

Games people play:

story by Suzanne Lundrigan
and Kourch Chan



I'm crouched in the bushes. My heart has taken up permanent residence on my tongue. Over its insistent tattoo I can hear them whispering, "Where is the chick? I want to get the chick!" I hug the ground praying that my grease paint and camouflage will serve their purpose. I don't want to be shot... I'm certain that it hurts.

Ten yards below me a bush rustles. I see the flash of a hand gun disguised by grease paint. I fumble with the safety on my gun, it clicks in. I aim and I'm rewarded with a cry of pain. Ecstasy. Time to see who I've killed. A giggle escapes me. Forgetting my pursuers, I yell out, "Did I get you?" A disgruntled shape emerges from the bushes waving a yellow arm band. "Oh shit, you're on my team." He shrugs and grins and another round of the Survival Game goes on.

"Where is the chick? I want to get the chick!"

Like thousands before me I've donned camouflage and grease paint and headed out to the bush to play war. It began rather inauspiciously.

Photographer Bruce Gardave and myself drove to a field outside of Fort Saskatchewan and pulled up at a camper truck and three tables laden with the tools of war games. Brian greeted us and started handing out the hardware; one camouflage suit, sort of coveralls — one size fits all, safety goggles, brown and green grease paint, copious amounts of Off and the weapon... a Nelspot 007. Within minutes my mild mannered photographer was transformed into a lean green fighting machine... Peering into a car mirror, I noted that equally disturbing changes had occurred on my persona. Brian seemed mildly amused at our reactions.

...I'm not going into combat with total strangers.

Other cars arrived. Within twenty minutes the rendezvous included twenty persons. Still in street clothes, they seemed innocuous compared to Bruce and myself. However, after they had their turn at the costume table they become as threatening as ourselves. We are ready.

Darren Stannard leads us over to an improvised shooting range where he explains how the gun works as well as outlining the rules of the game.

We are split into teams with armbands denoting team affiliations. Bruce and I end up on the yellow side. God knows I'm not going into combat with total strangers.

The goal of the Survival Game is to capture the enemies' flag. Sounds simple? But the name of the game is survival; players have to survive long enough to achieve the goal. This means avoiding the bullets of your all too accurate opponents.

The game is played in a designated area preferably treed and hilled so that players can hunt, stalk, and hide themselves effectively. The weapon, a Nelspot 007, is a paint pellet gun, originally designed to mark cows, trees, and telephone poles.

...there is a wonderful little rule called the "mercy kill."

The Nelspot 007 is a CO₂ cartridge powered gun which has an effective range of 30 yards. The gun doesn't really hurt the players though I did come away with a couple of bruises. The safety goggles worn by all players eliminate the risk of eye injury. As well, there is little chance of being shot at point blank range as there is a wonderful little rule called the "mercy kill." In cases where your enemy is looming over you, safety unlatched, prepped to end your playing life, you can cry out "mercy" and avoid the sting of a bullet at point blank range. I exercised this rule with amazing dexterity...

When you are shot and the dye bullet has exploded leaving its mark, you are out of that round of the game. The bullets do not always break on impact. This can be pain-

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