# Rudy Darken reflects on the impact of Tom Richardson's CHDS thesis, "First Responder: Weapons of Mass Destruction Training Using Massively Multiplayer On–Line Gaming."

By Rudy Darken

In July of 2002, the U.S. Army released version 1.0 of America's Army, a free, downloadable first-person shooter video game intended to be used as a recruitment tool. The game was initially developed by the MOVES Institute at the Naval Postgraduate School, and it featured a commercial-grade game engine and professional art that produced arguably the best federally funded visual simulation experience to date. Around that same time, Chief Tom Richardson of the Seattle Fire Department was a student in the inaugural CHDS cohort (0301). Tom saw the potential of high-end gaming in homeland security and wrote about it in his thesis, "First Responder: Weapons of Mass Destruction Training Using Massively Multiplayer On-line Gaming" (MMOG). Tom wrote about how an on-line game could be developed and used to meet specific training goals that may not be achievable any other way. He showed how such an endeavor is cost-prohibitive for any state to attempt alone, but through DHS and using DHS distribution channels, the return on investment is quite high. He analyzed the nature of the training task and matched it to the capabilities of the technology of the time, finally conducting a rough business case analysis to argue why an MMOG would be a good investment for DHS. He made a great case, so much so that when Paul Stockton (Founding Director of CHDS) and I visited DHS later that year for a brief meeting with Secretary Ridge, this concept was on the agenda. Being a Vietnam veteran with a great appreciation for all varieties of training, Secretary Ridge was intrigued by the idea, and for some years thereafter, CHDS actively pursued novel ways to develop and integrate simulation into its curriculum. Much of this was inspired by Tom Richardson's thesis.

## About the Author

Rudolph Darken is Professor of Computer Science at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. He is a former Director of the Modeling, Virtual Environments, and Simulation (MOVES) Institute. He has served on advisory boards for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the NASA Ames Research Center, the National Science Foundation, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (U.K.) as well as several technology companies. He is an Associate Editor of *Presence Journal* (MIT Press). He received his D.Sc. and M.S. degrees in Computer Science from The George Washington University and his B.S. in Computer Science Engineering from the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is also an Intellectual Property Attorney with JRG Attorneys at Law in Salinas, California and is a member of the California Bar. He may be reached at darken@nps.edu.

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