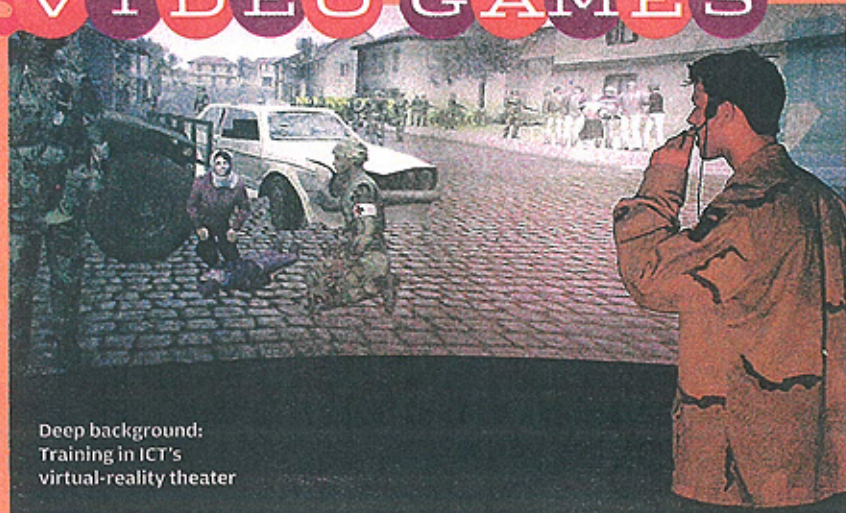


Rolling Stone

AUGUST 19, 2004

The Hot List

VIDEO GAMES



Deep background:
Training in ICT's
virtual-reality theater

The University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies is one of the most unusual, and unusually American, collaborations in the military. As creative director James Korris says, "It's the wackiest think tank in the Army." ICT brings together top Hollywood talent with Pentagon brass. "The basic idea was, 'Why can't the Army be more like Disney?'" says Michael Macedonia, chief technology officer for the Army's Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training and Instrumentation. Working under a \$45 million, five-year contract, ICT is based on three floors of an unassuming building in Marina del Rey, California, in an office designed by the production designer for the *Star Trek* TV shows and movies. (Yes, the doors really open with a swoosh.) ICT attracted an unlikely array of Hollywood talent, from Paul Debevec, who helped devise

the bullet-time effects in *The Matrix*, to David Ayer, the young screenwriter of *The Fast and the Furious* and *Training Day*, to Ron Cobb, who helped design the *Alien* movies after a career as an underground political cartoonist.

"We're trying to create situations that emotionally evoke the problems these military guys have to work through," says Jonathan Gratch, an artificial-intelligence scientist at ICT. The weirdest and most unsettling of these artificial worlds is the Sensory Environments Evaluation project, an immersive virtual-reality tunnel that can re-create unpleasant environments with astonishing verisimilitude. Another project, dubbed FlatWorld, allows users to experience virtual worlds - say a Baghdad street corner under enemy fire - without wearing clunky goggles. "You can create veterans who've never seen combat," says Ayer.

DAVID KUSHNER

