

Two Members of Notorious Videogame Piracy Group “Team Xecuter” in Custody

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Press Release

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Arrested on Indictment from Western District of Washington

Two leaders of one of the world’s most notorious videogame piracy groups, Team Xecuter, have been arrested and are in custody facing charges filed in U.S. District Court in Seattle.

Max Louarn, 48, a French national of Avignon, France, Yuanning Chen, 35, a Chinese national of Shenzhen, China, and Gary Bowser, 51, a Canadian national of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, were charged in a federal indictment unsealed today. The indictment alleges the defendants were leaders of a criminal enterprise that developed and sold illegal devices that hacked popular videogame consoles so they could be used to play unauthorized, or pirated, copies of videogames. The enterprise targeted popular consoles such as the Nintendo Switch, the Nintendo 3DS, the Nintendo Entertainment System Classic Edition, the Sony PlayStation Classic, and the Microsoft Xbox.

“These defendants were allegedly leaders of a notorious international criminal group that reaped illegal profits for years by pirating video game technology of U.S. companies,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Brian C. Rabbitt of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division. “These arrests show that the department will hold accountable hackers who seek to commandeer and exploit the intellectual property of American companies for financial gain, no matter where they may be located.”

“These defendants lined their pockets by stealing and selling the work of other video-game developers – even going so far as to make customers pay a licensing fee to play stolen games,” said U.S. Attorney Brian Moran for the Western District of Washington. “This conduct doesn’t just harm billion dollar companies, it hijacks the hard work of individuals working to advance in the video-game industry.”

“Theft of intellectual property hurts U.S. industry, game developers and exploits legitimate gaming customers, all of which threaten the legitimacy of the commercial video game industry,” said Acting Special Agent in Charge Eben Roberts of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Seattle. “We are committed to working with our international partners to find criminals like these who steal copyrighted material and bring cyber criminals to justice.”

“Imagine if something you invented was stolen from you and then marketed and sold to customers around the world. That is exactly what Team Xecuter was doing,” said Special Agent in Charge Raymond Duda of the FBI’s Seattle Field Office. “This is a perfect example of why the FBI has made the prevention of the theft of intellectual property a priority. These arrests should send a message to would-be pirates that the FBI does not consider these crimes to be a game.”

According to court documents, the Team Xecuter criminal enterprise is comprised of over a dozen individual members located around the world. These members include developers who exploit vulnerabilities in videogame consoles and design circumvention devices; website designers who create the various websites that promote the enterprise’s devices; suppliers who manufacture the devices; and resellers around the world who sell and distribute the devices.

The indictment alleges that due to the illegal nature of its business, Team Xecuter continuously sought to evade enforcement efforts by victim companies, financial institutions, and law enforcement. Notably, Team Xecuter attempted to protect its overall business by using a wide variety of brands, websites, and distribution channels, according to the indictment. From approximately June 2013 through August 2020, Team Xecuter used a variety of product names for its devices, such as the Gateway 3DS, the Stargate, the TrueBlue Mini, the Classic2Magic, and the SX line of devices that included the SX OS, the SX Pro, the SX Lite, and the SX Core.

According to the indictment, Team Xecuter at times cloaked its illegal activity with a purported desire to support gaming enthusiasts who wanted to design their own videogames for noncommercial use. However, the overwhelming demand and use for the enterprise’s devices was to play pirated videogames. To support this illegal activity, Team Xecuter allegedly helped create and support online libraries of pirated videogames for its customers, and several of the enterprise’s devices came preloaded with numerous pirated videogames. According to the indictment, Team Xecuter was so brazen that it even required customers to purchase a “license” to unlock the full features of its custom firmware, the SX OS, in order to enable the ability to play pirated videogames.

In September 2020, Louarn and Bowser were arrested abroad in connection with the charges in this case. The United States will seek Louarn’s extradition to stand trial in the United States. Bowser was arrested and deported from the Dominican Republic, and appeared today in federal court, in New Jersey.

Each defendant is charged with 11 felony counts, including conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud, conspiracy to circumvent technological measures and to traffic in circumvention devices, trafficking in circumvention devices, and conspiracy to commit money laundering.

The charges in the indictment are merely allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

This case is being investigated jointly by the FBI and HSI.

This case is being prosecuted by Senior Counsel Frank Lin of the Criminal Division's Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section Assistant U.S. Attorneys Francis Franze-Nakamura and Brian Werner of the Western District of Washington, with significant and ongoing assistance from the Justice Department's Office of International Affairs. The department appreciates the significant cooperation and assistance provided by its foreign government counterparts and the Government of the Dominican Republic, and Interpol Dominicana.

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