

Online game gets real-world banking license

March 18 2009, By PETER SVENSSON , AP Technology Writer

(AP) -- With banks around the world foundering, the idea of moving your bank account to another planet might have some appeal.

Interstellar banking isn't here yet, but at least you can pretend. The publisher of the online science-fiction game "Entropia Universe," set on the planet Calypso, received a [banking license](#) from the Swedish Financial Supervisory Authority last week and plans to open a real bank within a year, albeit one without physical, walk-in branches.

Players of "Entropia" already exchange real [money](#) for a [virtual currency](#) that is used for their expenses on Calypso. And virtual money they make in the game, through hunting, mining, trading or other activities, can be cashed out into real money. The virtual currency, Project Entropia Dollars, has a fixed 10-to-1 exchange rate to the U.S. dollar.

By setting up a real-world bank, Sweden-based publisher MindArk PE AB gains the protection of the Swedish government's deposit insurance for these accounts, up to about \$60,000 for each customer.

MindArk also plans to offer standard bank services like interest-bearing accounts, direct deposit of [paychecks](#), bill payment and lending, said David Simmonds, the company's business development director.

The company isn't clear on what type of lending it will engage in, but Simmonds said it wasn't planning to make the sort of risky investments that have foiled other banks.

The banking license also means regulators will gain more insight into possible money laundering in the [virtual world](#). Simmonds said the company is already keeping an eye out for such activities.

The [economic activity](#) in "Entropia Universe" was worth about \$420 million last year, about the same as the Pacific island nation of Kiribati, population 110,000. The game has 850,000 player accounts, though not all of them represent active players.

"Entropia Universe" is unusual in allowing a free conversion between its virtual currency and real money. Most online games, like "World of Warcraft," prohibit the sale of virtual items and money for real cash.

On the Net:

<http://www.entropiauniverse.com>

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