

FREE

# NEWS

## NORTH-WEST

Thursday, October 5, 2000

editorial@newsnorthwest.co.uk

M

LIFE

### ART

#### desert rain

Today until Mon, Upper Campfield Market, Liverpool Road, Central Manchester, noon to 9pm, £6, £4 conc, booking essential.  
Tel: 200 1500

The Gulf War never happened, claimed French Philosopher Jean Baudrillard.

It was just a virtual event, an experience totally distanced from what we used to call reality.

This view probably brings little comfort to our boys maimed by friendly fire, or indeed to the relatives of Iraqi conscripts and innocent bystanders nixed by surgical strikes.

Performance-artist group Blast Theory are also not too comfortable with Baudrillard's assertion, but believe that as a theory it does point to the way our world is now so filtered through the media that it's very hard to distinguish truth from fiction.

Their latest venture, Desert Rain, part of the inter:face digital festival, uses virtual reality, installation and performance to examine these boundaries by taking visitors on an interactive journey into the war zone. Blast Theory's previous piece, *Kidnap*, stirred up controversy by running a lottery in which



**Frontline: Blast Theory brew up a virtual war for the audience**

the winners had the chance to be kidnapped and observed on the Internet.

With marketing boasting 'state-of-the-art virtual environment technology,' and a format that gives teams of six just 30 minutes to 'complete their mission,' Desert Rain ventures into similarly dubious territory, mixing art, entertainment and a recent enough war for the wounds to still be sore.

Visitors encounter not just the virtual war, but the experiences of some of the soldiers who fought, who relate just how 'real' it felt to them. It aims to give an insight into the thin line between Norman Schwarzkopf and Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Hopefully this didactic purpose rescues it from being swallowed up by the multi-media monster it confronts.

*Martin Vincent*