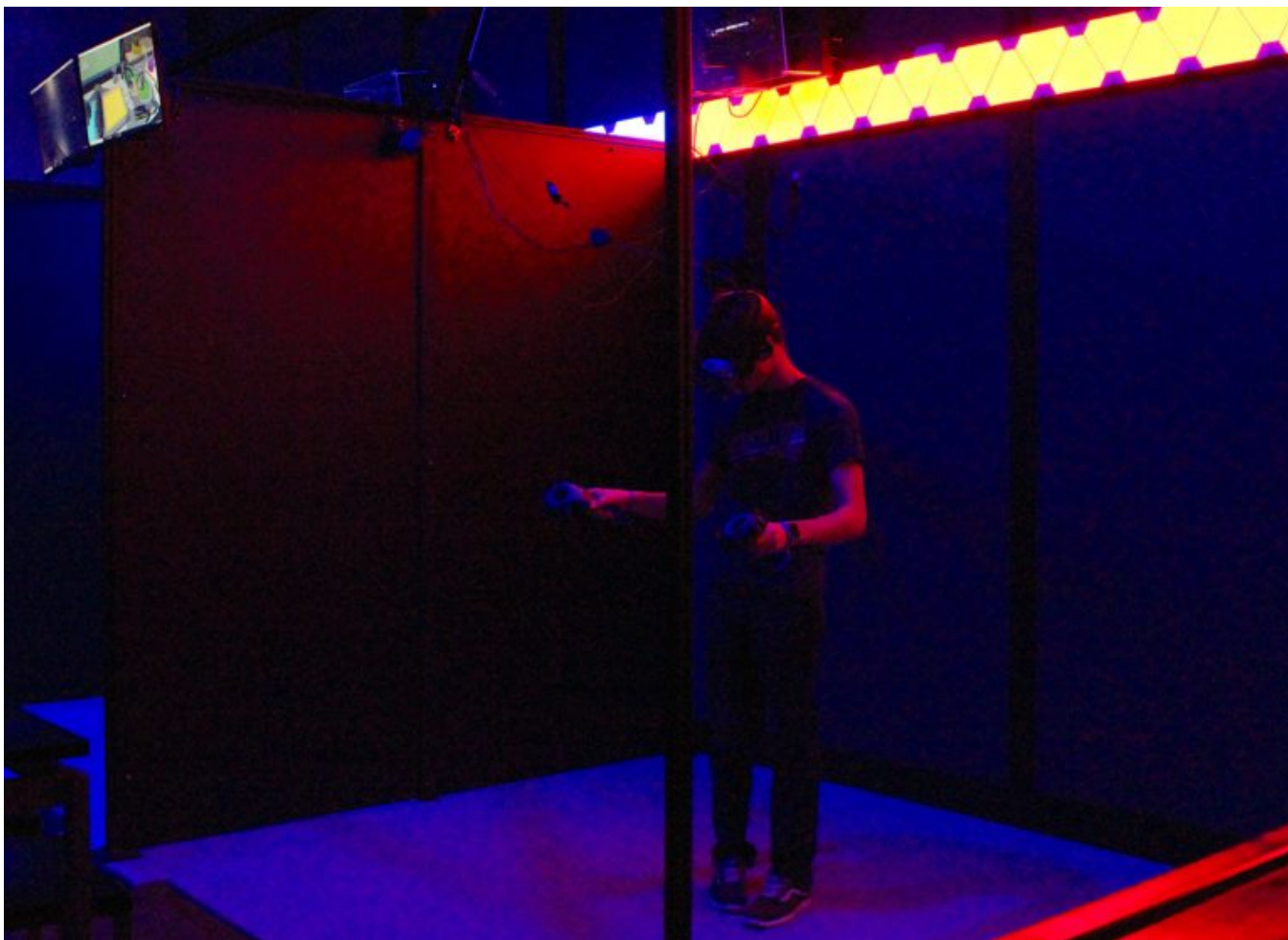


Escape reality at Escape VR



Each station at Escape VR is equipped with a \$3,000 VR setup that includes the headset and computer. PHOTO/KATERINA MIHAILIDIS

BY KATERINA MIHAILIDIS
OU News Bureau

Virtual reality allows individuals to enter new dimensions without leaving the comfort and safety of their homes. With VR arcades gamers explore the future with friends at a lower cost.

[Escape VR](#) in Oxford, Michigan, creates experiences where anything is possible. Escape VR is a virtual reality arcade with six stations in which individuals step into, put on a headset and enter a world of games.

“It’s the future,” said Nick Graff, game fanatic and co-owner of Escape VR.

Graff’s interests lie in the production and functionality of the games, he said. With a bachelor’s degree in computer science focusing on game development, he decided that VR would be “the next step.”

Escape VR opened in September 2017. Although it was his initial idea, Graff said that in the end the creation of the arcade was a collaboration among himself, Adam Sally and Mike Kraut.

According to an article in [Slate](#), the VR/AR Association counts about 60 VR arcades in the U.S. and at least 400 globally. VR/AR Association is a group that represents more than 3,800 organizations worldwide.

“People have been watching these things,” Graff said. “They want to be inside those experiences. They want to fly around like Superman. They want to be in the wars. They want to become something that they’re not.”

Each station at Escape VR is equipped with a \$3,000 VR setup that includes the headset and computer.

Entering Escape VR, visitors get a tour with introductory information. They choose a time slot and have the controllers explained.



In his first VR experience, Christian Cerny kept saying, “This is so cool.” Escape VR is kept dark to create a sci-fi feel. PHOTO/KATERINA MIHAILIDIS

“We express that half an hour is probably the best because you get a full understanding of what VR has to offer,” Graff said.

Visitors can choose to play by themselves or in groups of up to six. Once their headset is on and they’re plugged into the VR system, players can select their experience by looking around the 360-degree view.

They can select the game and the level of difficulty: beginner, intermediate or expert.

“It’s pretty straightforward,” Graff said. “As humans, they adapt very quickly to the different technology, so it just feels so natural inside the world. They quickly just interact and figure things out.”

Escape VR hosts about 30 games, including SuperHot, Job Simulator, Space Pirate Trainer and Fruit Ninja.

The company is trying to reduce the price of hosting games by developing its own, said Graff.

“We developed skills in not only conceptualizing but executing the idea to produce a game,” Graff said.

The arcade will soon have 10 stations and a 20-by-20-foot wireless VR arena.

“You would be wearing a backpack and then you’re no longer tethered to the wall,” Graff said. “The headset will be plugged into the backpack, and you’re solely walking around with a backpack. You’re no longer limited.”

“I like how you can do anything,” said Christian Cerny, 19, of Metamora, Michigan. “You’re not bound to a keyboard and a mouse or a controller. You are the controller.”

Christian and his younger brother Carter, 16, frequently come to Escape VR.

“You jump off a really high place in VR, nothing’s really going to happen,” Carter Cerny said. “Nothing’s going to happen to anything. You’re OK, but you still feel like you did it. It’s having the feeling of doing something without actually doing it.”

Coming to Escape VR is cheaper than owning a VR system at home and more people can play simultaneously, according to Graff.

A VR experience is like “taking a step out of what you’re used to and just going into a place that’s completely different than anything that can ever be created in the real world,” Carter Cerny said.

Although there are games that take place or replicate real-life settings, there are a lot of settings that “could never be possible,” Carter added. “You walk into a room like this, you put on a headset and you feel like you’re somewhere completely different.”

Escape VR is hoping to expand in Detroit, Plymouth area and East Lansing. Before branching out, Graff is making sure his young company is stable.

“It’s really hard to captivate what VR really is without experiencing it first-hand,” according to Graff.

“There’s really nothing like it,” Christian Cerny said. “This is the best there is.”



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