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## Documentation

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# Army, Hollywood plan joint 'virtual reality' institute

by Anton Chaitkin

The United States Army is organizing a center to combine the virtual reality and video game efforts of the entertainment industry with those of the military, according to Michael Zyda, a civilian professor at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. Zyda says that he wrote the Army's plan for the center. The U.S. military will fund the project—so far known only by the tentative name, "The Los Angeles Institute"—while Hollywood and video game companies will provide many of the training and research personnel.

In a June 22 interview, Zyda told *EIR* that the institute will be located at the University of Southern California, with a launch date set for Oct. 1, 1999. He cautioned that the formal contract signing has not yet taken place, suggesting that the contractual parties are nervous about hostile publicity in the wake of the Littleton massacre and similar outrages committed by virtual-reality-zombified youth.

Zyda told *EIR* that the entertainment industry must increasingly produce what he called "dual-use technologies," for both commercial entertainment and the military. The Satanic computerized video game "Doom," to which Littleton shooter Eric Harris was addicted, exemplifies this dual use: Designed by programmer John Romero following his computer-simulation work for Britain's Royal Air Force, and incorporating many years of military development, the "Doom" killer-training game is now used by the U.S. Marine Corps for four-person fire teams. The ID Software company provides samples of the game free to children and others who access the "SATAN.IDSOFTWARE.COM" web site.

Zyda said the Army's decision to create a joint institute with Hollywood arose out of a 1997 conference entitled "Modeling and Simulation: Linking Entertainment and Defense," chaired by Zyda and sponsored by the Department of Defense's Defense Modeling and Simulation Office (DMSO). That conference promoted collaboration ("synergy") between the military and private entertainment enterprises as the wave of the future—in a hellish world of perpetual war, where war is the entertainment.

Zyda confided to *EIR* that the report of the 1997 conference was not appreciated by the DMSO, and that the agency shelved the project. But, he said that the Army Science Board—the influential civilian advisers to the U.S. Army—

was hot for the idea and demanded that the plan go ahead.

A key member of the Army Science Board in this matter is Bran Ferren, a Walt Disney executive in charge of designing virtual reality. Ferren told Zyda that he would supply five Disney people for the Los Angeles Institute, marrying Hollywood and the military.

Hollywood has been good to Ferren, who is executive vice president of Walt Disney Imagineering. He was nominated for an Oscar for the visual effects in the 1987 British-filmed Satanic musical, "Little Shop of Horrors," in which Ferren gave a disgusting man-eating plant the characteristics of an African-American (the monstrous "negro" plant is finally electrocuted to prevent it from breeding). Besides the Army Board, Ferren is also on the Scientific Advisory Board of the National Security Agency, the top-secret U.S. surveillance unit; on the Technical Advisory Group of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence; and a member of the advisory council for the National Reconnaissance Council.

Zyda told *EIR* that the joint Hollywood-military work at the Los Angeles Institute would concentrate on immersion, or how to put people into a virtual environment; how to develop computer-generated characters; and large-network simulation, so that hundreds or thousands of players or soldiers can be online against each other. He said that Germany, Sweden, and other countries have asked for his assistance in creating similar projects overseas.

Zyda expressed considerable anger in response to the work of Lt. Col. Dave Grossman (see book review, p. 29). Zyda said, "Grossman is crazy—he lies all the time." He exclaimed, "To say that 'Doom' is evil is truly despicable!" Zyda said that since the Littleton massacre, he has been pestered by reporters, and they "only want to write . . . that Eric Harris played Doom, and therefore he committed murder."

### 'It's just a parental thing'

In Zyda's view, the blame belongs on the parents, not on "perfectly fine" games like "Doom." He claimed that 100% of the boys at his own son's high school have played "Doom." He said that such games are falsely blamed for problems, just as the youth culture has been blamed since the 1960s: "First they said rock was the road to hell; then Satanic rock was the road to hell; then it was punk rock; now this. It's just a parental thing." Zyda studied neurocybernetics at the University of Massachusetts. He teaches graduate courses in virtual reality programming to Navy officers.

University of Southern California spokesman Bob Calverley was startled about being asked for details on the planned Los Angeles Institute, immediately asking, "Who told you about it?" He repeated several times that "This has not yet been announced!" He said candidly that "the truck has not yet arrived with the money, so to speak," and that he would have to ask administrators for permission to speak about the plan. Clearly, the project could be scuttled if a sufficient public uproar developed, over spending government money to make children into brain-dead murderers.