

## CHANCE TO EXPERIENCE HORROR OF GULF WAR

# Virtual war

By EMMA HEAD

**VISITORS to a Nottingham arts festival will get the chance to experience the reality of the Gulf War.**

Desert Rain combines cutting edge technology with an artistic concept as part of the NOW ninety9 festival, which kicks off on Monday.

Visitors will have the chance to go on a mission in a desolate virtual desert environment.

Their direction through the world is controlled by standing on a footplate. If the mission is completed successfully they will hear accounts from people connected with the Gulf War.

The piece, which was commissioned for the festival and cost £120,000 to develop, includes some interaction with the artists.

The concept behind it has been devised by artists Blast Theory, who aimed to show how the boundaries between the real and virtual world became blurred during the Gulf War.

Ju Row Farr, of Blast Theory, said: "It is all to do with how the Gulf War was covered by the media and how we perceived it. It was like a live event. We could watch as the bombs were dropped, yet it was so far away."



The technology was developed by the University of Nottingham's Computer Research Group under its eRENA project.

The project aims to expand the involvement of new forms of performance and art in electronic entertainment, such as virtual reality.

Prof Steve Benford explained how the image of the virtual world is projected on to a water fall instead of a solid screen. The participant wears small headphones instead of a full head set. The aim is to expand the feeling of being in a virtual world so spectators can feel involved.

He said: "When we design computers they are usually for just one person using them — not for a spectator activity."

"With traditional virtual reality I could put on headphones and go somewhere when really I haven't moved. With this other people can see the virtual world too."

The attraction, at Stella House in Beckenham Road, Radford, is open all day from next Monday to Friday.

Tickets, at £6, need to be booked in advance on 0115 952 6611. Free return transport is available from outside the Broadway.

**ON THE WAR PATH:**  
Emma Head tests out Desert Rain

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PICTURE: STEVE THOMPSON

