

Hackers plunder games booty

Karen Dearné
Security

ONLINE role-playing gamers may be risking real theft as cybercrooks stalk virtual worlds plundering characters and powerful weapons for sale to other players. Online poker players are also at risk from two recently discovered Trojans that steal user credentials at some well-known poker sites.

Criminals hope to use the stolen credentials to play against their own accounts, extracting real money from the stolen account by purposely losing games.

Patrick Nolan, a US virus researcher with Fortinet Technology's FortiGuard team, says the latest Trojans suggest hackers are moving beyond phishing.

"The poker Trojan was first spotted mid-May, and we have received several submissions of the file for analysis," he says. "Thankfully, it has had some publicity and none of our customers have been infected by it."

Theft of online games elements, however, highlights an unsettling collision of real and virtual worlds.

In the increasingly popular massive multiplayer online role playing games, weapons, spells and other tools are exchanged for virtual gold coins earned in the game.

Some players, however, are willing to pay real money for particularly powerful items to empower their character.

"There may not be any monetary value other than what someone will pay for the items on an auction website," Nolan says.

"But if you've spent hours and hours developing a character, it's probably comparable to losing a trading card that you value."

Nolan says he's not aware of the activity in Australia although the popularity of such games is on the rise.

