

Terrorists practise war by cyber game

By: *Natalie O'Brien*

HOME-GROWN jihadists are rehearsing for terror attacks in virtual worlds such as **Second Life**, sparking concerns the terror cells could soon move into the real world.

The emerging threat has been identified by law-enforcement agencies, which are monitoring the activities of potential terrorists as they use cyber games to improve their skills.

This follows revelations that a fresh crop of jihadis has been groomed to replace the leaders of terror cells arrested or jailed.

International terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna says the use of the virtual world for terrorist training is a new phenomenon that has not been discussed outside intelligence agencies.

Dr Gunaratna, the author of *Inside al-Qa'ida*, said the security agencies were concerned about what the jihadis were plotting in the cyber world. He said they turned to virtual reality after the West broke up many of the training camps in Afghanistan following the US attacks of September 11, 2001.

"They're rehearsing their operations in **Second Life** because they don't have the opportunity to rehearse in the real world," Dr Gunaratna said. Intelligence and law-enforcement agencies in the US and Australia have established their own reality games in an effort to get the same experiences as the virtual terrorists.

The **Second Life** virtual world is an online reality game set up in 2003. People create their own characters, known as Avatars, and live an alternate life, buying goods and real estate and living in a community of more than eight million people from around the world.

Three jihadis are registered in **Second Life**, and two elite jihadi groups. And the game has featured a campaign of terrorist attacks in the past six months by a group known as the **Second Life** Liberation Army.

The head of the Australian High Tech Crime Centre in Canberra, Kevin Zuccato, has warned that terrorists can gain training in games such as **Second Life** and another game known as the World of Warcraft, using weapons similar to those in the real world.

"We need to start thinking about living, working and protecting two worlds and two realities," Mr Zuccato said.

Dr Gunaratna has warned that home-grown terrorists are the biggest

security threat to Australia. As much as 80 per cent of the nation's counter-terrorism resources are dedicated to monitoring and targeting them.

He said sympathisers were being groomed to move up whenever a leader was arrested, in much the same way as occurred in Canada and Europe.

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