

The Laser Horizon

Semi-Whenever-EZINE

August 2005

ONE SOURCE LASER TAG'S
NEWS SOURCE FOR THE LASER
TAG WORLD IN GENERAL

ISSUE: II

**Dreaming about Laser Tag!
...the Projects!!!
...The Planning
...THE Possibilities!**

A
SIMPLE
FORMULA
FOR LAZER
TAG™ CLUB
SUCCESS

**TAGGIN IN THE U.K THE
DROPZONE WAY!**

**AN INTERVIEW WITH AN LT FOUNDER!
Talking with David Small...Lazer Tag..Getting the Story Straight!**

A Letter From the Editor....

...Well, its been a long time comming - but IT IS FINISHED! Well, okay, I cheated a little, which you will find out at the end this edition - but I won't talk about that here! The cover picture should have read something more like - ever feel like you've taken on too many projects? Lol, the experssion on my face fits more to that by line, and it would be a closer truth to putting together this ezine. After staying up late at night for 2 weeks straight though, I look at what has been generated, and I hope you all appreciate it - and the end result is well worth the patience everyone has given me in getting this edition out a couple months late. Enough about that though. Fortunately, or unfortunately, there was so much material available for this edition that I had to abandon the format of the previous Ezine from last October. Special thanks to James and Peter who did an astoundingly great job at writing the main articles that make up the main portions of this edition. Also too a special thanks to David Small from Shoot the Moon for not only being nice enough to give us an interview - but invite us back for the company picnic later in the year as well! (They probably didn't think we were crazy enough to drive all that way for just a picnic and a game or 2 of Laser Tag!)

Finally, a special thanks to the people who took the time to make up some funnies for us to place throughout the Ezine (don't forget to bug me for those rental coupons!). There was some really great material turned in!



As you can see we again have adopted a new format - full Ezine style in PDF. Once again I'm on the learning curve and I couldn't get linking to work properly, so you will just have to use the old fashion method of flipping the pages! There are 3 versions of this edition available. A quick downloadable version where the resolution of the pictures has been reduced - good enough for reading through the articles but the pictures will have very low resolution. A long downloadable version - most of the resolution will be retained; however it may take a bit to download the file. Finally, you will have the option to purchase a printed copy of the ezine - turning it into a magazine. I'll have more on that posted as soon as I get a chance to research my costs.

I hope you all enjoy the work put into this...not only mine, but of those who contributed.

Best Regards,

David F. Roman

Editor - The Laser Horizon

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A Battle Joined:

Laser Tag for Everyone

By James Sinistrah

A group of students stand in a circle in the middle of the Illinois State University “Mini Quad” holding futuristic looking plastic guns towards the center. Suddenly they simultaneously bolt for cover as a beeping countdown echoes from their guns. Onlookers might find themselves at a loss but for the four foot square sign proclaiming today’s event as a “LAZER TAG GAME IN PROGRESS.” Laser tag is a combat simulation game which bears many similarities to paintball, but without the projectiles. Instead, the guns, or “taggers,” fire an invisible beam of infrared light which then activates a sensor. What really sets Laser tag apart from other combat simulation sports, though, is its use of the electronics within the guns and sensors to allow a more surreal experience. Players can have multiple lives and can activate shields to block incoming fire. The taggers used in these games are not just unique because of their internal wiring, they are also designed to be clearly identifiable as toys; nonetheless, detractors of the sport contend that laser tag can be seen as criminal activity by uninformed bystanders, and that the “lasers” can lead to other dangerous situations. On the other hand, when players follow the rules, laser tag provides a great way to build camaraderie and team spirit among groups of socially diverse players and gives “armchair warriors” a healthy outlet to express their love of simulated combat. With proper rules and safeguards in place, laser tag should be a welcome and refreshingly different pursuit that everyone can freely enjoy.

One of the major roadblocks standing between laser tag and widespread public acceptance is an incident which occurred in the late eighties between some children playing laser tag and a police officer investigating a report of suspicious activity. The children were playing in a school parking lot when the officer arrived and ordered them

to stop playing and explain what was going on. One of the players, believing this to be simply another part of the game, pivoted out from behind a car and fired his tagger at the officer, resulting in a horrible incident: "a California police rangemaster told ... of an officer ... who retired on a stress pension after



fatally shooting a young person who pointed a 'Laser Tag' toy gun at him" (Ayoob). This incident has stigmatized the sport since that day and has also been exaggerated to the point where some people believe there were multiple instances. In order to prevent horrible accidents like this from recurring, and thus show onlookers and critics that laser tag does not have to be a pursuit fraught with peril, several rules have to be adhered to by its players. First, players need to play only in areas where they have received proper



permission, and only after notifying the proper authorities. Second, and arguably more important in the current sociopolitical climate, players need to set up appropriate notices, or signs proclaiming that there is, in fact, a game in progress. Signs are best posted along every path allowing entry to the game area, which ensures that no

one will be surprised by someone who they might believe to be in possession of a weapon. It is also a good idea to play in areas away from major roadways and businesses if possible.

Along with the precautions taken by players, the companies producing laser tag gear can and have taken extra steps to ensure the safety of their consumers. All toy “guns” sold in the United States are required by federal law to have a blaze orange cap fitted at the front end to differentiate them from real firearms (“US Code: Title 15,5001”). Furthermore, there seems to have been a moratorium declared on muzzle flashes being added to commercially available laser tag gear, which is especially good since a muzzle flash was one of the indications that the officer recalled causing him to open fire (Farley).

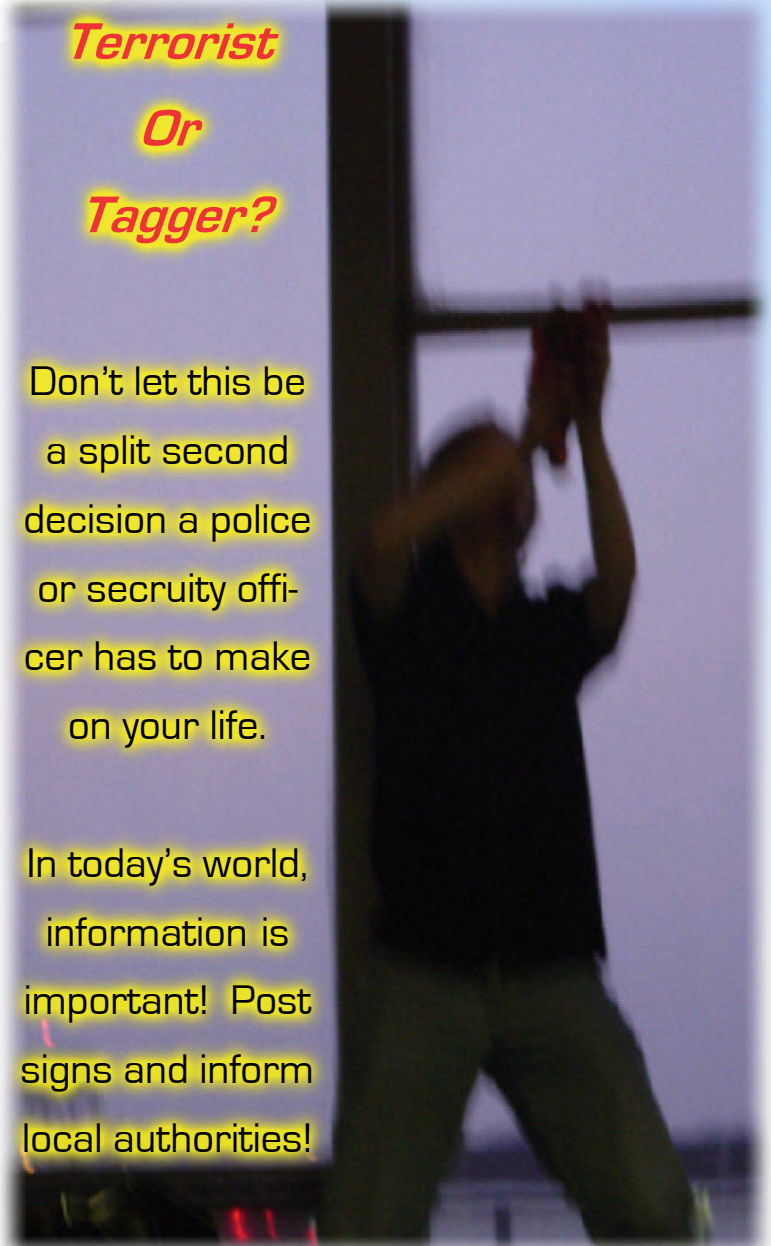
Another major concern put forth by those against allowing laser tag to be a widely accepted form of entertainment is the recent growing awareness of the health and safety hazards inherent in the use of lasers. While in most cases

Terrorist Or Tagger?

Don't let this be a split second decision a police or security officer has to make on your life.

In today's world, information is important! Post signs and inform local authorities!

this is simply an erroneous assumption, as almost no laser tag gear actually employs lasers, operating instead with a beam of light comparable to that released by a television remote, it can still be a valid concern. Some players enjoy using laser pointers as sights for their taggers, and others even go so far as to exchange the standard infrared emitters of their taggers with special infrared lasers. This poses dangers to other



players, the public at large, and even to the player using the laser. The main health concern in the use of lasers is that they can damage the eyes of anyone unfortunate enough to look into their beams, and that person might not even know it until he exposes himself to the danger multiple times (Falto). In laser tag games this danger is elevated by the fact that many players add telescopic sights to their taggers, which will focus the beam to an even more dangerous level; if viewed directly, the beam could then cause permanent eye damage in a matter of seconds. The danger a laser bestows upon its user is even more serious, however; a player using a laser risks being mistaken for someone with an actual firearm, thus negating all the precautions toy companies now take to ensure their gear is not confused for actual weapons. The only foolproof way to prevent the problems inherent with the use of lasers is a strict policy of zero tolerance. Clubs from all over the United States have already posted rules stating that the use of a laser in their games is a quick ticket to getting banned from their current and future games. If discipline can be maintained among the clubs while

still allowing the players to have fun, then there should be no reason for the players to try to break that rule.

With the proper rules of conduct applied to laser tag, the primary focus of the activity can shift towards more productive ends, such as building an atmosphere of teamwork and camaraderie among the players. Many corporations take advantage of this aspect of the game, but their games are generally held on private land or even within the buildings they own. How, then, can the general public benefit the same way from a game seemingly centered around violence as a means to succeed? The answer is simple: the players are encouraged not to think of what they are doing as violent at all, and in fact some groups have banned the words "shoot" and "kill" from even being spoken during their games. When a player goes into a game without the goal of simply living to the end, he seems to gain a certain awareness that he is a part of the team and is working to ensure everyone succeeds, not just himself. Another way of building a fellowship among the players that clubs often use is to introduce scenario games into their schedule of events. In a scenario game,

the goal has nothing to do with tagging out the members of the other team. Instead, the players are given a goal, such as assembling a device or finding certain hidden objects and safely transporting them off the game field. In games like this some team members aren't even armed, and this forces the team to become more close-knit so that they can quickly and efficiently communicate what needs to be accomplished for an assured victory. The benefit of these games often lasts long after the taggers are put away, too; players are encouraged to get together after games to swap "war stories" and socialize. Some of the players that can be caught hanging out together after a game might even give someone opposed to laser tag cause to reconsider that position.

Those children and adults that need to be dragged away from television and computer games seem to gravitate towards the door when laser tag is mentioned. After a recent game, one player, David Sauls, said that "me and my friends would have been sitting around playing video games if you



Digital Fire Fight is a new player in the outdoor lasertag market. Actually, our system has been in development since early 2002, but it is only now that we have had the opportunity to finally launch it in some capacity. The DFF system is one of several 'digital' outdoor tag systems. The DFF protocol is one that does not currently follow any open 'standards' as such. This is due to the fact that when we began development, there were relatively few data based systems out there on the market. That being the case, our original concept was to be a leader in moving away from the age old and highly primitive WoW protocol, to establish a new data based protocol which others could also follow. However due to the time taken in developing the system, other parties have since led the way in this area. It is therefore our aim in future revisions to have a switchable protocol, so that DFF guns can be used with other existing protocols.

The DFF system currently consists of the core gun and sensor helmet, and some support tools like a hand-held command wand with which the referee can setup and control games with ease out in the field.

The most unique aspect of the DFF system is it's ability to be fully configurable via software. Other systems often require a re-compile to change weapon parameters, but DFF allows you to change your entire gun to behave like any of 12 different pre-defined weapons within seconds, simply at the touch of a button. This gives the user a very high degree of flexibility and helps maintain players' interest and provide longer game-play. Other features of the system include variable damage and two levels of health. In fact, the DFF system was originally modelled on the very popular 'counterstrike' pc game.

WWW.DIGITALFIREFIGHT.COM

weren't holding these games." This is probably because laser tag bears a close resemblance to the video games David and others like him play, but whatever the reason, the results are what matter. In games held by the Nuclear Dawn Lazer Tag Club, many of the players would likely be surfing the web, playing video games, or participating in other non-athletic entertainment if they did not have the opportunity to play in the weekly games. Since most laser tag games range anywhere from three to five hours long, and running is highly encouraged in the games, participants benefit from completing part of their recommended weekly aerobic exercise, which consists of "at least three 20-minute bouts of continuous aerobic ... rhythmic exercise each week" ("Fitness Fundamentals"). Besides the exercise during the events, participation in the after-game parties is a great way for those encased in an increasingly virtual world to interact with each other and develop some new bonds which don't require a computer to maintain. The best moment of a laser tag event might involve seeing two former strangers

laughing and regaling each other with their exploits after the game is over.

In closing, consider all that laser tag has to offer to its players both in the game and in their daily interactions. Though in the past laser tag could be a very dangerous pastime, with proper notice and supervision it can be a rewarding experience for player and spectator alike. Without public acceptance, players will likely still find a way to participate in their hobby, but without the safety net which would protect them if they had a place where it was acceptable to play. Ask yourself which is the better option: letting children play a game you might not like in a safe environment, or denying those same children, who will likely play whether you approve or not, the proper environment to do so?



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So
This was the site
of the first Laser
Tag Arena!

They are
really going to be mad when
they hear that you left the tagger
back in the room!

Now Those Are
BARRIERS!



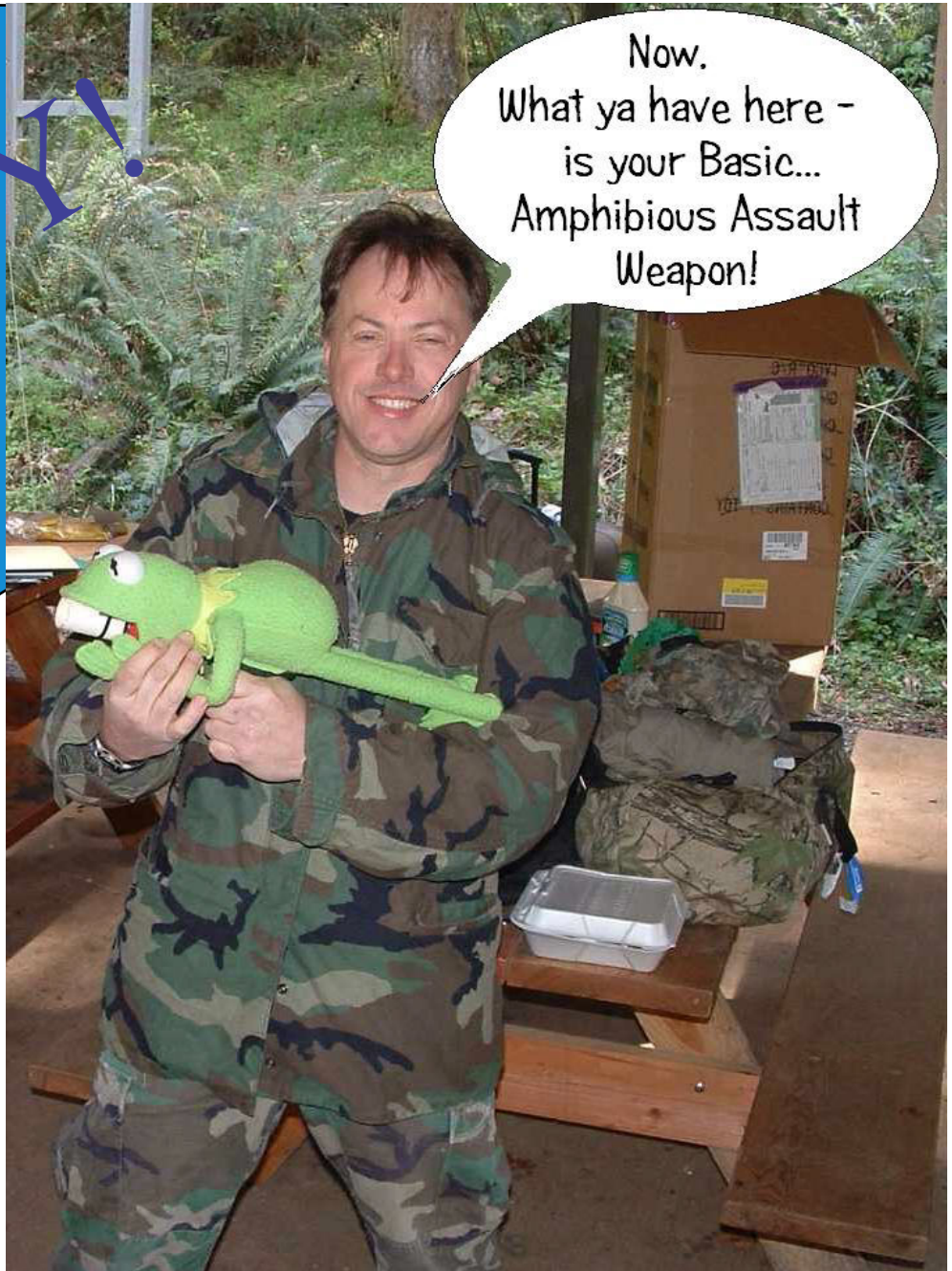
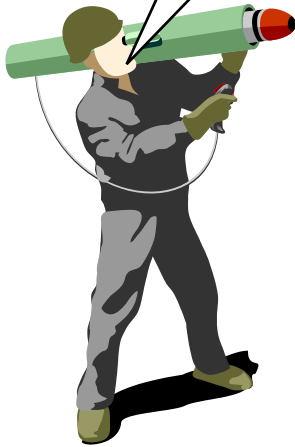
NOW DAT'S...

Your
right! This IS the perfect place
to snipe from! But do you think our
guns have enough range?



FUNNY!

My Gun's Bigger!



Introducing a new comic strip - **Taggers** by: OSSI





Taggin in the U.K.

-The Dropzone Way

Dropzone 2005

A lazertag weekend WRITE UP
BY PETE MORTON

DropZone is the biggest events in the UK lazertag calendar. Taggers from all over the country make the trek each year to socialize, catch up with old friends and play the widest variety of lazertag games imaginable.

In recent years DropZone has had a central theme to the weekend such as the “Alien” films, “Stargate” or Cthulu and such like, with non-themed games interspersed throughout. This year (2005) however it was decided to leave this format behind and go for a selection of games with a less specific link, this being British comics. There were still games that did not fall into this category.

The games fell into very broad game types, with some being more action orientated, some having more of a role-playing element, and some being more light hearted.

Game 1 – “Escape From Lopez Island” by Simon Barker

Friday Night

Traditionally the first game of DropZone is a hectic bullet festival, just to blow the cobwebs away and get people in the mood, and this game certainly did the job.

Set on an island prison colony in the near future, the plot involved trade disputes concerning genetically modified foods and industrial espionage. The European governments had sent a number of spies to the USA to find information on the GM processes, who had of course been caught and detained on Lopez Island for questioning. The Europeans had decided to send a rescue team by helicopter to collect the spies before their plans were exposed...

There were two groups of prisoners on the island, the “Tree Huggers” and the “Criminal Scum”, as well as a team of prison guards, and the European rescue team. I chose to play in the criminal scum team.

There were a variety of careers amongst the prisoners, disgraced pilots, struck off doctors, criminal mechanics etc, that players could choose to play. Thinking back, I should have chosen something a bit more useful than “armed criminal on the left”...

While we were out trying to hunt for food, we happened across a small group of prison guards guarding one of the helicopters that had landed the European team. They ordered us out of the area, but obviously this was our chance to escape the prison, so fairly quickly we decided to deal with the guards and steal the helicopter. We spread out onto two flanks and opened fire. The guards were heavily outnumbered and so we took the area without too many casualties on our side.

We discovered that the chopper was actually damaged, so we got our mechanics to start work while the rest of us spread out to keep anybody else off our discovery.

Then things started to go awry... There were two pilots on our team, and in order to make sure he wasn't left behind, one pilot shot the other point blank. After this, things got



even worse, when the team members inside the chopper noticed that it would only carry about half of our number. When we heard that the chopper was taking off, the team members standing guard ran over, only to be hosed by the players from the chopper doors. By then it was too late to catch them, and we were left behind. Still, that's what you get for playing the team called “Criminal Scum”!

Simon did a very impressive job of building the two helicopters, using garden canes and plastic sheeting, with an electronic control panel in the cockpit for the mechanics to work on. This was a lot of fun to play, but in the end turned out to be quite short at less than an hour.



Game 2 – “The Lost Patrol” by Dai Rees

Saturday Morning

Set against a backdrop of off-world territorial actions, Dai's game concerned the end of a tour of duty of a unit of Earth troops on the planet Altron, a fairly primitive society sitting bang on top of valuable mineral deposits.

The player team was divided up into two sections, both playing as Earth forces.

Having received reports of a local village harboring insurgents, both sections of the player team made their way toward the area in order to clear out any troublemakers. We came under fire from the locals very soon, and had to fight our way to the village. Entering the compound, we saw a group of locals worshipping at a large altar, who then attacked us as soon as they saw us.

As soon as we returned fire, the altar exploded, the blast knocking us all to the ground unconscious. When we awoke, there was no sign of any of the locals we had been fighting, or the altar. The whole area seemed to be deserted, so we dusted ourselves off and resumed our patrol and began to make our way to our extraction point

From time to time we would come under fire from locals, and there seemed to be a third group in unfamiliar uniforms with a few civilians, although they did not attack us. As well as this, our weapons did not seem to be effective against the locals, who would fall when shot at, but then get up and run away.

In between fighting the locals, we found numerous deposits of the mineral iridium, a very valuable metal, which of course we loaded ourselves up with to take home.

While we were searching for our EP marker, we entered a clearing in the forest and found a large monolith... A war memorial. Reading the list of

LASERTAG.ORG.UK

names on the memorial, we were shocked to find that they were our names!

It turned out that the explosion in the village had in fact killed us all, and the second part of the game was set years later, with all of us repeating the same patrol as ghosts, doomed to wander the battlefield searching for our extraction point.

The twist was more or less the whole point of this game, and while a few people did guess before the revelation, I think most were taken by surprise. The game was enjoyable in spite of his though, and the NPC crew ran themselves ragged for our benefit.



Game 3 – “Zombies Ate My Neighbors” by Full Tilt

Saturday Afternoon

Some DropZone games are serious, some not so... This was one of the funniest games in quite some time.



A plague of zombies had descended on Harmer Green – The recently dead rising to attack the living. The Government had authorized a nuclear strike on the area to eliminate the problem, but rescue teams had been sent in to rescue as many uninfected civilians as possible before the missiles hit.

The players were divided into groups of six and sent out to find the civilians, represented in this case by dolls! The players were awarded points for collecting these dolls, with different types of victim being worth different amounts of points. Golden cups were also dotted around the site, which could be exchanged for useful items with the local gypsy man.



Meanwhile the zombies were spaced out across the area and were now wandering in search of fresh meat. If a zombie managed to touch a player that player became infected, and would have to be taken to the gypsy man to be “De-zombiefied”... For a small fee of course!

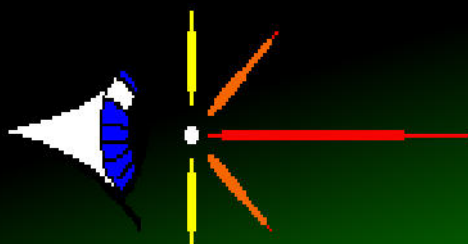
As well as the zombies, there were some other supernatural beasts around as well - a werewolf, which could be distracted by throwing sticks for him to chase, a vampire who could be kept at bay with a crucifix, and some kind of fire creature, which was only vulnerable to a fire extinguisher – all these items were for sale at the gypsy man’s tent.

Also hiding in a small shed were two gentlemen in dungarees, wear-



ing hockey masks and carrying chainsaws and cleavers! Apparently a player found the key for the shed and opened it expecting some kind of treasure inside!

I didn’t play this game, I became a zombie for a few hours and spent the afternoon shambling, moaning and being shot. However I still had a real laugh and the players did too.



Fiat Lux!
(Science Fiction Gaming)

<http://www.fiat-lux.org.uk>

Fiat Lux! is an informal (some would say anarchic) outfit that is almost a club. We don't have a formal membership or club structure, nor do we recruit generally. In fact we don't recruit full-stop. We are just a bunch of friends who all seem to want the same sort of thing from tagging (thought, action, and role-play in about equal measure) and happen to get along pretty well.

The purpose of this club is for its "members" to take part in and run Science Fiction based Live Roleplay games. These games are based around the LaserTag system.

Game 4 – “Skizz II – Old Friends” by Sarah Clark

Saturday Evening

This was the first of the themed games this year, as well as being the sequel to a game played 1994!

“Skizz” was a story published in the early 1980s in 2000 ad, written by Alan Moore and drawn by Jim Baikie. Think “ET” played out in Thatcher’s Britain and you’ve just about got it.

In the story, Skizz was an alien interpreter who was stranded on our planet after a crash landing, and who took refuge with a young girl in Birmingham. Pursued by government forces, she and two friends worked to get him home before they were captured.

In the original game Skizz was being chased by just about everyone – government agents, special forces, reporters eager for a scoop and civilians trying to help. Eventually a cover story concerning escaped animals and the accidental release of an army hallucinogenic chemical was released to explain the strange events away. However, some parts of the crashed spacecraft were recovered and remained in government control.



<http://www.2000adonline.com/?zone=thrill&page=profiles&choice=SKIZZ>

The sequel opened with the disappearance of one of these mechanisms and two of the scientists working on it. After eleven years, they had made virtually no progress at all – nobody even knew what the device was for it seemed.

The local police force were already at the research compound when the game started, but also in the area were the army and territorial army, on joint exercises, and two government agents from the Ministry of Defence’s shadiest branch, MI7, with a new cover story. I played one of these agents.

As well as these there were assorted civilians – some American “Bird Watchers”, and some TV reporters. The TV cameraman had been present for some of the events in the first game, and had come back to the area to try and uncover the truth about the original “Ruffley Incident”...

After making contact with both the army and the TA to ask for help in the search, the MI7 agents found one of the scientists, in between trying to keep the reporters out of the area and spreading a new cover story, this time one about weapons tech stolen from Iraq.

I continued the search, while the other MI7 agent stayed behind at the compound to supervise the investigation. I ended up separated from my party, but I did bump into a fellow who had played a part in the original incident, Cornelius Cardew (based on a character from the 2000ad story). This guy was somewhat child-like, even before spending the last eleven years in a government “hospital”, so he was very suspicious of suits, and nearly fled when I suggested that we return to the compound, but I was able to calm him down and decided to tag along with him because he definitely knew more about events than he was letting on – he continually referred to the alien creature by name and even knew the purpose of the missing technology, a flight recorder of some kind. It turned out that he knew where it was because he had actually hidden it himself!

Things got more complicated when the two reporters turned up. The cameraman was in a real state because he'd recognised the TA's commanding officer from previous events – only before he wasn't in the TA, he was in the SAS...



I decided to stay with this small group because Cardew seemed to be the only person who actually knew what was going on, but then two more civilians arrived who also were present at the first incident... One of them said he had a message from Skizz about needing the flight recorder from his ship, and so we all set off to recover it, with me trying to ignore the constant requests from my chief to answer his radio hails.

It turned out that the flight recorder had become active, and this had prompted the aliens to begin a sterilisation programme in order to prevent cultural contamination... A number of powerful war robots had been sent by the aliens to start work immediately and a huge firefought broke out while I was with the civilians, moving the device to a safer location.

We were able to get information on how to defeat these robots back to the main group by radio however, and so the Earth's forces made up of British Army,

police, SAS and foreign mercenaries prevailed.

Just then I felt a gun at my back – One of the civilians was trying to steal the device. It turned out that he was working for an organisation known as Majestic, who wanted the machine for themselves. I drew my gun, and we ended up in a standoff. Then Cardew also pulled a gun, and things got very messy. My gun was taken off me, but I still had a hidden knife, so I used that. Two stabbings and a brawl later, I had my gun, but the reporter had picked up a weapon during the fight, so the standoff returned. We ended up with both of us pointing a gun at each other's faces, but I fired first, only to be taken down by the last remaining civilian, while the cameraman looked on in confusion. Maybe he got it all on film, who knows?

Unfortunately, time ran out just a few minutes later, after our medic had revived us, so the game ended with the device in a very suspicious group of civilians, reporters, Government officials and Majestic agents.



I really did enjoy this game a lot – The early stages were fun, liasing with police and army forces, as well as getting to order reporters about, give interviews and even threaten them a little bit! Later on, once I'd met up with Mr. Cardew and his associates things really took off, with the revelation that the TA forces were not who they seemed to be and the unmasking of the majestic agent, as well as the discovery of the alien device. Unfortunately I missed the fight against the aliens' robots, but I wouldn't have missed the fight over the flight recorder for anything.

There was more emphasis on role-playing in this game than combat, but that's the beauty of DropZone – you get a good selection of game types. The feeling of intrigue that our little group evoked while piecing together our various bits of information was very effective, and Sarah says there will probably be a second sequel, so we may yet get to see what happens...



Game 5 - "Strontium Dog" by Richard Dicken and James Dawes

Sunday Morning

After the heavy role-playing of the previous night, it was time for another light-hearted game, again based on a 2000ad comic strip.

Strontium Dog was set after a nuclear war had caused widespread mutation amongst Earth's population – almost a whole generation had been born with the most spectacular physical defects after the strontium 90 from the bombs had contaminated the planet's atmosphere, creating a new underclass.

Soon only the worst jobs were open to mutants, and most fell into bounty-hunting – a job no normal human wanted, whilst at the same time hating the mutants for doing it.

Search and Destroy agents... commonly known as Strontium Dogs.

The game opened on the world of Man-trap, a dismal backwater planet that no-one wanted to live on, but no-one seemed able to leave.

A prison shuttle had crashed two weeks previously, and man of the system's worst criminal scum had escaped from the wreckage... Rich pickings for any bounty hunters in the area.



Also present were locals, religious nutters and criminals, all of whom had one agenda or another to carry out.

I chose to play in a criminal gang, desperate to leave the planet. Our plan was to steal the holy artifact from the religious gang and hold it to ransom to raise cash for passage off-world. The game began and almost immediately we came under fire from the religious nuts, the "Church of Bob". After an extended battle taking most of the game and involving most of the player teams, I myself managed to steal the holy artifact – a filthy pair of "Bob's" pants! I escaped to the compound used by the local lawmen to wait for my team, and watch the strontium dogs bring in their bounties.

After setting up a meeting with the religious fanatics, who had by this time split into two groups of heretics, to bargain for the pants' safe return, we ventured out to make the switch, only for them to open fire on us and kill most of our number.

Two team members escaped however, and happened to stumble across the smoking corpses of the real lawmen – the men currently in charge turned out to be escaped criminals themselves, so the last two gang members ran to find the strontium dogs and snitch the two imposters. The game ended with the bogus police officers getting their just desserts at the hands of the bounty hunters.



The taggers playing the mutated bounty hunters worked very hard on their costumes as well, so I think it will be a long time before we see quite such an outlandish player team at DropZone.



This game was loads of fun and all the players seemed to be having a great time. Richard and James had put in a lot of work and it really did pay off – especially the medical system, which had effects such as “You now believe that you are a superhero”, “You think you are a character from eighties television” or “You love everybody”. This was a really nice touch, which took some of the sting out of getting shot.

Sarah Clark's
Lazertag
Pages

UK Lazertag

*A Central Place for
information on events and
clubs in the U.K.*

<http://www.myownlittleworld.org.uk/lasertag>

www.dropzoneonline.org



<http://www.myownlittleworld.org.uk/lasertag/gallery>

Game 6 – “Dan Dare – Echoes Of Tomorrow” by Paul Watson

Sunday Afternoon

More comic based shenanigans in this game, this time from the pages of “Eagle” from the fifties.

Dan’s world was very different to our own. Humanity had united after World War II and, with the founding of Spacefleet focused its attention on the exploration of space. The discovery of life on Venus, however, led to a war between Earth and the Treen race, led by the Mekon, the hyper intelligent but physically atrophied alien leader.

In 2001 an alien race contacted Earth asking for help and Colonel Dare and his team left Earth to help them, only to find that it was all a trick and they were held captive in suspended animation.

Meanwhile the Mekon launched a fresh assault on our world, this time a successful one. His army of robots overwhelmed Earth’s defences and left with no choice but to surrender, humanity was enslaved.

Some Spacefleet personnel escaped and Spacefleet Underground has existed since this time, trying for ten years to find a way to repel the Mekon’s forces and reclaim the Earth.

The game began with the majority of players under the control of the Mekon’s army of Treen and robots, equipped with paralysing foam jets and keeping a close watch for any escape attempts while we worked. From time to time mass breakouts and small group attempts were tried, with only one or two players remaining free for any time.

After a while gunfire was heard near to the clearing where we were working, and our Treen guards began to move into a defensive posture. Suddenly a team of Spacefleet Underground agents swept into the area, guns blazing. The Treen were quickly dealt with and the prisoners released, with orders to find weapons at a nearby ammunition dump. Soon after we were all tooled up and itching to deal out some payback...

The plan was now to carry out an assault on the local Treen garrison and wipe out all their forces in the area. On the way we spotted a group of Treen



escorting a familiar looking prisoner towards their base, so we set an ambush and rescued the prisoner, who turned out to be Dan Dare himself! After a short delay to deal with our wounded we made our way to the Treen base and using some stolen explosives we blew the gate.

The base was of course crawling with Treen and their robots, but as well as this the Mekon himself was there, issuing orders and taunting us all. The firefight was hectic and difficult, but we eventually managed to take control of the base, storming through the yard towards the Mekon.

Confronting the alien leader, Dare found it to be a projection – The dastardly Mekon would escape to plan his counter attack.

The game ended with a rousing speech from Colonel Dare and a ceremony of raising the United Nation flag over the wreckage of the Treen base.

Another very enjoyable game then, with the NPCs playing the Treen forces making a meal of their roles, and Dan Dare being very well played by Liam Thompson.

The opening of the game was well handled, with the players being ordered to move heavy chunks of wood about the place. “Silly string” was used for the guards’ paralysing foam, and after a while most players had been on the receiving end.

Once things had moved away from the prison the action hardly let up, and the journey to the Treen base was a series of well staged firefights. The scrap at the base itself was suitably climactic and Dare’s speech rounded the game off very well.



Game 7 – “Rogue Trooper – Nu Haven” by Simon Gatherer and The Light Brigade

Sunday Evening

The last game this year was again from 2000ad comic. Rogue Trooper was a futuristic war story, set on the world of Nu Earth. Humanity has split into two power bases, the Norts and the Southers, loosely parallel to Eastern Europe and the West respectively.

In the scramble for territory and resources, these two sides have fallen into open warfare across the galaxy.

Nu Earth was one of the first planets discovered to support human life – unfortunately both sides discovered this at the same time, and the war began, and quickly ground to a stalemate.

Since then the use of chemical weapons has turned Nu Earth from a paradise to a poisonous hell. Banks of “chem clouds” swathe the whole planet, instantly suffocating anyone not wearing a cumbersome environment suit and breathing apparatus.

The Southers attempted to tip the balance by developing a genetically engineered soldier, able to breathe the deadly air. Without the need for a heavy suit and mask, these soldiers would be fast and agile – more than a match for the Norts in their heavy equipment.

These were the Genetic Infantrymen.

Another trick was intended to avoid the problems of time-consuming troop training – Each G.I. was implanted with a biochip, which would record their personality at the moment of death. These could be housed in powered slots on the G.I.’s equipment – The rifle, backpack and helmet – and re-implanted in a cloned host body at a later date. In the meantime they would continue to aid their comrades in the field.

On their first combat drop things went badly wrong. A traitor in the

Souther command had tipped off the Nort forces, and they were waiting at the G.I.'s drop zone, a blasted desert of volcanic glass called the Quartz Zone.

There was one survivor of the Quartz Massacre, and with three of his dead comrades, he began his search for the traitor...

The game began with two player teams, Nort and Souther. I played on the Souther team, and we had orders to reinforce a unit attempting to take control of a bridge leading into enemy territory, and then head for a small village on the other side. We had to fight our way to the bridge, and encountered a few enemies and a bunker, which we destroyed. When we arrived we discovered that these guys had all been driven insane after such a long tour of duty. No soldier of either side could get to the bridge without being picked off, and the standoff had gone on and on. The bridge seemed to be the only way through. The area was boxed in with "Bio Wire", a Nort invention – basically a carnivorous plant in the form of barbed wire. It was impossible to cross without it awakening and killing anyone it touched.

While we were trying to find a safe bolthole, a lone figure emerged from the chem clouds – With his blue skin, creepy white eyes and talking equipment, it could only be the Rogue Trooper. He also had business in the town and would allow us to follow him in once he had found a safer route across

the river. First he would have to neutralise the bio wire and so we waited for a short time while he set off to clear the way for us.

Once he returned we set off towards our objective, picking our way across minefields and crawling through the remains of the wire, while the remaining troops at the bridge staged a diversionary attack to cover for us. Finally we were through it all and were in sight of the compound, but something weird was happening inside... Laughter, music and what sounded like a bingo game was going on in there!

With the help of Rogue's technical specialist (now sitting in a slot on his helmet) our science officers were able to pick the locks, and we worked our way into the compound one door at a time.

Once inside we found that the Nort had got in before us, and it looked like a firefight was inevitable, but just as the shooting started, four or five very jolly chaps in white T shirts appeared. They introduced themselves as the Pontinians, a race of supremely powerful beings who lived for pure enjoyment... Unfortunately their idea of pure enjoyment consisted of bingo, karaoke and other "holiday camp" style diversions, so both teams decided to unite and try to escape from their clutches.

The Pontinians turned out to be immune to gunfire, but the device they were using to cross into our reality was destroyed, and the pan-dimensional holiday reps were sent packing back to their own world.

Free of their influence, it was agreed that both sides would return to their own lines and destroy the compound to prevent the Pontinians' return.

As for the Rogue Trooper, his mission was unsuccessful. The officer he wanted to question had already escaped. While we were treating our wounded, he vanished into the chemical mists.

This game was a fitting finale to the weekend. There was a lot of action, and a very bizarre twist, with the Pontinians' antics being funny, but at the same time quite sinister.

The battle of the bridge was a superb set piece, with bunkers in place, and great use of sound effects to convey the chaos of the battle. Although it might have gone on a little too long, it was still very effective. The compound at Harmer Green has been used many times as the

centrepiece for countless games, but The Light Brigade dressed it up very nicely, with interior walls and an inflatable "clean room".

Lastly, the character of the Rogue Trooper was very well played by Dai Rees (who got to take his shirt off again!) with the biochips being simulated by a hidden walkie-talkie.

So this was DropZone 2005 – A great selection of highly enjoyable games and a great social side to the event around the bonfire afterwards. A big "thank you" goes out to all the guys who ran games, helped out, organised the event, and to those who turned up to play as well.

All of this year's games were of a very high standard, and this has been one of the most consistently enjoyable DropZones that I have attended.

Same time next year guys

A Special Thanks to Phil H. and others for the use of the great photos!

<http://neophyl.fotopic.net>



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FragTag News

<http://www.users.bigpond.net.au/fragtag/>

PC Scoring Application

Recently we have completed much of the "FragScore" PC Scoring application that partners our Master Controller (which we call Odin.)

The PC application is used to display and print player scoring and administration information, and connects to Odin via a standard serial port (or USB adaptor.)

It collects and displays the following information for up to 96 players:

- ❖ Hit scores for all 96 players, consisting of the total damage points inflicted on each player (and them onto you.) Total damage points are needed as our system has variable damage.
- ❖ A "Soldiering" value, which is an overall measure of player skill, calculated on the total damage inflicted, accuracy, number of respawns, heals etc.
- ❖ Accuracy
- ❖ Number of shots fired

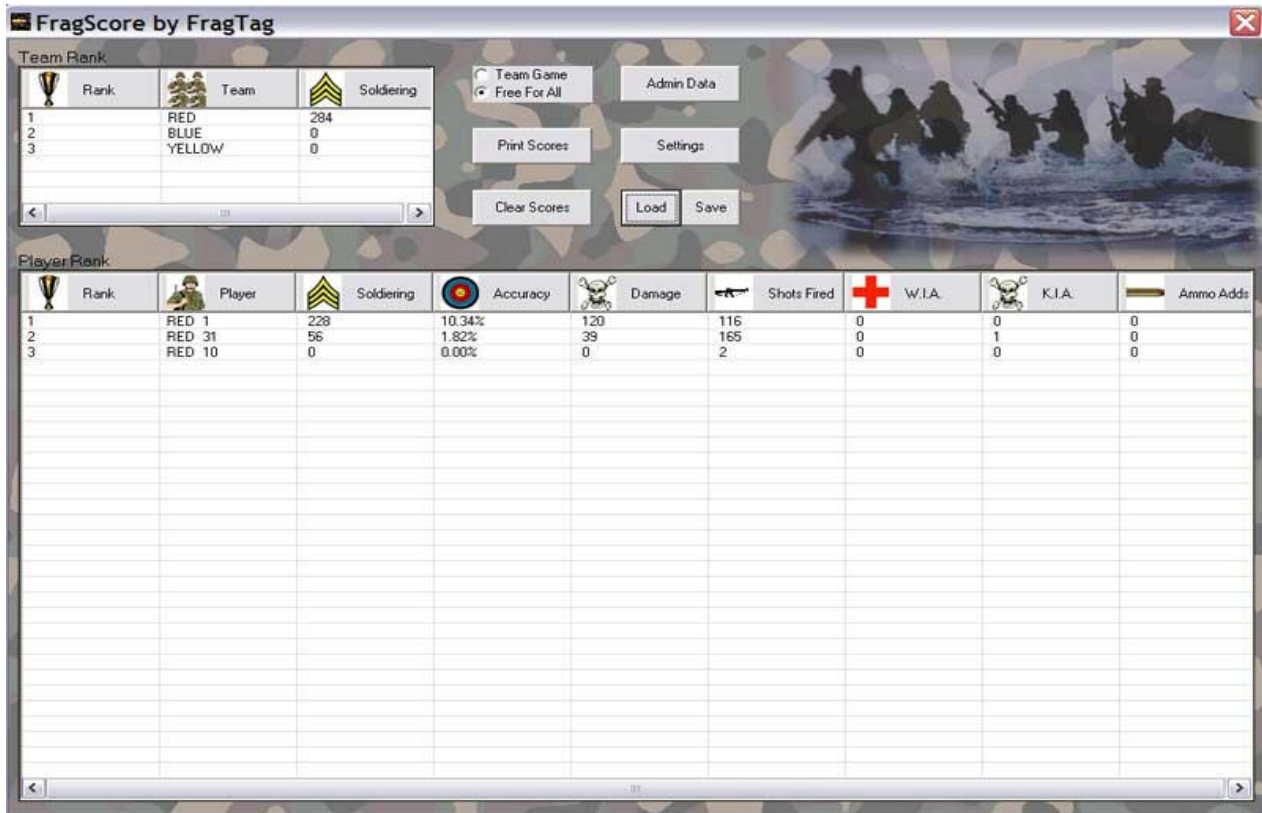
- ❖ Number of times Healing was done (from Medic pack) a.k.a. "Wounded in Action"
- ❖ Number of times Respawnng was done (from Master Controller) a.k.a "Killed in Action"
- ❖ Number of times Ammo was added to the player (from Ammo box)
- ❖ Total elapsed running time of each gun (for auditing purposes)
- ❖ Anti-cheat logging data (number of times the administrative instant kill function was used)

Each player can have a score sheet either printed or saved to a file. The score sheets use a Microsoft Word template, so can be customised to add the field's logo, and data is inserted using bookmarks. In this manner it's not necessary to use special printed paper, plain A4 can be used. Of course if you want fancy logos or large background images then it may be more economical to use pre-printed paper and save on printer ink.

Overall team scores are calculated as well as individual scores, and you have the option of "Free for all" mode (where you are rewarded for hitting any player including you own team) or "Team game" mode (where you are penalised for friendly fire.)

Scores can be saved and loaded to a disk.





Print Options

The FragScore application is included in the purchase price of an Odin Master Controller, making it a very economical method of adding scoring to a field.

Of course our Odin is also able to display ranked player scores in the field, if a PC is unavailable, or for a quick between game preview.

About FragTag:

FragTag is a full-featured commercial level tag system without the usual commercial prices. We are most suited to OEM manufacturers and to DIY hobbyists, as we sell only the electronics and not complete gun casings.

We are backing the MilesTag protocol as the tag protocol of the future. Its is truly free and open, not owned by a company, protected by copyright or enforced by licensing fees.

We are not afraid to publicly document the signals that we send (you can see them here: <http://lightbrain.8m.com/mtformat.htm>) and believe that a truly open protocol is the best way to advance tagging as an International sport.



We also support the standard Wow format as a selectable mode in our gun software, to allow play against existing commercial and hobby gear.

Visit us at:

<http://www.users.bigpond.net.au/fragtag/>



A SIMPLE FORMULA FOR LAZER TAG™ CLUB SUCCESS

By James Sinistrah

GETTING STARTED...

So you've decided you'd like to start a Lazer Tag™ club in your locale... Good for you, but keep in mind there is plenty of work involved in forming and maintaining a club of any sort, and you will not want to keep all the hard work to yourself! Below is a list of steps you should consider taking to help ensure your club makes it off the ground, and stays in the air, even when you aren't available to hold it up.



START WITH THE BASICS:

1. Start with the basics: Equipment, Players, Schedule
 - a. Equipment is definitely key to a club. Have you ever invited anyone over to play a video game, but told them they'd need to buy a copy of the game before they came? Would they even show up? I don't think so. In the same way, you are going to need to get some gear to lend out, at least in the beginning. It's probably a good idea to start out with at least four sets of gear. This will go along with your initial club size, which will usually start small (unless you have a sponsor)
 - b. Players: Can't have a game without someone to play it. Scratch that, can't have a SOCIAL game without other players. As you are starting out, stick to your friends. You already know them, and can easily predict which ones will be

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willing to play Lazer Tag™ in front of other people. Don't worry, as your club grows those who initially were unwilling to play should get into the spirit of things, but that's in the future. Start out with several friends (3 or 4 initial players is fine) who you know will come to a game if you schedule it.

- c. Schedules are the other important thing to a young club. Don't be a schedule-nazi, whatever you do. You need to be flexible to work around other people's appointments, classes and jobs. I find the easiest times for people to make games are weekends, but perhaps your case could be that Wednesday afternoons work best. Make sure to get input on this from all your members, as this will help you determine game times/dates AND will get your core members used to having a say in how games go.
2. Time to assign responsibilities to core players
 - a. This is important as the club will become hard to handle as it grows. One thing to do is to assign someone to letting all the players know the

date and time of future games. This can easily be accomplished by either forming a website for the group, or, even more easily, by starting a Yahoo or MSN Group, both of which offer calendar services with optional email alerts of upcoming events. Another important assignment is getting someone who will agree to familiarize new players with the gear. This can be, as all roles can be, a shifting responsibility, rolling from member to member each week, month, or however you all choose to arrange it. The person assigned this task should realize that they will be expected to sacrifice their status of winning in a game to come to someone's aid if the person seems lost or confused, even if that person is their opponent. Sometimes, depending on the people you have in the club, you may want to simply relegate this person to also be a referee, if they have trouble with the concept of not trying to win no matter what. The referee, as already mentioned, is another role that will sometimes be

necessary, but can also be supplanted if you have a good group of core players. Remember that the whole reason you're running the club is for fun, not to win. If everyone in the core group has that opinion, then you can agree to all be on the lookout for new players trying to cheat. Cheating is a great way to ruin a fun game quickly, so don't go easy on someone who decides to cheat even after you give them a warning, consider kicking them out of the club. LTTO requires players be hosted into the games for a reason, so that if someone who isn't admitted into the game wants to mess it up, they can't. Another role you may consider, if you are sponsored, is to have a treasurer to manage the cash and keep accurate records of spending and inventory. Other roles may be needed on a group to group basis, so if you find something that's left out here, feel free to post it on the LTAG board, as we may not have thought of it yet.

3. Now, for the advertising

- a. OK, you have some friends in your club, they all know what they need to do to keep it afloat, and have probably brought in a few of their own friends, but you want bigger games... What to do? Well, start small and work your way up as follows, and you should see your attendance rise in no time:
 - i. Talk to people! If you met someone new, try to mention your hobby at some point in the conversation. If they sound interested, then move in for the sale with...
 - ii. Business Cards – You can either buy blanks and print your own, or go to most any office supply or graphics shop and have some made to your specifications. Don't make them too complicated, or try to fit every possible thing about your club on them, as simple is much more memorable – It's best to have the Club Name, Web Address, Contact Email or Phone Number, and a simple catchphrase, or your club's slogan, perhaps with a unique graphic in the corner to catch their interest.

- iii. Another method is to post flyers at spots you think you could recruit players from: Internet cafés, Arcades, Paintball arenas, LT arenas (if they let you,) and any other local hangouts are all good ideas. If you have a community college in the area, that can be even better.
 - iv. Next up is to hit the online resources available to you. Look for your community's presence on the web, and see if they have a calendar of events you can post your games to. Check craigslist and see if one of its locations is close enough that a post there would bring in players. You can also search yahoo and msn groups for singles groups in your area, and suggest LT as a neat way to break the ice. Just use your imagination and you'll find plenty of ways to get the word out online.
 - v. OK, so you got some more players, but now you want to start building a reputation, right? The easiest way to start this off is by talking to the editor of your local newspaper, who will likely be interested enough to assign a reporter to interview you. It's up to you how you present your club, but do make sure to give the reporter contact info for anyone looking to join the club!
 - vi. Options beyond this usually end up costing money, but if you're alright with that, you can look into posters, local TV ads and ads in the classifieds.
4. Resolving disputes and keeping your reputation intact
- a. One last thing I'd like to cover here is how to keep your club together once it starts growing. This can be difficult, because you may start having people who dislike each other showing up, and the resulting tension might lead to an uncomfortable situation some players won't wish to return to. Here are a couple simple suggestions to ease that tension quickly:
 - i. If you notice people with bad sparks flying between them, talk to each of them, find out what bothers them. Often simple misunderstandings can be easy to clear up simply by letting both parties see both sides.



ii. If two players aren't fighting, but won't say a word to each other, try to arrange to get them both on the same team, or even the same small group within a team. Don't push this too much, just see if it helps. If not, perhaps their animosity can be released by having them on opposing teams to let off whatever steam they have building up.

iii. Finally, one piece of common sense, If any of your players get into an actual fight, don't hesitate to contact the authorities. If someone ends up hurt, and you didn't, then people will think you were trying to cover something up, and that is never good for any club's reputation, especially a family oriented one like a Lazer Tag™ club



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An interview with a LT Founder...

Article by: David Roman

Have you ever wondered who are the people behind the great laser tag gear available on the market, and how things got started or why gear was done a certain way?

Well, this year we have had the great adventure of getting to hang with the company and designers that did the superb work behind the new Lazer Tag Team Ops™ gear.

The picture (above right) was taken at a very HOT (in more ways than one) Shoot the Moon picnic. Starting on the left is Brian Farley - also known as TagFerret. Brian is well known to most of the Northwest U.S. Tag groups as he frequents many of the message boards as well as most of the U.S. Chat sessions. Brian is responsible for the programming and functionality of the LTTO gun systems. Brian is also the one who was smart enough to get in touch with the existing tagger community to find out what works and what doesn't with their new designs. It is one of the things in our minds that makes the LTTO system



so great - it is being designed by companies that both listen and appreciate the tagger community (and yes that includes Hasbro as well as Shoot the Moon).

Moving along, on the right hand side of the picture is Paul Rago. Paul was there back when Worlds of Wonder created the very first Lazer Tag system way bak in the 80's! That system was so influential that the designs and signal format of that system are still in use today - even in commercial grade gear. When Worlds of Wonder went out of business back in 1990, it was Paul that founded the new company Shoot the Moon! His motivation kept the label Lazer Tag alive.



The crazy looking guy next to Paul is yours truly (had to have proof I was really there- and it wasn't just a great dream!) - but I have absolutely nothing to do with the LTTO gear ...accept tell the rest of the world how great it is!

Then between myself and Brian is the man that is a major driving force of the Lazer Tag line of gear all the way back to the beginning - David Small. David Small is one of the original pioneers of Laser Tag. In reality, without David's guidance and vision and expertise, there would have been no Lazer Tag brand. It was this brand that pretty much coined the term which identifies the hobby / sport we all enjoy so much - "LASER TAG".

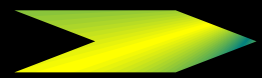
Back in January at a last minutes notice, I was lucky enough to get an interview with David Small. Not really having time to prepare for the interview (as I thought of the idea the night before we left), I posted for questions on my favorite laser tag message board. So, the questions asked in this interview were given to us by posters from the Tactical Action Game Message board (<http://members5.boardhost.com/lazertag>) as a last minute thing.

We were actually in San Francisco to meet some of the members of the Hasbro, LTTO team. Brian took us on a tour of the Shoot the Moon Research and Development area. I could tell you all the cool stuff they have lined up

there...but then I'd have to do a lot of killing so Brian wouldn't kill me.....(big grin). Although unfortunately Paul Rago was not at the office that day, David Small was there, and was gracious enough to give me a few minutes of his precious time – I was very honored. For those of you who do not know, David Small was one of the main founders of Worlds of Wonder. For those who are old enough to remember the DeVry Institute commercials, which featured the makers of World of Wonder's Teddy Ruxpin - David was the individual in that commercial.

Let me express to our readers that normally I do interviews through email. Interviewing someone face to face is a totally new experience for me – lets just say I'm not a professional at this. So, forgive me if the format of this interview is a bit on the odd side of things. We released this interview to our newsgroup readers earlier this year as a special privilege. We are releasing this interview now to the general public as we feel the interview holds some great historical information. Without further ado...the interview:

1SLT: Thanks David for giving us a bit of your time for this interview, these questions that were given to us by people off of various boards (actually, unfortunately I only had time to get the questions off of one board – but hey, I was nervous!) and stuff – it was a quickie thing because I didn't realize I was going to have this opportunity till right before we left.



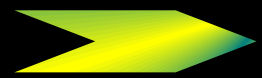
Anyways, umm (to avoid irking all the Speech teachers from my past, I will be editing out the multitude mums from this point on!) – I’m just going to go down through the questions – feel free to answer or not answer them as you want.

1SLT: Do you think that the LTTO would be able to revive the Lazer Tag industry at least back to the point it was in the 80’s where it was really popular?

David: I hope so, making the game of Lazer Tag that popular will come down to good marketing from the company that is doing the product, which is Hasbro right now. With a successful launch year, Hasbro is going to be much more aggressive with PR, advertising and setting up games ect – and that’s really what it takes to get Lazer Tag reinvigorated to the level of success that we achieved in the 80’s. Successful marketing and PR can generate a lot of interest in Lazer Tag, if that Hasbro is successful then groups of players come together, old groups reform and then hopefully people of all ages will start playing the game again. In today’s day and age, with all the other competing activities and products, it is a little more difficult to get people’s attention, therefore it is important to have very good marketing, including internet PR. The way WOW launched Lazer Tag in 1986, was great,

we went around the country and sponsored tournaments at high schools and colleges and that got a lot of people playing with the product. We also had a killer commercial, so if Hasbro does this kind of advertising and PR, they should be able to successfully reinvigorate the “core” tagging community and hopefully create a much larger “core” community. The core tagging community is a rather small part of the over-all market place but Shoot the Moon views it as a very important part. Those hard core guys that play Lazer Tag get some press and PR but most important, these guys are really into the game and they talk to a lot of people about playing the game. It is rare for products to be good enough to generate word of mouth recommendations; hopefully that is what we have with LTTO. Now, from a product point of view, I think that LTTO is the best Lazer Tag product that has been marketed, including the original, which was the gold standard for many years.

Shoot the Moon had the opportunity to develop LTTO without a lot of interference from Hasbro which was a very good thing. The Team at Hasbro felt that we knew what was best and left us alone to get it done. From a product position point of view, we targeted a fairly old audience knowing full well that the primary purchaser are kids 6 to 12 yrs old. Typically marketing wants to design product and play-pattern directly to the anticipated target audience. Their interest is getting the



widest possible penetration of the target audience, STM feels that the best way to get penetration is to design to an older audience of 12 to 18 years. If LTTO is successful at the higher age group then 6 to 12 kids will think the product is even better. That was the same design strategy we used at WOW in '86.

1SLT: Cool, How long do you think it will last, this run of success that is going on right now?

David: Ah, typically a product cycle is 3 to 4 years, hopefully LTTO becomes the next gold standard which should allow it to sell for quite a while at some level.. I don't believe that any other company is going to develop a better consumer grade platform for a long time. When it does happen, hopefully it will be Shoot the Moon again

1SLT: Is this a line you plan on continuing 10 years from now, 20 years from now, supporting newer versions and models?

David: Shoot the Moon is going to support Lazer Tag, forever. We feel as though we created the game, we own the Lazer Tag trademark, and we love to develop new product for the category.

1SLT: In view of the immense success enjoyed by video game companies through out the world, why aren't you building up hype for the product line before it is released like the video game companies do?

David: Well.....we do try, but pre-launch hype is expensive and the retail environment of today does not allow a Toy Company to forecast very large numbers. When we launched in '86 the retailers were really supporting the product so we knew we had a lot of marketing money to spend. Today, retailers buy very conservative with respect to initial purchase. Marketing budgets are based on advertising to sales ratio's, lower initial sales results in a lower Ad and PR budget. So it's a whole different ball game in toys marketing versus video game marketing . For instance if a video game company such as Sony is launching 20 titles, only a few of these titles will get aggressive marketing such as pre-launch hype. Those few titles that are aggressively market are the titles that have already reached tremendous success with a previous release so it is easy to put a lot of marketing dollars behind the past successes. Even in the video game market, not all titles get the same amount of marketing. Now that Lazer Tag has achieved a successful I hope that we see



a whole lot more marketing with pre-release PR for new products within the line.

1SLT: Will there be a story line built up behind the gear like with the original WOW gear?

David: (a big smile and a bit of laughing) I don't know, I would like it...but I don't know.

1SLT: Okay...moving along. Why don't you set up a way to give out teasers of what is in development?

David: The toy industry is extremely secretive. Shoot the Moon has some really cool stuff in development that could be used by competitors to catch up with us from a product point of view. It is possible to get as good a market penetration by shielding the neww product until is ready for release. At WOW we launched Lazer Tag with really cool teasers that played on TV and in movie theaters, the cool part about these teasers was that they contained no information about the product.....no information whatsoever, that was cool. Now that LTTO is launched and successful, you can be sure that other toy companies will try to compete by developing product that is similar or exactly the same as LTTO in order to tap into the LTTO user base. These competitors will copy our signature... reverse engineer the hardware and the software... ah, we are going to be very secretive of the new things that are coming out.

1SLT: That makes very good sense... Next question... Do you have any plans of creating a "module" based gun? In other words, a gun that you can connect various pieces in order to alter its abilities, and has maybe 1-3 slots. Additions could be things like enabling medic mode, ammo transfer, mega tags, firing while shielded, turning off the IFF beacon, etc...?

David: We have some extremely cool products coming up. We gave you a little inside peek into what is being launched in '05. The new products for '06 and '07 are incredible, their capability and their functions are going to exceed the capability to the existing Taggers. At some point we may have re-configurability but for now we are working on new functions. We are trying to be very forward thinking, its going to be very cool stuff.....and you guys are gonna love it!

1SLT: How did the whole Lazer Tag thing get started? Readers would like a history of tag from the guys who made it. The true story behind the rise and fall of wow and what gear did wow plan that never made it. Plus once STM came to be, what other tag ideas did you guys have that we never have seen? And how close did the first tiger LT gear come to killing off STM and Lazer tag in general?

David: I think that this group is asking for a history in our mind of how it all happened, where it went, how it got off track in the middle and how it came back at the



end. So, umm... in the beginning, Lazer Tag was first envisioned by my partner Paul Rago, he is a marketing guy. He came to my office one day and said that he was looking at light beams that were coming through blinds like this (points to Venetian blinds that were on the window in the room), the light was illuminating the dust in the air which appeared as light beams coming through the louver blinds. So he came to me and he said, "I was at home this weekend and I saw sunlight coming through louver blinds and you could see light beams in the air", he then asked if I could duplicate that phenomenon in a toy? I quickly said no way, we can't do that – but, what we can do is to create a light beam that could be detected by something far away. After a little discussion we came up with the concept of Lazer Tag. That's pretty much how it was originally conceived. Now, Paul and the marketing department did not give up so easily on the whole visible light beams in air very easily. My team worked for 6 months, trying to make

a light beam, that is visible in broad daylight, going through the air...

1SLT: Yikes....

David:traveling at audio speeds, it was crazy. The marketing department saw one too many Star Wars movies. Anyway we did some really cool development trying to make light beams visible in daylight, for instance one of the first prototypes of Lazer Tag had a water atomizer on the front of the gun. By pulling the trigger atomizer launched water particles into the air directly in front of the gun, at the same time the infrared beam and a green light beam was turned on resulting in a viewable green beam for about 5 feet in front of the gun!

That was very cool but marketing felt that 5 feet was not good enough as the spec was 100 feet, to make matters much worse they really did want to see the beam travel through the air at 50 feet per second like in Star Wars. We made crazy inventions such as light integrating spheres, which is a metallic highly polished hollow sphere with a very bright light source inside of the sphere. The sphere had a very small light exit hole, the theory was that all the light generated inside the sphere would have to escape out of the one hole yielding a collimated light beam of very high intensity. Unfortunately it did not work very good. At times during the development cycle, marketing was going to kill the product if the light beam was not visible. Eventually after a lot of meetings and pre-



sentations marketing relented and we abandoned all the visible light beam aspects of the spec.

There were plenty of other major R&D issues to resolve such as making the IR beam bright enough or the receiver sensitive enough to work outside in bright sunlight. The infrared light source was very weak in comparison to the sun. After a lot of R&D the team determined that the only way to make it work was to automatically bias the photo detectors to compensate for the daylight background noise from the sun. The receiver front end biasing circuit is the real reason why Shoot the Moon gear or the Worlds of Wonder gear has always been superior in performance. Good sunlight rejection is critical to gameplay, our sunlight rejection allows for the tag range in sunlight to be approximately 60% of non-sunlight range. When we started the Lazer Tag project the tag range in sunlight was less than 5 feet and that was the deal breaker, so we fixed that problem.

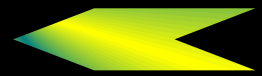
Lazer Tag was introduced with great fanfare through worldclass marketing and the product was every bit as good as the marketing campaign and that is why it was so successful.

During the first life cycle we introduced a lot of cool stuff like the rifle, the StarBase, the helmet and the GI Joe Gun, we had a lot of other products on the drawing board – but Worlds of Wonder ran up so fast and crashed equally as fast that we never re-

ally got to complete some of the other products on the drawing board. Quite frankly, I cannot recall the line list of new products that were cancelled at the end.

The Lazer Tag brand did get off track with the first Tiger gear. Shoot the Moon developed a product for re-introduction that was really good, we shipped it off to Tiger and at the end of the day when it came back from the manufacturer it wasn't very good at all. There were some really serious mistakes, the biggest mistake was that there was no lens in front of the IR LED, and with no lens in front of the LED the product had a beam spread that was far too wide. The firing characteristics were worse than a shotgun, the range was short and the beam angle was 16 degrees, that was just totally unacceptable. By the time we started putting lenses on the product and fixed some of the other software and design issues, Laser Challenge had cornered that market and was huge marketing success. I think the Laser Challenge product at least initially was not very good but they had a one year head start over Tiger and the Lazer Tag brand was viewed by retailers as like the second product coming in to the market and therefore we didn't get very good market penetration.

The beam angle problem due to no focusing lens was distasteful. What happened was that an IR component manufacturer guaranteed a custom Lazer Tag LED with high power and a 5 degree



beam. Initial samples looked very promising so the Tagger was designed and tooled assuming this new part. At production start it became known that the 5 degree led was not going to work and Tiger decided to introduce the product anyway. It was a huge mistake The next year we put lenses on everything and it was a far better product in year two but

1SLT: ...the word was already out...

David: ...yeah...so... I vowed that would never happen again... and this time Shot the Moon kept very tight control over all aspects of gameplay and technology. A couple of minor things still got away. Hasbro design group was so enamored with the lock on feature that they felt the Tagger did not need to have aiming sights. We addressed the problem by designing a simple mechanical aiming sight for the top accessory rail, but it was costed out at the last minute. The HMD headset ended up being very uncomfortable on your head, Shoot the Moon made the first 6 models of HMD headset, needless to say they were great. The last issue is that the handle of the gun is ergonomically wrong. Aside from those 3 errors, LTTO is about 99% a perfect product. It's a really good execution and we are very proud of it. The real driving force behind this iteration of the gameplay is Brian Farley. Brian took all his experience of video gaming and embedded processor design to create this extremely flexible and forward thinking game platform.

So, the second iteration of Lazer Tag got away from us, but Shoot the Moon has re-captured the dominant position with LTTO. Lazer Challenge had its time in the sun but Lazer Tag is back and better than ever. Lazer Challenge started off with a pretty elementary system design but their product got better as they went along... and they did good job quite honestly. I hope that Lazer Tag never takes a back seat to any other consumer tag product ever again.

1SLT: Yeah, the V2 gear was pretty good – but after the V2 gear, they went down hill – I guest because they didn't have you guys to compete with anymore..(laugh)...

David: ...Well, V2 is pretty good but not good enough....

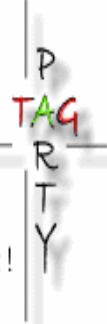
1SLT: I guess that is the end of our questions. Thank you so much for the interview!

David: I really appreciate all the discussion and all the help you guys are giving Brian (known to the tagger community as TagFerret) and all the stuff that is showing up on the internet so hey, a few minutes of my time is well worth it.

Once Again, Thanks for the interview Dave!



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Image submitted by: Peter Rossi

<http://www.tagparty.net>

Although this next article mainly has to do with the U.K., I felt it was relevant to put in this edition. Several good points are brought up in the article on both sides of the argument. As we advance into the future, this argument will become more and more prevalent in societies around the globe. Even locally for myself, realistic Airsoft guns have been banned from all local parks by mandate of the city.

....David Roman



Backlash at curbs to restrict replica guns

Government plans come under fire from airsoft and paintball fans, but anti-firearms campaigners demand a ban

Hugh Muir
Tuesday August 16, 2005
The Guardian

Relatives of people killed or injured by acts of gun crime clashed with sporting enthusiasts yesterday over the government's plans to restrict the manufacture and sale of imitation and replica firearms. Members of the Gun Control Network (GCN), many of whom have personal experience of tragedies caused by the use of illegal weapons, hit out at an international campaign being run by devotees of paintball and the similar but more militaristic airsoft shooting events.

Airsoft guns are plastic and fire 6mm or 8mm pellets. They originated in Japan in the 1980s and are said to be more accurate and to offer greater range than their paintball equivalents. There are thought to be 10,000 regular airsoft players and 70 sites around the UK which host events or "skirmishes".

The airsoft shooters say the government's violent crime reduction bill will effectively kill their hobby because the low-velocity guns, which fire plastic pellets, would be classified as "realistic imi-

tation firearms". Equipment now held would be unaffected but the sport would be unable to obtain new equipment.

Airsoft shooters have begun a campaign to pressure MPs and promote their sport, bolstered by support from enthusiasts in the US, Canada and Japan.

But anti-gun protesters argue that the shooters should be willing to switch to less lifelike weapons in the cause of public safety. They point out that a significant proportion of gun crimes committed in Britain involve imitation and replica weapons.

Steve Walker of GCN said: "We don't want to stop them enjoying their sport. The problem is the weapons they use. If they were brightly coloured and distinguishable from real guns there would be no problem."

Mr Walker, whose sons Alex, 17, and Andrew, 26, were murdered in 2001 by a paranoid psychotic with a reactivated weapon, said emotions are running high.

"We have got abusive emails from the airsoft shooters, paintballers and people who support the owning of firearms for self defence. But our position is clear. If it looks like a gun it should not be allowed."

Gill Marshall-Andrews, GCN's chair, said: "No one needs a realistic imitation gun - except perhaps a re-enactment society. Paintball and airsoft guns do not have to look like the real thing. A green plastic gun would not be affected by the new legislation. If it's not lethal and does not look like a real firearm then there is no problem."

But Frank Bothamley, who runs Free Fire Zone, an airsoft event site in Cambridgeshire, said enthusiasts felt "persecuted". He added: "We are an easy target. We are a minority group. I think this is a tip of the iceberg thing. If they ban this will it be rifles, shot-guns and other things.

"The government wants to stop 15- and 16-year-olds from being on the streets with airsoft guns which they buy from street traders for between £5 and £30. People also carry them as accessories because they look a bit flash. But people who do this as a proper hobby have guns which cost £100 to £600. They look after them."

He said manufacturers aimed to make the guns look real and would be unlikely to stop doing so just for a British market worth less than £10m. "People around the world want guns that look like real guns."

Parts of the US dictate that the guns should have orange bands around the ends to distinguish them from real firearms. "That would be the sensible thing to do," Mr Bothamley said. "The argument is that people would take the band off but if they did and they were caught they should be prosecuted. It is worth remembering that no one has ever been killed with an airsoft gun."

The pastime is straightforward - participants in military clothes hunt and shoot each other. But for the purposes of this debate it has taken on philosophical overtones. Enthusiasts quote Lord Salisbury and his call for a land where "people are allowed, so long as they do not hurt their neighbours, to do as they like".

However, detractors say they must address the practical issues on the street. Figures released this year show decreases in the number of offences involving shotguns, handguns and rifles but increases in those in which imitation guns, deactivated guns and blank firing weapons were used. Offences involving stun guns and paintball guns also increased.

Mr Walker, 62, a former Bedfordshire police officer, remains haunted by the shooting of his sons. "We just want to get guns off the street," he said. "The frightening thing is how many there are."

Special reports
Gun violence in Britain
Crime

Useful links
International Gun Violence Prevention
Gun Control Alliance
British Association for Shooting and Conservation

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DESPITE PLAYING JUST FOR FUN, SINISTRAHD STILL ENJOYED WINNING, TOO. HE WOULD HAVE TO PRACTICE HARDER. BUT FOR NOW...



PIZZA TIME!

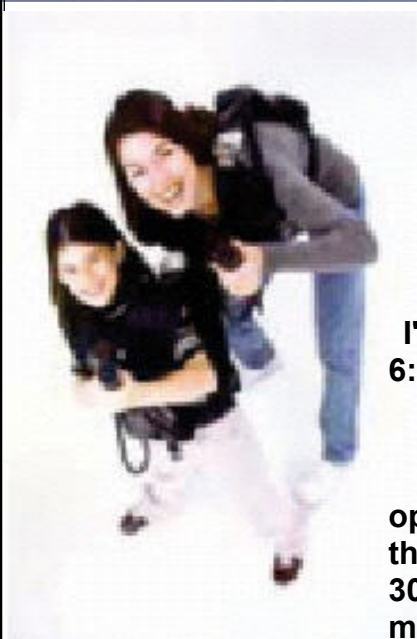
So long, Washington taggers. I had a lot of great games out here! And some great pizza!

to be continued...



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It's 'Gear Up, Game On' With Hasbro's LAZER TAG TEAM OPS

New TAG-MASTER BLASTER Takes the 'Ultimate Game of Electronic Tag' To A Whole New Level

Building on the success of last year's introduction, LAZER TAG toys from Hasbro's Tiger Electronics brand equip kids with advanced, high-tech gear to play an intense, action-packed game of electronic tag. The LAZER TAG TEAM OPS game combines hands-on extreme team play with a high adrenaline video game-like feature to deliver a one-of-a-kind play experience. With special features, such as the unique Heads Up Display and Tagger ID, it's easy to determine the TAG MASTER after every game. And with the new TAG-MASTER BLASTER launcher, kids can unleash "megatags" and level all their opponents at once for the ultimate LAZER TAG experience!

Highlights of Hasbro's 2005 LAZER TAG line, which is recommended for ages 8 and up, include:

(Approximate retail price: \$49.99; Available: Fall)

LAZER TAG is the ULTIMATE GAME OF ELECTRONIC TAG and now it's even better! The new TAG-MASTER BLASTER includes a megatag missile launcher and it is compatible with all other LAZER TAG taggers. The TAG-MASTER BLASTER features an increased range of up to 40 feet and new unique games. In addition, the TAG-MASTER BLASTER comes with a megatag missile launcher that releases megatags upon impact! Step into LAZER TAG - where video game action comes to life!

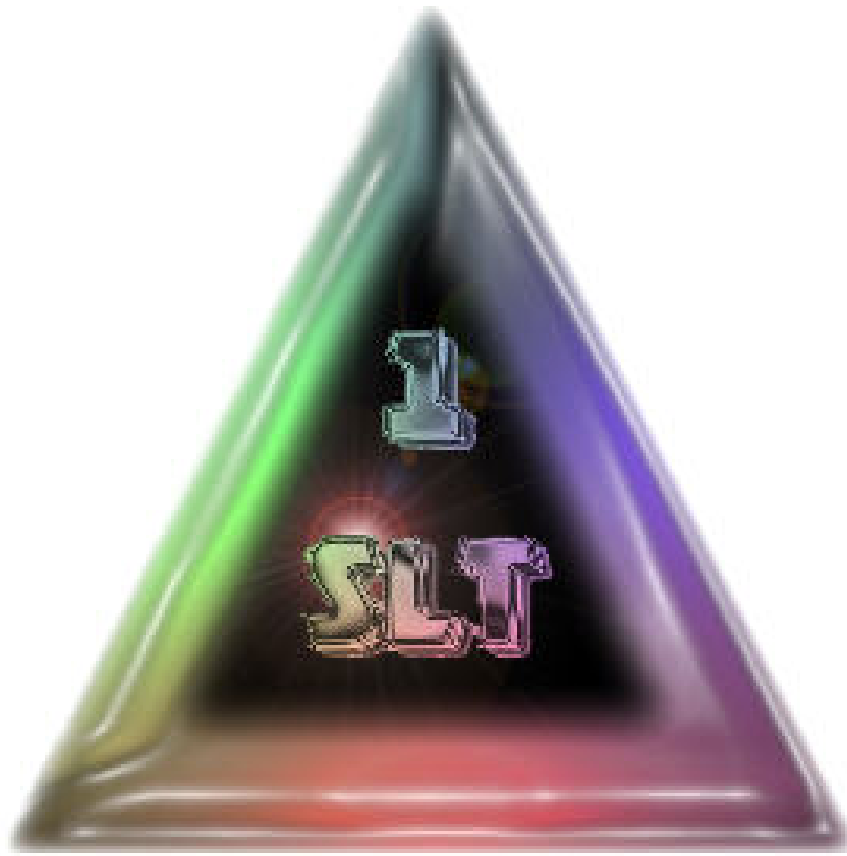
CLUB REVIEWS

Due to the editorial staff of 1! Running short on time - and running smack into a deadline wall and lack of sleep... (Also, it is taking about 8 minutes for this document to do the autosave every 10 minutes because it has gotten so big and my puter is totally out of memory.)

The club reviews on the Tag Master Blaster will be released in a separate Publication!

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