



Exoskeletons, Coming Soon!

By Jane Eden

Exoskeletons that will allow soldiers to carry large pay loads of equipment into remote areas may become a reality in the not-so-distant future. A program by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) is hard at work to make the exoskeletons the workhorses of warfare, but cautioned reporters recently that the skeleton is not ready for front line battle at this time.

The goal is to allow a single man to carry up to 200 lbs. of equipment, food or other items necessary to soldiers on the front lines at a speed and endurance that surpasses normal capacity. The gas-powered skeleton won't allow soldiers to jump tall buildings or run effortlessly without tiring. Such fantasies are largely the product of Science Fiction Writer Robert Heinlein. In the real world the much less glamorous job of carrying things around will be far more helpful.

In 2001, DARPA's job was to prove that such a device could be produced and that machine muscle and a portable energy source that worked could be combined. That done, in 2003 the University of California-Berkeley and Sarcos Research Corp were chosen to create the system. Locust USA Inc., of Miami and TIAX LLC, of Cambridge will design and produce the actual power source. While it's too early to tell what all the real-world applications will be, military personnel are watching the program closely. *