

# Players get virtual kicks in DOOM tournament

**By Jim Phillips**

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Clang. Zip. Argh. Squish.

Wasting mutant monsters on the Martian moon of Phobos may not be your cup of violence, but for two dozen competitors in the first DOOM tournament in Austin on Saturday, it was a slice of heaven.

With 16-bit sound and cutting-edge 3-D graphics networked into interactive games where zapping

slimebags only clears your line of fire to kill your real opponent, the intensity level at Austin Virtual Gaming was palpable.

Spectators hovered over competitors who were lost in their 27-inch flat-screen monitors, knowing that around the next corner, just past the bodies of the fallen, might wait their opponent. Would he be armed with a pistol, chain saw or plasma gun?

It was a frag-or-be-fragged free-

for-all, and the winner was the one with the most notches in his weapon.

"It's very easy to get lost in this game," said Kurt Dillard, one of the zappers. "It is violent. That's part of the attraction. It's a real macho thing.

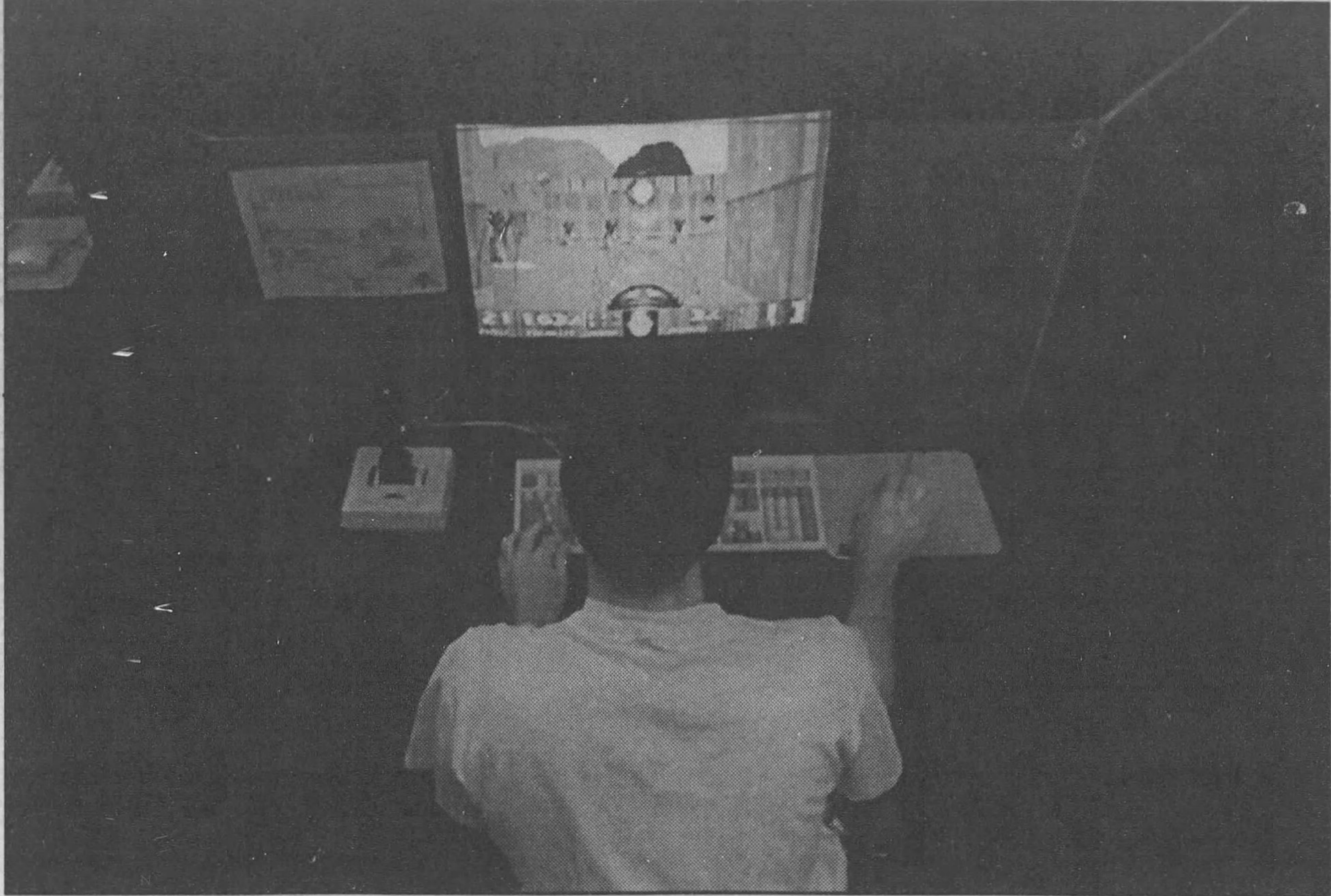
"And, it's a chance to withdraw from reality and go somewhere else for a while."

DOOM began taking computer gamers by storm in December and

is now one of the most popular games for IBM-compatible computers. It combines first-rate graphics and sound with interactive capability. With two or more computers wired together, players can cooperatively trash the bad guys or, in "death match" mode, try to kill each other.

That, naturally, was the mode of the day Saturday. Competitors paired off in one-on-one matches

**See Players, B5**



Staff photo by Tom Lankes

Ian Suhrstedt takes a turn at the game monitor at Austin Virtual Gaming on Guadalupe Street. The gaming cen-

ter, which offers three-dimensional interactive games, sponsored a DOOM tournament Saturday.

# Players get their virtual kicks in DOOM computer tournament

■ Austin gaming center lets the zappers and zappees fight it out

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for a double-elimination tournament fittingly played out in an episode titled "Knee Deep in the Dead."

The tournament was a first for Austin Virtual Gaming, the brainchild of five Austin computer enthusiasts. The gaming center, which opened in March at 2118 Guadalupe St., features eight interconnected computers and three games, of which the most popular is DOOM.

Up to four people can play DOOM simultaneously, an event one of the gaming center's owners described as "fantastically chaotic."

Produced by id Software in Dallas, DOOM is helping revolutionize computer gaming in several ways. The first eight levels are available at no cost, put out as

"shareware" that can be downloaded off Internet. Once hooked, gamers can buy the remaining two-thirds of the full DOOM for \$40. Also, editing software is available so people can construct their own levels from the ground up.

Ian Suhrstedt, one of the tournament players, created his own level and offered it over CompuServe last month. More than 1,600 people have copied it for their own use.

"It was just something I had to do," he said. "It took two weeks of every minute of my free time."

Suhrstedt enjoys not only the game, but also the direct competition against other players. "You can see some things about human nature. There are different strategies people follow. You can run through the whole level and kill all the monsters, or some people will sit right by the exit and wait for them to open the door, then shoot them.

"When you're playing against people, it gets personal."

Another player, Jimmy Kotrla, doesn't have DOOM at home yet, but at the gaming center on the

Drag, "I've been playing since they opened.

"You can experience war and not die. It's guiltless war. It kind of gets your violence out for the week."

If there had been a betting line on the tournament, it would have changed considerably when three of id Software's 10 employees showed up as entrants.

John Romero, one of the company's owners and programmers, said about 70,000 copies of DOOM have been sold. "People like violence. It's basically a male game, a guy game."

Romero, 26, was wearing a T-shirt with the DOOM logo on the front; on the back were the words, "Wrote It."

Asked why they came, Romero replied: "So we can beat everybody."

Romero, however, lost to Austinite Sean Gallagher, but because of the double-elimination format, Romero was able to come back. In a three-person finale, he finished first, while Gallagher placed third. Sean Green, also of id Software, finished second.