

Charge of the Light Brigade



LASER QUESTERS Phillip Thompsen, 11 and sister Emily Thompsen, 6 of Grand Island, N.Y., search for their opponents Tuesday evening at LASER QUEST, 6802 "P" St.

SCOTT MCCLURG/DN

Children of all ages wage war at Laser Quest

BY SEAN MCCARTHY
Staff Reporter

In a black-lit airlock, the smell of manufactured fog permeates the senses. Donning a v-shaped vest with flashing shoulder pads and a flashing sensors on both sides of the vest, two dozen combatants raise their lasers and yell an oath before going into an 8,000-square-foot structure that looks like it was borrowed from the set of "Aliens" or "Blade Runner."

"I will play smart! I will play hard! I will not use abusive language!" are some of the sayings the players are obligated to shout before blasting each other with lasers for an intense 20 minutes. Imagine Hanson doing a Ministry cover and you get the idea of the sound.

Meet the indoor answer to the swimming pool or softball this summer. It's Laser Quest, located at 6802 P St. Gary Lamb has been general manager of Laser Quest since it opened in March of 1997. Since then, Laser Quest has gathered some 400 members including 20-25 hard-core members who show up about every other day to blast their frus-

trations out on seasoned regulars and amateurs alike.

Lamb said the average age of the patrons was between 14 and 18. However, he said they catered to every age group, from age 7 to 77.

"And if they're older than that, that's not a problem," Lamb said.

For college students, Lamb said playing laser tag was a great way to build camaraderie among friends. The place has been rented out for several greek and scholastic functions from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

"It's an exhilarating, fun and interactive good time," Lamb said.

There is a price for the fun, however. And for non-members, that price is \$6 for a game that lasts about 20 minutes. After paying for a game, the patrons are required to give themselves a code name. Popular code names include Big Mama, Maverick, Subzero and any character from "The X-Files."

After this, the game's players are herded into a room that looks like a

lunar landing site at a children's museum. One of the marshals explains the rules. No running, no swearing, no ducking, no covering of the targets, no hitting other players on their domes with the butt of your laser and so forth. Then, players are allowed to go in and get their equipment on. After that, it's anyone's

"*It helps an old guy feel young again.***"**

RICK PALMER
Laser Quest participant

guess what happens.

With three towers, numerous mirrors to shoot off and a fairly frenzied group of players, the game offers numerous strategies. But like going to a bar on a Sunday night, you can spot the regulars with ease. The non-regulars tend to flee the moment they get tagged. When they get tagged by someone's laser, they cannot fire and cannot be fired upon for five seconds. They scurry to the towers or one of the many walls to

regroup.

The regulars tend to get aggressive and dive into the thick of things. Swerving, bending and maneuvering, they have it timed to the exact point when they can fire again, and they do, unleashing a barrage of ruby red beams at the player or players who just hit them.

Two members, the father and son duo Rick and Adam Palmer, just got back from a regional Laser Quest competition two weeks ago in Dallas, Texas. Rick, code name "Skinner," and Adam, code name "Nepenthe," helped form a team of players in January. The group of players placed fourth in the contest in Dallas.

Rick said the game, as well as the group, was a great stress reliever.

"It helps an old guy feel young again," he said.

Adam said his best strategy for the game was analyzing the situation when he enters the arena. Both Palmers prefer the dog-fighting style of laser tag play.

Every Monday, the group of about a dozen regulars practices. In general,

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