Gamers battle for big cash
Ron Harris in San Francisco
The Australian
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WITH total cash prizes of about $US400,000 ($552,000) spread out over eight
tournaments, this year's World Cyber Games championships adds big money to the test of
fast reflexes and superhuman eye-hand coordination. The event, a culmination of national
competitions held around the globe, pits teams of players against each other in first-
person shooters including Counter-Strike: Condition Zero, Unreal Tournament 2004 and
Halo.

In the world of virtual mayhem, these competitors are king.
"My parents didn't like it at all at first, but when I started travelling and making money
out of it, they realised that I'm actually not just wasting my time on this," said gamer
Michael Korduner of Stockholm.

The 20-year-old is among 700 players from 62 countries in the five-day competition,
which ends Sunday.

There's certainly no shortage of cash in the gaming industry today: The business rakes in
$US10 billion annually in the US alone.

The winning team in the five-on-five "Counter Strike" competition gets $US50,000, the
runner-up team half that.

But Hank Jeong, president and CEO of International Cyber Marketing, which is putting
on the competition, said the money takes a back seat to the bragging rights.

Mr Jeong has erected an extravagant cyber city full of gaming machines, PCs and
ethernet cable near City Hall where the competition will play out.

The World Cyber Games began in 2001 and included competitors from 37 countries in its
first year. This year is the first time it has been held outside of Korea, and from now on
organisers plan to hold it at different cities around the world, including Singapore next
year.

In addition to the popular shooting titles, competitors will play Need For Speed:
Underground, a racing game with exotic cars, and FIFA 2004, a fast-paced game of cyber
soccer, played on PCs.

US player Matija Biljeskovic specialises in FIFA 2004, and practices about 30 hours a
week.

"My favourite aspect of FIFA 2004 is to see the way world-class, intelligent players adapt
from one opponent's style of play to another," Mr Biljeskovic said. The Yugoslavian
immigrant said he grew up pooling pocket change with his friends just to rent a Nintendo
machine.

Members of the US national "Halo" championship team said they were eager to exact a
little payback for their early ouster from last year's championship in Seoul.

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