extra

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BY THE WAY

If you're going to the Virginia Tech game today to buy your Orange Effect T-shirt. Each year two specially designated — one as the Orange Effect another as the Maroon Effect game. You can buy if they aren't sold out — at the Virginia Tech Bookstore (both on- and off-campus).
Caffeine and junk food keep computer gamers wired as they go head to head.

By Joe Eaton
joe.eaton@roanoke.com
981-3376

At 3:22 a.m., Viper and Sampson glared into their computer monitors like long-haul truckers staring through windshields.

Since noon, Viper, a 19-year-old whose real name is Trente Robertson, had pounded four bottles of the energy drink Bawls and two more of a drink called No Fear.

Sampson, a 15-year-old named Chad Marlowe, had2 downed about the same amount.

Fingers on the keyboard arrows, the two piloted Formula 1 race cars around a loopy track.

“Oh my God!” Sampson yelled. “I found the biggest jump in the world.”

They weren’t going to sleep anytime soon.

Viper and Sampson were among 40 people who had come to a defunct restaurant connected to the Days Inn on Plantation Road for a 37-hour gaming party.

Set up by the Star City LAN club, the LAN party was a local version of gaming events held across the country and overseas.

At LAN parties, gamers bring computers, set them up on a common network and play against each other, often in hours-long tournaments.

The party last weekend began at 7 a.m. Saturday and ended at 8 p.m. Sunday.

Gary Lemon, a 28-year-old the gamers call Admiral, has hosted LAN parties in Roanoke six times since 2002.

Trenton Robertson, aka Viper, finally gets some rest Sunday morning as gamers continue playing behind him. After playing all day Saturday and taking a one-hour nap, Daniel Suthers (center) is ready for more games.

WHAT IS IT? Star City LAN holds gaming parties every other month.

What to bring:
- Computer
- Power strip
- Monitor
- Food and drink

Oh, and what does LAN stand for? Local Area Network, or a group of computers that share a common communications line or wireless link.

For more information go to www.starcitylan.com
GAME FACE: Computers, power strips, sleeping bags, coolers

FROM 1

At the first Roanoke LAN parties, gamers met in the pool room of an apartment complex. Electricity proved problematic. Computers blew breakers, stopping the games in the middle of the action.

The restaurant had no such problems. It was spacious, well-wired and cheap.

Lemon charges $20 for the event, which includes lunch both days. For this event, he grilled hamburgers and hot dogs.

Money left over goes toward prizes and snacks for the next event.

Gamers began arriving at the restaurant Friday night, hours before the LAN party was set to begin. They carried in their computers, power strips, sleeping bags and coolers.

Viper and his dad, Gregg Robertson, were two of the first to arrive. They drove seven hours from Ocean City, Md.

At 48, the elder Robertson was the oldest gamer at the event.

Computer gaming has a bad reputation with many parents, Robertson said. But he sees it as a chance to bond with his son.

Gregg Robertson sees gaming as a way to bond with his son Trent, aka Viper. The gamers' computers are connected together through a network. Many of the players will be playing the same game but as different characters or vehicles. 
If the party last weekend is any indication, LAN parties are uniquely male affairs. Girlfriends of some of the men made appearances, but they did not stay long. There are plenty of female gamers, but the people who attend LAN parties are extremists, Admiral said.

“Women don’t really get into it,” added Chris Fees, a 19-year-old Virginia Western Community College student who once went by Cheesy Puff, but now goes by Moscow. “We wish there were more women.”

By 1 a.m. Saturday, the area smelled like a dirty football jersey. Half-empty boxes of pizza, Twinkies and cookies surrounded the computers. It was dark, except for the glow of monitors and the red, green, blue and yellow lights of computer fans. Most people were playing Joint Operations, a game that pits a team of soldiers against a team of terrorists in a battle to capture the flag.

They yelled directions at each other that mimicked the sound from an Army commercial.

“We’ve got an A.P.C.,” Admiral said, warning his team of an approaching armored personnel carrier.

“Where is it?” someone yelled. The truck went up in smoke.

Two hours later, many players were asleep in corners or on rows of chairs pushed together. Some rented hotel rooms.

For the older players, the parties are less of an endurance test.

Chicken King said he planned to sleep three or four hours at most. “The time goes too fast,” he said.

Several of the teenagers and a few of the older players kept going, hoping to make it through the night.

At 3:30 a.m., Samson’s say, Admiral and Viper started playing the racing game TrackMania, which neither of them takes seriously.

Both gamers are into Counter-Strike, a military game they say requires strategy. Each belongs to Internet-based teams that battle other teams online. Viper said he plays the game at least six hours a day.

“It’s not really fun anymore,” he said. “It’s competition.”

Viper said LANs are more fun than at home. “Normally you are stuck in your room and stuck on your phone,” he said. “I can punch them.”

At 4:57 a.m., he stood up from his desk. He was going to bed.

Ten minutes later, he was back to the computer and sat down next to Viper. The energy drained from his body.

The two kept going through the night.

By 7 a.m., an orchestra of screams had risen above the chaos.

Viper and Samson don’t have any idea. The teenage gamers were there hours to go.