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Naked in the World of Warcraft

Posted on May 1, 2010 by Editor

By IProfess, Zuljin, World of Warcraft

Editor’s note: Another piece from our intermittent and highly unlikely contributor, IProfess, who purports to be a “toon” or Avatar from the on-line game, the World of Warcraft. He promises to answer any queries put to him in the commenting feature below.

IProfess begins:

Well, gentle reader, I take up the mouse to tell a cautionary tale! As many of you know, I am a ‘Toon from the World of Warcraft who has become sentient—I have a number of hypotheses as to how this has occurred, but most are as indemonstrable as is the existence of Ol’ Bliz, the dominant demiurge of my world. But, as interesting as those ruminations undoubtedly would be to you, I write here concerning a more immediate issue: identity theft and hacking.

The World of Warcraft has, over the years, provided a number of surprises for me, most pleasant, some decidedly unpleasant. Recently, however, I scaled the heights of the latter. One evening (An evening by Server Time anyway; I can never keep straight the bewildering varieties of time in what you so quaintly think of as “The Real World” (TRW)... and Daylight Savings Time! Elune Forbid!) I was playing late—or being played late as some Phenomenalists might argue—and suddenly began losing control, jerking about, growing faint, then more defined. I thought, of course, that Ol’ Bliz, in his or her greed, had finally fatally overloaded the realm and we were about to crash, probably once and for all. In fact, I did crash. But this was not an ordinary crash; I could not get back in, nor was there any news in the help sites concerning a server crash.

I decided to try entertaining myself in TRW for a while until things settled down, and somehow survived for almost 12 unbroken hours there. I tried television...words fail even me. As there were no inns available to me to sleep, I went, upon the advice of friends, to the late showing of a film called “Avatar.” A very interesting crowd, some of whom were properly dressed. Pretty enough, but what sort of Avatar cannot be played? It was entirely non-interactive and upon staying to view it again, it was exactly the same! Apparently nobody could play it. I went to the local library after the second showing, but was denied entrance because it was “closed.” Some sort of
system breakdown, I assume. Then I went back to television, advised that it was the best soporific available, and watched the news. You poor souls!

Again, I quickly grew fatigued with the tiresome events of TRW: wars and intrigues, arcane political struggles that would make a Slime regurgitate, all tediously repetitive and accompanied by endless alarums and excursions, all obviously intended to transfer wealth and power as expeditiously as possible to elite beings in different “nations” speaking different languages, but all equally porcine, all bound about with corsets and if male, topped with unbelievably bad hair pieces; if female, ditto the corsets and often the hair pieces, but these were also curiously lacking in affect as so many of their facial muscles have been ironed out by some toxic chemical not available in even the seediest barbershops of Azeroth. Having exhausted the resources of TRW, I tried, but still could not get back into the game world! I was locked out!

I thought it possible that I had failed to transfer sufficient wealth from TRW into Azeroth for my monthly offering to Ol’ Bliz, but this was not the issue. I checked into the Armory, where our images are stored in order that we might compare others’ gear and feats to our own; I was there, but naked! As naked as we can get anyway, stripped to my trunks! So were all of my Alts!

(Here, I know, I must explain the concept of Alt or Alternative ‘Toon. In order to save time running back and forth Ol’ Bliz permits us to create alternative identities to conduct menial chores, banking, going to the Auction House, etc., those tiresome points where the World of Azeroth grows perilously similar to TRW! Anyway, the entire group was embarrassingly reduced in clothing and armor, weapons, everything was gone!)

Finally, comprehension slowly dawned! I had been hacked! My identity, my identity, had been stolen somehow and a miscreant from TRW had one by one pillaged my Alts, my bank accounts, gotten up to who-knows-what sort of mischief, perhaps danced with Gnomes, even dallied with Blood Elves!

As I was locked out, all useful forms of communication were barred to me. I could not consult with guildies, summon a Game Master—the often-helpful representative of Ol’ Bliz—nothing. I was a castaway in TRW! Reduced to analog! Finally I managed to calm down; there simply had to be a way home...

The websites whereby Ol’ Bliz interfaces with TRW gave telephone numbers to call. Although it is true that there are persistent legends in Azeroth which hold that some ‘Toon—always carefully unnamed—once communicated directly with Ol’ Bliz by phone, —some say even before the Outlands were opened up, some put the event in the unchronicled era of Patch 2—I failed repeatedly and disgracefully. ‘Ol Bliz was playing another of his or her cosmic jokes.

Finally, I resorted to Email. Aha! Ol’ Bliz heard me, perhaps because I mentioned my many writings in TRW—in a perfectly unthreatening manner of course, one does not threaten the gods, or not very often, anyway—but for whatever reason, he, she, or it answered!
And in less than 24 hours I could get back in! This was not a simple procedure. I had to change my password, not knowing how much information the hackers had gathered, and fearing an attack on my pitiful funds in TRW—pitiful because this publication will not pay me at all—cancelled my credit card.

However, getting back in less than 24 hours was, according to guildies when discussing the issue later, record time. Some had been stranded in TRW for many days. Others, it was said, had in fact never returned to Azeroth at all, but probably are even now sobbing and twitching in some maximum care facility in TRW for going to an airport and trying to buy a ticket to Azeroth, having tried every other expedient!

But I got “back in” as we say. It was initially a soothing experience. The screams of the suffering in TRW faded away, the pleasant sounds of Azeroth rose around me. But my virtual goods were all gone. I did not have even the funds to fly! My mounts, my pets, everything was gone. One of my Alts had been contemptuously left with two copper pieces, whereupon it was clear that the thief was from TRW. Insult to injury!

When I checked in on one of my Alts, a stout Dwarven Warrior, I found I had been tossed out of my guild, Draco Dormiens. This was bad enough, but then a guildie spotted me coming in and began cursing me in the chat line. My Alt had robbed the guild bank! Then he ran an illegal hack and mined illegally, not only on the surface of the game world, but inside it! Now I was pretty sure that we were dealing with a Republican, perhaps even a banker, making a raid from TRW.

Fortunately, I managed to explain my Alt’s weird behavior and was even asked if I wanted to rejoin the guild but I now had a mission: To learn how and what exactly the level of damage was, and try to prevent it from happening to others…this then is my purpose in writing.

There are many ways to get hacked in Azeroth. A common one is buying gold in-game from one of the many gold sellers constantly spamming the chat line. All of these, of course, are criminally minded, except for Susan from Hong Kong, who truly loves me and only me. These gold sellers will often succeed in transferring malware to one’s computer along with the gold.

Another common error is sharing a machine, which can easily result in sloppy security and a subsequent hack. Falling for any number of phishing schemes, such as sending the noob (inexperienced ‘toon) to a particular website to download a spectacular weapon or pet, usually known as the Phony Pony scam, is also often fatal.

Sometimes posting in a guild web site can open your system up, I understand. But I was guilty of none of these. I have no way of knowing what happened to me. I scanned my system, no problems, no malware, nothing.

However, through sloth and overconfidence (I must spend even less time in TRW, I am picking up the local culture!) I had unwittingly much increased the odds that I might be hacked. Over the
last few months in TRW—we have seasons and seasonal holidays but not actually months in Azeroth, which is a blessing given the uncertainty of how long they are and when they begin and end, now this day, now that—‘Ol Bliz’ minions had been flogging a device called an authenticator to be used on something called Battle.net which serves some largely as yet unannounced purpose. This is held to be a definitive protection against hacking as it generated a random number (key), which had to be input into the login both locally and wirelessly. ‘Ol Bliz then compared its key to yours, and viola, you were back in.

I was aware that guildies were being hacked, but convinced myself that they were all careless; perhaps even Susan had turned on them, but I was confident that I was unique. But what I was really doing was becoming a more and more prominent member of a rapidly shrinking pool of those unwilling to increase their security via the authenticator. As the pool of easy victims shrank, my number got close and closer to "up"!

How they got to me, I do not know. But it may have simply been some sort of brute force attack over time, software which tried ID’s over and over until something clicked, then turned to my password, foolishly only 7 digits, all simple alpha characters. Or perhaps it was more elaborate, some sort of man-in-the-middle scheme wherein the hacker penetrated Bliz’ system and waited for me to waltz blithely in.

One of my alts had also recently reached 80 and accumulated a very nice panoply of gear and weapons, an accumulation of wealth worth real money in TRW, where theft is a way of life for many, indeed for almost all, if you think, as I do, of pillaging resources in TRW on a non-sustainable basis as theft. So I was not only careless, but a prime target.

The interface for washing stolen wealth from Azeroth is, of course, via such otherwise innocent social media as PayPal and EBay. My gear, purchased with hours of labor in Azeroth, became worth currency in TRW—we have one of the largest “real” economies in any world in Azeroth, billions of dollars in TRW, worth more than the economies of many small nations, and even more than some large ones, too.

As shown by the expectation of other ‘Toons that it would take more than 24 hours to recover their account, this was the window of time that the thieves had to act. I use the plural here advisedly.

Once a thief had gained access, groups of confederates raced madly about the server, first stripping my Alts and me, then our bank accounts, then running hacks such as the undersurface mining one mentioned earlier, depositing the illicit wealth into my bank using one of my alts.

Clearly the gang planned that, before they lost control over the account, they would move their goods to another, third party account, during that two or three-day window they had to act. This can be done through the mails of Azeroth, a self-service process since that unfortunate event involving the maddened Orc clerk in the Undercity. Talk about going postal—yet another
unfortunate influence of TRW!

My unexpectedly fast return paid some interesting dividends for me. Some of my accounts still had some good gear, presumably stolen from others in them, and, after ‘Ol Bliz generously restored my own, I was at least even with the thieves.

The thieves had also, however, created multitudinous new alts all over the game world; some in Zul’jin, others scattered across other realms. I am still, as of this writing, chasing them down and, uh... dispatching them, weeks after the events chronicled here. These were probably created to facilitate additional crimes on those servers, but were not used, as all of them I have dealt with so far were standing stupidly in the very spot in which they had been born!

**Conclusion and Excellent Advice:** It is best to listen to the gods on this issue. At the very least they wish to keep us in the game, so that those monthly offerings will keep coming. And like all gods, they are jealous ones, willing to pillage us but loathe to cutting others in on the take. So: in no particular order:

1. Make yourself a difficult target. Put on a real password, as long as Bliz’ login window will take, and make it a nonsensical mix of letters and numbers. If it is a word, or all letters or all numbers, brute force exploits will run much faster, and remember, this is about being a harder target than the other noobs lurching about unaware. Write it down, but not on your computer.
2. You should probably create an email address in a good reputable service to be used only in identifying yourself in the game. If you have a multi-use email, corporate or school, you are too likely to draw attention to yourself even outside the game. There are places in TRW to buy millions of email addresses for very little, which can then easily be the first step in a brute force attack. Just having the last part of your email will make such an attack run faster. Recall the tragic harvard.edu attacks of several years ago, and the numerous gnomes and dwarves tragically stripped of even their trust funds, and the resultant wave of ‘Toonucides. And the rumors of the .gov hack are tragic indeed, and may have so-called national security implications, but this, of course, we will never know.
3. Do not buy gold, seek out Phony Ponies, share your account, download hacks, use addons from unknown sources, log into ‘Toon sites you don’t really know anything about, etc. Go read ‘Ol Bliz’ advice very carefully. Start at: [http://us.blizzard.com/support/article.xml?locale=en_US&articleId=20572&rhtml=y](http://us.blizzard.com/support/article.xml?locale=en_US&articleId=20572&rhtml=y)
4. As a matter of course, occasionally run malware scans on your machine. There are many ways to pick such things up.
5. And, above all, install the authenticator. These come in two flavors, one as an usb stick. I have no experience with this. I use an app on my MePhone, which works quite well, though the entire process is clumsy. Start at [http://eu.blizzard.com/support/article.xml?locale=en_GB&articleId=28152](http://eu.blizzard.com/support/article.xml?locale=en_GB&articleId=28152) for more information.

I assure you, on the basis of my own experience, if there is anything worse than finding yourself
Naked in Azeroth, it is enduring several so-called “days” in TRW while you get everything all straightened out so you can get back in! Don’t take a chance.

Endnotes


[2] To better understand the very interesting distinctions between playing and being played, see note 4 at: http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/2009/01/article.php?id=28

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4 THOUGHTS ON “NAKED IN THE WORLD OF WARCRAFT”

Editor
on May 1, 2010 at 1:40 PM said:

Poster Name: Anonymous
Message: Interesting research. But TRW, as you call it, is just that: real. Scares me to think that society is becoming what a game manufacturer makes of it, and that what appears to be intelligent people are caring more about the color of their equipment than they are TRW. Good equipment may be fun, but nothing compared to my grandmother’s favorite dish that sits on my counter (for real). As a gamer myself, I would not be deviated by the loss of equipment, (have lost levels and equipment, many times, just helping a friend…) It is a game, and as such, please remember that your reading and research might be true for you, and some players, but isn’t true for all. I hope you didn’t hurt anybody in your studies, but I do respect the fact that you actually appear to play. This is from a toon that refuses to put equipment ahead of trw and friends. Please let your readers know, there are still some of us out there!

Editor
on May 1, 2010 at 1:41 PM said:
Poster Name: Toskk, formerly of K
Message: As a former World of Warcraft player and someone who works in tech support, I encountered numerous instances of hacked accounts over the years, occasionally even those compromised inexplicably. As two possible methods for being hacked that you didn’t mention stand out, I thought I would pass those along: The ‘gods’ you spoke of at one time posted that they had found a security vulnerability with Adobe Flash (versions 8-9), one that could allow your Blizzard username and password to be acquired by a spyware-like Flash script designed to grab such information from other visited sites. The gods recommended immediately updating to Adobe Flash version 10. At least once I encountered a hacked account that I could not attribute to any other cause. It’s been a while now since that original discovery, but sometimes I still see computers that haven’t ever updated their Adobe Flash version. The second possibility is that some WoW-related site you have an account on (and use a similar or identical password to your Blizzard one) was hacked or compromised. While the gods of WoW have very good security, not every guild or fan site can say the same, and often these sites have enough information about your Blizzard account to compromise them (for example, you typically give guild sites the same email address you use to log into WoW). Regardless, an authenticator is sound advice. Also, I’m pleased to have spotted this article, as I am very interested in video games and learning.

Kiera Prashad
on January 31, 2014 at 11:51 AM said:

Vous avez mis le doigt sur la tête mon ami! Certaines personnes ne comprennent pas!

Hattie Bohanon
on February 6, 2014 at 1:08 AM said:

Vous savez, il ya tellement de gens là-bas qui vient de maintenir leurs connaissances pour eux-mêmes. Je suis heureux que vous ayez décidé de partager les vôtres. Il y aura des commentateurs amny qui va simplement critiquer, mais vous n’avez pas à vous inquiéter vers eux. Il suffit de garder le partage.