

Developments to Watch

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LIGHTS, HOLOGRAM, ACTION!

GENE RODDENBERRY WOULD be proud. If the *Star Trek* creator were still alive, he would be witnessing one of his futuristic fantasies taking shape at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It's the holodeck, that space on the Starship Enterprise where crew members could go to create virtual worlds and live out their fantasies. Scientists and theater professors at MIT are working with Britain's Royal Shakespeare Company to create a space where, one day, actors may be able to rehearse—or even perform—in virtual environments.

For now, the holodeck stage is really just a concept.



THE TEMPEST: *So far, the actors and sets are still tangible*

Members of MIT's artificial intelligence lab aim to begin by automating production tasks such as lighting. Camera-

equipped computers would track actors on-stage and feed location data to a computerized lighting system, which would raise or lower beams based on the camera's input. Several years down the road, the team might be able to create a vapory forest for *Macbeth*. "You have to have grand fantasies to have research get somewhere," says Howard Shrobe, who heads MIT's AIRE (for agent-based intelligent reactive environments) research group. In the meantime, the troupe is developing video games with MIT that feature the Bard's work. Coming soon: *The Tempest*.

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