

But Can It Run DOOM?

By Retroinferno

"This is not why I brought you here... human."

"You sure?" he asked in return.

The titanic alien outside the room hissed as she peered through a doorway. Only a yellow eye was exposed. Her voice filled the air once a translation device sprung into action, personalizing it for the man as a feminine human one emitted from his helmet.

"Unfortunately, I cannot fit into small cracks and crevices. Not like you. What you're looking at is not just any ordinary computer system... it's an ancient precursor mainframe!"

The mainframe in question towered over the human. A few blinking lights accompanied a low humming noise coming from its metallic frame, presumably from a processor and other active components. In some ways, it looked ancient... like some of the first human computers due to the sheer amount of space it occupied within the dimly lit room. As for the human, he slowly walked towards it and placed his hand against the metal plating.

"Amazing..." he muttered, wiping some dust off the mainframe. "And I'm pretty sure it can run DOOM."

The alien let out a more venomous hiss. "Do I need to explain exactly why it cannot play that stupid game of yours?"

In response, the man shook his head. "No, no... you don't understand. You see, I've seen someone get a smart toaster to play DOOM before. Oh, and even a pregnancy test! Not sure if that last one technically counts, but whatever. The game itself is practically a benchmark for my species when it comes to computer hardware. If this precursor mainframe or whatever can't run it, can we even call it a computer if it's apparently so powerful?"

"Ugh." mumbled the alien, baring her fangs. "Look, Jeremy... listen. I don't know if you are joking, but that thing is not like some primitive human computer. It cannot interface with your software... they do not speak in the same tongues for lack of a better term... and quantum computing is currently beyond the capabilities of your species."

"Yeah, but what about your species and their tech?"

The alien narrowed her eyes. "What about it?"

Jeremy made a dismissive wave with a free hand as he walked towards her. "Oh, nothing. I just remember someone getting some human software to work on sthara computers. Which are based on precursor tech. Which means that one of your computers with human software could potentially interface with a precursor one and emulate a videogame at the very least..."

Following these words, the alien's golden eyes went wide. "Jeremy! Don't you DARE!"

By pressing a hand against a panel, the human closed the only door to the room.

"JEREMY!" she shouted on the other side.

After cracking his fingers, the man returned to the mainframe. A nearby computer rig allowed him to effectively hook up his own various devices to the mainframe. An alien woman hissing and scratching her claws against the metal door did little to deter him as he went about his work. A virtual client running an old installation of Windows 98 provided something along the lines of a graphic user interface and a command-line for him to fiddle around with, uncertain if he'd be able to accomplish his goal...

Suddenly, his view of the screen was interrupted by a distortion. Within mere moments, a holographic yet serpentine head with all red eyes was staring at him.

<ERROR.> it said with an unholy hybrid of a screech and a hiss emitting from the speakers.
<DEVICE: UNRECOGNIZED. OPERATING SYSTEM IS UNDEFINED. ANALYZING...>

Before it could continue, Jeremy yanked out a power cord. The computer abruptly turned off. He grumbled as he made his way to the mainframe, where the holographic avatar retreated before it stared at him from the other side of an electronic screen. A similar maneuver where he flicked a switch on a circuit breaker shut off the power. The avatar vanished, all the lights on the ship abruptly cut off, a short-lived scream erupted from outside, then things returned to normal once the human turned things back on.

"Damned precursor defense systems." mumbled Jeremy as he pulled out a revolver, ready to shoot his own computer or the mainframe itself if it made a weird noise. "Damned crapshoot AI..."

From there, he rebooted everything. It was a slow and painful process as the electronic devices resynchronized, but eventually, Jeremy was back where he started. As he typed away, a feminine voice emitted from his helmet once more, and a live video feed joined it... allowing him to see a disgruntled alien with golden eyes and an odd mix of draconic and feline features within the corner of his vision.

"What was that?" she asked.

Jeremy shrugged. "Just a hard reboot."

"Right. If you REALLY insist on running this little experiment or game of yours... know this. Precursor electronics are not necessarily more powerful than what we currently have available."

"Excuse me?" he asked with a raised eyebrow. "I thought precursor tech was worth a fortune from being super-advanced or something."

She sighed. "Their technology was made to stand the test of time rather than prioritizing pure performance. It's practically priceless and everlasting... for the precursors are not mortals like you and I. Hence why what you're doing has the potential to be incredibly dangerous, albeit I suppose I can't stop you from satisfying your curiosities."

"If you say so..."

Her ears folded down. "What is with your species taking so much stupid risks?"

Ignoring her question, Jeremy went about configuring a virtual client. Emulation software. He double-checked some of the various wires and other receptacles to ensure his rig was still connected to the mainframe. Unlike last time, the holographic avatar was nowhere to be seen on the mainframe's blank screen. Once everything was prepared following a short time period, Jeremy pressed a single key, filling him with glee once he suddenly saw a familiar sight flashing on the mainframe's primary screen...

The start menu for the original version of DOOM.

The human promptly disabled his helmet's translation device alongside ending the video feed, cutting off an unamused alien previously staring at him with narrowed eyes. "I knew it." he said to himself.

Without further delay, Jeremy prepared to play the game from the comfort of his chair. His keyboard acted as the input device. Meanwhile, the mainframe played the game's classic soundtrack as he configured the settings, which was joined by a gunshot sound every time he toggled an option. Nightmare mode was selected when he was finally ready to play. From there, it was a matter of instinct. The first-person perspective of a human man armed only with a pistol went about exploring a base on Phobos... beginning a long battle against the demonic forces of hell.

Outside, Jeremy's fellow scavengers gathered around his golden-eyed companion.

"Is he still in there?" asked a reptilian creature before he tapped on the tiny metal door.

A more avian looking one looked around with wide eyes while music from the game blasted throughout the leviathan of a ship. "What's that noise?"

The feline in question rubbed her eyes. "Jeremy is just..."

Out of nowhere, the sound of a shotgun echoed down the vast hallways. Demonic screeching erupted from multiple speakers strewn throughout the vicinity. Other titanic and heavily armed alien scavengers began backing into corners and readying their weapons, jumping a little each time they heard a gunshot or a scream intermixed with the odd music. Some began destroying nearby precursor security systems or inactive drones as a safety precaution, adding to the chaos, causing others to flee and fire their weapons to cover their retreat back to the transport ships.

As for Jeremy, he continued playing his game with a devilish smile spreading across his face, content with the knowledge that even on an ancient and abandoned precursor derelict... its mainframe was still more than capable of playing the original DOOM.