

Hackers, Gamers and Lamers
The Use of l33t in the Computer Sub-Culture

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Introduction:

The Internet - the fastest growing frontier of the modern age. A place where a person can meet and talk with hundreds of people with the same interests, make friends and enemies, all while never seeing their real face and maybe even without knowing their real name. A haven where subcultures can and do form in very short periods of time.

To look at a specific group of internet users, there are those who are most likely to have the time to dedicate to establishing a stable online presence - those who do not dedicate the same time to establishing connections in the analog world - the geeks, the nerds, the dorks. All those people who were marginalized in the real life community around them were finally presented with a world where they could be a powerful group.

Whereas it can't be said that every single one of these people likes the exact same things, the major categories can still be seen - A love of computers (of course), interests in Role Playing Games, fandoms of Science Fiction, Fantasy, Comics and Anime, and naturally, a shunning of popular culture, still deeply associated with the world that shunned them.

The Internet finally provides a world where their society can reign supreme, and with such an opportunity, the sub-culture develops at a fast rate. One such development is the establishment of the same clique systems that alienated them elsewhere - the groups that are cool, that one wants to fit in to. Of course, with such groups there are always those people who fit in naturally, and the people who just try too hard and come off desperate, one group will be

accepted, and the other will be mocked and marginalized. Insults and obscenities are flung at each other; parentage and sexual orientation are questioned. The same group dynamics exist in this cyber world as in the real one.

In a virtual world where people from all regions and dialects can come together and communicate in real time with everyone else, developing these complex hierarchical systems, it should be no surprise that the language used in these cyberrealms takes on qualities of its own.

Most of the world remains ignorant to how this subculture operates, knowing only what has been stated in varying fear-mongering news programs, or working from what they know of the established stereotypes.

One such complex issue is the difference between *hackers* and *crackers*, which in itself could make for a substantial paper, but it will just be lightly addressed here. Despite Mass Media's labeling of anyone who breaks into secure systems with the intent of stealing information or just generally causing mayhem as a hacker, as far as the original use of the word, this is a misnomer. Originally, hacker designated someone who enjoyed fully exploring the abilities of a computer, someone who stretched its limits, who learns and loves programming. With the popular mislabeling, true hackers tried to establish the use of the term *crackers* for those who broke into systems maliciously. At this point in time however, it may just be simpler for the original hackers to choose a new term to designate themselves than to try and teach everyone else the original meaning. Part of this confusion arises out of the fact that crackers consider themselves to be hackers - showing clearly which term has the higher status marking. This difference is only the beginning of some major sociolinguistic issues in the computer world.

The Development of l33t:

<Felon> What is a leet? Is that a type of ferret?¹

l33t has its origins in a few different places of frequent Internet activity. As a word, it derives from 'elite,' once used in the subculture as a designation for people particularly clued into the scene, and even being allowed access to hidden areas of online bulletin boards and forums. It still maintains its original complimentary meaning, but now also designates the system of alphanumeric switching in typing, where numbers and symbol combinations are used to represent letters.

The first most noticeable development in l33t came from creating secure passwords. Creating a completely random password makes them difficult to remember, but using a word straight from the dictionary makes it far easier to crack, as there are some programs out there that will input every available word to break an encryption. Integrating numbers and symbols can be a good way to evade these problems, and l33t allows for keeping the password in one's head as a word, but in the computer, it is an alphanumeric mix. One could remember the word 'armadillo' as a password easily, but typing it up as '4rm4d1||0' makes it more difficult to crack.

In the same vein of variation, l33t is also being increasingly used to create unique handles, or user names, for various online sites. Once a person registers for a forum, chat room, website, et cetera under the name 'DemonHunter', that handle can't be used by anyone else (at

least, not without their stealing the password), and as more people sign on to the internet, more of the unique names disappear. One option is to begin removing vowels from the desired user name - 'DemonHntr', or 'DmonHnter', but that has a maximum limit of combinations as well, a much smaller limit too, once certain combinations are dismissed as incomprehensible (for example: 'DmnHntr'). Another option is to begin adding numbers to the end of the name, 'DemonHunter01', 'DemonHunter2003' and so on, but this has a tendency to scream "unoriginal" out to everyone who sees the series of names. So, with these constraints, more and more chatters are registering names constructed in l33t - 'd3m0nHunt3r', 'd3\|0nHu\|73r' and so forth. This may not be any less unoriginal than the addition of numbers, but upon first glance, at least looks semi-unique.

The major developments of l33t came out of filter and bot evasions. Filters are a list of words, phrases or addresses, that if an email comes in with any of the words, they will be either sorted into a specific folder in the mailbox, or they will simply be kill-filed, in other words, automatically deleted. For example, someone trying to filter spam² out of their inbox may put words like 'mortgage', 'viagra' and 'webcam' in their filters. Filters can also be applied over a network as a whole, and with mass media's misrepresentation of the terms some newsgroup administrators would choose to filter out references to hacking or cracking. To get around these filters, newsgroup members would begin intentionally misspelling these hot words. Soon, the administrators would catch on and add the current misspelling to the filter lists, but l33t was too quickly adaptable for this to be truly effective.

¹ <http://www.bash.org/?341>

Soon the encoding passed down to websites offering illegal software downloads (known as warez); the legal licensors of the software would send 'bots', programs that scour the web looking for key words and phrases and then reporting their data back, out over search engines looking for mentions of their software name and download links. However, bots lack the ability to see the visual similarities between a word in l33t and the word they're looking for, so the providers of warez began evading bots the same way others before them had evaded filters. This is probably where the first standardizations began appearing. When simply writing out l33t to be read only, variation is acceptable as long as the other person can comprehend your representation of a word, but when searching the internet for a download, one encounters the same problem that stumps the bots: a Search Engine lacks the ability to see the visual similarities between a word in l33t and the word they're looking for. Thus, someone looking for an illegal copy of Adobe Photoshop to download would have to know what ways the title is likely to be encoded, even though they may have to make several separate searches, therefore, the natural development of a standardized system would develop to ensure that the providers of warez and the people seeking warez would be able to meet up.

Now, for this paper, I'm distinguishing between standard chat abbreviations and l33t, although some people would argue that there is no real difference between the two. Net abbreviations replace letters with numbers based on their sound, such as '2-gether' or '4ever', whereas l33t replaces them based on their appearance. Net Shorthand is also about saving time in chatting, whereas l33t's purpose is to encrypt. So in Net Shorthand, the first person pronoun is

² Spam: The internet equivalent of Junk Mail. The term Spam comes from a Monty Python sketch about the lunchmeat, where Vikings were singing the word until it drowned out all other conversation.

simply written 'i' and the second person pronoun is simply 'u', but in l33t they become '3j3' and 'j00.'

There are varying styles of l33t, ranging from the basic, and easier to read, to the incredibly complex. A basic summary of the codes used is below.

	Basic	Difficult		Basic	Difficult
a	a, 4, occasionally @	/-\.	n	n	\
b	b	8	o	0	
c	c	(p	p	>
d	d)	q	q	
e	3		r	r	
f	ph		s	5, s, \$	
g	g		t	t, 7	+
h	h	- , #	u	u	
i	l, i		v	v	√
j	j		w	w	∩∩
k	k	<	x	x, X	><
l	l, 1		y	y, j	√
m	m	\	z	z	

Not all replacements are based solely on appearance, l33t also has an intriguing system of phonetic based replacements. For example, 'dude' becomes 'd00d' and 'newbie' becomes shortened to 'n00b'. Or, an example involving l33t itself, the /i/ sound is often transcribed as '33', such as the shift from /ilijt/ to [3l33t]. However, the use of these rules vary from user to user, so often there will be two acceptable ways to write the same word.

<i>letter switching</i>	<i>sound switching</i>
fear	fear
ph34r	/fijr/ ph33r

There is also a tendency to switch around what would otherwise be expected in standard English. To use an above example of the /u/ sound, in cases where a word is already spelled

with two 'o's (and thereby, two '0's), occasionally the user may switch to using 'ew' in it's place, the most common example of this is using 'kewl' for 'cool', and in the Online Role Playing Game, Ultima Online, 'loot' is often written 'lewt'. This same phenomenon occurs with the switching of 'f' to 'ph' and vice-versa. This is what leads to 'fear' being transcribed as 'ph34r'. Interestingly enough, 'fuck' is not included in this rule, despite (or indeed, because of) its frequency of use.

The word final 's' also undergoes a regular change in l33t, being replaced with 'z'. To those who have studied English phonetics and morphology, this may seem a clever development, since word final /s/'s in English are, more often than not, pronounced [z], but the development again mostly developed as a need to be systematically different than the standard use. Thus why illegal software downloads are called 'warez' instead of 'wares'. Of course, since l33t is really a written language, this leads to occasional disagreements on whether 'warez' should be pronounced like 'wares' or like 'ware-ez', although the importance of this difference is negligible.

Another change that would be familiar to Linguists, is the occasional replacement of 'y' with 'j' leading to words like j00 ('you') and j0 ('yo')

One of the more interesting developments in l33t, is a structuring of a vague morphologic system. It began simply enough by changing the word 'hacker' to 'h4x0r' to evade newsgroup filters. H4x0r was meant as a noun, but soon it also became the l33t equivalent of the verb 'to hack', leading to 'h4x0ring' and 'h4x0r3d' as varying tenses thereof. The changes began as new people tried to assimilate into the subculture; they picked up l33t by watching others use it, but failed to pick up all the rules of the grammar and were left to fill in the mental blanks with their

own conclusions. Associating the 'x0r' with the 'ck' ending of 'hack' instead of the 'cker' ending of 'hacker', later users of l33t began using 'x0r' for a variety of words ending in 'ck' - r0x0rz ('rocks'), fux0r ('fuck'), sux0r ('suck'), and even in some cases chix0r ('chick'). The next developmental step was using '0r' at the end of words that already terminated in 'x', such as 's3x0r' for 'sex'.

Now, since 'h4x0r' and 's3x0r' are both the noun and the verb form, and 'fux0r', 'sux0r', and 'r0x0r' are verb form only, more recent learners of l33t have started associating the '0r' ending with verbs, leading to the appearance of '0wnz0rz' instead of the older form '0wnz'.

Even with such variations among users, there are still very clear lines about what can be acceptable as l33t and what is just incorrect.

```
<rewben> wh00t, i made online fax server yo  
<rewben> it even w0rkz  
<m0f73> @)!!!!  
<m0f73> theres no h in w00t3
```

As shown in the quote, it is still possible to misspell in l33t, as here m0f73 corrects another's spelling of w00t, even though w00t is only really considered a word in cyberspace (and not much of one either, it's equivalent to 'yahoo!' or 'yippee!').

And there are still many other developments in l33t that come from other systems of slang. Words from users' native accents and dialects work their way into the lexicon, like 'hella' and 'wassup'. Some words look like they could have come directly out of Gangster Rap, and in fact, may have. Many of these terms, like 'pl4y4z' ('playaz' or 'players') entered into l33t from people trash-talking in online games. Another common feature with l33t users is toggle casing,

³ <http://www.bash.org/?6301>

or the alternation of capital and undercase letters, possibly used because it creates the same height shifts as mixing numbers and letters does. This is a purely cosmetic development, as such shifting would not deter bots or filters, which are typically not case-sensitive. There is also a general acceptance of common misspellings such as typing 'teh' instead of 'the' or 'pwn' instead of 'Own', since such errors are a result of typing at fast speeds. Also, over time elements of net shorthand have been integrated both for their time-saving aspects and from the confusion of which is l33t and which isn't.

The Sociolinguistics of l33t speak:

```
<Joe> Who invented l33t-speak?  
<Evil_Lawn_Gnome> Joe, I did.  
<milencho880> i invented it  
<Joe> Really? Good. I always wanted to meet the world's  
biggest fucking idiots.4
```

The problem with l33t is that, as it was being formed, it was never intended to be a communication system, but rather a visual encryption code that could be read easily by human eyes but that would stump search engines. So then, why did people begin chatting in it? Mostly as an attempt to fit in and make ones computer skills seem better than they were. The logic may have gone something like this: Good hackers⁵ cracked good warez and good warez was hidden in l33t, so therefore good hackers must use l33t. This backfired in the same way that most attempts to appear like you fit in backfire: Using l33t in chat instantly identified you as a wanna-be, or in the slang of the group a "lamer" or "luser." True hackers and hard-core crackers, would not waste time on an inefficient typing system such as this and see people that do as "script kiddies"

⁴ <http://www.bash.org/?14509>

⁵ I use the term hacker here, because that's what the person making this syllogism would think. Warez d00dz are actually a form of crackers.

or someone who writes viruses and cracks into systems using other people's codes instead of writing their own. The following quote is an application of these script kiddie stereotypes - l33t speak and handles.

l33t translations

```
<@harb> Sith are like the
script kiddies of Force
users.
<@harb> They all have
silly handles.
<@harb> "Darth Maul",
"Darth Sidious", "Darth
Tyranous".
<@harb> "d00d ur most l33t
l3tz g0 own sum j3di lol"
< mdxi> <ObiWan> Do not
turn ot the Dark Side,
Anakin
< mdxi> <an4k1n> STFU F4G
<@harb> <tyr4nous> d00d
j0in m3 w3 c4n pwn
2gether!!
<@harb> <ObiWan> I'll
never join you, Dooku.
<@harb> <tyr4nous> suk6
```

"Dude, you are the most elite. Let's go beat some jedi. *Laughs Out Loud*"

<anakin>"Shut the fuck up, Fag"
<tyranous>"Dude, join me. We can rule together!"

A l33t user in these circumstances would be considered an idiot, regardless of how good they could be. As one survey respondent stated: "People who use l33t couldn't hack a windows 9x box if they wanted to." l33t became so popular among wanna-be hackers, that the official FAQ for the newsgroup alt.hacking contains the caveat: "Note, newbies, that l33t speak is not cool, and only makes it hard for people to read what you are trying to say (not to mention hard to type)." It should also be noted it's usually quite obvious when l33t users really don't have a clue how to hack at all.

```
<xwred1> my friend on aim is annoying me I want to hack
them
```

⁶ <http://www.bash.org/?14449>

```
<xwred1> I just want to get in and format his drive
<xwred1> I asked him for his address ip and he said its
127.0.0.1
<TheOnyx> heh
<TheOnyx> Do you know what 127.0.0.1 is?
<xwred1> its an address
<xwred1> loopback, or something, right?
<xwred1> it loops to him, then back to me
<xwred1> thats how I can hax0r him7
```

It's useful to know for this example that the IP Address 127.0.0.1 is self-referential; it's the IP one's computer reaches when it cannot connect to the internet at all. This hacker wanna-be is a little too easily tricked.

As these were people who were desperate to fit into the online culture, the trend of l33t moved out of the hacking/cracking crowd and into the world of online gaming. Here it served some purpose as phrases like "ph34r m3" and "3j3 Ownzed j00" served as trash talking in competitive environments, but as fresh players, still new to the rules and behavior inside the game, l33t soon picked up negative connotations due to the playing style of those users. Among more serious gamers, people who use l33t are seen as not feeling the spirit of the game. People who play online Role Playing Games see l33t users as people who are failing to play "in character," a necessity in a game where the character is the purpose of playing.

```
<ToddBored> FF118 is gonna suck, its gonna be MMORPG but on
PS2
<ToddBored> will kill the whole fantasy part of the series,
cuz there will be idiots in it
<ToddBored> naming themselves kewldude, and kingpimpmaster
<ToddBored> i dunno why they did it...
<ToddBored> im serious dude
<ToddBored> its not gonna have a story line to get into
```

⁷ <http://www.bash.org/?7658>

⁸ Final Fantasy 11 – Roleplaying game for the Play Station 2. In Development

```
<ToddBored> cuz all youre gonna hear is Lololo!!L!11 j000  
got owned  
<ToddBored> i roxx at FF119
```

An EverQuest player described l33t users as being unwilling to commit the time involved to get a really good game developed, that they're more interested in getting as many points possible as fast as they can, rather than developing the inter-character relationships and exploring the whole of the game. Similar problems arise in another popular RPG game, Ultima Online, where the users break down into "RPers" and "PKers" (Player Killers), a rivalry driven by the fact that PKers inhibit the character growth of RPers by constantly killing them off.

Fig. 1

⁹ <http://www.bash.org/?35524>



REAL LIFE ©1999 GREG DEAN

Translations:

Panel 1: UO = Ultima Online

Panel 3: (assorted spell types in UO)

Panel 4: "Dude! Stupid RPer had hella gold."

133t users in First Person Shooter (FPS) games are characterized as “campers,” people who stay in one strategic spot and just kill whoever walks by. Whereas camping could be seen as a legitimate strategy, if everyone camped, there would be no game, so this is seen as going against the spirit of the game. Campers also fail to protect their teammates, choosing raising their personal score over helping their “clan.” Again, this is seen as going against the spirit of

the game. Those stereotypes most likely developed from the added effort required to speak and understand l33t; a Role Player wouldn't use l33t because it would be out of character, a dedicated FPS player would spend more effort into actually playing the game, and possibly sending quick messages to teammates.

In the regular Internet community, the use of l33t seems kind of standoffish. If the point of the Internet is to communicate more effectively, then why chat in a system that inhibits comprehension? l33t fails to impress regular Internet users because they don't have many ties with the original culture that inspired it. So even though l33t may not carry the same taint of desperation to fit in, it instead carries a sense of wanting to intimidate people who don't associate with this culture.

However, when you have a large group of people all trying to fit in by using the exact same methods, eventually you will develop a group where using l33t *will* be considered a mark of coolness. These people will develop their own Quake clans and their own "hax0ring" groups to participate in. One such group can be found at <http://www.l33t-haxors.com>, which is a webpage community for l33t users. Most telling is the statement on the home page:

```
This S1ght i5aLL ab0ut HaXoring. /\ll of u5 Haxors
H3R3 at L33t Hax0rs.c0m R /\ll l33t. And w3 own /\ll
of joo shlty hax0r5 0ut th3re and /\3 o\3/n
/\3\icr0shit coz th3y is all gH3y, (\3\3 still u53
IE-5 and /\3\|ndoze 95 tho coz th3y is g00d) but all
of uz are l33t and if NE 0f y0uz out th3r3 pizz the
h3ll outta uz w3 wlll hax ure put3r coz w3 iz l33t nd
U sh0ulD b3 afrAiD, coz w3 kn0w 3verything bout
put3rs. W3 ju5t d0n't puT /\ny 0f th3 sTuFf w3 kn0\3\3
0|\3 0ur 51T3 coz w3 D0|\3'T w/\nT NE1 3lse 2 no.
```

Translation: This site is all about hacking. All of us hackers here at L33T-hax0rs.com are all l33t. And we own all of you shitty hackers out there and we

own Microshit because they are all gay (we still use IE-5 and Windoze 95 though because they are good) but all of us are l33t and if any of you out there piss the hell out of us we will hack your computer because we are l33t and you should be afraid because we know everything about computers. We just don't put any of the stuff we know on our site because we don't want any one else to know.

Note the empty threat at the end. They've tried to puff themselves up to appear dangerous but give no indication that they could actually do any damage. There is one problem with this example and that is that it may be just a joke by someone who dislikes l33t users. On many occasions it's difficult to tell the mockery from the real thing when l33t is involved.

Nowadays, l33t and the people who use it are a popular source of mockery on the Internet. The above example may or may not be one such joke. The homepage of someone with the user name DKHelmet¹⁰ has a "Low Intelligence Version" that consists of a blinding background, and annoying auto-play MIDI file, and various statements of superiority written entirely in l33t. More subtle mockery (or more subtle by Internet standards anyway) can be found in such online articles such as "How to be an Elite Online Wanker: 8 Easy Steps" from 3DActionPlanet.com which includes steps such as picking an intimidating name so one can "conjure images so intimidating that other players will be shaking so hard they won't be able to keep their mouse from jerking all over the place." Other titles in this article series include "How to Form a Clan of Elite Online Wankers" and "How to Create a Webpage for Elite Online Wankers." The site Turkey Manor Design¹¹ had a special "L33T Week" which documented some of the use of l33t as well as made fun of how it was used (this site was actually surprisingly useful considering it existed mostly to make fun of l33t users). Another way to mock l33t involves rewriting literature or movies in l33t for fun. One such example is a Flash Animation of

¹⁰ formerly at <http://www.ghetto.org/~dkhelmet/>, currently unavailable.

¹¹ <http://www.planetquake.com/turkey/l33t.htm>

Romeo and Juliet as done in l33t, written and programmed by Chris Cotts¹². Other such examples can be occasionally seen in IRC chat channels.

```
<Isajeep> in fotr when gandalf first goes to see that other
gay wizard what does he first say to him?
<NickBlasta> stfu noob
<Setzer> stfu noob
<CRC> he says: "sup dawg, i r g4nd4lf da gr3y!"
<CRC> we should get the script to LOTR and make it l33t
<DC4ever> CRC - and then add subtitles to the avi13 of it,
and rename it "L0rd of teh r1ngz0rs!"
<CRC> legolas: chex0r this out! *stabs orc in eye with
arrow* LOL! di3 f00l! *shoots another orc with arrow*
pwned!
<[H]Slacker> divx14?
<NickBlasta> orc: CHEATER CHEATER WALLHACK!!1
<CRC> (when pippin/merry/whichever the fuck knocks the
armor down the well) Gandalf: omg, noob!15
```

Here, the chatters take a common reference point for the groups of them (The Fellowship of the Ring movie) brought up in a question, and run with it, adapting a basic response given to shoot down Isajeep, and translating the scene into l33t for fun.

Mocking l33t has also become popular in many online comic strips. The strip *MegaTokyo* became extremely popular after only its ninth strip (fig. 1), which featured a l33t speaker on an airplane having medical difficulties and needing to find a translator, parodying a scene from the movie "Airplane". The Flight Attendant's panel and line: "Does anyone here speak L33T?" was quickly given a line of merchandise including shirts, mugs and mouse pads. When one of the main characters, Largo (the one who could speak l33t), began to be depicted

¹² <http://myboringlife.com/l33t/romeo.html>

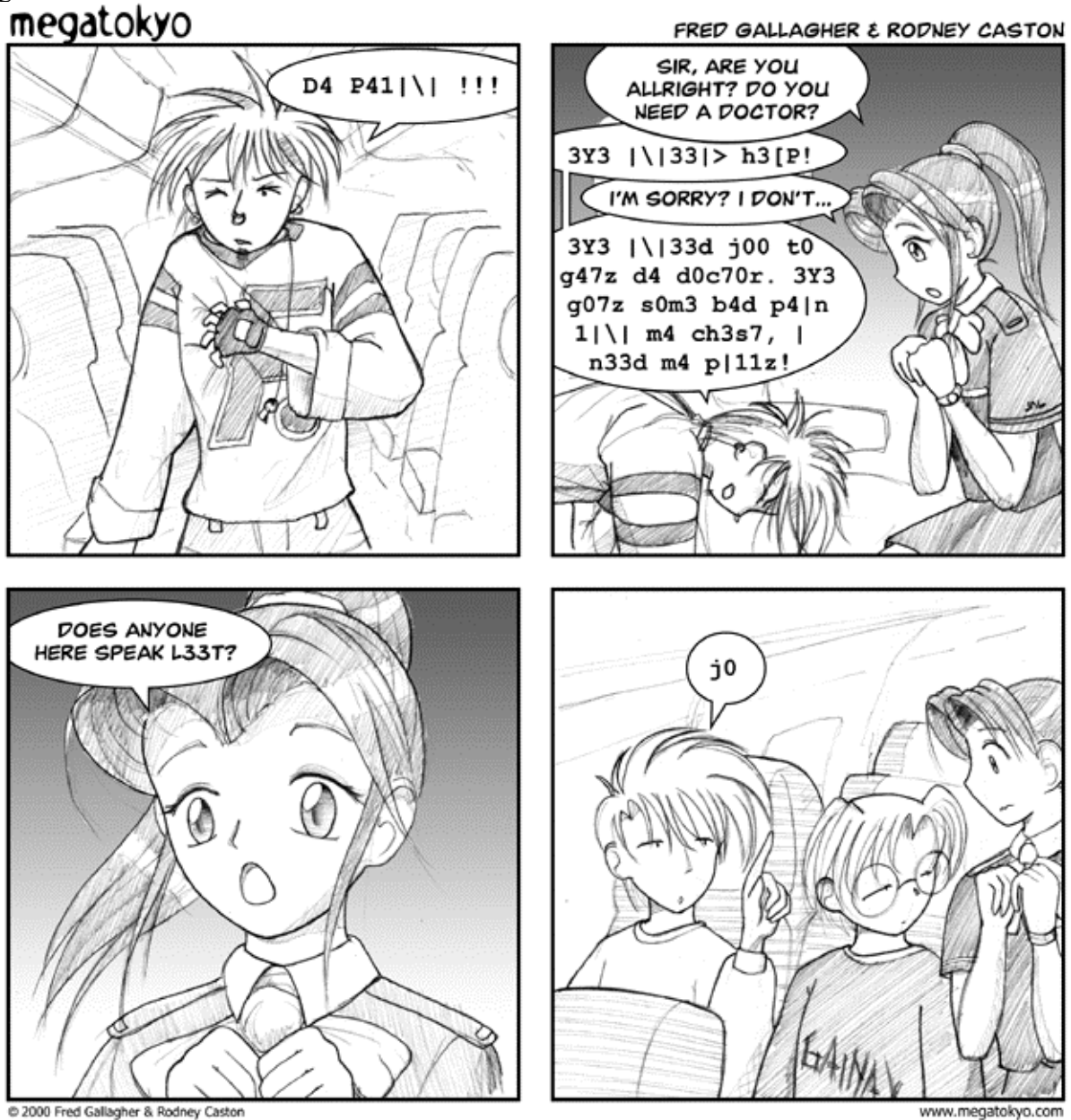
¹³ .avi - a file extension denoting a video file

¹⁴ divx - a compression rate for .avi videos. Gives very high video quality for a relatively small data size

¹⁵ <http://www.bash.org/?17291>

wearing a T-shirt saying “3V1L L33T” the creators of the strip got so many requests for similar T-shirts, they started making them in less than a week of the comic strip being uploaded.

Fig. 2



Translations:

Panel 1: "The Pain!"

Panel 2: "I need help", "I need you to get the doctor, I have some bad pains in my chest. I need my pills"

Panel 4 (Largo): "Yo!"

As more storylines developed in the Megatokyo world, the character with a knowledge of l33t - Largo - would revert into speaking items of l33t while in his gamer mode which later occupies his time in reality as he becomes convinced there are Zombies invading Tokyo. Eventually his delusions end up with him hired as an English teacher at a Japanese high school, where his l33t-sp34k is considered to be "very dynamic English phrases."¹⁶ If one looks closely at the chalkboard in Figure 2, Largo's class rules (or "Rulz" rather) include "No Campers" and "No Lamers"

¹⁶ Megatokyo strip 7/25/2001

Fig. 3



Another online comic strip, *Lethal Doses*, featured a series of strips where someone finally gets to confront the gamers he likes the least (Figs 4 and 5).

Fig. 4



Translation:

"Feel the wrath of '2Kool4U'"

Fig. 5



Translation:

"Check my mad skills, yo! 2Kool4U is elite, dudes. I will school you..."

These strips manage to display much of the hostility felt by gamers towards 133t Users as well as the perceived confrontational attitude of 133t users.

Yet another example is from the Comic Strip *Funny Farm* when the evil sentient Computer, PC, got around to creating a few lackeys. One is a handheld calculator who can speak only in equations, the other is a robot named ASKII who speaks only in 133t, which seems to frustrate PC (Figure 6)

Fig. 6



Translations

- Panel 1: "When do we go out to destroy things? I want to rip my claws into something!"
- Panel 2: "Come to my FTP! Let's kick butt! LOL" (FTP, File Transfer Protocol, possibly meant as like "Come to my place")
- Panel 3: "I will hack because they suck, LOL! Do we go to terrorize the world?"
- Panel 4: "Tore our ass" ? "<something> are ass"? Unclear.

This ties in with the complaint many Internet users have with l33t speak, it's barely comprehensible and the people who use it don't interact very well at a social level. The same joke is used for a filler strip in *Ghastly's Ghastly Comic*¹⁷ in the form of a l33t primer.

Fig. 7.

¹⁷ <http://ghastly.keenspace.com/d/20020512.html>

GHASTLY'S GHASTLY COMIC

Sorry About The BBS-Toon Repeat But I Was Really, Really, Fucking Sick This Week.

(First posted on Sexy Loser's BBS by me over a year ago)

by Ghastly

<http://ghastly.keenspace.com>

And now, as a public service Ghastly's Ghastly Comic proudly presents "ELITE SPEAK FOR BEGINNERS"

3Y3 m /337.
j00 R /337.

() ()
(^.^)
o(()

I am elite.
You are elite.

/\ /\
=(' . '=)
| \
(_)

h3, 5h3, !7 B /337.

() ()
(^.^)
o(()

He, she, or it is elite.

/\ /\
=(' . '=)
| \
(_)

Ph33R M4y M4d M!Mj4
h4xx0r 5k!//z !!!!!111

() ()
(>.<)
o(()

/\ /\
=(O . ° =)
| \
(_)

I am an idiot, with nothing
of value to offer society.

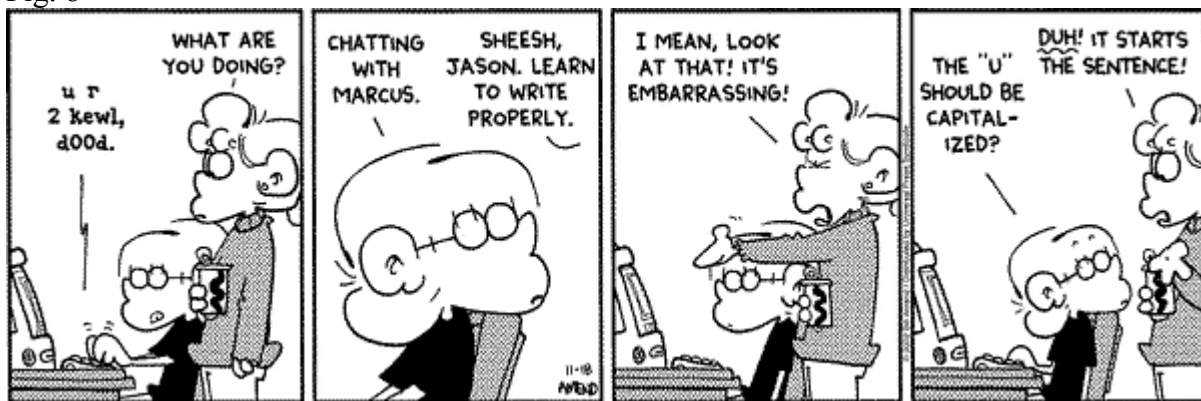
Heheheheh...
() ()
(^.^)
o(()

/\ /\
=(r . r =)
| \
(_)

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The problem with this sort of humor catching on the way that it has is that it can become quickly overused. One survey respondent expressed concern that the use of l33t in humor could suffer the same fate as the phrase “All your base are belong to us,” from the game Zero Wing, which went from a clever sub-culture reference to overused in less than a month. One such sign is the slow awareness of l33t outside the internet subculture, like in an actual printed newspaper comic, like Bill Amend's Foxtrot:

Fig. 8



It may not be as l33t intensive as online comics, and is more of a jab at internet shorthand typing, but 'd00d' is very much an example of l33t. The danger in the development of this outside awareness, is that it's just one step closer to being a part of popular culture. The assimilation of a sub-culture trend into popular culture, often leads to the original users abandoning the trend, and marking it as passé.

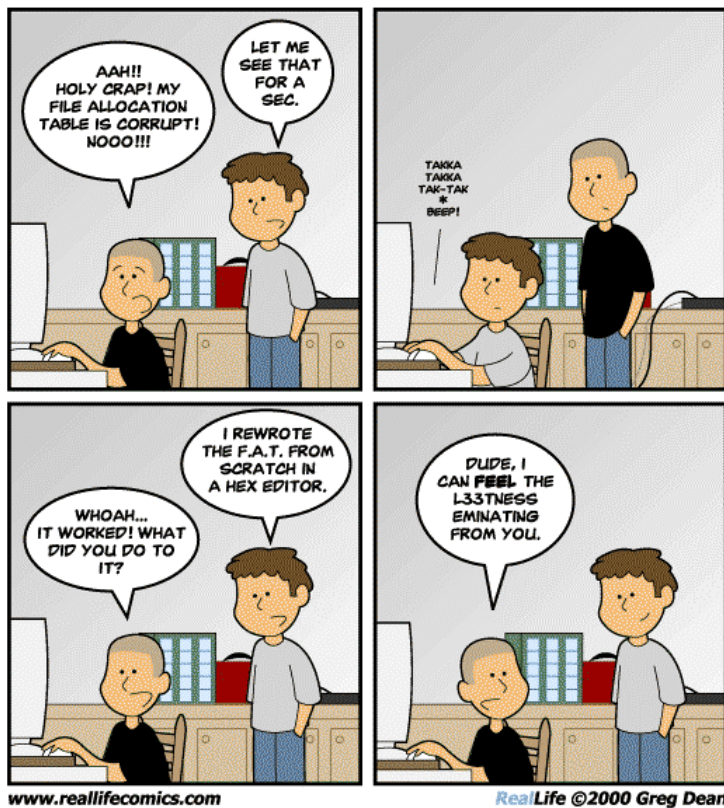
One of the more interesting side effects of this mocking of l33t, is that using it as an occasional vocabulary item, say a single word or phrase, is perfectly acceptable. In one MegaTokyo forum post, someone referred to Japan 0wNzing as far as technology went. Others also consider the term “l33t” a light compliment. Someone may brag about their computer as being l33t, even if they wouldn't normally use the language.

A news post for the comic strip *Real Life* referring to fig. 9 states:

You think I'm joking. Seriously.... a while back, Adam's comp decided it didn't need a FAT anymore. Rather than suck it up and accept it like any of the rest of us, and because of the fact that he had an immeasurable amount of MP3's to save, he decided to sit down and rewrite his FAT. It worked. I kid you not. Adam is as l33t as they come.¹⁸

This is clearly meant as a compliment, despite the negative connotations that l33t usually carries.

Fig 9.



Conclusion:

¹⁸ www.reallifecomics.com, news post and comic strip for February 22, 2001

The speed of the Internet makes language evolve even faster than it would in the real world. In about a decade, L33T went from an encryption system to an attempt to be cool, to a way of being mocked, to a source of humor, to something that, when used in moderation, is acceptable and even occasionally complimentary. It is unlikely that L33T will ever become a fully acceptable typing system that anyone would use, but it should be interesting to see what traits and connotations it will develop in the near future, and what other qualities, or lack thereof, will become associated with it.

Some aspects of l33t will remain constant regardless. Inside a system where fitting in is the key goal, standardizations will appeal alongside variations as new users attempt to assimilate the rules formed by past users, fully learning some rules, and incompletely learning others.

Terms, Slang and Jargon from the world of l33t:

Ownz: Verb used to represent superiority over something/someone. "3j3 Own3d j00!" (I owned you) could reasonably be translated as "I kicked your ass." Own is occasionally misspelled as 'pwn' from the proximity of the keys, but people don't bother correcting that any more.

31337, l33t, elite: Came from old internet bulletin boards that required special access, if one had access they were one of the 'elite'. Over time it started entering its current forms, and became just generally a statement of skill.

camper: someone in a First Person shooter game who hangs out in a single spot for a game, usually near an object vault, and just kills whoever comes near. Considered not in the spirit of the game. Often used in referring to l33t speakers.

FPS: First Person Shooter, for games where the player IS the shooter. All you see of your character is the barrel of your gun. Quake and Counter-Strike are these sorts of games. l33t is commonly used for trash-talking in these games.

frag: to kill. Usually used in First Person Shooter games.

hax0r (sometimes haxx0r): Hacker, to hack

IRC: Internet Relay Chat, old school text chatting. Connects to dedicated servers ("channels"), where rooms can be accessed (rooms would have names like #hackers, #warez and so on). Seen as a more l33t place to hang out than web based chats.

lamer: Someone who is lame, pathetic, a 'luser'

luser: From loser. Also a Unix reference to "Local User" started by system administrators

meme: Links, jokes or themes that are passed from person to person via chats, forums, websites, etc...

MMPOG, MMPORG: Massively Multi-Player Online (Role-playing) Game, a player logs on to an official server and can encounter anyone else who is playing at the same time inside the game.

newsgroups:

n00b: Derived from 'newbie', someone who is painfully fresh to the scene. Often used in referring to l33t speakers.

OMG, OMFG: Acronyms for "Oh My (Fucking) God"

PK: Player Killer, people who gain levels in a game by going around and killing other players. RPGers hate this because it limits their ability to develop a character.

pr0n: Porn. switching letters around is not unusual in l33t, and in many cases arise from common typos (such as 'teh' instead of 'the')

q2, q3: Quake 2 and Quake 3. Very popular first person shooter games.

script kiddie: Taken from old school hackers, it refers to someone who just uses pre-made codes to mess around with. Often used in referring to l33t speakers.

STFU: Acronym for "Shut the fuck up" commonly slung about in IRC rooms.

w00t: Exclamation used to represent excitement or generally being pleased with something. Like *yippee* or *yahoo*

wallhack: Cheat code used in First Person Shooter games that allows one to see through walls, making tracking easier, and in some cases even blend into the wall.

warez: illegal software downloads.

WTF: Acronym for "What the fuck?" commonly slung about in IRC rooms.

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