Stadia’s E3 Doom Eternal demo made me a cloud gaming believer

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- These images were taken from an earlier, local *Doom Eternal* demo, but give you an idea of the kind of fast-paced action that looks and plays just fine on Stadia.
- The Doomslayer lands.
- Most of this gallery is taken from real first-person gameplay, which is why the screen is smothered in a HUD. Milliseconds after this “glory kill” moment, your hero punches this demon’s head so hard that it explodes.
- Another glory kill. It was hard to capture clear images of these violent, health-refilling attacks; they’re all pretty quick in action.
- The trick with the super shotgun is to make sure to shoot before you get all the way to your target. The momentum will still drive your blast directly into the foe, and the recoil of your shot will conveniently bounce you away from its limp body toward your next target.
- There’s also the *DOOM* 2016 standby of running a chainsaw through an enemy to turn its body into useful ammunition. (Don’t ask us how that science works.)
- Decisions, decisions: do I go in for the glory kill,

since the enemy on the left is staggered and glowing?
- Nah, let’s focus explosive ballista fire on the bigger, scarier-looking one.
- Pretty terrifying sight, right? Hold on, lemme crank this one up a smidge…
- …there. You can practically smell its cow-carcass breath from here.
- Dash forward to close distance on your foe.
- Then set it on fire, because, why not.
- We should kill this one.

LOS ANGELES—Since Google’s Project Stream beta test in October and the company’s March announcement of the full Stadia platform, one question has loomed large over the service: will it actually work well enough for fast-paced, reflex-intensive games? After playing a demo of *Doom Eternal* for about half an hour Wednesday, I’m ready to say that the answer to that question seems to be yes—at least in Google’s controlled testing conditions.

Google invited me out to its downtown LA YouTube Gaming creator’s space—away from the Internet-congested E3 show floor—to try out the latest build of Stadia. My demo was running locally on a Pixelbook with the Chrome browser, connected to a TV via HDMI, and remotely to data centers more than 300 miles away in San Francisco. The Pixelbook had a wired Internet connection that I was told was running at “about 25 Mbps” (Google wouldn’t let me run a speed test to confirm the connection quality). I controlled the demo with a Stadia controller connected to the Pixelbook via USB, but keyboard and trackpad controls also worked.

Over thirty minutes of *Doom Eternal* play, I’d have been hard pressed to point out any differences between the Stadia version and one running on a local PC. The 60fps animation didn’t noticeably stutter for the entire demo, and the apparent resolution didn’t dip below 1080p either (though a Google representative said Stadia will sometimes lower that

resolution briefly to maintain a smooth frame rate if and when bandwidth dips). There were no signs of video compression artifacts or the color gradients you might see in a low-res YouTube video.

While I couldn’t swear the control latency was *identical* to a game running locally, I will say that aiming, shooting, jumping, and dodging the game’s various demons *felt* identical to playing the 2016 version of *Doom*. Perhaps a pro-level player might feel the difference in the precisely timed muscle memory needed for precision maneuvers, but Stadia certainly felt up to the game’s twitch-heavy design from my point of view. On this score, *Doom Eternal* served as a much better example than earlier Stadia tests of *Assassin’s Creed Odyssey*, a game that has extremely loose, latency-heavy controls even under local play conditions.

I wasn’t able to run any sort of slow-mo video tests on Stadia to estimate total control latency, as I had earlier in the week with Microsoft’s Project Xcloud demo. Real-world play conditions, with Wi-Fi routers and local network congestion, also might not be as performant as Google’s idealized demo setup. And I’d need a double-blind comparison with a locally run version of the game to determine whether the Stadia version was *truly* indistinguishable from a local version.

All that said, this extended demo convinced me that Stadia at least has the potential to deliver the solid, responsive, as-good-as-local gaming experience that Google promises, even for an extremely reflex-heavy game. I could easily see myself playing through the entirety of *Doom Eternal* on this version of Stadia without complaint and without the need for a high-end console or gaming rig, either.

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