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U.S. Army seeks Hollywood theories

Directors, writers asked for their ideas on terrorist scenarios

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HOLLYWOOD (Variety), Oct. 8 — In a reversal of roles, government intelligence specialists have been secretly soliciting terrorist scenarios from top Hollywood filmmakers and writers. An ad hoc working group convened at the University of Southern California at the behest of the U.S. Army. The goal was to brainstorm about possible terrorist targets and schemes in America and to offer solutions to those threats, in light of the aerial assaults on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center.

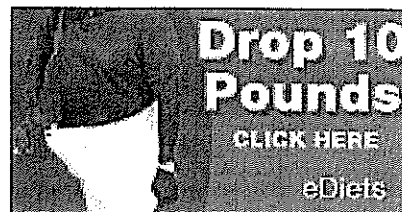
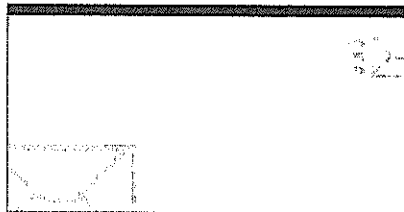
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One USC insider describes the ad hoc group as focused 'on the short-term threats against the country' and says that an army general had been heading the effort.

AMONG THOSE who convened just last week in the working group based at USC's Institute for Creative Technology (ICT) are filmmakers and writers with obvious connections to the terrorist-movie milieu, such as "Die Hard" screenwriter Steven E. De Souza, TV writer David Engelbach ("MacGyver") and director Joseph Zito, who directed the features "Delta Force One," "Missing in Action" and "The Abduction."

But the list also includes more mainstream suspense directors such as David Fincher ("Fight Club"), Spike Jonze ("Being John Malkovich"), Randal Kleiser ("Grease") and Mary Lambert ("The In Crowd"), as well as feature screenwriters Paul De Meo and Danny Bilson ("The Rocketeer").

In August 1999, the Army awarded USC a five-year contract to create the Institute for Creative Technologies with a mandate to enlist the resources and talents of the entertainment industry, videogame-makers and computer scientists to advance the state of "immersive," or virtual reality, training simulation for soldiers.

CREATIVE EXPERTISE

The entertainment industry brings a certain expertise in story and character, as well as visual effects and production know-how to the table.


But one USC insider describes the ad hoc group as focused "on the short-term threats against the country" and said that Army Brig. Gen. Kenneth Bergquist had been heading the effort, which has met twice already via teleconference with the Pentagon.

ICT creative director James Korris confirmed that the filmmaker meetings were ongoing with the Army but declined to elaborate as to what specific recommendations had been made to the Pentagon.

A call to the Army's office of public affairs seeking comment from Gen. Bergquist was not returned.

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