

\$10,000 for the first bot to play like a human

This year will see the first international competition to create a perfect computer game playing bot – a bot that you can't distinguish from a human player.

The **2K Bot Prize Contest** will take place this December, as part of the Symposium on Computational Intelligence and Games, in Perth, Western Australia. Australian game development company 2K Australia (creator of the award-winning BioShock) is providing a sizable prize of \$7,000 cash plus a trip to their Canberra studio for the team that can create a bot to fool a panel of expert judges into thinking it is actually a human player.

A “bot” is a character in a computer game that is controlled using artificial intelligence. Bots are common in combat games. The very best bots act a lot like a human player: they run, they hide, they make surprise attacks - they even taunt the other players with well-chosen words and gestures.

Bots that play like humans can make a game more fun. But it's not easy to make a bot play the way a human does. A bot that never misses or makes a mistake is frustrating to play. A bot that always does the same things is predictable and boring to play, and easy to beat.

While the contest is all about fun and games, there is a serious side to it too. More realistic bots could help make a game a commercial success. Bots are also used in serious simulations for defence and security planning (but then they're called “intelligent agents”). A bot that can adapt to different opponents and learn to play different games as well as a human can would be a breakthrough in artificial intelligence, with far-reaching consequences.

Full details of the contest can be found on the web site at www.botprize.org.

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