

Shoot 'Em Up

What happens when two western athletes, at the peak of their powers, enter the war-zone of laser tag? Will Peach and Nathaniel Liedl take up the challenge. Who will come out victorious?

Lance Corporal Will:

THE LAST TIME I CAME UP AGAINST Nathaniel "Chet" Liedl in a sporting arena he was a rather mean spirited contender. That time involved dodging balls, at which his tree-trunk-like arms created torpedo-style projectiles causing a very bruised and tender inner groin.

Laser Tag, I hoped, would prove to be a very different sort of challenge. Could my sneaky disposition possibly get me further than my wimpy muscles? Only a trip out to local city war zone, Alta Plaza, would tell.

Pitching up amid a schoolboy outing we took to warming up tag-team style. Handing over VND40,000 each for our 15-minutes of glory, we then scoured the crowds for easy prey. Ten-year-olds Nhan and Trung were plucked from obscurity, a decision heavily weighted by their dwarfish statures.

The English-speaking assistants suit and boot us up, with flashing-light pack-vests and silver handheld shooters. A quick glance at our guns reveals our in-game names, red team: 'Reaver' and 'Talon'. And then we're off, slowly entering into the darkness of the arena.

After a quick sort around our surroundings, the urban themed landscape proves very difficult for two tall white boys

to move about. Chet crashes headfirst into a wall; an event he puts down to darkness, but what I truly suspect is fear. Nevertheless, we both amble up a few ramps to get to the arena's second-tier where we camp out Enemy-At-The-Gates style.

◦ Let the Game Begin

Loud hip-hop music hits and an announcement is made in English that the game is commencing. 'Reaver' and 'Talon' wait in anticipation for their little blue vested enemies to emerge from the woodwork. The first few minutes go quietly, but I start spraying laser like there's no tomorrow. A quick bullet-in-the-back of Chet and I realise that the game is discounting any example of friendly fire.

Soon 'Xyon' from the blue team comes dashing out of his hiding place and gets me in his sights. With little time to aim back, I make a dive under a stairwell. Too late, I got zapped and I'm temporarily out of the game. Five-seconds later and my pack recharges, bursting back to life and sending me on a hellish revenge drive. I creep up behind 'Xyon' and pop him in the back of the head; "one-one," I mutter to myself and slink off into the shadows.

Much of our warmer game plays out in the same way, but at some point around the

10-minute mark we get the upper hand. It's no surprise at the end of the game to see us out in front, a colossal 6,800 points to 4,400.

Time for the big one. After building a hearty sweat, we mop ourselves down and join the next game. This time we're joined by 17 others and find ourselves on opposing teams. I take blue and the name 'Whitecap'; Chet takes red and the name 'Krieger'.

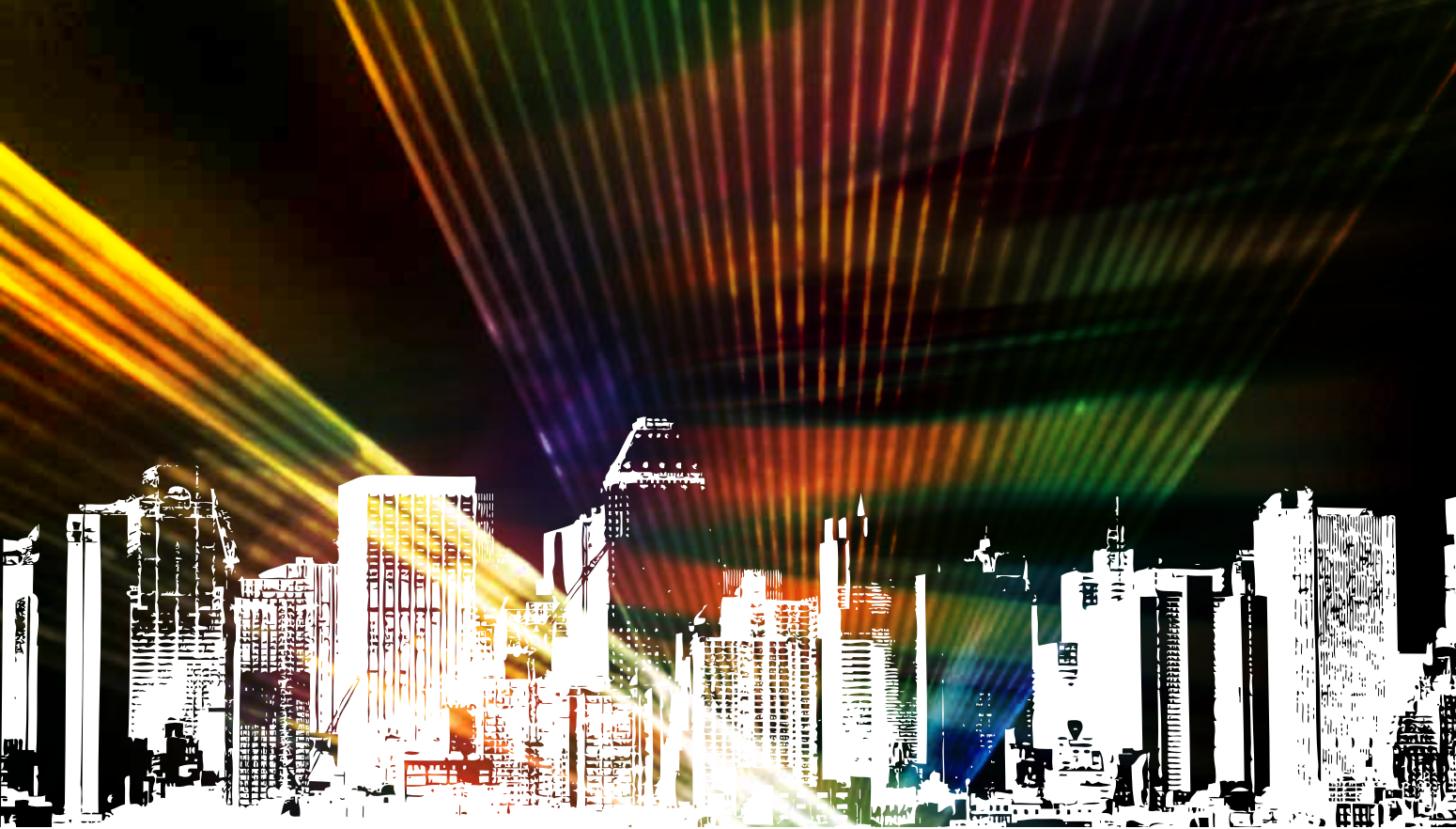
After duking it out with Chet behind a series of walls I fall slowly behind. A few plucky members of my team take to dispensing their jackets to avoid taking hits and camp out in a row on the stairs. Communication is few and far between with these teenagers and they avoid me like a bumbling grandfather attempting to use an iPhone. I'm taking more fire than the French at Dien Bien Phu.

The end of the game comes swiftly, however, and I'm pleased to see we're out in front. A total point haulage of 78,700 easily swamps that of Chet's team of 55,900, and I'm bounding back buoyed by victory.

"While I may not be able to dodge balls, I sure as hell can dodge laser," I tell Chet.

Lance Corporal Chet:

Will doesn't know it, but I'm plotting his death by laser tag as we ride *xe oms* to our



shoot-out. He looks pretty harmless. Is there a cunning killer behind that slender frame and nonchalant demeanor? I'm not taking any chances and envision myself as Arnold Schwarzenegger from "Commando" staked out, free from Will's vision, sniping at him again and again and again...

There are about a hundred boys in school uniforms congregating at Laser Tag. I wouldn't mind making virtual victims out of every last one. Will and I buy our tickets, but we need at least two others. We find the two nearest targets, Nhan and Trung, and invite them to 15 minutes of a world of pain. Will and I join forces for now as the red team and I'm forced to suppress my murderous desires.

We strap on our vests and enter the dark unknown. My vest vibrates immediately as I'm tag-teamed by Nhan and Trung, now morphed into 'Xyon' and 'Paragon'. A minute into battle I run full-speed into a wall in a botched escape attempt. Both my aim and language are poor examples to our younger opponents. And I'm already bathing in sweat. This is not going well.

Gathering my bearings, Will and I ascend to an upper level where we scope out our ten-year-old foes. From our vantage point, we have the upper hand. Amid the blaring hip-hop, A Flock of Seagulls blasts out.

Nothing sends me on a killing spree like crappy 80s music.

◦ Us vs Them

Eventually I muster the courage to venture to the lower tier, hiding behind various walls and picking off our enemies when they emerge. It seems like we're winning. The music fades and a loudspeaker notifies us the game has ended. We've just beat up on two pint-sized kids, but I couldn't be more pleased; a real self-esteem booster.

We decide we'd like a few more targets during the second round of action and sneak our way into a game. I'm now 'Krieger' of the red team. For the next 15 minutes Will will be known as my blue nemesis 'Whitecap'. I begin the game huddled around my red comrades as the blue cowards take to the second level. I feel protected for the first couple minutes as our team clings together.

Our fortification breaks down as the blue team infiltrates the first tier. I get shot by 'Sable' once, twice and again. We're in disarray. There's a blue foe behind every wall and corner. 'Inferno' guns me down and then 'Sable' again. My pack is perpetually vibrating.

I encounter 'Whitecap' for our much anticipated showdown. We duck out from

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behind walls, trading fire. It's hard to tell who comes out on top; players from both sides are swarming every which way, but there seem to be a lot more blues.

I need a safe hiding place, but there are three blue gits on my tail, shooting me every time my gun comes back to life. There's no happy, quiet haven to be found. Damn 'Sable' shoots me yet again. I can't even pinpoint his phantom fire.

The frustrating 15 minutes are up.

"It seemed like there were a lot more blues," I tell 'Whitecap'.

I'm vindicated as the results screen shows a 12 to 7 advantage in favour of blue. No wonder they won. My lone solace is that it's 'Sable' – not 'Whitecap' Peach – who will haunt my Laser Tag horrors.

Laser Tag can be found on the fifth floor of Alta Plaza, 91B2 Phan Van Hai, Tan Binh. Tickets cost VND40,000 a go and a game lasts 15 minutes. 