

**Avatar advocacy:** A member of the Second Life Liberation Army readies for battle.



## Terrorists in Second Life

Last year, several bombs were detonated outside the retail stores of American Apparel and Reebok. No one knew who was behind the attacks until the perpetrators came forward—the Second Life Liberation Army. The attack, planned and executed inside Second Life, the popular online virtual world, prompted fears that terrorism from the real world was bleeding into the digital world.

In the case of this terrorist attack, the threat turned out to be purely virtual. In the parlance of online gamers, the group consisted of “griefers,” or those who make life difficult for others. This particular outfit wanted Linden Lab, Second Life’s owners, to grant more rights to “avatars,” or virtual characters.

But the danger of terrorist groups’ lurking in the virtual world is not pure imagination. Interpol, the body responsible for international police cooperation, says that it has detected suspicious activity inside massively multiplayer

### For More Online

Watch a Second Life terrorist attack at: [ForeignPolicy.com/extras/secondlife](http://ForeignPolicy.com/extras/secondlife).

online role-playing games. “Online games now have their own foreign exchange, which lets players buy and sell different virtual currencies, just as in the real world,” the agency says. “Criminals will undoubtedly take advantage of this.” One such incident occurred in 2006 when Sony Online Entertainment became concerned with a player in Europe who was moving large amounts of money through one of its online games. The player was found and admitted to laundering funds between the United States and Russia.

Sean Kane, an attorney and an expert on virtual-world legal affairs, says the real threat may not be that violence spills from the real world to the virtual, but rather the other way around. “The more complex a virtual world becomes, the more it could be used for training purposes,” says Kane. For instance, terrorist organizations could rehearse tactics or spread propaganda and messages using the communications channels of virtual worlds. Or they might avail themselves of virtual-world currencies, such as Second Life’s “Linden Dollar.”

Linden Lab and other firms say there is no reason for concern. Michael Wilson, the CEO of Makena Technologies, which owns the 1-million-player strong virtual world

## Expert Sitings

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### [edge.org/archive.html](http://edge.org/archive.html)

Iconoclastic writer-thinker John Brockman started the Edge Foundation in 1988. His bimonthly publication, *Edge*, can be read online or as an e-mail. It features interviews, essays, and commentary by today’s great science and technology thinkers.

### [kk.org/cooltools](http://kk.org/cooltools)

Cool Tools is a blog written by *Wired* cofounder Kevin Kelly and his readers. Its purpose is to provide product reviews of everything—literally—from ordinary items such as Scotch tape, to oddball products like the “BananaBunker,” a carrying case for bananas. The site even reviews how effectively nonprofits are performing in the developing world.

### [allthingsd.com](http://allthingsd.com)

All Things Digital, a site owned by Dow Jones, is one of my most trusted sources for news on technology, the Internet, and the media. It combines journalistic forms—blogs, columns, traditional news stories—to cover topics ranging from digital music taxes to whether your home Wi-Fi network should be open to all.

### [lifehacker.com](http://lifehacker.com)

Lifehacker is a blog that provides readers with useful technology tricks, tips, and downloads. Past posts have helped readers make their Xbox 360 run more quietly by installing a \$25 whisper-quiet fan and provided tips on how best to sell one’s car on the Internet.

There.com, states flatly that “there are no terrorists” in his company’s game. But loose-knit terrorist organizations have continually proven to be adept at finding creative ways to communicate and move funds. That could mean that the next online terrorist attack is more a matter of when, not if. —*Dean Takahashi*

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