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Northern Ireland

3.15pm

Victims of Troubles condemn Internet game**Owen Bowcott, Ireland correspondent****Wednesday May 16, 2007**[Guardian Unlimited](#)

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An internet game in which players become republican or loyalist paramilitaries has been condemned by victims of terrorism who say it glorifies violence.



[The Hooded Gunman](#), which claims to be the first online game based on Northern Ireland's Troubles encourages those who register to accumulate money through drug dealing, counterfeiting, running prostitution rackets and murdering opponents.

Each round of the game ends with the awarding of a £1,000 prize for the "Top Dog" gunman or a laptop computer.

The designer, Warren Downey, 32, from Newtownabbey near Belfast, has defended the game on the grounds that it is merely "fun", portrays paramilitaries to be criminals and that the online community it attracts will be able to "unite in our differences".

As a game designer, he said, he had come across role-playing sites featuring the Mafia but none that used

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Northern Ireland's paramilitary factions as a theme.

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The welcoming statement on The Hooded Gunman declares: "Get rid of all your frustrations in this online game about Northern Ireland terrorism ... We believe that there should be no further segregation in our society.

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"So please play the game and have some fun, in the knowledge that although this is only a game the troubles were very real indeed. We believe that it is this division and unawareness to our beautiful diversities in our community that caused these troubles."

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But the game has angered some who fear it is exploiting the past. Alan McBride, who is a director of the Healing Through Remembering project, lost his wife and father-in-law in an IRA bomb on the Shankill Road in 1993.

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"It does attempt to glorify [violence] in some senses and it is absolutely appalling," he told BBC Radio Ulster.

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"Given all the good things that have happened recently in Northern Ireland, and we were moving away from that, I think this game is just silly.

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"I work with victims ... helping victims to talk about their experiences, but I can't see at all how this game can attempt to do that in any way. It is much more therapeutic for people to be involved in story-telling projects or other ways of actually dealing with the past."

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In the game, policemen pop up unexpectedly and offer inducements for players to become informers. Mr Downey has insisted that neither officers nor civilians can be attacked in the course of the game.

More than 2,800 people, some from America and Australia, have registered to play. The orange-coloured pages show the Union Jack, the Irish tricolour and what appear to be symbols of the outlawed Ulster Freedom Fighters.

A hooded gunman with a pistol appears above a sign saying "merchandise available". The site, which is not

complete, says it intends to sell clothing, keyrings and accessories.

The opening instructions for the game declare: "Start by making some money by collecting money from your casinos, brothels, loan sharks, gambling dens.

"Go to black market and buy drugs, alcohol to make your guys happy. Also get weapons for your defensive units. When you feel strong and rich enough you can attack other paramilitaries in your range.

"Be careful though, nobody will let you attack them without revenge."

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