

FUTURE GAMES

Boardwalk



Greg Pio/Sentinel

One of the highlights of the new 'Supercade' is the hunt 'n' shoot Sector 7 Laser Tag Arena.

Supercade attractions offer a thrill a minute

THE BOARDWALK'S new games hold the promise of action, speed and thrills — and they deliver.

At the heart of the "Supercade" is **Sector 7 Laser Tag**, sort of a paint ball war game without the paint. Instead, you have an Uzi-style gun that shoots pinpoint beams of light. The game pits you and your teammates against another team. You glide through a darkened maze, ducking behind floor-to-ceiling cylinders, hugging walls, and shooting opponents while trying not to get hit. If you ever wondered what it's like to star in a shoot-em-up action movie where the bad guy could be lurking around the corner, this is your game.

"It's very exciting," said Steve Grimaud of San Jose, who has played both paint ball and laser tag. After his round at Thursday's open house, he declared laser tag hands down the winner. Several people who played agreed on one thing: you could play over and over and never get tired of it.

Cost: \$4, \$3 for replays and \$3 with an all-day wristband.

Galaxian³ Theater launches you and five teammates into space where you battle enemy ships trying to destroy Earth. This is a lot like a video game, with one big difference: The screen is 15 feet wide and the 3-D effects put you right into the action.

The sound is a bit muffled, so don't bother trying to hear the instructions. Just wait until you can start shooting and then fire away. One tip: Hold the fire buttons down for continuous shooting or



Here's a couple of things to keep in mind when you enter the laser tag arena: keep moving and watch your backside or you'll end up being a beacon for opponents.

Greg Pio/Sentinel

you'll wear your fingers out in no time.
Cost: \$2.

Zone Hunter allows you to take a virtual walk through underground mazes and futuristic street scenes while trying to defeat hordes of enemies. Standing in a circular padded pod, you wear a lightweight headset that puts you in the game. When you move, the scene moves. Use your hand to punch an enemy and you really punch.

"It's awesome. ... like you're actually in it," said Christen Grinley of Santa Cruz of her first virtual reality experience.

Cost: \$5, \$4 with an all-day wristband.

The **Astro Canyon Virtual Coaster** that opened about a month ago simulates a roller coaster ride. The ride has received a thumbs up from the American Coaster Enthusiasts organization.

Cost: \$4, \$3 with an all-day wristband.

A single **Daytona USA Special** driving game has been at the Boardwalk for a year, but the catch now is a linked four-driver unit with video screens so you can watch the other drivers. This is the only Daytona game in California, according to the Boardwalk.

Cost: \$1.

Virtual reality comes to the Boardwalk — but at a cost

By MIKE BLAESSER
Bay Living editor

THE FUTURE is here, and it is a blast.

A red and green hide 'n' shoot laser blast; a fire your guns into space at the speed of light kind of blast.

And an expensive blast.

The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk made the leap into the world of virtual reality this week, introducing five attractions that put you into the action instead of on the outside looking in.

And for the assembled group of special guests — elected officials, PR reps and the media — Thursday's open house was nothing less than (there's no other word) a blast.

"It was awesome," said Reef Wilson of Soquel as he exited Galaxian³ Theater, where he and his teammates had just saved planet Earth from destruction.

"Addicting," said a Sector 7 Laser Tag player as she reviewed her score sheet.

Then again, the price was right. This was an open house where guests played for free.

When you strap on the laser tag vest and unhook the gun that you will be using to zap your opponents, you'll be spending \$4 for a game that lasts about 5 minutes.

When you step into the Zone Hunter circle, you'll be paying \$5 for a game that also lasts about 5 minutes.

The Astro Canyon Virtual Coaster that opened a few weeks ago costs \$4 for a 3½ minute ride.

A family of four could drop \$24 in a little more than 15 minutes playing just laser tag and Galaxian³.

But such is the changing face of the arcade business. Computer graphics, 3-D games and virtual reality experiences are the wave of the future.

"Everyone (in the business) who knows what's happening is doing it," said Ann Parker, director of public relations for the Santa Cruz Seaside Company, which operates the Boardwalk.

As the computer industry improves its products, Parker said, more virtual reality games will be added to amusement centers.

The new attractions come with a price tag of about \$1 million — the Virtual Canyon roller coaster costs \$250,000; the laser tag arena costs \$300,000; Galaxian³, \$200,000; and Daytona USA Special, \$150,000.

The games dictate a higher price to play than standard arcade games, but they offer a more satisfying experience, said Parker. Vir-

— Mike Blaesser

Please see BOARDWALK — D4

Boardwalk

Continued from Page D1

tual reality games are much more complex and offer the players the chance to improve their skills with repeated play.

The games also are not that expensive when compared to some other attractions, she said. The Giant Dipper coaster, for example, costs \$3 for a 2-minute ride, compared to Laser tag's \$4 for 5 minutes. Boardwalk rides have one advantage however, an all-day ticket that gives you unlimited rides on the Giant Dipper and other attractions costs \$17.95. That same all-day ticket will knock a dollar off the cost of virtual reality games, but doesn't give you unlimited play.

"A lot of people will just be novelty players," said Parker. They will try it out once and possibly — or possibly not — come back again.

"There will be others — mainly teens — who will want to become more proficient and will spend more of their disposable income on the games," she said.

The question of who will play and who won't will ultimately come down to how exciting the players find the games, and some of those at Thursday's opening

The ocean moves inland

Sentinel staff report

WHILE THE Boardwalk is moving into virtual reality, Raging Waters in San Jose is picking up reality and moving it over the hill.

The theme park known for its water slides has added a 500,000-gallon simulated ocean pool that produces waves up to three feet high.

Raging Waters also has added Pirate's Cove, an interactive water play structure.

Both attractions are scheduled to open June 16.

The park is located in Cunningham Regional Park. Admission is \$18.95. For hours and directions, call 270-8000.

didn't think the cost would be prohibitive — to a point.

"I'd pay \$2 to do that again," said Wilson after he played Galaxian³, "but I don't know how many times."