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The Security of Online Poker Executive Summary

My paper will break down the security risks of online poker into two distinct areas: accounting and gaming. It will start with the general risks of any online financial transactions and then move to the issues specific to online poker. The general risks involve the security of https, online servers housing bank account information, and electronic fund transfers.

The poker-specific section will focus on Neteller, a popular site for making online poker transactions, and the risks associated with it not being regulated by a U.S. recognized body. Additional risks are associated with keeping money on an actual poker site since it operates as a quasi-bank. There is a balance and methods for depositing and withdrawing, however no FDIC protection and no real recourse for disagreements with the site. If a site suspects a player of violating the user agreement, there is nothing a player can do if the site decides to absorb the entire balance. There is also the cautionary tale of PokerSpot, one of the earliest online poker rooms which went out of business, meaning that its players lost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The fairness of the game starts with the fairness of shuffling. This part will start with the difficulties of generating a "random" number in general, and how it expands to generating a random shuffle. The case of PlanetPoker's old faulty shuffling algorithm and how it was broken will be discussed and how it lead to the modern style of shuffling algorithm that reputable sites now use.

In addition to hacking the shuffling algorithm to determine another player's cards, there is another effective way to cheat online. Online collusion will be discussed along with speculation on how sites try to detect collusion(they absolutely will not divulge how), along with the punishments for colluding. The argument will be made that online collusion is something that can never be completely stopped due to the extreme variety of third-party ways for two or more users to communicate.

The concept of a bot will be discussed and debated as to whether it is a threat to poker security and its status ethically. Bots and collusion collide with a program called WinHoldem is a flexible tool for building bots and has built-in capabilities for collusion, in that it allows two users to easily share their hands through the program's interface.

The last part of the paper will deal with possible changes to the structure of online poker to alleviate the security risks, along with what a user can do to minimize their risk within the current system.

Bibliography so far

Forum discussing why bots are bad for poker.

http://forumserver.twoplustwo.com/showflat.php?Cat=0&Number=5403605&page=0&fpart=1&vc=1

Interview with the former head of a defunct poker site

http://www.rakefree.com/faq.htm

Documented cases of cheating

http://forumserver.twoplustwo.com/showflat.php?Cat=0&Number=5384779&page=0&fpart=1&vc=1

http://forumserver.twoplustwo.com/showthreaded.php?Cat=0&Number=4859737&page=0&vc=1

http://forumserver.twoplustwo.com/showflat.php?Cat=0&Board=tourn&Number=4785067&Searchpage=1&Main=4785067&Words=+JJProdigy&topic=&Search=true#Post4785067

Bot/collusion software

http://www.winholdem.net/

Breaking the shuffling algorithm

http://www.developer.com/java/other/article.php/10936_616221_1