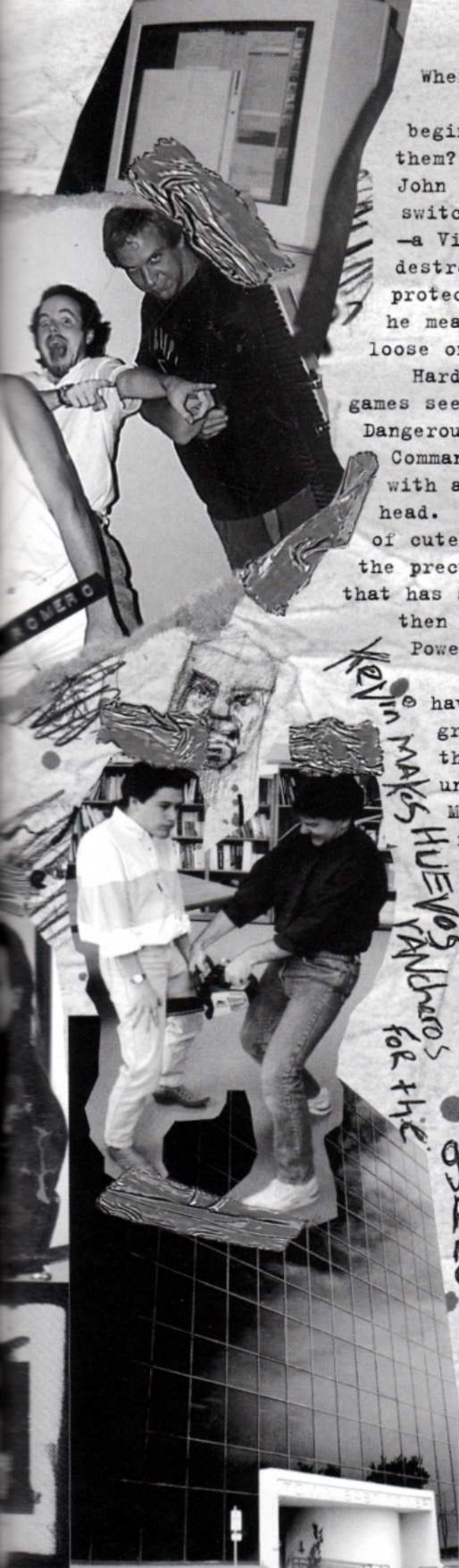
Dangerous Dave was anything but. Commander Keen...a little guy with a football helmet for a head. Aliens that looked sort of cute. Surely these were not the precursors of all the evil that has spawned and spilled since then from the guts of our Powerbooks and Pentiums?

John Romero...could he have known, when he was programming for the Apple II, that he was on the verge of unleashing monsters that Major Mayhem himself would never be able to defeat?

How could he—how could anyone—have realized that what had begun as clusters of tiny, colored pixels would end up capable of cracking open and swallowing the contents of a Mesquite SWAT sergeant's skull?

And the other Carmack, Adrian...was his mouse no more than a planchette moving over a Ouija board, bringing images of doom from a realm more real than he guessed? Did he think it was merely his imagination taking shape on the page, or did he realize that every scribble gave the monsters substance?

I am especially



suspicious of Sandy Petersen. For it is well-known that he was already in touch with--perhaps in thrall to--the minions of the Great Old Ones long before he brought his sinister talents to id Software. Petersen was well-beloved by Great Cthulhu and his kind for having increased the power of the Elder Gods here on the terrestrial plane. Nyarlathotep, the Crawling Chaos, is said to have treated him to special favors...the blessings of the blind idiot-god Azathoth had been bestowed...and only Yog Sothoth knows what part of id's evil plan was formulated and set into motion on Yuggoth, at the solar system's distant rim. I have seen a strange, silver canister stowed in a special cabinet at the back of Petersen's office, and I can almost swear that it watched me. It was there when the troubles began, and now it is gone...like Sandy himself.

But no ONE of them can take the blame--or credit--for what id wrought. They all played a part in it, every one of them. Those who formed the company. Those who joined later but remained until the gruesome and horrific Opening of the Way that transfigured everyone that it did not annihilate. And even those who fled to other companies, other opportunities--fled as if in fear of their souls, perhaps suspecting the horrors that lay ahead.

All responsible. All now numbered among the damned....

As far as I know, only I, who wasn't even one of them, remain to determine exactly what happened.

The screams have stopped, out in the hallways, and now I hear only the sounds of feeding...rather like the sound of my cramming down this last, fried pork rind. I intend to write for as long as I can--as long as I have strength. I only wish this old typewriter didn't make so much noise. I hate to attract Their attention.

I wish I had access to John Carmack's battle-ax right now or one of American McGee's shiny daggers. But those offices are a long way from here, across a corridor strewn with...well....

Better not dwell on that. Better to figure out where it all began. I'm digging back into the archives. What's the earliest thing in this box? Here's a photograph...a house on the shore of an eerie lake...some half-dressed fellows knee boarding on the tremulous waters....Ah, now I see the name and date scribbled on the reverse: Shreveport, Louisiana. August of 1991. An idyllic time, apparently, and yet....

The horrors were already beginning to spawn.

It began inconspicuously, as such things always do, at a small company called Softdisk...and yet even then, there were signs that various agencies of Darkness had taken an interest in the place.

First, there was Shreveport itself. Green and piney but infernally hot in the summer. The sort of place where it seemed like bliss to stay indoors all day, programming, with no thought to the outside world. Today the riverboat gam-

blers have blessed the town with a renaissance of sinful wealth, but in those days, after the collapse of Big Oil, the town had no economy to speak of. Managers at Taco Bell could live like kings. And programmers could be had for little more than \$5 an hour. To demonstrate the state of the nation's economy at the height of Reaganomics, this high wage attracted talented programmers from all over the country.

In September of 1987, with a degree in computer science from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, a young programmer named Tom Hall made the trek south to Shreveport. Shreveport was and always would remain synonymous with Hell for Hall, who marked it thus on his maps when he later managed to escape. But the programming was good. Softdisk put him to work creating games for the Apple II: five to 10 programs on one disk, one disk slapped out each month. The computer game industry was just picking up steam, rising in the shadow of video games. System prices were coming down. Demand was high. For hard-working programmers, there were literally no limits to what could be accomplished.

And Hall was not alone in his ambitions. Through the devious machinations of some cosmic puppet master, Softdisk attracted an entire team of programmers and artists with a bent for graphic mayhem.

In March of 1989, John Romero joined Softdisk and made Tom Hall's acquaintance. Romero had spent much of his childhood in California, attended high school in England, and then lived in Salt Lake City until he felt he'd suffered enough from the depredations of do-gooding citizens. He spent several years adapting Apple games for the Commodore (and vice versa), while programming and publishing his own games on the side, and studying various volumes of necromantic lore. At Softdisk, Romero set to work programming games for the IBM PC—the Gamer's Edge project.

Romero's games soon attracted the interest of a freelance programmer in Kansas City, John Carmack by name, who had been working at a pizza parlor and programming in his spare time. Carmack's programs impressed Softdisk enough that they offered him a job, so he, too, headed for Shreveport, driving down in a decaying, brown MG. The two Johns joined forces, and it was not long before Tom Hall began to sneak in at night to work with them because Softdisk management would not allow them to collaborate openly.

Then, the first breakthrough.

John Carmack devised a smooth, scrolling routine similar to that used for the background of Nintendo games but never before possible on the PC. When Tom Hall saw the scrolling in action, his first thought was to pull a prank on Romero. In the course of one night, Hall and Carmack reproduced the first level of Super Mario 3, pixel by pixel, replacing Mario with a character of their own named Dangerous Dave. They finished the work around 5 a.m., calling it Dangerous Dave in Copyright Infringement.

Romero arrived at Softdisk, booted up the game, and did not stop to take a breath until three hours later.



KYAN

Richard



More than a prank, Romero saw the staggering commercial potential of Carmack's design.

Did he also see the sinister forms which thronged the fetid streets of Shreveport, as if in celebration of rapidly approaching catastrophe?

The archives are silent on this point. But in that moment, with dollar signs flashing in Romero's eyes, id Software was truly born.

There was also at Softdisk a project manager named Jay Wilbur, formerly of chilly Rhode Island, now enjoying the warmth and unhurried lifestyle of the South. Romero approached Jay with a new Super Mario demo. Allured by the same visions of limitless wealth, Jay approached Nintendo. It is rumored that id's Mario demo made its perilous way to the highest levels of Nintendo, but those records are written entirely in Japanese, which I cannot read. Shinto priests in the employ of the company must have decided

Michael Abrash



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that Mario wasn't PC and nixed Nintendo's entry into the PC market after consulting various oracles. In the end, the team of secret conspirators at Softdisk decided to pursue the game on their own.

Meanwhile, a series of peculiar fan letters had been arriving at Softdisk, praising John Romero's games. (This story has been told so many times that it hardly seems worth mentioning, yet perhaps we should view it in a more sinister light.) At first, seeming to represent the ravings of a wide number of Softdisk fans, Romero eventually determined that all the letters came from the same address in Garland, Texas. Discovering the fraud, Romero fired off a threatening letter (missing from this file but known officially as the "Psycho Letter") and in this manner made contact with id's first benefactor.

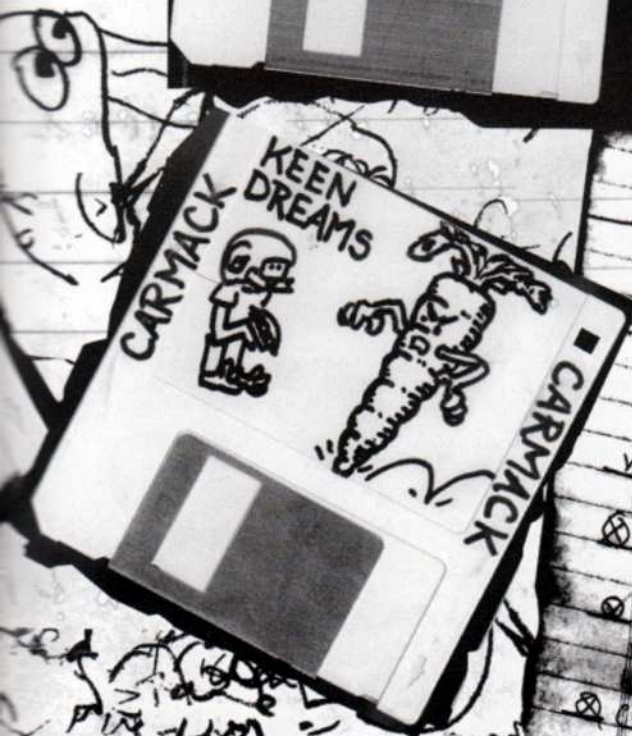
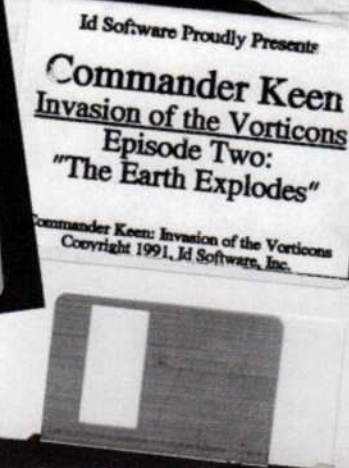
Scott Miller, anonymous author of the many letters, was a founder of Apogee Software, a pioneer in the shareware approach to marketing computer games. Great Cthulhu must have whispered to Miller in his dreams, urging him to seek out the boys at Softdisk. Nothing less than eldritch madness can explain his next actions. He told Romero that he loved the Softdisk games and wanted to lure them into the shareware market. Romero sent Miller a game called Catacombs, which whetted Miller's appetite. But once he got a glimpsed of the Super Mario demo for the PC that Carmack and Romero had done, he offered to put up money to finance their first real game.

Hall, Romeo and Carmack asked for \$2,000 to get their game off the ground. Miller had \$5,000 in his bank. He promptly cut them a check for two fifths of that.

For three months, the trio programmed for Softdisk during the day and slaved away at Commander Keen-Invasion of the Vorticons in every free moonlighting moment. They were young, impetuous, full of caffeinated vigor, and enjoying the boundless energy that comes with being unknowing slaves of the Dark Masters. But as good as they were, the Dark Ones required more souls: Find recruits...eat more brains....

They did as they were bade.

They had long admired the artistry of an intern at Softdisk, a Shreveport youth named Adrian Carmack. (I hate to say it, but I must. It is required by law at this point: Adrian Carmack and John



MASTER

BUGSHIT

- ✓ Bug when switching to Tile Select on higher res and filter scrolled down. Just clip it.
- ✓ Make Equis for Frigid & Icon bfgnd colors
- ✓ When picking up frigid tile, print "No tile"
- ✓ Make No Tile = No Icon
- ✓ Tile into planes is ok!
- ✓ When clicking 123 & tiles at bottom, check for existence of planes!
- ✓ Check out 3x8 XMS expansion with HGV
- ✓ Take 'back' out of dialog
- ✓ At Tiers 10/11, name input dialog, don't ask if no planes
- ✓ Delete Map
- ✓ Map Switch Option
- ✓ Map Dimension change
 - Top
 - Bottom
 - Left
 - Right
- ✓ Print map name in info bar (marginal)
- ⊗ Default frigid tile is NoTile
- ⊗ When redrawing the screen, Map Hide
- ⊗ Ctrl-arrow

VAR... IT FITS!

14 ← → B

Carmack are not related. Yet in this apparently innocent coincidence, I see the blood-encrusted scratch marks of Fate's black talons.) They invited Adrian to join them and finished Commander Keen with significant improvements to the look of the final levels.

The initial team was now complete. Apogee released the first episode of Commander Keen as shareware on December 14, 1990. Gamers who wanted the next two levels would have to pay for them, and pay they did.

In January, the first royalty check arrived. It was for approximately \$10,000. The two Johns went to lunch with the owner of Softdisk, told him they were leaving, and also informed him that Adrian was coming with them. They then returned to the office and informed Adrian that they had arranged for his resignation. As the entire design team was leaving, Adrian thought it wise to comply.

id Software was founded on February 1, 1991.

The group still had obligations to Softdisk, which they worked to fulfill even as they established id. Tom Hall remained with Softdisk for several months while a new development team was hired and brought up to speed. Meanwhile, out at the lake house, evil doings were under way.

The lake house...even those who hated Shreveport recall the lake house through a nostalgic haze. Originally a fishing shack which had expanded through additions, the lake house had a pool, a dock, a whirlpool, a solarium with retractable shades, a refrigerated beer tap....Ah, those were the days. Knee boarding and programming in not quite equal measure. Dungeons and Dragons every Saturday night. No one noticed the thick tentacles that swirled and swarmed below Jay Wilbur's speedboat and clutched hungrily at the dock as if to say, Hurry up! Hasten to your Dooms, puny humans!

The house was inhabited by Jay, John Carmack, and two other roommates whose names have been expunged from these records by the munching of tiny, fiendish jaws. Wilbur, with his business background, attended to the balancing of books and cutting of checks for id while continuing to hold his position at Softdisk. The others programmed like maniacs, working on the Commander Keen sequels Goodbye, Galaxy and Aliens Ate My Babysitter, laying the groundwork for the next campaign in their master plan of world dominion.

The summer wound on...the money poured in...but even this bliss was not enough. They were still, after all, in Shreveport.

Tom Hall was a Wisconsin boy. He began to extol the virtues of Madison to his fellows. In the heart of that summer, a trip to Wisconsin was organized. Hall, Romero and another programmer, who worked only briefly with id (and was best known as "The Guy in His Underwear"), made a trek to Madison and were impressed with the town--so sunny and warm and green, with its quintessential college town atmosphere. They decided to move and talked the other id gang into bringing the whole company north but only after savoring the last bit of summer at the lake house.

In September of 1991, they moved. (Jay Wilbur stayed behind. Softdisk needed him. And perhaps he suspected what lay in wait for them in the depth of a Wisconsin winter.) The Shreveport locals (namely Adrian and another Softdisk artist named Kevin Cloud) thought the others were crazy to give up the lake house, but Hall and Romero continued to praise Madison—especially the cool apartments they had found. They moved from the heart of Louisiana...to the heart of winter. The frost giants seized them in icy claws. Their hands went numb at their keyboards. Adrian could scarcely feel the pencil in his grip. They turned to Tom Hall and screamed, "You tricked us!" Madison wasn't just cool anymore...it was freezing.

Hall had sung the praises of a town without bums, and yet on their first outing in the town, they had seemed to encounter nothing but bums. One tried to sell Tom Hall a rag for a dollar. Hall pretended to examine the rag and then politely declined: "It doesn't go with anything I have." This sent the rag seller into a rage. "It's only a dollar, man!"

To make things worse, the apartments were wretched. Romero came out one night to find cops breaking down the door of the drug dealer across the hall. Gasoline was siphoned from their cars. Adrian couldn't find a cap for his water bed mattress and ended up in a sleeping bag for months while he scoured the area for a store that would sell him a cap without forcing him to buy an entire mattress to go along with it. This was supposed to be civilization?

One day around Christmas, with most of the other id members gone home for the holidays, John Carmack trudged to the bank through mounds of snow and Arctic winds, risking frostbite and hypothermia because he had no car. Entered the bank and withdrew \$11,000, shivering in his Shreveport clothes, caked with frost. Trudged out again, to buy not a car but a NeXT computer—a black box that would barely warm his hands. Even in extreme physical torment, his priorities were clear. This is also the critical period in which John Carmack formed his firm belief that people should not live in an environment hostile to human life.

They lasted six months in Madison, working from an apartment on Fish Hatchery Road. Six months of icy Hell, as if they had found Shreveport's opposite. Yet even in the yeti's lair, their work continued—the company grew. Following the first Commander Keen titles, id created Shadow Knights, Dangerous Dave in the Haunted Mansion, Rescue Rover, Hovortank, another Keen trilogy, Rescue Rover 2, Keen Dreams...and work began, while in Wisconsin, on Wolfenstein 3D.

They now sought out the talents of yet another Softdisk artist, Kevin Cloud. Cloud was multitalented. Beginning as a computer artist, he had been promoted by Softdisk to manager and editor; he was computer savvy and could do the layout for id's manuals as well. He had admired the id team's work, and when he learned that they were trying to hire another artist, he made it known that he was inter-

ested. They told him if he moved to Madison, he could have the job. So Kevin Cloud quit his job, threw some luggage and his wife in a car (not necessarily in that order), and drove like a fiend, nearly nonstop, from Louisiana to Wisconsin. It was early spring when he arrived; things didn't look quite so bad as they had in the midst of howling gales. The Clouds found an apartment, but it was late in the day, and they put off signing a six-month lease until the next morning. While they dozed fitfully at their hotel, awakened repeatedly by the raucous screams and poundings of teenaged ectomorphs who had taken over the hotel for a high school wrestling meet, the other idsters decided on an abrupt change of plan. They had been looking into other locations for the company for some time and narrowed it down to three possibilities: California, Dallas, or Salt Lake City. That night they narrowed it still further.

Dallas had several things in its favor: First, it was Apogee's home. Second, it was hot there. Third, it had a huge lake, and everyone was dreaming of finding another lake house and recreating the idyllic days of the previous summer. Finally, Tom Hall—prompted by a fiend from the outer dark—pointed out that Texas residents paid no state income tax, which translated to a substantial jump in salary for the members of id. They considered the lease the Clouds were about to sign, committing them to another six months—albeit temperate spring and summery months—in Madison. Then they called the hotel and left frantic messages telling the Clouds there'd been a change of plan. Don't sign anything! Kevin Cloud thought, "My god, I just quit my job, and they've fired me already!" They also left this ominous message: "We are the wind!" Clearly a reference to Ithaqua, the walker between worlds, whose baleful red eyes burn down from a starless sky....

On April 1, 1992, id Software set up shop in Dallas. The lake they'd seen on a Dallas map turned out to have been constructed by the Army Corp of Engineers and was therefore off-limits to private docks; there would be no party house on the shores of Lake Ray Hubbard. Jay Wilbur's speedboat sat in his driveway and never moved until he sold it.

id settled into La Prada Club Apartments, taking a one bedroom loft apartment for the company, and several more for themselves. Lacking a lakefront view, the apartment overlooked a swimming pool surrounded by bikini-clad Texas beauties, circumstances more conducive to leisure activities than to frantic programming.

Yet the games that made it all possible had hardly been forgotten.

Earlier, in March of 1992, id Software had made a trek to a publisher in California to meet with

they never stop
"These games
workers of us
needless death
because someone
on DOOM instead



...considering thought that after decades of...
...to create a global computer...
...first things users have done...
...a way to

I was Framed

a couple of computer game industry pioneers. They and Romero were fans of each other's work and had been corresponding for some time. Romero carried a copy of the game id had been slaving over throughout most of the harsh Madison winter, a game called (ominous music here) Wolfenstein 3D. Romero knew id had something no one else could top. He was hoping to sell the company.

They took one look at Wolfenstein, said "Okay," and offered to buy id Software for \$2.5 million.

Romero, managing not to swallow his tongue (that would come later, once the Shoggoth-tenders had cut it out and actually forced it down his throat), asked for a signing bonus of \$100,000. A trivial amount in the grand \$2.5 million scheme, but it caught in the publishers' throat. He turned them down.



id Software narrowly avoided coming under their control. The publishers narrowly avoided multiplying its \$2.5 million investment by factors of substantially more than ten.

So it was an independent id that cavorted and coded in the sunny La Prada, growing, still growing, as the End Times drew nigh. Jay Wilbur and Kevin Cloud both joined id on April 1, 1992, moving to Dallas to pitch in with the young, booming company. It was a hectic time—at times so wild with the sounds of Fatal Fury and Streetfighter 2 and complaining neighbors, that John Carmack would take his NeXT and stalk off in a fit of pique to his own apartment where he could get some work done. Hall and Romero played Street Fighter to the exclusion of almost everything else, including programming, although Romero finally lost heart after being trounced by a little kid (perhaps an emissary of Hastur, sent from Carcosa to get Romero back to his real mission).

Episode 1 of Wolfenstein 3D was released on May 5, 1992.

And now we can finally hear the Elder Gods laughing plainly and uproariously, with all but the last few pieces of their evil puzzle having fallen into place. It was a game the likes of which no one had seen. It seemed to draw gamers completely into their computers where they found themselves trapped in an endless series of mazes, pursued by vicious German shepherds and Nazi soldiers, forced to gain strength

by feeding on human giblets (a talent I wish I possessed now that the last pork rind is cud), unable to shake the spell of the game until they had assassinated Adolph Hitler. Lives were put on hold while game players fulfilled their gruesome mission. It was hard to believe it wasn't real.

Well, it wasn't. Not yet anyway.

But the money rolled in, and in, and in, and the blue water of the La Prada pool sparkled, and John Carmack endured more paper fights, and the bathing beauties let down their straps to avoid obvious tan lines but wouldn't be fooled into sitting up abruptly, damn it, and all was so wonderful. The id team began to

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C
king: Good lord!
were Nazis?!?
I knew the id guys
usly demented."

because these can be sold when you get back
converted into valuable...

-G9

terr.
Tienf
comp
add a

enjoy their first taste of fame. They began to collect high-performance cars. So much for John Carmack's battered, brown MG. Life was good.

But it could be better. The games weren't real enough yet.

(You've put a hairline crack in reality, the Old Ones whispered, but we're immense and bloated with corruption. We can't squeeze through that. You're going to have to do better.) Wolfenstein was followed by a sequel, Spear of Destiny, which was all well and good but brought the Elder Gods no closer to their goal. That would require yet another technological breakthrough.

The stars were propitious. The sleepers stirred in their cyclopean cities; tarry, black tides slopped at the shores of Yuggoth's cratered sea.

It was time now for DOOM.

November 1992. A new building. No more babes by the poolside. No more screaming neighbors. Unable to buy insurance for its increasingly expensive equipment in an unsecured apartment, id moved into Suite 666 of the Town East Tower, a tall cube of black, mirrored glass above the Lyndon Baines Johnson Freeway in the Dallas suburb of Mesquite.

There was a dentist down the hall. A cafeteria that served taco salads. Across the freeway sprawled the enormous Town East Mall; there a video arcade had once stood firm against a lawsuit brought by the town of Mesquite that secured for all American teenagers the inalienable, legal right to pour their quarters into Galaxian and Asteroids and Tempest and Missile Command.

An office building. A professional place. An office momma named Donna Jackson, whose main qualification for the job was having raised two boys of her own already; for Donna, coming to work was like never leaving home.

It was time to buckle down before the gods lost patience with their pets. id itself had grown impatient with Apogee and dissatisfied with the casual business methods of their one-time mentor, Scott Miller. Shawn Green, a defector from Apogee, had come to id to offer technical support and brought stories of rampant rubber band fights among the order-taking staff at Apogee. How could the maximum number of souls be claimed for

These guys, "I told my publisher, "are taking BFG all too seriously."

Computer gaming world

the dark empire when rubber band fights distracted the slaves? id was more than strong enough to strike off on their own now, and they did so, keeping control of their next game all to themselves. It was as if they were shedding all excess attachments, all distractions, as they accelerated toward the black hole of humanity's annihilation....

There had been distractions all along, side projects that never quite came together. At one point Atari asked id to develop a signature character, the equivalent of Mario or Sonic, and id spent some time on this critter named "Pounce." But Pounce was canceled, and, anyway, Atari was about to tank. There were false starts and delays on projects for Super Nintendo, including one ill-fated Biblical venture in which the Wolfenstein engine was put to work at the service of something called Noah's Ark. How the forces of evil must have gnashed their beaks at that one! Finally, id pulled in its pseudopods and began to concentrate on the next, pure-id project.

After finishing Wolfenstein 3D, John Carmack had created an engine for a Raven Software game called Shadowcaster. After this intermediate step, he was ready for DOOM.

"It's Green and Pissed!"...that was what they called it for a time. It was almost created as another offshoot of the Aliens marketing empire. But ultimately it acquired the name DOOM, and it was pure evil. Pure id.

DOOM generated tremendous interest almost from the start. A press release was issued in January 1993, followed by an alpha release of the game in March of 1993. In August there was a leak of the beta version, and even though it was an unauthorized leak, it worked to id's advantage. No one could believe the stuff id was coming up with. It was almost as if they were channeling some sort of dark cosmic energy, conjuring demons...it was that real.

But demons, if you haven't figured it out by now, don't make particularly trustworthy playmates. There were stirrings of trouble at id. Tom Hall, the first of the Softdisk team, one of the core founders of the company, was growing increasingly dissatisfied with the direction the game was taking. id had devoted itself to straightforward, minimalist, fast-paced, first person games. Even the idea of an inventory, allowing players to carry around weapons and gadgets until they wished to use them, seemed inimical to the id game philosophy.

But Tom Hall longed for richer, more complicated game play. Something with characters and a storyline and more involving environments. Some have said that Hall was unhappy with the increasing violence of id's games, but that wasn't it at all. If anything, he wanted more distractions and interactions on the way to a player's doom.

In August 1993, Tom Hall parted ways with id and joined Apogee. His first project there was to supervise Wolfenstein 2, under id's oversight, but id soon cut itself loose from the project, and the game metamorphosed into something unrecognizable. Tom Hall spun away into Apogee's gravitational

held, lost from sight in this narrative until very near the end when he will appear again, I promise.

It was in July of 1993 that another pawn was put into play by the shadowy powers that had been guiding id all along. At that point in time, there was no such thing as a level designer, but id was hiring them anyway. Applicants were given a short course in creating levels with the DOOM editor, and then turned loose to see how they reacted. Kevin Cloud brought in a prospective designer named Sandy Petersen, who was instantly enraptured by the editor's possibilities, and set about devising clever traps and generally displaying a natural talent and enthusiasm for the job. Of course, in retrospect it seems obvious that he would be a key player in the master plan. One would have been more surprised to find that he had not played a crucial role in the Lurker's unveiling.

Petersen had, in the employ of Chaosium, already created the role-playing game The Call of Cthulhu. In 1988 he turned his talents to computer games, working at MicroProse until 1993, when he came to id, replacing Tom Hall as a level designer. At that time the DOOM engine was completed, but there were no monsters, no textures or AI. Sandy jumped in and contributed virtually all the levels in episodes two and three, including the conversion of various levels left unfinished at Hall's departure. (Seven of Hall's levels remain in DOOM.)

Petersen was an unlikely candidate for such an evil position. Father of five, a card-carrying Mormon, he found himself surrounded by atheists, agnostics and outright idolaters. But others of the Righteous, far from shunning him for his part in the success of DOOM, were more likely to ask for three copies of the game than subject him to persecution. To those who wondered how he could reconcile his religious beliefs with his job description, he answered, "It's just a game. Get a grip."

Yes...just a game.

Around the time of Tom Hall's departure, Dave Taylor arrived at id central. A UNIX expert, Taylor became id's network administrator—an increasingly important task in the growing company, especially as network gaming became id's forte.

id's ambition, as always, was to create games that the members of id would love to play—this meant including features that, although perhaps of little interest to the world at large, were very important to them. One such feature, originally added as a tiny portion of DOOM, was capability for network play—Deathmatch Mode. As they worked their way through 1993, they figured only a tiny percentage of DOOM's ultimate audience would be interested in playing the game over modems or dedicated networks. But they liked the feature, so they included it.

On December 10, 1993, DOOM was released. 'Nuff said. Millions of gamers—all of them dead now, I suppose—know what happened, how the world changed, at that

moment. DOOM II was commenced almost immediately.

In early 1994, a young jack-of-all-trades and beta tester named American McGee was hired to assist Shawn Green with technical support. American began to spend almost all of his time in the building, sneaking sessions with the DOOM editor and creating levels of his own. When the other designers saw what he was doing, they promoted him to level designer, and six of his maps ended up in DOOM II. That game was finished on August 21, 1994, and released on October 10.

October 10, 1994. Doomsday. At the Limelight, an old gothic church in Manhattan that had been converted into a club, the game was released in a flurry of Deathmatches and publicity. In the midst of the chaos, two strangers representing an entity known as WANGO appeared to Jay Wilbur and John Romero and put disks in their hands, announcing that it was their life's mission to make contact with id. On their return to Dallas, Wilbur and Romero booted up the disks, discovered a very crude terminal program and worked their way through it to find themselves connected via long distance to a Deathmatch in Houston.

Ching-ching. Dollar signs. Deathmatch on demand. Once more Jay and John Romero saw incredible potential and moved to do what they could to make it happen smoothly. WANGO stood for Wide-Area Network Gaming Operation, and it grew quickly, soon tacking a D on the front of its name: D for DOOM. D for Dial-Up as it would encompass many more games than DOOM. DWANGO.

Romero worked with DWANGO's programmer over the speakerphone for hours at a time, trying one thing and another, until the software was working to his satisfaction. This was to be the first network gaming service, and it directly fed Romero's desire to find Deathmatch opponents at any hour of the day or night. He was not the only one with such desires either. The audience for networked games was growing explosively.

In Dallas, DWANGO made its headquarters directly below those of id, in the Town East Tower. On the night the Dallas server was supposed to go into operation, John Romero and Shawn Green went downstairs on their way home to check on the server's progress. They found 64 modems in boxes, miles of unconnected wire and a DWANGO founder lying drunk on a couch. Gamers were waiting! The Old Ones would be furious! Shawn and John shucked off their coats, started ripping open boxes, assembling the server themselves in one night. Deathmatch play was addictive—more than any solitary game. Now the addicts could feed their jones without hindrance. A new industry was alive.

Still, id's products were not received with unalloyed pleasure. One woman wrote with genuine concern, warning them (prophetic soul) that they were

"...and I'll hug'em
and squeeze'em
and never
let 'em go!"

MODERN ESSENTIAL PC GAME EVER,

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messing with powers beyond their understanding, tinkering with devils and "angles" and urging them to quit their sinful ways. She closed this ominous letter with the following addendum: "P.S. I love the chain saw!"

While ripples were spreading outward from DOOM, and waves of cash were pouring back into the company, the Ancient Ones pulled back their veils of tentacles and revealed the octopod beaks champing within: Keep it moving, or else...!

Oh, they were impatient, those vile powers of dismay! So much work had gone into DOOM, and still they were not satisfied. We must edge closer to reality. They took John Carmack aside and whispered their decree, and Carmack took their word as commandment and said, "Look, I've got this old character named Quake...."

Quake, who pounded the earth with his hammer and sent temblors rolling, plunged the cities of man into dust, flattening the landscape in advance of Their arrival. Quake, whose name was whispered in tones of awe by DOOM-struck fans across the world. Quake is coming, they whispered. Quake is coming!

And they waited.

And waited.

Many eyes were turned to the tower of black glass and the diabolical secrets harbored therein, and still no news. id fed on new flesh, receiving transfusions of fresh blood as it strove toward its next product. People came in and never went out. Dental patients began to disappear.



In the summer of 1995, Jay Wilbur found a right-hand man in the form of another Shreveport native named Mike Wilson. Wilson was an old friend of Adrian Carmack and an entrepreneur with several franchises to his name. He had occasionally haunted the lake house on Saturday nights in epic struggles of Dungeons and Dragons, but he had not exactly bonded with the other members of id in those early days. More recently, however, Wilson had bought the first DWANGO franchise and convinced others to invest in it, expanding the server base from zero to 25 across the nation between December of 1994 and August of 1995. From this prominence, the demonic overlords plucked him for their team, inviting him to handle retail distribution and other aspects of the id business.

The maw of Suite 666 gaped a bit wider, inhaling another programmer. Michael Abrash, formerly of Microsoft, made the journey from Seattle to settle at John Carmack's side. Abrash was a longtime graphics programmer and author whose columns for Doctor Dobbs' Journal had captivated and instructed the two Johns in earlier days. Now he was one of them, a minion of the Unseen and the Nameless. With Abrash's optimizations, the Quake engine took off like a mad steed. They could hardly keep up with it. The team had thought they had a handle on the game; no one had realized, in the beginning, exactly how fast it would run. Industrywide, processor power was making staggering leaps, completely altering Carmack's original plans. Even the Great Old Ones must have been taken by surprise, or else they surely would have tipped off their high priest earlier and saved them all some time.

In the summer of 1995, another programmer arrived, towing his family from Provo, Utah. John Cash: the man is black. He was a man with a mission: to make sure that nothing would retard the speed of Quake's dissemination, the spread of the gospel. He was a network expert, and Quake was an animal whose natural environment was to be the net.

The net itself contributed id's next level designer, Tim Willits. Willits' custom DOOM levels, created for his own pleasure and uploaded to the internet, attracted id's attention, and before long, they hired him to create some custom levels on a freelance basis. Willits moved to Dallas and went to work for Rogue Entertainment, a small company which had licensed the DOOM engine and was creating its own game just down the hall from id. Willits took to hanging out in the id suites, tinkering with the Quake editor, while moonlighting on Ultimate DOOM. When id realized it needed another level designer to finish up Quake, they offered Willits the job. His chair at Rogue might still be spinning today.

There was one departure toward the end of Quake's development. Dave Taylor had been working for some time to start his own company, Crack.Com, and once the first game was completed and the company began to roll, he parted ways from id. But Quake rumbled on.

Gamers grew anxious. They played DOOM, and DOOM II and

Ultimate DOOM and Final DOOM, and still they waited. They created their own levels of DOOM and played those, and still they waited. They played Heretic and Hexen, built by Raven Software of Madison, Wisconsin, which had a long relationship with id and had licensed the DOOM engine to create its dark fantasy games. And when they were finished, they waited some more.

The days by the poolside were behind id now. The young and restless programmers had begun to sink roots into the Texas soil. Most of those who weren't already married found themselves hitched. Some of them began to spawn, populating the world with more tiny servants of the shadow kingdom. In the minds of the id team, quiet scenes of domestic life began to take on at least as much importance as vividly rendered 3D scenes of howling carnage.

Quake was finally uploaded on June 22, 1996, and hit retail shelves in August. The penultimate piece of the Dark Plan fell into place. Gamers took a deep breath and leapt into a simulated nightmare of unprecedented realism. If you are still alive to read this narrative, then you already know what Quake accomplished. You have installed the disk; you have visited that fearful place.

And yet beyond it was another, far more awful. It is just now coming into view. But first, more changes were in order before the Way could be truly Opened.

Quake's delivery shook the terrain in numerous unexpected ways. Almost immediately upon the game's release, John Romero announced that he was leaving id to form his own company. Romero was leaving the fold—but not cutting his connections to it. He intended to use the Quake technology to create games in a different style. And he called his old friend and fellow cofounder Tom Hall to join him. Hall left Apogee to cast his lot with Romero. And so things had come full circle. Hall and Romero were on their own now, although they still retained a strong connection to id Software. No, even they could not escape the dreadful fate that awaited all such darkling servitors.

Now one final card remained to be played. The cocoon had almost cracked to show the larval face within. Almost....

John Carmack, true to form, hardly paused to take a breath when Quake was finished. He went straight to work on a new engine, new technology for the next game, beyond Quakeworld and Quake II and all the other Quake-dependent games.

"I should have something in about six months," he told his companions. They looked at each other with knowing smirks and thought, two weeks.... They were not far wrong.

It was at this time that my own story begins.

Quake represented the apex of what was technologically possible at the time of its release. The art, the code, the environments...all these were beyond reproach.

But the story, to the extent that it had one, was another matter.

It sucked.

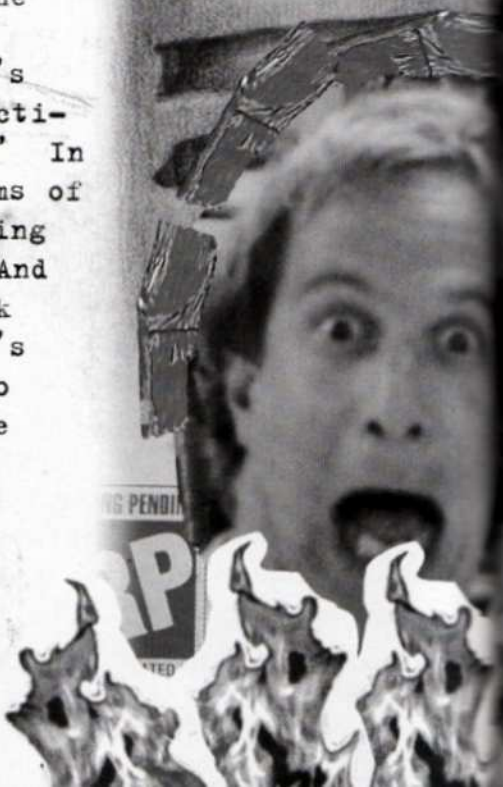
Many failed to notice that Quake even had a story.

Computer Gaming World was quick to label it the very worst story of all time. A dubious distinction, but a distinction nonetheless. And although some of the id team seemed to take pride in their achievement, it also must have rankled them a bit. For even as Quake burst out across the networks and clans of 3D warriors began to raid and pillage over the internet, even as John Carmack set to work on his next engine, I received a call from Mike Wilson, asking if I'd be interested in coming to id to help work on a story. They wanted to do it right this time. They wanted to lay out the basic elements of a back story even as the infant engine struggled into shape.

Why they invited me, I'm not exactly certain. Perhaps it was my literary novels, which had been compared with those of Tolstoy, Joyce and Hemingway. Perhaps it was my miniseries for Masterpiece Theater on the life of Emmanuel Kant. Or perhaps it was the other back stories I had done for games like MacroCarnage, Blood Pounder and Speed Leeches. Whatever the reason, I had admired id's games from afar, and I jumped at the chance to collaborate with them. I hopped on the first plane for Dallas-Fort Worth.

It was late when I arrived, and I decided to catch some sleep at the Mesquite Holiday Inn before commencing work at id. I telephoned Mike Wilson to let him know that I'd be there in the morning. He answered the phone in an excited rush: "Yeah, yeah, wait'll you see the stuff Carmack's come up with this time! It's practically crawling out of the screen!" In the background I could hear screams of excitement. "Come on up first thing in the morning, now I gotta..." And the line went dead. I called back several times but reached only id's voice mail system. I crawled into bed, phoned the front desk to make sure no adult entertainment might accidentally be broadcast to my room, and was soon asleep.

In the morning, the hotel waiter seemed nervous. He slapped down a plate of huevos rancheros and bolted for the door without



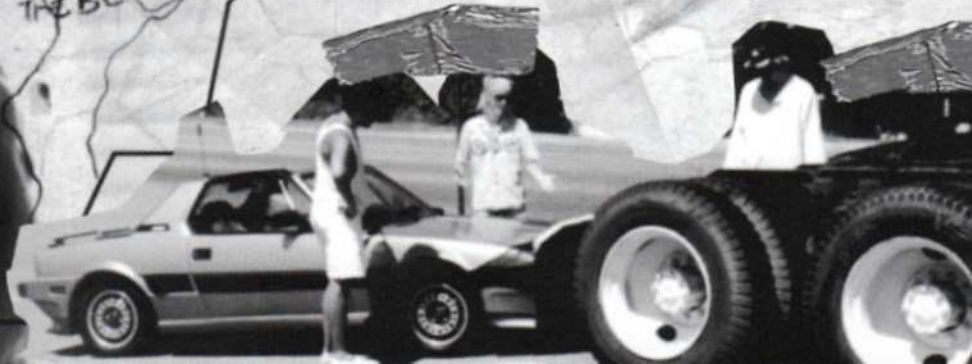
John
DE 2
replenishing my coffee. When I looked at the plate, I discovered that the chef had cracked two raw eggs over my refried beans. The lid of the salsa jar was buried in the salsa.

A strange mood pervaded the entire area. The hotel staff were muttering worriedly among themselves but gave me only blank looks when I asked them what was happening. Had America gone to war? Were the Dallas Cowboys losing?

Pulling my rented car onto the LBJ Freeway, I found more strangeness. A few cars jostled around me as I headed in the direction of Town East Road, but no cars at all were coming from the opposite direction. At one point, the clear blue sky darkened suddenly, and I glanced up through the windshield to see swarms of winged, black shapes swirling overhead, too large and faceless and rubbery to be ordinary bats. Ahead, I could see that the expanding cloud of flying things was streaming from one particular building at the side of the freeway.

I knew then, instinctively, that it was the Town East Tower.

More warning signs. In the parking lot of North Mesquite High School, cars and textbooks were burning. Soiled and gutted couches had been tossed on the road outside Haverty's Fine Furniture. When I pulled into the parking lot at the base of the black glass cube, I found myself in the midst of a crowd of police cars, ambulances, fire engines and a SWAT action fully in progress. Windows were shattered all up and down the sides of the building; shards of black glass covered the ground. I went up to the leader of the SWAT team and introduced myself. The sergeant took me by the elbow, offered the protection of his riot shield, and shepherded me through the crowd and the free-fire



zone to the front entrance.

"Look out!" he cried. "He's a writer!"

In a matter of seconds, I stood at the elevator, alone. The SWAT sergeant ran for the safety of the parking lot. I stepped into the car and pressed 6, deciding that I would sample the cafeteria's creamed chipped beef later in the morning, perhaps.

The sixth floor was eerily quiet. The door to id Software, Suite 666, hung from its hinges. The reception area beyond was deserted. As I looked about for one of those little silver bells, I saw a feminine hand on the computer keyboard. Donna Jackson, I thought. She must be underneath her desk, adjusting a plug or something. Then I saw that the hand was severed at the wrist. Not Donna after all. A temp, I hoped.

An enormous poster of a red demon hung on the wall behind Donna's desk. I noticed that someone had arranged tall, black candles and charcoal braziers at the base of the image, as if engaged in worship. The coals were still fuming, with a faint, charred smell that reminded me of a sinister Carl's, Jr. When I peered into the brazier, I saw what looked like chitlins. It was then I heard the sound of moaning from the halls beyond.

"Hello?" I called. I headed past the reception area, to the left, past several conference rooms whose glass walls had been freshly smeared with red paint, presumably for privacy. Around a corner I saw a row of offices, doors shut. The moaning came from the last one down the hall. There were no names on the doors, but I knocked lightly and then opened the door.

My mind and stomach still reel from what I saw in that instant.

In the middle of the room, someone had built a low cooking fire and erected an enormous barbecue spit above it. On that spit, turning slowly, was the torso of a man, roasted almost beyond recognition. A shape—a shape I could hardly bring myself to contemplate—stood over

the spit, painting the body with thick, dark barbecue sauce. As I stood there with my mouth fixed open in a silent scream, the "chef" looked up at me and bared a million dagger teeth. He laughed with his bottomless, black-blazing eyes and said, "You wanted Jay Wilbur?"

"Y-yes," I stammered.

The beast sneered and ripped off a huge chunk of bubbling flesh. "Here you go," it said. "Let me know if he needs more sauce..."

I spun from the office, rushing for a toilet I had glimpsed across the hall. I shut myself into the tiny room, opened the lid...and my vomit caught in my throat.

A severed head floated in the bowl, facedown.

I backed away, swallowing my spew. Out. I had to get out.

As I ran back to the reception area, something slapped against the glass of a conference room. I saw a lamprey mouth bigger than my head, vacuuming over the glass, thrashing to get at me. And at Donna Jackson's desk, something that had been hiding under it now came rolling out, grabbing at my ankles.

I kept running.

Now I found myself surrounded by offices. The lights were out, and most of the doors were closed. But one door lay open, a giant broadsword hanging from the wall, clearly the command center of the organization. I knew from the sword that this must be John Carmack's office.

One of the computer screens flickered and blinked like a watchful, rectangular eye. As if hypnotized, I found myself walking toward it. The room seemed empty and safe, and if I needed a weapon, I could always take down Carmack's sinuous broadsword.

Mike Wilson—wherever he might be now—had said something about Carmack's latest engine. Another breakthrough, I wondered? But of what sort? What had broken through this time? I had to see.

I took another step closer to the monitor. I thought of all those DOOM and Quake fanatics, unable to tear themselves away from their screens. Now this screen had me snared. It was drawing me in. Ropy, black tendrils, shimmering in the darkened room, appeared from nowhere, wrapping around my arms and shoulders, cutting off my air. They were coming from the monitor!

At first I thought they were pulling me in, but, no...they had merely grabbed onto me for purchase, as an anchor, as they hauled themselves out. A slithering, pulsating pile of inky, wet blackness, chirruping and spitting and making high-pitched octopus noises that pierced my brain. The crawling mass finally fell upon the floor with a noisy squelch, and as it gathered itself together, I found my chance to escape. I snatched down Carmack's broadsword and stabbed into the place where I thought the creature might have a brain. It emitted a weak, subsonic shriek, then snatched the blade from my hands and took a swing at me.

But by then, I had already run from the room.

Unfortunately, other things had heard me by now. All the doors of the other offices were open, and the things inside were shambling out.

Programmers...they might have been once. Unrecognizable now once. Clothed in shredded id T-shirts, ragged jeans dripping with blood and brains, black polyps exploding from their eyes. Which one was Abrash? Who was Kevin Cloud? There was no telling one Carmack from another. They laughed and closed in on me, and there was but one way to run. One open door. I ducked out of the way of their clutching talons, and instead of grabbing me, they tangled with each other.

The last thing I saw, as I closed the door of the switching room behind me, was the transfigured remains of the id team, tearing each other to pieces, mouths stuffed with pustulent flesh, laughing hysterically. While behind them, through the shattered windows of their offices, I could see the sky filling with faces like thunderclouds. Frozen toads and deformed armadillos began to rain from the sky.

It's quiet out there now. Too quiet.

And I cannot help but wonder why they've let me live this long. Surely the powerful things that roam the halls could have ripped this door from its hinges long ago.

It occurs to me that they might have wanted me to write this narrative—might have wanted the world to know how these things had come to pass.

I, too, have been an unwitting pawn.

And if I should stop typing? Now that my story is finished, is my life at its end also?

My wrists are throbbing, but carpal tunnel syndrome is the least of my problems now. I must keep typing...keep typing...to fool them...make them think I still have more to say, that the id story goes on and on and on....

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy Yog Sothoth...now is the time for all bad men to come to the aid of their masters....

What's that at the door? Who's laughing? Guys? Are you out there?

They can read my mind, of course. They know I'm finished. I should be a man about this. There goes the door. Time to pick up this typewriter and see how many of them I can take with me.

SLIP

tie

DESTINATION



The picture
and the run
shape of -

Farewell, humanity.

I'll see you on the other side.

??

