Gamers now ‘ready for combat’

Irene Tham

It is now open warfare.

A new genre of outdoor games involving laser rifles and pistols has become so popular here that some gamers are calling it a “thumbling break” on their Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 gaming consoles.

Said Mr Adrian Yap, 28, an avid computer gamer: “The act of running around, taking cover and shouting commands to fire at the enemy is adrenaline-rushing and healthier than thumbling in front of the computer.”

Two popular outdoor games are Combat Skirmish and Laser Shootout, organised by home-grown firms Combat Skirmish Singapore and Anergy Fun Engineers respectively.

They are often played in parks like East Coast Park and Bukit Purmei Hilllock Park, and disused buildings in Dempsey Road.

The uneven terrain and natural obstacles allow players to live out different combat scenarios.

Mr Yap, a freelance IT consultant, has played both Combat Skirmish and Laser Shootout over the last three years.

He was drawn to them because their warfare missions were similar to those from computer games like Counter Strike and Quake 2.

The missions range from simple search-and-rescue operations to one which requires the players to capture the enemy’s flag.

Like Mr Yap, Ms Li Pei Shan, 23, is giving up her gaming console to join the fray.

Ms Li, an accountancy student who just graduated from Nanyang Technological University, discovered a better way to have fun with friends through Combat Skirmish.

She stopped playing Counter Strike and World Of Warcraft primarily because of her studies but also because they were turning her into a couch potato.

The popularity of Combat Skirmish and Laser Shootout is evident in higher bookings with organisers.

Mr Joshua Tay, 31, founder of Combat Skirmish Singapore, said he organises 18 sessions a week, up from one a week in late 2005 when the game was introduced here.

Similarly, Anergy Fun Engineers founder Alvin Quah said he organises eight sessions a week, compared with one a week in the game’s inaugural year in 2005.

Even non-gamers have latched on to these outdoor combat games for team building and leadership workshops.

They include companies like Adidas Singapore, Citigroup, General Electric and Microsoft Singapore, and educational institutions like Catholic High School, Singapore Management University and Victoria Junior College.

Last month, Combat Skirmish Singapore upgraded 70 guns with newer technology that includes longer-range infrared beams of up to 200m, compared with 80m before, said Mr Tay.

The longer-range beam allows a sniper to operate more discreetly from farther away.

The equipment has been tested for safety and approved by the Arms and Explosives Branch of the Singapore Police Force.

HOW IT’S PLAYED

Each game, which lasts one to two hours, involves at least 10 players. The cost is about $30 per player.

The laser rifles and pistols are supplied by game organisers Combat Skirmish Singapore (which has 120 rifles) and Anergy Fun Engineers (about 50 weapons).

When the trigger is pulled, the guns emit an infra-red beam. This is unlike the traditional paintball game – which fires paint pellets that burst when they hit a person, smearing the target with paint.

The guns rely on sensors attached to the players to register a hit. When the sensors of the target detect a laser beam, they send a signal to a computer chip embedded in his or her rifle.

When someone is hit twice, he gets killed. A player has about seven lives on average. When the count is exhausted, the player can return to base to respawn (where the game organiser resets the rifle). Respawning simulates the arrival of support troops.

An LCD screen on the rifle shows how many times the player has been shot, and ammunition levels. Newer guns also display information such as the number of kills and the accuracy of shots, allowing players to pit their skills against one another.

The new rifles can also simulate the firing sounds of 69 weapons, including sub-machine guns and carbines. The older version makes only one type of sound.

Customers can use combat scenes from popular video games like Black Hawk Down or Saving Private Ryan or develop their own missions.

During the game, teamwork and strategy are key. The winning team has the least number of casualties and the most kills.