

Super-human 'soldier of the future' unveiled

12:00 AEST Mon May 25 2009

By Jay Savage, ninemsn

The soldier of the future will be a drug-enhanced, gadget-equipped fighting machine with a powerful "exoskeleton" straight out of science-fiction, according to US defence officials.

In an elaborate vision dubbed "Future Soldier 2030", the Pentagon reveals how it plans to transform its GIs into a combat elite with near super-human abilities.

One of the suit's features is a sensor capable of pinpointing an insurgent in a crowd, allowing the soldier to either track or shoot the person via a helmet-mounted computer screen.



A depiction of how the soldier might look. (US Army)

But despite these impressive powers, the Pentagon prototype seems to be drawing most attention for its peculiar battle suit, a light but sturdy armour which one leading Australian costume designer likens to a Storm Trooper from *Star Wars*.

"I can't imagine people taking this seriously," Melbourne-based designer Rose Chong told ninemsn.

"It would look great at a costume party — we think we could make money out of it."

Ms Chong, who won an AFI Award for costume design in 1990, said she thought the "sexy, tight" look of the trousers would be a hit with partygoers.

The Pentagon developers, however, took pains to explain the sophisticated hardware within the soldier's exoskeleton, which includes sensors to detect if the soldier has become wounded or fatigued, at which point it automatically sends a message back to mission headquarters.

"We're building an F-16 [fighter] on legs," developer Dutch DeGay told the *New York Post*.

"We work hard to be cognizant of what the overall ensemble looks like."

Pentagon officials said many of the technologies already existed in more primitive forms, while others were in the early stages of development.

A big enough budget would be the key to realising many of the prototype's features, they said.

"[The features are] controversial now, but perhaps ubiquitous in 2030," they said.

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