

An intriguing virtual reality project is taking place in Middlesbrough this month based on the Gulf War.

Robert Meddes finds it's a long way from Tron...

When it comes to philosophical musings, I'm up for a bit of hyper-reality as much as the next man and seeing as the 'Gulf War Didn't Happen' (according to Baudrillard, naturally), my interest was pricked by a new project by Blast Theory, entitled Desert Rain. It's a state-of-the-art virtual reality experience, in which six people are put into

separate cubicles and sent on a mission during the Gulf War. The reality of the Gulf is projected in front of them onto falling curtains of water (a rain screen 4 metres across, which provides a surface of fine water spray that holds the projected image of a virtual world), and they have thirty minutes to collaborate and solve the mission.

It works like this: On arrival, six visitors at a time enter a small antechamber. Each is given a magnetic swipe card of a person they must find. They leave their coats and bags and put on hooded black jackets. The visitors are then lead in total darkness into the next space. Each visitor finds themselves standing on a foot pad. They

begin alone in an American motel room and using the footpad the visitor is able to navigate within the world. In the corner, a television is switched to cable TV. Once outside they find themselves in a compound. By crossing a fence, they move from day to night and enter a desert landscape. Over the next 20 minutes the visitors have to meet

and exchange information to complete the rescue attempt and get out...

Using a combination of virtual reality, installation and performance, Blast

Theory have produced an extremely clever and thought provoking piece of art which examines the many filters that are placed between ourselves and the truth of what actually happens. It's top high-jinx to boot.

Desert Rain is being held at the former Red Star Parcels Office at Middlesbrough Railway Station from May 1st-6th, £5 per person (over 12s only) and group bookings are available. Tickets from Middlesbrough Town Hall Booking Office 01642 358 086.

Desert Rain

