

Intelligence agencies survey virtual world

by UPI

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity says virtual reality Internet sites may promote criminal activity and extremism. The intelligence agency said in a recent paper the economic and social mechanisms inherent in Web-based "worlds" such as Second Life open the virtual world to corporate espionage, terrorism or other criminal activity, The Washington Post said Wednesday. "Unfortunately, what started out as a benign environment where people would congregate to share information or explore fantasy worlds is now offering the opportunity for religious/political extremists to recruit, rehearse, transfer money and ultimately engage in information warfare or worse with impunity," the intelligence report read. The Post says virtual worlds may be the next frontier in the battle over the limits of government surveillance. The government also explored how to use Web-based virtual reality sites as a method of cyberwarfare, the newspaper said. Jeff Jonas with IBM said as the technology behind virtual worlds expands to a cross-world platform, criminal elements may find virtual reality more and more attractive due to its anonymity. There are numerous reports of fraud, harassment and other crimes, but one intelligence official told the Post organized crime does not yet have a presence in virtual worlds.

© 2008 United Press International. All Rights Reserved.

Intelligence agencies survey virtual world by UPI