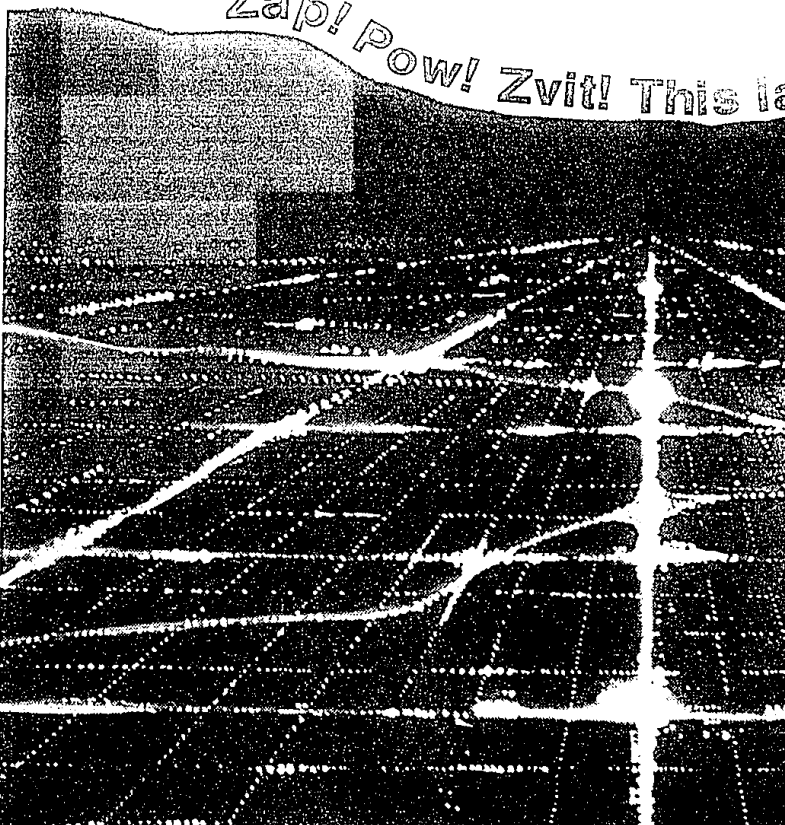


Zap! Pow! Zvit! This laser for hire



A fantasy warrior takes aim with his trusty laser at the Photon center at Universal Mall.

By Neal Haldane
staff writer

"You're in my sights, you reptilian slime."
"Turn around, zap her."
"Drat, I've been disrupted."
No, it's not the dialogue from a bad space flick showing at the local theater.
In fact, it's just an imagined conversation at Detroit's newest entertainment offering - Photon.
Photon used to be the Universal Mall Theater south of 12 Mile on the border of Oakland and Macomb counties.
Now instead of watching Luke Skywalker on screen, Photon participants can star in their own version of "Star Wars."
A \$1 million facelift has transformed the theater into a life-size video arcade.
"There's some sporting events in the Detroit area but nothing unusual," said Mark Menezer of West Bloomfield, general manager of the electronic battlefield.
"A big city should have a lot of diversity, and we felt this would bring a good deal of interest."
So Ron Gansberg of Southfield and Thomas Koosis of Bloomfield Hills brought the concept to Michigan after seeing a demonstration of the game in Texas, Menezer said.
Currently, 18 Photon centers are scattered across the United States and Canada with more on the way.

THE GAME is aimed at the 14-35 age group. The average player is 21, he said.
To start the game, players are divided into two teams - the reds vs. the greens.
Each player then straps on 14 points of equipment that includes a battery belt, helmet with stop-ophthalmia goggles, and a chest pod that totals individual scoring.
Warriors are then escorted onto a 14-foot by 14-foot arena made "Star Trek's" Scotty greet with em.
Tunnels, cubbyholes, floating helmets, and other weird shaped projectiles dot the two-level landscape that is mostly obscured by artificial fog.
The object of the game is simple - kill more of the other team.
Ten points are racked up for each kill of a competing player. Minus 10 registers for each destruction of a teammate. A team's 300 points are awarded for three successive kills of the enemy's home base.
Different sounds in the helmet indicate how many lives and provide enough background noise to make players forget that Darth Vader was so cranky underneath all that equipment.
SOUND SIMPLE?
It's not. In the movies, the dashing hero makes it look easy as he glides through enemy fire to destroy the evil empire.

In Photon, movies alternate being the 3D after an hour hiatus. The helmet limits vision and cuts off side and rear views. The players shoot over a surprisingly large 14-foot by 14-foot arena. And oh, almost forgot, every time a player is killed, a timer is staged for five seconds. That means both sides are in a fire and you become a space-age standing on 5.
For those who do not wish to run around pursuing space warriors, there is an observation deck. Observers can watch the action, popping in some tokens and taking shots of the warriors, without having any effect on the game in progress.
But the game is not the only thing out of this world.
The price may make some people head over to the nearest video store to rent "The Empire Strikes Back" a better than play it.
First-time players are charged \$10 for a passport and two games. Passport holders then pay \$3.00 for each game. Games last 60 minutes.
But Photon operators are confident of stellar sales.
To encourage play, they plan to form a special league games can square off against each other just like football at South City. Ladies' nights are also in the works.
And for those who think driving to the east side is too far to blast away for a high-tech adventure, a second Photon is planned for the Livonia - Plymouth area by the end of the year.