

The Name of the Game

One of the most pervasive software threats on the Internet today is a family of programs that target people who play online games. This malware (MALicious softWARE) is designed to steal the credentials of players. In this context we are talking



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about usernames, passwords and other information that may be used to access online gaming websites. ESET's threat labs have seen an increasing rate of growth in these specific threats. While they rank second for the first half of 2008, the trend is headed upward. In May and June these password-stealing trojans were far and away the most detected threat.

What makes gamers so attractive to crooks? The same thing that makes anyone attractive to a crook: \$,\$\$\$,\$\$\$,\$\$\$\$. Yes, that is dollars — in the billions. In a June 2007 article at techcrunch.com, venture capitalist Susan Wu reported that people were spending over \$1.5 billion each year on virtual goods.

We're not talking about spending virtual money for virtual items, but rather real dollars for virtual items such as swords, shields, cloaks, wizards, warlocks, and virtual gold. There is big money in these sales. Some virtual items can sell for thousands of dollars. There are websites that specialize in these sales. 500 virtual gold coins can be sold for \$15 US dollars. 30,000 virtual gold coins sell for nearly \$800.

If a gamer can be tricked into running a malicious program, then a remote attacker cannot only potentially steal their game credentials, but also commandeer their computer. For a business this can mean unauthorized network access and costly losses of real intellectual property.

As is the case in most areas of security, multiple layers of defense are in order. Policy is one defensive tool. Typically using file sharing programs and online games are not appropriate activities in a work environment. IT administrators can block access to many online gaming sites and file sharing programs. This is another part of what we call "defense in-depth". A good hardware-based firewall is an excellent compliment to personal firewalls that are already included in Windows XP and Windows Vista. Even better personal firewalls are often available in the product offerings of antivirus vendors. A good antivirus product is essential in the hostile world of the Internet.

However one need not be too worried about this recent trend. If you are already taking the required steps to defend against the other 80% of Internet threats, you should handily defeat this threat as well.

If you have questions or comments for "Ask the Expert" email them to askeset@eset.com.



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