



19 August 2005

HOME | NEWS | EXPLORE BY SUBJECT | LAST WORD | SUBSCRIBE | SEARCH | ARCHIVE | RSS | JOBS

MS Premium Content

BREAKING NEWS

LATEST HEADLINES

[Souped-up BCG vaccine destroys TB](#)[Supernova shock wave creates halo effect](#)[Baby comes with brain repair kit for mum](#)[Black holes born through a brutal labour](#)[Next space shuttle mission delayed to March 2006](#)[Virtual world fits on a smartphone](#)[New blood pulls Florida panthers back from brink](#)['Singing' wings help prevent small-plane stalls](#)[ALL LATEST NEWS](#)

PRINT EDITION

Subscribe



- Current issue
- Archive
- MS Premium Content

JOBS

JOB OF THE WEEK

study leader & software modellers

[Scientific Officer](#)
Institute of Cancer Research
Sutton, Surrey, South East, UK[Clinical Scientist - Molecular Genetics](#)
Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children Crumlin
Dublin, Ireland[Scientist Bioinformatics](#)
International Plant Genetic Resources Institute IPGRI
Rome, Italy

SUBSCRIPTIONS



Subscribe

The World's No.1 Science & Technology News Service

Computer characters mugged in virtual crime spree

11:31 18 August 2005
[NewScientist.com news service](#)
Will Knight

A man has been arrested in Japan on suspicion carrying out a virtual mugging spree by using software "bots" to beat up and rob characters in the online computer game Lineage II. The stolen virtual possessions were then exchanged for real cash.

The Chinese exchange student was arrested by police in Kagawa prefecture, southern Japan, the *Mainichi Daily News* reports.

Several players had their characters beaten and robbed of valuable virtual objects, which could have included the Earring of Wisdom or the Shield of Nightmare. The items were then fenced through a Japanese auction website, according to NCsoft, which makes Lineage II. The assailant was a character controlled by a software bot, rather than a human player, making it unbeatable.

Ren Reynolds, a UK-based computer games consultant and an editor of the gaming research site Terra Nova, says the case highlights the problem of bots in virtual worlds.

Arms race

By performing tasks within a game repetitively or very quickly, bots can easily outplay human-controlled characters, giving unscrupulous players an unfair advantage. Many games firms employ countermeasures to detect this bot activity. For example, they can ask the character questions or present them with an unfamiliar situation and monitor their response.

"There's an ongoing war between people who make bots and games companies," he told **New Scientist**. "And making real money out of virtual worlds is getting bigger."

Furthermore, the line between virtual and real cash has already disappeared. The game EverQuest, for example, lets players buy and sell virtual items and characters for real money through an authorised online trading site.

Money breeds crime

Reynolds says the growing number of online game players will only increase the incentive for scammers. "There's nothing exceptional about the virtual world," he says. "Wherever there is that sort of money, there's always crime too."

Bruce Schneier, a renowned computer security expert, adds that the distinction between virtual and real crime is rapidly disappearing. He points to recent reports of crooks trying to hack into games or steal players account information to make cash.

"I regularly say that every form of theft and fraud in the real world will eventually be duplicated in cyberspace," Schneier wrote on his weblog. "Perhaps every method of stealing real money will eventually be used to steal imaginary money, too."

There are also reports that some online scammers are using "sweatshops" in countries such as China and Indonesia in which people monitor teams of bots in order to generate money whilst avoiding bot traps.

Printable version Send to a friend RSS feed XML



► For exclusive news and expert analysis every week [subscribe to New Scientist Print Edition](#)

► For what's in New Scientist magazine this week see [contents](#)

Related Articles

[Counterfeit goods rock virtual world](#)
12 August 2005[Sony sets up online shop for gaming-goodies](#)
30 April 2005[Virtual island sells for \\$26,500 in cyber assets](#)
15 December 2004[Search New Scientist](#)
[Contact us](#)

Web Links

[Lineage II](#)[NCsoft](#)[Terra Nova](#)

Ads by Google

[Play Games Online](#)

Play Now! Most popular games. Play Games, Chat and compete.
[WorldWinner.com](#)

[Online Games from TNT](#)

Play online & find out about TNT's new line of programs like "Wanted".
[www.TNT.tv](#)

SUBSCRIBER LOGIN

username: password:

Log in

- Forgotten your password?
- [Subscribe now](#)
- [Institutional Subscribers](#)
- [Athens login](#)

HAVEN'T WE MET BEFORE?

If we haven't, maybe we should.

Every 15 minutes someone finds a job through New Scientist.

NewScientist Jobs
[www.newscientistjobs.com](#)

4 FREE ISSUES
When you subscribe

NewScientist Jobs
jobs to love

SPONSORED LINKS

[Renew](#)
[Change address](#)



- ▶ [Search](#) all stories
- ▶ [Contact us](#) about this story
- ▶ [Sign up](#) for our free newsletter

**Better than
a meal**



SPONSORED LINKS

[Car Insurance by A Quote](#)
[Van Insurance by A Quote](#)
[Bike Insurance by A Quote](#)

[Home Mortgage Loans](#)
[Movers in Your area](#)
[Find Moving Companies](#)
[Real Estate](#)

[Versicherungen Versicherung](#)
[1stoptravelinsurance.co.uk](#)
[Loans, Personal & Secured](#)

[Contact us](#) about links

Be Seen!

[Subscribe](#) [Contact Us](#) [FAQ / Help](#) [Advertise](#) [Disclaimer](#) [Terms and Conditions](#) [Cookies](#) [Privacy Policy](#)
[Open Source](#) [Site Map](#) [About NewScientist.com](#) [About New Scientist magazine](#)
© Copyright Reed Business Information Ltd.

Home ▾

Our publisher also produces websites covering the following topics:

Commercial Property	Travel & Tourism	UK Agricultural Services	Aerospace	Farming & Agriculture	Film & TV Classifieds	Catering Suppliers Directory	Electronics
Property Information	Holiday Cruises	Chemical Services & Supplies	Computing & IT	Entertainment Search	Hotel Search	Creative Services Directory	Air Transport
Retail jobs	Catering & Hospitality	Construction & Contractors	HR Information	IT Jobs	Catering Jobs - UK	Catering Jobs - Global	Jobs in UK