



■ **RAINSTORM:** Ju Row Farr immersed in the Desert Rain at the Upper Campfield Market on Deansgate

Fun and games — no this is war

BY DON FRAME

THE Gulf War is still being fought out in a corner of a former Manchester market building.

Desert Rain is a mixture of virtual reality and computer gaming and theatre — a blend of the real and unreal where images of Storming Norman Schwarzkopt blur into Schwarzenegger.

Staged by theatre company Blast Theory, it sends competitors on a mission into a virtual world where team members explore motels, deserts and underground bunkers as they each try to identify their chosen target, complete their mission and find the exit.

Images are projected onto a curtain of falling water and team members, who are each zipped into individual cubicles, communicate via head sets and microphones.

Company member Ju Row Farr said: "The blurring between the real and the unreal is taken a stage further when the teams realise at the end targets are real people who were involved in the



■ **WAR VETERANS:** From left, Bernie Snagg, Jack Lloyd and Ian Powell

news reporters or aid workers."

Students Bernie Snagg, Jack Lloyd and Ian Powell found the interactive experience awesome.

Bernie, 22, who is studying Performance, Design and Management at the City College, said: "It's absolutely superb. I was the only one of the team who didn't get my target. I got hopelessly lost in the end, but it was terrific fun."

tion with the screen of water is just brilliant. I've never experienced anything like it before."

Desert Rain, a sophisticated software system developed by Nottingham University, is running at The Upper Campfield Market on Deansgate until Monday

The production, which has been nominated for a BAFTA award for interactive arts, then goes on tour