

Computer characters mugged in virtual crime spree

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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.

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