Treading the Boards

Five Gaming Boards, Including Multiplayer DOOM and Graphics-Based Role-Playing

BY DENNIS FOWLER
ZIFFNET/CIS 72241,1011

Id Software's DOOM has stormed the nation, and some BBSs are acting as meeting grounds where DOOM mavens and novices alike can find and challenge other players to multiplayer or modem-to-modem matches. At the same time, offbeat boards like King of the Cats are making the most of RIP and ANSI graphics with role-playing games that fill your screen with image-packed storylines. This month we survey five innovative gaming boards that will keep you occupied during the doldrums of February.
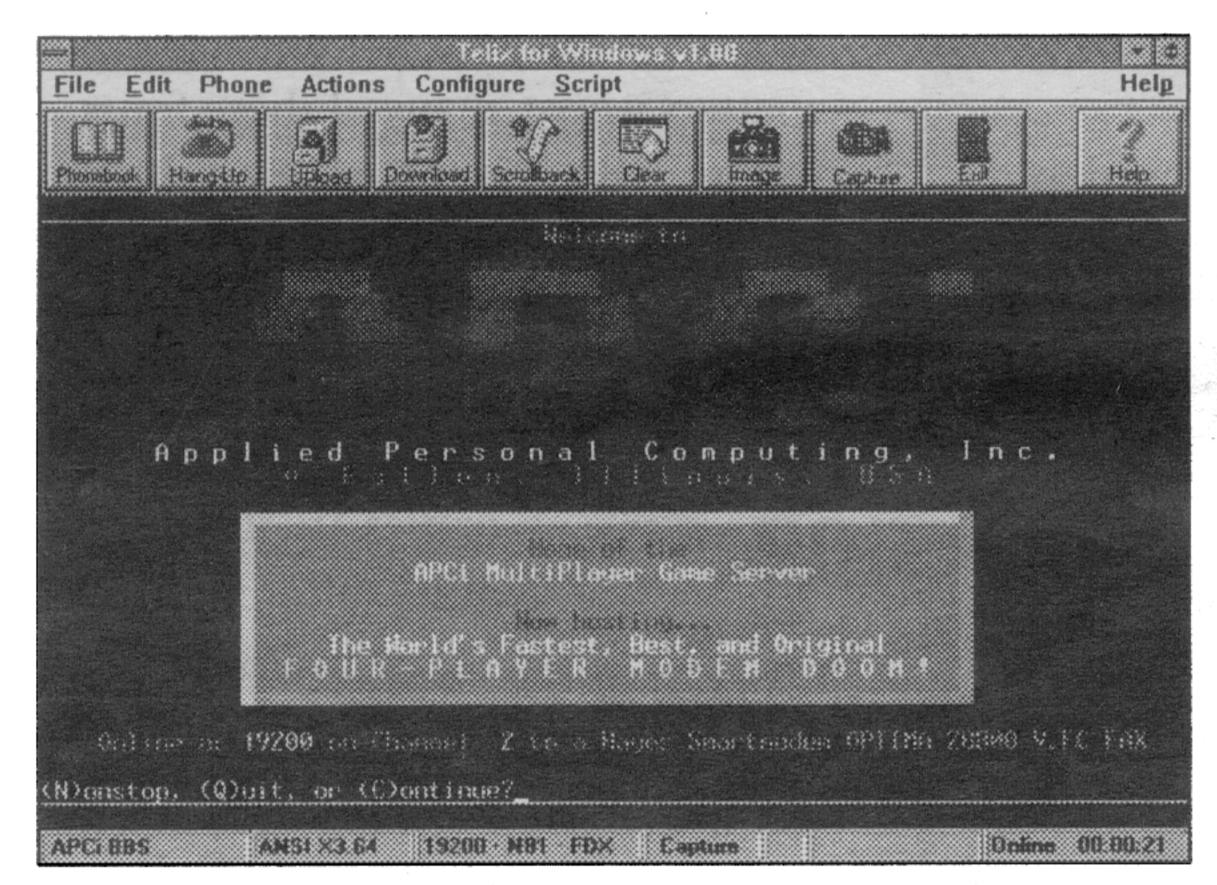
APCI BBS

Applied Personal Computing Inc. (APCi) brings the joy, graphics, sound effects, blood, gore, and incipient motion sickness of multiplayer DOOM to the masses with a multiplayer DOOM server for BBSs. With your own copy of DOOM or DOOM II, and the APCi terminal program APCiDOOM 5.1, you and up to three other players can battle each other, computer-generated monsters, or both, depending on your proclivities.

The free terminal program is really bare-bones, dedicated to just this one purpose, and is easy to set up and use. It's available from the APCi BBS, of course, as well as being widely distributed via the Internet and BBSs around the country. You can put APCiDOOM to good use with your buddy down the street or in the next office, since it supports two-player modem-to-modem, two-player serial-link, and four-player IPX-network games, as well as the BBS server.

If you know Id Software's shoot-'em-up, you know it requires a fast 486 system with plenty of RAM (8MB minimum). To play by modem, you need a 14,400-bps or faster model, and you'd better have a 16550A UART-controlled serial port as well. You also need to boot your system "clean," that is, without

APCi's multiplayer game server supports awesome four-player DOOM tournaments. Log on to test your survival instincts against multiple simultaneous opponents.

any TSRs or memory managers. APCiDOOM and DOOM will take care of managing your RAM, and they need all the resources they can get. If you're down on processor power (a 486SX/25, for instance, is a bit light), it helps to turn off sound support. If you don't have a VL-Bus or PCI graphics card, set DOOM to run in a lower-resolution mode so it's more responsive.

After configuring the terminal program (it's very easy), call the APCi BBS and head for the DOOM server section. Once there, you'll see boxes showing games in progress in red, and games that are waiting for players in green. You can either open your own game and wait for players, or join someone who's already organizing one and looking for participants. After you join a group of players, you're sent into chat mode to coordinate things, check version numbers, etc. All the players have to have the same game setup—DOOM version, skill level, WAD data file that governs graphics

details—or it won't work.

Once everyone switches from "Waiting To Die" to "Ready To Kill," APCiDOOM loads your copy of the game and you're off, trying to find each other in the maze of passages.

For identification, each player's character is a different color. You can even have a private chat with your various opponents.

It's fast and furious. Because each caller uses his or her own DOOM code, the overhead of transmitting the game's graphics and sound effects is minimized. Basically, the APCiDOOM Server coordinates the action among the various combatants. You play at the speed of the slowest participant's system setup (including modem and CPU).

APCi also offers other multiplayer games available for downloading. Many are designed for use with The Major BBS Entertainment Edition, which forms the base of the APCi BBS. Basically, these use The Major BBS's Teleconferencing or

Chat mode, with the BBS software simply acting as a gateway between the players.

You can reach the APCi BBS at (618) 632-7664. The board has eight 28,800-bps modems online. Nonsubscribers get a demo account good for 15 minutes per call totaling 60 minutes per day for 15 days, with full access to games but limited access to the teleconference and files areas. You can subscribe online, paying $10 for 72,000 credits, consumed at a rate of one credit per second.

APCi also sells the server for you sysops out there; check the APCi BBS for the latest information. As I'm writing this, APCi is waiting only for its Visa/MasterCard service to be ready to handle orders. Meanwhile, it's not releasing pricing or other details.